

RESEARCH FORUM

WHY MEN AND WOMEN ARE FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT IN THEIR MANAGEMENT STYLES

A recent report by *The Business* magazine found that a mere 6 per cent of plc directors in Britain were women. This figure has hardly changed in a decade (albeit up from 4.6 per cent in 1997) and suggests that either the glass ceiling is shatterproof or that women have to resolve some serious development needs before they can take their place in the boardroom.

One way of getting to the truth of the issue is to look at what male and female managers do differently, and whether they have gender-defined development requirements. At Kaisen we have a database of assessment information drawn from projects undertaken with thousands of managers. For the purposes of this investigation a sample of 250 360-degree survey questionnaires was drawn from the database, and selected to represent a wide range of organisations, industry sectors and managerial levels. Twenty-one organisations, covering 11 sectors, were involved; 77 per cent of the sample was managers; and the male-female ratio was 70:30.

The 360-degree surveys revealed how managers' performance and attitude were perceived by their own managers, and the skills that men and women were particularly good at or needed to improve. There were some shared development needs. Both sexes needed to listen more, improve their commercial skills, and would benefit from working on their communication skills.

But the research showed that female managers were worse than men at delegation (57 per cent to 44 per cent)

- Some development needs are shared, not gender-specific.
- Female managers were found to suffer from a lack of self-confidence in comparison to male managers.
- Females were far stronger on emotional intelligence.
- While men may network better, in the long term, boards must recognise the need for a mix of skills and, therefore, genders.

and, crucially, were much more likely to be perceived to lack confidence in their own abilities (almost no men had that concern, compared with almost 50 per cent of women). Three times as many female managers as men needed to be more assertive.

Women were found to be much better at displaying emotional intelligence, specifically listening and empathising, but were neglectful of their own interests. Men were better at building reputation by self-promotion, and the results indicated that women needed to be more proactive in growing their image in organisations through more effective networking – particularly important when in most companies reputation is a key criterion for promotion and fast-tracking.

The findings suggest that women in management need to display more belief in their own competence, and be willing to challenge prevailing opinions and working methods. Female managers appear to need to get better at accepting feedback and not dwelling on criticism. It is possible that this finding relates to self-confidence, ie, a lack of confidence that leads to over-defensiveness in response to negative feedback.

The still male-dominated boardroom might mean that the qualities valued there are valued throughout the organisation. Strengths of board members will be seen as essential skills, and it is these male-defined strengths that become the currency of promotion. This means the UK's boardrooms are missing out on the qualities that women would bring to the table. Things are slowly changing in today's world of high employee expectation – the days of the testosterone-driven "Gordon Gekko" types are fading. Businesses are realising that getting the best out of people is the key, and that emotional intelligence is a critical capability.

Robert Myatt heads the PR and research activity at business psychologists Kaisen » www.kaisen.co.uk



LEARNING CENTRE

OD ISN'T PASSÉ – IT HAS MUCH TO OFFER TO HR

As a young, green and idealistic "work study" engineer 30 years ago, I learnt much about organisation and people development. It involved intensive periods of timing and rating employees completing repetitive and disorganised jobs, and then turning the results to mutual advantage.

Despite the tide of new techniques, I still see OD as that part of HR that is about jobs and their organisation; the hard-skills side; the framework within which we can help the people who operate within it.

OD is now being stretched to cover up the touchy-feely image of HR. Don't tamper with it! Just understand what it can offer. Here's a definition to ponder over: it is a technical science with lots of logic and reasoned thought thrown in. It focuses on ways of working and their efficiency. It deals with organisations, effective restructuring, comprehensive job definitions and flexibilities, job evaluation and comparison. It links to pay systems and incentives and considers the impact of these on the business. It is a continuous project management role and, in short, always has to produce results.

Just because OD uses long-established terms, that does not make it a passé operation. On the contrary, it is a flexible framework within which all the other parts of HR – employee relations, recruitment, talent management and employee development – operate. OD is the scaffolding on which change is built. Instead of using "change management" as the *mot juste*, let's not be afraid to use another – "efficiency management". It is more practical and numerical, and one of our line manager colleagues fully appreciate, understand and will more readily buy into.

So let's be proud that OD is starting to be seen as a core component of HR once again. Let's use it as another tool in our box of tricks. If we use our knowledge of these areas competently, we can gain the respect of our colleagues as well as provide a platform from which we can enhance their people skills. A Trojan horse maybe, but carrying only HR goodies.

Chris Feetam is an HR consultant based in Zlatitsa, Bulgaria