ABOVE THE GLASS CEILING: A UNIVERSITY IN CRISIS?
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ABSTRACT

Gender inequity at senior ranks in Australian universities has long been recognised as a major problem. Universities are attempting to address the problem, with policies for recruitment and retention of senior women. This paper describes what happened in one faculty in a large university when three female heads were appointed. Within a year, all three were gone. A male-oriented culture predominated, where the women experienced bullying, male clubbiness, male solidarity, control by the dean and lack of respect for values which emphasised people and relationships. This faculty has significant problems which cannot be resolved without major change at executive management level.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equity has long been of concern in Australian universities. Whilst in 1999 women comprised roughly half of the academics employed at the base level, males dominated at all higher levels, with only 14% of Associate Professors and Professors being women (AVCC 1999). The AVCC launched a plan in 1999 to promote the achievement of gender equity in Australia. Universities across the board have embraced the principle of gender equity and equal employment opportunity, but the outcomes in a number of universities are poor. This is the story of one faculty in a large university which has tried to promote and retain senior women, but which has consistently lost senior women to other institutions.

Gender imbalance in leadership positions is not unique to universities. Whilst women now comprise 42 percent of the Australian labour force and 50 percent of graduates in business, law and related disciplines, the proportion of women in executive positions is declining (Sinclair 1998, Still 1993). Women are under-represented at board level (Carruthers 1997). There are several explanations for the absence of women in leadership positions. One is the 'pipeline effect' (Sinclair 1998) which suggests that as women gain the necessary qualifications and career experience we will see more women in leadership roles. A second explanation is the invisibility effect (Sinclair 1998): men and women are not different at leadership, but are perceived as different.

Sinclair (1998) notes that men tend to be motivated by achievement whilst women's motivation is marginalised and driven by affiliation needs. Women's goals are more likely to be communal, concerned with the wider community, whilst men's goals are more likely to be agentic, concerned with their own positions and outcomes. Men are more concerned with competitive success, and women are more focused on doing a job well. Men are less concerned with human relations and are more aggressive. Women are more caring. Men are more tolerant of ethical misbehaviour and women are less tolerant of such misbehaviour (Chung and Monroe 2001).

Hames (1994) suggests that male thinking characterizes work organizations, with an emphasis on control and conformity, a well-defined hierarchy of authority, rigid adherence to rules and procedures and impersonality of interpersonal skills. Women view organizations as a lattice of interconnections where equality of relationships is most valued. Shakeshaft (1987) found that women are likely to withdraw from conflict and use collaborative strategies.

BACKGROUND TO THIS RESEARCH

XYZ University is a large university with about 2500 staff. Approximately 35% of the academic staff is female, predominantly clustered at lecturer A and B. For a one-year period, there was not one full female professor in the whole university, although there were about 12 female associate professors. The university council, the executive committee of council and the academic board all discussed the worsening gender profile of senior academic staff at the university. Plans and recommendations were drawn up, and targets were identified. Various internal reports identified problems in moving towards gender equity, which included: lack of commitment to EEO and AA principles by senior management; lack of research and consultation, particularly in consulting the women rather than accepting the male perspective; lack of accountability, with managers not required to develop targets or report on progress; lack of resources to support the equity division in monitoring progress and developing policies; lack of university wide strategy.

In January 2000 in the ABC Faculty, which is the site for this study, three of the seven substantive heads of department were women, and a woman was acting head of a fourth department. However, by January 2001, one of the substantive

heads had stood down after her term expired, no longer wanting to be head. Another head had been promoted to professor – only the fourth female professor in the entire university – but had resigned from the university with two years of her term to go after being head hunted for a chair at another university. The third head resigned soon after, with 18 months of her term to go, and accepted a senior research position as associate professor at another university. Two other senior women in the faculty (an associate professor and a senior lecturer) resigned from the university for equivalent jobs elsewhere. In a three-month period the ABC faculty lost three of its six female members of the professoriate, leaving it with seven male professors, three male associate professors and only three female associate professors. The faculty is overwhelmingly male at all levels, not just at the professoriate. At the start of 2000, there were 170 staff, of whom only 42 were female.

January 2000	Lecturer A/B	Lecturer C	LecturerD	Lecturer E
Male	76	41	2	11
Female	29	7	5	1

The senior women in this faculty experienced both overt and covert discrimination due to the organization culture. They experienced the devaluing of "women's" work. The mundane administration and daily activities of the 'people and nurturing role' had no value in relation to career prospects. They were called upon to do these things because they are good at them – but as a result their research suffers, particularly in comparison to men who often are 'too busy' doing career enhancing research. The senior women were extremely pleased when three women were appointed to head's positions, hoping that there would be a change in the culture. Their hopes were dashed when all the women heads left those positions, and three of the professoriate left the university.

THE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCES

Qualifications XYZ University confirms Widdoups and Assane's (1993) results that women need more education than do men and Saftner's 1988 results that promotions to full professor take longer on average for women than for men. 5 of the 6 women professoriate have PhDs. However, only 6 of the 11 members of the male professoriate had PhDs.

The masculine management style The leadership group in the ABC faculty retained the maleness of values, norms and rituals (Sinclair 1998). Hames (1994) writes of the adversarial nature of male norms: controlling, competing, organizing, establishing rules and regulations and deferring to a higher authority. The women in this study experienced all of these manifestations of maleness, and some others.

The women believed that male heads had more access to the dean than they did. There were backroom deals done in the *clubby* atmosphere. E.g. one head was dealing with a difficult workers compensation claim. The dean and a male head decided on a course of action and did not even inform the worker's (female) head/line manager that there had been discussions about her staff member, let alone a decision

The male *'solidarity'* ritual appeared with directives that heads were not to suggest that there was any dissension or even discussion of negative consequences of decisions which had been made in the heads group. The women found this particularly hard as they felt that the 'clubbiness' had initially excluded their views and they then had to justify decisions which were manifestly wrong.

The male *'sporting'* ritual appeared on several occasions during the year under study. With short notice the heads were expected to attend a football match on a Friday night in the university's corporate box. All of the males attended, but none of the females, and the dean commented this on unfavourably. Long-standing and genuine prior engagements were not considered to excuse this lack of 'corporate spirit'.

The male *'combat'* culture found expression in the constant metaphor of the 'the troops' when referring to staff. The women believed also that there was an attempt to impose an adversarial culture of 'them and us': staff or 'troops' against the management group. There was a constant stream of discussion about how better to control the staff within the faculty. Control was to be achieved by policies and processes which by their nature suggested a mistrust of staff.

There was a constant emphasis on *'control'* within the faculty. All the heads were expected to perform only set tasks according to an agenda set by a few of the males - and the males always set the agenda. Control took place at all levels for female heads. Male heads were not subject to the same level of control –they could be trusted to 'do the right thing'. The women experienced bullying to a greater or lesser extent. One was so badly bullied at a promotion interview that the director of human resources had to step in and stop the comments. She also experienced severe bullying on a day-to-day basis.

The perceived male rituals and norms of the management group increased the alienation of the women who were ostensibly part of the group. The adversarial culture and the clubbiness did not sit well with the women trying to manage a

lattice of interconnections and equality of relationships. They tried to manage for the good of their staff as well as for the heads group. They also tried to manage for the good of the university and of the students in their schools. The males in the heads group adopted Hames (1994) male-oriented behaviours and values consistent with controlling, competing, organizing, establishing rules and regulations and deferring to a higher authority (Windsor 2000). The female-oriented values of respect for people and team orientation were not seen as legitimate behaviours.

The feminine management style One of the factors clearly evident in this research is the women's concern for people and relationships. The women were clearly concerned that they were being required to treat people in unacceptable ways. These women were not 'soft-hearted'. Each of them was concerned about managing their finances in a difficult environment, and each of them managed as frugally as possible, cutting out some of the benefits staff had enjoyed in the past. Each of them was also frustrated at times by the behaviour of her staff. However, they had an sense of what was fair treatment and what was not. They needed to balance tight financial management with showing leadership and encouraging staff to perform at high levels.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The three women heads who left their senior positions were in some ways treated the same as the male heads, yet clearly they perceived their jobs in different ways to the males. Gilligan (1982) and Hames (1994) suggest that women place higher priorities on relationships than men do and show greater concern for the people aspect of issues. This would suggest an explanation for the difficulties faced by the heads who perceived a complete disregard for the people issues relating to safety, and general management issues which were perceived as being financially driven with scant regard for the staff in some of the decisions. The women's motivation was both relationship and achievement driven, but they were in conflict with a culture which was solely achievement driven (Sinclair 1998).

There was a loss of well-qualified and capable senior women in a university with a public commitment to gender equity, but no evaluation of the culture, norms and values which defined the environment occurred. Sinclair (1998) suggests that men and women have very different perceptions of the need for change, and that is borne out. The women can clearly articulate why and how change is needed. The men however do not perceive a need for change. They cannot perceive that the management is problematic. They have the power, and it serves their interests to retain power. Sinclair (1998) analyses the male perception of the need for change in terms of denial and disbelief, fear of the feminine, and identification with the aggressor. In this university it is clear that the males simply do not believe that there is a problem. New managerial strategies aimed at a more corporate work culture and emphasizing interpersonal skills in leadership have emerged as western business organizations rethink organisational practices to face new demands in the global marketplace (Marongiu and Ekehammer 1999). These aspects of leadership parallel the female gender stereotypes suggested to help counter the traditionally 'male leadership profile'. Thus values and experience generally ascribed to women, such as people-oriented characteristics, are seen as valuable in managerial positions (Marongiu and Ekehammer 1999).

The university faculty has identified the recruitment of women into managerial positions as an issue of major importance, but has not yet identified strategies which will retain women in those positions. There is evidence in this research to suggest that it is the very qualities for which corporations are seeking women which result in them being disillusioned and moving out of these positions. The masculine paradigm treats feminine qualities such as sensitivity and care for other people's feelings as having little worth (Windsor 2000). XYZ university has not yet understood that there are places for both male and female management styles at senior levels. Despite the recruitment of women into senior positions, it is the male style which dominates. Women are uncomfortable with the lack of people and relationship skills, and probably will continue to leave this university until the senior men exhibit more people skills and a relationship orientation. The men need to modify their agentic and achievement goals and recognise the value of more communal and affiliation goals. As gender differences with respect to goals are ingrained from an early age (Gilligan 1982) this is likely to be a very difficult task.

REFERENCES
A full list of references is available from the author on request.