

Rethinking Management: What's Gender Got to Do With It?



Center for Gender in Organizations

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At the Center for Gender in Organizations¹, we have discovered that addressing gender issues in organizations is the gateway to rethinking management. That is, when apparently gendered problems surface, we use them as opportunities to look more deeply at the patterns, norms, and assumptions that govern how work gets done in an organization. From there, we work collaboratively with members of the organization to identify new approaches that not only address the initial gender issue but also generate better management practices. Here we share four illustrations of our process that focus on four different core aspects

By paying attention to the clues that gender gives us about how an organization may not be working very well—and how it could work better—we end up with better management practices and a richer understanding of management concerns.

of management: leadership, careers, negotiation, and globalization.² The cases are drawn from four quite different settings—an oilrig, a high technology company, an accounting firm, and universities in North America and Africa—and they appear on the surface to be four typical stories about advancement opportunities:

- a traditionally macho workplace changing in ways that let women in;
- women redefining excellence in traditionally male fields;
- women figuring out how to get themselves recognized as promotion candidates;
- demanding careers shifting, at women's impetus, to include work/life integration and societal impact.

Advancement challenges certainly can be significant; they are often the “presenting problem” that triggers action. But as you will see from the four accounts that follow, what looks on the surface like an advancement issue may, when examined more deeply, be an opportunity to improve management practices.

Leadership and Learning

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What are the issues that most often arise in organizations when it comes to questions about gender—or women—and leadership? One often-asked question is, do women and men exercise leadership differently? Some say yes, men make better leaders because they are more willing to take risks, more assertive, more confident. Hence, women should act more like men. Others say yes, women and men exercise leadership differently, but offer different reasoning: women make better leaders, they argue, because they are more relationship-oriented, more care-focused. Hence, men should act more like women. Still others argue that there are no sex differences in leadership style, and *that* is the problem: women act too much like men.

This tug-of-war of answers leads us to conclude that we are asking the wrong questions because we're stuck in a frame that we need to move out of. Rather than analyzing women leaders relative to men leaders, or women's leadership potential relative to men's, we suggest that an organization use women's experience as an opportunity to learn about itself. Specifically, when a group has trouble entering an organization or moving through its ranks, that organization has an opportunity to learn something about the unexamined assumptions that may well be inhibiting more than just the advancement of a particular group of people.

Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres use the metaphor of “the miner's canary” to describe this problem.³ Miners send a canary into the mine before they go in; if it fails to return, they know the environment is too toxic to send in the miners. With this metaphor in mind, the group in question—whether it be women, people of color, or any other group that deviates from the organization's “norm”—is the canary. Its trouble signals something toxic in the organizational environment more generally that is affecting everyone. The system is not operating optimally.

At CGO, we have many examples in our work with organizations of learning how to make the organization more effective by addressing what appears to be, on the surface, a “women's problem.” What is a problem for women often points to a more general problem. But until women entered organizations in large

numbers, the problem was something that workers adapted to unquestioningly as a constraint of the work-a-day world, regardless of the costs to themselves or to the organization. “Of course you have to work eighty hours a week—that’s being committed!” or “Of course you have to travel five days a week—how else can we meet the clients’ needs?” or “Of course you need to act like a bully—it’s the only way to make it in this profession.” These are cultural assumptions, and by questioning them and changing work practices to reflect a different set of assumptions, we not only make organizations more equitable, we often enhance their effectiveness as well.

Ask not, “What difference does gender make?” but rather, “How can gender make a difference?”

Consider the following example of an offshore oil platform. Offshore oil platforms are dirty, dangerous, physically demanding, technically complex, and risky. Traditionally, people believed that strong masculinity was required to cope with these conditions. But Debra Meyerson, Associate Professor of Education at Stanford University, and I have been studying life on the platforms for the past several years, and what we have learned, to our astonishment, is that over the past ten years these workplaces have undergone a self-conscious change in culture from a rough-housing, hard-driving, hard-drilling, rough-and-tumble cowboy culture to a work environment in which men eschew displays of machismo. Workers admit it when they make mistakes and explore how relational concerns may have been the cause. Men express appreciation for each other publicly and unabashedly at the beginning of every one of the countless meetings that are held on the platform every day. They begin each meeting with recognitions of one another: “I just want to thank Joe for the fine job he did out there helping me fix the leak in the hose;” “I think we all ought to give a big round of applause to the cleaning staff who took such good care of us last week during the shut-in.” Why did things change? Because oilrig managers, supervisors, and workers alike realized they needed to emphasize safety, and therefore learning. Learning practices have been consciously integrated into the everyday work routines of every individual on the platform. The thinking is, if you can’t expose errors and learn from them, then you can’t really be safe.

In this process, they learned something about “learning” itself: it requires questioning assumptions and reevaluating beliefs in the face of new information that contradicts what is “known” to be true. If the system has a failure, it could be life-threatening: these are workplaces that can literally blow up. Thus, individuals are highly motivated to question their assumptions, and when they

do, they often discover solutions that fix systems *and* relationships, solutions they would not have considered but for the new practices of questioning themselves and what they are doing.

It is this learning stance, we argue, that has enabled these platforms to fundamentally alter the dynamics of gender at work. Such a change is no small feat; it is the transformation of a hyper-masculine work environment that was entrenched in the belief that the work, because it was dangerous, required a rough, tough, macho approach. Not only is machismo a thing of the past, but women are increasingly getting positions on the rigs and entering leadership roles as foremen, team leaders, asset managers, and directors—all in an arena in which women were once all but banned.

This learning stance accomplished at least two important things. First, it made it possible to look critically at many of the behaviors that were taken for granted as not only the way things were, but the way things had to be. In fact, as has become clear, many old behaviors obstructed safe and effective work practices, and it turned out that many of these behaviors were traditionally masculine behaviors. Second, this learning stance encouraged a kind of mutual vulnerability—what Kathy Kram and Marion McCollom Hampton call “proactive vulnerability”⁴—which is inimical to entrenched power dynamics, to the notion of heroic individualism that underlies our current images of leadership, and more generally to idealized images of masculinity. A change in gender dynamics resulted from changes in the work culture that had nothing to do with *women*, but everything to do with *gender*—the men changed by redefining their notions of what it meant to work safely and effectively. This change reshaped a work environment that is now not only more accommodating to women, but also less accommodating to traditional, idealized images of men. If these men can let go of these idealized images, it would seem that corporate America could do likewise, and could learn, as the men on the platforms did, that they are far better off for doing so.

This example brings to life the connections between gender and organizational culture; between gender and the way work is defined and carried out. Change work practices and you can change the way gender manifests in organizations; change work practices to embrace a learning stance and you can move your organization in unimaginable ways.

What, then, does gender have to do with leadership? It is widely agreed that leadership is fundamentally about the capacity for adaptive learning, and adaptive learning requires change—change in values, in beliefs, and in behavior. Issues that arise about gender, about race, about any group of people who are somehow not “fitting in,” present an important opportunity to exercise a crucial organizational capacity: to stop, reflect, and learn something about how the organization can be truly transformed. It is pointless to ask whether women and men lead in the same way or differently. Instead, we might use women’s experiences in organizations to

question why things work the way they do in an organization. We can use this analysis as an opportunity, not to change women or men, but to mobilize everyone to learn new and better ways of working and relating. In other words, ask not, “What difference does gender make?” but rather, “How can gender make a difference?”

Careers, Rewards, and Human Resource Management: What Is Merit?

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Women remain scarce in the highest technical positions. Top managers at a high technology company, ProTech (a pseudonym), wondered why so few women were advancing to Senior Software Architect. Their concern is a classic presenting problem.

Two conventional explanations of this problem come to mind. One is that the women are working their way through the pipeline, and we just have to wait. And if they are not, we need to go back and check the pipes, perhaps sending volunteer tutors to elementary schools to keep girls interested in computers. The other explanation is to coach women on career issues such as getting onto the best projects with the most visibility, networking, and even fitting into the culture by dressing and talking like “credible geeks.” Both of these approaches have value, but they are insufficient. Using the approach developed at CGO, we can dig deeper into what is happening in the operations and work practices at ProTech to see what really defines “doing good work.” In this inquiry process, we may find that conventional approaches miss the very heart of the problem.

In my work with Amy Segal⁵, we probed the question, “Who gets to be a Senior Software Architect at ProTech and how?” We conducted seventy interviews, read promotion announcements, and tested interim ideas with groups of employees. Our investigation revealed that the way to demonstrate competence and get promoted was to make heroic fixes to software bugs at the eleventh hour to save the day. One man’s name kept coming up as the ideal Senior Software Architect: “Arnie is the best—he fixed the bug in the Highland code at 3 a.m., and we shipped the next day like nothing was wrong.” Big saves did not happen all that often, but everyone remembered them. New hires heard the legends. But there were no hero stories about the women programmers, and so we sought to determine why.

Three factors came out in our collaborative inquiry with the people at ProTech. First, the women programmers often felt like they were on probation in their positions in mostly male groups and

thought they should prove themselves by writing flawless code in the first place. Second, they knew they had to pace themselves. Many women—and of course many men as well—had family commitments and could not work until midnight. As one of the women said, “I accomplish nine hours of work in eight hours, then go home. No squash games, no *New York Times* online.” In contrast, it seemed that all of Arnie’s cleverest workarounds happened late at night—and he sent time-stamped emails to show it. Third, the women programmers tended to have good relationships with the quality-testing group, which was all women (and accordingly, taken less seriously by men who regarded the

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role as lower status). The women in quality-testing often complained that the male programmers just “throw their code over the fence at us.” One of the women reported, “We have some really good ideas for them about conventions that would save time. We see patterns in the things that go wrong.” But none of the men really listened to them. Indeed, it was the women programmers who picked up these helpful hints, which made them less likely to be fixing bugs at 3 a.m.

We uncovered reasons why women programmers did not look like dynamic, committed, creative programmers worthy of promotion. But the prevailing image of who is the “ideal worker” and what constitutes “good work” at ProTech was producing dysfunctions in the pacing and outcomes of the work.⁶ The factors we identified that made the women seem less “ideal” in fact made them better and more efficient workers: get it right the first time; pace yourself toward meeting deadlines instead of having mad crunch times; and look for patterns and learn collaboratively and cross-functionally. These approaches are consistent with a climate and a view of productivity that any good manager would want to foster. By looking through a gender lens at how the work gets done, we learned about how to better manage this software group.

Addressing these issues produced not just equal opportunity for women, but also better work practices—which, not surprisingly, the men preferred as well. (A few of the men joked that divorce was part of the benefits package at ProTech, because they worked frantically and ignored their families.) Our discussions unearthed good ideas for change. The group instituted some peer meetings to discuss software code, thus making it less of an individualistic experience. The women used to dread such meetings, as if they

were tests, but when the concept for it came from their own thinking about their work, the emphasis was more on exchanging ideas than testing one another. The men got on board because a lot of them did not like what one of them called the “flash, crash, then rescue” culture at ProTech. The group invited the women in quality-testing to join them monthly. They also set up more project milestones along the way in order to reduce the pressures at crunch time and the need for those eleventh-hour saves. The group had formerly balked at this kind of flow chart as “stupid bureaucracy,” but when the idea for it arose organically from their reflection, they embraced it. Our approach to joint learning with the people at ProTech has hallmarks of collaborative interactive action research, richly laid out by Lotte Bailyn, Joyce Fletcher, Bettye Pruitt, and Rhona Rapoport.⁷

In this work, we investigated ProTech’s assumptions about the definition of merit. In the United States, we cherish the idea that we have a meritocracy, that is, that the most talented people get ahead. The corollary is that if you are not getting ahead, you are not good enough. For people who believe in meritocracy, it is easy to think that if women are not making it as top software engineers they must simply lack the merit. This assumption simmered below the surface and made the question about why there are not more women software engineers feel very awkward. As a result, any attempt to advance women was seen as rigging the game in women’s favor.

The discovery process we engaged in at ProTech opened up a new set of questions: Who gets to define merit? Whose merits come to represent the standard? ProTech liked to hire the best and brightest, and everyone did good work, but in a pyramid-shaped organization such as ProTech, only a very few can be chosen for the next level. So organizations devise extra tests that are essentially “tie breakers” among many meritorious candidates. These extra tests tend to reflect the ways that successful, usually white, men do things, such as choosing those individuals who save the day with a “brilliant fix.” Women and people of color are then put in a bind as to whether they should follow their own ways of doing things or try to conform to the conventional ways. At ProTech, it was not only good for women but good for men and for the organization as well to learn from how the women were approaching their work. Because so many people cherish the hope of meritocracy’s existence, it is difficult to look at informal standards of merit to see where they are impeding not just equal opportunity but also best practices for management.

One way to shift from an individualistic to a systemic approach to understanding advancement, merit, and good performance at work is to form or join a women’s group. Employee groups are flourishing in many companies, including women’s groups, African American groups, GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) groups, and more. These groups help people

recognize that seemingly individual problems are in fact systemic. Not surprisingly, it was a newly formed women’s group that initiated our work at ProTech, which was done as a joint inquiry by the women’s group and us as researchers.

The Horatio Alger books that captured the American love of meritocracy often depicted on their covers a boy running with his dog.⁸ In the new stories we hope to tell, we would show a group of women linking arms on the cover, and on the next page they would be linking arms with the men too. Collective efforts to understand why there are gender differences can point the way to collective learning about better ways to manage careers, rewards, human resources, and work practices.

Negotiation and Gender: Beyond Fixing the Woman

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The question that everyone asks upon hearing “gender” and “negotiation” in the same sentence is, “Do men and women negotiate differently?” The typical response is, “Yes, they do, and the news is not good for women.” A recent book, *Women Don’t Ask*, covers most of what is considered the received wisdom: women don’t ask because they fear conflict, they might scare the boys, they compare themselves to other women, or they do not think they are worth much.⁹

But there is a problem with this question and with the premise of this book. Overall analyses of a wide range of studies of women and men and negotiation do not support the claim that women are less adept at negotiating than are men.¹⁰ True, meta-analyses have shown a significant, but small, likelihood that women will be more cooperative and may not do as well when money is being negotiated. But the real problem is the way the questions are posed, and moreover, that the questions send us looking for gender differences in the first place. With such questions, only two outcomes are possible: either women are the same as men, or they are different. There is no talk about the men. The focus is on women’s deficiencies, which are cemented with catchy labels like “aspirational collapse.” “Fixing the woman” is left up to individual women. Systemic problems—and learning opportunities—in the organization are overlooked.

Applying the CGO approach to my work on negotiation, I have asked how existing theory and practice on negotiation might have differential impacts on men and women. Economic and decision-making models that dominate the field make assumptions about practice—that people are ready and willing to negotiate, and that once into the process, they will focus on the problem and use techniques to come up with creative solutions. I have found these

basic assumptions are not always born out, especially in situations where there is inequity in power and distribution of resources. In order to negotiate, one first needs to be in a position to negotiate and to create a situation for the other party that encourages the kinds of “mutual gains” negotiations that are widely advocated. The entire issue of “positioning” is ignored but critical for women—and also for men. For instance, how do you get reluctant people to negotiate with you? How do you deal with challenges to you and your ideas? How do you promote interdependence so that people are motivated to work together?

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Second, negotiation skills can be used to open up and push back on gendered practices in the workplace. Indeed, when I teach, I use case materials that highlight gendered practices that may be remedied by negotiation tactics that address the systemic issues of concern to us at CGO. People come to see that they can negotiate about what kinds of work get rewarded, thus making “invisible work” visible; about how the definition of certain roles makes it difficult for women to be seen as qualified for these roles, thus allowing a reframing of how some of the jobs are valued; and about how people are put in leadership positions, and the kinds of support they get that either aid or subtly subvert their success.

A case example illustrates these two ways of bringing gender and negotiation together. Alice is an accountant in one of the “Big Four” accounting firms. A new leadership position, the Partner in Charge (PIC) of audit, has become available. Alice wants the job even though she is sure that it will go to a colleague, and indeed, that she is not even on the radar screen. Alice has been very successful in client service, but she is not an exact match with the criteria for getting the position. Those success criteria were built around characteristics that have worked in the past. The firm promotes the best “rainmakers”—people who bring in new business—even though not all of them make the best leaders. And it promotes people who are sponsored by others. Not surprisingly, there are no women PICs in the firm, even though there are more than 50 PICs in total.

Alice helped out with a demanding client that was in trouble. While she saved the client, she developed a reputation for micro-managing. She has a young family, and therefore does her work efficiently but does not hang around the office. She does not play

golf, and her community board experience is with child-oriented activities. The gender implications of this scenario are clear. Positions are defined around attributes that closely fit the incumbents of the past, so Alice would not be considered, and if she were, supporting her would be seen as risky.

How can Alice use negotiation principles to get this job, or even to get considered for this job? She needs to use some strategic “moves” to get her boss, Bob, to negotiate with her. These are the sorts of moves that traditional views of negotiation ignore. First, she can make her special value visible. She can show how she saved the client relationship and surface all the work she did that remains invisible. She can try to clarify that although micro-managing has been defined as bad, her careful actions actually salvaged the project. Second, she can make a ‘no’ more costly for Bob. She can lay out the consequences to Bob if she is not considered, perhaps by introducing other possibilities and asking his advice. Third, she can use allies who can talk to Bob and let him know not only about how great she is, but also that the company might lose her. She needs to find people she knows in the company who are likely to carry weight with Bob, such as a leader from one of the task forces on which she has served.

In other words, before Alice can even discuss the PIC position with Bob, she has to maneuver him into a position where he might listen. Once into the negotiation, she needs to be prepared to deal with various challenges. After all, Bob is unlikely to come around immediately. In fact, given that he has somebody else in mind, he is likely to try to discourage Alice. What Alice will need to do here is to “turn” his moves. “Turns” are ways a person can respond to the discrediting or undermining actions of another by shifting the meaning of those actions, and they can be used to resist any move that puts a negotiator in a difficult or disadvantageous position. Alice needs to prepare a repertoire of possible turns, including interrupting the action, naming a challenge, reframing a question, correcting impressions, and diverting to the underlying issue (i.e., how the firm should select the best leaders).

Consider some examples: Bob might tell Alice she needs more seasoning and experience, questioning her competence. Alice could turn this notion by asking him the age at which he became a PIC. Bob might say that she is too much of a perfectionist, questioning her style. She could then remind him how he hates it when little details slip and that she has learned from working with him to be very careful. She can note that she inspires the same kind of attentiveness and accuracy from others on her team. Bob might say that the job would be too demanding, questioning her commitment. Alice could turn this approach by focusing on the job itself, and the specific aspects of it for which she feels well-suited.

Finally, Alice will need to engage Bob to work with her on this promotion. He is going to have to retreat from a position he was close to taking: promoting one of Alice's colleagues. Alice needs to create a space for Bob using what we call "appreciative" moves. Bob, in his own eyes, has good strategic reasons for doing what he is doing. Alice needs to appreciate these reasons so she can engage him. For example, if Bob feels promoting her would be a risk, how can she help handle the risk? What supports or safety net does she need so that she will succeed?

Negotiating in this way, Alice may be able to create a situation in which she and Bob agree to look specifically at the success criteria for the position, which slows down a process that was driving toward selecting another candidate who better fit the traditional mold without reflection. With this "small win," she can start a process of challenging the informal ways that people get chosen for leadership roles—and the ways that women get left out—and open up possibilities for others.

How can Alice's small win spread through the organization? There are at least three ways this can happen. First, Alice and Bob can let the people in Human Resources know about their success criteria for the job, so that others might take advantage of their insights. Second, they can informally tell others about what happened, and why it is good for the firm to think more deliberately about who gets leadership roles. Finally, Alice can help her female colleagues recognize and negotiate through these kinds of issues.

I opened with a discussion of the dominant treatment of the subject of gender and negotiation, and with a consideration of how the approach we take at CGO is different. My book with Judith Williams, *Everyday Negotiation*, is full of stories like the one considered above, and introduces ideas like "moves" and "turns."¹¹ Nevertheless, one newspaper that reviewed it used the headline: "Women are not men's equal when it comes to negotiation." We always want to fix the woman! This case aims to show how it may be the organization and our habitual ways of thinking—not the woman—that want fixing.

The Connection Between Gender and Globalization

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Globalization is a relatively new term and has become part and parcel of today's discourse. It has an impact on all of us—from the trade wars, to the export of symbols like Madonna and McDonald's, to the critique of the curtailing of women's rights in Afghanistan, to the so-called "developed countries" having a "glass ceiling" that caps women's progress in organizations. Globalization affects work, organizations, managers, workers, women, men, and "first world" and "third world" peoples.

One simple definition of globalization is "the development and movement of financial capital, information technology, trade, the activities of multinationals, etc. In general, it gives prominence to market forces and tends to subordinate local and national trade to global trade."¹² There are many implications of globalization for management. For example, globalization challenges the notion of organizations as individual, autonomous entities, replacing these with the new reality of complex global networks of corporations, capital, workers, and information technologies. If we think we need look only at the issues and dynamics in individual organizations, we are missing the "global" boat.

Globalization is also a contested term. "Whether the phenomenon is a blessing or a curse depends to a large extent on where one sits in the broad, global map: an individual's nationality, class background, gender, race, and ethnicity can make all the difference. That is why looking through a lens that acknowledges the 'simultaneity' of different identities . . . is so richly revealing when exploring globalization."¹³

With globalization, the perspectives of women in different locations and with different interests and contexts come to the fore. Indeed, some argue that in the global world, female labor power is the most important "natural resource." For example, in export factories, women make up 70-90% of the total workforce.¹⁴ The CGO perspective emphasizes that globalization cannot be understood without paying attention to women. And at the same time, the situation of women in today's world cannot be understood without paying attention to globalization. These two points are illustrated by the following story, which connects to issues of globalization in ways that we generally do not read or hear about.

Joy is a lecturer at UC University (a pseudonym), who feels dissatisfied with her progress and research after many years. Her student evaluations are bi-modal: either great or terrible. They include inappropriate comments (for instance, her dresses are too boring), or no comments at all. Her research has not been funded, and she finds herself without resources, mentoring, or support. She is beginning to doubt her ability to "make it" in the system and is concerned about her teaching load and the amount of time she spends advising students, many of whom are women. Her male colleagues do not seem to have to do much of either. Joy's family life is suffering. She is tired, and wondering whether she needs a workshop for improving her research skills, some coaching to make her more effective, or whether she should just continue to do the best she can.

The story might end here, with Joy feeling alone and frustrated. But the scenario continues to unfold. In talking with Maria, another lecturer, Joy learned that both Maria and Fenela were just as unhappy. All three faculty members seemed to be having similar

problems. They complained about how the senior male professors only talked to each other and ignored their suggestions in faculty meetings, and that the men all seemed to have wives who took care of their children while they worked in their labs until late at night. Also, none of the men had had to leave their appointments to have children, so their career paths were undisturbed, allowing them to progress to the next stage according to expectations. The women faculty also noticed that they were getting similar inappropriate comments from students, particularly male students. Meanwhile, their women students seemed desperate for mentoring, just as they themselves did.

Again, the story might end here, with collective frustration and some needed venting. But the three women now had more momentum than that. They decided to review the university policies for the evaluation, recruitment, and advancement of faculty, and found that there were no explicit rules for moving from one stage to the next. Exactly what the criteria were for evaluating research and teaching loads, how many years before faculty could be considered for promotion, and other details of the promotion and tenure cycle remained unclear. There were some policies governing salaries and lab funding, but in their own departments these did not seem to be applied. And though there was a policy statement that indicated that accommodations would be made for maternity leaves, in practice each faculty had to negotiate particular arrangements with her Department Chair, thus making it an individual woman's issue rather than a systemic issue for the university. Though a family-work policy was in place, nobody used it, because those who did were bound to be considered not fully committed to the job.

The women also began to talk about how the culture of the organization seemed to reward faculty who brought in their own money—big research grants—while it paid less attention to student advising, mentoring, and teaching. Male faculty seemed to be much more likely to use research assistants to write their papers, and hoarded information on potential funding sources. The environment felt competitive and individualistic.

This vignette represents a composite of published, unpublished, and anecdotal research in four major U.S. universities (Harvard, MIT, Northeastern, and Princeton) and four African universities (Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Ghana, Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria, and the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania). The surprise is how familiar the stories sound across this range of settings.

Looking at gendered practices in global context alerts us to two biases: 1) that women in “developing” countries do not face the same career challenges that their “Western” counterparts do, and 2) that learning flows in one direction, from “developed” to “developing” countries. Consider some

of the implications of taking a gender approach to globalization and management by focusing on this example.

A “gender in all its complexities” lens¹⁵ for viewing a globalized world includes gender simultaneously with race, class, and nationality. By expanding our analysis, and learning to include other women—not just the expatriate corporate manager—in different countries, we can move toward understanding the deep and rich dynamics that impact all women in the global context. For example, using our CGO approach, we see other women players, such as women in higher education who are trying to change their institutions so that students, faculty, and women in their communities can participate in and contribute

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more fully to their developing economies. Moreover, we see problems that go beyond those of the much-studied individual women managers, such as problems of access, advancement, and work-family integration. CGO's “gender in all its complexities” approach also reveals challenges that tie gender to larger societal problems and solutions, like the national policies that guarantee women's rights in many African nations, which provide a more supportive landscape for institutional change in higher education than the diminishing affirmative action policies in the United States. On this dimension, contrary to their portrayal as “victims,” women in Africa have much to teach women in the U.S. about the societal conditions for successfully achieving institutional change.

We also see other important connections that tie gender to larger global issues. For example, Western women managers report how easy it is to work in “developing” countries, because they can find plentiful and inexpensive domestic and child care help. But who takes care of the children of the women who are taking care of the managers' children? And what is the responsibility of these Western women to think about that problem? How do the African women in relatively elite positions address such problems? For example, the women in African universities see the university not just as a setting for achieving personal excellence in research but also as a platform for transformative social change.

We in the U.S. are challenged to consider learning from people across the globe who are not like us in order to help expand our visions and strategies for change, just as women around the world are challenged to learn from us and to winnow the examples they

wish to adopt or adapt. I found that in one workshop with African change agents, the vision of an equitable, diverse, and inclusive university was one of the most encompassing visions I have ever seen in my twenty-five years of “diversity” work. At the same time, the “stop the clock” tenure track policies of the U.S. were an intriguing solution to the work-family integration issues the African women faculty were facing.

Using the CGO approach expands our understanding of global/transnational organizations and the people and the world in which they work. By paying attention to the many contradictions of globalization reflected in the situation of women—both the homogenizing and the fragmenting effects of globalization—we are in a better position to address the issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity that affect us all in this new global world.

Conclusions and Common Themes: The CGO Approach

The preceding illustrations and concepts highlight some special features of the CGO approach to gender equity and rethinking management. Looking at how work is gendered is certainly an important step for pursuing gender equity, simultaneously with equity in terms of race, ethnicity, class, nationality, and sexual orientation. But using a gender lens is not about “solving women’s problems” or “getting the numbers right” in terms of hiring, advancing, and retaining women and people of color.

Using gender to understand organizations is an analytical tool for seeing how organizations can find better ways to get work done, to elicit contributions from everyone, to learn, and to disseminate learnings. In many organizations, there comes to be *the* way to look promotable, or *the* way to look like a committed worker, or *the* way to do things. When there is just *the* one way of operating, it is usually one associated with men, who traditionally held and defined the role. Not all men work in these traditional ways, and some women can do so with ease. The point is that the traditionally male way takes on value, status, and a certain taken-for-granted rightness.

Uncovering these assumptions is central to our work at CGO. We unpack assumptions about how to operate, to see whom these assumptions are serving and who is left out, and moreover, to see if there are alternative ways that might serve the people and the organization better. Thus, we learn that the men on an oilrig can find a better pathway to safety by reconsidering the old macho style and defining a learning- and appreciation-oriented style. We learn that software programming does not have to be a roller coaster of crunch times. We learn how one woman’s quest to be promoted opens up the organization to a new pool of talent and new ways of voicing employees’ interests and goals. And we are reminded that “women in the global economy” does not simply refer to U.S. women in multinational companies,

but can involve reciprocal transnational learning about women’s opportunities and the roles of the less visible women who do domestic work to support them.

All of these stories are about *making change*. Consider the following seven hallmarks of the CGO approach. They might be the basis for “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Change Agents.”

1. *Engage in collaborative inquiry.*¹⁶ We work collaboratively with people who bring us a presenting problem about gender. They are the experts on their particular organizational system. Asking the right question prompts reflections from them, which stimulates new questions and an opportunity to learn together and identify appropriate levers for change. While it is tempting to take on the mantle of “expert,” the very nature of our stance reminds us that expertise is diffused, and solutions happen through a process of joint learning and experimentation.

2. *Fix systems, not individuals.* A recurring theme in the preceding illustrations is that what looks like a women’s problem is often a window into a systemic problem.

3. *Work on gender with men as allies.* A gendered analysis not only cracks the door open for women, but also lets men work in new, and often more authentic and satisfying, ways.

4. *Pursue a “dual agenda.”*¹⁷ We look for situations where new work arrangements can be good for solving the traditional problems of women’s inclusion and advancement and can, at the same time, enable the organization to get its core work accomplished, to learn and to strive for excellence, and to export its best local wisdom globally.

5. *Experiment with small wins.* Bringing about deep cultural change for an entire system sounds daunting. How can one woman single-handedly redress issues of inequity or globalization? But each of our cases shows people making local moves that create small wins. Hold open meetings with appreciative comments. Invite the women in the quality-testing group to the meeting. Put non-traditional job candidates on the radar screen. Get the Department Chair to put the parental leave policy in writing, so it is less about individual deal-making. Yes, these are *small* wins. But they do shake things up. One small win emboldens people to try for another, and cumulatively they add up to learning and change.¹⁸

6. *Hold onto a concern for social justice.* The protagonists mentioned above are all employed, well-fed, and earning a living wage, but they inhabit a world in which the inequality gap is widening. Many of the changes they suggested sought to connect the dots to these larger problems of inequality.

7. *Form alliances to make change.* Alliances open the way to addressing the system rather than fixing the women. Initially, alliances might form among people with apparently similar social identities (such

as a women's group or an African American caucus). But our approach emphasizes consideration of the simultaneity of social identities—African American women in the women's group, lesbians in the African American caucus, biracial people spanning groups, etc. Working on simultaneity and on the importance of groups forming alliances toward the larger concern for social justice are part of an ongoing project at CGO.

In closing, it is only by looking at the deep structures, cultures, and assumptions that make organizations look like they have advancement barriers that we can learn more about and create:

- organizations that ensure safety through new kinds of interpersonal relations and learning;
- organizations in which the definition of merit is fair and well linked to desired performance;
- organizations that do not overlook talented people;
- organizations that learn transnationally by challenging images of where new ideas for change are located and how they travel across people and nations.

Ultimately, we end up with better management practices and a richer understanding of management concerns like leadership, careers, negotiation, and globalization, because we pay attention to the clues that gender gives us about how an organization may not be working very well—and how it could work better.

Endnotes

¹ This briefing note was prepared by Maureen Scully, based on a panel presentation on October 8, 2003. The presentation was part of CGO's 2003-2004 event series, Gender at Work: A BOLD New Perspective, and featured the work of CGO faculty. We thank Jodi DeLibertis, Bridgette Sheridan, Tara Hudson and Kirsten Wever for editorial insights.

² The links between gender and core management concerns are examined in *Reader in Gender, Work, and Organization*, eds. Robin J. Ely, Erica Gabrielle Foldy, Maureen A. Scully, and the Center for Gender in Organizations, Simmons School of Management. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

³ Guinier, L. and Torres, G. 2003. *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁴ Kram, K. and McCollom Hampton, M. 2003. "When women lead: The visibility – vulnerability spiral." In *Reader in Gender, Work, and Organization*, *op. cit.*, 211-223.

⁵ Scully, M. and Segal, A. 2002. "Passion with an umbrella: Grassroots activists in the workplace." *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 19: 125-168.

⁶ Fletcher, J.K. 1999. *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power, and Relational Practice at Work*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

⁷ Rapoport, R., Bailyn, L., Fletcher, J.K. and Pruitt, B.H. 2002. *Beyond Work-Family Balance: Advancing Gender Equity and Workplace Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁸ For example, *Ragged Dick, or Street Life in New York* (1867).

⁹ Babcock, L. and Laschever, S. 2003. *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ Throughout this section, see the references in Deborah M. Kolb, "Negotiation overview," in *Reader in Gender, Work, and Organization*, *op. cit.*, 101-107.

¹¹ Kolb, D.M. and Williams, J. 2003. *Everyday Negotiation: Navigating the Hidden Agendas in Bargaining*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

¹² Throughout this section, see the references in Evangelina Holvino, "Globalization overview," in *Reader in Gender, Work, and Organization*, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-386.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

¹⁵ Holvino, E. 2001. *Complicating gender: The simultaneity of race, gender, and class in organization change(ing)*. CGO Working Paper #14. Boston, MA: Center for Gender in Organizations, Simmons School of Management.

¹⁶ For an in-depth treatment of collaborative interactive action research (CIAR), see Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, and Pruitt, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Bailyn, L. and Fletcher, J.K. 2003. *CGO Insights #18, The equity imperative: Reaching effectiveness through the dual agenda*. Boston, MA: Center for Gender in Organizations, Simmons School of Management.

¹⁸ Meyerson, D. and Fletcher, J.K. 2000. "A modest manifesto for shattering the glass ceiling." *Harvard Business Review*, Jan/Feb: 127-136.

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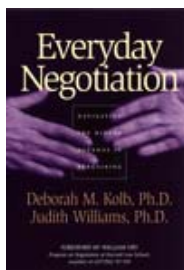
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