Through the Labyrinth?

A Provocation

Alice Eagly and Linda Carli, September 2007 Harvard Business Review article: Times have changed and the glass ceiling metaphor is now more wrong than right. For one thing, it describes an absolute barrier at a specific high level in organizations. The fact that there have been female chief executives... gives the lie to that charge. By depicting a single, unvarying obstacle, the glass ceiling fails to incorporate the complexity and variety of challenges that women can face in their leadership journeys. A better metaphor for what confronts women in their professional endeavors is the labyrinth. As a contemporary symbol, it conveys the idea of a complex journey toward a goal worth striving for. Passage through a labyrinth is not simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one's progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead. If we can understand the various barriers that make up this labyrinth, and how some women find their way around them, we can work more effectively to improve the situation.

Overview

The book, Through the Labyrinth, by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli asserts that there is no longer a glass ceiling preventing women from entering the executive suite, but rather a labyrinth of obstacles that decrease the number of women at each level. From my collective readings, I have created two research summaries about two sources of obstacles. *The ideal worker norm* assumes the market deserves workers that can perform unencumbered by outside demands, putting women at a disadvantage compared to men because of their typically higher level of responsibility expectations outside of work. *Useless Schemas* lead us to misperceive each other's abilities because of our genders.

Intro to Useless Schemas

Schemas are mental structures that represent some aspect of the world. People use schemata to organize current knowledge and provide a framework for future understanding. For gender, schemas speak to the basic perceptions we all have about men and women and how we think these two genders fit into the world. Through secondary research, I realized there is a large and very revolutionary body of knowledge based on statistical studies on the topic of gender perceptions in the workplace. This is a topic that cannot become known through qualitative interviews of employees or self-reflection alone. It continues to be one of the most difficult topics to tackle because (in short) none of us want to admit we can imagine men more easily than we can imagine women in many of the roles. My hope is to raise awareness of the judgments we all tend to make quite innocently that promote men into many roles over women. It is only with this awareness that we can move to action and truly open opportunities for everyone in the workplace to achieve their dreams.

Goals
- To make sure all opportunities are open for women and men in the workplace.
- To empower men and women through information from cutting-edge research that can help our community correct imbalances.
- To provide workplaces with the most competitive workforce
- To value both "masculine" and "feminine" traits/working styles.
- To raise awareness of all of our inherent gender schemas.

Research Summary - from Secondary Research
- There is nothing inherent to our biology that suggests either men or women have more leadership ability or potential, though men and women are socialized to have different interests and styles.[4]
- People have schemas about how women are defined: nurturing, expressive, communal, relational, and schemas about how men are defined: instrumental, assertive, independent, autonomous.[7]
- Schemas are a natural technique our brain employs to categorize everything we interact with, helping us deal efficiently with new situations.[7]
- Counter to the intuition from our schemas, "feminine" and "masculine" traits are not mutually exclusive. Further, most jobs require both "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics.[4]
- People's gender schemas guide both genders to more easily imagine and place men in leadership roles instead of women.[7]
- The masculine schema is the norm – the group against which all other behavior is compared or needs explaining.[7]
- On average, women's performance is evaluated negatively compared to men's.[7]
- When women do well we tend to credit their good luck and hard work, when men do well we tend to credit their natural abilities and potential.[7]
- In one study of undergraduates, women taking leadership roles get a preponderance of negative facial expressions, while men tend to get, on average, net positive facial expressions.[7]
- On average, women talk less than men in public and professional settings.[y]
- Small injustices add up into large losses – accumulation of disadvantage – for women in the workplace.[4]
- 93% of highly qualified women currently off-ramped want to return to their careers. Only 74% do so, 40% being full-time mainstream jobs.[2]
- Women and men tend to acknowledge that professional women are generally worse off than men, but do not acknowledge that this is happening in their own workplace or that they themselves have been treated unfairly.[7]
- This leads to the lower valuation and compensation of people in traditionally "feminine jobs" such as support roles, and lower compensation of women in traditionally "masculine jobs" such as leadership.[7]

Research Sources

[1] Brain Sex (1992) *film from the book by Anne Moir*

[2] Off-Ramps and On-Ramps (2007) *by, Sylvia Ann Hewlett*

[3] Talking from 9 to 5: Women and Men at Work (1994) *by, Deborah Tannen*

[4] Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders (2007) *by, Alice Eagly and Linda Carli*

[5] White Men, Women, & Minorities in the Changing Work Force (1997) *by, Anthony J. Ipsaro*

[6] Why Aren't More Women in Science? (2006) *by, Stephen J. Ceci (editor)*

[7] Why So Slow: The Advancement of Women (1998) *by, Virginia Valian*

[8] Women in Science: Career Processes and Outcomes (2005) *by, Yu Xie and Kimberlee A. Shauman*

Questions

Do you think gender schemas play a role in narrowing opportunities for women at in your workplace? What does equal opportunity look like? If this content was the inspiration for a career design event, what would your hopes for this event be? What fears? Are there moments in your workplace where we are unwittingly placing obstacles to relevant talent due to gender schemas? How might we redesign those moments to provide for a more equal opportunity?

Through the Labyrinth?
The Ideal Worker Norm

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Overview

The book, <u>Through the Labyrinth</u>, by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli asserts that there is no longer a glass ceiling preventing women from entering the executive suite, but rather a labyrinth of obstacles that decrease the number of women at each level. From my collective readings, I have created two research summaries about two sources of obstacles. The ideal worker norm assumes the market deserves workers that can perform unencumbered by outside demands, putting women at a disadvantage compared to men because of their typically higher level of responsibility expectations outside of work. Useless Schemas lead us to misperceive each other's abilities because of our genders.

Intro to The Ideal Worker Norm

There is a large and very revolutionary body of knowledge about balancing work and life based both on statistical studies of human behaviors, historical analyses of our society, and case studies of companies who have had some measure of success with work-life policies. Unpacking the reasons why outside demands propose challenges for the modern worker is a topic that cannot become known through qualitative interviews of employees or self-reflection alone. My hope is to help workplaces understand the societal context in which men and women work to help guide our creation of cutting-edge work-life policies. It is only with this awareness that we can move to action and truly open opportunities for everyone in the workplace to achieve their dreams.

Goals

•To make sure career opportunities are open to women and men.
•To empower companies through information from cutting-edge research that can help workplaces correct imbalances.
•To provide organizations with the most competitive workforce.

Research Summary - from Secondary Research

•Workplaces put more and more value on "ideal workers" – usually men unconstrained by outside responsibilities, able & willing to work extended days, maintain inflexible work schedules, travel frequently, and relocate.[10]

• Ideal workers cannot exist without "marginalized caregivers" - usually women who work in the home or do part-time work with disproportionately severe wage penalties to free up time to care for children, elderly, family and community. Caregivers' roles are undervalued. In their role, they take a huge hit in their personal lifetime earnings potential, social security, retirement, savings, resources for children and healthcare.[6]

• Expectations and norms about good parenting, especially mothering, are spiraling ever higher: impossible to fulfill with two ideal worker parents.[2,6]

• In dual-income families, women still perform the majority of household and childcare work: about 1 extra month of work/year.[2,8] Most men will not participate equally in family work if they have to marginalize to do so.[6]

• In a 2006 national study, controlling for occupation, industry, race, marital status, job tenure, fewer years work experience and fewer hours/year, women are still paid less than men (including professionals).[4,5,6,8,9,10]

•Beyond a simple personal choice or preference, women's sense of relief when they give up trying to perform as ideal workers reflects the fact that they no longer have to fight the stiff headwinds from the ideal worker (usually male) & marginalized caregiver (usually female) role expectations.[6]

• In one study of female off-rampers in business professions, 43% left for childcare, 31% elder care, 31% partner's income sufficient, 52% career not satisfying, 26% felt stalled in career (multiple responses allowed).[1]

• In the same study, 93% of off-ramped highly qualified women want to return to their career. Only 73% do so, 40% in mainstream full-time jobs.[1]

• Further, 0% of the on-ramping women in business wanted to go back to their previous company due to lack of support in their last months: meaty assignments were withheld, flexible work requests were turned down, or they were made to feel they were letting the company down.[1]

• Gen X & Y are less willing to be "ideal workers", 35-45 age group is shrinking, economic upswings outside U.S., and boomers are starting to ask for accommodations. Flexible policies attract and retain the most talent.[1]

• Flex policies have been calculated to save companies money through increased productivity and higher retention of both men and women.[1,6]

• If career trajectories were less rigid, compensated fairly compared to full-time, and still involved plum assignments, a great many more women would succeed in being in the labor market over the long haul.[1]

• In summary, providing women with treatment equal to typical male workers fails to produce equality [and optimal business performance]. A strict equal opportunity policy holds mothers and caregivers in our societal context to an ideal worker model in which they cannot equally compete.[10]

Research

The provocative statements on the previous page come from readings in the following resources:

[1]Off-Ramps and On-Ramps (2007) *by, Sylvia Ann Hewlett*
[2]Opting Out? (2007) *by, Pamela Stone*
[3]"Productivity Means Working Smarter, Not Longer" (1/30/06) *by, Stever Robbins*
[4]Rumors of Our Progress Have Been Greatly Exaggerated (2008) *by, Carolyn B. Maloney*
[5]Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders (2007) *by, Alice Eagly and Linda Carli*
[6]Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It (2000) *by, Joan Williams*
[7]White Men, Women, & Minorities in the Changing Work Force (1997) *by, Anthony J. Ipsaro*
[8]Why Aren't More Women in Science? (2006) *by, Stephen J. Ceci (editor)*
[9]Why So Slow: The Advancement of Women (1998) *by, Virginia Valian*
[10]Women and Workplace Discrimination: Overcoming Barriers to Gender Equality (2003) *by, Raymond F. Gregory*

Questions

What are the qualities of the "ideal worker" norm in your workplace? Are there moments in your workplace where we are unwittingly presenting obstacles to relevant and usable talent because they aren't operating like the "ideal worker"? How might we redesign those moments to provide for a more equal opportunity? If this content was the inspiration for new work-life policies, what would they be?