

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN SPORT - THE HIDDEN RESOURCE

ENRICHING THE MANAGEMENT MIX

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The title of my paper is 'Enriching the Management Mix' or, as I have subtitled it, 'When the best man for the job is a woman'. Management - is this a sexist word which deters women? If the research into women and their place in management is to be believed this may indeed be the case. There is a sharp contrast between the percentage of women in professional and managerial posts and that of men. Research by Cooper and Davidson (1982) showed that although male managers represented 10% of all men in employment, women managers accounted for under 5% of all women in employment.

The General Household Survey in 1980 gave further support to this theory with 29% of men's jobs being in the professional and managerial category.

- Few women occupy management positions, particularly at senior level.
- Recent research indicates that only 10% of women in recreation management occupy supervisory or lower management grades.
- Out of 33 London boroughs only two directors of leisure are women.

A survey in 1983 of recreation managers employed by local authorities in England and Wales found that only 8% of the total respondents were women. This represented 63% of all local authorities. It did not include museums, libraries, art galleries and catering, which would clearly have increased the percentage but serves to illustrate the problem.

For those managers in the public sector leisure industry, women managers represented 35% of the total in the tourism and conference areas, 18% of those in exhibition management, 16% in theatres and concert hall management, 12% in national parks, 10% in sport and leisure centres, 3% in playing fields and only 2% in parks and open spaces. These statistics have a major influence when we consider the traditional background of those entering the recreation management profession.

- baths management
- parks management
- physical education
- library and museum service
- entertainment and the arts
- resort and tourism.

The first three categories were the traditional backgrounds of the majority of chief officers in leisure management in 1974 and as confirmed by the previous figures notoriously short of women managers.

Returning to the theme that management is a sexist concept which deters women - most recent research supports the general view that women do not have as many 'managerial characteristics' as men. This is a view shared by both male and female managers who believe that there are certain characteristics and temperaments which are displayed by successful managers and these characteristics are predominantly male. They are concerned with leadership, competition, assertiveness, aggressiveness, self confidence, objectivity and ambition.

This contrasts with the 'feminine' characteristics which are concerned more with intuition, understanding, helpfulness and a greater awareness of other people's feelings. There are, however, qualities which are not considered to be gender related. These include intelligence, competence, persistence, tact and creativity. It is this view that there is a close correlation between the characteristics of men and successful managers which has influenced selection criteria.

This supports my slightly tongue in cheek selection and recruitment criteria to join the management team of a leisure centre in 1970, namely technical competence as a

- swimming pool manager
- coach
- communicator
- controller of budgets
- personal physical strength and assertiveness.

These criteria came from the perceived view that men were technically and scientifically more competent and better able to prevent the pool water from going stagnant, maintain a

constant temperature, and understand the intricacies of a Barr and Wray filter. As a side issue, 20 years on it is encouraging to see Linda Bishop-Bailey as President of the Institute of Baths and Recreation Management - things are changing.

Men are perceived as better coaches both technically and motivationally. As a consequence we find men coaching women's teams even at national level, a situation which is rarely, if ever, reversed. Men are perceived as more confident and able to express their views, particularly in front of an audience. Research indicates that women managers are less likely to speak in meetings than their male peers; they find it more difficult to make people take their views seriously.

Men are seen to be better able to win respect from subordinates. The male characteristics of leadership and strength and traditional family values which place the man as the head of the household, have had a major negative influence on people's attitudes to women as managers. Men are traditionally perceived to have a better understanding of finance and to be more numerate, hence all borough treasurers in Britain are men. It would seem that the world of local government finance has a bigger problem than leisure management.

Men are better equipped to eject troublemakers when duty officer in a leisure centre. This view was based on the traditional attitudes which have until recently pervaded the police and fire service. Physical strength and aggression were considered to be the only qualities required to repel undesirables. It has now been discovered that in certain situations a negotiated withdrawal conducted by a woman may be more appropriate and less damaging.

It is interesting to contrast the various areas of the leisure services and those which, because of the traditionally held values, have attracted men. And to quote Judy White, "It still reflects its origins, based on male team sports, cleanliness and fresh air, handed to it a century ago in the form of playing fields, swimming baths and parks. The managerial structures are overwhelmingly masculine, with male attitudes and values". This is well illustrated by these comparisons and reflects the changing climate in leisure and sports management in my own department, particularly when contrasting the traditional leisure centre with the new sports development/action sport outreach teams.

I recently advertised for a leisure centre manager for the King Alfred Leisure Centre in Hove, a popular multi-leisure complex with over 1.3 million visitors per year. The successful candidate would also become the DSO manager under the compulsory competitive tendering regime. Twenty-one applications were received, 14 from men, none from women and seven refused to provide the appropriate information under our equal opportunities monitoring arrangements. We appointed a man. This trend is further illustrated by information which relates to the appointment of an assistant manager at the King Alfred Leisure Centre. Eleven applications were received, nine male, two female, and we appointed a man to the post.

This contrasts sharply with the appointment of a Sports Development Officer, to head a four person action sport team, where we received 22 applications, eight male, ten female and four refusals. We appointed a female. In the case of the three assistant sports development officer posts, we were seeking to appoint one with particular skills in developing opportunities for women and girls, one for the elderly and disabled, and the third for young people. We appointed women to the women and girls and elderly and disabled posts, and a man to be responsible for young people.

What is clear from these statistics is that although we received more applications from men, the better quality candidates were women and in consequence we have appointed women to three out of the four posts. I am clearly 'enriching the management mix' using a recruitment and selection process based on merit.

The same situation has applied to the appointment of the play development and arts development officers, both of whom are women. These are areas of the leisure service which have been identified by men as 'women's'. Librarianship and the museum service are two others. I can illustrate this by reference to my experience some years ago when I appointed a museum curator, an important management position within the department. I again selected a short list for interview based on the qualifications and experience of the candidates and only discovered shortly prior to the interview that five out of the six candidates were women. We appointed a woman. There is clearly evidence which suggests that women are still having difficulty in penetrating the management hierarchy of the traditional leisure centre and it is my belief that this is caused as much by the perceptions of women as by men.

Women fail to apply for management posts in leisure centres because their backgrounds and experience have not equipped them with the traditional values and attributes considered necessary. It is therefore important that we recognise the qualities which women contribute to improving the internal effectiveness of leisure departments, the provision and delivery of services to the public and the development of innovative ways of working with our customers ensuring that we recognise the varying needs and wants of the different sections of the public.

The qualities which women contribute as managers provide a new dimension to the 'management mix'. They are often better able to resolve interpersonal relationship problems with staff as they have a greater understanding of the issues and are more approachable by their subordinates who are usually women. As they have had to work so much harder to

achieve management status they tend to place greater emphasis on adopting a caring management style.

In the area of customer care, women managers can make major contributions. Since a large proportion of the customers in any leisure centre are women and their families, women managers are often able to relate more closely with their problems and needs. These same qualities are brought to their relationships with the elderly who are predominantly women owing to a longer life expectancy. In the current climate of fear and mistrust which exists in many of our communities, women do not present the same potential threat as men particularly to women, children and the elderly and therefore often achieve better communications and, as a consequence, improve customer satisfaction.

People are also often more willing to be open and express themselves more readily to women. This was illustrated recently in the 'Move over Darling' series, when a man dressed as a woman to assess the reaction and attitudes which people have to men and women. He found that when dressed as a woman people, both men and women, were more willing to communicate and more receptive to his approaches.

Women also show contrasting qualities to those of men when involved in project-led teamwork - they tend to be rather more collaborative than adversarial, persuasive rather than dictatorial.

These may appear to some delegates to be rather sweeping and general observations, but they are borne out by research. What we clearly have to do is to harness the qualities and characteristics of both men and women to achieve a balance which ensures that the management structure matches the customers' needs. This will inevitably require a re-evaluation of the current position.

There is evidence that more women are entering the leisure service as graduate trainees. This, combined with the fact that the current economic climate has forced many young people to delay having children until they are in their mid to late 30s, is enabling women to pursue a career and change their focus of attention from family and home to work and achieving their full potential in their employment. This should enable women to achieve higher status management positions before deciding to have a family and, having reached positions of influence within the organisation, make the necessary policy changes to improve opportunities for women.

There is a danger that in an effort to achieve improved management status, women will adopt 'masculine' traits. It is my view that although women may need to 'toughen up' their management style, they do not need to take on the aggressive and competitive characteristics to convince the world that they are competent managers. Both men and women need to consider what changes are necessary to provide an androgynous organisation geared to achieving objectives through a balanced approach.

There must be open dialogue and I hope that this seminar will provide a forum for men and women to consider together, and I emphasise 'together', the changes necessary to improve opportunities for women. For there is a danger, and it is one of the major criticisms levelled at the current role of women in society and their position in organisations, that of 'tokenism'.

Please do not fall into the same trap by alienating potential male support. I recognise that there is a need for women to consider the issues which affect them in 'private' without the obvious and traditional interruptions which men would provide. However, I do feel that the position and status of women, both in society and employment opportunity, can only be improved by both men and women working together, not in isolation.

I must admit to being somewhat confused. I do not know whether I am the 'token man' on the stage for this seminar session today or the 'new man' who was referred to on the opening session of the seminar on Tuesday. In conclusion I would therefore urge those of you who are concerned with these issues to enlist the support of everyone, both male and female, who is prepared to take positive action to improve the opportunities for women to achieve their potential as senior managers in the leisure management profession.