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**Gendered Managerial Styles and Employee Perceptions in Relation to Job Satisfaction**

**Introduction**

Throughout my roughly seven years as part of America’s workforce, I have had many different managers who all employed different managerial techniques. For many, we have our own ideas about what comprises an effective managerial style but I am interested in the gendered norms associated with the effectiveness of gendered managerial styles and the perceptions that go along with those styles. As an increasing amount of women enter the workforce, and as more and more knowledge is gained about managerial styles, the classical approach to upper and middle level management is in some cases being questioned. I am interested, moreover, in the perceptions of managers in insurance agency offices where communication between managers and employees is paramount in running an effective operation.

The communication phenomenon I am interested in examining is the perceptions of managerial communication techniques of managers in the insurance field by employees and how these perceptions contribute to employee morale and overall job satisfaction. Ultimately, through my literature review, I have determined that feminine styled managers engage in more interpersonal communication with employees and include subordinates in more decision making processes which make them more effective managers in terms of morale and overall employee job satisfaction.

**Topic Overview**

While women have traditionally been a disenfranchised group in the context of organizational management, modern shifts in gendered societal expectations and gendered organizational expectations have helped usher in a new age where an increasing number of women are securing management positions. According to USA Today, there is a record high 18 women running fortune 500 companies with numbers steadily rising (Petrecca, 2011). With this increase in female managers, however, there has been increased scrutiny placed on feminine management styles as compared to the traditional masculine styles of their male counterparts. In this context masculine and feminine styles do not refer to the biological sex of the manager, but rather the kinds of communication techniques and strategies that they use in an organizational context.

As I said earlier, with more female managers stepping into managerial roles, their managerial style as well as their gender are being examined, and in some cases discounted. “In some cases, women who reach the top try to manage like men, yet it doesn’t work well for them… loud, public directives from the female boss is often interpreted as nasty or offensive” (Ludwig, 2011, p. 1). In addition to the double standard of gendered management, according to a 2011 poll, “Female bosses were easily threatened, emotionally unpredictable or irritable. Other negative descriptors of the female boss included moody, sharp tongued, and vain” (Ludwig, 2011, p. 1).

Research has been conducted on male and female managers and their associative styles of management, however very little information exists about employee perceptions of these styles in relation to organizational morale and overall job satisfaction. With a better understanding of what compromises gendered managerial styles and the implications of those styles on employee job satisfaction, we may be able to redefine what makes a good boss and determine what managerial characteristics are most beneficial to employees.

**Review of Literature**

Gendered Stereotypes in the Workforce

A large aspect of my topic involves the structure of male dominated organizational management because it contributes to what people consider to be an ideal manager. While a lot of research exists examining the traditional male dominated organizational structure, a 2004 study conducted by K. Lee Ashcraft and D.K. Mumby sought to examine the premise that organizations are fundamentally gendered. Through analysis of the progression of organizational attitudes and structures concerning gender, he found that women were presented with a paradox in many organizational roles. In examining the construct of an airline pilot, he found “seemingly contradictory constructions of the pilot (i.e., ‘‘if a woman can fly, anyone can’’ vs. ‘‘only qualified, technical experts can fly’’) worked in concert to entrust white, (upper) middle-class men with control of the airline cockpit and white, middleclass women with the work of in-flight domesticity (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p.37). Additionally, the researchers identified the problem of resistance to non-gender stereotypical instances of females in the workforce. According to the study, “Chiefly, our analysis demonstrated that gender is a fundamental principle in the organization of working subjectivities… inclusiveness may prove costly, for it will likely cast suspicion on longstanding material systems of value and reward” (Ashcraft et al., 2004, p. 39). This research shows that we have socially constructed ideas about females and males in relation to certain jobs or job related tasks. These constructed ideas rely heavily on gendered stereotypes and identify that perceptions of feminine and masculine styled managers may be deeply rooted and engrained in us by our societal expectations of men and women.

Typical Feminine and Masculine Management techniques

My research will be based on managerial techniques that have been linked to gender in our society. These traditional techniques displayed by male and female managers will help me define feminine and masculine managerial styles which will be used in my own research. In this field of study, there is some existing research concerning gendered management techniques and communication strategies. In a study conducted by Nancy Harper, masculine and feminine persuasion techniques were examined in the context of making a subordinate employee fulfill a task. The managers’ techniques were evaluated in terms of employee motivation to complete the task. The study found that when communicating with employees, male managers were much more comfortable using a punishment based strategy, whereas women used altruism based strategies (Harper & Hirokawa, 1988).

In this context, according to Harper and Hirokawa (1988), punishment based strategies refer to uses of “ultimatum (shape up or find another job), warning (if you don’t shape up, you won’t be with the company much longer), and threat (the next time you are late, I will start docking your pay)” (Harper et al.1988, p.164). 64% of male respondents said that they would rely heavily on punishment strategies as compared to only 37% of female respondents (Harper et al., p.164). The vast majority of female respondents said that they would rely on a strategy that employed an altruistic approach. According to this study, altruistic principles include such strategies as “counsel (is there anything that I can do to help you?), and duty (it is your obligation to report to work on time)” (Harper et al., 1988, p. 164).

In addition, Eagley and Johannesen-Schmidt conducted empirical research in 2001 that sought to identify masculine and feminine leadership qualities within organizational management positions. This research found that women displayed communal tendencies which would place a high level of concern on maintaining interpersonal relationships by tending to others’ welfare (Eagley & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). This study operated under the principle that gendered roles contribute to masculine and feminine style management techniques. The authors argue that gender roles create two very distinct attributes; agentic and communal attributes. According to this study, “agentic characteristics, which are ascribed more strongly to men than women, describe primarily an assertive, controlling, and confident tendency” (Eagley et al., 2001, p. 783) Communal attributes on the other hand, “are ascribed more strongly to women than men, and describe primarily a concern with the welfare of other people” (Eagley et al., p.787).

That same study also found that women were far more likely to display transformational leadership qualities than were men mainly due to the aspects of mentoring subordinates and concern for individual needs (Eagley et al., 2001). According to this study:

“Transformational leaders set especially high standards of for behavior and establish themselves as role models by gaining the trust and confidence of their followers. Transactional leaders establish exchange relationships with their subordinates… clarifying subordinate responsibilities, monitoring their work, and rewarding them for meeting objectives” (Eagley et al., 2001, p. 787).

Perceptions of Female Managers

The perceptions of male and female leaders and their associated techniques will also be a driving force behind my study. Understanding the communication relationships that exist between employees and managers from employee perspectives will be instrumental in evaluating employee perceptions of gendered managerial styles in relation to morale and job satisfaction. While little research exists about perceptions of female managers and their managerial styles, Smartseva and Fomina did conduct a study in 2001 that sought to explore the characteristics of female management decision making strategies and analyze the relationship between female managers and subordinates as compared to their male counterparts. This questionnaire based study found that women primarily used a fraternalistic decision making style which involved open discussion with subordinates about issues. According to this study, “fraternalism requires a high degree of leveling in relationships; decisions are made collectively and discussed by and explained to subordinates and relationships are fairly informal” (Smartseva & Fomina, 2001, p. 71). Men, on the other hand, typically used a bureaucratic style where, “functions are explicitly set for each employee… contacts between executive and subordinates are impersonal and do not extend beyond business matters” (Smartseva et al., 2002, p. 70).

Because of this strong disconnect between masculine management and employees, it was found that employees tended to support female managers more because they felt that they had a better chance of being heard under a feminine management style (Smartseva, 2002). Additionally both fraternalistic and bureaucratic styles are strongly influenced by the distance of authority. In other words, feminine styled managers tended to be more readily to help employees available and thus were perceived as more supportive than were masculine styled managers.

Along these same lines, Victor Callan examined how male and female managers communicated with subordinates of the opposite sex and how their employees perceived their communication and the consequences of those perceptions on levels of employee satisfaction. This research operated under the principle that there was congruence between satisfaction and nature of communication with one’s manager (Callan, 1993, p. 15). After examining 229 groups of managers and their subordinates and administering questionnaires relating to quality of communication, “male subordinates who had female managers believed that they had more opportunities to initiate, discuss, and disclose their opinions… the relationship style of many female managers tends to emphasize care, informality, and more personal attention to the individual employee” (Callan, 1993, p. 24). These findings are important because they propose that female managers are more collaborative throughout decision making processes.

Additionally, in a 2008 article, Taylor conducted random surveys over the course of one month to determine how people felt about female leaders in relation to male leaders. While most of the survey results were evenly matched between men and women, Taylor (2008) did note that 70% of respondents said that men were more arrogant than women and a majority of respondents thought that women were less stubborn than men. Both of these articles seek to more accurately define perceptions of women in powerful roles. This is extremely important because it is the perceptions of these managerial styles, not the styles themselves that drive the issue of gendered managerial styles.

Communication Influence Strategies used by Gendered Managers

An important aspect of manager-employee communication is the assertion of power. This is most typically displayed when managers ask subordinates to complete tasks. I believe that feminine and masculine styled managers approach these situations differently and that the strategies used in these situations may factor heavily in to employee perceptions of their managers. In a 1990 article for the “Western Journal of Speech Communication”, David Schlueter, Kevin Barge, and Dana Blankenship conducted research that sought to identify influence strategies used by male and female managers in relation to getting a subordinate to complete a task. They operated under the framework that power was a key variable in organizational life. Using the structuralist and socialization perspectives of power, the researchers found that “female managers tended to rely on the strategies of altruism significantly more than their male counterparts in the same situation. Also, “20% of female managers said that they would rely on the strategy of explanation [as compared to 10% for male managers]” (Schlueter, Barge, & Blankenship, 1990, p. 52). This study, again, proposed that feminine managers rely on altruism based strategies or a mixture of strategies in managerial roles much more frequently than their masculine counterparts.

With an understanding of the existing research concerning this topic, my research will fill the gap that exists between gendered managerial techniques and employee satisfaction, primarily those related to decision making techniques and the flow of communication in organizations with masculine and feminine managers. While research exists that tries to define these gendered managerial roles, very little research exists that shows the relationship between group decision making and communication flow in relation to the job satisfaction of employees and subordinates. My research will fill this gap and show what effective managerial styles exist that promote employee job satisfaction, especially examining styles which promote open employee-manager communication and group decision making processes.

**Theoretical Grounding**

Wood’s theories concerning gendered stereotypes of women in organizations will help guide my research. According to Wood (2009) women are typically viewed in one of four roles that all draw from gendered stereotypes. These four perceived roles are: the sex object, mother, child, or iron maiden. The sex object role defines women in terms of their sex or sexuality (Wood, 2009) and leads to judgments about women solely based on their physical appearance. The mother role refers to when people view women as “employees that take care of the ‘emotional labor’ for everyone and listen to and support others” (Wood, 2009, p. 233). In addition, the women as mother role can have career limiting implications in terms of childbirth and taking company leave. “Women employees who have or plan on having children are often perceived as less serious professionals as men or women who aren’t mothers” (Wood, 2009, p. 233). The third gendered stereotype is the women as children. According to Wood, viewing women as children “imposes a stereotype of a child or a pet- cute but not to be taken seriously… this stereotype reflects a view of women as less mature, less competent, and less capable than adults” (Wood, 2009, p. 234). The fourth and final gendered stereotype that commonly presents itself in organizational settings is that of women as an iron maiden. This stereotype refers to “a female professional who is independent, ambitious, directive, and competitive… [an iron maiden] is usually viewed as unacceptably unfeminine” (Wood, 2009, p. 234-235). These gendered stereotypes have long helped define women’s roles in organizations unjustly. They act to relegate women to roles that have been created due to gendered expectations and at times greatly hinder feminine managers’ abilities to be effective.

Structuralist perspective will help me better understand why gendered managerial differences and inequalities exist between genders. This perspective maintains that women are relatively powerless in most organizational contexts because they traditionally occupy lower level jobs and are not acclimated into the organizational hierarchy due to their lower positions (Schlueter et al., 1990). According to this research, “Structuralist perspective holds that power is embedded within an organization and constrains the range of influence strategies available to individuals” (Schlueter et al., 1990, p.43). This offers a unique theoretical look at organizational inequality between men and women and helps identify why women sometimes have difficulty navigating a male dominated organization.

In addition to using Schlueter’s findings about perspectives and Wood’s theories of gendered stereotypes, I will also look at Hirokawa and Gouran’s functional perspective on group decision making. This theory outlines four functions of effective decision making. These include: “Analysis of the Problem, Goal Setting, Identification of Alternatives, and Evaluation of Positive and Negative Characteristics” (Griffin, 2006, p. 250-252). This theory will be valuable in examining gendered managerial roles and communication because it believes, “discussion among members has a significant effect on the quality of group decision making” (Griffin, 2006, p. 255). With this theory, I will examine a particularly important aspect of my own study which is the implications of collaborative decision making by managers on employee morale and overall job satisfaction.

**Methodology**

I have chosen to perform a qualitative approach to this study. I have chosen this because I want to develop a study that will be able to identify and evaluate managerial components in a way that is extremely objective. This form of study will also help me better substantiate or discount the role that group decision making and communication flow have on employee and subordinate job satisfaction. With a study of this type, I will be able to draw correlations between gendered managerial techniques and perceptions of those techniques of employees and subordinates.

*Hypothesis #1; Implementation of group decision making and open communication flow are important to employee and subordinates’ sense of job satisfaction.* This hypothesis will help me identify the importance of these variables in an organizational communication context. I believe that group decision making is important because it fosters an environment where employee input is valued and I believe this contributes to employees’ senses of inclusion and morale. Additionally, group decision making fosters a more open communication culture where more interpersonal communication is displayed which I also believe is a positive indicator of employee job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis #2; Feminine styled managers rely more on group decision making processes and open communication environments than do their male counterparts*. This is important because it looks to link managerial communication tendencies to gendered managerial roles. Additionally, when taken into account with hypothesis #1 it seeks to prove that feminine styled managers have a more positive impact on employee morale and job satisfaction than do their male counterparts. This will fill the gap that seeks to identify which gendered style of management is perceived as better by employees and subordinates in terms of morale and job satisfaction.

Participants

Participants in my study will be professional insurance agents or clerical employees working in personal lines insurance offices with between 5 and 15 other employees. I have chosen this group because I believe that in the context of an insurance agency, managerial roles play an important role in creating positive morale. Also, I believe that successful agencies rely on more open communication climates and strategies to better serve clients. I chose to look at offices with 5 to 15 employees because I believe that that number is indicative of the average personal lines insurance agency office. Additionally, I hope to look at agents and clerical workers because in my experience everyone working in these offices contributes to the communication environment and overall organizational success. For the purposes of my research, my only demographic qualification is that the respondent is a full time employee of an insurance agency, that that individual spends at least 30 hour per week in their agency’s office, and that the individual has been with the agency for more than 3 months. Because I am looking at a number of different agency offices, male and female respondents will both be included to gain more information regarding managerial effectiveness. Additionally, I will also examine the managers themselves in these offices to determine what styles they typically display.

Procedure

To gather data, I will use surveys and survey analysis. I will generate two surveys through the online tool SurveyMonkey that seek to determine managerial styles and employee perceptions of those styles. To do this, I will distribute one survey to managers in all of the offices I examine that will determine how they use decision making in their offices and what overall communication climate they try to employ. I will also distribute a survey to the employees in each office to determine the perceptions of these managers’ styles. As defined by Keyton, a survey is “a system for collecting information to describe, compare, or explain knowledge, attitudes, and behavior” (Keyton, 2011, p. G-8 ) This methodology will be best for gathering information which seeks to draw correlations between managerial styles and employee perceptions of those styles.

The general areas on which my qualitative study will focus are inclusion in decision making and the perceived importance of inclusion in decision making (Appendix A, Question # 1), the frequency of interpersonal communication with managers and the perceived importance of that communication (Appendix A, Question #2), through what channels is information distributed and the perceived effectiveness of those channels, and the inclusiveness of organizational communication climates of employees and the perceived importance of the inclusiveness of those climates.

In order to determine effectiveness of gendered managerial styles, I will use a statistical correlation test. A correlation test seeks to identify the relationship between dependant and independent variables using a system that evaluates each in relation to each other (Johnson-Tsigaridas, personal communication, November 2011). For my first hypothesis, I will look at the correlation between group decision making and inclusion in organizational communication and employee perceptions of job satisfaction. The dependant variable in this instance will be the level of employee morale and job satisfaction and the independent variables will be feminine styled managers in the insurance industry and masculine styled managers in the insurance industry. Feminine styled managers in the insurance industry can be defined as managers who display nurturing qualities, often engage in interpersonal conversations with employees, and who display a collaborative communication style especially during decision making processes. Masculine styled managers can be defined as managers who are primarily task oriented, use very little to no group decision making and who discourage interpersonal communication between managers and subordinates. With these variables operationalized, a qualitative study will best help me identify the type of managerial styles employed in the insurance industry and the evaluation of employees regarding morale and job satisfaction.

**Conclusion**

With very little research conducted on effectiveness of gendered managerial styles and virtually none conducted on these styles in the context of insurance agencies, my research will be instrumental in determining what styles employees in this industry perceive as most important to their own sense of morale and job satisfaction. With the constant question “who makes the better manager; men or women?”, I feel that this research will help define gendered managerial roles and the effectiveness of those roles and may even be able to shed light on this nagging question. I will accomplish this goal by determining correlations between masculine and feminine managerial styles and employee perceptions of those styles, primarily in terms of employee morale and job satisfaction that may ultimately lead to a better understanding of managerial strategies and roles in the insurance field.

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**Appendix A.**

Below is a sample of the survey questions that I will distribute to employees in the insurance field using the online tool SurveyMonkey:

1) On a scale of 1-5, 1 being never and 5 being almost always, how often are you included in making office related decisions by your manager?

* 1. Never
* 2. Almost never
* 3. Sometimes
* 4. Often
* 5. Always
* 6. No Opinion

This will help me determine the frequency with which employees of gendered styled managers are included in the decision making process. As this is one of the main focuses of my research, this question will be instrumental in determining the frequency with which managers in the insurance agency employ group decision making techniques.

2) On a scale of 1-7, 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree, it is important to me for my manager to include me in the decision making process.

* 1. Strongly Disagree
* 2. Disagree
* 3. Somewhat Disagree
* 4. No Opinion
* 5. Somewhat Agree
* 6. Agree
* 7. Strongly Agree

This will help me determine how important employees perceive being included in the decision making process is. Because feminine managers tend to display collaborative communication styles in the decision making process and often consult with employees and masculine managers tend to use an authoritative communication method during the decision making process, this question should strengthen the correlation between positive employee morale and traditional feminine styles of management.