

## IS GENDER RELEVANT IN MANAGEMENT?

**Abstract.** *Management as both a discipline and practice is well established today. Similarly, gender and gender studies have received considerable attention in sociological studies across the world. This study is an attempt to bring both management and gender together and find out whether gender holds any relevance for management. The study was completed in two phases using qualitative and quantitative methodologies among working managers and aspiring managers (MBA students) with the findings of the two phases showing that gender indeed has a lot of relevance in management. A key management aspect where gender exerts a significant influence was also identified.*

**Keywords:** *gender, management, recruitment, career progression, salary*

### Introduction and background to the study

The distinction between the words “sex” and “gender” in the English language was chiefly used extensively during the 1950s and 1960s mainly by psychiatrists from the UK and the USA and among other personnel with a medical background working with intersex and transsexual<sup>1</sup> patients (Moi, 2005). Since then, the word gender has been used widely to differentiate between the word “sex” as being largely biological or physiological in nature, with “gender” reserved as a social and cultural construct. Gender is believed to be an acquired individuality that is learned, modified over time and can vary widely within and across cultures. “*Gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female at a particular point in time*” (World Health Organization, 2001: cited in Esplen and Jolly, 2006). Gender is sometimes defined as “*something we do*” (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and “*something we perform*” (Butler, 1990).

Management has been defined from different perspectives, but with a common undertone. According to Henri Fayol and Adair J. Coubrough (1930), “*To manage is to forecast and to plan, to organize, to command, to*

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*co-ordinate and to control*". Harold Koontz (1961) states that "*Management is the art of getting things done through and with people in formally organized groups*". Management is defined by Peter Drucker (1954) as "... *a multi-purpose organ that manages the business and manages managers and manages workers and work*". Over the years, management as a discipline and management as a process have developed and changed considerably. Many aspects and subdivisions of the management discipline have emerged in the last century. There is a multitude of perspectives ranging from leadership to good practices in management, but gender diversity has not been recognised as one of them (Burton and Ryall, 1995; Kaplan, 1996; Smith and Hutchinson, 1995). Management is generally associated with masculinity (Bartram, 2005). The language used by the management guru Henry Mintzberg (1975: 49) shows he implies a manager is male: "*If you ask a manager what he does, he will most likely tell you that he plans, organizes, coordinates and controls*". There are undoubtedly significantly more male than female managers in corporations around the world. It is worth noting that the presence of female managers has increased manifold in the last few decades, with some also rising to top positions. Some research rejects the notion that male and female managers perform or behave differently (Vilkinas and Cartan, 1997; Wajcman, 1996). The similarity in the behaviour of managers of the opposite sex is more striking than the dissimilarity (Billing and Alvesson, 1994). A plethora of studies and feminists complain about inequality in opportunity and growth and the responsibility in organisations that comes with management roles and functions. Some other studies justify the superiority of either sex for being effective and efficient managers. It is important to understand whether the parity or disparity in management is more stereotypical in nature than in other areas of life or whether it has been engraved in the minds of today's business leaders as well as future leaders. This paper represents an attempt to analyse the significance of the concept of gender in overall management.

## Objectives

The study's broad objective is to ascertain the relevance of gender in different aspects of management. The first objective is to establish any association of gender and management functions in the understanding of management students and management professionals (working managers). The second objective is to quantitatively determine the association of various attributes supposed to be significant for the management process, function and decision-making.

## Methodology

Taking the above objectives into account, the study adopts a mixed method approach that employs both qualitative and quantitative research. The study is broadly divided into two phases. The first phase meets the first objective while the second phase corresponds with the second objective.

To achieve the first objective of the study, an interview-based approach was applied among management professionals as this method best suits that purpose (McCracken, 1988), while focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted among management students, followed by content analysis of the notes taken during the FGDs. Using students as respondents in an empirical study on gender is appropriate as student communities are a mirror of the society surrounding them (Schein et al., 1989; Schein and Mueller, 1992; Owen and Todor, 1993; Ng, 1995).

Interviews are methodologically among the most powerful tools in qualitative research and provide many insights (McCracken, 1988). They involve intensive questioning and answering that helps a researcher understand a respondent's overall view of the topic under discussion (Woodside and Wilson, 1995). Observing respondents during the interview provides non-verbal cues that assist effective understanding (Miller and Crabtree, 1992). A focus group discussion is arguably the most widely used qualitative methodology and entails a group of participants coming together to discuss a topic moderated by a moderator (Wong, 2008). The transcripts made during the process of qualitative data collection are analysed through content analysis. Klaus Krippendorff (2004: 18) defined content analysis as *"a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use"*.

In order to accomplish the second objective, a set of relevant questions in the form of a questionnaire (discussed below) was administered to management students and management professionals to find any association of gender with management. The questions asked provided for Yes or No responses to ascertain agreement or disagreement. An interval scale to measure the level of agreement or disagreement was not used as the objective was to establish whether respondents regard the concept of gender as being associated with management or not.

## Data collection

The research sample constituted working managers and management students pursuing their MBA degrees in different Indian institutions and universities. About 30 management professionals working in middle and top-level management in India were personally interviewed or via an

electronic mode during October 2016 to determine their understanding of gender and its relevance for management professionals. The interviews were conducted informally. Notes were taken and voice recordings made wherever possible. The transcripts were subjected to a thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997).

Focus group discussions with 60 students in 5 groups were undertaken during November 2016 in the Indian city of Bhubaneswar. Each FGD lasted roughly 45 minutes. As recommended by Richard A. Krueger (1994), notes were taken for each FGD and content analysis was later carried out as per Irving Janis (1965).

To meet the second research objective, a pre-prepared questionnaire with input from experts was administered to all 30 managers and about 120 students in the last week of October and first week of November 2016 in Bhubaneswar. The results were arranged in an Excel sheet for further analysis.

## Findings and discussion

### *First phase*

In order to establish how working managers and aspiring managers understand gender in the field of management, a series of interviews and focus group discussions was conducted. The respondents' demographic profiles are given in Table 1.

*Table 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS IN THE FIRST PHASE*

Demographic characteristics	No.
Male	50
Female	40
On job managers	30
Students	60
Age range among managers	25-49
Age range among students	20-25
Qualification: university graduate and above	90

Source: Data from the author.

The interviews of working managers and the FGDs with management students showed that the relevance of gender varies from industry to industry and function to function. Gender is believed to hold significant relevance for the human resource management function, team-building and leadership. Similarly, in marketing, sales and advertising, the relevance of gender is quite significant (gender marketing). It appears that the qualities

associated with gender are in many cases stereotypical. The findings of the interviews with the working managers and the FGDs with aspiring managers are summarised as follows:

*Understanding of Gender:* For most working managers who were interviewed and the students participating in the FGDs, gender is synonymous with biological sex. The social and cultural roles played by genders take centre stage in discussions on gender, but gender is not identified in terms of responsibility for the work performed, but with biological sex.

*Gender and responsibility in the firm:* The majority of managers agreed that gender has an important role in deciding upon roles and responsibility across the hierarchy. While male employees are preferred for sales and travelling jobs, females are preferred for desk or back office work. Many believe their organisations are gender-neutral when assigning responsibility in the organisation, yet many believe the opposite.

*Gender and recruitment:* Management professionals are likely to be recruited for their soft skills and analytical skills, which do not depend on gender identity. However, all of the working managers and aspiring managers interviewed asserted that gender plays an important role during the recruitment process. Certain organisations do not want to hire young professionals because they do not wish to deal with female employees who leave their job or ask to be relocated due to marriage or maternal leave.

*Gender and reporting authority:* The situation of having a female boss seems to be critical. Although nobody claimed they would have any issue in reporting to a female boss, most had the feeling that many other persons in their organisations would not be overly comfortable having a female boss. There is much greater acceptance of a male reporting authority.

*Gender and work ethics:* There was an agreement that female workers are quite ethical in their approach, but there was a concern that they give a lot of excuses for not doing more. In many organisations faced with a shortage of manpower or excessive customer demand during a certain period of the year that forces employees to work long hours, several managers believe their female colleagues make excuses to not work overtime, very often leaving a male colleague burdened by the work.

*Gender and career:* Despite women's better education and commitment, there is a belief that a male manager is expected to do better in a corporate career or rise higher up the managerial hierarchy. Higher pay and responsibility are expected to be reserved for male managers. Most respondents believed this is the situation as well as the expectation in the environment. Similar views can be seen in much of the literature; namely, male managers are better paid than female ones, have better job security, occupy higher positions, to be less tense, are able to spend more time for each level of

responsibility, and not to have experienced any kind of prejudice and discrimination (Calás and Smircich, 2006).

This study was an attempt to highlight the association of gender with management, with many aspects being detected where gender was an issue in management. In the modern era where equal opportunities are provided, especially in white-collar managerial jobs, the dominance of the issue of gender does not augur well. Modern organisations are supposed to only function according to meritocracy without any stereotypes, but the association of gender with management could be a reflection of society. India is adopting a modern and Western outlook, but remains strongly connected to its roots. In a patriarchal society like in India where women are largely homemakers and engaged with household activities and sometimes contribute within agriculture or a family enterprise as a helping hand, protective mindsets among men might still be in place. In many sections of society, man is considered more capable and intellectually sound. While the education and performance of female managers are changing stereotypes to a great extent, consciously or subconsciously the male chauvinistic mindset is still present in society and shapes the perceptions of individuals, with the findings also reflecting these to some extent.

### *Second phase*

A questionnaire with Yes/No responses was prepared and administered to management professionals and students. The questions considered the importance of gender as part of management education, whether gender has any impact on career progression, salary, recruitment, responsibility given and team performance etc. Out of 30 managers and 120 students approached, 25 management professionals and 82 students gave a complete response to the questionnaire. The respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in tabular form in Table 2.

*Table 2: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS IN THE SECOND PHASE*

Demographic characteristics	No.
Male	52
Female	55
On job managers	25
Students	82
Age range among managers	28-53
Age range among students	20-25
Qualification: university graduate and above	107

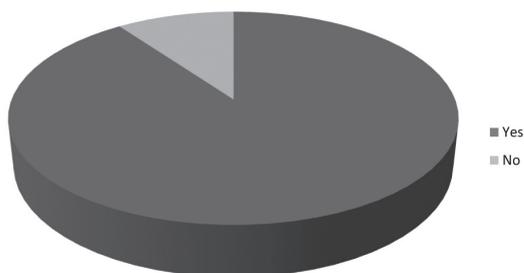
Source: Data from the author.

The quantitative study revealed a number of different perceptions among working managers and aspiring managers concerning gender in relation to management functions. The key findings of the quantitative study are presented here. The results also show that opinions are quite divided and in some cases also contradictory. The main findings are as follows.

### *Gender in management education/practice*

The respondents were asked to express their views on whether gender is important in management education and management practices, with 90% giving a positive answer. The first phase of the study showed that the respondents understand gender mostly as biological sex only. We believe that it is promising that there is an eagerness and agreement to acquire knowledge on gender.

Figure 1: IS GENDER IMPORTANT?

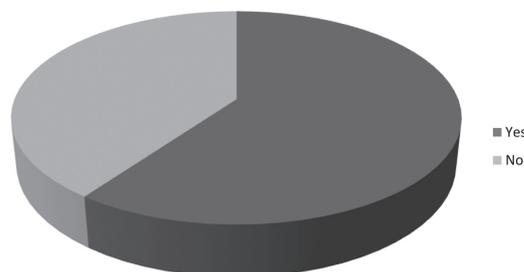


Source: Data from the author.

### *Gender impact on career progression*

The majority of respondents (60%) stated that gender plays an important role in career progression. Still, 40% believe it is not an important aspect. The respondents were not asked whether the impact is positive or negative.

Figure 2: DOES GENDER IMPACT CAREER PROGRESSION?

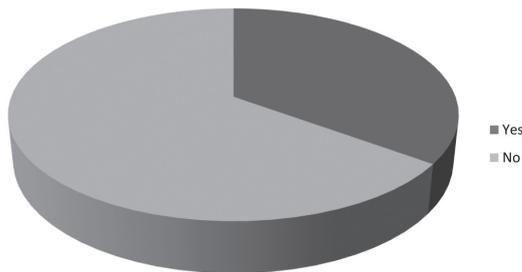


Source: Data from the author.

### *Impact of gender on salary*

The respondents were asked about how they view the impact of gender on salary in any organisation or in any management function. The majority of respondents do not believe that salary and pay structure has anything to do with gender in the typical organisation today.

*Figure 3: DOES GENDER IMPACT SALARY?*



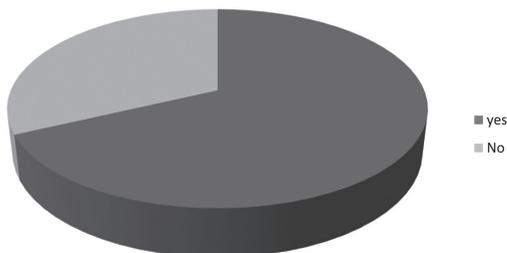
Source: Data from the author.

### *Impact of gender on recruitment and responsibility*

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According to the respondents, recruitment and responsibility seem to be affected by gender. The majority believes that gender plays a role in recruitment for jobs and the roles and responsibilities assigned in organisations.

*Figure 4: DOES GENDER IMPACT RECRUITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY?*

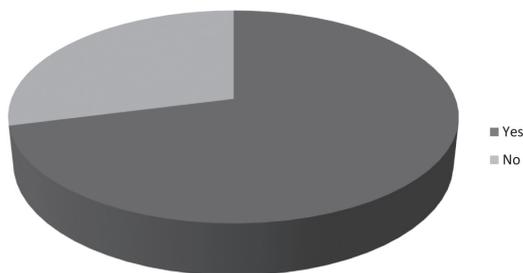


Source: Data from the author.

### *Impact of gender on work culture and team performance*

Most respondents believe that gender has a significant impact on work culture and team performance. The respondents were not asked whether the impact is productive or counterproductive.

Figure 5: DOES GENDER IMPACT TEAM PERFORMANCE?



Source: Data from the author.

The findings of the second research phase showed that the respondents attribute greater significance to gender with regard to some aspects of management and organisational dynamics. Based on the responses, it is safe to conclude that for recruitment and career progression gender is quite relevant in Indian organisations.

## Conclusion

The study sought to estimate the relevance of gender in Indian organisations. We found that both managers and aspiring managers assign a high level of relevance to gender in management in the Indian context. Almost 45% of the respondents in the study are female managers or students, namely there is approximately equal representation of the two genders, allowing the findings to be seen as unbiased. There was a focus on any differences in responses between male and female respondents as well as between working managers and students. The responses of the male and female students were not very different, with similar views being expressed by the majority, although there were significant differences in opinion among the male and female managers. In most cases, the male managers did not agree that gender actually plays an important role in their organisation, yet the female managers strongly supported that statement. Some students who did not have exposure to any organisation were not fully certain about the issues but, overall, the responses had more or less a similar pattern among the female managers and female students. The study quite elaborately illustrated and confirmed the relevance of gender in management. The crucial finding of the study is that, whether true or false or right or wrong, gender is perceived to have an impact on management and the management function and is something that must be addressed. One of the best ways for dealing with an issue is to know more about it. It is contended that it would be beneficial for both women and organisations if MBA students and working managers were to be equipped with proper knowledge

and information about gender issues. Gender studies should be incorporated into the curriculum for management education, and also in other subjects.

There is ample scope to conduct deeper gender-related research in the public sector and in private-sector organisations. A comparison of gender issues in the organised and un-organised sectors would allow an improved insight into gender and management. Gender sensitisation, gender-specific laws and their impact could also be the subject of future research.

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