

THE CULLITON REPORT: THE RESOURCE ISSUE OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT

Noelie Hannan *

Given that the Culliton Report makes no specific reference to women, the question might be asked: why look at it in relation to women in management. The answer is in the two major themes running through the report itself: the need to optimise the use of resources and the urgent requirement for change. How well a resource is being used and whether or not the status quo is adequate are questions which are highly relevant in relation to the current role of women in the Irish workforce. They are straightforward business issues that have to do with effectiveness and competitiveness. The focus here happens to be on women – but this is not a “women’s issue”.

The preface to Culliton sets the tone of the report:

The principal economic goal of our nation is to provide a high and rising standard of living for our citizens and this depends on the productivity of our resources...

Also in the preface we read that “It is time for change. Time to accept that the solutions to our problems lie in our own hands...” These are just two of the many statements focused on change and resources – statements that happen to be set in general terms. Clearly these themes harden into specifics at various points in the text. This paper takes them into the area of human resource management – to look at the role of women in management, how effectively they are able to contribute to the organisation and whether or not changes in the status quo are feasible or desirable. This is also worth doing in that it sheds light on how people, men and women, are managed and on the opportunities, taken or foregone, for them to contribute to the effectiveness of the organisation.

Resources

The report examines the issue of the resources needed to make Irish industry competitive. Factors identified as significant range from the ability to raise equity to the creation of industrial clusters. A number of themes recur throughout the text: the need to derive value from within our own resources, for innovation and for imaginative contribution from within the firm. The thrust of the argument is that we must identify capability additional to what we already know – and use it. In this context it is reasonable to

* Noelie Hannan is Senior Consultant with Colin McIver Associates Limited.

suppose that we should look, in this country, to where resource has been found elsewhere – within some measure of diversity, given that there is considerable evidence to support the idea that “...the flexibility of thought and organisation that diverse people bring to a team offer an important and potentially controllable contribution to team performance” (West and Farr 1990).

But how diverse are teams, especially management teams in Irish organisations? Our society is not notably diverse. We may pride ourselves on perceived regional differences; but they are more a matter of folklore than fact. We are not a multi-ethnic society, we are not especially cosmopolitan in our attitudes or approach. We might be thought, therefore, to need all the creative impetus to be found from within our own resources and that we would have developed the capacity to search out methods of tapping into whatever abilities are to be found in our society and our workforce.

And, indeed, that is precisely what a few companies are doing – the relatively few who have looked at the spectrum of abilities in the totality of the population, male and female. They have noted that fewer women than men are apparent in managerial grades and have asked the question: why are we losing out on the potential for contribution to business and industry of some 50% of the population? In organisations that recruit men and women in equal numbers, what happens to the vast majority of women who don't make it into management grades?

Perspective

As a broad generalisation it is often said that women are poorly represented in management – across the work force as a whole. There are statistics which give some perspective – but they offer only a very broad outline. The problem arises from how people are counted as managers. In most published statistics “Administrative, Executive and Managerial Workers” is the category which is used. In this country women make up 17% of this group (Blackwell J. 1989). This is slightly less than the U.K. (Ashridge) (approximately 20%) and very much less than the U.S. (US Dept. of Labour, 1989) – where statistics would suggest that approximately one third of managers are women. But the U.S. definition is, again, broad in the extreme. If top management is in question, in both the U.K. and the U.S., the figure decreases to around 3%.

Commentators agree that these figures are inexact in the sense that the definition of manager from which they derive is inexact. The figures serve only to point to a general message – that relatively few women seem to reach senior management jobs. There is evidence in the U.S. that the numbers are increasing pretty rapidly there – more than doubling between 1970 and 1990 – but that evidence does not exist for this country. The data for determining exact numbers in management grades here are available only for the civil service. There, some increase is evident in the higher grades – but the numbers are very small.

Cause for Concern?

Which poses the question: is this cause for concern? Common sense would suggest that it is. In the current environment, to be competitive organisations need to get maximum advantage from the resources they have. They need their people to be positive and highly motivated – able and willing to contribute to the business. Looked at another way: companies, who we would recognise as being successful, tend to develop their people – sometimes, specifically, their women staff members. Aer Rianta, for instance, have taken note of the results in the public examinations and degree system – where some of the highest achievers are women. They have then raised the question: if you recruit men and women in equal numbers yet notice that only 3–4% of women develop to management level – what has happened to all that apparent potential?

In Britain the resource issue is rather more sharply focused as a result of their demographics. A specific initiative, called Opportunity 2000, has been put in place – its inauguration in 1991 marked by John Major – to encourage Chief Executives to work towards what is termed a “balanced workforce” (Opportunity 2000). Much of the concern which this initiative embodies arises from the more dynamic role women are seen to play in competitor countries. Germany is most often cited in this regard and, in particular, a company like Mercedes Benz – where women are brought into all areas of activity including engineering and management. From within Britain itself there is further impetus for the initiative in the form of a curious statistic: one in ten women in the labour force, in possession of A levels, does an unskilled or semi-skilled job. Even when unemployment is rising that suggests a worrying waste of resources.

Can Women Manage?

So, if there is evidence that women are under represented in management grades, the next obvious question is: are there good reasons for this? There are – but they run from readily understood structural causes through to issues of attitude and company culture which are almost impossible to measure. Specific structural factors can be identified readily. They are seen in types of industrial process, in requirements for qualification or experience and in the constituents of career patterns.

The most easily understood structural barriers to women’s progress can be seen in construction, or in manufacturing with a heavy engineering content. Companies which have traditionally recruited men for heavy work will be slow to change – perhaps not recognising changes arising from the use of technology; and certainly not recognising the interest some women may have in non-traditional work areas. Attitude is part of the barrier here – but the first barrier is certainly structural. This at least is understandable – if not especially defensible – given the ability demonstrated by women who have qualified as engineers or in similar work areas. It can be argued also that women can, and do, work in functions such as marketing, finance and personnel. In fact, research shows that women are concentrated in staff as opposed to line functions – something

which tends to distance them from the route to a Chief Executive's job. And there is little doubt that, in many areas of manufacturing, they will be working in a culture – whether staff or line – where the traditions and role models are entirely male. So while there is a basic structural factor at work there are also powerful pressures created by tradition and attitude.

Interestingly, the professional bodies, for instance the Institution of Engineers of Ireland, are entirely supportive of the emergence of women in the profession. Their Director makes the point that women do extremely well in the non-traditional area of civil engineering: that the perceived inability of women to cope with rigorous working conditions is simply not an issue. Anecdotal evidence in relation to individual companies suggests more ambivalent attitudes – from those that readily assign non-traditional responsibilities to women, to those who do not envisage women functioning at senior level – even in a staff role. Attitude rather than structural requirement would seem to be the more resistant barrier.

Qualification

Qualifications required constitute another structural factor limiting women's access to the higher levels of some professions. Medicine provides a ready example. The traditional method of qualifying as a consultant (multiple, short-term hospital jobs) requires maximum mobility at a time when women would be marrying and starting a family. Additionally, there are few opportunities for re-entering the profession after a break to have a family, or opportunities to acquire training other than in the traditional mode. Recent British studies confirm that the current methods of medical training militate against all but the most focused women. Yet skills shortages suggest that, while no one doubts the value of breadth and depth of experience, some fresh thinking is required on how to provide this. As of now the problem persists and ability is being lost to the medical and other professions. What persists also is the fact that the status quo is what we know, understand and therefore trust.

Career Path

Staying for a moment with structural problems, the question remains as to why women don't make it to senior management in careers characterised more by administrative work processes and decision making. The figures for the senior ranks of the Civil Service in this country make puzzling reading until related to the time factor. It can take anything from 11 to 23 years according to most research – either in private or public sector – for an individual's career to progress from recruitment level to senior management. In this country, it has been suggested that, in the Civil Service, we are still looking at the effects of the marriage bar, lifted during the 1970s. That is probably part of the problem. Another part may be that women already serving – as opposed to being recruited – do not have the access to appropriate training. The figures for women on

training courses would appear to bear out something that has been identified internationally; that training, apart from technical skills, tends to happen for the more senior grades. If, traditionally, women are clustered at the junior grades, they simply will not be given the training they would need in order to build management capabilities and skills.

In fairness it has to be said that changes are taking place in the Civil Service, as elsewhere. The larger numbers of women graduates will, in time, have an impact. Certainly for the private sector, it has been shown internationally that education, particularly at third level, is one of the most powerful drivers of women's career progress – at least to middle management levels. This should be true also of the public sector. With increasing numbers of women represented in the business oriented courses – such as the MBA – it might be expected that such progress would increase in pace. However, even in the U.S. which seems ahead of the Irish and U.K. position, much of the research there suggests that movement is slower than might have been expected. Perhaps it is not surprising that the U.S. also provides most research which suggests that women need to plan their career paths more carefully; to seek mentors and “visibility”, if they are to make significant progress. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that recession hits the development of women's careers with disproportionate effect. The director of MIT's management development programme (Fortune, 1992) points to a fall off in the number of women nominated by companies for their senior executive programmes. The suggestion is that in hard times decision makers (male) tend to fall back into traditional modes of thinking – and invest in that which they know and trust – the person most like themselves.

Issues of Attitude

However much effort we put into analysing the effect of structural factors, it can be seen that the question of attitude recurs in almost every case study. Repeatedly the question presents itself: “is there a feeling in organisations that women make poor managers?” Certainly much of the research and literature testify to the fact that many organisations are, at best, ambivalent in their approach to women in senior management.

In many ways it is hard to see, in this country, why that attitude should exist. We have, for instance, a hospital system that has its roots in the religious orders. The role of senior manager usually fell to a religious. There would probably be very few people who would seriously question the effectiveness, shrewdness, vision or capacity for motivating embodied in these women. This same pattern was characteristic of education. So at a simple, intuitive level there seems to be evidence in our culture and environment that some women make excellent managers.

There is also a considerable amount of evidence, here and elsewhere, that small businesses are often started by women. Organisations, however, tend to present a rather different picture. There, most of the managerial role models are male – so that potential

women managers would need to break a mould in order to achieve managerial status. Additionally, the organisation can only supply the opportunity: the individual has to self select as a possible candidate. Attitude is a two way process. The individual must want to develop to become a manager. This is where role models are important. An organisation with women in its senior management grades sends a message to its staff that women with the potential and motivation can progress. Where there are no role models, therefore, there is little encouragement built into the system for the individual woman to succeed.

Stereotype and Role Models

All through the research and the literature on this subject (and, indeed, in practical experience) the question of stereotypes recurs. A controversy appears to exist on what characteristics are required to make a manager. Some of the literature is based on assumptions about types of behaviour and what they contribute to management. The traditional male/female stereotypes are invoked to suggest that the “male” stereotype represents something from which business would benefit. In this model the male stereotype would be characterised as self reliant, aggressive, competitive, decisive; the female stereotype as sympathetic, gentle, supportive and sensitive to others.

However, some very substantial American research (Powell, 1990) has tackled these assumptions and come up with interesting findings. Reviewing the evidence on behaviour of male and female managers at work and reviewing test responses under laboratory conditions, the results showed that there were very few differences in how men and women actually managed in the workplace: even though laboratory results would have suggested that, in some instances, a difference would have been shown. This particular piece of research is especially interesting in that its range is very substantial: and in that it tackles some powerfully held assumptions.

Essentially, the point that Professor Powell establishes is that a mixture of what were thought of as characteristically male and female traits was required for effective leadership and management: and that this mixture tended to be found in good managers – male or female – under operating conditions.

Creativity and Innovation

The resource implications of this are especially important where creativity in problem solving and innovation are required. There is a respectable body of research to suggest that groups exposed to diverse viewpoints are more likely to express novel (but still correct) solutions than groups confined to a majority viewpoint (West and Farr 1990). There is also considerable evidence to show that creative response is evoked in an organisational climate where individuals – male and female – feel free of the expectations of stereotype. What have been termed “balanced groups” – that is mixed groups of men and women – have been shown repeatedly to work more productively and to disprove

many of the stereotypical perceptions about the behaviours of men and women. These groups have been shown to be better motivated and that group members place “greater emphasis on demonstrating capabilities” (Rozell and Vaught) than single sex groups. The general trend of research findings is that women certainly influence group dynamics – and that their influence is positive.

The value of groups that represent some degree of diversity is nothing new, but it has been well documented of recent times. The success of the American newspaper USA Today has been linked to their policy of encouraging a diverse workforce “The reason we were interesting is that there were a lot of ideas from different people with different points of view in our news meetings every day. There were women, there were minorities, there were young people, there were old people...” (Belfray and Schmidt, 1988/98).

The notion that groups work better where there is greater freedom to respond to challenges in unconventional ways is also nothing new. But in most business organisations it is an idea that has not been given much currency. Yet innovation and creativity are, perhaps, more valuable now than they ever were. Michael Porter puts it very simply when he points to the fact that innovation is the result of “unusual effort” (Porter, 1990). He makes the case that creative response carries an element of risk to the individual – the perceived humiliation of being proved wrong. Diversity of viewpoint then will hardly flourish in a company culture where conformity and familiarity are prized. Yet that would appear to be the case in some Irish organisations. In one of the submissions to the Industrial Policy Review Group which dealt with causes of business failure (Bastow, Charleton & Co., 1991), the point was made that many Irish companies are very satisfied with the status quo. It was then suggested that this type of complacency may well be related to project failures. Certainly common-sense would suggest that very few things in the current business climate benefit from being static. There is need for “unusual effort” and therefore need for those factors which make it possible.

Company Culture

If there is agreement that company culture can affect individual performance there is also evidence to suggest that it can militate against women becoming managers. The Network study (O’Higgins, 1992) on the role of Non-Executive Directors in the Irish Boardroom saw reason to suggest that existing board members, overwhelmingly male, tended to choose new members from among their own contacts and networks – also male. The study goes on to suggest that the broadening of view point that women could bring to boardroom deliberations would have some value. Perhaps there is a fear that women would bring an unduly feminist approach to bear on their role as board members? If such a fear exists it could well be unfounded. The New York based Catalyst (Burke and McKeen, 1990) organisation surveyed female directors on the

special characteristics they brought to their work. Out of ten characteristics, they ranked only ninth “a sensitivity about issues affecting women”.

In the U.K. an interesting case study can be seen in B.P. (U.K.). In one of their regions they tried to develop women, specifically, as managers – through all female programmes. The initiative failed. B.P., when asked to account for this, suggested that company culture – in that region – was the main factor at work. There was nothing in that particular segment of the company to support the notion that women could be developed and progress to management jobs. Elsewhere in the company the idea worked well.

There is evidence to suggest that providing women with the skills required for management is not straightforward. Some all-women programmes fail – as in B.P. But that is not universal experience. Aer Rianta have, very successfully, organised development programmes for women. When problems have been identified they have tended to reflect concerns common to men and women; and dealing with them has proved a contribution overall to Human Resource Management.

Some companies offer programmes to male and female staff. Yet in some of these mixed programmes women will appear to be intimidated by male colleagues who play a dominant role. There are case studies to suggest that people – men and women – under particular circumstances, fall back on stereotypical roles. There is other evidence, however – Allied Irish Banks would be a case in point – to suggest that well designed and managed programmes work well for mixed groups. It would appear that the success of development programmes – either for women alone or with their male colleagues – is primarily a function of how women perceive their chances of progressing within a company’s culture; the individual woman’s approach to planning her own career path; and the messages sent to female staff by company policies and tradition.

Looking at some of the constituent elements of company culture may point to one source of problems. In one way or another, typically, company culture is usually thought to include the following elements:

- Politics of the organisation;
- Norms, values and organisation’s heroes;
- Skills and competencies necessary for the next step upwards;
- Knowledge about paths to advancement as opposed to blind alleys;
- Knowledge of acceptable ways of gaining visibility;
- Knowledge about stumbling blocks and personal failure patterns.

There is a considerable literature to suggest that women have, traditionally, been seen to be ill at ease with the skills necessary to deal with this complex of factors: perhaps with the individualism required to focus on successful action. However, that notion is currently under challenge. There is a growing belief, arising from organisations where women have been given positive support, that women’s difficulty in dealing with these issues relates more to the closed nature of the informal information system in an

organisation than to any innate lack of ability. These issues do not arise where the organisation opts to recruit simply for competence. In, for instance, the Federal National Mortgage Association in the U.S., where a policy was implemented to bring women into Senior Management – “nobody blinks an eye at the fact that the person who started our mortgage backed securities programme, which now has \$200 billion outstanding, is a woman” (National Association of Bank Women, 1990). Women there have reached the most senior levels – in significant numbers. The factor that differentiates the FNMA from other organisations is the approach of the Chief Executive who has set about recruiting women with management potential and giving them access to the most senior management grades. As the major decision maker he has simply removed attitudinal biases from the system, to the benefit of the organisation.

But the more usual situation is to unearth evidence that women encounter problems or feel ill at ease about developing their careers. There is general agreement that reaching senior management, for men and women, requires that one be seen to be competent (as opposed simply to being competent). Many women suggest that they have to be more competent than their male counterparts to make career progress. And many women fail to appreciate the value of “visibility”. Research shows, repeatedly, that women feel it is enough to do a good job. The reasons for this are, again, complex (Gummer, 1990) – from social experience to role models, or the lack of them, in the workplace. Part of the answer is education, part is training and part of it relates to company policy. Where a company policy exists to encourage women to come forward for training and development, then an increase in the number of women managers follows over time.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change is probably the most difficult attitudinal barrier to tackle. It is even difficult to describe. We know it when we see it; and it can be a powerful constraint on business development and competitiveness because of indifference or hostility to new ideas. Writing on managing innovation, Rosabeth Moss-Kanter (1991) refers to “people who step outside of conventional categories or traditional assumptions”... This is not a description that would readily fit the role of women in a great many organisations – Irish or otherwise: perhaps it would not even greatly reflect the position that many organisations take to staff – male or female. But at least in most cases, the male staff member who self selects for progress can have some confidence that the organisation’s culture, the perception and assumptions of senior management and his colleagues, may well be biased in his favour. His female colleague may not be able to make that assumption.

Some of the resistance that women encounter takes the form of a belief that they lack commitment. Research on this has been inconclusive – in the sense that different studies have shown different results in comparing men and women managers. Rather,

high levels of commitment – both for men and women – have been linked consistently to:

- Age
- Education
- Greater job satisfaction
- More meaningful work
- Utilization of skills

Intuition and experience might have suggested that such was indeed the case. Commitment is obviously an issue at the point where the individual decides whether or not to progress their career. There is anecdotal evidence in this country that women tend to settle for less, for the most part under pressure of having and raising a family. There are large social and cultural issues here – beyond the scope of the organisation. But the organisation can invite commitment by providing access to development and progress and by encouraging the women with potential to avail themselves of it.

Taking Action

So the question presents itself: is there something that organisations can do? Are there ways of releasing the potential of women to contribute to the business? Some of the answers can be found in what has been done already by successful companies.

The National Westminster Bank, (Willis and Daisley, 1992) for instance, has implemented a programme to make inroads into an actual decline in the numbers of women in management. They began with a review of their situation in 1977 – based on the belief that a management team made up of men and women would be stronger than a single sex team. Their programme started with a workshop designed to consult women staff members on their requirements for development and to focus on the way ahead. What followed was a Management Development Programme aimed at women with potential. The specific focus was on personal development and on training the individual for the requirements of the organisation. The curriculum covered a range of subjects from financial policy to career planning and goal setting. The programme has now developed to the point where participation is split equally between men and women and Nat West report that it has produced more rapid advancement for able women and more objective selection of staff for development.

National Westminster Bank are not alone in this initiative. Other participating companies are British Airways, Marks and Spencer and the British Civil Service.

The success of this programme illustrates the process required to change the status quo to something more dynamic. Probably the first step for any organisation is to develop an awareness of its current policies and practice; and an awareness of their effect. A number of questions present themselves: are there skills and capabilities among staff that are unused?; does the training system concentrate on known quantities?; is there access to training available to all employees – is there encouragement to come

forward for training?; what is the effect of recruitment policies – do they simply underpin the status quo? Do female staff members feel encouraged to advance their careers?

Perhaps one of the most telling answers will come from the question – is there interest in change at the most senior level? Everything that research and the literature suggest and that people in organisations will tell you underlines the fact that support for change must come from the top. It has to do with the culture of the organisation and the signals that make up an information network. If the signal from the top is not positive and supportive, the impetus to change entrenched viewpoints will not be there on the ground.

A range of other questions also need to be answered; for instance – do managers receive encouragement to seek out potential from among the people working to them? The role of “visibility” cannot be ignored. There are many good people at work – especially women – who underestimate the value of being seen to do a good job. Failing to give them support is to risk losing what they have to offer. There is also the issue of flexibility. Does some flexibility exist for non-standard working hours or career patterns? There is a tendency in any sphere of life to regard current practice as sacrosanct. But experience here – Aer Rianta would be an example – and elsewhere suggests this need not be the case. BP have senior women working what are described as “term time” hours. Obviously it is easier in a large organisation; but the point is that change can happen without impinging on standards. It requires, essentially, flexibility and insight – both on the part of the organisation and of the female staff member who must be able to appreciate the organisation’s requirements.

Acquiring that insight calls for effort – by the employee and the organisation. Thames Television found that the benefits deriving from its women’s development programme were such that they implemented a similar programme for their male staff (Willis and Daisley, 1992). This is certainly unusual – but at least it supports the contention that these programmes are not a luxury; they can bring tangible, effective benefits. The Thames programme was a blend of technological and personal skills development which was judged by participants and, ultimately, by the company to be singularly successful.

A similar, carefully researched programme was undertaken by Grand Metropolitan Foods. Here the needs of senior and of non-management women were identified separately and catered for in different programmes. The outcome was seen in a much more dynamic approach to work and its organisation – including interest in further education and training and a willingness to accept greater responsibility among the non-management women.

Effective Options

It is fairly clear that different approaches work in different circumstances. There is agreement that the higher the level of education at recruitment level, the more likely

women are to make progress towards management. But equally it has been shown that confidence can be a fairly resistant problem – in the Irish environment as elsewhere. Issues of early socialisation and cultural conditioning certainly play a role. For this reason it is not surprising that there are a variety of models for women's management development which start with confidence building programmes focusing almost exclusively on personal issues. These have been shown to work well in a range of organisations in the U.K. – Nat West and Grand Metropolitan being just two examples; and they are also well used and considered in the U.S.

But there is also a trend, exemplified in programmes offered by the University of Manchester (UMIST), to extend the programme content beyond the simple area of personal issues and into business theory and practice. This seems to make more sense. The development dividend must be applicable both to the organisation and the individual where resources are in short supply – which is surely more typical of the Irish environment. That is not to say that an enhanced level of personal skills will not benefit the company – obviously it will in the long run. But the most enduring confidence has to be built on the basis of understanding the organisation's business.

The question of whether or not training programmes need to be extended, modified or redesigned is something for the individual company to decide. If women, who appear at recruitment level to have energy and potential for achievement, subsequently do not develop or progress in the company – then some questions have to be asked. Some resource is going to waste. If most of these women are deliberately choosing not to progress – it is surely worth knowing why. If that choice is an unwilling one – within the scope of the organisation to change – surely that change should be implemented.

The requirements for being a manager, whenever formally identified, invariably include breadth and depth of experience (Martinez, 1991; Fisher, 1992). A Fortune survey showed that 65% of CEOs believe that women cannot make it to senior management because of lack of experience (Fisher, 1992). That experience has to start somewhere – with the availability of an opportunity to learn.

There is evidence that many women are choosing not to progress their careers for good personal reasons. That can be a perfectly reasonable choice. The point is that people – men and women equally – need to be able to assess where they want to go in their careers, to understand what they have to offer, what they need to give and what there is to gain. Without this insight it is unlikely that they will be able to make the kind of positive, innovative contribution to business required in a competitive environment. This is where many women seem to lose out: there is evidence that they undervalue their ability to contribute and are intimidated by the business environment in which they must operate. Additionally, organisations often tend not to distinguish between what have been termed “career primary” women and “career & family” women (Economist Publications, 1989). The terms are self explanatory. The difference between the

women's approaches to work can be quite different at different stages – but is not necessarily a matter of ability. The “career primary” woman will probably have taken decisions to meet her career goals. Research suggests that some of those decisions may involve major personal sacrifice – more so than among her male colleagues. The “career and family” woman may require some flexibility of the organisation and may contribute effectively without seeking a senior management role. But much of the reported data on the flexibility requirement suggests that it need not be particularly onerous.

Training is part of the process – designed to help women make up lost ground or overcome their own (or others) fears and attitudinal barriers. But the very earliest starting point is a determination to make best use of the people in any organisation: and to change those factors which inhibit that determination. Implementing such a decision may have cost implications at some stage.

But the costs of not moving towards change may be higher. The use and management of diversity is already a sizeable issue in the U.S. – and set to remain so as the composition of that society continues to change. But businesses there benefit from the variety of viewpoints on which they can draw; and problems that arise are amenable to solution – largely solutions which derive from the willingness of organisations to adapt and the ability of the individual manager to handle diversity (Belfry and Schmidt, 1988–89). And that ability can be a function of training.

The same pressure is part of the EU environment. The relative isolation of Ireland has perhaps slowed somewhat the rate at which we accept that real change is happening. But that change has to come: our competitors in the EU have, in many cases, a longer tradition of using diversity and managing a workforce that more fully reflects the talents of men and women. The evidence is there that women have a positive effect on the management team, that working teams generally are more productive when there is a balance of men and women and a breakdown of stereotypical barriers. The evidence also exists that there is no real risk in opening management opportunities to women – the women who choose to take the management route have been shown to function with the same success as their male colleagues. We have really nothing to lose by discarding some of our more entrenched attitudes. We might instead take a constructive look at recruitment policies, career paths in the organisation, the role of merit in promotion, the accessibility of training, the extent to which managers recognise equality of opportunity as a business issue and the attitudes and values that inform the climate of the workplace. None of these activities will call for massive financial investment. What will be required is a certain open mindedness and flexibility of thought – qualities which, in any event, can only benefit the organisation.

References

- Ashridge Management Research Group.
- Belfry M. & Schmidt L: 'Managing the Diverse Workforce': *Employment Relations Today*, Winter 1988-89 pp 335-339.
- Blackwell, J. *Women in the Labour Force*, Employment Equality Agency, Dublin, 1989.
- Burke R.J. & McKeen, C.A., 'Mentoring in Organisations', *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 9, pp 317-332, 1990.
- Bastow, Charleton & Co., *The Causes of Failure in Industrial Projects in Ireland*, Report to the Industrial Policy Review Group, 1991, p 3.
- Nat. Association of Bank Women, 'Fannie Mae: Progressive Human Resource Management', *Executive Financial Woman*, Winter 1990, pp 6-8.
- Fisher, A.B., 'When will Women get to the Top', *Fortune*, September 21, 1992 pp 52-63; p 54.
- Gummer, B., 'The Organisation of Women: Poor Copy or Catalyst for Change', *Administration in Social Work*, Vol. 14 (3) 1990, pp 111-129.
- Michael A. West, James L. Farr (Eds), *Innovation and Creativity at Work*, Wiley, Chichester, 1990.
- E. Rozell and B Vaught, The Interaction Effects of Women in Groups: A Review of the Literature and its Implications, *Arkansas Business & Economic Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp 1-15.
- M. Belfray, H. Schmidt, 'Managing the Diverse Workforce', *Employment Relations Today*, Winter 1988/89.
- Martinez, M. N., 'The High Potential Women', *HR Magazine*, June 1991.
- Michael E. Porter, 'The Competitive Advantage of Nations' *HBR* March/April, 1990.
- R. Moss Kanter, *Managing Innovation*, in J. Henry & D. Walker, Sage Publications, 1991.
- Economist Publications, 'Newsletter from the Harvard Business School', *Multinational Business*, Summer 1989, No. 2.
- O'Higgins E., 'Non Executive Directors in the Irish Board Room', *Network*, E.E.A., 1992.
- Opportunity 2000, *Business in the Community*, 5 Cleveland Place, London SW1Y 6SJ.
- Powell, G.N., 'One More Time: Do Female & Male Managers Differ', *Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1990.
- U.S. Department of Labour, *Employment and Earnings*, October 1989.
- 'When will Women get to the Top', *Fortune*, September 21, 1992.
- Willis L. and Daisley J., *Developing Women through Training*, McGraw Hill, London, 1992.