



The discriminatory impact of non-adherence to leadership selection criteria

The case of higher education

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Abstract

Purpose – This research aims to fill a gap in the literature concerning the extent to which recruitment interviewers may substitute leadership capability sets (CSs) differing from those in the job specification (JS).

Design/methodology/approach – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior personnel involved in senior staff selection in a higher education (HE) institution.

Findings – The interviews reveal that the majority of respondents select candidates against transactional capability sets (TcCSs), ignoring the largely transformational capability sets (TfCSs) laid down in the JS.

Research limitations/implications – The research is anchored in a single organisation and in a single sector, HE. It would be useful to extend the research to another institution in the public sector within both the public and the private sectors. It would furthermore be useful to identify the practical measures needed to overcome the problems identified here.

Practical implications – Organisations pursuing diversity initiatives or attempting to influence the culture of an organisation and its leadership style need to be aware of the extent, hitherto unrevealed, to which the leadership CSs laid down in the official selection criteria can be disregarded in favour of CSs substituted, consciously or unconsciously, by recruiters. If the practice identified here is representative across the HE sector, then a failure to follow the leadership CSs contained in a JS can serve as a barrier to the appointment of women who may favour the deployment of TfCSs. It may also serve as a barrier to the introduction of transformational leadership and cultures.

Originality/value – The paper provides useful information on CSs laid down in the official selection criteria and whether they can be disregarded in favour of CSs substituted, consciously or unconsciously, by recruiters.

Keywords Gender, Higher education, Recruitment, Leadership, Discrimination

Paper type Research paper



The glass ceiling

The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in the number of women pursuing managerial and professional careers but evidence of a “glass ceiling” in private and public sector organisations in developed countries (Burke, 2002; Burke and Nelson, 2002). Despite having appropriate education, and despite the fact that the slowdown in their careers, relative to men’s, begins before the arrival of children (Jackson and Hirsh,

1991), their careers advance at slower speeds than men's (Jackson and Hirsh, 1991). In the UK just 32 per cent of managerial positions, and 6 per cent of directorships are held by women (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002), a pattern reflected in the developed countries (Burke and Nelson, 2002). This pattern of women's careers is matched in higher education (HE) with men rather than women fast-tracked through the system (Halvorsen, 2002).

Many hypotheses have been advanced to explain women's relative failure to reach senior positions (Fagenson, 1993). These include bias and discrimination, as well as a masculine organisational culture. Discussion of the latter point has been held back by an emphasis on Equal Opportunities (EO) policies (see Fagenson, 1993, pp. 3-4) and subsequently diversity policies that focus on individual rather than group-based differences. Finally, it has been held back by a fear that discussion of gender differences will be used, as it arguably has in the past, to reassert inferiority and exclusion (Webb, 1997), thereby maintaining the power of dominant groups (Liff, 1996).

A new approach to workplace opportunities, the capabilities approach, argues that equality comes from an "enabling environment" (Nussbaum, 1999) that affords individuals the opportunity to exercise their capability sets (CSs) (Sen, 1999), thereby turning a "potential capability" into a "realised functioning capability" (Gagnon and Cornelius, 2000). The factors in the recruitment process that might contribute or hinder the establishment of an "enabling environment" have not been comprehensively explored and the work described here fills a gap in examining the extent to which the leadership CSs sets laid down in the JS necessarily drive the recruitment process. It should be noted that the term "capability set" employed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (1999) is taken as synonymous with the term "competence" referring to behaviours a person displays to be competent (Woodruffe, 1991). It should also be noted that the recruitment context for this study is HE.

The discussion that follows presents some background on EO and diversity capabilities equality frameworks, the impact of gender on leadership style and finally the position of men and women in HE.

EO, diversity and capability equality

In the 1960s and 1970s, EO policies were introduced to complement anti-discrimination and equal pay legislation and to equalise opportunities and outcomes in the workplace (Kirton and Greene, 2000). EO policies were predicated on the assumption of ontological equality, a belief in the fundamental sameness of individuals (Miller, 1996; Kirton and Greene, 2000; Gagnon and Cornelius, 2000) and the EO mindset produced an acceptance that white, non-disabled, heterosexual men's experiences and interpretations of organisational life were universally applicable (Alvesson and Billing, 1997). This led to organisational analyses that "occurred through a lens which is primarily white and male" (Cianni and Romberger, 1997), producing organisational cultures constructed around a "white, male norm" (Kirton and Greene, 2000). A practical consequence was that minorities were required to adopt the norms and practices of the majority (Nkomo, 1992).

Success was, for instance, all about having women at senior levels of the company – even if none of them had children and they all behaved exactly like men. The message seemed to be: if they want to join us, they can, but they need to fit in and play by our rules (Schneider, 2001).

The critiques of the notion of sameness implied within EO policies gave way to diversity initiatives that emphasised the expectation and positive features of difference (White, 1995). An example is the acceptance (Eden, 1989) that managers may be involved in the psychological, rather than simple objective construction of the world, leading them to, singly or collectively, produce different cognitive maps. Another example is the finding that socially constructed group membership leads men and women to favour different leadership CSs (Rosener, 1990; Nkomo, 1992; Kirton and Greene, 2000; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003a). The focus in these literatures on diversity in CS preferences, and the external obstacles to their exercise (Sen, 1999), is one way of addressing, at an individual and group level, the obstacles to workplace equality, fairness and non-discrimination (Gagnon and Cornelius, 2000).

In this article, we concentrate on the CS of senior management leadership. Leadership is the focus of study for three reasons. First, the leadership style of senior management is a major determinant of organisational culture (Denison, 1996; Sarros *et al.*, 2002) and through that, organisational success (Zahra, 1998). Second, and relatedly, there is an extensive literature documenting the leadership preferences of men and women, suggesting that men prefer using the *laissez-faire*, and management by exception elements of transactional leadership, with women preferring all aspects of transformational leadership (Rosener, 1990; Nkomo, 1992; Kirton and Greene, 2000; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003a) plus the contingent reward element of transactional leadership (Eagly *et al.*, 2003). It might be thought, following on from this, that each sex would be advantaged by leadership CSs that mirrored their own preferences, and disadvantaged by leadership CSs that failed to do this. Some background on leadership CSs is therefore appropriate.

The transactional capability sets (TcCS) have been described as involving management by exception as well as managing (actively or passively) by monitoring followers' performance and correcting mistakes, relying on the harder management skills of information command and control (Bass, 1997a; Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership, by contrast, is said to focus on charisma (influence based on the perception and behaviour of the leader as charismatic), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration (attention to followers' individual needs and one to one communication with followers). Transformational capability sets (TfCSs) are said to rely, in turn, on leading by example, empowerment (Bass, 1997a, 1985; Yukl, 1998), managing effective working relationships at work (Moore, 2000; Bird and Brush, 2002) as well as using interactive skills and leadership (Rosener, 1990; White, 1995).

In terms of the impact of transactional and transformational leadership on organisations, transformational leadership is widely held to produce superior long-term results for organisations across a wider range of sectors and continents than the non-contingent reward aspects of transactional leadership (Ferrario and Davidson, 1991; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Lowe and Kroeck, 1996; Bass, 1997b, 1998; Sarros *et al.*, 2002; Eagly *et al.*, 2003; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003a; Eagly, 2004). Outcome variables are given as enhanced organisational productivity, greater job satisfaction and commitment, and lower levels of stress (Ferrario and Davidson, 1991; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Lowe and Kroeck, 1996; Bass, 1997b, 1998; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003a). Other studies have produced the "augmentation hypothesis" according to which the contingent reward aspect of transactional leadership are

complementary to transformational leadership, with the former assisting followers to meet expectations (Bass, 1995, 1999) and the latter assisting followers to move beyond expectations (Bass, 1998; Judge and Piccolo, 2004).

In terms of men and women's preferences, an earlier study (Kanter, 1977) failed to note any difference between men and women's styles, while more recent studies highlighted a male tendency to exercise the laissez-faire and management by exception (active and passive) components of transactional leadership, with women exercising all aspects of the transformational (Rosener, 1990; Nkomo, 1992; Kirton and Greene, 2000; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003a) as well as the contingent reward element of transactional leadership (Eagly *et al.*, 2003). The observation that men and women may "manage differently" has, moreover, been made by numerous researchers (White, 1995; Moore, 2000; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002; Bird and Brush, 2002) and the discrepancy with Kanter's findings may relate to women's increasing willingness to adopt leadership styles that reduce perceptions of role incongruity (Eagly *et al.*, 2003, 2004).

The finding that preferences for leadership CSs may be segmented by gender has been interpreted as placing an advantage on the sex that can mirror the leadership success CSs favoured by an organisation. The premium placed on transformational leadership in the management literature (Pfeffer, 1998) has resulted in an assumption that women's propensity for this would constitute a source of competitive advantage (Fagenson, 1993), leading to the "disappearance of the glass ceiling" (Rosener, 1990). By analogy, Eagly (2004) and Burke (2002) predicted that an expansion in the currency of transformational leadership would cause a shift from masculine leadership to "stereotypes emphasising traditionally female characteristics" while Burke predicted an increase in "perceptions of women's abilities to fill these [management] jobs".

The research reported here is designed to test the assumption that using predominantly TfCSs in a selection procedure is likely, *sui generis*, to influence the recruitment process, and through that have the positive impact on women's opportunities predicted in the literature. The setting in which this is tested is in a single institution in HE in the UK. Background on HE in the UK follows.

HE institutions in the UK

There is a large literature discussing the organisational culture of HE institutions in the UK, revealing that the majority of academic staff employed full-time in UK HE institutions (HEIs) are male (see Table I).

The effect of vertical segregation has been to concentrate women at the lower rungs of the academic ladder, with only 10.1 per cent of professors in the UK in 1998 – female (University of Cambridge web site, 2005). This pattern makes for "male institutions" (Ramazanoglu, 1987, p. 61) in which "the masculine culture is pervasive" and "women are likely to be disadvantaged in their employment" (Halvorsen, 2002, p. 348). This

	1995/1996 (%)	1996/1997 (%)	1998/1999 (%)	1999/2000 (%)	2000/2001 (%)	2001/2002 (%)	2002/2003 (%)
Female	29	30	31	33	33	34	35
Male	71	70	69	67	67	66	65

Source: HESA online statistics

Table I.
UK HEIs, full-time
academic staff by gender
1995-2003

pattern is reflected worldwide although there have been attempts in Sweden, to redress the balance by appointing and promoting on the basis of adherence to specific CSs (Hogskolverket, 2001).

In terms of management style, one study (Davies, 2002) examined 15 HEIs and reported the prevailing management style as offering little in the way of encouragement or recognition. The apparent absence of inspirational motivation and individual consideration, features of transformational leadership, taken with the apparent use of management by exception techniques, would appear to denote a culture rooted in transactional leadership. Such a culture would be a useful test ground for ascertaining the transferability, through selection interviews, of TfCSs.

Research design and methodology

The research was conducted in a HEI employing about 2,000 people and with a male-dominated upper and senior management. The reasons for conducting this study in a HEI were based on the premise that this is a sector in which transactional management styles predominate. The reason for selecting the particular institution in which the research was conducted was primarily that all the CSs selected for senior-level management appointments were transformational, rather than transactional, in nature (see Table II).

It transpired subsequently that these CSs were written by the female head of Human Resources (HR) department in conjunction with the senior members of staff who acted as interviewers. The head of HR explained that the selection of these criteria was rooted in a long-term initiative to recruit into senior positions people who, through the quality of their leadership, would bring about greater job satisfaction and staff commitment, and through that increase intellectual capital. The increasingly competitive nature of the HE sector is highlighted in recent studies (Shore and Selwyn, 1998; Hellstrom and Husted, 2004).

The selection procedure relied heavily on interviews plus references, and, of the interview team of 12, just one was female. A second woman was involved as head of HR.

It is commonly acknowledged that while quantitative sampling is driven by the imperative of representativeness, qualitative sampling is concerned with the richness of data, the potential richness of qualitative data can place a lesser priority on representativeness than on the achievement of quality data (Gummerson, 1991), making it "possible to use small samples to provide a fairly robust indicator of the overall direction of people's behaviour and especially attitudes" (Smith and Fletcher, 2001).

Given the need to understand the context of the research, non-probability sampling was deemed appropriate (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1986) and a key issue within this is identifying and gaining access to key informants (Crimp and Wright, 1995). In this case, these were senior postholders involved in top-level recruitment, by definition a small sample. Of the total sample available (twelve interviewers plus one head of HR), access was afforded to nine interviewers plus the head of HR.

After confidentiality assurances, and general introduction to the research project ("we are conducting a study into factors in recruitment") respondents were asked in semi-structured interviews about:

Job description	Person specification
1.	Provide leadership and vision He/she will be an excellent communicator. The postholder will possess most of the following attributes The list includes: (i) "The ability to attract, lead, motivate and retain staff at all levels" (ii) "An open, consultative, inclusive and engaging leadership style" (iii) "The ability to build an inclusive management team" (iv) "Extensive and effective management skills and capabilities"
2. "Excellent interpersonal, leadership and management skills"	These are listed as essential skills and abilities: – Leadership and management skills – The capacity to enthuse and inspire, motivate and manage performance – Excellent interpersonal skills, being able to persuade and influence others – Good relationship builder – ... have a flexible approach to workload and responsibilities"
3. /	
4. /	
5. (i) Interpersonal skills with ability to build relationships (ii) Ability to relate effectively and sympathetically to the academic community (iii) Drive, resilience, empathy and a sense of humour	
6. Excellent man-management, leadership and motivational skills Team player	/
7.	Essential skills: Lead and support individual members of staff in their profession Functions and ensure these mesh with the work of others Ability to lead, develop and co-ordinate professional staff with a diverse range of skills. A team player ... a leader by both advice and example Ability to enthuse and inspire others A flexible approach to workload and responsibilities
8.	Excellent communication skills Pleasant manner – sympathetic to staff and student requirements Ability to manage and delegate to staff
9.	Essential skills: Strong and proven management ability Excellent interpersonal skills Including the ability to influence and carry people with you
10. A customer-focused approach Able to maintain effective working relationships at all levels A sense of humour with a pleasant disposition Flexible	Essential skills: Team player Patient, courteous, personable Mature approach

Table II.
Competencies from senior
management job
descriptions and job
specifications relating to
leadership skills

- the importance of the behavioural CSs contained in the CS laid down in the JS;
and
- ways in which these behavioural CSs could be measured.

Where applicable, interesting lines of enquiry were followed up to facilitate unbroken discussion. All interviews followed the same schedule and lasted an average of 45 minutes. At the end of the interview, participants were encouraged to express feelings and opinions that were related to the subject but not touched on during the interview, making the conversation informal and relaxed and encouraging comments (Coolican, 1999).

One way of reducing concerns about the disclosure of information and opinions is through non-obtrusive interviewing to minimise the participants' awareness of involvement in the research process (Haslam and McGarty, 1998). Confidentiality issues relating to recruitment issues, taken with the fact a tape recorder is not recommended "where the discussion touches on sensitive issues" (Denscombe, 1998) and that "many people feel inhibited in the presence of a tape recorder's microphone" (Coolican, 1999) discouraged the researchers from using a tape recorder.

In order to reduce potential disadvantages from the lack of any such equipment, one of the researchers focused on note taking and the other on fielding questions. Immediately following the interview, the researchers reviewed their notes. Some authors suggest that "as long as notes can be written up immediately, or very soon after the interview ends, it is possible to produce a reasonable record of what was said in the key areas" (Bell, 2001 p. 140) with the notes also act as a form of permanent record (Denscombe, 1998).

In terms of coding the results, two concurrent methods were adopted. First, answers were noted against the structured questions provided in the interview and in doing this, the pattern described by Mariampolski (2001) with analysis occurring "at the same time as data collection" was followed. In this way, analysis occurred with the first interview and finished after the last sentence of the report, with the researchers looking out for patterns of attitudes during the discussions. The analysis was "a continuous and evolving process rather than one which takes place entirely at the conclusion of data collection" (Mariampolski, 2001).

Results

Respondents were asked to comment on two questions and their answers are shown against the appropriate question.

How important are the behavioural competencies shown in Table II

All the respondents agreed on the importance of the behavioural CSs listed in the JS, the majority of which were transformational in character but not labelled as such. Asked how important these CSs were, frequent responses were that they were:

Second only to the basic ability to do the job.

Hugely important.

Exceedingly important.

When probed as to their understanding of the term “transformational leadership”, typical responses followed that of the respondent who equated it with “transforming the system”, with only one respondent having a clear understanding of the term.

In the course of the interviews, several of the male respondents volunteered information on the managerial CSs that they actively sought in successful candidates:

People need to have some gravitas about them.

Need to focus on the financial understanding of candidates and their likely chemistry with the chairman.

Need to see how the guy would get on with other senior managers.

We may be looking for someone with harder skills.

I would be looking for people who were professional, had expertise in their field, who were competent and had moral authority.

When I was reading the application forms, I was looking for someone who could lead strategically.

You probe what the person is saying and assess whether it sounds like the way you would do it.

The male respondents tended to place some distance between themselves and the CSs listed in the JS as is clear from the following remarks:

[...] we focus the initial questions around the job specification but it can be too much like a tick box exercise.

Following the criteria listed can be very mechanical and does not provide the flexibility you sometimes need and may result in your missing the right person for the job.

The JS used to be loosely interpreted and people appointed who did not really fit the JS but who were thought to be a real addition.

It's not cut and dried. I look for flexibility. We are restricted by EO and that restricts our flexibility.

We work out a framework of questions but this again is restricting and can lead to a lack of flexibility. It is very constraining at times.

The importance of these criteria would depend on the senior job you are interviewing for.

The two female respondents both expressed support for structuring questions around the JS. One of them had been responsible for producing the competencies contained there and the other said that “we try to explore the job description and personal specification and link the questions to them”.

How can these CSs be measured?

Respondents were asked how behavioural CSs, such as motivational skills, ability to inspire others and create teams can be measured. All the respondents acknowledged difficulties:

[...] not sure that you can measure them at interview I might attempt to follow up points made in the interview by cross-checking with references.

difficult to measure the soft skills accurately.

[...] these skills are very difficult to measure so I would ask for a practical example of what the candidate had done in the past. I would also ask about a hypothetical scenario. Also by informal collection of information from people in their organisation.

I don't feel that you can measure these competencies. You could ask for examples of successful change management and then cross-reference the answer with references[1].

[...] yes, they are sometimes difficult to measure.

[...] ask for examples you can verify and ask how they've dealt with a major piece of change management and assess whether it sounds the way you would do it.

Drill down as best you can.

Respondents referred to alternative assessment methods including references and assessment centres. Considerable reliance appeared to be placed on the first with one respondent detailing the way informal, verbal references are obtained from people who know the institution and the candidate well. Another respondent referred to taking soundings from an external consultant and a third to the informal collection of information from the organisation they currently work in.

Discussion

The female respondents expressed active support for the predominantly transformational CSs contained in the JS while the male respondents stressed the need for flexibility and the ability to deviate from these CSs. This implied a distancing from the CSs listed in the JS, and in fact a large proportion suggested alternative CSs. It is apparent from this that a large proportion of the respondents ignore the CSs laid down in the JS, the majority of which were transformational in character, and rate candidates against CSs of their own devising.

An indication of the nature of the substituted CSs is provided by respondents' comments. One respondent voiced the opinion that they might be "looking for someone with harder skills" while another was looking for someone who could "lead strategically", manage change programmes and manage financial budgets. Another was looking for someone with "gravitas". One respondent supported a female candidate who had a reputation on paper of being tough, but was thought, at interview, to be "too empathic" and not tough enough.

Table III compares the implicit CSs used by respondents with measures of TfCSs and TcCSs and shows that many of the CSs advocated by the respondents fall into the command and control or *laissez-faire*/management by exception transactional models of leadership (Burns, 1978).

Moreover, the implied substitution of elements of TcCSs for TfCSs is likely to favour male candidates on the basis that men have, with some exceptions (Kanter, 1977), been shown to be more likely than women to exercise these elements of leadership (Rosener, 1990; Bass *et al.*, 1996; Eagly *et al.*, 2003; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003b). This would serve as an example of recruitment in one's own

Transactional leadership characteristics	The CSs prioritised by the male respondents and the leadership characteristic to which they correspond	Transformational leadership characteristics	The CSs prioritised by the male respondents and the leadership characteristic to which they correspond
Contingent reward Management by exception (active)	–	Charisma	–
	Gravitas	Inspirational motivation	–
	Expertise		
Management by exception (passive)	Hard skills		
	Financial understanding		
	Gravitas	Intellectual stimulation	–
	Expertise		
	Hard skills		
	Financial understanding	Individual consideration	–

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Table III.
Leadership CSs
prioritised by the male
respondents and the
transactional or
transformational
leadership styles to which
they correspond

image, a frequently observed phenomenon (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003b).

The phenomenon of recruiting in one's own image in turn finds echoes in other disciplines. It links with the "empathy principle" according to which aesthetic value does not inhere in objects but is the product of empathy between object, perceiver and artist (Crozier and Greenhalgh, 1992). In the field of branding, it translates into the aspiration for congruence between the brand personality and the consumer's self-concept since purchases are thought to offer a vehicle for self-expression (Karande *et al.*, 1997). In the field of communications, it translates into the notion that persuasiveness can be enhanced by similarity between source and receiver (Brock, 1965; Brown, 2004). In social psychology, it translates into the "matching hypothesis" or "similarity-attraction" paradigm according to which increased similarity leads to increased attention and attraction (Byrne and Nelson, 1965; Berscied and Walter, 1978). In design, it corresponds with the "self-selecting phenomenon" according to which each sex tends to prefer the designs (whether graphic, product or web sites) produced by people of their own gender (Moss and Colman, 2001; Moss and Gunn, 2005).

By analogy, the selection of a candidate who would mirror the characteristics of the respondents is implicit in respondents' comments about the ideal candidate. Here are a few examples (from the male respondents):

[...] we do recognise that a person is not necessarily the right person for the job because he is a first class chap to be with.

You can see some of the younger guys who are making their way through.

(Women working in a clerical capacity were referred to as "girls".)

[...] you do need to find out how the guy would get on with ...

Moreover, references to non-males tended to be negative. One male respondent described an assertive woman in pejorative terms (as "Attila the Hun") while a female senior manager, referred to as "large" was criticised for regularly bringing sizeable reports to the respondent to read. As for women as a whole, two respondents assumed them, as a group to be burdened by family and childcare responsibilities. This interpretation took no account of single women, or families in which women did not shoulder the burden of family responsibilities.

Finally, on the topic of EO, one respondent expressed the view that the selection process was "restricted by EO" while a second respondent, addressing a question about the appointment of women, made reference to the case for appointing women and racial minorities or "whatever it is you're supposed to have". These responses betoken limited sympathy with the philosophy of EO.

Taken as a whole these responses suggest that respondents frequently have male candidates in mind, and denigrate women either as too assertive, insufficiently assertive, or as "girls" or people with family commitments. Lip service, at best, is paid to EO and notions of diversity appear absent.

These findings fortify Burke and Nelson's (2002) finding that bias and discrimination is common in the selection of top managers and related to the low priority attached at this level to objective credentials. Crucially, an examination of the way that CSs laid down in the JS are overruled in practice by CSs introduced by the interviewers, serves to add new insights into the factors that induce a "subjective and

personalised judgement of the individual's performance" (Doyle, 2002). The discovery that one set of CSs (in this case transactional) is substituted in practice for another (largely transformational) offers an explanation for the finding, over a number of studies, that male candidates are preferred for management positions over females (Shaw, 1972; Dipboye *et al.*, 1975; Gerdes and Garber, 1983).

The tendency observed here for TcCSs to be used in preference to TfCSs may, moreover, not be an isolated phenomenon. According to research by Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2003a), bosses at the highest levels of organisations frequently assume optimum leadership behaviours to be transactional rather than transformational, and this fact may be linked to the fact that senior management is overwhelmingly male (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002). The continued male domination of senior levels of organisations may therefore serve to ensure that TcCSs continue to dominate selection procedures even when the CSs specified in the JS specify otherwise. The fact that the norms of the dominant group are regarded and treated more seriously than those of another group is in line with work on women and quality of life (Nussbaum and Glover, 1995). An additional factor may be difficulties in the way of measuring these criteria.

The findings have serious implications. If the application of largely TfCSs are thought likely to favour the opportunities of females (Rosener, 1990; Burke, 2002; Eagly, 2004), it follows that the failure to apply these – whether because interviewers substitute their own CSs, or because these capabilities cannot easily be measured – is likely to curtail these opportunities and produce an environment that is negative for women.

The findings also have important implications for the culture of organisations and HEIs. If a predominantly male selection panel tend to select senior managers according to predominantly TcCSs, the likelihood is that senior management will reflect this style and that style will serve as a role model to managers below them (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003b). It is easy from this to see how the leadership style of senior managers can then influence the culture of the organisation as a whole so that the prevalence of the transactional management style at senior management style will work to produce a transactional culture throughout the organisation. It is the view of many, as we have seen, that this will not optimise performance (Ferrario and Davidson, 1991; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Bass, 1997b; Lowe and Kroeck, 1996; Bass, 1998; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003a).

Ways forward

The findings offer preliminary evidence that each sex uses criteria in recruitment selection that match their own preferences. A number of ways of circumventing these problems are proposed below.

Training and change models

It appears that the majority of respondents were not aware of the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership, and not aware either of their relative impact on organisations. The absence of this information would make it difficult to recruit leaders skilled at optimising organisational performance. Training is one way of filling this gap.

The training could also report on the observed tendency towards recruiter bias and interpersonal attraction based on perceived similarity in attitudes and values (Berscied and Walter, 1978; Motovidio, 1986; Maccoby, 1990; Byrne and Neuman, 1992; Dipboye and Macan, 1988; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003b), a tendency recorded as producing reduced disconfirmatory questioning with same-sex candidates (Binning *et al.*, 1988). The training could also assist potential recruiters to understand their own biases in relation to preferred leadership style and the fact that their own preferences may stand in conflict with the CSs prescribed in the JS.

Training could cover the issue of the validity and reliability of the interview (Ferguson and Fletcher, 1989), assessment centres (Sackett and Dreher, 1982; Edwards, 1983), references and informal contacts. Where the latter two are concerned, respondents' replies indicated that the recruitment and selection process placed considerable reliance on references and informal contacts. The reliance on references and opinions from informal contacts is suggestive of a patronage system which permits informal lobbying and support of candidates. Such a system exists in the medical profession and is cited as a factor discouraging women doctors (Parkin and Maddock, 1995). It also increases the element of subjectivity in decision-making.

Over and above training, initiatives could include cultural change programmes aimed at underpinning the TfCSs in the JS and promoting diversity values alongside that. This can be achieved by linking selection policy to HR diversity goals and values as recommended in strategic HR management (Armstrong, 2006).

Limitations

The research reported here highlights the fact that interviewers may, in practice, fail to follow the CSs laid down in the JS, substituting instead CSs of their own devising. The research was based on a small sample size, preventing meaningful comparisons of male and female respondent behaviours, and based also on just a single HEI. These are limiting factors. Future research could therefore expand the research base to include other HEIs. It could also explore practices in other sectors, and seek evidence on ways in which the problems, highlighted in this research, could be overcome, thereby facilitating the practice of transformational CSs.

Conclusion

It is hoped that a growing awareness of diversity coupled with capabilities equality would alert people to the potential for CSs laid down in a JS to be neglected in favour of alternative CSs substituted, consciously or unconsciously, by interviewers. Where this substitution involves the substitution of TcCSs for TfCSs, this can subvert moves to a transformational culture and may also prevent organisations from offering an enabling environment for women.

Organisations would be well served by examining ways in which TcCSs could effectively be measured in the context of recruitment and selection, and ways in which adherence to the leadership CSs prescribed in a JS could be encouraged in an interview situation. A new approach to workplace opportunities, the capabilities approach (Gagnon and Cornelius, 2000), affords a useful umbrella for discussing the factors that prevent potential capabilities from becoming realised functioning capabilities (Nussbaum, 1999).

Note

1. Later the interviewee said that they did not specifically ask referees to cross-reference points.

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