University of Huddersfield Repository

Elvitigala, Gayani, Amaratunga, Dilanthi and Haigh, Richard

The impact of culture on career development of women in construction

Original Citation

Elvitigala, Gayani, Amaratunga, Dilanthi and Haigh, Richard (2006) The impact of culture on career development of women in construction. In: 6th International Postgraduate Research Conference in the Built and Human Environment, 6-7th April 2006, Delft University of Technology and TNO, Delft University, Netherlands. (Unpublished)

This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/22685/

http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

Gayani Elvitigala, Dilanthi Amaratunga and Richard Haigh
Research Institute for the Built and Human Environment, University of Salford, M5 4WT
E-mail: N.G.ElvitigalageDona@pgr.salford.ac.uk

ABSTRACT: The construction industry is the most male dominated industry and displays a macho culture, where relationships are characterized by argument, conflict and crisis. Male values are the norm and are rewarded and the expectation is that career achievement is paramount in construction. This challenging nature of the construction workplace and its impact on women's career forms the basis for a significantly lower participation of women in the industry. It is also found that the cultural environment is likely to remain problematic for women unless it can be changed in a way that values their contribution. Such changes require a radical shift in middle management attitudes, a departure from current organizational human resource management systems, and a wider acceptance of the need for cultural change within the industry. In this context, this paper presents a review of the literature on experiences of women working in the industry, particularly focusing on whether (and how) the cultural aspects of the workplace environment impinge upon women's career development.

Key words- Career development, Construction, Culture, Women

1. BACKGROUND

As in many developed economies, the construction sector in the United Kingdom remains largely a male preserve. Currently, women constitute less than 10 percent of those working within the industry as a whole (Dainty et al, 2002). The poor image of construction, a lack of role models and knowledge, poor careers advice, gender-biased recruitment literature, peer pressure and poor educational experience have all been cited as militating against women's entry to the industry (Gale and Skitmore, 1990; Coles, 1992; Johnson et al., 1992; Srivastava,1992; Bronzini et al., 1995; Wall, 1997; Dainty et al, 2000). Sommervill et al. (1993) identified both structural and image related barriers to women's entry to the sector, such as facilities, training, career progression, education and the present level of their participation. This replicates the unfortunate position in construction as having one of the worst public images of all industries, being synonymous with high cost, low quality and chaotic working practices (Ball,1988).

Willkinson (1992) found that 20% of employers believed that construction work was "unsuitable for women". According to Greed (1997), the need for identification with values of the construction sub-culture prevents the entrance of people and ideas that are seen as different and / or unsettling. Employer prejudices in this regard may manifest themselves through the recruitment process (Morgan, 1992), particularly as recruitment in construction is often informal and happens through personal contacts (Druker and White,1996). Other women are made to feel unwelcome, and are not encouraged to develop towards the senior positions from which they could contribute to shaping the built environment (Greed, 1997).

Bagilhole et al., (2000) noted that the construction workplace has been described as amongst the most chauvinistic in the UK, with an extremely macho culture which is hostile and discriminatory towards women. This results in gender differentiated career opportunities which have an inevitable consequence of high staff turnover of women in construction companies (Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Brett & Stroh, 1994). Andrew et al., (2000) found that younger women became disillusioned with their career choice more rapidly than men, and sought to leave the industry early on in their careers. This was caused by women having

opportunities over-sold to them by target recruitment campaigns aimed at attracting them in to the industry. Very few had been advised to join the industry by their friends and family, and so they had a poor initial understanding of the culture of the industry and the other inherent difficulties of working in such a male dominated and oriented environment.

According to McNamara (2005) the Human Resources Management (HRM) function includes a variety of activities, and key among them is deciding what staffing needs you have and whether to use independent contractors or hire employees to fill these needs, recruiting and training the best employees, ensuring they are high performers, dealing with performance issues, and ensuring your personnel and management practices conform to various regulations. Activities also include managing your approach to employee benefits and compensation, employee records and personnel policies. But Bagilhole (2003) noted that the responsibility for HRM and development tended to have been devolved to line management in an organization. Further, these managers were invariably male, and were untrained in HRM or equal opportunities practice. so they were perceived as having stereotyped expectations of women's career priorities. They preferred to recruit men, whom they saw as being more compatible with their own ethics, and who would reinforce existing culture within the organizations (Bagilhole, 2003). Also, it has been reported that many women saw inter-organizational mobility as necessary to circumvent the barriers obstructing their development. Men, however, preferred to remain within companies where they had a good understanding of the organizational structure and culture that could be used to further their career. This strategy also found that women were forced to expend their efforts in maintaining their positions, or in coping with discriminatory actions perpetrated by their male colleagues, whilst men could expend their efforts in actively developing their careers.

Women now comprise some 18% of the undergraduates on construction related courses within the UK (HEFCE, 2001). Thus, the focus of concern should now lie with ensuring that equal opportunities exist for women working within the sector, in order that they remain within it in the long- term (Bagilhole, 2003). Maintaining an upwards trend in the number of women wanting to enter the industry is difficult when those currently working within the industry are neither evenly distributed throughout the professions, nor appropriately represented at middle and senior level. Further, according to Bagilhole (2003), once women have entered the industry they progress at slower rates than their male colleagues, and confront a greater number of obstacles to their development. Clearly a wide range of interrelated structural and cultural factors have contributed to this disparity, including women's own active strategies in coping with career constraints. This problematic nature of the construction workplace and its impact on women's career forms the basis for a significantly lower participation of women in the industry. In this context, this paper presents a review of the literature on experiences of women working in the industry, particularly focusing on whether (and how) the cultural aspects of the workplace environment impinged upon women's career development.

2. CONSTRUCTION ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Within organizational theory the concept of culture tends to be used in two distinct ways: firstly as something that an organization has, that can be construed as an independent variable; and secondly, as something an organization is, a root metaphor (Smircich, 1983). A number of writers (Newman, 1995; Schein, 1992) describe culture as having different layers. Schein (1992) envisages three levels of culture: first artifacts, which includes observable behaviour and processes as well as physical objects; second, publicly espoused values such as mission statements and policy documents; and lastly, the underlying assumptions which are

rarely articulated and may conflict with espoused values and even with each other. This framework can be used to explain the gap between rhetoric and reality in equal opportunities for women in organizations. Many companies with espoused "women friendly" policies which may be exposed by women's lack of progress compared to their male colleagues, an artifact in Schein's (1992) terms. The contradiction between espoused value and artifact indicates a conflict between espoused values and underlying assumptions. It is the embeddedness of gendered attitudes and behaviour in organizational culture that is inimical to women, and hinders their progress (Wilson, 1998). This is because that individual can influence the recruitment and promotion of those whom he or she considers to be similar to himself or herself in terms of sex, social, background and education (Kvande and Rasmussen, 1993). The pursuit of self-interest and power is a basic process in all organizations, and should be viewed as a political system (Handy, 1993).

Organizational cultures present problems for Human Resource Management practitioners and researches alike because they are the most difficult part of the organization to change (Itzin and Newman, 1995) and the hardest to measure (Owen, 1993). Despite this, awareness of organizational culture is an essential element of Human Resource Management strategy (Guest,1992). The Human Resource Manager must be sensitive to the organizational culture as a significant determinant of career development (Bagilhole et al, 2000).

2.1   Male Dominated Culture and Environment

The construction industry displays a macho culture where relationships are characterized by argument, conflict and crisis (Gale, 1994). As a result, employees (male and female) find that they are exposed to an extremely hostile environment. Women who are attracted to the construction industry face the same stereotypical barriers as women in other sectors. In this male dominated profession there are added stereotypes regarding the nature of the profession and the professional themselves (Langford et al, 1994). Women who do enter the construction industry in professional positions tend to fill technical specialist positions rather than general managerial posts (Bennett et al, 1999).

This macho environment is also expressed in more disturbing terms, and sexual harassment within the construction industry is a real concern, with almost all reports on women in the industry acknowledging this problem (CIB, 1996). According to professor Michael Romans, a past president on the Chartered Institute of Building, the construction industry is characterized by "a boy's own culture" which is overtly fostered through language and behaviour. Davey et al (1999) highlighted that in the construction industry, male values are the norm such as long working hours, competition, independence, full-time working and that rewards and the expectations for career achievement are paramount. Davidson (1996) and Davidson & Cooper (1992) indicated that women who seek entry into male –dominated cultures either have to act like men in order to be successful, or leave if they are not adaptable to the culture, or they can remain in the industry without behaving like men but maintaining unimportant positions. However, faced with this organizational barrier, some women still seem able to gain a higher degree of career satisfaction and optimism than their male counterparts, as they continue to enter former male roles (Nicholson and West,1988).   As discussed in section 2 and 2.1 it is an important issue of identification of organization culture and the male dominated environment in the construction industry. By considering the above, it can be said that it is important to evaluate and have a good understanding about women's career development within the construction industry.

3. THE PROCESS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Theorists such as Super (1957) and Schein (1971) assume that a career is a life–long, uninterrupted experience of work, which can be divided into neat stages of development, starting with initial ideas about working and ending with retirement.

However the patterns of women's career development are frequently affected by family as well as workplace commitments and responsibilities, unlike those of men. Therefore Astin (1984) proposed that career development theory should describe women's career separately from men's careers. Her model of career development is based upon four constructs which she believes shape women's career development. They are: work motivation, work expectations, sex-role socialization and structure of opportunity which includes factors such as sex-role stereotyping, distribution of jobs and discrimination. Larwood and Gutek (1987) concluded that any theory of women's career development must take account of five factors:

1. Career preparation, or how women are brought up to view the idea of a career and whether they believe they will have one or not.
2. Availability of opportunities should be taken into consideration, and whether they are limited for women, compared with men.
3. Marriage, viewed as neutral for men but harmful to the career of women.
4. Similarly, pregnancy and having children inevitabley cause women to take some kind of career break.
5. Timing and age, as career breaks and family relocations often mean that women's careers do not follow the same chronological patterns as those of men.

Powel and Mainiero (1992) claimed that women have two overriding concerns in their lives, for their career and for others (e.g. family and friends). Their model therefore incorporates the influence of personal, organizational and societal factors to describe the balance between work and non-work aspects of life which most women strive to achieve.

3.1 The Nature of Organisational Career Development

The paid work aspects of most careers unfold within an organizational context. As such, it is important to understand the processes that influence organizational behaviour and the development of the individuals within them (Hall and Seibert, 1992). Within organizations, careers can be seen to be determined by the mutually interdependent dimensions of structure, culture and individual action (Dainty et al, 2000). Structure and culture are influenced by the decisions and actions of the individual, while at the same time helping to determine their decisions (Evetts, 1992). This perspective sees individuals as defining their growth throughout their life of work, rather than moving along pre-determined career paths (Sonnenfeld and Kotter, 1982).

Gender is fundamental to the culture of organizations, as has been shown in well known studies within other sectors (Ledwith and Colgan, 1996), and effectively organizations form "gender culture", known to be hierarchical, patriarchal, sex-segregated, sexually divided, sex-stereotyped, sex-discriminatory, sexualized, sexist, misogynist, resistant to change, and to contain gendered power structures (Itzin,1995). The masculinity forms a key element of corporate culture (Hofstede, 1984).

It is clear from this literature review that construction industry culture has an impact upon women's career development from entry in to the industry up till achieving a higher position in the organisations. Therefore Section 4 further elaborates how cultural dimensions affect career development.

4. DISCUSSION

Research findings summarized that construction companies provide a patriarchal workplace environment, where men resent women's participation as professional equals. Gender appears to be embedded within the practices and relationship that construction organization endorse, as the synergy of the exclusionary and discriminatory aspects of the industry's subculture challenge women's success and avert their participation. Hofstede (1991) contented that culture creates an orderly set of rules which allow work to be carried out in a particular way. This reflects the different power of workers and managers to create these practices. According to Brown (1995) Human Resource Managers now claim organizational culture as their "territory". This implies that they manipulate culture through recruitment (control over the types of people that gain entry to the organization), promotion and demotions (control over who reaches positions of influence within the organization), induction and socialization (a strong influence over the social dynamics within the organization), codes of practice, mission statements and reward appraisal systems. Human Resource Managers aim to remove cognitive and behavioural dispositions which deviate from the norm, and to ensure that employees adopt the organization's values as their own behaviour in pursuit of career goals (Baron and Greenberg, 1990). Therefore Human Resource Mangers are the key persons to handle the career development guiders. Such mangers make assessments of their staff's training needs and progression via performance appraisal systems. These male managers stipulate performance criteria compatible with male career development patterns. In particular, working hours and staff allocation are organized in an erratic and ad –hoc manner, which creates difficulties for women with life-cycle restraints (Bagilhole, 2003). According to Bagilhole et al (2000), reaching powerful senior operational positions has proven particularly problematic for women, because in addition to socially excluding them, men appear to overtly attempt to undermine women's contributions in an attempt to preserve their own positions. This demonstrates that cultural conflict exists between the environment offered by the construction workplace and women's career needs expectations. Bagilhole (2003) has highlighted the competitive work environment as a reason, where mangers are in a contest for a limited number of promotional opportunities. Further, they argued that this situation has been intensified by companies continuing to appoint externally to middle management positions, and by the removal of management levels in order to streamline organizational structures. This results in women being perceived as a threat, both in terms of promotional opportunities and to existing cultures. This resentment is manifested in overt discrimination and harassment and informal discriminatory mechanisms. These latter mechanisms include excluding women from out of work events, which offer career enhancing benefits.

According to Bagilhole et al (2000), an organization can be seen as having cultural systems that promote competition and cooperation simultaneously. Members cooperate to carry out tasks while competing for a limited number of career openings (Kvande and Rasmussen, 1994). Such systems form an arena for the manifestation of the power and interests of their members (Mintzberg, 1983). Gender is an essential aspect of an organization's makeup (Ledwith and Colgan, 1996) and women can be prevented from progressing in their careers in parity with men by the cultural environments they encounter (Chi-Chang, 1992 and David and cooper, 1992). Women entering the labour market are expected to fit into career patterns that tend to be full-time, involve a life-time commitment, seek an ordered vertical progression and require employees to exhibit a high degree of career focus.

Nicolson (1996) highlights that the most obvious effect of patriarchal work culture is that they lead to discriminatory practices that in turn undermine, devalue and subordinate women's contributions. Overt discrimination may be manifested in discriminatory remarks and behaviour or in promotional and other policy decisions whereby women are ignored or subordinated in relation to their male peers (Bagilhole et al, 2000). Unconscious forms of discrimination are subtle and non-deliberate, but also have a tangible effect on career development. Discriminatory actions lead to feeling of low power and prestige, and increase the likelihood of conflicts at work for women (Gutek et al, 1996).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has provided a literature review on the impact on culture in women's career development in construction. The culture of the construction industry has been highlighted by many researchers as one of the major barriers for women's career development, beginning with difficulties in joining the field of construction up to achieving the top position in an organisation's hierarchy. Construction organizations form competitive "power" cultures where women's contributions are marginalized and their careers impeded through a combination of inflexible work practices and discriminatory behaviour (Bagilhole et al, 2000). Further, they argued that these barriers to women's careers are maintained in small project teams by autonomous male operational managers. Therefore this cultural environment is likely to remain problematic for women unless it can be transformed in a way that values their contribution (Bagilhole et al, 2000). This requires a radical shift in middle management attitudes, a departure from current organizational human resource management systems, and a wider acceptance of the need for cultural change within the industry (Bagilhole et al, 2000).

6. REFERENCES

Astin, H.S. (1984) The meaning of women's lives: A socio-psychological model of career choice and work behviour *Counselling Psychologist*, Vol 12(4), pp117-126

Bagilhole, B.M. (2003) *A comparative analysis of professional women's and men's careers in the UK construction industry*, ESRC London

Bagilhole, B.M.Dainty, A.R.J., and Neal, R.H. (2000) A grounded theory of women's career under-achievement in large UK construction companies, *Construction Management and Economics*, Vol 18, pp 239-250

Ball, M. (1988) Rebuilding construction, London, Routledge

Barbara, M.B., Dainty, A.R.J. and Neale, R.H. (2000) Women in the construction industry in the UK: A cultural discord*?*, *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering,* Vol.6, pp73-86

Baron, R.A. and Greenberg, J. (1990) *Behaviour in organizations: understanding and managing the human side of work*, Boston, MA. Allyn and Bacon

Bennett, J.F., Davidson, M.J., and Gale, A.W. (1999) Women in construction: a comparative investigation into the expectations and experiences of female and male construction undergraduates and employees, *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 14 (7), pp.273-91

Bronzini, M.S., Mason, J.M. and Tarris, J.P. (1995) Choosing a civil engineering career: some market research finding, *ASCE Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education & Practice*, Vol 121(3), pp170-176

Brown, A.D. (1995) *Organisational Culture*, London, Pitman

Chi-Chang, E.Y. (1992), Perceptions of external barriers and the career success of female managers in Singapore, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 123 No.5, pp.661-74

CIB (1996) *Tomorrow's Team: Women and Men in Construction*, Report of the Construction
    Industry Board, London, Thomas Telford
CIB(1996) Tomorrows Team: Women and Men in Construction, *Report of the Construction
Industry Board Working Group 8 (Equal Opportunities)*, London, Thomas Telford
Coles, B.S. (1992) *Gender balance in engineering education*, Duggan,T.V., eds,Paper from
    3rd World Conference on Engineering Education, university of Portsmouth, pp 459-
    465
Davey, C., Davidson, M., Gale, A., Hopley, A., and Rhys Jones, S. (1999), *Building Equality
    in Construction – Good Practice Guidelines for Building Contractors and Housing
    Associations*, Manchester, MSM Working Paper
Davidson, M.J. (1996), Women and employment, in Warr, P. (Eds), *Psychology at Work*,
    London, Penguin Books
Davidson, M.J. and Cooper, C.L. (1992), *Shattering the Glass Ceiling – The Woman
    Manager,* London, Paul Chapman
Druker, J. and White, G. (1996) *Managing People in Construction*, London, Institute of
    Personnel and Development
Evetts, J. (1992) Dimensions of career: avoiding reification in the analysis of change.
    Sociology, Vol 26(1), pp 1-21
Gale, A.W. (1994) Women in construction: An investigation into some aspects of image and
    knowledge as determinants of the under representation of women in construction
    management in the British construction industry, Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Bath
    University, United Kingdom
Gale, A.W., and Skitmore, M. (1990) Women in the construction industry: a discussion of the
    findings of two recent studies of the construction industry sector, *Proceeding of the
    CIB W55/65 International Symposium*, Sydney, Australia, pp209-221
Greed, C. (1997) Cultural change in construction, in Kings College Cambridge *Proceedings
    of the 13th Annual ARCOM Conference*, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK
    September, pp. 11-21
Guest, D. (1992) Human Resource management in the United Kingdom, In Towers, B. (Ed.),
    The handbook of human resource management, Oxford, Blackwells
Gutek, B.A., Cohen, A.G., and Tsui, A. (1996) Reaction to perceived sex discrimination,
    Human Relations, Vol 49(6), pp791-813
Hall, D.T. and Seibert, K.W. (1992) Strategic management development: linking
    organizational strategy, succession planning, and managerial learning, in Montross,
    D.H. and Shinkman,C.J., eds, *Career Development: Theory and Practice,*
    Springfield, pp. 255-275
Handy, C. (1993) *Understanding organizations*, London. Penguin
HEFCE, (2001) Applicant to degree courses at university or college, London ,HEFCE
Hofstede, G. (1984) *Culture's Consequences*, London, Sage publications
Hofstede, G. (1991) *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind,* London, McGraw-
    Hill
Itzin, C. (1995) The gender culture, in Gender, Culture and Organizational Change: Putting
    Theory into Practice, intruder, *Scandinavian Journal of Management,* Vol 10(2),
    pp153-74
Itzin, C. and Newman, J. (1995) *Gender, Culture and Organizational Change: Putting
    Theory into Practice,* London, Routledge

Johnson, P.A., Leasure, J.D. and Llinas, E.S. (1992) Future resources for engineering, *ASCE Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education & Practice,* Vol 118 (1), pp30-7

Kvande, E. and Ramussen, B. (1993) Structures-Politics-Cultures understanding the gendering of organizations in *Proceedings of ISS conference*, Sorbonne, pp1-36

Kvande, E. and Rasmussen, B. (1994) Men in male dominated organizations and their encounter with women intruders, *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol 10(2), pp153-174

Langford, D., Hancock,M., Fellows, R. and Gale A.W. (1994) *Human resources in the management of construction,* Harlow, Longman

Lawood, L. and Gutek, B.A., (1987) Working towards women career development, California, Sage publishing

Ledwith, S. and Colgan, F. (1996) *Women in Organizations: Challenging Gender Politics*, London, Macmillan

Mcnamara, C. (2005), *Human Resource Management*, [webpage] http://www.managementhelp.org/hr_mgmnt/hr_mgmnt.htm, [cited 25th December 2005]

Mintzberg, H. (1983) *Power in and around Organisations*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall

Morgan, C.S. (1992) College students' perceptions of barriers to women in science and engineering. *Youth and Society,* Vol 24(2), pp 228-36

Newman, J., eds. (1995) *Gender, Culture and Organisational Change*, London and NewYork, Routledge

Nicholson, N., and West, M. (1988), *Managerial Job Change: Men and Women in Transition*, Northampton, Cambridge University Press

Nicolson, P. (1996) *Gender, power and organization: A psychological perspective,* London, Routledge

Owen, J.V. (1993) Women in manufacturing: Engendering change, *Cost Engineering*, Vol 8(8), pp11-18

Powell, G.N. and Mainierio, L.A. (1992) Cross- currents in the river of time: conceptualizing the complexities of women's careers, *Journal of Management,* Vol 18(2), pp215-237

Schein, E. (1992) *Organizational culture and leardership,* San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass

Schein, E.H. (1971) The individual, the organization and the career: A conceptual scheme, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science,* Vol 7, pp401-426

Smircich, L. (1983) Concepts of culture and organizational analysis, *Administrative Science Quarterley,* Vol.28, pp 339-358

Sommerville, J., Kennedy, P. and Orr, L. (1993) Women in the UK construction industry, *Construction Management and Economics,* Vol 11, pp285- 91

Sonnenfeld, J. and Kotter, J.P. (1982) The maturation of career theory. *Human Relations*, Vol 35(1), 19-46

Srivastava, A. (1992) A case study of widening access to construction higher education, in *8th Annual ARCOM Conference*, Isle of Man, September

Super, D.J. (1957) *The Psychology of Careers*, New York. Harper and Row

Wall, C. (1997) `Editorial Note', Women in Construction, *Construction Labour Research News Special Edition*. No.3, pp.1- 2

Wilkinson, S.J. (1992) Looking to America: how to improve the role of women in civil engineering. *The Woman Engineer,* Vol 14(16), pp12-13