Gender and managerial stereotypes

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If someone has a belief about the attributes, characteristics and behaviours of members of certain groups, then they have a stereotype (Powell, Butterfield & Parents, 2002). Stereotypes can be advantageous as they are convenient to people because they allow information to be processed easily. Stereotypes can be used in organisational settings also. Previous studies have shown that a good manager is described as possessing masculine characteristics such as independence, ability to take risks, aggressive, courageous and assertive. So a disadvantage to using stereotypes is the effect it has on women in work settings because women have to deal with these stereotypes (Powell, Butterfield & Parents, 2002). Research has also shown that the managerial stereotypes are a disadvantage to women at all levels of management (Powell, 1999). Some organisations might consider that male managers are better at the job when compared to female managers. However, women in management positions are increasing and traditional female characteristics such as understanding, supporting, compassion or sensitivity are seen as important also. In the workplace, stereotypes about gender can have a negative impact such as the “glass ceiling” effects.

Organisations need to make managerial hiring decisions based upon competency and who is qualified for the job, not based upon ‘masculine characteristics.’ The common stereotypes about women are changing as the nature of the work environment is changing, but the glass ceiling still remains. This is because masculine characteristics are still highly valued in top managerial ranks and people are favoured when they act accordingly (Catalyst, 2000 cited in Powell, Butterfield & Parents, 2002). However, in order for organisations to survive, it is important to hire the right person for the job. Organisations need to be able to adapt to the needs of the market and being a good manager involves characteristics such as communication, people skills and being flexible. Research into leadership also suggests that all these ideas and ways to become a good leader or manager depends on individual factors (competency), the organisation and the working styles of the employees and employers.

References

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