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Confronting the Problem of Sexism in Organizations: Structural-Humanistic Versus Legal-Coercive Efforts at Change

Ralph H. Kilmann, University of Pittsburgh
Jyotsna Sanzgiri, University of Pittsburgh

ABSTRACT

Kenneth Clark suggests that as far as social problems are concerned, "Social scientists plan for the past, rather than the future." It is in order to confront the norm, that this paper is written. It attempts to analyze the problems of sex-role stereotyping as these affect organizations today. This paper argues for a planned technology for change, such as the MAPS Design Technology, and considers the implications for using such a strategy.

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

Organizations today find themselves confronted by groups consisting of minorities and women who question the social value of the economic services that organizations perform. These newly conscious groups demand new kinds of responsiveness, demanding that the organization world must come to terms with the fact that changing values for women and minorities will mean a need to change the structures manifesting corporate values. Since these confrontations are likely to increase rather than decrease, it becomes essential for the organization world to develop a means of conceptualizing the problem itself, and through these conceptualizations, to utilize technologies to cope with the problem. For unless prejudice and sexism are seen in terms of a changing value set, affected by past history and a dissatisfaction with the status quo, rather than in terms of satisfying EEOC requirements, solutions remain symptematic, rather than structural. It is in trying to understand the nature of prejudice and sex-role stereotyping, that we arrive at a social science technology to confront and manage these problems, specifically the MAPS Design Technology (Kilmann, 1976).

EFFORTS TO CONFRONT THE PROBLEM: LEGAL AND COERCIVE

Social norms concerning prejudice against persons because of color and sex-role stereotyping are being confronted on several grounds. At the macro-level, U.S. Legislation such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1970) deems it unlawful to engage in discriminatory practices based on sex or color. Administered by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, it is found that one-third of the charges made under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (U.S. Department of Labor, 1970) are cases of alleged discrimination on the basis of sex. Other Federal Legislation which discourages discrimination includes the Equal Pay Acts, issued under the Federal Department of Labor. Moreover, employers have to contend with State Fair Employment Practice Laws, instituted by 37 states.

Such legislation and the growth of movements such as NOW have caused a change in the consciousness of groups which have been socially oppressed. These groups no longer accept the status quo; and the following changes in the value positions of women groups may be suggested: They call for a social schema which requires them to use initiative, independence, creativity. No longer are the passivity-dependency norms unquestioned (Bartol, 1974; Bem and Bem, 1970; Broverman, et al., 1972; Frieze, 1974). They call for institutional and structural changes, which will allow them to get away from roles they have been stereotyped into (Helson, 1972; Lipman-Blumen, 1972). They call for a fuller development of their own potential through challenging careers (Kreps, 1971; Lewis, 1968); the necessity to develop professional programs which would allow these changes to be incorporated into the organization (Epstein, 1970).

Activists like Barbara Boyle and Edward Jones suggest that responsibility in organizations should increase to deal with the specific problems that women and minorities pose. They call for a redefinition of the male-female, black-white problems, in terms seen by the oppressed rather than dominant groups. They question the present norms, whereby women and minorities are channeled into nonmobile areas, with less pay. They demand executive involvement in a real, consistent, serious way; suggesting that women would need other competent women as role models for self-development. They call for the restructuring of jobs; for leadership and personal development programs which will lead to greater self-awareness and more humanism on the job (Boyle, 1973).

Let us consider one confrontation of national importance, which symbolized some of these changes in values. In 1971, an EEOC task force confronted the Bell Telephone Company on discrimination of the following fronts (Cronin-Wohl, 1973): While approximately 60% of all Bell workers are women, women held 99.8% of all secretarial jobs and 99.9% of all operator jobs. They held only 1.1% of higher paying craft jobs. While Bell claimed that 41.1% of the managers were women, 94% of these were to be found at the lowest management rank. At the highest level, only 1.1% were women. Women were excluded from the development program which groomed college graduates for top jobs. The average women earned only 60% of her male counterpart; a white person had five times the chance of reaching management as a black. Black workers had less than half the chance of whites did of obtain-

ing craft jobs. Thus, there appeared company-wide discrimination. The structure of the company was such that it fostered racism and sexism. Bell created its own stereotypes and then forced women and blacks to accept the Company's view of their rigidly categorized places.

Once EEOC began its findings, it was joined by groups such as NOW and NAACP; and together these groups submitted reports which pressured Bell Telephone into paying $15 million as back payment. Not only that; Bell had to institute some structural changes for 1975: 55% women would be in third-level management; 5.2% would be skilled craftspeople. Women and blacks would have access to training and development programs. Bell had to agree that males were eligible for jobs as "switchboard operators" and that women and blacks had organizational competence. The activists agreed that women and minorities would benefit from a positive imagery from confrontations such as these; and future hiring policies of Bell and other large confrontations would be influenced by the above.

In such confrontations, the structural aspects of the organizations become important. Formal decision-making structures determined day-to-day operations. Once these centers of authority and responsibility get hardened into traditional philosophies, it becomes impossible for the corporation as a whole to respond to a new and creative issue it has not had experience in dealing with. Since the norms for the behavior of women are changing, organizations have to respond to these demands by changing their structures to allow for the newly defined values for women to operate.

But it becomes important to ask how effective can the confrontations mentioned in the EEOC versus Bell be in the long run? One must consider that these strategies for introducing change were coercive; they demanded the unwilling commitment of top management. For the most part, the philosophies of the oppressed group and top management continue to remain far apart. Changes which are brought about through these means can only have an impact at the level of increasing efforts to satisfy legal requirements, rather than a fundamental change in value positions. We are suggesting, on the other hand, that it becomes crucial for those concerned with change to specifically utilize a structural change technology so that their demands are not filtered out through bureaucratic networks and that such a technology has a value position that is congruent with the changing values of women.

EFFORTS TO CONFRONT THE PROBLEM: STRUCTURAL AND HUMANISTIC

Organization change theorists generally define their value positions when they discuss their particular strategy for change. For example, Bennis (1969) suggests that Organization Development (OD) will involve a "response to change; a complex educational strategy intended to change beliefs, attitudes, values and structures of organizations,

so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets, challenges, and the dizzying rate of change itself." Such organizational change theorists are committed to a position that recognizes human interpersonal process as well as task structures; and are interested in changing the positions of organizations from bureaucratic stances to an organic-adaptive stance.

It becomes important to consider a specific technology, however, which will be able to incorporate some of the needs and objectives of women into the mainstream of organizational structures and processes. Without such a technology (i.e., a systematic and integrated set of methods, principles and ethics to create social and organizational change), efforts to manage the problem of prejudice and sexism are likely to remain piecemeal and largely ineffective.

Power Equalization With the MAPS Design Technology

MAPS--which stands for Multivariate Analysis Participation, and Structure--was initially suggested by Kilmann and McKelvey (1975) to re-design the sub-units of organizations and was then developed into a formal design technology by Kilmann (1974; 1976). Essentially, using questionnaire data on members' task and/or people preferences, MAPS can group tasks into task clusters, people into people clusters, and can then assign each people cluster to a task cluster resulting in alternative organization designs. MAPS is intended for a wide variety of design objectives including: re-designing operational sub-units, designing a new organization, forming a strategic planning design to co-exist with the organization's operational design, designing a community organization, etc. In essence MAPS is meant to be applicable whenever the issue emerges of how to best mobilize human and technical resources to address social system objectives.

The MAPS Design Technology, however, is much broader and more varied than simply a multivariate procedure which processes member preferences into various clusterings. Specifically, the formal technology involves the following steps:

1. Entering and diagnosing the organization;

2. Conceptualizing the design problem and determining the boundaries of the analysis (e.g., who is to be included, which departments, divisions, etc.);

3. Specifying the design objectives (e.g., designing for operational purposes, for strategic planning, etc.);

4. Choosing one of the scientific models of MAPS (i.e. different combinations of input variables, computer analyses, and output formats in relation to design objectives or conceptual models of the problem);

5. Developing the task and/or people items for the MAPS questionnaire (i.e. tasks to accomplish, people to work on the tasks);

6. Responding to the MAPS questionnaire (e.g., the extent to which each respondent would like to work on each task, and to work with each other respondent);

7. Analyzing the design data from Step 6 via the MAPS Computer Program (i.e., using multivariate statistics to generate alternative organization designs by showing which groups of people should work on which clusters of tasks);

8. Selecting a MAPS design (i.e. choosing one of the several designs that can be generated in Step 7 via dialectic debate);

9. Implementing the selected design (i.e., providing resources, authority, policies, responsibility, etc. for members to actually work in new design - team building and support to help them learn to work effectively in new design);

10. Monitoring the implementation process (e.g., assessing resistances to change, emerging problems, etc., and then utilizing strategies to best manage the process);

11. Evaluating the results of the design change (i.e., does the new design solve or manage the initial problem? - does the new design improve organizational effectiveness?);

12. Re-diagnosing the organization (i.e., reinstating the diagnostic process in Step 1).

While each step of the MAPS Design Technology could be discussed vis à vis its effect on managing the problem of sexism, we chose to concentrate on Steps 3, 5 and 6. That is, specifying the focus and purpose of the design analysis, and developing the task and/or people items for the MAPS questionnaire including responding to this questionnaire. Of the many types of organization designs that MAPS can formulate (Kilmann, 1976) two of special interest here are, (a) redesigning the operational units of organizations, and (b) designing a collateral organization for the objectives of addressing an identified problem area.

One approach to better mobilize and represent the views and expertise of women in organizations is to systematically facilitate their influence in designing the organization's structure to better meet their needs and support their interests. This would be accomplished by allowing the women in the organization (just as other members) to develop the task items that will appear on the MAPS questionnaire and to respond to the final questionnaire according to their perspectives. The organization design that would be formulated by the MAPS Computer Program and represented in the MAPS Output would therefore be influenced by the views of women. This is in contrast to the current designs of organizations where the given design has not only been determined solely by the White-Male "establishment," but where women and minorities (persons and their views) have been conveniently scattered throughout the organization and at generally the lower levels of the organization. This situation and behavior tends to re-enforce and formalize the prejudices in existence. The MAPS Design Technology, however, does not weight member responses to the questionnaire according to race, sex, ethnic origin, etc. Rather, each respondent has an equal influence in the final design, and hence, MAPS tends to foster power equalization and organization designs based on mutual perceptions of task and people preferences.

A particular problem with using MAPS to redesign organizations through women input, is that these individuals are under-represented in given organizations due to previous prejudice and discrimination. If each individual in the organization (or the division) has equal influence, then an organization of 500 Males and 50 Women would give the women only ten percent influence in the resulting organization design. This would hardly compensate for the years of unequal influence of women in organizations.

A second approach utilizing MAPS would consist of designing a special purpose collateral organization (Zand, 1974) to specifically address the problem of prejudice and sexism in the organization. Instead of attempting the arduous task of counteracting discrimination through a modest change in organizational structure (via women representation in the redesigning), MAPS can be applied to mobilize a set of groups (e.g. task forces, committees, etc.), composed of only women and those concerned with issues of prejudice and sexism. In particular, the women in the organization would develop task items for the MAPS questionnaire which would express their special concerns, issues, and needs regarding their role in the organization. Their responses to the MAPS questionnaire would then be processed by the MAPS Computer Program to suggest a set of groups to address these issues.

For example, if there were 30 women in the organization who developed 50 task issues concerning their particular needs and desires, MAPS could provide five groups of women, five clusters of task items, and each group would be assigned a task cluster to address. It should be emphasized that individuals are placed in the same group if they have shared perceptions as to with whom they can best interact (Kilmann, 1976). Consequently, each group is composed to be purposeful and viable in defining and meeting its objectives. Furthermore, tasks are placed in task clusters because the items are seen by respondents as belonging together and therefore, there is a high internal consistency of items in the same cluster and the different clusters tend to be fairly independent of one another. This enables the groups to work on their task cluster with minimum needs to coordinate their efforts with each other group. In fact, MAPS specifically forms task clusters to separate out the key, central, and independent issues implied in the whole list of task items so that organizational members can effectively pursue their goals. Moreover, the assignment of each group to a task cluster is performed so as to maximize the overall preferences that the groups have regarding particular issues. All these computations and assignments can be performed from the individuals' responses to the MAPS questionnaire. MAPS can therefore create a design (e.g., task forces, committees, etc.) that most effectively translates the views, needs, and expertise of wo-

men into organizational activity.

It is through such a MAPS design that the women can effectively express their needs to the organization, and through this design, these individuals can have a much greater influence in organization decision making than would be the case if they remained scattered and alienated in the organization. MAPS, in essence, helps to bring people together who can effectively work together, and MAPS suggests a way of decomposing task issues and concerns in a manageable and efficient manner so that such concerns can be appropriately expressed. The resulting task force groups thus establish a support base to formulate and express views, and to influence the management of the organization to confront such views. It is one thing for the management of the organization to disregard women concerns when they are expressed by isolated individuals, it is quite another thing to attempt to ignore the action recommendations of cohesive and articulate groups of women. And while these individuals are still isolated and spread across the formal organization's structure in their day to day activities, in their MAPS groups (where they may meet only a few hours a week or a month), these individuals are a force for management to take seriously.

CONCLUSIONS

The crucial question regarding the MAPS Design Technology and its potential usefulness to further the aims of women in organizations is whether the top management will agree and in fact be committed to using MAPS for the purposes described here. We suggested earlier that previous attempts to solve the problems of prejudice and sexism in organizations have largely been legal and coercive, and consequently, these approaches have been piecemeal and not directed at the underlying causes of the problem. But for MAPS to work, the management of organizations have to voluntarily accept its application and use. Why would top management of our contemporary business firms (and other organizations) wish to do this?

We think that organizations will utilize MAPS for this purpose if not now, in the future because the environment their organizations face will require it. Legal actions and coercion can only go so far, but for the organization that expects to be relevant and adapt to a dynamic and changing environment (and to utilize the resources and expertise within and outside the organization) will find the necessity to mobilize the untapped power and resources of women. Organizations have recently found the untapped commercial market of minorities to be exceedingly profitable and available with certain changes in product development, advertising as well as value changes about "catering" to minorities. We believe that organizations will also find the untapped potential of women inside the organization and that the resources and commitments of these individuals will also be available with certain changes in organization design, organizational decision making, and organizational values.

But perhaps we can appeal to top managers to confront prejudice and sexism in their organizations not simply because of profitability and adapting the organization to a changing environment, but because the top manager's underlying values and ethics are to develop organizations toward humanistic goals, and that a design technology such as MAPS will be used because it enables organizations to operationalize and manifest such value positions.

What is of prime importance to us in this paper, is that the values underlying MAPS Design Technology are congruent with the value positions of change enumerated by women and minorities seeking more power and utilization in organizational decision making. For example, Kilmann (1976) makes an explicit statement about the values and ethical positions underlying the MAPS Design Technology: "The MAPS Design Technology was developed to further the following ethical and value position: allowing individuals greater choice and control over their behavior as it affects their involvement and meaningfulness in personal and organizational life, to the extent that such choices are based on valid information and are consciously desired by the individuals; and that these choices are to be integrated with organizational and societal goals...these stated values are meant to be operationalized by member influence and control over the design of social systems, and not just control and influence within a given design and structure..."

If the MAPS Design Technology is used as intended, then organizations can effectively confront the problem of prejudice and sexism, but not by superficial public image statements or by adhering to the minimum requirements of legislation (which is greatly subject to interpretation). Rather, the problem of prejudice and sexism can be best addressed by: (a) changing the structural design of the organization which manifests and re-enforces prejudice and sexism, and (b) providing a structural mechanism such as effectively designed action groups to mobilize the concerns and influence of women. Either or both of these two applications of MAPS can significantly help to confront and manage the stated problem.

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