

# A Management Model For the '80s

By MARGO E. GAREN

**L**ife in the 1980s has changed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the rate at which change occurs has accelerated significantly! Psychologists, sociologists and futurists document the resulting differences and recommend responsive solutions in the language of their own disciplines. Socio-psychologists such as Christopher Lasch speak of the "culture of narcissism." Management theorists such as Peter Drucker comment on the need to manage "discontinuity." Theorists such as Russell Ackoff speak of "systemic" rather than analytical thinking. Futurist Alvin Toffler envisions the post-industrial "third wave." But all of them address the fact that the world is changing and that our human capacity to handle change effectively, to manage that discontinuity, to plan for "third-wave" realities, lags well behind the rate of change itself. Schon goes so far as to say that it takes us longer to solve problems than for the problems to solve themselves; time may be spent solving problems which no longer exist!

## Accelerated corporate change

Corporate life in the 1980s is a microcosm of life in the macro society. The automobile business is forced to change to accommodate changed resources.

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Cigarette and oil companies have had to diversify to respond to new environmental constraints. Communications businesses and expanding in user intensity and functional scope. In short, corporate environments and structures have changed and must continue to change quickly, so that they don't run frantically in place!

Managers, often from an older-world view, must now manage the "new worker." New workers in corporations are not post-depression and post-war acculturated. They are products of narcissism and relative affluence, and they look for different satisfactions from work.

New workers and new realities of the 1980s require a new management style. It is time for an examination of the potential possessed by both men and women in corporations to develop a newly-focused and people- (as well as bottom-line) sensitive management style. A number of major corporations seem to agree. Quality of work life projects are one example of such a response. Furthermore, as a component of the quality of work life approach, some companies have begun to encourage innovation in management style and improvement in work relationships as well as productivity and revenue results.

## Women in management

The full integration of women and the characteristics they can bring to management is one way to encourage development of a new management style for the 1980s. The entry of women into

the mainstream of corporate life started in the late 1960s. But the problem of human reaction and delayed reaction to change arises again. As human beings functioning in the new world of the 1980s, we sometimes do not handle change well. Rosabeth Moss Kanter said, "People often prefer established modes of operating, not out of ill-will or prejudice, but because of inability to see either their capacity to behave differently, or the benefits to them or the utility of another mode of doing business."

The necessity to "regroup" for the 1980s and beyond may force men, women and corporations to stretch capacities to behave differently and to see that there are benefits and utilities to be gained from developing a new model for the successful managerial style.

In the past, women who were successful exhibited traditional managerial skills. These were by definition "masculine," or skills demonstrated and practiced by male corporate managers. Women who found that these skills emanated naturally from their own styles, or who easily imitated successful male-model skills, were therefore readily recognized and accepted by male supervisors. And, since it is a normal human tendency to be comfortable with people much like ourselves, the newly successful women managers were likely to accept and reward subordinates, both male and female, who also exhibited managerial skills based on the same male model. This perpetuated the masculine or male-model managerial style.

This in itself may not be negative. Current managerial style has after all created, as well as been the creation of, business and industry. It is, however, a product of an earlier industrialized past, as corporate leaders themselves often now note. In Toffler's terms, it is the behavior of the "second wave." It may continue to be a successful style in the future, but it need not be the only successful style. The time has come for a male/female approach—an androgynous style—attuned to the new worker, new environment and new realities of the 1980s.

The increasing numbers of female college graduates and the growing number of women in the work force surely have an important contribution to make to business and industry. "Women now constitute more than half of college enrollments, which means

that the future pool of talent will be predominantly female." It is unlikely, however, that the contribution of large numbers of women would be in the same managerial model style. Equality does not imply discernible differences. It is not synonymous with sameness. It seems only to be expected that successful management models should vary from the past male model, yet still be valuable to corporations.

### Differences exist

There is a difference between men and women which may be reflected in their respective management approach and specific management skills, just as the difference is reflected in all areas of personality and life. This is not in any sense an assumption which discriminates against either men or women. It does, however, discriminate in

the literal sense of the word. It recognizes and discerns differences, noted for exactly the opposite intention of revealing bias. Women's management skills and style are considered different to suggest that the differences should be looked for and valued by corporations when assessing management potential. Women possess their own stylistic versions of essential managerial skills. And now more than ever, an acceptance of the female-model manager, as well as the male-model, may be in the best interests of individuals and corporations.

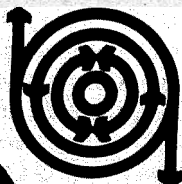
Comparisons between male and female may seem to be inexact comparisons. That is, women used as the basis for generalizations may be in the home or in middle management roles. This is difficult to avoid since there are still proportionately few women

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in upper management positions. Jane Adams, in *Women on Top*, focuses on women who have reached upper management levels, noting that the consensus of literature on women in business is that they are not successful in making greater progress because they are not like men. She agrees they are not and that even the successful women she interviewed admitted to these differences. She concludes that these highly successful women succeeded in spite of having managerial style traits antithetical to success, i.e. "not like successful men." These women had cultivated their traits within a context recognized as the pattern of professional success. For example, one successful woman might have the "typically female" trait of attention to detail. However, by including that quality with others considered to be "man-like" she would have become accepted and successful in spite of her feminine quality. None of the successful women discussed in Adam's book possess exclusively female qualities.

What are the important management skills? Do women have these essential skills in any form, male or female? If they have a feminized version of a particular management skill, could that be valuable to corporations as they are now and as they will become in the future?

### Management skill dimensions

Precisely what are the essential ingredients of a successful management style? The most inclusive list of qualities used as a measuring stick against the nation's most eminent management leaders would reveal exceptions to the rules—people who are unique and yet successful. There are, however, a number of dimensions which corporations use to assess an employee's potential effectiveness in management. Looking at men and women along these dimensions sometimes eliminates women from corporate pools of management talent, because men



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and women display their competence along these dimensions in different ways.

The following skill dimensions are used by a number of major corporations in assessing management potential:

- Oral communications;
- Written communications;
- Leadership;
- Flexibility;
- Decision making ability;
- Inner work standards;
- Organization and planning;
- Performance stability.

The assessment of the potential of women as managers on each of these skill dimensions may reveal a number of strengths and weaknesses peculiar to women as a result of social conditioning. In each case, however, women have their own strengths which, when recognized, will be useful to corporations.

Studies of verbal abilities show

that females demonstrate early superiority. Consistent sex differences in verbal ability begin to be apparent in pre-adolescence, with females forging ahead not only in verbal fluency but in measures of complex, high-level verbal skills.

If women experience difficulties in oral communication, it may have more to do with an unwillingness to take risks than with their actual ability. If they have learned to be seen and not heard or if they have functioned in any authoritarian-paternal arena (home, school, early work experiences), they may be reluctant to speak for fear that the content of their speech will not be respected. Worse, they might be perceived as "aggressive" for offering comments.

On the other hand, being slow to speak in situations is not necessarily negative. The person



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may be listening instead, and listening is a skill which many major corporations are now training their employees to develop. Some reticence to speak, even if motivated by such notoriously feminine desires as wanting more detail first or a tendency to react rather than to initiate, may also allow more fact finding, more reading of the other person's reasons or intentions or more interactive communications. Men may have or can learn empathic behavior. Women can also learn to speak out when that skill is necessary. An organizational climate which clearly values both listening and speaking will positively assess female as well as male versions of this managerial dimension.

Women have traditionally demonstrated competence in language and literature studies. In the past, this skill was "used against them." It once led women to be counseled exclusively into clerical/secretarial functions where they merely corrected the spelling, grammar or syntax of male managers. Yet, writing skills are valued in corporate circles and their absence is often lamented. Since writing is an important way to define thought (in addition to a means of finally communicating that thought), corporations are right to value this skill and to look for it in managers. Therefore, if writing ability is given real, not "lip-service" status, women should fare well in this assessment of management potential.

### Leadership qualities

Image, having that look or quality of personality which creates respect and confidence in subordinates, is important to leadership. In a society reared with male authority figures, even extremely competent, confident women can find these attitudes confounding. The recognition of this problem brought John Molloy devoted readers among women who wish to know how to dress for success. The entire thrust of his advice is to encourage women to dress in a way which increases

their aura of authority.

Aside from visual image, some women's vocal tone and pitch can rob them of effective images. A man's naturally lower vocal register and greater volume are culturally associated with respect and authority. This too can be altered, just as dress standards can be changed. And, as society perceives women as competent and capable of leadership, our visual and auditory images of authority will expand.

Leadership and decision making come together in the area of risk taking. Women may have greater fears that they will be laughed at—or worse—for a bad decision, and not followed when they try to lead. But leadership for any person is not a gift, it is learned. Competence and the ability to lead is created in inner circles of excellence. In business, you learn management and motivational skills by moving at corporate levels where intelligence, diplomacy and know-how are being exhibited. Through observing and modeling, women as well as men learn you can risk, make mistakes, speak up, question certain "game calls," lose a set and yet win the match.

On the positive side, women are generally conceded to be empathic. Empathy is an important quality in motivating people, particularly the new worker of the 1980s. Recent biomedical research findings suggest that male and female brains differ in certain respects. One difference explains the much mythologized female intuition, now physiologically explainable as a female sensitivity to context. In explaining the disproportionate number of women in neuropsychology, researcher Jerre Levy of the University of Chicago's Department of Behavioral Sciences, says research supports the view that women are better at dealing with human subjects. They are more sensitive to context and nuance. This ability should be highly valued by corporations, particularly as they enter an era where the ability to extend the productivity of

workers is critical; understanding them increases in importance.

### Flexibility

Women have had considerable practice in being flexible . . . a lifetime of it. They have learned to pack up and move families around the country an average of once every five years. They have learned to cope with the incredible level of change that requires new doctors, schools, shops and friends. These are changes which on change-stress indices register as highly stressful. Yet, as people who historically depended on others for their livelihoods, women learned to accommodate the moods or changes of fortune of male providers.

If women can claim all of these achievements in flexibility and the management of change, why then are they sometimes perceived as inflexible in business? First, they may be. Inflexibility is often a function of fear. When in doubt or feeling threatened, human tendencies probably are to revert to hostility or inflexibility. If women as well as men doubt that mistakes will be accepted and that small failures are okay, even necessary to learn from if you are to be both innovative and effective, they may avoid situations requiring risk taking. But, if both men and women feel their decisions will be given a fair assessment, perhaps the flexibility women demonstrate socially will become more apparent professionally. Certainly from a corporate point of view, the rate of environmental change alone makes the willingness and ability to alter a course of action and develop a new approach to reach a goal, of enormous value.

### Decision making

Many women have never had an opportunity to learn to decide. They've spent much of their lives with others making the decisions for them. Skill in decision making may come slowly, even painfully, for women. Yet, many women become quite skilled at the "let

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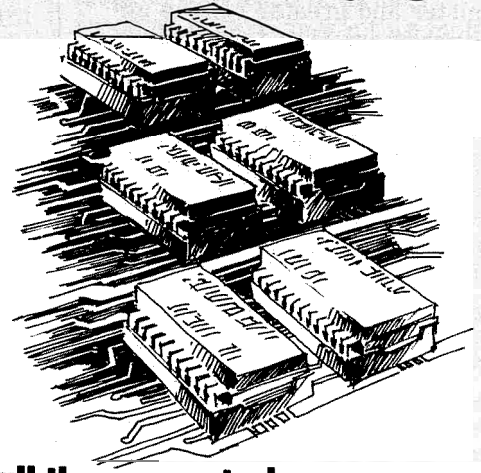
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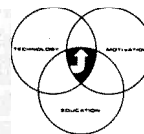
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him think it was his idea" technique, historically used to direct the decisions which would ultimately be made by others. Certainly manipulation is not recommended as a management skill, but more direct, participative approaches to decision making processes may now be especially useful to corporations and "natural" for women.

In the 1980s, the "second-wave" style of decision maker, to quote Toffler, may well be an anachronism. The movement, long coming but in an era of intense information availability, is toward more participative decision making. When life was simple, autocratic decisions could be effective. They are fast and, if made by a person in command of the facts and blessed with good judgment, they are efficient. Today, most corporate cir-

cumstances make possession of all the facts by any one person a virtual impossibility. Experts with specialized information must be consulted and used as "input" (in itself a computer word and a product of the very technology which makes high information levels so available) for complex decisions.

Quality of work life programs support the value of involving workers in decisions that affect their lives. Team management is also fairly common. Product development or marketing activities are examples of this. Here, the decision making style many women have learned to handle well will be an important corporate asset. Women have had social experiences which have caused them to learn to negotiate, mediate and value a variety of contributions. In short,

they have learned many of the skills of participative decision making needed in business today.

### Inner work standards

Why do women often believe that if they sit at their desks and produce excellent work, they will be recognized? All of her life, a woman has been rewarded for being a "good" girl, conscientious and hardworking. In the past, women had limited opportunities for team playing. They were solo performers, if performers at all, in athletics. But corporate life requires you to be a team player and for the coach to know you're good, or you'll spend the entire game and season sitting on the bench. Producing good work in a vacuum will not lead to rewards.

On the other hand, this very attitude or lack of awareness, as

well as the famous female attention to detail, is needed by corporations. In an era of careless standards, where work produced may give the producer no sense of pride of ownership or of performance, the "good girl" performer may be a real asset to a corporation . . . perhaps enough of an asset to encourage management to seek out and reward this important managerial dimension. Possessing this skill may also allow a woman to be a positive role model so that people she manages will be similarly motivated to maintain their own inner work standards.

This is not to say that men do not also have high inner work standards. Obviously, the characteristic is needed in both men and women managers. Social psychologist Ronald Hansen of Oakland University said in the *Detroit Free Press* that a man's promotion will be viewed as a reward for ability. The women's promotion will be seen as an acknowledgement of effort. The man has talent. The woman works hard. Corporations need both talent and hard work and benefit from seeing that both ability and effort in men and women are recognized and rewarded.

Except for the possible charge of failing to see "the big picture," organization and planning are managerial skill dimensions where women are not perceived to be at a disadvantage. Organizational ability is the ability which has been valued in secretaries, the reason many a top executive has said that he or she could not possibly manage without his or her secretary's excellent support. The ability does not vanish when women decide they would prefer to be the executive, rather than a member of the clerical support team.

"The big picture" perception becomes important in the planning portion of a management position. Sociologists and futurists might well charge that not enough managers of either sex have done well on that management dimension. Access to information and positions high

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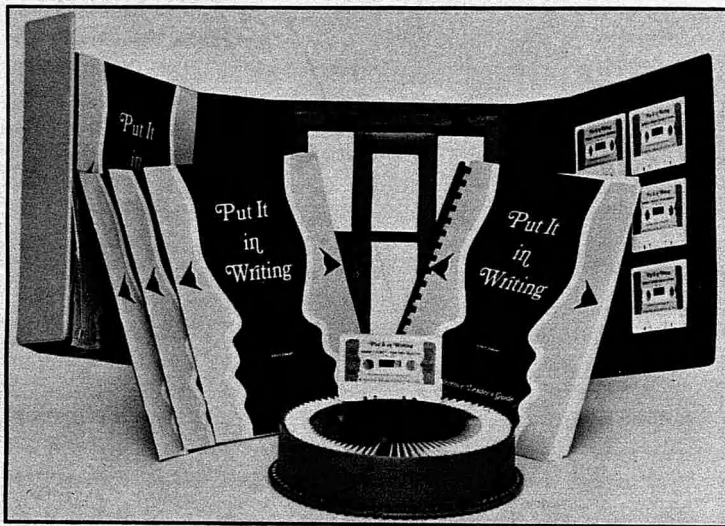
enough in an organization to be dealing with truly long-range plans rather than day-to-day survival decisions assist any manager in expanding perspective and learning to think more broadly. There is no factual reason to think that, given an environment with enough information, there would be sex dif-

ferences in ability to plan effectively for both today and tomorrow.

## Performance stability

In an era where people still believed that women were the victims of raging hormones, their ability to sustain high levels of performance was in question.

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Women were expected to respond emotionally in stressful situations. The description of that emotional response might well have been tears. Of course, men might respond emotionally to stress also, but the male response is more likely to be anger ... or ulcers. In the 1980s, educated people understand that neither men nor women are controlled by the hormonal changes both experience. They are also beginning to understand that it is important to incorporate controlled emotionalism and intuitiveness into executive decision making. A participative management style is particularly useful in this regard since it allows input from a variety of personalities and perspectives, and thus increases the possibility of including positive emotion as well as logic in the final decision.

The possibility of stress hindering effective management is certainly increasingly recognized by enlightened corporations. This is not a problem peculiar to women in management. Solutions from corporate jogging and athletic complexes to company-financed, transcendental meditation classes proliferate. Both men and women in demanding positions may need assistance to keep stress levels low and performance stability high. No evidence exists to support the old myth that the problem is greater for women. It is a human problem.

There is one variety of stress which women who are upwardly mobile in corporations may experience — *isolation*. Women who succeed are still often seen as exceptional, whereas men are expected to succeed. The successful woman may be seen as being better or different than her "sisters." That sense tends to isolate successful women and may make them feel self-conscious. Successful men are still part of the fraternity. At high corporate levels, women may simply lack female peers. It is unlikely that they can achieve the same level of relaxation and rapport with male peers. This isolation may result in breaking the natural flow; women may

falter under scrutiny rather than move naturally with the corporate context. Less sense of satisfaction or pleasure in achievement may result for successful women. Still the penalties in no way outnumber the rewards of a successful business career for many women.

Corporations are now in an unprecedented era of rapid change. Managers with competence, creativity and daring are needed more than ever as guides through and shapers of change. In response to new ecological, social and individual needs, the time is right for a widened perception of the management model of the future. This future management model must fully use the skills and abilities of both men and women in corporations.

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