Organizational Cultures: Obstacles to Women in the UK Construction Industry

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ABSTRACT

The global economic downturn coupled with recent changes in UK law have led to a sizable reduction in public sector funding. As a result, both public and private sector organizations are under greater pressure to provide evidence of their activities in promoting equality and diversity in their use of public sector funds. This requirement poses a particular challenge for the UK construction industry, which remains largely White male dominated. Empirical data gathered from a series of semistructured questionnaires and focus groups that have received managerial and soft skills training are analyzed and discussed in this article in an effort to establish the organizational cultural obstacles that women face in working in the UK construction industry. The findings outline that White male-dominated organizational cultures, inflexible work practices, and a lack of supportive networks serve as obstacles to women in the UK construction industry. This study concludes with recommendations for the expansion of training opportunities for women to encourage workforce diversity within the UK construction industry.

INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom (UK) construction industry consists of more than 300,000 businesses that contributed a sizable 8.3% of the country's Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2007 (Department for Business, Innovation and Regulatory Reform [BERR], 2007). The industry sector is the country's top employer with more than two million workers, and it generates the second largest output of its type within the European Union (EU). Within this impressive setting, the sector consists of a diverse range of businesses that include the production, supply, and installation of construction materials and products; building services manufacturers, contractors, subcontractors, professionals, advisors, and clients; as well as organizations that design, build, operate, and refurbish buildings. Despite these healthy statistics, the latest research outlines that the UK construction industry is facing critical ongoing skills shortages and gaps in its workforce (Worrall, Harris, Stewart, Thomas, & McDermott, 2010).

Since 1990, the recorded percentage of women within the industry has remained relatively unchanged at between 10 and 13% of the workforce. Measurements have historically varied within a few percentile points due to variations in the classification and quantification of various empirical data between the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and BERR. However, all the statistics concur (Table 1) that women are still very much underrepresented in the industry sector (Office for National Statistics, 2010).

ConstructionSkills (2011) as part of the Women & Work: Sector Pathways Initiative (W&WSPI) funded the research analyzed and discussed within this article. The project provides continuous professional development (CPD) training to promote the retention and career growth of women who are underrepresented in the industry sector. The project is aimed at helping women in managerial, technical, professional, and administrative roles to retain or advance their career progression within the male-dominated UK construction industry.

Table 1

Gender in the UK Construction Industry

Year	Quarter	Men	Women	Total
2009	Q1	1,964	266	2,230
2009	Q2	1,905	256	2,161
2009	Q3	1,850	240	2,090
2009	Q4	1,826	242	2,068

Note. United Kingdom (thousands), seasonally adjusted. Source: Office for National Statistics (2010)

Many researchers and theorists in recent years (Chan & Dainty, 2007; Gale & Davidson, 2006; Worrall et al., 2010), have outlined strong arguments regarding the potential challenges existent within the White male-dominated UK construction industry sector. The industry is also extremely fragmented, with a myriad of small businesses that can be difficult to regulate and monitor, to which minority groups of all types already find it difficult to enter, stay, and progress. There exist immense difficulties in the provision of CPD due to a short-term priority of "profit over people"; and this working culture is predicted to continue for the near future (Chartered Institute of Building [CIOB], 2008).

This study focuses on the organizational cultural obstacles that prevent women from staying or progressing in their careers in the UK construction industry. It begins by providing a background literature review of the term "culture," both with regard to its origin as well as outlining some example literature with reference to both societal- and organizational- based cultures. Then some of the latest research within the specific area of the UK construction industry is reviewed to provide insights into the fragmented and White male-dominated organizational culture existent in the industry sector. The next section outlines the methods and tools used, including justification of the usage of grounded theory (GT) as the most appropriate methodology in this research process; empirical data are given center stage in directing the discovery of both the ongoing literature and evolving research process. The methodology section includes an outline of the number of participants, their age and professions, as well as the nature and origin of the collected data. The article concludes by identifying three key areas in which CPD for minority groups could arguably facilitate positive change in the organizational culture of the sector along with recognition that further research will be required to ascertain its effectiveness over the long term.

Culture: Concept, Origin, and Usage

The term "culture" originated from the Latin word *colere*, an agricultural term that means to manage, preserve, or to live on land. Cicero (106–43 BC) was the first known scholar and philosopher to use the term with reference to people in his use of *excolere animum* (the cultivation of the mind) and *cultura animi* (of cultured minds), Taylor (1918, p.597).

Culture can play a central role in defining the thoughts and behaviors of individuals, social groupings, organizational bodies, institutions, companies, and societies (Barthorpe, Duncan, & Miller, 2000). In societal terms, politics, economics, and communications can greatly influence cultures. Communications is very much in the arena of public awareness and media debate in 2011, largely due to the influence of the worldwide web and the Internet and effects on citizens in advancing their awareness of the availability of societal structures in countries such as Egypt and Libya and aiding in fomenting recent revolutions in support of change for societal democracy.

Additional areas of affective impact upon culture include familial systems, religion or belief systems, the division of labor, as well as other areas of stratification or classification such as class, age, gender, and ethnicity.

I am in agreement with the generic definition of the term culture offered by Giddens (1989) who states:

> *Culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create ... culture refers to the whole way of life ... it includes how they dress, their marriage customs and family life, and their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits. (p. 31)*

In terms of societal cultures, Hofstede and Hofstede (2004) argue that every individual possesses a "software of the mind" that is learned throughout his or her lifetime. A large part of this programming occurs in early childhood when individuals are more open to learning and assimilating new information. These patterns can be altered, but it is more difficult during adulthood, as prior established patterns of thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors have to be unlearned before new "software" can be assimilated and established. In terms of societal structures, recent examples in 2011 can be found that involve the role of communications, such as the worldwide web and Internet in promoting new knowledge assimilation and demands for change by citizens of several countries in the Middle East.

Hofstede (2007) provides insights into differences existent with national cultures within subsidiaries of the multinational corporation IBM in 64 countries. This led to the establishment of five "dimensions" that he argues impact the working cultures of countries. In the United Kingdom (UK), the most powerful dimension is individualism (IDV; as opposed to collectivism), which scores 89 of 100 on this scale. Societies that score highly in this dimension possess loose ties between people, and individuals are expected to look after either only themselves and/or their immediate family. The second highest scoring dimension in the UK is masculinity (MAS) with a value of 66 (as opposed to femininity). This value relates to the distribution of gendered roles. The UK tends to have workers' roles based on a person's gender. Hofstede (2007) also states that although some countries may possess a low MAS score, they may actually be more masculine due to the impact of other factors, such as religion or ethnicity affecting the "software" of individuals, groups, and organizations; therefore, the picture within this dimension can be rather complex to unpack, analyze, and discuss.

The third dimension refers to the power distance index (PDI), or how much inequality is accepted and endorsed by individuals; the fourth dimension is the uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), or the degree to which uncertainty and tolerance are not part of societal paradigms; both are scored as being very low (35) with the scoring range being between 1-120. This indicates that UK residents are predisposed toward encouraging equality and diversity, and embracing differences between individuals and groups. The fifth dimension is long-term orientation (LTO) with a low UK score of 25. The LTO values are associated with perseverance, respect for tradition, and social obligations. I would argue that it is difficult to provide a thorough interpretation regarding this score, as this dimension can be seen equally in a positive or negative light depending on the issues, characteristics, attitudes, behaviors, and social or organizational groupings that are being analyzed or discussed.

Hofstede (2007) provides examples of problematic differences in business cultures and cultural misunderstanding between the countries of the Middle East and the West, particularly the United States. He states, "Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy. Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster" (p. 1).

Within a commercial setting, there can exist high levels of misunderstanding regarding differing norms, values, and behaviors. Hofstede (2007) puts forward the example that whereas in Western countries individuals shake hands to secure an agreement, in Middle Eastern countries this is interpreted not as an end to the negotiations process, but the beginning. Such cultural misunderstandings could admittedly lead to commercial errors within decision-making processes. With reference to Hofstede's (2007) work, I would also argue that increased awareness of cultural norms, values, and behavior would avoid any extreme statements of disaster-based outcomes, which could arguably be viewed as an overexaggeration. Hofstede (2007) has also admitted that the role of other factors such as religion can play a much greater part in impacting "software" patterns between differing countries. Such views on societal paradigms do not take into account the role of subcultural norms and values that can lead to variations within differing societal groupings and organizations.

Other theorists have also argued that some of Hofstede's (2007) data are contradictory within certain countries (McSweeney, 2002). Within the limited space available here, I aim to offer the reader the most thorough debate as possible on the UK construction sector itself, rather than include it within a broader brush of gender-themed research that covers other industries. In previous publications (Worrall et al., 2010), I have argued that it is unacceptable to amass other industries within one gendered framework, largely due to the complex and fragmented working cultures in the UK construction industry. Hofstede's work has been criticized with regard to its gender-based dimensions. Moulettes (2007) argues that his gendered dimensions add to a prejudicial understanding of both gender and culture and stipulates for a need to focus on local variations of both concepts. With this level of understanding, I attempt to analyze and discuss the UK construction industry in particular. It is useful to drill down into the next tier within society— to that of organizational cultures—to ascertain and understand the working environment of women in the UK construction industry.

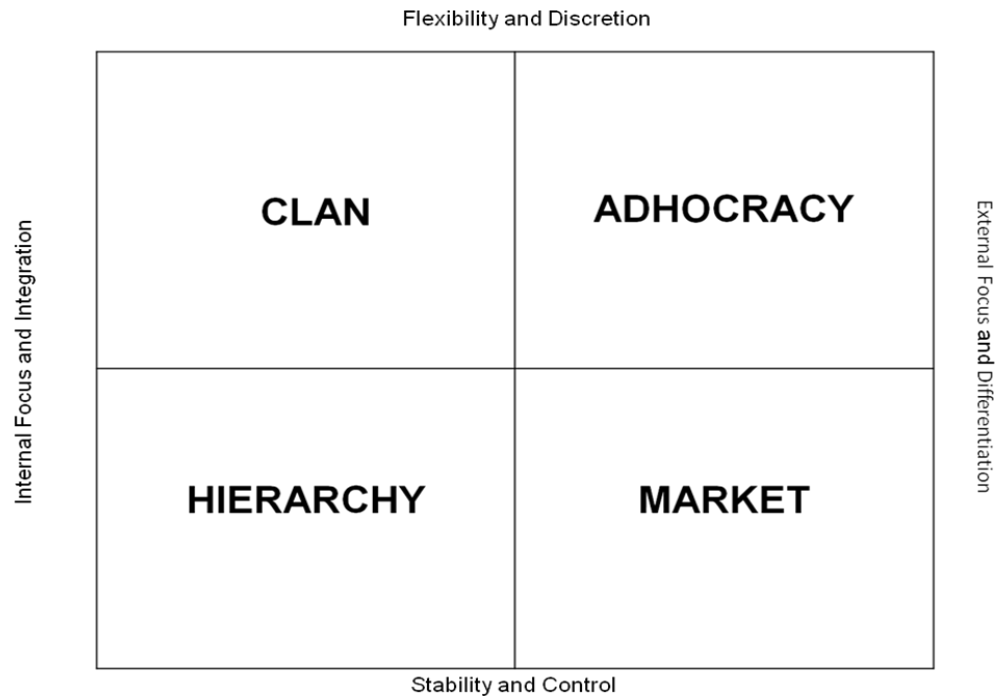## Organizational Culture: A Definition for Analysis and Change

Definitions of the term "organizational culture" are arguably very complex and varied (Schein, 1988). Organizational cultures can be conceptualized as either static or changeable, affected by societal influences, or completely rooted within specific and identifiable subcultures. Cameron and Quinn (2006) define organizational culture as consisting of "… the core values, assumptions, interpretations, and approaches that characterize an organization" (p. 31).

Within this definition, I am also in agreement with Smircich (1983) who states that specific groups' behaviors and their use of language and other symbolic acts and rituals can help solidify the identity of groups and their norms and values, which themselves can also can be traced back historically to identify the origin of prior behaviors, experiences, and working environments. A good example of this is the extraordinary success of Japanese organizations during the economic boom of the 1980s. The meteoric rise of Japanese organizations led to much research regarding their specific organizational and worker-based cultures (Schultz, 1995). This, in turn, led to an expansion in research and comparison analysis of organizational cultures of other countries, including the United States (Peters & Waterman, 1982), the United Kingdom, and further afield (Alvesson, 1993).

Cameron and Quinn (2006) have designed a conceptual framework that posits four main cultural dimensions outlined in Figure 1. They argue that once identified, these organizational culture dimensions could potentially be altered to enact organizational change.

Figure 1

Competing Values Framework (Cameron and Quinn, 2006)

Flexibility and Discretion

CLAN	**ADHOCRACY**
HIERARCHY	**MARKET**

Internal Focus and Integration

External Focus and Differentiation

Stability and Control

Cameron and Quinn (2006) offer the examples of Microsoft, Nike, and the aerospace industry as organizations that focus on flexibility and discretion to maintain their levels of effectiveness and adaptive competitiveness. Organizations that center themselves on the values of stability and control include governmental agencies and the higher education sector, which are more static and structured. Organizations can also differ in terms of those that are externally focused (i.e., place a greater emphasis upon differentiation, such as Toyota and Honda) compared to those with a greater internal focus (i.e., place a greater emphasis on integration, such as Hewlett-Packard and IBM) that encourage in-house homogeneity.

Adhocracy-based organizations are readily adaptive in response to changing external environments, such as think tank consultancies and software development firms. They often operate in extremely competitive and high-risk business sectors. Within these organizations, authoritative and leadership-based roles are constantly changing and adapting. Working environments, employee roles, and tasks are also constantly changing in response to highly volatile environments and evolving client demands. This type of organization promotes individualism, self-reliance, and innovation.

Market-based organizations focus on stability and control. This type of organization liaises frequently with both its suppliers and customers to maintain competitive edge and customer loyalty. An example organization of this type is the U.S. company, General Electric, which possesses a leadership and authority ethos that prizes gaining niche footholds in the market, while also meeting high business targets and establishing a strong customer base.

Hierarchy-based organizations focus on operating within stable external environments with an internal focus that promotes integration. Bureaucratic processes play a central role in these organizations with the establishment of set guidelines that prize the norms and values of authority and control. Example organizations of this type include McDonald's, the higher education sector, and governmental organizations. Workers that closely follow the set rules and regulations are most likely to obtain a promotion in their careers.

Clan-based organizations have an internal focus centered on integration along with an openness to flexibility and discretion. They possess characteristics similar to family-based networks, whereby consensus and open communication encourage loyalty, with the expression of shared values and a sense of community. These organizations tend to maintain close contacts with both their suppliers and customer base. The structure encourages the norms and values of informality and equality. An example company that espouses this type of culture is the U.S. company, Tom's of Maine.

The majority of businesses and organizations will possess a mixture of these types of dimensions. However, each organization is likely to exhibit more of one type of dimension than another type. Cameron and Quinn (2006) argue that by using their Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), which is based on their Competing Values Framework, organizations can both identify and facilitate organizational change more effectively to meet current and future challenges that face an organization. For example, if an adhocracy-based organization (such as the construction industry) identified the need to become more clan-based and promote the values of workforce equality and diversity, then OCAI would identify ways in which this could be achieved.

The Organizational Culture of the UK Construction Industry

Barthorpe, Duncan, and Miller (2000) state that the UK construction industry is highly fragmented. In many ways, the industry sector shares a good number of characteristics with Cameron and Quinn's (2006) adhocracy- and market-based dimensions. The sector is fragmented due to the many sole traders, small businesses, and seasonal and short-term contractual job roles, as well as being an industry that places greater emphasis on the values of profit over people and in winning competitive and often short-term contractual-based work (Dainty, Grugulis, & Langford, 2007). An inherently masculine culture also exists as the workforce is mainly dominated by White males, and workers are placed within a highly competitive and inherently unsupportive climate. This exacerbates the already negative image and perception, both inside and outside of the UK construction industry sector (Latham, 1994). This further damages the sector by deterring minority groups such as women, Blacks, and ethnics from considering entry into the industry (Gale, 1992).

Of the larger companies that do exist, Dainty et al. (2007) state that they have moved toward being "hollowed out," with very few companies directly employing permanent staff. However, I would balance this viewpoint with an awareness of recent developments in 2010 and 2011 in the area of UK construction workforce development. Within the past couple of years, a notable handful of organizations have won National Women in Construction Awards, as well as one winning the coveted Queens's Award for Enterprise in 2011 in recognition of their dedication in advancing equality, diversity, and career progression opportunities in their workforce. Reference to these organizations merits mention as it outlines evidence of some recent shifts (at least within some of the larger organizations), which were likely influenced by the requirements set out in the Equality Act (2010).

Over the past decade, there have been many governmental reviews of the industry sector. Of these, there are five reports in particular that summarize the main findings and need to be discussed. The first report is by Sir Michael Latham (1994) entitled, "Constructing the Team."

This report recommended standardizing construction-based contracts and promoting best-practice guidelines, including the introduction of changes to UK legislation to resolve disputes that had become commonplace. The recommendations of this report directly led to the enactment of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The report predicted that the sector could potentially save up to 30% in construction costs over the next 5 years once these changes had been enacted.

Sir Peter Levene (1998) authored the second report entitled, "Efficiency Scrutiny into Construction Procurement by Government." The report outlined a need to improve managerial and project procurement processes. The document recommended a need to improve modes of governmental communication with the construction industry to reduce adversarial conflicts and to improve the efficiency of the industry sector. Civil servants required training in risk reduction and procurement-based managerial practices.

Due to the mainstream perception of the slow progress and change that was occurring in the construction industry, a Construction Task Force was set up by the Deputy Prime Minister and a third report was penned by Sir John Egan (1998) entitled, "Rethinking Construction." The report identified the following problems: unacceptably high levels of defects; a lack of efficiency and effectiveness; fragmentation and unpredictability; a lack of investment in research; low levels of development, training, and equipment (and other capital); a lack of contractor-based profits; a lack of process in seeking and receiving customer feedback; and a high level of dissatisfaction among customers and clients. The recommended five major areas for improvement were (a) a stronger focus on meeting customer and client needs, (b) committed leadership, (c) more closely integrated communication and team-based processes, (d) greater focus on quality, and (e) greater supportive commitment to its workforce.

Sir Peter Gershon (1998) wrote the fourth report entitled, "Efficiency in Civil Government Procurement." This report stated that the industry remained highly fragmented and experienced an ongoing lack of governmental coordination and communication-based frameworks. The report recommended standardizing procurement processes, enacting performance measurements, centralizing information about suppliers, setting core standards for e-commerce, and improving codes of good customer practice and communication. The outcome of this report led to the establishment of the Office of Government Commerce.

The National Audit Office (2001) undertook the fifth and final major report entitled "Modernising Construction." The report drew together the findings from Latham (1994), Levene (1998), and Egan (1998). The document also outlines the ongoing issues surrounding the adversarial and unsupportive nature of the industry sector and the continued focus of profit over people. The views from these reports indicate that little has changed over the past decade regarding positive progress despite the handful of examples of best practice that have arisen over the past couple of years in response to the Equality Act (2010).

Due to its inherent make-up and modus operandi, the UK construction industry bears strong markers of both an adhocracy- and market-based organizational culture as defined by Cameron and Quinn (2006) and as set out in the governmental reports provided by Latham (1994), Levene (1998), and Egan (1998). The Egan (1998) report specifically recommends a need to build upon strengthening relationships of loyalty between clients and contractors to aid in improving quality, efficiency, and customer-satisfaction levels. This indicates a recommendation by a governmental report in advance of clan-based organizational cultures as defined by Cameron and Quinn (2006).

Method

The research used Glaser's (1992) GT methodology and is based largely upon an analysis of qualitative data, although some statistical data are also included in Table 3. GT is seen as ideal in

this research area because it is inherently inductive in nature. The data are central in the discovery of theories, themes, and subthemes. The cohort consisted of a random grouping of women aged between 18 and 65 years within administrative, professional/managerial, and "other" roles. Within this random research grouping, although not deliberately excluded, there were no individuals older than 58 years old as outlined in Table 2. It is tempting to provide a debate about why no age groups beyond 58 were found. However, it should be stated that the research cohort is far too small to provide any valid or reliable analysis regarding possible ageism.

Table 2

Profession and Age

Profession	Age (years)					
	18–24	25–35	36–45	46–55	56–65	65 +
Professional/Managerial	4	20	41	6	7	0
Administrative	2	45	52	27	14	0
Other	3	3	1	2	4	0
Subtotal	9	68	94	35	25	0
Total						231

Note. Trainee cohorts do not include those from Craft and Trade professions.

It should be noted that the training cohort does not include those from the Craft and Trade professions. This was due to the nature of the managerial and soft skills training being offered, as well as the project-funding framework of trainees set out as being eligible to the project by this research's funders, the UK Sector Skills Council (SSC) in construction, ConstructionSkills. Women from the Craft and Trade professions were offered training of a different type via a different project.

The numbers of individuals within each of the nine focus groups varied between 20 and 30 people for each training session. At each session, participants sat at a circular table sized to fit six to eight people. This was deliberately designed to encourage face-to-face interaction in an action learning-based setting. Prior to each focus group, participants were fully informed about the research aims of the project and that participation was voluntary. Participants were also informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of the research data.

All focus group participants worked full-time in the UK construction industry and were at the session to receive training as part of the project. Once permission was given to take part in the focus group, the circular tables were set up during the lunch hour break of the training, and active discussions took place over the lunch break. The questionnaires were additional tools given to the women to complete at the lunch break or to mail after the event. Although not ideal, this method was found to be the most practical, as many women did not have the time or opportunity to participate in the research other than at each training session or immediately after its completion. Many women found it difficult to attend more than one or two training sessions over the period of the year that the project was taking place. Taking time out for training or other activities is especially difficult during the current economic slowdown, so this was the most practical and realistic solution to acquiring research data from this particular cohort.

Both the questionnaires and focus groups were designed to be semistructured to encourage data collection during the research process. A central part of GT is theoretical sensitivity. Researchers utilizing GT support the stance that insights from initial data can lead to a research situation. In the first instance, insights are conceptual rather than concrete, which is referred to as the creative

aspect of GT. As the research progresses, researchers gain experience and knowledge that lead to their recognition of the most important findings. This guides researchers to conceptualization and formulation of dense theory.

All respondents were asked to give details of their age grouping and their profession categorization as outlined in Table 2. Respondents were also asked to provide information on how long they had worked in the industry sector and to specify what they consider to be the top two barriers (if any) that they had already faced in staying or progressing their careers in the UK construction industry. They were also asked what type of training they would like to receive, and whether they had any recommendations for training or support for women in the industry sector. The data were analyzed as an ongoing process; themes and subthemes were identified through keyword analysis in a series of Word documents. The emergent nature of this process included the discovery of relevant literature.

Quantitative Data: Main Barriers Facing Women in UK Construction

Table 3 outlines the main barriers faced by women of differing age groups. The findings illustrate that younger women in the 25-35 and 36-45 age group struggle the most with sexist attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors.

Table 3

Age Groupings and Individual Top Barrier Issue

Obstacle	Age (years)					
	18–24	25–35	36–45	46–55	56–65	65+
Attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions	1	36	35	9	10	0
Inflexible working practices	0	11	32	13	2	0
Lack of training opportunities	2	4	15	8	12	0
Lack of support, networking and mentoring opportunities	5	17	9	4	1	0
Other issues	1	0	3	1	0	0
Subtotals	9	68	94	35	25	0
Total						231

Of almost equal concern for women in the 36- to 45-year-old age group were inflexible working practices that negatively impact upon their work–life balance. These findings are particularly interesting as they cross-fertilize with the potential merits of providing soft skills training. It should be stated that it is not the case that women are deficient in requiring confidence building, communication, and leadership training; it is more the case that the specific organizational culture of UK construction industry disadvantages women more than men (Worrall et al., 2008). It would be a very difficult task to change the organizational culture of the UK construction industry sector itself. The provisional soft skills training is likely to be helpful for women and ethnic minorities to enable them to traverse their way through the White male-dominated industry sector and to enable women to negotiate flexible working environments and career progression opportunities

more confidently with senior colleagues, who are often male with entrenched attitudes toward both work practices and women (Worrall et al., 2010).

Despite the anticipated backlash of opinion, it is difficult to deny the White male-dominated environment of the UK construction industry, the inflexible and long hours inherent in this working culture, and the vast numbers of women who leave the industry each year, which has often been described as being a *"leaky pipeline"* (Gurjao, 2006).

The empirical findings of this research indicate that attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions are viewed as the top barrier to women from all job roles and professions (averaging 39% of respondents). Broken down into specific job categories, 40% of professionals/managers and 39% of administrative and other workers outlined this as being the main barrier. The second most important barrier for all job categories was inflexible working practices, with an average of 25% to within 1 percentile for all the job role professions. These empirical averages were more greatly concentrated in the 25–35 and 36–45 age groups. Indicators as to why this is the case include those women with growing families who experience prejudicial barriers that take into account work–life balance issues in their career lifecycle.

Both the qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that these barriers faced by women seem to be universally experienced, regardless of their job role or profession. Gurjao's (2006) call for "inclusivity" highlights the need to attract more women to the industry sector by focusing on young entrants, returnees to work after a career break, and those who seek a career change. In addition, there is a need to understand issues surrounding how women are employed and supported in the industry as a whole, including the supply chain. As these findings indicate universal problems, there could be a case for finding universal solutions. It could be argued that inflexible working practices and the inherent competitive culture of the industry sector may also negatively impact male colleagues due to the universal placement of "profit over people" (Dainty et al., 2007). I argue that further research is required to ascertain any potential gains that an expansion of soft skills training and supportive networks would achieve for the workforce as a whole. As women also face the barrier of a White male-dominated organizational culture, I would like to state a strong case for the specific merit of providing additional soft skills training for women.

Although these empirical findings are not quantifiably large enough to provide proof of causation, they are very compelling. They build on my prior work (Worrall et al., 2008) that showed that women face "old boy" networks and cultures; a severe lack of managerial support; non acceptance issues and attitudes in general; low expectations of their skills, knowledge, and abilities; and work–life balance penalties. These issues exacerbate the barriers of self-doubt and a lack of confidence for women in the UK construction industry sector.

Negative Perceptions and a Lack of Support

With regard to the qualitative findings of this study, the majority of both the questionnaire and focus-group respondents outlined the strong negative impact of male-dominated and sexist organizational cultures on women workers. This can negatively affect self-esteem and reduce levels of confidence. More frequent experiences occur on site than in office-based settings:

> *"Hearing sexist comments on site and not being taken as seriously as my male counterparts" (a 35-year-old professional).*

The impact of male-dominated traditional organizational cultures goes deeper than being undermined and includes prejudices that make women feel like outsiders:

> *"Female stereotyping of having a lack of ability ... being excluded from social banter" (a 27-year-old professional).*

In terms of managerial hierarchies, with a majority of male managers, experiences can vary widely between individuals within the profession. There was strong anecdotal evidence of a perceived or real glass ceiling, or the level beyond which women cannot advance in their careers: "By my mid-thirties I seem to have hit a "glass ceiling." Male colleagues the same time in the profession have been promoted, yet I have not. I believe strongly that it is because I am a woman" (a 38-year-old professional). A 46-year-old professional stated:

> *"I have been consistently overlooked despite my many accomplishments. It is very frustrating, and many in my company have very old fashioned attitudes towards their female staff."*

There is a strong perception from many of the women participants that to advance in their careers, they need to outperform their male counterparts:

> *"I need to work harder than the blokes in order to progress my career. I have had to consistently do this, but now I have finally reached a level where I need to do this less" (a 51-year-old professional).*

Linked with these issues is an overarching perception of the majority of the respondents that women are initially seen as being less capable or automatically assumed to be working in an administrative role or similar:

> *"There is a widespread expectation that women only do administrative jobs. I have also often been the first person asked to provide tea and coffee!" (a 26-year-old professional).*

Sexist stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors are still prevalent. There are also overlapping issues that disadvantage women over other groups and result in imposing restrictive work–life balance penalties.

Absence or Penalization of Flexible Working Practices

The industry sector prizes a long hour working culture to such an extent that female workers who face work-life balance issues, such as family commitments and caregiving responsibilities, become the most penalized working group. This negatively impacts their careers and promotion prospects and opportunities in the long term: According to a 32-year-old administrator, *"There are a lack of part-time and flexible working opportunities."*

> *Asking to work part-time or for flexible working opportunities has proved to be a major barrier to my promotion and career opportunities. This type of working is seen so negatively that I have had to choose between my family and my career. I know of some women who have suffered terribly in their careers as a result. (A 43-year-old professional)*

In response to these challenges, women have outlined a number of critical training areas in the area of soft skills CPD that seem to be of particular importance to them.

Identification and Application of Targeted CPD

The UK industry sector possesses a deficit in providing adequate training opportunities and in its provision of accessing support funding to enable women to enter, stay, and progress in or between

professions in the UK industry sector: "Access to funding for training is virtually nonexistent. It is hard to be able to progress from being originally an administrator to becoming a recognized and accredited professional on site" (a 24-year-old administrator). A 25-year-old professional who did have funding found:

> "There is no continuity in funding. I began my HNC course and was doing great for the first year, but there was no continuation of funding for the second year. This is very illogical and demoralizing."

Within the past few years, government funding permitted introducing women to training opportunities, while encouraging employers to continue or complete the funding route for training. Although some of the larger employers have followed this governmental aim and expectation, the majority of the industry sector has not, as it consists of mainly small, fragmented small to medium enterprises that are constantly vying for work and often have to place profit over people. The findings highlight an overall lack of understanding within current governmental funding strategies. This problem of unavailable or fragmented learning is likely to worsen further in the current economic climate.

Concerning soft skills and communication, courses such as confidence building, assertiveness, and learning how to deal successfully with difficult personality types are in great demand:

> "To both survive and thrive as woman in this sector, I need to have skills in how to become more confident, assertive, and how to deal with difficult (often male), old-fashioned attitudes and stereotypes" (a 25-year-old professional).

Respondents also requested the potential benefit of gaining advanced communication and leadership skills and to learn how to better present themselves to facilitate their retention and progression alongside male colleagues within the UK industry sector:

> "Effective communication and leadership is a key skill in learning how to overcome barriers when dealing with old fashioned male attitudes towards women in the industry sector" (a 32-year-old professional).

Even a 41-year-old administrator felt that:

> "I may work in the administrative side of things, but I have worked in this industry for many years and have a lot of experience. Learning how to best present and communicate this would be very helpful."

I was concerned to find that some of the women wanted to just "fit in" with current White male-dominated organizational cultures to integrate better into their working environments, rather than positively change the current status quo: "Learn how to blend with males. To learn how to integrate into the environment rather than stand out as a an outsider" (a 23-year-old professional).

Many of the women responded that due to prejudicial attitudes, they were often assumed to have less ability or even just overlooked compared to their male counterparts when training or career advancement opportunities arose. In response, most participants outlined the need for greater network and support opportunities.

Supportive Networks

The findings provided strong indicators of the sense of isolationism that many women feel as a minority group in the UK construction industry. Respondents stated a need for supportive networks and of identifiable role models as sources of advice and guidance:

"There is a need to form an e-mail list or series of chat rooms for women to support and network with one another" (a 31-year-old professional).

"Role models and mentors would be useful, within an easy-to-access network system of support" (a 26-year-old professional).

The request for supportive networks included both those that are face-to-face and virtual, particularly with the time and travel constraints that women face often having to work full-time while balancing family commitments:

"Even having someone there by e-mail would be of great support, with the option of a few face-to-face meetings, or group meetings to discuss issues, ideas, and offer general support" (a 28-year-old professional).

Further requests mentioned the potential benefit of a job shadowing system. This would help women gain insights into future career growth and new work experience to explore different roles and occupations over the longer term:

"There are many jobs that I have no idea what they entail, or if I could do them. If there was some system of job shadowing it would be useful to be able to explore this and see what is out there" (a 24-year-old administrator).

This sentiment was echoed by a 29-year-old professional:

"I need to get more on site experience. If I was able to job shadow someone, that would help enormously, I think, in both getting me the experience and in informing me of what other jobs or more senior roles that I could consider aiming for."

Due to the many requests for supportive networks, the W&WSPI project created a Social Networking Software (SNS)-based website. SNS includes synchronous chat rooms as well as asynchronous message boards. The website also includes information-based facilities, including outlining workshop training dates and venues, news items, and online library documents. The website is currently aimed at women in the Northwest and Midlands regions of England. This is largely due to the funding of the project as well as the travel issues related to women attending the face-to-face workshops. The project also offers two online training courses, and there are no limits placed on registering to use the chat room and message board facilities. Further research is required to assess the feedback of the users of the website.

Conclusion

A complex picture has emerged during this GT-based research process with regard to the organizational cultural barriers that women face in the UK construction industry. The findings have shown that women battle "old boy," White male-dominated organizational cultures and negative perceptions and attitudes that include low expectations of their skills and abilities, which negatively impact their levels of confidence and self-esteem. As a minority group, women also face isolationism and a lack of networking resources, support, mentoring, and job-shadowing opportunities. Women also often face work–life balance penalties, and there is a general lack of awareness regarding areas of potential future career options and growth opportunities.

The various governmental reports discussed in this paper (Egan, 1998; Latham, 1994; Levene, 1998) and the research findings from this study provide indicators that the UK construction industry can be viewed as possessing strong characteristics of both adhocracy- and market-based organizational culture. Such organizations exist in environments of high competition and risk, often vying for short-term contracts and subject to constant change and adaptation in response to varying and often volatile market conditions and client needs and demands. In this environment,

within these organizations, individualism and monetary concerns override people-oriented concerns, often to the detriment of having a diverse workforce. I would suggest a wider introduction of a clan-based organizational culture as defined by Cameron and Quinn (2006). This type of organizational culture places a greater emphasis upon "people" as opposed to just "profit" in industry (Dainty et al., 2007). This arguably may facilitate the entry, retention, and progression of women and other minority groups into the UK construction industry sector. Within these organizations, a stronger emphasis could be placed on the importance of fostering integration and family-based loyalty networks with workers and clients. As this type of organizational culture is more supportive of people, it may therefore encourage more women and other minority groups to enter, stay, and progress in the industry sector. How this achieved is likely a long-term goal; the W&WSPI is attempting to facilitate this change by auctioning access to soft skills and positive action training to women within the regional funding limits of this project.

There are strong economic and social merits in the promotion of workforce diversity, in terms of reducing aggressive, stressful, and often negative workforce organizational cultures with a high staff turnover, to enable access to a larger and varying pool of talented workers in an industry sector that is still largely White male dominated. The UK construction industry is also experiencing an aging workforce phenomenon, and not enough new blood is coming into the ranks to replace workers who are retiring. It may remain the case that a "top-down" process is more effective, which is quite possible with the introduction of the new Equality Act (2010) with its greater call for organizations to provide transparent evidence of their facilitation of equality and diversity in their workplace. The impact and findings regarding short-term versus long-term gains will require further research.

There are no quick solutions to a traditionally static and old-fashioned industry sector, but the W&WSPI is attempting to forge a way forward in a "bottom-up" process of facilitating training, awareness, and networking support opportunities for women. Only time and further research will tell which approach is more effective, or if indeed both approaches are required to make any substantial impact on an old-fashioned and static White male-dominated organizational sector. I will continue to research and provide positive action in this area as part of the "bottom up" process, including analysis of SNS, while analyzing feedback on changes in the procurement process. I look forward to analyzing and reporting on this area's evolution over the long term.

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