Adorable woman, expert man: Changing gender images of women and men in management

ERICH KIRCHLER
University of Linz, Austria

Abstract

In the past, leadership was perceived to be the special province of males and still females tend not to occupy top management positions. Traditional social stereotypes hold that a leader needs to have typical masculine characteristics: he needs to be competitive, aggressive, tough and successful. Due to important changes in the conception of the societal female and male gender role during the last decades it can be assumed that the classical sex role stereotypes have at least become less polarized.

Obituaries concerning deceased male and female managers, published in the years 1974, 1980 and 1986 in four daily newspapers were content analysed. Terms used to describe the managers were classified into 53 categories and included in a correspondence analysis. The results show that images of male and female managers were dissimilar in 1974 and 1980 and were still different in 1986. Male managers were perceived as intelligent, knowledgeable, experienced, outstanding instructors, unselfish opinion-leaders with an enviable entrepreneurial spirit. Women, on the other hand, were described as adorable, likeable superiors in 1974 and 1980. Some years later, in 1986, they became fighting managers: their surviving colleagues described them as courageous, highly committed workers who, nevertheless are still lacking in knowledge and expertise.

INTRODUCTION

'A woman does little, gossips much; you, youth, believe in wagging tongues?'

The Magic Flute (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart;
libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder).

Sex role socialization starts early in one's life. Once the sex of a baby is known, parents, grandparents and friends choose pink or blue cloth to wear. The two pastels not only represent a tradition but are signs of a significant differentiation between

males and females which begins at birth and continues to segment activities within the family and at work.

The women's liberation movement has fought and still operates against prejudices in the evaluation of women's intellectual and professional competence and the tendency to devalue a woman's performance in society. Nevertheless, jobs held by women are still less gratifying in terms of extrinsic rewards. Women are predominantly in clerical, operative, nursing, teaching and social service occupations and, as Austrian and German studies show, earn less than men (Müller, Wilms and Handl, 1983; Steinberg, 1985; Wolf and Wolf, 1991). Managerial positions appear to be the special province of the male. Although, women make up about 40 per cent of the workforce they fill a minority of managerial positions in Western society and are virtually invisible in top management. According to surveys, the proportion of women who hold top management positions world-wide is no more than 2 to 5 per cent (Adler and Izraeli, 1988; Bischof-Köhler, 1990; Hörburger, 1988; Marshall and Rummel, 1989; Powell, 1988).

Traditionally, society harbours significant doubts about whether a woman can be tough enough in management positions to handle difficult leadership situations. Effective managers have had a masculine image and were perceived as competent, competitive, rational, analytical, and successful strategists. Females, on the other hand, were seen as warm and expressive, cooperative and humanitarian, intuitive and artistic; in short, too emotional for top positions (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson and Rosenkrantz, 1972; Loden, 1988; Powell, 1988).

Traditional beliefs about gender differences include a much wider range of characteristics than actual sex differences as they are described by Eagly (1983) and Maccoby and Jacklin (1974). There are on-going debates about whether the female manager's behaviour actually differs from the male manager's behaviour and whether male managers are still perceived and evaluated differently than female leaders (Carbonell, 1984; Dobbins and Platz, 1986; Donnell and Hall, 1980; Powell, 1988; Rosen and Jerdee, 1973; Schein, 1973; Watson, 1988). Researchers generally agree that there are negligible gender differences in actual leadership behaviour but the perception of behaviour and the image of the power position differ (e.g. Nieva and Gutek, 1981; Ragins, 1991). Traditionally, a male leader is said to be dynamic, while a female leader is more likely judged aggressive for the same behaviour. He is accurate, while she is said to be pedantic, he decides in a rational way, whereas she has prejudices, while he is leading, she is authoritarian (Gold, 1990). As far as the behaviour is concerned it has been shown that female managers and male managers behave similarly. Female managers seem to be atypical women who are not different from males in comparable positions (Friedel-Howe, 1990; see also Neubauer, 1990, for a discussion about women as applicants for managerial positions). Thus, it can be concluded that there are negligible differences in actual behaviour between female and male leaders but there are, or, at least, were sex stereotypes.

During the last decade, an abundant quantity of articles and books have been published which praise women as the new leaders. Future business firms will need androgynous managers with a less masculine and a more feminine working style. Cooperative behaviour with a greater proportion of emotionality is seen as more promising than competitive aggression (e.g. Loden, 1988; Demmer, 1988). Recently, however, struggles for equality between the sexes seem to have had an impact on gender stereotypes. The women's liberation movement, the future need for everybody

in the labour market, increasing legislation banning sex discrimination in employment practices, increasing opportunities for women to acquire advanced education and training, as well as the increasing number of young women with work experience, no small children and a strong desire for a career, operate for equal opportunities in the work place and may have affected images concerning male and female managers. Consequently, gender images are assumed to have changed from the 1970s to the 1980s, the period characterized by the strongest liberation movements. Today male and female managers should no longer be perceived as being different.

To investigate changes of social images of male and female managers, rather than using questionnaires or interview techniques which usually are leading to results biased by social desirability, a less obtrusive method was applied; announcements of death of a male or female manager in four newspapers were content analysed. Words (verbs, adjectives, nouns etc.) used to describe a deceased manager are indicators of social stereotypes. They describe in part perceived personality traits and leadership style of a manager and express additionally what people think is convenient to say about a lost person. It can be assumed that descriptions in obituaries represent images or social stereotypes about male and female managers and change with the time. When leaders are expected to be task-oriented, obituaries will probably praise expertise and success of a deceased person; when managers are expected to be socio-emotional specialists, bereaved colleagues may emphasize the deceased person's comrade-like understanding and ability to care if images of male managers differ from those of female managers then words used to describe the deceased persons in obituaries should differ (cfr. Bourolieu and de Saint Martin, 1975).

METHOD

Obituaries published in four newspapers in the years 1974, 1980 and 1986 were analysed. All four newspapers are published daily in the German language, one in Austria (*Die Presse*), two in Germany (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung*), and one in Switzerland (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*). These newspapers were selected because they usually contain obituaries by order of private persons and also by business firms and public organizations and are considered important for their articles on economic events. The years 1974, 1980 and 1986 were chosen because during this time period the women's liberation movements were strong and can be expected to have led to a change of gender images in Western societies.

For the analysis, 26 issues of each newspaper were selected for each year according to the following selection principle: for 1974, 1980 and 1986 the Monday issues of the second week of the years were chosen (January 6th, 1974, 1980 and 1986); the Tuesday issue of the fourth week (January, 21st); the Wednesday issue of the sixth week (February, 2nd); the Thursday issue of the eighth week (February, 20th); the Friday issue of the tenth week (March, 7th) etc. If a newspaper did not appear on a selected day, the issue of the following day was selected.

Overall, 312 newspapers were scrutinized with a total of 2196 obituaries; 699 announcements concerned females and 1497 were dedicated to males. Only 641 obituaries reported explicitly about persons who had been working in business firms or public organizations. Out of these, 497 obituaries concerned persons who had been in leading positions: 20 persons had been females and 477 males. A person

was considered having had a leading position if he or she had been the director of or head of a firm, school or other public organization, chair of a department, etc.

Since only 20 obituaries concerning female managers were found, a further search for announcements concerning females was made in those issues of the above cited newspapers published in 1974, 1980 and 1986 which were not considered at the first run. Overall, 65 more obituaries concerning female managers were found, giving a total of 562 obituaries, 85 concerning females and 477 concerning males. Table 1 shows the distribution of frequencies of obituaries across the three years. Obituaries concerning males were much more frequent than those of females in 1974, 1980 and also in 1986. Moreover, frequency of obituaries concerning females did not increase over the years.

Table 1. Frequency of obituaries concerning females and males who had been in leading work positions organized by year of publication and by newspaper

| Publication year | Male managers | Female managers | | Total |
		First search	Second search	
1974				
Die Presse	11	0	3	14
Frankfurter Allgemeine	75	2	8	85
Neue Zürcher Zeitung	39	2	8	49
Süddeutsche Zeitung	44	3	10	57
1980				
Die Presse	3	1	3	7
Frankfurter Allgemeine	54	1	4	59
Neue Zürcher Zeitung	29	0	2	31
Süddeutsche Zeitung	41	2	9	52
1986				
Die Presse	10	1	0	11
Frankfurter Allgemeine	89	1	5	95
Neue Zürcher Zeitung	26	5	7	38
Süddeutsche Zeitung	56	2	6	64
Total	477	20	65	562

The 562 obituaries were content analysed by a male and a female expert who first identified those verbs, adjectives, nouns and small sentences which described the dead persons. Some sentences in the obituaries read as follows: 'person X was a restless and competent leader ...'; 'the adored person X was a highly capable collaborator ...'; 'he or she had a strong personality, was an excellent leader and good friend ...'. In these examples the following words are crucial indicators of social stereotypes: 'restless', 'competent', 'leader', 'adored', 'capable', 'collaborator', 'strong personality' and 'good friend'.

Overall, 2365 relevant verbs, adjectives and nouns were identified in the selected obituaries. These words were presented to two judges, a male and a female business administration student, who were blind concerning the sex of the deceased and the experimental hypothesis. They classified them into 281 categories and then into 58 classes. The judges' classifications were highly similar with a percentage of concor-

dance of 97 per cent. In cases of dissimilar classifications they discussed their classifi-
cations until they reached agreement. Table 2 lists the frequencies of the 58 categories
by sex of deceased person and year of publication of obituaries. In the following
analysis only those categories of descriptive words were considered which were fond
mentioned in the obituaries at least 10 times. Overall, five categories were observed
less than 10 times and 53 categories were occurred more often.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In search for obituaries of male and female managers revealed no increase in the
number of obituaries concerning females over the years. This result can in part
be explained by the fact that men are still more likely to hold high positions than
women (Müller *et al.*, 1983; Wolf and Wolf, 1991). The explanation could also be
that most defunct female leaders have been older and the changes in the proportion
of male to female leaders in the last few decades will only be observable in the
obituaries of years to come. Furthermore these older women quite possibly might
be less influenced by the women's liberation movements than their younger counter-
parts. Both generations might very well also differ in their leadership behaviour,
so that major observable changes in obituaries might only be expected in the future.
However, it should be repeated that the behaviour of male and female managers
has not been found to differ (Friedel-Howe, 1990; Nieva and Gutek, 1981; Ragins,
1991).

As Table 2 shows, deceased managers were described most often as having had
a strong personality (5.9 per cent of the cases), as having been indefatigable (5.3
per cent) experts (5.2 per cent) and comrade-like (4.3 per cent), energetic (4.3 per
cent), faithful (3.9 per cent), intelligent (3.7 per cent), successful (3.7 per cent) and
outstanding (3.4 per cent) instructors (3.3 per cent) with considerable experience
(3.0 per cent). Male managers were most often praised for having had a strong
personality (5.9 per cent), having been experts (5.8 per cent), indefatigable (5.4 per
cent), comrade-like (4.6 per cent), energetic (4.4 per cent), intelligent (4.0 per cent),
successful (3.7 per cent), outstanding (3.5 per cent), faithful (3.4 per cent) and exper-
ienced (3.4 per cent) instructors (3.3 per cent). Female managers were praised for
having been faithful (7.9 per cent) and adorable (7.4 per cent) persons with a strong
personality (5.5 per cent) and indefatigable (4.7 per cent), caring (4.3 per cent),
as well as successful (4.3 per cent), amiable (3.9 per cent) and work-oriented (3.1
per cent) instructors (3.1 per cent).

A comparison (*z*-tests) between the frequencies of categories attributed to males
and females showed that male managers were more often than female managers
described as being honest, decision-makers, expert, intelligent, comrade-like persons
with entrepreneurial spirit. Females, on the other hand, were reported to be more
work-oriented, likeable, kind, amiable, courageous, faithful, adorable, and far-
sighted. Table 3 shows the respective percentages and *z*-values.

These lists of most often used terms praising deceased female and male managers
show that males are perceived as task specialists and socio-emotional leaders, while
females are predominantly described as nice persons who are work-oriented and
courageous.

It was assumed that descriptions of females and males might vary from 1974 to

Table 2. Frequency of 58 descriptive obituary categories by sex of deceased manager and year of publication

Category (German–English)	Male			Female		
	1974	1980	1986	1974	1980	1986
1. Aktiv — active	13	5	8	0	0	0
2. Angesehen — respected	25	7	23	1	1	1
3. Arbeitsorientiert — work-oriented	8	4	11	6	0	2
4. Aufgeschlossen — open-minded	5	5	7	2	0	0
5. Ausgeglichen — balanced character	7	3	5	0	0	2
6. Beliebt — likeable	2	3	2	3	0	0
7. Bescheiden — modest	6	1	4	1	1	1
8. Ehrlich — honest	15	11	14	0	0	0
9. Engagiert — committed	5	13	23	0	1	6
10. Entscheidungsträger — decision-maker	5	2	13	0	0	0
11. Erfahren — experienced	30	14	25	0	0	0
12. Erfolgreich — successful	26	17	31	8	0	3
13. Experte — expert	43	32	41	0	2	1
14. Fähig — skilful	19	13	13	2	0	3
15. Freundlich — friendly	7	3	4	1	0	2
16. Führer — leader	4	3	5	1	0	0
17. Fürsorglich — caring	12	7	32	5	2	4
18. Gerecht — fair	2	3	5	1	0	0
19. Geschätzt — esteemed	17	16	22	3	1	2
20. Gütig — kind	9	4	3	3	2	1
21. Hilfsbereit — supportive	12	7	12	4	2	1
22. Hochachtungswürdig — admirable	9	8	14	5	1	0
23. Initiator — innovator	11	13	10	0	1	1
24. Intelligent — intelligent	38	19	24	3	0	1
25. Kameradschaftlich — comrade-like	34	33	26	2	3	0
26. Kontaktfreudig — sociable	8	3	10	2	0	2
27. Korrekt — ethical	3	5	3	0	0	0
28. Kräftig — energetic	29	22	37	4	1	4
29. Kreativ — creative	9	5	19	5	0	0

Table 2 continues opposite

1986 in such a way that in the late 1980s no more differences would be perceptible. A correspondence analysis of frequencies of 53 descriptive categories was carried out with gender of the deceased manager and year of publication of the obituaries as independent variables. Correspondence analysis bases on chi-square tests and allows for the factoring of qualitative data, similar to factors analysis (Benzecri et al., 1976; Greenacre, 1984). The analysis yielded three factors explaining 42 per cent, 23 per cent and 17 per cent of the variance, respectively. A graphical representation of the results showed that, from a social-psychological point of view, the third factor did not add any information to the first two factors. It will therefore be neglected in the further discussion. For a more clear-cut interpretation of the results only those descriptive categories were considered that contributed to the inertia of the first and second dimensions by 0.01 or more. In a second run of correspondence analysis 31 categories were included. Two factors emerged, the first explaining 45 per cent of the variance and the second explaining 27 per cent. Whereas the first factor discriminates between the sexes, the second factor differentiates between the female images of 1974 and 1980 and the images of 1986. Figure 1 shows

Table 2 continued

Category (German–English)	Male			Female		
	1974	1980	1986	1974	1980	1986
30. Lehrer — instructor	24	10	33	3	2	3
31. Liebenswürdig — amiable	9	8	10	4	1	5
32. Meinungsmacher — opinion-leader	13	14	31	2	1	2
33. Menschlich — humane	13	13	20	1	1	2
34. Mutig — courageous	5	0	5	1	1	4
35. Organisator — organizer	4	5	9	0	0	0
36. Persönlichkeit — strong-personality	45	28	46	5	4	5
37. Pflichtbewußt — conscientious	12	8	7	0	2	1
38. Professionell — professional	3	2	5	0	0	0
39. Ruhig — calm	9	3	5	1	0	0
40. Selbstlos — unselfish	8	11	14	4	0	3
41. Treu — faithful	27	18	23	9	7	4
42. Tüchtig — efficient	11	7	2	1	3	0
43. Überzeugend — convincing	5	1	4	0	0	0
44. Umsichtig — regardful	4	2	5	1	0	0
45. Unabhängig — independent	2	4	4	0	0	0
46. Unermüdlich — indefatigable	40	32	36	5	2	5
47. Unternehmergeist — entrepreneurial spirit	11	4	16	0	0	0
48. Verantwortungsbewußt — responsible	12	8	10	1	1	1
49. Verdienstvoll — outstanding	27	23	21	3	3	1
50. Verehrungswürdig — adorable	7	6	5	12	5	2
51. Wegbereiter — pioneer	14	9	8	5	1	0
52. Weitblickend — farsighted	8	0	5	1	2	3
53. Zuverlässig — reliable	3	3	4	1	1	0
54. Diener — servant	0	1	1	0	0	0
55. Religiös — religious	2	1	0	1	1	0
56. Kompromißbereit — agreeable	0	0	0	1	1	0
57. Patriotisch — patriotic	0	1	0	0	0	0
58. Tier-/Naturschützer — naturalist	0	1	0	1	0	0

the results with 31 descriptive categories. It should be noted here that results of the first and second correspondence analyses led to similar interpretations and equal conclusions about social stereotypes.

Figure 1 shows that the images of male managers remained relatively stable from 1974 to 1986. Deceased male managers were in 1974 and 1980 described as enviably intelligent, experienced, active, outstanding and comrade-like experts who always were aware of their duty. In 1986 male leaders were still perceived as intelligent experts but also as talented organizers, decision-makers and influential opinion leaders. These bereaved colleagues also attributed to their male leaders a high degree of entrepreneurial spirit and described them as social instructors. In general, the images of male managers remained rather stable across the years.

On the other hand, images of female managers changed considerably from 1974 and 1980 to 1986. Although, a change in the images of females was expected and observed in the results, in 1986 females were not perceived to be more similar to the men of 1974 and 1980. Females were still considered to be different from men but were also seen to be different from female leaders in 1974 and 1980. In 1974 and 1980, female leaders were described as nice persons; the surviving colleagues

Table 3. Percentages of categories observed with significantly different frequencies in obituaries concerning male and female managers

Category (German — English)	Male (%)	Female (%)	z-values	p
3. Arbeitsorientiert — work-oriented	0.011	0.031	−2.6	<0.01
6. Beliebt — likeable	0.003	0.012	−1.9	=0.05
8. Ehrlich — honest	0.025	0.000	2.3	<0.05
10. Entscheidungsträger — decision-maker	0.009	0.000	3.0	<0.01
13. Experte — expert	0.058	0.012	3.1	<0.01
20. Gütig — kind	0.008	0.024	−2.4	<0.05
24. Intelligent — intelligent	0.040	0.016	1.9	=0.05
25. Kameradschaftlich — comrade-like	0.046	0.020	2.0	<0.05
31. Liebenswürdig — amiable	0.013	0.039	−3.1	<0.01
34. Mutig — courageous	0.005	0.024	−3.3	<0.01
41. Treu — faithful	0.034	0.079	−3.5	<0.01
47. Unternehmergeist — entrepreneurial spirit	0.015	0.000	2.0	<0.05
50. Verehrungswürdig — adorable	0.009	0.075	−7.8	<0.01
52. Weitblickend — farsighted	0.006	0.024	−2.4	<0.01
Total observations	0.203	0.254		

remembered their female superiors as adorable, likeable, charming persons who were very kind during their lives. In 1986, however, female leaders were attributed much more concrete characteristics: now females were remembered as having shown courage and commitment. Female leaders were perceived now as struggling for success. In sum, while male leaders were always perceived as knowledgeable and efficient, descriptions of female leaders changed from rather content-less adoration to attribution of motivation, commitment and courage. In late 1980 females are perceived as struggling, possibly for acknowledgement at work. This pattern is in part similar to findings on gender differences according to which success in males is attributed to stable factors such as, e.g. ability, whereas the same success in females is attributed to unstable factors, such as, e.g. effort or motivation (Deaux, 1976, 1984; Dweck, 1975).

Gold (1990), Friedel-Howe (1990) and others found that male and female leaders do not differ in their actual behaviour and personality traits. But if there is a difference between the genders, then it is in favour of women. Women proceed with more collaborating and sharing of decision-making in many organizational settings and collaborators are usually more satisfied with female leaders than male leaders. Nevertheless, social stereotypes suggest differences between men and women in favour of men. Also, Eagly (1991) concludes her review of empirical studies on gender and leadership stipulating that there are no considerable gender differences in the way people lead, but that women are victims of discrimination (DeAngelis, 1991).

The first dimension revealed by correspondence analysis (Figure 1) ranges from adoration at one end to expertise and intelligence at the other end. While female managers are situated at the rather content-less pole of adoration, male managers are projected at the opposite pole. Descriptions of males on that dimension did not change from 1974 to 1986 whereas female managers' descriptions moved from one extreme in 1974 to a more moderate, intermediate point in 1980 and 1986. The second dimension is difficult to label: one pole can be described by highly dynamic terms such as 'courageous' and 'highly committed', on the other pole terms such
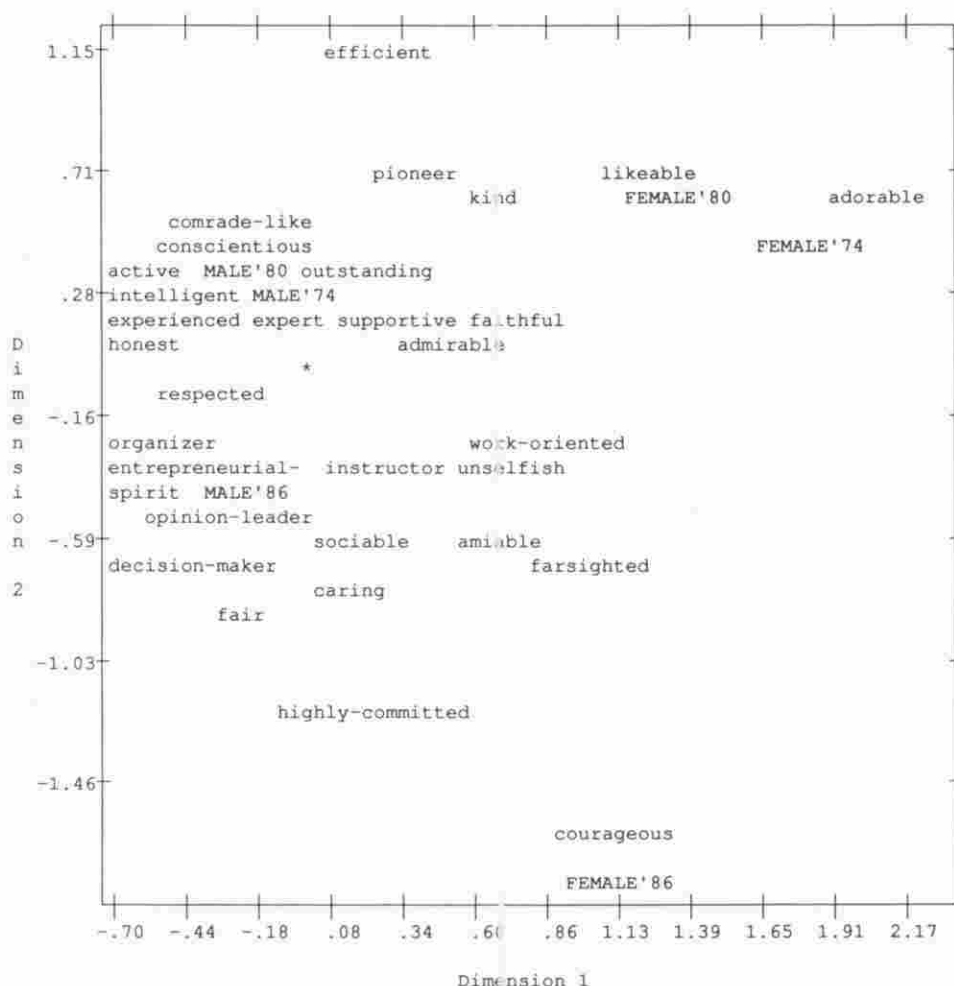
Figure 1. Correspondence analysis of the frequencies of 31 disruptive obituary categories by gender and year of publication

as 'efficient', 'adorable', 'likeable', 'pioneering' and 'kind' can be found. It is this dimension which shows the major changes in perceptions of female leaders from a static description to a dynamic personification of the female managers.

These dissimilarities in the obituaries are interpreted as reflecting gender stereotypes. It could be argued, however, that they are a function of the actual differences in personality characteristics and behaviour of these particular individuals. This objection can be rejected by the fact that several studies report no actual behaviour differences between the sexes in leading positions and as a study soon to be published shows (Passauer, 1992), when asked directly, work colleagues could not report any behaviour differences between male and female leaders.

In sum, this study shows typical differences in the images of male and female leaders until 1980. Then some changes occurred. In the 1980s female managers have convinced their colleagues by motivation and engagement. Male and female managers

are both perceived as working for success; but while men may win through knowledge; women struggle for success. These results attribute female success to unstable factors, whereas the males' success is attributed to stable factors (Deaux, 1976). In a few years, perhaps, females got the experience and knowledge of men also in the view of society?

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