



aquitude

**Survey Report
Stereotyping in the Workplace**

February 2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New figures released by Aquitude, reveal that stereotyping can have an implicit and highly negative impact on the way businesses are run.

Foremost leadership development and organisational consultancy, Aquitude, has released the results of a survey conducted with partners at Gulf Research last year as a precursor to the Women's Global Leadership Conference for Energy and Technology in Houston, Texas.

The objective of the research was to understand whether women face specific stereotyping in careers in male-dominated fields. The study asked women to discuss whether stereotyping had impacted them personally. Respondents from a wide variety of roles and levels in the energy industry took part.

69% of those surveyed revealed that they had experienced some kind of stereotyping as a woman in a male dominated culture.

Christina Ioannidis, CEO of Aquitude commented on the survey findings:

"This research has highlighted that stereotyping is a complex issue. A knee-jerk reaction by companies to offer Diversity or Sensitivity training is not enough.

We have learnt from the companies we work with that the number one activity which needs to happen is to break gender stereotypes. This involves a concerted effort for culture change so that individual values and differences are embraced across the organisation.

Giving women and other minority groups a voice, a sense of appreciation for the difference in perspective and the invaluable source of innovation that they inherently bring to the table is a source of competitive advantage that needs to be harnessed in today's challenging economic climate".

The research findings show that there are several types of stereotyping. These include people making assumptions based on age, ambition, role and the differences between the way the genders communicate.

SURVEY RESULTS IN DETAIL

The following pages include selected qualitative results from the survey.

Age – in particular youth, can be a serious stereotype

“On occasion, as a young woman, I have commonly been mistaken for the admin. Also, people have a tendency to see a young woman as less professional or less able to lead on a large scale.”

This attitude can hamper the performance of the person being stereotyped; stereotyping acts as an invisible barrier being placed in the eyes of the others, and as such frustration build-up occurs within the person on the other side. Women can feel the invisible barriers and, inadvertently, question their desire and their capabilities for performing their function.

Ambition

“I spent 16+ years in a male dominated environment. At one point I was told that I should put my career mobility on hold while I had younger children at home because I was a single Mom at the time. I quickly moved into another department where I was able to move up the corporate ladder while I still had children at home. I moved up and around quite a bit, but did hit that glass ceiling where politics became the name of the game.”

Assumptions about individual careers due to family responsibilities are a stereotype that extends beyond the energy industry. Motherhood is a challenge, but not a dampener either in performance, nor the ambition of corporate women. As the quotation above shows, women can be placed in difficult situations due to these assumptions, and need to work in career flexibility when the barriers appear.

“Assuming that I could not travel because I am a woman with a child. Assuming that I wouldn't want to transfer to a location because the local culture is different than the US and limiting my career opportunities.”

Assumptions based on perceived or expected limitations also put a dampener on women's advancement. Having a family should not imply capability or capacity falters. However, these are two comments above firmly show the opposite is true.

Interpretation of emotion

“I have been called ‘too emotional’ on rare occasions when I have expressed any frustration or anger. Perceived negatively when behave aggressively as men would.”

This is the female double-bind: women have to tread carefully: if they are not assertive they are perceived as “weak”; if they express their views forcefully the “emotional” or “aggressive” cards come out. These are badges which implicitly impact perceptions and bias expectations of performance.

Role Stereotyping

"In (my) current supervisory role, have been assigned a team where I must handle personnel problems, while my male counterpart is assigned to handle drilling operation issues"

This is one of the most challenging issues around stereotyping: women have to fight against the perception that there are "traditionally female" roles, such as personnel/HR and that men are more attuned to "hard" business roles such as Accounting, Finance, Operations. This is one of the greatest sources of unconscious bias which inadvertently affects the negative perception men tend to have of women in their understanding of "business issues" and hence question their capabilities for entering the Corporate Boardroom.

Christina Ioannidis, CEO of Aquitude comments:

"In our work with large corporations across the globe,, we do see that women tend to have a natural talent for people management, learning and development, which have been extensively highlighted as management skills that women inherently bring to the business world through, (for example recent research undertaken by McKinsey&Co). However, management skills and "hard" business functions are not mutually exclusive – in fact they go hand-in-hand. This perception that in order to be a good financier, engineer, or lawyer you behave in one particular way, and not exhibit the "feminine" behaviours (which are linked to better management) is what leads to these industries to prevail a culture of hard-nosed machismo with only like-minded individuals succeeding. If you happen to be different, or have a differing style or values, you are out."

Reversing role stereotyping requires confronting bias

One example was a few years ago when I was in charge of having outside people come in for a technical meeting about a prospect. My boss just flippantly said, "Make sure we have coffee.", so I looked him right in the face and asked him if he would have made the same comment to my male geologist colleagues. He said, "oops, no". So I reminded him that the secretary did the coffee and I did the maps. I think he got the message and I don't remember whether we had coffee that day or not because I didn't order it."

This is an excellent example of the benefit of level-headed confrontation when stereotyped. Sometimes it is more effective strategy to overcome and highlight inappropriate comments when they occur and not succumb to stereotypical behaviour, like, in this case, making the coffee.... However it is very challenging for women to do this, as (on average), it is against their innate nature to confront and so fall into the trap of stereotypical behaviour that is imposed upon them.

Lack of respect – patronising

“As a field engineer told ‘not to take a long shower because the rest of us want some hot water too....”

Whilst not malicious, male bantering and humour can be hurtful or just plainly frustrating, particularly as a sole female you are bombarded with what we perceive as inappropriate comments. Whilst we advise our clients to develop a “thick skin” to be able to ignore, or respond, it is difficult to do so when you are the “odd one out” and exclusion aggravates the frustration.

Alien Communication and Working Styles

“ (stereotyping) still exists especially in field positions. Men typically do not feel women are capable of doing these jobs and generally do not want them in their teams. Men tend to feel their territory is sacred and putting a woman in the mix ‘ruins’ the dynamics. They feel they have to talk differently and be more guarded if a woman was part of their group.”

The bottom line: difference exacerbates difference. Psychologists refer to ‘out-group’ and ‘in-group’ behaviour. The cultural impact of feeling ‘out- group’ is heightened when those in the majority, or “in-group”, isolate those in the minority, as the next response shows:

“I do not feel like I am taken as seriously, especially being a young woman in the oil and gas industry. Others also assume they have nothing in common with me and therefore are not as interested in talking to me.”

Underestimated competence

“Of course. I started out in trading and was “thrown bones” because I was female. That didn't last very long when they realized I was just as savvy as they were when it came to trading (with the help and encouragement of my male boss). It comes with the territory.”

Line management support is critical in the redressing of stereotyping. Line managers need to be supportive, with highly-tuned, emotional intelligence skills in order to guide and advise the woman being stereotyped. By the same token, they also need to be catalysts for changing the status quo and not accepting inappropriate stereotyping when it occurs.

Women perpetuating stereotypes

Women are perpetuating stereotypes; through responses such as

“Yes, but not just by the men. Many of the harshest stereotyping has come from other women.” and “it is actually the women in the drilling and completions communities and networks that perpetuate the stereotypes. For example, one activity they had planned at my company's global drilling and completions conference was a nail salon outing.”

We can see that women themselves are being their own worst enemy. It is important for women to promote the fact that they can excel in a man's world, and do so as a woman. What is critical is the balance between overt femininity with overt masculinity. A visit to a nail salon or a spa is the male equivalent of going to a boxing match.

Furthermore, segregation is partially to blame for lack of understanding and appreciation of the genders. There are times when female-only activities are useful. As the interaction of women in a "safe" environment with like-minded people is different. However, it is critical to consider activities that don't perpetuate the stereotyping cues.

Things are, nonetheless, getting better. A few of the respondents highlighted that...

"I think we all see (gender stereotyping) at the non-professional levels, but I have not seen it specifically at the professional level. I think there is always a challenge of balancing family life to work life, which can be more difficult for women."

This relates to the personal challenge of managing in expectations around family and work; through our at Aquitude work we often witness how women can be their own worst enemies by expecting perfection... in all aspects of their life. "You can have it all... just not at the same time" is one of the most enlightening comments a C-level Suite once communicated in a training session. This is a reality that needs to be engrained widely within the female population.

Conclusion: A long way to go...

As one respondent in the survey commented "Many years ago, (stereotyping) was more, however, it still exists...". Companies are slowly redressing the issue, largely supported by the "political correctness" campaign which has been fuelled by the fear of litigation (particularly in the US). However, the stereotyping behaviours and unconscious bias creeps in on a daily basis, as this research has highlighted.

...The need to Break Gender Stereotypes

This research has highlighted that some of the most conservative stereotyping of women in the Energy and Technology industries still prevails. What is needed is to break those stereotypes, in a concerted, individually-focused manner. Gone are the days where traditional "sensitivity" training may have appeared to suffice. Aquitude has developed the "Breaking Gender Stereotypes" Programmes to truly knock stereotyping on the head and create an inclusive gender-smart corporate culture for the benefit of both men and women.

For the blueprint of this concept, **Breaking Gender Stereotypes: How your Organisation can Redress the Brain Drain and Fuel Innovation**, visit:

<http://www.aquitude.com/academy/book-breaking-gender-stereotypes>