Gender Sensitivity as One of the Factors in the Management of Technical Projects

Helena Kolibova, Pavel Machal, Ivan Beloev, Lubica Libova

Abstract: The labour market area is characterized by a vast variety of approaches to human diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, etc. The strategy of the European Union and national economies emphasizes creation of such policies which try to compensate for consequences on a decrease in the number of active population by strengthening the labour market particularly in favour of gender-profiling groups such as the elderly, women and parents returning to the labour market after parental leave, etc. Based on their experience, male/female employees and employers are forced to rethink their ideas, future strategies and practices flexibly. However, there is a plurality of paradigms. The issues of project management and human resources can be seen in a broader perspective. The ambition of this paper is to highlight the implementation of gender sensitivity in managing technical projects. The current emphasis is not only placed on project managers´ knowledge and experience in the field of behavioural competencies, but it is also placed on their knowledge how to apply the competencies in the management of technical projects such as gender sensitive political strategy. The study of gender inequality is based on horizontal and vertical segregation levels.

Keywords: Project Management, Labor Market, Human Resources, Technical Projects

INTRODUCTION

Management can be simply understood as the science and art of managing business activities (e.g. according to Drucker´s opinions). Critical processes that are considered to set business objectives are planning, organizing, operational controling, leading, or coordinating and decision-making. The concept of professional management is given a modern interpretation based on proper functioning of its three components – organization, communication and information. It is usual to label initial conceptions of management simply as management. The most important of these are Process management, Scientific management, Modern theory of operations management, Behaviorism, Systems theory, Modern concepts of management, and also Project management.

Project management is a special discipline also called 'philosophy of management', modern management concepts of complex, discrete planning tasks with a high degree of indefiniteness and complexity. In other words, a special approach to the processes of planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling and decision-making in all aspects of processes called the project. It includes motivating all involved staff in order to achieve the project objectives. It means to achieve a required product category and quality at the output in compliance with meeting deadlines, costs and risks (Doležal, J., Máchal,P., Lacko, B., a kol.) Process management is a term that may represent a synonym for 'project management'. Howevere, in the Czech Republic this term is used to describe a more specified process related primarily to issues of operations management for specific projects.

The paper aims to discuss the gender sensitivity in the management of technical projects. It is generally accepted that especially some 'soft' projects are managed by female project managers. Nonetheless, this practice is not so common in the field of the management of technical projects.

Political and organizational negotiations and activities on the labour market are never gender-neutral. Various life situations may be reflected in differentiated labour market status of an individual and cause unfavourable impacts according to various aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc. Therefore, the society requires companies to obey a number of rules which are becoming, more or less, a part of corporate strategies. They are implemented in activities of multinational and local businesses.

Introducing a gender issue into society and companies is exposed to the contrast of formal declaration of equality and maintain the current image of a divided world

(KOCMANOVÁ, A., HŘEBÍČEK, J., a kol.). Researches show the validity of value and cultural transmissions which are influenced by a 'toxic cultural environment' (Killbourne, J. Levin, D.). Certain domains are being commonly attributed to gender-profiling groups, i.e. women and men have predetermined completely different talents, qualities, or ambitions. Processes have been developed since the 1980s. They emphasize the fact that genderism is occurring in organizations at least in four interrelated processes (Křížková, A., Pavlica, K..):

a) **Division within gender lines –** represents a work division, acceptable behaviour, space and power controlling. Women in companies are mostly employed in personnel departments and men are more frequently working in technical and operational departments. Women express their emotions in a different way than men.They are allowed to cry but swearing or profanity is not tolerated.

b) **Design of symbols and images** – represents the creation and maintenance of symbols and images that explain gender division. For example, a dresscode (the dresscode both for men and women without ornamentation), design of corporate printed materials, pictures of men and women depicting the superior position of men, e.g. a man standing and dictating something, a woman watching and writing; a young person is considered to be more efficient, an aged employee do not possess ICT skills, etc.

c) **Interaction among participants** – helps maintain established inferior/superior workplace relationships. Men usually behave like mentors, instructors, while women provide them with emotional support and are willing to lend an ear. Young people are more vigorous and energetic; the Caucasian race is more valuable; elderly people are unpromising. If a man raises his voice during a group discussion, it is widely considered to be the element of emphasis. In case of similar female behaviour, raising voice is identified as a note of hysteria.

d) **Production of identities –** represents an internal and external policy of compliance with official gender culture in an organization. Employees adopt their roles in the company as a natural part of their own identity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to determine working methods, authors worked on both basic characteristics of the management of technical projects and the analysis of female participation on the labour market in the Czech Republic. The competency standard of project management IPMA was used as a starting basis. Different types of organizations were distinguished in the context of gender equality:

− **Gendered organization** – corporate culture is still influenced by a stereotyped image in companies and solves the dilemma of relevant feedback on making a profit. A limited range of roles is adopted where women are considered to be mothers or caregivers with a narrow focus on career advancement, while men are perceived as dominant authoritative people with technical specialization and skills. Such organization is little interested in maintaining work-life balance showing a lack of respect for current hedonistic tendencies of individuals to enjoy all the roles including an opinion that childcare is a matter of women. It shows one-sided favouritism towards one gender in organizational processes. For example, a possibility of a flexible return after parental leave is not guaranteed as well as conditions for providing a care for ill family members or aging parents, or a lack of working conditions for older male/female workers, etc.

− **Gender-integrated organization** – it operates in cultural dimensions based on norms, values, and practices of gender equality and its principles. Corporate culture is becoming stronger. In fact, it means that companies monitor gender issues in practice. They are, more or less, mindful of proportional representation of women and men in managerial positions, promote career development of their male/female employees, and guarantee for their equal pay.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of female participation on the labour market in the Czech Republic shows that there is a variety of factors which often have an impact on the path and progression of women's career (KOLIBOVÁ, H.).

They are:

− *Dominating gender norm* which is mostly associated with the fulfilment of gender roles and career choice. It is made in accordance with gender stereotypes about suitability of certain jobs for men and women. Workers in stereotypically 'male' professions are better employed on the gender-segregated labour market with a guarantee of higher salaries, steady jobs with better working conditions and more favourable opportunities for career advancement. Such professions are associated with higher social status. In contrast, the secondary labour market with typically 'female' professions offers low salaries, poor working conditions with limited options of career advancement, limited autonomy and no authority for making decisions, limited training opportunities and low-prestige jobs. (KŘÍŽKOVÁ)

− *Changing social and institutional conditions, family background charakteristics* – disproportionate representation of women and men in certain types of jobs is largely related to their different levels and branches of study and different preferences for their chosen career. The difference in preferences can be either innate or caused by gender stereotypes. The stereotypes may either facilitate or complicate access to jobs, organizations, and groups of respective companies.

−

− *Factors affecting participants in their career choice* – benefits, financial incentives, career opportunities. In order to distinguish gender norms we differentiate between a horizontal segregation which refers to the amount of people of each gender across occupations, sectors and disciplines, and a vertical segregation which describes men's or women's domination at various levels of organizational hierarchy. Feminization of some professions and posts seems to be an important manifestation of labour market segregation from the perspective of gender. Jobs and professions where women make up more than 70% of all workers are marked as feminized. These jobs are gradually credited all the stereotypical feminine characteristics such as sensitivity, ability to care for others, devotion, empathy, patience, etc.

−

− *The role of individual factors in career choice* – ambition, expectation. There is already some discrimination before entering the labour market which is evident from actual job offers. Employers attribute some job positions only to men and some only to women. The wording of adverts sometimes discriminate covertly against young or older women, women with children or women who are seeking rewarding and highly paid jobs. Companies as well as male/female candidates make decisions based on what they are possibly expected to do (set patterns for rights, responsibilities, procedures, methods, and techniques of presentation). Certain restrictions, which are related to career stages or age that is advancing, are applied. However, they are replaced by other modes, e.g. detachment, or social relationships in the workplace.

Stimulation tools to involve gender-defined workers can be divided into three basic groups:

− *legislative tools*, which consist mainly of laws that uphold the equal status of gender-profiling groups on the labour market, prevent male/female aged workers and disabled workers from discrimination, etc.,

− *benefits and other tools,* which are mainly based on providing a sufficient number of various courses and training for gender-profiling groups,

− *motivation tools,* which inspire an interest in lifelong learning in gender-profiling

groups.

An example shows the connection between different levels of society and the dynamics of social changes.

Table 1 Types of social changes in the implementation of strategies for equal opportunities

	Micro-level	**Meso-level (group)**	**Macro-level (society)**
Short-term changes Example:	**Behaviour change** Acceptance of information on gender balance Growing awareness of the forms of gender balance	**Change of norms, administrative change** Impact restrictions of the assessment by stereotypes, sexist forms of communication – double entendre, seemingly neutral slogans, offensive means of communication.	**Policy change** Elimination of all forms of discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender identity.
Long-term changes Example:	**Lifestyle changes** Intolerance to features of sexistic and gender stereotyped behaviour – stereotyping, objectification, sexualization, fragmentation, violence against women, elderly people, etc.	**Change in corporate behaviour** Respecting the gender dimension of personnel agenda in companies, improving reputation and enhancing the company's credibility. *Systematic promotion of equality in remuneration, career progression.*	**Socio-cultural development** Open society respecting dignity, without discrimination on any ground such as race, nationality, gender, age, physical disability, or sexual orientation. *The shift from verbal manifestation to the use of specific aid instruments.*

Source: Author

Gender competence is accepted by theoretical and practical spheres as a new key competence, which is profiled as a natural part of both individual and company's professionality (SOKAČOVÁ L.). It includes elementary awareness of gender politics in society, gender-sensitive political strategies adopted by potentially applicable instruments in meeting requirements for gender equality in society (gender mainstreaming), and general perception of gender as a social category.

Segments of gender competence:

− *Social competence* – ability to work with gender-profiling groups (not only with men, women, transgender, intersexuals, or people with disabilities or somehow limited by their race or ethnicity).

− *Individual competence* – gender is the issue of individuals who regularly perform their various activities within their interactions so as to reflect male/female gender and normative social expectations related to people of their gender. They constantly depict men and women and their 'natural' difference although many of the situations, in which they do so, may not seem relevant at first glance from gender perspective.

− *Professional competence* –knowledge of processes, skills in making new connections

relating to equal opportunities, gender structures, gender-diferentiated solutions, respect for the model of working life from the beginning to the end of employment, meaningful ways of employing diverse teams in terms of age and experience, which are able to transfer their knowledge, experiences, and contacts.

− *Methodical competence* – conditions for perception of complex structures of gender relations in society, politics, administration, and organization.

Gender sensitivity and its effects:

− to mobilize the interest of skilled employees in terms of interest and options, e.g. workers' inspiration and creating a culture of commitment, improvement, and accountability.

− to enhance the motivation for productivity, affect promoting values for customers (a company may utilize competencies, information, and authorization of male/female employees; a manager is able to communicate, coach, and lead), inspire creative and innovative environment and a low turnover of staff.

CONCLUSIONS

Studies and social theories have not interpreted the progress and impact of analyses concerning gender relations on the labour market adequately so far. The authors' objective was to convey a gender context and its influence on the acceleration of new social risks. Specifically, the prevention and responses of companies and businesses represent key points that are able to point out the negative aspects of general identifying characteristics of gender-profiling individuals.

Gender sensitivity of individuals (managers at all levels of organizations) and its qualitative diversity is based on three sources.

− It is about *understanding of one's own experience* within the scope of stereotypical characteristics and behaviour towards gender-profiling groups such as elderly people, women, men, parents returning to the labour market after parental leave, people from ethnic minorities, etc.

− It is about *understanding the corporate culture of a particular company*. The company strategy is obviously aiming at making a profit in business. However, in order to remain competitive, companies must have some capability of their human resources development (i.e. including gender approach to their employees) as well as the exploitation of necessary technologies, etc. This raises the problem of a limited range of roles where gender-profiling groups are accepted whether it is the hierarchy of roles in a company or the focus on performance, the cult of youth, or belonging to the majority population, etc.

Understanding the corporate culture with its perspective on the content and technical aspects of gender issues consists both in the legislative base and apparently in specific examples of good practice in the transfer of experience.

Data analysis of the enterprise must respect the quality diversity of lived experiences and their significance. In this perspective, it is recommended to put social pressure on:

− respecting equal opportunities in employment on the regional labour markets,

− policy support of corporate social responsibility, i.e. ecology and sustainable development,

− company management based on the vision and integrity, which is able to optimize the policy of strengthening the corporate culture, that is:

- − regular monitoring of gender issues in established practice, innovation of human resources processes with a special emphasis on the education of employees in the field of gender stereotypes, and overcoming other prejudices, e.g. race prejudices, etc.
- − training for the purpose of strengthening professional competencies may have many forms in a corporate environment, e.g. initial trainings for recruits, further

education in the form of workshops, seminars, study materials, language learning, vocational training, soft skills training, etc.
− learning by good examples; mentoring and coaching with manuals for practical use with interactive elements led by experienced professionals and managers, who have an exclusive position in lifelong learning. They guarantee the transfer and applicability of theoretical knowledge into practical needs where specific social and managerial skills are practised.

The purpose of these social activities is to promote a rich and differentiated gender-sensitive environment which is reflected in a functioning management. According to modern interepretations, this depends on the balanced configuration of three components – organization, communication and information.

SUMMARY

The aim of the paper was to uncover and identify gender issues concerning gender-profiling groups such as the elderly, women and parents returning to the labour market after parental leave, people from ethnic minorities, who are an integral part of the labour market. The awareness of these facts may affect employment policie both in a positive and negative way. The stated issues are complex in nature. They are interrelated and can not be addressed only from one perspective.

The data analysis dealt with defining the qualitative diversity of gender structures. The research has shown that there are broad differences in a corporate practice both in terms of implementation strategies and the atmosphere in the organization. The analysis has focused on indicating and identifying the resources which determine the degree of gender sensitivity of individuals. Eventually, the profile and level of its structure shapes the corporate culture of human resources. In the opposite direction, it affects communication in companies both at vertical and horizontal levels. The proposed measures allow greater flexibility within the professional framework. Maximum productivity can be only ensured if employees are able to gain control over their working patterns of behaviour in professional communication.

The paper aims to make a contribution to further discussion on the culture of gender sensitivity on the labour market, orientation and specificity of the topic in the business sphere. It turns out that human resources management can not ignore the influence of social changes and development that we are currently witnessing.

REFERENCES

[1] Bujna, M., Beloev, H., (2015) Tools of risk management in production processes. 1st ed., Ruse : University of Ruse Angel Kanchev, 2015. pp. 105. ISBN 978-954-712-654-1.

[2] Drucker, P., F., (2007) *To nejdůležitější z Druckera v jednom svazku.* 1. vyd. Praha: Management Press, 2007. 300 s. ISBN 978-80-7261-066-2.

[3] Doležal, J., Máchal, P., Lacko, B., a kol. (2012) Projektový management podle IPMA. 2. vyd. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2012. 526 s. ISBN 978-80-247-4275-5.

[4] Levin, D., Kilbourne, J., (2009) So Sexy So Soon. Random House, 2009. Dostupné z URL: http://dianeelevin.com/sosexysosoon/introduction.pdf>

[5] Kocmanová, A., Hřebíček, J., a kol. (2013) *Měření podnikové výkonnosti*. Brno: Litera 2013. ISBN 978-80-85763-77-5

[6] Kolibová, H., (2012) Sociální problémy z aspektu gender. Opava, FVP SU, 2012. 150s. ISBN 978-80-7248-748-6

[7] Křížková, A., Pavlica, K., (2004) Management genderových vztahů, postavení žen a mužů v organizaci. 1. vydání Praha, Managementpress, 2004 198 s. ISBN 80-7261-117-8

[8] Prístavka, M., Beloev, H., Kročko, V., (2014) Quality Control in Production Processes. 1st ed., Ruse: University of Ruse Angel Kanchev, 2014. ISBN 978-619-7071-62-7.

[9] Prístavka, M., Beloev, H., (2015) Engineering of Products Quality. 1st ed., Ruse: University of Ruse Angel Kanchev, 2015. pp. 186. ISBN 978-954-712-655-8.

[10] Sokačová, L., (ed.) (2006) Kariéra – rodina - rovné příležitosti Výzkumy postavení žen a mužů na trhu práce, Praha: Gender Studies, o.p.s. 2006, 28 s. ISBN 80-86520-12-9.

CONTACTS

Helena Kolibová, The Institute of Public Administration and Regional Policy, Faculty of Public Policies in Opava, Silesian University in Opava, Hradecká 17, 746 01 Opava, Czech Republic, e-mail: helena.kolibova@fvp.slu.cz

Pavel Máchal, Department of Project Management, The Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies, Mendel Univerzity in Brno, 613 00 Brno, Czech republic, e-mail: pmachal@mendelu.cz

Ivan Beloev, Department of Transport, Faculty of Transport, University of Ruse, 8, Studentska str., 7017 Ruse, Bulgaria, e-mail: ibeloev@uni-ruse.bg

Lubica Libova, Vysoká škola zdravotníctva a sociálnej práce sv. Alžbety, Palackého č. 1, P.O. Box 104, 810 00 Bratislava, Slovakia