

HIGH-PERFORMANCE CLASSROOMS FOR WOMEN? APPLYING A RELATIONAL FRAME TO MANAGEMENT/ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR COURSES

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With the increasingly diverse U.S. workforce, accelerating rate of change, and growing reliance on work teams to address increasingly complex business issues, the traditional command and control management style is no longer effective in many organizational settings (Drucker, 1992, 1997; Mohrman, Cohen, & Mohrman, 1995; Rosener, 1995). Evolving high-performance work practices include self-managed work teams, decentralization, reduction of status differences, and information sharing (Dessler, 1999). In recent research, relational skills, including empathy, authenticity, empowering others, and facilitating teamwork, heretofore utilized predominantly in the private domain (and used primarily by women) have been shown to be effective in the workplace (Fletcher, 1998; Weisinger, 1998). Many of these concepts and practices are captured in a theory called relational psychology, a theory developed based on the experiences of women (Miller, 1987, 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

By the year 2008, women are projected to constitute 47.5% of the U.S. workforce (Fullerton, 1999). Women are increasingly moving into mid- and upper levels of management. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Wootton, 1997), women held 43% of managerial positions in 1995. Therefore, providing a climate in business schools that fosters the development of women as well as men is critical. However, Bilimoria (1999) points out that management education fails to meet the needs of many women. She states, "management education is itself mired in the same gendered constructions prevalent in the larger corporate/business environment. In this sense, the institutional and pedagogical structures and practices of management education mirror the prevailing gender biases of our larger society" (1999, p. 120). MacLellan and Dobson (1997) conclude that behavioral assumptions that underlie business education have a male moral bias, which may create a chilling environment for female students. A recent Catalyst (2000) survey of MBA graduates of prestigious U.S. business schools provided empirical support. The Catalyst study reported that almost one third of female respondents found the business school culture to be overly aggressive and competitive. More than half of the women surveyed reported that they could not relate to protagonists in case studies and nearly 40% said they did not have adequate opportunities to work with female professors.

Research indicates that men and women have different needs and concerns in learning environments. For women, learning tends to be highly personal (Gallos, 1993). Women learn by integrating different perspectives. In the learning process, women relate theory to their own and other's experiences, rather than thinking primarily in the abstract as men often do. Women more

regularly think contextually and holistically than do men (Fisher, 1999). As women learn, they integrate, generalize, and synthesize (Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1995). Women's learning also involves connecting affectively as well as cognitively with the subject matter (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). They tend to define learning and self-development as their ability to develop and express their own "voice" (Belenky, 1986; Gallos, 1993), reflecting their own experiences and identity as women. For women, communication is a means of seeking and providing confirmation and support. Women seek consensus and connection in interactions with others rather than establishing hierarchy and status as is common in interactions among men (Tannen, 1990).

As I look at the ways we have conducted and taught our classes in business schools, I ask whether the ways we conduct our classes are consistent with (a) the changing gender composition of the work force, (b) the recognition that women and men approach the learning experience with some different concerns and needs, and (c) the evolving philosophy and practices of many of today's high-performance business organizations. To what extent do we recognize these transitions not only in the content we cover in the course but also in the ways that we teach organizational behavior (OB)?

This article looks at the process of teaching in the OB classroom using a relational lens. To that end, I would like to briefly present relational theory, review several reports on the use of relational practice in organizations, and summarize articles published in the *Journal of Management Education* over the past 9 years that are relational in nature. Then I will present some thoughts about the application of relational practice in management and OB classrooms.

What Do We Mean by "Relational Practice"?

RELATIONAL THEORY

Relational Theory (Miller, 1987, 1988, 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997) evolved based on women's experience and on earlier research on gender-related developmental issues. Gilligan (1982) found that women's sense of self and morality involve issues of responsibility and care for others. This self-conception includes an appreciation of the context in which events occur, rather than a view of events in isolation. Decisions women make tend to include consideration of the effects of the decision on others involved in the situation (Smith & Oakley, 1997). Surrey posited that mutual empathy, "being with" others, is experienced as self-enhancing for women (Surrey, 1991, p. 55). A large part of women's life activity involves active participation in the development of others. Miller (1987) theorized that an inner sense of connection to others is a central organizing feature of psychological development. According to relational theory, one's sense of self and worth is grounded in the ability to make and maintain connections with others.

According to Fletcher (1999) and Fletcher and Jacques (1998), relational theory can be used to expand the definition of work to include enabling and empowering others through sharing of information and through teaching. The theory proposes a broader definition of "outcome" to include outcomes embedded in others (e.g., their increased knowledge or competence). Skills involved in relational practice include empathy, authenticity, the ability to connect or build relationships with others' ideas, and openness to being influenced by others' emotional, physical, and intellectual reality. Also important is the ability to understand, interpret and use emotional data, and the ability to share information, to admit not knowing, and to affirm others without loss

of self-esteem. Although based on listening to women's experiences, relational theory is not proposed as a theory to explain all women's experience, nor is it applied only to women. It is presented as a model of human growth and development that is an alternative to the masculine bias in mainstream theories of development (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1993; Miller, 1987; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

DIMENSIONS OF RELATIONAL PRACTICE

In the organizational context, Fletcher (1996, 1998, 1999) has classified relational practice into four dimensions: preventive connecting, mutual empowering, achieving, and creating team. Preventive connecting involves a focus on the entire project. It involves doing what is necessary on a day-to-day basis to ensure the task is completed, including assuming tasks outside the job description, communicating with others to ensure a collective understanding, and resolving conflicts that threaten the success of a project or task. Preventive connecting is based on the belief that team members should put the needs of the project ahead of individual issues (such as one's status or power). Preventive connecting is based also on the ability to see things holistically, looking at the big picture, rather than focusing on separate parts of a task. Finally, preventive connecting involves seeing projects and decisions in the context of consequences and implications.

Mutual empowering includes behavior intended to enable others' achievement and contribution to a project through increased competence, increased self-confidence and/or increased knowledge (Fletcher, 1996, 1998). Dimensions of mutual empowering include mutual empathy (Surrey, 1991) and empathetic teaching that takes the learner's emotional and intellectual reality into account. Other dimensions of mutual empowering include minimizing status differences, conveying an openness to others' points of view (Jordan, 1993), and fluid power relations where power moves to the individual or group that possesses critical information or resources rather than residing in a particular position. Power is conceived as power with rather than power over others (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Terms that describe mutual empowering include trust, facilitating, connecting, collaborating, supporting, and receptiveness (Fletcher, 1996).

Achieving involves using relational skills to enhance one's own professional growth and effectiveness. Fletcher (1996) defines achieving to include the ability to ask for help where such asking is not seen as a sign of weakness. Achieving also includes paying attention to the emotional overlay of a situation and repairing potential or perceived breaks in working relationships. Requisite skills include the ability to stay with contradictory information, to blend thinking and feeling in coming to a decision, and to pay attention to process. Achieving is based on the belief that professional growth is rooted in connection rather than autonomy (Fletcher, 1996).

Creating team means working to create the conditions through which group life can flourish, thus creating the experience of team. Creating team involves fostering collaboration and cooperation, smoothing relationships between people, creating interdependence, and using collaborative rather than confrontational language in working with others in the organization. In creating a sense of team, the leader enables others to feel heard and seen, by acknowledging their thoughts and feelings. Creating team is based on the underlying belief that a collective understanding of

problems or situations is preferable to a separate, individual, and competitive problem definition (Fletcher, 1996).

RELATIONAL PRACTICE IN ORGANIZATIONS

Several studies have identified relational practices in organizations. Rapoport and Bailyn (1996) reported in a study of work practices at three large corporations that employees, particularly women, drew not only on skills and behaviors typical in large organizations, such as rationality, linear thinking, assertiveness and competitiveness, but also on relational skills, including collaboration, sharing of information, empathy, and facilitating others' growth. These skills contributed to effectiveness and enhanced work accomplishment. Similarly, Helgeson (1990) reported on the management styles of women CEOs and found that these leaders used a web approach relying on relationships built over time rather than on hierarchical reporting systems for task accomplishment. In her follow-up study of management practices in several large, successful organizations, Helgeson (1995) found that both men and women used relational practices. Finally, Weisinger (1998) and Goleman (1998) identified (relational) skills including the ability to build relationships, empathy, authenticity, mutual empowering, and creating team as keys for enhancing effectiveness at work.

Related research in the organizational context further indicates that use of relational practice enhances effectiveness in organizations. Tsui, Pearce, Porter, and Tripoli (1997) found that some high-performing organizations employed practices that were relational in nature, including developing a long-term relationship with employees, investing in the employees' career through training, investing in the employee's well-being, mentoring relationships, and expecting that the employee will be willing to go beyond the narrowly defined tasks associated with the job description. These organizations reported higher levels of employee performance, citizenship behavior, intentions to stay, attendance, and perceptions of fairness. The companies also reported greater trust among co-workers, more positive employee attitudes, and higher employee commitment than did organizations using only nonrelational practices.

Past JME Articles That Are Relational in Nature

The literature cited above suggests that employees in high-performing organizations, particularly women, are using relational skills and that there are positive organizational benefits. Are we, as instructors, employing relational practice or encouraging our students' development of relational skills in our management and OB classrooms? I applied relational theory as a "frame" for assessing the extent to which students' psychological growth and development is facilitated and encouraged through relational practice in management and OB classrooms through a review of papers published in JME from 1990 to 1999. I sought to identify articles that described the development of skills and/or practices that are relational in nature on the assumption that such published work represents a sample of reports of innovative teaching practices used by instructors in the management and OB classrooms. My review was not designed to be exhaustive, rather to present a sample of the types of work presented in JME that encourage the development of relational skills among students and faculty. The literature search turned up a number of articles that relate to Fletcher's (1996, 1998) four dimensions of organizational relational practice. A summary of the articles is presented in Table 1 and a brief review of the applications of relational practice in Management/OB classrooms is presented next.

To review, preventive connecting involves going the extra mile to ensure that work gets accomplished, resolving conflicts, ensuring collective understanding, and adopting a holistic view. At a basic level, preventive connecting can mean being aware of one's own feelings and reactions to life events. Coughlan (1993) used journaling as a way for students to begin to identify feelings and to connect their subsequent behaviors to their reactions, thus facilitating students' empathetic response to their own experiences.

Clark (1999) used an opening day class activity in which students were encouraged in groups to reflect on their experiences about empathetic versus unempathetic listening. They were invited to identify the characteristics of effective listening and the feelings that being heard engender. He used this as a model of effective listening for students to follow throughout the semester in class. Thus, he facilitated an important skill requisite to preventive connecting.

In a different form of preventive connecting, Bailey, Saporito, Kressel, Christensen, and Hooijberg (1997) discussed a model for faculty develop-

TABLE 1
JME Articles That Integrate Relational Practice in the Classroom

| <i>Relational Dimension</i> | <i>JME Author(s) and Year of Publication</i> | <i>Implementation of Relational Practice in the Classroom</i> |
|--|---|---|
| Preventive connecting | Bailey, Saporito, Kressel, Christensen, and Hooijberg (1997) Clark (1999) Coughlan (1993) | Use mid-semester course evaluation to identify potential class problems. Uses group activity to teach students about empathetic listening. Uses journaling to help students connect feelings with subsequent behaviors. |
| Mutual empowering | Akin (1991) Alie, Beam, and Carey (1998) Eylon and Herman (1999) Gregorson, Oddou, and Ritchie (1993) King (1998) Murphy (1991) Neal, Schor, and Sabiers (1998) Sims and Lindholm (1993) Waddock (1999) | Uses a self-directed learning model. Use team-based activities to improve interpersonal skills. Use in-basket exercises to help students create empowerment plans and assess the effectiveness of empowerment strategies. Use analysis of learning project to help students become aware of their learning strategies. Uses journal writing to teach about diversity issues. Students' writing and discussing about an admired person increased class cohesion. Use lifelines of critical events to help students identify influences of their attitudes, values, and beliefs. Use Kolb's (1984) Learning Style Inventory to help student's understand how they learn. Students write a letter to a friend, identifying career interests and MBA experiences as a way to develop strategies for future development. |
| Achieving | Kellogg (1991) McKnight (1995) | Students assume the identity of a case character in writing cases as a way to develop student empathy. Uses role-plays, active listening, and discussions of student experiences to enhance awareness of effective motivation and communication. |
| Creating team | Egri (1999) Lyons (1991) | Uses role-playing to demonstrate collaborative decision making. Uses a cooperative learning paradigm to develop students' interpersonal skills. |
| Preventive connecting, mutual empowering, achieving, and creating team | Bolton (1999) | Integrates all four dimensions through presentation of characteristics of high performing teams, having students compare their experiences to these characteristics (creating team), use of diagnostic team performance assessment and troubleshooting at mid-semester (preventive connecting), discussions of learnings (to enhance mutual empowerment), and instructor coaching to facilitate development of interpersonal skills (achieving). |

ment that included a mid-semester evaluation process. During the evaluation, students were invited to provide both survey and open-ended feedback about their satisfaction with their course

in discussions with a focus-group facilitator. This information was used to help the instructor modify course content and process during the semester. Potential difficulties with course material, instructor technique, or classroom process could be identified and addressed. In the context of relational practice, it would be possible to go even further, to engage with students in a discussion of perceptions about performance expectations to arrive at a collective understanding that satisfies the needs of both students and instructor. Thus, the relational dimension of preventive connecting could be enacted further to enhance communication and connection in the classroom.

Mutual empowering involves enabling others' achievement through increased confidence, competence, and/or knowledge; empathetic teaching; minimizing status differences; being open to students' viewpoints; fluid power relations and self-directed learning.

Gallos (1993) recognized the dimensions embedded in mutual empowerment in her editorial note. She pointed out that many OB topics are embedded in students' everyday experiences and can serve as potentially rich sources of insight. Thus, she saw the teacher as guide, support, and designer of a learning environment. She referred indirectly to relational practice when she wrote of the shift in her role from "teacher as banker—where I as the teacher deposit into and manage accounts that grow only because of my interventions and skills—to teacher as midwife—the skilled yet unobtrusive aid to the natural unfolding of life itself" (p. 9). She also pointed out that students often learn best when working in small groups. She called for a positive affirmative class environment rather than a confrontational, competitive atmosphere.

In a summary of a class activity, Murphy (1991) wrote of the mutual empowerment she experienced with her students. In an in-class activity, students wrote about the person they most admired. Most students wrote about a parent. Some of the descriptions expressed appreciation for the guidance, love and sharing students had received. Murphy reported that she was surprised by the thoughtfulness of student responses to the open-ended question. She also noted that the reading of the reports led to the class becoming more closely knit and concerned about each other (i.e., more authentic).

Waddock (1999) used an assignment in which students wrote a personal letter to a valued friend or family member in which they reflected on their MBA experiences, their career interests and how they could use their talents in the future. Waddock saw this project as a way to encourage students to express their own voice around an issue they cared deeply about, providing an opportunity for "an energetic, active, and caring voice to emerge" (p. 193) thus increasing students' self-awareness and empowerment.

Akin (1991) developed a self-directed learning model for an introductory management course. Instead of using a traditional syllabus, students designed learning goals and plans that, with the instructor's approval, became learning contracts. Akin encouraged students to develop a collaborative and supportive classroom climate through small-group, relationship-building activities. Along with reports generated as a function of learning goals and plans, students also completed a paper of their learning experiences, explaining how learning took place and how they knew they had effectively learned. Akin reported that students indicated increased

confidence in their ability to help others. Thus, students were empowered to take control of their learning activities and processes.

Alie, Beam, and Carey, (1998) used team-based activities to introduce managerial work. Students were divided into two groups, hierarchical teams with managers, supervisors, and employees that operated according to traditional organizational processes and consulting teams that worked collaboratively and used peer-review for performance appraisal. Teams had assignments to conduct feasibility studies for new product development for a fictitious firm. Team members had opportunities, with faculty coaching, to work through interpersonal difficulties. The authors reported that the team graduates of the course indicated that participation built self-confidence in interpersonal skills and was helpful in learning to work cooperatively with peers. The experience appeared to have potential to empower participants through increased interpersonal confidence and competence.

Other instructors used various pedagogies to enhance students' self-awareness. Sims and Lindholm (1993) used Kolb's (1984) Learning Styles Inventory and experiential learning model to inform students about how to learn from their own and others' experiences. Gregorson, Oddou, and Ritchie (1993) used an analysis of learning project to help students become aware of their individual learning processes, thus increasing their competence and confidence in acquiring new information and skills in their jobs and careers. Neal et al. (1998) used an experiential learning activity, the construction of lifelines of critical events by students, to help them identify influences on their attitudes, beliefs, and values toward others who were different. Similarly, King (1998) employed journal writing in his undergraduate OB course as a means of learning about diversity issues. Again, students reflected on their own life experiences to increase their self-awareness and understanding of diversity issues.

Eylon and Herman (1999) designed a set of in-basket items in an exercise to help students recognize how to empower themselves and others by creating an empowerment plan. As part of the activity, students discussed and wrote down, for later discussion, what made them feel empowered or disempowered and completed an Affect Questionnaire to measure their reactions to the activity. Thus, students learned both cognitively and affectively what it meant to be empowered or disempowered. These activities were consistent with Miller and Stiver's (1997) theoretical development of the importance of integrating thinking and feeling to being authentic.

Achieving means using one's relational skills to enhance one's professional growth and effectiveness. Achieving involves attending to both thoughts and feelings. Integration of cognitive and affective experiences enhances authenticity and assists in the achievement of deeper connection in working relationships.

McKnight (1995) asked students to recount their own experiences about various OB topics. For example, when covering leadership, he invited students to identify characteristics of successful leaders rather than lecturing to his students. He used role-plays and discussions of students' experiences in interactions with their bosses as opportunities for the students to learn which motivational and communication approaches work effectively. He also encouraged students to engage in active listening as a way to encourage others' involvement in developing solutions to

problems, enhancing the possibility of growth-enhancing connections. Thus, students had the opportunity to use relational skills to enhance their learning and their performance in the course.

In an innovative approach to student case writing, Kellogg (1991) had her students assume the role of a particular character in the case when writing their reports. Students had to call upon empathetic understanding of that character's values and concerns in deciding on the appropriate solution to the case problem. Kellogg responded to case write-ups as if she were the manager in that organization. She encouraged students to submit their papers ahead of the deadline for feedback on specific questions that could be incorporated in revisions. She also encouraged students to revise their papers and resubmit them within 1 week for reconsideration. Kellogg found that her relationship with her students shifted from instructor as controller to collaborator as she worked with them to help them obtain a more positive reaction from their business reader, in effect a transformation from a "power over" to a "power with" orientation (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Creating team involves fostering teamwork and collaboration to create conditions that foster and facilitate authentic, effective team performance. Lyons (1991) used a cooperative learning paradigm with teams to encourage students to develop interpersonal skills. In this program, Lyons introduced team-building activities, joint student-teacher discussion of grading factors and policies, and peer review processes as part of team efforts to investigate and present material on human resources management topics. Lyons reported that students indicated that they had learned a great deal from one another and had come to appreciate the special contributions that individual team members can make to the group.

Egri (1999) used a role-play simulation based on the Round Tables on the Environment and Economy in Canada to illustrate the effect of collaborative decision making in the context of challenges brought by constituencies with different values, interests, and goals. In the ensuing discussion, focal topics included influences that hindered the creation of a sense of team, identification of barriers to consensus, sources of conflict, strategies for finding common issues and concerns, and approaches for reducing conflict.

Bolton (1999) integrated all the dimensions of relational practice in the team-building activities she used in her management course. At the beginning of team projects, she introduced the class to information about high-performing teams, invited a discussion with students of positive and negative team experiences and compared these experiences with the dimensions of high-performing teams just introduced. She used feedback on group roles to help students understand their habitual approaches in team activities. In mid-project, she spent a class session in which students completed an instrument measuring conflict resolution styles. After a debrief on styles, Bolton reviewed approaches for opening up discussions for common team process problems, such as free riding, dominant members, and so on. These activities helped students engage in preventive connecting, by identifying potential or emerging group process problems and providing guidance in how to approach these problems.

At the completion of the project, each team member reflected on the task and the process outcomes of their group work. Students had an opportunity to reflect on what they learned about themselves and what they learned about others, creating opportunities for mutual empowerment.

Students also could assess their team's effectiveness by comparing group processes with the characteristics of high-performing teams.

Throughout the activities during the semester, Bolton (1999) acted as coach to facilitate interaction among team members, thereby modeling the achieving dimension of relational practice for her students. Thus she served as guide and model to help students achieve desired outcomes (high grades and satisfaction with group processes and enhanced ability to work effectively on teams) through the use of relational skills.

Implications and Future Directions

Relational theory may be a useful model that adds meaning to evolutionary management practice of moving toward a collaborative, team-based approach to decision making. The theory is based on the notion that human growth occurs through authentic, mutually empathetic relationships. The good news is that a number of recent JME contributors are employing dimensions of relational practice in their classrooms.

If we are to move away from the traditional, competitive, male-oriented business classrooms to embrace a more diverse student body, including major participation by women, we need to go beyond integration of relational theory in individual components of management and OB courses. Relational practices need to be integrated throughout these courses.

Several additional steps could more firmly embed a relational approach in terms of activities in the management and OB classrooms. This change would occur at two levels: content and process. Students need to understand the growth-enhancing potential of relational practice at both the cognitive and the affective level. An overview of relational theory could be presented during a presentation of topics on motivation to help students learn intellectually about the value of working from a collaborative, cooperative stance. Following this introduction, in conducting debriefs of experiential activities, the instructor could encourage students to identify the dimensions of relational practice that were present during the activity. Then the instructor could invite students to reflect on the feelings the activity raised and to share these reactions if they wished. It would be important for the instructor to acknowledge and validate student's feelings through reflective listening. These steps could create a more welcoming atmosphere for women students seeking to learn through both their own and others' experiences during class activities. Additionally, validation of women students' feelings could facilitate the affective component, and thus the integration, of their learning. Finally, explicitly recognizing and discussing relational theory in a motivational context would legitimize women's interactive style.

In many team activities, peer review/evaluation is a component of each student's grade. Most of the time, the evaluation rests on perceptions of the focal team member's task performance. However, research indicates that the process by which work gets done can have a lasting impact on intergroup relations (Stevens & Campion, 1994). From a relational perspective, additional feedback could help team members become aware of their relational, interactive skill level in several ways. In addition to task-related performance, feedback about process skills would be useful. Feedback could include other team members' observations about the student's ability to work on a team. For example, to what extent was the team member willing and able to listen to others' points of view? Other questions might be whether the team member sought mutually

supportive solutions to team problems and appeared to be empathetic and honest in conveying concerns to the rest of the group. Encouraging these kinds of behaviors could create a classroom culture that facilitates women students' emergence of their "voice."

As a next step in the management/OB classroom, relational theory could be used as a frame for examining organizational practices, norms, and values. For example, when examining the competitive culture common in many organizations, the instructor could invite a discussion of the costs to organizational performance, of activities such as hoarding resources, empire building, and withholding critical information. Then the discussion could turn to the ways in which mutual empowering through collaborative decision making might ameliorate the negative effects of intraorganizational competition. These discussions could help women students integrate their values into the organizational concepts they are learning.

Another way the theory could be used to examine commonly accepted norms would be the instructor leading a discussion in which the class explores underlying gender assumptions in organizations (Kolb, Fletcher, Meyerson, Merrill-Sands, & Ely, 1998). For example, in many organizations, time spent at work is a proxy for organizational commitment. This norm evolved when many employees who were primarily men had nonworking spouses and today, favors those employees who have few nonwork obligations. Engaging in preventive connecting about work/nonwork responsibilities can enhance students' awareness of these workplace challenges affecting women, primarily, at this point in time.

One of the implications of applying relational practice is a humanizing effect in which women students are more able to bring themselves, their feelings as well as their thoughts, to the classroom. Learning theory indicates that learning is more permanent when both the intellect and the heart are involved (Daloz, 1986), particularly for women (Belenky et al., 1986). Integrating relational practice in management/OB classrooms may help instructors better prepare today's students, both women and men, for current and future high-performing workplaces.

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