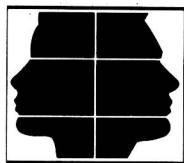


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The Androgynous Manager

Alice G. Sargent

Foreword by Elsa A. Porter



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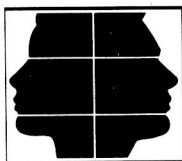
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The Androgynous Manager

*To my androgynous manager,
my daughter,
Elizabeth*

Foreword

“Unhappy are the people who haven’t the words to describe what is going on,” Thurman Arnold wrote almost half a century ago. For those who have been struggling to understand what is going on in American organizations today, *androgyny* is a happy word. It helps to describe part of a very complex, intense, inchoate effort under way to enable people to develop the best that is in them and to use their energies positively within their organizations and the society around them.

The responsibility for this effort rests mainly with the leaders and managers of our organizations. They run the machinery of society: business, government, education, philanthropy, politics, and so on—the panoply of interconnected parts that make up our social, political, and economic system. The system itself is suffering stress in all its parts. Not since the Great Depression, when Thurman Arnold wrote that line, has this country been so beset with problems for which it has no clear solutions. Inflation and unemployment appear intractable. Energy independence eludes us.

Pollution persists. The War on Poverty is not won. Government has not solved these problems, and now, in fact, is considered by the electorate to be a problem in itself—bloated and unresponsive. On the industrial front, our productivity is declining and with it the standard of living that has made us the envy of the globe. “We have rarely known a time when the nation seemed so conscious of its problems and so uncertain of its ability to respond with vigor and imagination,” lamented Harvard University president Derek Bok in his 1980 annual report.

When all the complex issues are sorted out—the demographic changes affecting the society, the aspirations of women and minorities, the impact of technology, the reality of a global economy, and our universal dependence on diminishing quantities of fossil fuels—the need for vigorous and imaginative leadership becomes paramount. It is clearly the issue of the day. Where are the leaders and managers who can pull the society out of its present doldrums? What qualities and competencies must they have? How do these differ from the past?

Alice Sargent proposes a definition of leadership that draws on the best in all of us, both men and women. She calls it *androgynous*, having the characteristics of both sexes. But the key to her use of the term is balanced coexistence, as in the Chinese concept of *yin* and *yang*, male and female forces acting equally within nature to build and sustain the world around us. Effective leaders and managers need to use both logic and intuition, recognize both facts and feelings, be both technically competent and emotionally caring.

Until recently, the definition of managerial competence has excluded most feminine characteristics. The respected leader or manager was a highly competitive, power-driven person whose personal feelings were systematically submerged. The character of such contemporary leaders and managers was vividly described by Michael Maccoby in *The Gamesman* (Simon & Schuster, 1976). His message was that managerial leadership, deprived of compassion and caring, was destructive of the human values that undergird our society. He described a few exceptional leaders who combined

compassion and idealism with their gamesman entrepreneurial qualities. They were "a kind of managerial mutant, a new corporate type, the gamesman who develops his heart as well as his head, and who could become an example for leadership in a changing society where the goal is economic democracy and the humanization of technology" (p. 244).

In this book, Alice Sargent adds the perspective of women and minorities, two groups who are new to their management roles and for whom the imitation of the old male model of leadership has been personally difficult and painful. We have to ask why that is so. Why don't women and many minority males fit the managerial roles now defined by most white males? Or if they do fit, if there are no real differences, then why this consternation about sex roles and the relative importance of being either a man or a woman in a position of leadership?

The answer is that sex does count. Cultural differences count. There *are* differences between the way men and women manage in most organizations. Sargent looks at these differences and their strengths and relative weaknesses. She concludes that neither, alone, provides an adequate model for management in this decade. The issue for women is not to imitate men. Rather, it is for women to adopt the best that men have to offer, and for men to do the same with the contributions that women bring.

The prescription is probably too easy. Such monumental social reconditioning is not easily accomplished. For in the last analysis it involves the complicated matter of ego and self-esteem. It brings into question the early social conditioning that establishes the boundaries within which self-esteem is gained and preserved. For most men, self-esteem is integrally connected to winning competitions, either as individuals or as part of a team. To be male is to be a warrior. The social expectations of warriors are that they will always be strong and courageous. They never cry. They fight to win. Warriors have territories that they are expected to protect. Any incursion into their turf is perceived as a threat to their power and their ego.

In our modern world, these battles are fought daily in the

bureaucracies of public agencies and private corporations. Most women working in these organizations are amazed at the issues that become grounds for battle: the size or placement of an office, the number of people on a staff, the order of precedence in a hierarchy, the elegance of a title. Often the *appearance* of power becomes the reality for which many men seem to strive. They get caught in organizational conflicts, large and small, where the issue of the common good is more often than not submerged in the petty struggle of egos. No one will yield or admit he is wrong, for to do so diminishes his masculine self-esteem. In an article in *Esquire* magazine (May 1980), Barbara Tuchman questions why, in the course of human history, man has governed so unwisely. She draws this conclusion:

Males, who so far in history have managed government, are obsessed with potency, which is the reason, I suspect, why it is difficult for them to admit error. I have rarely known a man who, with a smile and a shrug, could easily acknowledge being wrong. Why not? *I* can; without any damage to self-respect. I can only suppose the difference is that deep in their psyches, men somehow equate being wrong with being impotent.

Women are not put to that test. But they, too, hold limiting self-concepts. Feelings of dependency and powerlessness, as imaginary but as psychically real as notions of masculine impotence, can paralyze otherwise competent women. Assertiveness training may help some women, but the real antidote has to be a personally deepened self-trust and self-esteem. That comes only by experiencing achievement in one's job, as many of Sargent's women so poignantly attest.

Each sex has its own dragons to slay. That they can help one another is clearly the good news this book conveys. Our age could well mark the beginning of the end of the War Between the Sexes! However, we cannot underestimate the power that the dominant male mentality has had and continues to have in our lives. To struggle against that norm is no easy task. The very litigiousness of

our society can be described as a manifestation of maleness. This point was made especially vivid to me by Carol Gilligan's report of her study of young girls growing up. Watching the girls at play, Gilligan noticed that when there was a conflict, they stopped the game and did not proceed until the relationships were mended. If the conflict was too deep, the game was abandoned. Girls, she concluded, were more concerned about maintaining the relationships they had with one another than about playing the game. Boys, on the other hand, were more concerned about winning or losing. Their way of managing conflict was to have rules. If someone broke a rule, the game would be stopped, an appropriate judgment would be rendered, and the game would then continue. They respected the rules more than they did their relationships. In fact, boys who disliked one another could play effectively on the same team, since their aim was not necessarily friendship, but winning.

Rules certainly have their place in society. Consider for a moment what chaos would ensue if we abandoned all rules and adjudicated every conflict in the context of the existing situation! That would be the extreme of "feminine" behavior as Carol Gilligan describes it. But consider as well the vast proliferation of rule making in our society, and the consequent litigiousness (and the burgeoning number of lawyers, including, of course, women). Have we not reached an excess of rule making? Are we not experiencing runaway *yang*, or maleness, in our culture, relying solely on rule making and regulation to govern conflicts that might better be resolved by examining the underlying relationships of one part of the society to the other?

A rule-bound society can produce order. But carried to extremes it produces bloody adversaries. And that, it seems, is where we are today. Business perceives government as an enemy, concocting injurious rules. Government assumes that business and industry will evade the rules. The rules, themselves, ought to concern the common good. They are pushed into place by people who care deeply about the quality of life on this planet—about clean air, clean water, the health and safety of workers, and the end of oppression

for classes of our society. But in struggling to achieve each particular "right," these special-interest groups lose sight of the needs of the whole society. Business cannot be the enemy of government, or vice versa. The two must be partners in developing the commerce among people without which our standards of living cannot be sustained. People who care about the environment also need to care about the needs of the people for whom the environment provides basic sustenance. Balances need to be struck so that harmony can be maintained among our separate needs and interests.

The movement toward androgyny in management is part of the larger movement toward balance in the society at large. It cannot come too soon! Jean Houston tells us that in times of chaos, like our own, the rise of the feminine principle is a sign of hope. It promises to redress the imbalance between compassion and conflict that marks our present organizational lives. Let us hope so, but let us also not leave it to chance.

Each and every manager, male and female, can contribute to the process of civilization by learning how to become androgynous. Androgyny means unlearning our negative behaviors and learning how to become equally contributing human beings. In the last analysis, it means growing up, shedding the excesses of both male and female adolescence that in the past have limited our human experience. It means becoming fully human.

Elsa A. Porter

*Former Assistant Secretary for Administration
U. S. Department of Commerce*

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Alice G. Sargent

What Is Real?

"What is Real?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but *really* loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

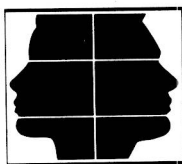
"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

Margery Williams
The Velveteen Rabbit

Contents

<i>Foreword by Elsa A. Porter</i>	vii
<i>Prologue</i>	1
1 The Age of Androgyny	9
2 Building Androgynous Relationships in Organizations	15
3 Management and the Concept of Androgyny	37
4 What Androgyny Means to Men and Women	53
5 Increasing Androgynous Behaviors	65
6 New Models of Effective Managers in the 1980s	75
7 Androgyny and Management Systems	87
8 Human Resources Development and Androgyny	105
9 Effective Interpersonal Relationships in Organizations	119
10 Androgyny as an Antidote to Stress	139
11 Androgyny and Adult Development	153
12 Barriers to Interaction in Organizations	163

13 Sexuality in Organizations	173
14 Androgyny Beyond the Office	181
15 Toward an Androgynous Organization	189
16 Developing Androgynous Managers	199
<i>Appendix A: The Androgyny Scale</i>	207
<i>Appendix B: Sample Lists of Management Competencies</i>	213
<i>Appendix C: Self-Assessment Instruments for Masculine and Feminine Behaviors</i>	224
<i>Index</i>	229



Prologue

As women, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians began to move into the world of management, the emphasis was not on learning from them. Efforts focused, instead, on fitting minorities and women into what once was the domain of white men. These efforts almost totally missed the point by failing to take advantage of the new resources being brought to the management world. Interestingly, though, as affirmative action has gained ground, management theory and practice are expanding the concept of what makes a good manager. The new members of the workforce exhibit many of the behaviors that are being discussed and very tentatively tried out by managers.

As concern for people inches toward parity with concern for getting the job done, managers will have to exercise greater skills in dealing with people. They will need to express and accept emotions, nurture and support colleagues and subordinates, and promote interactions between bosses and subordinates and between leaders and members of work teams. These behaviors are desirable not only