Chapter 5
Gendered Organizational Culture:
A Comparative Study in Bangladesh and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study began with the question of what are the factors that lead to different outcomes of women in engineering employment in Bangladesh and Thailand. The primary data for answering this question were drawn from questionnaire surveys with 204 professional engineers, in-depth interviews with 80 professional women engineers, and discussions with employers in construction organizations in Bangladesh and Thailand. The findings identifies several barriers that not only deter women from entering into organizations, but also stopped the stream of women engineering graduates to flow into the engineering job market. The study has shed light on how organizational cultural practices as well as the influence of external factors within organizations affect women's entry and stay in construction organizations in Bangladesh and Thailand. The findings suggest that organizations should develop their own equal opportunity guidelines and policies to provide women with a suitable job and ensure that they remain employed.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture has been defined in many ways by various authors and researchers. However, the general definition of organizational culture is stated by Arnold (2005:625) is "the distinctive norms, beliefs, principles and ways of behaving that combine to give each organization its distinct character". In other words, it represents the unwritten organizational rules and assumptions that dictate how individuals should act and how things are to be done within the organization.

According to Evetts (1996), an employee's career within the organization is influenced by three cultural factors - stereotypical belief system, behavior or style and power relations. The belief systems and

control of social institutions influence career choice. For example, stereotypical beliefs about women in professional positions generate the idea that having traditional male characteristics is a better predictor for success, thus reinforcing the "think manager-think male" belief (Schein as cited in Sauers *et al*, 2002). In the context of an individual's behavior or style in the organization, McILwee and Robinson (1992) contended that cultures create an orderly set of rules, which allow work to be carried out in a particular way. This reflects the differential power of employees to create those practices. Within male-dominated organizations, male power has helped to institutionalize norms culturally associated with men and masculinity (Billing, 2000), therefore, present different kinds of problems for women's professional career.

Engineering[1] is considered to be a men's profession. Thus, not only are there fewer women in engineering profession worldwide, there is also a sharp gender segregation in terms of positions (Wirth, 2004). Careers related to this employment generally provide a higher professional and social status than many other professions; however, the general image of the profession is tough, heavy, dirty and machinery-oriented (Zywno *et al.*, 1998; Ogunlana *et al.,* 1993; McILwee and Robinson, 1992). Hence, any entry by women into this profession is considered an attempt to cross the sex barrier (Jaiswal, 1993).

Further, various schools of thoughts explained the reasons for the relative absence of women in engineering employment. Functionalist and gender-socialization theorists stress socialization and gender role behaviors as major sources of gender inequality and gender segregation in the work force. It stressed that if women are socialized to be more interested in engineering, there will be more women in the engineering workforce; and that gender segregation in the engineering workforce will decrease. However, statistics belie this. Country statistics show a non-linear relationship between the ratio of women in engineering education and the ratio of women in engineering employment. Comparative engineering education and employment statistics in Thailand and Bangladesh show that women have made significant progress in both countries. For instance, in 2015, women constituted 23.7% of the engineering students (in all disciplines) and 22.8% in civil engineering in Bangladesh (Figure 1). In Thailand, the corresponding figures were 17.3% and 9.7% (Figure 2). These figures are a massive leap forward from the early 1990s

Figure 1. Women in engineering education and employment in Bangladesh
Sources: Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET); Institute of Engineer, Bangladesh
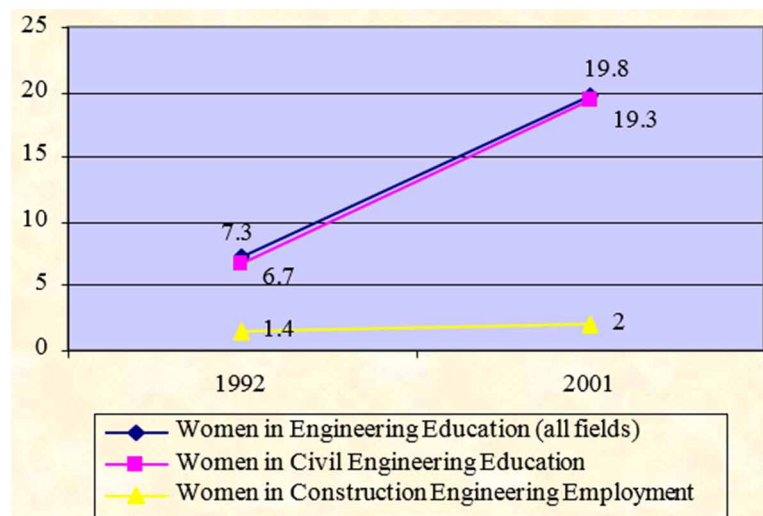
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