

9 December 2013

## PRESS RELEASE

### **The truth about gender differences at work**

When I began my career, over 30 years ago, it was generally accepted that the reason why there were so few women in senior positions was because men were better suited to them. Men were rational, analytical and decisive. Women were openly described as emotional, hormonal and indecisive. The negative portrayal of women was, quite rightly, objected to and so the nature and tone of the descriptions has changed.

Today there is a line of thought that my wife, Jo Kandola, and I call the 'valuing differences' approach. The approach, which we describe in our new book, *The Invention of Difference: The Story of Gender Bias at Work*, says that not only do the two genders have different styles of working but that women's style is under-valued. Male strengths are the same as they ever were-rational, analytical and decisive. Female strengths however are now seen as being compassionate, caring and empathetic. The argument goes that if you had a mix of men and women in the team then you'd have the perfect blend of skills: the women's qualities complementing those of the men. Whilst the advocates of this position think they are talking about 'valuing difference' they are in reality perpetuating age old stereotypes.

All stereotypes are essentially an evaluation of a group on two dimensions: competence and warmth. Thirty years ago both men and women were being assessed on competence-men having it and women lacking it. Today whilst male strengths are still in the area of competence, women strengths are seen as being in the domain of warmth. And as we all know, in business it is competence that counts. The positive descriptions make the stereotypes very appealing and many women will accept them as accurate. But make no mistake they are still stereotypes. This is made worse by something known as the innuendo effect: the things that we do not discuss are seen as lacking. In other words women will still be viewed as less competent.

The media constantly reports on research that shows that men and women have different qualities and styles of working. The gender differences are continually being reinforced. It is, to coin a phrase, the politically correct view of the genders. Inconveniently however the research on personality differences between the genders at work, over the last 30 years, reveals that there is, to all intents and purposes, no difference. Whilst individual studies may reveal a variance these are difficult to replicate and any differences are invariably very small. The truth is that women can be task focussed and decisive; men can be compassionate and caring.

It follows from this that women will be equally capable of being leaders both now and in the future. Why then does the Davies report state that organisations should have 25% of their boards as female and why does the 30% Club set the target five points higher? The correct figure is clearly 50%. Davies and the 30% Club have set targets which are arbitrary and lack logic. Because of their misreading, or ignorance, of the research they have ensured that whilst some short-term gains may be possible they have colluded with a system that deprives many women of having their talents fully recognised and valued.

As George Carlin the American comedian said: '*Men are from Earth and women are from Earth. Get over it.*'

*The Invention of Difference* is published by Pearn Kandola Publishing and is available from [www.pearnkandola.com](http://www.pearnkandola.com) and [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com). *The Invention of Difference* follows Binna Kandola's critically-acclaimed book, *The Value of Difference*, published in 2009, which examined unconscious bias and how to eliminate it in organisations.

**ENDS**

**Professor Binna Kandola OBE** has more than thirty years' consultancy experience in diversity, gender equality and unconscious bias. He is a founding partner of Pearn Kandola, a business psychology consultancy offering services in assessment, development and diversity to private, public and charitable organisations in the UK and internationally. In 2004 he was recognised by the Independent on Sunday as one of the UK's Top Ten Business Psychologists. For more information go to <http://www.pearnkandola.com/binna-kandola.html>

**Jo Kandola** is a chartered occupational psychologist who has worked with a wide variety of organisations to audit, develop and implement their approach to diversity and inclusion. She is currently conducting research at Warwick Business School that explores ways to alleviate prejudice within organisations, with a specific focus on gender bias.

**For more information please contact:**

Mike Idziaszczyk

Pearn Kandola LLP

t: 01865 399060

m: 07831 098490

e: [midziaszczyk@pearnkandola.com](mailto:midziaszczyk@pearnkandola.com)