Analysis Guidelines for General Motors Formal Report Assignment

Many students have trouble developing a methodical approach to looking for the story that is hiding in the numbers of this relatively large table. The approach is to break it down, starting from the largest level of analysis and then moving progressively down to the smaller categories.

The first step is to give the reader a feeling for the big picture, i.e., give your reader a sense for what is happening in the total GM employment picture regardless of how it is impacting any gender or specific categories.

Then look at how women are doing in the totals category, and determine if there are any significant pattern differences.

Next look, at blue-collar and white-collar totals for all employees and then check to see if there are any pattern differences for the women's totals for blue- and white-collar totals. Is there a clue here that maybe points to where the story lies? I would say yes.

Next, look at quality issues. The job categories are ranked in order of desirability. Officials and Managers is the most desirable job category for white-collar jobs; Office and Clerical is the least desirable. The same ranking order is true in the blue-collar category listings.

If things are changing, and obviously they are, are these changes positive or negative overall and for women in the desirable jobs? If they are negative in the less desirable jobs, is that good or bad?

When measuring changes in the specific job categories, you have several tools. The column on the far right measure women's share of total jobs and that tells you something, but I don't want you just to rely on that information. I also don't want you saying bonehead things like: Women's employment in Officials and managers has grown by 1.3% from 1977 to 1979. Why? Because you would be mislabeling what the column on the right (6.4% -5.1% = 1.3%) is measuring. You could say that women's share of jobs in this category has grown, but the growth rate is calculated completely differently, and will be a much larger number. (You calculate growth rate by looking at the raw employment numbers and dividing the difference by the base number—e.g., for Officials and Managers, 77 to 79 the growth rate would be 31.5% (3610 – 2745 = 865 divided by 2745 = 31.5%). There's a big difference between saying the growth rate is 1.3% and 31.5%. And yet this is one of the most common errors I come across

Another common mistake is to compare growth rates women to men or women's growth to total growth. This is misleading when the differences are so large to begin with. Let me give you an example. If we had a category with 101 employees, and 100 were men, and 1 was a woman, and we added 11 employees, 10 men and 1 woman, you would have 100% growth for women, and only 10%

growth for men. Is that the real story? I don't think so. It makes things look much better for women, and it looks like men are getting a raw deal.

The better comparison in this case would be women's share of new hires. In this case you would give the reader a more accurate picture which is that of the new employees women's share is only 9% (1 divided by 11 = .09). This is a big clue. I would calculate women's share of new hires/layoffs in each category. That's where I think the real story lies.

This should get you started. If you get stuck or confused, check with me about it.