

# Women Executives in MNC Subsidiaries

**One of the richest underutilized resources  
in America is the talents of its women.**

**Hubert H. Humphrey<sup>1</sup>**

**The subject of women** executives in multinational corporation (MNC) subsidiaries has not received attention in the professional literature. Our survey of relevant research to the end of 1978 did not reveal a single study on the topic and hardly even a passing reference to women's presence as senior executives in international business. In his monumental review of research of management in international business, R.D. Robinson reports that women's place is almost never mentioned.<sup>2</sup> The fact that he devotes only a single paragraph to the subject makes his book no exception.

Women are moving into previously male-dominated roles and occupations. They are pursuing their ambitions across boundaries they have never before crossed. MNCs would be well advised to take note of this development for two reasons. First, there is an increasing shortage of managerial talent for complex organizations.<sup>3</sup> Second, international business requires that management methods be continuously adapted to changing conditions and social values, and geared to taking advantage of opportunities in host environments.

In the U.S., between 1960 and 1970 (prior to affirmative action), the number of women managers and administrators grew from 829,000 to 5,126,000 and the number of female bank officers and financial managers from 2,000 to 55,000.<sup>4</sup> In the eighteen months between spring 1975 and the end of 1977, there was a 40 percent increase (from 240 to 340) in the number of large corporations with at least one woman member on the board of directors.<sup>5</sup> Approximately 20 percent of these 340 corporations were MNCs. Heidrick and Struggles Incorporated reports that the number of women corporate officers in the 1,300 largest U.S. companies rose to 416 in 1978, a 28 percent increase in one year.<sup>6</sup> In 1978, 22 percent of U.S. managers were women.<sup>7</sup> As more women elect a major in business, economics, or related disciplines<sup>8</sup> and as their enrollment in graduate programs of administration and management increases,<sup>9</sup> more women will be available for managerial positions.

Male managers remain the gatekeepers to women's entry into the executive suite. This article explores their attitudes toward women as senior executives of MNC subsidiaries. It reviews existing research relating to factors affecting resistance to women in leadership roles,

and reports and analyzes the attitudes of Host Country Organization (HCO) managers towards women as heads of MNC subsidiaries in their respective countries.

### Sources of Resistance to Women Executives

Despite evidence of women's managerial potential<sup>10</sup>, there appears to be persistent resistance to their participation in managerial careers. Studies indicate that they are discriminated against in staffing, particularly for challenging managerial positions, in monetary remuneration, and in promotion and training opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

Such differential treatment has been explained in part by the persistence of sex stereotypes<sup>12</sup> which directly or indirectly define women as unsuitable for management and management as inappropriate for women.<sup>13</sup> Three variations of stereotypical beliefs may be distinguished: sex characteristic stereotypes, sex role stereo-

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types, and sex labeling of occupations. Underlying and more sinister in its consequences than all three of these is the attribution of subordinate status to women, which we refer to as "sex value stereotyping." The effect of these four factors on the attitudes toward women as managers is analyzed below.

*Sex characteristic stereotypes* are widely held beliefs about differences in personality traits between men and women.<sup>14</sup> The view that women are less ambitious and rational, more emotional, dependent, conforming, and passive than men is an example.<sup>15</sup> This kind of stereotype appeared in the 1965 Bowman, Worthy, and Greyser study of two thousand executives, 51 percent of whom felt women were "temperamentally unfit for management."<sup>16</sup> In J.E. Haefner's 1977 study, women were considered less competent than men.<sup>17</sup> The stereotypical characteristics attributed to women usually make them appear to be lacking in the personal qualifications required for managing others.

*Sex role stereotypes* are widely held beliefs concerning the appropriate behavior of men and women as individuals and in relation to others.<sup>18</sup> The beliefs that a woman's first responsibility is to her children, that women should not be aggressive, that they should not give orders to men, and that men should not take orders from them are examples. The behavioral injunctions expressed by such stereotypes discourage women from taking on managerial roles and discourage men from accepting them as managers.

Sex role stereotypes have a stronger normative component than sex characteristic stereotypes, which tend to be more descriptive. The former are usually expressed in terms of what women should or should not do. The latter usually make claims as to what women are. "Acting out of role" is more likely to arouse moral indignation than is "acting out of character," particularly when the former involves a person's obligations to others. A woman who displays characteristics that are not "typically feminine" may be criticized as strange, perhaps unattractive. When her behavior is "inappropriate" and infringes on her obligations to her role partners,

such as her husband and children, she invites moral censure.

*Sex labeling of occupations* involves the expectation that an occupation will and ought to be filled by one sex rather than the other.<sup>19</sup> Once an occupation acquires a sex label, each sex tends to self-select itself and be selected for the job accordingly. There is a strong expectation that managers are men<sup>20</sup> and nurses are women.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, women are not even considered for promotion to top positions in complex organizations. As M.G. Burrow notes, the first problem most women face is getting into the management evaluation process in the first place.<sup>22</sup>

The relationship between sex labeling and women's absence from managerial roles is circular and reinforcing. The belief that certain kinds of work are more suitable for men keeps women from applying for such jobs. At the same time, the paucity of women in executive roles, and the lack of visible role models, reconfirms the belief and keeps the label intact. Sex stereotypes also have an *evaluative character*. They not only describe what men and women are like, or how they behave, but also assign differential worth to these characteristics and to these typical behaviors. Numerous studies indicate that both sexes evaluate men's achievements or outputs more highly than those of women.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, differences in value attributions can be discerned even among children as early as five and six years of age.<sup>24</sup>

The implications for women managers are far reaching. People who are valued more highly have greater social status and more influence over others. Consequently they tend to be more effective in getting things done. The effect of status is circular. Higher status individuals initiate more activity for others and others tend to be more responsive to them, which enhances their status and in turn reinforces initiative.<sup>25</sup> The preference for men as managers may be viewed as a rational preference for working with those of higher status and influence, those able to get things done in the organization and those known to be going places.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Expatriate Manager**

The role requirements of the expatriate man-

ager in a MNC subsidiary differ from those of the domestic manager.<sup>27</sup> Expatriate managers are expected to remain in one host country for only a limited period of time and then move either to another subsidiary or to regional headquarters. As the term implies, expatriates almost always operate outside home territory and in a foreign culture. They are cut off from the environment which they know and in which they are known. The role requires an agility at learning new languages, customs, and ways of doing business. Expatriate managers must be able to establish and sever social ties easily and become familiar with new surroundings quickly. A talent for picking up and translating environmental cues even when these are transmitted in unfamiliar symbols is a precondition for success. The rotation policy (on the average every four to five years) raises special difficulties for women. Gaining recognition for one's personal authority usually requires time. This is true for men and for women, but with a difference: a man must confirm expectations for his success, whereas a woman must often disconfirm expectations for her failure.<sup>28</sup> This may explain why, following their third year of work, the twenty-five top women executives studied by M. Hennig and A. Jardim remained in the same firm for the next thirty years.<sup>29</sup> They were "painfully aware that they needed all the energy they had to excel at their jobs and lacked both time and strength to cope with interpersonal relationships that were constantly in flux."<sup>30</sup> The expatriate role with its frequent moves does not permit this luxury and creates a continuous impermanence of interpersonal relations which can be problematic for women. Every new entry requires overcoming the sex role stereotypes and establishing one's status in the organization.

The structure of MNCs produces additional pressures on the expatriate role.<sup>31</sup> The ethnocentric staffing policy means blocked promotion for immediate host country subordinates who can neither expect to replace the expatriate manager as head of the subsidiary nor to be transferred to a top level job at headquarters.<sup>32</sup> Second, host country nationals view expatriates as lacking information about local conditions and as more concerned with short-run accomplishments than long-run conse-

quences, the brunt of which must be borne by those who remain in the subsidiary. Third, the sense of inequity among the local nationals is exacerbated by the fringe benefits paid to the expatriate, greatly inflated compared to those received by local managers, who cannot justify this policy in terms of the expatriate's performance and contribution to the subsidiary. Fourth, expatriate managers are greatly affected by the clash of interests between the government and other stakeholders in the parent country and those in the host country. Yet, unless they represent megafirms, they have insufficient power to effect the outcome in favor of the MNC. The expatriate thus comes under the cross fire of the conflicting political loyalties and national interests of parent and host countries, as well as those of MNC headquarters and subsidiary.

Expatriate managers frequently operate in an environment which is strained and resistant to their leadership. It is not surprising that studies of staffing practices of MNCs indicate that expatriates develop symptoms of transfer anxiety, culture shock, social uprootedness, 'exile complex' (feeling abandoned by headquarters), insufficient influence, adaptation problems, and reentry trauma.<sup>33</sup> There is no research indicating whether men and women differ in their responses to the special conditions of the expatriate role, and it is doubtful that research findings comparing leadership behavior of men and women in uninational organizations can be generalized to MNCs. There is no information concerning attitudes of HCOs towards women expatriate managers. Since favorable attitudes among HCOs toward subsidiaries are essential for MNC success in each host country, such information is extremely important.

Our study was an exploratory one focusing on the attitudes of HCO representatives toward women expatriates as heads of MNC subsidiaries. We attempted to ascertain the prevalence of resistance to women in such positions, the nature of this resistance, and the conditions for increasing the likelihood of women's acceptance.

### **The Study**

*The Respondents.* The data reported here were collected as part of a larger cross-cultural study

of attitudes of HCOs toward personnel policies and managerial behavior in subsidiaries of MNCs. The sample included representatives of 111 HCOs (107 men and 4 women): 33 in England, 16 in Holland, 8 in Belgium, 16 in France, and 38 in Germany. Each HCO in our sample interacted with a subsidiary of a MNC specializing in one of the following industries: agricultural products (39 HCOs), banking (29 HCOs), industrial products (24 HCOs), and tourism and transportation (19 HCOs).

HCOs were selected by expatriate managers heading subsidiaries with which the HCOs interacted, or in some cases, by headquarters of these subsidiaries. The respondent selected from each HCO was the executive most affected by the subsidiary's senior managers. Respondents were either chief executives of the HCOs or heads of departments directly responsible for relations with the respective subsidiary. In the case of agricultural products, respondents were heads of purchasing departments which bought agricultural products from the subsidiary; in the case of tourism and transportation, they were travel agents or airport authorities in the host countries.

*The Variables.* The dependent variable was the attitude of HCO representatives toward women as top managers of MNC subsidiaries. This variable was measured in two stages. In the first stage, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following question: "Can a well-qualified woman successfully head and manage a MNC subsidiary?" During the pilot study when a similar question had been asked, most respondents answered that a woman could not manage a subsidiary because there were no qualified women available. Consequently, the phrase "well-qualified" was added to the question to elicit attitudes towards women as senior executives assuming they were professionally competent.

In the second stage, which comprised a relatively unstructured personal interview, HCO respondents were asked to explain the answer they had given to the above question. The explanations were subjected to content analysis. The three independent variables in the study were: the host country of the respondent, their host industry, and the degree of ethnocentrism

of the HCO representative with regard to international staffing policies. D. Krech, R.S. Crutchfield, and E.L. Ballachey define ethnocentrism as "a generalized attitude which predisposes the individual to reject members of groups other than his own and to exalt the superiority of his own group, especially his ethnic and national groups."<sup>34</sup> In this study, ethnocentrism of HCOs toward international personnel policies was defined as the strong preference of HCO representatives for expatriate managers who are culturally and ethnically similar to themselves. It was measured by seven statements of belief. This cluster was constructed by pooled judgment of experts who independently selected the following items from our questionnaire:

- All top managers of foreign subsidiaries should be host country nationals.
- Expatriate managers should be of West European ethnic origin.
- Expatriate managers should be thoroughly familiar with the culture of their host country.
- Expatriate managers should adhere to local managerial patterns of behavior.
- Expatriate managers should be proficient in the host country's language.
- Expatriate managers should have a perfect knowledge of their host country's social characteristics.
- Expatriate managers should be thoroughly familiar with the history of the host country.

The respondents' ethnocentrism score was determined along an interval scale which ranged from very low (negative reply to all statements) to very high (affirmative reply to all statements). The score was calculated by dividing affirmative responses by total responses for each individual.

*The Research Question.* Is there a relationship between attitudes toward women as senior executives of MNC subsidiaries and the host country, host industry, or ethnocentrism? Since, to the best of our knowledge, there is no research on differences among host countries and host industries in attitudes toward women as managers, we refrained from formulating hypotheses. With regard to ethnocentrism, however, we expected to find a negative relationship between level of ethnocentrism of HCO

respondents and their attitudes toward women as managers of MNC subsidiaries. Since senior management in Western Europe is a masculine occupation, we reasoned that those who have a strong preference for expatriates like themselves would also have a strong preference for males. Those high in ethnocentrism would be less favorable towards a woman heading a MNC subsidiary and those low in ethnocentrism more favorable to them.

## Findings

The findings are presented in two parts: the first reports the data from the closed questionnaire; the second reports and discusses findings from the interviews.

*The Questionnaire.* The majority of respondents (60.7 percent) agreed that a woman could successfully head and manage a MNC subsidiary. Assuming that had an identical question been asked about a well-qualified man, all respondents would have agreed, we compared the actual distribution of answers received on women with a hypothetical distribution on men (using an identical N). The difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 52.24$ ;  $P \leq .001$ ).

Differences among host countries and host industries were not statistically significant. When the distribution for each country was compared with that of others combined, only the difference between Germany and the other countries was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 5.96$ ;  $P < .05$ ). More than two-thirds (68.7 percent) of the West Germans answered yes, a finding for which we have no explanation. A similar comparison was made for host industries. Only the difference between agricultural products, (where over 70 percent of the replies were favorable) and the other industries proved statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 6.72$ ;  $P < .05$ ).

Since the overall ethnocentrism level of the sample was relatively high (median score = .8) and the variance small, ethnocentrism was treated as a nominal variable and respondents were divided into two categories by cutting at the median score:

High ethnocentric level:  $X \leq .8$  (65 percent).

Low ethnocentric level:  $X > .8$  (35 percent).

The  $\chi^2$  value revealed that there was no sig-

**Table 1. Attitudes toward Women as CEOs by Host Country and Industry**

Attitude	Host Countries						Host Industries			
	Total (107)	West Germany (38)	U K (32)	France (16)	Holland (13)	Belgium (8)	Agricultural Products (38)	Banking (29)	Industrial Products (21)	Tourism & Transportation (19)
	**60.7%	*68.4%	53.1%	56.2%	53.8%	75.0%	*71.1%	63.5%	42.9%	52.6%
Yes	65	26	17	9	7	6	27	19	9	10
	39.3%	31.6%	46.9%	43.8%	46.2%	25.0%	28.9%	34.5%	57.1%	47.4%
No	42	12	15	7	6	2	11	10	12	9

\*p is less than .05

\*\*p is less than .001

nificant difference between the two groups in their attitudes towards women as subsidiary managers. Whether a person held strong beliefs about the desirability of ethnocentric international personnel policies or moderate ones did not affect whether that person considered a well-qualified woman capable of heading a MNC subsidiary. Our hypothesis was not supported.

*The Interview.* During the personal interviews HCO representatives were encouraged to explain why they thought a well-qualified woman could or could not head a MNC subsidiary. With few exceptions, respondents indicated considerable apprehension about the desirability and feasibility of assigning a woman as senior executive of a MNC subsidiary. In no case was support for the idea unqualified. Almost all respondents stated that such a staffing policy entailed risks not encountered in the case of male executives.

They anticipated that a woman executive would meet with a great deal of resistance from host country superiors, subordinates, colleagues and clients. The following are typical statements revealing the general belief that women are not acceptable as executives (sex role stereotype) and that executives should be men (sex labeling of occupation).

The French clients will not accept a woman as manager and will not be prepared to conduct complex business transactions with a female executive.

(France, banking)

The travel agents and airport authorities just won't go for a woman in the [senior] position in their organization [airline subsidiary]. You see, the English aren't ready to accept a woman and she won't fit into the international transport system.

(England, tourism and transportation)

It is preferable to assign a man to a woman because despite her intellectual ability to do the job, she will encounter a lot of difficulties. The German client is not yet prepared to accept a woman in such positions.

(Germany, agricultural products)

The local society does not accept women representatives.

(Holland, industrial products)

We attempted to understand this apparent blanket nonacceptance of women through a content analysis of interview statements. This revealed three general issues: illegitimacy of authority; lack of role models; incongruent status set.

### Illegitimacy of Authority

Respondents perceived the problem for women executives as more basic than gaining recognition for their competence. It touched on the very legitimacy of women being in the executive role. They tended to view personal authority as a masculine sex characteristic and exertion of formal authority as part of the male sex role. A woman who attempted to exercise the authority of her position would not have the same credibility or impact. A woman expatriate in quality clothing, in Germany, said "The purchasers in this field are all men and they don't take a woman's authority seriously. I'm the manager of this subsidiary, but when I want to make a sale to a large chain, I send a man to negotiate the deal." A reply typical of respondents was, "A woman's opinion just doesn't carry the same weight as that of a man, unless she is very exceptional."

Sex role stereotypes not only undermine a woman's potential authority, they also require that she be subordinate to men hierarchically, except in exceptional cases. HCO representatives who claimed women could be senior ex-

executives almost always added that she should be second or third in command, and even then, only if she was unusually talented. It was important for them that the relative positioning of the sexes be maintained. A woman could rise, but a man should rise higher.

In most cases, it is desirable that the number one person in the subsidiary be a man. But if there is a woman who is outstandingly capable, she could be the number two.

(England, banking)

A woman could well be a manager in a branch, but not the general manager of the subsidiary.

(France, industrial products)

She could even become a station manager at London airport, but a woman could not manage an international airline branch and certainly not be the official airline representative.

(England, tourism and transportation)

You could place a woman as manager of sales, but not in a representative function and certainly not as subsidiary chief executive.

(Germany, tourism and transportation)

It is possible for a woman to be a senior manager, but not the top manager in the branch.

(Holland, agricultural products)

Respondents' reasons for not having a woman as number one relate also to women's lower social status. Since the job of the top person in the organization symbolizes and personifies high status and authority, it fits men better than women. In addition, the status of the expatriate was perceived as reflecting the importance attributed by headquarters to the assignment and to headquarters' relations with the host country. Respondents stated that assignment of a woman executive would be taken as an affront by HCOs and as indicative of headquarters' low regard for its business with the subsidiary. HCOs were also concerned that a woman would have less influence over headquarters and thus be less autonomous in negotiations, and less able to commit the MNC in local transactions.

### **Lack of Role Models**

Lack of personal experience working with women senior executives and of role models of such women in their own environment were important reasons underlying respondents' resistance to women's entry as heads of subsidiaries. Those who believed that a well-qualified woman could not head a MNC subsidiary also said they knew of none. Respondents who had no personal experience working with women

executives expressed a sense of discomfort which stemmed from lack of clarity concerning the appropriate behavior with women in a business situation. The norms that apply to the relations between the sexes in the everyday world were felt to be not suited to the conducting of complex business transactions.

Conducting business with a woman executive puts an extra strain on an already difficult encounter. I have to guard my manners, be especially careful in my choice of language. In other words, I'm not free to deal the way I'm used to dealing with businessmen.

(Germany, agricultural products)

In this industry [airlines] representatives and travel agents often discuss business in the informal atmosphere of a private club. A woman would be out of place there.

(Holland, tourism and transportation)

One of the four women in our sample described some of the things she had to anticipate when planning a business engagement:

When I invite a male customer for lunch there are four things I take care of. First, I always make sure the headwaiter is told ahead of time to send the bill to my office. This avoids the problem of who will pay the bill—my guest because he is a man or me because I'm the one who invited him. Second, I make sure my client knows in advance that he is going to meet a woman—just so that there won't be any embarrassing surprises. Third, the setting is very important. I take clients only to first class restaurants. This bolsters my prestige in their eyes. Fourth, I only go to places that are well lit, just to make certain there are no misunderstandings that despite the fancy lunch, this is a meeting between business executives.

Respondents who had encountered women subsidiary heads were more receptive to the possibility. This was the case in agricultural products, where there were a number of East European subsidiaries headed by women. This may explain why there was greater acceptance of the idea of a woman executive among respondents from agricultural products than from other industries. In their case, personal experience provided them with new role models and reduced ambiguity concerning social norms which govern interaction with women executives.

A woman could fill the job as well as a man. I've had successful experience with women senior managers of foreign countries.

(England, agricultural products)

It's tricky, but I know a case of a German woman who represented a Spanish company very successfully.

(Germany, agricultural products)

The representative can be a woman. In Eastern Europe women manage the business in the agricultural sector. I

did business with one recently and there were no problems. If countries in Eastern Europe send women there is no reason why others cannot do so.

(Belgium, agricultural products)

### **Role Incongruence**

The incongruence respondents perceived between being a woman and a manager is highlighted by their view of the effect of family status on job performance. Married or single, mother or childless, women's family status was viewed as problematic.

A single woman is open to harrassment, is "easy prey" and too vulnerable to be sent abroad. In her home country, respondents told us, she is protected by her social group and family relations. In Western Europe, she is lonely and in search of companionship. Respondents were concerned about possible romantic liaisons with HCO managers, resulting in "irrelevant considerations" which would distort business judgment. Because a single woman might prefer a client's interests to those of headquarters, she was not only more vulnerable but less reliable than a man.

If married, respondents explained, the woman executive would have problems with her husband who would have to follow her around from subsidiary to subsidiary. HCO representatives seemed to identify with the "husband's dilemma" and expressed disapproval of a woman who would demand such a sacrifice from her spouse. Moral indignation was usually combined with considerations of efficiency. Marital conflict would distract the woman executive, and be bad public relations for the MNC.

On several occasions, our interviews were followed by dinner engagements with HCO representatives and their wives. The wives explained how they helped their husbands advance their careers by entertaining at home, and even by their own style of living—such as horseback riding (Belgium) or managing an art gallery (Germany). "What husband would do those things?" queried one wife. "And what would people think of him if he did?" To use H. Papanek's phrase, a senior executive position is a "two person career" that requires the backing and even active involvement of the officially

nonemployed spouse.<sup>35</sup> Social norms encourage such involvement from wives, but are less encouraging of husbands.<sup>36</sup>

The least feasible combination, according to respondents, was the married mother executive. The arguments are too familiar to require repetition. What we found interesting was the moral position taken by the representatives, who felt it wrong for a mother to neglect her children to advance her own career.

### **Implications**

The lack of significant differences among host industries, host countries, and ethnocentric groups indicates that there is considerable uniformity among respondents in their attitudes toward women executives. This finding was supported by the interviews. We consider the implications outlined below to be generally applicable across industrial and national boundaries, at least in Western Europe.

Given the apprehensions of HCOs, what can headquarters do to increase the probability of a woman's success as executive of a MNC subsidiary? Our answer is presented in the form of specific recommendations regarding selection, training, and assignment. On the assumption that most considerations which govern these areas of personnel policy apply equally to expatriates of both sexes, the recommendations focus on the points of difference. Altogether they aim at reducing the risk factor in sending a woman to lead a MNC subsidiary.

*Selection.* At which point in an executive's career should assignment to a foreign country be made: relatively early so that the experience is seen as preparatory for promotion, or at the final stages when it becomes a dead end?<sup>37</sup> The answer for women is—somewhere in the middle. It is essential that a woman expatriate have accumulated considerable managerial experience at headquarters including a list of achievements and proven qualifications. A reputation for competence provides an important basis for authority and a source of legitimacy for the executive role. The female incumbent should be in midcareer, when her reputation for competence has been well-established and she is still on her way up the promotion ladder.



Although experience usually correlates with age, there are independent considerations which make it desirable to send "mature" women. First, age, even in modern society, can serve as a resource for authority. Men who work with a woman expatriate will probably be less resistant to her authority if she is older than themselves or close in age than if she is much younger. Second, among mature women, sexual appeal tends to become less an object of focus as many of the feminine role components attached to the female sex status become less intrusive in interactions between men and women.<sup>38</sup>

Another selection criterion is the woman's attitudes toward the role of senior executive and the roles of wife and mother (if she is either). Ambivalence about becoming the top authority in the subsidiary, about moving her children, and about changes of her husband's status in his own family or in his career, would make it more difficult to allay the fears of her role partners in the subsidiary. These attitudes need to be explored and resolved in the selection stage.

While the effect of physical mobility of the expatriate on the other family members is particularly problematic for women, it is not unique to them. Studies show that the wife's adjustment in the host country is a crucial factor in the success of a male expatriate.<sup>39</sup> This suggests that the problem needs to be explored with expatriates of both sexes and perhaps also with their spouses.

*Training.* In addition to the technical and managerial predeparture training given to all expatriates, women need to be provided with an opportunity to explore possible problems resulting from their encounter with men as subordinates and clients in host countries. The purpose of the training is two-fold: to increase women's awareness of when and how sex is made relevant in business interaction; and to develop women's skills for handling situations when sex status interferes with effective leadership. The training material should be based on actual case studies taken from the field experience of other women managers, as well as on diagnostic studies of HCO attitudes and behavior toward women executives. Such training is

best conducted in small groups, where women can provide mutual support, using role playing and other simulation methods found effective in learning new behavior responses.

*Assignments.* Four features of an assignment are particularly important for women. The first is site. It is wiser, at least at first, to assign incumbents to host countries where there are other women in senior executive positions—either in subsidiaries of MNCs, such as those of Eastern Europe, or in HCOs. This policy has three advantages: the presence of other women would indicate that the host society is receptive to this innovation, and the expatriate woman would feel and actually be less conspicuous than if she were the first in such a senior position; also, it is more likely that local male managers would have had experience doing business with high-level women and would be less threatened by this seeming breach of social norms.

The second feature is preview. Advance preparation for the assignment of a woman should aim at creating a climate of opinion among HCOs that would be receptive to her entry and to the legitimacy of her authority. Disseminating information about the incumbent's qualifications and achievements and any other relevant data that would present an image of competence and leadership ability among members of the subsidiary, of HCOs, the local Chamber of Commerce, and other influential bodies. The preview should emphasize headquarters' high regard and support for the new expatriate manager.

The third feature is length of stay. A recent study in Western Europe found that HCO managers prefer successful expatriates to remain in the host organization for a period of seven to eight years, rather than the current average of four to five years.<sup>40</sup> If implemented, such a policy would be of great advantage to women executives for whom entry problems are more acute than for men.

Lastly, hierarchical position is of importance. Our findings suggest that placing women in the number two role in the subsidiary could reduce the risk of rejection. Considering that in most businesses, it takes around twenty-five years to train a senior-level manager,<sup>41</sup> it is unlikely that at this stage MNCs have more than a handful of

sufficiently qualified women for senior positions in subsidiaries. Consequently, MNCs committed to greater equality in the top jobs could use the lower upper ranks of the subsidiary hierarchy as a training ground for women, preparing them to become chief executives in the future. At the same time they must be careful to avoid locking women into the traditional second-in-command "assistant to" position.

### The Exceptional Woman

In view of the magnitude of problems anticipated by respondents, most of them concluded that only exceptional women could actually succeed in the job. It was not that they had a personal preference for working with outstandingly competent women, but that they believed such competence was necessary to overcome the barriers.

At face value this belief seems highly dysfunctional for the advancement of women, since there is no reason to assume that there are more exceptional women around than men. From another perspective, however, this belief may be functional for assisting HCO representatives, as well as superiors, colleagues and subordinates in the subsidiary, to accept a woman executive. Given that a woman is assigned as expatriate manager, the members of her role-set may either reject her, for reasons already explained, or rationalize that if she has reached the position of senior executive, she must have superior qualities. In the latter case they would be accepting the authority of not "just a woman" but an "exceptional woman," which would likely be more palatable.

We may then hypothesize that the stronger the belief that only exceptional women can make it to the top, the more likely host country managers will perceive women who become senior executives as exceptional women. This belief would then be functional for accepting a woman head of a MNC subsidiary.

### REFERENCES

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