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# Women Managers'

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## Moving Up and Across Borders

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*The best reason for believing that more women will be in charge before long is that in a ferociously competitive global economy, no company can afford to waste valuable brainpower simply because it's wearing a skirt. (Fisher, 1992:56)*

World business has become intensely competitive. Top-quality people allow corporations to compete. Yet, although outstanding human resource systems provide competitive advantages, companies worldwide draw from a restricted pool of potential managers. Although women represent over 50 percent of the world population, in no country do women represent half, or even close to half, of the corporate managers. Even in the United States, where many believe the proportion of female executives to be outstanding, reality belies the belief: Whereas 46 percent of the American work force is female, women constitute only 5 percent of the expatriate managers (Moran, Stahl, & Boyer, 1988), 3 percent of the senior executives (Ball, 1991; Segal & Zellner, 1992), and less than half of 1 percent of the highest paid officers and directors (Fierman, 1990).

## Cross-National Comparisons

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Until the late 1970s, women were virtually invisible as managers, and their absence was generally considered a nonissue (Antal & Izraeli, 1993). Since then, women managers have become increasingly visible in many countries

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where broad societal forces during recent decades resulted in more women entering lower-level managerial positions.

In the economically developing and recently industrialized countries, a shift took place between the 1950s and early 1970s from agrarian toward manufacturing economies. This shift, along with the development of labor-intensive industries, primarily by multinational corporations, created a demand for cheap labor that brought many women into the urban labor force. Governments saw increasing women's participation in the labor force as essential for national economic growth and development, and therefore encouraged women's economic activity. These governments, however, had no special interest in women's promotion into management. Moreover, the traditional male ethos associated with manufacturing industries made industrial firms less friendly toward women managers than would be the next wave of service sector firms.

In both the industrialized and industrializing worlds, the expansion of the public and service sectors, along with the increased importance of staff positions, became major factors promoting women's initial breakthrough into management. The expansion of banking and other financial services opened opportunities for women in lower- and middle-level management positions. In most countries in the 1970s and 1980s, the growing public sector also absorbed the growing population of educated women into lower-level managerial positions. As new jobs were created, women moved into management and men moved up the hierarchy. Reference to positive stereotypes—such as recognizing Asian women's traditional experience managing family finances and regarding women as more honest and trustworthy than men—helped employers rationalize women's presence in what had previously been a male domain (see Chan & Lee, 1994; Cheng & Liao, 1994; Siengthai & Leelakulthanit, 1994; and Steinhoff & Tanaka, 1994, among others).

In both the industrialized and industrializing worlds, economic growth and increasing global competition heightened the demand for top-quality managers. Economic enterprises began to take advantage of the growing availability of qualified women to fill the new positions. In each country, however, the specific processes used to bring about change differed.

In the United States, powerful women's groups used the political process and the courts to help establish regulations that held employers responsible for implementing equal opportunity within their organizations (see Fagenson & Jackson, 1994). Such political and legal changes made it in organizations' self-interest to open their doors to women for lower-level managerial positions. However, neither the political nor the legal changes were sufficiently powerful to counter resistance to women entering the most senior levels.

In France, legislation passed in the 1980s gave unions responsibility for negotiating equal opportunity on behalf of women. Progress, however, was very limited. The French unions appear to have lacked sufficient motivation



to effect the previously legislated societal changes. Many French observers believe that the union leaders, most of whom are men, share management's prejudicial attitudes against women (Serdjenian, 1994).

In Hong Kong, where government intervention in commerce has been purposefully minimal and sex discrimination in employment continues to be legal, the proportion of women among corporate managers remains negligible (see de Leon & Ho, 1994).

In the social welfare states of Western Europe and Israel, social democratic parties created large public service bureaucracies that became the major employers of women and therefore provided a major channel for women moving into management. Not surprisingly in these countries, gender segregation emerged along sectorial lines, with women managers concentrated in the public sector and men in the private sector (see, for example, Hanninen-Salmelin & Petajaniemi, 1994; and Izraeli, 1994).

Under communist rule, Eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union set quotas for women in local-level management. However, women remained highly under represented in more senior and national positions. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, opportunities for women managers depended on the political interests of the Communist Party (see Kavcic, 1994). Women's chances for promotion were best during periods of economic growth and political calm. However, during the times when political unrest was greatest, the proportion of women promoted into and within management dropped. At those times, the Communist Party allocated positions either to men known to be loyal to the Party or to men whose loyalty it needed to secure. In Poland, since women rarely filled managerial positions in state enterprises, few now have sufficient experience to draw upon for managing in the new market-oriented economy (see Siemienska, 1994). The large women's organizations in certain former communist countries, such as Poland and Russia, operated essentially as extensions of the Communist Party. As such, they served primarily a social control function for the Party, rather than an advocacy role for women (see Puffer, 1994; and Siemienska, 1994).

Countries recently freed from communist rule appear to be experiencing a backlash against many of the policies that were supportive of women's employment, professional advancement, and general freedoms (Moghadam, 1992). For example, high unemployment has increased competition, including for managerial positions, most often to women's detriment. In addition, due to a lack of funds, most former communist countries have chosen to severely reduce the extensive network of childcare services, thus further increasing unemployment among women managers forced to quit working because too few acceptable childcare options remain available. Moreover, the belief that a woman's place is in the home is replacing the quota system that guaranteed women's representation in lower- and middle-level management in most former communist countries. For example, under pressure from the Catholic Church, the Polish parliament recently



passed a severely limiting antiabortion law. In Russia, Poland, Eastern Germany, and parts of former Yugoslavia, women face a difficult struggle ahead to maintain or regain their previous representation in the economy (see Antal & Krebsbach-Gnath, 1994; Kavcic, 1994; Puffer, 1994; Siemienska, 1994). Only now are women in these transitional economies beginning to organize to advance their professional and political status and interests (Moghadam, 1992).

Other countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Zimbabwe, have only recently emerged from extended periods of colonial rule. Colonialism's impact on women differed in important ways from its impact on men. For example, in colonial Indonesia, the Dutch recruited upper class men for roles in the civil service and reinforced women's exclusion from public life (see Wright & Crockett-Tellei, 1994). Moreover, the Dutch in Indonesia did not develop an educational system for the local people. In contrast, the Americans introduced universal education in the Philippines, thus giving Philippine women a decided advantage in urban labor markets compared with women from many other post-colonial countries. In Zimbabwe, where white men control the private business sector and black men control family life, black women continue to face a double challenge both as women and as black women (Muller, 1994; also see Erwee, 1994, for similar patterns in South Africa).

In most post-colonial countries, women participated in the struggle for liberation. A number of them later became members of their country's new government, thus providing role models for other women. However, because they were brought into government positions only by these unusual circumstances, the token women leaders did not necessarily become harbingers for succeeding women's continued involvement in the centers of economic or political power. More commonly, they emerged as exceptions to a pattern that generally continues to exclude women from power (see Muller, 1994). This exclusion has most frequently reasserted itself with the passing of the original leadership.

To date, there is no systematic research on the few executive women of almost every nationality who have succeeded in assuming very senior positions; however, they appear to come from the same societal groups as do male executives. For example, in cultures in which executives are drawn primarily from the upper classes, such as from the Javanese *Priyayi* in Indonesia, the few female executives, like their male counterparts, are most likely to come from elite families in which family connections smooth the way for business success (Wright & Crockett-Tellei, 1994). Similarly, in cultures such as Hong Kong in which the dominant enterprise structure is the family business, senior women, like their male counterparts, are most likely to run their family's business (de Leon & Ho, 1994). In such cultures, executives generally view themselves as working in the service of their family. However, for a woman, being an executive in a family business is not necessarily recognized as qualifying her to assume an executive position in a nonfamily enterprise. For example, in the Malaysian province of Kelantan,



where women have traditionally dominated both business activity and family finances while men worked primarily in agriculture, the proportion of women who have been promoted into upper-level managerial positions in nonfamily enterprises and government organizations remains negligible (Mansor, 1994).

## Women as Senior Executives and Expatriate Managers

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Until recently, a single theme dominated questions about women managers worldwide: the concern for understanding their under-representation, under-utilization, and skewed distribution among the levels of domestic and international management. Only in the 1990s has the question of global competitiveness and transnational efficacy begun to transform and complement these equity-based concerns.

Although the proportion of women managers has increased significantly in recent years in all countries for which data are available, the anticipated breakthrough into the centers of organizational power seems even less likely today than it did twenty years ago when the groundbreaking book *Breakthrough: Women into Management* noted: "It's when and how, not if women move up. The groundwork has been laid" (Loring & Wells, 1972:15).

This optimism was reflected in many of the countries described in our earlier book, *Women in Management Worldwide* (1988), the first to provide a multinational perspective on women in management. We were cautioned, however, that we must analyze the gains carefully to separate myth from reality (Keller Brown, 1988).

Whereas the optimism about women's movement into management appears to have been well grounded, the optimism about women moving into the international arena or up into the executive suite now appears to have been premature. Conditions that we, like other observers, expected would remove the barriers to women's progress throughout the profession of management, left most women well below the glass ceiling, where they could glimpse the executive suite but not quite enter it. Similarly, it left most women in the domestic positions while power was shifting to the global market (Calas & Smircich, 1993). Women's increased investment in higher education and greater commitment to management as a career, as well as new equal opportunity legislation and the shortage (or anticipated shortage) of high-quality managers, did not result in a significant breakthrough either into international management or into the executive suite. Regardless of the proportion of women managers at lower levels, women in every country remain only a tiny fraction of those sent on international assignments and those who make it to senior positions (Segal & Zellner, 1992). According to *Business Week*, "at the current rates it will be 475



years before women reach equality in the executive suite" (Spillar, 1992:76).

Our earlier work as well as that of others had failed to appreciate the important distinction between entry into management and upward mobility within management (Izraeli & Adler, 1994). We implicitly assumed that women managers moving up into the executive level and across domestic borders involved dynamics similar to those facilitating women's initial entry into management. We were perhaps overly impressed with the thin trickle of extraordinary women, operating under exceptional circumstances in each country, who had succeeded in breaking through the glass ceiling and, in a very limited number of cases, assuming senior executive positions and increasingly important international assignments. The mass media heightened public exposure to their presence. In all countries, articles and feature stories in women's magazines and some mainstream business journals made these exceptional women highly visible. Visibility had the benefit of increasing the female executives' impact as role models, along with the unfortunate consequence of reinforcing the illusion that substantial numbers of women had and could make it to the top (Izraeli, 1988). The reality, however, is that the executive suite and the international arena have remained highly resistant to women's entry.

Clearly, the situation facing women executives as well as women international managers has not been the same as that facing lower- and middle-level managers in domestic positions. A fuller understanding of the barriers that have limited women's access both to international management and to the executive suite—as well as the differences between "moving into" and "moving up within" management—will better equip organizations to select more effective policies: Such policies are capable of both increasing organizational effectiveness and remedying the current inequality. New approaches free them from remaining trapped within their prior, self-limiting perspectives. The following sections examine women's under-representation both in international management and in the executive suite. The ways managers commonly think about women as managers is contrasted with the reality of women's experience as managers. We begin with three beliefs about women's unsuitability for international assignments that although widely held to be true are not supported by the facts of the case. Because they are held to be true, however, they become true in their consequences and serve to limit women's opportunities in international management.

## Three Myths About Women Managing Across Borders

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As cross-border business becomes more widespread and more firms become multinational and transnational, international assignments form an increasingly important component of the new definition of managerial roles (see



Adler & Bartholomew, 1992), and women as expatriate managers becomes a more important issue (see, for example, Izraeli & Zeira, 1993). Given the historical scarcity of local women managers in most countries, most firms have questioned if women can succeed in cross-border managerial assignments. They have believed that the relative absence of local women managers formed a basis for accurately predicting the potential for success, or lack thereof, of expatriate women. To predict what women's roles in management will be in the 1990s and the twenty-first century, it is important to understand the underlying assumptions that firms make in each country about the role of women in management.

Given the importance of these questions to future business success, Adler conducted a multipart study on the role of women as expatriate managers. Research revealed a set of assumptions that managers and executives make about how foreigners would treat expatriate women, based on their beliefs about how foreign firms treat their own local women. The problem with the story is that the assumptions have proven to be false. Moreover, because the assumptions fail to accurately reflect reality, they are inadvertently causing executives to make decisions that are neither effective nor equitable.

The study addressed three commonly held "myths" about women in international management:

- Myth 1: Women do not want to be international managers.
- Myth 2: Companies refuse to send women abroad.
- Myth 3: Foreigners' prejudice against women renders women ineffective, even when interested in foreign assignments and successful in being sent.

These beliefs were labeled "myths" because, although widely held by both men and women, their accuracy had never been tested.

### *Myth 1: Women Do Not Want to Be International Managers*

Is the problem that women are less interested than men in pursuing international careers? The study tested this myth by surveying more than a thousand graduating MBAs from seven top management schools in the United States, Canada, and Europe (see Adler 1984b & 1986). The results revealed an overwhelming case of no significant difference: Female and male MBAs display equal interest, or disinterest, in pursuing international careers. More than four out of five MBAs—both women and men—want an international assignment at some time during their career. Both female and male MBAs, however, agree that firms offer fewer opportunities to women than to men, and significantly fewer opportunities to women pursuing international careers than to those pursuing domestic careers.



Although there may have been a difference in the past, women and men today are equally interested in international management, including expatriate assignments. The first myth—that women do not want to be international managers—is false; it is, in fact, a myth.

### *Myth 2: Companies Refuse to Send Women Abroad*

If the problem is not women's disinterest, is it that companies refuse to select women for international assignments? To test if the myth of corporate resistance was true, human resource vice-presidents and managers from sixty of the largest North American multinationals were surveyed (see Adler, 1984a). Over half of the companies reported that they hesitate to send women abroad. Almost four times as many reported being reluctant to select women for international assignments as for domestic management positions. When asked why they hesitate, almost three-quarters reported believing that foreigners were so prejudiced against women that the female managers could not succeed even if sent. Similarly, 70 percent believed that dual-career issues were insurmountable. In addition, some human resource executives expressed concern about the women's physical safety, the hazards involved in traveling in underdeveloped countries, and, especially in the case of single women, the isolation and loneliness.

Many of the women who succeeded in being sent abroad as expatriate managers report having confronted some form of corporate resistance before being sent abroad. For example:

*Malaysia.* "Management assumed that women didn't have the physical stamina to survive in the tropics. They claimed I couldn't hack it [in Malaysia]."

*Thailand.* "My company didn't want to send a woman to that 'horrible part of the world.' They think Bangkok is an excellent place to send single men, but not a woman. They said they would have trouble getting a work permit for me, which wasn't true."

*Japan and Korea.* "Everyone was more or less curious if it would work. My American boss tried to advise me, 'Don't be upset if it's difficult in Japan and Korea.' The American male manager in Tokyo was also hesitant. Finally the Chinese boss in Hong Kong said, 'We have to try!' Then they sent me."

A few women experienced severe resistance from their companies to sending any female managers abroad. Their firms seemed to offer them an expatriate position only after all potential male candidates had turned it down. For example:

*Thailand.* "Every advance in responsibility is because the Americans had no choice. I've never been chosen over someone else."



*Japan.* "They never would have considered me. But then the financial manager in Tokyo had a heart attack, and they had to send someone. So they sent me, on a month's notice, as a temporary until they could find a man to fill the permanent position. It worked out, and I stayed."

Although most of the women are sent in the same capacity as their male expatriate colleagues, some companies demonstrate their hesitation by offering temporary or travel assignments rather than regular expatriate positions. For instance:

*Hong Kong.* "After offering me the job, they hesitated: 'Could a woman work with the Chinese?' So my job was defined as temporary, a one-year position to train a Chinese man to replace me. I succeeded and became permanent."

These findings concur with those of 100 top line managers in Fortune 500 firms; the majority of whom believe that women face overwhelming resistance when seeking managerial positions in international divisions of U.S. firms (Thal & Cateora, 1979). Similarly, 80 percent of U.S. firms report believing that women would face disadvantages if sent abroad (Moran et al, 1988). Thus, the second myth is, in fact, true: Firms are hesitant, if not outright resistant, to sending female managers abroad.

### *Myth 3: Foreigners' "Prejudice" Against Female Expatriate Managers*

Is it true that foreigners are so prejudiced against women that the women could not succeed as international managers? Would sending a female manager abroad be neither fair to the woman nor effective for the company? Is the treatment of local women the best predictor of expatriate women's potential to succeed? The fundamental question was, and remains: Is the historic discrimination against local women worldwide a valid basis for predicting expatriate women's success as international managers?

To investigate this third myth—that foreigners' prejudice against women renders them ineffective as international managers—over 100 women managers from major North American firms who were on expatriate assignments around the world were surveyed. Fifty-two were interviewed while in Asia or after having returned from countries around the world to North America (Adler, 1987; Jelinek & Adler, 1988). Since most of the women held regional responsibility, their experience represents multiple countries rather than just their country of foreign residence.

*Who Are the Female Expatriate Managers?* The women were very well educated and quite internationally experienced. Almost all held graduate degrees, the MBA being the most common. Over three-quarters had



had extensive international interests and experience prior to being sent abroad by their present company. On average, the women spoke two or three languages, with some fluently speaking as many as six. In addition, they had excellent social skills. Nearly two-thirds were single, and only three had children.

Firms using transnational strategies sent more women than did those using other strategies, with financial institutions leading all other industries. On average, the expatriate assignments lasted two-and-a-half years, with a range from six months to six years. The women supervised from zero to twenty-five subordinates, with the average falling just below five. Their titles and levels within their firms varied: Some held very junior positions—assistant account manager—whereas others held quite senior positions, including one regional vice-president. In no firm did a female expatriate hold her company's number one position in the region or in any country.

The women were considerably younger than the typical male expatriate. Their ages ranged from twenty-three to forty-one years, with the average age just under thirty. This reflects the relatively high proportion of women sent by financial institutions—an industry that sends fairly junior managers on international assignments—and the relatively low proportion sent by manufacturing firms, which select quite senior managers for expatriate positions (such as country or regional director).

*The Decision to Go.* For most firms, the female expatriates were “firsts”: Only 10 percent followed another woman into her international position. Of the 90 percent who were “firsts,” almost a quarter represented the first female manager the firm had ever sent abroad. Others were the first women sent to the region, the first sent to the particular country, or the first to fill the specific expatriate position. Clearly, neither the women nor the companies had the luxury of role models or of following previously established patterns. Except for several major financial institutions, both the women and the companies found themselves experimenting in hope of uncertain success.

Most women described themselves as needing to encourage their companies to consider the possibility of assigning international positions to women in general and to themselves in particular. In more than four out of five cases, the woman initially suggested the idea of an international assignment to her boss and company. For only six women did the company first suggest the assignment.

Since most firms had never considered sending a female manager abroad, the women used a number of strategies to introduce the idea and to position their careers internationally. Many explored the possibility of an international assignment during their original job interview and eliminated companies from consideration that were totally against the idea. Other women informally introduced the idea to their boss and continued to mention it at appropriate moments until the company ultimately decided to



offer them an expatriate position. A few women formally applied for a number of international assignments prior to actually being selected and sent.

Many women attempted to be in the right place at the right time. For example, one woman who predicted that Hong Kong would be her firm's next major business center arranged to assume responsibility for the Hong Kong desk in New York, leaving the rest of Asia to a male colleague. The strategy paid off: Within a year, the company elevated their Hong Kong operations to a regional center and sent her to Asia as their first female expatriate manager.

Most women claimed that their companies had failed to recognize the possibility of selecting women for international assignments, rather than having thoroughly considered the idea and then having rejected it. For the majority of the women, the obstacle appeared to be the company's naivete, not malice. For many women, the most difficult hurdle in their international career involved getting sent abroad in the first place, not—as most had anticipated—gaining the respect of foreigners and succeeding once sent.

### *Did it Work? The Impact of Being Female*

Almost all the female expatriate managers (97%) reported that their international assignments were successful. This success rate is considerably higher than that reported for North American male expatriates. Although the women's assessments are subjective, objective indicators support the fact that most assignments, in fact, succeeded. For example, the majority of the firms—after experimenting with their first female expatriate manager—decided to send more women abroad. In addition, most companies promoted the women on the basis of their foreign performance and/or offered them other international assignments following completion of the first one.

### *Advantages*

Given the third myth, the women would have been expected to experience a series of difficulties caused by their being female and, perhaps, to create a corresponding set of solutions designed to overcome each difficulty. This was not the case. Almost half of the expatriates (42%) reported that being female served as more of an advantage than a disadvantage; 16 percent found it to be both positive and negative; 22 percent saw it as being either irrelevant or neutral; and only 20 percent found it to be primarily negative.

The women reported numerous professional advantages to being female. Most frequently, they described the advantage of being highly visible. Foreign clients were curious about them, wanted to meet them, and remembered them after the first encounter. The women therefore found it easier for them than for their male colleagues to gain access to foreign clients' time and attention. The women gave examples of this high visibility, accessibility, and memorability, such as:



*Japan.* "It's the visibility as an expat, and even more as a woman. I stick in their minds. I know I've gotten more business than my two male colleagues. . . . [My clients] are extra interested in me."

*Thailand.* "Being a woman is never a detriment. They remembered me better. Fantastic for a marketing position. It's better working with Asians than with the Dutch, British, or Americans."

*India and Pakistan.* "In India and Pakistan, being a woman helps in marketing and client contact. I got in to see customers because they had never seen a female banker before. . . . Having a female banker adds value to the client."

Again contrary to the third myth, the female managers discovered a number of advantages based on their interpersonal skills, including that the local men could talk more easily about a wider range of topics with them than with their male counterparts. For example:

*Japan.* "Women are better at putting people at ease. It's easier for a woman to convince a man. . . . The traditional woman's role . . . inspires confidence and trust, less suspicion, not threatening."

*Indonesia.* "I often take advantage of being a woman. I'm more supportive than my male colleagues. . . . [Clients] relax and talk more. And 50 percent of my effectiveness is based on volunteered information."

*Korea.* "Women are better at treating men sensitively, and they just like you. One of my Korean clients told me, 'I really enjoyed . . . working with you.'"

Many women also described the high social status accorded local women and found that such status was not denied them as foreign women. The women often received special treatment that their male counterparts did not receive. Clearly, it was always salient that they were women, but being a woman was not antithetical to succeeding as a manager.

*Hong Kong.* "Single female expats travel easier and are treated better. Never hassled. No safety issues. Local offices take better care of you. They meet you, take you through customs, . . . It's the combination of treating you like a lady and a professional."

*Japan.* "It's an advantage that attracts attention. They are interested in meeting a *gaijin*, a foreign woman. Women attract more clients. On calls to clients, they elevate me, give me more rank. If anything, the problem, for men and women, is youth, not gender."

In addition, most of the women described benefiting from a "halo effect." The majority of the women's foreign colleagues and clients had never met or previously worked with a female expatriate manager. Similarly, the local community was highly aware of how unusual it was for North American multinationals to send female managers abroad. Hence, the local managers assumed that the women would not have been



sent unless they were "the best," and therefore expected them to be "very, very good".

*Indonesia.* "It's easier being a woman here than in any place in the world, including New York City. . . . I never get the comments I got in New York, like 'What is a nice woman like you doing in this job?'"

*Japan.* "They assumed I must be good if I was sent. They became friends."

Some women found being female to have no impact whatsoever on their professional life. Many of these women worked primarily with the Chinese:

*Hong Kong.* "There are many expat and foreign women in top positions here. If you are good at what you do, they accept you. One Chinese woman told me, 'Americans are always watching you. One mistake and you are done. Chinese take a while to accept you and then stop testing you.'"

*Asia.* "There's no difference. They respect professionalism . . . including in Japan. There is no problem in Asia."

### *Disadvantages*

The women also experienced a number of disadvantages in being female expatriate managers. Interestingly enough, the majority of the disadvantages involved the women's relationship with their home companies, not with their foreign colleagues and clients. As noted earlier, a major problem involved the women's difficulty in obtaining an international position in the first place.

Another problem involved home companies initially limiting the duration of the women's assignments to six months or a year, rather than offering the more standard two to three years. While temporary assignments may appear to offer companies a logically cautious strategy, in reality they create an unfortunate self-fulfilling prophecy. When the home company is not convinced that a woman can succeed (and therefore offers her a temporary rather than a permanent position), it communicates the company's lack of confidence to foreign colleagues and clients as a lack of commitment. The foreigners then mirror the home company's behavior by also failing to take the woman manager seriously. Assignments become very difficult, or can fail altogether, when companies demonstrate a lack of initial confidence and commitment. As one expatriate woman working in Indonesia described, "It is very important to clients that I am permanent. It increases trust, and that's critical."

A subsequent problem involved the home company limiting the woman's professional opportunities and job scope once she was abroad. More than half of the female expatriates experienced difficulties in persuading



their home companies to give them latitude equivalent to that given to their male counterparts, especially initially. For example, some companies, out of supposed concern for the woman's safety, limited her travel (and thus the regional scope of her responsibility), thus excluding very remote, rural, and underdeveloped areas. Other companies, as mentioned previously, initially limited the duration of the woman's assignment to six months or a year, rather than the more standard two to three years. For example:

*Japan.* "My problem is overwhelmingly with Americans. They identify it as a male market . . . geisha girls. . . ."

*Thailand (petroleum company).* "The Americans wouldn't let me on the drilling rigs, because they said there were no accommodations for a woman. Everyone blames it on something else. They gave me different work. They had me on the sidelines, not planning and communicating with drilling people. It's the expat Americans, not the Thais, who'll go to someone else before they come to me."

A few companies limited the women to working only internally with company employees, rather than externally with clients. These companies often implicitly assumed that their own employees were somehow less prejudiced than were outsiders. In reality, the women often found the opposite to be true. They faced more problems from home country nationals within their own organizations than externally from local clients and colleagues. As one woman described:

*Hong Kong.* "It was somewhat difficult internally. They feel threatened, hesitant to do what I say, resentful. They assume I don't have the credibility a man would have. Perhaps it's harder internally than externally, because client relationships are one-on-one and internally it's more of a group; or perhaps it's harder because they have to live with it longer internally; or perhaps it's because they fear that I'm setting a precedent or because they fear criticism from their peers."

Managing foreign clients' and colleagues' initial expectations was one area that proved difficult for many women. Some found initial meetings to be "tricky," especially when a male colleague from their own company was present. Since most local managers had never previously met a North American expatriate woman who held a managerial position, there was considerable ambiguity as to who she was, her status, her level of expertise, authority, and responsibility, and therefore the appropriate form of address and demeanor toward her.

*People's Republic of China.* "I speak Chinese, which is a plus. But they'd talk to the men, not to me. They'd assume that I, as a woman, had no authority. The Chinese want to deal with top, top, top level people, and there is always a man at a higher level."



*Asia.* "It took extra time to establish credibility with the Japanese and Chinese. One Japanese manager said to me, 'When I first met you, I thought you would not be any good because you were a woman.'"

Since most of the North American women whom local managers had ever met previously were expatriates' wives or secretaries, they naturally assumed that the new woman was not a manager. Hence, they often directed initial conversations to male colleagues, not to the newly arrived female manager. Senior male colleagues, particularly those from the head office, became very important in redirecting the focus of early discussions back toward the women. When this was done, old patterns were quickly broken and smooth, ongoing work relationships were established. When the pattern was ignored or poorly managed, the challenges to credibility, authority, and responsibility became chronic and undermined the women's effectiveness.

As mentioned earlier, many women described the most difficult aspect of the foreign assignment as getting sent abroad in the first place. Overcoming resistance from the North American home company frequently proved more challenging than gaining local clients' and colleagues' respect and acceptance. In most cases, assumptions about foreigners' prejudice against female expatriate managers appear to have been exaggerated: The anticipated prejudice and the reality did not match. It appears that foreigners are not as prejudiced as many North American managers had assumed.

## The *Gaijin* Syndrome

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One pattern is particularly clear: First and foremost, foreigners are seen as foreigners. Like their male colleagues, female expatriates are seen as foreigners, not as local people. A woman who is a foreigner (a *gaijin*) is not expected to act like the local women. Therefore, the societal and cultural rules governing the behavior of local women that limit their access to managerial positions and responsibility do not apply to foreign women. Although women are considered the "culture bearers" in all societies, foreign women are not expected to assume the cultural roles that societies have traditionally reserved for their own women. As one female expatriate in Japan described:

The Japanese are very smart: they can tell that I am not Japanese, and they do not expect me to act as a Japanese woman. They will allow and condone behavior in foreign women that would be absolutely unacceptable in their own women.

Similarly a Tokyo-based personnel vice-president for a major international bank explained (Morgenthaler, 1978: 1, 27):



Being a foreigner is so weird to the Japanese that the marginal impact of being a woman is nothing. If I were a Japanese woman, I couldn't be doing what I'm doing here. But they know perfectly well that I'm not.

Many of the female expatriates related similar examples of their unique status as "foreign women" rather than as "women" *per se*. For example:

*Japan and Korea.* "Japan and Korea are the hardest, but they know that I'm an American woman, and they don't expect me to be like a Japanese or Korean woman. It's possible to be effective even in Japan and Korea if you send a senior woman with at least three or four years of experience, especially if she's fluent in Japanese."

*Asia.* "It's the novelty, especially in Japan, Korea, and Pakistan. All of the general managers met with me. . . . It was much easier for me, especially in Osaka. They were charming. They didn't want me to feel bad. They thought I would come back if they gave me business. You see, they could separate me from the local women."

*Pakistan.* "Will I have problems? No! There is a double standard between expats and local women. The Pakistanis test you, but you enter as a respected person."

*Japan.* "I don't think the Japanese could work for a Japanese woman . . . but they just block it out for foreigners."

*Hong Kong.* "Hong Kong is very cosmopolitan. I'm seen as an expat, not as an Asian, even though I am an Asian American."

It seems that we have confused an adjective, *foreign*, with a noun, *woman*, in predicting foreigners' reactions to expatriate women. We expected the most salient characteristic of a female expatriate manager to be that she is a *woman* and predicted her success on the basis of the success of the local women in each country. In fact, the most salient characteristic is that expatriates are *foreign*, and the best predictor of their success is the success of other foreigners (in this case, other North Americans) in the particular country. *Local managers see female expatriates as foreigners who happen to be women, not as women who happen to be foreigners.* The difference is crucial. Given the uncertainty involved in sending women managers to all areas of the world, our assumptions about the greater salience of gender (female or male) over nationality (foreign or local) have caused us to make false predictions concerning women's potential to succeed as executives and managers in foreign countries.

The third myth—that foreigners' prejudice precludes women's effectiveness as international managers—is false; it is, in fact, a myth. Of the three myths, only the second myth proved to be true. The first myth proved false: Women *are* interested in working internationally. The third myth proved false: Women do succeed internationally, once sent. However, the second myth proved to be true: Companies are hesitant, if not completely unwilling, to send women managers abroad. Given that the problem is



caused primarily by the home companies' assumptions and decisions, the solutions are also largely within their control.

Why do companies hesitate? The following section attempts to move beyond surface explanations (for a review see Izraeli and Zeira, 1993) to the underlying factors that maintain the current situation of women's under-representation both in international management and locally within each country worldwide.

## Four Perspectives on Women in Management

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While the specific explanations offered for women's under-representation, under-utilization, and skewed distribution among the levels of management worldwide have varied, they reflect four essentially different perspectives. The first perspective emphasizes differences between women and men; the second perspective focuses on organizational context; the third analyzes institutionalized discrimination; and the fourth underlines the power dynamics that limit women's access to executive positions. We consider each in turn.

### *Perspective 1: Gender Differences—Why Can't Women Be More Like Men?*

The most widely held explanation by managers and, until recently, by scholars for the paucity of women in management is perceived personality and behavioral differences between women and men. Taking men's characteristics and behaviors as the norm for effective managerial performance, many proponents of this perspective presumed that women's actual or perceived divergence from male norms explained women's limited representation in the managerial ranks. Perceived differences between women's and men's managerial behavior were usually attributed either to differences in women's and men's early socialization or to innate biological predispositions.

This perspective had the advantage of not assuming that women are identical to men. However, taken alone, it had three serious shortcomings in explaining women's under-representation in management. First, as will be highlighted in the second perspective, most studies that compared women and men managers in similar jobs found negligible differences (Chusmir, 1988; Nieva & Gutek, 1981; Powell, 1988; Ragins, 1991). Second, the contemporary emphasis on the manager as a "team-player and coach," especially in today's increasingly knowledge-intensive industries (see, for example, Peters & Waterman, 1982), suggested that a more people-oriented leadership style might render women more qualified than men



for modern management positions. Similarly, the increasing emphasis on international and transnational management, and with it the heightened importance of relationship-building skills, again put a premium on the very characteristics that have been thought to be women's strengths. Third, focusing on the individual ignored and concealed the importance of organizational factors affecting women's managerial careers.

### *Perspective 2: An Emphasis on Organizational Context*

According to the organizational context perspective, characteristics of organizations—such as the under-representation of women in management, the uneven distribution of women and men in various roles, as well as the greater opportunities organizations provide for men than for women to gain access to power, prestige, and monetary rewards—shape attitudes and behavior much more than do individual personality traits. For example, research suggested that opportunities for promotion, more than gender-related individual differences, influenced women's and men's ambition. Specifically, women's concentration in low-ceiling positions and in career tracks that limited their opportunities for promotion helped to explain women's lower level of ambition in relation to their job, career, and organization. Tokenism, for example, helped to explain the dynamics associated with being the only woman in a senior management position—such as higher visibility and more stereotypical responses from colleagues. These dynamics both increased the performance pressures on women and reduced their prospects for success. Proponents of the organizational context perspective argued that these and other difficulties associated with tokenism would disappear when women represented a substantially greater proportion of the managers in an organization, since colleagues would then respond to them primarily as individuals and not as stereotypical representatives of a group (see Kanter, 1977).

A limitation of the organizational context perspective was its implicit assumption that organizations are essentially gender-neutral (Acker, 1990; Calas, 1988); that is, that our culturally based ideas about women and men do not inherently influence our organizational concepts and practices. Essentially, organizational context explanations implicitly assumed that organizations treat women and men the same. Unfortunately, viewing organizations as gender-neutral allowed managers and scholars to ignore the gender specificity of organizational choices and responses. For example, according to organizational context explanations, being a token in a group creates strong performance pressure on the token person (Kanter, 1977). Moreover, the presence of a token in a team, whether female or male, heightens team members' awareness of their own gender identity as well as of the differences between themselves and the token. Given this heightened awareness of gender differences, the second perspective



explained that the organization would be more likely to treat the token in a stereotypical manner: that is, as a representative of a group rather than as an individual. While true, what this argument concealed was that societal stereotypes of women and men differ and that therefore tokenism has very different consequences for token female managers than for token male managers (Israeli, 1983). Specifically, organizations frequently derail token female managers to less powerful, more peripheral jobs, while they often promote token male managers up the glass escalator (Williams, 1992). An easily visible example of the latter in many countries is the rapid rate at which banks promote token male tellers into supervisory and managerial positions compared with the negligible promotion rates of their equally qualified female colleagues. Consequently, although problematic for women, being a token often works to the advantage of a man. By inaccurately equating the experiences of female and male tokens, organizational context explanations obscured masculinity's connections with power and privilege, connections that are embedded in the broader society as well as in organizations.

A second limitation of the organizational context perspective was its assumption that power negates the influence of gender (Kanter, 1977). According to this assumption, once a female manager achieves a certain level of power, her status as a woman becomes irrelevant. However, what actually happens is that women who attain positions of power become more likely, rather than less likely, to experience a backlash against them (Faludi, 1991). Thus, in reality, rather than eliminating the significance of gender, power often heightens it.

Third, organizational context alone inadequately explained the persistence and replication of the gender-based division of authority and power. Even in organizations in which women managers held a sizeable proportion of lower- and middle-level managerial positions, men continued to dominate the top positions. Theories that suggested that organizations and bureaucracy were gender neutral did not adequately account for this continued structuring based on gender (Acker, 1990).

### *Perspective 3: The Unveiling of Institutionalized Discrimination*

The third perspective rejected the view that organizations were gender-neutral. Rather, it argued that established, taken-for-granted understandings about organizations have built-in assumptions about gender and that these assumptions explained women's persistent under-representation, under-utilization, and especially their skewed distribution in management (Acker, 1990; Calas, 1988; Calas & Smircich, 1992). This third perspective demonstrated that organizations were neither objective nor gender-neutral. Fundamentally, it argued that gender discrimination was embedded in managers' basic assumptions about society and organizational life.



To say that an organization . . . is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, [between] masculine and feminine (Acker, 1990:146).

From this third perspective, the significance of gender was seen to permeate all aspects of the organization. For example, the third perspective did not view management as simply a gender-neutral set of technical, human, and conceptual skills associated with various management positions. Rather, it viewed management as an occupation in which the assumptions about who was suitable to be a manager, including which social and personal characteristics were required, were based on societal assumptions about women and men. For example, common managerial beliefs were shown to support the lifestyle that societies most frequently reserve for men. Beliefs such as that successful managers must prove their worth by their early thirties, that career breaks to care for family members indicate a lack of organizational commitment, and that being the last person to leave at night demonstrates exemplary organizational commitment, all advantage a lifestyle more easily pursued by men than by women. Definitions of appropriate experience eliminate women from consideration for senior corporate positions. For example, the requirement of many British firms that candidates for board member positions must have had prior board experience in a public company—which few women have had—has eliminated most British women from consideration and explains, in part, the paucity of women board members (Hammond & Holton, 1994).

Most societies expect women to act subserviently to men and therefore assume that men—but not women—will exercise authority over other people, especially over other men. These societal expectations form part of the everyday taken-for-granted reality of organizations. Organizations only marginally violate such expectations when they promote highly qualified women into lower-level managerial positions, since these women frequently supervise other women. However, organizations generally perceive women as neither natural nor acceptable in positions of real power and authority, and consequently they overlook them for higher-level positions. When this happens, it rarely occurs to anyone that it should be otherwise.

In Western countries, research found that both women and men managers perceived the characteristics of the ideal manager to be those they associated with the typical man but not with the typical woman (Schein, 1973; 1975). A more recent study found that by the late 1980s, these perceptions were still held by men, but no longer by women (Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989). Similar studies from other cultures, such as Hong Kong, also found that male managers held more prejudicial attitudes against women than did female managers (de Leon & Ho, 1994). The widely supported belief by male managers that typical masculine characteristics are requisites for effective management revealed the close coupling of



management with masculinity. "A 'masculine ethic' of rationality . . . [has given] the managerial role in the West its defining image for most of the 20th century" (Kanter, 1977:22; see also Hearn & Parkin, 1988:20-21):

This "masculine ethic" elevates the traits assumed to belong to some men to necessities for effective management: a tough-minded approach to problems; analytic ability to abstract and plan; a capacity to set aside personal emotional considerations in the interests of task accomplishment and a cognitive superiority in problem-solving and decision-making.

The specific image of an ideal manager varies across cultures, yet everywhere it privileges those characteristics that the culture associates primarily with masculinity.

According to this third perspective, three implicit and explicit processes produced and reproduced discrimination against women managers. These processes explained the persistence of institutionalized patterns of gender discrimination in organizations.

First, organizations emphasized gender differences by using deceptively circular logic. The circular logic begins by organizations presuming that women and men have different personality predispositions, abilities, and occupational interests, even when such managerially relevant differences have yet to be proven to exist. On the basis of such presumed differences, organizations then assign women to jobs different from those assigned to men, with those jobs assigned to women incorporating less prestigious tasks, lower rewards, and fewer opportunities for advancement. The organization then uses the contrasting patterns of jobs held by women versus men to reinforce its belief that differences between women and men are inherent, rather than in fact being constructed by the organization itself (West & Zimmerman, 1983). For example, when organizations assume that men have a tougher-minded approach to problem solving than do women, they tend to hire mostly men for managerial positions that they believe require such tough-mindedness. They then interpret women's absence from such positions as evidence of an inherent shortcoming among women; namely, that women lack a sufficiently tough-minded approach to problem solving. Neither women's actual tough-mindedness nor the assumption that such a characteristic is the best way to achieve desired results is questioned or tested. Once such a pattern is established, organizations then use women's absence from the initial managerial categories to justify women's continued exclusion from both the initial and similar managerial positions. Thus, the first process reproducing institutionalized discrimination was organizations' assignment of women and men to different categories of jobs.

The second process reproducing institutionalized discrimination was managers' tendency to promote people who most resembled themselves, those "who shared their own backgrounds, lifestyles, prejudices, politics and goals" (Martin, Harrison, & Dinitto, 1983:25). Some observers used the



nature of managerial work to explain this pattern. They stated that since managerial work is highly indeterminate, full of uncertainty, and fraught with difficulty in discerning the direct consequences of actions and decisions, managers want to work with people they feel they can trust (Kanter, 1977; Mintzberg, 1975). Moreover, since ambiguity precludes any form of direct assessment and control, only similarity can form a basis for trusting new managers, rather than any form of more precise performance measurement. Because senior male executives perceived women as being different, and therefore as not being completely like *them*, they tended not to select women for senior management positions. Selecting new managers on the basis of similarity secured the status quo regarding the distribution of rights, privileges, and rewards for the current, primarily male, cohort of managers and executives (Offe, 1976).

According to this perspective, the third process reproducing institutionalized discrimination stemmed from the hierarchical interactions taking place daily between women and men in organizations. Hierarchies structure interaction into patterns of dominance and subordination, most commonly between senior men and junior women, including between male bosses and female secretaries. Such male-dominated hierarchical interactions create and reinforce power and positional distinctions between women and men and make them appear natural. When such gender distinctions form part of the organization's taken-for-granted reality, managers rarely question them. Moreover, individuals who are aware of such organizational discrimination often have difficulty obtaining sufficient support for their views to change the patterns. Thus, by hierarchical gender relationships becoming a part of the taken-for-granted reality of organizational life, organizations sustained women's absence from the centers of power.

The case of the Israeli military, where compulsory service applies to women and men, is an example of the processes that reproduce discrimination against women as managers and contribute to the persistence of institutionalized patterns of gender discrimination in Israel. First, gender is the basis for determining length of service and the assignment of recruits to training and career tracks. Women are excluded from the more prestigious activities and from the career tracks that lead to the more senior ranks and provide experiences that firms consider crucial for managing complex organizations.

Women's lack of experience then becomes evidence of lack of leadership ability and competence for senior level positions both within the military and civilian life. In addition, their very limited access to senior military positions prevents women from developing links to social networks that are crucial for gaining access to positions of power in the civilian economy (Israeli, 1994). The informal ties among men are extended and reinforced through annual reserve military service not required of women. Once in positions of authority, former army officers tend to hire other former army officers, thus reproducing women's marginality from positions of power.



An important contribution of this approach has been that it challenged taken-for-granted definitions of reality and revealed many of them to be reflections of the pro-male bias embedded in society and organizations, rather than of objective, rational definitions of the best, or most effective, approaches to management. While the institutionalized discrimination perspective was highly instructive for understanding the persistence of discrimination, its primary shortcoming was that it failed to explain why, despite existing discrimination, women have nonetheless moved into lower- and even middle-management positions. A greater appreciation of power and of the interests of those in power to preserve it for other men was needed to understand the role of senior management in monitoring women managers' promotion into the executive suite.

#### *Perspective 4: Revealing Power's Influence in the Organization*

From the fourth perspective, societal and organizational institutions that give men privilege have persisted because individuals and groups with a vested interest in their persistence have had the power to preempt change. From this perspective, one reason current managers limit the number of women managers has been simply that they do not want more competition. Managers at each level in the hierarchy have not differed in their desire to limit competition but rather in their ability to do so. Only those at the top, most of whom are men, have had the power and authority to determine an organization's rules, including determining the criteria for promotion close to and into their own ranks. Senior executives are more able than lower-level managers to protect their sphere of influence from outsiders—including from the entrance of both women and all but selected other men.

In all countries surveyed, the proportion of women among lower-level managers increased significantly when a rising demand for managers created a shortage of equally qualified men (Reskin & Roos, 1990). During times of rising demand, it has been in organizations' interest to hire and promote the highest quality female and male managers available. The women hired did not replace male managers so much as they filled newly created positions. Senior executives remained largely unaffected by this dynamic because, given the limited number of executive positions, there has yet to be a scarcity in any country of interested and qualified male candidates. Moreover, because societies generously reward senior executives, firms are unlikely to suffer from a serious shortage.

In the United States, pressures to comply with affirmative action regulations and to establish the firm's image as an equal opportunity employer, have encouraged senior executives to create incentives for lower- and middle-level managers to promote women (see Fagenson & Jackson, 1994). Legislated affirmative action, a policy unique to the United States, was ostensibly intended for senior as well as lower-level management. In reality,



however, it successfully opened up entry level positions to women but not to the executive suite.

Not only have senior executives been protected from such affirmative action pressures but they have also been exposed to pressures to exclude women from the most senior ranks. Managers who promoted women to senior positions could rarely do so without social support. For example, Ralph Ablon, chairman of American Ogden Corp., number 74 on Fortune's list of the 100 largest diversified service companies, recently appointed a woman as Ogden's chief financial officer. Ablon explained, "When I became CEO 29 years ago, I don't believe I could have been as liberal, and I couldn't have gotten away with appointing a woman as CFO. Today I could" (Fierman, 1990:42). Why was Ablon able to do today what he was unable to do in the past? Perhaps because societal norms in the United States have changed. Ablon implicitly explained his (and his colleagues') past choices not to select a woman to be the CFO, as emanating in part from his assessment of the potential cost to himself and to his company had he done so. Due to societal pressure, discrimination against women has often actually been rational from the perspective of individual senior executives, since behaving otherwise has usually elicited criticism from their peers (Larwood, Gutek, & Gattiker, 1984:341).

Adding the dynamic of power to the institutional discrimination perspective helps explain why some patterns have changed while others have not. It helps explain why, despite management's masculine image, women have succeeded in entering the lower levels of management, but once in, have failed to move up into the senior-most ranks.

## Conclusion

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Global competition and the need for top-quality managers are making women's promotion into senior management a business issue, rather than strictly an issue of equity. Global competition is, and will continue to be, intense in the 1990s (Adler & Jelinek, 1986). Can corporations risk not choosing the best person just because her gender does not fit the traditional managerial profile? Needs for competitive advantage, not an all-consuming social conscience, may answer the question, if not in fact define it. Successful companies will select both women and men to manage their domestic and cross-border operations. The option of limiting senior or international management to one gender has become an archaic "luxury" that no company can afford. The only remaining question is how quickly and effectively each company will increase the number and use of women in their worldwide managerial work force. Some observers already argue that the "number of qualified women will soon be so great that ignoring them will be bad business" (Segal & Zellner, 1992:76). Although this may well be true, those in power need to recognize the broader economic and competitive advantages of sharing the executive ranks with more women.



The power perspective emphasizes the need for executives to understand that it is in their own and their companies' best interest to welcome more women into the executive suite. The intensification of global competition has become a major influence compelling executives to view women managers as a competitive advantage rather than as a legislated necessity. Global competition challenges corporations to maximize the effectiveness of their human resources. The successful performance of growing numbers of women managers offers firms an opportunity to outperform their more prejudiced competitors by better using women's talents. A number of leading transnational firms have already accepted this reality and begun to act accordingly (see Adler, 1994, 1987).

## Note

1. This chapter is based on Nancy J. Adler and Dafna N. Izraeli's book, *Competitive Frontiers: Women Managers in a Global Economy* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 1994). Authors names are listed in alphabetical order.

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