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Global managers: no longer men alone

Nancy J. Adler

Abstract The reasons companies give for choosing to include women along with their male managers, how they expect women to contribute once hired, and the levels at which women managers are invited to contribute have been changing rapidly, but subtly, over the last fifty years. Companies' expectations have varied depending on their assumptions about the value to the company of diversity, the value to the company of men's and women's unique contributions, and to belief, or lack thereof, of the possibility of positive synergies. This article explores these issues in the context of global management.

Keywords International management; global management; women managers; cross-cultural management; cultural synergy.

> It's about time to realize, brethren, as best we can,
> That a woman is not just a female man.
> (Ogden Nash)

According to the CEO of Hewlett Packard, Carly Fiorina (1998), 'Anytime you have a fiercely competitive, change-oriented growth business where results count and merit matters, women will rise to the top'. How prepared are global companies to recognize that their success depends on including the most talented people in the world among their global and expatriate managers, women as well as men? Based on history, the answer would appear to be, 'Not very'. Women today hold less than 3 per cent of the most senior management positions in major corporations in the United States (Wellington, 1996) and less than 2 per cent of all senior management positions in Europe (Dwyer *et al.*, 1996; also see Davidson and Cooper, 1993; Vinnicombe and Sturges, 1995). As recently as the 1980s the proportion of women among companies' expatriate managers fell below 3 per cent and by the 1990s it had risen to only approximately 10 per cent (Adler, 1994).

Can companies – or countries – afford to continue their historic pattern of male-dominated leadership? As global competition intensifies, the opportunity cost of such traditional patterns escalates. Most global managers know their companies can no longer afford to ignore potential talent 'simply because it's wearing a skirt' or because it holds a passport different from that of the founding executives (Fisher, 1992).[1] Although many have chosen not to act on it, CEOs are increasingly recognizing that in a global economy, 'Meritocracy – letting talent rise to the top regardless of where it is found and whether it is male or female . . . [is becoming] essential to business success' (Kanter, 1994: 89).

Careful observation reveals a rapidly increasing number of countries and companies moving away from historic men-only patterns of global leadership and management. Of

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the forty-seven women who have served in their country's highest political leadership position – as either president or prime minister – more than two-thirds have come into office in just the last decade, and all but seven are the first woman their country has ever selected (see Adler, 1996, 1997a, 1998a, 1998b). Similarly, among the current women CEOs leading major companies, almost all are the first woman their particular company has ever selected (see Adler, 1997a, 1997b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). The question is no longer, 'Is the pattern changing?' but rather, 'How is it changing? Why is it changing? And how will companies take advantage of the change?'

Global managers: the challenges of including women

As companies increasingly select their global managers from among the best women and men worldwide, rather than restricting candidates almost exclusively to men – as has been done so often in the past – an inevitable question arises: how different are women managers, if at all, from their male counterparts? While few studies, until recently, have focused on women who are global managers, especially from a cross-cultural perspective, researchers have studied the differences between women and men in general, and between female and male managers working within their own countries (Adler and Izraeli, 1994). Although unanimity on the existence and type of differences and their effects has yet to be reached, scholars do agree that male and female managers are perceived differently (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Powell, 1999; Yeager, 1999). Most US research contends that both men and women describe successful managers as more like men than women (Schein, 1975), with the exception of one follow-up study in which men but not women persisted in sex-typing managers (Schein *et al.*, 1989).

Advocates of the two seemingly opposite positions – 'Women and men managers are exactly the same' and 'Women and men are distinctly different' – often tenaciously adhere to their own point of view and respond incredulously or even with hostility to proponents of perspectives other than their own. Not surprisingly, this crucial similar-or-different dilemma surfaces frequently within global companies considering sending women abroad as expatriate managers. Given the paucity of research on women expatriate managers, existing studies cannot, as yet, definitively resolve whether women and men act differently as global managers or whether they are perceived to act differently.[2]

Given the inherent ambiguity, global managers and scholars need to understand both the behavioural and the perceptual similarity-versus-difference controversy in such a way that it facilitates, rather than undermines, organizational effectiveness (Thomas and Ely, 1996). The first step towards such a constructive reframing is to recognize that, whether similar or different, increasing the number of women who are global managers will increase competitiveness. Why? Because whether women manage in similar or different ways from their male colleagues, and whether such differences are perceived or not by colleagues and clients, drawing from both groups increases companies' pool of potential talent. As basic statistics make clear, if you draw from a larger population, on average, you will select better global managers.

Given the transparent advantage inherent in drawing from a larger pool of candidates – one that includes both women and men – why do so many people, and companies, continue to get sidetracked by the similar-versus-different controversy? The explanation lies in the fact that at most companies the controversy is not explicit and therefore can neither be discussed nor resolved by simply asking or answering a single question. Rather, as highlighted in Table 1, the assumptions individuals make relative to six distinct, albeit related, issues define both the confusion and the complexity. Among the first two questions, the first is behavioural – 'Do women who are global managers manage in similar ways to those of their male colleagues?' – while the second is perceptual – 'Are women who are global managers perceived as managing in similar ways to those of their male colleagues?' Similarly among the third and fourth questions, the third is behavioural – 'Are male or female global managers more effective?' – and the fourth is perceptual – 'Are male or female global managers perceived to manage more effectively?' The fifth question is behavioural – 'If women and men differ, are the differences primarily an advantage or disadvantage to companies' global effectiveness, competitiveness and ultimate success?' – whereas the sixth question is perceptual – 'Are the differences, if any, between women's and men's styles of managing internationally perceived to be an advantage or disadvantage to companies' global effectiveness, competitiveness and ultimate success?'

Inherent in the six questions is the confusion caused by some people appreciating difference simply as 'difference' while others judge it as reflecting either inferiority or superiority. As shown in Table 1, the six questions differ markedly on this appreciation-versus-judgement spectrum. The first two questions are strictly descriptive. They simply ask if people observe (or imagine) differences in the ways women and men manage internationally. Such differences are not judged to be either good or bad. Unlike the remaining four questions, the first two questions are appreciative (i.e. descriptive), not evaluative. In contrast, questions three through six are evaluative. Depending on their perspective, people judge either men's or women's ways of managing internationally to

Table 1 *Global managers: the nature of the questions*

Fundamental questions	*Nature of question*	*Type of question*	*Treatment of difference*	*Underlying dilemma*
Do women who are global managers manage in similar ways to those of their male colleagues?	Behavioural	Descriptive	Appreciative of difference	Similarity vs difference
Are women who are global managers perceived as managing in similar ways to those of their male colleagues?	Perception	Descriptive	Appreciative of difference	Similarity vs difference
Are male or female global managers more effective?	Behavioural	Evaluative	Judgemental	Superiority vs inferiority
Are male or female global managers perceived to manage more effectively?	Perception	Evaluative	Judgemental	Superiority vs inferiority
Is diversity an advantage or a disadvantage to global companies?	Behavioural	Evaluative	Judgemental	Advantage vs disadvantage
Is diversity perceived to be an advantage or a disadvantage to global companies?	Perception	Evaluative	Judgemental	Advantage vs disadvantage

be superior. Similarly, depending on one's perspective, a diversity of global management styles is judged either to benefit or to detract from companies' global effectiveness, competitiveness and ultimate success.

Although in most companies one set of assumptions tends to dominate, the full range of behavioural-versus-perceptual, similar-versus-different, superior-versus-inferior and advantage-versus-disadvantage assumptions is believed, expressed and, all too often, argued about. Given most companies' lack of experience in sending women abroad on global assignments, a disproportionate number of decisions are based on managers' perceptions – their best guesses – as to what the impact of being a woman and a global manager will be, rather than on observing the behaviour and impact of women who are working internationally. Differences of opinion are therefore not uncommon between women who have had expatriate assignments in, for example, the Middle East, and those who have had no direct experience working in the region and are only imagining what the reaction of Saudis, Iraqis and Kuwaitis might be to a woman executive. It is important, therefore, to understand how the various assumptions influence companies' attempts to achieve a more balanced representation of male and female global managers from all regions of the world and, more importantly, how they influence companies' overall effectiveness.

Alternative approaches: understanding how global companies view difference

When combining behavioural and perceptual perspectives, the six questions listed in Table 1 reduce to three fundamental questions. As highlighted in Table 2, alternative attitudes towards difference – as expressed in people's responses to the three

Table 2 *Global management: approaches to difference*

	Approaches			
Assumptions	*Denying differences*	*Identifying with men*	*Identifying with women*	*Creating synergy*
Do women who are global managers manage in similar ways to those of their male colleagues? Are they perceived to manage in similar ways?	Similar	Different	Different	Different
Are male or female global managers more effective? Are men or women perceived to manage more effectively?	Neither	Men	Women	Neither
Is diversity an advantage or a disadvantage to global companies? Is it perceived as an advantage or disadvantage?	Disadvantage	Disadvantage	Disadvantage	Advantage
What is valued?	Culture of sameness	Conformity to men's ways	Conformity to women's ways	Leveraging diversity
Cross-cultural equivalent	Parochial (domestic)	Ethnocentric (pro-men)	Ethnocentric (pro-women)	Cultural synergistic

fundamental questions – lead to four very different approaches to increasing the number of women in global management positions and to valuing, or not valuing, their potentially unique contributions to the company.[3] As will be discussed, the four approaches are:

- identifying with men's approaches to managing internationally;
- denying differences;
- identifying with women's approaches to managing internationally; and
- creating synergy – leveraging women's and men's approaches to managing internationally.

In the first and third approaches, people acknowledge differences, but see them as negative. The first approach assumes that being a man and that men's ways of managing internationally are better, while the third approach assumes that being a woman and women's ways are better. By contrast, in the second approach, people deny the possibility of differences; they see women's and men's styles of managing internationally as identical and believe that women and men are perceived identically by foreign colleagues and clients. The fourth approach acknowledges differences without judging either women or men – or men's or women's ways of managing – to be superior. The fourth approach is premised on a company's ability to create synergy by integrating and leveraging women's and men's unique styles into complementary approaches. While companies can adopt any of the four approaches, the fourth approach (synergy) is most conducive to sustained, long-term global effectiveness (Adler, 2002; Thomas and Ely, 1996). Each of the four approaches, with its respective underlying assumptions, is described below.

Identifying with men's approaches to managing internationally

The first approach views men and women as distinctly different and judges men and men's approaches to managing internationally to be superior to those of women. Men are seen as displaying characteristics that have historically allowed them to succeed. The most common descriptions of men – as aggressive, independent, unemotional, objective, dominant, active, competitive, logical, worldly, skilled in business, adventurous, self-confident and ambitious – support the image of men as effective managers, especially in the United States (Fondas, 1997: 184, based on Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Glennon, 1979; Grace, 1995; Kanter, 1977; Seidler, 1994). Further supporting men as effective global managers is the perception that they are acceptable to foreign business people. This perception is particularly influential because the majority of managers making decisions about whom to send abroad on global assignments believe that foreigners are so prejudiced against women that they could not succeed no matter how well they managed (Adler, 1994). From this point of view, women are seen as neither equally acceptable nor equally effective as are men.

The traditional descriptions that have been used to describe women – as talkative, gentle, tactful, religious, quiet, empathetic, aesthetic, submissive and expressive – have consistently undermined their image as effective managers, especially in Western cultures (Ashmore *et al.*, 1986; Broverman *et al.*, 1972; Harriman, 1996; Williams and Bennett, 1975). Although the specific characteristics vary somewhat from company to company, and culture to culture, the overall pattern in this first approach is for companies to identify success with men and with men's ways of managing, rather than with women and with women's ways of managing.

Identifying with the masculine echoes the same cultural dynamic as classic ethnocentrism. In male/female terms, such ethnocentrism might be labelled male chauvinism. Whereas women are recognized as differing from men, all such differences are judged to be detrimental to women's abilities to manage successfully and therefore to contribute successfully to the company's performance. From this perspective, of identifying with men's global management styles, it is inconceivable that women or women's unique approaches to managing internationally might benefit the company. Both men and women, therefore, attempt to minimize the differences between their own approaches and the male norm. Seeing men's ways as superior, women attempt to think like, act like and manage like their most successful male colleagues. North American women who are sent to Japan as expatriate managers, for example, choose to go out drinking with their Japanese colleagues and clients – thus replicating the pattern of the men who are sent to Japan. Similarly, managers who see women's approaches as counterproductive attempt to minimize the differences by coaching high-potential women to act like men when working domestically and to not consider taking a global assignment. Women are coached to play golf, to work late and to maintain a strict separation between private and professional life. Women who identify with men generally believe that companies are unlikely to select a woman for a global assignment, and that therefore their company will select them to work abroad only if they manage in exactly the same ways as the most successful men. Such women often believe that women in general differ from men, but see themselves as the exception. They see themselves as unique – as fitting men's typical pattern, not that of the majority of women (see Hampden-Turner, 1993). Similarly to many of their male colleagues, these women see the typical female pattern as incompatible with success.

The historic pattern of promoting primarily men into companies' most senior leadership positions and selecting almost exclusively men for global assignments reflects companies' overall tendency to value men and men's ways of managing above women and their ways of managing. From this perspective, women's attempts to conform to the male pattern are neither surprising nor illogical.

Denying differences

The second approach to dealing with both cultural and male/female differences is denial – choosing to assume that no salient differences exist. In this approach, rather than judging women's managerial styles to be inferior (as is done in the first approach) or superior (as is done in the third approach), both men and women simply choose to assume that there is only one way to manage. From the perspective of denying differences, talking about a man's or woman's style of managing is meaningless, as is any consideration of diversity's value to the company.

On a cultural level, denial is most similar to parochialism: 'Because I am most familiar with my own culture, I believe that it is the only culture.' Because all of us are most familiar with men's style of managing, many people simply assume, albeit implicitly, that men's approaches provide the only possible model for success. Women who deny differences generally believe that, as professionals, they are just like the men who have always led major global companies. Men who deny differences often compliment women for acting 'just like a man'. Denying differences leads to a *culture of sameness*, in how organizations treat their male and female professionals as well as in how they treat people from Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Middle East. Given the *culture of sameness*, companies attempt to foster fairness and effectiveness by treating everyone identically.

Examples of men and women denying differences are pervasive, especially in the United States. Perhaps the most visible expression of denial is Americans' use of *politically correct* speech and behaviour, in which, among other focuses, all recognition of women as women is curtailed as a hedge against potential discrimination. Complimenting a woman on her looks, for example, becomes unacceptable, in part because it explicitly violates the denial-of-difference norms by recognizing that the women is, in fact, a woman. Women who express resentment at being referred to as women managers (rather than just as managers) are exhibiting a form of denial. Similarly, women who reject being invited to women's leadership forums and other events for women managers are also exhibiting denial. They reject the idea that they differ from their male colleagues in any substantive way that would make it reasonable to hold a special event for women, or to solicit a women's point of view at a high-level meeting, or for her colleagues to recognize that 'she' is not just like all the male managers (Adler *et al.*, 2000). Showing characteristic denial, one European woman executive's response to her CEO's invitation to his company's first global women leaders' summit was: 'I am happy to attend . . . if I'm being invited because of my business acumen as one of the top 100 people in the company, [and] not simply because I am "a girl" ' (Adler *et al.*, 2001). The denial is transparent both in the woman's use of the pejorative term for an adult woman – 'a girl' – and in the opposition she creates between the category of 'executives seen to have business acumen' and 'executives seen as women'. Women's implicit, and often reality-based, fear is that being seen as a woman will diminish their perceived stature as a global manager. Similarly, male executives who question their company's plans to design unique recruitment procedures for women to fill global management positions, or to institute worldwide women's mentoring networks, or to build more flexible expatriate compensation and support packages to meet women's needs deny the possibility that male and female professionals might differ. In all cases, those who deny differences prefer that everyone be treated identically, as if no differences, in fact, existed.

Identifying with women's approaches to managing internationally

Similar to the first approach, the third approach accepts that women and men differ. However, unlike the first approach, the third approach judges women's – not men's – managerial styles to be superior, especially for the twenty-first century's more networked, less hierarchical, global organizations. Labelled as the *feminine advantage*, women's greater tendency to use more democratic, inclusive, participative, interactional and relational styles of managing are cited by many scholars as among the reasons women's approaches will bring more value than men's to modern organizations, especially global organizations (Fondas, 1997: 259, based on Chodorow, 1978; Helgesen, 1990; Lippman-Blumen, 1983; Marshall, 1984; Rosener, 1990, 1997, among others).[4] Anthropologist Fisher, for example, concludes that women have many exceptional faculties for managing internationally, including:

> a broad contextual view of any issue, a penchant for long-term planning, a gift for networking and negotiating . . . a preference for cooperating, reaching consensus, and leading via egalitarian teams . . . an ability to do and think several things simultaneously . . . emotional sensitivity . . . and a talent with words.
>
> (Fisher, 1999: xvii)

Whereas most of the qualities labelled as masculine strongly reflect American men's ways of managing, those currently being labelled as feminine reflect not only the style of many American women managers, but also those of successful men and women in most parts of the world. Based on the assumptions made in this third approach, all global managers – men and women alike – are encouraged to incorporate a more feminine approach into their style of managing.

Echoing the dynamics of the first approach, identifying with women's styles of managing can be seen as a type of reverse chauvinism, and is, in fact, a variant of traditional ethnocentrism. Similar to both the first and second approaches, managers perceive diversity – in this case, deviance from women's ways of managing – as disadvantaging the organization in its ability to complete effectively.

One of the most common work-based expressions of the *feminine advantage* is the belief that women executives understand and work better with women clients. Similarly, the assumption that women are better able to develop relationships with clients from more relationship-oriented cultures, such as Asians and Latin Americans, highlights the thinking underlying a woman-based approach. In identifying with the feminine, women are seen, and see themselves, as better than men at offering companies the styles of management they most need in a global economy.

Creating synergy: integrating and leveraging men's and women's approaches to managing worldwide

The fourth approach, similar to the first and third approaches, accepts differences; women and men are not seen as managing in identical ways. However, unlike the prior approaches, it does not judge either women's or men's styles of managing to be superior. Rather, companies value women and men and their particular styles of managing as contributing both uniquely and in synergistic combinations to the whole. Benefits come primarily from the potential for combining and leveraging men's and women's different managerial styles, not strictly from matching women with female clients and men with male clients. When adopting a synergistic approach, companies benefit not only by learning from and combining women's and men's managerial styles, but also by learning from and combining the perspectives and approaches of people from a wide range of cultures and countries.

For companies to pursue a synergistic approach successfully, they must not only include both women and men from around the world among their global managers, but they must also ensure that each maintains his or her unique perspective and voice. To the extent that one group assimilates the approach of another group, synergy becomes impossible. Only recently have we begun to see organizations that have created the conditions for synergy among women's and men's approaches. Under the leadership of former Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, for example, Norway became the first country in the world to create a gender-balanced cabinet, and thus the potential for real synergy. Currently led by CEO Andrea Jung, Avon Products has become one of the first major global companies similarly to achieve gender balance among its most senior executives and managers.

The evolution of organizational culture

Whereas companies' organizational cultures evolve over time – sometimes leading, and at other times lagging behind, more general societal trends – the evolution is not random. As highlighted in Figure 1, the most common evolution within major companies relative to including both women and women's approaches along with men and men's approaches generally begins with a homogeneous culture with all (or almost all) men in the managerial, executive and expatriate ranks. As companies begin to hire women managers, usually initially for domestic, entry-level positions, they generally expect the newcomers to fit into the existing male culture; that is, the company expects the newly

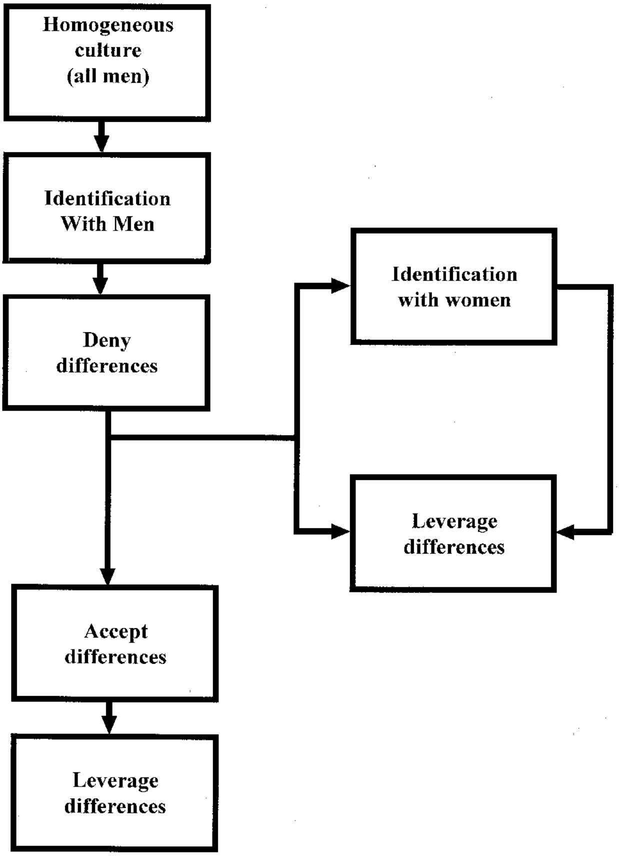
Homogeneous culture (all men)
Identification With Men
Deny differences
Identification with women
Leverage differences
Accept differences
Leverage differences

Figure 1 *Evolution of corporate culture: towards including and valuing diversity*

hired women to emulate the existing male culture. As the number of women increases and their level in the company rises, organizations frequently begin to deny differences. In the name of equality and fairness, they claim not to notice if a manager is male or female, but rather to assess only if he or she is productive. Denial gives way to acceptance as companies begin to recognize that men and women are not identical. Once such acceptance is made explicit, companies are able to begin to leverage differences and benefit from potential synergies. In some companies, most frequently woman-led entrepreneurial start-ups, women and women's approaches to managing are valued for a period of time above men and men's approaches (Adler, 1999a). Whereas the evolution in global and domestic management is similar, the inclusion of women in global management in North America has tended to lag behind their inclusion within domestic organizations. The most visible evidence of this is the larger proportion of women in domestic managerial positions (in the United States, now exceeding 40 per cent) than in global management positions (less than 10 per cent). In many other countries – Japan and Taiwan, for example – women have been included more rapidly and extensively within the global organization than in the domestic organization (Adler, 1994).

Table 3 *Women managers and the evolution of organizational culture*

Organizational culture	*Pressure for change*		*Level of pressure*	*Male/ female ratio*	*Level of women*	*Primary goal*
	External	*Internal*				
Homogeneous culture	Little or none	Little or none	None	All men	None	None
Identification with men	Legal compliance	Recruitment	Human resources	A few women	Managers	Increase number of women
Denial of differences	Legal compliance	Recruitment	Human resources	Increasing number of women	Managers	Increase number of women
Accept differences	Global competition	Retention	Competitive business strategy	Increasing number of women	Senior managers	Increase numbers & change org'l culture
Identification with women	Global competition	Retention	Competitive business strategy	Mostly women	Global managers	Change org'l culture
Leverage differences	Intense global competition	Retention	Competitive business strategy	Balanced number of women & men	Global managers	Change org'l culture

As summarized in Table 3, the external societal forces encouraging companies to favour one approach over the others, and to make the transition from one approach to the next, have varied over time, as have the strategies companies have used to respond to each successive set of external pressures. The following section describes each evolutionary stage in more detail.

Homogeneous culture

Historically, the managerial cultures of most companies initially included only men. The global analogy, of course, is the historical dominance of country and regional managing director positions by expatriates from a company's home culture: American foreign operations led by American men, German foreign operations led by German men and Chinese foreign operations led by Chinese men (see Dorfman, 1996). Such homogeneous cultures are possible only when little or no external or internal pressure exists to force them to change, as was the case until quite recently in most countries when companies felt little need to invite women into their all-male managerial cultures. In such homogeneous cultures, questions of diversity remain irrelevant.

Single-culture dominance: identifying with men

Beginning in the 1960s, most prominently in the United States, various equal employment opportunity laws began to be passed and increasingly enforced. In the United States, for example, sex discrimination in employment became illegal in the

1960s (see Fagenson and Jackson, 1994). The Equal Pay Act of 1963 required employers, for the first time, to pay women and men equally for the same work. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided federal protection for women against discrimination in hiring, job assignments, transfers, promotions and discharges as well as other employment-related decisions (Lee, 1993). Executive Order 11246, amended by Executive Orders 11357 and 12086, prohibited sex discrimination by recipients of federal contracts exceeding $10,000 and required employers to create and employ affirmative action policies (Lee, 1993). Based on the difficulty women have had in winning discrimination cases and receiving compensation, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 was passed providing women who file discrimination charges with the right to have a jury trial and to sue for expanded compensatory and punitive damages (Lee, 1993). Other countries and regions, most notably the European Union, have followed with their own sets of legal measures to encourage and enforce women's equitable treatment in the workplace.

In response to these external legal pressures, companies began recruiting women, primarily into lower-level positions and almost exclusively into domestic positions. Such compliance was reactive, not proactive – with most companies viewing such recruitment efforts as an aspect of human resource policy, not as a strategic initiative related to the success of the business. Companies simply aimed to increase the number of women sufficiently to avoid external legal sanctions; they did not seek to gain unique business advantages from the women they hired.

As selected women began to be promoted, organizations realized that these female 'outsiders' could potentially become executives, and thereby have influence over the nature of the organizational culture. In response, most companies reasserted the superiority of their historic organizational culture – that is, the ways of the dominant male leadership culture. In essence, companies invited women and into their previously all-male managerial ranks, while rejecting the notion that women could contribute anything unique that would be valuable. Similarly, from a cross-cultural perspective, companies began recruiting people from a diversity of backgrounds to join their managerial ranks, while rejecting the notion of diverse approaches to management. Whereas people from various groups may become executives, they can do so only if they replicate the approaches of the dominant group. As women begin joining companies, the companies implicitly and explicitly reassert the superiority of men's approaches to management. Companies' identification with men's ways of managing causes them to select a preponderance of men for influential positions, including expatriate postings, along with a few, select women, each of whom is valued for her adherence to men's managerial styles. To succeed in such cultures, women know that they must become 'more male than the men'. The few women selected for global management positions therefore identify more with men than women, and the organization praises them for conducting business in the style of men. The praise given to former Prime Minister Golda Meir, that she was the best man in the Israeli cabinet, echoes this dynamic.

In this period, global companies often select their first non-headquarters-culture executive or board member. To succeed, the cultural 'outsider', similarly to his female equivalent, must often adopt the thinking and behavioural patterns of the dominant culture, and is praised for having done so. American companies, for example, often chose a Canadian as their first non-US executive, someone whom they perceived to be most like them. The search is not for difference, but rather for high-potential people who excel at thinking and behaving in the ways of the historic leadership group.

Denial of differences

As the world moved out of the post-war era, globalization – and with it global competition – replaced equity legislation as the defining external dynamic. Diversity shifted from being an issue of legal compliance to one of competitive strategy. To compete in the new global economy, companies increasingly needed to attract and retain the best and brightest people, men and women. Their goal became to identify excellent performers. Company policies began to shift from recruiting women for lower-level positions, to attempting to recruit, promote and retain more women for the previously all-male domain of upper-level and global management positions. As company policies shifted, asserting that men's ways were best gave way to a denial of difference.

To comply with the law, and to appear to be fair to the newly recruited women, companies attempted to treat women in exactly the same way they treated men. To do otherwise would have rendered the company open to suspicion of prejudice and, in some countries, liable to legal sanction. From a global perspective, companies proudly announced that they would treat all employees the same worldwide. The underlying absurdity of this rigid equality is reflected in one multinational's decision to offer financial assistance to high-potential European expatriate managers for gaining a master's degree, a strategy that had worked well in recruiting top candidates in the United States. The company had failed, however, to realize that most Europeans already have access to free, or nearly free, state-supported education. It was offering to pay for education that was already free, not a particularly effective incentive. The same fallacious logic led companies to offer all employees time off for military service, but not for maternity leave. As a part of their expatriate package, companies continued to offer families memberships in elite social and athletic clubs while failing to add executive search and multi-continent commuting provisions for the increasing number of expatriates in dual-career marriages, the majority of whom were women. The pretence, but not the reality, was that there were no differences. Today, denial of differences among men and women is most evident in the United States in Americans' adherence to 'politically correct' vocabulary and behaviour that eschews recognition that a particular manager is male or female, or from a specific cultural, religious or racial group.

Although denial-of-difference strategies were well meant, a disturbing trend emerged: the best and brightest women began leaving companies in record numbers. As became apparent, treating women identically to men was not leading to optimal conditions for women or for companies, especially *vis-à-vis* global management. In response, some companies began designing systems that were more responsive to women's unique work and lifestyles.

Accepting differences

Recurring experiences with actual differences, combined with the unexpectedly high turn-over rates among women managers, led some companies, eventually, to accept that everyone is not the same and to appreciate the need to design more responsive systems. Competitive business pressures further motivated such recognition, often eclipsing both the influence of corporate diversity policies and the previous focus on recruitment and retention. Companies began asking – many for the first time – what women's and men's unique skills were, and how such skills could enhance the company's competitive positioning (Adler *et al*., 2000, 2001). Without initially accepting that differences existed, companies could not ask these questions.

Based on an appreciation of differences, companies began recognizing that managers often understand people from their own culture better than do most outsiders. Simultaneously, they recognized that an increasingly large proportion of the managers making purchasing decisions for their products and services were women (Adler *et al.*, 2000, 2001). More than one company concluded that women might therefore be best able to develop the most effective marketing strategies for the company's female clients. Companies thus began to value women for their ability to understand and work well with women clients. This was particularly striking in such countries as Saudi Arabia, where male expatriate managers had absolutely no direct access to the local women consumers or decision makers. Whether it was women designing cars for women or TV programmes for women, companies increasingly asked women to help them succeed in markets dominated by women decision makers and end users. Women managers were no longer being asked to think and act like men, but, rather, for the first time, they were being asked to think like women.

Such employee/client 'matching' parallels the approach taken by companies when implementing multi-domestic strategies – strategies that focus on the unique culture and conditions of each country individually and independently (see Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). For example, a German company using a multi-domestic strategy would expand operations into China by choosing to send a managing director who speaks Chinese to Shanghai, a Swedish company might decide to send a Swede who was born in Korea to manage its new Seoul headquarters and a Quebec-based company might choose to send a Hispanic-Canadian to serve its Latin American markets. Each company recognizes and chooses to use the innate cultural abilities of its key employees.

The advantages companies gain at this stage from accepting differences are limited to culture-matching situations: women are valued for their ability to market to women and the Chinese are valued for their ability to manage operations in China. The matching approach is a cultural-fit strategy, not a strategy that combines or leverages differences into innovative solutions to organizational problems. Using such 'fit' strategies, companies value women primarily for their ability to understand other women, not for their ability to integrate their unique perspectives with those of their male colleagues.

Leveraging differences

By the end of the twentieth century, global competition had intensified to the point where, for many companies, the opportunity cost of both discrimination and blindness had become prohibitive as had the cost of under-utilizing people by relegating them to working primarily 'with their own kind'. Companies searched for ways to increase their global competitiveness, primarily by out-learning and out-innovating their competitors. Leading companies recognized that the fundamental value of diversity, when well managed, was not gained from 'fit' strategies, but rather from the increased possibilities for diversity-based learning and innovation. Companies no longer wanted women simply to fit in, nor to work strictly with other women; rather, they needed women to strengthen the company's competitive culture by leveraging their perspective and combining it with that of men. Companies chose to include women among their global managers, not simply so they could work with women clients worldwide, but so the organization could benefit from diversity by combining women's and men's perspectives into more innovative and effective global business strategies. Whereas in the past, the women who fitted in – who thought and acted like the majority of the men – were most valued, now companies began valuing women who thought and acted like themselves. Similarly from a cross-cultural perspective, Chinese executives were no longer valued singularly for their Chinese language skills and knowledge of the Chinese culture, but rather, for their ability to bring a unique perspective to discussions concerning the company's overall business strategy and tactics. Synergy, combining unique differences into innovative approaches, is the inherent value in diversity.

No longer men alone

Over the course of a half-century, companies' approaches had shifted, albeit often implicitly, from reactive compliance (meeting legislated requirements for equality) to proactively initiated competitive strategies designed to enhance business success. The focus on women had shifted from recruiting, primarily for domestic positions, lower-level women, who were expected to fit in, to hiring, promoting and retaining, increasingly for global positions, very senior-level women, who could change the organization. Evaluation has shifted from quantitative measures – increasing the ratio of women to men to comply with external legal requirements – to qualitative measures – integrating masculine with feminine perspectives to enhance business competitiveness. Expectations have thus shifted from wanting women to 'become who they weren't' – men – to encouraging women to 'act as who they are' – women.

Is the evolution over? No. Few global companies have reached the stage at which they consistently value diversity, whether male/female or cross-cultural, and can readily leverage it to their advantage. Equally daunting, few women have, as yet, had the opportunity to use all of their strengths consistently in the service of senior-level global positions. The majority of managers, both male and female, remain constrained within managerial styles more restricting than those needed for twenty-first-century success. Evolution towards more synergistic approaches, by both companies and individuals, will be enhanced and accelerated by a more open discussion of the nature of diversity and a deeper understanding of the assumptions embedded in our organizational processes.

Notes

1 For a review of the strategic use of expatriates, see Black *et al*. (1992), Brewster (1991), Brewster and Scullion (1997) and Tung (1988), among others.

2 In addition to articles published in the special issue of *International Journal of Human Resource Management* on female expatriates, some of the more recent studies on women as expatriate managers include Caligiuri and Cascio (1998), Caligiuri *et al*. (1999), Caligiuri and Tung (1999), Chusmir and Frontczak (1990), Davidson and Punnett (1995), Elron and Kark (2000), Forster (1999), Harris (1993a, 1993b, 1995a, 1995b, 1999), Harris and Harris (1988), Hill and Tillery (1992), Izraeli *et al*. (1980), Linehan (2000, 2002), Linehan and Scullion (2002), Linehan *et al*. (2000a, 2000b), Linehan and Walsh (1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), Moran *et al*. (1998), Napier and Taylor (1995, 2002), Osland *et al*. (1998), Punnett (1997), Punnett *et al*. (1992), Stroh *et al*. (2000), Taylor and Napier (1996a, 1996b), Vance *et al*. (1999) and Westwood and Leung (1994).

3 The four approaches are based on the combined work of Milton and Janet Bennett and Maureen Murdock. The Bennetts developed a six-phase model to explain people's ability to learn about and work effectively with people from other cultures (see Bennett, M., 1993; Bennett, J., 1993, 1999). Based on the work of Joseph Campbell, Murdock (1990) developed a multi-phase model for understanding women's personal and professional development *vis-à-vis* the masculine and feminine aspects of their personality.

4 Several studies from the United States and other countries found that women prefer a more participative style than men (Bayes, 1991; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Gibson, 1995; Soutar and Savery, 1991).

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