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Career Progression of Managers: An Asia-Pacific Perspective

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Abstract
Purpose: The increase in general managerial roles held by women has failed to translate into senior management positions in many countries. The article focuses on the experiences of two groups of female and male managers in two diverse countries and how these groups of employees view career advancement and how this perspective may relate to the lack of women in senior managerial roles.

Design/methodology/approach: This study adopts deductive reasoning to understand social practice as a means by which and how senior management identities are perceived and whether these roles are attainable. A survey was administered to female and male managers in Malaysia and in Australia.

Findings: The findings indicate that women in two countries studied still have significant responsibilities for performing family duties, and bringing up children. In particular, the Malaysian respondents viewed family and personal responsibilities as their greatest impediment to attaining senior management positions. Hence, they are unable to contemplate both careers and families, a view strongly supported by the Australian women as well.

Originality: Societal expectations on women in certain cultures are still strongly entrenched because they believe that they are required to comply with the social roles by prioritising marital obligations over any desire for senior management careers.

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, there has been a growing interest in the study of women and how their careers have progressed relative to men especially in managerial roles (Davidson and Burke, 2004; Rowley and Yukongdi, 2009). Numerous journal articles and academic commentaries have reported on the varying demographic representation in the labour market distribution which has resulted in increasing roles for women in the workplace, and the implications of such changes internationally. Along with the increasing participation of women in the labour force globally, women's take-up of managerial positions has also increased. For instance, in the USA in 2010, the percentage of managerial and professional jobs held by women was 51.5 per cent (Catalyst, 2010c); in Australia, 44.6 per cent of managerial and professional roles were occupied by women in 2010 (Catalyst, 2010a); and in Canada, women held 36.8 per cent of managerial and professional speciality positions (Catalyst, 2010b). These figures are significant compared to the 1960s and 1970s where only 16 per cent of managerial positions was held by women in the USA (Powell, 1999).

There is a global trend that shows women's managerial careers are less successful than men (Adler, 1993, 1997; Anker, 1998; Antal and Izraeli, 1993; Arttachariya, 1997; Burke, 2006; Davidson and Burke, 2004). A pattern that suggests women managers face significant challenges and barriers in their middle-management careers that hinder their further progression into senior roles (Davidson and Burke, 2004; Eagly, 2007). This paper focuses on
two groups of female and male middle managers in two countries and their views on career advancement and how this may relate to the lack of women in senior managerial roles. In doing so, we discuss how managerial work has shifted from being perceived as something hard for women to attain to being perceived as something even harder to advance in if an applicant is a woman. Finally, we show how social roles and cultural expectations are maintained in some societies by highlighting challenges and obstacles faced by men and women when enacting the managerial role and aspiring for senior managerial positions, and then offer some conclusions.

**WOMEN’S CAREER PATHS—from mothers to managers**

A cluster of theories offered person-centred argument or gender-difference explanation to rationalise women's lack of success in attaining senior management roles. It is said that individual's biological sex determines experiences at early socialisation and later influences attitudes and behaviours that women and men bring to organisational roles (Fagenson, 1986; Harragan, 1977; Horner, 1972; Riger and Galligan, 1980; Schein, 1973, 1975). For instance, women would be expected to naturally exhibit nurturing, caring, kind and considerate behaviours. Through sexual division of labour in families where women become mothers, we observe how it produces gender differences in the types of roles expected of women. It also shows how men can potentially move away from the family situation to organisational life but women have to remain within the family domain because their role is linked to reproduction and in turn mothering of the next generation. According to Chodorow (1978, pp. 38-39) “women's mothering as an institutionalised feature of family life and of the sexual division of labor reproduces itself cyclically”. However, men with fewer social and family expectations can focus on developing skills required in the organisational world (Fagenson, 1990) thus become appropriate candidates for fulfilling the requirements of managerial positions. In addition, the valuation of objectivity and rationality seen in men renders women as lacking the central characteristics for senior managerial roles because organisations and people working within organisations have often been described as needing these attributes. In the public domain, and especially in organisations, the gendering of senior managerial skills have continued to give emphasis to the basic gender binary which values masculine attributes and devalue feminine attributes (Gherardi, 1994).

The popular perception that men have the key characteristics for performing senior managerial roles has become an increasingly an unsubstantiated remark. Researchers found limited gender differences in experiments conducted in field settings in relation to women's and men's capacity for undertaking senior managerial and leadership roles (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Heilman, 1983; Powell, 1988). In fact, women and men were reported to exhibit similar skills in carrying out organisational tasks. In addition, males and females were found to have the capacity to be assertive as well as sympathetic in their dealings with others (Vecchio, 2002), both of which are important characteristics for senior managerial roles. Another large meta-analysis study concluded that women were equally as capable as men in demonstrating leadership in their senior managerial roles. In particular, women were reported to exceed men in the specific aspects of a transformational leadership style (Eagly et al., 2003, p. 569) that contribute to subordinate satisfaction and extra effort at work. This body of research argues that men are much better in making important skills and attributes their own when women can equally display those characteristics in senior organisational positions.
There is also a notion termed as the organisation-centred approach arguing that women were unsuccessful in attaining senior management roles in organisations because organisational structures have created barriers to their progression (Kanter, 1977). Theorist said that structures influence the way in which a senior managerial role should be enacted. Since, elements associated with masculinity are valued over elements associated with femininity, men are placed in “advantageous” jobs that gives men advantage to access resources and authority. To advance in managerial careers, men utilised these privileges and support to get ahead because men are much better in making these attributes their own innate capabilities with power and resources in hand. This arrangement has enabled men in their advantageous roles to progress upward the corporate ladder. In contrast, women with under valued feminine skills occupy “disadvantageous” roles that provide them with little authority in decision-making or in securing resources (Fagenson, 1990). As a consequence, women held positions with limited power at their disposal within organisations that gave them fewer opportunities for developing skills required for progressing on the managerial trajectory. This organisational system allude us to the importance of access to resources and power for ones career advancement.

Another body of literature investigated whether the unequal career advancement of women was due to the attitudes of the more senior male colleagues who most frequently make key decisions in an organisation, such as recruitment, selection, strategic planning and promotion outcomes, rather than any differences in ability between male and female managers. The gender stereotype literature examines alternative explanations to account for the lack of women in senior management positions, and focuses on stereotypical views held about women and the managerial roles they occupy in the workplace (Wood, 2008).

Stereotypes arise when there is a belief that certain groups of people will possess the characteristics and behaviours expected of that group (Eagly and Carli, 2003), without a recognition of the need to judge on the basis of individual merits. In this body of work, stereotypical attitudes toward women holding managerial positions are proposed (Gregory, 1990), and the gender stereotype perspective examines the assumptions that are made about female managers, and the role such assumptions play in career progression. Schein's (1975) early work demonstrates that the position of manager was sex-typed as a male occupation. Qualities such as leadership ability, competitiveness, confidence, objectivity, aggression, ambition, forcefulness and desiring responsibility were qualities often assumed to reside in men (Schein, 1975). Replications of this earlier work found that male managers retained their stereotypical views of a successful manager 15 years later; however, female managers had begun to modify their views (Brenner et al., 1989). Furthermore, almost 20 years after the initial research, stereotypical attitudes were still found to be prevalent toward women in managerial roles in a study where both sexes reported that a successful middle-manager was likely to have the characteristics believed to be displayed by men more frequently than by women (Schein, 1994; Schein and Mueller, 1992). This shows that there are different consequences for women compared to men when enacting their sex role identities.

In the twenty-first century, gender stereotypes have continued to create barriers for women's career progression, with stereotypes about the maleness of the management role persisting (Heilman, 2001; Lyness and Heilman, 2006; Schein, 2001). Such views are based on a perception that females are more suited to a supportive, nurturing role such as motherhood, rather than the decision-making role of management. In particular, gender stereotypical thinking discriminates against women managers in senior roles (Eagly and Carli, 2003) through attitudes toward role expectations, perceptions of importance and evaluations of
capability (Yukl, 2002). To illustrate this process, Lyness and Heilman (2006) found that
gender bias against female managers in organisations has contributed to a perception of lack
of person-job-fit. This notion detrimentally affects performance evaluations which, in turn,
affect the career advancement outcomes of women managers (Lyness and Heilman, 2006).
What appears to be central and problematic is that the gendering of managerial skills are
drawn upon to make decisions on managerial advancement in organisations. With this
attitude in mind, one may then ask how far the equal opportunity in employment policies at
work means that career progression of women and men managers' is treated fairly.

SOCIETAL LANDSCAPE

Similar to how gender roles influence and moderate career advancement potential in
organisations, it is also possible that some cultural traditions and societal values related to
gender roles might moderate this relationship. A second purpose of this paper is to identify
more systematically whether variation in cultural context influences career progression and
career-related variables, and if so, how.

Traditional gender roles characterised by belief in men as breadwinners and women as
homemakers and mothers is reflected in the Malaysian culture more so than the Australian
society. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic collectivist and high power distance country compared to
Australia which is an individualistic and low power distance society (Hofstede and Hofstede,
2005). In Malaysian, organisational authority and status is often held by men rather than
women. These significant and substantial differences are most pronounced between
subordinates and superiors at work. The disparities create difficulties in communications
between people in the workplace and it is possible that such differences may be exacerbated
when the individuals are from different gender roles.

Furthermore, “strong levels of power distance are associated with high levels of male
domination in societies” (House et al., 2004, p. 559) an evidence reported by a few cross-
national studies. This is reflected in the Malaysian culture, where society inherently placed
males in positions of power and authority across the nation. This culture specific tradition is
often tolerated and seen as acceptable. It is also common in Malaysia to impose different
expectations of the role of women and men based on the higher social status ascribed to men.
In this study, we take into account this cultural variation because it provides particular
insights about social variables that influence career decisions and allow culture specific
interpretation of the data.

Australia, however, as a low power distance culture demonstrates different societal
foundations to Malaysia. The early colonisation history in Australia had a strong impact on
the formation of the Australian societal culture. It has influenced the values, beliefs and
attitudes of modern day Australians with an obvious behaviour of disliking dependence and
authority. In contemporary terms, such values and attitudes may impact on the behaviours of
women and men, particularly, where roles of authority and power are evident. In the event
that bureaucracy and power do exist, it is usually perceived to be for the convenience of
administrative processes and often treated with derision by employees. There is also less
adherence to traditional gender role beliefs because women are more likely to hold critical
roles and may be in positions where they can promote societal recognition for undertaking
such responsibilities.
In a nutshell, in this paper we illustrate how women and men's individualism and collectivism orientation and acceptance of patriarchal values influence how they define career progression to senior managerial roles and whether they elicit any social support for undertaking their organisational roles.

**METHODOLOGY**

In this paper, we focus on understanding challenges faced by managers when they have a desire to attain senior managerial position. The research questions and design was based on theories and methods adopted by other studies in the careers literature (Adler and Izraeli, 1994; Arttachariya, 1997; Marshall, 1995; Ng and Chee, 1999; Powell, 1993; Schein, 1996). The gendering of managerial skills especially how senior managerial roles are stereotypically perceived as a male domain despite evidence that suggests aspirations of female and male middle managers to attain them in organisations differed very little (Hede and Ralston, 1993; Powell and Butterfield, 2003; Wood and Jogulu, 2006; Wood and Lindorff, 2001) is examined. In this paper, we also illustrate how people view their current career trajectory to senior management and how they make sense of the changing nature of the senior managerial work and whether these roles are still gendered. In order to do this systematically we propose the following research questions:

**RQ1.** Do women aspire to attain senior managerial leadership roles in organisations?

**RQ2.** Do men and women differ in their views regarding attaining senior managerial leadership roles in organisations in Malaysia and in Australia?

**RQ3.** What are the perceived barriers that women and men face in attaining senior managerial leadership roles in organisations?

**Study Sample**

We invited female and male respondents from two diverse cultures to participate in a study to measure the similarities and differences in senior managerial aspirations and perceived barriers when attaining senior decision making responsibilities. The sample was drawn from middle managers in Malaysia and in Australia. Middle-managers were invited to participate because they are individuals for whom the desire to achieve senior management is most salient.

Drawing on the literature that argues women's lack of progression is due to certain culture specific constrains that impose strong social roles for women provided impetus for selecting two samples from differing cultural foundations. Furthermore, previous studies have also suggested that women's under-utilisation and under-representation in senior decision making positions has been driven by cultures that distinguish roles of significant importance to men more so than women (Omar and Davidson, 2001; Yukongdi and Benson, 2005).

Three private organisations in Malaysia and four private organisations in Australia were invited to participate in the research. These organisations were from manufacturing and financial services industries. The sampling was restricted to only two industry types to control for organisational variables. It is also important to keep the focus narrow when sampling so that the findings are generalisable to these specific workplaces.
**Measurement Instrument**

Through the administration of a survey, this study will be theory-driven in nature to understand social practice as a means by which and how senior management identities are perceived and lived. Theories are often, though not always, used during quantitative research such as this study to generate research questions to be tested using statistical analysis. Deductive reasoning that involves arguing from the broad theoretical perspectives presented in literature review is used to explain career aspirations of middle level managers and to make sense of the attainability of senior managerial roles.

Respondents received a covering letter, a survey form and confidentiality statement that protected individual responses. Survey questions were divided into three parts which included views on how they were experiencing their middle management role and career aspirations for future, what they wanted to do next, their role models and attitudes to senior managerial positions, barriers they perceive may hinder their desire for senior decision making roles and a brief section on demographic details. Respondents for this study were obtained through an initial contact with the human resource departments in organisations in Australia and in Malaysia. In total, 139 middle-managers participated in the study; 82 of whom were Malaysians and 57 were Australians. The sampling technique using human resource departments in organisations to distribute the survey may have created a potential bias because the researcher was not in a position to make sure all middle-managers in the organisation were invited to participate in the project.

**Demographic Characteristics**

Table I outlines the demographic characteristics of the sample. The majority of the respondents in both countries have a tertiary education. More of the Australian female respondents had postgraduate qualifications compared to their counterparts in Malaysia. Most of the Australian managers were either married or in a partnership; significant numbers had dependent children. Almost half of the Malaysian respondents were single and 60 per cent of this sample did not have any children. One possible explanation for the higher proportion of single women in the Malaysian sample is because the sample is drawn from organisations in the private sector where women in managerial roles are likely to prioritise their careers and delay social commitment of becoming wives and mothers.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the past, research has reported that the managerial aspirations of female and male managers differed very little (Hede and Ralston, 1993; Wood and Jogulu, 2006; Wood and Lindorff, 2001) although women's career progression is slow compared to men's. In Hede and Ralston's (1993) study, female and male middle-managers equally expected to attain executive promotion before retirement. Similarly, Wood and Lindorff (2001) also found no significant gender differences in the aspirations of female and male managers in the workplace. RQ1 and RQ2 posed questions on women's aspirations and whether women and men have differing aspirations. To answer these questions, the managerial aspirations were measured by single items. Variables of age, educational attainment, living arrangements, number of children and organisational tenure were cross-tabulated with the perceived career aspirations of middle-managers. In the Malaysian data a significant difference ($\chi^2=16.640$, df=3, $p<0.01$) was found, indicating that there is a strong relationship between managerial
career aspirations and age. The majority of the respondents (73 per cent) who aspired to senior management positions were below the age of 39 years. Only 27 per cent of females who wished for a senior managerial promotion were between 40 and 59 years. The Australian sample also reported a significant difference ($\chi^2=14.616$, df=3, $p<0.01$) in that 41 per cent of female managers in Australia who aspired to reach senior management were between the ages of 31 and 39 years.

We then measured the influence of respondents' age on their managerial aspirations. The literature encapsulates the view that high educational attainment correlates positively to managerial career aspirations (Sorensen, 1977; Tharenou, 1996). According to Tharenou (1996), women with higher educational qualifications are likely to have higher managerial career aspirations because women are usually discriminated against for promotion based on a lack of qualifications and pipeline experience compared to men. Education is seen as an appropriate enabler for achieving a promotion. The $\chi^2$ analysis appears to show no statistical significance on this variable, contrary to the literature which proposes that a female's managerial career aspirations are positively related to educational attainment.

Furthermore, a plethora of studies argue that women's careers are more likely to experience disruption, with relationships outside the job creating barriers such as child bearing, child rearing and family responsibilities. This is because women are still predominantly responsible for raising children and attending to household chores, factors which have limited their capacity to plan their managerial careers (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Gallos, 1989). Some researchers also argue that women managers are choosing to be single and childless in order to progress in their managerial careers (Omar and Davidson, 2001; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1993; Wood, 2006; Wood and Newton, 2006). Our data in this regard showed no statistical significance in respondents' aspirations and their marital status. That is, whether the managers were in a relationship or single had no influence on the degree of their aspirations although, in terms of the number of children our participants had in both countries, there was a significant difference ($\chi^2=6.06$, df=2, $p<0.05$).

The final variable that was examined in relation to answering RQ1 and RQ2 is whether organisational tenure influences aspirations for attaining senior managerial roles. Studies reveal that organisational tenure and managerial career aspirations are negatively correlated (Singer, 1991; Tharenou, 1996) because aspirations may diminish with increasing tenure (Kanter, 1977; Tharenou, 1996). For example, Singer (1991) reported that leadership aspirations of managers declined after two years of working. A significant difference was found in the length of tenure and the managerial career aspirations of managers in the Malaysian sample. The middle-managers who aspire to senior management roles worked in their current organisation for an average of five years and ten months. In contrast, those who did not aspire to senior management positions worked much longer, an average of ten years and three months ($t=-3.23$, $p>0.05$). The Australian data, however, show no significant difference ($t=-1.51$, $p>0.1$). The respondents who aspire to senior management roles had worked in the organisation for an average of four years and eight months, compared to those who do not desire senior managerial positions who had worked for an average of six years and seven months. The results for the Australian sample were contrary to the literature.

In RQ3, respondents were asked to rank the barriers they believed were hindering their career progression. Participants were provided with five top barriers reported in a study by Catalyst, a leading non-profit membership organisations in the USA that work towards expanding opportunities for women and business. Table II presents the answer to question 3. In
particular, female respondents in both countries believed that commitment to family or personal responsibilities were the major barriers for women's career advancement. In fact, almost half of the Australian females (46 per cent) and 35 per cent of the Malaysian females expressed this view.

The differences and, in fact, the similarities highlighted in Table II are of interest. The high proportion of Australian female managers who stated that commitment to family and personal responsibilities created barriers to their advancement suggests the reality for women in Australia. It is the vast majority of women who take on the responsibility of children, family and/or elder care. Hence, their career paths will most probably be truncated at some time during their working lives which will create an impediment for promotion opportunities. At the very least, part-time or casual work may be an unwanted but necessary reality. What is also of interest is the lower proportion of Malaysian women who have responded to this question. If almost half of the Australian female respondents considered this to be their reality, it is surprising that at least this proportion, or higher, have not made a similar response in the Malaysian sample. In a country where both the explicit and implicit view and belief of women's primary role in the family is seen as the norm, only just over a third of the respondents indicated commitment to family as an impediment to their career advancement. This response is surprising as one would expect the majority of women in Malaysia to be likely to perceive this as the major barrier for career progression. However, an explanation for this view would be the domestic help women receive in collectivist cultures. In collectivist countries such as Malaysia, extended family support and nannies are available which may well assist women to achieve a balance between workplace and family lives.

The responses to open-ended questions in the survey further indicate that most of the Australian respondents believe it is inevitable to have career breaks either have a family or to raise a family. In reference to their own personal experience, their responses suggest that women have compromised or will compromise their careers to accommodate relationships outside the workplace at some stage in their careers. One respondent wrote:

[…] women are totally disadvantaged because of family and personal responsibilities. It is almost a given that if the couple is working, it is the woman's career that would be impacted by childcare.

Respondents in both countries implied that the majority of women are responsible for family duties and were aware of how it would impact negatively on their career path and progression. One respondent said: “progression means more time for career and travelling which is difficult”. Pervasive societal expectations appear to restrict women and constrain their choices by dictating the appropriateness of women's and men's roles at societal level. Our participants felt that there were limited options for women to ignore the social responsibilities that are expected of them, reflecting on a feeling of discomfort when they do not fulfil the gender roles that are ascribed to them. One open-ended answer by a Malaysian woman illustrates this clearly:

[…] hiring maids and external family support is not everything because of the guilt for not being at home and spending time with kids and husband. It makes me feel that I have failed in my duty as a wife and mother.
The respondents in both countries appear to consider that gender role stereotyping imposed a clear division of labour between the roles of women and men in their society. The data suggest that women take time out to have children, men do not take time out; it is the women who have to deal with responsibilities related to children. There was an assumption that females would fulfil the social and family responsibilities because women were more suited to such roles. There was an overwhelming response from women in both samples that maternal instinct and innate nurturing ability would mean that women are able to perform the social responsibilities and childcare needs better than males, hence, the primary caring role should rest with them.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The present research found similarities in the aspirations of female middle-managers in two diverse cultures and in the perceptions of barriers they face in advancing their careers to senior managerial ranks. The cross-cultural literature has broadly encapsulated the view that different cultures foster the manifestation of different values, attitudes and behaviours in people that influences on individual career development (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005; House et al., 2004). However, women in both cultures we studied noted that the primary responsibility for family duties, bringing up children or undertaking social responsibilities at home have been hindering their senior managerial aspirations. Furthermore, according to Gallos (1989), women's careers are more likely to have disruptions and breakdowns, with relationships outside the job creating a barrier for women's career planning and career advancement. Gallos (1989) further emphasised that women face fundamentally different experiences, options and priorities in their social roles as well as organisational roles compared to men, due to societal expectations, family constraints, marital status, motherhood and career demands. Such a combination of factors has traditionally been seen as disadvantaging women in attaining senior management promotion (Gallos, 1989), and these factors still appear to be a significant hindrance to women's careers today.

It can be argued that, in Malaysia, domestic assistance and childcare can be outsourced through full-time nannies and maids, therefore, realistically that should assist career-oriented women to fully commit to their jobs. However, the Malaysian respondents viewed family and personal responsibilities as their greatest impediment to achieving senior management positions. This, essentially, reinforces the deeply entrenched views that it would be too difficult for Malaysian women to contemplate both careers and families, despite domestic helpers, because the expectations of their traditional role take precedence over their careers and the expectations are endorsed by Malaysian society. The Malaysian female respondents appear to believe it is too high a price to pay and they are not prepared to go down that path. It can also be inferred that such strongly entrenched sex role expectations would constrain women's progression in management roles because women feel they must comply with societal expectations.

Despite the contribution made by the study, several limitations are acknowledged. This study examined individual aspirations for a senior management role and perceived barriers that may slow down career progression plans. In particular, middle-managers' aspirations for future senior managerial roles were investigated, and what they believed to be a hindrance to promotion-seeking behaviour. However, we did not measure or present any actual promotion data in this study, which is acknowledged as a potential limitation.
Furthermore, culture is a very complex and complicated area of research due to its density and the intricate layers representing societal, organisational and individual levels (House et al., 2004). Numerous studies have highlighted and acknowledged the difficulties and challenges when undertaking cross-cultural research (Sekaran, 1983), in particular, in relation to problems with developing methodological design for cross-cultural comparisons (Roberts, 1970; Roberts and Snow, 1973; Sekaran, 1983). We recognise this complexity and in this study we have inferred, rather than measured, the effect of gender and culture on aspirations for attaining senior management roles and responsibilities. This necessitated an assumption that culture-specific values could be inferred from the behaviours and perceptions of people.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study reflects some current realities of life for female middle managers in two countries studied. We found evidence that perceptions for attaining senior management and barriers for the advancement process differed amongst male and female respondents. There is evidence that these perceptions were closely linked to social roles of women as mothers and wives and have created impediments for their career advancement prospects. In general, that perceptions and experiences of the female middle managers were less positive than their male counterparts. These perceptions have implications for practice because organisations must directly find ways to leverage the talents women are yet to bring to their managerial roles. One way of being responsive is organisations can strive to create a climate to support women and all individuals by integrating work-life balance policies and by providing employees with opportunities to voice their needs and to make specific recommendations. Specific and actionable feedback by organisations for example in forms of providing family friendly policies and on site child care assistance for women and other employees will go a long way in helping organisations retain and leverage the talents of women.

Furthermore, organisational leaders and senior managers have the ability to positively influence career advancement of middle managers and help maintain high levels of organisational experience by building positive relationships with middle managers, and improving their perceptions of senior management. Commitment from top management will also create perceptions of fairness in employees and have meaningful impact for job satisfaction. What we need in many organisations today is structural change to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of current policies and practices to show that workplaces are committed to support and facilitate advancement and development of women and all employees. By elevating barriers faced by certain group of employees, organisations can began to shift their culture so that career barriers that may impede progression of middle managers are recognised and addressed.
### Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Malaysia (%) (n = 82)</th>
<th>Australia (%) (n = 57)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Educational qualifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Malaysia (%)</th>
<th>Australia (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 12 and high school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE or college/diploma</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate degree</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others, e.g. ACCA, CIMA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
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**Marital status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Malaysia (%)</th>
<th>Australia (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single (including divorced, widowed)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married or partnership</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Malaysia Male (%)</th>
<th>Malaysia Female (%)</th>
<th>Australia Male (%)</th>
<th>Australia Female (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to family or personal responsibilities</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes and preconceptions of women’s roles and abilities</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of significant general management/line experience</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of mentoring</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note: Significant at: *p < 0.01*
References


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