GLOBAL CAREERS FOR WOMEN MANAGERS: IS THE GLASS BORDER THICKENING?

by

Professor Leonie V. Still
Professorial Fellow
University of Western Australia

and

Professor Catherine R. Smith
Foundation Professor of Business
University of Newcastle, Central Coast Campus
Australia

Contact details:
e-mail: crsmith@mail.newcastle.edu.au
Tel: 061 243 484156
Fax: 061243 484101

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INTRODUCTION[1]

A recent study into the personal, organisational and cultural barriers to global careers for women in the Australian private sector confirmed the existence of a 'glass border' (Mandelker, 1994) - an invisible, but impenetrable, border inhibiting Australian women's career progress on the international scene (Smith & Still, 1996, 1997). Despite comparable experience and better qualifications than their male counterparts, women constituted only 6.4 per cent of Australian private sector overseas appointments, which compared poorly with their current representation of 21.7 per cent in Australian management (Hede & O'Brien, 1996). Replicating women's experience of the 'glass ceiling' in the national context (Vilkinas, 1991; Still, 1994, 1997), the major barriers faced by aspiring women expatriates appeared to be grounded in organisational and cultural factors prevalent within companies, rather than deficiencies in women's qualifications and experience (Smith & Still, 1996).

The 1995 Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills (commonly known as the Karpin Committee after the name of its chairperson), cited globalisation as the most significant environmental trend affecting Australian business, and argued that Australian companies needed to develop more effective organisational structures and leadership skills. The manager of the future, according to the Karpin Report, would need international management experience, language capabilities, cross cultural management skills and an understanding of the social, economic and political relationships abroad (Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, 1995).

Partly as a result of this report, and other research findings, expatriate programs and their place and importance in the internationalisation of management have seen a renewed interest. Most recent research has an international context (Forster, 1998 forthcoming; Harris, 1996). With the exception of research conducted for the Karpin Committee (Boston Consulting Group, 1995) and the work of Stone (1985, 1986,1991a, 1991b) and Fish and Wood (1994, 1996, 1997), there has been little Australian research on the subject. Even more significantly, the research has not generally raised the gender issue. Researchers have been more interested in understanding and exploring the expatriation and repatriation process in a dynamic and competitive global environment, even though for over a decade Adler (1984, 1993a, 1993b) and Adler and Izraeli (1988, 1994) have questioned the absence of women managers in expatriate positions in the international arena.

It is only recently that Australian companies have been explored in depth through interviews and surveys (Fish & Wood, 1996, 1997) focusing on their processes and practices in expatriation, probably because of the growing importance of Asia as a trading region and its close proximity to our shores. What has not been explored to date are the reasons Australian companies are not providing increasing opportunities for women managers to participate in global careers. Even though equal opportunity has been a factor in Australian business for twenty years, the low numbers of Australian women working abroad suggests that it has not been a consideration in

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international appointments. Is the absence of women due to unsuitable candidates? Or is it a response to a multiplicity of complex factors which are not yet understood?

This paper reports the findings of an interviewing program of 17 major Australian companies which endeavoured to 'go behind' the stated positions of organisations, to determine what reasons or barriers were preventing women from being appointed to overseas assignments. The work was considered important given the findings of the Karpin Committee (1995) that managers of the 21st Century would need international experience if they are to remain competitive. As women managers still face considerable barriers domestically in reaching senior management (Still, 1993; 1997), are they also to be excluded from gaining international experience when this is probably the most important competency for a future career? The research was thus interested in two main issues: why women were not being appointed to expatriate positions, and whether this practice of non-appointment would seriously undermine the attempts of women managers to reach senior management in the future.

Background to the Study

An investigation was conducted in two phases during 1996-97 to determine whether or not Australian managerial women faced a 'glass border' in being appointed to international assignments.

The first phase comprised a survey of the Human Resource Managers of the Top 1000 Australian companies by employee size to assess the numbers of women currently being appointed to international posts and the processes involved in their selection, management development and expatriation. A total of 247 organisations responded to the questionnaire, with 16 per cent [n=40] having only male expatriates, and 9 per cent [n=21] having both male and female expatriates. The remainder [n=186] did not make international appointments. The results of the survey have already been reported in several publications (Smith & Still, 1996; 1997) and are not the subject of this paper.

The second phase of the study consisted of an interviewing program of those organisations who expressed an interest in participating further in the research. A total of 17 companies or 28 per cent of those who employed expatriates in the original survey was interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, the sites of the Head Offices of the organisations, where the interviewees were based. The companies employed a total of 313 expatriates, of whom women represented approximately 6 per cent [n=19] - a figure slightly lower than in the overall survey. The greatest number of women expatriates employed by any one organisation was four, with two other organisations employing three women each. The remainder were primarily represented by one-woman appointments. Eight organisations, or 47 per cent, had either never employed women expatriates or had no currently-employed women expatriates. They were included in the interviews because they provided a slightly different cohort of experiences and opinions to those currently employing women expatriates, and some of these were at the time contemplating making expatriate appointments in the relatively near future.

The interviews covered aspects reported by the companies in the questionnaire responses (such as location of expatriates), and explored in depth selection processes, management of the

expatriate process, costs of sustaining an expatriate program, emerging trends and issues significant to expatriate employment as a result of increasing globalisation, problems encountered in the employment of expatriates, and the management and results of the repatriation process. The interviews were conducted with the relevant management personnel responsible for expatriate programs in each organisation and lasted approximately two hours in duration.

This paper reports the results of the interviewing program to present an in-depth company perspective of the opportunities and experiences for women managers participating in the global career marketplace.

RESULTS

Selection Process

Despite the fact that many of the 17 companies were multi-nationals, and the majority competed in the global marketplace, the selection of expatriates varied widely between organisations. Some companies still used the ad hoc method of allowing employees to nominate themselves for overseas appointments; others had a more systematic career management process that rotated 'high flyers' through predetermined locations and assignments, including overseas appointments. Although a number of companies had nominated seemingly sophisticated selection processes in their responses to the questionnaire, the most prevalent form of selection, evaluation and appointment was ad hoc recommendations by line managers (including the Chief Executive Officer), or specialist personnel. This confirms other research in this area (Stone, 1991; Harris, 1995). However, whether identification of potential candidates was through formal appraisal or ad hoc recommendations by line managers, women were usually not considered for several reasons: the lack of 'sufficiently senior' women managers in the organisation (despite the fact that most women sent abroad were professionals or functional specialists), enduring stereotypes about their professional competency, personal commitments and cultural stereotypes.

Table 1 lists the various competencies which the companies nominated and ranked in the questionnaire as being 'very important to extremely important' when considering employees for international appointments.

Table 1
Competencies for International Appointments

Willingness to relocate	93%
Communication skills	84%
Willingness of spouse to relocate	82%
Functional/technical skills	81%
The ability to cope with greater responsibility	81%
Emotional maturity	79%
Organisational skills	75%
Cultural sensitivity	72%
Family circumstances	68%
Management experience	61%
Networking ability	47%
Language skills	9%

Interestingly, language skills were not highly regarded among the management competencies required by the companies, despite the importance accorded to them in Australia by the Karpin Report (Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, 1995). However, language skills did seem to be much more relevant in the appointment of women expatriates. The interviews revealed that companies who had recently appointed women for overseas assignments had chosen women who were either originally nationals of the assigned country (for instance, born in China but lived abroad either in Australia or another country) or who spoke the language (for example, Japanese).

This language facility was considered important to enable the woman to be 'credible' and to be able to operate professionally with little induction or cultural training. Language facility was not considered important for most male candidates, as the companies reported that the appointee would be 'backed up' by local expertise, or the business language was English which negated the necessity for language facility. While the different language criteria for males and females may appear to be discriminatory on the part of the companies, the 'difference' actually made it easier for the woman to operate in the foreign context as she already had an appreciation and understanding of the relevant cultural nuances which so often undermined the success of an overseas appointment. For example, she was able to appreciate any gendered nuances in advance which might be critical to her effective functioning as an overseas representative.

Most companies denied that there was any gender bias in appointments or selection. Typical comments explaining the company perspective were as follows:

The difference in numbers between the number of male expatriates (6) compared to the number of women expatriates (4) is purely coincidental because it's voluntary. We open it up to whoever feels so inclined and if we have more than one applicant we base it on a selection process and the best person gets the role...

Probably the best thing I can say is that there are no sex barriers at all. Even with short trips it is a matter of meshing a person with the role.

We've got a policy and there is a high level of equal opportunity here, so we wouldn't ask anything different of our male and female expatriates. One of our HR managers looks after that area to ensure there is no discrimination and she looks at all the selection criteria across the board for the company... They would be treated equitably and there should be no change in role either whether they are male or female.

I ...believe that people should be appointed not for their gender, just for their ability. I don't believe that in institutional banking that I have seen any appointments on the basis of the fact that they are male or female.

The companies generally expressed the view that their selection processes were 'merit' based, although few realised that this notion could be gender biased. For instance, two companies used 'targeted selection' or the old-fashioned 'tapping on the shoulder' of 'proven people'. Others reasoned that men were chosen because they 'were known', while still others rationalised that women were in more junior roles in the organisation and therefore not suitable for appointment. Some held the view that women refused overseas appointments because of childbearing and dual career issues (although the numbers of women who had actually done this was difficult to determine), while another reported anecdotally that women were turning down opportunities. Most of these views were expressed by companies with a traditional conservative outlook on employee relations. But perhaps the main, and often unstated, reason for the non-selection of women was that many of the companies had operations in Muslim-oriented countries such as the Middle East, with their cultural and religious implications for the employment of women. Women expatriates were considered to be 'unsuitable' for employment in such 'sensitive' environments. A number of companies explained some of the many and varied issues involved:

Most of our women candidates would come from the junior professional group. Unfortunately, in Indonesia for example, they won't allow junior professionals into their country when there are suitable junior professionals already there...The difficult countries are those generally operating Muslim-type religions...

There are countries around the world that would perhaps be inappropriate because of the role women are seen to play and their social standing in society. In the United States I think that you could equally have a male or female in the role. Agree with that with New Zealand. We already have a woman in China and I imagine Singapore would be pretty much the same. Italy I would question a little. I'm not sure about Malaysia and Indonesia...

Some countries, such as Uzbekistan, are inappropriate for women. Although Uzbekistan was part of the USSR and women traditionally did all the jobs that men did, there is now a strong backlash against anything that smacks of Russia and that includes the role of women. Women are now expected to be in the home rather than the workplace...Anyway the working environment and living conditions in Uzbekistan are very basic, and might not be very attractive for some women - and some men...

Some countries like Chile have a macho attitude towards women and would not welcome women as expats...Also some Muslim countries where women play a more traditional role than in Australia...

Countries with Muslim influence (for example, Indonesia) or macho culture (for example, Chile). You're up against the national culture...

The nature of the work often precludes women. A number of our jobs are in Asia and the Middle East. The Middle East is very sensitive. It would be difficult for women to sell gasoline to a Sheik. Pakistan brings out other issues such as marriage status. We've had a couple of situations where we have said that if you are in a defacto relationship you either get married, go single, or don't go because you won't get into the country otherwise...

Many of these views explain some of the barriers facing women in the selection process, a factor already noted in other research (Adler, 1987; Harris, 1993). However, the accuracy of these perceptions has been challenged by Adler (1987), Stone (1991) and Westwood and Leung (1994), who argue that expatriate women or women with potential for expatriation are more likely to suffer discrimination by Western expatriate men, or men in their own countries, rather than from men in the overseas host country. Other research has shown that because there are so few women appointees to international assignments, women may be automatically assumed to be exceptionally able, with high visibility and memorability, and therefore accorded special treatment in business dealings (Adler, 1987; Napier & Taylor, 1995). One woman expatriate interviewed during the interviewing program found this to be so. Nevertheless, despite the potential validity of this argument, contrary perceptions exist in Australian companies, adding to the complex nature of the barriers and circumstances surrounding the appointment of women managers as expatriates.

The type of skills required by the companies, and the conditions under which the expatriate has to work, also preclude many women from being considered for appointment. For instance, overseas jobs often require engineering skills and there just aren't enough women engineers available for consideration. Similarly, many of the companies were either building plants or had operations in remote rural areas in the overseas host country where living conditions are, at best, primitive or considerably below that normally associated with Western-style countries. Some companies are even adopting a 'fly-in, fly-out' policy for their male expatriates in these appointments - that is, the families are left in Australia, and the man is flown out for several weeks and then brought home again for a week before returning. This policy, already in vogue in the more remote outback areas of Western Australia (such as Kununurra, Karratha and Kalgoorlie), is being adopted because of cost considerations, cultural problems, and general adaptability issues relating to the expatriate and his family. However, not all companies are deterred by such considerations in relation to female appointments. Although one company does not presently employ women expatriates, it explained its approach if it were to do so:

We're an open book: we prefer women truck drivers, as they take more care of the trucks. Men want to be graders or excavators, which are higher status, but we find women, despite being quite assertive or strong-minded, are content to stay with the trucks. In fact, we don't know how we can get them interested in doing other work...[we would not provide cultural adaptation] if they pass muster here, they'll be OK overseas. Remoteness of the location isn't

likely to be a problem, as women in Australia are already working in very remote locations, for example, one in the Northern Territory, a 1500km flight from the nearest town.

This last comment also raises another relevant point. Many positions available for women overseas are not at the managerial level. Instead, they are either at an operative or a basic office-skill level. Those that are at a higher level are primarily professional positions where the woman can operate alone because of her professional expertise, e.g. law. In only one instance amongst the 17 companies was a woman in a responsible managerial position. The company had appointed a Chinese national to Beijing to set up 'the China office'. While she was currently working on her own, it was envisaged that she would eventually have up to three employees. She was essentially a 'Country manager', a position normally occupied by males. The woman was chosen because of her nationality and her language facility.

Because of costs, a factor explored more fully in a later section, a number of companies were dispensing with their career-development expatriate programs and were beginning to employ either Australian expatriates already overseas (usually working for another company) or Asian-born nationals who were either Australian citizens, had attended school or university in Australia or who were trained in other Western countries such as the United States. The candidate's language facility was an advantage in these new-style appointments, as well as the ready-made cultural understanding which meant that companies did not have to provide cultural and language training. A number of women were being appointed through this change in employment policy, usually Asian-born nationals after an international 'search'.

However, while still only in the formative stages, this change has two interesting implications: a 'just-in-time' international workforce is appearing (similar to the just-in-time workforce currently being introduced into the financial sector in Australia [Still, 1997]), while Australian-born women managers or non-managers will now compete with overseas-born nationals for expatriate positions. These developments could narrow even further the opportunities for Australian women managers to be selected for overseas assignments.

Overall, the interviews with the companies revealed a number of implications of the selection processes for women:

• women who possessed specialised or high-level skills and expertise (such as linguistic, professional, technical) were best positioned to take advantage of the current trend towards internationalisation of organisations.

• as with women who aspire to senior management and executive positions in Australia, women who are interested in undertaking expatriate assignments face problems such as lack of visibility in organisations (not being 'known'), access to networks, and self-promotion in an environment which targets potential candidates as 'high flyers' who should be groomed by the company.

• in those organisations where expatriate postings are predominantly offered to people with particular technical skills (for example, engineers who manage an operation), broader patterns of labour market gender segregation in Australia dramatically reduces the pool of women who could be considered.

• perceptions about the problematic culture-gender matrix in some overseas countries, and their implications for the selection of women, mean that expatriate women have not made the same inroads in Asia (a growth area for Australian investments) as they have in English-speaking countries. Where women have been appointed, they have usually been Asian-born nationals, not Australian-born nationals.

• few companies had placed women who were married or had family commitments [most females appointed overseas were single]. Those companies which had posted a woman who was either married or in a defacto relationship were sensitive to the difficulties faced by dual-career families but considered this to be the couple's problem. In only a few instances were attempts made to find a company solution, e.g. finding a position for the partner.

Management of the Expatriate Process

The companies all had some form of internal infrastructure to handle expatriation and repatriation. Depending on the extent of overseas operations, the Australian-based infrastructure varied from a single person responsible for the function to a sizeable office operation. For those companies with multinational global operations, the office also handled 'inpatriates' [those being assigned to Australia] as well as expatriates. Most companies volunteered that administration of expatriates was time-consuming, especially if there were 'problem' appointments. However, they also found the effort involved in looking after the expatriates to be rewarding, and made particular efforts to keep in touch with them. Communication strategies varied from regular monthly visits home of appointees to attend management meetings, to the provision of Reuter News Services, e-mail linkages and company bulletins, newsletters and publicity material. Information relating to developments in Australia and personal interests such as football scores, the weather and results of elections was also transmitted to expatriate staff by some companies.

Most organisations also invested time in preparing the expatriate and his/her family for the appointment. The preparation usually involved a pre-assignment visit to ensure that the appointee and family members were comfortable with the country and the assignment. As previous research has shown, the ability of the family to relocate successfully is the primary determinant of the success of failure of an overseas posting (Antal & Izraeli, 1993; Davidson & Punnett, 1995). While there were no apparent variations in the preparation given to either male or female appointments, some differences did emerge. The following case reveals how the lack of appropriate company policy can lead to 'problems' with appointments:

We have had some difficulties with a female appointment to [the States]. It had to do with setting up her unit. Her expenses were a lot higher than the usual - not in total, but in comparison. She was also more demanding in terms of what she wanted. For instance, when she was setting up house her homewares were all designer items like Calvin Klein. Normally when we set up the house with crockery, furniture and things you wouldn't expect the figure to come out at $US20,000 like hers did. This was not for furniture, it was for utilities. She was not expected to do entertaining. The trouble was that she had a choice of buying what she wanted and we had not set a budget. The $US20,000 utilities now belong to the company. Her project has gone really well and she can expect to be rewarded when she gets back.

Normally, the process of expatriation and repatriation is covered by appropriate policies and it is only in exceptional circumstance that such a case would arise. However, the example illustrates that company policies have to be capable of handling a myriad of possibilities if they are to be effective.

Problems Encountered with the Expatriate Process

As mentioned above family issues tend to determine whether an international posting is successful. For the companies in this survey, problems mainly centered around male expatriates and their families because of the few women appointees. However, several companies were able to detail some of the issues concerning female appointees. For instance:

It is important to mesh a person with the role. We have a woman we sent to [Europe] for six months...It has been very expensive to send her there as she, against my express wishes, has had her furniture shipped over there because she rented an unfurnished apartment... Her expectations were, 'if you want me to go..., great, I take the boyfriend, we've been living together...' ..[W]e pay for everything, she wanted to even have her office chair shipped over and then I found out he ... would actually be working while he was over there. So managing expatriates can be very tricky. You have to be very aware of managing appropriate treatment for people as against what their expectations might be...

We've got a couple of highly regarded females in the country at the moment from offshore, one is married with two kiddies and the other one married while she was here, her defacto came with her. They've both been quite fortunate in that we were able to offer employment to their spouses. The childcare needs of the married are different to the [usual]...if the male's the expatriate and his spouse comes and we have an instance where we found work for her...we've found preschool for them from 7 in the morning to 6-7 at night. But childcare for school-aged children when both people are working - who looks after them pre-school and after school? That has been an issue and the company was not able to assist at that time [she hired a nanny at her own expense]. That was our first instance with a situation like that. [There were] no precedents ...

I guess the one that comes to mind was the lady that went to [The States]. Her husband gave up a good practice here..., at the Bar. [He] did all the right things, a 'new age ' man. Said, "well, it's good for your career and [that's] what we will do", [and] I guess got into [The States] in the middle of winter, had great difficulty getting into any Colleges, when he found out what was available the cost was astronomical. We came to the party and footed the bill for $10,000... But he went with the best of intentions and I guess you don't know what the circumstances are. You say, "I'll be all right, I can look after myself, I'll go jogging or whatever in the daytime while you are at work"..... The other example was a[n Asian] lady who came out here, she was ...married to a [man who] couldn't get a job, don't think he tried too hard, ended up in divorce...

The woman who recently went to [Asia] took her husband. I'm not sure actually what he does. And that's a big problem...especially if they both had a role here; to go away with her for two years and not know what he is going to get over there. We do support the spouse in some areas if we can with work and our networking through HR in different countries to see if there is

work somebody can maybe contract with the company ...The gentleman we have in [continental Europe], his wife was contracting with us for the past two to three years... We don't sort of leave them high and dry. Again, it is difficult, especially with head count constraints...

The question of dual-career couples affected both male and female expatriate appointments. In many countries the accompanying spouse or partner was not allowed to work because of visa or local employment restrictions; in others, the accompanying partner had given up a good career or job to go overseas, only to find that their skills or talents could not be employed to the same advantage as in Australia. Some 'early returns' of male appointees were due to the fact that the partner either could not work in the host country or engage in appropriate alternative activities such as community work. The study did not find any 'early returns' of female appointees, probably because to date there have been so few, compared with males.

Nevertheless, the companies recognised that dual-careers were going to impact on decision-making even more in the future. One company reported the issue as follows:

Again we need to qualify: women with families, women alone, women with partners. One of the growing issues that I see is the dual income family with no kids, where both [are] professionals. I think we are going to have to really be more creative...for people like this. If you've got two professionals, both with good careers, and one is asked to sacrifice for the other then do you just ask the male, who was a stockbroker, to stop earning $150,000? Is there any income replacement? These will be typical questions. Does one partner go alone for a year? Because if, in the case of the female, [she may think], "if I don't go do I get another chance? If I don't go will I ever know?" Very hard questions and I think to answer that question it becomes very individual. Each case will be different. In talking to other companies they are going through exactly the same problem. I can think of a domestic move we made three years ago where we moved a Victorian branch manager to Queensland because his wife had achieved an appointment to a good... role with the Queensland government. They had come to some sort of pact between them whereby every 3 or 4 years they went through a cycle and each did for the other. So it was her 3 or 4 years [and] we had to try and find him a job because we didn't want to lose him.

Interestingly, the study revealed that some countries such as Fiji had strong Australian expatriate communities who were able to assist the assimilation of the expatriate and family members during the assignment. This was particularly so with male expatriates and their families. No mention was made of the same benefits for female expatriates, possibly because the companies mainly sent them to countries without this support mechanism and most of the women were single. Apart from the Asian-born nationals who were securing international appointments, it would be interesting to know how Australian-born women managed in their assignments without the back-up of either an expatriate community or a family. There appears to be little research evidence on this question at present.

A major concern of the companies was that many expatriates thought they would make a 'profit' out of the appointment. This was possible in the past, but was becoming more difficult with international tax regulations and other such factors. However, this raises the issue of expectations in general. As one of the above incidents illustrates, it is important that both the company and the appointee have similar expectations in respect to both the assignment and the

outcome. This then lessens the chances of problems arising at a later stage. One company described how they knew when 'problems' were beginning to emerge:

I'm keeping my eye on one [expatriate] because his focus has become money and his wife isn't with him. He's been away six months. He's been back at least once in that time and that was after 3 months. I'm not sure if it's not what he thought it was going to be and his wife can't come and join him. Usually if money becomes the focus it is a symptom that something else is wrong because they focus on the thing that they think they can change if they can't change other things.

Costs

Most companies reported that expatriate programs were very costly to run. Estimates varied between 2 to 3 times a local executive's salary, to ten times as much. Few companies were interested in employing 'professional expatriates' (that is, executives who served a number of postings abroad although some of this still took place); neither were they interested in leaving them abroad for long periods such as eleven years, although once again there were a few incidents of such postings.

A number of companies were actually thinking of shutting down their expatriate programs because of the expense and the uncertainty of local conditions (such as mergers and takeovers). Some expatriates had been retrenched on their return to Australia due to the current dynamic state of the business climate. The tensions relating to local business conditions were forcing the companies to consider the outplacement of expatriate management, a development which was being encouraged by consultants who were now providing information to companies on comparative costs and conditions in running expatriate programs. Many of the companies in the study had a long history of expatriate employment. Some still had paternalistic feelings and traditions concerning their obligations to 'outposts'. However, monetary considerations were becoming more paramount and it is anticipated that old-style expatriate management and programs will gradually disappear in the future. Whether Australian companies will withdraw from expatriate employment altogether is difficult to anticipate, but the emergence of the employment of suitably qualified local nationals abroad suggests that, overall, there will be fewer opportunities for Australian managers to gain international experience with their current employers.This goes against the recommendations of the Karpin Task Force (1995) and other research (Fish & Wood,1997).

Repatriation Issues

Most companies interviewed acknowledged that repatriation was a more difficult issue that expatriation. A considerable proportion of executives and their families did not re-integrate well into the Australian culture on their return. Some even asked to be re-sent abroad. Just as there were difficulties in accommodating to a new culture, other difficulties were encountered on returning home. The latter ranged from re-adjusting to different living conditions, the fact that former homes were no longer considered suitable, and that friends, family, and interests might have 'moved on' in the intervening period or simply changed. Some children, born abroad, felt they were coming to a foreign country rather than their home country or had difficulty

reintegrating back into Australian schools. In short, the returnees felt that they no longer 'fitted in'.

Another difficulty concerned the employment of the expatriate on return. Few companies guaranteed that a particular job would be waiting; instead, the expatriate was allowed a certain amount of time to find another job in the company with the assistance of management and human resources, or was put into a position that needed to be filled. Much of the success of repatriation depended on the extent of company planning. Some felt they did not handle repatriation well, that it was last minute and reactive, rather than proactive. One company had introduced a 'best efforts' clause: that is, they guaranteed that at the end of the assignment they would make their best effort to put the executive back into comparable employment. However, it was important for executives to keep themselves up-to-date, to develop a 'portfolio of skills', and 'to manage their own careers' rather than rely on company benevolence. The companies felt that these tactics might help protect the executive from exigencies such as downsizing and mergers. These conditions applied to both male and female returnees.

Along with costs, repatriation issues were a reason behind the emergence of sending contract workers abroad with no offer of continued employment on termination of the contract. This strategy was being employed especially by one multi-national, the subject of a recent takeover, to overcome the difficulties associated with merger negotiations, yet needing to service international posts. Redundant and retrenched executives from the old company were being hired to fill the posts until new company policies could be developed and decisions made on expatriate appointments.

Emerging Trends and Issues

Outsourcing of expatriate administration was clearly an emerging trend, fuelled by encouragement from service- providers such as management consultants.The study also revealed that companies in Sydney had formed a network to exchange information on costs and conditions, although no such network appeared to operate in Melbourne or Perth. However, the Sydney network had revealed that considerable dichotomies existed amongst companies in relation to costs and conditions. While some companies would not necessarily change their policies and direction as a result of this information, both the network and the work of management consultants were providing benchmarks for expatriate employers. As cost is such a significant factor in an expatriate program, these benchmarks are likely to become more important in the future.

A second major development concerns the employment of a 'just-in-time' international expatriate workforce, already domiciled abroad, who can be employed on local rather than Australian conditions. This means a considerable saving for the Australian company. It also means that Australian managers, either male or female, may not receive as many opportunities as in the past, as they are now competing for appointments in a larger pool of aspirants and candidates, many of whom are now being sourced through international executive search companies. While many companies still invest in expatriate programs for career development purposes, others are beginning to rely increasingly on mobilising and utilising a flexible international workforce or cadre of troubleshooters, thereby saving the expense involved in language and cultural training and repatriation. If Australian managers wish to receive

international experience in the future, then it may mean that they have to invest in that experience themselves (that is, adopt the high-risk strategy of living abroad to gain experience), rather than expect companies to provide such development for them. It would appear that numbers of young executives have already adopted this strategy, especially in relation to employment in Hong Kong and Singapore.

Finally, equity issues concerning opportunities for women do not seem to be a high priority either now or in the future. Although women are being given some opportunities for international postings, the disparity between the number of male and female appointments remains enormous. It is doubtful that this situation will change, especially with the trend towards employing Asian-born nationals. Women managers may thus be excluded from experiencing global careers in any great numbers unless they also adopt the high-risk strategy of managing their own careers by living and working abroad.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.

This study arose out of an interest in determining whether women managers would be given access to global careers, a need highlighted for all Australian managers by the 1995 Karpin Inquiry. Phase One of the research, which surveyed major Australian companies, suggested that women were currently being given few opportunities, with the major barriers being grounded in organisational and cultural factors prevalent within companies, rather than deficiencies in women's qualifications and experience (Smith & Still, 1996, 1997).

The interview phase of the study confirms the findings of Phase One, namely that few women are being given access to international appointments. Some of the barriers, from the company perspective, include not having enough 'senior women' from which to select; perceived difficulties of placing women in some countries; and the trend towards selecting overseas-born nationals who have ready-made language and cultural facility.

The study also revealed that expatriation as a process is in a state of flux. The 'old-style' programs, with an emphasis on career development and nurturing of the expatriate, appear to be on the way out. In their place are signs of new developments: the emergence of a shift to employing a 'just-in-time' international (Australian or otherwise) who can be 'slotted in' to positions according to need; the use of contract workers who have no guarantee of continued employment; the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' executives in certain areas; the employment of local-born nationals with international experience; and the outplacement of expatriate administration and servicing. Women's best opportunities under this changing scenario appear to be if they are overseas-born, with language and cultural facility, or have developed these facilities themselves through travel or self-development.

Apart from the implications of international labour sub-contracting on career-development programs in general and contemporary models of career development, the study also has broad implications for women managers and their aspirations. Just as their progress in the local environment appears to be hindered by the glass ceiling (Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Still, 1992; 1997), so their progress on the international scene is being hindered by a 'glass border' (Mandelker, 1994). Moreover, as few women are currently being nurtured for international appointments through career development programs, it would appear that locally-born women

managers will find their careers confined to the national, rather than the international, scene in the future. This trend is likely to be further exacerbated by the need to compete with overseas-born women managers, most of whom have a ready-made facility in language and cultural appreciation. Another problem is that many women are entering the professions, a feature which necessitates a presence and a proven track-record nationally or locally if women are to be appointed partners. Thus, the emerging trends seem to suggest that Australian women managers are likely to be disadvantaged career-wise by globalisation and its attendant implications (for instance, the emergence of a 'just-in-time' international workforce), rather than be liberated by it.

Unfortunately, most women managers, focusing closely on attempting to reach senior management and board level in Australia, may be unaware of the changing career scenario that is unfolding before them. Moreover, it is likely that few have even considered the possibility of an international career, instead being locally oriented in their career aspirations. If this is to change, and women are to be given an equitable chance of competing for future managerial careers, then both women and the organisations that employ them need to adopt some visionary policies to ensure that women are both educated for, and given opportunities in, this changing scenario. Otherwise a new type of 'secondary labour market' will arise with Australian women managers being confined to the local arena, and male managers having a wider range of choice career-wise both nationally and internationally.

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