
European female expatriate careers: critical success factors

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Keywords

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Abstract

The particular focus of this paper is female expatriates in Europe, which is a relatively under-researched area. A total of 50 senior female expatriate managers were interviewed, representing a wide range of industry and service sectors. The aims of the paper are to highlight a number of critical factors which are necessary for successful female expatriate assignments. The results of the study show that female expatriates are disadvantaged in their careers because of the lack of organizational support which is readily available to their male counterparts. This lack of organizational support, together with the invisible barriers which constitute the glass ceiling,

Foreword

Recent years have seen rapid increases in global activity and global competition in all industrialised countries, which has resulted in more women entering lower-level managerial positions. Despite women's increased investment in higher education, their greater commitment to management as a career, the shortages of international managers, and equal opportunity legislation, female expatriate managers in every country remain a small fraction of those in senior positions.

Research investigating the position of women in management has, largely, been confined within national boundaries. Over the last 15 years, empirical studies of women in expatriate management have been undertaken, predominantly in north America. In this research field, many questions remain unanswered or have been only partially addressed. In particular, there is a dearth of empirical research which details the role and career moves of the senior female expatriate manager. Studies in Europe, the USA and Australia have shown that the majority of expatriates are men, usually married men, which means that the research which has been undertaken has typically focused on the *male* expatriate career move (Smith and Still, 1996; Harris, 1995a; Torrington, 1994).

According to Smith and Still (1996), the international human resource management literature has given very little attention to women as expatriates, "probably because international assignments have long remained a male preserve". Dallafar and Movahedi (1996) noted that, up to the early 1980s, research on women in international management was primarily restricted to the role of the expatriate wife – especially the wife of a Western manager – in facilitating or hindering her husband's performance overseas. Brewster (1991) suggested that a negative reason for not appointing women in

expatriate positions may result from a tendency of organizations to confuse the role of female expatriate managers with that of the female expatriate partner, whose frequent failure to adapt has been one of the most commonly cited reasons for premature expatriate returns. Adler (1993) argues that as a result of a historical scarcity of local female managers in most countries, organizations have often questioned whether women can function successfully in cross-border managerial assignments. The participants in this study, however, are 50 senior female managers who have successfully completed at least one expatriate assignment. Our research has taken as its starting point the unique perspectives and experiences of *senior* female expatriate managers based in Europe. From these different perspectives and experiences, our findings highlight the factors which the interviewees believe are critical to the success of the female expatriate assignment.

Introduction

The increasing labour force participation of women has been one of the most significant features of the global labour market in the last half of the twentieth century (Black *et al.*, 1999; Caligiuri and Tung, 1999). Over the past decade, in particular, there has been an increase in the number of women pursuing managerial careers (Forster, 2000; Gordon and Whelan, 1998). Recent studies suggest that men still occupy about 90 per cent of management positions in Europe and women managers remain concentrated in junior and middle management positions (Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1995).

Until recently, the number of women female expatriate managers remained at between 2 per cent and 5 per cent of the total expatriate population (Harris, 1995b; Reynolds and Bennett, 1991). The evidence

suggests that while there has been a modest increase in female participation in expatriate management in some countries, the number of female global assignees is proportionately low in relation to the overall size of the qualified labour pool (Caligiuri and Cascio, 1998). In north America, less than 14 per cent of global assignees are women compared to the 45 per cent of women in management generally (Caligiuri *et al.*, 1999) and the figures for Australia (Hede and O'Brien, 1996) and Europe are considerably lower (Linehan, 2000). Several studies have found that, while organizations may be prepared to promote women through their domestic managerial hierarchy, few women are given opportunities to expand their career horizons through access to expatriate careers (Linehan, 2000; Adler and Izraeli 1988).

This paper aims to develop an understanding of the female expatriate career move in a European context in order to appreciate more fully the covert and overt barriers that may limit women's expatriate career opportunities. The paper also explores the dual-career phenomenon in the international context from the perspective of both dual career couple members and the implications for employing organizations. The paper also highlights organizational forms of support which the interviewees believed were critical for the success of their expatriate career moves. Unlike many international human resource management studies which limit themselves to understanding the corporate human resources perspective, the present study seeks to understand the issues and problems faced by female expatriates from the perspective of female expatriates.

Method

A total of 50 female expatriate managers participated in the study. Listings from *Fortune 500* and *The Marketing Guide to Ireland 1997* were used for targeting interviewees. An introductory letter was sent to the chief executive officers of these companies in England, Belgium, France and Germany (for practical reasons, such as time and travel), and 180 letters were sent in total. Of the 112 responses received, 58 replied that they did not have female managers with international experience in their organizations. At the time of interviewing, four managers were unavailable, thus reducing the sample size to 50. None of the managers selected for inclusion in the study

refused to be interviewed. The interviewees were all eager to participate, indicating that, because there were relatively few women expatriate managers, topics and issues which were specifically relevant to their situations had received very little attention in the international human resource management literature.

The 50 female expatriates who participated in this study were representative of a broad spectrum of manufacturing and service industries, including:

- pharmaceuticals;
- financial services;
- car manufacturing;
- tourism;
- electronic components;
- management consultancy;
- international retailing;
- telecommunications;
- mobile telephones;
- oil refining;
- computer manufacturing; and
- state-owned enterprises.

The criteria for inclusion in the study were that, first, the women had to be part of the senior management team and, second, they had to have made at least one international career move. Half (25) of the participants were based in Ireland, 13 in Belgium, nine in England and three in Germany, a factor which needs to be taken into account in considering the generalisability of our results.

All the interviews were face-to-face and semi-structured in nature, varying in length from one hour to an hour and a half and took place at the interviewee's place of work. All interviews were recorded on tape. The use of interviews was particularly advantageous in the context of this research, as interviews provide depth; information from non-verbal behaviour; opportunity to probe; greater sensitivity to misunderstandings; and, more spontaneity in the answers given – all required given the complexity of the questions addressed in this study. Based on a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, an interview guide was prepared to make sure that essentially the same type of information was obtained from the participants by covering the same material. Although there were some deviations from the sequence in the interview guide in order to follow interesting lines of inquiry and to facilitate an unbroken discussion, all the issues mentioned in the interview guide were covered. Different profiles of age, marital

status, length of marriage, number and ages of children, and choice of occupation caused subtle differences in the issues each female manager faced. A female manager with pre-school children, for example, may have valued child-care support more than those with school-aged or older children. The research, however, focused on commonalities among the senior female international managers rather than on variations, as a way of highlighting major themes and issues.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately or shortly after each interview. The data was then coded in order to facilitate the retrieval of data segments categorised under the same codes. Coding was essentially indexing the interview transcripts, reducing the data to equivalent classes and categories and, in some cases, expanding and teasing out the data in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation. The nature of qualitative interview data meant that data relating to one particular topic were not found neatly bundled together at exactly the same spot in each interview; therefore, sifting through vast amounts of data to find preliminary codes was a slow process. These codes, however, were a useful introduction for more detailed analysis later. Codes of different degrees of generality were included so that the data retrieval could be undertaken at different levels.

The next step was cross-case analysis, which meant grouping together answers from different people to common questions and analysing different perspectives on central issues. As an interview guide approach was used, answers from different people were grouped by topics from the guide. The interview guide, therefore, provided a descriptive analytical framework for analysis, and 12 main themes emerged from the research, these included:

- 1 breaking the glass ceiling;
- 2 the accompanying spouse;
- 3 international career versus relationship and child-bearing conflicts;
- 4 mentoring;
- 5 tokenism and lack of female role models;
- 6 networking;
- 7 male/female/individual style of management;
- 8 characteristics of an international manager;
- 9 career planning;
- 10 the international transfer cycle;
- 11 whether or not female managers want international careers; and

- 12 the impact of gender on female managers' international careers.

The factors which the interviewees believe are crucial to the success of their expatriate careers are the focus of this particular paper and are listed as follows.

Breaking the glass ceiling

As more women enter the workforce, their failure to reach the highest management positions has become the cause for considerable research and debate both in their home countries and in international management. European women, like their US and Australian counterparts, are confronted by a glass ceiling – a term used to describe: a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up the managerial hierarchy (Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990, p. 200).

According to Morrison and Von Glinow, the glass ceiling is not simply a barrier based on the person's inability to handle a higher-level job, but, it applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women.

There is now an extensive literature on this topic, with evidence from Australia, the USA and Europe, which indicates that women face obstacles in their careers which are not faced by their male counterparts. Overcoming "hidden" or less obvious organizational barriers to managerial equity may be difficult for women to achieve in the near future. According to one estimate, attaining full economic integration for women at every organizational level would take 75 to 100 years at the current rate of change (Women's Research and Education Institute, 1992).

Breaking the glass ceiling is the first of the dominant themes to emerge from analysis of the data and a factor which the interviewees perceived to be critical to the success of their expatriate careers. Each interviewee was asked if she believed the glass ceiling still exists in Europe, and if she had personal experience of the glass ceiling. Our research findings reveal that all 50 managers were very aware of "hitting the glass ceiling" in their home organizations at the early stages of their careers, the selected quotations below are representative of the sentiments of all the interviewees:

Let me tell you the glass ceiling is there and it is harder than glass. As far as the term is concerned, every time I hear it I think you've

got to be kidding: we're talking concrete here. Sometimes we are talking plywood, but don't minimise it, it is not glass, it is not just a "glass ceiling" (manager, software company).

The glass ceiling is still there, in the sense that there are so few women in global terms that have gone to real positions of seniority in companies (manager, oil company).

The glass ceiling is definitely still there for women today. Here in Belgium it is very significant, in the USA it is slowly cracking, but not here (partner, management consultancy company).

Certainly there are invisible barriers there today because if one looks at senior management one will find very few women. There is no real reason why they should not be there (legal director, manufacturing company).

Our research results confirm that career blockages for women appear at much earlier stages than for men, with the respondents observing that, as they moved up the managerial hierarchy, they repeatedly encountered the glass ceiling. The interviewees spoke of the ceiling being harder than glass, and asserted that it was "firmly, firmly in place". These sentiments resonate with Schwartz (1989) who suggested that the metaphor of the glass ceiling is misleading, as "counterproductive layers of influence on women", such as tradition, socialisation, and negative stereotypes, hinder their progression to senior managerial positions. The interviewees also suggested that, it was most difficult for them to be taken seriously at the initial stage of their respective managerial careers when, they believed, they were generally judged on their appearances – unlike the case of their male counterparts. The respondents reported from their experiences that they believe the glass ceiling still exists throughout Europe, the USA, south America, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, China, Singapore, and Japan:

The glass ceiling is still in place for women, and not a glass one, but absolutely a concrete one. There is no question in my mind but it is firmly, firmly there, and not just here in Europe, but in the USA, too. There is no question about that (director, health insurance company).

The glass ceiling is still in place here in this company because of top management. It is what they promote and it goes right down through the organization. Women have to be better than men. The men in this organization are very, very critical. They would tear you to pieces at the least opportunity, even when

you get into more senior positions than theirs (vice president, computer company).

Of the respondents, 12 believed that they could break through the glass ceiling and make it to the top of their professions, but that this would mean sacrificing much of their personal lives. This finding is similar to a view expressed by Fuchs (1989), who commented that women's progress in the labour market has been offset by the loss of leisure time and the decline of marriage, with employed women more likely to divorce than non-employed women. Morrison *et al.* (1987) and Marshall (1984) also suggested that women, in comparison with their male counterparts, need to choose among different lifestyle options. Such lifestyle choices include:

- decisions about the importance of a career relative to other areas of life;
- whether or when to marry;
- whether or when to have children;
- arrangements for managing housework and childcare;
- managing relationships with spouses, relatives, and friends; and
- managing competing demands from various life roles.

This research, however, has identified that for female expatriate managers, lifestyle choices are even more difficult than for domestic female managers. For example, managing relationships with spouses while partaking in international assignments was identified by 22 of the 50 respondents as the most difficult obstacle to be overcome. In this regard, the respondents spoke of additional strains placed on personal relationships where the male partner became an accompanying spouse, or how their quality of life suffered where the couple decided to have a commuter marriage. The interviewees with children added that while on foreign assignments childcare was a major concern for them, and one interviewee stressed that unless she was completely satisfied with childcare arrangements she would not take an international management position. The managers believed that when their male counterparts move internationally they do not have to take the responsibilities for housework and childcare. The interviewees with children also believed that they missed out on family support for childcare, which would have been available to them in their home countries.

Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993) noted that women managers are less likely to be married and more likely to be childless than

their male counterparts, suggesting that women who are strongly committed to their managerial careers have chosen not to marry or, in the event of marriage, not to have children. The situation of the ten unmarried interviewees concurs with the findings of Parasuraman and Greenhaus, as these ten managers chose not to marry in order to commit themselves to their careers. These interviewees believe that it is more beneficial to their careers to remain unmarried, especially when partaking in international management, as they have only themselves to think about when moving abroad. Of the 50 interviewees, 31 are married and believe that there are additional sacrifices to be made by female managers who partake in international management, as they assert that balancing a career, marriage and childcare from a distance is much more difficult. A total of 26 of the interviewees have children. The quotations below indicate some of the additional barriers which prevent female managers from progressing to senior management positions:

Balancing home life is difficult if you have children. I must say that I have done more homework for the children around the world by e-mail than most people. It has never been unusual for faxes to arrive at my hotel room wherever I am, as well as e-mails from my son to ask if I can read his assignment, or sometimes saying that he cannot understand what he has to do for his homework. So you have to allow an extra amount of time for that type of thing (human resources manager, manufacturing company).

It is definitely more difficult for women to have a senior career position and to have children also. That is another obstacle for women to overcome. Women have to sacrifice more. In the case of myself and my partner, for example, when I first met him I was the one in a more senior position; then our son came along, life did not change for my partner, but life totally changed for me. My whole life was turned upside down. I did hire a nanny for the first two years, and I continued on as though I didn't have a child, but that was not satisfying for me personally. I felt that I couldn't leave the child with a nanny because the sacrifice was too great in the formative years. I wanted to give my kids every chance. I had watched my friends who had kids before me not being able to talk to their kids in their teenage years, and I did not want that to happen to me, so I had a big issue with that. I believed that a balance was needed: I would either give 50 per cent to the job and 50 per cent to the kids, or I would give it all to the job and let the nannies rear the kids, or I would give 100 per cent to the kids for a number of years. I decided that I would

give 100 per cent to the kids for five years. There is no doubt about it, but women have this guilt feeling. While my partner travels all the time, he comes back at weekends and only feels exhausted; whereas now that I am back working again I feel guilty. I try to spend more time with the kids, but my partner does not feel one bit guilty about the kids (human resources manager, computer company).

The managers also spoke of the difficulties they faced when allocating time between their careers and personal lives:

My husband works in London and I work in Dublin, which was quite a tough decision to make because it does affect one's marriage relationship. The fact that my husband is still in Britain is difficult, because I am a married person here and acting like a single person. But, if I had children I could not do what I have done. Where would the children live? – in Dublin or London? Many women have to choose between career and family (managing director, manufacturing company).

The engineering industry is a very difficult industry to combine work and family. There is no recognition of any kind of childcare facilities and flexible working hours, so women have to choose between career and family. In my experience, most of the responsibility of child rearing falls on the women (senior engineer, manufacturing company).

I believe that women choose between career and family. In my case it was my dream to have an international assignment. Earlier in my career an international assignment came up but I could not take it because I was married; my former husband was in his second marriage and he had kids, and I played a major role with his kids, so at the time I had to choose between the family and work. At the time I let the work opportunities go because of the family, and then I separated two years ago. Fortunately this international assignment came up and I was free to take this because I do not have any family commitments now (human resources manager, financial services company).

Hochschild's (1989) study established that: careers were originally designed to suit traditional men whose wives raised their children.

Similarly, Fierman (1990) suggested that: the 1980s effectively destroyed the notion that women could have it all, that is, a successful managerial career, a fulfilling marriage, *and* children.

Fierman concluded that the career ladder in the USA is typically predicated on the life-cycle of a man. Our research supports Fierman's observations regarding the

difficulties for managerial women to “have it all”. The married interviewees with children spoke of the difficulties they experienced when they took time out to have children; for example, the assumptions made by some male managers that they would now be more interested in their families than their careers. One of the interviewees believed, even though she was as experienced and as well qualified as her male counterparts, that she did not get a particular position because she was a woman and was pregnant:

In our generation the obstacles are not very overt. I think they are quite covert. There was one job that I did not get and I think it was because I was a woman and I was pregnant. That was in the USA. I believe there was covert discrimination there. I think every woman encounters both covert and overt discrimination, and I have experienced it both in my academic life and in my medical life (medical consultant).

The managers also spoke of the additional stress they experienced in attempting to balance a senior career and family life, often with very little support from their partners. One of the eight divorced interviewees stated that her career used to be a major threat to her former partner and that he could not cope with her success. The respondents believed that, because of the extra strains and guilt feelings which women experience in balancing an international career with child-rearing responsibilities, the majority of female managers choose between a career and family. The research revealed that female international managers may have to make this decision because:

- of what they perceived to be the relative inflexibility of organizations;
- of the assumptions by home-country senior management and societal assumptions that a woman’s primary role is that of a mother and not an international manager; and
- career success is still based on a male career model which ignores the influence of marriage, pregnancy and children, and household duties.

The views of the participants also concur with Astin’s (1985) findings, which noted that childhood socialisation and early childhood experiences are important influencing factors in shaping occupational interests. Astin believed that basic work motivation is the same for men and women, but they make different occupational choices due to early socialisation and because opportunities are different for men and women.

The results of research in the USA, by Kleiman (1992), indicated that women in lower management levels are likely to encounter the glass ceiling, thus preventing their advancement into middle management. Kleiman concluded that:

the height of the glass ceiling has been found to be much lower than first thought.

Our research confirms Kleiman’s study, as the participants suggested that one of the main barriers for women in international management is getting to senior management positions first in their home organizations, as one participant suggested: the ceiling moved up as she moved up. O’Leary and Johnson (1991) found that women managers in the USA who reached senior management positions in previously male-dominated areas, do so at the cost of isolation and loneliness. The findings from our research confirm that the participants employed in traditional male-dominated areas in Europe, such as medicine, accounting, law, and engineering, also experienced loneliness and isolation, just as their US counterparts did. As outlined by the interviewees, the strains of coping with loneliness and isolation, because of the lack of networks, high visibility, and tokenism, contribute to the extra burdens women have to overcome to reach senior managerial positions. The managers also expressed their views on isolation and loneliness, factors which they believe contribute to the glass ceiling:

I feel isolated sometimes. My sister, who is a doctor and my friends who are teachers and nurses, all seem to have loads of women friends, but I don’t. Because of where I work I don’t meet many women. Women don’t tend to have the type of networking back-ups that men have, and that is a lack (senior engineer, software company).

It is isolating for women in senior management. In a team, for example, when you are the only woman it is not quite as natural for a woman to go and do the typical things the guys might do after work, like having three or four beers together. The guys can sit there knocking back the beers giggling, and talking about sports. It is slightly lonely (account executive, technology company).

I am constantly aware that I am a woman in a man’s world, and that there are barriers that need to be overcome. I find that I have to prove myself and I believe that a man would not have to do this (vice-president, pharmaceutical company).

From the comments of the managers, it is clear that the glass ceiling is still in place for women managers in Europe. The above discussion highlights that many female managers encounter more barriers in their career progression than their male counterparts do. An analysis of the interview data confirms that both glass ceilings and glass borders are still perceived to exist for female managers. Our research suggests that these barriers are not confined to European countries, but exist in all countries in which the participants have worked. As suggested in the interview data, these barriers are both covert and overt and are experienced by female managers in their home countries and host countries. It is evident that additional barriers exist for women in international management, as studies have shown that the number of female managers pursuing international careers still remains much lower than the number of their male counterparts, and also lower than females in domestic management. The interviewees believe that, because of these additional barriers, many female managers may choose not to partake in international assignments. In this regard the 50 interviewees considered themselves to be “unusual” in pursuing senior international managerial careers.

The 50 managers, all of whom have reached senior management positions, believe that they need to be as well qualified or, in some cases, more qualified, more ambitious, and more mobile than male managers. The respondents suggested, in addition to these traits, that they broke through the glass ceiling in their own careers because:

- they persistently asked for their next career move, rather than waiting to be offered the next move; and
- they were better than their male counterparts at balancing a number of functions at the same time.

The respondents believe that:

Women have to be much more outspoken about what they want. When men come to promote people, they look to people like themselves. The women might be achieving the results, but they are not shouting about it, so they don't get promoted. And that is why women need to be much more self-confident, and to say what they want, and say things like “if that job ever comes up, I want to be considered for it”. If women don't do that, they are going to continue to be left behind. I don't think enough women do this. But, for myself, I am very career minded and I go forward and say “this is what I want”. I ask where is my next career move? And I keep on asking and badgering people until I get

answers and I think that is very important, and I don't think enough women do that. They sit back and they wait. You must let your intentions be known. I constantly keep saying what I want. After my first appraisal in the company I said to my manager, who was the financial controller, “I want to be running my own division”. I thought he would collapse off the chair. I added, “I don't know how long it is going to take me to get there, but, that is my ultimate aim”. Another thing is that, on the personal front, you have to get yourself known and that is part of pushing yourself. Overall, flexibility, getting known and letting people know your career aspirations are important to break through the glass ceiling (managing director, manufacturing company).

I always went ahead and looked for the next promotion. That was important. In my previous employment, when I did a job at a certain level for one or two years I would get bored and I would go and ask for the next promotion. I would always ask for a chance. And then when I made progress I realised that I was very lucky to be given a chance and I took advantage of that. A lot of women do not do this (partner, management consultancy firm).

As stated above, the managers believe that in order for them to break through the glass ceiling they need to be better than male managers at balancing a number of functions simultaneously. The respondents suggested that they developed this ability from their childhood experiences and their socialisation as children. The respondents recalled from their childhood socialisation their fathers being singularly focused on work outside the home, whereas their mothers needed to develop the ability to balance a number of different responsibilities:

The glass ceiling is all about hidden, unspoken and indirect things. The invisible barriers are discomfort, lack of trust, and generally having to convince men in the organization that you are powerful enough to run the organization and to achieve results. Men concentrate on achieving results, and they don't want anything to get in their way. Their whole life is like that; therefore, they want only people on the team who can achieve results. Any female entering the organization for the first time or coming to a new country is going to be rigorously tested. Women, blacks, Jews, and all minorities are tested. Men concentrate on results, whereas women are much better at balancing a number of things and that is very discomforting for men. All of this goes back to our socialisation, and all of it has to do with our mothers who could and had to manage 50 things all together, and that was the only

thing we ever saw. At the same time, we were very aware that our fathers had only one thing to do: he went out to work and came back again. It all goes back to our childhood; thus, women are much better at keeping a number of different balls in the air (chief executive, insurance company).

There is no question about it, for women to break through the glass ceiling they have got to be better at balancing more things. I think there are more obstacles, particularly in the initial stages of an international career move. There are difficulties in trying to be accepted, trying to understand the culture, getting your arms around the business, and understanding different ways of doing things. I have to balance all of that with two little children, one who is 15 months and the other who is three and a half. I don't think the main obstacle is childcare, however, but I think the biggest challenge for us is balancing all of that with my husband's circumstances. One of the biggest problems for women managers are their spouses who are not working and whose expectations and careers are put on hold when they move with their wives (managing director, manufacturing company).

Our research illustrates that many of the barriers which prevent female managers from reaching senior managerial positions in their home organizations are similar to those experienced by female expatriate managers. Our research further reveals that it is necessary for the participants to have senior managerial experience in their home organizations before being considered for international managerial positions:

We have 7,000 employees, and at my level there are not very many female managers. I certainly had many barriers getting to my position in my home organization because of my gender. The company is not particularly women-friendly. A woman is supposed to have the necessary senior experience before she is given the chance of an international position, whereas a man who is working in area A is often given the chance of an international promotion to area B or C, where he may have no experience at all – whereas, a woman would be told that she does not have the qualifications. That sort of thing has gone on (managing director, telephone company).

I had a senior position in the Swedish administration system before I came here. I do not think that I would have been given the opportunity for an international position if I did not have this position first, in Sweden, because men tend to recruit men. It has nothing to do with intellectual ability (director, European Commission).

We have 250 employees here right now, with only three women in senior management

positions. The company is Swiss, so it has many male managers. It is unusual for the company to have a woman in senior management. I remember once when I went to a meeting and they didn't know what to do with me as I was the only woman. I am an American and I worked in England for five years and before that I gained senior managerial experience in the States. I believe that if I did not have this experience I would not be here today. There is a selection programme in the company for people with high potential to go to a lot of companies all over the world, but it is mostly men who are chosen. Maybe this will change, but I think it will be a long time before things change regarding societal attitudes to women having careers (financial controller, pharmaceutical company).

In summary, our research illustrates that the overt and covert barriers which prevent female managers from progressing to senior managerial positions in domestic and international management include:

- the obligation to balance home life and career;
- isolation and loneliness;
- constant awareness of being a woman in a man's world;
- having to prove oneself to others; and
- having to work harder and to be better than male counterparts.

The respondents shared the view that the glass ceiling in home countries is a contributory factor to the low participation rate of women in international management. The managers believed that because of these additional barriers many female managers may choose not to partake in international assignments. The managers further suggested that a critical success factor in their expatriate careers was having broken through the glass ceiling first in their home organizations. In this regard, the 50 interviewees considered themselves to be "unusual" in pursuing senior expatriate managerial careers.

Dual-career couples and the accompanying spouse

As an international assignment usually requires an accompanying spouse to forfeit the accustomed structure and continuity of his life, this can make dual career issues highly problematic for the expatriate couple. This research regards the "accompanying spouse" as the partner in the secondary professional role. Each dual-career couple faces different difficulties, for example, based

on the couple's marital status, host-country work or visa regulations, and the accompanying spouse's occupation. The interviewees stressed that another factor which is critical to their career success is having the details of one's personal life in order before embarking on an international career move. The data presented here highlights the additional difficulties for female international managers when the male partner is the accompanying spouse:

Women may turn down international career moves because of the accompanying spouse issue. If you are a two-career couple, then having an accompanying spouse is a very significant concern (human resources manager, automotive energy and component company).

Obviously, it is more difficult for women to move if they are part of a dual-career couple. There would be difficulties in working out an agreement between the couple, and that is a major factor preventing women from taking international assignments. No company is going to accept responsibility for two people and it is a very rare occasion when the second person can find a job. There might be problems with work visas for the second person also (chief executive, insurance company).

I believe that it is extra difficult having a male accompanying spouse because it is more unusual, and the pressure is really on him, to a large extent. That is all the more reason why I am eternally grateful to my accompanying spouse. I don't think that a lot of men would be prepared to do this. It takes very special men, and men that can put up with the sort of comments that people make about the situation. He has come across a lot of comments from people. People say to him openly that they cannot believe that he is an accompanying spouse. People say all these "wonderful" things to him like that he must have the patience of a saint, and that must make it worse for him (counsellor, government department).

Studies of domestic managerial transfers have, generally, found that companies need to take a proactive approach to dual-career couples if they are to attract and retain the best employees. The findings from our research suggest that a proactive approach to dual-career couples is more important in the case of international transfers, as additional difficulties with visas and work permits have to be overcome. According to Handler and Lane (1997), there is a dearth of literature informing the human resources practitioner of what multinational companies are doing to confront dual-career issues. Career prospects

for the accompanying spouse, especially in the geographical vicinity of their partner's assignment base, become an important consideration. A total of 28 dual-career couples relocated to facilitate the careers of the female partners, but none of these couples received any assistance from their home organizations. Our research indicates that every couple had to devise their own particular solutions to cope with additional difficulties associated with the male accompanying spouse, and 49 of the respondents believed that most dual-career problems are left to the couple to resolve, with no help from their organizations. Of the 50 managers interviewed, only one knew of a accompanying spouse being facilitated:

Our company is quite good because it has started putting various policies in place, such as, looking at what assistance we can give the spouse. I know of two occasions here where the accompanying spouse has been the husband. One case worked out very well, but the other case ended up in divorce. Our company will now pay for the education fees of the accompanying spouse at university and that is a good package, as some of the education fees can be quite expensive. It is a good idea also because, if there is a problem with working visas, what are the spouses supposed to do? (human resources manager, automotive energy and component company).

Our research confirms findings by Brett *et al.* (1992) and Davidson and Cooper (1983), who highlighted that female managers in dual-career relationships are more likely than their male counterparts to have partners with professional careers. All 31 married interviewees are married to professional partners. This created further personal difficulties as the research established that throughout Europe it is not the norm for an organization to arrange an international relocation for any personnel in order to facilitate the career of a partner. Carmody (1989) and Shellenbarger (1992) noted that, despite profound changes in workforce composition, organizational policies and practices are still largely predicated on the outmoded assumption that employees are predominantly males from traditional families – the traditional family being one in which the husband is the sole breadwinner and the wife the home maker and child rearer. Our findings confirm the work of Carmody and Shellenbarger, as the German interviewees stated that it is still unusual for a woman to have the primary career. These interviewees believed that German societal and organizational norms remain very traditional, and that in their organizations

they would be considered to be quite unusual because they, as women, are in senior managerial positions. The managers also suggested that it is considerably more difficult when it is the male partner's career that is "put on hold":

In Germany it is very, very unusual if the husband's career takes second place. One of my colleagues here in the bank is married and she has one child and she works here full-time. Her husband works half days and a lot of people have been surprised with this. It is not the normal way (bank manager).

Of the 31 married respondents, 16 respondents believed that the progression to the top of their managerial careers was facilitated by the careers of their spouses becoming the secondary careers. These interviewees stressed that they were both lucky and unusual in that their careers took priority over those of their partners, and they believed that this undoubtedly contributed to their career success:

I have a husband and that is another challenge. It has been extremely difficult for us. I guess it was a surprise that the actual move would be difficult because we considered ourselves pretty worldly and flexible, but we found the move much more difficult than we thought it would be. My husband originally had a job lined up here in Brussels, but that fell through. We are now here three years and since we have been here he hasn't had a full-time job. I come home at night and usually find him extremely frustrated and unhappy and he would say things like "I hate this place". That is very much an extra strain on me because it isn't something that I could offer any support on. He would say to me "You just don't know what it is like, you have someone to talk to all day and I have no-one". So from his standpoint the international move has not been a positive experience. Also, since there are so many men, rather than women, that lead the move, there are a lot of women groups that my husband cannot go to. He has found a group of men here who are the partners of high-flying women, but they are mostly older and retired men, and my husband is not yet 40. My husband and I made a conscious decision to allow my career to have priority and that was also a difficult position to reach, because my husband's career had to take second place. That is another reason why many women do not take international career moves, because their husbands' careers have to take second place, and especially if couples are planning on having children it puts the female in an awkward position (manager, freight carrier company).

When I moved from England to the United States my husband came with me. I would not have gone without him. My husband had to give up his job and the company did not compensate us for all that. My career has always taken precedence all through our married life, and I know that I am very lucky with this. We don't have any children, which helps, as I can do a lot more things. If we had decided to have children it would have been very difficult for us because I don't think organizations are flexible enough for women with children (manager, retailing company).

Most people think that having an international career is exciting. In Canada it sounds quite exotic to say that you are going to live in Europe for a while. But, the reality is quite different, because it means that the husband has to sacrifice his career for three or four years. If you have small children it is vital that both parents share in the responsibility of bringing up those children, and you have to think of the children's education. My husband is actually working here now. He works as a consultant which means that he is quite flexible. When he took this job he said that our children would be his priority and he would have to do the school runs and that type of thing. So, my career has priority for these four years at least. One career has to have priority because of the huge amount of travel involved in an assignment like this and because of the school breaks, as one does not have the support network of family. I missed this a lot when I came here first (managing director, freight carrier company).

Two of the accompanying spouses decided to retire early from their own careers to facilitate the careers of their partners. The two interviewees in this situation emphasised that having supportive partners, who took care of the cooking, shopping, and housework, undoubtedly contributed to the success of their careers. These two accompanying spouses are members of the Brussels-based STUDS (spouses accompanying under duress successfully) group, and, along with approximately 78 other male-accompanying spouses in the group, provide support for their executive partners' careers, as well as holding golf outings, fund-raising events and social evenings. The STUDS group provides a social network for the accompanying spouses, which, in turn, helps them to settle in their new location:

My husband retired when we moved and undoubtedly that made it so much easier for me. I would say that is the single largest factor which allows me to perform to my full ability at my job. The one outside factor that has made all the difference to my job has been

the support of my husband. He is fabulous. He cooks for me all the time. When we moved here to Brussels he got involved with the STUDS group, and this meant that we had a whole new social element and that was really good. There are about 80 men in this group who follow their high-flying partners around the world. I believe, number one, STUDS helped us to make new friends and, number two, if you look at any of the research on expatriates you will see that the ones that don't make it are the ones where their spouses don't settle. If the spouses and families don't make it, then the employees don't make it (managing director, telephone company).

Potter (1989) suggested that companies with successful family-related policies will be able to increasingly attract the cream of the crop in future workers. Our research confirms Potter's findings, as the interviewees foresaw problems for organizations which do not have positive policies on dual-career issues, and they believed that the absence of these policies should lead to difficulties in attracting the most suitable expatriates. The respondents did not expect organizations to spend substantial amounts of money to help them, but believed that much could be done at relatively little expense, such as financing educational courses for their partners. The interviewees perceived that family-related policies are not yet adequately developed in the organizations where they worked. In this regard, the interviewees spoke of the lack of organizational recognition for their partners having to put their careers on hold.

The results of Australian research by Pierce and Delahaye (1996), suggest that organizations may no longer be able to assume that the male partner's career will always take precedence, and that the female partner will always subordinate her career aspirations to those of her partner. Our research confirms the earlier work of these authors, as only two of the interviewees regarded their own careers to be relatively less senior to the careers of their partners. Incidentally, these two interviewees pointed out that they chose to adopt the relatively secondary career role, because of their partners being relocated. These interviewees added that because they have young children, it suited them to temporarily adopt this role and to cut back on professional commitments, but in future they may review their roles and relative positions.

The interviewees also identified the necessity for both partners to work around the optimum financial arrangement, because of the implications of one partner having to

give up work due to an international transfer would be quite significant. As the difficulties associated with male-accompanying spouses are quite significant, three of the married interviewees decided on commuter marriages and their views concurred with the findings of Brewster and Scullion (1997) and Taylor and Lounsbury (1988), which suggested that commuter marriages are likely to increase proportionately among working couples as the labour force participation of women continues to rise. Of the 31 married interviewees, 11 stated that their careers were equal to their partners, and because of this decided to have commuter marriages, meeting only at weekends rather than sacrificing one career:

It is very interesting when you fly from Dublin to London on Friday night and back on Monday morning to see how many other people are also doing the same, there are quite a number in the same situation. I know one woman who commutes from France to New York every weekend. Before this she commuted from Paris to London for five years. If people want to do it they can, but it is very tough (managing director, manufacturing company).

I am responsible for the overall site here in Ireland, but I am also director for international quality assurance, which means that I manage groups in the United States, Tokyo, Beijing and Taiwan, so, I always have too much travelling. I wake up in the middle of the night and I look in my briefcase for my ticket to see where I am! I followed my husband's career for several moves, but now I am here in Ireland and my husband and son are in the United States. In the summer all the family are together here in Dublin for a month or two. My son has an Irish nanny, he is eight going on 40, he sends me e-mail messages and fax messages every day (director, computer company).

Only two of the interviewees acknowledged that their partners' careers were the main careers. This created further difficulties in planning their own careers. The results also showed that achieving a balanced lifestyle is important, but difficult, for dual-career couples:

I went to New Zealand with my husband, as he had a job to go to and I didn't have a job. I decided that I would look for a job while I was there and I got a job after three weeks, so I was very lucky as it just worked out for me. When you are in a dual-career relationship it is very difficult balancing the two careers. We have come to the conclusion that somebody has to take the lead and somebody has to take the second

role, because you can't operate two executive careers at the same time. Then my husband was moved to London, so I moved with him again. I got a very good promotion in a company which I had been working for in London in October 1993, but in November 1993 my husband was moved to Dublin. So after a month we had this dilemma about what we were going to do. We decided that he would set up home in Dublin and I would stay in London. We had a young child and two countries to commute between. My husband found it very difficult when I was not with him. He felt that there was a lack of commitment from me to the relationship, and I found it very difficult because I was managing a home, a job and I became pregnant again. It was not a planned pregnancy so it was all very difficult. That was a very tough year, so then I decided that I was not going to work at all. I decided that I was going to take time out and move to Dublin, and that was really the hardest thing of all, adjusting from working so hard to doing nothing at all. I did that for two years, and then I came back to work again. I look at the number of people who are separated or divorced in my peer group and most of the causes have been people living two separate lives. My husband has a very good job, but he is away a lot. He goes to work at 6.30 in the morning and is not home until late at night, and if you have got two of you doing that your paths just do not cross. So, that you have to make some trade-offs, like where are your priorities going to be and I decided it was going to be my family first. So, my husband's career now takes precedence, because if one stands back one has to decide which career is going to be the main career. With two small children now, that suits me at the moment, but in ten years' time it might be quite different, who knows? (marketing director, telecommunications company).

The personal satisfaction of the accompanying spouse is particularly important, as spousal failure to adjust is the most common reason for expatriate failure. The limited research which has been conducted on international managers who are in dual-career marriages suggests that spouse-related problems are more serious when men have to adjust to the role of secondary breadwinner. Spouses accustomed to working and having a career may be particularly frustrated if they cannot work, or if they encounter difficulties in finding work. Within this research trajectory, Punnett *et al.* (1992) suggested that additional emotional stress is experienced when the spouse in this position is male, and this can lead to some dual-career couples preferring

to avoid international transfers, thereby sacrificing the female partners' career advancement. Five of the interviewees spoke of the additional stress they experienced when their husbands had difficulty in finding work in their new locations. Our respondents noted where an employee refuses relocation, because of the potential impact on their partner's career, that this may amount to "career suicide".

Our research results show, from the perceptions of the 31 married respondents, that an international career move is much more difficult when the male partner is the accompanying spouse, which suggests that sociocultural norms relating to career models make it relatively easier for women, than for men, to make these transitions. It is clear from the research that it is not yet the norm for the male partner to be the accompanying spouse. Of the respondents who had male accompanying spouses 28 noted, in all cases, that the presumption in social settings was that the female was the accompanying spouse. Whenever it was pointed out that the international move had taken place because of the female's career, people generally did not know how to react to this, and the couple were often considered an "oddity". The 20 married managers with children also mentioned that it was more difficult for them to adjust to a new neighbourhood, particularly when the other women in the neighbourhood did not work, and their neighbours considered it strange that a man should stay at home and be the accompanying spouse. They also remarked that their neighbours perceived them as "always working", and "too busy" to be invited to neighbourhood gatherings.

Analysis of the data also indicates the importance of accompanying spouse issues to expatriates, and suggests that the effective handling of accompanying spouse issues should be a matter of growing concern to home-country management. Of the respondents, 98 per cent are currently employed in organizations which do not have any policies to assist dual-career couples. Further analysis showed that 92 per cent of interviewees believed that the success or failure of expatriate assignments is directly related to the happiness of their spouses. This figure is consistent with the literature, indicating that spousal and family problems are the chief cause of difficulties relating to expatriate assignments (Handler and Lane, 1997; Tung, 1982).

In the absence of home-country organizational policies on dual-career couples, the 31 married participants have coped with this particular difficulty in a variety of ways, such as: commuter marriages, putting the male career on hold, giving priority to the female career for a number of years, or the male partner retiring from employment. As discussed above, these options are still not socially accepted as normal, as 74 per cent of the interviewees believed that many female managers did not partake in international assignments because of these additional difficulties. This 74 per cent asserted that the issue of the male-accompanying spouse is a major contributory factor in explaining the scarcity of female international managers. They also believed that many male partners would not be prepared to put their own careers on hold, and 16 of the senior female managers believed that they would not have made it to the top of their careers if their partners had not sacrificed their own careers. All of the findings concur with DeCieri *et al.* (1991) and with Adler (1991), who suggested that, by failing to assist the accompanying partners of dual-career couples, a firm increases the risk of an accompanying spouse's unhappiness which in turn contributes to the expatriate's poor job performance and/or premature return. Despite the additional difficulties involved when the male partner is the accompanying spouse, our research has indicated that the low participation rate of females in international management, and who are in dual-career marriages, cannot be attributed solely to problems arising from dual-career marriages. Overall, therefore, it is evident that additional difficulties exist when the male partner is the accompanying spouse but, as the above evidence illustrates, these difficulties are not insurmountable.

Mentors as sources of organizational support for female expatriates

There is growing evidence that female managers have to overcome more barriers in their progression to senior management positions both inside and outside the work environment. As a result of these additional barriers, studies have established that women need more psychosocial support than men (Linehan, 2000; Clutterbuck, 1993). Organizational sources of support for managers include mentors and interpersonal

networks. The findings from our study suggest that not only do mentoring relationships play an important role in the career success of female expatriate managers, but that mentors may also have a special role in improving the quality of organizational life for female managers. In this study, 40 of the interviewees had the experience of either formal or informal mentoring relationships. A total of 28 managers had been mentored by males only, six had been mentored by females only, and six had been mentored by both males and females. All ten interviewees who did not have mentors believed that they would have benefited from such a relationship, especially in the early stages of their careers. The sentiments of ten managers who did not have mentors can be summarised as follows:

I wish I had a mentor in my career. It is important to have one. I could possibly go with either a male or female mentor. In the early years in particular it was something that I could have done with. With a mentor you would be able to put the local issues on the table, for example, how would I handle this or that, and it is something that I lacked. If I had a mentor it would have been more beneficial to my career (account executive, technology company).

I haven't had a formal mentor in my career. I have had people that I can sound off my ideas with and I still do that. I believe that mentoring is a very good idea and I also believe that there should be a formal mentoring system in organizations. But, people should not be forced to be mentors, because that would not work. I would be very happy to be a mentor for younger people. I don't think it should matter if the mentor is male or female (managing director, manufacturing company).

I never had a mentor in my career. But, I think if I had one, I would have benefited from it (vice-president, computer company).

Seven of the interviewees suggested that their mentoring relationships were informal, and mentors were usually senior managers or bosses who gave guidance to them. These interviewees spoke of their bosses, all male, who facilitated informal mentoring support. These interviewees believed that a "good boss" acted as a supporter and adviser for them, helped to develop their reputations, helped to get their names known to senior management, set high standards for them, and stimulated their personal motivation:

Long before the word mentor was invented, I was fortunate to have a couple of bosses who were helpful in that way. It was very informal. What you need is someone to

discuss issues with and whom you can trust and who sometimes helps you to find a way out and to help you solve problems. I have two sons, and when they were very young it was not acceptable for me to go home and pick up the children from school, so sometimes there were very difficult situations. But, I was very fortunate that I had a boss who arranged meetings so that I could leave when I needed to, and accepted that I took papers home and did work at home, without talking to anybody else about it. So it worked thanks to a very good attitude from his side (director, European Commission).

I had a male mentor, but it was not that formalised. We had a process at one point in the company where there was this idea of “godfathering”, whereby we would be allocated a senior manager whom we would be able to go to in our sector and bounce ideas off. Mine has always been very informal, with a boss that I worked with a number of years ago, before I moved abroad, and whom I have kept very close to. I would consider him as a mentor. I don’t think that this is as important for one’s career as much as for one’s level of sanity. I have had two mentoring relationships, and they have both been with men. I have found these relationships particularly useful in situations which I have found difficult or if I have been going through a rough patch in my career. These men have tended to be a bit longer in the tooth and a bit older in career terms, but, I have found that invaluable (manager, oil company).

The 28 interviewees who had been mentored by males talked about the absence of female mentors, which reflected the relative scarcity of women in senior management, who might otherwise have been a source of mentors. Davidson and Cooper (1992) also found that successful female managers often report that at least one of their superiors (usually male) has been instrumental in helping their careers. The research results indicate that there are not enough women in senior international managerial positions yet to act as mentors for other women. As a result, female managers are more likely to be mentored by males. The findings establish that the mentor’s gender does not influence the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship. None of the 34 interviewees that had been mentored by males had experienced any difficulties with cross-gender mentoring. All 34 believed that their mentors did not view them just as females, but saw their mentoring roles as aiding the career advancement of their managerial protégées, also 38 of the interviewees added that females are more likely to be mentored by males,

because of the lack of women in senior management positions:

In a previous job I had a mentor, who didn’t see me as a female, but as a professional. He gave me things to do and I initially thought that I couldn’t do that, as he put me in situations where I was going to be really stretched, but I thrived on it, and it definitely helped my career. He gave me more faith in myself. I realised that I could do more than I originally thought I could and I became personnel manager and vice-president because of him. He also gave me a lot of international opportunities. I have to say that I never worked for a woman boss, because they are generally not there. I normally work on the board and again because the board is mainly composed of males I have never really worked with females (director, manufacturing company).

I have always had mentors and they have always been male. I have never had a female mentor. They are not there at senior levels. I have never come across a female mentor. I always look for a mentor in the first couple of months in my new job and I suss people out quickly. To me it doesn’t matter about their personality, but what matters to me is their business brain (human resources manager, computer company).

I always had mentors in my career. When I would have been making my way up in organizations, they would have been powerful males at that time. And, certainly, in the organization in which I spent most of my young career there were some men who were very good at mentoring. It is important for everyone to have a mentor, in particular for women, because it gives them information about the organization which they are not used to having. A lot of research which has been done in the United States showed very clearly that women who first made it to the top in big organizations tended to have received formative information from their fathers whom they were closer to, information like how organizations work. The one thing that is hard for women is that there are not enough women in senior positions for them to have female mentors. But, there are men in organizations who are suited to this purpose, and I really don’t think it matters too much whether the mentor is male or female as long as they can provide the information, and a lot of men tend to think that information is power (chief executive, insurance company).

When I was 28 years old I was working as a marketing manager in one of New Zealand’s biggest companies. The marketing director at the time was fired, so I was appointed marketing director, but the senior management did not want to give me the same package as my predecessor. This was

because of my age and probably being female and not being Australian, because the company was run by Australians at that time. I think there was a whole host of other reasons, like lack of confidence in me, for example, wondering if I was really going to be able to deliver and make such a big leap in job terms. The man who stuck his neck out and gave me the opportunity was a very good mentor to me. He really kept me in touch with what was going on, and what the important issues were, what different people's feelings were, and how to approach things so I would get the best chance within the group. I learned an awful lot, but had it not been for the kind of feedback I got from my mentor it would have been much more difficult. A year later, I was appointed marketing director and it was only then that I realised what I had been missing out on, in terms of the whole package and the benefits and so on, and the kudos from it. So, that is a very good example of having a mentor. An example of where I did not have that kind of relationship was when I was working for a company in England. I went into that company at a very senior level, working part-time. Later they asked me to work full-time, which I did. But, I was given what was an impossible job. That is really the only time when I ended up really struggling with my career. I didn't have access to anybody who was able to point me in the right direction. It was a very political organization and it was a big disadvantage for me not to have a mentor. If I had been male it would have been different because in that organization it was all about male bonding and male drinking and so on. I had a small child at the time, so I worked very hard to get my job done and to get home. The last thing I wanted was to go to the pub (marketing director, telecommunications company).

Our research revealed that, in an international management context, a mentoring relationship is even more important than in domestic management. The participants believed that while partaking in international assignments, mentors provide the contact and support from the home organization which in turn facilitates re-entry – in addition to improving the self-confidence of protégées, increasing their visibility in organizations and increasing their promotional prospects. The participants also believed that the opportunities for them to partake in international assignments would have been partly attributed to mentoring relationships. The interviewees suggested that, in the absence of family and friends, their mentors also provided many support benefits, and also helped in keeping them in touch with their home organizations, which in turn

reduced the “out of sight, out of mind” syndrome.

Clutterbuck (1993) asserted that everyone needs a mentor. Clutterbuck and Devine (1987) pointed out that the benefits of a mentoring relationship are not limited to the protégé. The mentor is said to achieve increased job satisfaction, increased peer recognition, and potential career advancement. The 40 interviewees who had the experience of mentoring relationships acknowledged that the benefits provided by their mentors began in their home organizations, for example, in providing career direction and psychological support. These interviewees suggested that their advancement to international management may be partially based on the successful development of mentoring relationships.

Six of the interviewees who had been mentored by both males and females believed that they were fortunate to have had the experiences of mentoring relationships with both genders. These interviewees believed that they had “the best of both worlds”, but suggested that it is the capability of the mentors that matters most, and not their gender:

Having a mentor is important. I had one formal mentor and a number of different informal mentors. The formal mentor acted as a career manager for me. When you are overseas, a home-based mentor is someone who provides that link when you are going to return. Having a home-based mentor, while I was overseas, kept me in touch with what was happening back home in the company, and that is incredibly important. Sometimes, if you want to find solutions or if you want to sound things off and you have a close relationship with your mentor, you can use that person in a confidential situation to sound things off. This is very important. Three of the mentors I had were men and two were women, and it was their different personalities and their different contributions that mattered, rather than their gender. Of the two women mentors that I had, one has children and it has been really refreshing for me to see that she is very senior, that she has kept a balance in her life, and she hasn't become macho. She is not working towards all these macho things like the different images of the long hours and all the rest of it, so it is quite good to see. So, it is refreshing to see that you can get there and not sacrifice yourself in getting more like men (human resources manager, telecommunications company).

The 40 interviewees who had mentors believed that the benefits provided by mentors, regardless of gender, has

undoubtedly facilitated their career advancement. Ten of the managers are now providing a mentoring role for junior staff members, mostly for younger females:

I love to mentor people. Most of them are women, but not all. It is a different interaction if one is mentoring a male or a female. I believe that I have a lot more in common with women, because we face some of the same challenges in terms of how we communicate, how we react to things, our family situations, children and the balancing of chores (partner, management consultancy company).

I have many females working for me, which is just a coincidence because they were in the department when I took it over, and I try to spend some time mentoring them (human resources manager, computer company).

I was officially a mentor for men, while unofficially I was a mentor for women who asked me to mentor them. I would spend some hours discussing their situations and problems. I believe the women have chosen me because there are not very many senior women managers (director, European commission).

The managers also suggested that mentoring in organizations outside the USA is a relatively recent development and, therefore, denied to many female managers who worked in an exclusively European context. A critical question is whether organizations can create conditions that encourage females to take on the role of mentors, as it is clear from the research that there is a scarcity of senior female mentors. Our findings reveal that managers who do not experience the benefits provided by a mentor, as discussed above, could in turn be a contributory factor in explaining the scarcity of female managers in international management.

Interpersonal networks as sources of organizational support for female expatriates

Smith and Hutchinson (1995) noted that there is not much empirical research literature available on interpersonal networks. Previous research studies of networking in domestic organizations, however, have indicated that in many organizations the concept of networks is understood to mean a male club or an “old boy network” model (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Ibarra, 1992). Our research findings indicate that, throughout Europe, the old boy network is still strong in most organizations, and particularly in established industries, such as medicine, accountancy and law. The

interviewees believed that, given the absence of family and friends while abroad, the benefits provided by formal and informal networking in international management are of even greater value than the benefits provided by networking in domestic management. Despite these benefits, however, the participants believe that women are disadvantaged from networking as gaining access to or male-dominated networks is still a significant barrier. Of the participants, 43 believe that there is a lack of networking for females in senior management. The managers perceive that quite an amount of business is discussed and that useful contacts are made when male managers network informally, but that as females they are excluded access to these informal situations:

There is a lack of networking for female managers and maybe it is worse in Ireland. I got quite a shock when I found out that there were all-men golf clubs, and with special days for ladies. Even if you have a handicap of eight, you have to beg and plead to be allowed to play on a Saturday or a Sunday, and the only discussion point I had was “you pay only half price”, and I said “well I am willing to pay full price”, and then they even had to think about that. It would be beneficial for women if they had more informal contacts. From the conferences I have been to, I see that there are quite a few women out there in managerial positions, but we are new, and we are up-coming and we have not shown what we are made of, and what we can do in an almost all-male environment. I still think women have to work harder than men in the managerial environment (customer services manager, computer company).

In Ireland I have found that there is a lot of networking for men, and it seems peculiar to me that a lot of business is done informally. I came here after working in the USA for 11 years, so I am not shy, but, there is the old boy network that women are excluded from (senior research and development engineer, computer company).

Many of the male network systems are not officially through network associations, but are through rugby clubs, football clubs, golf clubs and so on. It is like a natural ready-made contact system that exists, but which women do not have as much ready access to. So, women have to try harder and they have to take individual responsibilities for their own careers. In general, the networking opportunities for women are not as extensive as for men (manager, tourism promotion agency).

Our research findings suggest that managerial women are still less integrated

with important organizational networks. Our research further indicates that negative attitudes towards female managers were found to vary by industry, with a more hostile corporate climate prevailing in established industries. The participants believe that because they are in a minority group, they feel isolated by male colleagues. The participants also suggest that the exclusion of females from male managerial groups perpetuates the more exclusively male customs, traditions and negative attitudes towards female managers. The negative effects of these covert barriers include: blocked promotion and blocked career development, discrimination, occupational stress, and lower salaries. The respondents also believe that they are further disadvantaged from networking because of their additional family and home commitments and, generally, have far less time to network than their male colleagues:

There is a lack of networking for women in senior management, but maybe we are not like men in looking for things like the old boy network. I would not be interested in that and I would not have the time for it. I just want to go home and do what I have to do. For example, last night I wasn't home until 8.00 p.m. and the home was unhappy because mammy was home late. I have three children, one ten, one eight, and I have a small baby who is two, and when I come home the two-year-old's face just lights up. He does this for his daddy, too, but obviously his world is not complete until his mammy comes home. So I wouldn't have a lot of time for networking (chief accountant, computer company).

To be quite honest, I think women have less time than men for networking. Networking has to take place to a great extent after work and on top of your job. If you are a woman with a family, you have less time. Men have more time for networking. Working women are very busy (human resources manager, computer company).

There is a lack of networking for women in senior management. I work quite long hours and I have a son and a partner, so I really do not have time to network. But, I think one should really make the time to network (plant manager, pharmaceutical company).

Despite the shortage of time available to female managers for networking, however, 43 respondents suggested that if there was a professional networking organization available for female managers they would ensure that their schedules permitted joining such an organization:

There is not a well-developed professional women's network here in Ireland as yet.

I have not found the right organization yet. I have investigated four organizations and none of the four seems to have the type of people that would have things in common with myself. There is a lack of this type of organization for senior business managers. There is an organization called Network which tends to be for entrepreneurs, women who are managing their own business, but that is not what I do. I certainly do not have time for a lot of networking because of three young children, but if it were part of a professional organization with time well spent I would make time for it. There is an opening for a professional networking for business women (human resources manager, computer company).

According to Davidson and Cooper (1992), the task for female managers of breaking into the male-dominated "club" of managers can prove difficult, and this difficulty thereby denies them social support, contacts, opportunities and policy information. Similar findings resulted from our work, with all of the interviewees expressing awareness of old boy networks, and the difficulties associated with breaking into these. The interviewees spoke of "male bonding" which takes place after work hours, during sporting events, and in clubs and bars which they felt excluded from. The respondents also noted that male managers in their organizations spent more time networking after work hours than female managers. As gaining access to this "male club" has proved difficult for the participants, some of the interviewees have established their own informal female or mixed-gender networks. The views of the interviewees reflected previous research by Davidson and Cooper (1992) which indicated that, although it is beneficial for female managers to network in these newer groups, there are still more benefits to be gained from networking in established male-dominated groups, as power in organizations is still predominantly held by men. Five of the interviewees were members of networking groups for female managers within their own companies. Four of these interviewees were members of networking groups which were already in existence in their organizations and one interviewee was responsible for setting up a female networking group in her organization:

We developed a women's networking programme in the corporation I previously worked for. The corporation took a great deal of interest in that from a corporate and legal point of view. They wanted to become involved, which they did. They were

concerned about the purpose and the scope of the organization, and they were very concerned about our reason for forming. We responded by inviting them to participate. We are a female organization and our purpose is to share our experiences with other females to help them overcome obstacles. It has nothing to do with male bashing, it is not a coffee morning, it is not a bunch of hens. These are the types of things you hear: “Ah, it’s hen time”. I am not even offended by that type of comment any more, because I know there is a level of fear and it is that negative type of male attitude which produces those type of comments. We used to meet monthly and during this forum we had an agenda, hosted guest speakers, and kept very detailed minutes. Our invited guests included women executives who talked to us about their backgrounds and about what they were doing, but it was primarily for networking. The network is not about reacting; it is about becoming proactive; it is about strength in numbers; it is about sharing – and we need to share this so that we can overcome obstacles, because there are obstacles out there, whether they are overt or implied, they do exist (European technical support manager, computer company).

One interviewee who works in the medical profession believed that the professions of medicine and law are still very male dominated, and she is currently involved in setting up a networking group for senior female medical professionals:

My colleagues and I have discussed setting up a women’s networking group and giving it official recognition and not to let it be seen like the old boy network. I have some ideas of how it might work, but I don’t want it to be seen as a busy bees’ club. I would like to see it set up so that it has a positive role and not set up so that it looks threatening. Men find women together very, very threatening. It is also interesting that men equate women working together with trouble. I don’t know why this is so, because women in positions of authority can have a very calming influence. With a lot of men in authority the decisions can be based on male egos, but when you bring a woman into a position of authority it often dampens down any aggression. I think the old boy network is still alive and well and, of course, there are the conversations in men’s loos, and general male bonding (medical consultant).

Four of the interviewees were critical of networks which catered exclusively for females:

The difficulty in Belgium is that women are not accepted in clubs like the Rotary Club and the Lions Club. Then you have clubs where only women are present, and that is something that I do not agree with because it

does not reflect the reality of society (bank manager).

I am very wary about setting up women’s groups because straight away we are isolating ourselves. We are always saying that we want to be treated equally and we want to work equally with males and females. So, I am very, very wary of women-only groups (human resources manager, computer company).

These four managers believed that it is not necessary to restrict membership of these networks to females only, and that female managers should actively encourage male managers to join. Five interviewees believed that female networking groups were established in their companies because of the dominant old boy network, and the benefits that were seen to be derived from networking:

Our organization is very good and organizes a structure for women to network and it provides a lot of money for this and the network functions well. You get out of it what you put into it. I have worked for the company for 12 years and I have a huge network of people, not just women, but men as well. The only way you achieve and get on is to have that network. I would not say that it should necessarily be restricted to women only. We have the old boy network, and that is most certainly here and I think it will always be here. The key is to try to nudge into networking and get a piece of the action. Networking can be exclusive, but I am beginning to have discussions with my female colleagues when making internal professional decisions. I almost feel myself being sucked into an old girl network, which I guess feels comfortable. It feels that there is a source of information in the network about the whole working environment that otherwise you would not have (international assignment and repatriation manager, telecommunications company).

Our research findings suggest that female managers can miss out on international appointments because they lack mentors, role models, sponsorship, or access to appropriate networks – all of which are commonly available to their male counterparts. The findings indicate that the exclusion of female managers from business and social networks compounds their isolation, which in turn prevents female managers from building up useful networking relationships which should be advantageous to their international careers. The interviewees noted that peer relationships and interpersonal networks provide additional sources of organizational support for managers.

The interviewees further suggested that men, as the dominant group, may want to maintain their dominance by excluding women from informal interactions. The interviewees also suggested that exclusively male networks may be responsible for developing and nurturing negative attitudes and prejudices towards female managers. Since males still hold the power in the majority of organizations, the participants believed that if they could gain access to these networks, which would previously have been exclusive to men, that many benefits should result, in particular visibility and access to informal discussions with senior management, and 46 of the managers perceived that there are more benefits to be gained for career progression if they can penetrate male networking groups. Given the difficulties outlined in gaining access to the old boy network, these participants believed that benefits, such as psychological support, camaraderie, and general sociability, could result from networking with females or in a mixed-gender group. The interviewees believed that if females had more access to networking groups they could be socialised in both the formal and informal norms of the organization and gain advantages from these. As discussed, our findings suggest that two significant obstacles for female managers regarding networking are:

- 1 access to male networks; and
- 2 having less time available for networking due to domestic commitments.

Our findings, however, further suggest that if female networks become stronger and begin to have more power, then perhaps more females will reach senior management positions and in turn partake in international management.

Discussion of results

Our research contributes to the primary research domain of international human resource management literature – an area which has given very little attention to women expatriates in Europe. An explanation for the scarcity of research in this field might be attributable to:

- the lack of appropriate theoretical structures, as a field of research; and
- the lack of a universal model of human resource management.

Our findings confirm that the persistent stereotypical characteristics of a successful international manager are those

characteristics which are typically associated with male management.

Organizational assumptions and policies regarding the suitability of an individual as an expatriate manager are based on societal assumptions about men and women. Beliefs, such as, that successful managers must prove their worth by their early thirties, that career breaks to care for family members indicate a lack of organizational commitment, and that being the last person to leave at night demonstrates organizational commitment. The participants believed that the view generally held by home-country managers – that typically male characteristics are necessary for effective management – means that management itself is typically equated with masculinity. Home-country male managers perceive women as being different and not like themselves, so they tend not to select women for expatriate positions. Our findings suggest that female managers would have to be much more determined than men if they want international managerial positions, and must be prepared to ask for these positions because females are rarely offered such opportunities. In particular, senior home-country male managers believe that entry into a new job requires total involvement and longer than usual hours of work, therefore, the married expatriate manager is likely to be even less available to her family than when working in her home organization.

The interviewees perceived that gaining the necessary senior managerial experience in their home organizations was the most difficult of all stages, since many overt and covert barriers still prevent female managers from breaking through the glass ceiling in their home organizations. The participants perceived that it appears easy for women to gain employment at the lower levels of the organization, but it can prove very difficult for them to reach upper, middle, and senior management positions. Research conducted in north America by Adler, similarly suggested that corporate barriers to women, especially to women entering top management, persist (Adler, 1986-1987).

Our findings establish that, despite these additional obstacles, female managers are capable of reaching senior managerial positions, but that in comparison with their male colleagues they often have to make decisions about the importance of their careers relative to their personal lives. The interview participants believed that these gender obstacles contribute to the glass ceiling which still exists in Europe, and that

it is extremely difficult, though possible, to break through the glass ceiling, but unlike their male counterparts, it is not yet the norm for female managers to “have it all”, that is, to have a successful career, marriage and children.

After deciding to apply for their expatriate career moves, the interviewees perceived that the covert barriers tokenism, exclusion, and isolation, which contribute to the glass ceiling, are still very prevalent at this stage of their careers. The interviewees suggested that because female managers are frequently the sole female in an otherwise all-male environment, they face increased stereotyping, visibility, and performance pressure. The findings suggest that the sex labelling of occupations, which involves the expectation that an occupation will and ought to be filled by one sex rather than the other, is also problematic for female managers. The paucity of women in executive roles and the lack of visible role models reconfirms the traditional view and keeps sex labelling intact. Izraeli *et al.* (1980) similarly suggested that once an occupation acquires a sex label, each sex tends to self-select itself as an “appropriate” candidate, thus precipitating selection for particular jobs.

There is, for example, a strong expectation that managers are men and nurses are women. Consequently, women are not even considered for promotion to top positions in complex organizations. According to the International Labour Office, about half the world’s workers are in sex-stereotyped occupations. Men still dominate the technical and managerial tasks, while women are concentrated mainly in caring and nurturing occupations and support roles (*The Economist*, 1998). The interviewees suggested that organizations may choose to either address or ignore these problems – by ignoring them, however, the interviewees believed that organizations lose valuable managerial talent.

It is apparent from the managers that the wishes and desires of female managers to partake in international managerial positions are equal to those of male managers. The career paths of female managers, however, are still compared with those of their male counterparts, despite women in dual-career marriages inevitably having to face more difficulties when partaking in overseas positions. The managers stressed that it is essential to have their personal lives in order before going abroad and believed that because of the

additional difficulties involved when the accompanying spouse is male, female managers have to make extra efforts to ensure that their personal lives are in order before partaking in expatriate management. Previous research with male expatriates has indicated that the main cause of expatriate failures is the inability of spouses to adapt to their new surroundings (Scullion, 1994; Tung, 1982). The interviewees reported, from their experiences, that female managers tend to consider the position of their spouses to a greater extent than their male counterparts do, and that this in turn could help explain the success of the female international managerial assignment.

The interviewees perceived that home-country managers contend that marriage has a stabilising effect on male expatriates. They also perceived that, for female expatriate managers, home-country managers contend that marriage increases the risk of the assignment failing due to the additional difficulties associated with the male-accompanying spouse.

The interviewees noted that home-country and host-country organizations do not provide support to assist managers in coping with dual-career issues. Of the 50 interviewees, 18 were the main careerists, a situation which they believed was still “very unusual” in all countries where they had worked. These interviewees also suggested that it is more difficult for the male partner to adjust to the secondary careerist role, as this role is still more socially acceptable for females. The managers believed that society judges men, more than women, by their career advancement and, by extension, when men become the secondary careerist this can be especially troublesome for many males as they can be understood to undertake a “negative” career move.

The experiences of the divorced or separated interviewees suggest that another problem facing dual-career couples is when a woman chooses a more “high-flying” career. This can be interpreted as relative demotion for the partner’s image, or as prioritising career over one’s partner, and thus can lead to a destabilising of the former interpersonal balance or to an undermining of the partner’s self-image and confidence in the relationship.

These non-traditional career women may also experience external pressures which make life choices difficult for them, as they receive little or no organizational or societal support. The interviewees believed that, because of the lack of interest and concern

shown in the management of dual-career issues, this was a further contributory factor in explaining the scarcity of female expatriate managers

The interviewees predicted that because of an increasing number of females pursuing managerial careers, and the difficulties associated with male accompanying spouses, the number of commuter marriages will increase. They also believed that as the prevalence of commuter marriage is a relatively recent phenomenon, few senior home-country managers may be directly acquainted with couples having such an arrangement, and therefore may view such an arrangement as a threat to the longevity prospects of an assignment.

For most organizations, the women expatriates were “firsts”. This meant that neither the women nor the companies had the benefit of role models or established patterns. Despite these additional difficulties, however, both married and single female managers have expressed a willingness to relocate internationally. Difficulties regarding their marital status, however, still persist in their home countries, as senior managers continue to be sceptical about a woman’s ability to function effectively in a foreign country.

Regarding mentoring, our findings suggest that mentoring relationships developed in home-country organizations can contribute to the success of the female international career. Given the glass ceiling and the current male-dominated composition of most organizations, the 40 respondents who had experience of mentors believed that their career successes could be attributed in part to their mentors. Our research suggests that females who develop mentoring relationships should have better promotional prospects than those who do not. Mentors can increase the self-confidence of protégées by counteracting the effects of negative stereotypical sex-role socialisation in organizations, which can otherwise lead female managers to doubt their own abilities. Mentors were recognised by the respondents as being particularly beneficial at the early stages of career development, for providing challenging assignments, personal support, and friendship. Mentors were also perceived as being instrumental in helping women to overcome gender-related obstacles in organizations. The interviewees stated that having a mentor in their home organizations, while on an international assignment, is beneficial in terms of receiving social support and providing information on

repatriation assignments. Because of the scarcity of senior female managers as sources of mentoring support, organizations might develop more female mentors at middle management level, thus reducing the burden placed upon the few senior managers. Based on the interview findings, this increase in the availability of mentors should develop the career prospects of more women managers. None of the ten managers who now provide mentoring support to junior managers reported any difficulties with their roles. These ten managers believed that mentoring relationships may be most effective for junior female managers at early career stages where, in addition to the general mentoring support they provided, they also acted as role models. This finding contrasts with Bowers (1984) research which suggested that female executives are discouraged from becoming mentors to others in organizations because of non-supportive environments and time pressures.

Our findings also suggest that the exclusion of female managers from formal and informal networks compounds professional isolation, restricting the availability of peer support, which in turn benefits the promotional prospects of their male colleagues. The interviewees believed that women experience additional difficulties when they are excluded from “old boy networks”.

The respondents believed that networks are useful at all stages of their careers. The managers, however, stated that women frequently found themselves between two networks: a women’s network which provided social support and a male-dominated network which provided assistance in career progression. The interviewees perceived that their careers should have benefited from the support they would have received from peers – particularly in the absence of mentors – if they had been better integrated in organizational networks. Our research suggests that in addition to providing the much needed professional support for the expatriate move, networking provides many other advantages, such as psychological support, during all stages of the female career. The interviewees added that exclusively male networks can nurture negative male attitudes towards female managers, thus continuing to promote male managers as the dominant power holders in organizations

Implications for practice

It is clear that expatriate management has long been a masculine preserve in Europe and the USA. Our research suggests that in Europe the development of women in international management deserves special attention despite the current human resource policy initiatives in the USA directing attention away from equal opportunity policy towards diversity management (Wilson, 1996). Our research would support the argument that a growing interest in the management of diversity in the very different cultural context of Europe runs the risk of devaluing the claim of special attention for women's management development (Woodall, 1996).

Our research suggests that women will remain a small minority in international management until organizations fundamentally re-examine and reassess their human resource management policies and practices. Sinclair and Ewing (1993) argue, however, that these practices are difficult to identify and difficult to dismantle, as they are embedded in organizational cultures and entrenched in organizational power structures. Human resource management practices primarily reflect the interests of the dominant group in the organization (Burrell and Hearn, 1989) and organizations generally have not succeeded in introducing development strategies that effectively meets the needs of women.

Our research supports the view that organizations should proactively seek information about the individual requirements and career aspirations of women managers who may be interested in a career in international management. Sinclair and Ewing (1993) suggest an approach based on customising human resource practices to meet the very different needs of various groups of women managers based on listening to views of different groups of women and developing human resource strategies which are geared to an understanding of what motivates women and drives their career path. This approach suggests the application of basic marketing principles in segmenting employees, understanding their requirements and customising human resource policies accordingly. Our data suggests that the approach of segmentation and customisation outlined above could usefully be extended to women seeking to progress their careers in international management.

Our research identified the lack of mentoring and networking relationships as among the most significant barriers facing women managers in their pursuit of careers in international management, and argued that, in an international management context, these relationships are even more important than in domestic management. However, while there remains so few women in senior and international management, many women managers will not be able to benefit from career development support through mentoring. Our findings suggests that organizations should introduce formal and informal mentoring strategies specifically designed to promote the participation of women managers in international management and recognises that female managers may have different mentoring needs than men.

Given the severe shortage of female mentors, organizations urgently need to address the question of how to encourage female managers to take on the role of mentors. Our research suggests that in order to encourage commitment to mentoring it may be necessary to introduce incentives such as making mentoring part of the formal duties of senior managers and included in the performance assessment of managers. The challenge for international companies seeking to increase women's participation in international management is to develop a pool of senior female mentors who can advise, support, sponsor and, very importantly, act as role models for the new generation of female managers seeking to break into careers in international management.

Our research also suggests that organizations need to develop policies in relation to dual-career couples, and specifically address the needs of the spouse in these transfers. Organizations should allow longer preparation time for the move in order to assist the accompanying spouse, e.g. with visas and work permits. A pre-assignment trip should also be arranged to allow the accompanying spouse to make employment contacts. The plan should also specify the duration of the assignment, and outline any assistance for the male partner to be provided by the organization.

A further perception by home-country senior management, highlighted by Berthoin-Antal and Izraeli (1993) and Adler (1987), revealed that female international managers are considered to be additional risks for their organizations. As the results of previous studies have shown, organizations

can attempt to reduce risks for both personal safety and organizational involvement by limiting female expatriate manager's professional contacts to corporate personnel, by defining her assignment as temporary, and by not offering her the most senior position in the host country. The findings from our research question these measures for reducing risk, particularly in countries which treat women in a manner similar to that in the home country, e.g. in north America and Europe, and suggest that these strategies may instead increase the organizational risks involved, as the managers may be restricted by such constraints. All 50 managers successfully occupied senior managerial positions in their host countries, seven of the participants held their respective company's number one position in the country, with the length of international postings being equivalent to those of their male counterparts. It is clear from our research, therefore, that organizations in Europe no longer need to employ these risk-reducing strategies for female managers and that senior international positions should now be offered to managers regardless of gender considerations.

The interviewees suggested that these traditional home-country perceptions are usually based on men's apprehensions about the possibility of female managers being more successful than male managers. The participants also suggested that many home-country senior male managers frequently feel threatened by female managers, and to reduce this threat they often promote people most similar to themselves (i.e. other males) to expatriate management positions. Our research suggests that organizations can no longer afford to ignore their female managers, especially in the area of international management where shortages of managers have been reported, because of misjudged perceptions such as these.

Our research reveals that the stages of career development for female managers do not have the predictable phases that male life patterns tend to have. The interviewees confirmed that evaluating many life choices; for example, whether or not to have children, is more difficult and complex for female expatriate managers. The managers believed that their careers would have benefited from a model of career development which acknowledged different life paths and which placed positive values on a variety of experiences, both inside and outside their organizations.

Future research agenda

Our research findings provide opportunities for further research with senior female international managers. As international management is relatively new for female managers, very little empirical research outside of north America has been conducted with this management sector. Arising from our interviews, a number of specific themes emerged, each of which can be further developed in future research; for example, our findings highlight the additional difficulties that dual-career couples have to overcome when international relocation is necessary. Dual-career appointments almost invariably have to cope with the outcome of one career having to suffer for the career advancement of the partner who receives the international reassignment, as it is rare that both partners are employed by the same organization, and it would be very exceptional for such a couple to be offered geographically-shared international assignments. Relating to dual-career couples and accompanying spouses, future research might, therefore, investigate the decision-making practices used by both dual-career couples and home-country senior management in relation to international transfers. Our findings indicate that home-country senior management should no longer assume that the male partner's career will maintain priority among couples, despite the additional obstacles that have to be overcome when the male partner adopts the role of accompanying spouse.

The failure of organizations to respond to dual-career issues results in costs, not only to the couple, but also to their organizations. The willingness of organizations to address dual-career issues may be important for achieving competitive advantage in the future. Regarding the career development of individuals who are from dual-career couples and the attendant difficulties outlined above for dual-career couples, the question of whether relocation is really necessary and, if so, to what extent, needs to be addressed.

Alternatively, if dual-career couples are unable to reach a decision to relocate in the same geographical location, then further research should explore the advantages and disadvantages of commuter marriages from both the viewpoint of the couple and that of the organization. The interviewees predicted that the proportion of commuter marriages is likely to increase among dual-career couples, as prior work and the findings of this research establish that females do want to

participate in international management. Further research is needed to investigate: the arrangements for children if they are part of commuter marriages, the geographical distances between the couples, the time span between couples meeting, and the overall anticipated duration of the commuting arrangement of the marriage.

Further research might also focus on the accompanying spouse phenomenon. Studies might investigate the implications of one partner putting his or her career on hold, as previous studies have generally concentrated on other difficulties experienced by the accompanying spouse while abroad. Traditionally, the accompanying spouse tended not to have a career and was female. Now, as more women move into management positions, it is increasingly likely that many male partners may have to put their careers on hold. Research might investigate the implications for both males and females who put their careers on hold. Questions arise regarding the financial, personal, and emotional costs experienced by the accompanying spouse in an international move. Such research might also assess the overall advantages and disadvantages of putting a career on hold from the individual's perspective and from the perspective of the organization. Adding to the findings of this research, new research on careers which are put on hold should contribute to a relatively new area in career-theory literature, as studies on international management careers have largely been based on the mainly linear progression of male managers' careers.

Arising from discussions with the 50 participants, and from previous research, other specific barriers which prevent female managers from partaking in international careers include the lack of mentors, lack of networking opportunities, and lack of female role models. These three areas merit further investigation. With regard to mentoring, for example, the extent of the use of mentoring in organizations outside the USA, and the advantages and disadvantages of same-gender and cross-gender mentoring might be assessed. The research findings in the mentoring literature, particularly on the gender mix of mentoring relationships, are inconclusive and further empirical investigation with female managers who had mentoring relationships should help to clarify this area. Further research might also investigate the impact of mentors in home organizations on the career successes of female international managers.

The managers also highlighted the benefits of formal and informal support networks for career advancement, particularly during their international assignment. Very little empirical research, however, has been conducted on networks. Future research might investigate the similarities and differences of male networks, female networks, and mixed gender networks. The research might also examine the entry barriers to these networks, and report on the personal and career benefits these groups provide. Future research might also usefully investigate the likelihood of more successful international careers for female managers who are members of influential networks.

Conclusions

This paper has extended our knowledge relating to the senior female managerial career move in the European context. In particular, we have highlighted the nature of corporate or organizational barriers to the career development of women managers. These can be considered as being especially embedded in the management processes of traditional industries, suggesting that newer, fast-moving industries such as the electronics, software and e-commerce sectors may afford women greater opportunity in career progression.

This paper aims to identify and discuss some of the key factors influencing the success or failure of female expatriates on expatriate assignments. Our findings suggest that the low participation of women in expatriate management across Europe continues to be a cause for concern and will be a key challenge for international human resource managers over the next decade. Given the growing shortages of international managers (Scullion, 2001), the failure to develop effective strategies to promote increased participation of women in international management will become increasingly costly to organizations and will limit the potential supply of expatriate managers.

Our study suggests that women expatriate managers will remain a minority until organizations re-examine their human resource management policies and practices, and offer organizational support in the form of mentoring and interpersonal networks. Our findings also addresses the lack of mentoring and networking perceived by the participants as representing significant obstacles to their professional development

and reveals how pervasive these barriers appear to be across a wide range of sectors throughout Europe. Current human resource management practices primarily reflect the interests of the dominant group (males) in organizations and organizations have not yet succeeded in introducing training and development strategies that effectively meet the needs of women.

Our study highlights that female expatriates are disadvantaged in their careers and suggests that few organizations have developed distinctive career models for female expatriates. In addition, gender disparity in organizations and family responsibilities often prevents women employees from reaching senior managerial positions. Our study shows that female managers believe that they are often forced to choose between an expatriate career and family, and their choices are more difficult than for their male counterparts because of the linkages that exist between their career and family roles. Our study further suggests there is little evidence of the development of strategic human resource management practice in this area and that traditional career practices still predominate across different sectors and national origins.

The findings from our study also reveal that the combination of a successful career, marriage and children remains more difficult for the female executive to achieve than her male counterpart, even though a growing number of women are able to break through the glass ceiling which still exists in many organizations. An important finding of the study, however, is the extent to which career experiences are similar across national, linguistic and sectoral boundaries, a finding at odds with much previous research on male career patterns and, in our view, an area worthy of further examination.

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. Drawing on the perceptions of senior female managers ignores other levels of managerial women, whose experiences might be significantly different to those of their more established colleagues. The study did not gather information from the employing organizations, which could shed light on the policies and practices they use in their approach to the female career and whether these have changed over time and in what direction/s. The study takes the senior level of management only as its source for the participating interviewees. While such an approach is merited, given the aims of the study, including management levels other

than senior could help in triangulating the findings in this paper.

Finally, our findings establish that gender stereotyping is still a major obstacle for female managers to overcome, particularly, in their home organizations at the early stages of their careers. The managers believed that their progression to senior management is hampered by covert and overt barriers, which, they assert, still exist for women in management. Our findings, in agreement with previous research in Australia and north America, confirm that Europe-based female managers want an international career, and suggest that many of these managers also want marriage and children. A commonly-shared sentiment of the 50 interviewees could be summarised by a finding of McGee-Calvert and Ramsey (1992) which they expressed as:

Until we admit to the fact that most organizations, as they currently exist, are seriously flawed, the glass ceiling will remain firmly in place, while being polished assiduously by those above it.

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