Can We Send Her There?  
Maximizing the Success of  
Western Women on Global  
Assignments

Paula M. Caligiuri  
Wayne F. Cascio

This paper examines factors affecting the performance of Western women on global assignments. Four categories of causal agents that affect female expatriates' success are: their individual characteristics, their organizations, their families, and the host nationals with whom they work. Along with these factors, the paper offers 15 strategies for multinational organizations to maximize the likelihood of success of their female expatriates.

The number of expatriates multinational companies (MNCs) are sending on global assignments is increasing steadily (Dobryznski, 1996; Laabs, 1993; Stroh, Dennis, & Cramer, 1994). For example, 94% of the 164 companies responding to a recent KPMG Peat Marwick LLP survey said it was important to send people on international assignments today, and a stunning 99% said it will be important by the year 2000 (McClenahen, 1997). However, the availability of people who are willing to accept global assignments is not growing at the same rapid rate. In fact, multinational companies report that finding enough of the right people with the requisite skills for global assignments is one of their greatest international human resource concerns (Stroh & Caligiuri, 1998). Even with the urgent need to broaden the global talent pool, it is still the case that only 10 to 12 percent of expatriates from Western organizations are women (The Conference Board, 1992; Tung, 1997).

We believe there are three major reasons why firms should consider sending more women on global assignments: (1) multinational companies (MNCs) need competent expatriates who possess a wide-range of technical and interpersonal characteristics. Expanding the talent pool to include women provides a
tactical advantage for MNCs. (2) Affording all employees who are interested in a global assignment the opportunity to be considered for one is consistent with the corporate value statements and EEO policies of many MNCs. (3) Case law (*Fernandez v. Wynn Oil Co.*, 1981) as well as recent legislation (e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1991) make it illegal to deny a woman a global assignment on the basis of gender (Cava & Mayer, 1993).

While there exist several frameworks for predicting the success of expatriates in general (McEvoy & Parker, 1995; Teagarden & Gordon, 1995), examining the strategies for maximizing female expatriates’ success is appropriate because of the various sets of beliefs and expectations, both in home and host countries, about the role of women in society and in business (Fernandez & Barr, 1993). Sending a woman to a host country is likely to cause both the woman and her host national colleagues to examine those beliefs. To consider these issues in a systematic manner, this paper proposes four sets of variables for predicting a Western female expatriate’s success: (1) her individual characteristics, (2) the support she receives from her organization, (3) her family, and (4) the host nationals with whom she works. We will discuss each of these four causal agents, and offer fifteen practical strategies that Western MNCs can implement to encourage the success of women on global assignments. These four causal agents are illustrated in Figure 1.

**Personal Characteristics and the Female Expatriate’s Success**

We describe these four causal agents in the context of Adler’s “myths” surrounding female expatriates (1984a, 1984b, 1984c).
The first myth addressed by Adler (1984a) concerns the most basic personal characteristic of a potential female expatriate, that is, her motivation or interest in a global assignment. Adler (1984a) tested the myth that very few women were in expatriate positions because women neither sought nor accepted international positions. She tested this assumption with a sample of more than 1,000 male and female M.B.A. students in seven top business schools. Adler (1984a) found no significant difference between men and women in their interest or desire to have an international career.

Assuming, then, that motivation to accept a global assignment is not a limiting factor, what other personal characteristics may affect the likelihood that a woman will succeed on a global assignment? From the literatures on expatriates and female managers we identified several other personal characteristics that could affect the outcome of a woman’s expatriate assignment. These personal characteristics fall into three general categories: (1) technical competence, (2) self-efficacy and confidence, and (3) personality. Each will be discussed in greater detail below.

**Technical Competence**

Technical competence is the first important personal characteristic that will affect a female expatriate’s success. While technical competence is also very important for male expatriates, it is even more critical for women who may be considered “tokens” in their global assignments. Kanter (1977) offered an operational definition of tokenism, namely, being a member of a 15% or smaller minority group. In most global contexts female expatriates would be categorized as tokens because they are not likely to have other female counterparts at their level. Indeed Kanter argues that a minority-group member (i.e., a token) has to be exceptionally competent to gain acceptance by the majority. There is support for this argument in the case of female expatriates, for female expatriates reported that “demonstrating their competence” was critical for gaining the respect of the host nationals (Adler, 1987). Other research has supported Adler’s (1987) finding as well. Thus, Stone (1991) surveyed Australian, Asian, and expatriate managers to identify factors that contributed to the success of female expatriates. Australian managers ranked technical competence second, while Asian and expatriate managers ranked technical competence third (Stone, 1991). For both Asian and Australian managers, “ability to adapt” was ranked first.

**Strategy 1:** MNCs should select female expatriates who demonstrate the technical or managerial skills for the position.

**Self-efficacy and Confidence**

Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) proposed that having a self-orientation was important for the cross-cultural adjustment of global assignees (both men and women). Self-orientation encompasses characteristics “that enable the expatriate to maintain mental health, psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and effective stress management” (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Other characteris-
tics related to “self-orientation,” such as, self-esteem, comfort with self, and self-confidence, have also been linked to cross-cultural adjustment (Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Black, 1988; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1988).

Self-orientation, and, more specifically, self-confidence and self-efficacy, may be especially important for women on global assignments given that they will need to believe solidly in their own competence to be successful. Both self-efficacy and self-confidence refer to one’s belief regarding one’s own competence or ability to overcome obstacles and succeed in a given situation (Bandura, 1982; Rosenberg, 1979).

For women, having high self-efficacy and confidence is associated with success in nontraditional, powerful jobs (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Further research suggests that confidence is linked with encouragement-seeking and training-seeking behaviors (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994)—both of which are likely to facilitate success on global assignments.

Having self-confidence during global assignments may be especially important because verbal and nonverbal signs of encouragement from host nationals may be uninterpretable due to cultural or language differences. Even when the outside signs of encouragement from others are present and interpretable, women are less likely to increase confidence in their own abilities from that encouragement (Dvir, Eden, & Banjo, 1995). Therefore, rather than encouragement coming from an outside source, women must enhance their performance by inspiring confidence from within. Again, this is important because a woman’s self-confidence is related to her managerial advancement (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994), and her desire to remain in a group where she is a minority (Cohen & Swim, 1995). A woman facing the prospect of a global assignment is more likely to be successful if she has a high level of confidence in her ability to succeed. This leads to a second strategy:

Strategy 2: MNCs should select women for global assignments who are self-confident in their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Personality Characteristics

With both competence and confidence in place, women will need additional personal characteristics to be successful on global assignments. Studies examining male and female managers in a domestic context have generally concluded that there are no pronounced differences between the sexes on personality characteristics related to managerial success (Powell & Butterfield, 1979; Donnell & Hall, 1980). This picture, however, may change somewhat in a global context.

The previous section discussed one of Mendenhall and Oddou’s (1985) three dimensions related to cross-cultural adjustment—self-orientation. The other two, perceptual-orientation and orientation toward others, may also be somewhat more important for women on global assignments. With respect to the female assignee’s orientation toward others, it has been noted that women tend to rely on cooperation to achieve goals, and to adopt an indirect style of communication (Tung, 1997). This trait may be
particularly useful for female expatriates conducting business in high-context cultures (Asia, Latin-America), where the social values dictate indirect communication styles. The importance of cooperation in forming global strategic alliances has also been recognized (Cascio & Serapio, 1991; Tung, 1995). Thus, the ability to form relationships with host nationals as colleagues, superiors, subordinates and clients may be integral to performing the assignment for expatriate women, and may be facilitated by certain traits that women are known to possess (Tung, 1997). Further, in a domestic context, Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) have pointed out that forming interpersonal relationships at work plays a key role in the career advancement of women. By forming relationships with superiors, subordinates and peers women derive mentoring, support and networking opportunities (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). In an international context, orientation toward others may enable women to form such relationships, hence enabling better cross-cultural adjustment.

Given that western women are often working in host countries that have a lower incidence of women as managers (Caligiuri & Tung, 1998), the perceptual orientation of women may be particularly important. Women, more so than men, not only need to understand cultural differences—but also the gender differences that might be present in cultures that see a more traditional (home-maker) role for women. Thus, female expatriates may be placed in situations where these cultural differences have a more direct impact on their performance on the job, and the ability to be open to differences in values, norms, and behaviors may be all the more important. Research has indicated that expatriates (both male and female) who are flexible in their attitudes towards cultural differences and are willing to learn from different cultural contexts adjust better to overseas assignments (Harvey, 1985; Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). This suggests:

**Strategy 3:** MNCs should select female expatriates who possess a greater perceptual-orientation (e.g., openness, flexibility).

The second dimension, perceptual-orientation, includes personality characteristics such as nonjudgmental attitudes and openness to new cultural norms, values, and behaviors (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Expatriates who adjust well cross-culturally tend to be more intellectually curious, willing to accept cultural differences, and flexible (Harvey, 1985; Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). As such, we propose the following organizational strategy:

**Strategy 4:** MNCs should select female expatriates who possess a positive orientation toward others (higher in sociability, high-context communicators). MNCs should also examine if the same communication style that may be deemed ineffective (i.e., unassertive) in the home culture may be appropriate for the host culture.
The Sending MNC and the Female Expatriate's Success

We now shift our focus from the characteristics a female expatriate should possess to the practices the MNC should implement. This implies four additional organizational strategies. Before discussing strategies however, it is important to consider the decision-making context of MNCs that send women on global assignments. A multinational organization, trying to blend into the host country in which it is operating, might be inclined to follow the social mores of that particular country—assuming that by doing so, it will gain a competitive advantage (Cava & Mayer, 1993; Feltes, Robinson, & Fink, 1993). Therefore, under the guise of competitive necessity, MNCs may decide not to send women to countries where women are not accepted in business settings. These MNCs assume that their businesses would suffer if they sent a woman to a country where few, if any, women occupy senior-management positions. For example, “U.S. female expatriates may encounter resistance if they are performing traditionally male roles . . . (this) could hamper her ability to accomplish her assigned overseas mission” (Feltes et al., 1993, p. 84).

Adler (1984b) surveyed HR managers to determine the attitudes of MNC’s toward sending women on global assignments. She sampled 60 HR managers from MNCs in North America and found that only 35% had selected a woman for a global assignment, compared with 80% had selected a man. Adler (1984b) also found that 72% of these HR managers believed the number of women they would send on global assignments would increase in the future, and 82% believed that women are qualified for global assignments. She followed up with an assessment of the HR managers’ beliefs regarding the barriers for women in obtaining (and presumably succeeding in) a global assignment. The HR managers believed that the prejudice of host nationals, expected problems with a dual-career marriage, and the company’s reluctance (not their own) to send women on global assignments, were all potential barriers for women.

From a U.S. legal perspective, the 1991 Civil Rights Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act protect Americans in foreign countries who are employed by American (or American-controlled) MNCs from discrimination—despite local customs or traditions (Carmell, 1997). This suggests that even if a host country “prefers” not to conduct business with women, U.S. women cannot be unfairly denied access to jobs, training, promotions, etc. in foreign countries. In U.S. case law, Fernandez v. Wynn Oil Co. (1981), the court held that neither stereotyped impressions of male and female roles, nor stereotyped preferences of host national customers may justify a sexually-discriminatory practice as a bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ) under Title VII. Thus a company’s allegation that its host national customers would refuse to deal with a female corporate officer did not constitute a legitimate defense for its decision to promote only males to that position. Reversing the district court’s
ruling, that male gender was a BFOQ for a job performed in foreign countries where women are discouraged from pursuing business careers, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that stereotyped gender preferences of the defendant's Latin American customers did not justify sexually-discriminatory hiring practices.

Thus, an argument cannot be made by U.S. employers that their foreign customers "prefer" to work with men, and then subsequently use this argument as a basis for discriminating against U.S. women. Gender, in these cases, can only be considered a BFOQ when a law of the host country limits women from doing a particular job (Cava & Mayer, 1993). Indeed, the U.S. courts have long ruled that customer preference is not a BFOQ (Diaz v. Pan American World Airways, 1971).

Even if organizations have no desire to send women on global assignments, we have proposed at least two reasons organizations should consider doing so: The first is based on case law (in the U.S.) and the second is that they are simply running out of potential male candidates. Therefore, we agree with other authors (Adler, 1984b; Stone, 1991) that the number of female expatriates will grow over time. What, then, can organizations do to maximize the potential of female expatriates? Building on the work of Bhatnagar (1988) we propose four specific management practices that MNCs can implement that will facilitate the success of Western female expatriates (especially those assigned to countries with more traditional views about the role of women in society and in business). These include (1) predeparture training that addresses the specific needs of female expatriates, (2) organizational support and championing, (3) in-country support and mentoring, and (4) the adoption of policies that support the fair treatment of women.

Predeparture Training

Limited empirical evidence on predeparture cross-cultural training programs generally supports the position that accurate exposure to a host culture, in the context of training, is related positively to the cross-cultural adjustment of both men and women (Early, 1987; Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, 1971; Black & Mendenhall, 1990). For female expatriates' predeparture cross-cultural training to affect global assignment success, the training must facilitate an integration of the newly-learned behaviors into a woman's repertoire of behavioral responses (Dinges, 1983). This may include training on the norms, values, and traditions of a host country regarding women, and deriving solutions for the potentially challenging situations that female expatriates may encounter (Feltes et al., 1993). Prior to the global assignment, MNCs should provide developmental experiences for their female expatriates (as they often do for male expatriates), such as short-term business trips and necessary domestic experiences (Adler, 1984b). In addition, they should allow potential female expatriates the opportunity to role play or to simulate (e.g., through interactive video) a variety of difficult situations that female expatriates, in particular, may encounter (e.g., "after-hours" socializing, peer pressure for sexual
favors, and, for single females, strategies for coping with the loneliness that often characterizes global assignments to "culturally-distant" lands).

Cross-cultural training may also provide a realistic expectation for what is to come in the global assignment. Research suggests that realistic job previews will enhance job survival (Wanous & Colella, 1989) by helping individuals form realistic impressions about their future positions. These realistic expectations may also help to reduce anxiety during the stressful period of being a newcomer in the position (Nelson & Quick, 1991). These ideas lead to the following organizational strategy for MNCs.

**Strategy 5: MNCs should train female expatriates on the norms, values, and traditions that the host nationals possess regarding women, and train them on deriving solutions for the potentially challenging situations they may face as women.**

On-country Support and Mentoring

In addition to training their female expatriates, MNCs can manage the perceptions of them before and while they are on their global assignments. This may be especially important in subsidiaries of U.S.-based MNCs where most host national managers know that U.S. civil rights laws exist—and may assume that their female expatriate colleague fulfills an affirmative action quota. As such, MNCs should take special care to ensure that the female expatriate is "the best candidate" available, rather than simply a U.S. EEO "requirement." Knowing that host nationals' perceptions of a Western female expatriate's competence may be blurred by stereotypes (confounded with some knowledge of U.S. civil rights laws), MNCs should not only select the best manager—but also emphasize that she is. To demonstrate that the MNC is committed to placing the "best person" in all positions, it could send more than one female (who may be viewed as a legal "token") to a given host national location (Adler, 1984b; Feltes et al., 1993). These ideas lead to our sixth strategy.

**Strategy 6: In order to dispel the "token" image, MNCs should actively promote expatriate women as their "best qualified" candidates.**

**In-country Support and Mentoring**

Once women are in their host countries, MNCs can enhance their success through in-country support and mentoring programs. Mentors have been found to improve greatly the likelihood of success in managerial roles for women (e.g., Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1989). Mentoring relationships, "while important for men, may be essential for women" given that the barriers for success may be greater for women in organizations (Ragins, 1989).

While the barriers for women in a domestic context may still be pronounced, barriers to women's success are even more dramatic in a global context. Given that in many global assignments gaining access to potential mentors may be limited, MNCs should...
assign sponsors (Adler, 1984b) or in-country consultants (Feltes et al., 1993) to support women in their new roles. This suggests the following strategy for organizations.

**Strategy 7:** MNCs should provide each female expatriate with an in-country support network or mentor.

**MNC Policies and Organizational Culture**

While the previous three strategies were tactical and specific, our next recommendation involves MNCs’ policies and organizational culture. In a study of almost 700 MNCs, Adler (1984c) found that the proportion of expatriates on global assignments cannot be explained by the same organizational-size variables (sales, number of countries in which a firm operates, total number of employees, and assets) for women, as it can for men. This suggests that while the proportion of male expatriates may depend on organizational size, the proportion of female expatriates depends on other factors, such as MNCs’ implicit policies on women as expatriates (Adler, 1984c). Such policies could restrict women from ever obtaining a global assignment—and from succeeding once they are on one.

Adler (1984a, 1984b, 1984c) recommends that MNCs should not make any assumptions about women as expatriates (e.g., do not assume their husbands will not approve, or that they will not be accepted). We believe organizations should do more. They should actively promote policies that support women in global assignments. Promoting an organizational culture that supports women’s efforts to advance and grow professionally will improve the assimilation and acculturation of these women in organizations (Hood & Koberg, 1994). Thus, we offer the following strategy for MNCs:

**Strategy 8:** MNCs should have (and explicitly implement) policies worldwide regarding the fair and equal treatment of all employees, regardless of race, gender, creed, age, disability, or religion. That is, these policies should be integral parts of an MNC’s worldwide culture, rather than adopted solely in the spirit of legal compliance.

**Spouses, Children, and the Success of Female Expatriates**

In a domestic context, discussing predictors of job success may be complete after considering the first two categories—individual characteristics and organizational practices. In a global context, however, organizations need to consider the needs of the families that will be uprooted for the sake of one person’s career. Family concerns can be especially challenging for female expatriates. For example, female expatriates who are married will likely have male spouses relocating to the host country. In societies where men are considered the primary breadwinners, this is a non-traditional situation where husbands follow their wives for the sake of their wives’ careers. However, with the rise of dual-career marriages (i.e., both partners are committed to their careers), this situation is becoming ever more
common (Colwill & Temple, 1987; Punnett, Crocker, & Stevens, 1992; Wiggins-Frame & Shehan, 1994). To date, however, research on male expatriate spouses is virtually nonexistent (Punnett et al., 1992). Extant research on expatriate spouses has been limited primarily to samples of female, non-working spouses (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989). To date, the sole research study conducted on male expatriate spouses suggests that men have some unique concerns that affect their work and social lives (Punnett et al., 1992). For female expatriate spouses, many find an intact social support network with the other expatriates’ wives. A male spouse may not feel comfortable spending a significant amount of time with a group of female spouses (Punnett et al., 1992). In addition, in the dual-career situation where both partners have careers, the male partner may have a difficult time adjusting to being a nonworking spouse (Westwood & Leung, 1994). Not unique to male partners, this may be especially true in countries where host-national work permit restrictions do not allow both partners to work in the host country (Punnett et al., 1992).

These challenges affect a male spouse’s potential for cross-cultural adjustment. They are a source of concern, given that research suggests that spouses’ inability to adjust to living in the host country was the most frequently-cited reason for the failure (Tung, 1981; Harvey, 1985). Therefore the adjustment of an expatriate’s spouse is one of the most critical determinants of whether the expatriate will complete his or her assignment (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Tung, 1981), and how successful the expatriate’s performance will be while on the assignment (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989). These findings are not limited to U.S. or Western expatriates. In a study of Japanese expatriates, Fukuda and Chu (1994) found that family-related problems were ranked first in explaining why expatriates terminated their assignments.

Related to this, but less often studied, is the role of children on global assignments. Again, given that women have tended to assume the traditional role of child rearing, the impact of children may affect female expatriates differentially, compared with male expatriates. Research from the literature on domestic relocation suggests that relocation may be stressful for children, but the outcome on their emotional and social functioning is not yet clear (Cornille, 1993). In the global context, adaptation may be even more extreme. Two of the most problematic areas in children’s global relocation are (1) their education and (2) reestablishing social networks (Brett, 1982; Fukuda & Chu, 1994). For Japanese expatriates, education is especially a problem because of their desire to give their children a Japanese education. When students are above grade nine, finding Japanese schools outside Japan is especially difficult. Many Japanese mothers choose to return to Japan for the sake of their children’s education, thus separating the family (Fukuda & Chu, 1994).

The effect of the spouse and children’s adjustment on an expatriate’s performance can be explained through spillover theory (Caligiuri, Hyland,
Spillover theory hypothesizes a reciprocal relationship between affective responses in one's work life and in one's family life. That is, such responses carry over from one domain (e.g., home life) to the other (e.g., work life) (Aldous, 1969; Barnett & Marshall, 1992; Crouter, 1984; Leiter & Durup, 1996; Piotrowski, 1979). Spillover occurs when workers carry their positive or negative emotions and attitudes from their work life into their home life (Kelly & Vyodanoff, 1985; Piotrowski, 1979), and when they carry over emotions and attitudes from their home back to the work environment (Belsky, Perry-Jenkins, & Crouter, 1985; Crouter, 1984). Studies examining the influence of work on family assume the centrality of work in establishing the conditions of family life (Kanter, 1977); however, spillover theory suggests that one's family also can affect performance while on the job. These two types of spillover may not exert equal effects. Job-to-home spillover is greater than home-to-job spillover (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993). In the context of a global assignment, the effects of spillover from home to work and from work to home can either enhance an expatriate's performance or detract from it because the originating emotions can be positive, or negative or both (Barnett, Marshall, & Sayer, 1992; Lambert, 1990). These ideas lead to the following strategies for organizations.

**Strategy 9:** MNCs should offer mechanisms to improve the likelihood that the spouses or partners of female expatriates will adjust well cross-culturally (e.g., training for spouses, male-oriented social networks, language classes).

**Strategy 10:** MNCs should offer mechanisms to improve the likelihood that the children of female expatriates will adjust well cross-culturally (e.g., day care, educational assistance, language classes).

The Host Nationals' and the Western Female Expatriate's Success

In this last category of recommendations we focus on the people with whom female expatriates will be transacting business. Some key players in the environment where the female expatriate will be expected to do her job are the host nationals with whom she will work (e.g., clients, co-workers, superiors, subordinates). A fundamental concern is whether or not host nationals will do business with expatriate women. In her seminal research on the topic of female expatriates, Nancy Adler (1987) examined female expatriates' perceptions of whether or not host nationals are prejudiced against them. Using a sample of 52 North American female expatriates in Asia, she found that 97% of them self-reported that their assignment had been successful. She noted that other indicators besides these self-report ratings, (e.g., being offered another global assignment after completion of the current one) suggested that these women were successful. Only 20% of her sample noted that “being female” was a disadvantage. As she noted, surprisingly, 42% of these expa-
triate women viewed their “being female” as an advantage!

Adler discovered that female expatriates perceived that they are not placed in the same “professionally limiting roles as are local women” in Asian cultures (Adler, 1993, p. 5; Adler, 1987; Jelinik & Adler, 1988). This phenomenon may be explained through the cognitive process of stereotyping subtypes: That is, the categories of distinct stereotypes for a single group (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). For example, “the elderly” may be subcategorized as either “worried senior citizens” or “kindly grandparents” depending on the social cues (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981). This subtyping would explain Adler’s findings. Based on the way the female expatriates in Adler’s study reported being treated, Adler concluded that these women were viewed first as foreigners and second as women (and that the second was a distant second). The salient information (being foreign) activated an entirely different stereotype from the group as a whole (being female; Kunda & Thagard, 1996). Asian host nationals, in Adler’s study, may have had a sub-stereotype of “Western working women” and a very different sub-stereotype for “Asian working women.” The reactions to these two groups may be quite different—and even inconsistent. The former may be treated very professionally, and the latter disrespectfully, by the same group of Asian host nationals.

Adler’s research also found that these women were all treated as if they were (and in all likelihood they actually were) very competent. Based on these results she deduced that the host nationals perceived that “if a woman was sent by a company, then she must be exceptionally competent” (Adler, 1987). A woman sent from headquarters, in addition to being Western, may activate another sub-stereotype (headquarters representative) to which Asian men respond very favorably. In a similar research study, female expatriates in Hong Kong believed that “if you are perceived as a competent manager and could do the job, gender was incidental” (Westwood & Leung, 1994). These women may have also benefitted from the sub-stereotyping phenomenon—while being given the opportunity to demonstrate their competence.

This line of research is encouraging for female expatriates. However, while 97% is an impressive success rate, it also seems somewhat unrealistic and not generalizable in view of anecdotal evidence suggesting that the success rate for expatriates, in general, is only about 50% (Copeland & Griggs, 1991). We also do not have a relative comparison of how well men would have performed in the same positions. In addition, the results of this research must be viewed with some caution, given that the attitudes of the host nationals were inferred; they were not assessed directly.

In a study directly assessing host nationals’ preferences for expatriates, Stone (1991, p. 15) asked Asian and Australian host-national managers, and expatriate managers to respond to the following statement, “given people of equal ability, it is preferable to appoint a man to an international position.” Over half the expatriates (56%) and Asian managers (53%) agreed with this
statement. Over half the Australian managers disagreed with this statement (56%). When asked whether they agreed that “expatriate women managers are not appropriate for countries such as Japan and Korea” over half of the managers in all three categories agreed (Australians 64%, Asians, 53% and expatriates 59%). Stone’s (1991) findings are somewhat contrary to those of Adler (1987). However, these findings should also be viewed with caution given that they are based on a very small sample.

Izraeli, Banai, and Zeira (1980, p. 56) found similar results with a sample of European host nationals from Germany, Britain, France, Holland and Belgium. They were asked “can a well-qualified woman successfully head and manage an MNC subsidiary?” Sixty percent of the sample responded “yes.” Follow-up interviews suggested that the men in the sample responded “yes” with much hesitation. This suggests that a dichotomy (i.e., yes or no) did not allow for the variance of true feelings in the sample. Izraeli et al. (1980) report that many respondents cited reasons of the society not being prepared to accept (or recognize the competence of) a woman in a position of authority. This should be considered with caution given that the study is almost 20 years old. In addition, both the Stone (1991) study and the Izraeli et al. (1980) study incorporated several methodological flaws, such as potentially biased samples and weak measures of the constructs.

There was agreement in the conclusions of Adler (1987), Stone (1991), and Izraeli et al. (1980), that female expatriates may find themselves victims of discrimination and sexism not only from host nationals, but also from other expatriates. Researchers have found discrimination and chauvinism against Western female expatriates by Western expatriate men. In the context of stereotyping and substereotyping, this result is interpretable and consistent with the theory. Unlike Asians, Western men do not have a separate (and more favorable) sub-stereotype for “Western women from headquarters” given that the qualities “Western” and “from headquarters” are not salient enough to activate a substereotype. For example, in a study of Western female expatriates in Hong Kong, Westwood and Leung (1994, p. 76) noted that many women in their sample believed that “much of the sexism they encountered came from expatriate men, and not from locals... (except for some) older and more traditional” Chinese males. They further point out that it may be the case that Western women are better able to interpret the behaviors of Western men, and are less likely to interpret sexism in more subtle Chinese behaviors (Westwood & Leung, 1994).

At either extreme, the argument of whether or not women will be accepted as expatriate managers seems oversimplified. It is oversimplified to state that “all female expatriates have the same chance as male expatriates to succeed in every foreign situation”—because, it depends. It is also oversimplified to state that “host nationals will simply not work with women”—because it too depends. Host nationals will accept (or not accept) female expatriates as business colleagues for a variety of reasons. We propose that there are two critical
factors that will interact to form the host nationals' attitudes and behaviors toward female expatriates. These are gender stereotypes and the female expatriate's power base.

**Gender Stereotypes**

The fact that people can form an opinion to questions that ask about a person's capability based solely on his or her gender suggests that stereotyping may be present. Assuming the demand characteristics were low for anonymous and confidential surveys, the more overt statements, such as those found in Stone (1991) and Izraeli et al. (1980), confirm that this is so. Gender stereotyping can take many forms, such as gender-characteristics stereotyping, gender-role stereotyping, and gender-labeling of occupations (Izraeli et al., 1980). These stereotypes can potentially limit the success of high-potential female expatriates in a global assignment. There are two reasons why stereotyping can be so damaging to the career of a female expatriate. One, a competent woman may not have her capabilities recognized or rewarded to the same extent as a man with the same talents. Two, male co-workers, superiors, and subordinates might outwardly derail a woman's drive for success. The first is more of a subtle bias, while the second is more overt discrimination.

Some gender stereotypes might not manifest themselves as overt actions against female expatriates and may play out in more subtle ways. For example, when women are in the minority of a work group they tend to be rated lower in performance than when they are in groups comprising over half women (Sackett, DuBois, & Wiggins-Noe, 1991). This is a potential problem because performance evaluations often comprise the standard by which we judge success on the job.

Some stereotypes against women as expatriates stem from the host nationals' view of what is appropriate behavior for a mother and a wife (Izreali et al., 1980). Here, the focus is not on the job, but rather her unfulfilled duty at home. This would be the case if the female was viewed as a female first and an expatriate second. Consistent with Adler's (1987) findings, however, the perception of the female may be that she is different from a typical host-national female and therefore she may be judged by a different standard. That is, host nationals may view female expatriates in a way that is inconsistent with their views of women. In this case, the stereotype may be weakened or abandoned altogether. This leads to the following suggestion for female expatriates.

**Strategy 11:** Western female expatriates should not attempt to “blend in” with host national women (e.g., serving their male colleagues tea). That is, they should not try to change the fact that they are being viewed in a stereotypically-inconsistent manner (e.g., as a foreigner and a company manager).

Stereotypes, however, can be changed (or a sub-stereotype can be formed)—sometimes by mere exposure (Zajonc, 1969) or contact (Amir, 1969) with a successful person in the stereo-
typed group. Izraeli et al. (1980) found that the host nationals who were most positive about female MNC leaders were those who had exposure to a female expatriate who was successful. Izraeli’s findings can be interpreted in terms of “availability heuristic” (Rothbart, Fulero, Jensen, Howard, & Birrell, 1978; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). According to this phenomenon, the positive and salient interaction with one competent female expatriate would result in host nationals’ more favorable attitudes toward female expatriates in the future. This leads to another suggestion for multinational organizations.

**Strategy 12:** MNCs should give host nationals greater exposure to successful women in the organization (e.g., when host nationals visit headquarters or when female managers visit subsidiaries).

In the United States, the organizational movement to improve the value of domestic diversity has often started with cultural awareness or cultural sensitivity training (Cox, 1994). In the international context, this training could be extended to host nationals whose exposure to “diversity” may be the female expatriates with whom they will work. It may be especially helpful to train host nationals on the appropriate behaviors for interacting with Western women on a professional level. This type of training may be helpful in making host nationals aware of their unconscious attitudes and stereotypes. However, as Cox (1994) suggests, awareness training should be used within the context of a greater initiative and not in isolation. That said, it would be unlikely that awareness training would be effective if some of the other strategies mentioned in this paper were not also addressed. This suggests Strategy 13:

**Strategy 13:** MNCs should provide training to the host nationals who are going to be interacting with female expatriates.

Stereotyping in its more overt form is demonstrated through behaviors that host nationals (or possibly other expatriates) exhibit that may reduce a female expatriate’s effectiveness. For example, one study noted that a female expatriate who “attempted to exercise the authority of her position would not have the same credibility or impact” (Izraeli et al., 1980, p. 58). Following from the prior discussion of how substereotypes are formed, the host nationals may have a negative sub-stereotype of “female expatriates” for one of two reasons. One, being “western” does not provide enough salient information for the host nationals to alter discriminatory behavior. Or, two, the salient information from one female expatriate was so negative and salient that it created a negative substereotype in the minds of host nationals. No matter the cause, this negative stereotype will impede future business transactions between female expatriates and host nationals. This leads to the following (albeit, reluctant) implication.

**Strategy 14:** If the MNC is certain that a female expatriate will
need to transact business with host nationals who harbor and act upon their gender stereotypes, have a male colleague (who is respectful of the female expatriate) team up with her for a specific business situation. The crux of this strategy is that the MNC must be absolutely certain that the host’s stereotypes are fixed. As was mentioned in a prior section, when in doubt, do not assume that the host nationals possess negative stereotypes toward Western women.

**Power Base**

Research suggests that power and status will have an impact on a group’s impressions of its own abilities and other groups’ abilities (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991). This finding may be extended to individuals who would be considered minorities (female expatriates) with a host national “in group.” There is the perception of high-status people that they will use “strategies involving the control of resources (power bases)” (Stahelski & Payton, 1995, p. 55). The subordinates’ perceptions of their manager’s status and power bases may influence the subordinates’ attitudes and behaviors at work (Carson, Carson, & Roe, 1993).

In some cases, MNCs place female expatriates in positions with inherent position power. For example, if a female expatriate is a lead negotiator for a potential joint venture in which the other party is extremely interested, her gender could become quite incidental at the point of these negotiations. Her power derives from the authority she has in the situation—and her “subordinates would acknowledge and respect the power accordingly.” Likewise, if a female expatriate was sent to head a subsidiary where her authority was the ultimate authority at a given location, the host nationals, by virtue of her position power, would need to take her seriously—or risk losing their jobs—as she would be recognized as holding the power bases of reward and punishment. The status of the position would lead to the perception of the power bases (Carson et al., 1993). This leads to our final suggestion for MNCs.

**Strategy 15: MNCs should give their female expatriates high position power in the host subsidiary, whenever possible.**

**CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Table 1 summarizes each of the strategies we have discussed. In addition, it suggests methods of implementing each strategy together with possible implementation problems. Table 1 suggests that four broad predictor constructs forecast the relative level of success among female expatriates—the individual characteristics of female expatriates—the individual characteristics of female expatriates, their treatment by host nationals, family support and adjustment, and company support. All four of these variables, operating concurrently, will likely affect the outcome of the female expatriate’s assignment. It may be the case, however, that for a female expatriate, these factors are independent in affecting failure globally, yet additive in
1 MNCs should select female expatriates who demonstrate the technical or managerial skills for the position.

2 MNCs should select women for global assignments who are self-confident in their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

3 MNCs should select female expatriates who possess a greater perceptual-orientation (e.g., openness).

4 MNCs should select female expatriates who possess a positive orientation toward others (e.g., sociability).

5 MNCs should train female expatriates on the norms, values, and traditions that the host nationals possess regarding women, and train them on deriving solutions for the potentially challenging situations they may face as women.

6 In order to dispel the "token" image, MNCs should actively promote expatriate women as their "best qualified" candidates.

7 MNCs should provide their female expatriates with an in-country support network or mentor.

8 MNCs should have policies worldwide regarding the fair and equal treatment of all employees.

Table 1
Strategies, Implementation Methods and Possible Problems with Implementing the Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>HR tool, method, or intervention</th>
<th>Possible Problems with Implementing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 MNCs should select female expatriates who demonstrate the technical or</td>
<td>Selection based on demonstrated competencies.</td>
<td>It may be difficult to find a person with every necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>managerial skills for the position.</td>
<td>Additional technical or managerial training prior to</td>
<td>credential who is also willing to accept the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>departure, if needed</td>
<td>It may be difficult for the organization to anticipate every</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>skill needed for a given global assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 MNCs should select women for global assignments who are self-confident</td>
<td>Select expatriates based on their self-confidence in their</td>
<td>An expatriate who was too self-confident may come across as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</td>
<td>knowledge, skills, and abilities.</td>
<td>arrogant to the host nationals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finding the balance between confidence and arrogance might</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>be challenging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 MNCs should select female expatriates who possess a greater perceptual-</td>
<td>Select expatriates based on personality characteristics,</td>
<td>It may be difficult to find a person with the requisite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orientation (e.g., openness).</td>
<td>such as openness and flexibility.</td>
<td>personality characteristics who is also willing to accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 MNCs should select female expatriates who possess a positive</td>
<td>Select expatriates based on personality characteristics</td>
<td>It may be difficult to find a person with the requisite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orientation toward others (e.g., sociability).</td>
<td>such as sociability.</td>
<td>personality characteristics who is also willing to accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 MNCs should train female expatriates on the norms, values, and</td>
<td>Offer predeparture culture-specific training for female</td>
<td>All of the possible &quot;difficult&quot; situations cannot possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traditions that the host nationals possess regarding women, and train</td>
<td>expatriates.</td>
<td>be anticipated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>them on deriving solutions for the potentially challenging situations</td>
<td></td>
<td>There may not be enough lead time to conduct a thorough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they may face as women.</td>
<td></td>
<td>cross-cultural training session before the expatriate leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>on her assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 In order to dispel the &quot;token&quot; image, MNCs should actively promote</td>
<td>Memos of introduction</td>
<td>Some of these initiatives may be misinterpreted, depending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expatriate women as their &quot;best qualified&quot; candidates</td>
<td>In-person introduction by a very senior executive</td>
<td>on the cultural context. The intervention should be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A statement of qualification</td>
<td>culture-specific.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any other culturally- appropriate method for establishing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>credibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 MNCs should provide their female expatriates with an in-country</td>
<td>Have a mentor back home—and a method for communication</td>
<td>Communication is more difficult from a far distance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support network or mentor.</td>
<td>Have a mentor in-country</td>
<td>The policies may be viewed as culturally ethnocentric if not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>communicated correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 MNCs should have policies worldwide regarding the fair and equal</td>
<td>Be sure the policy is communicated through all of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treatment of all employees.</td>
<td>culturally appropriate channels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Train employees on the policies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reward managers on promoting the policies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 1
Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>HR tool, method, or intervention</th>
<th>Possible Problems with Implementing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 MNCs should offer mechanisms to improve the likelihood that the spouses of female expatriates will adjust well cross-culturally.</td>
<td>Cross-cultural training for spouses Male-oriented social networks Language classes Reemployment assistance Money for professional or personal development</td>
<td>There is always a chance that the spouses’ needs will not match what is being offered. The spouse may not use the services. The options may not be available in a given location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 MNCs should offer mechanisms to improve the likelihood that the children of female expatriates will adjust well cross-culturally.</td>
<td>Day care Educational assistance Language classes</td>
<td>There may not be appropriate services available for expatriate children in a given location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Western female expatriates should not attempt to “blend in” with host national women.</td>
<td>Train women on how to cope with being “different” from host national women. Train women on the behaviors that could be misinterpreted (e.g., serving tea in Japan).</td>
<td>It may be difficult for the female expatriate to balance perceptions (i.e., not appear too masculine). It may be difficult to find role models from whom expat women can learn culturally appropriate (and professional) behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 MNCs should give host nationals greater exposure to successful women in the organization.</td>
<td>Have more professional women take short business trips to the host country to increase interactions between Western females and host nationals. Have host nationals take business trips to headquarters for the same purpose.</td>
<td>This strategy can always backfire if the women they interact with are not competent and professional. The host nationals may not change their attitudes toward women as a result of the interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 MNCs should provide training to the host nationals who are going to be interacting with female expatriates.</td>
<td>Offer the training to host nationals before the female expatriate arrives on location.</td>
<td>The host nationals may not change their behaviors toward women as a result of the training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 If the MNC is certain that a female expatriate will need to transact business with hosts who have gender stereotypes, partner her with a male colleague for a specific business situation.</td>
<td>Develop professional partnerships</td>
<td>The MNC must be absolutely certain that the host’s stereotypes are fixed. When in doubt, do not assume that the host nationals possess negative stereotypes toward Western women—this will simply undermine her credibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 MNCs should give their female expatriates high position power in the host subsidiary, whenever possible.</td>
<td>Succession planning into high-level expatriate positions for women</td>
<td>It would only be a risky strategy if the person in the position did not have the competence for the job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women on Global Assignments 411
affecting her success. In other words, any one of these four causal agents could produce a highly negative environment that would reduce her chance for success, even when the other four were positive. For example, consider a situation where the entire assignment is a positive experience, yet the expatriate’s husband wants to return home. On the other hand, as each of these four causal agents moves from neutral to positive in a woman’s global assignment, the assignment should produce greater and greater success. For example, the company might not be very helpful, but her husband is supportive and her host national colleagues are helpful. Each factor, independently, would make the assignment a progressively better experience. The combination of causal agents, either independent or additive, should be tested in future research.

When considering each causal agent separately, we have the least amount of direct evidence about the attitudes of host nationals toward expatriate women. This is a critical determinant of in-country success, yet much of what we think we know is based on attributions of host nationals’ attitudes by third parties. However, if the field is to move beyond hunch and intuition toward predictions of success of female expatriates based on empirical data, then direct assessment of the host nationals’ attitudes, along with empirical data on the remaining three predictor constructs, is necessary.

Direct assessment of the attitudes of host nationals has several advantages. First, it will allow home-country managers to dispel some of their own myths and assumptions regarding host-nationals’ attitudes toward female expatriates. This should go a long way toward breaking down barriers to expatriate assignments for females. Second, it will allow us to begin to map important similarities and differences in host nationals’ attitudes toward expatriate women within and between countries, and across management levels. Finally, we believe that incorporation of this information into prediction models will explain unique, incremental variability in the relative performance of female expatriates in their overseas assignments.

In conclusion, the need among MNCs for a talented pool of expatriate candidates has mandated full use of the potential of female global assignees. The strategies presented here suggest that the outcome of the assignment will likely be affected by some things out of the female expatriate’s direct control (i.e., her family, company, and host national colleagues). Beyond the expatriate’s own characteristics and competencies, the next most important factor appears to be the MNC’s mechanisms for supporting female expatriates and their families. Multinational companies must be proactive to ensure that their female expatriates, both senior and junior, along with their families, have company backing while successfully completing their international assignments.

In this paper we offer fifteen strategies for MNCs to improve the success of female expatriates. As business becomes ever more internationally-oriented, and as the sheer number of global assignments grows, finding individuals
who are willing and able to uproot themselves from their native lands will put pressure on businesses to consider all members of their organizations, both male and female, for these important positions. The strategies provided in this paper should give MNCs some guidance on how to enhance the success of the women who will represent their companies in other countries.

REFERENCES


Cui, G., & van den Berg, S. (1991). Testing the construct validity of intercultural effec-
Studies of Management and Organizations, 24: 36-47.


