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## *Conversations with the Experts*

### Women Leaders in a Global Economy: The Challenges for Senior Executives



**Brad Googins, Ph.D.**

**Bio:** Brad Googins is Co-Principal Investigator for the Sloan Work and Family Research Network at Boston College. Brad was named Executive Director of the Center for Corporate Citizenship and professor in the Department of Organizational Studies at the Wallace E. Carroll School of Management at Boston College in 1997. Since becoming Executive Director, he has undertaken a major restructuring to better serve the over 400 corporate members of The Center and to enhance its research agenda as part of the School of Management.

In 1990, Brad founded, and for six years directed, The Center for Work & Family at Boston University. The work at this Center continues under his leadership at Boston College. He has been principal investigator on numerous research projects, including *Corporate Involvement in Community and Economic Development* for The Ford Foundation, *Work Redesign and Work Family Research Network* for the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and *Families and Neighborhoods Cluster Evaluation* for the Kellogg Foundation. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the MacArthur Foundation project on Human Development and Healthy Organizations.

Brad is the author of several books and monographs including: *The Company of Choice*, *Strategic Responses: Corporate Involvement in Family and Community Issues*, Boston University, 1995; *Balancing Job and Home life Study: Changes Over Time in a Corporation*, Boston University, 1994; *Work-Family Stress - Private Lives, Public Responses*, Greenwood Press, 1991. He has published numerous articles and book chapters and has appeared at conferences around the world. He is often called upon as an expert spokesperson in the media on issues of corporate citizenship and on the role of the corporation in relation to work, family and community.

**Editors Note:** Brad Googins reports on a conference and research project, which focus on women in senior executive positions. The purpose of the project is to shed light on how executive women within a global context achieve success and balance work/life issues.

### A Conversation with Brad Googins

In July, 100 of the most senior women in ten US based multi-national companies convened in Prague as part of a new research project being carried out by Catalyst, The Center for Work & Family at Boston College, and the Families and Work Institute. The project team came together to develop a research model to assess the issues facing women managers in four key regions of the world: North America, Latin America, Europe-Middle East-Africa and Asia-Pacific. The major purpose of this project was to illuminate the issues related to women's leadership in the global business community.

Participating companies included:

- Baxter International
- Citigroup
- Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu
- Dow Chemical Company
- Eli Lilly and Company
- IBM
- JP Morgan Chase

- Marriott International
- Merck & Co., Inc.
- Merrill Lynch & Company

The project addresses two developing and overlapping issues. Women increasingly are moving into senior positions, in the corporation, breaking through the glass ceiling that has traditionally kept them from positions of influence and authority within the firm. How these particular women have dealt with issues of career, as well as work and life balance is not well understood and research on this group is only now beginning to capture the experiences and sentiments of this cohort.

Perhaps even more profound is the absence of data from senior women operating outside the United States. As corporations become more globalized, the emergence of senior women operating within other countries has become more common. This project will attempt to better understand the similarities and differences of senior women across the globe, and the unique cultural and social environments within which these senior corporate women operate.

### **Stages of the Project**

In order to address these issues, the project was developed in three Stages. The first stage of the project involved interviewing a sample of each participating company's most senior women from the regions named above to explore the factors that promote and inhibit their success. This was accomplished through brief qualitative telephone interviews.

In Stage Two, between 4- 15 senior women from each participating company convened in Prague at a Global Forum. The primary purpose of the forum was to provide the participants and their companies' feedback on the issues facing women managers globally. The forum consisted of a number of interactive sessions focusing on participants' strategies in crafting successful careers. Other sessions focused on men's voices, including the participation of two CEO's, Ray Gilmartin from Merck and Harry Kraemer from Baxter International, who shared their views about the issues of women's advancement. Other sessions focused on the economic and political power of women, a talk by Anna Quindlen on Women and Leadership, and experiences of going global from women across the globe.

The conference reported on the qualitative data collected through the interviews in Phase I, as well as benchmarking data collected on company policy, programs and leadership within each company. In addition, the conference provided an opportunity for the senior women to network with and learn from other senior women in these leading companies. The women also had an opportunity to explore the factors that stand in the way or help senior women feel successful at work and at home. The discussions culminated in practical recommendations for each company and the feedback into the design of a quantitative survey that will constitute Stage Three of the project.

Stage Three will consist of an extensive quantitative survey that will be completed by a stratified random sample of 100 of each participating company's senior women and senior men from the regions named above. This online survey will provide the most comprehensive study yet of senior women in a global context.

### **Findings from Stage One**

1) Interview data suggest a number of hindering and facilitating factors for achieving success as senior women.

#### **Barriers to Success**

- Lack of mentors or coaches
- Exclusion from the old boy network
- Managing work with home responsibilities
- Limits based on stereotypes about women
- Isolation

#### **Facilitators of Success**

- Mentor/boss
- Spouse/partner
- Networking/professional relationships
- Leadership training/executive coaching
- Flexible schedules

2) Benchmarking data revealed a number of different approaches, and organizational strategies for addressing the advancement of senior women. Across the ten companies, company commitment to women could be seen through three different lenses.

1. Leadership- company drives women's intuitive with direct ties to the CEO or management committee

2. Respect for Individual—company tied to highly visible company values of respect responsiveness and results

3. Diversity—company drives women's advancement through diversity initiatives

The role of some managers seemed critical. Key executives at the highest levels played an important role related to women's advancement. In 7 of the companies the CEO plays a visible role.

Virtually all companies reported the presence of key components such as Advisory committees, flexibility policies, and mentoring, strategic plan for women's advancement, training and women's networks. On the other hand there were few metrics for measuring program impact or success.

The next phase of quantitative interviews will be conducted over the next several months and a full report will be available by the spring.

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