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Glenice J. Wood  
Uma D. Jogulu

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# Malaysian and Australian Male and Female Middle Managers

## A Cross-cultural Comparison of Workplace Attitudes, Aspirations for Promotion, and Self-rated Leadership Styles

Glenice J. Wood, University of Ballarat, Australia

Uma D. Jogulu, University of Ballarat, Australia

*Abstract: This paper outlines the rise of women in management worldwide, and considers why so few women achieve senior or executive management positions. This slow advance of women into senior roles is unexpected given that the changes in organisations today are believed to require more 'feminine leadership'. A decrease in the emphasis on masculine characteristics for managers is reported, and a requirement that more 'feminine leadership' needs to be adopted by organisations in order to ensure their survival in the future (Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002, p.189). Recent empirical research reports that there are differences in leadership style between male and female managers, and the findings suggest that women exhibit more transformational leadership than their male counterparts, with this style being strongly equated with effective leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, van Engen, 2003). However, these findings are based on western research, and it may be that cross cultural research will yield a different picture (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Leadership and leadership styles may be conceptualised differently in a more paternalistic society. To explore this possibility, a cross cultural study was conducted in Malaysia and Australia. It is hypothesised that countries that are paternalistic in cultural values will exhibit a stronger constraint on women in management roles, which may impact on workplace attitudes, aspirations for promotion and style of leadership exhibited. Therefore, it is possible that the career advancement of women may be more problematic for Malaysian managerial women than their Australian counterparts. Results from an initial pilot study in Malaysia and Australia are outlined, and highlight some interesting similarities and differences to what are reported in the western literature.*

Keywords: Women in Management, Attitudes to Women in Management, Leadership Styles, Cross-cultural Analysis, Career Advancement

**I**N WESTERN DEVELOPED countries, despite the fact that more women are taking up management positions, very few women reach senior or executive roles. Over the past three decades, a large body of literature has been written on the barriers to career advancement of western women in management. One area that has received particular attention has been a focus on gender differences in leadership styles. In addition, research in leadership styles has suggested that women exhibit more of the appropriate skills for organisations today, than do their male colleagues. However, it may be that these findings are culture specific. Little is known about the experiences of female managers in developing Asian countries such as Malaysia (Omar & Davidson, 2004), although it is recognised that culture will exert an additional source of influence on the leadership styles of male and female managers (House *et al.* 2004), and this may impact on their career advancement. The aim of this paper is to examine how middle managers in Australia and Malaysia perceive their own styles of leadership. In addition, attitudes toward the workplace participation

and career aspirations of female and male middle managers will be sought.

### Background to the Study

There appears to have been a steady increase in the proportion of women filling management roles worldwide over the past 3 decades (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Davidson & Burke, 2004; Powell, 1999). This is illustrated by US figures on women in management, which have increased from 21% in 1976 (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002) to 50.5% in 2002 (Catalyst, 2003). These increases have also been noted in the UK where the proportions of women in management have increased from 7.9% in 1990, to 29.6% in 2003 (Labour Force Survey, 2003).

In Australia, the numbers of women filling managerial or professional careers has also steadily increased since 1964; at this time, women comprised 28% of the total workforce, whereas in 2004, the figure had risen to 44% (Equity Statistics Australia, 2004). In 2003, it was estimated that 25% of employed women filled the roles of 'manager and administrators'; this figure represents a small



increase up from 23% in 1999 (Women in Australia, 2004).

The increases in the proportions of women entering management roles in the west have occurred mainly at lower levels of management (Parker & Fagenson, 1994), with women continuing to remain underrepresented in middle management levels (Trudgett, 2000). It is even more evident that such advances in numbers have not continued to the executive ranks of organisations.

A recent study by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen (2003) reported that only 1% of Chief Executive Officers are women in the Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. and this is believed to be a reduction from the 5% reported over a decade ago (Maniero, 1994). In Australia, a review of three large surveys indicates a small increase in the number of women in senior management roles. Ten percent of executive management positions were filled by women in 2004 (a small increase since 2002). In addition, in the nation's top 200 companies only four women held the role of chief executive officer (Still, 2006).

In developing Asian countries, less is known about the experiences of women in management, and the numbers entering the profession, or advancing to fill more senior positions. It has been reported that there has been little change in the rate of women's participation in the workforce between 1970 and 1990, although a relatively high figure of 45% of women's participation in the labour market has been recorded during this period (Omar & Davidson, 2001).

### Organisational Changes

The nature of organisations has changed dramatically over the past two decades, and contemporary organisations are characterised by flatter structures, and a philosophy which embraces continuous improvement and organisational learning. Frequently, such organisations adopt a high degree of teamwork as opposed to individual input (Omar & Davidson, 2001). Such a workplace requires less direct, authoritative leadership, and a higher degree of self-management amongst empowered employees (Cooper & Lewis, 1999).

In addition, because organisations today are required to be more service-oriented than in the past, a new focus on leadership roles is required, as the motivation and inspiration of employees is paramount, in order to generate a positive work culture, where the contributions of workers are valued (Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough, 2001).

Such changes in traditional organisation structures require a unique kind of manager and leader who is less competitive, aggressive and task focused

(qualities typically associated with masculine management stereotypes), and more communicative, intuitive and flexible, allowing for coaching of others through effective people skills (see Cooper & Lewis, 1999). The requirement now appears to be for a "relational-oriented, nurturing and caring" manager (Omar & Davidson, 2001, p.40) where "compassion, sensitivity to the needs of others, and understanding" are displayed (Powell *et al.* 2002 p.178). Such styles are typically associated with women. In addition, these latter skills are associated with feminine managerial stereotypes. Therefore, there is an increased interest in 'feminine leadership' (Rosener, 1990) as organisations are believed to benefit when management practices "display a high amount of feminine characteristics" (Powell *et al.* 2002, p.189).

According to Powell *et al.* (2002) this perspective has led to a decrease in the valuing of masculine characteristics for managers (Powell *et al.* 2002), and a recognition that organisations that embrace the feminine characteristics will survive in the future (Powell *et al.* 2002).

The requirements of the new organisation, as outlined above, benefit from such a 'feminisation of management' (Omar & Davidson, 2001) which is reported to have been widely adopted in Europe (Adler & Izraeli, 1994), and is built on a recognition that women, while unique, are equally capable of making a valuable contribution towards the success of the organisation (Omar & Davidson, 2001).

Therefore, the slow advance of women into senior roles worldwide is unexpected given that today's organisations require more 'feminine leadership', and the belief that managers who exhibit 'feminine characteristics' will benefit organisations (Powell *et al.* 2002). Such changes in management practices are being reflected in contemporary research in Leadership styles.

### Contemporary Leadership Theory

In recent studies of leadership, researchers have reported that the leadership styles of men and women differ significantly (e.g. Carless, 1998; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) in that female managers are reported to lead in a transformational style, whereas male managers are believed to display a more transactional style. Transactional leadership has been described as a transaction that occurs between leaders and followers, where rewards are based on work performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In contrast, transformational leaders have been seen as nurturers, who motivate and inspire their followers to contribute to the organisations goals.

This latter style of leadership involves gaining the trust and confidence of followers, and taking the part of a role model. Transformational leaders develop

plans to achieve future goals, and use innovative practices to achieve their goals. One key feature of transformational leaders is that they develop their followers through mentoring and empowerment thus enabling the full potential of their staff to be reached (Eagly *et al.* 2003). Leaders who display this style of leadership are said to “articulate a vision, use lateral or non-traditional thinking, encourage individual development, give regular feedback, use participative decision-making and promote a cooperative and trusting work environment” (Carless, 1998, p.888).

Therefore, transformational leaders motivate, inspire and support creativity in their followers (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991; Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996). Such descriptions of Transformational leadership have been conceptualised into the following dimensions: *idealized influence or charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.*

Idealized influence or charisma is defined as a leader’s ability to act in a way that followers admire. Inspirational motivation is described as a leader’s ability to communicate a vision that has the capacity to inspire employees. Intellectual stimulation is defined as a capacity to challenge assumptions and to consider employees viewpoints. Finally, individualized consideration, is described as a propensity for a leader to focus on the individual needs of their staff and to operate as something of a mentor (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

A recent meta-analysis review of 45 studies comparing the leadership styles of men and women (Eagly *et al.* 2003), concluded that female leaders were more transformational in their leadership style than male leaders. The findings of this review highlight an important area for further exploration.

Eagly and her colleagues reported that “all of the aspects of leadership style on which women exceeded men relate positively to leaders’ effectiveness whereas all of the aspects on which men exceeded women have negative or null relations to effectiveness” (Eagly *et al.* 2003 p.569). Similar results had been reported earlier by Lowe, Kroeck and Sivasubramaniam (1996), who concluded that transformational leadership was more effective, as it supports a greater organisational performance.

While the previous findings on comparisons of male and female leadership abilities report small differences, there does appear to be a consensus that there is a difference in the predominant styles of leadership; the typical leadership styles adopted by women “tend to be more transformational than those of men (e.g., Bass *et al.*, 1996) and are thus more focused on those aspects of leadership that predict effectiveness” Eagly *et al.* 2003, p.586). This finding

appears to substantiate the trend in recent research (Sharpe, 2000) that women possess unique qualities as leaders because of their ability to operate in a transformational manner. In essence women are considered to be “less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented to enhancing others’ self worth” (Eagly *et al.* 2003, p.569). They are also described as “more friendly, pleasant, interested in other people, expressive and socially sensitive” (Eagly & Johnson, 1990, p.235).

However, the above findings on leadership styles and practices are reported in research studies conducted in western countries. Leadership theories have been derived from empirical studies carried out predominantly in the US, UK and more recently Australia. Very few empirical studies have been done elsewhere and we know very little about the experiences of women in leadership roles in developing industrialised countries or the style of leadership that is practiced and valued in these countries. There is a growing awareness that the increasing globalisation of industrial organisations, along with the interdependencies that now exist among nations, has created a need for understanding the cultural influences that operate on leadership within organisations across cultures (House *et al.* 2004). In addition, there is a recognition that cultural influences, both from the societal and organisational level, will influence leadership practices and organisation processes.

### **Cultural Influences on Leadership Practices**

To address these significant areas, a major research initiative, entitled *Culture Leadership and Organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies* was commenced in 1994 to contribute theoretical developments and empirical findings relating to the culturally contingent aspects of leadership. In essence, the program was designed to “explore the fascinating and complex effects of culture on leadership, organizational effectiveness, economic competitiveness of societies and the human condition of members of the societies studied” (House *et al.* 2004 p.10). To date, cumulative results are reported for countries that have been grouped together (e.g. The ‘Southern Asian cluster’ incorporates Thailand, India, Indonesia, Iran, Phillipines and Malaysia. The ‘Anglo cluster’ incorporates Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States). However, results which are specific to individual countries have been difficult to tease out, and hence cross-cultural comparisons are still rare.

Hence, the present study will focus on selecting two distinctively different societies that sit at the

opposite ends of the cultural spectrum as proposed by Hofstede in his well known research on cultural norms. An individualist society and a collectivist society have been chosen as a base to explore whether culture influences the workplace attitudes, aspirations for promotion and self-rated leadership styles exhibited in organisations in two distinctively different countries, Malaysia and Australia.

Malaysia was clustered as a collectivist society in Hofstede's study because the Malaysian culture was based on a heritage of communal living. That is individuals live as a close knit group and prioritise the needs and the welfare of the group ahead of self interest. Decisions in such cultures are made with collective consensus and must benefit and advantage the group more than particular individuals (Hofstede, 1991). In contrast Australia ranks as having a high level of individuality as measured by the Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Index. In fact the individualism score for Australia on this cultural dimension is 90, the second highest in the world behind the United States (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005 p.78), indicating that individuality and individual rights are very dominant within Australian society.

As part of the tradition in collectivist society, Malaysian managers prefer to work in teams compared to individually. Group tasks are favoured with the belief that each individual contributes towards the benefit and well being of the organisation jointly. In this manner individual weaknesses are not highlighted because the group takes responsibility for the outcomes. This is particularly true in collectivist societies such as Malaysia because of the 'face saving' concept which means that it is important not to embarrass an individual with direct disagreement as it is believed that this will undermine the harmony of relationships (Abdullah, 2001).

However, the individualist society of Australia requires individuals to take responsibility, to be straightforward, firm and confident, voice their opinions even if that means disagreeing with superiors and to make individual decisions while attempting to solve organisational conflict. Additionally, superiors also encourage and greatly involve subordinates of both sexes in decision making and through the delegation of individual tasks. This phenomenon is unlikely to take place in Malaysian organisational settings because Malaysians acknowledge and accept hierarchies across organisational and societal formation, and disagreeing with superiors is seen as an indication of assertiveness and confrontational behaviours in individuals. Such attitudes are feared to undermine collective harmony because respect towards elders, superiors and people with power are fundamental living customs in a collectivist society. One application of this principle in organisations is that

managers are not prepared to speak up and hesitate to voice their opinions to their superiors based on a cultural apprehension of being seen as arrogant (Schermerhorn, 1994).

Therefore, it is expected that these unique cultural differences between Malaysia and Australia will influence workplace attitudes, desire to achieve promotion and the leadership styles exhibited by female and male managers in organisations.

It would seem that there is a growing push for research to consider more fully the aspects of culture in any study of women in management to reveal the challenges that may be faced by women in non western cultures (Omar & Davidson, 2001). However, it has been suggested that the glass ceiling, reported widely in western research into women in management, may not be the same impediment to women in developing countries, as women only began to penetrate in to the senior managerial roles in developing countries in the last decade (Arttchhariya, 1997; Bank & Vinnicombe, 1995; Omar & Davidson, 2001).

Obviously, we need to know much more about the experiences of women in management careers in industrialising countries. The aims and objectives of this study are to explore some of the experiences of women in management in two diverse cultures, and hence will address some of the issues raised above. The main focus will be on identifying current attitudes toward workplace participation, the career advancement aspirations of male and female managers, and the leadership styles that are practised by male and female middle managers in Malaysia and Australia. In addition, an examination of the culturally specific values and expectations that may be influential on attitudes, aspirations and leadership styles will be made.

## Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of middle managers in relation to the workplace participation of male and female managers in and ?
2. Will Malaysian female middle managers hold similar aspirations to achieve senior management roles to their Australian female counterparts?
3. How do male and female middle managers in and perceive their leadership styles?

## Methodology

This study represents the first stage of a three part research project, which will continue throughout 2007-2008.

## Sample

The sample for this study is drawn from a pilot study of 40 Malaysian managers; 24 male and 16 female middle managers, and 19 Australian respondents; 6 male and 13 female middle managers. In total, 59 respondents participated in this first stage of the research.

These managers were obtained by initial contact with organisations in the finance industry, which were approached and invited to participate in the study. The first organisation contacted in both countries agreed to participate, and in the case of Australia, the participating department passed on the survey to other areas within the organisation, hence expanding the sample size.

## Procedure

After initial approval had been granted from the participating organisations, Managers in the Human Resource department were sent a copy of the Survey on Career Advancement (SCA), which was designed to examine attitudes toward male and female middle managers, and attitudes toward career advancement in a management career. In addition, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Leader form (MLQ) was administered to female and male middle managers for self evaluation of their leadership styles.

A self-addressed envelope was attached to each of the instruments, and when completed, participants mailed the forms directly to the researcher. The final question on the SCA invited respondents to include their name and contact details if they wished to participate in subsequent stages of the research.

Statistical analysis was undertaken with SPSS through cross tabulation and frequency comparisons.

## Results

The first research area addressed the attitudes of middle managers in relation to the workplace participation of male and female middle managers in Australia and Malaysia. Three areas were covered relating to the manager's suitability to be filling a management role; commitment, motivation and education qualifications.

### Commitment

Respondents were asked: "How would you describe the degree of commitment to management as a career in your organisation from...". Three sub-categories were given in the responses: yourself, managers of your sex, and managers of the opposite sex. A Likert type response of 1 = Very Uncommitted to 5 = Very committed was used. A third (33%) of the Malaysian and Australian male managers stated they were 'very

committed' to management as a career. Half of the female Malaysian middle managers (50%) stated they were 'very committed', compared to slightly higher proportions of female Australian middle managers (54%).

In relation to commitment to management from managers of 'your sex', the following results were obtained. Thirteen percent of the Malaysian male middle managers felt that other male managers were 'very committed' to management as a career, but no Australian male manager responded to this category of the question. (Over 80% responded that other male managers were 'quite highly committed', i.e. 4). In contrast, a quarter of Malaysian female middle managers felt that other female managers were 'very committed' to the role, with a higher proportion of the Australian female managers expressing the same belief (46%).

In terms of the commitment of the opposite sex, 13% of Malaysian male middle managers felt that female managers were 'very committed' to the role of management, but no Australian middle manager responded to this category. (However a third of the sample thought that female managers were 'quite highly committed'). In contrast, 19% of Malaysian female middle managers felt that their male colleagues were 'very committed' to the role of manager, with a higher proportion of Australian female middle managers expressing the same view (23%).

### Motivation

Respondents were asked: "How would you describe the degree of motivation to management as a career in your organisation from...". Three sub-categories were given in the responses: yourself, managers of your sex, and managers of the opposite sex. A Likert type response of 1 = Very Unmotivated to 5 = Very motivated was used.

Fairly low proportions of male managers from both countries responded that they were 'very motivated' to management as a career (17% Malaysian cf. 20% Australian middle managers). Thirteen per cent of Malaysian female middle managers stated that they were 'very motivated' with higher proportions of Australian female middle managers expressing a similar view (39%).

In relation to motivation to management as a career from managers of 'your sex', only 8% of Malaysian male managers felt that other male managers were 'very motivated', with no response in this category from Australian male managers (although 67% felt that other male managers were 'quite highly motivated' toward management as a career). In contrast, only 6% of Malaysian female middle managers felt that other female managers

were 'very motivated' to management, whereas a much higher proportion of Australian female managers (39%) felt that other female managers were 'very motivated' to management as a career.

In terms of 'the opposite sex', only 13% of Malaysian male middle managers felt that female managers were 'very motivated' to management as a career, with no Australian male manager responding to this category. Once again, 50% of the Australian male managers sample responded that female managers were 'quite highly motivated' to management as a career. In contrast, 6% of female managers from Malaysia felt that male managers were 'very motivated', but a higher proportion of female managers from Australia responded that they thought male managers were motivated toward management as a career (31%).

### Educational Qualifications

Two questions were asked to assess attitudes toward education qualifications of female managers to fill senior management roles. Firstly, a general question was posed, and this was followed by a specific question. The first question asked "In terms of educational qualifications to fill senior management positions, do you think that women in organisations *in general* are:..." Responses were 'Not as well qualified as their male counterparts'; 'Equally qualified as their male counterparts'; 'Better qualified than their male counterparts'; 'Don't know'. The following results were obtained. The majority of Malaysian male middle managers (83%) believed that women in general were equally qualified as their male counterparts to fill senior management positions, whereas 100% of the Australian male sample agreed with this statement. A very high proportion (88%) of Malaysian female middle managers felt that women were equally qualified to fill senior management roles, compared to 69% of Australian female managers.

The second question was "In terms of educational qualifications to fill senior management positions, do you think that women *in your organisation* are:..." The same four choices for responses were given. Similar proportions of male Malaysian and Australian middle managers (83%) felt that women *in their organisation* were equally qualified as their male counterparts to fill senior management positions. Slightly lower proportions of Malaysian female managers (81%) and Australian female managers (77%) expressed this view.

The second research area addressed the aspirations of male and female middle managers to achieve senior management roles. Four questions were

designed to address this area. Firstly: "Do you wish to achieve a senior management promotion in your current organisation?" Three quarters of the Malaysian male managers believed they were going to achieve a senior management promotion, compared to only 33% of Australian male managers. For the female managers, 69% of Malaysian middle managers expressed the view that they were going to achieve a senior management promotion, compared to 39% of Australian female middle managers.

The second question was: "In your personal view, do you think a senior management position is attainable for you in your current organisation?" Thirty eight percent of Malaysian male middle managers responded positively to this question, with a higher proportion of Australian male middle managers responding similarly (67%). For female managers, 44% of Malaysian middle managers believed such a promotion was attainable, with a higher proportion of Australian middle managers (54%) concurring.

The third question was designed to tap confidence levels: "If yes, how confident are you that this will happen?" A Likert type scale: (1 = Very confident; 5 = Not confident) was used. For the purposes of comparison, 'quite confident', (ie. 2) was used for this analysis. Malaysian male middle managers were considerably less confident on this scale (8%) than their Australian counterparts (with 50% of this group responding that they were 'very confident'). No female managers, from either country, responded that they were 'very confident'. However, 22% of Malaysian female managers, compared to 10% of Australian female managers stated that they were 'quite confident' that they would achieve promotion.

Finally, the following question added a temporal dimension. "When do you believe a senior management promotion will occur?" Six response categories were provided: 'Within one year'; 'Within 1-2 years'; 'Within 3-5 years'; 'Within 6-10 years'; 'More than 10 years'; 'Never'. For the male managers, the majority of both the Malaysian (26%) and Australian sample (40%) felt this would 'never' occur. In contrast, the majority of the Malaysian female sample (39%) and the Australian female sample (31%) felt they would achieve this goal within '3-5 years'.

The third research area addressed the self-rated transformational leadership exhibited by male and female middle managers in Australia and Malaysia. The MLQ was used to provide mean results for Malaysian and Australian male and female middle managers. The following results were obtained on the MLQ subscales:



**Table 1: Mean MLQ Sub-scales Individual Scores Based on Self Ratings**

Respondent	II(A)	II(B)	IM	IS	IC	CR	MBEA	MBEP	LF
Malaysian (M)	2.84	2.95	2.95	3.1	2.95	2.94	2.78	0.83	0.56
Malaysian (F)	2.6	2.58	2.9	2.94	2.63	2.79	2.5	0.88	0.67
Australian (M)	2.83	2.71	2.83	2.67	2.88	3	1.75	1.33	0.79
Australian (F)	2.55	2.45	2.66	2.82	3.18	2.9	1.91	0.95	0.45

The key to the frequencies is as follows: 'Frequently, if not always = 4'; 'Fairly Often = 3'; 'Sometimes = 2'; 'Once in a while = 1'; and 'Not at all = 0'.

The above subscales refer to:

II(A) = Idealized influence (attribute)  
 II(B) = Idealized influence (behaviour)  
 IM = Inspirational motivation  
 IS = Intellectual stimulation  
 IC = Individualised consideration  
 CR = Contingent reward  
 MBEA = Management by Exception Active  
 MBEP = Management by Exception Passive  
 LF = Laissez Faire

Table 1 gives a summary of the mean individual scores based on self ratings of leadership styles by female and male middle managers in both countries. These responses will be discussed in the Discussion below.

## Discussion

The results obtained on commitment to management as a career indicates that similar proportions of male managers in both Malaysia and Australia feel they are very committed, but that higher proportions of female managers express commitment to their management career. When asked to reflect on managers of the same sex, almost double the proportion of female middle managers in Australia felt that other female managers were committed, compared to female middle managers in Malaysia. This may suggest that Australian female managers hold a stronger belief about the suitability of their role, or a belief in the likelihood that their commitment will be rewarded. In relation to managers of the opposite sex, fairly low proportions of male and female managers in both countries expressed the view that managers of the opposite sex were very committed to management as a career.

In relation to the degree of motivation to management as a career, greater proportions of male and female managers in Australia rated themselves as 'very motivated' compared to their colleagues in Malaysia. Again, female managers in Australia had

the highest proportion of positive responses (39%). In relation to managers of their own sex, it was again noted that Australian female managers were more positive in their response about considering other female managers to be 'very motivated' (39%). It was noted that low proportions of Malaysian male and female managers responded to this question, indicating that very few respondents felt that other managers of their own sex were 'very motivated'. Finally, when considering managers of the opposite sex, once again Australian female managers were positive in their appraisal, with 31% stating that male managers in their organisation were 'very motivated' toward management as a career. This figure was in direct contrast to the smaller numbers of male and female managers in Malaysia who expressed the same view.

Responses to the question on Educational qualifications were interesting. All of the male managers in Australia were of the opinion that women in general were equally qualified to fill senior management positions as their male counterparts. A high proportion (83%) of Malaysian male managers concurred. More female managers in Malaysia (88%) felt this statement was accurate, compared to 69% of Australian female managers. This is an unexpected result given the very positive responses from the female managers to the questions of commitment and motivation of managers of their own sex. When asked about their organisation specifically, once again, male managers were more positive than their female counterparts. Similar proportions of male managers from both countries (83%) felt that female managers in their organisation were equally qualified to fill senior management positions, with slightly less female managers in Malaysia (81%) agreeing. Slightly less Australian female managers (77%) agreed with this premise.

The responses in relation to aspirations to achieve senior management were illuminating. Male managers in Malaysia were more than twice as likely as their Australian male colleagues to respond positively to the question "do you wish to achieve senior management promotion?" Female managers in Malaysia were almost twice as likely to respond positively to this question, compared to their Australian colleagues, suggesting higher levels of aspirations amongst Malaysian managers when

compared to their Australian counterparts. Of interest is that more Australian male and female managers thought that such a promotion would be attainable. This suggests that although less Australian managers expressed a desire to take up a senior management position when compared to their Malaysian counterparts, they were more positive that such a promotion was attainable.

In terms of confidence levels, 50% of Australian male managers stated that they were “very confident” that a promotion would occur, compared with a low 8% of their male counterparts in Malaysia. However, it is noted that no female managers from either Malaysia or Australia claimed they were ‘very confident’. More Malaysian female managers, compared to their Australian counterparts thought they were ‘quite confident’ such a promotion would occur.

A very interesting response was noted to the question “when do you believe a senior management promotion will occur”? Higher proportions of female managers from Malaysia (39%) and Australia (31%) felt such a promotion would occur within 3-5 years. However, fairly high proportions of male managers from Malaysia (26%) and Australia (40%), as well as female managers from Malaysia (15%) and Australia (46%) felt this would “never” occur. This may suggest that even though Australian managers believed a promotion was “attainable”, a relatively high proportion of Australian managers, male and female, felt this would not occur, perhaps expressing a personal view that they did not want this to happen.

The results from the MLQ Leadership rating scale were also illuminating, and are reported in Table 1. The subscales of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration are taken as measure of Transformational leadership. In contrast subscales that measure Transactional leadership are contingent reward, management by exception (active) and management by exception (passive). On an examination of the mean values reported, Malaysian male middle managers perceived themselves to be slightly more transformational as leaders when compared to their female colleagues, rating themselves most highly on the intellectual stimulation (IS) subscale. This score of 3.1 indicates that male managers ‘fairly often’ perceive that they stimulate their followers efforts to be creative, encourage new ideas and are innovative in finding solutions to problems (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Overall, Malaysian male managers rated themselves highly on all the five subscales of transformational leadership compared to their female counterparts. This result is unexpected as the strong cultural influences of the traditional Malaysian societal formation places males in position of power

and authority, and the literature has reported that traditionally Malaysians accept certain forms of authority figures across many levels of society. This custom is anticipated to influence the leadership style the male managers’ exhibit and it suggests that Malaysian male managers may be expected to adopt a transactional style of leadership.

Leadership styles in Malaysia are strongly paternalistic due to the nature of hierarchies in this society (Abdullah, 2001; House *et al.* 2004). However, in Asia, a paternalistic style of interaction is often viewed positively and managers are believed to be responsible for both the productivity and wellbeing of their staff. This may be the reason why Malaysian male managers rated themselves highly on subscales of idealised influence (behaviour) (IIB), intellectual stimulation (IS), and inspirational motivation (IM). These behaviours reflect a paternalistic approach by taking up the “parent” figure in leading, behaving as a caring parent towards the needs of the subordinates and stepping in to make most decisions in organisations.

In contrast the highest score that Australian male managers gave themselves was 3 on the first subscale of transactional leadership, contingent reward (CR). This score suggests Australian male managers perceive that they ‘fairly often’ reward and recognise their followers when the team or individuals accomplish expected results (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Australian female managers in contrast reported an individual score of 3.18 for individualised consideration (IC), which is a subscale of transformational leadership, indicating that they perceived that they ‘fairly often’ provided mentoring and independent consideration to each of their followers (Avolio & Bass, 2004). These results support the western literature which states that female managers show a higher propensity to work considerately with others, focusing on each individual follower’s growth needs and desire for achievement. This often manifests in creating a learning environment which allows employees to achieve their optimal potential.

On the laissez-faire subscale (LF), the entire sample of female and male middle managers in both countries perceived that they did not exhibit a laissez-faire style of leading, which is characterised by avoiding problems or delaying responses and reluctance to be involved in decision making.

## Conclusion

The limitations to this pilot study are that the results are drawn from the first stage of a larger scale study, and hence the sample size of the male and female respondents in both countries is quite small. In addition, the data is drawn from only one industry

classification, the finance industry. Hence, generalisations cannot be made from this data.

Notwithstanding the above limitations, these initial findings suggest some fruitful areas of further research. The responses indicate that there are some unexpected results, with Australian women expressing more positive attitudes in general than their male or female colleagues in Malaysia. However, in relation to education qualifications in general, and in their own organisation, female Malaysian managers were more positive about the qualifications of their female colleagues than were their Australian counterparts.

In terms of aspirations to achieve a senior management promotion in the current organisation, both male and female Malaysian managers expressed much higher levels of aspiration. In contrast, more male and female Australian managers expressed the view that the promotion was actually attainable, suggesting that the previous response tapped a 'desired state', but in reality, fewer people felt such a promotion would be attainable.

As reported earlier, more Australian male managers expressed confidence in future promotion than any of the other respondents. However, relatively high proportions of both male and female Australian managers did state that they felt that such a promotion would 'never' occur.

Further research is needed to explore more dimensions of culture, and how such cultural influences may have modified the responses found above. Various researchers have called for studies which focus on leadership attributes and styles, while recognising the cultural influences of male and female managers and leaders (e.g. House *et al.* 2004; Omar & Davidson, 2001; Powell, 1999). At this point, it would seem that the leadership styles, and career advancement aspirations of male and female managers in Malaysia and Australia have some very interesting similarities, as well as some clear differences.

Responses to the research questions indicate that Australian female managers are more positive about themselves in their workplace participation, as well as more positive about the commitment and motivation of other managers. However, Australian

male managers, and Malaysian female managers saw the educational qualifications of women to fill senior management roles more positively than did Australian female managers.

In relation to aspirations to achieve senior management roles, higher proportions of Malaysian male and female managers responded positively, although Australian male and female managers felt such a promotion would be more attainable than did their Malaysian counterparts. Confidence levels were higher amongst Australian male managers and Malaysian female managers, and higher proportions of female managers (Malaysian and Australian) expressed a belief that a promotion would occur in 3-5 years, when compared to their male colleagues from both countries.

According to Van Der Boon (2003), women in Southeast Asian countries are likely to be seen as more reliable and faithful compared to their male counterparts and hence are seen as highly desirable for senior managerial positions, with Asian women making successful entry into boardrooms "without affirmative action programmes" (p.137). This suggests that a 'glass ceiling' effect may not be operating in Malaysia, and that cultural influences may not be suppressing women to the same degree this has happened in the west, where slow career advancement and progression into senior managerial roles has been widely reported. Therefore, the paternalistic culture that operates in Malaysia does not appear to be constraining the career advancement of women in management roles to the extent that was expected.

Further explanations of these unexpected findings will be addressed in the second and third stages of this research using different industry classifications and a larger sample from both countries. At this early stage, it does appear that the cultural influences of paternalistic society has not created a constraint on this group of women in management roles in terms of their attitudes, their aspirations for promotion and the leadership style they exhibit. Therefore, career advancement may not be the problem for women managers in developing industrialised countries as it has been in the west.

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**About the Authors**

*Dr. Glenice J. Wood*

My research interests are in women in management, particularly from a cross cultural perspective. My recent work has involved a follow-up study of male and female middle managers to ascertain what proportion were successful in obtaining a senior management promotion. In addition, reasons for advancement were recorded, along with perceptions of factors that had hindered their progress.

*Ms Uma D. Jogulu*

My background is Business studies majoring in marketing. My personal interest is engaging in research related to attitudes toward women in management specifically focusing on evaluations of women leadership styles cross-culturally.



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