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Preparedness, Career Advancement, and  
the Glass Ceiling

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United States Glass Ceiling Commission

# **Preparedness, Career Advancement, and the Glass Ceiling**

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**DRAFT**  
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## **Executive Summary**

The “preparedness” of white women and minority men and women to advance to mid-level and senior positions in the private sector, and their resulting availability as executives, is an issue of dissension. Some argue that educational credentials are key. Since women and minority men did not begin earning business-related degrees in any substantial numbers until after 1970, they are still “in the pipeline.” This argument contends that it is simply a matter of time before more white women and minorities move into executive positions.

Others argue that this emphasis on graduate degrees is a smoke screen. They contend that racism and gender stereotyping by corporate leadership prevent minorities and white women from being promoted. Both sides are correct, to a degree.

The development (preparation) of business executives is a long, complicated process. Generally, chief executive officers (CEOs) are in their 50s or 60s when they assume that position, and have spent 25-35 years “in the pipeline.” Those who hold that white women and minority men and women are working their way up are correct. Greater numbers of women and minority men have begun business careers in the past 20 years. The other side is also correct. Minorities and white women with appropriate educational credentials have been overlooked or ignored for managerial promotions and developmental opportunities.

But each argument ignores certain realities. Because U. S. companies are primarily hierarchical, the development and promotion process is one of continual winnowing and elimination -- the top of a pyramid is just too small for more than a few people. Furthermore, the people at the top pick those who will replace them, reaching down or out to make their selections. Because the future of the organization depends on their selections, they look for replacements they trust, who know the business (or industry) and have contributed to its profits. Educational credentials are only one factor of the preparedness issue. Equally, if not more important are visibility, credibility, access to upper management and executives, broad and varied experience in core areas of the business, organizational savvy, and career planning.

Our society wants to believe that the selection process is carefully planned and objective. We expect it to be based on performance and merit, and to result in the choice of the single “best”

person at each step. In actuality, research finds this is rarely the case. Few companies have formal succession or executive development plans. Most rely on informal practices and procedures that often use limited information to make selections. Such practices make it easy to reinforce racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes and biases and to limit even the opportunity for advancement of interested and educationally qualified employees.

## **Findings**

### ***Educational Preparedness***

- *Education has become an increasingly important factor for advancement in the private sector.* An undergraduate degree is now a necessity for executive advancement. A graduate degree has changed from a helpful asset to an important credential for advancement and promotion, especially in large firms. Younger executives, both men and women, white and minority, are better educated than their predecessors. It is interesting to note that the demand for better educated managers and executives corresponds to the passage of equal employment legislation and the increase of white women and minority men and women in the work force.
- *Women and minority men have increasingly secured business-related educational credentials.* In 1990, women and minorities earned 46 percent of the master's degrees in business and management. In that same year, nearly a quarter of all college degrees were in business, and women and minority men earned over half of these. However, 1990 appears to have been the peak in the undergraduate business degree boom. Consequent years have seen reduced numbers, particularly among women. With regards to first professional degrees (law, medicine), minority and white men earn more than do women.
- *The cost of college and graduate school is a potential barrier to advancement. This is a particular problem for low-income students, as grants, fellowships, scholarships, and paying internships have been scaled back or eliminated.* Research finds that for significant numbers of Blacks, tuition support is a determinant in educational decisions. Research was not available for other minority groups.
- *The female work force is becoming better educated than the male work force.* Since the early

1980s, more women than men have been earning bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. For workers under the age of 40, women of each race or ethnic group are equally or more likely to have graduate degrees than are men in the same age group.

◦ *However, occupational segregation between women and white men, and increasing job segregation between white women and women of color, reduces the availability of women for advancement, particularly minority women, in the for-profit sector. The majority of well educated professional and managerial women are not found in the private, for-profit sector, but in the government sector (local, state and federal) and the "third sector"--non-governmental agencies in health, social welfare, and education; legal services, professional services, membership organizations and associations; and libraries, museums, and arts organizations. African American and Native American women are particularly dependent on these two sectors for professional, technical, and managerial positions, as are African American men.*

### ***Developmental Preparation***

◦ *Career attainment, mobility, and salary are influenced by gender and race, as well as by education. Despite comparable education and experience, white men tend to progress more quickly into middle and upper-management positions than do white women. There are few empirical studies of minority (African Americans) and white managers, and their findings are mixed. It would appear that early (mid-level) mobility may be similar, but with Blacks plateauing more quickly, with lower promotability into upper positions.*

◦ *Managers and executives look for "signals" from those they will select to advance. Those signals found to be most significant indicate credibility and provide increased access to visibility to decision makers.*

◦ *Certain functional areas are more likely to provide preparation and opportunity for advancement than other areas do. The powerful functional areas pertain to the organization's business -- production, sales and marketing, engineering, accounting and finance. However, many minorities in such "line" positions, e.g., Asian American engineers, do not find comparable opportunity for advancement.*

◦ *Broad and varied experience in core areas of the business is paramount for advancement.*

White women and minority men and women have only limited opportunity to obtain such experience in most companies. They tend to be in supporting, “staff” functional areas -- personnel/human resources, communications, public relations, affirmative action, consumer affairs -- and movement between these and “line” positions is rare in most major companies. Furthermore, career ladders in staff functions are generally shorter than those in line functions, offering fewer possibilities to gain varied experience.

◦ *White women and minority men and women are less likely to be selected for assignments involving risk-taking and/or additional responsibility, i.e., committees, task-forces, special assignments, or for management or executive development programs.* Such assignments tend to be made on an informal basis, with managers and executives selecting people they know and feel comfortable with. Recent research indicates that this “comfort level” is more easily expanded to include white women than men and women of other racial/ethnic groups.

◦ *Access to information, which is critical to advancement, is often limited to selected groups or individuals within the managerial ranks or the work place.* Informal methods of information sharing, including the “old boys’ network”, mentors, and sponsors, cause invisible barriers for qualified, interested employees.

## **Conclusion**

*A significant factor in the availability debate is the haphazard and inefficient developmental and advancement process within companies and organizations themselves.* Our research on educational credentials does not support the contention that there are not enough educationally qualified women and minority men to be hired for or promoted into managerial and executive positions in business. A major reason for the perceived lack of qualified women and minority males is that they have limited access to the developmental experiences and activities needed to become prepared for advancement. The selection procedures for these tend to be informal and bound by stereotypes, biases, and questionable “qualifications.” Thus, companies ignore many individuals with the education, interest, and potential for managerial and executive responsibility.

To correct this situation, companies need to change their policies and programs to make

development and promotion procedures more formally structured, more objective, and more inclusive. They then need to communicate the policies to all employees. Furthermore, top management must be extensively and visibly involved, and must hold those making development and promotion decisions accountable.

## INTRODUCTION

The legislation creating the Glass Ceiling Commission, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, calls for an examination of “the preparedness of women and minorities to advance to management and decision-making positions in business.” Such an examination explores whether there is, in fact, a supply of qualified people to fill such positions, which account for roughly 11.2 million positions in work force approaching 120 million people.

Supply side explanations of differences in access of certain groups to desirable jobs focus on the skills, preparation, and motives of the members of these groups. The human capital theory suggests that individuals are rewarded in their current jobs for their past investment in education and job training. Following this reasoning, individuals with comparable education, training, and experience would achieve similar levels of career success (Cox and Harquail 1991; Morrison 1987). Using this argument, many contend that it is only a matter of time until women and minorities, whose educational attainment is increasing, will move into top corporate positions.

Two studies indicate that this is happening for women (particularly white women). As more women have earned graduate degrees, their movement into upper management positions has increased (Adler and Yates 1993; Forbes et al 1988). Other studies suggest that this is not the case--that even with comparable education and tenure, managerial women and minority men lag behind white men in promotions and pay (Stroh, Brett, and Reilly 1992; Cox and Harquail 1991; Cox and Nkomo 1991; Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley 1990; Cannings 1988). Both findings are correct.

The reality is that educational credentials are only one factor when hiring and promotion decisions are made. Equally, if not more important, are visibility, access to upper management and executives, broad and varied experience in core areas of the business, organizational savvy, and career planning. These are gained through a variety of credential-building experiences, including job rotation, special assignments, mentor and sponsor relationships, informal on-the-job training, and formal development programs. Any examination of preparedness for advancement must also analyze the availability of and access to these activities.

One final factor must also be considered: the “traits” deemed necessary for a specific job or

position. These often become incorporated, formally or informally, into the qualifications for that position. As a result, various groups may be determined to be better prepared or more qualified for those positions. The opportunities or barriers resulting from such stereotypes influence preparedness and advancement.

The objective of this study is to determine from current literature and research whether educational and developmental barriers exist organizationally which effect the preparedness of minorities and white women for decision-making positions in the private sector. The paper is organized into four sections. The first examines “educational” preparedness, looking at educational attainment, educational costs, and the impact of education on mobility and salary. The second section identifies “developmental” experiences gained on the job and currently considered necessary for advancement and mobility. The third section explores the access of minorities and women to these credential-building, developmental opportunities. The fourth section presents characteristics of successful executive development programs.

### **Methodology**

This paper is a review and analysis of current business and academic literature and research. The author gathered information through published documents and discussions with research experts. Documents were obtained through a search of libraries, on-line databases, by telephone networking, and by reviewing the bibliographies of the monographs commissioned by the Glass Ceiling Commission. Library collections which were searched included the Library of Congress, George Washington University, the Department of Labor library, and the District of Columbia Public Library. The author read and analyzed scores of articles and studies in academic, professional, and business periodicals, books, and other publications. She also followed up on mentions of studies in newspapers and magazines and contacted authors to get copies.

For the section on educational credentials, statistical reports were analyzed. Sources included the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Census Bureau, and the American Council of Education’s *Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education*. Governmental and other studies of educational attainment, training requirements for managers and executives, and educational costs were also reviewed. For the section on developmental preparation, studies and articles regarding executive career paths and promotion selections, developmental experiences necessary for

advancement, and the access of minorities and women to these were analyzed.

## **Educational Preparedness**

A college degree has become an important qualifying credential in the selection of professional and managerial staff, especially in large firms (Carnavale et al 1990 Roomkin 1989; Harlan & Weiss 1982). Employers use screening information about the type and reputation of an individual's college program, grades, and recommendations when hiring (Braddock and McPartland 1987). An undergraduate degree is now a necessity for executive advancement; about 90 percent of executives have graduated from college (Korn/Ferry International and UCLA 1993; Forbes and Piercy 1991).

The emphasis on educational credentials for managers corresponds to the passage of equal employment legislation and the increase of white women and minorities in the work force. In 1960, as few as 17 percent of all managers had attended four or more years of college (Kurtz 1989). By 1976, an American Management Association survey found that 40 percent of male managers and 20 percent of female managers held an undergraduate degree (Burrow 1978).

A graduate degree has been transformed from a helpful asset in a business career to an important credential for advancement and promotion. Whereas in 1979, just over 40 percent of male executives in large corporations had a graduate degree, by 1989, more than 60 percent did. Women executives show an even more startling increase: from slightly more than 25 percent with graduate degrees in 1982 to more than 50 percent in 1992. Of executives with graduate degrees, 40 percent of both men and women had master's degrees in business administration. The second most popular degree was law, either an LL.B. or a J.D. (Korn/Ferry International and UCLA 1993).

Table 1, on the next page, shows clearly that the American work force is continuing to become better educated, particularly its women workers. By 1991, the educational achievement of working men and women was far more equal than it had been twenty years ago. At the post-secondary level, 20.9 percent of women workers have college or post-graduate degrees, as do 22.5 percent of men workers. This compares to 11.5 percent and 14 percent respectively in 1973.

Data from the 1990 Census Supplementary Reports show that by race or ethnic origin, Asian Pacific American men and women have the largest percentage of their work force with a college or post-college degree (42 percent and 35 percent, respectively). However, this varies significantly when disaggregated by national origin, with Pakistanis and Asian Indians over 50 percent, and

Cambodians, Samoans, Laotians, and Hmong below 10 percent (Woo 1994).

**Table 1**

**Share of Workforce**

	Women 1973	Women 1991	% Change	Men 1973	Men 1991	% Change
HS Dropout	22.2%	10.2%	-54.1%	26.6%	14.7%	-45%
HS Grad	46.2	41.8	-10%	37.1	38.5	04%
Some College	17.2	24.5	42%	18.6	21.8	17%
College Grad	8.6	14.8	72%	9.4	14.7	56%
College +2	2.9	6.1	110%	5.6	7.8	39%

From data in *The State of Working America 1992-93* by Mishel and Bernstein, p. 166-168, based on *Current Population Survey (CPS)*.

They are followed by white men (26 percent), white women (23 percent), black women (14 percent), black men (12 percent), Hispanic women, Native American men, and Native American women (10 percent each), and Hispanic men (9 percent). College or post-college completion for Hispanics also varies by national origin, with Cubans and Central and South Americans above 15 percent, and Mexicans and Puerto Ricans below 9 percent (Mauricio Gáston Institute 1994).

**Undergraduate Degrees**

In 1982, the number of women awarded bachelors degrees began to exceed that of men, with the trend expected to continue through the year 2000 (U.S., Department of Education 1991). This is due primarily to

white women now earning more college degrees than white men; the number of minority women (except for Asian Pacific American women) earning college degrees has long been higher than that of minority men.

During the 1980s, there was a large increase in the number of colleges offering undergraduate business degrees (Roomkin 1989), and for the past ten years, the most popular undergraduate degree, across race and ethnic origin, has been in business and management. In 1990, nearly one-quarter of all college degrees were in business.

- The percentage of bachelors degrees in the fields of business and management awarded to women has grown significantly. In academic year 1969-70, women earned 8.7 percent of all bachelors degrees in these fields; this figure increased markedly to 46.7 percent in 1990. Sixteen percent of the degrees (7 percent of the total) earned by women were earned by women of color, up from 14 percent (5 percent of the total) in 1981.
- Men of color earned 10 percent of the bachelors degrees in business earned by men, five percent of the total.

The boom in business degrees appears to be over, however, reversing a 30-year trend that peaked in 1990 (Tooley 1993). Roomkin (1989) speculates that, possibly because of salary competition for college graduates with business degrees, companies are beginning to shift their hiring preferences to undergraduate majors in the liberal arts and humanities. This should benefit women, who earn far more of these degrees than do men. However, because the pay for graduates with these degrees has traditionally been lower, it may also contribute to the long-term decline of real wages for college graduates which began in 1987.

### **Advanced Degrees**

For workers with graduate or professional degrees, Asian-American men lead with 19 percent holding such degrees. Ten percent of white men and of Asian-American women have graduate degrees, seven percent of white women, five percent of black women, four percent of black men and Native American men, and three percent of Native American women, Hispanic men, and Hispanic women.

According to 1990 Census data, (U.S. Department of Commerce 1992) the greatest percentage of workers with graduate degrees is in the 40-69 age group, where 60% of the men and 53% of the women hold such degrees, even though this age group represents only 40 percent of the total work force. In this age group, larger percentages of men have graduate degrees than do women, regardless of race or ethnic group.

Although the Census Bureau report does not disaggregate workers age 40-44, it is likely that the percentages are much closer. In younger age groups, beginning with 35-39, the percentages switch. Younger women of each race or ethnic group are equally or more likely to have graduate degrees than are the men in the same age group.

- The number of women earning masters degrees began to exceed the number awarded to men in 1981; by 1991, women were earning 52.5 percent of all masters degrees. Except for Asian American women, women in each racial or ethnic origin group earn more masters degree than do men. However, minority and white men earn more first professional degrees (law, medicine) than do women.
- Minority men earned 10.2 percent of the masters degrees and 11.9 percent of first professional degrees awarded to men in 1990, up from 9.3 and 7.7 percent respectively in 1981.

- Women are also increasingly securing masters level degrees in business and management, from 3.5 percent in 1970 to 40 percent in 1990 (26,220). Minority women earned 12.5 percent of these degrees awarded to women in 1990 (3,294), up from 10.3 percent in 1981.
- Minority men earned 9.5 percent of the graduate business degrees awarded to men in 1990 (4,878). More men in each racial or ethnic group earned graduate business degrees in 1990 than did women in the same group.

With the emphasis placed on the importance of an MBA in terms of career advancement, and recognizing that it is the most common graduate degree held by executives, it is important to keep in mind that less than a quarter of male executives in 1989 held that degree. Just over one-third held graduate or professional degrees in other areas, and 40 percent did not have a graduate degree.

It should be noted, too, that the general devaluation of foreign educational degrees limits both entry and advancement opportunities for those earning them, at least for immigrants from Asia (Woo 1994).

### **The Education Pipeline**

During the 1980s, the number of African Americans enrolled in higher education declined during the first half of the decade, held relatively steady in 1985; and grew at a modest rate from 1986 to 1990. African American men in particular showed considerable gains from 1988 to 1990, reversing a downward trend during the previous eight years. However, between 1990 and 1992, the college enrollment rate of African American men who graduated from high school dropped five percentage points, to 30 percent. For African American women, the enrollment rate increased five percentage points, to 37 percent during the same period. For Hispanic men it increased 6 percentage points, to 34 percent, and for white men, the rate held steady at 42 percent (American Council on Education 1994).

### **Educational Costs as a Potential Barrier**

With educational achievement so necessary for a managerial or professional career, access to college and graduate school becomes an important factor. A national survey of black and white healthcare executives found tuition support through scholarships and grants was critical for far more Blacks, with more than twice as many having received financial support through scholarships to pay for their undergraduate tuition than had Whites. For their graduate tuition, Blacks in the study were more likely to have received 50 percent or more from grants and fellowships. In both cases, such tuition support was cited as a determinant in the decision to complete college or pursue careers in healthcare management by significantly more Blacks than Whites (American College of Healthcare Executives and the National Association of Health Services Executives 1993).

An earlier study (Raymond 1989) found that minority enrollments in healthcare administration began decreasing during the 1980s, at the same time scholarships and paying internships for minority students were scaled back or eliminated. Many minority students were unable to afford graduate-level tuition and fees that, in 1985, could total as much as \$25,000 a year for a full-time student

### **Education and Career Attainment/Mobility**

The human capital theory suggests that individuals are rewarded in their current jobs for their past investment in education and training. Following this reasoning, individuals with comparable education, training, and experience would achieve similar levels of career success (Cox and Harquail 1991; Morrison 1987). Research indicates that race and gender are also factors.

Much of the empirical research on disparate treatment at the managerial level has focused on the experiences of working women, particularly white women. Among the few studies of minority and white managers, Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990) found that compared to Whites, Blacks were more likely to be plateaued and had lower ratings of promotability. In their four-year research project of black women managers, Bell and Nkomo (1994) found that equal educational preparation did not predict equal advancement for women, and that significantly more white women than black women were at the top management level of their companies.

Cox and Nkomo (1991), however, found that black MBAs did not hold lower positions compared to Whites with comparable experience and performance ratings, although the study did not measure the actual authority and responsibility of the positions. The authors noted, however, that respondents tended to be at early stages in their careers. The study did find a gender differential between white men and women, with white women MBAs at lower levels than their male counterparts.

In their study of 1,029 male and female managers employed by 20 Fortune 500 companies, Stroh, Brett and, Reilly (1992) found that despite comparable education and employment in high paying industries, female managers and professionals lagged behind their male peers in salary progress and geographic mobility, although not in promotion rates. Although women reported that they were receiving promotions at the same rate as the men, they were moving less frequently than the men and their salaries had progressed over the past 5 years substantially less rapidly than the mens. Neither the number of exits from the workforce nor the number of company changes were significant predictors of career progression.

Borkowski and Walsh (1992) surveyed graduates of an MBA program. Ninety percent attended the program on a part-time basis while working full-time in healthcare. The study compared initial post-MBA positions and current positions, categorizing them as upper, middle, lower, and non-management. The majority of men previously employed in entry-level positions progressed into middle management positions after graduation, but no similar career advancement was discernible for women immediately after completing their graduate studies. It took women a longer time to move into middle management. Men progressed more quickly into upper management over time as well, while the percentage of women executives actually declined.

Finally, a paper prepared for the Glass Ceiling Commission cites a 1993 follow-up study of the Stanford MBA class of 1982 which found that 16 percent of the men were CEO, chairman or president of the company, compared to 2 percent of the women. In addition, 23 percent of the men held the title of vice president and 15 percent held the title of director, compared to 10 percent and 8 percent, respectively, for the women (Woody and Weiss 1994).

### **Impact of Education on Salary**

Salary in an other area influenced by education. Research again shows that gender is a factor as well. A 1990 Business Week study of 3,664 business school graduates found that a female MBA from a top 20 school took home an average of \$54,749 in her first year after graduation; a male MBA received 12 percent

more, \$61,400. Even when grouped by industry, women still showed lower starting salaries. The largest differential was in information-systems management (29.5%); the smallest gap was in finance (3.3%).

In Borkowski and Walsh's study (1992), although male and female mid-level managers advanced to executive positions after graduation from the MBA program, compensation was slightly higher for male executives.

Cox and Harquail (1991) examined the relations between gender, career paths, and career success in a sample of MBAs. They found that women in managerial careers experienced lower salary increases, fewer management promotions, and lower hierarchical levels compared to men of similar education, age, experience, performance, and career paths. As a result, the roughly \$2,000 difference in starting salaries (\$31,206 versus \$29,474) grew to \$11,000 (\$55,891 versus \$44,813) over the average of 4-5 years of the subjects' career addressed in the study.

### **Industrial Segregation**

The research on educational attainment does not support the contention that there are not enough qualified women and minority men to be hired for or promoted into managerial and executive positions. The question remains: why are they "invisible" in top positions in the private sector?

One answer is that many are not in the for-profit sector. Instead, they are disproportionately found in professional, technical, and managerial (PTM) jobs in the government and in what Burbridge (1994) calls the "third sector"--non-governmental agencies in health, social welfare, and education fields; legal services, professional services, membership organizations and associations; and libraries, museums, and arts organizations. During the 1980s, while white women increased their participation in traditionally white male dominated occupations such as law and medicine, black women increased their concentration in social work and teaching as white women vacated these positions (Badgett and Williams 1993). For the most part, these positions are not found in the for-profit sector.

By 1990, almost 90 percent of black female professionals, 74 percent of black female technicians, and 50 percent of black female managers worked in government and the third sector. Native American female PTMs were a very close second on their dependence on government and third sector employment. White and Hispanic female PTMs were also heavily dependent on these sectors, with 83 percent of professionals, 57-59 percent of technicians, and 30-32 percent of managers employed in government and the third sector. Asian and Pacific American women had the least reliance on these two sectors, although like all women, they are over-represented in these sectors relative to men (Burbridge 1994).

Among men, Blacks were most reliant on government and the third sector for employment: 70 percent of black male professionals, 48 percent of black male technicians, and 44 percent of black male managers, with Native American males a close second. Hispanic males follow Blacks and Native Americans in their reliance on these two sectors, while Asian male PTMs are slightly less dependent on these sectors compared to white males. Of white males, 56 percent of professionals, 31 percent of technicians, and only 24 percent of managers are in the government and third sector. (Burbridge 1994).

Occupational segregation between white men and women, and increasing job segregation between white women and women of color reduces the availability of women, particularly minority women, for advancement in the for-profit sector.

However, this does not account for the situation with regard to men of color. Nor does it explain the lack of advancement of the millions of qualified white women and minority men and women working in the for-profit sector, which still accounts for 70 percent of all employment. A second answer may be found in those non-educational factors associated with preparation for advancement.

## Developmental Preparation

This section identifies the types of preparation gained on the job, which are currently considered necessary for advancement and mobility. Different levels of management require different types of preparation and qualifications. According to *Training in America: The Organization and Strategic Role of Training*, strong technical skills are the significant qualifying preparation for supervisors (5 million positions). For managers (5 million positions), formal education and informal training play much more important roles in qualifying preparation. Executives (1.2 million positions) receive training for specific jobs through the management ranks, with substantial developmental training (Carnavale, Gainer, and Villet, 1990).

Forbes and Piercy (1991) describe two types of career systems among corporations, each based on a different corporate strategy, and each with different implications for development and promotion:

- Defenders protect their niche in relatively stable environments and rely on internal efficiency to competitively price their existing products or services. They generally use formalized, centralized control systems and are often organized by function. Managers tend to be specialists who are promoted within their specialized areas, with the powerful function areas being finance, accounting, and production. These firms emphasize carefully developing those in critical areas of production and accounting/finance and use extensive on-the-job training and detailed succession planning programs. People are typically hired into lower positions and promoted from within, and there is likely to be a reliance on early predictors of management potential.
- Analyzers operate like defenders in some product markets, but they also are poised to move quickly to take advantage of new opportunities. The firm is organized to allow for flexibility as well as efficiency. Some people are brought in at entry level and trained within specific functions, but others are recruited from outside to provide immediate expertise. The areas of marketing, engineering, and production are important, and there is more emphasis on movement across functions and products as means of learning about various departments.

They also found that career paths to the position of CEO vary by industry. In manufacturing, eight equally well traveled paths were identified from functional management to top management; in utility firms, two career paths tend to dominate; in banking there were 10 separate paths from vice president to CEO, although two were used by over 55 percent of the CEOs. In retailing, one path was followed by one-third of the CEOs. There was no clear pattern of upward movement among CEOs of transportation companies, nor in the insurance industry. Certain support functions, notably legal and finance, can be routes to the top, especially in industries which are highly regulated. A functional specialist path in these areas exists which allows for more mobility between firms and between industries. Such specialists are able to move into other functional areas and/or into general management and eventually into corporate top management.

Obviously, specific developmental preparation will vary by industry. However, studies across industries find certain factors common to successful executives, whether male or female, Black or White. Those found to be most significant to advancement signal credibility and provide increased access or visibility to decision-makers:

- Broad and varied experience in core areas of the business (Korn/Ferry 1993; Catalyst 1992; Forbes & Piercy 1991; Nkomo & Cox 1990; Morrison et al 1987);
- Access to information, particularly through networks and mentor assistance (Johnson 1991; Greenhaus

et al 1990; Nkomo and Cox 1990; Dreher and Ash 1990; Burke and McKeen 1988; Morrison et al 1987; Nixon 1985).

Other significant factors include company seniority, initial job assignment, high job mobility i.e., shorter average job tenure, education, organizational savvy, long hours and hard work, and career planning. There is a difference, however, between the characteristics of successful executives and what employers indicate is considered in making promotions.

Braddock and McPartland (1987) find the most important information used by employers in making promotion decisions for top level jobs was 1) performance ratings, 2) internal recommendations, and 3) production or sales record. Interestingly, for positions in which women are the majority of job holders, production record and performance ratings (credibility signals) are more important than recommendations from supervisors or others.

What becomes apparent from the research is that managers and executives look for “signals” from those they will select to advance. Initially the signals indicate credibility, such as education or early successful performance. In addition they look for signals which combine credibility with visibility or familiarity. These include entering through a management training program, early promotion, moving through various functional areas, or being assigned initially into a powerful department. As the individual is considered for upper level positions, credibility signals are still critical, but general signals of familiarity and trust also become important.

## **Findings**

Broad and varied experience in core areas of the business and access to information are critical preparation factors.

Certain functional areas are more likely to provide preparation and opportunity for advancement than other areas do.

Minorities and white women would be expected to have more opportunity to gain broad experience in companies with greater flexibility to respond to changing conditions, and with more emphasis on marketing, customers, and the competition.

## **Access to Developmental Preparation**

As individuals advance, informal and developmental training plays an increasingly important role. This section describes how individuals gain the developmental experiences identified above. It also explores the actions or structures which limit access.

## **Broad experience in core business areas**

Possessing broad and varied experience in core areas of the business is consistently cited as paramount for advancement. An individual can become head of a staff area without line experience, but advancement beyond that position will be virtually impossible. Conversely, while a history of line experience is necessary for advancement, it generally is not sufficient. Forbes and Piercy (1991) found that breadth of experience was by far the most important variable in predicting the choice of a general manager by top executives.

However, moving between staff and line positions is often not easy. In a survey of Fortune 500 and Service 500 companies, over half of the senior managers reported that such mobility is rare in their company. When moves do occur, they are often made by high-potential performers at junior levels of their careers. Staff to line mobility can be perceived as developmental but risky, and sometimes entails moving to a lower rank. Movement tends to occur most often where interaction between line and staff is routine, and where staff and line jobs are physically close to each other (Catalyst 1992).

Gaining experience in core business areas is an obstacle for employees in staff positions, especially those in mid-level positions and above.

**Functional Area.:** Certain functional areas are more likely to lead to management jobs than others. As Forbes and Piercy state, the “right area” is most likely to be a “line” function such as marketing or production or a critical control function such as accounting or finance. Or it will be “floor jobs” in stores -- furniture, produce, grocery departments. It is not likely to be a supporting “staff” function such as personnel/human resources, communications or public relations (p. 73). Research shows that significantly more women start in such staff positions than do men (Catalyst 1992; Olsen et al 1986). Few studies exist regarding initial assignments of minorities. However, one recent survey of black and white healthcare administrators found that Blacks most often began in staff positions, while Whites more often started as hospital department managers (NAHSE/ACHE 1993).

Research regarding current positions generally finds that although percentages may drop, women are still more likely than men to be in staff positions (Olsen et al 1986), and black women are more likely to be in staff positions than white women (Bell and Nkomo, 1994). Korn/Ferry found, for example, that 40.1 percent of male executives were currently in general management, 25.4 percent having spent most of their career in that functional area, although only 4.5 percent started in that area. While a larger percentage of women executives began their career in general management (7.7 percent), only 13.9 percent spent most of their career in that area, and only 17.5 percent were currently holding such positions.

Although a 1990 survey of members of the National Black MBA Association found that 68 percent were currently in line positions (Nkomo and Cox, 1990), other writers indicate that Blacks tend to be concentrated in staff positions, particularly in the “relations” -- community relations, human relations, public relations, or in positions where their only relevant expertise concerns Blacks and other minorities (Cose 1993, Jones 1987). Interviews with 76 top-ranking black executives found that 66 percent had their careers in the areas of black consumer issues or jobs related to affirmative action (cited in Bell and Nkomo,

1994).

Even those in line positions may find their positions “ghettoized” when they become designated as “safe” positions for minorities. Johnson cites the case of the marketing group at a large consumer goods corporation, where certain kinds of cereal have quietly been designated “black brands.” “These are popular, cash cow products, given to black brand managers because they would make fewer ripples there than if they failed on a new brand” (1987, p. 22).

Research about functional occupations for other racial or ethnic groups is limited. However, Asian Pacific American males are generally concentrated in engineering, accounting, and health technology. A recent survey of 235 Asian American scientists and engineers in Arizona found that only 2 percent were in top managerial positions, compared to 15 percent of white respondents, and only 8.2 percent were mid-level managers, compared to 14 percent of white respondents (cited in Woo 1994). Even in high technology companies, minority group members with the necessary educational credentials and tenure tend not to be promoted to significant managerial positions (Woo 1994; Cherian 1993; Bozman 1988).

**Relocation.:** This is one means of gaining experience in a different area, although this varies by industry. The Catalyst survey (1992) found that while such moves are frequent in manufacturing, they are more rare in financial services, and unusual in high technology companies. For minorities, relocation may result in geographical isolation, denying themselves and their family social, cultural, and religious activities and community support (Friedman and Carter 1993). Corning Glass attracted a black hairdresser to town at the urging of their black managers who were driving an hour or more to Ithica to have their hair cut (Wall Street Journal 1989). While this action was taken to retain managers the company had recruited, the problem applies to minorities who move within a company, as well.

Women are far less likely to be asked to relocate than men. Over 60 percent of the women executives in the Korn/Ferry study (1993) had never been asked to move, compared to only 16.5 percent of the men executives. Of those asked, fewer women refused the relocation. For both men (41 percent) and women (45 percent), family was the most important reason for refusing. It appears that superiors assume most, if not all, women will not relocate, and therefore do not even make the offer.

**Overseas assignments.:** This is an area expected to increase as companies recognize the need to develop leaders to deal with the global economy. (American Society for Training and Development 1990). Only a small percentage of men or women in the Korn/Ferry surveys had served overseas, but men (13 percent) were more likely to get such assignments than women (2.5 percent). Interestingly, for these women an overseas assignment more often led to a better job upon returning than it did for the men (82 percent compared to 70 percent).

### **Development Programs**

Developmental experience also encompasses committee assignments, task force experience, and special assignments, particularly those which involve risk-taking and/or additional responsibility, and selection for educational/developmental programs. These enhance credibility. They also increase visibility and familiarity. Little, if any, research has been done regarding the selection of minorities and women for special assignments. Only a few studies have examined the participation of women in management or executive development programs, and none addressed minorities.

**Management/Executive Development Training::** In the mid-seventies, a study of nearly 2000 members of the American Management Association showed that 70 percent of the respondents had a formal management development program, but 58 percent considered only a limited number of women qualified for participation. Only nine percent specifically recruited women for developmental activities. And while four percent of the organizations included women on a quota basis as representatives of a minority, another 12 percent did not admit females. The vast majority of respondents, 70 percent, indicated women were permitted to participate in management development “as discovered.” Not surprisingly, 30 percent of the firms had less than one percent female representation in their management ranks and 58 percent had no more than one woman out of every 20 managers (Burrow 1978).

The situation has not increased significantly. A recent study by Business Week discovered that less than five percent of the managers sent to high-profile executive MBA programs were women, and that minorities were terribly underrepresented as well. For example, only about three percent of the 180 executives in Stanfords 1991 advanced-management program were women (Business Week 1991).

How are participants selected for these programs? A survey of 1,000 large and small companies indicates that primarily higher-level managers are selected to attend university residential and/or executive MBA programs. In 51 percent of the companies, only upper/top level managers participate in these programs. Also, 66 percent of the companies send only experienced managers, and 40 percent send only managers designated as “fast-track, high-potential” to these programs (Saari et al 1988).

The authors found that in almost all companies, top management is involved in both nominating and selecting participants for university residential programs. In about half the companies, a managers immediate supervisor is also involved. For short-course or company-specific programs, the immediate supervisor is usually involved in nominating and selecting managers to attend. In the majority of companies, managers can nominate themselves to attend training or education programs. However, in only a small percentage of companies can they approve their own attendance. Furthermore, less than a third of companies conduct some type of needs assessment to determine the training and development needs of their managers, and these are conducted primarily for employees at the supervisory level.

In a study conducted on Workforce 2000 issues for the Hudson Institute, only 12 percent of responding companies, and only 15 percent of those with strong management support reported training minorities for supervisory positions as a part of their efforts to handle cultural diversity. There was not a comparable question regarding activities to help women on the job (Towers and Perrin, 1990).

Borkowski and Walsh (1992) found that men MBAs had greater access to further training opportunities through their employing organizations--job rotation, in-house education programs, and tuition reimbursement for continuing education.

A 1991 study by the U.S. Department of Labor found that while the same percentage of men and women reported needing training to qualify for their jobs (57% of men; 56% of women), women received much less through formal company programs (9%) compared to men (14%). Women also received slightly less training through informal on-the-job activities (29% men; 25% women). A larger percentage of women than men (35% to 31%) received their training from school. The same percentage of Blacks and Whites reported receiving formal company training (12%), but only 8% of Hispanics attended formal programs. Eleven percent of all other races [Asian Pacific Americans, Native Americans, and other races], reported qualifying through formal programs (Amirault 1992)

Women and minority men have less opportunity to participate in employer-sponsored training programs. In many companies, assignments to managerial and executive training programs tend to be made on an informal basis, with managers and executives making the selection from people they know and feel comfortable with.

**High-potential/Fast Track Programs.:** These are presented as a mechanism for early identification of employees for development. However, those which exist do not appear to be benefiting women. No research was found regarding minorities participation in such programs. Catalyst discovered that in many Fortune 500 and Service 500 companies, such programs do not reach into the middle-management ranks, where women and minority professionals tend to be concentrated. As a result, while 66 percent of the companies reported that more than a quarter of their professional employees were women, only 40 percent had at least that percentage of women identified as high potential (Catalyst, 1989). The survey also found that development was not tightly managed and that corporations did not put much effort into development.

### **Access to Information**

**Networking.:** This type of activity fills two important needs: social and supportive, and access to information and resources. Many researchers argue that exclusion from the informal “old boys” network explains the failure of minority and female managers to advance more rapidly in their careers and organizations. Kanter (1977) has argued that people whose type is represented in a very high proportion in an organization tend to join the informal network, but people whose type is represented by a very small proportion are more likely to be excluded from informal peer networks. Nixon (1985) found that 56 percent of the black managers in her sample perceived themselves as either partially or totally alienated from the formal or informal aspects of corporate life. At least 36 percent of the respondents in a recent survey of Asian Americans working in Silicon Valley felt excluded or unwelcomed when they sought entry to networks outside their own circles (AACI 1993).

**Mentors.:** Mentors are recognized as being extremely important in the development and advancement of individuals to management and executive positions. (Korn/Ferry 1993; Burke and McKeen 1990; Nkomo and Cox 1990; Thomas 1990; Noe 1988). These individuals provide protégés with career-enhancing functions, such as sponsorship and coaching, as well as greater exposure and visibility. They also help their protégés learn the ropes and adapt to organizational expectations (Nkomo and Cox 1990; Morrison et al 1987).

Research has been inconclusive as to whether minorities and women find fewer mentors than do white men. Cox and Nkomo (1991) found that black MBAs reported less help from mentors than Whites did, whereas women (compared to men) did not. Thomas (1990), in studying black and white managers at one company, found no difference in the number of relationships; however women tended to have slightly more relationships on average than did men. It is clear that there are difficulties in establishing same-gender or same-race mentor relationships because of limited numbers. There are also problem in establishing mentoring relationships because of sexual or racial dynamics (Ragins & Cotton 1993; Thomas 1992; Burke & McKeen 1990; Thomas 1989; Noe 1988).

Thomas (1990) found that while the majority of developmental relationships of black protégés are with Whites, white protégés have almost no cross-race developmental relationships. In addition, Blacks are more likely to form relationships outside the formal lines of authority and outside their departments. Ibarra research (1993) on the networking of minority managers is consistent with other findings that successful black managers develop relationships with white sponsors but do not rely on them extensively or

exclusively for the psycho-social support they can obtain more readily from other minorities. However, she found that successful minorities do not appear to sharply divide their network relations.

High-potential minorities differed from their non-high potential minority counterparts by having greater same-race contact across task, career, and social domains and not simply a separate minority circle for the exclusive purpose of social support. This “pluralistic” approach supports the findings of Nkomo and Cox (1990) that advising black managers to simply assimilate into dominate white network activities, i.e., country clubs, may not be effective. This research also reinforces the importance, stressed in Friedman and Carter (1993), of the participation by high ranking minorities in employee network groups.

## Effective Development Programs

**Executive Development:** A study by Fenwick-Magrath (1988) of 12 corporations recognized as leaders in the field of executive development, shows a high level of agreement about the major characteristics of an effective executive development process. Five major criteria were identified as critical by between 75 percent and 100 percent of the survey participants:

- Extensive and visible involvement by the chief executive officer (CEO).
- A clearly articulated and understood executive development policy, strategy and philosophy.
- Executive development policies and strategies are directly linked to the corporations business strategies, objectives, and challenges.
- The following elements are included: an annual succession planning process; planned on-the-job developmental assignments (assignments to task forces, job rotation lasting from 1-2 years, overseas assignments, temporary assignments); and customized, internal, executive education programs, supplemented by the selective use of university programs.
- Executive development is the responsibility of line management rather than of the human resources function.

These criteria make no mention of race, ethnicity, or gender. Yet research about the successful preparation and advancement of minorities and white women identify the same criteria. Such studies find:

- There is strong, visible commitment and involvement from the chief executive officer and top management levels.
- The development and maintenance of a diverse workforce and management team is a business objective, and must be measured as are other business objectives.
- Managers are held accountable (usually as part of their compensation) for identifying and developing employees.
- The process for advancement and promotion is objective, and opportunities and qualifications are communicated to all employees.
- Support system such as employee network groups and mentoring programs are formalized, encouraged, and supported.
- There is training and education on race relations, gender issues and diversity for all employees.
- The culture of the company is supportive of these goals.  
(Bell and Nkomo 1994; Mauricio Gastón Institute 1994; Braddock and Bachelder 1994; Woody and Weiss 1994; James et al 1994; Thomas et al 1994; Catalyst 1994; Morrison 1993).

Furthermore, employers are encouraged to examine their current “pipelines” for promotion and to expand career ladders, particularly from administrative positions (Mauricio Gástón Institute 1994; Harlan and

Berheide 1994; Shaw et al 1994).

**Mentoring Programs::** Successful formal mentoring programs are characterized by top management support, careful selection of mentors and protégés, an extensive orientation program emphasizing the development of realistic expectations concerning the relationship, clearly stated responsibilities for both the mentor and protégé, and established minimums of duration and frequency of contact between mentor and protégé, (Association of Women in Science 1993; Arman 1992; Thomas 1990; Noe 1988)

**Networking::** Employee network groups have been around in some organizations since the early 1970s, including Xerox, Corning, AT&T, and DEC. More recently, the number of groups has exploded. Friedman and Carter (1993) found, in their sample of Fortune 500 and Service 500 companies that responded, 29 percent had network groups. Of these, 77 percent had African American groups, and 74 percent had womens groups. Among respondents from the Executive Leadership Council, 43 percent had network groups; among National Black MBA Association respondents, 34 percent had network groups.

All respondents indicated that network groups seem most effective at expressing concerns to management, providing social support, dispensing informal career and business advice, and supporting younger Black employees. They are also considered effective at providing additional training. They are seen as less effective by all at influencing policies or fighting racial discrimination.

“Policy changes include several generic approaches. First, some groups try to make sure that existing systems are in fact used. For example, there may be a performance appraisal system, but one that is not used much or managed well. All employees suffer, but those who have old-boy networks to rely on suffer least. Second, some groups try to put in systems (for everyone) if there are none already. For example, if there is no formal mentoring system, one is designed and proposed. Third, some groups try to develop special HR programs for members, such as a formal mentoring program designed to support African American employees while the informal system remains for others....

The most difficult changes to make happen are full-blown changes in the corporate culture. Most network groups do not even contemplate creating such a change. Most seek to change attitudes about minorities and women, and to eliminate racism and sexism, but this does not require changes in the core culture of the organization.” (p. 20)

Network groups are not a panacea for the problems of minorities in corporate America. But they are important as one piece of a multi-faceted effort to improve conditions and communications for minorities in companies, and can serve as an effective starting point for developing such an effort. Support from top management is critical (Friedman and Carter, 1993).

## **Conclusions**

There are educationally prepared individuals throughout any given company's workforce. This is especially the case now, as college graduates are taking lower-paid positions just to have jobs. But it has been true for years because of initial assignments based on occupational segregation or race or sex stereotyping. A major reason for the perceived lack of qualified women and minority males is the fact that they usually have not had access to the experiences and activities companies use to develop and prepare supervisors, managers and executives.

Selection procedures tend to be informal and bound by stereotypes, biases, and questionable "qualifications." Thus, the company overlooks many individuals with the interest and potential for managerial and executive responsibility. A major factor in the preparedness debate is the haphazard and inefficient developmental and advancement process within companies and organizations themselves.

White women and minority men and women have made advances into senior positions in the past few years, yet their numbers are still miniscule. Gaining appropriate educational qualifications and working in powerful functional areas have certainly played a role. Just as important have been the efforts of several corporations to improve development programs and make promotion policies more objective and inclusive, and known to employees.

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