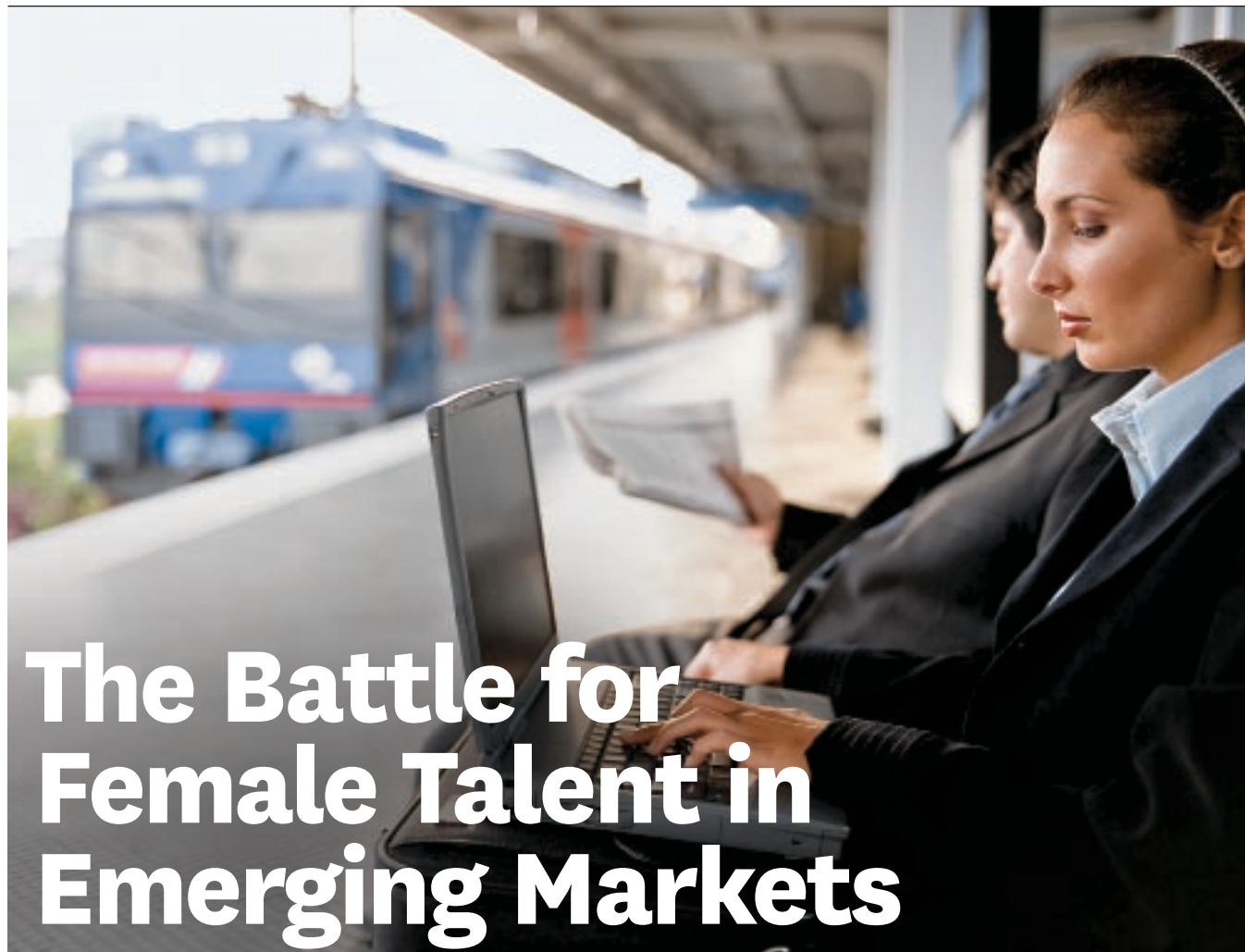


# The Globe



## The Battle for Female Talent in Emerging Markets

To attract and retain well-educated, highly ambitious women in developing economies, companies must understand the societal challenges those women face. *by Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Ripa Rashid*

**A**fter working for almost 20 years outside China at a global consulting firm, a woman we'll call Mei was recently forced to return home to Beijing, where she faces work/life pressures unrelated to raising children. Mei's elders needed care, and in China a social stigma is attached to using professional help or placing parents in assisted-living facilities. Mei worries about how these obligations will affect her career. Apart from facilitating her return home, however, the firm seems to be unaware of Mei's problems.

In the United Arab Emirates a rising star we'll call Rana is an analyst in the fixed-

income division of a bank. Her company regularly offers opportunities for professional development, but Rana had to decline an invitation to a recent training session in New York, because a single woman from the UAE can't board a plane or stay in a hotel unless a male relative is willing to tag along. Adding insult to injury, no video hookup was provided to allow Rana to participate from home.

In many emerging markets, workplace bias seems to escalate for young mothers, who are under constant scrutiny. In India these women commonly return to less-challenging roles or projects or get lower performance ratings. A Brazilian woman told us about a colleague who was fired after being overheard mentioning plans to have a second child. Such explicitly discriminatory behaviors, although they violate company policies, continue unchecked.

## THE TOP-TALENT POOL

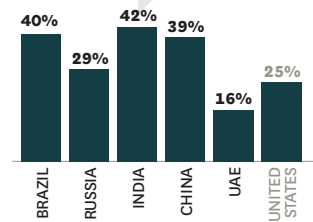
Percentage of college graduates in 2007 who were women



## WOMEN'S INCOME

42%

of highly educated Indian women earn as much as or more than their spouses, according to our survey



Women in these countries face unique challenges, as the stories above show. This presents a major problem for multinational companies whose hopes for growth are pinned on emerging markets. They face a cutthroat war for talent, despite the enormous labor forces of the BRIC countries. India produces as many young engineers as the United States, and Russia produces 10 times as many finance and accounting professionals as Germany. Yet according to the McKinsey Global Institute, a mere 25% of those professionals in India and 20% in Russia are suitable for employment by multinationals. In China less than a 10th of university graduates are prepared to succeed in those organizations.

To meet the talent shortage in emerging markets, multinationals often send managers overseas (not a sustainable solution) or compete with local companies. They need to develop the best-educated and best-prepared managers in those markets, which increasingly means women. Every year large numbers of college-educated women enter the BRIC professional workforce; in 2006 the number was around 26 million. Furthermore, these women are highly ambitious. As we will show, smart multinationals recognize their potential and have found ways to recruit and retain them, giving them the support they need to break through a very thick glass ceiling.

## The Talent

To bring these practices to light, we launched a study (the first of its kind) of talent in emerging economies. The study was spearheaded by five global compa-

nies that are grappling with the complex challenges associated with globalization: Bloomberg, Booz & Company, Intel, Pfizer, and Siemens. We collected data on 4,350 college-educated men and women in Brazil, Russia, India, China, and the United Arab Emirates, and supplemented them with qualitative research from focus groups, virtual strategy sessions, and interviews with hundreds of white-collar women. Western media often focus on stereotypical images of deprived and oppressed women in less-developed countries, overlooking this vibrant and growing segment of the population. We found that talented women in emerging markets are ahead of the curve in unexpected ways.

**Education.** Our most surprising finding is that women are flooding into universities and graduate schools: They represent 65%

## BRIC and UAE women find satisfaction in being part of the emerging-market success story.

of college graduates in the UAE, 60% in Brazil, and 47% in China. In Russia, where communism promoted universal access to education, 86% of women aged 18 to 23 are enrolled in tertiary education. More than a third in that age group are enrolled in tertiary education in Brazil and the UAE, and 50% of the Indian women (versus 40% of the Indian men) in our sample hold graduate degrees.

**Ambition.** Although highly educated women the world over are ambitious, the degree of ambition and aspiration among

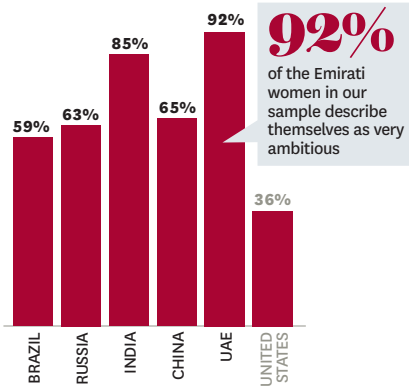
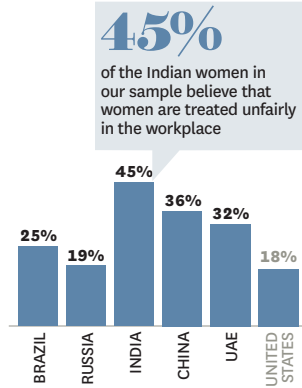
BRIC and UAE women is extraordinary: 85% in India and 92% in the UAE consider themselves very ambitious, and in Russia and China the figures are 63% and 65%, respectively. (Only 36% of U.S. women consider themselves very ambitious.) Furthermore, 80% or more of women in Brazil, India, and the UAE aspire to hold a top job.

**Commitment.** More than 80% of respondents in Brazil, Russia, India, and the UAE report loving their work, and a similarly high percentage are “willing to go the extra mile” for their companies. This is good news for employers, particularly in light of a 2007–2008 Towers Perrin finding that a mere 21% of global workers are engaged in their work. BRIC and UAE women express a deep connection to and passion for their jobs, citing intellectual stimulation, a sense of personal growth, and the

quality of colleagues as key motivators—on a par with job security and compensation. Underlying these factors is the satisfaction of being part of the emerging-market success story. As Leila Hoteit, a UAE-based principal at Booz & Company, puts it, “We have the opportunity to be involved in high-impact projects that are reshaping countries and the region as a whole.”

## The Problem

Unfortunately, female talent is underleveraged in emerging markets. Part of the rea-

WOMEN WITH  
AMBITIONPERCEIVED GENDER  
DISCRIMINATION

son is that family-related pulls and work-related pushes conspire to force women to either settle for dead-end jobs or leave the workforce. The inducements to languish or leave reflect both entrenched cultural perspectives and modern complexities.

**Elder care.** As we saw with Mei, family-rooted pulls come from a direction that companies might not expect: the older generation. Professional women in BRIC and the UAE are less encumbered than women elsewhere by child-care issues, because many grandparents are active caregivers (cultural visions of old-age pursuits center more on family than on individual leisure), and working mothers have access to affordable domestic help and a growing infrastructure of day-care and early-childhood centers. But in India and China notions of filial piety underpin the cultural value system; although many women in our sample had no children, 70% or more had elder-care responsibilities. In some countries daughterly guilt—and its alternative, daughterly responsibility—are an even greater burden than maternal guilt.

Far more adult women in BRIC and the UAE than in the U.S. live with their parents or in-laws. From 40% to 68% also assist their parents financially, providing 18% to 23% of their elders' income—necessary in countries where state benefits for the elderly are limited or nonexistent. As a highly qualified Emirati woman explained to us, “It is part of the expectation of what children do in the Arab world. We take care of our parents when we grow up.”

**The lure of the public sector.** Family-friendly jobs in the public sector are another

oft-ignored pull. More than half our respondents in Brazil, India, and China consider the public sector “very desirable,” citing job security, professional opportunities, benefits, and prestige. In the UAE public-sector salaries are equal to or higher than private-sector ones, so Emiratis account for less than 1% of private-sector staff but 54% of employees in federal ministries. A recent Indian study of men and women students found that 60% aspire to public-sector positions over private-sector ones.

**Powerful gender bias.** In BRIC and the UAE professional women face a triple whammy of gender, ethnicity, and cultural attitudes. Of our respondents in Brazil, China, and the UAE, 25% to 36% believe that women are treated unfairly in the workplace because of their gender; in India the number is 45%. In Russia the figure is only 19%, again owing to its communist legacy.

**Travel and safety.** Social disapproval of women traveling alone is strong in many societies, with more than half our survey respondents in India and China citing difficulties. This puts industries and corporate positions that require travel at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining talented women. Sales roles in India's pharmaceutical sector, for example, involve frequent trips to semiurban and rural locations, so recruiting women for them is a challenge. The same is true in the industrial and infrastructure sectors. Women often concentrate on careers with local responsibilities—such as medicine, law, hotel administration, advertising, public relations, nursing, and education—or gravitate toward finance and the media, which are city-based and require

**WOMEN'S  
HOURS AT WORK**

In the countries we studied, educated women working full time at multinational companies say they put in significantly more than 40 hours a week, on average.



minimal travel. But even an urban context can be daunting for women. Economic shifts aside, mass culture in India remains tradition-bound and male-dominated. In 2009 commuter trains exclusively for female passengers—Ladies Specials—were introduced in Mumbai, New Delhi, Chennai, and Calcutta to provide a safe haven from the harassment women face when using public transportation.

Other safety concerns are a harsh reality for professional women in emerging markets. In Russia crime is escalating: In one month in 2009 Moscow's murder rate rose by 16% and its fatal assaults by 44%. According to a recent U.S. State Department report, "Assaults and burglaries continue to be a part of normal everyday life" in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Rape cases in India rose by more than 30% from 2003 to 2007, and kidnapping or abduction cases rose by more than 50%. These dangers strongly influence women's preferences about what type of career to pursue.

**How to Attract and Keep Talented Women**

The opportunity has never been greater for multinationals to attract and retain top talent in emerging economies. For some it's an imperative. Melinda Wolfe, Bloomberg's head of professional development, says, "Bloomberg is now in 146 countries and growing at a rapid pace. We have an urgent need to draw upon a deep pool of local talent—both men and women—to deliver excellence." Forward-thinking companies can do several things to maximize the opportunity.

**Find talent early.** With so many women earning advanced degrees throughout the developing world, the best place to start looking for talent is the universities. Smart companies adopt a creative and targeted approach, differentiating their brand as employers of choice for talented women. For example, the Google India Women in Engineering Award was launched in 2008 to celebrate women pursuing engineering and computer sciences careers in college or graduate school. Sixteen women in 2008 and nine in 2009 won the \$2,000 award; Google senior managers and engineers serve as judges. Anjali Sardana, a doctoral candidate at the Indian Institute of Technology (Roorkee), a 2009 winner from among 250 applicants, says that the award has inspired her to keep pursuing her dreams: "Not only did the award encourage me to stay in my field, it has made me confident and given me the spark to mentor other, younger women engineers."

**Help them build networks.** Ensuring that top talent in emerging markets feels valued is of fundamental importance in multinational organizations, particularly those headquartered in the U.S. or Western Europe. Networking and relationship building, essential to strengthening engagement and commitment, help women develop the ties, visibility, and organizational know-how essential to professional success. Siemens launched a program this year to establish a network for its young, high-potential managers in emerging markets. The company invites them to develop business-centered projects that will contribute to its success; the first plans

were presented to Siemens leadership in the spring of 2010.

Smart companies are using networks to help women fight isolation and gain visibility as well as achieve their business goals. For instance, General Electric is piloting a version of its myConnections talent-spotting and mentoring program in the UAE. Its goal is to help women connect with one another across levels and functions in the company, recognizing how critical relationships are to career success. The program has been opened up to all of GE's female employees in the UAE. Participants are sorted into "pods" of 10 to 12 members each and assigned a coach, typically a rising female star on the verge of becoming a leader; they determine their own agendas. Four pods have been launched. At one kickoff meeting a woman said that she worked in finance but was based across town from most of her colleagues and felt she was missing out. "I can help you," said another participant, the executive assistant to the region's chief financial officer. As a result, the frustrated finance employee met a senior female finance leader and started building closer ties with her department.

Similarly, Women at Intel Network (WIN) in China, an extension of a global program initiated 13 years ago, endeavors to strike a balance between global goals—in areas ranging from membership to professional development—and local priorities and cultural contexts. In 2007 Intel China became the first to initiate a chapter outside the U.S.; it now has groups in Chengdu, Shanghai, Beijing, and Dalian. "It's not easy for women to have a role in this industry,"

## How to Attract and Keep Talented Women

says Helen Tian, the operations manager of Intel China Research Center and a co-head of the Beijing chapter of WIN. “WIN can bring our women a lot of inspiration to share ideas and help each other on career development.”

At monthly meetings the local chapters host visiting senior American women who offer key advice to their Chinese counterparts. For instance, a session on leadership skills and career development in challenging times encouraged women to take on stretch assignments or cross-train with co-workers. In the spring of 2008 Tian helped organize the first Chinese WIN Leadership Development Conference, bringing 300 Intel women together in Shanghai to attend sessions on work/life balance, stress, and technical skills.

### Give them international exposure.

Women are more likely to break through the glass ceiling in multinational companies that make sure they are posted overseas for short periods. However, in emerging markets these assignments work best when companies can provide flexibility and support to lighten the burden on spouses and families. For instance, the

Boehringer Ingelheim sent her mother along, too. One woman’s stay-at-home husband went with her on assignment to Latin America.

**Build communities outside the company.** Maximizing opportunities within the company produces great results for professional women, but it’s also important to help them build ties to their clients, customers, and communities in emerging markets. These external networks serve two purposes: One is to establish a broader support system for women who are navigating pushes and pulls—particularly important when they have few role models at the top. The other is to strengthen the relationships that help them achieve business results.

The global pharmaceutical giant Pfizer has made it a business priority to engage and retain high-potential female talent in India—one of its top growth markets. The company recently piloted Creating a High Performance Community, under the guidance of its Global Women’s Council. The program has three main goals: to ensure that top female talent feels valued and supported; to strengthen connections among Pfizer’s high-performing women and their

- 1** Find talent early. The best place to start looking is in the universities.
- 2** Help your women recruits build networks to fight isolation and gain visibility while achieving their business goals.
- 3** Give them international exposure, but provide plenty of support for families in the host countries.
- 4** Build ties outside the company—to clients, customers, and communities.

## International assignments work best when companies can provide flexibility and support to lighten the burden on spouses and families.

German pharmaceutical giant Boehringer Ingelheim has a short-term assignment program that enables less-mobile employees to gain international exposure. Its assignments—offered around the globe, with a current focus on the Americas—last three to six months and provide development opportunities for high-potential directors and managers. Boehringer Ingelheim supplies housing and transportation in the host country, along with support for family members, including child care, elder care, paid monthly visits for spouses, or opportunities for family members to come along for the entire stay. When a woman from Venezuela took an assignment to Ecuador,


women customers; and to test an approach potentially useful in other markets.

As a starting point, Pfizer India identified its top 10 women in sales and marketing and its 10 most important women customers (including physicians in private practice, medical professionals in high-profile hospitals, medical technologists, and so forth). The women participated in a focus group to discuss their career goals and the professional challenges and opportunities they faced. What emerged was a narrative of blazing ambition often blocked by cultural barriers. The women compared notes on the usual issues of work/life balance, but also on how their career aspira-

tions ran contrary to societal expectations. The pilot has established a powerful forum in which Pfizer’s rising stars can network with their customers—one where they can celebrate successes and compare difficulties, thus deepening relationships and combating the isolation so frequently experienced by women rising through the ranks. Pfizer India plans to hold a workshop this spring to provide essential career navigation and leadership development skills.

It will be years before the glass ceiling is broken in emerging markets, but some multinational companies are helping to speed up the process by ensuring that they attract and retain the most talented women available. This not only improves the prospects of these companies in developing countries but also has a significant effect on the women they employ. The remarkable reality is that these women are at the forefront of change, shaping the very world in which they live. ♥

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 **Sylvia Ann Hewlett** (cwl@worklifepolicy.org) is the president of the Center for Work-Life Policy in New York and the founding chair of the Hidden Brain Drain Task Force—a group of 56 global companies and organizations committed to fully realizing female and multicultural talent. **Ripa Rashid** (rrashid@worklifepolicy.org) is a senior vice president of the Center for Work-Life Policy.