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Women managers and diversity programs in Mexico

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Abstract *Up to three or four years ago, practically no private company in Mexico was concerned with implementing specific policies to support and advance women executives. However, recently this prospect has begun to change. This article will provide information on the mission, objectives and targets and results of two companies that are starting to introduce special programs to support women's careers in Mexico and Latin America. In addition, it discusses some research results on the opinions of corporate presidents and human resource directors of the leading corporations.*

The female workforce in Mexico is estimated to comprise 33 per cent of the economically active population. However, women only represent 14 per cent of officers and directors. The inequity becomes even more acute if we count only those women who are paid more than ten times minimum salaries (others could hardly be considered officers with any decision-making responsibility). That figure is 7 per cent of the total. In other words, for every two employees in the country, one is a woman. Among officers and directors, the gap is markedly wider: one woman for every 13 male officers and managers[1].

Women are more likely to hold management positions in the public sector than in the private sector. While 14 per cent of the private sector managers are women, the percentage goes up to 21 per cent for public officials. This is similar to other countries where it has been shown that most women in professional and management roles are concentrated in the public sector and in a "third sector" of non-governmental service agencies, such as health, education and cultural institutions (libraries, museums, art organizations, philanthropic institutions, etc.)[2]. However, it is also true that, despite the fact that women usually represent a majority in certain health and education institutions, in many they do not reach executive or other public policy planning positions.

Women's presence in the highest management positions.

The full list of methodologies used in this study is given in the Appendix. If we look at the situation from other sources besides national statistical data, we see a much more inequitable picture – my own analysis based on the directories of the 600 largest companies in Mexico shows that in 1994, all general directors (CDO) were men. Although the panorama changes slightly by 1997, we see only two women in the post of general director.

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If we consider the next six highest positions in addition to general director (directors of administration, finance, business, production and human resources), we see that women represented 5 per cent of management positions in Mexico in 1994[3]. Consequently, we note that far beyond the 1:6 ratio at all managerial levels, and the 1:13 ratio at mid-level posts, the ratio of women to men at the highest managerial levels in the largest privately held companies is 1:17. The picture changes slightly in 1997 when female executives constituted 7 per cent of all management positions.

In this sense, Mexico is no exception. According to a recent ILO study, despite the fact that women constitute 36 per cent of the average working population in the world, in most countries they only hold between 10 per cent and 30 per cent of administrative jobs. This percentage drops to approximately 5 per cent when considering the jobs with the most responsibility (De Avelar, 1994; International Labour Organization, 1992).

Vertical and horizontal segregation in privately held companies

"Vertical segregation" (meaning the presence of women in hierarchically lower level jobs) is tied to "horizontal segregation" (women in certain fields and occupations). Based on the most important executive directories of the largest companies in Mexico, we find that 45 per cent of female officers were human resources directors, and only 5 per cent occupied management positions in production.

The scant presence of female executives in production management is not an exclusively Mexican phenomenon. In Argentina, women only represent 1 per cent of those jobs and female managers are mostly concentrated in the areas of human resources, sales, and public relations (Heller, 1994).

My research also showed that an inverse correlation exists between the size of a company and the probability that executives in the upper management echelons will be women. In this regard, female executives' status in Mexico is similar to that of their counterparts in other countries. Some studies conducted in places as diverse as the USA, Argentina and Japan have shown that women prefer to work for small organizations where there is less occupational segregation and where structures are less hierarchical and bureaucratic (Gallos, 1989; Heller, 1994; Steinhof and Tanaka, 1995; Zabludovsky, 1997).

In contrast to what we have seen in studies done of women owners of small and medium businesses[4] who tend to focus on traditionally female enterprises (clothing stores, cafeterias, daycare centers, etc.), the presence of women in upper management positions in privately held companies depends more on the specific area they work in (human resources, public relations, etc.) than the nature of the business.

In addition to the size of the company and the type of management job, the presence of women depends on the company's organizational structure. There is a greater chance that female executives will be found in companies with a management model that is less pyramidal and decentralized, that provides opportunities for independence and flexibility.

The presence of women in management positions in private companies is also tied to women's involvement in all working levels of the organization. Responses from the human resources directors show that there is a greater chance of finding female executives in companies that have greater female involvement at all levels[5].

Women have more chances of entering and advancing within the very few companies that have assumed some kind of planning policy for encouraging their involvement. However, besides legislation which often deals with nothing more than maternity leave, most companies do not facilitate the balancing of family and work responsibilities (through, for example, flexible schedules, special leaves, part-time work, and work-site daycare) or any kind of support program in other areas. The interviews with company presidents make this evident[6].

Career path and training of women in management positions

Based on the questionnaires given to human resources directors, we found that women in management positions have been trained within the company or its subsidiaries. At the highest hierarchical levels, it is very rare to find women who have developed any significant portion of their career outside the company where they work.

Presidents, human resources directors, and the women themselves place great importance on educational level and training. Female executives in the study have a high level of education with professional, post-graduate, and doctoral degrees, and/or technical and business studies.

Personal and family traits of female managers

As to their marital status, 51 per cent of women executives are married and 49 per cent are unmarried (widowed, divorced and single). This last percentage is extremely high when compared to the rest of women in the country, where the percentage of married women over the age of 25 in the Federal District is 69 per cent, a difference of 18 points[7]. As to their age, the questionnaires filled out by female executives show that 43 per cent of them are between the ages of 20 and 29; 38 per cent are between the ages of 30 and 40; and 18 per cent are over 41 years old.

The questionnaires reflected that for women, typically, an executive career means giving up the possibility of motherhood[8]. Most of the women interviewed (64 per cent) do not have children, 17 per cent of them have only one child, and only 10 per cent have two children. In fact, a slight majority of married women (52 per cent) have no children, which is a very distinctive, nearly unique, trait of this segment of the female population, compared to the rest of the population in Mexico where there is an average of three children per family. The data also show that the higher up the occupational pyramid one looks, the fewer the chances of finding a female executive with children.

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Incentives, abilities, obstacles and opportunities for including women in management positions: opinions of corporate presidents

Based on the questionnaires given to the presidents and/or general directors of companies, we found that the most important incentives for increasing the number of women in management positions come from the growing number of trained women entering the workforce and the need to hire more qualified employees. By contrast, the least important reasons for advancing women to management positions were a company's sense of social responsibility and its need to provide female role models. Corporate presidents do not attribute obstacles to the company policies themselves, to the possibility of making changes, or to a lack of planning in management positions.

Presidents of companies believe women competing with men for the main administrative jobs are their own best asset, not the policies implemented by the company. In the first place, there was an indicated need for formal, up-to-date training. Second, they believe in the need to show their "commitment and responsibility" and their "confidence and strength," their maturity and hard work, the nature of their character and other similar factors.

The answers of the human resource directors

Like the corporate presidents, human resources directors do not connect women's success with policies and the corporate organization. Far from conceiving of the need for some institution-wide collective action, it is believed that the best performance in an executive career and the chances for "success" depend solely on a woman's abilities. Asked about the aspects that should be considered by the company for facilitating women's advancement to management and executive leadership positions, those interviewed did not mention any plan, policy or responsibility of the company. Rather they simply listed women's obligations: the need to meet the goals of the company, get satisfactory results, show their training and experience; professionalism, technical knowledge, professional competence, capability and experience, decision-making ability, initiative and efficiency, commitment, responsibility and flexibility in scheduling.

Human resources directors' responses clearly differentiate by gender the reasons why any executive quits a company. While most men leave the company because they have a better offer with economic and personal opportunities, women usually quit for personal and family reasons. Leaving to take a better job and professional development are only mentioned secondarily. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that as far as any decisions made by the company itself that affect personnel reduction and low performance are concerned, the analysis of the responses from human resources directors does not show significant differences between men and women.

Obstacles for female executives

All female executives indicated that they face a considerable number of obstacles to their career development. Nearly all the women said that the main

barriers were the difficulties in performing their distinct family and professional roles (decision to have children, home and family, etc.).

The second group of obstacles has to do with various cultural matters that lead to practices of discrimination and the accusation leveled by female executives against the "national ideology" and "chauvinism." In third place, the barriers indicated are related to specific corporate policies and the lack of opportunity within the company.

As noted, the answers to these questions show differences among the perceptions of women, and between those of company presidents and human resources directors. Women think the challenges depend not only on their training and their own attitude, but also on overcoming cultural and organizational barriers that are linked to the gender-based social structure in our societies.

There is no significant differentiation between the type of obstacles that female executives face and the size, nature or type of company where they work. The perception of the obstacles and barriers varies, depending on other factors such as the type of position, the years of experience, marital status and maternity issues.

The data suggest that the "decision to have children" and "marital status" represent a constant dilemma for younger women who have not attained positions at the upper levels of the company hierarchy. They associate the chance for future professional success with a choice between "career" and "family" that they must make today. In contrast, for older women at higher executive levels, the references to the role they play in the family come from another perspective. Their responses denote the choice that they have already made between the weight they give their "public, professional life" and their "domestic environment." Although in their everyday life they have to make constant adjustments to meet the demands of work and family, they do so within an emotional and professional framework of greater stability.

On the other hand, it is also interesting to note that the higher the level of a female executive, the more important "chauvinism" and the "national ideology" become as barriers. These data suggest that women in lower positions and with less experience still have not faced the same problems of corporate and cultural discrimination in their professional lives that occur at higher levels where the "glass ceiling" is more acutely experienced. So, while women who have been with a company for less than five years say that the primary barriers are the "decision to have children" and the "lack of time," women who have worked for more than six years for a company believe that the obstacles not only have to do with the gender expectations for domestic tasks but also with the extended scope of the "national ideology" and other cultural and organizational factors (see Appendix).

Specific policies to promote women executives in Mexico

As stated above, companies operating in Mexico had not previously taken any specific steps to incorporate and advance the careers of women in management positions and considered that companies had no responsibilities in this area.

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However, at present the situation has shown signs of change. Some important companies have begun to implement diversity programs to prompt the hiring of women and promoting them to higher positions, and although this is happening in an isolated and exceptional manner, these programs got underway last year, for the first time in the country. This section will discuss the example of two pioneering organizations in the support of women in Mexico: one, Motorola, is a radio communications company and the other, IBM, is a world leader in computers.

Case 1. Motorola de México

Background

As is generally known, Motorola is an electronics company, manufacturing such products as cellphone equipment, mobile radio communications, pagers, data transmission and electronic components for the automotive, space, defense and computer industries.

The company has been operating in Mexico since 1960, when it started up as a small business. In 1966 the first in-bond processing plant opened and in 1969 a modern assembly plant was founded. In 1970, Motorola made an important contribution to the country's communications when it began to manufacture the popular pagers that have become so highly successful among professionals, executives and business people. In 1979, seeking greater consolidation and co-ordination in all its operations, the various companies merged and Motorola de México was founded. Its most important areas are administration and sales and systems engineering.

The diversity program

In January 1999, Motorola de México implemented its diversity program, as part of a strategy oriented towards recognizing untapped resources of talent in Mexican society.

The project is based on the premise that the plurality of ideas and ways of behaving bring added value to a company and, therefore, specific measures should be taken to promote the participation and advancement of groups that have been less privileged until now. Supporting and promoting women's careers is a fundamental precept of this strategy. The program also seeks to impact on other segments of the Mexican population that have encountered limitations in their professional development: people over 40 years of age and graduates of public universities from low-income families.

With respect to women, the initiative proposes to first undertake incorporating and retaining them in executive positions, to later extend their leadership into the different areas of the company and enhance their participation and image, stressing their contributions to Mexican society. To achieve these goals, the company has adopted specific programs that "attract, retain, reward, motivate and promote women in leadership positions within the organization."

To meet these objectives, measurable parameters have been established for hiring over the next five years. Due to the short time the program has been in

effect, it is difficult to fully evaluate it at this time. However, it can already be said to have shown some success. Up to August 1999, the proposed goal had been achieved: after giving top priority to the criteria of competence and professional characteristics, 33 per cent of the personnel hired consisted of women. This percentage was established, since it corresponds to the number of women registered as students in Mexico's universities and institutions of higher education.

The increase of the presence of women can be observed in the following table on women's parity status in Motorola, which shows that between 1997 and 1999 the percentage of women hired rose from 21 per cent to 30 per cent. However, it is also true that the increase in the number of women has not yet resulted in more women at middle or top management levels. While the number of women at entry levels increased by 9 per cent, at middle management levels there was only a 1 per cent variation (from 11.81 per cent to 12.8 per cent). The situation is even more drastic in top management, where women's participation has in fact slightly decreased. Furthermore, all the vice presidents are still men (Table I).

The company is aware of this situation of inequality. Its "target diversity road map" states the intention that by 2003, half the vice-presidents will be women. Therefore, one woman will be promoted within the organization or will be hired from outside to hold the position of vice president in the year 2000 and another in 2001.

For entry level positions, Motorola proposes that the percentage should increase from 30.7 per cent to 43 per cent in 2000, which means hiring ten women in 1999 and 16 in 2000.

For management, on the medium-term the company plans to increase the number of women from 12.8 per cent to 30 per cent by 2003, which means hiring or promoting between five and six managers per year.

With respect to top management positions, the proportion of women will increase from 12.5 per cent to 25 per cent in 2001 and the company plans to hire or promote one woman manager per year (Table II).

In addition to these internal goals, Motorola de México has proposed others, such as backing the founding of the Association of Women Executives of Mexico, the mission of which is to bring together women working in different companies operating in Mexico to promote the professional development of women executives and facilitate their entry into top management positions. The association has already held its first meetings and is developing a plan of activities for the future.

Level	Entry level			Management level			Directors			Vice presidents		
Year	1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
Total population	343	358	215	127	129	94	15	16	8	0	1	1
Women	73	78	66	15	16	12	2	2	1	0	0	0
Percent women	21	22	31	12	12	13	13	13	13	0	0	0

Table I.
Motorola: 1999 women's parity status

Source: Diversity programme, Motorola de México, 1999

Category	Grade	Actual %	Goal %	Time frame	Metric/compliance			%
Women	Entry level	30.7	43	2000	1999	10 hires		39
					2000	16 hires		61
					Total	26 hires		100
	Management	12.8	30	2003		Hires/promotions	Accumulated	
					1999	5	5	18
					2000	5	10	36
					2001	6	16	57
					2002	6	22	78
					2003	6	28	100
					Total	28		
	Directors	12.5	25	2001		Hire/promotions	Accumulated	
					2000	1	1	50
					2001	1	2	100
					Total	2		

Source: Diversity program, Motorola de Mexico, 1999

Table II.
Motorola diversity
target for Mexico
(1999-2003)

Case 2. IBM diversity program in Mexico and the rest of Latin America

Background

IBM is an information technology company which has had experienced a very strong evolution during the last ten years from a hardware and software company to a more customer oriented one.

IBM has been operating in Mexico for more than 70 years now, being one of the international companies with more history in this country, offering information technology solutions for different market industries like banking, government, retail, manufacturing, distribution, etc.

Today IBM marketing services cover all the country, operating from three main branch offices. As part of IBM's commitment with Mexico, a manufacturing site initiated about 40 years ago, which is now the largest electronics manufacturing site in Mexico, located in Guadalajara, Jalisco with reported exports around 3 billion dollars in 1999, which includes a software lab plus a very important think paths manufacturing mission.

IBM has been working with diversity programs for over 20 years internationally. However, it has only started implementing them in Latin America as of the second half of the 1990s.

In recent years, IBM has proved eager to promote the advancement of women based on the guiding principles of urgent evolution, equity for all groups and the understanding of and respect for the differences existing in each country.

Women leadership Advisory Team for the Advancement of Women

Starting in 1997, IBM's efforts to enhance and promote the advancement of women throughout Latin America were channelled through the Latin America

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Advisory Team for the Advancement of Women, comprising 14 women from nine countries.

The fundamental objectives of the Advisory Team are to:

(1) understand women's perceptions of issues and barriers and their advancement;

(2) develop initiatives to address issues/barriers;

(3) enhance networking opportunities for women;

(4) serve as visible role models for women;

(5) provide insight to senior management on issues related to women.

These are the most important initiatives in process:

- Executive women mentorship program: oriented towards identifying and advancing women with leadership potential, assigning mentors to encourage them and serve as role models.

- Leadership development: oriented towards developing women's leadership abilities in the company.

- Speaker program: conferences given by specialists to support the professional development of women in executive positions.

- Child care initiative: oriented to identifying and understanding the child care requirements in the region and defining the best approach to fulfil these requirements with the services providers available.

- Work/life balance: this program is already underway and has achieved important success, as will be discussed below.

To gain an overview of the population which it planned to support, in 1988 IBM conducted the first ever "Latin America work/life issues survey" that provided unpublished results on the population working in the corporation.

Facts about Latin American work/life issues

The sociodemographic results obtained from this survey showed that the working population is relatively young, with 73 per cent under 40 years of age. At least one-third (31 per cent) were not married.

With respect to women's participation in IBM by region, as of 1997 women constituted 21 per cent of the total workforce in Mexico, making it the Latin American country with the lowest percentage of women employees. In Brazil, women constituted 31 per cent; in the Andean region (Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) the figure was 30 per cent and in the Latin America South region (Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Chile) it was 23 per cent (Figure 1).

In congruence with the small percentage of women employees overall, Mexico was also the country with the lowest level of professional women. As shown in the following table, in 1997 the percentage of women at the professional level in Mexico was only 19 per cent, while in Venezuela it was 33.8 per cent (Figure 2).

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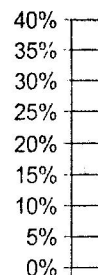
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A similar situation can be observed at the top management levels. As shown in Figure 3, while women held 29.9 per cent of management positions in Venezuela in 1997, the percentage for Mexico was only 4.6 per cent.

In addition to the preceding survey, IBM conducted research through focus groups that allowed it to detect the specific problems of women in the company. The results obtained in 1997 showed that women had similar opportunities for career advancement as men but felt obliged to make a choice between career or family life.

As will be shown below, the results of the study were the basis for designing measures to support women that the company would later formally adopt through its diversity program and its work and life program.

Diversity program

As part of the efforts that IBM Latin America has made in implementing diversity programs since 1997, several challenges have been defined as critical for the advancement of women in the company. Basically, the program
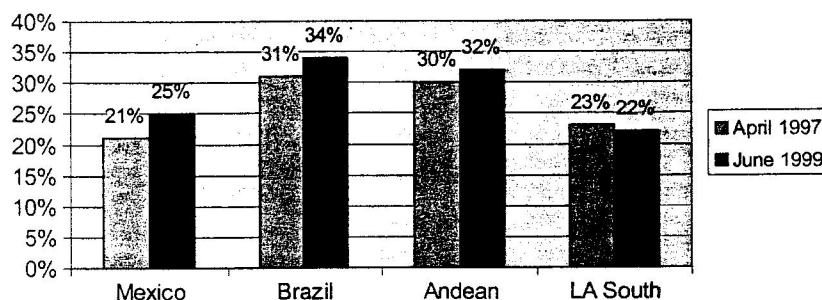
Source: Diversity Program, IBM, Latin America, 1999.

Figure 1.
IBM in Latin America.
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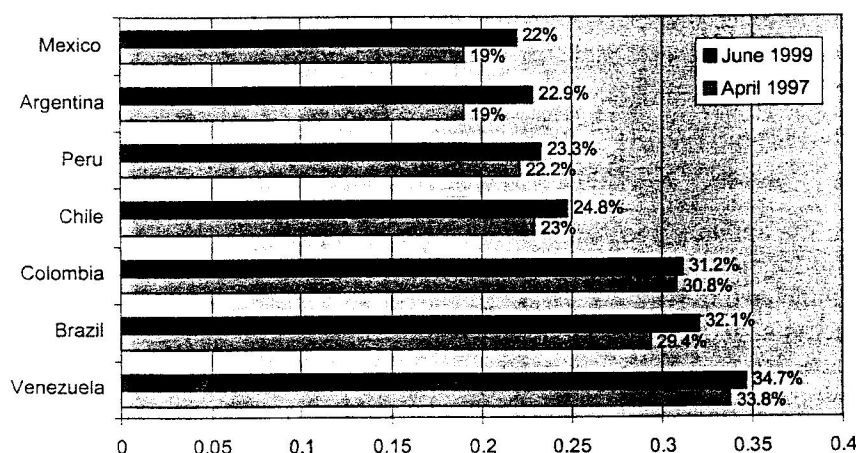
Source: Diversity Program, IBM, Latin America, 1999.

Figure 2.
IBM in Latin America.
Professional women in
major countries

Figure 3.
IBM in Latin America.
Women managers in
major countries

Source: Diversity Program, IBM, Latin America, 1999.

currently comprises three points: diversity in management (especially women), the advancement of women and work and life balance. In October 1999, for the first time in its history, IBM Mexico created a special area and appointed a manager for it, whose task is to focus precisely on the initiatives related to diversity and the advancement of women.
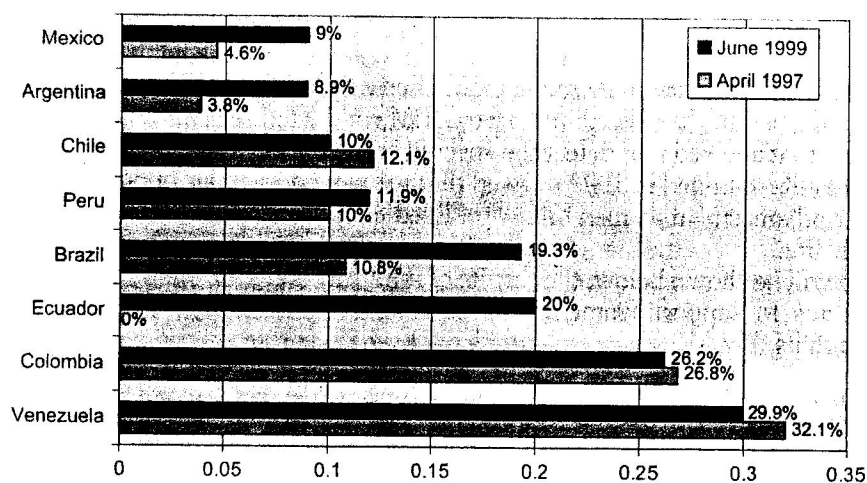
Work and life program: flexible work options
Seeking to create a better balance between work and family activities, in July 1998 IBM formally announced Phase I of the work/life program that was implemented in 11 Latin American countries. The "flexible work options" (FWO) identified the four following options:

(1) Individual work schedule (IWS).

(2) Compressed work week (CWW) (nine hours a day from Monday to Thursday and four hours on Friday).

(3) Part-time job (RPT) (from 20 to 30 hours per week).

(4) Leave of absence (LOA).

Since the announcement, there have been 52 documented cases of employees opting for flexible work options. Although FWO has been aimed at all IBM personnel, women employees have been the most benefitted in Latin America, since, as stated above, the number one reason for women's leaving IBM in Mexico has been the impossibility of coping with work/life demands simultaneously.

One aspect of the flexible work options program which has proven to be an effective tool for retaining women in the organization has been the part-time job option, which can help them pursue both career advancement and family life. In

July 1999, IBM activated this as a regular option in Mexico and since then ten women have chosen to work part-time following maternity leave. One financial analyst manager who was planning to quit to take care of her newborn baby accepted RPT and has remained with the company.

With respect to the leave of absence (LOA), in the Mexico office five women have requested leave, typically to be able to spend additional time at home with newborns, take master's degrees abroad or to pursue other personal goals.

Another effort that the company has implemented is spousal accommodation. A female employee in Mexico asked for a six-month leave to accompany her IBM husband who was being sent to California to complete an assignment. Her manager proposed an alternative, which was to locate an IBM office in San Jose where she also could continue to work during this six-month period, and she accepted.

However, one of the basic problems that the company faces is that, despite the programs to support work/life issues at the beginning, many employees in Latin America agree that their commitment would be questioned if they chose to participate in work/life programs (Figure 4).

However, this perception is changing as part of the company's efforts to promote the needed cultural change and take a positive view of the different
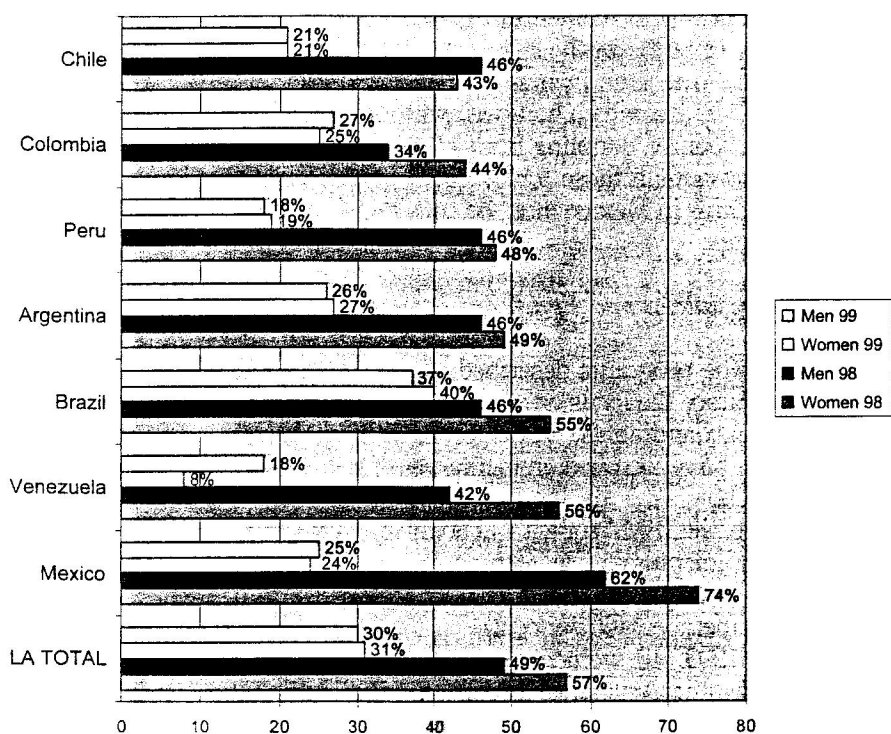
Source: Diversity Program, IBM, Latin America, 1999.

Figure 4.
Men and women believing their commitment would be questioned if they used flexible work options

flexible work options. The success of this transformation of company values is already notable. There has been a 20 point improvement for Latin America overall and a significant closure of the gap between men and women, who believed their commitment would be questioned if they used flexible work options.

From 1998 to 1999, the percentage of women in Mexico who stated that their commitment to the company would be questioned if they used the FWO dropped sharply from 74 per cent to 24 per cent. These changes are also taking place in other Latin American countries (Figure 4).

Other successful results in Mexico and the rest of Latin America

Despite having been created very recently, the diversity programs have already shown important results, and the participation of women in IBM in Latin America is growing at every level of the organization. Taking into consideration those women who have less than five years of service, in the Andean region this group comprises 75 per cent of all women employees, while in Brazil the figure is 67 per cent and in Latin America South it is 66 per cent.

In the specific case of Mexico, the country has shown significant changes in the participation of women: 69 per cent have less than five years of service; 24 per cent of the hires in 1997 were women, 28 per cent in 1998 and 37 per cent in 1999. The percentage of women in the total regular workforce in Mexico has increased by 4 per cent over the last three years (Figure 1).

With respect to women in management positions, in only three years the percentage for Mexico, which had been one of the lowest in Latin America, has increased significantly, doubling from 4.6 to 9.2 (Figure 3). However, this figure is still much lower than those for Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela, so that the diversity programs in Mexico must be considered among the most relevant for effecting change.

Ongoing key initiatives and significant accomplishments: programs for the future

In addition to the programs described above, the company has been actively working to enhance the focus on mentoring, role models and networking. With this proposal, roundtables and meetings have been held with visiting executives that have focussed on mentorship for all women, especially those at the middle levels.

Furthermore, the IBM Women's Leadership Advisory Team have served as role models and mentors for women and have actively participated in external organizations. Over the next two years, a rotation program will be implemented to include new members (60 per cent).

In August 1999, 40 women from nine countries attended the American Women's Leadership Conference in Vancouver and worked as a PAN-LA team to determine priorities and associated actions for the advancement of women. This team is currently working closely together to further the diversity programs that have recently been implemented in various Latin American countries.

As an indication of the progress of women executives in Latin America, for the first time in history of the region, there is now a woman general manager in IBM Colombia.

Apart from the flexible work options made operational in Phase I, the implementation of Phase II is in process, which includes the telecommuting and work at home options.

In the short-term, the WLAD will continue to define and execute initiatives and diversity programs. In addition to the programs described herein that are aimed at women executives in the company, the Women Leadership Advisory Team has actively worked with the Market Segment Team for Women Entrepreneurs.

As part of the same, IBM has sponsored the formation of the Inter-American Federation of Women Entrepreneurs (FIE) and a project to identify women's business associations in Latin America and the Caribbean (Inter-American Dialogue and the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC).

In Mexico in recent years, IBM has developed an agreement to offer technology solutions for women entrepreneurs; it has worked in conjunction with five different women entrepreneur associations and in 1988 sponsored the first research study on women entrepreneurs in Mexico.

Final remarks

In Mexico, as in other countries, there are still very few women in leadership positions in large corporations. As shown in this paper, the probability of finding women in those positions diminishes with the climb up the corporate ladder.

In addition to this vertical segregation, a horizontal segregation exists in which women tend to be more represented in certain occupations (such as public relations and human resources) and practically excluded from jobs that entail control and decision making in production.

The gap between male and female presence in upper management positions can be explained by general socio-cultural factors, as well as by more specific elements of organizational culture.

The fact that few women are in executive positions can be explained by factors inherent in policies adopted within the companies themselves that are a function of gender differentiation: the various patterns for evaluating and compensating the work of men and women, the lack of flexibility in the work schedule, pyramid structures, and the existing expectations for commitment to the company that sometimes require that another type of personal and family activity be given secondary priority, and even put aside. Female executives are required to make choices that men never have to consider. The most difficult one is the decision between work and family.

Nevertheless, rarely is the overcoming of these factors considered to be the company's responsibility or that of society in general. In general, corporate presidents and human resources directors believe that it is exclusively the responsibility of women to make the changes needed "to compete in a man's

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world." They think it is up to women to get training, be more responsible, be available for scheduling, etc.

Consequently, until very recently, no companies in Mexico had established policies to promote women. However, beginning in 1997, the picture began to change somewhat. Currently we can find limited examples of companies that are implementing diversity programs aimed at supporting and promoting women in executive positions.

This paper has analyzed the case of two companies that have started incorporating programs to retain, motivate and promote women in leadership positions within their organizations.

Motorola has established as "target definitions" the incorporation of growing percentages of women in hirings at every level, including executives. Its diversity program contemplates promoting women and other less-favored segments in Mexico, such as the population over 40 years of age and graduates of public universities. Despite the fact that the program has only been implemented since 1999, and it is difficult to judge the results, it is already evident that more women have been hired, with the percentage of female employees having increased form 21 per cent to 30 per cent. Moreover, over the next two years, there is expected to be a significant influx of women to management positions.

In the case of IBM, in 1997 work began on designing a diversity program conceived for the various Latin American offices, focussed on diversity in management, the advancement of women and work and life balance.

The IBM program has centered on implementing a work and life program through a flexible work program which, despite having been created only recently, already show signs of the advantages obtained by the women working in the company. Another of the most important achievements attained by the corporation is the emphasis on cultural change. This has resulted in an important improvement among men and women in Latin America who had previously believed that their commitment would be questioned if they used flexible work options.

Due to the fact that programs are very new, it is still too early to know what is working well and what is not. However, some of the successful results have been presented in this paper. It is much to be desired that the measures these companies have taken will come to have an important impact on Mexican society and will become an example to be imitated.

If this should happen, we could promote important changes and reverse the still predominant trend of thought that considers that companies have no responsibilities related to the possibilities of women's advancing to top management positions.

Notes

1. Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística _INEGI-, *Encuesta National de Empleo* (*National Employment Survey*), Mexico, D.F., 1991-1997.

2. Percentages in Mexico were calculated by the author based on data from *National Employment Survey 1991-1998*. Observations about other countries were taken from several sources: Adler and Izraeli (1995), Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), Goetz (1992), Hola and Todaro (1998) and Zabludovsky (1997).

3. Percentage calculated by the author based on the commercial directories of the nation's largest companies (1994). This fact was confirmed by the questionnaires sent to the human resources directors. Their responses showed that the presence of women in administrative positions is generally under 5 per cent.

4. For more information on the subject of businesswomen, see the following papers: Gina Zabludovsky, "Presencia de las empresarias en México, diagnóstico comparativo a nivel regional y mundial" (Presence of businesswomen in Mexico: a comparative diagnosis on regional and international levels), *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, Vol. 57, No. 4, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, UNAM, Mexico, D.F. and G. Zabludovsky, *Businesswomen in Mexico, an Emerging Economic Force*, UNAM-IBM-NFWBO, Mexico, 1998.

5. However, the above does not mean that women usually achieve administrative positions in companies where they are a majority.

6. The responses from the presidents of companies show that in half of those companies, there are none of these supports. In a few of them, only one or two of these measures are implemented and very few of them offer most of these possibilities.

7. This is very similar to what was found among businesswomen. See Gina Zabludovsky, "Hacia un Perfil de la Mujer Empresaria en México" in *El Cotidiano*. 53. UAM-A, Mexico, D.F. and *Women Business Owners in Mexico, an Emerging Economic Force*, UNAM, 1998.

8. In every instance, women with high level income and position are over 30 years old and the percentage of women without children is 67 per cent.

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Appendix. Methodological summary

This study provides information on a subject that had been practically unexplored in Mexico. The data and results of the research were obtained from the following sources:

(1) Analysis of national statistical information taken from materials produced by the Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística de México-INEGI. In particular, an analysis was made of the National Population and Residence Census (1990) and National Employment Surveys (1994-1997).

(2) Bibliographic sources on the reality of female executives in various countries. Various magazines, newspapers, association newsletters, material printed by international organizations and academic publications were all consulted.

(3) The analysis of the primary administrative positions based on directories of the largest companies in the country.

(4) A series of interviews conducted during the last two months of 1994 and the first two months of 1995 at some of Mexico's largest companies. Three types of questionnaires were sent out to:

- Company presidents (10 responses);

- Human resources directors; (22 responses); and

- Female executives (85 responses).

(5) Of particular importance was the collaboration of people in the companies themselves, especially IBM and Motorola managers of diversity programs. The data supporting the section about the specific policies to promote women are based on the documents and interviews that these two managers provided to the author.