Resignation of Women Managers: Dispelling the Myths

Sandra Trudgett
Lane Cove, NSW

The relative lack of career achievement among female managers, when compared to male managers, is often attributed to higher turnover rates of women. Such stereotyping may result in the development and perpetuation of a vicious cycle. On the one hand, perceptions of turnover rates may impact on promotional opportunities of women managers; on the other, women managers may resign because, for example, they do not perceive they receive equivalent promotional opportunities as their male counterparts or there is dissatisfaction with the management style.

This article reports the findings of a recent study into the reasons why managers resign. Managers in Australian were surveyed to identify whether or not female managers resign for the same reasons as male managers. The research findings suggest that both male and female managers resign from organizations in Australia for effectively the same reasons. The findings also suggested significant gender differences between respondents in areas related to the environment within which managers work. These differences were independent of resignation status.

Keywords: *management, resignation, women*

This paper outlines research undertaken to examine resignation by women managers from organizations in Australia. Analysis was undertaken to determine whether these women differ from their male counterparts and, if so, how such differences are manifested.

Women's labour-force participation rates have steadily increased over the course of the twentieth century and currently women represent approximately 43 per cent, or almost half, of the Australian workforce (ABS, 1998). While the number of women pursuing managerial and professional careers has increased, numerous researchers have observed the failure of women managers to achieve the same degree of career success as male managers (Spencer and Podmore, 1987; Davidson and Cooper, 1992, 1993; Davidson and Burke, 1994; Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994). While women are making some advances in corporate hierarchies, they remain underrepresented at the middle management level and are almost absent from boardrooms (London and Stumpf, 1986; Sinclair, 1994). A frequently given explanation for this phenomenon is that turnover rates of women managers are higher than those of male managers (Brett and Stroh, 1994). Promotions and rapid advancement opportunities

have been reported as not appropriate to be assigned to women for fear they will quit to marry (Lewis and Park, 1989; Schwartz, 1989).

Women potentially face a 'glass ceiling' (Davidson and Cooper, 1992) when they attempt to enter positions of power at a senior level. The ceiling is invisible but women vying for top jobs experience it as a resilient barrier. Gender differences and their impacts on career development have been reported (Kanter, 1977; Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994) and numerous studies on 'level playing-field' issues have been undertaken (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Gold and Pringle, 1989).

Organizational politics and deliberate attempts to marginalize women, which in turn may limit promotional opportunities, were seen to influence resignation (Marshall, 1991; Bellamy and Ramsay, 1994; Rosin and Korabik, 1990, 1991, 1992; Marshall, 1995a) particularly where organizations are not prepared to consider the benefits of a diversified workforce (Marshall, 1991; White, 1992). The key impact of stereotyping and blocked promotional opportunities is that, while organizations have a growing need for high level management skills, a considerable pool of management talent is potentially ignored.

While a small number of qualitative studies have been undertaken into the resignation of female managers, there exists very little quantitative evidence from which to identify reasons for the resignation of women managers. The qualitative studies were completed primarily outside Australia (see Marshall, 1991, 1995a, 1995b; Rosin and Korabik, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995).

Further, previous research into attrition of female employees has tended to examine all women workers, including those in traditional roles (see, for example, Stewart and Greenhalgh, 1984; Ginn and Arber, 1995). Conversely, studies of management behaviour have traditionally employed male samples (Rosin and Korabik, 1991). Such studies have failed to consider women managers as a group.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON RESIGNATION

As noted, limited research has been undertaken on the resignation of women managers. This section highlights the main findings by Bellamy and Ramsay (1994), Lee and Mowday (1987), Marshall (1991, 1995a, 1995b), Morris (1995), Rosin and Korabik (1990, 1991, 1992, 1995) and White (1992).

The major reasons for leaving an organization, cited by Bellamy and Ramsay (1994), relate to marginalization—of feeling and being treated as different. Women are often led to make choices that withhold opportunity and reinforce stereotypical assumptions. Deliberate exclusion and a lack of support were identified as key factors. Women managers span two worlds, that of a woman and that of a manager, and this was noted as causing considerable disharmony, at both a personal and interpersonal level.

Lee and Mowday (1987) examined the influence of job expectations and values, job performance, experience and organizational characteristics on resignation. Job satisfaction, job involvement and organizational commitment were found to explain a considerable amount of incremental variance in intention to leave.

The key influencers of resignation noted by Marshall (1991) included organizational factors, such as politics, lack of opportunity to progress and job expectations not being met. Marshall (1991) cited organizational culture and attitudes as key factors limiting the acceptance of women into organizations and identified some correlation between resignation and family issues.

A key element of Marshall's (1995b) findings related to the stress experienced by the women interviewed. Familiarity with members of an organization's senior management team also emerged as a theme of Marshall's research where respondents indicated that senior male managers only communicated with women managers at a superficial level and without attempting to form effective relationships.

Lack of support by senior management, or issues with support being given privately but not in public, was another theme of Marshall's (1995b) research. Marshall also discussed the potential threat posed by women managers, particularly where male managers hold the view that women do not belong in business and where male managers were perceived by the women in Marshall's sample to be inadequately skilled to perform their roles effectively.

Key issues identified in Marshall's (1995a) research included a desire for a more balanced lifestyle, lack of promotional opportunities, stress, prevalence of a male culture, lack of job fulfilment, fatigue, desire for a different type of job, and frustration or disillusionment with an organization.

Morris (1995) described the findings of a US-based research project, finding little evidence to suggest that work–family conflicts impact on resignation. Disparity between organizational and personal views, together with a lack of job fulfilment, were found to have a strong impact on resignation. Boredom with the job and a desire to further prove oneself were also considered to impact the decision to resign. Finally, the issue of balance between work and other activities was suggested as being influential in the resignation of senior women managers.

Rosin and Korabik (1990, 1991, 1992) examined possible links between family-related factors and resignation, the main theme being misconceptions relating to women managers. They suggested that the number of women leaving organizations was similar to the number of men but women left for different reasons. Family factors were not the principal reason for resignation and the interface between work and family was deemed relatively unimportant in assessing the decision to resign. It was suggested that women may seek alternate employers rather than leave the workforce and four key variables significantly contributed to women's propensity to resign—office politics, working in a male-dominated environment, the nature of the position held and meeting of expectations.

Further to the study discussed above, Rosin and Korabik (1995) undertook follow-up research into propensity to resign. The approach appears to have been to sample a group of men and add this data to that obtained through the survey of women undertaken previously (see Rosin and Korabik, 1990, 1991, 1992) to enable gender-based comparisons to occur. Rosin and Korabik (1995) identified gender-based differences in the areas of job demands and met expectations. They also identified that the strongest predictors of resignation were commitment and satisfaction.

White (1992) examined societal influences on organizational culture and the impact of male organizational attitudes towards women managers. White suggested that women resigned to join other, more synergistic, organizations rather than quit the workforce.

METHOD

Undertaken in Australia, this study utilized a quantitative approach consisting of pre-resignation and post-resignation elements to enable statistical analysis of issues influencing both male and female management resignation. Comparisons were made on the basis of gender and, separately, on pre-resignation versus post-resignation status. The study utilized a questionnaire of 50 questions, divided into demographics and reasons potentially influencing resignation.

The survey was distributed to 667 alumni of a graduate management school. Of the questionnaires distributed, 232 (35%) were returned and eligible for inclusion in the analysis phase, 23 were returned but were ineligible for inclusion as recipients indicated that they had not been employed as managers during the last three years. Two questionnaires were received after analysis had been substantially completed and were therefore excluded, and 2 were unusable as respondents did not indicate their gender, which was essential for comparative analysis. Thirty questionnaires were returned as undeliverable.

Several statistical processes were applied to the data. Descriptive statistics were applied to background data. Factor analysis was undertaken on the main body of data to reduce variables to a more manageable number of factors followed by analysis of variance.

ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

Background information sought from respondents included gender, age, extent of work and management experience, number of employers that respondents had worked for, whether or not they had resigned from a management position within the previous three years and, if so, what was their focus of activity immediately following resignation.

Of the eligible respondents, 153 (66%) were male and 79 (34%) were female. Australian Bureau of Statistics (1998) figures indicate that managers in the Australian workforce are comprised of approximately 79% male and 21% female personnel, suggesting that the gender composition of respondents was similar, if not exactly equal, to that in the workforce. The average age of all respondents was 38.9 years (male average: 39.3, female average: 38.1 years).

During the preceding three years, 57 (37%) of the male respondents compared to 36 (46%) female respondents had resigned from a management position. Statistically, no significant difference was identified between the male and female groups in terms of resignation rates.

The mean length of employment for all respondents was 18.3 years (mean for

males: 19.5, for females: 16.0 years). While data on length of tenure with current organizations was not collected, respondents had, on average, been employed in a management role by 3 different employers.

The mean length of employment in a management role was 9.9 years (mean for males: 10.7, for females: 8.2 years).

Post-Resignation Focus

Responses on post-resignation focus were categorized in terms of 'work-related', 'family-related' and 'personal' areas of focus. The 'work-related' category considered respondents' continued participation in the business sector and included moving to new employment and starting a business. The 'family-related' category included the birth of a child or caring for family members. The 'personal' category included taking a holiday or a break, recovery from an illness or injury, and undertaking further training or education.

A large proportion of male respondents who had resigned focused on 'work-related' activities (91%). The corresponding figure for female respondents was 69 per cent. Z-tests indicated that significant differences existed between male and female respondents on 'work-related' focus and also on 'family-related' focus. It was noted that 19 per cent of the women had specifically started their own business, compared to 12 per cent of the men. While a significant difference was identified between male and female respondents on 'family-related' focus, only 8 per cent of the women who resigned, and none of the men, did so for family reasons.

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was undertaken to reduce the 41 variables within the body of the survey, representing reasons potentially influencing resignation, to a more manageable number of factors. Initial factorization eigenvalues were calculated and plotted against the eigenvalues obtained from the factor analysis of a simulated equivalent random number dataset (see Montanelli and Humphreys 1976). The two curves intersected just beyond the seventh factor, so seven factors were considered an appropriate number with which to undertake the analysis.

The factor analysis procedure was re-run with seven factors specified. Variables with low communalities, less than 0.2, were identified. Low communality scores indicate that only a small proportion of the variance in relation to the particular variable, in this case less than 20%, could be explained by the extracted factors. Such variables were considered to represent extraneous 'noise' and were removed from further analysis.

A varimax rotated factorization was then used to extract uncorrelated factors. The resultant factor loadings are shown at table 1 and the seven factors combined to explain 89.3 per cent of the variance in the data set. For ease of reference the factors were given names based on the general nature of their component variables. The factors and their constituent variables are shown in the appendix.

Table 1 Factor loadings

Ref	Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
Q31	Support	**0.785**	0.038	0.102	0.042	−0.052	0.034	0.310
Q21	Recognition	**0.739**	0.013	0.159	0.025	−0.080	0.123	0.171
Q38	Expectations	**0.732**	0.083	0.120	0.415	0.064	−0.081	−0.097
Q50	Assessment	**0.649**	0.062	0.194	0.055	0.159	0.198	0.115
Q37	Disillusion	**0.640**	0.124	0.150	0.400	0.113	−0.038	0.039
Q17	Progression	**0.639**	−0.108	0.036	0.304	0.026	0.050	−0.012
Q41	Beliefs	**0.602**	0.024	0.179	0.228	0.126	−0.051	0.092
Q40	Politics	**0.480**	0.152	0.208	−0.024	0.006	0.062	0.037
Q26	Development	**0.474**	−0.018	0.060	0.265	0.196	0.075	−0.018
Q15	Balance	0.023	**0.897**	−0.036	0.050	−0.016	−0.061	0.034
Q14	Conflict	0.060	**0.885**	−0.004	0.033	−0.018	−0.075	0.119
Q16	Family	0.015	**0.607**	−0.072	−0.110	−0.192	0.146	0.004
Q28	Leisure	0.208	**0.541**	−0.023	−0.136	−0.003	0.002	0.021
Q10	Overload	−0.046	**0.498**	0.060	−0.316	0.119	0.060	0.054
Q11	Deadlines	−0.026	**0.404**	0.137	−0.272	0.084	0.092	−0.049
Q13	Fatigue	−0.005	**0.375**	0.092	0.083	0.203	0.046	0.140
Q49	Leadership	0.175	−0.016	**0.708**	−0.044	0.136	0.166	0.147
Q44	Stereotypes	0.115	0.077	**0.660**	0.042	0.142	0.165	0.095
Q42	Acceptance	0.240	0.007	**0.639**	0.091	0.132	0.038	0.078
Q34	Culture	0.139	0.031	**0.633**	0.056	−0.005	0.090	0.025
Q48	Standards	0.175	0.072	**0.517**	0.062	0.082	0.231	−0.010
Q33	Team	−0.024	0.068	**−0.462**	−0.053	0.084	0.102	−0.079
Q19	Boredom	0.152	−0.198	0.098	**0.723**	0.060	0.008	0.163
Q18	Challenge	0.343	−0.333	0.058	**0.706**	0.019	0.062	0.043
Q22	Fulfilment	0.424	−0.107	0.077	**0.569**	0.021	−0.001	0.171
Q27	Job type	0.312	0.059	0.102	**0.459**	0.002	0.074	0.052
Q46	Male threat	0.092	0.038	0.230	0.069	**0.812**	0.198	0.013
Q47	Female threat	0.115	0.002	0.029	−0.019	**0.720**	0.154	−0.020
Q45	Client	0.097	0.040	0.186	0.031	0.161	**0.786**	0.097
Q43	Sexual	0.122	0.089	0.270	0.031	0.273	**0.717**	0.104
Q36	Networks	0.163	0.123	0.162	0.160	0.017	0.204	**0.674**
Q35	Interaction	0.099	0.120	0.107	0.130	0.055	−0.010	**0.597**
Q30	Familiarity	0.449	0.006	0.177	−0.078	−0.235	0.062	**0.492**

Analysis of Variance

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was undertaken on the seven extracted factors, using standardized factor scores, to enable group comparisons based on gender and resignation status. Procedures were undertaken using SAS and a 95 per cent confidence interval was applied to all treatments.

Female Group ANOVA

Comparisons within the female group were based on resignation status. Analysis across all factors ($F_{(1,75)}$ = 8.07, P = 0.0058) identified a significant difference between females who had resigned and those who had not resigned. Female respondents were then compared using a post hoc Tukey analysis of each of the seven factors. A significant difference was found between average responses for factor 1 (*individual career issues*) as shown in table 2.

The nine variables loading onto the *individual careers issues* factor were:

- support by senior management for respondent's role;
- recognition of respondent's achievements by the organization;

Table 2 Summary of female group Tukey results

Factor	*Factor name*	*Mean (resigned)*	*Mean (non-resigned)*	*Significant ?*
1	Individual career issues	0.5720	−0.4557	**Yes**
2	Quality of life	0.0474	0.0274	No
3	Attitudes/culture	0.5471	0.1171	No
4	Job satisfaction	0.0526	−0.0854	No
5	Perceived threat	0.8371	0.5231	No
6	Discrimination	0.8197	0.5057	No
7	Relationships	0.3091	0.0188	No

Table 3 Summary of female Z-test results (individual career issues)

Variable	*Variable Name*	*Mean (resigned)*	*Mean (non-resigned)*	*Z-value*	*Significant?**
1	Support	2.36	3.47	3.96	**Yes**
2	Recognition	2.39	3.40	4.04	**Yes**
3	Expectations	2.11	3.19	4.32	**Yes**
4	Assessment	2.72	3.54	3.28	**Yes**
5	Disillusion	4.17	3.09	−3.86	**Yes**
6	Progression	2.03	3.07	3.47	**Yes**
7	Beliefs	2.14	2.88	2.85	**Yes**
8	Politics	4.25	3.72	−2.12	No
9	Development	2.61	3.44	3.07	**Yes**

* After Bonferroni correction

- whether the organization met respondent's expectations;
- assessment of respondent's management skills based on individual capability;
- frustration or disillusionment with the organization;
- satisfaction with the level of opportunity to progress;
- consistency of respondent's views and beliefs with organizational culture;
- the role of organizational politics in getting ahead;
- availability of personal development opportunities.

A series of Z-tests was conducted to compare 'resigned' and 'non-resigned' females on each of these nine variables using a Bonferroni correction because the analysis was repeated. As shown at table 3, significant differences were identified in eight of the nine variables—the exception being 'the role of organizational politics in getting ahead'.

A key outcome of the female group comparison was the absence of any evidence to suggest that the *quality of life* factor, which included variables relating particularly to balance and/or conflict between work and family roles, was significant in differentiating between female respondents based on their resignation status.

Overall, the results suggested that female respondents who had resigned were focused on their careers and upon issues that they perceived would help or hinder them in their existing environment.

Male Group ANOVA

Comparisons within the male group were based on resignation status. Analysis across all factors ($F_{(1,143)} = 423$, $P = 0.0415$) identified a significant difference between males who had resigned and those who had not resigned. A post hoc Tukey analysis was undertaken to compare male respondents on each of the seven factors. A significant difference was found between average responses for factor 1 (*individual career issues*) as shown in table 4.

A series of Z-tests was conducted to compare the male groups on each of the nine variables pertaining to *individual career issues*. Significant differences were found in five of the nine variables, as shown at table 5.

Based on these results, it is suggested that male respondents who had resigned differed from those who had not resigned in the level of senior management support for their roles; the level to which organizations met respondents' expectations; frustration or disillusionment with the organization; satisfaction with the level of opportunity to progress; and availability of personal development opportunities.

Recognition of achievements, individual assessment, consistency of views and beliefs with organizational culture and the role of organizational politics did not differentiate between male respondents, suggesting these issues were unimportant in the decision by male managers to resign.

Resigned Group ANOVA

Analysis of variance was undertaken to examine managers who had resigned in order to identify any average score differences between male and female respondents. Analysis across all factors ($F_{(1,83)} = 23.26$, $P = 0.0001$) identified a significant difference between male and female managers who had resigned. A post hoc Tukey analysis was undertaken to enable gender comparisons within the resigned groups on the basis of each of the seven extracted factors. Significant differences were found between average responses for factor 3 (*attitudes and organizational culture*), factor 5 (*perceived threat*) and factor 6 (*discrimination*), as shown at table 6. These three factors were then examined separately.

The six variables loading onto the *attitudes and organizational culture* factor were:

- organizational perceptions of leadership as a 'male' characteristic;
- stereotyping of women managers;
- lack of organizational acceptance that its managers can be women;
- executive culture based on 'masculine' norms;
- absence of common standards for judging male and female managers;
- gender of members of the senior management team.

Z-tests were conducted to compare male and female respondents who had resigned on each of the six variables loaded onto factor 3 (*attitudes and organizational culture*). Details of the analysis are summarized in table 7.

Table 4 Summary of male group Tukey results

Factor	*Factor name*	*Mean (resigned)*	*Mean (non-resigned)*	*Significant ?*
1	Individual career issues	0.4122	−0.2255	**Yes**
2	Quality of life	−0.1140	0.0309	No
3	Attitudes /culture	−0.0604	−0.2221	No
4	Job satisfaction	0.1982	−0.0854	No
5	Perceived threat	−0.3234	−0.3701	No
6	Discrimination	−0.3564	−0.3375	No
7	Relationships	−0.0602	−0.0908	No

Table 5 Summary of male Z-test results (individual career issues)

Variable	*Variable name*	*Mean (resigned)*	*Mean (non-resigned)*	*Z-value*	*Significant ?**
1	Support	2.55	3.25	3.33	**Yes**
2	Recognition	2.61	3.04	2.15	No
3	Expectations	2.09	2.91	4.56	**Yes**
4	Assessment	3.37	3.66	1.38	No
5	Disillusion	3.89	3.10	−3.76	**Yes**
6	Progression	1.93	2.84	4.14	**Yes**
7	Beliefs	2.44	2.94	2.50	No
8	Politics	4.25	3.91	−2.00	No
9	Development	2.77	3.39	3.10	**Yes**

* After Bonferroni correction

On the basis of the variable comparisons, a significant, gender-based, difference was identified in the area of leadership and its perception as a 'male' characteristic. Importantly, no significant differences were identified in perceptions of stereotyping of women managers, organizational acceptance of women managers, 'masculine' executive cultures, common assessment standards and the predominant gender of senior management.

The *perceived threat* posed to other managers (factor 5) consisted of two variables, namely the perceived threat respondents posed to male managers in the work environment and the threat they perceivably posed to female managers. A Z-test conducted on the mean scores of male and female respondents (1.91 and 3.56 respectively) for the 'male threat' variable resulted in a Z-value of 5.50, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. Similarly, a Z-test on the male and female mean scores (1.63 and 2.67 respectively) for the 'female threat' variable resulted in a Z-value of 3.85, again indicating a significant difference between the groups.

Discrimination (factor 6) was also made up of two variables, relating to sexual discrimination in the work environment and exclusion from client dealings on the basis of gender. A Z-test conducted on the mean scores of male and female respondents (1.14 and 2.08 respectively) for the 'client discrimination' variable resulted in a Z-value of 8.55, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. The Z-test on the male and female mean scores (1.28 and 2.69 respectively) for the 'sexual discrimination' variable resulted in a Z-value of 6.41, indicating another significant difference between the groups.

Table 6 Summary of resigned group Tukey results

Factor	Factor name	Mean (males)	Mean (females)	Significant?
1	Individual career issues	0.4122	0.5720	No
2	Quality of life	−0.1140	0.0474	No
3	Attitudes/culture	−0.0604	0.5471	**Yes**
4	Job satisfaction	0.0526	0.1982	No
5	Perceived threat	−0.3234	0.8371	**Yes**
6	Discrimination	−0.3564	0.8197	**Yes**
7	Relationships	−0.0602	0.3091	No

Table 7 Summary of resigned group Z-test results (attitudes and organizational culture)

Variable	Variable name	Mean (male)	Mean (female)	Z-value	Significant?*
1	Leadership	2.91	3.97	3.66	**Yes**
2	Stereotypes	2.86	3.50	2.21	No
3	Acceptance	3.32	2.86	−1.64	No
4	Culture	3.64	4.06	1.45	No
5	Standards	3.45	2.97	−1.66	No
6	Team	1.32	1.64	1.60	No

* After Bonferroni correction

Overall, the 'resigned' group analysis suggested that male and female respondents differed significantly in the areas of *attitudes and organizational culture*, *perceived threat* and *discrimination*. Specifically, the male and female groups differed significantly with regard to five variables, namely the perception of leadership as a 'male' characteristic; perceived threat posed to male managers; perceived threat posed to female managers; exclusion from client dealings on the basis of gender; and sexual discrimination in the work environment.

Non-Resigned Group ANOVA

A final analysis of variance was undertaken to examine managers who had not resigned. Based on the analysis across all factors ($F_{(1,135)} = 11.14$, $P = 0.0001$), a significant difference was identified between male respondents who had not resigned and female respondents who had not resigned. A post hoc Tukey analysis was used to compare the two 'non-resigned' groups on each of the seven factors. As shown at table 8, significant differences were found to occur between the gender groups' average scores for factor 3 (*attitudes and organization culture*), factor 5 (*perceived threat to other managers*) and factor 6 (*discrimination*). These outcomes were the same as those determined for the 'resigned' group.

A series of Z-tests was conducted to compare male and female respondents who had not resigned on the six variables loaded onto factor 3 (*attitudes and organizational culture*). Details of the analysis are summarized in table 9. On the basis of the variable comparisons, no significant differences were identified in respect to any specific variables, between male and female respondents.

Table 8 Summary of non-resigned group Tukey results

Factor	*Factor name*	*Mean (males)*	*Mean (females)*	*Significant?*
1	Individual career issues	−0.2255	−0.4557	No
2	Quality of life	0.0310	0.0274	No
3	Attitudes/culture	−0.2221	0.1171	**Yes**
4	Job satisfaction	−0.0854	−0.0854	No
5	Perceived threat	−0.3701	0.5231	**Yes**
6	Discrimination	−0.3375	0.5057	**Yes**
7	Relationships	−0.0908	0.0188	No

Table 9 Summary of non-resigned group Z-test results (attitudes and organizational culture)

Variable	*Variable name*	*Mean (male)*	*Mean (female)*	*Z-value*	*Significant?**
1	Leadership	2.69	3.23	2.45	No
2	Stereotypes	2.68	2.95	1.35	No
3	Acceptance	3.89	3.72	−0.85	No
4	Culture	3.88	3.53	2.19	No
5	Standards	3.77	3.28	−2.58	No
6	Team	1.44	1.32	0.92	No

* After Bonferroni correction

Z-tests were then conducted on the two variables that loaded onto factor 5 (*perceived threat*). A Z-test conducted on the mean scores of male and female respondents (1.83 and 2.98 respectively) for the 'male threat' variable resulted in a Z-value of 5.48, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. Similarly, a Z-test on the male and female mean scores (1.59 and 2.40 respectively) for the 'female threat' variable resulted in a Z-value of 6.75, again indicating a significant difference between the groups.

Z-tests were then conducted on the two variables that loaded onto factor 6 (*discrimination*). A Z-test conducted on the mean scores of male and female respondents (1.05 and 1.70 respectively) for the 'client discrimination' variable resulted in a Z-value of 6.50, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. The Z-test on the male and female mean scores (1.29 and 2.44 respectively) for the 'sexual discrimination' variable resulted in a Z-value of 7.67, indicating another significant difference between the groups.

Overall, the 'non-resigned' group ANOVA suggested that male and female respondents differed significantly in the areas of *attitudes and organizational culture*, *perceived threat* and *discrimination*. It was noted that none of the individual variables loaded onto the attitudes and organizational culture factor differed significantly between the male and female groups. It was found, however, that perceived threat posed to male and female managers; exclusion from client dealings on the basis of gender; and sexual discrimination in the work environment represented areas where significant differences were identified between male and female respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

In answer to the question 'How do women managers who resign from organizations in Australia differ from other managers?', the research results suggest that both male and female managers resign for the same basic reasons and these reasons are linked to their own careers. Women managers appear to differ from their male counterparts, specifically in their experience of discrimination, the threat they perceivably pose to other managers and, in some cases, the perception of leadership as a male characteristic. These differences were found to occur in the management environment regardless of resignation status.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

As noted previously, research into the resignation of women managers is scant. A significant outcome of this study was that, while much of the research undertaken to date has identified various issues as impacting on resignation, many of those issues were also found to exist within the group of respondents who had not resigned, including issues traditionally attributed to gender differences. Although several differences were identified between male and female respondents, those issues were not found to directly impact resignation.

Results Compared to Previous Research Findings

Overall, the current study did not support Bellamy and Ramsay's (1994) findings in respect to resignation. The level of familiarity with senior managers and the extent of interaction with them did not differ significantly between resigned and non-resigned groups, nor did the variable examining organizational acceptance that its managers can legitimately be women. Conflict between work and family roles was also considered but was not identified as significant.

The study supported Lee and Mowday's (1987) research with respect to the impacts upon resignation of individuals' expectations not being met by an organization and disparity between organizational culture and individuals' views and beliefs.

Marshall's (1991) findings that organizational influences, such as lack of opportunity to progress and job expectation not being met, were supported. The issues of organizational culture and attitudinal impacts on resignation were not supported by the current research; however, significant gender differences were identified in attitudes and organizational culture.

The study supported Marshall's (1995b) findings relating to the level of support received from senior management and the threat women managers perceivably pose to other managers, especially men. The issues of stress, fatigue and lack of familiarity with senior management were not supported by this study to the extent that they were not determined to be differentiators between groups based on either resignation or gender.

The outcomes relating to a desire for a more balanced lifestyle did not support

Marshall's (1995a) findings on resignation; however, the results pertaining to disillusionment and opportunity to progress were seen to support Marshall's findings. 'Male' organizational culture was found to impact female managers as an issue regardless of whether or not they had resigned. Finally, job fulfilment and a desire for a different type of job were considered but the results were not found to support Marshall's findings.

Limited support was found for Morris' (1995) findings. Consistency of individual's views and beliefs with organizational culture, as a variable, was found to influence resignation. Issues of work-family conflict and/or balance, boredom, lack of fulfilment and a desire to further prove oneself were considered in the current study but not found to directly influence resignation and hence did not support Morris's findings.

The study supported Rosin and Korabik's (1990, 1991, 1992) findings on turnover rates and the tendency to remain in the work environment. Only 8% of the women surveyed actually resigned to take care of children. This, and a lack of supporting data to suggest family-role conflict as an issue, support Rosin and Korabik's position with respect to common misconceptions about women's propensity to resign due to maternity reasons and work-family conflict.

Of the variables identified by Rosin and Korabik (1990, 1991, 1992) as making a significant contribution to women's propensity to resign, the current study supported 'met expectations' as impacting resignation. This was found to be true for both male and female respondents. The current study did not support Rosin and Korabik's findings on organizational politics and the position held. Finally, the current study did not support Rosin and Korabik's findings with respect to working in a male-dominated environment having a direct impact on resignation, but significant variance was noted between male and female managers on this issue, regardless of resignation status.

Mixed support was given to Rosin and Korabik's (1995) findings. Rosin and Korabik identified gender-based differences in job demands whereas the current study, via the *quality of life* factor, did not. No gender-based differences were found in met expectations in the current study, although this variable was found to influence resignation. No gender-based differences were identified in the area of job satisfaction.

The results of the study provide collaborative evidence for White's (1992) findings—that women mangers are impacted by organizational culture, which was seen by White to be strongly influenced by societal values—but not to the extent that they would resign. Support was also provided for White's findings that women tend to move to other organizations rather than leave the workforce.

Future Research

Several implications for future research emerged from this study. It was noted that proportionally more female managers started their own business following resignation. Given that the results of the data analysis suggested that male and female managers resigned for the same general reasons related to their personal careers, it is unclear what issues influence women managers to decide to move into their own

business rather than to move to another organization. Identifying the influencers of such a decision is worthy of further research.

Similarly, a high percentage of respondents possessed tertiary qualifications. This may be a reason for the similarity between male and female respondents with respect to resignation—that is, with people at this level of training and education there may be very little gender difference. It might be questioned whether the results would be the same for less well-trained and educated people. This suggests another possible area for future research.

Given the scant research into the area of resignation by women managers in direct comparison to their male counterparts, there is a need for continued research to complement previous studies that have utilized a largely qualitative approach. Many of the issues previously linked to the resignation of women managers were shown to be gender issues rather than resignation issues. Additional research into this area will assist in identifying issues pertaining to both resigned and non-resigned managers, and will help to isolate specific issues which may directly impact the decision to resign.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

A key outcome of this research was that male and female managers resigned for the same career-based reasons. A number of the research outcomes suggest opportunities for organizations, especially in regards to human resource management, to better recognize certain aspects of the environment within which women managers work.

Women managers were not found to resign for family reasons. This finding repudiates certain assumptions about the validity of promoting women managers. It may be appropriate for more organizations to gather segmented data on employees who resign for family reasons and to separate and analyse the data on women managers specifically.

This research focused specifically on women as managers rather than all women employees. The resignation rate of women employees due to family reasons might, in fact, be higher than that for the management group. However, assumptions may be applied to all women and therefore potentially discriminate against women managers on the basis that they are perceived to be likely to resign for family reasons.

The findings also suggest that organizations that fail to hire, promote or retain women managers, based on the perception that women represent a poor investment due to their propensity to resign and have children, do so fundamentally on an inaccurate, and misleading, stereotype.

Linked to this issue was the finding that female respondents who had resigned were predominantly found to have moved to other employment or started their own business.

Managers who had resigned, male and female alike, appear to have done so in order to redress situations where their personal career opportunities had been blocked in some way. The impact on organizations is that both individual and environmental issues that potentially influence resignation need to be fully considered.

When the specific variables related to resignation are examined, many can be influenced within the organization, including senior management support for the role being performed, assessment of skills based on individual capability, recognition of individual achievements, career path planning and availability of personal development opportunities.

Senior management in Australia, which is strongly skewed towards male representation, is a key catalyst in redressing inappropriate behaviours and attitudes. Effective change is essentially implemented from the top down and, given that many of the issues may challenge senior managers' own beliefs, considerable courage is required if they are to seriously address these issues.

SUMMARY

This research analysed issues influencing the resignation of women managers. A key differentiating factor was the use of a male and female sample and the utilization of both pre-resignation and post-resignation perspectives. This approach, and the use of quantitative techniques, were used to isolate factors specifically influencing resignation and to compare relevant issues across gender groups.

Overall, women managers were found to resign from organizations for the same reasons as male managers. Issues were identified between the male and female groups; however, those issues were consistent regardless of resignation status. It was therefore suggested that women managers face particular issues in the organizational environment which differentiate them from their male counterparts; however, with respect to resignation, male and female managers resign for the same reasons and those reasons relate to the managers as individuals.

Sandra Trudgett *(DBA) undertook this research as part of a DBA program through Southern Cross University in Australia. Her research interests are in the area of management and performance optimization. She was, until recently, a senior manager in a large Australian company. Her primary focus now is on consultancy in the management environment.*

References

Alimo-Metcalfe, B. (1995) An investigation of female and male constructs of leadership and empowerment. *Women in Management Review*, 10(2): 3–8.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (1998) *Labour force Australia, January 1998*, Cat. no. 6203.0. Canberra: AGPS.

Bellamy, P.A. and Ramsay, K. (1994) *Barriers to women working in corporate management*. Canberra: AGPS.

Brett, J.M. and Stroh, L.K. (1994) Turnover of female managers. In M.J. Davidson and R.J. Burke (eds), *Women in management: Current research issues* (pp. 55–64). London: Paul Chapman.

Davidson, M.J. and Burke, R.J. (eds) (1994) *Women in management: Current research issues*. London: Paul Chapman.

Davidson, M.J. and Cooper, C.L. (1992) *Shattering the glass ceiling: The woman manager*. London: Paul Chapman.

Davidson, M.J. and Cooper, C.L. (1993) *European women in business and management*. London: Paul Chapman.

Ginn, J. and Arber, S. (1995) Exploring mid-life women's employment. *Sociology*, 29 (1): 73–94.

Gold, U.O'C. and Pringle, J.K. (1989) Management promotions: Gender-specific factors. *Women in Management Review and Abstracts*, 4(3): 5–10.

Kanter, R.M. (1977) *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Lahtinen, H.K. and Wilson, F.M. (1994) Women and power in organisations. *Executive Development*, 7(3): 16–23.

Lee, T.W. and Mowday, R.T. 1987, Voluntarily leaving an organization: An empirical investigation of Steers and Mowday's model of turnover. *Academy of Management Journal*, 30: 721–43.

Lewis, G.B. and Park, K. (1989) Turnover rates in federal white-collar employment: Are women more likely to quit than men? *American Review of Public Administration*, 19: 13–28.

London, M. and Stumpf, S.A. (1986) Individual and organization career development in changing times. In D.T. Hall and Associates (eds), *Career development in organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Marshall, J. (1991) Senior women managers who leave employment. *Women in Management Review and Abstracts*, 6(3): 4–10.

Marshall, J. (1995a) *Women managers moving on: Exploring career and life choices*. London: Routledge.

Marshall, J. (1995b) Working at senior management and board levels: Some of the issues for women, *Women in Management Review*, 10(3): 21–5.

Montanelli, R.G. and Humphreys, L.G. (1976) Latent roots of random data correlation matrices with squared multiple correlations on the diagonal. A Monte Carlo study. *Psychometrika*, 41: 341–7.

Morris, B. (1995) Executive women confront midlife crisis. *Fortune*, 18 Sept.: 50–74.

Rosin, H. and Korabik, K. (1990) Marital and family correlates of women managers' attrition from organisations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 37: 104–20.

Rosin, H. and Korabik, K. (1991) Workplace variables, affective responses, and intention to leave among women managers. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 64: 317–30.

Rosin, H. and Korabik, K. (1992) Corporate flight of women managers: Moving from fiction to fact. *Women in Management Review*, 7(3): 31–5.

Rosin, H. and Korabik, K. (1995) Organisational experiences and propensity to leave—a multivariate investigation of men and women managers. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 46(1): 1–16.

Schwartz, F.N. (1989) Management women and the facts of life. *Harvard Business Review*, 1: 65–76.

Sinclair, A. (1994) *Trials at the top: Executives talk about men, women, and the Australian executive culture*. Parkville, Vic.: University of Melbourne.

Spencer, A. and Podmore, D. (eds) (1987) *In a man's world: Essays on women in male-dominated professions*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Stewart, M.B. and Greenhalgh, C. (1984) The work history patterns and occupational attainment of women. *The Economic Journal*, 94: 293–519.

White, J. (1992) *A few good women—Breaking the barriers to top management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.