Organisational Factors, Social Factors, and Women's Advancement

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This study examines if organisation size and the degree to which the organisational hierarchy is male moderate the relationships between social factors (career and psychosocial functions of mentor support, and internal and external networks) and women’s advancement in management. In all, 848 women in the Australian banking sector were surveyed. Results from moderator regression analyses found that, although male hierarchy does not moderate these relationships, the size of the organisation does. Specifically, career functions of mentor support and internal networks explain women’s advancement more in small than in large banks. Recommendations for facilitating women’s advancement in management are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

There is evidence worldwide that countries are failing to realise the maximum potential of their women managers (Davidson & Burke, 2004; Wirth, 2001). As mentor support and networks are known to explain differences in

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advancement between people with similar education and work credentials (Burt, 1998; Portes, 1998), much advice has been given to women and organisations on mentoring and networking (e.g. Burt, 1998; Ibarra, 1997; Linehan, 2001). But are mentor support and networks equally effective for women’s advancement in all organisations? The answer to this question is not known. As a result, I take a contingency approach to women’s advancement in this study, and examine whether organisation size and the extent to which the hierarchy is predominantly male moderates the relationship between mentor support and networks and advancement.

In sum, the purpose of the current study is twofold. First, it examines the main effects of social factors and network factors on advancement. Then, it examines the interactions between social and network factors and two organisation factors (organisation size and the extent to which the hierarchy is predominantly male) in predicting women’s advancement.

The Relationships between Social Factors and Advancement

Social factors such as having mentors and being part of networks can help men and women advance in management (e.g. Burt, 1998; Ragins, 1999; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003; Wirth, 2001). This is because mentors are more experienced, highly ranked, and influential members of the organisation who provide support to the career development of less experienced individuals (Kram, 1985), and networks involve “contacts with a variety of colleagues for the purpose of mutual work benefits” (Linehan, 2001, p. 823).

In particular, mentor support is thought to assist women advance more rapidly and to higher levels in the organisation than they would without it (Ragins, 1989, 1999). One explanation is that mentor support can help women overcome some of the obstacles they encounter to advancement such as stereotyping (e.g. Griffith & MacBride-King, 1998), discrimination (e.g. Bierema, 2005; Davies-Netzley, 1998), and reduced organisational power (Ragins, 1989, 1999). Ultimately, mentor support can increase women’s job satisfaction and optimism in their career prospects (Burke, Burgess, & Fallon, 2006). As mentor support can encompass distinct career and psychosocial functions (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004), it follows that it would be useful for women and for organisations to know the separate contribution of each type of mentor support (career or psychosocial) to career outcomes such as advancement (Wanberg et al., 2003). Such knowledge can enhance the management of human resources and careers.

It is possible that career functions, but not psychosocial functions, assist women advance in management. Career functions include “those aspects of the relationships that primarily enhance career advancement” (Kram, 1983, p. 614), such as challenging work assignments and coaching. Psychosocial
functions are “those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in the managerial role” (Kram, 1983, p. 614). In Kram’s view, this includes role modelling and counselling. The sparse research that exists on the separate effects of career and psychosocial functions on women’s advancement indicates that career functions might be solely or more related to advancement than psychosocial functions (Allen et al., 2004). For example, Johnson and Scandura (1994) found that coaching, which was measured as a career function, was the sole mentor function to have a positive effect on women’s earnings. More recently, Tharenou (2005) found a small effect for career functions of mentor support on women’s hierarchical advancement, and a negative effect for psychosocial functions. One of Tharenou’s (2005) explanations for the negative relationship was that mentors might provide psychosocial mentoring functions to protégées who are not advancing. Based on the few studies that exist, career functions appear to be related to objective career outcomes for women because of the developmental nature of career mentoring (Kram, 1983). But it is still unclear how psychosocial functions might relate to women’s advancement. Therefore, this study explores the relationship between psychosocial functions and women’s advancement. In addition, this study tests the link between career functions and advancement, because this latter relationship is sometimes weaker or less pervasive (e.g. Johnson & Scandura, 1994; Tharenou, 2005) than is expected based on mentoring theory (e.g. Kram, 1983).

**Hypothesis 1:** The career functions of mentor support will be positively related to women’s advancement in management.

In addition to having mentor support, being part of networks of contacts internal and external to the organisation might assist women advance in management. Internal and external networks differ from mentor relationships because they can encompass many contacts (versus few mentors) that take longer and more effort to develop and maintain as they may be drawn from a wider group of people (Ibarra, 1993). Internal networks are defined in this study as the male and female contacts an individual has at different hierarchical levels inside the organisation, such as male and female co-workers and superiors. External networks are defined as the male and female contacts an individual has outside the organisation. Because women’s work and non-work lives are inextricably intertwined (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), external networks in this study comprised the respondents’ male and female contacts in other organisations, as well as relatives and friends (as recommended by Ibarra & Smith-Lovin, 1997). Eby, Butts, and Lockwood (2003) found that internal and external networks were associated with perceived career success, which supports individuals investing time “in networking both inside and outside their organisation” (Eby et al., 2003, p. 702).
In general, internal networks of influential work contacts can assist individuals advance in management (e.g. Eddleston, Baldridge, & Veiga, 2004; Schor, 1997) because they provide career enhancing resources such as information, advice, and status (Ibarra, 1995; Ibarra & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Timberlake, 2004). For example, networks can provide information needed to perform one’s job and on promotion opportunities (Burt, 1998; Schor, 1997), thus leading to higher income, job level, promotions, and intra-organisational mobility (Boxman, De Graaf, & Flap, 1991; Meyerson, 1994; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Schor, 1997).

Women in particular believe that being part of internal networks can assist their advancement (e.g. Linehan, 2001; Bierema, 2005), possibly because this will place them on a par with their male colleagues in terms of having the necessary information and resources to perform and advance. Some of the empirical evidence, however, indicates that women enjoy few or no career benefits from internal networks (e.g. Burt, 1998; Eddleston et al., 2004). Nevertheless, given the strong theoretical rationale for expecting internal networks to positively impact women’s careers, I believe it is warranted to test this hypothesis again with a large female sample.

**Hypothesis 2a**: Internal networks will be positively related to women’s advancement in management.

Women’s internal networks may comprise only one or a few strategic persons because of their difficulty in infiltrating male-dominated internal networks (Burt, 1998). In such cases, external networks might furnish additional useful resources that assist women perform their jobs and advance (Burt, 1998), such as career development advice and information on promotion opportunities. This is because individuals function within a community of people with similar work interests. Therefore, external network contacts may be in a position to share valuable career and job market information because they are part of networks of key contacts inside and outside their own organisations (Boxman et al., 1991; Burt, 1998). In addition, social resources theory posits that it is the type of resource in the network that is beneficial to the individual (e.g. Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981). External networks may provide or may help women reach the type of resources (e.g. contacts with relevant experience who can provide career advice) necessary to advance. This rationale explains why successful women report pursuing a strategy of developing networks with important others who are outside their immediate work group (e.g. Davies-Netzley, 1998; Linehan, 2001; Schor, 1997). Ibarra (1997) also found that women high in advancement potential “relied to a greater extent than both high-potential men and less high-potential women on close ties and relationships outside their subunits” (p. 91). This strategy is supported by some empirical evidence.
that external networks contacts predict higher managerial income and position level (Boxman et al., 1991). In sum, women may obtain some of the resources needed to advance from external networks of contacts in order to complement the assistance that they get from their internal networks. Thus, it is proposed:

_Hypothesis 2b_: External networks will be positively related to women’s advancement in management.

The literature reviewed so far has led to hypotheses of direct relationships between social factors and women’s advancement in management. But is the strength and direction of these relationships the same in all organisations?

Organisational Factors as Moderators

The size of the organisation and the extent to which the hierarchy is male might change the strength or the direction of the relationships between the career functions of mentor support, internal and external networks, and women’s advancement. Size is positively correlated with formalisation of structures, number of reporting layers in the organisation, and bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1979). Although large organisations may have more stakeholder pressures and resources to address the gender imbalance in management (Mintzberg, 1979) and more opportunities for advancement than small ones (Markham, Harlan, & Hackett, 1987), women may still find it difficult to advance in large organisations. The high formalisation and number of reporting layers are likely to make it difficult for employees in large organisations to know one another and to develop instrumental relationships with influential colleagues and superiors. Further, the bureaucracy and formalised procedures of larger organisations means any individual manager (mentor) might be less influential in decision-making. In contrast, women in small organisations may not have access to plentiful organisational resources, but their mentors and internal networks may have few superiors and enjoy strong relationships with influential decision-makers. This is because people are more likely to know one another and to have better access to senior managers and executives in small than in large companies. Similarly, it might be easier for outsiders to gain access to the decision-makers in small than in large organisations. The low formalisation, number of reporting layers, and bureaucracy enable influential contacts in one’s external network to identify their counterparts and decision-makers in small organisations. As a result, mentors and networks may exert a greater impact in small than in large organisations. Thus, it is proposed:

_Hypothesis 3_: Organisation size will moderate the relationship between social factors (career functions of mentor support, internal and external networks)
and women’s advancement, such that social factors will have a stronger relationship with advancement in small than in large organisations.

In addition to organisation size, the degree to which the hierarchy is male is likely to influence the strength or direction of the positive relationships between social factors and women’s advancement. In male-dominated hierarchies, the decision-makers are likely to be men and the internal networks are likely to be male, which may disadvantage women (Brass, 1985; Kanter, 1977). Based on social (Burt, 1998; Portes, 1998) and homosocial (Kanter, 1977) theories, men form a group based on demographic similarity, because men are more comfortable with (Ruderman, Ohlott, & Kram, 1995) and prefer to liaise with other men who are like themselves (Kanter, 1977). So, women find it difficult to be part of the dominant male networks (e.g. Brass, 1985; Burt, 1998; Kanter, 1977; Portes, 1998) and are, thus, perceived to have less influence and receive fewer promotions than men (e.g. Brass, 1985; Ruderman et al., 1995). Because of people’s preference to be and work with others like themselves (Kanter, 1977), it may also be difficult for the individuals who mentor women and for the members of women’s internal and external networks (who are likely to be women; Brass, 1985; Kanter, 1977) to influence male decision-makers to promote or give career opportunities to women. So, mentors and networks may be less influential in organisations with hierarchies that are predominantly male. Thus, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Male hierarchies will moderate the positive relationships between social factors (career functions of mentor support, internal and external networks) and women’s advancement, such that male hierarchies will weaken these relationships.

METHOD

Participants

A sample from the Australian banking industry was used to test this study’s hypotheses because the banking industry in Australia has a clear two-tier structure (Metz & Tharenou, 1999). The first tier encompasses the four major Australian banks (each employs more than 20,000 full-time equivalent [FTE] staff) and the second tier comprises the remaining banks (each employs 7,500 FTE staff or fewer).

Procedure

To test this study’s hypotheses, a confidential, voluntary survey was mailed to all 1,183 women members of the Australian Institute of Banking and
Finance (AIBF), who were in non-management or management positions and who worked for Australian banks. Because the AIBF’s list had only 11 women in executive positions, the author asked a few of the banks for their cooperation in getting this study’s survey to women in middle and senior management in their organisations. In addition, every woman senior manager or above (e.g. Chief Manager, General Manager, CEO, and Executive Director) received two questionnaires and was requested to pass one on to a female colleague in senior management who had not heard of the study. This is known as the “snowball” sampling approach (Zikmund, 1994). As a result of these efforts, surveys were mailed to an additional 163 women in middle and senior management levels, to obtain sufficiently large samples at high levels.

Forty-six of the 1,346 questionnaires mailed were returned because of out-of-date or incorrect addresses. Of the remaining 1,300 questionnaires, 848 were completed and returned, resulting in a 65.2 per cent response rate. The sample comprised 665 (or 78.6%) respondents who worked for the large banks and 181 (or 21.4%) for the small banks. The sample was representative of the natural concentrations in the population, because approximately 80 per cent of the female workforce in the Australian banking industry work for the large banks and 20 per cent for the small ones (Metz & Tharenou, 1999). Chi-square tests (available from the author on request) revealed that the respondents from small banks had changed companies more often, were less likely to want to move up two or more levels in the hierarchy, and were more likely to have had a female mentor than women in large banks.

MEASURES

Advancement

The dependent variable was advancement in management. Tharenou’s (1999) three-item scale of managerial advancement was used to measure advancement in this study. Tharenou’s scale assessed the respondent’s managerial level, salary, and total number of managerial promotions. “Number of staff” was added to Tharenou’s (1999) reliable and validated measure because it has been used in past studies to measure advancement (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994), organisational stature (which encompassed managerial level; Lyness & Thompson, 1997) and managerial authority (Reskin & Ross, 1992). The resulting Advancement scale was the mean of the four standardised items (α = .77).

Social Factors

Career and Psychosocial Functions of Mentor Support. Dreher and Ash’s (1990) scale of overall mentor support was used to measure mentor support
in this study. The mentor support scale averaged 18 items that measured various forms of career and psychosocial functions. The items used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very large extent). Examples of items of career functions included in the mentor support measure were, “Given or recommended you for challenging assignments that present opportunities to learn new skills” and “Given or recommended you for assignments that increased your contact with higher level managers”. In turn, examples of items of psychosocial functions were, “Conveyed feelings of respect for you as an individual” and “Served as a role model”. Only 24 respondents, or 2.8 per cent of the sample, did not report having had a mentor. The 24 respondents who did not report having had a mentor were included in the analyses, because past research suggests that not all women have mentors, including women who advance (Burke & McKeen, 1997). Therefore, including women without mentors in the analyses is necessary to understand the real impact of mentor support on advancement.

A principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation was performed on the 18-item, mentor support scale. Based on scree tests, career functions (Factor 1) and psychosocial functions (Factor 2) of mentor support emerged as empirically distinct factors (results are available from the author on request). “Career functions” (Factor 1) comprised the first four items of the mentor support scale, explained 39.9 per cent of variance, and had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .88. “Psychosocial functions” (Factor 2) was made up of the remaining 14 items, explained 11.3 per cent of variance, and had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .92.

The survey included a question on mentor gender to help describe the sample. The respondents were asked to indicate the sex of the one mentor who played a significant role in their careers. Mentor sex was 1, male and 2, female. The majority of mentors were male; 80.9 per cent of women in large banks and 73.6 per cent of women in small banks reported having or having had male mentors.

Internal and External Networks. Ibarra (1995) defined an informal managerial network as a “set of job-related contacts that a manager relies on for access to task-related, career, and social support” (p. 674). In addition, Ibarra (1995) and Campbell, Marsden, and Hurlbert (1986) explained that networks have characteristics of status (or managerial level of contacts), degree of closeness (between the individual and his/her network contact), sex of contacts, and size (or number of contacts in the network). Hence, the network measure developed for this study reflects the aspects of network dimensions of composition (status), closeness, and diversity (sex, and different work, friends, and family contacts internal and external to the organisation) identified by Ibarra (1995) and Campbell et al. (1986).
As a result, internal and external networks were measured by 24 items. The survey stated that an informal network had been defined in this study as a set of job-related contacts that a person relies on for access to task-related, career, and social support. Then, the respondents were asked: “How many of each of the contacts below do you have whom you can discuss important matters with (e.g. work, leisure, family, politics)?” The 12 items listed aimed to measure network size. The items used a 7-point Likert scale from 0 (none) to 6 (six or more). Then, the respondents were asked: “How close are you to each of the contacts below?” The 12 items listed aimed to measure network closeness by using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not close at all) to 5 (extremely close). For both the network size and the degree of closeness scales, internal (work) and external (friends and family) contacts were included as scale items. In relation to the internal contacts, status or level of contact’s position was assessed by including co-workers or colleagues and superiors as scale items. Finally, separate items for male and female contacts were listed. For example, the respondents were asked to specify the number of “female co-workers in my immediate area” and of “male co-workers in my immediate area” with whom they discussed important matters.

A principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation was performed on the 24-item network scale. Based on scree tests, external networks (Factor 1) and internal networks (Factor 2) emerged as empirically distinct factors. The 12 external network items (or Factor 1) explained 24.9 per cent of variance. The 12 internal network items (or Factor 2) explained 7.5 per cent of variance. In addition, Factor 1 was only weakly correlated with Factor 2. Thus, factor analysis results supported construct (unidimensionality) and discriminant validity of the internal network measure from the external network measure.

The average factor loading of the 12-item external networks scale was .55 and its Cronbach alpha was .86. The average factor loading of the 12-item internal networks measure was .50 and its Cronbach alpha was .82.

Organisational Factors

Organisation Size. Organisation size was measured by asking the respondents which bank they worked for. Specifically, the name of the employer bank was a 15-category item, which listed four large banks, 10 small banks, and a category for “Other”. Only 4 per cent of the respondents selected the “Other” category. The 15 categories were collapsed into 1 for large banks and 0 for small banks (which included the “other” category).

Male Hierarchy. Male hierarchy was measured by a single item, asking respondents about the proportion of men above their level at work. The
response categories ranged from 1 (all women) to 7 (all male). The majority (83.6%) of the respondents reported working in areas with male-dominated managerial hierarchies above them (i.e. hierarchies that comprised 85 per cent males or more).

Control Variables

The effects of having children, ambition, and six work-related individual factors were controlled for in this study, because they have been found in past research to be linked to women’s advancement in management (e.g. Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Tenbrunsel, Brett, Maoz, Stroh, & Reilly, 1995; Tharenou et al., 1994).

Family responsibilities were measured by the number of children the respondents had, and it was coded as 0 (no children) and 1 (one or more children).

Ambition was the mean of seven standardised items (α = .81), based on Korabik and Rosin’s (1995) ambition scale and on Howard and Bray’s (1988) ambition measure. Howard and Bray (1988) asked respondents how many levels they wanted to move up the hierarchy.

Six work-related individual variables were included in this study. First, education was a single item measuring the highest level of education completed, with response categories ranging from 1 (completed primary school) to 9 (doctorate). The item was based on Tharenou and Conroy’s (1994) 12-point education measure. Second, work experience was the mean of two items with response categories ranging from 1 (less than one year) to 9 (30 or more years) (α = .79). This was based on Tharenou et al.’s (1994) work experience measure. Third, training and development (T&D) was the mean of a five-item scale (α = .82) based on Tharenou and Conroy’s (1994) T&D scale. This measure assessed the frequency of participation in training and development activities, with response categories ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (11 or more times). Fourth, work hours (which was measured as the hours worked each week) was a single item with response categories ranging from 1 (less than 15 hours) to 9 (more than 60 hours). Fifth, company changes was a single item with response categories ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (more than five times), based on Tharenou and Conroy’s (1994) company moves measure. Sixth, the career breakthroughs variable was developed for this study and averaged nine items (α = .73). These were developmental experiences found to be important breakthroughs in career advancement because they were opportunities for individuals to prove themselves, expand their knowledge and skills, and become known to influential decision-makers in the organisation (e.g. Forbes & Piercy, 1991; Mainiero, 1994; Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994). The respondents were asked to what extent events (e.g. an international assignment) and a variety of
job opportunities (e.g. an opportunity to be a staff member in the chief executive office) had been especially important as a breakthrough in their careers. The response categories ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very large extent).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for advancement (the dependent variable) and all the independent variables included in this study. As can be seen from Table 1, there is little evidence of multicollinearity amongst the independent variables, which had correlation coefficients of 0.63 or less.

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses for the whole sample were performed to assess the relative importance of career functions and psychosocial functions of mentor support, internal and external networks, organisation size, and male hierarchy in explaining advancement for women (see Table 2). The control variables of family, ambition, and work-related individual factors were entered in Block 1 to control for their effects, as recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). As can be seen from Table 2, six of the eight control factors were positively related to advancement, as expected. The control variables explained 56 per cent of women’s advancement. Many control variables were used in this study to imbue confidence in the variance explained by the social and organisational variables entered in Blocks 2 and 3, respectively. The social factors comprised career and psychosocial functions of mentor support, and internal and external networks. The organisational variables comprised size of the organisation and male hierarchy. Block 4 comprised the interaction terms between career functions of mentor support, internal and external networks, and organisation size. Separate hierarchical regression analyses were also performed with the interaction terms of the social variables and male hierarchy in Block 4. These interactions assessed the effects of male hierarchy on the relationships between the social variables and women’s advancement.

The interaction terms were composed of one of the social factors multiplied by organisation size or male hierarchy (e.g. Internal networks × Size; Career functions × Male hierarchy). The variables that form the interaction terms were standardised (as z-scores) before their multiplication to cater for differences in standard deviations. Organisation size and male hierarchy were identified as moderators if significant increments in variance occurred in advancement when the interaction term was added to the independent variables. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), interaction terms are easier to interpret if the moderators are uncorrelated with the predictors and with the dependent variable. As can be seen from Table 1, organisation size was uncorrelated or almost uncorrelated with career functions of mentor support (r = −.00),
### TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients for the Dependent and Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SDs</th>
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<th>12</th>
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<th>15</th>
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<td>1. Advancement</td>
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<td>0.77</td>
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<td>2. Children</td>
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<td>3. Ambition</td>
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<td>0.53</td>
<td>-.04</td>
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<td>4. Education</td>
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<td>1.41</td>
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<td>5. Work experience</td>
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<td>.38</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<td>-.32</td>
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<td>6. Training &amp; Development</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.52</td>
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<td>7. Work hours</td>
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<td>8. Company changes</td>
<td>1.17</td>
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<td>9. Career breakthrough</td>
<td>2.26</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<td>10. Career functions</td>
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<td>.22</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.00</td>
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<td>11. Psychosocial functions</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>12. Internal networks</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. External networks</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Organisation size</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Male hierarchy</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** For the total sample, correlations of .07 and .08 are significant at $p < .05$, and of .09 and above are significant at $p < .01$.

*Mean is zero because advancement is the mean of $z$-scores.*
with internal \((r = .05)\) and external networks \((r = .06)\), and with advancement \((r = -.02)\). Similarly, male hierarchy was very weakly or weakly correlated with these five variables (the correlation coefficients ranged from \(-.14\) to \(.07\)). As a result, the findings of this study can be viewed with some confidence.

The Relationships between Social Factors and Advancement

Hypothesis 1 proposed that the career functions of mentor support would be positively related to women’s advancement in management. Table 2 shows that there was a main effect of career functions (Block 2), illustrating
that the more career functions women reported, the higher they advanced, supporting the hypothesis. There was also a main effect for psychosocial functions (Block 2), but in the opposite direction, illustrating that the more psychosocial functions women reported, the lower they advanced. Hypotheses 2a and 2b proposed that internal and external networks would be positively related to women’s advancement. As can be seen from Block 2 in Table 2, neither hypothesis was supported. Internal networks were not related, and external networks were negatively related, to women’s advancement.

The results of the social variables explained 1 per cent of the total variance in this model of women’s advancement in management. This reduction in the error of the model is small, partly because the link between social factors and advancement was examined in this study while controlling for many individual factors. The results of the model without control variables (available from the author on request) showed that the $R^2$ change for the social variables was 9 per cent for the overall sample, 7 per cent for the large banks, and 15 per cent for the small banks (all at $p < .001$). Hence, this provides a more rigorous test of the explanatory power of mentor support and networks vis-à-vis other important human capital factors.

Organisational Factors as Moderators

Hypothesis 3 proposed that organisation size would moderate the relationship between social factors (career functions of mentor support, internal and external networks) and women’s advancement, such that these relationships would be stronger in small than in large organisations. As can be seen from Block 4 in Table 2, organisation size moderates two of the three relationships. The significant interactions were plotted in Figures 1 and 2. As predicted,
the relationship between career functions of mentor support and advancement is stronger for women in small than in large banks (Figure 1). Contrary to what was predicted, the (negative) relationship between internal networks and advancement is stronger for women in small than in large banks (Figure 2). However, organisation size does not moderate the relationship between external networks and advancement. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported. Possible explanations for the unexpected finding plotted in Figure 2 are offered in the discussion section.

The results of the interaction terms by organisation size for the whole sample explained only 1 per cent of the total variance. However, this reduction in model error is still considered important, because it is difficult to detect interactions and moderator effects in field studies (McClelland & Judd, 1993).

Hypothesis 4 proposed that male hierarchies would moderate the positive relationships between social factors (career functions of mentor support, internal and external networks) and women’s advancement, such that male hierarchies will weaken these relationships. The degree to which hierarchies were male did not influence the relationships between any of the social variables and women’s advancement, as shown in the second Block 4 of Table 2. Hence, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Regression analyses were also performed that included interaction terms of organisation size and psychosocial functions of mentor support, and of male hierarchy and psychosocial functions of mentor support, because psychosocial functions were negatively related to women’s advancement in this study (Block 2, Table 2). The results (available from the author on request) showed that these interaction terms were not significant ($p > .05$).
DISCUSSION

The study’s aim was to examine if organisation size and the extent to which the hierarchy is predominantly male moderate the relationship between mentor support and networks and women’s advancement. This study contributes to current knowledge in three ways. First, the findings show that organisation size moderates the relationships between the social factors of career functions of mentor support and internal networks, and women’s advancement. Second, this study’s results indicate that the mentors and networks women have in banking are, generally, of limited help to their advancement. Of the four social factors examined in this study, only career functions of mentor support are positively related to women’s advancement, and more so for women working in small than in large banks. This finding is in line with the argument that women and their mentors are more visible in small than in large organisations. It may be easier for individuals who mentor women to establish relationships with, and be known by, decision-makers in small than in large organisations. Third, this study contributes to an emerging body of evidence (e.g. Tharenou, 2005) that shows that psychosocial functions of mentor support are negatively related to women’s advancement. It is possible that mentors provide, or women need, more psychosocial support, such as coaching and counselling, at lower than at higher levels of management. Alternatively, it is possible that women who advance in management in Australian banks either have male mentors who provide few psychosocial functions or are women who do not need the psychosocial functions that male mentors can provide.

In addition, an unexpected result is the negative relationship between internal networks and advancement for women in small banks. A possible explanation is that women working in small banks need to change companies for advancement due to fewer career opportunities in small banks compared to large. Although women in all banks might need to change companies to advance (see Table 2), women in small banks change companies more often than women in large banks (as previously mentioned). However, changing companies for promotion means that women will be less likely to develop a large supportive network in their current bank.

The size of the organisation does not moderate the negative relationship between external networks and women’s advancement. Based on the results of this study (available from the author upon request), women felt closest to female friends and relatives and appeared to rely mainly on them to discuss important matters. These external contacts are unlikely to have much power inside the organisation, regardless of its size. In turn, organisational size is unlikely to influence the composition of this type of external network made up of family and friends.

While organisation size moderates some of the relationships between social factors and advancement, the extent to which the hierarchy is male
does not. The lack of significant results may be because “male hierarchy” is a subjective, single-item measure, which may have led to the inaccurate measurement of the construct. However, this is unlikely to have been the case. The majority (83.6%) of the women in the current study indicated that they worked in areas with male-dominated managerial hierarchies above them and these reports are supported by Metz and Tharenou’s (1999) finding that the Australian banking industry has a male-dominated hierarchy. Metz and Tharenou (1999) used Affirmative Action Reports submitted by the banks to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency in their study. A more plausible explanation is that a direct and moderator effect of male hierarchy on the relationships between social factors and advancement might not have been detected in this study due to the homogeneity of the sample. Organisations in the same industry are likely to have hierarchies similarly dominated by men or women. This was supported by the fact that chi-square tests showed that large and small banks are similarly male dominated.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study, and Future Research

The strengths of this study are its large sample, use of many control variables, and use of moderator tests to explain women’s advancement in an increasingly complex work and social environment. The sample size and the number of control variables imbue confidence in the variance explained by the social factors of career and psychosocial functions of mentor support, and internal and external networks. The results of this study also indicate that models explaining women’s advancement should encompass the direct as well as the indirect effects of the factors being examined, for a more comprehensive understanding of women’s advancement in management. For example, the examination of direct effects alone in the current study would have led to the conclusion that the size of the organisation does not have an impact on women’s advancement (see Block 3 of Table 2). However, by examining the moderator effect of organisation size on the relationships between mentor support and networks and advancement, we now know that the effect of organisation size on women’s advancement is an indirect rather than a direct one.

As with many studies, the current study suffers from two limitations; namely, its cross-sectional nature and the homogeneity of the sample with regard to male hierarchy. Future study of the relationships between social variables and women’s advancement can benefit from a longitudinal approach to circumvent some of the alternative explanations associated with cross-sectional studies and, thus, provide evidence of possible causality. Future studies should also investigate the moderating effect of male hierarchy by using data from industries with different gender composition in their management structures.
Implications for Organisations

This study shows that the career functions of mentor support are positively related to women’s advance in management, but more so in small than in large banks. It is possible that mentors in small organisations, such as small banks, can influence the career decisions made about their mentees, because there are fewer players involved in the decision-making processes in small than in large organisations. Large organisations can simulate the environment of small ones by ensuring that the recommendations made by mentors have sufficient weight in the promotion and career development decisions made about women.

This study also shows that women in banks are likely to suffer from social isolation, because the managerial hierarchy is dominated by men. This partly explains why internal networks are not related to women’s advancement in banks. So, organisations with male-dominated hierarchies, like banks, can assist women advance in management by nurturing a culture of including women in their influential internal networks and of mentoring women. Such a culture can be encouraged, for example, by recognising the mentoring of women in performance appraisals and salary decisions. There is also evidence in banking that strong executive commitment to the voluntary, informal mentoring of women achieves cultural change and, thus, assists women’s advancement (Dreyfus, Lee, & Totta, 1995).

In conclusion, both large and small organisations can benefit from implementing the recommendations offered, such as the encouragement and reward of voluntary mentoring of women and their inclusion in influential work networks. These recommendations may be challenging to implement and may take time to show results, because they involve behavioural changes. Yet, organisations need to seriously consider them in light of the slow progress made in addressing the gender imbalance in management using other initiatives, such as the introduction of family friendly policies.

REFERENCES


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