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for women and business

NEW YORK
120 Wall Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10005
tel/ 212-514-7600
fax/ 212-514-8470

SAN JOSE
2825 North First Street, Suite 200
San Jose, CA 95134
tel/ 408-435-1300
fax/ 408-577-0425

TORONTO
8 King Street East, Suite 505
Toronto, Ontario M5C 1B5
tel/ 416-815-7600
fax/ 416-815-7601

info@catalyst.org
www.catalyst.org

Contact: Susan Nierenberg
snierenberg@catalyst.org 646-388-7744
Serena Fong
sfong@catalyst.org 646-388-7757

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Barriers Across Borders: Throughout Western Europe, Stereotypes of Women's Leadership Persist, with Potentially Far-Reaching Effects

Stereotyping Contributes to the Gender Gap in European Business Leadership

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, JUNE 13, 2006—Managers in Western European businesses subscribe to stereotypical perceptions about men's and women's leadership abilities regardless of actual aptitude and performance, according to *Different Cultures, Similar Perceptions: Stereotyping of Western European Business Leaders*, a study released today by **Catalyst**, the leading research and advisory services organization working to build inclusive environments and expand opportunities for women and business. The study was conducted in collaboration with the **Institute for Management Development** in Switzerland.

Previous research, including analyses of 45 studies, concluded that gender is not a good predictor of leadership performance. Yet this study showed that across cultures, managers consistently perceived differences in leadership behavior and effectiveness of women and men, even though prior research showed that leadership traits of men and women are similar.

Data analysis from four different cultural clusters in Western Europe—Nordic (Denmark, Norway, Sweden), Anglo (United Kingdom, United States), Germanic (Germany, The Netherlands), and Latin (Italy, France, Spain)—revealed striking consensus around stereotypical beliefs that women are better at “taking care” (i.e., supporting others) and men are better at “taking charge” (i.e., influencing superiors).

“This study confirmed that stereotyping knows no borders,” said **Ilene H. Lang, Catalyst President**. “Stereotyping clearly undermines and undervalues women's leadership capabilities. In this increasingly competitive global marketplace where companies must fully leverage all talent, they cannot do so if stereotyping of women prevails.”

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Despite the prevalence of stereotyping in general, the study did expose some significant differences in the nature and prevalence of stereotypic perceptions across cultural clusters. Somewhat paradoxically, *Different Cultures, Similar Perceptions: Stereotyping of Western European Business Leaders* found that stereotypic perceptions were more widespread in cultures with higher gender equality. Although Nordic nations are recognized for their high levels of women's representation and emphasis on gender equality, stereotypic perceptions were most prevalent in this cluster.

Some key similarities and differences the study found in stereotyping and its effects across clusters included:

Across Western Europe, a large majority of managers ranked inspiring as an important leadership attribute.

- Anglo, Latin, and Germanic managers also saw team-building as another important leadership behavior; Nordic managers placed a high value on delegating.

Stereotyping can have a different impact on women depending on which leadership behaviors their cultures value most.

- For example, Anglo men were the only group who perceived that women were relatively ineffective at inspiring others. This could be especially damaging for Anglo women as inspiring others was the leadership behavior respondents in the Anglo cluster valued most.
- Similarly, Nordic men perceived women as relatively ineffective at delegating, a behavior that was top-ranked by over three-quarters of Nordic respondents. This could have significant implications for Nordic women because if they are perceived as not as effective as men at delegating, they might not be given opportunities to advance.

Stereotypic perceptions on leadership behaviors that were not top-ranked in importance—especially those where managers perceived the largest differences between women's and men's abilities—can have significant spillover effects.

- Anglo, Germanic, Latin, and Nordic managers perceived the largest differences between women and men at supporting others, problem-solving, and influencing upward.
- If a woman is judged effective at supporting, she is more likely to be judged effective at team-building.
- Conversely, women's reputations at problem-solving could have an adverse effect on their perceived effectiveness at inspiring others—the most highly valued leadership behavior.

The study recognizes that eliminating stereotypes is not an easy feat. Moreover, since highly valued leadership behaviors often vary by regional clusters, global companies need to be particularly aware of these differences as they transfer their executives in and out of these cultures.

The study offers some concrete measures for companies to implement to curb stereotypic biases so they do not have a chance to influence behavior.

- Expose employees to advocates for women leaders.
- Engage men—through employee resource groups, discussion forums, or mentoring programs—as advocates for women in leadership.
- Through education, increase employees' abilities to monitor and control the effects of stereotyping on behavior.
- Define gender equality in measurable terms and evaluate managers' performance against these metrics.

Different Cultures, Similar Perceptions: Stereotyping of Western European Business Leaders is the first study in Catalyst's Barriers Series of research reports in which the organization examines specific barriers to women's advancement to business leadership positions in Western Europe. It follows similar research released earlier this year which studied aspects of stereotyping of U.S. business leadership against these metrics.

The report was sponsored by **General Motors Corporation** (lead sponsor) and **IBM** (participating sponsor).

Visit www.catalyst.org to **download the full report**.

About the survey

The survey analyzed the responses of 935 alumni of IMD (282 women and 653 men), of whom 42 percent were employed in top management positions, 51 percent in lower-middle-level management positions, and 7 percent in non-manager positions. By regional clusters, 37 percent were Germanic, 29 percent were Nordic, 18 percent were Latin, and 17 percent were Anglo.

About Catalyst

Catalyst is the leading research and advisory organization working with businesses and the professions to build inclusive environments and expand opportunities for women at work. As an independent, nonprofit membership organization, Catalyst uses a solutions-oriented approach that has earned the confidence of business leaders around the world. Catalyst conducts research on all aspects of women's career advancement and provides strategic and web-based consulting services on a global basis to help companies and firms advance women and build inclusive work environments. In addition, we honor exemplary business initiatives that promote women's leadership with our annual Catalyst Award. With offices in New York, San Jose, and Toronto, Catalyst is consistently ranked No. 1 among U.S. nonprofits focused on women's issues by The American Institute of Philanthropy.

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