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## **Where Are We?**

*– A case study of Asian women leadership development  
at A.P. Moller - Maersk Group*

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MSc in:

**Managing People, Knowledge, and Change**

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Lund University

**Supervisor**  
Saara Taalas

**Authors**  
Na, Yu  
Kyung Rim, Son

## Abstract

- Title:** Where are we?  
– A case study of Asian women leadership development at A.P. Moller - Maersk Group
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- Authors:** Na Yu & Kyung rim Son.
- Supervisor:** Saara Taalas
- Key Words:** Talent management, Leadership development, Modesty, Women, Asian culture, Networking.
- Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to try to understand how leadership development is addressed in talent management and how Asian women relate to the leadership development practice adopted, and the role culture, gender and networking play in Asian women leadership development in the company.
- Methodology:** The research is a qualitative study, in which the data is collected by interviews with selected employees from the case company, non participant observation, and secondary materials.
- Theoretical Perspective:** In the study three theoretical perspectives are introduced: Asian women leadership focusing on joint effect of gender and culture in terms of modesty, Talent management and leadership development for women.
- Empirical Foundation:** Seven interviews were conducted during research but four of them were used for main analysis. And field notes were taken during the observation. Additionally secondary materials from the case company's website were collected for analysis as well.
- Conclusions:** More effective human capital and social capital trainings organized by the company are required for Talent management. A diversified culture needs to be considered to improve women leadership development. Asian women's modesty characteristic hampers their leadership development and requires more attention from both Asian women and the company if the number of Asian female leaders is to increase.

## **Preface**

This report is for the final examination of the master program Managing People, Knowledge and Change at Lund University. The topic is to develop a new perspective on women's leadership development, especially for Asian women at a multinational company in Denmark – the A.P. Moller - Maersk Group, based on existing literature and empirical data generated in the case company.

The A.P. Moller - Maersk Group is a global conglomerate. Business is conducted in some 130 countries and it has a workforce of some 120,000 employees. In addition to owning one of the world's largest shipping companies, it is involved in a wide range of activities in the energy, logistics, retail and manufacturing industries.

One of the researchers, Na, has been working in the case company for 6 years, 3 years in Maersk China and 3 years in Denmark. She has work experience from both the HR department and Projects. Another researcher, Kyung Rim, is from South Korea. She studied in South Korea and Hong Kong before starting her Master program in Lund.

We would like to thank our supervisor Saara Taalas, who has inspired us to move the project in a more theoretical direction and who has provided us with valuable advice to get close to our subject. Further, I would like to thank colleagues at A.P. Moller Maersk who have contributed with valuable insights through the interviews and informal conversations, and in general have taken the time to discussing the project with us whenever we asked.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Research objectives**

This thesis is a report of leadership development practices for women in a large multinational company, the A.P. Moller – Maersk Group ( abbreviated APMM or Maersk ), focusing on Asian women. The research was conducted purely in the head quarter office in Copenhagen. The research mainly covers on talent management practice on women leadership development and Asian women’s adoption of it. The focus is on determining the role of gender, culture and networking play in Asian women’s leadership development, seen from the perspective of APMM and the Asian women.

Leadership is a never ending topic, and gender issue is a recurring topic of debate and study. Our research indicates that comparing attitudes or behaviour of male and female leaders, Female leaders tend to emphasize interpersonal aspects such as connection, relatedness, listening, empowering more than male leaders who favour task-focused aspects like competitiveness and control over their team (Astin & Leland, 1991). Therefore, besides developing male leaders as is tradition, more attention is now given to women leadership development in modern organizations. Firstly, different leadership style of men and women can be developed together for specific purposes in the organization development, thereby improving decision making through having a broader perspective. Secondly, promoting more female leaders in the management team could also project an image of a company that recruits the best person for the job irrespective of gender.

The A.P Moller - Maersk Group, operates in some 130 countries and has a workforce of

around 120,000 employees. We have found that Maersk pays attention to leadership development, with many leadership trainings and workshops organized for leaders globally. Maersk has signed the “Charter for More Women in Management”, developed by the Danish Ministry for Gender Equality. The company tries to increase in numbers of women in leader positions; attract women talents and retain high performing women.

Diversity website of APMM (2009) also shows that this is still an area where they have a clear deficit. In 2009, female applicants for Director Level position only made up 11.4% of the total, and only 9% of the directors in the global organization are female. The company has tried to remove potential internal barriers that may prevent women from pursuing a career as leaders. But why is the ratio still low? And what does it take to make women become leaders or apply high level positions? What has the company has done for leadership development? And is this effective enough in promoting female leaders?

Besides the gender issue mentioned above, we also discuss the effect of culture; Asian culture in particular. More and more Asian women are working in western countries or in international companies. The intersection of culture and gender is of particular interest in the leadership development of Asian women in the multinational corporations because both groups are underrepresented in management in organizations which are usually Western centred, and male dominated. Very few Asian women hold leadership positions in APMM. When taking ethnicity into consideration, we got the report<sup>1</sup> the company which shows that the percentage of Asian female leaders among Asian women is much lower than the percentage of Danish female leaders among Danish women. Also, in the women leadership workshop, there was only one woman from Asia among almost a hundred participants. We were quite interested in this imbalance, and wanted to investigate deeply into Asian

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1

women's leadership development in APMM. Although the company has many programs to development women's leadership, we wanted to know how this impacts development Asian women's leadership.

In this thesis, we started with the research on the APMM's practice on women leadership development under talent management program from two dimensions. One is from the company's perspective, and the other is from individual women's, especially Asian women's perspective.

## **1.2 Research questions**

- 1) How is leadership development addressed in talent management?
  - a). How does women leadership development manifest in company talent management practices?
  - b). How do Asian women relate to the leadership development practice adopted?
- 2) What roles do culture, gender and networking play in Asian women leadership development in the company?

## **1.3 Limitations**

This study has limitations which are caused by research scope, time, the number of interviewees, the choice of interviewees. Thus, a number of relevant topics will not be evaluated and discussed. These are listed below.



- Difference in leadership development and networking between Dane women and Asian women in APMM
- The financial influence of promoting women leaders
- The international aspect of the company, the focus is only for Denmark

In spite of these limitations, the present study is still deemed relevant and covering for the stated research questions. Investigating these subjects in future research could bring interesting additions and modifications to the findings of this study.

## **2. Research Method**

### **2.1 Case Company**

#### **2.1.1 Why A.P. Moller - Maersk Group**

A.P. Moller - Maersk Group is a famous international company with a good reputation and image in the market. The company puts a lot of effort in people development, training and promoting internal potential leaders as well as recruiting good candidates from externally, irrespective of gender or race. In this gender and culture diversified company, how the company practices leadership development and how people from different regions adopt these practices seem very interesting to make the research.

Besides, one of the researchers Na has been working for this company for almost 6 years. She used to work in Maersk China and then transferred to Copenhagen 2 years ago. As an Asian women working in this big multicultural company, she has many empirical experiences on leadership development from an Asian woman's perspective and we really want to exam what she has experienced in depth by a theoretical research. The company is currently taking many actions in a highly debated field of research wherefore it will be interesting to investigate how these actions support or reject the theory. Further on, she could get access to company resources easily such as interviews and website. The company is currently taking many actions in a highly debated field of research wherefore it will be interesting to investigate how these actions support or reject the theory. At the end, hopefully, this project is not only the completion of our Master program but will also benefit company in relation to women leadership development. Therefore, A.P. Moller – Maersk Group was targeted as our case

company to do the research.

### **2.1.2 Women Leadership Program**

Being a large multinational company, APMM is always in pursuit of new talent for its global business. It puts much effort on women talent management which will help secure a sound talent base in APMM and help to facilitate the goal of utilizing all high performing women in the organization. Currently, women talent management focuses mainly on staffing/recruitment and leadership development.

In the recruitment process, the company takes pride in recruiting the best person for the job irrespective of gender, in order to attract talent and gain access to a larger talent pool, to develop high performers, and to secure the leadership pipeline needed to carry the company forward. This is further explained by the company CEO.

‘A.P. Moller – Maersk Group is largely a diverse company where we take pride in recruiting the best person for the job irrespective of gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, or religious belief. Looking ahead we want to drive multiple forms of diversity more proactively. The initial focus will be on gender diversity, because this is an area where we have a clear deficit.

It is our aspiration to increase the number of women in senior management positions significantly over time. To obtain that goal we will work actively to remove potential internal barriers that may prevent women from pursuing a career as leaders.’ (CEO, Nils S. Anderson<sup>2</sup>)

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2 Sources: A.P. Moller- Maersk Diversity Site

<http://apmportal.apmoller.net/group%20functions/human%20resources/diverse@maersk/pages/default.aspx> [Accessed 24 March 2010]

Meanwhile, as part of talent management, women leadership development has been practiced in the company. Some women leadership trainings and women leadership networking workshops have been organized in the case company to expand the potential talent pool. Women leadership program was only launched in the headquarter office in 2008, and that program will expand to a global effect in 2011. Woman leadership development mainly focuses on women leaders in Copenhagen area, who are general manager level and above, and aimed to increase the women leader numbers from General Manager 17% 2009 to 20% 2014; Director 9% and VP 4% in 2009 to 15% and 10% respectively in 2014. Meanwhile the company expects more women leaders to apply to higher level positions in the following years.

Our research started from the gender diversity website and went further to the women leadership development to examine how women leadership development manifests in the talent management through interview and secondary material analysis then we conducted some interviews with Asian women and an observation of a women leader group activity to see how they relate to the leadership development practice adopted, and what role gender, culture and networking play in their leadership development in the case company.

## **2.2 Research methods**

Qualitative analysis has been used mainly for this thesis. Qualitative inquiry employs different knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003). It then could provide a deeper understanding (Silverman, 2005) of the research. Qualitative analysis prioritizes the study of perception, meanings and emotions as well as behavior which aims to figure out authentic insights and study how phenomena are

constructed (ibid.). Qualitative research includes interviews, observation, texts, audio or video recordings and so on (ibid.). In this project, we mainly used qualitative research, such as interviews, observation and secondary material like company website, presentation. Quantitative research is also a good method however due to the time and resources limitation, we didn't use that in our project.

### **2.2.1 Interview**

The best way to learn people's subjective experience is to ask them about it and listen carefully to what they say (Auerbach et al, 2003). That is also a powerful method of producing knowledge of the human situation (Flick, 2007). It is a sequence of actions describing a specific episode located in (past) time, and an evaluation of the happening (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). In this project, we still refer to the romanticists approach to the interview, as it is defined by Alvesson (2003), which advocates for a more genuine human interaction in the interview situation.

We chose interview as one of our research methods and conducted seven interviews in a targeted group with different nationalities and levels, as we aimed for a high level of diversity in the information. The interviews were carried out in English, a foreign language for both interviewers and interviewees. The interviews took place in meeting rooms in case company. Prior to the interviews, a short introduction of us and our research topic was presented to the interviewees and as agreed, we recorded each interview to secure data quality for the further analysis. As Creswell (2003) claimed, qualitative research is emergent rather than prefigured, meaning that interview questions could be changed for situated purpose. During the interview, although we prepared some questions for the interviewers, our strategy was to control the

overall line of questions (ibid.), evoking or guiding participants to involve as much as possible rather than insisting on specific questions. Therefore, some non-prepared questions were asked and some valuable answers were received. After the interviews we transcribed the seven interviews based on Riessman's (1993) suggestion; firstly we started with a rough transcription, and then went back and re-transcribe selected portions for detailed analysis. Interviewee information is as below:

Women leadership network workshop's organizer from Group Human Resources Talent Management Team, she is:

Louise Jensen, General Manager, Dane. She works in Group Human Resources and she is the organizer of women leadership program in Denmark. She has been working here for 10 years. Prior to Group HR, she worked as an HR consultant in the biggest Unit, Maersk Line.

With this interview, we aimed to get an overall idea of the initiatives taken in the relation to women leadership development. She provided more vivid information on how women leadership development manifests in the company talent management practices, and further provided her perspectives on the influence of gender, culture and network on women leadership development.

Furthermore, we conducted some interviews with Asian women working in the case company in Copenhagen from different levels and nationalities to investigate how Asian women adopt the leadership development practices. We conducted 7 interviews with Asian women with different nationalities and levels; we aimed to make the diversity on collecting information. However in this thesis, only 3 of them will be used because their stories are more relevant to

our research. They are:

Samantha Li, Senior General Manager, 32 years old, Chinese. She has been working in the company for almost 11 years. As a Maersk Trainee, she worked in China, US and Denmark respectively in the past 10 years, and now she works in the key business department in Maersk, where she is one of the few Asian women leaders in the headquarter office. She lives alone for career development while her husband is living in the States.

Kelly, Chinese, 28 years old, She joined A.P. Maersk after her university in China and has been working for the company for 6 years. She used to work in Maersk China, and 2 years ago, she moved to Denmark due to her husband's job transfer. At that time, she sacrificed her career development to be an HR manager in China, and took an entry level HR position in Denmark.

Maebe, Pilipino, 34 years old. She married a Dane and moved to Denmark 2 years ago. She was a school teacher in her home country and now she has worked in Human Resources as an Assistant for more than 2 years. She is the most experienced person in the team; however, she has had no promotion since she joined.

### **2.2.2 Observation**

As the observer, the researcher can gain firsthand experience with the participants and record information as it is revealed (Creswell, 2003). In the observation, the researcher might get some answers of what he or she could not ask face to face in the interview. Moreover, the researcher can also observe the tension of the participants, discourse in the organization as

well as power relationship etc.

The women leadership network meeting aims to create opportunities for women leaders to share knowledge, exchange resources, and build up their network. In order to get a better understanding of the real practices of the company's women leadership network sessions, its effectiveness and women leaders adoption on that, we acted as observers of a discussion in one of the women leadership network groups. There were five participants from various business units and countries. Actually there was supposed to be ten persons, however due to other priorities, only five showed up. Firstly we introduced ourselves and our purpose of joining the meeting, and then we sat aside and took some field notes. The meeting lasted for one hour. After the observation, we went through all field notes immediately to ensure its accuracy.

### **2.2.3 Secondary Material**

Using secondary material is a quick method to get to the point and it saves time and expenses of transcribing (ibid.). It enables us to find out historical data, and could recognize the language used in the material for further analysis. Besides that, it provides opportunities for participants to directly share the reality of the past (ibid.). Because one of our researchers works for the case company, we have an easy access to company resources. For the secondary material, we mainly focused on the structure of company websites, language used in some presentation slides and stories. Basically, we went through all company leadership development websites, including the gender diversity site and women leadership workshop slides and project charter etc.



## **2.2.4 Limitations on Research Methods**

### Interview

As one of the major position on interviewing, romanticism claims for the trust and commitment between interviewer and interviewee. However, it hardly guarantees truthful interview statements that give a realistic picture (Alvesson, 2003). The interview is a political actor rather than a truth teller (ibid.). Under this discourse, especially we name the interviewees in this report and researcher knows all of them, it is the potential risk if they could not speak freely. Therefore, we need to question the reality or validity of information collected from interviews. And sometimes the interviewee provides indirect information (Creswell, 2003), which calls for an intensive sense making on behalf of interviewees (Alvesson, 2003). Although we do not approach reality as tabula rasa, it is not easy to be objective and accurate to make sense all the time.

### Observation

When conducting an observation, firstly, the observer may be seen as intrusive and not welcome in the present situation (Creswell, 2003). Secondly, people working in the observed organizations might use “insider” language to hide the truth purposely, for example, during our observation, they used the language “you know” or “as I told you last time” which cannot be unfolded by us as an outsider of the meeting. Language used could block the way to the reality. From researcher’s part, for example, the field note, even though we tried to review our field notes immediately after the observation, there still might be some missing points or unclear handwriting notes.

## Secondary Material Analysis

Secondary material is easier for collection and comparison than primary material, for example, less time used for data collection, however, it is less immediate (Rozakis, 2007). Secondary material can be treated as historical information which might be out of date. Some website information was updated in 2008 which is not the most valuable material to review. Moreover, as said by Creswell (2003) we got some useful data from documents, however due to company restrictions, we can not include these in the thesis. In our case, we had plenty of figures on women leaders and the company's ambitions on the topic, however we need to get permission from the company before some of the data can be shared with the public.

### **2.3 Conclusion of research methods**

Qualitative analysis is a socially constructed nature of reality and one cannot escape the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis (ibid.). Interviews, observations and secondary material are not always objective and accurate. We cannot rank them or choose the best, and no method of research is intrinsically better than others; everything depends upon what we are trying to find out (Silverman, 2005). Therefore, in our project, we combined three research methods together for the situated purposes.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Asian women Leadership**

The intersection of gender and culture is of particular interest in the development of Asian female leaders in multinational corporations, because each woman represents an oppressed force in the organizations, especially if the company is Western and male-dominated. Asian women's gender role has been reinforced by their Asian culture, which is considered to be more passive and patriarchal – a “traditional” culture (Espiritu, 1997).

In this section, we first review leadership studies with respect to the gender issue and introduce women's networking as one of the skills which are required to develop leadership. We then identify the cultural impacts on the gender role, especially focusing on the modesty effect, which is a widely researched area in the social psychology and has direct relevance to understanding leadership development of Asian women (Budworth & Mann, 2010). Because the modesty effect literatures rarely have examined the joint effects of gender and culture on leadership development, our thesis is one of the few studies of the joint effects of gender and culture.

##### **3.1.1 Leadership and Gender**

Gender studies have become a popular area of leadership research. However, gender roles continue to present a contradictory and confusing picture that illustrates a dissonance between theory and practice. Academics and the public have lauded women as having the skills necessary for leadership in the twenty-first century (Eagly, et al., 2003; Sinclair, 1995). At the

same time, female leaders still are evaluated less favourably than their male counterparts, and equally-qualified women often lose out to men when competing to attain leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, 2007).

Many studies have demonstrated several advantages of having a woman leader. In consistent with this issue, in modern organizations, they work on the female leaders' development. Indeed, women's intuition and sensitivity in certain situations make them stronger leaders. In transformational leadership women leaders tend to believe in and support interpersonal aspects such as connection, relatedness, listening and empowerment (Astin & Leland, 1991). As claimed by Eagly & Carli (2007), women's leadership style – characterized by innovation, building trust and empowering followers – is ideally suited to today's business challenges.

Gender is a socially-constructed topic; specifically, there are differences in gender role expectations and responsibilities for women and men (Chin, et al., 2007). Normally, women are expected to do more housework than men and to look after children. However, nowadays we can see that more and more men are accepting responsibility for childcare. The situation is changing over time, together with the development of a more gender-equal environment. Recently, it can be observed that gender-related biases still exist. Many women leaders are questioned regarding their capabilities and it is assumed that they attained leader positions only because of affirmative action (ibid.). Gender discrimination can be changed only if our social institutions and organizations become more gender-equitable.

Some research outcomes suggest that gender can be considered as a moderate variable in leadership. Both male and female leaders contribute differently to organizational change and development. Therefore, to optimize leadership skills, companies need to develop leadership

skills regardless of gender and use different leadership styles for situated purposes.

### **3.1.2 Women's Networking**

Networking is one of the leadership development skills which are positively related to recognition and promotion in the organization. It is also one of the most important regarding points of both women and minorities who are considered a limited access to resources which are critical for career development, daily business problem-solving and socio-psychological support. Such supports are easily and usually available within the informal, personal networks in organizations (Miller, et al., 1975). Therefore, limited access to networking can cause many disadvantage in the organization, ranging from restricted information about the current situation to difficulty in forming or being part of a network (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990).

Early studies on networking with relation to gender argued that men had more fully developed informal networks than women. Some studies insisted that there is a significant gender difference in the impact of informal networks in career success. Ibarra (1993) argue that differences in personal networks between genders favours men. This means that women have less chance to broaden their network beyond associations based on the similar interests. For example, Ibarra's studies (1992a, b) of gender differences in the networking of managers in the USA showed that men's networking was characterized by more high-status and male individuals, while women's networking was characterised by individuals with similar levels of education and experience.

Specific social elements in networking may also relate differently to men/women's and

majorities/minorities' career success (Van Emmerik, et al., 2006). Some studies show that women and minorities have a higher incidence of career interruption (e.g. maternity leave) and higher rates of inter-organizational mobility, so their relationships generally are less stable and more subject to disruption (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990).

### **3.1.3 Gender and Culture – The Modesty Effect**

Gender roles can be defined by culture. Social norms and expectations may reinforce the stereotype of gender roles in a certain society; they provide behaviour guidelines for males to be 'masculine' and females to be 'feminine' (Kilianski, 2002). These stereotypes vary from culture to culture and have an impact on the way of life throughout (Franklin, 1984; Landrine, 1985; Harris, 1994).

The opposite of self-promotion, modest behaviour describes a set of management behaviour that plays down the self and recognises others for achievements. Modest behaviour may have a significant impact on an individual's leadership development. Self-promotional skills are positively related to acknowledgement, recognition and promotion, and easily are associated with qualities such as competence, confidence, and ambition, which are considered prerequisites for potential leaders (Rudman, 1998; Xiaohua et al, 2009). Modesty has been related to various career outcomes such as a successful performance in a job interview or effective networking (Kacmar, et al., 1992; Wade, 2001; Forret & Dougherty, 2004); nevertheless, modesty also may hide personal achievements, which then may be ignored.

The visibility created by effective self-promotion may benefit the individual. However,

choosing to avoid self-promotion does not lead to a neutral outcome. Unfortunately, talented individual contributors, up-and-coming leaders, and even experienced managers who avoid self-promotion also miss out on rewarding opportunities and new experiences, positive recognition and rewards, and increased confidence, credibility, and influence (Hernez-Broome, et al, 2009).

### **3.1.3.1 Gender – The Modesty Effect**

Even though self-promotional skills are crucial for career development regardless of gender, many studies argue that men seem to self-promote in very active and more straightforward ways, while women tend to be less visible (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2001; Linehan, 2001; Rugherford, 2001). Broadbridge (2004) explained that many female managers might consider such self-promotion activity to be a waste of their managers' valuable time. They thus remain anonymous and less visible to senior management, thus potentially affecting their career negatively.

Another reason for women's modest behaviour (non-self-promotional) is that a woman's assertive and confident manners are considered to be a violation of common, modest gender prescriptions (Rudman, 1998; Singh, et al., 2002). According to Berg et al (1981), women downplay their achievements, while men consistently self-promote their successes. Many studies argue that, due to a socialized gender role that considers modest women more positively, women may downplay their accomplishments in order to avoid being judged as unfeminine (Daubman & Sigall, 1997; Gould & Slone, 1982; Rudman & Glick, 1999). It seems that the modesty norm is more congruent with femininity rather than masculinity since females are stereotyped as being more nurturing and caring for others (Xiaohua et al, 2009).

Women's tendency to be modest in the reporting of their achievements has a major impact on the perception of their accomplishments in the workplace and on subsequent reward and promotion. It is a dilemma situation for women: if they behave in a modest way in order to fit into their expected gender roles, they may be perceived as more affable, but at a cost to their access to leadership positions and economic reward. In reverse, their non-modest behaviour leads to a *backlash effect* in which self-promotion may enhance perceptions of their qualifications, but at the cost of social rejection. This dilemma also may prove counterproductive to their career success in the organization. Consequently, women are not developed well if they self-promote, and damned if they do not (Rudman, 1998; Budworth & Mann, 2010).

As a result, women must make a choice between being an affable person and success in terms of career development. As a consequence, women are faced with a double-edged sword when it comes to entry into top-level management (Ibid, 2010).

### **3.1.2.2 Culture – The Modesty Effect**

Cultural background also has an effect on an individual's likelihood of making favourable self-evaluations. Chiu and Hong (2006) argued that both Eastern and Western cultural contexts motivate people to evaluate themselves favourably given the protective functions of favourable self evaluations. However, different cultural norms regulate the expression of this motive. In Eastern cultures, the dominant norm of modesty prescribes downplaying one's accomplishments and showing moderation in self-presentation, and discourages direct communication of favourable self-evaluations (Bond, et al., 1982; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Yoshida, et al., 1982).



There is evidence that the norm of modesty has a strong influence on self-presentation in Asian cultures. For example, in Chinese societies, students who showed self-effacing attributions were perceived more favourably than those who displayed self-enhancing attributions (Bond, et al., 1982). In addition, in Asian cultures, subscription to the modesty norm predicts stronger self-criticism and weaker self-enhancement. Asians also display self-enhancing behaviours (e.g., making self-serving attributions for their achievement outcomes) when the norm of modesty is not salient, as when the individuals' responses are completely private and anonymous (Kudo & Numazaki, 2003). In short, the available evidence is consistent with the idea that dominant cultural norms of self-presentation moderate overt expressions of favourable self-evaluations.

From the literature review on modesty effect above, we can deduce the joint effects of gender and culture on Asian women's modest behaviour. Their Asian cultural background reinforces not only modesty as a normative behaviour but also the traditional gender role which reconfirms social expectations regarding women's modesty. Therefore, Asian women easily can be considered a transparent, invisible person, especially in organizations in which the majority of members do not understand Asian, feminine modesty and perceive the behaviour as an incompetency.

### **3.2 Talent Management**

Companies currently spend a lot of money and time on talent management to drive retention of talent throughout the organization – and to ensure that the organization has the skills that it will need in place to respond to rapidly shifting situations (Hills, 2009). Some authors argue that talent management programs are made available to people in the organization who are

considered to be talents, while others claim that talent management should adopt a broad approach by recognizing that everyone has the capability and potential to display talent (Blass, 2007). It is a never-ending topic on the definition of talent management.

Talent management as a range of elements in a “value cycle” of employee issues includes the attraction phase (recruiting and contingent staffing), development (leadership development and assessment) and reward and retention. Therefore, leadership development is one of the key factors to manage, attract and retain talent.

Talent management is said to be critical to organizational success, being able to give a competitive edge through the identification, development and redeployment of talented employees (Iles, et al., 2010). Therefore, a lot of talent management practices are designed by an internal human resources department to attract the right people in the right jobs at the right time (Heinen & O’Neill, 2004), and it encompasses a broad range of HR practice areas (Cairns, 2009), such as professional leadership development, diversity, succession planning, etc. All of these elements must be included to develop an effective and comprehensive strategy for talent management.

### **3.3 Leadership Development for Women**

Leadership development as a part of talent management is an additional management process and opportunity (Blass, 2007). It has a significant impact on talent retention (Lockwood, 2006). Leadership development is a process through which required leadership skills may be developed gradually, for example by human and social capital training programs. Today’s organizations, more than ever, need effective leaders (Tseng, et al., 2010) for organizational

development, especially in a fast-speed economic growth society. It could be conceived that gender biases might be embedded into the most sophisticated leadership development systems; however, the development of more effective leaders requires the elimination of biases and the utilization of female top performers as well. Meanwhile, talent management also calls for diversity management. In this section, we will discuss leadership development for women in these two dimensions - human capital and social capital. The former focuses on individual skills development while the latter aims to achieve relational and interpersonal development.

### **3.3.1 Human Capital**

Leadership development is an ongoing process of training leadership skills, which has been traditionally conceptualized as an individual-level development (Day, 2000). Cappelli (2008) defines talent management simply as a matter of anticipating the need for human capital and then setting out a plan to meet it. The predominant emphasis in organizational leadership research has been on the human capital of individual leaders (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999).

Human capital training for women is crucial because women leaders need relevant leadership skills and abilities to be empowering, inspirational and visionary (Burns, 1978). Previous individual-level skill trainings for women were not enough or did not completely fit for developing recent women leaders, because women are more ambitious to be leaders than before and organizations are dynamic. Therefore, more specific individual leadership trainings for women are needed for situated purposes. Leadership development for women can come in the form of traditional classroom training sessions, such as training on women leadership skills – how to motivate, empower and engage subordinates in general.. Human

capital could also be improved through interventions such as mentoring or coaching by women leaders' managers. Within this tradition, a development plan mainly focuses on individual development to train women leaders' skills and abilities and perform effectively in any number of organizational roles (Day, 2000).

Many perspectives view the majority leadership development writing as too dependent on an individualistic orientation, which sees female talent essentially as a form of human capital. This neglects the importance of social capital. Because leadership for women does not only rely on their personal skills development but also asks for more upon collective/group actions which aimed at developing bonds, bridges, trust and networks (Iles, et al., 2010).

### **3.3.2 Social Capital**

Social or relational systems are needed to help build commitments among members of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Under this approach, leadership development is focused on building networking relationships among individuals, which enhance cooperation and resources exchange in creating organizational value (Bouty, 2000; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Researchers found that women think networking is time-consuming and a waste of time-- networking means courting people one loathes, and networking exploits relationships for professional gains. Based on the above, we could summarize that women are not interested in networking, which could be considered as a lack of effective leadership development in an interpersonal context (Day, 2000). On the contrary, researches also show that women have good networking skills outside of work, such as in the family or neighbourhood. However, networking at work could hardly be seen.

An integration strategy may be to help women understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks on the job by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives. Social capital skill trainings, especially instrumental networking, are needed. Such training should involve current job-related resources, as well as advice for career development and chance to meet upper management (Fombrun, 1982).

We should be aware that both individual and relational leadership development for women are important. Leadership in volatile and virtual environments requires careful attention to both the development of individual leaders and the development of leadership capacity in organizations overall (McCallum and O'Connell, 2009). The two kinds of capital are complementary (*ibid.*). Human capital advances organizational performance as individuals apply their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Social capital enhances performance through networked relationships that foster cooperation and resource exchange (Day, 2000). Human capital, such as personal communication skills, may enhance working relationships, resulting in increased social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). At the same time, social capital, such as trust generated through work relationships, may in turn enhance one's human capital (*ibid.*; Brass & Krackhardt, 1999). Therefore, we cannot ignore any of them, and leadership development should be designed to be appropriate to the situation in question (Paton, et al., 2007).

## **4. Case analysis**

In our analysis, we will try to use collected empirical data, for example, the stories from interviews, material from websites and observations of the workshop in order to see how women leadership development manifests in human resources development practice. We also want to ascertain how Asian women relate to the leadership development practice adopted, and further investigate the role culture, gender and networking plays in Asian women leadership development in the case company. Meanwhile, we will continue to refer to the leadership management theory, Asian women leadership theory and networking theory.

### **4.1 Company Perspective**

#### **4.1.1. Interview with Louise from Group HR**

(Louise, Dane, has been working in the HR department at A.P. MOLLER - MAERSK GROUP for 11 years. She now works in the Group HR talent management team, her focus areas are talent attraction and development. She is also the person in charge of gender diversity management and the women leadership network workshop. As a contact person in group relations, communicating A.P. Moller Maersk – Group’s HR items and issues is one of her responsibilities.)

*Interviewer: Why did the A.P. Moller - Maersk Group launch a women leadership development program?*

*Louise: It has been launched to ensure that we are considered an attractive proposition to a large proportion of talent, we have the leadership pipeline in order to lead the company forward,*

*we launched a number of initiatives, women leadership development program is only part of that.*

Talent management has been paid more and more attention in modern organizations to respond to the rapidly shifting sands that make up today's business environment (Hills, 2009). As a large multinational company, the A.P. Moller Maersk – Group also follows management trend tightly. The initiative on women leadership development is to create “*a large talent*” pool. The activity was organized by HR to develop female talent to ensure the company has the “*leadership pipeline in order to lead the company forward*”. From the company website, we could also see that women leadership program aims to achieve talent management's value cycle of the attraction phase and development at the same time. Talent management is the biggest strategic challenge facing HR professionals (Crabb, 2007), in Maersk, “*women leadership development program is only part of that*”. And as a person in charge of talent management, Louise uses ‘we’ instead of ‘I’. It may show that she is talking as a representative of the company's opinion, more examples of this was found frequently during the interview.

The company's website shows some action plans for women leadership development and networking is ranked as the top priority. When we asked how and why HR chose networking as a main focus to develop women, Louise said:

*“When we worked on the diversity drive, before it was launched, we did a number of things, we did interviews internally, we had some work groups that we discussed various options because there is a lot of practices, suggestions on what is it then you need to do to be attractive to female. The one we should focus on and they suggested that we establish women leadership network.”*

The company's intention on “*Diversity*” is to drive forward the needs of women leader's development. Women must be treated as potential talent in these times and this has been

given a lot of attention in the A.P Moller Maersk - Group because when women do occupy leadership positions, they display different leadership styles compared to males. Especially in the case of a company that claims to promote gender diversity and equality. Based on the feasibility study, network is the main deficit area in terms of leadership development of women in Maersk Copenhagen. In order to change this situation and refer to “*interviews and group discussion*” instead of assumptions, HR chose women leadership network as their starting point as one of the talent management program.

*“It was established based on the request from the organization with the aim of creating transparency, establishing platform of women to get to know each other across business units, job grade. (...) we would like to communicate and have an interaction with all groups and all groups are able to meet each other but the small groups are also put together based on job grades and business units spend. You can use your network in your current job for business problem solve or just sparing about various issues.”*

The company built the “*platform of women to get to know each other*” and “*interaction with all groups*” to develop the social capital of leaders through women leadership network workshops and small group meetings. It enhanced cooperation and resources exchange in creating organizational value (Bouty, 2000; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Moreover, women leaders were encouraged to share their experiences, knowledge and leadership skills in the workshops or small group meetings in an interpersonal context (Day, 2000).

Besides the intention to create more opportunities for women leaders to share their knowledge and exchange their resources through formal network, the company also wants to use the women leadership network workshop to enhance women leaders’ networking by all chances. Louise said:



*“Having a good networking is very important to your career, no matter women or men. We know from a lot of researches, people get job opportunities based on the network. And we knew from the research that men are a lot better at using the network than women are. And women tend to not prioritize or spend time on networking. They focus on doing the job and family.”*

The company realized that networks are important “no matter women or men” to achieve hierarchical levels and that is essential for success in any professional career. Therefore HR took networking as part of leadership development for employees’ career development. “Men are a lot better at using the network than women are” leads to the disadvantage of women by restricted information about the current situation and difficulty in forming or being part of network (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). In order to break this situation, HR chose networking for women leadership development to give women more “advices for career development and chance to meet upper management” (Fombrun, 1982).

Gender is a socially constructed topic; specifically there are differing gender role expectations and responsibilities for women and men (Chin, et al., 2007). Women normally go home immediately to take care of their children and do some housework after work instead of drinking a beer at the bar. The impression on working women is “*they focus on doing the job and family*”, because women often have networks centred on the home. It also could be seen that women’s networking might be less stable than men and more subject to disruption (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990), such as, incidence of career interruption (e.g. maternity leave).

The company’s main goal of implementing women leadership development program keep revealing throughout the interview. They want to be attractive to talented women, develop

their human capital and social capital through formal leadership training and networking workshops etc. Louise also acknowledged that *“difficulties in accounting the existing organizational barriers exactly but focus areas may help the company to approach to these problems”*. For example, besides the networking workshop, the company launched flexibility policies in the organization to support women leaders in a systematic way.

*“We are not attractive to that female population from the outside and we know that we lose people internally as well, if we appear both outside also internally to be more flexible, if we have broader career path than what we’ve had had so far, and you can actually combine family and work life and you can actually come back from maternity leave and have a flexible work package meaning that you can combine both sides.”*

Eliminating the barriers for women on their development could give individuals a legal ground to sue organizations for unequal treatment (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). However it could be conceived that some women leaders still can not get back to the same position after maternity leave or some of them unfortunately lose their jobs because of the organizational structure change. The company tries to represent its fantasy image of equal treatment for men and women; however, the gap between talk and action is not easily explicitly acknowledged (Brakel, 2000). But it is an improvement that HR has been aware of this barrier and tries to make the change.

When mentioning the barriers of women leadership development, we prepared some questions for the interview which are culture’s influences on it. If we just take Asian women in A.P. Moller Maersk Copenhagen headquarter office into consideration, there are few of them could be seen as leaders. As we thought, it might because of their culture background or gender identity. In order to exam how HR leader see culture difference and its effects on

women's leadership, we started the below dialogues.

*Interviewer: In this international company, you have many colleagues or women leaders who are from different regions, can you see the difference on the leadership regarding to the culture?*

*Louise: Our experiences show that we want the same thing, and are equally ambitious and the same things that drive our career, irrespectively, whether you're from China or Denmark or US. So we don't see any differences in nationalities based on this.*

*Interviewer: so is it more on gender, rather than culture for women leadership development?*

*Louise: It's more on gender. Yeah.*

Louise, a Talent Management manager, cannot “*see any differences in nationalities*” on leadership development. As a Danish woman works in her home country, she claimed that no matter where you are from, you are “*the same*”. And in her opinion, gender impacts leadership development more than culture. However, a number of scholars have shown how cultural values and traditions can influence the attitudes and behaviours of leaders and culture also defines gender roles (Littrell & Nkomo, 2005). The reason why Louise doesn't realize culture's impact on women leadership might be because she is Dane working in her home country where her culture comfort zone is.

We were a bit surprised that Louise didn't think culture matters, so we continue asked why the number of Asian women leaders is quite low and how to develop Asian women leaders.

*Louise: I think that is because it is here in Denmark, also the situation or seeking job opportunities outside of your own country is that also something that, women are more hesitant in doing than men. But in order to boost the numbers, we need to be attractive to women outside*

*of Denmark as well, because we don't have Danish population to actually fill the numbers.*

She attributed the reason of small number of Asian to the small population of Asian women employees in Denmark, however, according to additional research on Asian women ratio and Asian women leader ratio, only 3% of Asian women got promoted to manager level while 15% of Danish women became managers. Obviously that is not a geographical impact. Another reason is because Asian women are devoted and loyal to their families (Northouse, 2009), so they don't want to seek the job "*outside your own counties*". But Louise at the same time admitted that the company needs to attract non-Danish women and develop them because "*they are potential group for further leadership development in the organization*", but she didn't mention how to attract Asian women to work overseas. Regarding how to develop Asian women leaders, she had no clear clue on the point "*I really haven't been thought about it because we're sort of just looking at the population that we're having here*", but "*women leadership development is in general for all, no matter where they are from*".

In the interview, she was trying to separate her personal opinion with the company's perspectives by using different subjects and she emphasized "*some of things are more personalized*". But as a manager in charge of Talent management and diversity management, her personal experiences and opinions may have an affect on the implementation of the program.

*Interviewer: What the role organizational culture play in shaping leadership conception?*

*Louise: I also think it is very much about cultural mindset change, it is about changing the habits, what people always have done. And a lot of male leaders still say that 'well this is the men's industry, difficult to find women' oh yeah maybe difficult but it can be done.*

The company culture shared from one generation of members to the next (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Maersk started its business with shipping and still have business units mainly related to shipping area which is considered male-dominated industry and masculine cultural atmosphere. Organizational culture has been embedded in the organization for a long time, as mentioned by Alvesson & Sveningsson (2007) that is a difficult project to make a change of culture in this *'men's industry, difficult to find women'*. But we can see that Maersk is making the change of culture overtime to recruit, attract, develop talents irrespective of gender and culture, however, still, Asian women may have double difficulties in the organization.

## **4.2 Asian women's perspectives**

In the following text, we will make the detailed analysis based on the interviews with some Asian women, by using contents analysis. We did individual interviews with 6 Asian women, but we chose 3 interviews which we could find relevant contents related to our topic. We will continuously refer to the Women Leadership development theory, Asian women leadership theory and networking theory to unfold the meaning and apply them into Asian women's daily life in the case company.

### **4.2.1 Interview with Kelly**

Kelly, Chinese, 28 years old, She joined A.P. Maersk after her university in China and has been working for the company for almost 6 years. She used to work in Maersk China, and 2 years ago, she moved to Denmark due to her husband's job transfer. At that time, she sacrificed her career development to be a HR manager in China, and took the entry level HR

position in Denmark.

*Interviewer: What do you think of the women leadership development program?*

*Kelly: Em...I know women leadership program from company gender diversity site. It's a good initiative from company to develop women leaders and give them equal chance to take managerial role as men. Maybe because company has been aware that female leader and male leader's leadership skills are different, management wants to optimise all resources, I guess. I could see the figures on website that they want to promote general manager from low ratio to a higher one in 5 years, but there is no change around me.*

Kelly was not confident to answer this question, because “maybe”, “I guess”, “em” have been used frequently. She appreciated the company’s effort on women, however no impression on what the impact was on her. As parts of talent management at Maersk, women leadership development has not been widely diffused in the company, especially for junior women. Women leadership development exists as an agenda in the organization, but considering leadership as a practice and a process, actual efforts on implementation of the agenda are required.

When we asked if she wants to be a leader, Kelly said,

*“Of course I want, but it is very hard due to many objective reasons, for example, my instability. I transferred to Copenhagen because of my husband and had to give up my career in China. And my current manager in Copenhagen assumes that I will go back when my husband contract expires, although that is not my plan. I have no career build up in these 3 years.”*

We feel Kelly’s concern of being a woman leader because of boss’s biases. The woman is considered as a family orientated person and devoted and loyal to their families (Northouse,

2009). In Kelly's case, her manager thought Kelly would go back with her husband because she came here for him. If managers take family reason to measure and promote followers, gender equality cannot be achieved, and women leadership development needs to be questioned.

*Kelly: That is one of the reasons, still have some other barriers.*

*Interviewer: Such as?*

*Kelly: My personality. Because my boss said I have the very humbleness approach while doing the work in the team, sometimes I am invisible and he couldn't see my ambition, if I want to be the leader, change is a must.*

As most of Asian women, Kelly is considered as a humble and affable person in the job because gender provides behaviour guideline females to be 'feminine' (Kilianski, 2002). But her boss sees her behaviour as "invisible" and no "ambition" which is the barrier to be the leader. Women inherently behave in a modest way in to fit into their expected gender roles may result in being affable, but at a cost to access to leadership positions and economic reward (Budworth & Mann, 2010).

*"I am an active person in China, while moving to Denmark, I became quiet. It's not because I don't want to speak out, such as in the meeting, I rarely have chance to express my views, other colleagues are too talkative, and most of the time I was interrupted before I finished the speech."*

Irrespective of her personality, there are many other reasons result in her invisibility in Denmark, such as different culture background and educational background. As researchers are all from Asia, we all know that in Confucian culture counties, where modesty values more

than self-promotion behaviour, people show their respect or modesty during talk by not disturbing others; from their educational background, students who showed self-effacing attributions were perceived more favourably than those who displayed self-enhancing attributions (Bond, et al., 1982), therefore most of students just follow and learn instead of critique and discussion in class. That leads to the same phenomenon in the office.

*“So, it’s better to say nothing especially when I am not sure my ideas are right or wrong. It’s also responsible for others.”*

In Asian cultures, subscription to the modesty norm predicts stronger self-criticism and weaker self-enhancement (Kudo & Numazaki, 2003). Kelly emphasized the correctness of her ideas before she voices out, and she only wants to contribute to the topic when that is helpful to others. Rather than be active in the meeting and show her importance by talking a lot.

After a few seconds silence, she said:

*“But I know I need to change myself since I am in Denmark, and I need to be visible and communicate more with my manager.”*

As said by Kelly “*I know I need to change myself*” shows her willingness to eliminate the modesty functions barrier to get promoted in the company and “*more communication*” is needed to achieve a self-enhancement.

*Interviewee: For your development in Maersk Denmark, what do you think is the bigger obstacle, gender or culture?*



*Kelly: Both, but cultural difference accounts for more in Denmark.*

People in Denmark, which is one of the most egalitarian societies in the world, call for the right of gender equality. Government and company try to apply this concept by making gender diversity in the organization, at least their intention is to make the number balanced and ensure no mistreatment. Also as mentioned by Kelly *“I remembered a HR meeting, all HR staff got together and gave some feedbacks on what could HR management improve for HR function’s development. Some Danish women asked for the equal right. They challenged management why all HR low level employees are women, why don’t they hire a guy to work on the assistant role. At that time, I was wondering, why they have this kind of question which I have never thought about?”*

Obviously, culture makes difference of the way people think and behave towards gender issue. Gender roles and understanding vary from culture to culture and have impacts on the way of life through (Franklin, 1984; Landrine, 1985; Harris, 1994). In this sense, we can understand her saying *“I was wondering, why they have this kind of question which I have never thought about?”*

As an Asian woman, Kelly does have some difficulties for development in Maersk Headquarter office in Denmark where most of employees are from local or other European countries. And through her interview, she appreciated company’s women leadership program, but she is in doubt of her development in Maersk because of her personality and behaviour which can be attributed to the woman gender and Asian culture.

#### **4.2.2 Interview with Samantha**

Samantha, 32 years old, Chinese, has been working in A.P. Moller Maersk for 11 years. She is a Senior General Manager in one of the Maersk key business functions in Denmark. She joined company in 1999 as a Trainee, after working in Maersk China for a couple of years, she expatriated to United States for 5 years, because of organizational change, she moved to Denmark 2 years ago. She married to a Canadian Chinese who is stilling working in the United States. However because of career development and other reasons, they have to be apart for 2 years while Samantha is in Denmark.

*Interviewer: Are you familiar with gender diversity program in the company?*

*Samantha: Yes, I am one of the participants of women leadership network group which is under gender diversity initiative.*

*Interviewer: Do you like that program?*

*Samantha: Yeah, sure. I knew some new women leaders from other business unit, we learn the woman leadership knowledge by formal trainings and share the experiences and build the good network in the workshop.*

The company's intention of organizing this women leadership network is to develop women leaders' leadership skills by "formal training" and some resources exchange by "sharing the knowledge". Company's practice has been accepted by women leader and they could benefit from the program on developing human and social capital.

*Interviewer: How do you think of the woman leadership Network? Is that important for women leadership development?*

*Samantha: Not only for women, but for both. I could see many job opportunities gained through networking in this company. However woman's networking is usually weaker than men in that sense. So that's quite important to fill in the blank of women's networking weakness.*

She emphasized the importance of networking and how crucial it is for both men and women, because “*many opportunities gained through the networking in the company*”. Networking is a way to achieve hierarchical levels that is essential for success in any professional career. Women normally build networks in their small team or some similarities which may restrict their development. Therefore women network workshop could “*fill in the blank*”.

*Interviewer: Can you see something else that company has done for women leadership development around you?*

*Samantha: Not a lot. I do see from the website that company made some plans for gender diversity such as from recruitment. Company tries to offer the same opportunity to men and women when we hire people, however the truth is that few women can be promoted to high level positions. I think company's focus should not only on the recruitment equality but also on how to develop women after hiring, and how to get more women to the leadership position by some practices.*

Obviously, Samantha was not satisfied the company's action on women leadership development from a recruitment aspect. Talent management process includes staffing and recruitment, therefore, attract the right people in the right jobs at the right time from recruitment process is essential for talent management (Heinen & O'Neill, 2004). As an employee working for company for more than 10 years, she worried about women leaders' development. The company's initiative is good because at least the company makes it diversified when hiring people, however that's not enough. The most important thing is to keep developing women, especially preparing qualified women candidates to take high level

positions by leadership trainings.

*Interviewer: Few Asian women leaders could be seen in the company headquarter office, how do you look at this phenomenon?*

*Samantha: Firstly here is Denmark, actually there are not a lot of Asian women working here, therefore Asian women leaders are fewer than other nationalities.*

She is very rational when commenting on the low number of Asian women leaders. She emphasized that we cannot judge anything based on assumption; instead, data collection is needed. During the interview, we could conceive that she was confident of what she was saying. But our additional research shows only 3% of Asian women got promoted to manager level among Asian women, the figure of Danish women leader is 15%. So, that is not a geographical issue.

*“Secondly because of cultural background, Asian women normally are not active or don’t engage a lot for group discussion. Previously I don’t say anything unless I am sure that is 100 percent right, but now I changed a lot. I could contribute my idea whenever it springs to mind. No matter it is right or wrong. I have been working in this department for a long time; I am clear of its business and confident of my knowledge.”*

Because she has been living in western countries for such a long time, she felt her conduct has been changed. However culture is not something that you manipulate easily (Kotter, 1995). She dares to speak in front of public is not only because western culture impacts her a lot, but also because she has become an expert in her area when she is “*confident of my knowledge*”. We can also see that, as a successful Asian women leader, she behaves differently to normal Asian women because she could “*contribute my idea whenever it*

*springs to mind*” by sort of effective self-promotion. To develop Asian women leadership, she suggested a “*change*” from individual level.

*Actually I don't feel I am mistreated because I am a woman or I am from China. People are promoted based on their capabilities and performances.*

She attributed her high position to her “*capability and performance*” and denied the mistreatment from management of gender and nationality. And we could feel that she was proud of her position since it is almost an exception to be that high level as an Asian woman. For her, there is no obvious obstacle in the career development in this company because her position is even higher than some local people around. In her case, Chinese nationality and culture is a plus for her career build up because her main task in the company is to coordinate the business between China and other overseas countries.

So, when we asked what you think are the limitations for you, her answer is “*gender*”. In this case, culture helps her development, but she is ambitious to climb to high level, although she mentioned “*I am not mistreated because I am a woman*”. Furthermore, she is alone in Denmark, although gender is a socially constructed topic specifically there are differing gender role expectations and responsibilities for women and men (Chin, et al., 2007), but for her, she does not need to take this responsibility at the moment.

#### **4.2.3 Interview with Maebe**

Maebe, Filipino, 34 years old. She married a Dane and moved to Denmark 2 years ago. She

was a school teacher in her home country and now she works in Human Resources as an Assistant for more than 2 years, no promotion since she joined.

*Interviewer: how you think of the company gender diversity program?*

*Maebe: To me, I mean, personally, it does feel like it is encouraging, because it gives you inspiration you could get to somewhere. It promotes the openness that I mean women can get pregnant and they can go for maternity leave.*

She thanks for the gender diversity program because she could “*go for maternity leave*”. As per her understanding, pregnancy and maternity leave is the big barrier for women in their career development. She has the willingness or fantasy of being treated equally however no more details provided on why she thought of this, on the contrary, she also said:

*“However this company still also male-dominated, if you look at the members of the board, the LMB, the leadership management board, it is just I think there is only one woman, and rest are men. I don’t see the women leader number is increasing yet. But the doors are open, but I don’t know how to get in to the door. There maybe company culture whatever, social barriers that women are not allow to get into the door.”*

Obviously, she noticed the difficulties to get to a leader position. “*Doors are open*” is an opportunity, but “*how to get to the door*” is the challenge for her. There is no practice from the company to guide women to the door, especially for entry level women. The company puts their efforts on developing women leaders, but as an Asian women at entry level, she could also be the future leader however if no opportunities provided to develop them, the company cannot get more women leader as its plan.

Furthermore, Maebe was aware of culture and social impact on such situation. Since company started with shipping business in which founder and main employees were men, “*male-dominated culture*” in the case company still exists somehow. But organizational culture has been embedded in the organization for a long time, as mentioned by Alvesson & Sveningsson (2007) that is a “difficult project” to make the change. Therefore, company needs to put more energy on women leadership development.

*Interviewer: So you think company culture and social barriers are main issues preventing you becoming the leader?*

*Maebe: Not really, and also something else, like networking. I don't know a lot people in this company besides some team colleagues and Pilipino. Normally I go home after work rather than social.*

Gender wise, women are not eager to build network, sometimes they need a “push” from others to meet new people and keep that relationship, rather than their initial willingness to build network. And they tend to “*go home*” to relax in a quiet place at home, or do some housework, or accompany their families. Ibarra (1993) argue that differences in personal networks between genders favours men. It means that women have less chance to broaden their network beyond the networking based on the similarities, such as their “team colleagues” and people from the same country as she comes. Culture wise, as an Asian woman, she is not open to meet people which is beyond her comfortable zone, her networking limits at a small scope, especially in this foreign county.

As a woman from Asia, lack of networking results in few information or resources shared from others for higher positions. At the end of interview, Maebe emphasized the Asian

woman's leadership to individual level irrespective of gender, culture and networking dimensions. Leader's position is defined on "*what kind of background you have, what kind of education you have had, and what your profile is, very personal issue*".

This concept is also mentioned by other interviewees. From this point of view, personal capability decides the position. Although gender, culture and network etc play an important role at Asian woman's leadership, these are not the main indicators.

Before the interviews, we plan to find some similarities from Asian women; however answers vary from person to person according to their personal background, education, work experience and life experience. Almost all of them mentioned that culture, gender and networking impact on their leadership development in Denmark as Asian, however they are not ranked in the same order. Meanwhile, none of them talked any advantages as an Asian woman. They mainly focused on the negative part than positive. And some of them mentioned to make the change to fit for current organization and personal development needs. Can Asian women be true to themselves? The same question to other women leaders such as some women pretend to blend in with men by talking tough. That is certainly one way to avoid negative stereotyping (Goffee & Jones, 2000). However abandoning gender and culture difference could limit the broader perspectives on decision making and in terms of talent management, it also has negative impacts on organizational development.

### **4.3 Observation**

We joined one of the group discussion sessions which are followed by women leadership



workshop in February. One woman manager, Samantha sent an email to invite 10 people from two groups which are divided after workshop for discussion and network in small number, 5 people attended the meeting at company meeting room 320, at 11:10am. Before they started the discussion, we introduced ourselves and our research project and told them we join this meeting as nonparticipant observers. One of us took a note and based on that field note is made for our analysis.

Samantha: Chinese

Sandy: Canadian Chinese

Alexandra: British

Ebba: Italian

Karen: Dane

[It was my first time at Maersk, and first time at headquarter of any big company. A meeting supposed to start at 11a.m. we went to the meeting room earlier than the participants. It was neat, well-equipped meeting room. 5 minutes to 11, the first participant came; she was Ebba from Italy who is working at the corporate service center. We briefly introduced ourselves and our purpose of observation. And *I asked “do you know how many people are coming?” she said with her eyes on her watch “not sure, maybe 5 or more? It is hard to come here during the work hours, people would like to prioritize their own work rather than attending informal meeting like this”* soon Karen, Samantha and Sandy came into the room together, they seemed meet in front of the door. Everyone set on the chair and we set at the end of the table not to disturb their conversation. A few minutes later Alexandra came in and said ‘sorry I haven’t been to this side of building so took me a while to find here’ it was 11:10.]

From the first participant, we can see she is not fully motivated to join this meeting. She expects to get something from this time but at the same time she doubts about the possible

validity of this meeting. As a voluntary and informal meeting which is arranged by women who had participated women leadership workshop, there is no obligation to join this meeting. This may affect people when they prioritize informal meeting that newly begins and cannot guarantee its helpfulness compared to keep doing their daily basis work.

[Karen suggested to change the meeting time to early in the morning around 8:30 and Sandy also agreed because she works in Damco, 20mins walking distance from the main building so she preferred to have a meeting before she starts working rather than dropping by middle of the day. But Alexandra said, if they meet in the morning like 8:30, it would be hard for her to join because she has to bring her children to the day care center. So they decided to have next meeting at the same time as today and to have lunch together at the company cantin after today's discussion. After talking about the last session, introducing themselves, and time setting for the next meeting, there was silence for 5 more seconds. Some of them have met before but still silence happened many times during the discussion especially after they finish talking about one topic.]

It was not easy to decide the perfect meeting time and venue for everyone. They work in different buildings and have different schedule. Moreover, to participate, they seemed they are sacrificing their time. If she has family to take care of, she has to give up more than other women. Kamenou's study (2008) on people's perception of work-life balance according to gender and ethnicity show that negotiating work and life typically focus on time management, childcare. The interview data from her study have indicated that family responsibilities rested more on the female rather than male regardless of ethnicity. From this conversation, we could find consistent result with Linehan & Scullion' research(2008) that women often have less time available for networking due to additional family responsibilities when networks are available to women.

Considering accumulation human and social capital through women leadership workshop as a part of talent management, at the organizational level, it would be helpful for women to freely join and create this kind of voluntary meeting when the company encourage this with systematic supports which can ease the concern about spending working time or sacrificing personal duty. At the individual level, it is important to have strong motivation or beliefs to spend their time on enhancing social capital rather than having doubtful attitudes because the effect of social capital is additive to human capital. According to Greve, et al. (2010) social capital can augment human capital by adding support, solutions, help and suggestions to ongoing work processes. And it seems that women require seeking more on social capital since they have felt the disadvantageous situation in the organization for them to have necessary social capital.

[Finally Sandy asked what they want to achieve from this time. Samantha said her purpose is to build network with other women in APMM concerning low women ratio in high positions in the company. She did not explain how exactly network and getting promotion are related but seemed that she agrees network can be one of the area that women should improve to be a leader and everyone nodded when Samantha mentioned this. Next, Karen said for her, networking with other from different business units is also her main purpose and she was impressed by the company's recognition of its necessity and their efforts on building network among women managers. But she said she does not feel that the session and workshop need to have limited focus on gender. For Sandy, she wants to have female role models who can give her inspirations, and learn from the inspirations. Ebba has more specific purpose, she wants to know how to deal with daily issues such as how to posit her among majority men colleagues in the meeting, and get news inside and outside of Maersk line (her business unit). When she explained about daily issues, she said "guys, they don't worry as much as we do". Everyone nodded again. And silence happened again.]

Their main purpose to participate this meeting was building a network with women managers

from different business units. Karen considered network building, leadership development are not gender matters but an individual issues. But she also agreed with others on that women worry more than men do in terms of networking. Existing theory and research also suggested that women need more organizational level of supports than men to advance in the organizational hierarchy because they face more organizational, interpersonal, and individual obstacles than their male counterparts (Ragins, 1989). When Samantha asked whether there are differences in leadership style between men and women, they said it is also more about individual's style matter not the gender issue. Here we can see the contradiction between what women want to believe and the reality women actually face every day. To become a woman manager, they probably have dealt well with professional tasks not as a woman who need more care and consideration but as a capable talent. It can be analyzed that they do not feel different or difficulties in terms of human capital development but of social capital, they have felt the situation is not advantageous to them. As we could see from Sandy's purpose, women who are seeking female mentors often find few available due to the absence of women in high-ranking positions who can serve in the mentor or role model (Ibarra, 1993; Linehan & Scullion, 2008).

[Samantha started talking again with the new topic, doing some action. She was the one who invite everyone to have second meeting, so she seemed to try to lead the discussion and have ambition to build network through this chance. Sandy also wanted to discuss on actual actions rather than talking. She said 'from this meeting, hope we can identify what we need, what we can do and give actual outcome or feedback to the company' Samantha said 'yeah maybe we can suggest some points which might help or enhance managers' treatment toward women employees'. However, Karen, she would seek individual opportunity from this rather than give suggestions for organizational HR level. She said 'I am not sure about spending time here'. Another silence started.]

Samantha and Sandy seemed to achieve tangible outcome through this meeting. Sandy was the one who keep recalling the action plan during the meeting. When she mentioned, action or actual things they can do, the atmosphere in the meeting room changed from somewhat indifferent attitude to a little more concentrated one. While Samantha and Sandy suggested actual plan and considered this activity as a HR practice that they can contribute to improve, Karen focused more on individual talent development opportunity and expressed her doubt on this meeting to others. It may be because of the beginning phase, we felt that every participant have doubts on this meeting. After Karen's expression about her doubt, silence started but, some of them tried to do something to make this meeting useful for their networking or career development.

[Alexandra tried to get people involvement to this meeting. She suggested to have a focus on networking and to talk about how they actually do make network through this meeting and following meetings. *She went to the paper board and started making notes for ideas.*

On that paper, the word 'networking' posited in the middle and people tried to add ideas about 'HOW TO'. Basically ideas are about sharing inspiring experiences, stories that they have had or heard and skills for being a leader. *When Sandy asked about 'real action plan', the longest silence happened.* Again, Alexandra said she will take charge of skill part and talk about personal branding and tried to get others involvement too. So Sandy and Karen will prepare to share their experiences and stories. Alexandra tore the paper and said she will make power point slides based on the notes they just made and send it to all of them.]

From the moment they decided to write notes on the board, their attitudes seemed to be changed to more active. As Sandy said earlier, doing some action rather than just talking convinced them to involve actively. At least they could have one piece of paper after this meeting. They brought many ideas which can be classified into sharing experiences and sharing skills. But when they had to draw some real action plan, they did not know where and

how to start for realizing their ideas. Finally some people took the initiatives for the next meeting, but still without specific, concrete action plan. To expect effective meeting, preparation from both presenter and listener seems to be required. As Wang's study (2009) suggested, organizations may also consider not only giving chances to meet each other but also offering training that will increase women's awareness of the gendered networking differences, their own networking behaviors, and subsequent benefits and risks.

[It was 5 to noon, Karen left earlier than others due to her work related meeting and others talked about the schedule for the next meeting. Ebba emphasized the building trust for building network and suggested to do some ice breaking activities next time to get closer to each other. Actually atmosphere got easy when they stopped talking about the main, official topic, networking and leadership development but, when they tried to decide the date. I was quite surprised because the next meeting will be the end of May, more than a month later from the second meeting.]

To build trust, network, having a meeting once a month seems not to work out that well. They want network but hesitate to put their efforts actively on actual building of it and they seemed getting interested when they talk about actions, outcomes, results from the network building but not sure about possibility of achieving these goals through the meetings. Eagly (1987) suggested that females are more likely than males to avoid social risks in interdependent situations. This will reduce women's expectation for reciprocal behavior from others who are not that close to them. Ebba's saying shows that tendency to have strong bond network based on trust. It also reveals that contradiction between what they want to have (instrumental networks for career development) and the way they usually build network, which requires more time and efforts. To have a strongly bonded network may help to keep their modest behaviour. Within a closed related network, women can ask job related questions or solutions to the members without being afraid to be considered as a rude or aggressive attitude.

#### 4.4 Secondary material analysis

We got below tables from company website regarding female leaders' development and retention:

1. Percentage of actual and 5 year's goal

Level	2009	2014
General Manager	17%	20%
Director	9%	15%
VP	4%	10%

One of the measure points of diversity management in A.P. Moller - Maersk Group is female representation ratio from general manager to vice president level. The target ratio is set by overall Danish demographic ratio and aims for building a leadership pipeline. That seems also the main purpose of the women leadership trainings and women leadership network program. Comparison with the target ratio of general manager, A.P. Moller Maersk – Group's goals for building a strong leadership pipeline seems quite ambitious; they want to achieve 250% increase (from 4% to 10%) in vice president level in 5 years. Because of the limited resources of Danish women, company could broaden the way of women leadership development by focusing on more nationalities, they are also potential talents for the leadership succession as well as they could bring different perspectives in business development.

Here, we can also see that the conception of leadership is leadership as a position where people can exercise the positional influences, and is for women who already have been leaders to encourage to climb up the organizational ladder. However, developing junior level managers could also be the option for leadership pipeline, and company could utilize its internal resources rather than hiring high level people with huge salary cost. Moreover, this figure might cause another misunderstanding, such as many women leaders are questioned of their capabilities and are assumed that they got the leader positions only because of affirmative action (Chin, et al., 2007).

## 2. Application and Retention actual and 5 year's goal

Director Level	2009	2014
Female Application	11.4%	20%
Retention of female high performer	95%	97%

We can see there are extremely few women that are applied for positions at director level. I interviewed a number of leaders in the company they say that a *“number of male colleagues they’re sort of come into the office on irregular basis saying that I have done this and that and I am ready for my next move, when you’re going to promote me, when can I transfer whereas as the female colleagues, they want to be asked or have a pad on the shoulder, ‘I think this job would be good for you, why don’t you apply? And then they will start consider”*.

According to Berg, et al. (1981), women down play their achievement while men consistently self-promote their successes. Although they are qualified however they dare to ask for the



high position. Many studies argue that socialized gender role which considers modest women more positive may bring downplaying her accomplishment to avoid being judged unfeminine. (Daubman & Sigall, 1997). Women's tendency to be modest in the reporting of their achievement results counterproductive to their career success as Budworth & Mann's (2010) findings.

Based on that, company could tell the female population that this is actually how we as a female normally react, because then it would create awareness for us to see maybe if I really want to make it to the top, and I need to provoke myself to act differently. Not only the women themselves, but also in the company wise, there should be efforts on encouraging women leadership, such as, company also need to work with the leaders so telling them, it might be that you shouldn't always treat your female and male colleagues exactly the same.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1 Findings**

The research concluded here was a case study of Asian women's leadership development in a multinational company in Denmark. Asian women have many characteristics in common with women from other countries; but also have traits specific to their Asian background. This research mainly used a qualitative approach to unfold the meaning of company's practice on women leadership development for women in general and investigate women's adoption of company practice, especially women from Asia, in depth.

The case study mainly relied on interviews, observations and secondary material analysis from the company website. In order to figure out how women leadership is addressed in practice, we interviewed Louise from group HR. She is responsible for the women leadership development program as part of talent management. The company's diversity website was used to get an understanding of the intention, action and goals for developing women in the company. Furthermore, in order to examine how the company practice was adopted by Asian women, we interviewed seven women from Asia currently working at the company. We also participated in a women leadership network workshop discussion arranged and implemented by a group of women leaders from the company.

From the company side, throughout the interview with Louise and the analysis of the company diversity website, we noticed that the women leadership development program aims to achieve organizational success by providing a competitive edge through the identification, development and redeployment of high women performers (Iles et al, 2010). The program

focuses on leadership training both at the individual-level skill training (Day, 2000), such as women leadership workshops, and at interpersonal development (ibid.), such as women leaders network to improve women leaders' human capital and social capital. However, these activities are only for the people who are considered to be talented (Blass, 2007) already, to encourage them to climb the organizational ladder. However, the company at this stage ignores the junior level women's development who might have leadership potential. We could also see from the interviews and figures at the company website that junior level positions are gender balanced, but that for higher organizational levels the women are in clear minority. Developing junior level women could help in balancing this. Furthermore, the organizational culture impacts the company's women leadership development; changing the long history of male dominated management takes time. However, as mentioned by Alvesson & Sveningsson (2007) changing the culture is difficult because it has been embedded in the organization for a long time.

We noticed that from the perspective of the company, networking and gender do play an important role on women leadership development. When the company became aware of the weakness of women's networking, which is essential in any professional career, they started the networking workshop for women leaders to share work experiences, cooperate, and exchange resources and create opportunities to know each other better by having informal lunches and similar events together (Bouty, 2000; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998).

Further, the company realized that women are not good at promoting themselves due to some gender specific personality traits. Self-promotional skills are positively related to acknowledgement, recognition and promotion and are easily associated with qualities such as competence, confidence, and ambition which are considered prerequisites for a potential

leader (Rudman, 1998; Xiaohua et al, 2009). Therefore, the company has plans to train business managers to motivate women differently from male employees for their career development. Furthermore, although the company has acknowledged or has been aware of the necessity to attract non-Dane women as potential talents in the organization, cultural impact on women leadership development has not been taken into consideration at this stage and no specific actions could be seen.

From the individual interviews with Asian women, we noticed that they appreciated the efforts made on diversity management and women leadership development program and considered it as a good development opportunity. However, the practice is not obviously implemented in the group. At the same time, interviewees also emphasized the role culture, gender and networking play for their career development. Some of them attributed their modesty to their gender and culture and considered it to be a barrier to get promoted in this company with a long history of Danish male leaders. For example, some women from Asia do not speak a lot or voice out in front of public, because the dominant norm of modesty prescribes downplaying their accomplishments and showing moderation in self-presentation (Bond, et al., 1982; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Yoshida, et al., 1982), causing their invisibility or transparency in the team. Their Asian cultural background reinforces not only modesty as a normative behaviour but also the traditional gender role which reconfirms social expectation of women's modesty. As a consequence, Asian women are faced with a double challenge when it comes to entry into top-level management (Budworth & Mann, 2010).

Another finding is that Asian women lack a professional network. Both the women and the company are already aware of this. The women do not spend a lot of time on meeting people, especially in this foreign country. Therefore, limited access to networking can cause many

disadvantage in the organization, from restricted information about the current situation to difficulty in forming or being part of a network (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990).

Gender, culture and network do matter. However, most of interviewees mentioned that the most important indicator for women leadership development should be your personal capability and experience. Asian culture decides their behaviour of self-criticism rather than self-enhancement. During the interview, none of Asian interviewees mentioned any advantages as an Asian woman. They focus more on the negative part than the positive. Many challenges, obstacles, and biases have been mentioned instead of their Asian women's advantages.

As part of women leadership development, women leadership network workshop was organized as an informal, voluntary meeting. The discussion session showed doubts on the possible validity of the meeting. It seems hard for women to prioritize to join newly established informal meetings with no guarantee of being useful and thus sacrifice working hours or give up personal life. Considering the accumulation of human and social capital through leadership network workshop, it is important for individual women to have strong motivation or beliefs to spend their time rather than having doubtful attitudes. It seems that they think they have to be close and build trust among them to have a network. It also shows contradiction between what they want to have (instrumental networks for career development) and the way they usually build network, which requires more time and efforts. Furthermore, as part of company's women leadership development initiatives, the company does not follow its effectiveness and its achievement of this network workshop.

From the material analysis, we can also see that the conception of leadership is leadership as

a position where people can exercise the positional influences, and HR's performance is measured by the number and percentage of women leaders positions at certain level (General Manager and above) in the organization. The intention of the company is to mainly focus on female leaders, whereas, developing junior level managers could also be an option for the leadership pipeline. This could be a benefit for the company if internal junior staff could be developed rather than hiring high level people with huge salary cost (Hills, 2009). Moreover, this figure might cause another misunderstanding, such as many women leaders are questioned of their capabilities and are assumed that they got the leader positions only because of affirmative action (Chin, et al., 2007).

## **5.2 Reflections**

Above findings revealed some constrains and opportunities for women leadership development for the case company. Firstly, from the company side, they need to make more specific trainings and some network activities to enhance women's human capital and social capital and then tightly follow up to track its effectiveness. Secondly, women normally downplay their achievement and do not apply for the higher position, therefore the company could tell the female population that this is actually how we as a female normally react and encourage them to apply for leadership positions actively. HR needs to teach business leaders that they should not always treat female and male colleagues exactly the same, as different motivation and development skills are needed for women's leadership development. Thirdly, culture plays an important role in women leadership development, as do gender and networking. HR needs to be aware of the chance to enhance culture diversity, which will collect the broad perspectives from all cultural background employees on decision making process.

As Asian women, by doing this project, both of us gained a lot from the study and company interactions. We are facing the double edged sword. In order to develop ourselves in a foreign country and an international company, we need some changes after the study especially for Na who is working in this company. Na is using the different approaches to deal with her business gradually, for example, she doesn't want to be silent anymore, she attended more group activities actively, gained network with colleagues and presented herself in front of others more proactively than before. Her change has been conceived by the leader and she got the acknowledgement of improvement from others.

### **5.3 Opportunities for further study**

This study specifically covered the role of Asian women leadership development in the headquarters of the A.P. Moller – Maersk Group. The scope could be increased by adding additional geographies and ethnicities, or by comparative analysis with one or more other companies. As an employee in the case company, Na has firsthand experience with the working environment and knows many of the interviewees personally. This could introduce preconceptions, but also an advantage as it provides easy access to company knowledge and resources and personal experience.

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### **Appendix 1**

Report from APMM HR

Number of Danish women in Maersk Line	145
Number of Danish women above General Manager	43
Number of Asian women in Maersk Line	81
Number of Danish women above General Manager	10