Gender and agency in careers: the work-life experiences of women employed by Japanese and South Korean firms

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Chapter 6

Constructing Policy Meanings and Role of Managerial Women

> I worked for two female bosses. One of them was very considerate about work-life balance. She herself was a working mother. The other was not a working mother and had a different perspective... For example, when I consulted my boss about my PTA [parent teacher activities] as I might need to leave early or come late, she told me not to mention those things otherwise I might be taken as a person gotten off the career track. From what she said, I assume she herself considered me as one of those being off the track. She was a female but her way of thinking is more like a male's and very competitive.
>
> (43-year-old manager, mother of three)

What happens to women once they assume managerial positions and become authority figures to their own subordinates? In this final empirical chapter, I will shift my analytical focus to the perspectives of women as *implementers* rather than *users* of policies in the organization and their role as mediators advancing equity and better work-life balance within their work groups. In essence, the chapter explores how managerial women can contribute to better working conditions in a high-pressure business climate that expects more (immediate results, continuously high output, creativity, instant response to connectivity technology) from fewer managers with less staff members (Sullivan 2014). How can women under such conditions be industrious managers and practice what they "preach" in terms of work-life balance given their heightened visibility? And when do managerial women with long careers in bureaucratic organizations become "agents of change" (Cohen and Huffman 2007) rather than "cogs in a machine" (Maume 2011) who reproduce inequalities in real possibilities for work-life balance? I will examine both interpretations and actions to improve one's own and subordinates' work-life balance to reveal the dilemmas and resolve of managerial women who are expected to serve as role models for younger women and achieve targets that cannot possibly be met within regular

working hours. My findings will reveal that the attitudes and behaviors of line managers make the difference whether employees can reap the benefits of policies or not. The careful analysis of developments on the work floor seen through the eyes of change agents will also show how exactly new work-family norms and values are seeded (top-down) and negotiated by individuals (bottom-up) as they are filtered by many layers of middle management.

The analysis in this chapter aims to uncover how crucial factors identified by work-family scholars and organizational behavior specialists operate within the context of Korean and Japanese internal labor markets and high-commitment work systems. To name a few, the significance of gender and relative status in the organization for managers' support of "risky" policies (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Daverth et al. 2016) and the interaction between gendered organizational leadership beliefs and managerial women's behavior towards younger women (Kanter 1977b; Lewis and Simpson 2012). By focusing on the processes that connect the actions of individual employees within their work groups (micro-level) to new institutionalized norms and practices (firm-level) from a gender equality and work-life balance standpoint, I will also establish what challenges and opportunities the features (structural and cultural) typical of Korean and Japanese firms with large workforces pose in reducing the gap between formalized rights and access to benefits in the lived experiences of individual employees.

This chapter starts by exploring the roles and strategies of women responsible for policy implementation. The informants included four Korean women (HR professionals in charge of women's policies in their organizations) and 13 Japanese women (eight diversity managers and five D&I staff members). These individuals regularly communicated with stakeholders within their organizations (from male executives, line managers, and lower ranked women on the work floor) and were attuned to work-family/gender diversity approaches of domestic firms and

companies abroad. Their narratives are used to find out how these change agents grapple with official policy approaches, private beliefs, and everyday realities. After clarifying how meanings of policies are reconstructed by the women from the bottom-up, the analysis proceeds to how they reflect on their own role and strategies to address negative and ambivalent meanings of policy use among members at lower levels in the organization and how they make sense of the positive changes observed in their organizations. In closing of the first part of the chapter, remaining obstacles regarding the behaviors of middle managers that surfaced in the combined interview data with Korean and Japanese informants will be presented. These issues serve as a point of reference for the in-depth analysis of managerial women's contribution to organizational change in the next part of the chapter.

The second part of the chapter then explores how managerial women mediate between formal policy objectives and substantive work-life balance freedoms/career development alternatives of subordinates. How did first-hand experiences with work-family conflict and unfair treatment in the workplace inform managerial women about the type of leader they can and want to be? And how do the ways others perceive them given their marginalized position in middle and top management shape women's capabilities to manage subordinates and their work-life needs differently from male precedents (with conservative work-family values and authoritarian management styles) or the leaders who cultivated them? These processes will be given special attention since they possibly feed into managerial women's responsiveness (beliefs and behaviors) to the progressive policies they are expected to practice in their daily work.

The analysis also probes into the ways female supervisors actually construct meaning about policy use in their work groups through their management approaches and own work-life behaviors. Supervisors are powerful local actors that often exert greater influence over

employees' willingness to use "risky" policies than formal organizational endorsement (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002). When deciding to grant work-life policy requests, managers are primarily led by the perceived disruption it would cause for the work in their functional units rather than consequences for working relations (Dulk and Ruiter 2008). It is still an open question whether female supervisors differ from male supervisors in their treatment of subordinates who indicate they need time off or scheduling flexibility or if women prioritize long-term gains (keeping a happy and motivated subordinate) over short-term losses (workflow disruption, lower output, heavier workload of other team members) when deciding to grant requests (Ibid.). Thus, the narratives of managerial women from different generations about how to resolve such managerial issues will be examined to clarify how the social work group context, women's relative status in the organization, and one's own sense of entitlement to work-life balance as managers shape their views on who deserves to use the policies (and "burden" others for individual needs) and support for subordinates with newer work-life values.

The last area of investigation pertains managerial women's agency to function as positive role models both directly through their daily interaction with female subordinates and indirectly by the qualities they project as female leaders to younger women in their organizations. Current female leaders who made personal sacrifices to prove their loyalty to the firm and obtain an insider status might distance themselves from younger women with a newfound sense of entitlement to work-life balance given their own history being marginalized in the higher echelons of their firms. However, later cohorts of managerial women (future leaders) who experienced more favorable workplace conditions as they developed professionally may have different inclinations and alliances. These dynamics will be explored to gain a more nuanced

understanding of how future female leaders contribute to the emancipation of female and male employees in corporate Japan and Korea.

6.1 The Predicament of Female Change Agents

> It is frustrating for us. We want to make changes but the people above us don't want to cooperate. It is up to the CEO, CFO and directors. They can push for change and make the rest follow. We hope that will happen. Otherwise, it is just us trying to move a mountain of senior managers on our own. We don't have that power. There has to be someone higher in rank to make that happen.
>
> (Korean women's policies officer, 31-year-old section chief)

Reconciling Official Policy Goals and Private Beliefs

Female policy implementers are in a difficult position as they are expected to advocate the official line which they may not wholly agree with due to personal experiences with unfair treatment and everyday dynamics while performing their jobs. Top management wants them to drive change that may not be welcomed by powerful individuals and produce measurable results. However, the fruits of workforce diversity are difficult to quantify and unclear. Besides, being a change agent can come at a cost when moving on to the next project. How then do women strike a balance between official rhetoric and personal convictions when (re)constructing meanings of policies?

First of all, there was little variation in the informants' official statements about *what* the policies ultimately aimed to achieve (recruitment/retention of female talent, reduction gender imbalances in career opportunities, fostering a family-friendly organizational culture) from a HR perspective but there was a notable difference in their policy orientations across countries. The measures were disseminated as "work-family balance" or "women's policies" in the Korean

companies stressing legal rights to leave provisions and employment security (of female employees) whereas they were part of strategic business-oriented initiatives with broader (and gender-neutral) references to "work-life balance", "workstyle reform" and "diversity and inclusion" in the Japanese counterparts. The general understanding of the HR informants was clearly informed by each government's vision of a gender egalitarian (Korea) and diverse and inclusive (Japan) society. The concepts and language used when describing policy approaches and priorities seamlessly followed the master narrative in publications of the government bodies that dominate the public discourse on the matters (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in Korea and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in Japan). As I will show later, the official government's orientation at the time indirectly influenced whether informants placed greater emphasis on the moral/legal side or organizational benefits in policy dissemination.

There was a great deal of ambivalence in the narratives of informants in both countries. For instance, all informants had mixed feelings about strategies specifically targeted at women as a group in need of special consideration. This reflects the challenging position they are in as female change agents in organizations where women in higher management positions are still a scarcity. Their ideas about the methods to achieve gender equity were often a combination of (sometimes contradicting) principles. They believed it required eliminating discriminatory practices from a moral and legal standpoint but also evaluating women to the same standards as men without caregiving responsibilities or gender-specific disadvantages in career advancement. Similarly, they stressed gender-neutral meritocratic principles but also acknowledged women need additional support programs to level the playing field. I think they deliberately used gender-blind discourse because of the perceived backlash against policies favoring women (Smithson 2005b) rather than having an intrinsic belief gender is irrelevant in the realm of work. This is

substantiated by the typical pattern of the conversations and inconsistencies within the statements of each informant throughout the interview indicate tensions between their personal beliefs and a dominant liberal version of egalitarianism[89].

To illustrate, the informants started talking about their organizations in gender-neutral terms stressing meritocracy, procedural fairness in performance evaluations and promotion decisions, equal distribution of work-life benefits and avoided polarizing discussions about women and men. At first, the informants typically denied women are discriminated against based on their gender and downplayed the existence of gender inequality in the company. As shown by the following accounts, there was a strong tendency to rationalize biased practices (downgrading leave takers, delayed promotions) of line managers and mask the existence of motherhood leadership penalties with gender-blind meritocratic rhetoric emphasizing individual ability and productivity.

> They select based on cumulative grades of performance evaluations and scores on other competencies such as presentation skills. We must look at ability and cannot select based on gender. Promotion decisions are not unfair to female employees. The only thing is that they may have lower chances because they received a C after returning from leave.
>
> (Korean women's policies officer, 31-years old, section chief)

> Evaluation is made equally based on ability. Promotion is not delayed because of childcare leave. However, they could have less output while working reduced hours. If they work reduced hours, they need to increase productivity.
>
> (Japanese diversity manager, 59-year-old department head)

[89] This strand of egalitarianism assumes that women and men are autonomous, not socially constructed, agents entitled to equal opportunities and treatment. It is mainly concerned with procedural fairness so that women can compete for any position they aspire but does not question why women may have different aspirations or how they were formed (Blau 2006).

As the interviews progressed, the informants increasingly went "off script" contradicting what they had said earlier. In these candid moments, they abandoned euphemisms that downplayed the significance of gender and acknowledged the policies were essentially about mitigating men's subconscious bias so that women collectively could rise to mid- and high-level managerial positions. Moreover, a common stance of both Korean and Japanese informants was that "fixing the behavior of men" would take too long if left to managerial discretion and required stronger enforcement with accountability structures and top-down pressure. In fact, accountability was mentioned by almost all informants as the missing link in getting policies practiced.

Then, informants typically talked about changing the behavior of women that somewhat echoed a "fix the women" approach. Like Japanese HR managers in previous in-depth studies, they conceived of generous leave policies as a "fair bargain" (Brinton and Mun 2015) necessary to retain female employees. By offering leave provisions beyond what is legally mandated, the company enables female core workers to continue their career trajectories, but it is up to individual women to use them "wisely" and fit into the male-oriented promotion system. The following account reveals that wisely meant returning to full-time work the moment childcare arrangements are made.

> The company has already introduced childcare leave up to 3 years. Now it is more important that women themselves change their mind and try to return early for their career advancement. I think it will be better for women to return to work as quick as possible. 3 years is okay to have as a system, but I think it is important to support those women so that they can return earlier.
>
> (Japanese diversity officer, 43-years old, deputy general manager)

In like manner, some expressed views that younger women needed to adjust their own attitudes towards their careers extending their outlook beyond current job situations to the organizational roles they could potentially fulfill in the future.

> Many women in our company are not very positive about their career. I would like to change their mindset. Younger women say that they are not willing to become even kachō [section chief] because I look very busy. I tell younger women that they can be committed to childcare at some stage, but that they should not give up on career advancement.
>
> (30-year-old Japanese HR manager)

While none of the informants believed university-educated female recruits were lacking in ability or competence, many had somewhat essentialist views. For instance, several said "younger women have a harder time navigating office politics" and "tend to fall behind male peers due to underdeveloped skills" before joining the company. The Japanese informants particularly addressed gender differences in confidence and assertiveness in the workplace. They attributed this to women's limited experience taking the lead in schools or universities and stereotypical depictions of boys as leaders and girls as modest caregivers in educational materials. Most informants thought women as a group display different work attitudes and qualities in the workplace that disadvantage them in the competition with men. Therefore, they considered mentorship and special skills programs that enable women to meet their superiors' expectations of ideal workers essential to reach parity with men in management.

This is not to say the informants endorsed an assimilation approach to women's career advancement or spared the behavior of men from scrutiny. Towards the end of the interviews the topic frequently shifted to undesirable behaviors of senior male managers in their forties and above. This marked a turning point when the conversations became surprisingly informative and

moved beyond "socially desirable" answers. These narratives were distinctively more critical and intense than the matter-of-fact comments about women's deficiencies (deemed largely beyond their control) and indicated a deep conviction that the core of the solution lies in "fixing the men." Pertinent behavioral changes included men's subconscious bias (in performance evaluations, selection of promotion candidates, task assignments), favoritism in mentoring, exclusion of women from male power networks, and notions of competent workers based on facetime or availability to work at irregular hours. Women's strategies to tackle these issues given their marginalized status in the workplace will be addressed later. We will see that the way women framed policies had consequences for the implementation challenges they faced.

There was a between-country difference in policy discourse that is worthwhile mentioning from an organizational perspective. The informants in Korea justified the policies primarily from an ethical standpoint stressing the obligation of "good" employers to practice procedural fairness in traditional functions of human resource management (standardized recruitment and selection, transparent performance evaluations, rationalized promotion decisions, skills training and development, etc.). Their rationalizations why promoting gender equality in their organizations is crucial clearly reflected arguments associated with a social justice case (Kirton and Greene 2005). That is, measures are needed to protect women's fundamental rights to equal treatment at work and it was not tied to perceived benefits for business or organizational performance. They frequently referred to statutory policies regarding maternal employment (protection from overtime work, unfair dismissal) and childcare (maternity and parental leave). The strong emphasis on national legislation indicated they interpreted the policies as basic human rights not mere company favors. Flexible work arrangements, however, although recognized as vital for mothers to manage dual responsibilities long-term were deemed

extra benefits. The narratives of Korean women's officers indicated they internalized a traditional EO policy orientation[90] with liberal notions regarding the means to achieve gender equality in the workplace and reconstructed a binary notion of work-family as strictly separate spheres. Using the words of an experienced HR official, they tacitly accepted "unfortunately, it is up to the women and their families to make arrangements themselves after one year."

In contrast, the informants in Japan more frequently emphasized the organizational benefits of promoting gender diversity and healthy flexible workstyles for male and female employees based on individual needs and preferences. Their arguments were often combinations of business case and social justice principles. Both were deemed equally important and complimentary. All mentioned positive outcomes of diversity initiatives in optimistic business terms reflecting the "happy diversity" (everyone's unique contribution to the organization) discourse in business and academia in the West (Benschop 2011). Like their Korean counterparts, the Japanese officers believed in a less divisive positive action approach and at least officially denounced more radical measures (affirmative action, hard quota's) as counter-productive in changing the mindsets of senior males and getting everyone on board. This could be seen as anecdotal evidence of the argument interventionist measures aimed at specific groups do not fit easily within a diversity approach that stresses individual merit (Kirton and Greene 2005). Unlike their Korean counterparts, they also stressed the social responsibility of companies to provide comprehensive support systems for its workforce beyond rudimentary government regulations regarding overwork restriction and childcare provisions. Some diversity officers who worked for companies with predominantly male workforces stated corporate responsibility also

[90] Traditional EO policy approaches seek to ensure the employer complies by the law and addresses discrimination and disadvantage but do little to proactively promote equality or diversity. Such organizational initiatives tend to reflect liberal and minimalist legal requirements and emphasize the moral or ethical side of equality projects as the primary goal rather than the benefits for the organization (Kirton and Greene 2005).

involved emancipating women and men in the workplace, and rather unexpectedly, also at home. In their ideal version of a family-friendly, diverse, and inclusive organization, centralized HR departments with high ranked diversity officers who are perceived as powerful clearly played a more proactive role than merely establishing formal policy frameworks from above and holding individual employees accountable for taking benefit of them.

Now, I will return to women's personal interpretations of corporate policies. Seniority in age and rank made a significant difference in women's appreciations of policy initiatives. The younger Korean and Japanese HR staff members were most skeptical of government work-life balance campaigns and their company's intentions behind workstyle innovation/reform programs. These women in their thirties worried the measures were more about raising productivity than reducing disproportionate workloads on individuals or increasing personal control over work time and place. Compared to their older colleagues, they perceived the policies more as window dressing saying "they just look good on the outside" and "policies are just policies, they never have much influence on the real situation." From an organizational perspective, this perceived gap reveals the existence of tensions between performance-centered corporate realities and family-friendly policy goals.

Seniority, however, did not make a difference when it came to limitations of current approaches. As concluding remarks, the informants usually expressed a strong sense of frustration with the slow pace of progress and resistance to change using metaphors like "ant-steps", "moving a mountain of male middle managers", or "impenetrable clay layer" (of senior male managers). They admitted current soft business case approaches relying on the goodwill or voluntary cooperation of male middle managers were inadequate to eradicate subtle forms of gender discrimination. Although the informants believed the ideal way to establish cultural

change was bottom-up, imposing accountability structures top-down was deemed crucial to speed up cultural change.

To summarize, women in charge of gender equity/diversity projects actively construct meanings of company policies or uptake, but they are bound by top management's master narrative. The individual accounts in both countries revealed women's ambivalence towards policy orientations and one's role as implementers. The contradicting statements and discrepancy reflected tensions between what informants personally desired (proactive top-down policy approach) and the dominant version of liberal egalitarianism (based on autonomy and individual discretion) in their companies. The findings also confirmed the significant discrepancy between personal motivations (making a radical difference for younger women) and organizational goals (positive change without backlash from male workforce) observed in human resource management research on the career costs and opportunities of diversity practitioners when they are drawn from middle managers in the firm internal labor market (Kirton and Greene 2009). Due to their tight integration in the internal labor market, the women's/diversity officers with many years invested in their companies often had to compromise on their personal beliefs to be a good corporate citizen and avoid burning bridges.

As shown, there was an undeniable between-country difference concerning the framing and emphasis of policy goals. The Korean informants perceived equality projects primarily from a social justice standpoint stressing women's legal rights to childcare leave and job security upon return like traditional EO approaches. They largely understood the work-family/women's policies as means to help women fit male working patterns after motherhood and compete with men for the same jobs. In contrast, the Japanese informants interpreted diversity/workstyle innovation initiatives as gender-neutral measures that served a dual purpose (equitable access to

employment opportunities/work-life balance services and business benefits) in line with popularized managing diversity approaches of US organizations. This posed specific challenges in their daily jobs, particularly when persuading male line managers to cooperate.

When combined, the interview data vividly illustrated that top management's target-centered expectations, individual women's lower status and high visibility in the organization, and the dominance of senior males in middle- to high management who resist changing work behaviors that seemed natural and justified to them from a business perspective restrict the agency freedoms of female change agents to construct their own interpretations of corporate policies. A major predicament of these women is that to succeed in their current (temporary) role, they risk antagonizing powerful individuals whom they might need to advance their careers in the future. I believe this makes the difference as to why some women are more forceful in their attempts to change undesired work behaviors and components of corporate cultures while others exert more caution and compromise on their personal beliefs.

Discrepancy Between Policy Ambitions and Everyday Realities

In order to fully understand the discrepancy between policy ambitions and everyday realities, we must consider both the behavioral and structural reasons behind individual employees' hesitance to act. A good start is to ask what sort of implementation issues the HR informants observed in their daily jobs and what they believed to be the main sources of the problems. This section identifies the main challenges and opportunities getting policies practiced by middle managers in Korean and Japanese firms based on the accounts of my informants and connects them to their individual resources but also status given structural constraints. This will set the stage for the subsequent examination focused on women managers' role in

reinforcing/challenging deeply embedded ideas and behaviors regarding work, family, and leadership. I will address what critical conditions are necessary so that more female policy officers can take the steps they propose.

Although some women worked for companies with a nearly gender-balanced workforce in feminized industries (hospitality, fashion, lifestyle products) while others were employed by male-dominated firms (high-tech equipment and solutions, manufacturing, financial services) with few women core workers, the dissemination issues (e.g., underutilization by employees, non-compliance by line managers, little enthusiasm among company leaders) they addressed were strikingly similar. Much of the inertia and resistance to change among middle managers observed by my informants was clearly rooted in persistent organizational beliefs about the burden on others and ideal managers.

The interview data pointed to a major challenge, even in early adopters of family-friendly and gender diversity policies, that is correcting practices deemed "unfair but unavoidable" by male middle managers that disadvantage mothers (and fathers who use work-family/flexibility policies) in their career progression. This is not surprising since, from an organizational perspective, it is extremely hard for centralized HR departments or diversity task forces to address these subtle and often unintentional forms of gender discrimination on the work floor given the increasing managerial discretion of team leaders to handle HR-related matters of subordinates. The real impact of formalized policies then rests on voluntary cooperation of individual managers who have the decision power to grant (or decline) policy requests and influence the promotion of subordinates through performance evaluations and job assignments. A section chief HRD in charge of women's policies at a Korean IT company explained:

> I don't think team leaders deliberately give bad grades to female team members because of their gender. But in case of maternity and parental leave it is inevitable that team leaders give lower grades to woman who were on leave since the male team members did more work during that period. Many share the opinion that it is an unfair aspect of performance evaluations… often they [team leaders] give lower than that [B grade], in many cases they give a C. It is against company regulations. From the HR department of each member company, we persuade the leaders to follow the rules. However, the directors and executives don't think it is important. Since the evaluations are done by individual leaders, it is hard to influence their decisions.

This raises the question whether female team leaders who believed past supervisors gave them lower grades for other reasons than actual work performance exert more caution when using their managerial discretion in evaluating policy users vis-à-vis non-users in their teams. In other words, do managerial women's own experiences with gender bias in performance evaluations propel them to practice procedural fairness when they become responsible for subordinates' career prospects? I will return to this question later in this section.

A diversity officer at a Japanese tech firm illustrated motherhood penalties also involve delayed promotions despite bureaucratic procedures to mitigate bias against policy users.

> In practice, it takes more time for them. We have made a system so that childcare leave or shorter working hour would not adversely affect their prospects for promotion. But their promotion is still slower than other coworkers. I think that is because they are likely to be assigned less challenging job. They [team leaders] select prospective managers or prospective technical specialists and let them take a promotional examination. The selection is made based on their total grades in the last 2 years. Each department has its quota. The head of each department selects their own candidates.

These accounts underline the pivotal role team leaders play in reinforcing (and reducing) systemic bias against mothers with young children and employees with time restrictions in their work groups (micro-level) through their approach to basic bureaucratic procedures. The way individual managers handle policy requests, performance evaluations, promotion decisions, and

task allocations primarily informs subordinates about potential consequences of policy uptake for one's career and the burden on others. Biased practices (i.e., downgrading subordinates returning from leave, delaying promotions, assigning easier work to mothers with preschoolers) are not isolated cases by individuals with ill intent but normalized actions rooted in shared work and family values in organizations. Needless to say, such unfair practices are particularly problematic for ambitious junior women with caregiving responsibilities to develop a stronger sense of entitlement to career advancement and work-life balance. Therefore, it is meaningful to explore further how managerial women approach decisions regarding policy uptake, performance evaluations, job assignments and selection of candidates for promotion (exams) and if personal experiences with delayed promotions and gendered job assignments make them less biased in the supervision of female subordinates. Women's narratives about the challenges they face practicing procedural fairness in the afore mentioned managerial responsibilities may offer clues as to whether they follow formalized policies more closely than male counterparts who generally feel their "hands are tied" or perceive them as "too difficult and disruptive to practice".

Another common issue that was hard to mitigate in the current situation had to do with gender-specific informal networking strategies and homosocial reproduction. Gender differences in mentorship and (lack of) role models were frequently mentioned in connection to women's inability to break the glass ceiling. Informants in both countries stressed the importance of male *and* female mentors and diversity in female role models. In their own words, "male supervisors usually take male subordinates with similar work attitudes under their wing, recommend them for managerial positions, and promote them when they get transferred themselves." For junior women, however, they explained "working relations with male or female superiors do not naturally transform into mentor-mentee relationships." The limited success of formal female

mentorship programs in the surveyed companies implies the crux of the matter is the availability and readiness of female leaders to help younger women navigate company life and seize opportunities that present themselves amidst organizational change but also the informal relations between senior and junior women.

According to the informants, female leaders are not necessarily interested in helping younger women and often do not participate actively in female mentorship programs. Previous organizational behavior studies (Kanter 1977b, Ellemers 2012) tell us this so-called "Queen Bee phenomenon", or strategy of women in positions of power to distance themselves from lower ranked women, reflects gendered leadership expectations or heightened visibility of female leaders rather than a general tendency among women (not men). The HR section chief Eun-suh (33-year-old mother) interpreted this phenomenon as follows:

> Female leaders don't always treat other females fairly or in a preferable way. We have this saying "women are women's worst enemy". I often wonder: Why are female leaders not really generous or sensitive to other female employees' lives? My conclusion is that those leaders had to compete fiercely with male leaders. In their work life, they probably only took three months leave after giving birth. They were so eager for success within the organization. Now they think that it is what it takes to survive in the company for a woman. All that hardship will make you stronger. They don't want to go easy on female employees. They had to overcome many challenges to reach the top. The female leaders at our company all have strong personalities. They are very competitive, efficient, smart and goal oriented. Many of them are single, divorced or have no children. I mean, they had to give up a family because there is no work-life balance in those leadership jobs. That is why, they can never be fully understanding or supportive of the private lives of other female employees. In our organization, the female leaders don't play a role in promoting gender diversity. I don't understand why either.

The emerging picture is that instead of inspiring younger women, female executives with masculine dispositions and single-minded work-life orientations can function as negative role models who discourage female juniors to pursue leadership positions. When junior women with

broader work-life orientations don't have positive female role models and have few chances to interact with different types of female leaders, they may self-select into less competitive jobs. This obviously hinders progress as it limits diversity in the pool of potential female leaders and reinforces the common misconception that "women are lacking in leadership aspirations." Therefore, it is important to find out whether younger managerial women, who benefited more from the growing awareness for gender equality in their firms than the pioneer women that occupy most executive positions, have different ideas about the type of leaders they want to be and their responsibility to be positive role models for younger women in terms of work-life balance.

This touches upon a final issue worthy of exploration, that it is the difficulty to foster genuine gender diversity in the top management of companies given tenacious stereotypical believes about strong and competent leaders. While the aptitude of women for entry- and mid-level managerial positions is no longer in question, feminine or "soft" leadership skills are generally not appreciated as much as masculine qualities in candidates for executive positions (Painter-Morland 2011). Because homosocial reproduction also operates across genders, the few female board members often possess the same behavioral traits as male company leaders and de-emphasize social-emotional leadership skills (Kanter 1977a). When gendered leadership beliefs in the workplace remain strong, as in the case of the surveyed Korean and Japanese companies, it can create a "double bind" for (future) female leaders. If women in high positions show masculine traits (assertiveness, competitiveness, confrontational, authoritarian, uncompromising, etc.), it can backfire because others (men *and* women) perceive them as "too emotional," "overachieving," or "too aggressive". However, when they emphasize stereotypically feminine qualities (soft communication styles, understanding, strong interpersonal skills, modesty, etc.),

they risk being viewed as "too weak" or "unconvincing as visionary leaders" (Ellemers 2012). Self-stereotyping of women managers and executives, in response to workplace realities (gender stereotypes about successful leaders) or "role entrapment" as situational adjustments could lead to self-distortion of highly visible women (Kanter 1977b) and lead to a reproduction of hypermasculine leadership models. Since managerial women also construct meanings of leadership in their daily supervision of subordinates, their management approach can confirm or contradict gender stereotypes of female and male juniors. Thus, in the remainder of this chapter I will also examine how younger cohorts of managerial women (who might become future executives) view themselves as female leaders, what qualities they attribute to successful leadership, and what agency freedoms they have in developing leadership skills that match their personalities and preferences. As shown above, managerial women are uniquely positioned and their behaviors in the workplace have a strong impact on the aspirations and work-life realities of junior women.

In short, I identified three main challenges to narrow the gap between formalized policies and practices as addressed by the HR informants in both countries irrespective of company situation (gender composition work force, ratio female managers, industry type) or dissemination phase (short/long policy history). These involved reducing bias against mothers and flexibility stigma, offering more chances for junior women to engage informally with positive role models and mentors, and altering gendered perceptions of "competent leaders." The following analysis examines managerial women's situated agency in these three areas. This is, in my view, where I make the largest contribution to the field as it shows the complexities of women managers' daily realities navigating jobs historically associated with men and, more importantly, the intricate interplay between individual attitudinal-/behavioral matters, components of corporate

culture/rigid hierarchical structures, and remnants of conservative work/family values in society that constrain women's ability to construct their own version of being a good leader and loyal corporate citizen.

6.2 Managerial Women's Role in Normalizing Policy

The findings thus far highlight middle managers are gatekeepers of subordinates' work-life balance when they have individual discretion to grant/deny policy requests and give signals about workstyle and leadership norms in their organizations. This begs the question when do managerial women who experienced being marginalized (and discriminated) earlier in their careers become positive role models through their daily interaction with subordinates and visibility in their companies? To answer this question, I will first examine managerial women's views on the task at hand in relation to their organizational status and previous experiences.

One's Own Organizational Position and Current Management Ideology

Women's own experiences navigating a male-dominated working environment and interpretations of the challenges they faced on their career paths are closely related to their current views as managers about fairness, moral leadership, and supervision of subordinates with varying work-life needs. The way the women interviewed now approached the work-family and career issues of junior women in their teams was in part a reflection of how they themselves made sense of their past achievements, personal sacrifices, and marginalized position in organizational power structures. For instance, while all women welcomed the new policies and said they would allow subordinates to use them freely, they had different ideas about how younger females *should* take advantage of them in opposing directions. On one end of the

spectrum, they believed women are better off minimizing uptake (parental leave, reduced hours) and resume their duties full-time as soon as possible to avoid falling behind their peers. This sentiment shared by several women across functional fields (including HR and diversity promotion) reveals an implicit understanding that the rules of promotion will not fundamentally change in the near future despite policy initiatives. On the other end of the spectrum, women were convinced their juniors could and should fully benefit from the variety of systems that would have helped them through difficult periods earlier in their careers. In contrast to their somewhat cynical counterparts, they appeared confident women "could poke holes from below and change the system". In any case, the reflections of managerial women showed their inclinations were strongly motivated by how others perceived them in work and organizational roles previously assumed by men only.

Women who emulated a masculine workstyle to signal their aptitude for managerial positions had similar concerns about younger women's stronger sense of entitlement to equal treatment in the workplace. Using their own words, younger women believed "they should be promoted because of their gender", "had unrealistic expectations about career progression", and "only cared about life not work." Rather than celebrating their juniors' emancipation, they worried "the emphasis on gender can become a disadvantage for female candidates who are up for promotion" because of backlash from male workers against the advancement of women in their organizations.

In contrast to women who inevitably became "cogs in the machine", there were those who believed younger women should rise without working like men. A close inspection of how they made sense of their work achievements reveals a probable explanation for this attitudinal difference. They themselves had chosen different routes to get where they are today and

developed a professional identity without trying to catch up with male peers or comparing their progress to theirs. The mothers among them were not relegated to “mommy tracks” by superiors but given options after returning from leave to either resume their duties or change to jobs with predictable working hours or workplaces closer to home. More importantly, immediate supervisors assigned stimulating jobs matching the intensity of childrearing responsibilities. Maintaining their role as a valued team member, and status organization-wide of a worker worthwhile investing in, throughout different stages of parenthood appeared to have broadened the horizons of their own career development and that of junior women.

The female executive Hiroko (54-year-old mother) is a case in point. She started her career as an IT-systems engineer, got married and gave birth five years after joining the company. Supervisors and many others in the organization helped her move to corporate housing nearby another group company where she continued her career as an engineer. At her new workplace her supervisors and coworkers treated her as a full member despite time constraints, accommodated meetings around her schedule, and even welcomed her son to drinking sessions. She got promoted after 17 years, albeit slower than her male peers, and decided to change functional fields. At her new department, much sooner than expected, she was selected to take on the role of head HR. Four years later, she received an offer from another group company to lead the HR department where she eventually became director (within months after the last interview). Favorable workplace circumstances (open and inclusive team atmosphere, supportive supervisors, intra-firm mobility, considerate colleagues) allowed Hiroko to reconcile her professional and parenting role and may have instilled confidence that there are real possibilities for younger women in technology to shape their own version of a corporate career. This became

clear when she spoke about (negative) career consequences commonly associated with long leaves.

> Thinking that one is lagging behind or that it [catching up] is impossible, will make it difficult so one should think about what he or she can do. A career is very long, so 1-2 years should not matter. There are people who enter university one year late, or there is a time period between changing from one job to another. So 1-2 years is not a problem. In Japan there is a majority of men who work constantly, so it [career progression] will be different when compared to them. But, it is not bad…

Drawing from prior experiences, Hiroko kept a progressive outlook when she moved to a more conservative company and encountered employee resistance to changes in longstanding work practices. In her case, joining a new company as an outsider (mid-career recruit) without loyalties to dominants in a position with discretionary power appears to have actually strengthened her agency freedom to display an innovative work-life orientation as a female leader despite low internal legitimacy of policies among senior members.

The case of her subordinate Yoko (50 years old, single) confirms managerial women who are not accultured to one single organization since the start of their careers can be crucial in changing workstyles of juniors when they practice a less restrictive kind of leadership on the work floor. Following a reorganization, Yoko too had changed companies and was promoted to section chief at her new workplace. She became team leader of seven subordinates of whom many were older males. Like her superior Hiroko, she also adopted a nondirective approach to supervise her subordinates: “My subordinates probably think I am a soft type of leader. I like to decide things together. I am not a type of leader who decides unilaterally and orders them.”

When Yoko reflected on the difficulties managing subordinates, another motive for developing a collaborative leadership surfaced.

> People here had many different backgrounds. Some people had been working here, some came from other companies, and some were temporary. It was hard to bring the team together, because they had different ways, different views and different opinions. We have less *nomikai* [after-work drinking sessions]. It might have worked in the old culture, but it has become more important to talk with each person. I am trying to take my time and have a talk during work hours. I did not know anything at first. So I had to learn from my subordinates who had more knowledge and network here.

Both Hiroko and Yoko had flexible work attitudes and adapted quickly to new organizational environments without losing convictions built on previous experiences elsewhere. These qualities made them effective in managing people with different backgrounds and work values. These individual cases also indicate diversity among team members can become an impetus in itself for managers to practice flexibility and be tolerant of different opinions and workstyles.

Another case shows managerial women can also be particularly disadvantaged by the combination of gender, age, and employment status when they join firms with a majority workforce of employees fostered in the internal labor market. The in-house lawyer Mi-kyung (38 years old, single) was approached by a headhunter and joined her firm as a deputy of a female department head.

> It usually takes a long time to get promoted from deputy to department head. Since I am still rather young to be department head looking at the company's ranking system. I am also younger than most deputy heads. I always hear that from my co-workers. You are too young and haven't been with the company long enough to be in such a high position. From the beginning people have commented on that. Instead of congratulating me. Especially male deputy heads and managers don't like it. I must be very sensitive and careful about how to approach others. If I don't use the right words, they will say I am

> arrogant and that I don't know about the company's business that well either. If I make a small mistake, they will say "see, it's because she is too young and has little experience." I often hear the criticism that I only know law and miss the big picture lacking deep knowledge of the company's operations. It would have been easier if I were a man and a little older. Especially in dealing with senior males. I always have to spend much energy to make the work relations with male managers, deputies and department heads go smoothly.

After five years, Mi-kyung still struggled to establish herself as a full-fledged member of the organization and authority figure within her team. In response to others questioning her aptitude to fulfill a relatively senior position based on being a young female from the external labor market, Mi-kyung "humbled" herself when dealing with senior men and became trapped in a subordinate feminine role to do her job. Exclusionary behaviors by female coworkers further heightened her visibility in the workplace.

> Between women, there is a lot of jealousy. It is inevitable. At work, I feel that from other women. Our situations as female employees are not the same. Some believe they had to overcome more challenges being hired as fresh recruits. They give me a harder time because I, while also being female, entered the company later at a higher post. Because of my rank I receive higher salary. They don't like that. In the company there is a community of female employees. One of my friends is a member. She tells me that those women take a special interest in my case and gossip about it a lot. They also spread rumors that are not true. I find that very strange.

When Mi-kyung rationalized the tendency of junior employees to scrutinize superiors, she initially downplayed the significance of gender saying "it is human nature that those lower in the hierarchy complain about their superiors, it is more an issue of human nature than gender." Her later statements, however, revealed being one of the few female leaders in the workplace left her vulnerable to particularly harsh judgements.

> But since there are very few female leaders in the organization, they are more visible. They attract even more interest. That is why I feel a lot of pressure to achieve excellence. If I lack in competence in one aspect of the work, they will immediately criticize me.

It is understandable substantial external pressures to demonstrate leadership abilities propelled some women to be more masculine or authoritarian in managing their subordinates. Mi-kyung's self-evaluation illuminates gender ascriptions also informed her management approach.

> I am quite strict when it comes to juniors in age and rank. They say I am scary [laughs]. If they are wrong, they say I am really tough on them. I believe it is necessary to be firm and explicit about what I want. When they make a mistake, I tell them immediately so they can correct it. I have a no-nonsense way of working. But when we are not working, I socialize and joke with them. I am a little less tough [on female juniors]. I cannot treat them with the same toughness as the men. I communicate to them in a slightly softer manner but if they make a mistake, I point it out clearly. That is the only way we can go forward.

Mi-kyung's story indicates polarization between employees (male and female) who tacitly accept the cracks in the reward and promotion system and a small minority of experienced newcomers who join the race adds additional performance pressure for female mid-career recruits in managerial positions and may prevent them from developing more collaborative leadership styles.

Several cases of managerial women who waited patiently for promotion in the same company they started their careers show employees, although deeply embedded in the system that fostered them, do not necessarily become masculine type of leaders like their male supervisors. For instance, Hye-jin (38-year-old mother of two) was finally promoted to deputy head after establishing a track record in the same department of 15 years of loyal service. When asked about the difficulties she experienced as a first-time supervisor of subordinates, she said:

> I was suddenly responsible for three juniors. I had to arrange their schedules too. At first, I felt embarrassed. I didn't understand to what extent I should control them. I thought 20% would be sufficient but my boss thought differently. He wanted me to control them more so they wouldn't make any mistakes. It was very hard to make sure my own work was flawless while micro-managing my juniors so they would not make mistakes. Everyone has a different personality and different ways of working. Not everyone works the same way as I do. Sometimes it is hard for the juniors who have different workstyles than me to respond well when I tell them what to do.

There clearly were tensions between Hye-jin's and her team leader's notion of strong leadership, but she did not yield to adopt the "military style" of her boss who thought she should be more controlling. She took a deliberate decision not to micro-manage but to entrust her juniors to get things done in their own way. This act of resistance, that jeopardized her chances to be selected as his successor, would have been inconceivable without a strong belief she had earned the "right" to be in a leadership position (sense of entitlement) and readiness to move elsewhere if unable to break through the glass ceiling in her current department (perceived scope of alternatives).

All female managers, including those who had built their entire careers within one organization or were single and childless felt some moral obligation, albeit to varying extent, to support younger women so they could lead more balanced work and personal lives than themselves. For them, hardships in the earlier days before awareness of gender equality became a motivation to change the system from within. Their positive appraisals of progressive company policies revealed they believed the key to women's advancement to management was correcting the informal mechanisms responsible for underutilization of available support systems. They condemned middle managers' practices that discouraged younger women (and men) to use policies (e.g., giving lower performance grades to leave takers, only assigning easy work to

mothers with young children, excluding flexibility policy users from stretch projects) and recognized them as indirect forms of gender discrimination. The managerial women who mentioned they encouraged their subordinates, male and female, to use flexible work arrangements or reported having subordinates using them at the time of the interviews actually made conscious attempts to minimize their own subconscious bias in performance evaluations or task assignments. As the case of HR department head Soon-Ja (47-year-old mother of two) illustrates, this also included avoiding positive bias towards female subordinates.

> That [performance evaluations] causes me a big headache. Before I evaluate individual employees, I first consider the situation within the team as a whole. The performance of team members fluctuates and cannot always be satisfying. So I consider the work done by each team member and the work situation from their perspective… I try to think of better ways to utilize them, whether they are junior or senior employees, so they can be more successful. I want to evaluate them in such a way that they can thrive in the future… Each individual should do his or her best to achieve good results at work on his own merit. This is what I encourage male and female junior staff to do.

Soon-ja's deliberate use of gender-neutral bureaucratic language when describing her evaluation process seems to reflect sensitivity about being perceived as favoring women by senior men who occupied nearly 80 per cent of team leader positions at her firm in spite of a female workforce of 45 per cent. Other managerial women who took notice of senior men complaining about policies only favoring women or reverse discrimination had similar attitudes and deliberately did not go easy on female subordinates returning from leave or working reduced hours in terms of output. Like Soon-ja, they spent a great deal of time and energy making sure their evaluations were perceived as fair and transparent to all team members, especially when some had increased workloads due to policy use of others. For instance, Itsumi (44 years old,

single), a manager at a technology firm explained how she mitigates tensions arising from individual differences among subordinates.

> Usually, I know in advance when my female subordinates will take childcare leave. I arrange replacement, but the person will not get used to the work right away. Their coworkers might be burdened by taking care of the work. And after the women return to work, they will work reduced hours, which also could be a burden on their coworkers. I think it is very important to properly manage such situations…When my female subordinate was working reduced hours and others took on her work, I tried to evaluate their additional work properly. And I tried to share information with everyone in my team so that they all know how our projects were progressing.

Itsumi's narrative shows replacing leave takers with temporary staff, a measure recommended by some scholars (Takahashi et al. 2013) but regarded "too costly and unfeasible" in the field according to the Korean and Japanese HR informants, has its limitations in reducing bias against policy users in work groups when the majority of members are (over)committed to work. The typical strategy of managerial women to "properly manage" individual differences was to reward subordinates for heavier workloads and more troubleshooting in the office but not to penalize those who worked fewer hours and understandably had lower outputs[91]. Personal experiences with supervisors who apparently had not evaluated them based on merit alone and did not bother motivating their grading may have propelled them to be open about sensitive performance evaluations and give subordinates constructive feedback rather than merely pointing out their weak points.

The managerial women were particularly mindful of another gender stereotype, that is being overly considerate to female subordinates with family responsibilities in terms of task

[91] On a critical note, this approach-- however well intended-- also disadvantages policy users in their promotion opportunities under relative grading systems with predetermined percentages of score distributions (typical in the surveyed Korean companies). Since only a limited number of team members can receive A's or B's, policy users will still end up with lower grades than the coworkers who assumed the extra workload.

assignments. As with the performance evaluations, personal experiences with male supervisors had made them sensitive to this issue. Not receiving challenging jobs after marriage and childbirth or exclusion from projects that could have put them on top management's radar had strengthened their beliefs they should offer opportunities for development to women with young children or reduced work schedules and not assume they are not ready to take on a challenge. The following conversation between Japanese managerial women during a panel session illustrates the gender dynamics in job assignments.

> Fumiko: If women are given high targets, they will develop more. Many supervisors try not to give women challenging work, being overly considerate to them. That causes women to miss opportunities.
>
> Hina: Men are given challenging work even if they are not capable. Women are given challenging work only if they are capable, that means they have less opportunities. Moreover, men get more support from their superiors than women. Superiors may be too considerate of women to give more assignments. That deprives women of opportunities for development.
>
> Fumiko: That's unconscious bias.
>
> Mari: I want them to ask each person about their own wish or circumstance. Someone may want more promotion, others may not.
>
> Hina: Men are given many different work assignments without so much as consideration.
>
> Mari: I feel there is a lack of communication.

The interviews with HR informants and Korean team leaders confirmed these are common practices of male middle managers in Japanese and Korean companies. The narrative of a male general manager (47) at a fashion company reveals how gendered assumptions about women's aptitude, or lack thereof, for certain jobs/fields influence task assignments.

> There are several areas in which male employees are more desirable for the company. The frequency of female employees to quit and leave the company is far higher than among men. Women are less committed to their job and the company. Added to that, they come with the risk they may interrupt their career after giving childbirth or go on leave. From the perspective of the company, that is hard to deal with. You don't know when an employee will leave. In the fashion business, there are two main fields product development and sales. In sales, you have to go out and deal with customers, factories and outlets. This kind of work is hard for women. In Korea, we have to meet and drink with our customers frequently. Married women must go home as soon as they finish their work to look after their children. That is why they don't prefer female employees in the sales divisions. Because our chairman pushes for more female employment, our company on the whole has about 50% women. This creates problems for some team leaders from a pragmatic point of view.

Returning to the communication issue briefly addressed by Mari, this was a recurrent theme in the individual interviews with Japanese and Korean managers. The "lack of communication" about expectations between superiors and subordinates relates, in my view, to the indirect way of communication of Japanese and Korean employees. Rather than speaking one's mind, individuals tend to gauge what others think or want and adjust their behavior accordingly (*nun'chi pogi* in Korean; *kūki o yomu* in Japanese). According to the managerial women, this tendency creates problems when subordinates are unsure about their superiors' attitudes towards policy use and supervisors make gendered assumptions about subordinates' readiness to be challenged at work. This realization may have propelled the women to reserve a lot of time for one-on-one conversations with subordinates on a daily basis even when their own work was piling up. In any case, the women in my samples made conscious efforts to be more thoughtful supervisors than the ones they had themselves.

On the whole, the managerial women interviewed did not consider support policies to be mere favors granted by the company to employees (who are responsible as individuals to take advantage of them and bear the consequences of their choices) but legal entitlements that needed

to be protected. This sentiment was also shared by single and childless managerial women like Mi-kyung (38-years old, single, general manager).

> I think the company should follow transparent and gender-neutral standards from the time of recruitment to promotion. The mindset of all employees must change. Especially towards the use of maternity and parental leave. When someone is on leave, it is considered a burden to other team members. I think it is a matter of being considerate to other's family circumstances. It is all regulated by law. Women have the right to maternity and parental leave. Why should they be punished for using it in terms of performance evaluations? This is absurd and we need structural change… If the company provides an organization-wide working environment that truly enables women to combine motherhood and their professional career, what reason would women have to quit?!

The general consensus among the women interviewed was that if performance evaluations are fair and transparent and women are given opportunities early in their careers to show their capabilities by challenging assignments, ambitious female employees would rise to managerial positions now that support systems are in place. I am personally more skeptical since it takes more than the existence of equity policies or support systems for women's career development to increase the ratio (or diversity) of women in top management and boards. From an organizational perspective, stimulating historically and institutionalized marginalization of women in leadership positions requires a process-oriented approach with constant monitoring and evaluation (and adjustment when current policies fail to produce intended results over time)[92].

[92] A crucial first step is for top management to critically examine its own values and basic assumptions about what a good executive, parent, and career is (Hall 1990). Since the roots of the problem exist on multiple levels, simultaneous interventions targeted at individual employees, work culture and organizational structure, but also outside the workplace (e.g., public policies, access to support systems, political shifts) are needed to help women reach parity with men in leadership (Martin et al. 1983).

Women managers' supervision of female juniors and views of women's promotion policies reflected a liberal vision of gender equality like the HR informants emphasizing meritocracy and women's behavioral adjustments (agency). At the same time, they personally believed "there is nothing wrong with providing extra support for women since they have been marginalized for decades." Nonetheless, except for one Japanese manager, none of the managerial women believed affirmative action or quota systems would be a sensible solution because of concerns it may feed perceptions women only get promoted because of their gender instead of competence. Kayoko (56-years old general manager) recalled:

> In the following year I became manager, other departments also promoted female employees to manager. But they did not do well because they got promoted without sufficient preparation period. And we did not have female managers for many years again. General managers felt afraid and put a stop to it.

Interestingly, Kayoko held the policy (positive action) responsible for the negative outcome (failure of women after promotion) but not the flawed implementation by male leaders. My interpretation is that her ambivalent attitude towards increasing the ratio of women in management stems from a concern it could jeopardize the status of managerial women altogether in the organization. This event most likely propelled her to exert extra caution when selecting female candidates for promotion exams and making sure they are sufficiently prepared for a managerial job. She said "I would like to promote my female subordinates if they are very capable. However, I don't want to promote them only because of diversity." Kayoko's emphasis on "very capable" in itself is telling. It signifies an underlying assumption that it is only justified for women to be promoted instead of men when they show much greater abilities. Although Kayoko's example was an unusual case, many managerial women mentioned others (female

supervisors) tend to be "harder on female juniors instead of helping them" or "women being women's worst enemy." Those who had such supervisors or lacked positive role models earlier in their careers made conscious attempts to set better examples to their own subordinates especially when it came to workstyles. Several Japanese (but not Korean) women said they deliberately try to go home early (and act less busy) so their female subordinates do not lose their aspirations to become managers. These well-intended acts appeared harmless at first but more problematic when the women spoke about their own work-life balance. For instance, section chief Chiharu (50) worked for an IT company with only four female department heads. She was keenly aware of the impact her own work behavior could have on the aspirations of her female juniors as shown by her statement "younger women say that they are not willing to become even kachō, because I look very busy." However, her workload was too heavy for her to finish before 8:00 or 9:00 PM. On top of that, she was concerned about "overtime harassment" so she ended up finishing her subordinates' work. In her team, there were three working mothers whose responsibilities she personally intended to take over during their leave (rather than transferring them to other team members). Although Chiharu reproduced the workstyle of senior males in her company, she did practice greater flexibility in the organization of work. She encouraged fathers to use telework, had two subordinates who worked from home at the time of interview, and sometimes used the system herself. When asked whether it was difficult to manage employees without face-to-face contact (often heard disruption argument), she responded "there is no problem if they are doing their work properly." Her later statement reveals Chiharu nonetheless reproduced gendered practices in performance evaluations: "Those who come to the office have to handle inquiries and troubles more often. I will have to give fair evaluations based on their contribution." My impression was that her notion of "fair evaluations" implied giving higher

grades to members who worked regular hours in the office and dealt with more challenging tasks. In that sense, she unintentionally gave flexibility penalties to subordinates with alternative workstyles.

Similarly, Haruna (50-year-old mother of two) was one of the few female managers in her high-tech firm. She now supervised six subordinates (two males, four females) in the PR department. Although the number of female managers increased slowly in recent years, she did not know any women who had children indicating that managerial jobs were still male-oriented. Her self-reported average working days by far exceeded regular hours due to understaffing. She usually left the office by 7:30 or 8:00 PM but it was not unusual to stay until 10:00 in the evening. When asked about her own work-life balance, she bluntly stated "it is not good as a manager. The work has increased but the number of members are the same." Like Chiharu, she did desire a better work-life balance but found herself trapped reluctantly emulating the workstyle of most male managers in her company. Both women responded to structural constraints (marginalization of women in senior management) by reinforcing ideal worker images attached to managerial jobs and possibly became negative role models to their female juniors.

These cases highlight two dynamics that complicate managerial women's agency when trying to become positive role models in their daily supervision. First, the mismatch between disproportionately high workloads of managers and policy goals to reduce overtime can have a negative influence on women's own work-life balance when they compensate for the (perceived) lower productivity of subordinates without a more fundamental reorganization/fair distribution of work processes. On this issue, I agree somewhat with the argument that certain HR policies (i.e., managerial overtime exemption, staff reductions, managerialism in performance evaluations

focused on autonomy, merit, unattainable targets) by Japanese major firms are prone to exploit managers (Ho 2020). Second, when managerial women tacitly accept the dominant notion that employees who do not work in the office contribute less to team productivity, they reproduce inequalities through gendered performance evaluations.

In contrast, the senior manager Hana (48 years old, mother) at an aviation/hospitality company that employed more women than men (58% female employees) reacted very differently once she had subordinates of her own. At the time of the interview, she had eight subordinates (two males, six females) and no longer habitually worked late like she did for many years (leaving on time one day, working until 9:00 PM the next) to set a good example. She was fortunate that her company allowed her to switch between non-career and career-tracks as her family situation changed. Hana had few role models of her own and was one of the few female senior managers with children (only two of the 30 senior female vice presidents had children, all four female board members were childless). Although she had always been a hard worker, she now accepted new recruits "don't like being busy… not work but life is very important… they [young men and women] don't want to be managers" and observed regular working hours. The interview with one of her subordinates, Kimiko (27 years old, engaged) verifies Hana indeed served as a positive role model to her subordinates. Kimiko started in the non-career track as she "did not think seriously" about her career. In fact, she wanted to get married, have children and keep working at her own pace. In her own words, she did not think about becoming manager but after she came to the headquarters and got to know many women like her current manager, she recently started to think about more challenges and change to the career-track. However, seeing other women managers put in enormous efforts despite being on reduced working hour schemes made her question whether she could achieve expected results, especially now that she planned

to get married next year and have a child. On a positive note, she noticed a recent decrease in male managers who "stayed in the office late for no apparent reason" which made her feel hopeful. Kimiko's story revealed that the combination of positive female role models and behavioral adjustment of senior males can inspire younger women to pursue a career as it widens their perceived scope of alternative workstyles.

In sum, negative views among male workers regarding the advancement of women in management before recruitment of women in career track positions became normalized complicate the emancipation of women as a group (and solidarity among them) especially now that companies are reducing the total number of senior management positions. The interviews with younger managers, however, indicate this inclination is decreasing among those who got promoted when highly educated women gained critical mass in the core workforce. The managerial women in their forties were notably less concerned about how the promotion of female subordinates would affect their own status and credibility as female leaders.

Women managers' past experiences with unfair practices sensitized them to exert caution when evaluating the performance of their subordinates. Male perceptions of reverse discrimination, however, constrained their freedom to act upon their personal beliefs. Managerial women who are highly visible in organizations with hypermasculine work cultures face additional pressures to avoid being accused of favoritism or incompetent leadership. How they are perceived by others, then, influences the way they manage female juniors and may, in some cases, lead them to reproduce gendered practices in performance appraisals.

Lastly, the interview findings show the dubious power of female role models and constraints individual women managers face due to their special status in the workforce. In positive cases, women who lacked female role models earlier in their careers can become

committed to set a better example by practicing alternative workstyles than the single childless female managers who currently assume most senior posts. In negative cases, female managers who noticed little change in the work behaviors of senior men and women despite workstyle reforms have few options but to continue their old ways especially when there is no fundamental rethinking of what makes an employee valuable to the company. From a policy perspective, this implies that superficial measures to reduce overtime without adjustments of workloads and reorganization of time-consuming work processes (e.g., *ringi* system) can aggravate the work-life balance of managerial women as they take on unfinished business of their subordinates. This brings me to the final point of interest in this chapter: What circumstances enabled managerial women to develop their own leadership styles different from the senior men in their organizations? The following section explores further how gendered organizational beliefs interact with women's agency in leadership.

Gendered Organizational Beliefs and Women's Leadership Styles

> I think it is easier for me to work with females. Some males are very masculine and stubborn, especially the older ones. I am not good at dealing with them. Having a gender mixture is more interesting… Men like rules. If I wanted to do something new, they would start a discussion. They would try to stop me, especially if the rules were made by them. With many females, it is easier to persuade them verbally… Women managers are more precise. The female team leader I had talked details a lot. She laid out the workflow step by step. I think it was because she had such long specialized experience on the job. For me it was easier to work for such a boss. Male managers are just looking at outcomes.
>
> (32-year-old male employee, aviation company)

Detail-oriented women and goal-directed men

Unfortunately, very few women interviewed in both countries shared the sentiment of the gentleman quoted above. In fact, most did not consider detailed instructions or micro-managing to be a positive inclination of women managers at all. How then did they construct images of good female vis-à-vis male leaders? Like the HR informants, most women irrespective of social generation or educational level expressed rather essentialist views in line with universal notions of masculine and feminine traits in leadership[93]. Except for a handful who believed it was more about personality than gender, managerial women echoed common stereotypes. Female leaders were described as micro-managers, or more positively, detail-oriented and conscientious. Traits primarily attributed to male leaders (and masculinized women jokingly referred to as *zipper women*) often included decisive, authoritative, and tough. This is not to say that they necessarily attached value judgements to the traits associated with men and women. For instance, department manager Kaori (56) at a technology provider mentioned:

> Women are as capable as men. However, I often hear that men are easier to work with, because women ask detailed questions about their assignments to make sure they fully understand. Men just say "okay will do." And I hear that our current COO once had a hard time under female superiors, that [why they prefer male candidates for department head/executive positions] might have some influence.

This statement is interesting for two reasons. First, it reveals women's beliefs in gender-specific traits can be decoupled from competence or merit. Instead, they are understood as different inclinations or behaviors during interactions on the work floor. More importantly, the

[93] In surveys feminine traits often include being excitable, gentle, emotional, submissive, sentimental, understanding, compassionate, sensitive and dependent. On the other hand, male traits typically include being dominant, aggressive, tough, assertive, autocratic, analytical, competitive and independent (Painter-Morland 2011).

phrase “men are easier to work with” reflects a dominant view of ideal managers based on the tendencies of men who came before and succeeded in climbing the corporate ranks. It is telling that Kaori’s rationalization of the biased selection process does not involve questioning why it is *normal* to believe women who ask detailed questions before taking action are considered “difficult to work with.” It indicates male standards, that are perceived as superior, are too deeply embedded in the company culture to be questioned by individual women and men despite measures to raise awareness for diversity and inclusion. Secondly, the narrative echoes an internalized “fixing the women” approach to gender equality. Women should ask less questions, but men do not have to be more thorough. This indicates the persistence of a gender hierarchy shared by the members of her company that disadvantages women to rise to the top through biased views about women’s limited aptitude for leadership roles.

Asako (58) a director HRD at a beauty/lifestyle firm was the most outspoken about gender specific traits among the women managers and confidently summed up some major differences between female and male employees she observed.

> I always thought there was no difference between men and women. But through an employee survey, I learned there is a difference. Women have a strong sense of justice and try to do right things. Men just do what they are told without thinking too much, so they are very convenient and useful for managers. Men do not have a wide perception, do not hesitate, and have confidence. Women have a wider view, hesitate, and give up easily…I was also like that [asking many questions to the boss] myself.

Asako started her career as a specialist (engineer) but switched to the generalist track when she was about 45 years. She recalled finding it difficult at first to manage younger employees saying “They want to make changes, but their speed of change is different from mine.” Her later comment “They feel they are equal and want to make contributions but are not

very good at having discussions, compromising, and finding the third solution" reveals generation also intersects with gender in her perception of subordinates' work attitudes. Her own work behavior and development appears to have shaped the lens with which she currently evaluated younger men and women. At the time of the interview Asako supervised six junior employees and after gaining confidence in her managerial role, she wanted to take on greater challenges. Unfortunately, she found her voice too late and now that she expressed her aspirations, she knew nobody who would give her a chance. To an outsider, her earlier lack of confidence seems to stem more from not having opportunities to develop leadership skills (she had no team members or subordinates when she became manager "by title only") in the formative years of her career than a gender-specific trait. From a policy perspective, this finding validates the argument of many HR informants interviewed that female employees benefit from early (promotion) opportunities to grow with challenging assignments that take them beyond their own work group so they can be ready when they qualify for leadership positions.

Indeed, the self-perception and gender beliefs of Korean women managers who were promoted in their early thirties and Japanese counterparts who became managers with subordinates faster than usual given the seniority-based promotion system, were distinctively more nuanced and less gender essentialist. For instance, Young-mi (34) a manager technology planning mentioned:

> Maybe I will get more ambitious and goal-oriented after I receive more recognition. At this moment, I hope so. I never imagined being promoted to manager when I was assistant manager. But as I was working and received training, I gained confidence. It could be the same when I become deputy chief. If my supervisor trains me in leadership skills and gives me more responsibilities, I may see myself as a leader.

During the panel sessions in Japan, the participants who all managed subordinates spoke of a similar developmental process. Like Young-mi, they gradually gained confidence as they accumulated hands on experience leading a team. These senior women managers now described themselves as "impudent," "bold," and "goal-directed." Interestingly, they ascribed masculine qualities to themselves while believing "senior men are more cautious and afraid to overstep hierarchical boundaries." The panel data, thus, shows women's gender beliefs about good managers are fluid, tend to change over time with maturity, and more context-specific than biological.

In fact, surprisingly many Japanese and Korean women managers thought of themselves as ambitious go-getters before even starting their careers. They defined their qualities in masculine terms without any mention of feminine traits. It is possible they partially became what was expected from them through socialization in their companies and distanced themselves from other women who are perceived as not committed, sensitive, or indecisive. In any case, the way they evaluated themselves today as managers/leaders was clearly influenced by a male yardstick. Overall, the women gave me the impression they had somewhat assertive personalities as they shared early memories such as "always wanting to be the best in school" (Chung-ja), "being ambitious even as a young girl" (Mi-kyung, Chiyako), or "being impatient and result-driven" (Hina), but also adjusted to fit the mold since they "had to be more masculine and work like men to succeed." This resonates with leadership research that argues "women can respond quite authentically to unarticulated expectations that inform one particular situation while resisting these same expectations in another. This does not amount to a lack of authenticity. Instead it is a reflection of the institutionalized prejudices to which women are regularly exposed, and the ways

in which particular individuals challenge, resist and navigate them (Painter-Morland 2011, p. 460)."

A similar dynamic seemed responsible for women's tendency to distance themselves from women perceived as inferior. This surfaced most clearly in their statements about female subordinates deemed too "sensitive," "emotional," "insecure," or "quitters." Their descriptions of military style leaders (Korea) and corporate warriors (Japan) in the highest echelons of their organizations leads me to believe the tendency of these managerial women to turn against their own category was also a reflection of internalized hypermasculine leadership ideas *and* (an understandable) fear to be perceived as less competent than male leaders. On the two matters, I agree with scholars who challenge the Queen Bee hypothesis for these very reasons.

Now I will return to the stereotypical view that women tend to be micromanagers mentioned in the beginning of the section. Several women in both countries described themselves as such. However, as they reflected on why they wanted to control their subordinates' way of work it became apparent it had more to do with their heightened visibility as women leaders. To illustrate, general manager Mi-kyung (38) said:

> [s]ince there are very few female leaders in the organization, they are more visible. They attract even more interest. That is why I feel a lot of pressure to achieve excellence. If I lack in competence in one aspect of the work, they will immediately criticize me.

For the women like Mi-kyung, who were one of the few female leaders in their companies, worries of becoming the object of scrutiny about their competence/aptitude as senior managers seem to have propelled them to employ a more directive leadership style than they would have otherwise. Mi-kyung's case was not isolated to the Korean sample and several Japanese women (Hiroko, Kimiko, Mayumi) recalled being micro-managers when they first

became responsible for subordinates because of such pressures. However, these women often became more democratic and flexible after a learning curve and believed they now gave their subordinates more individual freedom to use their own judgments in how to conduct business. These cases indicate that detail-oriented is not always a gender-specific trait but a response to disproportionately high-performance pressures on women leaders when they are marginalized. The positive examples of women who were able to develop unique leadership styles that matched their personality identified two crucial preconditions. The first pertains numbers, namely normalization and diversity of women in senior management. The second concerns the extent to which institutionalized gender stereotypes are contested by authority figures to whom managers look for signals about appropriate traits/behaviors. Now that I discussed the interaction between dominant gender beliefs that disadvantage women in their individual agency in leadership and clarified the contexts that helped them develop more authentic and transformative leadership[94] styles, I will turn to some positive attributes associated with women that frequently occurred in the narratives.

Soft skills of Japanese women managers

What particular feminine skills or traits were perceived as beneficial to the career achievements of Japanese managers, and why? Not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned qualities were "soft/good communication skills," "being an adhesive that connects people and teams," "broader orientation in work/life," and "thorough preparation before taking decisions."

[94] Transformative leadership as a new alternative style is defined as leadership grounded in an ethical commitment to serve the best interests of the organization, individuals, and society. Transformative leaders create a strong personal bond with followers that inspires them to achieve unprecedented results, display humility, believe in universal principles and values over short-term outcomes, honor both employees and the organization, and provide and practice a learning culture (Caldwell et al. 2012).

Unlike observations that women managers themselves do not view feminine traits such as interpersonal orientation as advantages (Kim 2005a), the women in my sample explicitly mentioned them as strengths. However, the same women also said the men in their companies generally do not value them for leadership roles.

The following excerpt of Rina (32) staff member beauty/lifestyle firm captures the stance of Japanese women managers.

> I think the female supervisors are relatively far better at communicating within the organization as compared to the men. There are women I know who actively communicate with the overseas offices and seem to manage their work using excellent relation building capacity. In that sense, they are much more open than their male colleagues and as leaders they bring out the best in their subordinates without discriminating between a male or female... I don't mean to say that male bosses are bad at communication. Perhaps they take a much more professional approach whereas women communicate in a friendlier way…I had been working as an engineer for about 10 years, and then I started to think about my strong points but couldn't find any… One day my supervisor told me, "You are an adhesive. You connect teams." I realized that's a good role for women, not for men. Men often regard other teams as enemies… many women are very good at communication and multiple tasks, like thinking about meals while taking care of child. Women are good at managing several projects and connecting people…I don't think they recognize that as strong point to promote women.

Hina's elaborate narrative also indicates managerial women are particularly empowered when superiors/powerful individuals acknowledge feminine qualities. A commonality of women managers who employed softer skills in managing their subordinates was that they themselves had superiors who displayed feminine qualities. For instance, when asked how she developed her own leadership style, senior executive Nao (53) answered:

> I had 3 superiors at PR and IR division. One was the type who needs to know everything before making any judgement. The other was the type who delegates tasks to his subordinates. And the other was the diligent type. I was positively influenced by each of them, particularly by the superior who delegated challenging jobs to us. So I tried to

> delegate to my subordinates. I also tried to talk to them in person and see whether they had any trouble. Whenever they did something well, I always told them "Good job."

This example suggests that an effective way of mitigating the negative influence of people's tendency to devalue feminine qualities on women's individual agency in leadership is through the behavior of powerful males. A careful reading of the self-evaluations of women managers further shows an individual's leadership qualities are hard to capture in binaries (masculine versus feminine). Hiroko (54), a section chief engineer product development, illustrates it is often a mixture of both depending on the situation/person:

> I think there are different types of female leaders. I had a female leader at former company. She was strict with her subordinates. I am a strict leader too, but I try to be soft in communication. It is quite difficult to think and act for ourselves. I want my subordinates to think for themselves, so I try not to give too detailed instructions. I feel a bit anxious, but I would like to support them so that they can think and work as they like.

Some women like Nozomi (43), a senior engineer at an IT company reflects, turned what they believed to be gender-differences into an asset saying:

> 20 years ago, female managers wanted to be equal to male managers. But I don't think that way. I want to do what male managers cannot do. I think more and more women feel like that now…Senior women are more thoughtful about people around them. It is not good or bad, just different.

Altogether, these narratives show the positive influence of authority figures' validation of feminine qualities *and* direct exposure to superiors with a combination of masculine and feminine qualities on women managers' confidence and ability to give their own meanings to effective leadership. In the opposite direction, when women only worked under one type of superiors with masculine traits (i.e., authoritarian, performance-oriented, competitive,

aggressive, etc.), they tended to exaggerate those instead of develop softer skills that may have been just as (or perhaps even more) effective in getting the best out of subordinates, especially when they belong to younger generations. On a comparative note, it was striking that soft skills were rarely validated by the Korean women managers. I will now discuss the dynamics that shaped the leadership styles typically employed by the Korean women in my sample.

Masculine leadership of Korean women managers

The senior Korean women managers (deputy head and above) irrespective of age or occupational field all gravitated more towards masculine leadership styles. This is not surprising as they had no role models other than male leaders in their fifties and above. As mentioned before, these pioneers emulated male leadership styles primarily in response to expectations of others and their heightened visibility in higher job ranks believing "it was the only way to succeed." The department head HR at a fashion company Soon-ja (47) was a case in point.

> I am not a Queen Bee but… I believe the work performance of women cannot be evaluated more lenient because of their gender. We can be understanding when it comes to working times but each employee, regardless of gender, should be judged based on the quality of their work. It is the end result that matters. Of course, I am considerate when women sometimes have to leave early if there is something with their child. That can happen. But I am not sympathetic when the outcome of their work is different from others.

Soon-ja's firm stance regarding the work outcomes of her female subordinates reveals an underlying assumption women should change and adjust to the standards set by men (and women) without other responsibilities. Furthermore, her emphasis on autonomy and meritocracy reveals an inclination to downplay the significance of gender and ignore reasons external to women that also influence their work performance.

In like vein, Mi-kyung (38) a general manager legal affairs at a manufacturing company believed it was necessary to be authoritative in her supervision of subordinates.

> I am quite strict when it comes to juniors in age and rank. They say I am scary [laughs]. If they are wrong, they say I am really tough on them…I believe it is necessary to be firm and explicit about what I want. When they make a mistake, I tell them immediately so they can correct it. I have a no-nonsense way of working. But when we are not working, I socialize and joke with them.

Mi-kyung, who was younger than most deputy heads in her company and joined mid-career, felt others (especially senior male managers) constantly watched her to fail. In her case, the intersection of gender, age, and employment background in the external labor market created unfavorable working conditions that made her overcompensate for her lower status by being controlling and authoritative in her supervision. When asked if she treated female subordinates the same way, she responded:

> I am a little less tough. I cannot treat them with the same toughness as the men. I communicate to them in a slightly softer manner but if they make a mistake I point it out clearly. That is the only way we can go forward.

This is in stark contrast with the tendency of Japanese managers to favor softer skills and empower their subordinates by focusing on what they did well rather than their shortcomings.

Another woman (Chung-ja), a corporate lawyer who was recruited mid-career from outside, responded in a slightly different yet still defensive way to performance pressures and heightened visibility as one of the few female vice presidents in her manufacturing company.

> There is a lot of competition whether among men or women. I don't think about that. I am lucky that I have a specialty…I want to focus on my work, my team's work and team members. I don't focus on office politics and competition. I do my job and care about my

> staff. If you are concerned about how you compare to others, you cannot do your job properly. Just believe in yourself and do your work with confidence.

Although Chung-ja believed she was less concerned with others' opinions than perhaps women like Soon-ja and Mi-kyung, in my view she was not completely immunized as she behaved reactively by turning inward. Interestingly, Chung-ja who struck me as remarkably assertive and stern in her mannerism, described herself as friendly and very flexible in her supervision. When the topic of home-based work came up, however, it became clear that her flexibility also had its limitations as she firmly said:

> This is a Korean [emphasis] company. They [her subordinates] can never work at home. They have to work in the office. I am flexible about their working hours. I found my staff sticks to the working hours even more because I am so flexible. If employees don't feel well and cannot be productive, I don't see why they should stay until 6PM. Just go home, relax, and come to the office the next day at 7:00 AM and work.

The cases of rather masculinized Korean female managers underscore the systemic constraints to women's agency in leadership. Marginalization, scrutiny from others (male and female employees), and disproportionate performance pressures can all limit the agency freedoms to develop an alternative leadership style of women in senior positions. In contrast to the Japanese women who described the atmosphere in their companies as "friendly" and "not so competitive," most Korean women managers in my sample were unfortunately not in any position to become change agents or progressive female role models. To be sure, this observation is not meant as a judgement of the women interviewed but as a critical note on the biased practices they faced in their organizations. The implication of the rather masculine orientation found among the Korean women managers is that their leadership may be evaluated lower by subordinates and superiors as studies suggest women receive more disapproving and

uncooperative reactions than men do when they proceed in an assertive and directive manner because of role incongruity[95].

6.3 Conclusion

Overall, my exploration of how Korean and Japanese women responsible for disseminating policies in their companies construct their own meaning from the bottom-up highlights a large discrepancy between personal beliefs and official policy goals/methods to achieve them. Personally, women in both countries believed the firm should take a more proactive approach with accountability structures and incentives for middle managers to safeguard equal employment opportunities and better work-life balance for individual employees. In reality, they often compromised and practiced a softer liberal approach focused on autonomy and meritocracy relying on the goodwill of middle managers to practice the policies. My observation is that female implementers are particularly constrained in reconstructing alternative meanings of policy use by their own marginalized status in the workplace and concerns about antagonizing powerful individuals who might be instrumental in their career development.

The official policy narrative chosen by top management set boundaries, but in some cases individual policy makers were able to use their own judgement how to achieve corporate goals. What became clear after comparing the accounts of Korean (mostly section chiefs in their 30s)

[95] Role congruity theory posits that two forms of prejudice (less favorable evaluations of women's leadership potential and less favorable evaluation of the actual leadership because it is perceived as less desirable in women than men) towards female leaders constrain their agency in balancing masculine and feminine traits. Many scholars of leadership found empirical evidence that if female leaders violate prescriptive beliefs by fulfilling the agentic requirements of leader roles while failing to display the communal, supportive behaviors preferred in women, they can be negatively evaluated for these violations (Eagly and Klonsky 1992; Eagly and Karau 2002; Latu et al. 2011).

and Japanese (mostly department heads in their 50s) managers was that women with seniority in rank and age were better equipped to design and implement policies more closely aligned with their own beliefs. While the Korean women felt their hands were tied, their Japanese counterparts felt some sense of control over the policy directions and means to get there. This confirms power structures, and particularly whether individuals and their responsibilities are situated in the periphery or center of decision making, influence the agency freedoms of female gender equity/diversity actors to manage tensions between business objectives and moral arguments and strengthen internal legitimacy to implemented policies (Collinson et al. 1990; Cornelius et al. 2000; Kirton and Greene 2005).

My comparison of women's interpretations of gender equality/diversity and work-life balance in each country revealed another contrast with theoretical significance. The negative cases in Korea showed the limitations of what is referred to as a more traditional notion of gender equality in the diversity literature focused primarily on legal provisions (social justice perspective). This emphasis in official rhetoric crippled female implementers in raising support for initiatives among a broader group of employees. Unfortunately, the narrow gender-coded frame meant employees collectively understood policies as favors to women not men and unintentionally aggravated polarization and backlash. The positive cases in Japan, revealed that a broader view with gender-blind social justice and business case arguments can mitigate policies being brushed off as "women's issues" or "reverse discrimination." I believe this difference in how policies are framed coupled with higher organizational status of implementers enabled the Japanese women to incorporate more personal beliefs in formulating and executing strategies and be more progressive in dissemination. In both countries, however, unrealistic expectations from top management regarding policy outcomes and women's positionality as insiders deeply

invested in their companies and future careers (after moving on to a new position) complicated their agency when dealing with harsh realities while doing the job.

The interviews with policy officers identified some common difficulties getting policies practiced that resonate with the management literature and studies on organizational change initiatives such as resistance from middle managers, flexibility stigma/gendered ideas of policy use, and masculine images of ideal leaders. From an organizational perspective, reliance on voluntary cooperation (or lack thereof) of middle managers was found to be a major impediment that slowed down positive change at lower levels of the organization. Without the means to penalize undesired behavior, corporate policies tended to lose internal legitimacy and, in the worst-case scenario, be skeptically perceived as cosmetic by individual employees. On the work floor, fundamental cultural change was proven hard to promote without any real reduction of the burden employees perceive to use policies and stigmas attached to utilization. On an individual-level, women themselves needed to take greater advantage of the policies and use them wisely (but also accept any consequences of uptake). The problem, however, remained that career-oriented women (and men), especially those who are dependent on their immediate supervisors for promotion (as most corporate employees are in Korea and Japan are), were particularly discouraged to make requests or display alternative workstyles as they look for signals of appropriate behavior to current company leaders. It is not surprising that under such circumstances few women managers felt comfortable to stand out as agents of change or vocal positive role models for younger women in their organizations.

My findings further showed that a women manager's agency is closely related to organizational gender beliefs, her social status in the workplace, and her own experiences navigating a corporate career (both positive and negative) in a corporate environment where

managerial positions for men and women alike are decreasing. Outside the workplace, neoliberal transformations of work (e.g., flexible labor, managerialism, nominal management, erosion of income stability and job security, etc.) negatively affect the socio-economic lives of women (and men) in many occupations including corporate managers. This increasingly individualized and target-driven climate negates corporate workstyle interventions because individuals find it impossible to meet managerial expectations when working less than their overcommitted peers. In a positive direction, personal work experience with a male or female leader who possessed a mixture of qualities commonly perceived (and validated!) as masculine and feminine traits empowered individual women to become a different kind of leader than the conservative or authoritative senior males in their forties and above. In the reverse direction, the more women were exposed during their long careers to one single type of (hypermasculine) leaders, the greater their tendency to exaggerate masculine or hide feminine traits and reproduce gender stereotypes in leadership.

My comparison across companies and countries revealed a similar pattern at the organizational level. The Korean managers who typically described the atmosphere at work as "hyper competitive, military-style, and unfavorable to women" were notably more authoritative or controlling in their daily supervision and critical of the work behaviors/attitudes of younger female subordinates. The Japanese managers who more frequently reported a "friendly, noncompetitive, safe workplace" had a greater tendency to develop into more transformative and flexible leaders. This contrast shows that gendered ideal manager beliefs and leadership styles are fluid[96]. More importantly, it underscores that women managers' ability to develop unique

[96] Social psychologists Diekman and Eagly (2000) make an interesting point about the dynamism of gender stereotypes that offers some room for optimism. Their experimental study concerning stereotypes of women and men found that people are like implicit role theorists who believe personal characteristics adapt to social structure. When this structure changes (women's entry into the paid workforce), people believe the characteristics of new

leadership styles (and become positive role models) is indeed constrained by the combination of organizational status, judgement of others due to high visibility, and tensions between one's personal desires and a harsh corporate reality.

My observations about managerial women's own work-life balance challenges the notion that managers have better access to family-friendly policies and are in a better position to practice alternative workstyles due to their discretion and flexibility in work schedules (Blair Loy and Wharton 2002; Glass and Estes 1997; Glass and Fujimoto 1995). Instead, I argue that female managers in Japan and Korea are particularly disadvantaged. As Ho (2020) points out they are prone to exploitation as they are generally not paid for overtime and are expected to perform ever more functions with unattainable targets and fewer staff members. Moreover, dominant ideas about competent leaders in the higher echelons and lack of true diversity among senior managers and executives of both genders who can shield senior managers from scrutiny constrain ambitious women in becoming their own version of a good manager/leader with a healthier work-life balance of their own.

Since most executives in Korean and Japanese companies are still men in their fifties with older work family values, the chances are low that senior female managers have supervisors who encourage work-life balance policy uptake or put their neck on the line for them when they practice alternative workstyles. Besides, unless serious measures are taken to reduce homosocial reproduction in selection of executives, quotas will not make a profound difference in the experiences of aspiring women managers. Lastly, if there remains a sharp contradiction between

role occupants (women workers) change accordingly shifting towards those of men. Although I do not entirely agree with the authors' argument that stereotypes can be dynamic forces of social change in the Korean and Japanese context, I do believe in the positive implications of the findings that stereotypes concerning female leaders and women's development of conventional/alternative leadership styles are dynamic and adaptive constructs.

what work-life balance promise to do and exploitative HR practices on the work floor, I do not expect substantial improvements in the work lives of women and men in corporate Korea and Japan. Without addressing these issues at all levels, and fundamentally changing the ways employees are validated, it is unlikely that women managers with many years invested in their careers can escape from being “cogs in the machine.”