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Asian Female Senior Execs in Multinational Firms Confined to Regional Roles

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- 90% of Asian female senior leaders aspire to global roles, but only 36% are at least somewhat confident that they will have the opportunity
- An astonishing 85% are considering leaving their current companies in the next two years

HONG KONG, March 22, 2017 /PRNewswire/ -- As the shortage in the Asian executive talent pipeline continues to pose a major business challenge for many multinational companies, a majority of Asian women leaders at multinational corporations feel trapped in regional roles, according to a new study by [Heidrick & Struggles](#) (Nasdaq: HSII), a premier provider of executive search, leadership consulting and culture shaping worldwide.

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The firm's study reminds leaders at headquarters to take notice of Asian women leaders as an untapped resource for global roles, said **Steve Mullinjer, Regional Leader of Heidrick & Struggles, Asia Pacific**. "As leadership advisors, we recognize the pressing imperatives for companies to hire and promote the brightest and those with high potential in order to stay competitive and outperform others, regardless of their nationalities, age groups, gender and cultural backgrounds," Mullinjer said. "Senior management or headquarters need to embed such diversity of thinking in their organizations' DNA to become truly diverse and inclusive organizations and drive better value to their stakeholders."

According to the study, 90% of Asian female senior leaders currently in regional roles in multinational companies with headquarters outside Asia aspire to be promoted to global roles. However, only 36% are at least somewhat confident that they will be granted the opportunity. More than half (54%) believe these barriers are a response to their ethnic background, while nearly half (47%) feel that their gender is the main obstacle. Meanwhile, a staggering 85% are considering leaving their current companies in the next two years.

"Visionary corporations that recognize the increasing importance of Asia to their business are relocating their global headquarters to Asia. This move by a handful of companies serves as a great opportunity for Asian female leaders to take on global responsibilities without juggling time zone differences or perceptions that they are below average performers just because of the foreign accent they display during midnight conference calls. This requires a shift in mentality for headquarters leaders and must align with performance appraisal systems that indicate the path to global roles," said **Karen Choy-Xavier, Partner of Heidrick & Struggles** based in Singapore.

From May to December 2016, Heidrick & Struggles gathered findings from 138 female senior Asian leaders in the region, who shared the challenges they encounter and practices they adopt when taking the leap into a global role. Among the other findings:

- 43% are unwilling to take up global roles which would demand relocation, or participate in evening conference calls or other tasks that take away from time spent with their family.
- 19% feel that it is not culturally acceptable for women to be too ambitious, or that they would be regarded as culturally unfit by their colleagues at headquarters in terms of their communication styles.
- 13% feel that it is their non-native English accent and lack of English language communication skills that hinder their progression.
- 48% agreed that a major barrier is that headquarters' leaders do not pay enough attention to developing Asian women.
- Only 4% cited lack of capabilities and skill sets as a barrier.

"Although there has been a focus on subjects such as women on boards and the development of the local female workforce, the research by Heidrick & Struggles reveals the difficulties of mid- to senior-level Asian female leaders who are limited to regional roles. This is the biggest glass ceiling issue that our successful female leaders are facing in this part of the world," noted **Alain Deniau, Partner of Heidrick & Struggles** based in Hong Kong.

To gain greater clarity around issues raised in this study, Heidrick & Struggles has launched a series of focus group events in Singapore, India, Hong Kong, Japan and China, bringing together groups of female leaders. The insights gathered from the focus group will be consolidated in a Heidrick & Struggles APAC thought leadership paper to be launched in later in 2017.

About Heidrick & Struggles

Heidrick & Struggles (NASDAQ: HSII) serves the executive talent and leadership needs of the world's top organizations as a premier provider of leadership consulting, culture-shaping and senior-level executive search services. Heidrick & Struggles pioneered the profession of executive search more than 60 years ago. Today, the firm serves as a trusted advisor, providing integrated leadership solutions and helping its clients change the world, one leadership team at a time. www.heidrick.com

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