

## Methodology



This longitudinal study draws on data collected through five surveys:

1. A survey of MBA alumni who graduated between 1981 and 1995 from 12 leading U.S. business schools that participated in the Catalyst study *Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity*.
2. A follow-up (re-contact) survey in 2007 of alumni who participated in the Catalyst study *Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity*.
3. A global survey of MBA alumni who graduated between 1996 and 2007 from 11 of the 12 U.S. business schools that originally participated in the Catalyst study *Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity*, plus 15 other business schools in Asia, Canada, and Europe.
4. A follow-up pulse survey in 2009 on the impact of the economic downturn on the careers of a subset of the participants in the global survey.
5. A comprehensive survey in 2010 to collect additional career information from a subset of participants in the global sample.

### ***Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity***

In 2000, Catalyst published *Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity* based on research conducted in cooperation with the University of Michigan Business School and the Center for the Education of Women at the University of Michigan. The report examined career outcomes for women and men MBAs who graduated from 1981 to 1995. Aspects studied included: what industries and functional areas graduates were then working in, levels of leadership they had attained, their expectations for future advancement, barriers they had encountered, and their recommendations for business schools and for corporations interested in attracting and retaining high-potential women.

The survey was mailed to 4,064 women and men MBA graduates from 12 of the top U.S. business schools. A total of 1,684 recipients completed the survey for a response rate of 41%. Survey findings were supplemented with focus groups.

### **Re-Contact Survey of MBA Alumni from 1981 to 1995, in 2008**

In 2006, Catalyst sought and received permission from 11 of the 12 schools that participated in the *Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity* survey to re-contact alumni who graduated from 1981 to 1995 and who had responded to the original survey.<sup>1</sup>

In 2008, invitations to participate in an online survey were sent under the signature of the dean or another highly ranked executive at each school by email or traditional mail to 1,219 alumni for whom updated contact information was available. Of those, 112 invitations were undeliverable, resulting in 1,107 invitations reaching the intended recipients. A total of 335 recipients completed the survey for a response rate of 30%.

### **Global Survey of MBA Alumni Who Graduated from 1996 to 2007, in 2008**

Again in 2006 and into 2007 Catalyst invited the 12 U.S. business schools that participated in the *Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity* survey plus top business schools in Asia, Canada, and Europe to participate in a survey of MBA alumni who graduated from

<sup>1</sup> Dartmouth College was unable to participate in this re-contact survey.

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1996 to 2007. The study was ultimately fielded at 26 business schools around the world: four Asian schools, seven Canadian schools, four European schools, and 11 U.S. schools.<sup>2</sup>

Each participating school fielded between Fall 2007 and Spring 2008. Schools were asked to invite all MBA alumni who graduated from 1996 through 2007 to participate in the online survey. In some cases, schools sent the invitation only to a random sample of their MBA alumni.

A total of 85,392 invitations to participate in the online survey were sent by email under the signature of the dean or another highly ranked executive at the school. In total, there were 9,927 survey respondents, resulting in a response rate of 12%. As most schools were unable to track email bounce-backs, this number is likely an underestimate of the true response rate.

Most reported findings in *Pipeline's Broken Promise* and *Mentoring: Necessary But Insufficient for Advancement* draw from the 4,143 respondents who completed full-time MBAs and worked full-time in companies or firms at the time of the survey, with some notable exceptions:

- When we look at promotions and compensation growth in the jobs high potentials held as of 2008 in *Mentoring: Necessary But Insufficient for Advancement*, we draw from a sub-sample of 3,013 respondents who either never had a mentor or had a mentor at some point while at their current employer as of the 2008 survey.
- *Pipeline's Broken Promise* revealed that women and men were equally likely to take a nontraditional career path—working for a time in the nonprofit, government, or education sectors; being self-employed; or working part-time before returning to work full-time in a company or firm—but women paid a penalty for going off-path with respect to advancement that men did not. For this reason, when investigating the impact of individuals' career advancement strategies in *The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All The Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?*, we draw from a subset of 3,345 high potentials who stayed on a traditional career path post-MBA through to the 2008 survey.

### **Pulse Survey of MBA Alumni from 1996 to 2007 Following Economic Downturn, in 2009**

Participants in the global survey of MBA alumni conducted from Fall 2007 through Spring 2008 were given an opportunity to provide an email address expressing interest in participating in future surveys. Of the 9,927 survey respondents, 2,762 (28%) provided email addresses.

In Spring 2009, these alumni received an email invitation to participate in a brief online follow-up survey of their career experiences, focusing on job changes and unemployment during the economic downturn that occurred since the 2007 and 2008 survey. A total of 1,317 respondents completed the survey yielding a response rate of 48%.

<sup>2</sup> The University of Michigan was unable to participate in this new cohort survey.

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Findings reported in *Opportunity or Setback? High Potential Women and Men During Economic Crisis* draw from the 873 respondents who completed full-time MBAs and worked full-time in companies or firms as of their initial survey participation date.

### **Comprehensive Follow-Up Survey of MBA Alumni, in 2010**

In the winter of 2010, we sent a follow-up email to the 2,762 respondents who had previously provided email addresses. A total of 1,479 respondents completed the comprehensive survey providing additional information on their career progression, yielding a response rate of 54 percent. Of the alumni who graduated from full-time MBA programs, 742 had worked full-time at a company or firm at the time of the 2008 survey and were, thus, part of the 4,143 respondents whose responses served as the basis for previous reports.

Analyses in *The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All The Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?* that use data from this 2010 survey draw from the 577 respondents who:

- Had continued to work full-time from MBA graduation through to the time of the 2010 survey;
- Had worked in a company or firm; and who
- Were not employed in the government, education, or non-profit sectors, and were not self-employed.