

National Culture and Gender Diversity Within one of the Universal Swiss Banks: A detailed experiential description of a professional woman officer and president of the Women Managers' Association.

A Phenomenological Exercise according to Max Van Manen's four existentials: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality) and lived human relation (relationality or communality).

This is an attempt to lace anecdotal narrative into more formal textual discourse to create a tension between the pre-reflective and reflective pulls of languages (Manen, 1990, p.121). This approach is also selected to bring out experientially the inherent contrasts and contradictions of cultural and gender diversity in a Swiss Universal Bank as seen by a bi-cultural professional woman. This narrative is a story of a North American woman whose U.S. parents moved to Italy when she was two then divorced and remarried Europeans when she was five. Switzerland became home until she returned to the U.S. for graduate school in Santa Barbara, California and post graduate school at Thunderbird School of International Management in Phoenix, Arizona. With diplomas in hand, she returned to work for a large Swiss bank at the tip of the lake Geneva. Five years after her return, this is her story.

NARRATIVE

*I was nervously perched on a little sofa outside the conference room. The General Director of Mont Blanc Bank, Geneva, was holding his meeting with his men. I must remember! Before the re-engineering process, they were termed **Directors of Departments**. Now, they were chiefs of division, or were they? It made no difference to me what they were termed. They were, nevertheless, the most powerful men of Mont Blanc Bank, Geneva. Furthermore, the vocabulary describing the hierarchy of the bank was still a carbon copy of the military system. Was this not an indication of the spirit of the bank? Previously, the men who climbed the military ladder were lured into enticing jobs at one of the three largest banks in Switzerland: Union Bank of Switzerland, Swiss Bank Corporation and Credit Suisse. It was believed that they made better managers since they had plenty of practice at leading, ordering, planning for and controlling their soldiers. To be a*

high ranking military official was almost a must in order to pursue a career in one of the big banks. It always surprised me, as a foreign woman, that this paradox could exist in a country that prided itself in its neutrality. Many Swiss still assumed that neutrality required a strong military force to protect it. The Swiss Universal bankers, in particular, have some strange nostalgia for the military system. They participated aggressively strategically and tactically in world events which has made them astute international bankers but will their 'military' banking systems be the most appropriate structure when change seems to be accelerating in the global financial environment?

As soon as the voices I was hearing through the conference room door ceased, the impressive wooden door would open. Apart from a former Jesuit, I would walk into a room of men that vouched for the military system. Rumor had it that this was changing. Was it just a coincidence that they used military jargon profusely?

I wondered whether the animated talk I was hearing through the walls was ever going to come to an end. I was impatient to deliver my speech. I believed in my mission "to strengthen professional women's identities and working conditions in the bank." Granted, we were asking for a better quality of work and an enforcement of equal opportunities for women. In counterpart, we would create events that would attract professional women outside the bank to invest in a more "progressive" bank. Was this not also appealing to a capitalistic stance?

In preparation for this meeting, every night after work I had reviewed what other companies were doing to ameliorate the conditions and opportunities of the women working in their institutions. I thought I had gained a "sense" of what Swiss companies were ready to change. I had been president of several professional women's organizations and had created programs to promote women.

The "sense" that was felt by this professional woman corresponded to the emergence of entrepreneurial project-based groups--a microclimate in which patch dynamics can work. These are operations at the peripheral boundaries of the organizations where experiments can thrive and perpetuate the variety necessary to preserve the system as a whole. However,

the "sense" expressed here was not representative of the whole organization. Inevitably, this activity entails the potential creation of crisis for existing mature operations (Hurst & Zimmerman, 1994, p. 350) such as the Swiss banks. In other words, maybe nothing less than a crisis could have instigated large-scale change.

Legally, women had equal rights, or at least that is what I believed. But did the heads of companies want to enforce the women's newly acknowledged rights? How could one explain why French or German international banks had many more women managers?

Big Brother, the Head Office of Mont Blanc Bank, seemed a little embarrassed by the large discrepancy between the image the bank portrayed of a global bank and its local management in regards to women. Dr. Tug himself, the God of the Gods, gave his men directives! Listen to the women in the bank! Was this not our opportunity to have women's voices heard? As president of the Women Managers' Association, I was the representative of our project.

What were the chances of this woman succeeding in her project? Where was this organization on the ecocycle? According to Hurst & Zimmerman (1994), an organization goes through four phases of the ecocycle. An organization evolves from the exploitation phase to the conservation phase to the creative destruction phase and, finally, to the renewal phase. These authors draw parallels between organizational change and the formation of a forest. The exploitation phase of the ecosystem is characterized by the rapid colonization of an available space, such as a gap in a forest due to the fall of a large tree. A "microclimate" is created. The newly opened space now offers equal access to resources to more organisms. There are many different ways for resources to flow through the system. Slowly this newly opened field becomes dominated by a few large systems and differentiates into a hierarchy of smaller niches. At this point, a more mature phase of the ecocycle is reached. Successful organisms produce fewer successors, investing their energy in protecting them for longer periods of time and in defending their territories. In organizations, large hierarchical structures will control a set of niches beneath them. Seen from afar, the forest or the organization will look impressive and stable. However, many organisms in the system will be specialized and, therefore, the total diversity of the system will be less than in the

exploitation phase. "It is precisely the homogeneity of such systems in age, species type and their specialized adaptation to protected niches that renders them susceptible to catastrophe" (Hurst & Zimmerman, 1994, p. 343).

The Swiss banking industry is in its mature phase of development. It is in the conservation phase of the ecocycle which entails that the next ecocycle is the "creative destruction" phase according to Hurst and Zimmerman (1994). A significant decrease in the number of banks took place in the Swiss financial market in the 90's. There is a process of concentration in the industry (Andersen, 1992). Is the forest being dominated by a few large trees? Is the organizational system highly articulated with specialists?

I was anxiously fidgeting with the papers I was going to distribute when suddenly the General Director appeared in front of me. He very kindly told me that they were looking forward to my intervention. They were resolving important issues and would appreciate the relaxation during my ten minutes speech. He would call me in a few minutes. He then disappeared behind those large, heavy doors.

Was the "more pressing matter" alluded to by the General Director an indication of his preoccupation with the banking industry entering a more competitive environment? The young lady could speculate that if the organization was in its phase of "large hierarchical structure that controls available resources," (Hurst & Zimmerman, 1994) it would be less likely that the bank would be susceptible to any form of change altering the status quo. The bank would be in a tightly connected system where few alternative pathways existed to use the resources.

Lived time (temporality)

Was my speech going to be their ten minute cigar break? Were these issues that I was going to fight for classified as being of minor importance?

\$ 7,000, the amount requested from the Mont Blanc Bank, Geneva for the women's association that year was, indeed, minor for this prestigious bank and its over \$100 billion in assets. The reality of this matter did not really enter my consciousness.

Like many women, my impression was colored by my relationship with my father. Insidiously, I heard my father's vociferation coming to me from my past. He was speaking with a loud and overbearing voice to his four sons seated on the staircase leading to the second floor. He was standing up waving his hands as an orator would to stress his main points. "YOU my son, John, will be the director of the company. You, my son, Kelly, will market our products in the rest of Europe. You, my son...."

My father's voice was slowly dimming in my mind as if he was receding once again into my past. I only barely remembered him noticing my presence where I was perched on the last step of the staircase. Did I even hear him say "Oh Micky Ticky, learn how to type?"

Present experience in any given Now has a "historical" dimension, issuing from a past life and leading into a future life. This is related to what Schutz called our "biographical situation" (Wagner, 1983).

Today, I was fighting for my rights and my women colleagues' rights to be respected as three dimensional persons. I had worked endless hours for this recognition and produced effectively above and beyond my yearly quotas. The revenues of my mutual fund department had soared to unprecedented heights.

My colleagues and I labored to create a project that would narrow the discrimination between the percentage of female and male managers within the next five years. Furthermore, we envisioned a possibility of more flexible working schedules at reduced rates for both men and women. Would that not be a win-win situation for the bank?

The Boy-Network

While the **woman officer** was ruminating in her thoughts, muffled sounds filtered through the walls. She was too preoccupied to notice the agitated sounds emanating from the conference room. The General Director was facing his men and one in particular. The director of credits, Mr. Evan Remey. He was a man of fifty-three, sharp and shrewd, and after 25 years of a successful career in the bank, he could easily recognize when his favors were losing their allure. He had been the model of entrepreneurship when the bank was making loans at an ever increasing rate. As interest rates were

persistently creeping up, more credit defaults were being witnessed. Today the credit market called for extreme prudence. What was once seen as a dynamic business approach was now perceived as dangerously overextending the bank's risk.

Evan Remey was shuffling his papers then realized his internal agitation might transpire. He laid his hands gently on his papers and looked up to meet the General Director's gaze. He uttered his figures calmly even though he knew better than anyone that troubled waters lay ahead. Evan Remey gauged incisively his auditors' reactions, but they were demonstrating the usual collegial responses. Confronted with negative financial figures, he knew his colleagues' loyalties and political allegiances to him were going to be put to the test in the next year. His mind wandered but his voice did not. His usual discourse was peppered with witty irony at crucial moments to reduce the increasing tension in the room. Increasing interest rates were reducing real estate values up to 30 and 40 percent which reduced the bank's guaranty on their loans. Consequently, the bank was going to be reluctant to loan more money to his clients in difficulty which might set another cascade of defaults. With each credit failure, his accounts would be further scrutinized, and each mistake would be brought to light. If, temporarily, realtors could increase the rent to their renters and banks could see their interest rates increase substantially, the commercial department might see itself through this credit difficulty. But he knew that this was not easily done in a society composed of over 70 % of renters without provoking a social upheaval. Politically, this option would be difficult to take. His speech came to an end, and the Director General asked him to describe the client profile most effected by the economic slowdown. He mumbled a clever response that set his auditors chuckling, but Remey knew that in the enthusiasm of making new loans much of the data on the client's profile was missing in the dossier. Faced with adversity, Remey and his men were going to go busily to work to consolidate their portfolios. The pendulum had swung the other way. The more meticulous, conservative bankers would have their time of favor. Evan Remey knew he had only bought time.

When the Director General got up with a smile to announce that the president of the women managers' association was next on the agenda, Remey was relieved and told a dirty joke about women that set the boy network laughing in unison. It was the most cohesive

moment of the afternoon. As the Director General was known to have a healthy appreciation for women, the joke was welcomed by this Chief in Command. When the laughter subsided, the head of Mont Blanc Bank, Geneva, Mr. Ladefond, a gentle man in his sixties, mentioned in a serious tone that headquarters wanted the directors to be more proactive in integrating women in management. "Active intaking!" echoed a young ambitious director while glancing at his colleagues playfully and rocking his chair backwards. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," said Mr. Ladefond while raising his hand, "The Head Office has asked us to sponsor the Women Managers' Association."

Reputedly, the German Swiss and French Swiss regions had more than just a language and cultural barrier between them. The German Swiss area accounted for 70 % of the country and harbored most of the industry. The French Swiss area (Romandie) accounted for 27 % of the country and jealously guarded the tertiary activities. They were known for banks and insurances. Mont Blanc Bank, Geneva was the most successful branch office in Mont Blanc, Switzerland, and this was with the conscious effort of its directors to hold as many resources in the Geneva branch office as possible. This time the German Swiss Director General, who was part of the Director Generals Mont Blanc worldwide and whose headquarters were located in the German Swiss area, was also politically interested in maintaining as much power in the French Swiss area. It was under his area of responsibility. For the local directors, headquarters was the big brother to comply with, but not in any way to concede to. Most directives from the German Swiss headquarters were perceived as undermining their authority and were, at times, resented. On the other hand, the German Swiss generally thought of the French Swiss as the Southerners--the latin minority: not serious workers, nor rigorous in their methods but who lived in a great place to spend the holidays. They shared this last attribute with the Italian Swiss who held 3% of the sunniest part of the country, on the borders of Italy.

Mr. Ladefond could not pursue his comments as the Director General was already personally walking over to open the door to the next item on the agenda.

I heard through the walls a few more voices and then silence. The door opened and out peered the General Director to invite me in. I bounced up. I must have had as much adrenaline in my system as a sprinter before a

race. I was going to face the Gods of Finance of my company--The Mont Blanc Bank. This company had been my life, maybe even my soul, for five years. Of course, five years for a Swiss banker was a short time--stability being of essence. Consistency and durability were cherished values. Brilliance or out right ambition were suspicious qualities in this society where decisions were made in a civilized consensus form. Open confrontation was something the Cartesian French might relish, but the Swiss, "God forbid!" mused the U.S. voice in me.

Typically, the Swiss were non-confrontational. How could the Swiss ever come to any decision if their style was confrontational? Every canton, each of which could not be much bigger than Santa Barbara, California, has its own rules and regulations. Each canton has its own school system. If you drive a half hour in one direction, you will most likely be out of one canton and well into the next. There are four official languages in Switzerland, and this country is only 41,000 km² with a population of 7,000,000 people. It is half the population of New York. With the Swiss borders touching Germany, France, Austria, Liechtenstein and Italy, consensus insured the country's diversity and survival.

Lived space (spaciality)

Before I knew it, I was standing before nine Gods of finance with snow white temples who were sitting around a large U shaped conference table. The light was a dim glow. We were floors beneath the surface of the earth, near those gold safes. No exterior sound reached us. The ceiling appeared endlessly high, and yet the room seemed confining after accommodating these nine gnomes of finance. The General Director was on his throne at the far end of the table. Each director's power could be measured precisely by the distance of his seat from that of the General Director's. His court consisted of the young and/or ambitious opportunists who were at the tip of the U table. The more submissive consensus buffers were seated at the middle of the table. Were the buffers the General Director's men at the end of their careers in this bank, waiting for their retirement, or were they here at interim waiting for their next promotion? The buffers, nevertheless, adopted the same policy--no risks, no mistakes. Finally, the core decision makers were concentrated at the head of the table. The General Director's bodyguards were competing for his favors. There was no

doubt who ruled this roost. Unprotected by any of this hierarchy, I felt very insecure in front of these colossal decision makers, who in a snapshot would decide my career in the bank.

Lived body (corporeality)

Evan Remey stretched out his upper body, determined to make these next ten minutes last. Now that he was out of the center of focus, the gnawing pain in his back came to his consciousness. He shuffled his papers again like a pack of cards and mechanically placed them in his familiar folder, worn and faint in the corners where he had searched for comfort by rubbing it numerous times with his fingers.

He was jolted into the present time when he witnessed a young woman racing into the quaint and familiar room where decisions with his colleagues were made with conscious deliberation. Like a young mare, isolated from the troupe, she rushed into the conference room with a mixture of brut force characteristic of youthful conviction and an awkwardness from being in uncharted territory. Her gaze settled for an instant on Evan Remey who matched her glance while judging the strength of her body dressed in a tight black suit. Her hands and body moved expansively while she was stressing a point on the graph projected on the screen. What was it about North American women, he thought, that left you with the impression that they were trespassing on your private space. Their innate democratic attitude did not leave you with a comfortable hierarchical distance. He had noticed that a lot of North American women's faces expressed an apparent "naïveté" as if American women were unhampered by the same historical and traditional references or constraints as the Europeans. She was unabashedly ambitious and wanted to play with the big boys, and she even seemed to demand it as a right. It was unusual, appealing and maybe even exciting but... to be controlled. Evan Remey was reflecting on a previous presentation given by a Japanese woman officer. In contrast, she was so reserved, shy and controlled in her movements that he felt he had been invited to peek in a china store full of hidden treasures too fine and small for him not to feel clumsy and awkward. Her unassuming behavior and her soft spoken voice made him lean forward to hear as there seemed to be more distance between them than necessary. Suddenly, Evan Remey was distracted from his thoughts by someone nudging him in the arm. A second later a note was slipped into his hand. He discretely opened it

under the table. Scribbled in pencil was the message, "Some pair of legs! By the way, could you facilitate that loan to Mr. X of Company Y?" Evan Remey's eyes blinked a second longer than usual which assured his colleague's dossier would be examined with a positive bias.

I wonder what the Spartans felt when they were thrown into the ring to fight the wild lion. Seconds before the beast was released, when the Spartan stole a quick look at the public. Did the public appear serene, amused or untouchable? Would the Spartan draw the public's attention first to his body then to his look of defiance?

The spectators would probably gauge his success in combat then continue talking or laughing. A moment of silence would follow when the lion ran into the ring. Curious spectators would evaluate the force of the beast. If he was forceful or different in any way, the lion would hold their glances, their minds, their breaths, the time between two drops of water, before spectators resumed their conversations.

I walked briskly into my ring, ready to fight in earnest for women's recognition. I challenged the glances of these nine men looking at my attire, my suit, my hair. I suddenly was aware not only of their power and my lack of it, but also of my body and my gender. I was the only woman in the room. Did I expect anything different? Of course not! No professional women reached this level of power in the bank. Although I cognitively knew that I would be faced only by men, physically, I was finding my bearings. I was young, maybe attractive, but I felt foreign amongst this boy network. My body, for a fleeting second, was no longer part of me. It stood out awkwardly. It lost its naturalness and behaved clumsily. There was no room to move. The room barely contained the large conference table. Mostly venerable older men sat around it. They were chatting while occasionally glancing my way. Was I the buffoon called in to amuse them for the equivalent of the ten minute cigar break?

It was not until three minutes into my speech, as most of these important men continued their conversations, albeit more hushed, that I was beginning to feel ill at ease. I was losing my bearings. I began to go into the details of my outline instead of giving them the global view. It would be similar to a Spartan worrying about the strength of his spear instead of gauging the

reactions of the lion facing him. After all, the lion, with one strategic leap, could snuff out his last sigh. I felt vulnerable. Two Directors were laughing at their own jokes while slipping notes to each other. Now, what lions were these? Here I was called in to provide them with a program to improve women's conditions, and I felt I was in front of a kindergarten class watching small boys being disruptive and oblivious to the school teacher. Two good students, at the tip of the U table, were looking straight at me which drew my attention to them in search of spectators or any sign of positive recognition of my presence.

I should have tapped my ruler on the desk, stopped dead in my tracks and called on them. "Why do you call on us? What do you expect from the women of the bank? What are you ready to change? Do you have the power or will to enforce equal opportunities in your division? Are you going to establish a dialogue with us and answer these questions directly to us?"

Instead, I did not call on them to take positions or to act as adults. I continued with my statistics. "One woman out of every four men is in middle management. Only two women out of 1700 employees are Vice Presidents, and approximately fifty percent of all the employees are women."

"May a group of women make a survey investigating what the professional women of the bank **would like to** change to ensure equal opportunities?"

A survey seemed the most adequate procedure. After all, were these directors not constantly asking us to know what our clients want inside and outside of the bank? Total Quality Management, TQM, was all I had heard in the last six months. No response came from the Directors. "Are you content with this situation?" I wanted to scream! But I did not. I gave in to the unspoken collusion, "One does not question authority."

The typification, "Gods of Finance," served already to predetermine the intersubjective agenda, assuring that "they'll have their way" without thoughtfulness or much effort (Rehorick, 1994). In other words, the author's biographical situation predisposed her to submit to the authority structure and not attempt to alter the status quo.

At the end of the speech, I felt I was making a plea. I felt like the Spartan waiting for the verdict for a

performance that barely held the spectators' attention. I felt condemned as a bad fighter. My lion had had the better of me. I instilled more power in him than he actually possessed.

The speech had finished, and the conference room was finally silent. It was time for questions. A few polite inquiries followed from one of the bodyguards. The Swiss are so very composed. It was such a contrast to my internal agitation. I heard myself answer one of the questions in what I thought might have appeared as my last breath. "There is a trend that started in the USA. It will sooner or later come to Switzerland." I saw a few heads nod among the Directors. I continued, "How do you want to position the bank within this trend: before? amongst? or after the trend?" This was another direct question, albeit timid. It received no answer. I was dismissed cordially, and with due form, from the conference room.

The ten minutes were already up, thought Evan Remy. The meeting was coming to a close with a few polite questions and answers. And the thud of the conference door announced that the men's club were in their familiar room again. Of course, the \$ 7,000 would be approved. The sum demanded was insignificant. Furthermore, it was both politically correct to approve what headquarters asked for and wise not to overtly counter a women's association when more than 50 % of the bank's workforce were women. "But she wanted to play with the big boys, did she" he thought, "in a market that was ever more highly competitive and where overcapacity of human resources were becoming a serious problem. There were enough players among the men of the bank for every chosen spot, and if she wanted play the game, she would have to start learning the rules of the big boys." Evan Remy scanned his colleagues to evaluate their potential resistance to his next remark. First, he judged the ambitious director at the end of the table. As a fine sailer, the younger and ambitious director knew how to take advantage of favorable winds. Next, he glanced at the director in chief of the president of the women's association. He was seated in the buffer zone and was not going to take any undue risk for anyone under his responsibility. Furthermore, the women president in question was not now representing a department under his authority, and she was too low in the hierarchical structure for her successes or failures to be associated with his. Evan Remy was already internally chuckling when assessing the remaining directors. With one controlled ironic

statement, he set his audience laughing spiritedly at the woman officer's expense. Finally, the general director tapped his hand and ordered his men to pay attention to the next item on the agenda, "downsizing."

As soon as I heard the closing thud of the large conference door, I felt a lonely, desolate and uncomfortable feeling of having not been recognized as a person. I had received no feedback. How were these gnomes of Finance going to make their decision? But of course, it was going to be behind closed doors.

Now what did I expect? Gods of Finance do not negotiate directly with the commoners. Gods make the rules of the cosmos; commoners live by them.

As I walked out of the bank, which stretched out for an entire block, I saw that the building was almost empty, and it was dark outside. Was it already night time, or was I feeling somber and gloomy which tainted my vision? What had happened during the meeting? There had been no real communication or sharing of ideas. I left the conference room not knowing what the directors were thinking nor what they would decide, which left me with a heavy load to carry--a sense of failure.

When system members back away from change "because of resignation, inertia, passivity, or despair" (Levinson, 1978, p. 52), the closing of the transitional opportunity often brings a sense of failure or stagnation (Gersick, 1991, p. 31). Was this the case with this woman? Was she feeling a sense of despair? In mature and successful organizations, managers will naturally tend to restrict activities to those that have proven to work, leading to tightly coupled practices. (Hedberg, Nystrom, & Starbuck, 1976; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985; Hurst & Zimmerman, 1994). Cost reductions and efficiency are priorities during the mature phase of the ecocycle. "It seems that just as the trees in the forest go up in smoke when faced with fire, rigid inertial structures and systems within organizations can be destroyed only by crisis" (Hurst & Zimmerman, p.347). The womens' association was not a priority to the Mont Blanc Bank, Geneva Branch. It was not going to help the directors out of their current difficulties. The boy network was a cohesive force between members, and no advantage was to accrue to the directors if they integrated women actively in management. Furthermore, the program was initiated by headquarters which made any outcome a political decision.

The other possibility for a system-wide change on every scale to occur is a major crisis as described by Hurt's (1995) creative destruction phase. The creative destruction phase may allow a new system to emerge with different values. On the other hand, punctuated equilibrium suggests that for most systems' histories, there are limits beyond which "change is actively prevented rather than always potential but merely suppressed because no adaptive advantage would accrue" (Gould, 1989, p. 124).

I must have walked a mile before realizing where I was. I was still in the conference room arguing for more equal opportunities. I saw those ten minutes repeated endlessly in my mind..... as if somehow, the "Gods" would finally hear me. What I said during the conference echoed in my head.

*"Have you not been talking to us profusely about Total Quality Management: Find out what the clients want..... to serve them better! ...OK! Let us do a survey among the women in the bank to find out what would enable **them** to be happier and more productive in this bank .." Another echo came to me, "Here is a minute detail of how the funds would be allocated if given to the association of women managers of the bank. A women guest would be invited to talk to the women inside and outside the bank about..."*

Inner experiences occur within a continuous flow of "duration"; no isolated things appear in it but only ongoing happenings (Wagner, 1983, p.26). The woman's inner and exterior world are being experienced as the same during her walk from the bank. She is experiencing "duration,"; her sense of time is totally subjective and does not correspond to the objective time of a clock. Consciousness is then experienced as a flow of happenings (Wagner, 1983).

I heard tires screech and a horn blow which jolted me out of my thoughts in time to pull out of the way of a car racing at me. The endless film of the conference room resumed like a bad movie, but this time, it was reviewed in slower motion. Was the adrenaline wearing off?

Two days later, when I was back in the hustle and bustle of a trading room, my phone rang yet again. It must have been for the thirtieth time that day at only ten thirty in the morning. Whether the phone rang or

someone talked to me, my eyes never left for long one of the numerous screens encircling my desk. I had the pulse of the world's markets half a meter from my body. I grabbed the phone and answered a curt "yes" only to be answered by an unusually serene and poised voice. I heard him say, "The \$7,000 has been attributed to the Swiss Bank's women managers' project for the year 6/92 to 6/93. Thank you and congratulations for your project, Mrs. Odier."

The dollar against the yen was weakening on the screen in front of me. The information did not register consciously. I was asking myself if I had killed the lion. Had the emperor judged the fight valiant enough to show his thumb upward to the public? Did he grace the Spartan with his life? Did I misjudge the impact of my fight? Had I killed the lion? I was so relieved that as the representative of the women in the bank I had succeeded in my mission. I felt a surge of love for my women colleagues, my friends. I felt thankful to the Directors. I know this was no major achievement in itself. It was only a step, but like a baby's first steps, it implied that it might walk someday to its independence.

Indeed, two years later the Women Managers' Association, my baby, was beginning to walk alone. Each year new projects were gathering vital force. Women were working together--proposing ideas, creating events. However, the idea of a survey asking professional women what they believed would make them more productive professionals was never allowed to blossom. The project was nipped in the bud. The director said, "The survey would create expectations." "Of any change...." I thought.

I keep regular accounts of what I felt was my biological child. Yes, I left the Mont Blanc Bank a few months after the women's project had first been approved. I never believed I would ever see this child grow to adulthood. Was I going to be co-opted by this token gesture from management or did I abandon this new-born? Should I have stayed with this baby even if it did not grow beyond childhood? I see my friend, the child's adoptive mother leading the group. She is providing for its growth with her patience and care. She has faith that change occurs by incremental, cumulative and gradual steps. On the other hand, I believed that incremental adaptation was far inferior to the economic, social dislocation taking place in the environment. With regards to women, Swiss banking

organizations were not in alignment with the rest of the banking institutions in Europe, or was my North American culture affecting my perception?

Maybe my father's ghost still hurts me, and the pain has distorted my vision of reality. Change has occurred. Was it more than cosmetic? Did I make a mistake by leaving the bank?

My mind wanders off into a daydream. I remember sitting next to the General Director at a wedding. We talked and laughed until he geared the conversation to professional women. The General Director leaned over to me and said, "Women should be in the kitchen sweeping the floors," but of course, this was a joke of his! Did I not have a sense of humor?

It reminds me of one of the negotiation meetings which I held with the second in command of several hundred people in the Geneva branch of the Mont Blanc Bank. After an endless discussion of the purpose of our projects, I embarked on a light social conversation to end the meeting by asking our number two General Director, "Do you have children?" to which he answered, "Yes, three girls, all of whom are in secretarial school." I took a second look at this tough but kind man and thought he resembled my father too much.

While at a luncheon with twenty of the women managers of the bank, I was seated next to another one of my Directors, the host of the luncheon. He gave us an impressive speech on how he had given equal opportunities to the women in the bank. Once he had finished his speech, he and I continued a more private conversation about women working in the bank.

"Yes," he said, "my wife keeps pestering me about wanting to work. I do not think she should take the place of a woman who really needs to work." He took another look at me and paused. He assumed that with the well known last name I carry, I did not need to work, and he corrected his remark to, "I prefer that my wife does not work since she does not need to. I provide for her." Strangely enough, I felt relieved by his candor. Finally, my God of Finance was looking me in the eye and telling me his true thoughts.

Did I make the right decision to leave the Mont Blanc Bank? I felt gratitude for the opportunity to initiate a women's program with one of the most prestigious

banks in Switzerland. But I equally knew that my child would take several generations to grow to adulthood in the Mont Blanc Bank. While it was an immediate and tangible gesture was it not only a token?

And yet, I could not keep myself from wishing that some external crisis or the internal psychological make-up of the professional women might reach such cognitive dissonance that the process of change would be accelerated.

Kuhn (1970) states that crises are necessary precursors to scientific revolutions. Tushman and Romanelli (1985) identify "performance pressures ... whether anticipated or actual" as being fundamental agents of organizational reorientation. Here again, there were no crises. The banking industry as a whole was doing fairly well. One questions whether management even would have been concerned with equal rights if its bottom line was in jeopardy. Under stress, management would probably have reverted to its conservative behavior. In sum, change was demanded from the Chief Executive Officer of the bank during a period of relative stability, but the sense of urgency to address the change desired was not transmitted to these directors. Tushman and his colleagues (1986) found that change can occur during equilibrium periods but through broad participation. They also found that top teams are the only instigators strong enough to mount successful reorientations. In the narrative, headquarters expressed the desire to reorient gender issues, but no will was expressed by the branch's directors. Through the hierarchy, the order to "listen to the women of the bank" was acquitted by accepting the professional women managers' association's budget, but no communication was allowed that might have addressed some of the more fundamental issues of gender discrimination. Gersick (1991) would have stated that the banking system was in an equilibrium state that allowed only incremental adjustments to compensate for internal or external perturbations without changing their deep structures (p. 16).

How could change be dispersed through this banking institution? Prigogine and Stengers (1984) propose that organizations begin with a "nucleus" where the change must first become established firmly before it can take over the rest of the system (p.187). The more articulated the system, that is the more mature the organization, the stronger and larger the nucleus must be if it is to result in a systemwide change. In sum,

this entails that if patch dynamics take place and women's groups gather in informal networks throughout the organization, these groups may gather momentum to have systemwide influence. Gould (1972) states that the nucleus must be formed rapidly and in groups that are small and isolated enough for the change to take hold, so as not to be deluted by the parent company. In other words, these groups must have enough autonomy to have a self-referential system. Groups create their own agendas and start questioning the status quo. Self-referential systems, if they are not co-opted into the larger system, have lives of their own. Finally, Gersick (1991) states that for a new direction to emerge, one random environmental events or circumstances are required. Does that mean that the outcome of the narrative would be a question of chance, or is the "unexpected" an integral part of change?

On the individual level, Levinson (1986) argues that transitions in adult development are stimulated by deficiencies in the current life structure (p. 5). In other words, the narrator's life structure no longer adapted to this environment and, therefore, permitted the narrator to shift developmentally. This may explain why the narrator took the Presidency of the Professional Women Managers' Association and why she left the bank. Maybe the directors' attitudes towards the lady were too similar to her father's stifling behavior, and her vision of reality was tainted by her biographical history.

Kuhn notes (1970) that perception is a subjective phenomenon; there is always more than one plausible way to interpret reality

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