

Toward a Society Where All Women Shine

An Intensive Program to Help Women Break Through the Glass Ceiling

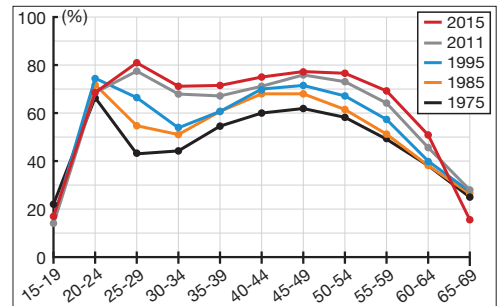
The Japanese government has promoted various initiatives to increase the number of women in the workforce in line with its aim of realizing innovation and enhancing productivity through diversity. As a result, women's advancement in Japanese society—traditionally thought to be male-dominated—has progressed. According to statistics from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the labor force participation rate for Japanese women aged 25–64 has reached 71.1%, surpassing the figure of 69.9% for the United States. But the glass ceiling that hinders women from rising to executive positions continues to be an issue in Japan, just as in many other countries.

Measures are now being taken to address this issue, with a focus on increasing the numbers of women in executive posts. As one step to foster the next generation of women leaders, the Japanese government collaborated with the private sector to hold the Executive Program for Women Leaders, which was conducted this January by professors from Harvard Business School (HBS). The participants were women in key managerial posts at companies actively seeking to promote women's advancement. They underwent training in the strategic-thinking and decision-making skills required of executives and forged personal networks with each other through group discussions.

Miki Kotani, who holds a managerial position at Sekisui House, one of Japan's major homebuilders, was a participant in the program. The majority of employees in the housing industry are male, and Kotani recalls, "When I joined the company 29 years ago, the managerial posts were largely held by men." She has worked to remove the glass ceiling by fostering women managers with initiatives including the creation of in-house training programs and support systems to promote women's active participation, along with steps to enhance awards systems. "The interaction and collaboration among the women in high-level managerial posts who participated in the HBS program will lead to changes in women's social roles," she expectantly declares.

Kotani speaks enthusiastically of her hope for a society in which women's participation will expand even further: "I've been working for many years in construction technology development operations, and company reform is similar in some ways to the work of development. I'd like to make use of what I learned from the HBS program for the development of new measures that will lead to greater involvement of women." Her bright gaze is focused on a future in which the women leaders who emerge from the HBS program will serve as role models for the empowerment of women throughout society.

Women's labor force participation rate by age group



Changes in the labor force participation rate for Japanese women: Until 1995, the rate for women aged 25–39 showed a pronounced dip, forming an M-shaped curve. Since 2011, the dip in the curve has become much less pronounced.

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.



Miki Kotani

Studied architecture at a public university in Japan and earned qualification as a first-class registered architect, along with various other qualifications in the fields of construction and real estate. Joined Sekisui House in 1988. After working in a technical capacity in residential design operations and on the development of energy-efficient homes, was appointed manager of the company's Diversity and Inclusion Promoting Office in April 2014.

Providing facilitation for students enrolled in Sekisui House Women's College, which trains candidates for managerial positions. Kotani developed and manages this course herself.



Executive Program for Women Leaders

In mid-January this year, 66 high-ranking women managers from leading companies in Japan participated in the Executive Program for Women Leaders, an intensive five-day program held in Tokyo. The idea for this program originated when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Professor Michael Porter and Dean Nitin Nohria at Harvard Business School (HBS) in late April 2015, when they discussed how HBS could collaborate with the Prime Minister's Office to increase the participation of women in executive offices in Japan.

All the women stayed at a hotel near the program site and spent the full five days learning from Professors Joseph Badaracco, David Moss, and Hirotaka Takeuchi and from each other through the case study method. The case studies showed in detail how executives have led their firms through very challenging times, dealing with important strategic issues in which uncertainty, restructuring, inequality, and innovation were crucial factors.

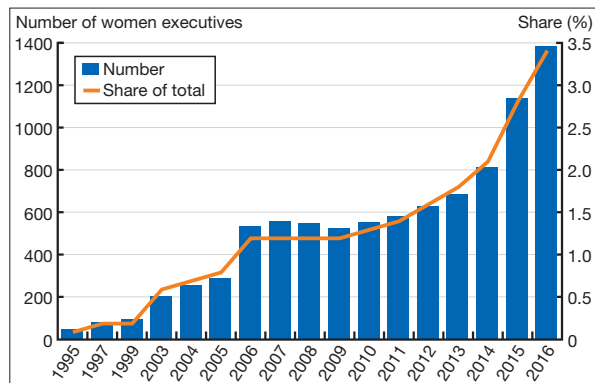
The Executive Program for Women Leaders was well received for three reasons: First, it prepared the participants for executive roles by training them to think strategically, behave as leaders, and grasp the global macroeconomic environment. Second, they forged a lasting personal network through the intensive discussions. And third, they were motivated by Prime Minister Abe's address at the closing reception, a sign of government support for their career goals. Since 60 companies sent managers to this program, we should soon see women sitting on 60 corporate boards.



Hirotaka Takeuchi

Professor in the HBS Strategy Unit, where he specializes in competitive strategy, knowledge management, and marketing.

Women executives at listed Japanese companies



Source: *Yakuin shikiho* survey of listed companies conducted every July by Toyo Keizai Inc.

Three Main Themes of the Program

Competitive Strategies (Professor Hirotaka Takeuchi)

Learning about drafting and implementing a competitive strategy by debating a strategy that focuses on people, as in human resource management.

Leadership (Professor Joseph Badaracco)

Learning how top management should lead a company by debating a case study from an existing company.

Macroeconomics Environment (Professor David Moss)

Learning by debating methods to analyze various countries' economies, mechanisms that trigger financial crises, and the impact of government policies on economies.



1 | 2 | 3

1. Professor Badaracco's class. The 66 participants from all over Japan debated in a lively fashion. 2. Hopefully new leaders will emerge from among these women to be role models for the younger generation of women. 3. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered an address at the closing ceremony and spoke of his wish to realize a society in which women actively participate, a goal he has been aiming for since the inauguration of his administration.