**Navigating the Corporate Labyrinth:**

**The Career Trajectories and Success Strategies of Female Migrant Executives in Australia**

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**Abstract**

Australia’s corporate landscape is enriched by the presence of many skilled migrants occupying high-level executive positions. The diverse mix of executives offers unique perspectives that drive organisational performance, innovation, and competitiveness and positively impact the economic advancement of a multicultural nation such as Australia. However, skilled migrants, particularly female executives from non-English speaking backgrounds, face unique challenges navigating the Australian corporate sector (Berg & Farbenblum, 2020; Groutsis et al., 2018; Haque & Haque, 2020). This study aims to delve into these challenges and explore strategies that enable career progression to executive levels.

Employing a critical social constructivist approach, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 female migrant executives. These interviews explored their career trajectories, the barriers they encountered, and the strategies they employed to overcome these obstacles and succeed in the Australian corporate environment. The study’s analytical framework incorporates theories of intersectionality (Acker, 2012; Adapa et al., 2016; Hearn et al., 2014), hegemonic masculinity (Baines et al., 2015; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013; Hearn, 2004; Poorhosseinzadeh & Strachan, 2020), and the concept of whiteness (Carangio, 2023; Carangio et al., 2021), offering a nuanced understanding of participants’ experiences.

Findings reveal that female migrant executives often experience downward career moves upon migration, hindered by restrictive visa requirements, the undervaluation of overseas qualifications, and systemic barriers such as language, ethnicity and gender discrimination. Additionally, biases in hiring practices and lack of support within professional networks further challenge their career advancement.

Despite these challenges, the study identifies key factors contributing to the career success of migrant executives, including acquiring host country qualifications, navigating the dynamics of citizenship and residency status and leveraging ethnic privilege. A supportive organisational climate, a diverse workforce and a solid professional network are pivotal in their career trajectories. Importantly, mentorship from individuals who understand the challenges of migrating executives plays a critical role in their career development.

This research contributes to the literature on skilled migration and executive career progression, providing insights for policymakers, governments, and organisations. It underscores the importance of developing inclusive practices and policies to facilitate the integration and advancement of highly skilled migrants into top-level positions, thereby enhancing Australia’s economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

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