

# Taboo: management consulting and policy prohibiting women

[Business](#), [Management](#)



The Taboo of Women in Management International management consulting firm Burns & McCallister is listed by Working Mother magazine as one of the top fifty firms in the United States for employment of working mothers and by Working Woman magazine as one of the top ten firms for women. The firm has earned this reputation for several reasons. First, nearly 50% of its partners are women. Second, it has a menu of employee benefits that includes such things as flex hours, sabbaticals, familyleave, home-based work, and part-time partner-track positions.

However, B&M recently has been the subject of a series of reports by both the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times that scrutinise its policy on female executives in certain nations. B&M has learned, through its years of consulting, that certain countries in which it negotiates for contracts prohibit the use of women in the negotiation process. The cultures of many of these countries do not permit women to speak in a meeting that includes men.

Consequently, B&M has implemented a policy prohibiting women partners from being assigned these potential account negotiations and later the accounts themselves. Clerical help in the offices can be female, but any contact with client must be through a male partner or account executive. For example, Japan still has a two-track hiring system with only 3% of professional positions open to women. The remainder of the women in the Japanese corporate workforce become office ladies who file, wear uniforms, and serve tea. Dentsu, Inc. a large Japanese ad firm, had a picture of the typical Dentsu " Working Girl" in its recruiting brochure. Surrounding the photo are comments primarily about her physical appearance: such as (1)

her breasts are " pretty large"; and (2) her bottom is " rather soft. " In response to criticism regarding B&M's posture, the head of the firm's New York office has explained: Look, we're about as progressive a firm as you'll find. But the reality of international business is that if we try to use women, we can't get the job. It's not a policy on all foreign accounts.

We've just identified certain cultures in which women will not be able to successfully land or work on accounts. This restriction does not interfere with their career track. It does not apply to all countries. The National Organisation for Women (NOW) would like B to apply to all its operations the standards that it employs in the United States. No restrictions are placed on women here, NOW argues, and other cultures should adapt to our standards; we should not change our standards to adapt to their culture. NOW maintains that without such a posture, change can never come about