Women in the Workplace

2015

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About the study

Women in the Workplace is a comprehensive study of the state of women in corporate America. The study is part of a long-term partnership between LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company to encourage female leadership and foster gender equality in the workplace.

One hundred eighteen companies and nearly 30,000 employees participated in this 2015 study, building on similar research conducted by McKinsey & Company in 2012.[1]

Contents

[1] Joanna Barsh and Lareina Yee, *Special Report: Unlocking the Full Potential of Women in the U.S. Economy*, McKinsey & Company (April 2012), http://www.mckinsey.com/unlocking_potential.

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Corporate America is not on a path to gender equality

Women are still underrepresented at every level in the corporate pipeline. Many people assume this is because women are leaving companies at higher rates than men or due to difficulties balancing work and family. However, our analysis tells a more complex story: women face greater barriers to advancement and a steeper path to senior leadership.

Female leadership is an imperative for organizations that want to perform at the highest levels. Yet based on the slow rate of progress over the last three years, it will take twenty-five years to reach gender parity at the senior-VP level and more than one hundred years in the C-suite.[2]

While CEO commitment to gender diversity is high, organizations need to make a significant and sustained investment to change company practices and culture so women can achieve their full potential.

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2 The calculation of time to reach gender parity at each level is based on the change observed between the 2012 and 2015 studies: a 0.9% increase in female representation in the C-suite over three years.
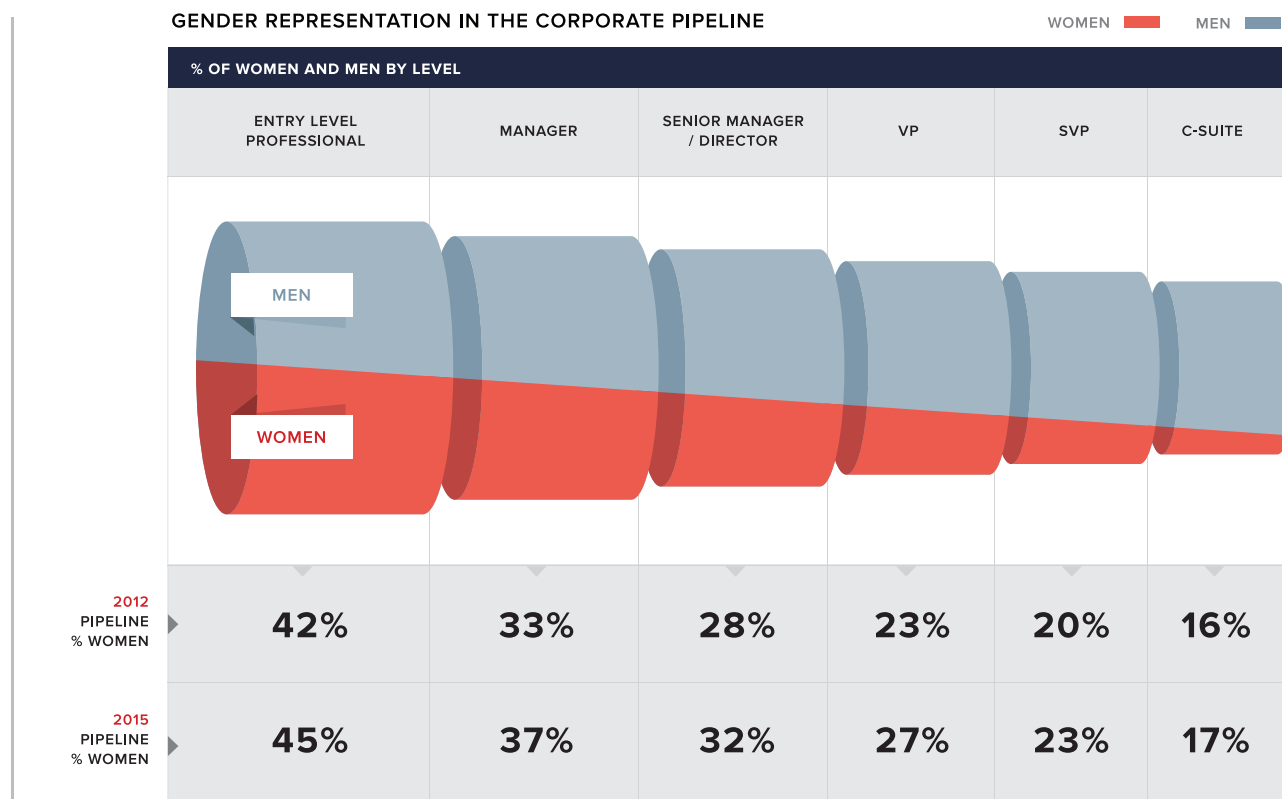
A closer look at the corporate pipeline

Based on employee pipeline data from 118 companies in 2015 and 60 companies in 2012, two broad themes emerge: women are still underrepresented, and they face real barriers to advancement.[3]

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3 One hundred eighteen companies submitted aggregate 2014 data for employees in the United States and Canada, including gender, level (individual contributor through C-suite), line or staff role, age, tenure, attrition, and full-time vs. part-time.

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Women are underrepresented at every level[4]

Despite modest improvements since 2012, women are still underrepresented at every level in the corporate pipeline, and the disparity is greatest in senior leadership.

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE CORPORATE PIPELINE

WOMEN ▬ MEN ▬

% OF WOMEN AND MEN BY LEVEL

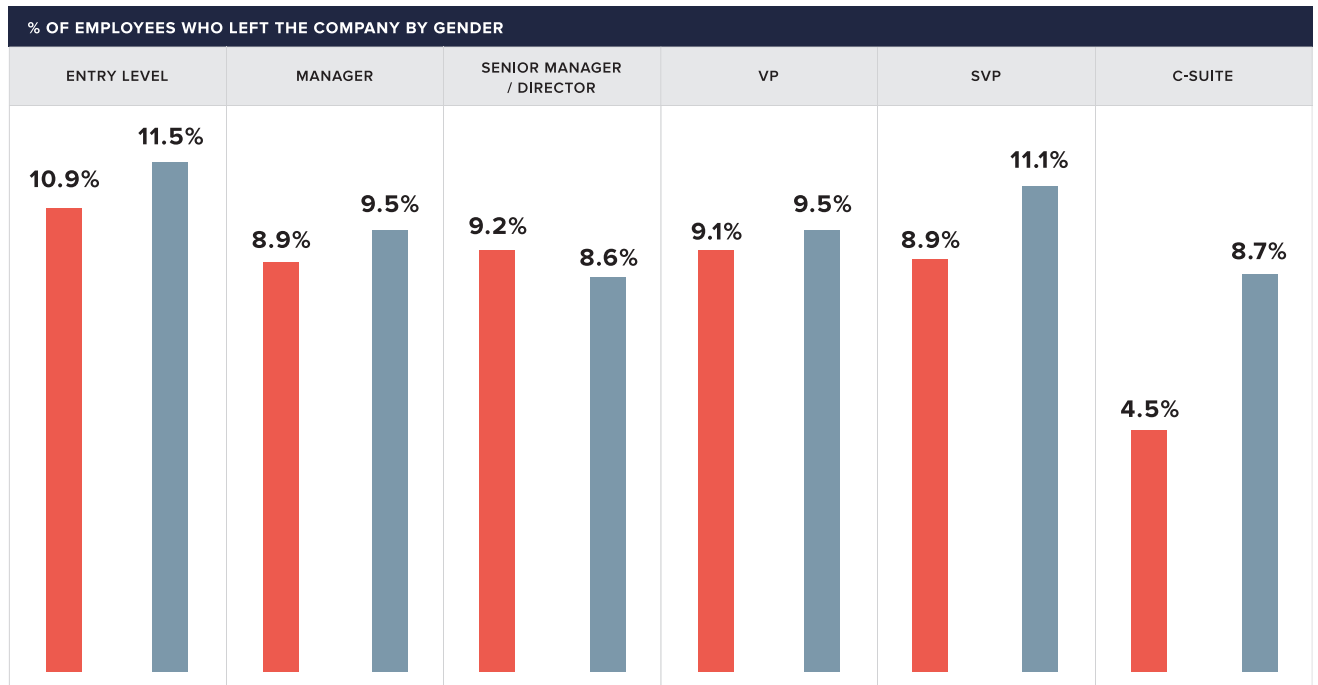|	ENTRY LEVEL PROFESSIONAL	MANAGER	SENIOR MANAGER / DIRECTOR	VP	SVP	C-SUITE
2012 PIPELINE % WOMEN	42%	33%	28%	23%	20%	16%
2015 PIPELINE % WOMEN	45%	37%	32%	27%	23%	17%

Women are not leaving organizations at higher rates than men

Women, on average, are leaving their organizations at the same or lower rates as men. Most notably, women in leadership are more likely to stay with their company than their male counterparts. Compared with men at the same level, SVP-level women are 20 percent less likely to leave, and women in the C-suite are about half as likely to leave.

WOMEN AND MEN LEAVING COMPANIES

WOMEN ■ MEN ■

% OF EMPLOYEES WHO LEFT THE COMPANY BY GENDER

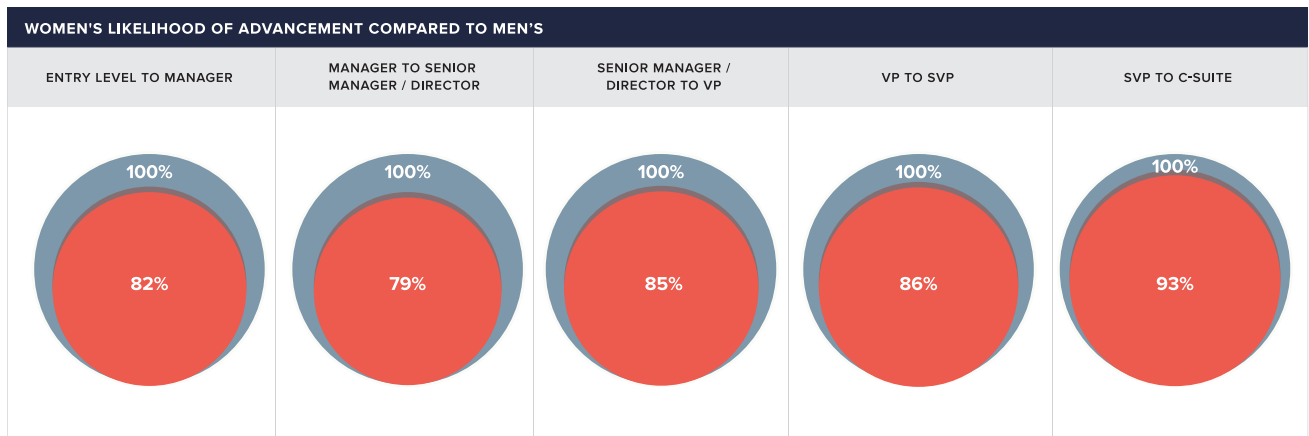| ENTRY LEVEL	MANAGER	SENIOR MANAGER / DIRECTOR	VP	SVP	C-SUITE
Women 10.9% / Men 11.5%	Women 8.9% / Men 9.5%	Women 9.2% / Men 8.6%	Women 9.1% / Men 9.5%	Women 8.9% / Men 11.1%	Women 4.5% / Men 8.7%

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There are signs that women are less likely to advance than men

If women were advancing at similar rates to men, companies would see the same share of women from one level to the next. However, that is not the case. Across levels, the expected representation of women is 15 percent lower than that of men. This suggests that women face greater barriers to advancement.

ADVANCEMENT BY GENDER

WOMEN ▬ MEN ▬

WOMEN'S LIKELIHOOD OF ADVANCEMENT COMPARED TO MEN'S

ENTRY LEVEL TO MANAGER	MANAGER TO SENIOR MANAGER / DIRECTOR	SENIOR MANAGER / DIRECTOR TO VP	VP TO SVP	SVP TO C-SUITE
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
82%	79%	85%	86%	93%

[1] Likelihood of advancement calculated as the number of people at a given level divided by the number of people at one level below
SOURCE: 2015 McKinsey & Lean In Women in the Workplace Study

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Women face obstacles on the path to senior leadership

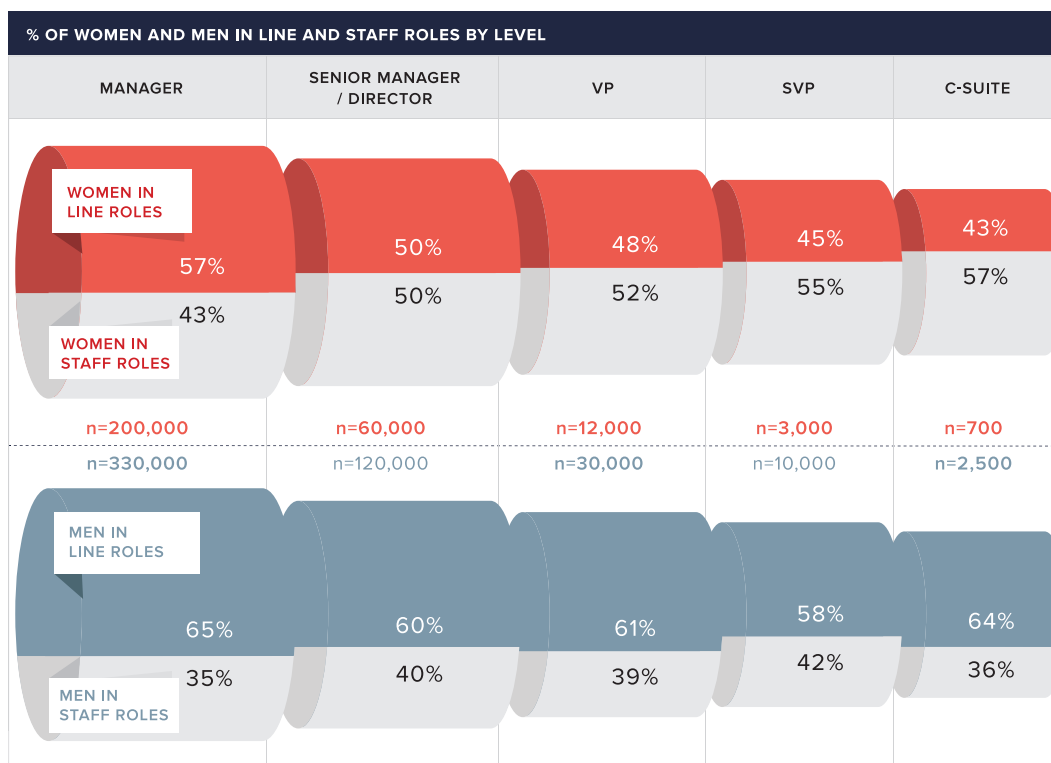Two trends help explain why women hold so few top spots in organizations:

1. Fewer women hold roles that lead to the C-suite

A majority of manager-level women hold line roles (positions with profit-and-loss responsibility and/or focused on core operations), but by the VP level more than half of women hold staff roles (positions in functions that support the organization like legal, human resources, and IT). In contrast, a majority of men hold line roles at every level. Since line roles are closer to the company's core operations and provide critical preparation for top roles, this disparity can impede women's path to senior leadership.

> CEOs are promoted more often from line roles than staff roles,[5] and a higher percentage of C-suite executives are in line roles.

LINE VS. STAFF ROLES BY GENDER WOMEN IN LINE ROLES   MEN IN LINE ROLES

% OF WOMEN AND MEN IN LINE AND STAFF ROLES BY LEVEL

MANAGER	SENIOR MANAGER / DIRECTOR	VP	SVP	C-SUITE
WOMEN IN LINE ROLES 57%	50%	48%	45%	43%
WOMEN IN STAFF ROLES 43%	50%	52%	55%	57%
n=200,000	n=60,000	n=12,000	n=3,000	n=700
n=330,000	n=120,000	n=30,000	n=10,000	n=2,500
MEN IN LINE ROLES 65%	60%	61%	58%	64%
MEN IN STAFF ROLES 35%	40%	39%	42%	36%

At each level, the total number of female employees drops faster than the total number of male employees.

5 Joanna Barsh and Lareina Yee, *Special Report: Unlocking the Full Potential of Women in the U.S. Economy*, McKinsey & Company (April 2012), http://www.mckinsey.com/unlocking_potential.
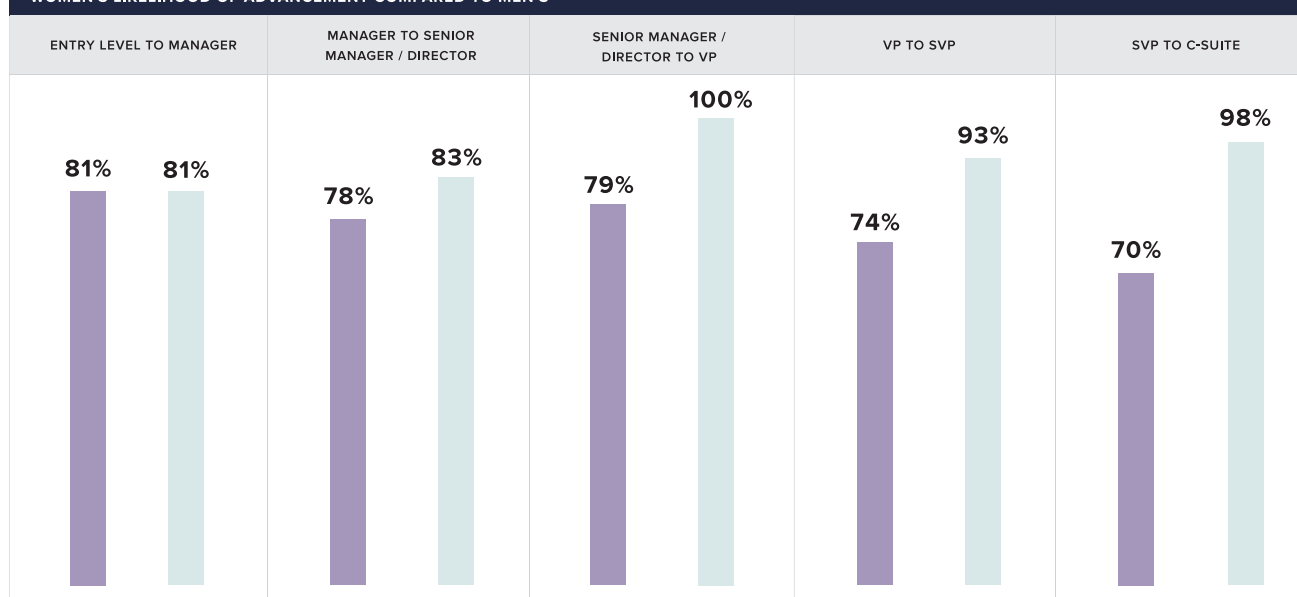
2. Lower odds of reaching senior leadership

By middle management, women are represented in staff roles consistently from one level to the next, which suggests they are moving through the pipeline at a fairly steady rate. However, women's representation in line roles is lower than expected at each subsequent level, which suggests they are less likely to advance. In combination, these trends create a dilemma for women who aspire to senior leadership. On the one hand, line roles provide the type of experience that leads more directly to the C-suite. On the other hand, women in line roles have lower odds of reaching top spots than their peers in staff roles.

ADVANCEMENT BY LINE VS. STAFF

LINE ▮ STAFF ▮

WOMEN'S LIKELIHOOD OF ADVANCEMENT COMPARED TO MEN'S				
ENTRY LEVEL TO MANAGER	MANAGER TO SENIOR MANAGER / DIRECTOR	SENIOR MANAGER / DIRECTOR TO VP	VP TO SVP	SVP TO C-SUITE
81% / 81%	78% / 83%	79% / 100%	74% / 93%	70% / 98%

Despite the different opportunities for women in staff and line roles, it is worth noting that they are equally satisfied with their careers, as well as their personal lives and finances.

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A closer look at employee attitudes

Based on a survey of nearly 30,000 employees from thirty-four companies, there is compelling evidence that women are disadvantaged by company practices and culture—and in some cases, men are disadvantaged, too.[6]

6 Employees from a subset of our 118 participating companies answered a ninety-two-question online survey. Company participation in this additional survey was encouraged but optional. Reported differences between groups are at least five percentage points and are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

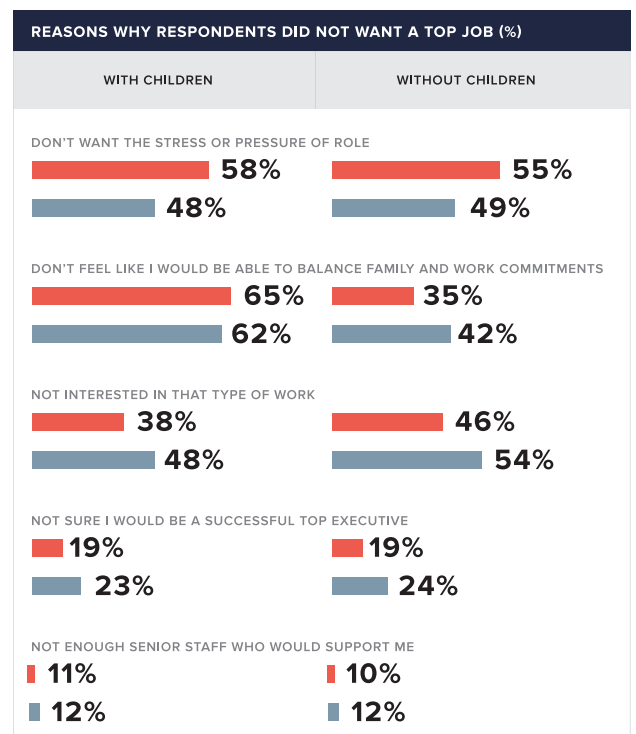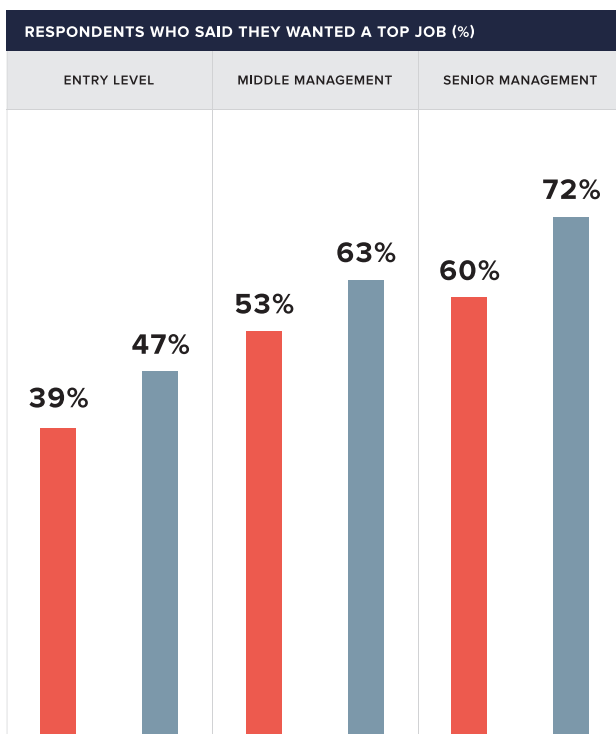# The leadership ambition gap persists

Entry- and midlevel women and men share similar aspirations for promotion to the next level, but senior-level women are less interested in advancing than senior-level men. In addition, at every stage women are less eager than men to become a top executive, and this gap is widest among women and men in senior management.

While women's and men's appetites for senior leadership differ, they share concerns about stress and balancing work and family. However, women are more likely to cite "stress/pressure" as a top issue, and this is not solely rooted in concern over family responsibilities. As evidence of this, women of all ages without children also cite "stress/pressure" as their number-one obstacle; men say balancing work and family is their main concern; and parents of both genders are more likely to say they want to be promoted and become a top executive. These findings point to another possible explanation: the path to leadership is disproportionately stressful for women.

> Mothers are 15 percent more interested in being a top executive than women without children.

DESIRE TO BE A TOP EXECUTIVE AND REASONS FOR LACK OF INTEREST

WOMEN ▬ MEN ▬

RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THEY WANTED A TOP JOB (%)

ENTRY LEVEL	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	SENIOR MANAGEMENT
39% (women) / 47% (men)	53% (women) / 63% (men)	60% (women) / 72% (men)

REASONS WHY RESPONDENTS DID NOT WANT A TOP JOB (%)

	WITH CHILDREN	WITHOUT CHILDREN
DON'T WANT THE STRESS OR PRESSURE OF ROLE	Women 58% / Men 48%	Women 55% / Men 49%
DON'T FEEL LIKE I WOULD BE ABLE TO BALANCE FAMILY AND WORK COMMITMENTS	Women 65% / Men 62%	Women 35% / Men 42%
NOT INTERESTED IN THAT TYPE OF WORK	Women 38% / Men 48%	Women 46% / Men 54%
NOT SURE I WOULD BE A SUCCESSFUL TOP EXECUTIVE	Women 19% / Men 23%	Women 19% / Men 24%
NOT ENOUGH SENIOR STAFF WHO WOULD SUPPORT ME	Women 11% / Men 12%	Women 10% / Men 12%

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Women of color and leadership ambition

Black, Hispanic, and Asian women are more interested in being promoted than white employees of both genders. On average, they are 43 percent more interested in becoming a top executive than white women and 16 percent more interested than white men. In contrast, they are similarly interested in promotion but less interested in becoming a top executive compared with men of the same ethnicity.

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Women experience an uneven playing field

Women see a workplace skewed in favor of men. They are almost four times more likely than men to think they have fewer opportunities to advance because of their gender—and are twice as likely to think their gender will make it harder for them to advance in the future.

Women not only observe a workplace biased against them; they believe they are disadvantaged by it. They are almost three times more likely than men to say they have personally missed out on an assignment, promotion, or raise because of their gender. Compared with men, women also report that they are consulted less often on important decisions. These dynamics help explain why women appear to advance at lower rates than their male peers.

Finally, both genders see room for improvement. Two-thirds of both women and men do not think their companies are meritocratic, suggesting a broad appetite for cultural change.
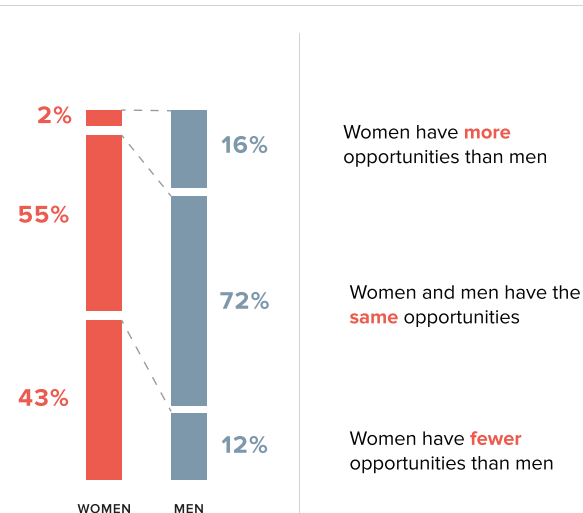
> Women are twice as likely as men to think their gender will make it harder to advance.

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF GENDER ON OPPORTUNITIES AND ADVANCEMENT

WOMEN ▮ MEN ▮

IN YOUR ORGANIZATION, DO YOU THINK THAT WOMEN HAVE MORE, FEWER, OR THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE AS MEN?
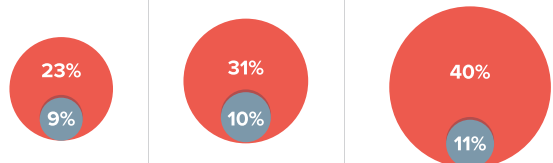
% OF RESPONDENTS

	WOMEN	MEN	
Women have **more** opportunities than men	2%	16%	
Women and men have the **same** opportunities	55%	72%	
Women have **fewer** opportunities than men	43%	12%	

IS YOUR GENDER INHIBITING YOUR SUCCESS?

ENTRY LEVEL	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	SENIOR MANAGEMENT

YOUR EXPERIENCE TO DATE (% YES)

ENTRY LEVEL	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	SENIOR MANAGEMENT
23% / 9%	31% / 10%	40% / 11%

YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE (% YES)

ENTRY LEVEL	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	SENIOR MANAGEMENT
28% / 13%	36% / 15%	36% / 15%

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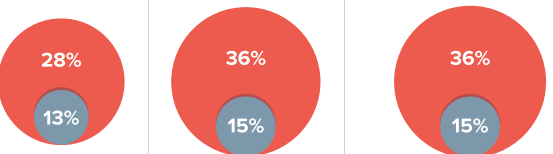
The playing field seems more uneven to women at the top

Senior-level women view their gender as a bigger disadvantage than entry-level women do. They are less likely to view their organization as meritocratic and more likely to think that women have fewer opportunities. They are also more likely to believe that their gender has made it harder—and will continue to make it harder—for them to advance. Compared with their male peers, senior-level women are about half as likely to say that they are consulted on important decisions and are less likely to feel recognized for their contributions.

This uneven playing field appears to take a toll on women in leadership. Senior-level women are markedly less satisfied with their role, opportunities for advancement, and career than their male counterparts.

> Only 28 percent of senior-level women are very happy with their careers, compared with 40 percent of senior-level men.

Gender diversity is not widely believed to be a priority

Seventy-four percent of companies report[7] that gender diversity is a top CEO priority, but the message is not reaching the majority of employees. Less than half of workers believe that gender diversity is a top priority for their CEO, and only a third view it as a top priority for their direct manager. Moreover, women are less likely than men to see gender diversity as a priority for their manager and CEO.
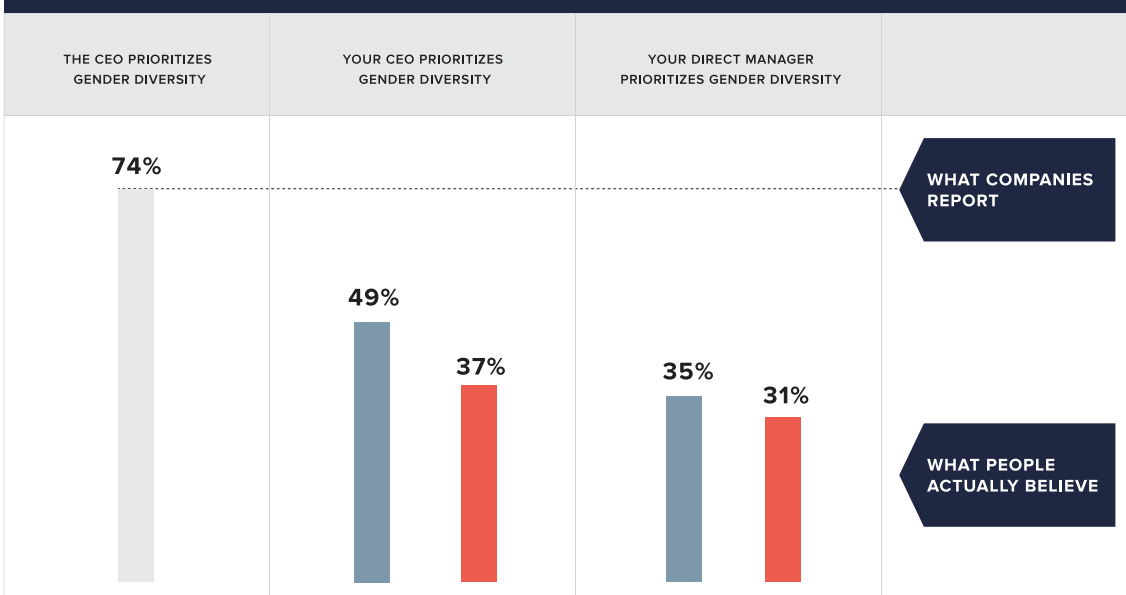
There also appears to be a disconnect between men's interest in gender diversity and their understanding of the challenges women face: 70 percent think gender diversity is important, but only 12 percent believe women have fewer opportunities. In addition, there is some evidence of pushback: men are less likely than women to think their organization should do more to increase gender diversity, and 13 percent of men believe it is harder for them to advance because they are disadvantaged by gender-diversity programs.

Only 1 in 9 men believes that women have fewer opportunities than men, and 13 percent of men believe it is harder for men to advance because of gender-diversity programs.

SOURCE:

COMMITMENT TO GENDER DIVERSITY

WOMEN ■ MEN ■

CEO COMMITMENT COMPARED TO EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS			
THE CEO PRIORITIZES GENDER DIVERSITY	YOUR CEO PRIORITIZES GENDER DIVERSITY	YOUR DIRECT MANAGER PRIORITIZES GENDER DIVERSITY	

74%

49%

37%

35%

31%

WHAT COMPANIES REPORT

WHAT PEOPLE ACTUALLY BELIEVE

[7] Each company designated a representative from HR or its diversity office to complete the survey and submit data on behalf of the organization.

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Employee programs are abundant, but participation is low

A majority of companies offer flexibility and career-development programs, and employees who participate in these programs by and large report that they are beneficial. Yet with the exception of telecommuting, employee participation in flexibility programs is low. In fact, the contrast between availability, participation, and impact is striking. For example, less than 2 percent of women and men participate in part-time programs, but those who do find them highly beneficial.

There is also evidence that employees are reluctant to participate for fear of being penalized. More than 90 percent of both women and men believe taking extended family leave will hurt their position at work—and more than half believe it will hurt them a great deal.

> **More than 90 percent of both women and men believe taking extended family leave will hurt their careers.**

SOURCE: 2015 McKinsey & Lean In Women in the Workplace Study

PROGRAMS, PARTICIPATION RATES, AND IMPACT

WOMEN ▬   MEN ▬

GENERAL WORK FLEXIBILITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

	% OF COMPANIES OFFERING PROGRAMS	% OF WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATE	% OF MEN WHO PARTICIPATE	% WHO REPORT SIGNIFICANT IMPACT[1]
REDUCED SCHEDULES	88%	12%	11%	76%
PART-TIME SCHEDULES	85%	2%	2%	66%
TELECOMMUTING / WORKING FROM HOME	82%	45%	38%	74%
LEAVES OF ABSENCE / SABBATICALS	82%	7%	8%	67%
COACHING SESSIONS	69%	10%	10%	53%
EXECUTIVE TRAINING / FURTHER EDUCATION	61%	19%	18%	56%

FAMILY-ORIENTED FLEXIBILITY PROGRAMS (LIMITED TO RESPONDENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18)

	% OF COMPANIES OFFERING PROGRAMS	% OF WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATE	% OF MEN WHO PARTICIPATE	% WHO REPORT SIGNIFICANT IMPACT[1]
EXTENDED MATERNITY LEAVE	65%	4%		70%
PEER NETWORKING GROUPS FOR PARENTS	49%	3%	1%	42%
EXTENDED PATERNITY LEAVE	44%		1%	56%
SUBSIDIZED / IN-HOUSE CHILD CARE	36%	3%	2%	66%
PROGRAMS TO SMOOTH MATERNITY TRANSITION	32%	4%		67%

1 People who report "a great deal" or "a lot" of impact—the top two of five possible responses.

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There is still inequality at home

Women continue to do a disproportionate share of child care and housework, so they are more likely to be affected by the challenges of juggling home and work responsibilities. At every level, women are at least nine times more likely than men to say that they do more child care and at least four times more likely to say they do more chores. Even in households where both partners work full-time, 41 percent of women report doing more child care and 30 percent report doing more chores.

Working women are 60 percent more likely than working men to have a partner who works full-time. This disparity increases at the executive level, where women are 85 percent more likely than their male counterparts to have a partner who works full-time.

There is also little evidence that the next generation is striking a better balance. Although younger couples split household chores more evenly, women under thirty still do a majority of child care.

> **Women are more likely than men to say they make sacrifices in their career to support their partner's career.**

DISTRIBUTION OF CHORES AND CHILD CARE

WOMEN "I DO MORE" ■ MEN "I DO MORE" ■ "WE SPLIT" ■

COMPARED WITH YOUR PARTNER / SPOUSE, DO YOU DO MORE OF THE CHORES / PROVIDE MORE CHILD CARE OR EQUALLY SPLIT THE CHORES / CHILD CARE DUTIES IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD?

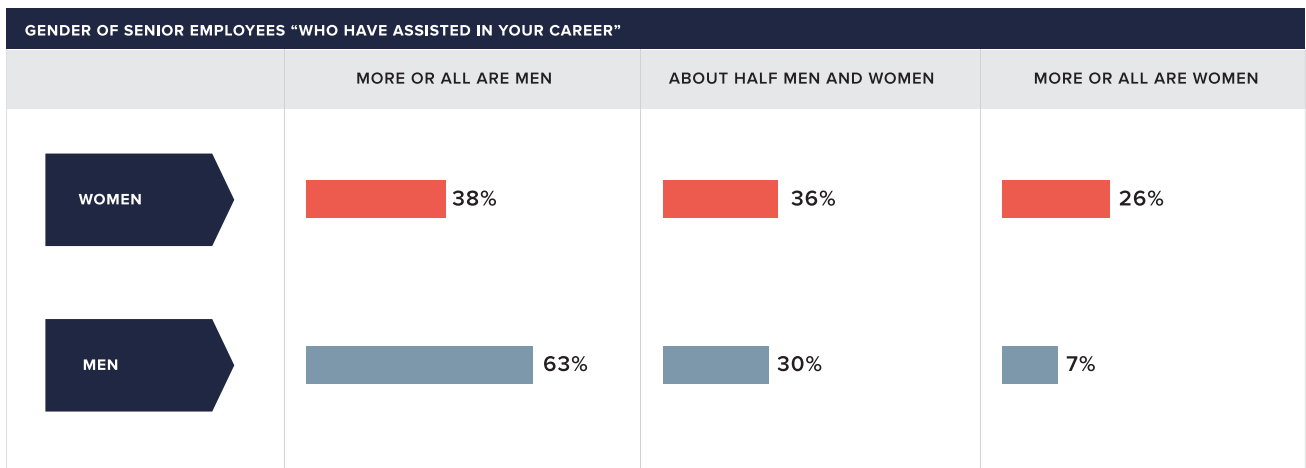|		CHORES		CHILD CARE	
ENTRY LEVEL	WOMEN	47%	44%	34%	45%
	MEN	48%	11%	32%	5%
MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	WOMEN	47%	38%	36%	39%
	MEN	43%	9%	27%	3%
SENIOR MANAGEMENT	WOMEN	47%	30%	37%	27%
	MEN	35%	4%	16%	3%

McKinsey&Company
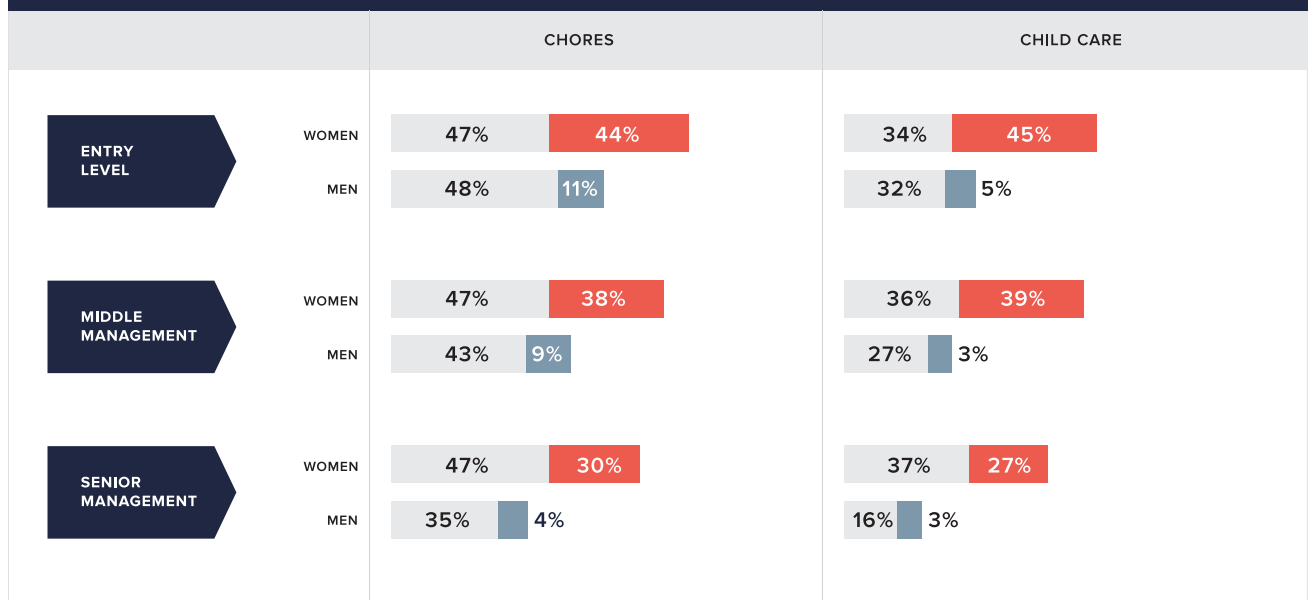
Women and men have very different networks

Women and men agree that sponsorship is vital to success and advancement, with two-thirds describing it as "very" or "extremely" important. Yet they do not have the same type of professional networks, which may result in different levels of support. Although women's and men's networks are similar in size, their composition is different: men predominantly have male networks, while women have mostly female or mixed networks. Given that men are more likely to hold leadership positions, women may end up with less access to senior-level sponsorship. In fact, only 10 percent of senior-level women report that four or more executives have helped them advance compared to 17 percent of senior-level men.

> Nearly two-thirds of men say that the senior leaders who have helped them advance were mostly men, compared to just over a third of women.

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS BY GENDER

WOMEN ▬ MEN ▬

GENDER OF SENIOR EMPLOYEES "WHO HAVE ASSISTED IN YOUR CAREER"		
MORE OR ALL ARE MEN	ABOUT HALF MEN AND WOMEN	MORE OR ALL ARE WOMEN
WOMEN 38%	36%	26%
MEN 63%	30%	7%

Only half of Black women say they have received senior-level support in advancing their career, compared with about two-thirds of white, Asian, and Hispanic women.
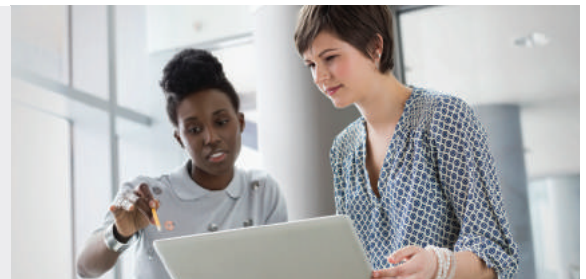
A road map to gender equality

Changing the structure and culture of work to advance women will take a comprehensive and sustained effort, but gender diversity is an imperative for companies that want to perform at the highest levels. Although there is no "one size fits all" solution, we recommend five key steps.
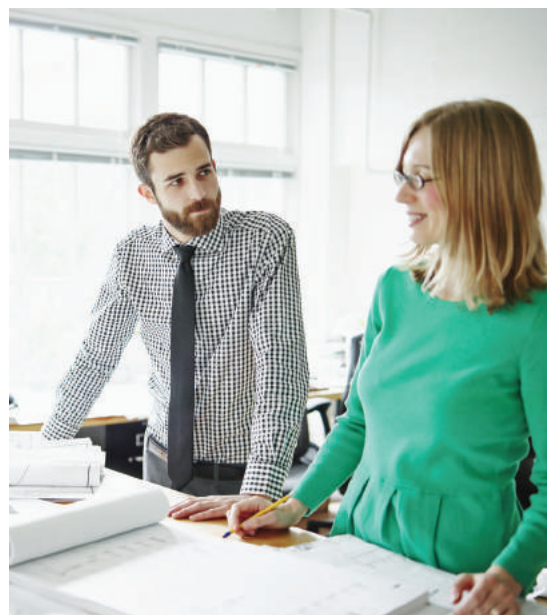
Track key metrics so you understand the problem

It is hard to change what you do not measure. Organizations need to understand their performance metrics ("hard" pipeline data) and health metrics ("soft" cultural/attitudinal data) to know what is working and where they can improve. While there is no set formula for this, we recommend companies go beyond the basics of pipeline performance to develop a more comprehensive picture of gender disparities. It is also important that they track key metrics over time to see trends and assess program effectiveness.

Key performance indicators for gender equality

PERFORMANCE METRICS	HEALTH METRICS
Employee pipeline • Number of women and men at all stages in the hiring process: sourcing, résumé screening, interviews, offers, and acceptances • Number of women and men hired (both new and lateral hires) **Performance reviews and internal promotions** • Promotion rates for women and men • Promotion rates for staff and line roles • Performance ratings for women and men • Allocation of stretch and high-visibility assignments **Compensation** • Compensation across women and men in similar levels and roles **Attrition** • Number of women and men leaving at all levels and why	**Employee attitudes/behaviors** • Satisfaction with role, opportunities for growth, management, etc. • Perception of meritocracy • Desire to advance to next level • Desire to advance to top executive roles • Perception of work/life balance

Demonstrate that gender diversity is a top priority

It is critical that senior leaders commit to gender diversity, but commitment is not enough—getting the message across to employees requires authenticity and accountability. Although 74 percent of companies report that gender diversity is a top CEO priority, less than half of employees believe that to be true.

To make headway, companies need to invest time and money in gender diversity. Executives can set the tone by participating in women's events and publicly sponsoring high-potential women. In addition, companies should find ways to take action, from investing heavily in initiatives that support women and inclusion more broadly to reviewing employee compensation and closing pay gaps.

Finally, setting gender targets—and holding leaders accountable for reaching them—is another way for companies to demonstrate their commitment and emphasize the importance of results. We see emerging evidence that companies that set gender targets for recruiting and advancement will realize better outcomes. Among the twenty-five companies that participated in the 2012 to 2015 studies, those with gender targets over the three-year period saw the most progress in female representation at entry levels, while those without formal targets lost ground.[8]

> Only 37 percent of women and 49 percent of men believe gender diversity is a top priority for their CEO.

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[8] The case study was based on ten companies that did not set targets in 2012 but did in 2015, six companies that set targets in both 2012 and 2015, and seven companies that did not set targets in either year; two companies were excluded that had targets in 2012 but did not have them in 2015.

Identify and interrupt gender bias

Our research suggests that women are less likely to advance than men, but generally speaking women see this uneven playing field while men do not. To create an environment for change, employees of both genders need to understand how gender bias plays out in the workplace and contributes to creating fewer opportunities for women.

Transparency and training are vital. If employees see that there are real, measurable gender inequities in their organization, they will be more likely to participate in solutions. Companies should implement training to help employees learn how to identify and counteract gender bias. This is particularly critical for managers, who shape the day-to-day work experience of most employees.

It is important that companies find ways to minimize gender bias in hiring and performance reviews. For example, hiring managers should ensure that women and men are recruited equally for open positions and establish consistent résumé review and interviewing processes so the same standards apply to all candidates. In the same vein, managers need to be aware of gender bias in performance evaluations and make sure that evaluation criteria are set in advance, understood, and measurable.

Only about one-third of employees believe that gender diversity is a top priority for their direct manager.

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A gender bias primer from LeanIn.Org

We rely on mental shortcuts to simplify the world around us. Gender stereotypes are one of these mental shortcuts, and they often disadvantage women at work. All of us—women and men—hold these biases, but they are hard to acknowledge, which makes it difficult to take steps to counteract them.[9]

This primer covers four types of gender bias:

Likeability bias

Success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women, creating a double bind for women.[10] If a woman is competent she does not seem nice enough, but if she seems nice, she is considered less competent. This bias often surfaces in the way women are described, both in passing and in performance reviews. When a woman asserts herself, she is often called "aggressive," "ambitious," or "out for herself." When a man does the same, he is seen as "confident" and "strong." As a result of this double standard, women can face penalties in the workplace like missing out on hiring or advancement opportunities and salary increases.[11]

Performance evaluation bias

Male performance is often overestimated compared with female performance, especially in domains traditionally dominated by men.[12] This bias is even more pronounced when review criteria are unclear, so that evaluators are more likely to rely on gut feelings and personal inferences.[13] The difference in the perceived performance of men and women helps explain why women are typically hired and promoted based on what they have already accomplished while men are hired and promoted based on their potential.[14]

9 For a review of social science studies on gender bias, see Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Emily Pronin, Thomas Gilovich, and Lee Ross, Objectivity in the Eye of the Beholder: Divergent Perceptions of Bias in Self Versus Others," *Psychological Review* 111, no. 3 (2004): 781–99; Emily Pronin, Daniel Y. Lin, and Lee Ross, "The Bias Blind Spot: Perceptions of Bias in Self Versus Others," Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 28, no. 3 (2002): 369–81. **10** Madeline E. Heilman and Tyler G. Okimoto, "Why Are Women Penalized for Success at Male Tasks? The Implied Communality Deficit," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92, no. 1 (2007): 81–92; and Madeline E. Heilman et al., "Penalties for Success: Reactions to Women Who Succeed at Male Gender-Typed Tasks," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, no. 3 (2004): 416–27. **11** Madeline E. Heilman et al., "Penalties for Success: Reactions to Women Who Succeed at Male Gender-Typed Tasks," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, no. 3 (2004): 416–27; Laurie A. Rudman and Peter Glick, "Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes and Backlash Toward Agentic Women," *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 4 (2001): 743–62; Laurie A. Rudman and Peter Glick, "Feminized Management and Backlash Toward Agentic Women: The Hidden Costs to Women of a Kinder, Gentler Image of Middle Managers," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 5 (1999): 1004–10; Laurie A. Rudman, "Self-Promotion as a Risk Factor for Women: The Costs and Benefits of Counterstereotypical Impression Management," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 3 (1998): 629–45. **12** Corinne A. Moss-Racusin et al., "Science Faculty's Subtle Gender Biases Favor Male Students," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 109, no. 41 (2012): 16474–79; Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, "Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of 'Blind' Auditions on Female Musicians," The American Economic Review 90, no. 4 (2000): 715–41; Rhea E. Steinpreis, Katie A. Anders, and Dawn Ritzke, "The Impact of Gender on the Review of Curricula Vitae of Job Applicants and Tenure Candidates: A National Empirical Study," Sex Roles 41, nos. 7–8 (1999): 509–28. **13** Eric Luis Uhlmann and Geoffrey L. Cohen, "Constructed Criteria: Redefining Merit to Justify Discrimination," *Psychological Science* 16, no. 6 (2005): 474–80. For a discussion, see Cheryl Staats, *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review* (2014), Kirwan Institute, Ohio State University. **14** Joanna Barsh and Lareina Yee, *Special Report: Unlocking the Full Potential of Women in the U.S. Economy*, McKinsey & Company (April 2012), 6, http://www.mckinsey.com/unlocking_potential.

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Performance attribution bias

Women are given less credit for successful outcomes and blamed more for failure.[15] In addition, men typically attribute their success to innate qualities and skills, while women often attribute theirs to external factors such as "working hard," "getting lucky," or "help from others."[16] Because women receive less credit—and give themselves less credit—their confidence often erodes and they are less likely to put themselves forward for promotions and stretch assignments.

Maternal bias

Motherhood triggers assumptions that women are less competent and less committed to their careers. As a result, they are held to higher standards and presented with fewer opportunities.[17] Men are not immune to scrutiny either. Studies show that fathers receive lower performance ratings and experience steeper reductions in future earnings after taking time away from work for family reasons.[18]

15 Madeline E. Heilman and Michelle C. Hayes, "No Credit Where Credit Is Due: Attributional Rationalization of Women's Success in Male-Female Teams, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2005): 905–26; and Michelle C. Hayes and Jason S. Lawrence, "Who's to Blame? Attributions of Blame in Unsuccessful Mixed-Sex Work Teams," *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 34, no. 6 (2012): 558–64. 16 Sylvia Beyer, "Gender Differences in Causal Attributions by College Students of Performance on Course Examinations," *Current Psychology* 17, no. 4 (1998): 346–58. 17 Shelley J. Correll, Stephen Bernard, and In Paik, "Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?," *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 5 (2007): 1297–339. 18 Scott Coltrane et al., "Fathers and Flexibility Stigma," *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 2 (2013): 279–302; Laurie A. Rudman and Kris Mescher, "Penalizing Men Who Request a Family Leave: Is Flexibility Stigma a Femininity Stigma?," *Journal of Social Issue*s 69, no. 2 (2013): 322–40; Jennifer L. Berdahl and Sue H. Moon, "Workplace Mistreatment of Middle-Class Workers Based on Sex, Parenthood, and Caregiving," *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 2 (2013): 341–66; and Adam B. Butler and Amie Skattebo, "What Is Acceptable for Women May Not Be for Men: The Effect of Family Conflicts with Work on Job-Performance Ratings," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 77, no. 4 (2004): 553–64.

Rethink work

Work is not working for lots of employees. While many companies offer programs aimed at addressing the commitments employees have outside the workplace, their low uptake suggests that their efficacy needs to be evaluated.

Working parents are one group that feels this tension. Parents of both genders are concerned about balancing work and family. However, they take very little advantage of family-friendly programs, often for fear of being penalized at work.

Companies need to do more to give all employees the flexibility to fit work into their lives, from offering programs that do not inadvertently penalize participants to fostering a culture that gives employees permission to take advantage of these options.

In many cases, this requires a more holistic approach to employee programs. Take parental leave as an example. Offering it piecemeal is not enough. Companies should consider implementing ramp-off/ramp-on programs to ease employee transitions and adjusting the annual review process to make it clear that employees who take a leave will not be penalized. In addition, employees need to know that management supports their decisions to start families and take parental leave—for example, by making sure high-profile women and men take full advantage of such programs and celebrating their decisions publicly.

More than 90 percent of women and men believe a leave of absence to handle a family matter will hurt their career.

Create a level playing field

Companies need to make sure women have access to the same opportunities as men, and managers and sponsors have a critical role to play in making this happen.

It is important that managers see themselves as proponents of the women who report to them. Companies should put systems in place so managers have the skills to support women and are rewarded when they do so.

Sponsorship can accelerate career advancement, yet there is evidence that it is harder for women to gain the support of senior-level men. Companies can help by establishing formal mentorship and sponsorship programs and making it a badge of honor to support women in the organization. From networking events to group lunches, they can create opportunities for informal interaction between women and men—these personal connections can lead to the professional relationships that propel careers. Finally, company leaders can make sure they sponsor a diverse group of employees.

Only 40 percent of companies hold managers accountable for performance on gender-diversity metrics.

Manager Checklist

☐ Conduct regular check-ins with the individuals on your team to understand their aspirations and what is driving their desire (or lack of desire) to advance. Unless you understand what is affecting women's ambitions, you cannot do anything to encourage them.

☐ Tap women and men equally to take on high-profile assignments and new opportunities, and push back if women say they're "not ready" or "not qualified." In addition, track the distribution of mission-critical work to make sure it is evenly divided among women and men.

☐ Talk openly about the trade-offs between staff roles and line roles, and make sure everyone understands that line roles offer the type of experience that typically accelerates advancement and more often leads to the C-suite.

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Create a virtuous cycle of female leadership

Company leaders should make it a priority to make senior-level women feel encouraged and appreciated. Our research shows that senior-level women are particularly disillusioned and dissatisfied with their careers, and this works against creating an environment that fosters female leadership. We need senior-level women to become more optimistic so they continue to push to reach the highest levels of the organization and serve as positive role models for more junior women.

Tap into the power of peer support

Lean In Circles are small peer groups that meet regularly to learn and grow together. Circles are designed so members practice new skills and benefit from the insights and expertise of the group. Research shows that people are more confident and are able to learn and accomplish more in groups.[19] More than 650 companies currently run Circles, and they are producing results—83 percent of members say they are more likely to tackle a new challenge or opportunity.

19 Patrick R. Laughlin, Erin C. Hatch, Jonathan S. Silver, and Lee Boh, "Groups Perform Better Than the Best Individuals on Letters-to-Numbers Problems: Effects of Induced Strategies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 4 (2006): 644–51; and Paul Zarnoth and Janet A. Sniezek, "The Social Influence of Confidence in Group Decision Making," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 33, no. 4 (1997): 345–66.

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Looking ahead

We will all benefit from gender equality in the workplace. Companies that leverage the full talents of the population have a competitive advantage. Employees on diverse and inclusive teams put in more effort, stay longer, and demonstrate more commitment.[20] Women and men of all ages benefit from the flexibility to be their best selves at work and at home.

While there is still significant work to do, it is encouraging to note that a majority of women and men report being satisfied with their careers, family situations, and personal lives. Building on this foundation, corporate America can eliminate the barriers women face and help all employees achieve their full potential.

20 Corporate Executive Board, *Creating Competitive Advantage Through Workforce Diversity* (2013), http://www.diversityresources.stlrbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/HRLC-Creating_Competitive_Advantage_Through_Workforce_Diversity.pdf.

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All creative images in this report courtesy of **Getty Images** from the **Lean In Collection**.

Methodology

COMPANY PIPELINE AND PROGRAMS SURVEY

This study is based on research from 118 companies across North America and builds on research from 60 companies in a similar study conducted by McKinsey & Company in 2012. Twenty-five companies participated in both years. Each participating company submitted its gender diversity talent pipeline, policies and programs data to McKinsey.

We drew aggregate conclusions from this data set using the following heuristics:

- **Averaging by company:** In calculating averages across companies, each company received equal weighting to avoid a skew favoring the results of the largest employers.
- **Industries weighted to match Fortune 500:** Results were also weighted by industry to approximate the industry composition of the Fortune 500 as of July 27, 2015, to avoid a skew toward industries overrepresented in our sample.
- **Likelihood of advancement:** Women's likelihood of advancing compared with men's was calculated by taking the ratio of women in a lower level to women at the next level compared with the ratio of men in a lower level to men at the next level. This ratio assumes that the more senior level pulls directly from the level below and does not factor in attrition or external hires.

EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES SURVEY

This study is based on research from thirty-four companies and nearly 30,000 employees in North America and comprised ninety-two questions.

We drew aggregate conclusions from this data set using the following heuristics:

- **95 percent confidence level:** Differences reported are statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level unless otherwise indicated.
- **Differences greater than 5 percent:** Where we report differences between groups of participants, those differences are at least five percentage points.

DEFINITION OF LEVELS

Companies divided their employees into six levels of seniority based on standard definitions. Companies with more or fewer than six levels were encouraged to consider three elements when assigning employees: reporting structure, salary, and advancement. The levels and definitions are as follows:

- L1—C-level executives and presidents: CEO and his or her direct reports, responsible for company operations and profitability
- L2—Senior vice presidents: Senior leaders of the organization with significant business unit or functional oversight

- L3—Vice presidents: Leaders of the organization who report directly to senior vice presidents
- L4—Senior manager / Director: Seasoned managers with responsibility for multiple teams and discrete functions or operating units
- L5—Managers: Employees who have management responsibility over a store or team
- L6—Individual contributors: Employees who carry out discrete tasks and participate on teams, typically in an office or corporate setting

TAXONOMY OF SENIORITY GROUPINGS

To analyze characteristics of women by seniority, the six levels were further consolidated into three groupings: senior, middle management, and entry level. This was done to have a large enough sample size to run statistically significant analyses given the uneven distribution (the result of few executive women). The mapping of levels to these groupings is:

- Senior—L1, L2, and L3
- Middle management—L4 and L5
- Entry level—L6

COMPANIES INCLUDED

Participating companies opted in to the study in response to invitations from LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company or by indicating interest through a public website. Their participation in the employee attitudes survey was encouraged but optional. The industry breakdown of participating companies is as follows:

- Health care and pharmaceuticals—ten
- Industrial (energy, basic materials, automotive, and industrial manufacturing)—fifteen
- Media and telecom—thirteen
- Finance and professional services (banking, consumer finance, capital markets, insurance, and professional services) —twenty-one
- Retail and consumer products (retail, nonfood consumer products, and food and beverage)—twenty
- Tech (electronics, technology hardware, software, and information technology services)—twenty-six
- Transport, travel, and logistics (logistics, transportation, and hospitality)—thirteen

OTHER REGIONS

In addition to data from North America, we collected parallel data to these two surveys in four additional geographic regions: Europe, Asia Pacific, Latin America, and Middle East/Africa. While we may publish further analysis on these regions at a later date, this report deals only with findings from North America, in which the vast majority of our participating companies have operations.