



A Curated Research Report

Prepared by The Center for Women and Business at Bentley University

The Pipeline Predicament: Fixing the Talent Pipeline



Gloria Cordes Larson
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About the Gloria Cordes Larson Center for Women and Business (CWB)

The CWB is dedicated to advancing women and workplace diversity from the classroom to the boardroom. We provide thought leadership on critical diversity issues and offer tools and training to foster inclusive organizations. Our programs inform and empower students, alumni, and business professionals.

Through a dynamic suite of programs, we focus on critical issues impacting workplace and gender diversity:

- Building Confidence and Overcoming Unseen Barriers
- Men in Partnership to Advance Women
- Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networks
- Advancing Women to the C-Suite and Boardroom
- Women's Workplace Retention and Re-Entry
- Corporate Culture and its Impact on Workplace Diversity
- Unlocking Unconscious Bias for Inclusive Leadership
- Workplace Flex and Parental Leave
- The Multigenerational Workforce—Issues and Impacts
- Pipeline Issues
- Measuring Success
- Wage Parity
- Employee Resource Groups

The Center for Women and Business offers custom, in-house programs ranging from strategic sessions for senior leaders to hands-on workshops for emerging professionals. We optimize the format of each skills-based program to meet the unique goals of the organization.



BENTLEY
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About This Report

The Pipeline Defined...

The leaky corporate pipeline describes the way women drop out or “disappear” from the career and leadership trajectory at all stages of their professional lives.

Despite the now widespread recognition that diversity is good for the bottom line, the corporate career pipeline remains stubbornly – indeed infuriatingly – leaky for women and particularly for women of color. In this report, the Gloria Cordes Larson Center for Women and Business presents a thorough review of current research and media coverage related to the pipeline predicament.

We begin with a look at the current state of the pipeline, citing the most significant, glaring disparities, including the wage gap. We then explore the array of factors behind the leaky pipeline, delve into interventions, and address how and why interventions sometimes fall short. We conclude the report with a discussion of steps women can take themselves.

A few notes for the reader...

- While we occasionally reference international data or practices for context or validation, the focus of this report is U.S. businesses.
- Although this report primarily addresses pipeline issues related to gender, many of the causes and solutions are relevant for all underrepresented groups.
- More than 80 percent of the research cited in this report has been published within the past three years. Data that is older is used primarily for context, clarification, or support.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **leaky corporate pipeline** is a term that describes the way women drop out or “disappear” from the career and leadership trajectory at all stages of their professional lives. Despite widespread recognition that gender diversity and inclusion of all groups is good for the bottom line, women continue to fall off at every step, beginning with the first important move from entry level to early management. And from there, women’s representation continues to decline all the way through the C-suite.

This report, based on a review of 185 sources, explores the state of the pipeline, the array of factors that impact it, and proven interventions. While focused on gender, the report also addresses other underrepresented groups, particularly women of color.

The primary reasons the leaky pipeline persists include:

- Entry-level women start out making 20 percent less than their male peers.
- Women are 21 percent less likely than male peers to be promoted to the first level of management.
- Mid-career issues impact women disproportionately, as family issues often converge with increased job responsibilities. Often, these women have already been sidelined into support roles rather than line positions that provide a better path to the top rungs of management.
- Compared to men, women lack adequate access to career-building relationships such as sponsors, mentors, role models, and networks.
- Unconscious bias and micro-inequities play an outsized role for women. This includes biases against mothers, the double bind, the glass cliff and numerous micro-inequities that erode women’s aspirations over time.

- Outmoded workplace cultures and inadequate workplace policies and programs are a major impediment to women’s career success. A few examples include a “24-7” mentality, a “boy’s club” sentiment, inadequate parental leave, and a lack of flexible work options.

What do women see as major career deterrents? They believe the path to promotion is harder; that balancing home and work responsibilities is a major challenge; that they have less access to powerful relationships that can boost careers; that managers are often not transparent about pay and performance; and that both confidence and ambition are challenged by day-to-day workplace experiences.

Women see keys to career success as supportive cultures; fair and transparent pay and promotion processes; access to important relationships like mentors, sponsors, and networks; and adequate work-life balance programs like parental leave and flex.

The report discusses workplace interventions extensively, categorizing them into four broad categories: culture and leadership; metrics; people programs and processes; and game-changing relationships. A sampling of recommendations in this section includes: inclusive corporate culture reviews and leadership styles; improved hiring and promotion processes; and programs like flexible work, allies, professional development, and frontline manager training.

Featured sections of this report include: the benefits of women’s leadership at every step of the pipeline (page 7), how women can make change (page 26-27), and why interventions sometime fall short (page 28-29). We conclude by noting the role of society and government in addressing pipeline issues.

A LOOK AT THE PIPELINE

Theoretically, the path to the top has gotten better for women in recent years. Not only do women now earn more bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and even doctoral degrees than men,¹ but ample evidence supports the view that women's leadership is well-suited to the complexity of contemporary organizations and that women can positively impact organizational effectiveness.²

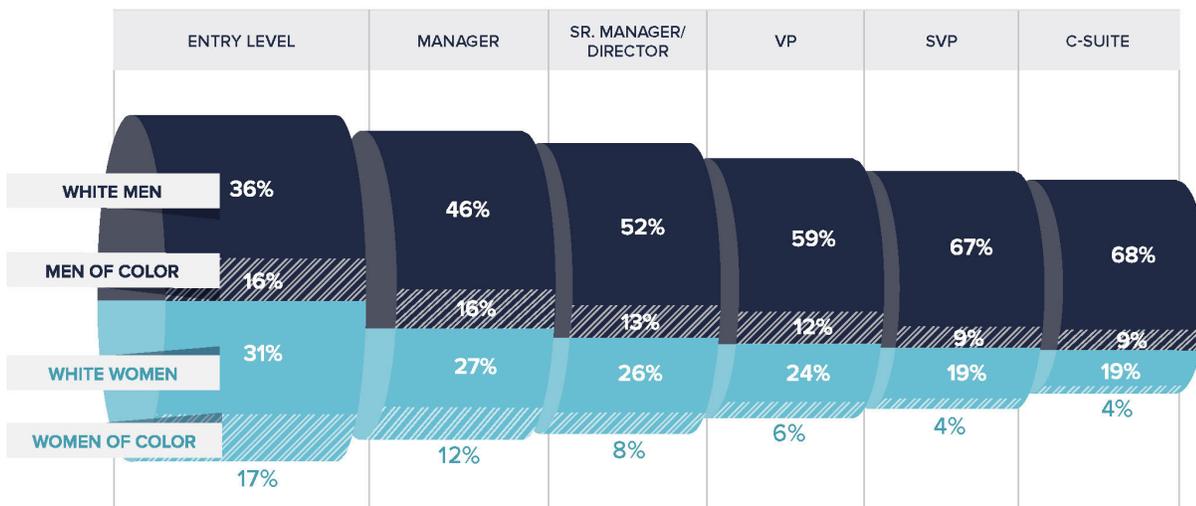
And yet women start behind their male peers and fall behind at every step in the career pipeline. The abundant research demonstrating the consistent gender divide and its amplified effect throughout each career stage has been conducted and reported by such varied organizations as:

McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org; Accenture; Korn Ferry; the Rockefeller Foundation; Gallup; Mercer; the American Association of University Women (AAUW); the Peterson Institute for International Economics; and numerous other credible research groups and firms including accounting and financial services organizations. *Critically, women of color are more disadvantaged than white women at every level.*

On pages 4-5, we highlight the metrics and dynamics that characterize each step in the pipeline, from entry level to the C-suite. **Please note that for consistency and clarity we use McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org 2018 pipeline metrics, illustrated in Figure 1, throughout this section of the report.**

Figure 1 - Corporate Pipeline Representation by Gender and Race

% OF EMPLOYEES BY LEVEL IN 2018



Source: McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org. Women in the Workplace 2018. Page 6.

Starting at the Bottom

2018 Entry Level	
White Women	31%
Women of Color	17%
Total Women	48%
White Men	36%
Men of Color	16%
Total Men	52%

The divide begins before people enter the workforce – during college – when men and women gravitate toward different majors. Fields of study such as computer programming, finance, and engineering remain male dominated and lead to wider career opportunities for men after graduation.³

And although women hold nearly as many entry-level jobs as men (48 percent women and 52 percent men)⁴ a gap in earnings and promotions emerges almost immediately. First, women from even top colleges earn less than their male peers and second,⁵ entry-level women are 21 percent less likely to be promoted than their male counterparts.⁶ This last dynamic presents the biggest gender gap in the pipeline, one that we will revisit when we explore why women's representation declines and recommended interventions.

¹Percentages listed sourced from McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org *Women in the Workplace 2018*, Page 6. Data may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Dropping Off as Managers

Women are 21 percent less likely to attain their first promotion than their male peers,⁷ and men outnumber women nearly two to one by this first move up the management ladder.⁸ Along with this, highly trained women leave the workforce at a greater rate between the entry and mid-level roles.⁹

2018 Manager	
White Women	27%
Women of Color	12%
Total Women	38%¹
White Men	46%
Men of Color	16%
Total Men	62%

2018 Senior Manager/Director	
White Women	26%
Women of Color	8%
Total Women	34%
White Men	52%
Men of Color	13%
Total Men	65%

About 60 percent of mid-career women versus 40 percent of mid-career men have a spouse or partner who is pursuing an equally or more intense career, and mid-career women with children are almost six times more likely to be the primary parent.¹⁰

Interestingly, as these managers move to the senior manager and director level, the percentage of white women drops by one percent while the percentage of white men increases by 6 percent at the expense of primarily men and women of color.¹¹



The lack of women in C-suite positions is a self-perpetuating cycle. Because we don't have many females in the C-suite, young women don't see role models or potential paths towards executive level leadership and are more likely to deselect themselves out of higher-level leadership roles.¹⁹



—Deanna Strable-Soethout, Executive Vice President and CFO,
Principal Financial Group

Opposite Directions by Gender

Women's representation in the pipeline drops by five percent and men's representation increases by six percent as they transition from Senior Managers/Directors to VPs.¹² During their next transitions – VP to SVP – women's representation drops six percent while men's increases by five percent.¹³

2018 Vice President

White Women	24%
Women of Color	6%

Total Women 29%¹

White Men	59%
Men of Color	12%

Total Men 71%

2018 Senior Vice President

White Women	19%
Women of Color	4%

Total Women 23%

White Men	67%
Men of Color	9%

Total Men 76%

Declines Amplify in the C-suite

The C-suite is comprised of 77 percent men and 22 percent women,¹⁴ with women of color comprising only 4 percent. The research provides data on some specific C-suite positions:

- At U.S. S&P 1500 companies, about 11.5 percent of chief operating officer (COO) and chief financial officer (CFO) positions are women.¹⁵
- About 14 percent of the Fortune 500 chief information officers (CIOs) are women.¹⁶
- About 55 percent of chief human resource officer (CHRO) roles – considered the most social of the C-level positions – are held by women.¹⁷
- Women account for about 5 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs. To date, a woman has succeeded another woman as CEO at a publicly traded company only three times.¹⁸

2018 C-suite

White Women	19%
Women of Color	4%

Total Women 22%¹

White Men	68%
Men of Color	9%

Total Men 77%

Boardroom Doors Crack Open

Women hold about 21 percent of corporate board seats in the S&P 500.

- Female board directors are less likely to be sitting CEOs and tend to be younger, less tenured, and more likely to serve on multiple boards than their male counterparts. Over half of the businesses that have increased directorships held by women in recent years have done so by increasing board size;²⁰ this is probably why larger boards tend to have more female directors.
- While more women have joined U.S. corporate boards in recent years, the country ranks lower in board gender diversity compared to most other developed markets.²¹

A Narrower Pipeline for Underrepresented Groups

We know that women of color are negatively impacted at disproportionate levels at every step in the career ladder. Here is an update on what's happening at the senior levels for women of color and women from other underrepresented groups:

As of August 2018, 25 women led a Fortune 500 company and two were women of color.²²

- With the departure of Ursula Burns at Xerox (end of year, 2016), there are no longer any black women CEOs in the Fortune 500.

Black women's advancement into senior leadership roles has remained stagnant for years, despite their numbers increasing in professional and managerial roles.²³ And this isn't for lack of ambition. Research indicates that black women are even more likely to aspire

to powerful positions with prestigious titles than white women. Furthermore, financial services industry data indicates that women of color represent one in five employees at entry level but they virtually disappear at higher levels.²⁴

- Indra Nooyi will leave her role as CEO of Pepsi in October 2018, bringing the overall number of women who lead a Fortune 500 company down to 24 and women of color to one.²⁵
- Only one female Fortune 500 CEO, Geisha Williams of PG&E, is Latina.²⁶
- In July of 2018, Land O'Lakes promoted Beth Ford to be the company's new CEO and first openly gay woman to lead a Fortune 500 company.²⁷
- Yum China CEO Joey Wat is the only Asian woman who holds a CEO position in the Fortune 500.²⁸

Asian American representation in the workforce presents a paradox. Often referred to as the "model minority," Asians are not considered an underrepresented group because despite making up only 5 percent of the overall population they comprise 12 percent of the workforce. However, they are often slotted for individual contributor roles and are less likely to be promoted to management than any other race. Asian Americans' experience in the tech world is a case in point: they are the least likely racial group to be promoted into Silicon Valley's management and executive levels even though they are the most likely to be hired into high-tech jobs.²⁹ Goldman Sachs reported that 27 percent of its U.S. professional workforce was Asian American, but they represented only 11 percent of its U.S. executives and senior managers and none of its executive officers.³⁰

In addition to ample evidence that having women on boards is associated with better performance,³¹ a study of

Boardroom

dynamics reveals three behaviors that female directors are more likely to exhibit than men: broadening discussions to better represent a wider set of stakeholders; diligently pursuing answers to difficult questions, possibly because they are more willing to acknowledge that they don't know an answer; and offering a more collaborative approach, thereby opening up communication channels between the board and the executive team.³²

Further research, including that performed by Gallup among 27 million employees over four decades, demonstrates that female managers possess unique qualities that make them strong

Frontline Managers

– perhaps better than their male counterparts – that drive employee engagement.³⁵ They particularly tend to excel at team collaboration and strengthening relationships with customers, benefitting both their teams and their organizations.

McKinsey finds that when three or more women are on a

Senior Leadership Team

(versus none), businesses score higher on average on an extensive array of criteria including accountability, leadership capabilities, innovation and much more.³³ And numerous studies correspond with Credit Suisse findings which demonstrate that female top managers are “associated with higher returns on equity, valuations and payout of dividends, as well as better stock performance.”³⁴

Research demonstrating specific benefits of improved gender representation at the

Entry Level

of the pipeline is lacking, but there is ample evidence of the advantages women bring to teams regardless of level. Carnegie Mellon research finds that when women comprise more than 50 percent of a team, the average collective intelligence of the group increases, leading to greater ingenuity, collaboration and decision-making.³⁶ And as gender diversity among all ranks becomes an increasingly competitive driver for acquiring new talent, seeing women playing a role at every level of the company allows new hires to envision themselves moving through the pipeline with the company.³⁷

WHY THE LEAKY PIPELINE EXISTS – AND PERSISTS

Throughout the following pages, we explore the *why* behind the leaky pipeline, identifying key contributing factors.

Women Start From Behind

The problems at the start of the pipeline establish a pattern that is hard to break. Many societal and systemic factors clearly influence girls long before they begin their careers – they are difficult to pinpoint and are beyond the purview of this report. However, we can certainly identify one tangible factor influencing women *before* they enter the workforce: choice of college major.

Glassdoor research indicates that numerous college majors leading to higher-paying roles – such as those in the STEM fields – are male dominated, while majors in the social sciences and liberal arts that lead to lower-paying jobs are female dominated.³⁸ The following stats give a feel for the lopsided gender representation in various college majors [See Table 1]:

Table 1: 2017 Top College Majors By Gender

Mechanical Engineering	89% Male
Civil Engineering	83% Male
Physics	81% Male
Computer Science and Engineering	89% Male
Social Work	85% Female
Healthcare Administration	84% Female
Anthropology	80% Female
Nursing	80% Female
Human Resources	80% Female

Source: Chamberlain, Andrew and Jyotsna Jayaraman. *The Pipeline Problem: How College Majors Contribute to the Gender Pay Gap*. Glassdoor, April 2017. Page 25.

Women Earn Less Than Men

The **gender pay gap** is real.

Consider women's 2016 earnings compared to White, non-Hispanic men:⁶¹

Asian-American = 87 cents on the dollar

White = 79 cents on the dollar

African-American = 63 cents on the dollar

Hispanic = 54 cents on the dollar

The other significant factor at the career-entry point is salary. Entry-level women make about 20 percent less than their male counterparts,³⁹ a gap that is difficult to make up over time. Based on 2016 wage gap data, women's average lifetime earnings losses over a 40 year career total \$430,480.⁴⁰ These losses are greater for women of color, with Latinas losing a total of \$1,007,080 and African American women losing \$877,480 over that same period. The lifetime gender earnings deficit also decreases women's retirement security.

Ongoing difficult career decisions often exacerbate the pay differential that begins at the start of the pipeline. For example, if two parents are both working and one of them has to reduce hours or leave the workforce, they generally maintain the higher-paid position, likely that of the male partner. U.S. Census Bureau data shows that husbands are paid more than wives 71 percent of the time in married, opposite-sex couples.⁴¹

Women Drop Off at the First Step to Management

As previously noted, the biggest drop in the pipeline occurs at the first promotion point – between entry-level and manager – when women are 21 percent less likely to get promoted than their male peers.⁴² We call it out here because research suggests that if women at this level were promoted at the same rate as their male peers, their numbers in the SVP and C-suite ranks would more than double.⁴³

Data demonstrating the reasons this cohort immediately falls behind suggest a combination of eroding confidence and aspiration,⁴⁴ possibly already resulting from an unsupportive culture – one characterized by mostly male leaders, less access to mentors and sponsors, a lack of role models, and micro-inequities.

Research among entry-level women in financial services help explain the drop-off at this stage. These women indicate that they seldom picture themselves in top executive roles compared to their male peers (26 percent of women compared to 40 percent of men).⁴⁵

The same research identifies another disconcerting dynamic that might impact movement from the first job to the next position: entry-level women are more likely than men to express concern about failure. This might reflect a confidence gap but could also result from a true difference in the impact of failures between men and women. While 57 percent of entry-level women believe that a high-profile failure would impact their day-to-day experience as an executive only 42 percent of their male peers hold this belief.⁴⁶

Mid-Career Issues Impact Women Disproportionately

For many women, the middle part of a career is where long-term relationships and life decisions start to play a larger role, compared to the earlier career years. Sally Blount, former Dean of Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, refers to this stage as the "Mid-Career Marathon,"⁴⁷ a time when issues related to marriage, children, care for elder parents, and the need for further education all converge and can divert women from their career path. Although men often experience similar life pivots at this stage, Blount explains that, "by choice, necessity, or fault, women typically pick up more of the burden for meeting their families' growing non-work needs during this phase."⁴⁸

Other dynamics come into play at this pivotal time. This group of women represents a significant pool of potential C-suite candidates, yet they often find themselves in support roles rather than line positions that provide stepping stones to the top rungs of the organization.⁴⁹

And while micro-inequities and bias impact women at every level (see *Unconscious Bias, Discrimination and Micro-inequities Play an Outsized Role*, page 11), it may also be this point in women's journeys where day in and day out micro-inequities catch up with them, having worn them down over a number of years. A Boston Consulting Group (BCG) report notes that "Many women stall out in middle management—or step off the career track entirely—not because of explicit discrimination or lack of ambition but rather because of many small factors and daily hassles."⁵⁰

“Women are not simply denied top leadership opportunities at the culmination of a long career. Rather, these opportunities disappear at various points along the way.”⁶²

—American Association of University Women (AAUW)

Women Have Less Access to Powerful Relationships and Networks

The positive impacts of mentorship, sponsorship, networks, and strong role models is discussed at length on pages 24-25 under *Interventions*. Because lack of access to these critical relationships plays a significant role in eroding women's feelings of inclusion, engagement, and ultimately, desire and ability to advance through the pipeline, we highlight some key facts here.

- It's well documented that men find it easier to gain access to these powerful relationships, including sponsorship⁵¹ — arguably the most important advisor-advisee role of all.
- 81 percent of entry-level women have networks that are primarily female,⁵² resulting in fewer women who can sponsor them as they move through their careers.
- Women are twice as likely as men to report feeling excluded from the networking process.⁵³

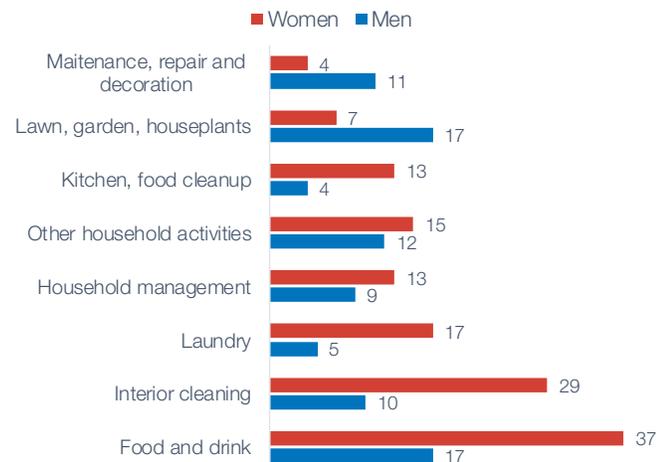
Caregiving, Motherhood, and Domestic Responsibilities Hit Women Harder

Consider these U.S. Census Bureau statistics: about 23 million mothers with children under 18 are in the domestic workforce, making up nearly 1 in 6 of all workers, and these mothers often face unconscious bias and more.⁵⁴ For starters, this group must earn a bachelor's degree just to achieve the same earnings as fathers with a high school degree.⁵⁵ Add to this the “double burden” — the time spent both in paid work and on unpaid domestic responsibilities — and the multiple challenges to advancement that many women face become more evident.

Globally, women spend significantly more time engaged in unpaid work than do men, undertaking 75 percent of the world's total unpaid care, including tasks vital to keeping households functioning such as child care, elder care, food preparation, and cleaning. In the U.S., the metrics

are only slightly better, with women doing an average of 135 minutes of unpaid work per day compared with men's 75 minutes.⁵⁶ [See Figure 2]

Figure 2: The Second Shift
Average minutes per day spent in household activities



Source: Berman, Jillian. “Women's Unpaid Work is the Backbone of the American Economy.” *Market Watch*, 15 April 2018.

An AAUW report notes that, “Motherhood triggers powerful negative competence and commitment assumptions that can result in a maternal wall of bias that is an order of magnitude more powerful than other biases.”⁵⁷ The assumption that women will take on child care and other domestic responsibilities can also mean that managers subconsciously pass over them for opportunities that lead to career growth, promotion, and higher pay such as challenging assignments, high-visibility projects, travel, and international placements.⁵⁸

The New York Times elevated the issue of discrimination against pregnant women in 2018, reminding all of us that motherhood bias can start before one even becomes a mother. According to the paper's investigative story, “Many of the country's largest and most prestigious companies still systematically sideline pregnant women,” passing them over for promotions and raises and firing them when they push back.⁵⁹

Unconscious Bias, Discrimination and Micro-inequities Play an Outsized Role

The role of discrimination and unconscious bias in holding women back at every step in their careers cannot be overstated and could easily be the subject of a freestanding report. This bias has a compounded effect that is easily overlooked: not only do unfair stereotypes impact the actions of those doing the judging but also of the women themselves, as they sometimes effectively yield to the stereotype threat against them and, for instance, opt out.

Micro-inequities

Micro-inequities came into the lexicon in the 1970s, at a time when researchers and organizations began recognizing that overt bias and discrimination, sometimes referred to as first-generation bias, was often less of a barrier to underrepresented groups' advancement than more subtle unconscious bias.⁶⁰ This less obvious, often unintended second-generation bias is comprised largely of micro-inequities, and research indisputably documents their impact.

Second-Generation Bias

Former DuPont CEO Ellen Kullman noted that at the time she was at DuPont, men were promoted within two years, women in three. "It **wasn't as overt** as, 'she's too aggressive.' It came down more to, 'We're not sure she's ready for that job.'"⁶⁴

Our center's first-hand experience working with organizations amply demonstrates how pervasive micro-inequities are and how deeply they can impact employees' confidence and aspirations.

In our work with a wide variety of businesses, we hear plenty of positive success stories of organizations that are making progress and of women and minorities who feel included. And yet, many women working in large and small businesses across diverse fields tell us that they are excluded from men-only social activities; they are the objects of sexist comments from male clients; they are talked over in meetings; and they are passed over for promotion. They also share more egregious experiences that cross the line from the subtle to not-so-subtle, including parental leave policies that are woefully inadequate, policies requiring diverse candidate slates that are overlooked, or an emphasis on hiring for "culture fit" that they feel is short-hand for a male-oriented culture.

“Many explanations have been offered for why women have difficulty in reaching top leadership positions and chief among them is the stereotype-based lack of fit between women’s characteristics, skills, and aspirations and those deemed necessary for effective leadership.”⁶³

—Crystal Hoyt, University of Richmond, and
Susan Murphy, University of Edinburgh

Unconscious Bias Narrows the Pipeline

We provide a few examples of how unconscious bias plays out below. For almost every example, the negative impact is significantly greater for LGBTQ women and women of color. One woman put it well, “White women catch colds; women of color catch pneumonia.”⁶⁵

- The **double bind** refers to a conflict between traits that are desired in women compared to those valued in a leader.⁶⁶ If an assertive, strong, decisive woman embodies classic leadership traits but defies traditionally gendered characteristics such as warmth and humility, a double bind occurs: she can be seen as strong but not particularly likable or ineffectual but well-liked. Men, on the other hand, can safely embody a combination of traits – being both likeable and formidable – a winning formula for a successful long-term career.

As recently as this year, Pew Research reported that people are much more likely to use the term “powerful” in a positive way to describe men but in a negative way to describe women.⁶⁷

- **The glass cliff**, a concept recognized by researchers in 2005, is a phenomenon in which women are given a top position but charged with an exceedingly difficult challenge – most likely in a business or division that is unlikely to succeed. More often than not, women offered such positions are internal candidates, and evidence suggests that these women feel they have a choice between accepting the position or resigning. Why? Perhaps because they have worked for many years to attain a senior role, therefore harboring an internalized sense of pressure to take the assignment.⁶⁸

- Being “the only one” can have a profound negative impact on a woman’s workplace experience. *Only’s* experience more micro-aggressions than women as a whole, 80 percent versus 64 percent, and are almost twice as likely to be sexually harassed at work.⁶⁹
- Women tend to be evaluated and promoted on what they have achieved while men tend to be promoted on what they will do.⁷⁰ Related to this, women are penalized more than men for negative performance and rewarded less for positive results.⁷¹
- A 2016 American Sociological Association study found that women whose résumés indicated they were LGBTQ received 30 percent fewer callbacks than other women, suggesting that LGBTQ status, like race, adds an additional burden.⁷²
- Compared to men, women assume more of the “office housework” and other non-promotable tasks.⁷³ This fills their plates with less critical projects, reducing recognition, visibility and promotions.

Inadequate Workplace Policies and Programs Play a Role

Biases can seep into workplace systems, presenting unseen barriers to the career success of any impacted group, whether women, people of color, veterans, those with disabilities, employees with LGBTQ status, or those with any attribute that places them in an underrepresented category. Such biases are extensive and varied, ranging from inadequate health plans and workplace flexibility programs to poor metrics and weak D&I goals.

We address positive systems interventions under *Workplace Interventions* on pages 16-25 and inadequate programs and policies *Why Interventions Fall Short* on page 28-29.

Outmoded Corporate Cultures Hurt Women More

A Rockefeller Foundation report states that hurdles to female leadership “...are driven by company culture and the attitudes of men in the workplace. This ‘boy’s club’ sentiment is widely felt.”⁷⁴ A strong majority of those surveyed for the study say that attitudes of men both throughout the company and in top leadership make it hard for women to get into senior roles, and nearly 80 percent view corporate culture as a major impediment to women getting ahead. BCG’s findings support this assertion, concluding that, “The career obstacles women face, such as being overlooked for promotions, tend to be institutional, with deep roots in the organization’s culture.”⁷⁵

Cultures that work against women’s ability to thrive and succeed are those that embrace an outmoded “24-7” mentality,⁷⁶ those where flex options aren’t available or employees fear using them, places where people don’t take vacations, workplaces where employees can’t be authentic, and organizations whose leaders do not set the right tone at the top. Clearly, such environments are unappealing for most workers, yet a married man with a full-time spouse at home will be less disadvantaged in such an environment than most women will be.

Corporate Culture Can Limit Advancement

Isolation

Cultures that allow people to feel isolated are particularly distressing, and women, especially those in STEM and women of color, often report feeling isolated. To protect themselves from criticism, their isolation may be somewhat self-imposed, while at other times they are explicitly excluded from meetings and social events. Either way, the result is their being sidelined socially and professionally.⁹²

Social Class Bias

It is important to note the role of organizational culture in social class bias, which is often more pronounced for women. Many hiring processes use some sort of “culture fit” criteria to judge whether a candidate will fit in. A study among investment banks and law firms found that culture fit is routinely mentioned in the top three hiring criteria, being more important than analytical or communication skills.⁹³ Questions that can serve as shorthand for culture fit and indicate class bias are: *Does the candidate golf? Did the candidate attend an Ivy League school? Does the candidate know the same people I know? Will I enjoy having lunch with this person?*

Ambition is not a fixed attribute but is nurtured—or damaged—by the daily interactions, conversations, and opportunities that women face over time.⁹⁴

—Boston Consulting Group

Women's Perspectives

Problematic misperceptions persist about women's views.⁷⁷ And sometimes it is difficult to distinguish myth from reality. For instance, if women are prioritizing family over career at a certain point, is it because they want to or because their options diminished and they grew discouraged? Below, we highlight research findings on women's views about their work and workplaces, what holds them back, and their aspirations and goals.

A Perception Gap

The Wall Street Journal reports that women largely view gender equality as a work still in early progress, while many male colleagues see it as “mission accomplished.”⁷⁸ This perception gap helps explain why so many employers haven't solved the gender gap – the issue has to be acknowledged and understood before it can be fixed.

The Confidence Gap

When it comes to careers, women are more likely than men to report that they lack confidence, question their ability, or have difficulty envisioning themselves as leaders. Bain and Company research, in fact, suggests that women's confidence wanes with experience while men's increases.⁷⁹ We address confidence more fully on page 26, under *Women Can Make Change*.

Women Are Ambitious

Research indicates that women enter the workforce with the same ambition as men, and that erosion of this ambition should not be viewed as a *fait accompli*.⁸⁰ So while women experience variability in their aspirations over the course of a career — as do men — leaders who want to retain them should be looking at what they can do to address causation, chief among them developing a culture of support.

- Having children does not reduce women's career ambitions. According to BCG, “The ambition levels of women with children and women without children track each other almost exactly over time.”⁸¹
- 68 percent of women and 67 percent of men are interested in being promoted to the next level, but significantly more women than men think it will be harder for them to be promoted or obtain a raise.⁸²
- Women feel that the impact of external factors like home dynamics and micro-inequities erodes their aspirations. But the good news is that they aspire to leadership in organizations with positive work environments that value diversity.⁸³

Home, Family, and Children

This section goes hand-in-hand with the discussion of ambition, above, which establishes that children are not the cause of diminished career aspirations. In fact, research indicates that a significant majority of professional women who leave the workforce and are caring for their children have done so as a last resort due to unfulfilling roles and perceived diminished prospects for advancement (including pay).⁸⁴ Indeed recent studies among younger professionals suggest that they do not perceive home life as a major barrier to advancement.

We contrast this with McKinsey research among women at the most senior levels. Half the women in this group cite the inability to balance family and work as a major reason for not wanting to pursue top executive positions. The study notes that as these professional women advance through their careers, their workplace responsibilities increase while their home responsibilities remain significant (50 percent of senior women feel this way compared to 13 percent of their male peers).⁸⁵ These senior women are also more likely to feel that prioritizing work-life balance by using flex programs or taking parental leave will erode their ability to succeed professionally.

A recent global PwC study adds to the angst: it reports that nearly half of women are nervous about the impact that having children might have on their careers and that almost half believe they have been overlooked for career advancement because they have had children.⁸⁶

Accountability Transparency and Trust

Worldwide, women lack trust in what their managers tell them about promotions, pay, and what helps or hurts their careers. Women surveyed by PwC said they want greater transparency about these practical markers so they can trust the feedback they receive, discern where they stand, and make their own case for their career progress.⁸⁷ Women and men alike believe their employers provide equal opportunities to learn and grow when the firm's leaders are held accountable for gender diversity, when hiring and promotions are impartial, and when the firm supports diverse work styles.⁸⁸

- Nearly a third of all women respondents in a recent survey believe that employers are biased in favor of male job candidates and interestingly, 28 percent of millennial respondents held this view in the newest study compared to only 16 percent in 2011.⁸⁹
- 40 percent of women professionals believe they have missed a promotion or opportunity due to their gender.⁹⁰

Women's more challenging work and home dynamics make it tougher for them to juggle heavy work volumes and work-related stress.⁹⁵

—Bain and Company

Feedback from Women Near the Top

The New York Times conducted in-depth interviews with women who held the number two spot in major organizations but didn't make it to the very top. These women identified unconscious biases they observed and experienced during their lengthy careers.⁹¹

- Women are often seen as dependable rather than visionary.
- Women tend to be less comfortable with self-promotion and more likely to be criticized when they do seek the spotlight.
- Men continue to be threatened by assertive women.
- Women are often disproportionately penalized for mistakes.

The Path to Satisfaction and Success

Regarding satisfaction, research such as PwC's and Mercer's concurs that key drivers are: fair and transparent pay and promotion processes; transparency and trust regarding practical markers like pay and promotions; strategic support from leaders and peers (networks); and organizational support related to work-life balance programs such as parental leave, re-entry, and flexibility.⁹⁶

Regarding success, data suggests a bit of a difference between senior women and those with less experience: senior level women in financial services specifically identify sponsorship as the most essential factor in their success, along with risk-taking and knowing and communicating one's value. Entry-level women in the same field see performance as the top driver. These younger women also mention strong communication skills and being an effective team player.⁹⁷

WORKPLACE INTERVENTIONS

A comprehensive approach — including policies, processes, and programs — all supported by an authentic culture of commitment is essential.

The specific recommendations in this section, both small and large, address mechanisms at every level of the pipeline to recruit, hire, retain, support, and promote women who can thrive and attain their leadership goals. As you review these diverse approaches, bear in mind that best-in-class organizations have been persistent — they have been at it longer — and they have advocates and role models for gender diversity at every level, demonstrating that it takes time to achieve sustainable progress.⁹⁸

Culture and Leadership

The Impact

Study after study demonstrates the power of culture to propel people forward or to hinder them, and leaders are absolutely critical to establishing a strong, positive culture.

Accenture finds that workplace culture's complexity and fluidity can make it difficult to define. Their report concludes that, "Culture is an accumulation of norms and customs that evolve over time, and leaders increasingly recognize that they need to be more proactive in shaping it. If they succeed, they will create a more diverse, engaged and highly skilled workforce, as well as contribute to improving the communities that they serve."⁹⁹ A winning culture trusts and respects its employees, offers them freedom to be creative, and allows them to train and work flexibly.

Deloitte's research shows that the behavior of leaders ranging from frontline managers to top executives can drive up to 70 percentage points of difference between those employees who feel included and those who do not, and the effect is even greater for members of underrepresented

groups. And the key factors that distinguish truly inclusive leaders? Commitment to D&I, courage and humility about their own abilities, awareness of their own bias and systems issues, curiosity, cultural intelligence, and collaboration.

Create a Culture Where Employees Thrive

- If you think you already have a culture that promotes and supports inclusion and belonging, take a good look at it to be sure. Culture can reveal itself more through retention numbers than recruitment success because good employees who don't feel included won't stay.¹⁰⁰ To get at this, **utilize focus groups and engagement surveys**, asking questions like whether differing opinions are respected and whether employees think top leadership is supportive.
- **Encourage diverse leadership styles**, making sure that there isn't an unspoken image of leadership, sometimes referred to as the "outmoded leadership model."¹⁰¹ The benefits of diversity — and genuine inclusion — don't emerge unless people's differences in work styles and leadership are embraced.
- **Establish the business case** — why diversity is a priority for your organization. Establish and then socialize how gender diversity supports your business goals, perhaps by improving innovation, expanding the talent pool, or impacting the bottom line.
- **Address unconscious bias through formal training programs.** Note that criticism of such programs stems principally from two sources. First, when they are used as one-offs, and second, when people use them as an excuse for their own bias rather than taking action, thereby perpetuating the problem. We revisit the role of unconscious bias training in *Unconscious Bias, Discrimination and Micro-inequities Play an Outsized Role* on page 11.

Hiring more women without changing the workplace experience won't significantly address the gender gap.¹⁰⁴

—Mercer

Promote Inclusive Leadership

Development Dimensions International identifies two distinguishing factors beyond standard D&I practices in companies that achieve and sustain strong gender diversity: inclusion is embedded within their culture and their leaders embrace varying mindsets. For example, their leaders are twice as likely to collaborate on solutions, 1.5 times more likely to work across organizational boundaries, and more likely to embrace multiple perspectives.¹⁰²

If you are a leader, ask yourself how you are doing with these factors:

- Visibly providing the vision and mandate for diversity, equal pay, and advancement goals, and communicating progress against these goals¹⁰³
- Measuring the impact of your policies and actions
- Encouraging your leaders at all levels to proactively improve workplace culture through personal incentives and performance processes
- Holding your leaders accountable for reaching diversity targets

A Commitment to Inclusion

Sodexo's CEO has committed to reach a global representation of 40 percent women in senior leadership by 2025, and he has made the teams accountable by linking 10 percent of annual incentives for the executive population to help target this benchmark. Additionally, Sodexo has a target that all employees work for gender-balanced management teams by 2025, up from today, where 59 percent of the company's employees work within entities with gender-balanced management.¹⁰⁵

A leadership priority for **Genentech** is building a culture where diversity, inclusion, engagement and flexibility all increase the ability to innovate. The company has more than doubled the number of women in the executive ranks after a decade of determined focus on gender diversity. Today women represent 53 percent of employees, 48 percent of managers and 40 percent of officers at Genentech. The company provides a framework for working flexibly as well as on-site amenities to promote employee wellbeing, including childcare facilities and a campus health center.¹⁰⁶

Engage Men

A male ally understands and values gender diversity and is actively engaged in eliminating inequities. He will, "...advocate for women even when there are no women in the room."¹⁰⁷

While the #MeToo movement has given some men pause as they consider whether to act as allies in the workplace, the heightened sensitivity around workplace gender issues makes the case for male allies all the more compelling. Women and other underrepresented groups need male allyship more than ever before. Men — white men in particular — continue to hold the most power and influence in the majority of organizations and therefore have the credibility to advocate for others.

And although men sometimes fear negative repercussions for publicly supporting underrepresented groups, they should not. Recent research demonstrates that while white men are not penalized for publicly valuing diversity, people of color and women are often penalized in performance ratings when they advocate for such initiatives.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, when men do become directly involved in gender diversity, both men and women believe that their organization makes better progress in achieving gender balance. In worldwide BCG research, 96 percent of respondents said they believe that companies are making gender progress when men are actively involved compared to only 30 percent among companies where men are not involved.¹⁰⁹

The CWB report, *Men as Allies: Engaging Men to Advance Women in the Workplace*, reviews male allyship and contains numerous recommendations for both organizations and individuals.¹¹⁰ A few ways men can act as allies to improve pipeline issues include:

- Establishing or supporting gender-advancing workplace policies and programs

- Mentoring and sponsoring women and other underrepresented groups
- Publicly advocating to advance such groups (in meetings, on hiring committees, and in the board room)
- Being active bystanders – calling out bias whenever they see it
- Talking about it

Harness the Right Metrics

Metrics have become an acknowledged and widely-used tool in D&I efforts, particularly for gender, but too often organizations are using the wrong data or applying it insufficiently. Below we identify key metrics strategies.

- **Ensure your CEO, other top leaders, and frontline managers are involved in the metrics process.**
 - Take the lead in requiring and establishing the metrics process.
 - Consider providing incentives and penalties for all responsible employees' success against metrics.
 - Provide tools, training and resources to the frontline managers so that they can succeed in meeting the goals.
 - Openly share metrics, even unfavorable ones, and tell employees what actions you plan to take based on the findings.
- **Make sure you establish clear, understandable, actionable metrics.** BCG and others recommend establishing solid metrics around the following five dynamics: *recruitment, retention, advancement, representation and pay*.¹¹¹
 - Look at individual business units and support functions, analyze changes over time, and dig deeper into each of the five dynamics.

- For the hiring process, examine how many candidates are applying, who they are, who is getting to the interview stage, and who is advancing to the final round and being hired.
- Find out how many women are in administrative roles such as HR or marketing versus operating units.
- If your retention numbers are changing, what are the contributing factors — interventions that you've implemented or overlooked — or what are the exit rates? At what levels are women leaving and why?
- Use both hard and soft data such as women's exit rates, promotion rates, time to promotion, and wages, while also analyzing your culture in engagement surveys, exit interviews, and focus groups.¹¹²
 - Understand what drives women's job satisfaction within your environment and determine how bias shows up. Are micro-inequities the major problem or are more pernicious forms of bias playing a role?
 - If you can gauge perceptions of employees at various levels throughout your organization, you might get advance warning of future retention issues. Imagine what you might learn through a climate survey that asks employees whether they see themselves at the firm three years from now or whether they feel the organization is making an effort to retain women.
 - Consider the insight you will gain about culture and bias by asking women if they believe they have a fair shot at senior roles and leadership positions.
- Determine how often you will run diagnostics. One approach is to conduct comprehensive surveys periodically with shorter pulse surveys and focus groups in between. The combined comprehensive, quantitative and qualitative

feedback will provide critical understanding of your success against new goals and programs and help you determine where to make changes.¹¹³

As you measure success, remember that feedback via surveys and focus groups, as well as trends in data, demonstrate important incremental progress. Concrete changes in numbers and percentages often take time, and it can be frustrating if they are the sole factors used as measures of success.

The CWB report, *Developing Meaningful Diversity Metrics*,¹¹⁴ provides additional recommendations on measuring the impact of programs and policies focused on women's advancement.

A Data-Driven Approach to Understanding the Leaky Pipeline

Historically, **PwC's** approach to fixing the leaky pipeline was to drive diversity programs focused on the retention of women and on support for new mothers. This was based on the assumption that during their career progression women were leaving to have families. However, five years ago, when PwC applied rigorous analytics, the results were revealing:

- More women than men were leaving only at the most junior levels — and very few of these women were at the stage of starting a family.
- At all other levels, more men were actually leaving than women, but the company was predominantly replacing both men and women who left with experienced male hires.

The results of this data-driven approach led to a new diversity strategy to hire diverse, experienced candidates as a critical KPI for global diversity growth.¹³³

People Programs and Processes

The research is clear on the need to implement robust, long-term processes and programs to tackle the pipeline problem, and yet we encourage readers not to get discouraged at this point. Remember that no company, no matter how large or how well-funded, has solved the overall diversity and pipeline problem and that it is better to start small than to avoid action completely. If you are just getting started, pick low-hanging fruit, utilizing the extensive suggestions and check-lists we provide in this section.

Frontline managers

Frontline managers critically impact engagement, loyalty, productivity, and of course, retention. In fact, both men and women believe frontline managers play a significant role regarding employees' views about becoming top leaders.¹¹⁵ Managers need to be trained, supported, and held accountable for diversity and inclusion goals. Expose the frontlines to the same resources and education that enable senior executives to be more inclusive leaders. Equip them with:

- Unconscious bias and allyship training
- How to have courageous conversations
- Communications tools to explain where and how the organization is moving strategically
- Individual skills enhancement

Once educated, these frontline managers will harness a range of progressive strategies, including: modeling work-life balance and encouraging it on their teams: working from home; making sure opportunities for visible stretch assignments are equitably distributed; and rewarding those who utilize flex and excel at their jobs. Leaders should reward frontline managers who visibly support flex.¹¹⁶

Hiring and Promotion Processes

This section provides practical tips on the many techniques organizations can use in the interviewing, hiring and promotion process to impact their pipeline. We recommend using this section as a checklist for these processes.¹¹⁷

Recruiting

- Analyze your interview and hiring data to determine if meaningful gender differences exist.
- Assemble a diverse applicant pool.
- Introduce blind assessments.
 - Protect candidates' names or identities with a code or number.
- Ensure that candidates meet with an equal number of female and male employees when interviewing.
 - Use a diverse set of interviewers.
 - Ensure that recruiters are asking men and women the same questions.
- Eliminate unstructured interviews.
 - Develop a question checklist and assign weights to each question.
 - Evaluate candidates in real time.
 - Select a panel and develop instruments that require input from multiple parties.
 - Ask candidates to take a sample work test/ case study.
 - Create a rubric or template for interview questions so all candidates are held to the same standards.
- Evaluate candidates comparatively.
- Offer incentives to employees for diverse referrals.

- Review the career site and make updates to depict an inclusive culture, including photos of employees with different backgrounds.
- Increase the proportion of women employees at recruiting events.
- Be sure that salaries match the market rate.
 - Establish a strong pay equity process, objectively reviewing pay and ensuring that women and other underrepresented groups are on the pay equity team.
- Conduct surveys with job candidates to see if women experience the process differently from men or others.

Job Postings

- Use pro-diversity language such as *“We want people from different regions.”*
- Remove gendered wording from job postings.
- Replace culturally biased terms with inclusive terms. For example, replace the word “fit” with “shared values.”
- Consider new technologies that flag biased words and suggest alternatives or strip resumes of names and non-essential information that can trigger bias.
 - Examples: Talent Sonar, Blendoor, Textio, Gap Jumpers and Hundred5.

Evaluations and Promotions

- Standardize 360 degree feedback.
- Provide feedback to women that is specific and comparable to what men receive.
- Consider performance and potential separately, as discussed on page 12.
- Eliminate the self-evaluation “anchoring effect.”
 - Because men tend to be substantially more overconfident than women, they rate themselves higher.
- Conduct comparative evaluations and promote people in groups.
 - Research demonstrates that employers who promote employees in “bundles” versus individual promotions tend to promote more diverse groups. Why? If you are promoting ten people at once, a homogeneous group is much more obvious.
- Enhance women leaders’ visibility.
- Create a sponsorship program for women to help them gain support for promotions from other colleagues in the workplace.
- Hold informal, “in the moment,” frequent discussions about performance rather than annual reviews.
- Reward outcomes achieved instead of hours worked.
- In global organizations, make it possible for people to be promoted at high levels without requiring experience running an international division.

How Google Defines “Culture Fit”

If **culture fit** is part of your hiring criteria, make sure you define it. Google describes googlyness as “enjoying fun, a certain dose of intellectual humility, the ability to admit when you’re wrong, comfort with ambiguity, and having taken some courageous or interesting paths.”¹³⁴

A Comprehensive Approach to Inclusive Recruiting and Retention

Syros Pharmaceuticals points to specific interventions that impact the gender pipeline and contribute to its diverse leadership team. The company has a strong history of recruiting diverse leaders, including people of color, immigrants and those who identify as LGBTQ. Syros also monitors performance evaluations and promotions to ensure that women and other historically underrepresented people are advancing, and specifically promotes cognitive diversity.

The company augments hiring and professional development approaches. This includes providing incentives for search firms and employees who find and refer diverse employees, improving onboarding and exit interviews to learn from employees, and facilitating authentic connections with underrepresented groups.¹³⁵

Workplace Flex and Caregiving Support

Consider how many times the conundrum women face around work-life balance has been mentioned in this report and what you likely see in your own life and workplace. Nearly half of women surveyed in the most recent research say flexible work schedules will help their careers,¹¹⁸ and women in junior and middle-management positions find it critical in navigating the dual pressures of career advancement and family needs.¹¹⁹ Workplace flexibility not only provides a tangible intervention for the gender pipeline

problem, but it increases trust among all members of an organization, increases employee loyalty and enhances engagement.

Consider the following flex programs for women and all employees to ensure a more inclusive, engaged, productive workforce.¹²⁰

- Work-life balance programs
 - Create return-to-work programs that help employees returning from parental leave get back up to speed.
 - Make it clear that flexibility is compatible with promotion.

“Organizations don't do nearly enough...to better facilitate a more flexible work/life scenario. For me this means visibly and actively assisting women, ensuring they are able to shape their work days to best meet their family responsibilities... It involves trust and mutual respect. In my experience, job satisfaction and long term productivity is enhanced for all — men and women.”¹³⁶

—Gail Kelly, Former CEO, Westpac

- Parental and family leave
- Remote working and related variations: telecommuting, virtual work, working from home
- Flexible schedules
- Unlimited vacation
- On-campus daycare programs
- Onsite employee well-being centers, including fitness centers
- Health programs that address unique female needs
- Other: Job rotation, shared sick time, wellness offerings, tuition assistance, hoteling, sabbaticals, pet friendly policies, summer Fridays, and paid time off to volunteer

Additional recommendations for organizations implementing workplace flexibility can be found in the CWB curated research report, *The Value of Workplace Flexibility: Options, Benefits, and Success Stories*.¹²¹

Recognize Unique Health Needs

Research by Mercer found that women's representation increases when employers perceive and **support women's health needs.**

Women have a distinct connection with healthcare as patients, caregivers and decision-makers, yet less than a quarter of financial services firms acknowledge the importance of supporting this unique relationship and its importance in recruiting and retaining women. In fact, only 12 percent of financial services organizations work to identify gender-specific health needs and education.¹³⁷

Women's Professional Development

Women value personalized support and professional guidance. A host of well-respected research organizations provide recommendations for gender-specific training, some focusing on women's unique competencies, some on helping women better understand their career options, and still others addressing hard skills, where women are sometimes viewed as lagging compared to men. We recommend seeking feedback from women and their managers to determine what will work best in your organization.

Important skills linked to leadership development include:

- **Soft skills** – A Deloitte study on Women CFOs highlighted the mastery of “soft skills” that helped women make their way to the top. These skills are not acquired in a classroom, but rather through personal and workplace experiences. *They include curiosity, courage, perseverance, confidence and ethical responsibility.*¹²²
- **Public speaking** – Being adept as a public speaker can help demonstrate confidence and improve public speaking and presentation skills.
- **Negotiation and conflict resolution skills** – Women often note the need to become better negotiators.
- **Influencing change** – Gifted leaders know how to activate change through influence instead of mandates.

In addition to formal training, proven methods include:

- **Personally focused career coaching or professional development** – The learning and development budget might provide funding for this approach.
- **Executive shadowing** – Younger professionals can particularly benefit from seeing a more experienced role model at work.

Beyond the type of training, consider who you are picking for training. Egon Zehnder identifies a number of strong predictors of leadership potential.¹²³ At the top of the list are such factors as commitment to excel, curiosity, insight, engagement, and determination. Interestingly, women tend to score high on more of these competencies, especially curiosity, determination, and engagement, than do men. And yet, corporate training programs often value skills where men tend to score higher, such as strategy or change management, resulting in labeling the wrong people as “high-potential.” Not only are some of the wrong people likely to be picked for training, but the type of training itself may miss the mark.

Egon Zehnder recommends utilizing the predictors of leadership potential instead of just “hard, existing skills” to select candidates for training and to develop the right type of training.¹²⁴ The leadership predictors also create the opportunity to develop an employee “growth map” showing how a person’s strengths in each of the predictors aligns with the competencies required in various roles.

Empowering Women to Lead

Philadelphia-based **Penn Medicine** works to accelerate women into leadership roles via mentorship opportunities and skill-building workshops. These initiatives, coupled with a culture of equality, have empowered the women who make up 77 percent of Penn Medicine’s workforce to claim 55 percent of the company’s executive positions and five of the seven CEO roles at the health system’s hospitals.¹³⁸

Game Changing Relationships

The positive impacts of mentorship, sponsorship, networks, and strong role models cannot be overstated. Women who have reached senior ranks share stories of mentors who supported them emotionally, sponsors who advocated vocally, people they have admired, and groups of women who have given them safe harbor during tough times.

Research backs up the anecdotal evidence demonstrating the positive career impact for all women and women of color.¹²⁵ Center for Talent Innovation research demonstrates three specific, critical impacts: pay raises, high profile assignments, and promotions.¹²⁶ And one study found that 85 percent of sponsored mothers employed full-time stay in the game versus 58 percent of those going it alone, and other research demonstrates that women with sponsors are significantly more likely than those without to seek raises and stretch assignments that build leadership experience.¹²⁷

Despite the positive stories of how mentors and sponsors have helped women, there are far more examples of women being denied access to these critical relationships either inadvertently or systematically. While equal access to mentors and sponsors is one way to address the pipeline gender gap, Catalyst notes that men’s “mentors” tend to be more senior, more influential, and have access to a wider network than women’s mentors. In fact, men’s “mentors” are often really sponsors, and that is the critical difference.

Having influential senior leaders ... serve as mentors, advisers, and role models (provides) emerging women managers with the tacit knowledge needed to navigate their company's leadership structure.¹³⁹

—Cindy Pace, Assistant Vice President,
Global Diversity & Inclusion, MetLife

What's the upshot for businesses who want to harness the power of these important relationships to better retain and advance women?

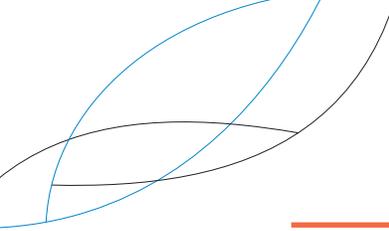
- **Be sure your organization is mentoring and sponsoring women and other underrepresented groups.** Some companies eschew formal programs because the relationships can feel forced and therefore yield disappointing results. However, formal programs keep people accountable, can jumpstart a culture of mentorship, and can provide the foundation for ongoing informal relationships. Organizations that are uncertain about how to proceed might start with pilot programs, shorter rotational programs, or group mentoring – all are low risk and require few resources.
- **Ensure that advisors and advisees receive preparation.** The senior people should be trained on allyship, the micro-inequities their protégés might face, the importance of trust, and the role they need to play; both parties should understand how to set goals, timetables, and communications guidelines for their work together.
- **Encourage role models.** Research indicates that there are almost three times more high-performing women in organizations with at least one female senior leader than in organizations where all the top leaders are male.¹²⁸
- **Establish and support women's Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).** ERGs are known to foster professional development, encourage a more inclusive overall environment and provide a "safe zone" for women. Accenture identifies 14 factors that are central to creating positive culture change in organizations and one such factor is the presence of a women's network.¹²⁹ Indeed, two-thirds of high performing women participate in women's networks compared with less than half of women overall. Where networks do exist, 90 percent of women participate and the majority are also open to men.¹³⁰

- **Foster informal networks that can provide women with emotional support.** When our center advises women's groups, we encourage them not to overlook these more informal groups, comprised of friends and colleagues who they know will provide support without judgment and allow them to "take off their armor." Deb Liu, VP of Marketplace at Facebook, shares how trusted, familiar faces have helped her: "When I joined Facebook, a handful of former PayPal colleagues joined around the same time. That support helped me take a leap even though I was feeling overwhelmed as a new mom. Based on that experience, I work to cultivate that feeling of safety and support within my own teams."¹³¹

The CWB curated research report, *Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networks: The Power and Value of Professional Connections*, summarizes expert advice on developing and sustaining mentorship, sponsorship, and networking relationships and programs.¹³²

The Power of ERGs

The **S&P Global** CEO hosts diversity thought leadership gatherings featuring diverse employees, their stories, and their accomplishments. Consider teaming with your ERGs to sponsor these forums. You will support your organization's culture, support individual employees, and demonstrate the value of employee networks to the many diverse groups ERGs bring together.¹⁴⁰



WOMEN CAN MAKE CHANGE

As organizations work to create more authentic, inclusive cultures, establish programs and processes to help all employees thrive, and work to eliminate micro-inequities that erode engagement and ambition, women should identify and address what they can do to help themselves and others. In this section, we look at how women can build and maintain confidence and aspirations along with identifying career challenges and goals. We also take a look at some advice from women who made it to the top.

Confidence Drives Success

Data and anecdotal evidence make a strong case for the positive link between confidence and success. In fact, confidence correlates just as closely with success as with competence.¹⁴¹ But research suggests that women lag behind men in self-confidence, which then impacts workplace engagement and career progression. Men also experience self-doubt, but a key differentiator is that women tend to internalize it while men move past it.¹⁴²

Why does the confidence gap exist? There are no precise answers but rather a host of interdependent, sometimes correlative factors. For starters, girls are often socialized to be agreeable, perfectionistic, and risk-avoidant. And later in their journeys, the micro-inequities and barriers we have discussed can further erode confidence. Yet as a Bain report notes, aspiration and confidence, in particular, are vital to staying the course.¹⁴³

As women address their confidence challenges, they should be particularly aware of perfectionism, sometimes considered to be “one of the most significant self-inflicted barriers for women seeking challenging assignments and advancement.”¹⁴⁴

Establish Your Priorities

As women set their sites on challenging and rewarding opportunities they may also encounter challenges with work-life integration issues, thus the need for laser focus on the specific experiences that will best prepare them to progress through the pipeline. They should ask themselves the following questions to guide them in decision-making related to new opportunities:¹⁴⁵

- Will this assignment enhance my creativity, my operating know-how, my strategic thinking, or my organizational and collaboration skills?
- Will it improve my ability to negotiate or influence others?
- Will it help me make difficult decisions or confront difficult people or tasks?
- Will it provide greater visibility with key decision makers?

Catalyst research provides support for this last consideration. It finds that when women are proactive in making their achievements visible they advance further and are more satisfied with their careers, and they have better compensation growth.¹⁴⁶

I think women are looking at the industry, the board, the C-suite, and management to find people who are similar to them so that they understand they can also succeed in those roles.¹⁶⁵

— Marianne Lake, CFO, JPMorgan Chase

“ So, what are women in the workplace to do, when research shows that we’re penalized for trying to lift each other up? The antidote to being penalized for sponsoring women may just be to do it more — and to do it vocally, loudly, and proudly — until we’re able to change perceptions. There are massive benefits for the individual and the organization when women support each other.¹⁶⁶ ”

—Anne Welsh McNulty, Co-founder and Managing Partner, JBK Partners

Advice From and About Women Who Made it to the Top

Women who have made it to the top often identify the following mindsets and practices as critical to success. Women reading this report should consider how to put these ideas into practice (to fuel your own journey to leadership):¹⁴⁷

- Establish a sense of purpose, which is often a key motivator. Think about what you are aiming for in your career and why, understanding the trade-offs you might need to make and the risks you will take.¹⁴⁸
- Identify your own approach to building your career and maximize it. Korn Ferry identifies four unique approaches:
 - Lifelong Learners, who seek new challenges
 - Bird’s Eyes, who thoroughly understand the business, maybe working in numerous roles at the same place
 - Innovators, who are growth-oriented and probably entrepreneurial
 - Career builders, who focus on a specific path and don’t deviate
- Seek the best experience, skills-building, and career-coaching to prepare you for your career goal.
- Utilize mentors, sponsors, and networks, remembering that most men have more access to these powerful relationships than you do.
- Seek new experiences that provide diverse perspectives and help hone business skills.¹⁴⁹
- Ask for what you want and negotiate for it.¹⁵⁰
- Harness the power of five soft skills – curiosity, courage, perseverance, confidence and ethical responsibility. A 2017 Deloitte study of female CFOs identified these five qualities as essential traits for success.¹⁵¹

Women Do Help Each Other

If you are looking for a mentor or sponsor but don’t know where to begin, just ask. A majority of senior women leaders say they haven’t been asked even though:

- About three quarters of senior women have served as a formal mentor at least once.
- About three quarters of women say they always accept invitations to be a formal mentor at work.
- The overwhelming majority of women report that they would mentor more if asked.¹⁶⁷

WHY INTERVENTIONS FALL SHORT

A Culture Gap

Organizations that fail or fall short in attracting diverse talent, including women, often lack cultures of inclusion without the leaders realizing it. Are varied opinions respected? Do the top executives demonstrate an authentic culture, do they respect other employees, and do they listen?

Complacency – Diversity Fatigue

A key driver of complacency in today's workplaces may be "diversity fatigue." Yes, it's real, but let's remember that this isn't the first time a kind of malaise has developed around the issue. *The New Yorker* references a similar syndrome occurring in the nineties when managers reported stress in trying to meet diversity goals.¹⁵² Human nature plays a legitimate role – people working in this space might feel that they no longer see or hear anything new, and they are tired. Add the current political backdrop – the concept's legitimacy being questioned – and one can understand the dynamic. To counteract apathy, provide greater context, expanding the concept of diversity. For instance, include diversity of thought and be sure inclusion discussions are taking place throughout the organization and not just among the converted. The imperative for leaders to demonstrate passion for the issue and to model inclusive behaviors becomes even more critical in environments where diversity fatigue might be present.

“There is a main reason why gender diversity initiatives either fail or come up short... They are failing to address gender and equity in a comprehensive manner, because there are so many different factors at play.”¹⁶⁸

—Marianne Cooper, Sociologist, Stanford University

The Frozen Middle

We noted the importance of frontline managers earlier in this report, and yet studies reveal a gap in this cohort's engagement when it comes to D&I initiatives. In a financial services study, Mercer found that a significant majority of senior managers are actively involved in D&I initiatives compared to less than one-third of middle managers.¹⁵³ While senior leaders are given time to gain understanding about interventions, frontline managers are often given directives without adequate support and therefore lack understanding. One researcher notes, “Ah, the middle manager's conundrum. The grassroots are energized, the executives have seen the light, and the top-down and bottom-up momentum comes to a screeching halt right in the middle girth of most organizations.”¹⁵⁴

Do You Have Discrimination and Harassment Policies?

Establish strong processes for employees to report and inquire about discrimination or harassment, and communicate clearly about them. Your employees need to know that they can take action safely, without fear of retaliation, and with confidence that the organization will respond appropriately.

Principal Financial established an Ethics Hotline so employees can report compensation concerns anonymously,¹⁶⁹ and Intel runs a service it calls WarmLine to help with discrimination and bias concerns. Employees can contact case managers via the service who help mitigate issues anonymously. WarmLine helps employees and leaders, who can document cases to understand where they are falling short.¹⁷⁰

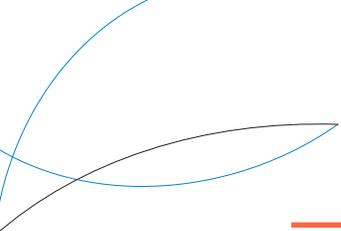
A Gap Between Policies and Execution

Studies demonstrate genuine commitment to gender diversity at the top of many companies. In fact, McKinsey data suggests that the U.S. number is as high as 78 percent¹⁵⁵ and a Fortune Knowledge Group-Royal Bank of Canada study put the percentage at 70.¹⁵⁶ Few executives, though, feel their businesses have translated the policies into actions that will move the needle and few believe that senior leaders communicate enough about its importance.

One of the primary reasons for the gap between intent and results comes down to implementation, either because programs are not comprehensive enough (there is no “silver bullet”),¹⁵⁷ executives and managers are not held accountable, communication is weak, or specific programs and processes — such as workplace flexibility or data — are lacking. Consider that in Massachusetts, where some of the most progressive wage legislation in the country was recently enacted, two thirds of companies are not measuring the number of women in leadership roles, the extent to which women advance into more senior roles, or retention of women leaders.¹⁵⁸

Consider this list of potential pitfalls to avoid as you address pipeline issues:

- **The D&I goals are not aligned with business goals** (i.e., ERGs are only social).
- **There is a lack of executive sponsorship.**
- **Programs for underrepresented groups lack visibility** (i.e., women’s leadership programs don’t expose women to leaders).
- **Communication about goals, accomplishments, setbacks, and metrics falls short.**
- **The data gathering or reporting processes are bad.** A common pitfall is reliance on vanity metrics. These are metrics that are easy to gather but don’t tell the real story, often leading to distorted findings and conclusions. For example, an engineering firm might count non-engineers, like administrative assistants (mostly women), as part of their engineering teams, artificially inflating their gender diversity numbers. Another example might be measuring membership numbers for ERGs. While an increase in membership provides an indication of employee interest and engagement with the ERGs, it tells nothing about how ERGs are aligned with business goals.
- **Well-intentioned interventions can be biased.**
 - For example, putting one woman on a hiring slate can result in a statistical chance of her being hired at zero. Yet when several women are on the slate the odds increase dramatically. Why? Being *the only* highlights how different one is from the norm.¹⁵⁹
 - When faced with a workforce reduction, companies often use a “last hired, first fired” approach to layoffs, which has a disproportionate effect on women and other underrepresented minorities. To rectify this, businesses should look seriously at individuals and diversity as part of the layoff process.¹⁶⁰
- **Well-meaning leaders can miss the impact of intersectionality.**¹⁶¹ Sponsorship for black women provides a good example. They have mentors and networks but lag in sponsorship, because they are eclipsed by white women and black men even in the women’s and African American ERGs where they might be members. Leaders need to foster environments in which employees who are double or triple minorities receive adequate support and opportunities to thrive as they move through the pipeline.



THE SOCIETAL ROLE

Though not a focus of this report, we would be remiss if the societal and governmental role in gender pipeline issues were not mentioned as we close. As a McKinsey study concludes, “There is almost no country in the world where equality in the workplace outstrips that of women in society. This fact highlights the power governments have to instigate change.” Government and foundation programs and policies that can drive advancement include elder care, childcare, tax systems, parental leave, educational programs, and wage gap legislation.¹⁶² A few examples include:

- The Rockefeller Foundation’s 100X2025 goal is to increase the number of women CEOs in the Fortune 500 to 100 by the year 2025.¹⁶³
- Efforts to inspire and encourage young girls as leaders — high school and even middle school programs — can start building the pipeline early.
- At the college level, leadership programs can meld with experiential learning, internships, and academics and empower young women to persist and advance in their careers. Our center’s Women’s Leadership Program does just that.

Though unpopular in the U.S. many countries have adopted quotas to address gender balance. Norway, for instance, established quotas for large businesses, requiring 40 percent female representation on corporate boards. The limitations are clear – women selected through such systems can be stereotyped as less qualified, creating an additional backlash. Interestingly, at the time of this writing, California (CA) has become the first state in the U.S. to mandate including women on corporate boards. Publicly traded companies based in CA now have to appoint women to their corporate boards and face financial penalties if they do not comply.¹⁶⁴

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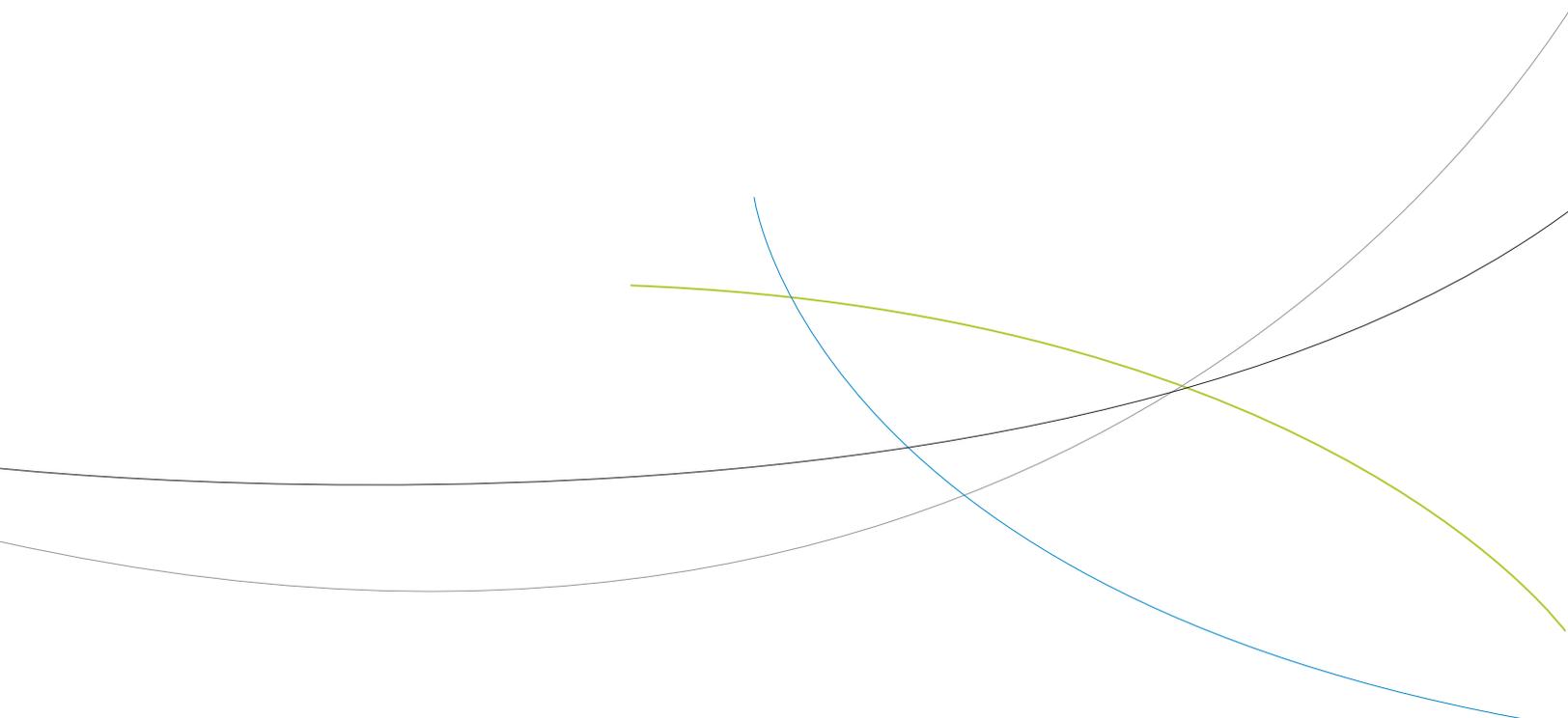
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