



Time to talk: *What has to change for women at work*

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Time to talk

What has to change for women at work

The collective voice of women, speaking up about their experiences in the workplace, has never been stronger. There is a new fearlessness and urgency to address the challenges women face, including, but not limited to, the possibility of discrimination and harassment, and the slow progress in bridging the gender gap.

Our 2018 survey of 3,627 professional women from around the world tells this story of determination, hope and frustration. But it also gives a clear indication of three key essential elements that business leaders must focus on to advance gender equality and help women's career advancement as they lead their enterprises into the 21st century.

Transparency and trust

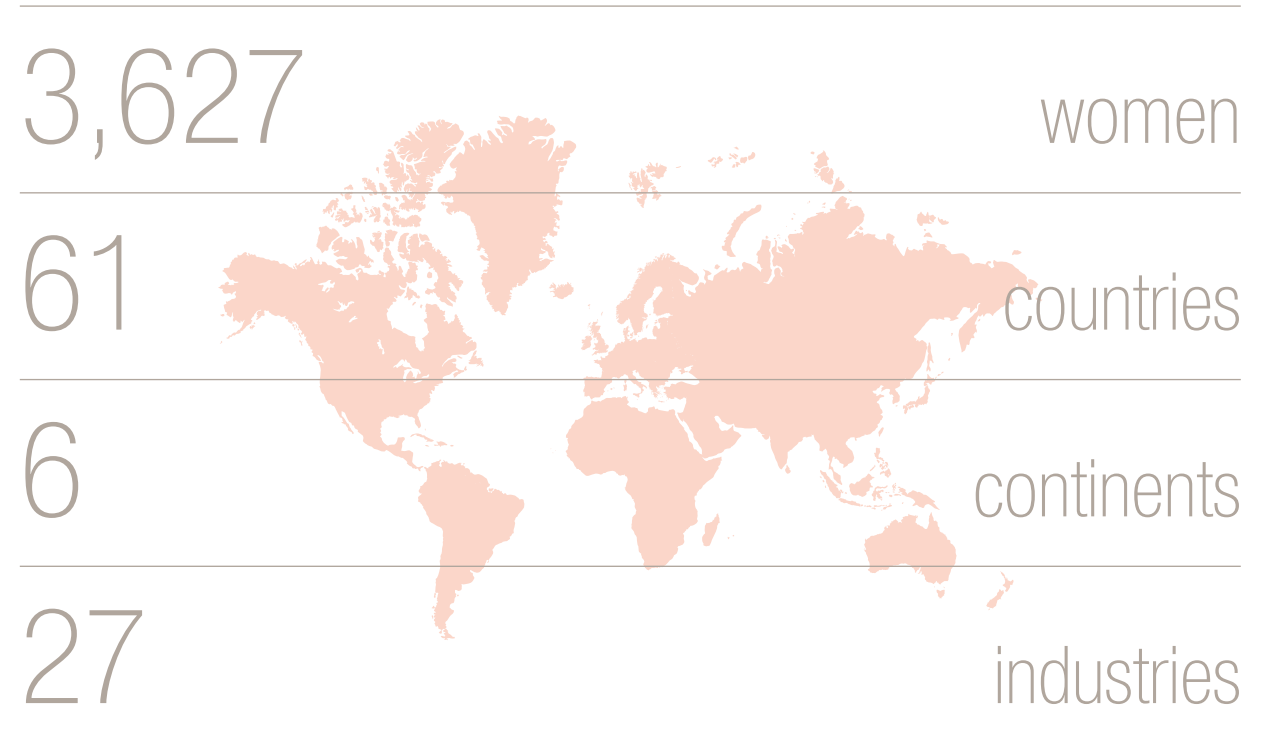
First, there is a big issue with the relationship between women and the organisations they work for. Our survey shows women around the world don't trust what their bosses are telling them about promotions and pay, or what helps or hurts their careers. They need greater transparency about these practical markers so they understand where they stand, make their own case successfully and trust the feedback they get. And greater transparency won't benefit only women; it will foster more inclusive environments, which give everyone greater opportunities to fulfil their potential.

Strategic support

Second, women need proactive networks of leaders and peers who will develop, promote and champion them at home and in the workplace. Women don't need men to back away. They need dedicated sponsors and role models of both genders. Lack of support from male colleagues will stall progress. This blend of workplace and personal support will also work to underpin the self-advocacy women need to advance.

Life, family care and work

Third, women need employers to rethink their approach to balancing work, life, parenthood and family care and provide organisational solutions that work. There is a move to redesign maternity and paternity leaves and re-entry programmes, but this should be expanded and best practices must be communicated broadly. Flexibility alone is not the issue: people don't take care furloughs precisely because they believe it will hurt their careers. Employers must recognise that everyone is making flexibility demands. It's not a life-stage or gender-specific issue.



Source: PwC Time to talk survey 2018. Base: All respondents, 3,627.

Achieving gender parity throughout the workplace is one of the most critical challenges that business leaders face today. CEOs are optimistic about growth in the coming year, according to the 21st PwC CEO survey, with more than half expecting to increase hiring.¹ Yet more than one-third (38%) are extremely concerned about talent shortages, a threat to their success that is second only to cyber security.

The quality of women's talent and leadership is vitally important to business; the skills and experience they bring, including experience gained outside of the workplace, has proven to be essential in strategic decision-making and in ethical, sustainable enterprise. In 2015 MSCI*, a financial research firm, analysed more than 4,200 companies and found that return on equity was 2.7% higher for those with strong female leadership and these companies were less prone to governance-related controversies.² Women's voices on teams, especially those which span cultures and functions, have been shown to increase emotional commitment, which leads the teams to push harder for success.

In 2017, the #MeToo movement brought broad public attention to the very real challenges women face in the workplace and beyond. But the momentum for change was quietly building long before then. Companies that do not promote safe, equitable and bias-free environments for all employees do so at tremendous risk to their organisations.

The Working Mother 2017 list of the top 100 companies to work for in the US now bases its scores on a combination of criteria, including gender balance data, and professional and personal support programmes across the career lifecycle.³ None of the best companies scores close to 100% in all categories. One company may offer generous parental leave but score low on career development programmes. Another might offer mentorship but no flexibility in working arrangements. These metrics are increasingly recognised as indicators of the day-to-day problems women encounter when trying to build a career and raise a family at the same time.

The respondents in our survey are aged 28 to 40. They are at the point in their working lives where the gap between men's and women's progression begins to widen dramatically and the challenges of combining careers and personal priorities increase. They live around the world and work in a variety of cultures. Some live in places where many women work; others are regarded as members of a minority simply because they have roles outside the home. They work in all sectors of industry, from education and healthcare, which traditionally employ many women, to aerospace and technology, which typically do not. These respondents represent the enormous amount of female talent in the global workforce, forthright and ambitious for success on their terms. Women in the emerging economies, we found, have even higher levels of confidence. Their high aspirations are a reason for hope.

*Source: MSCI.

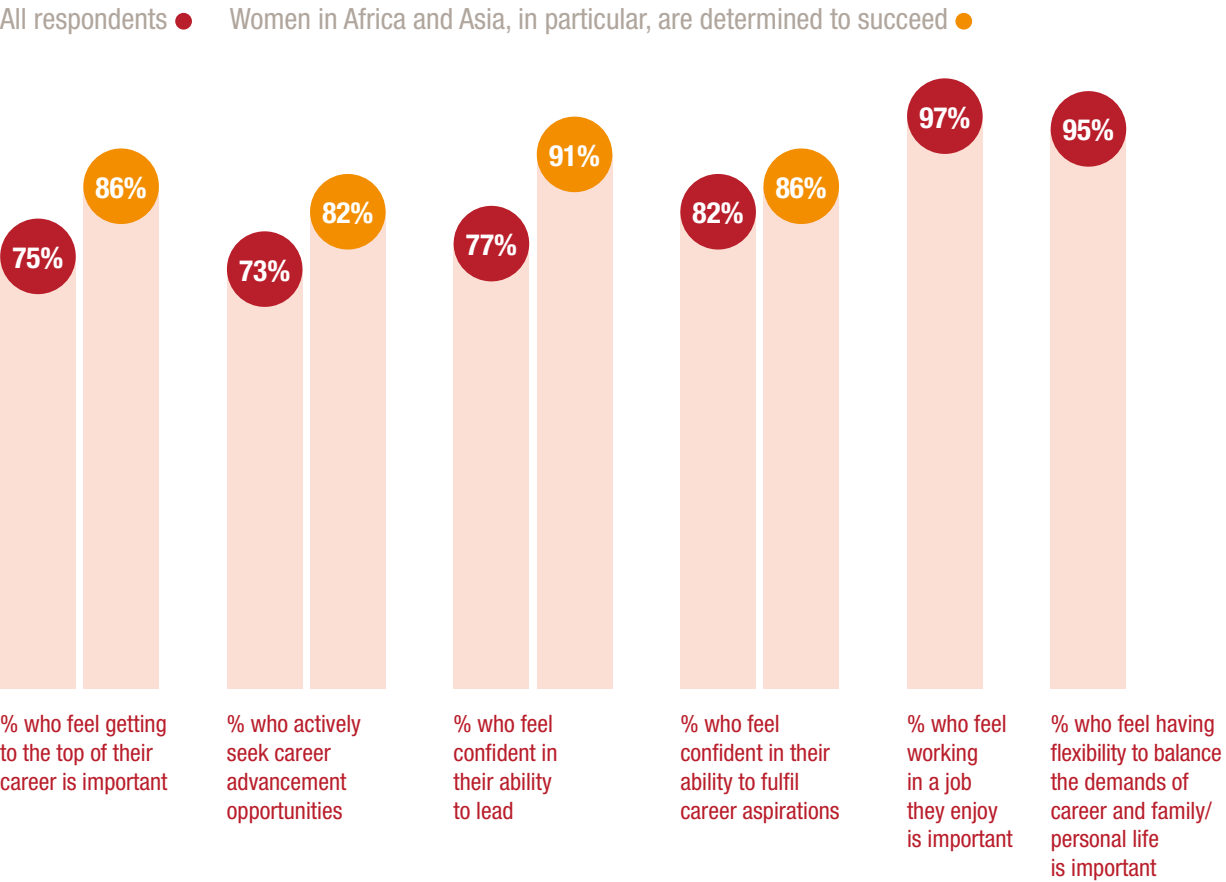
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Women today are trailblazers, they are more career ambitious and financially independent than ever before and they expect more from employers. Talking the talk is no longer enough. To attract and keep female talent, employers must be transparent about their commitment to diversity, their diversity progress, and create an open and inclusive culture where women can thrive and reach their potential.”

Agnès Husherr, Global Human Capital Leader,
PwC

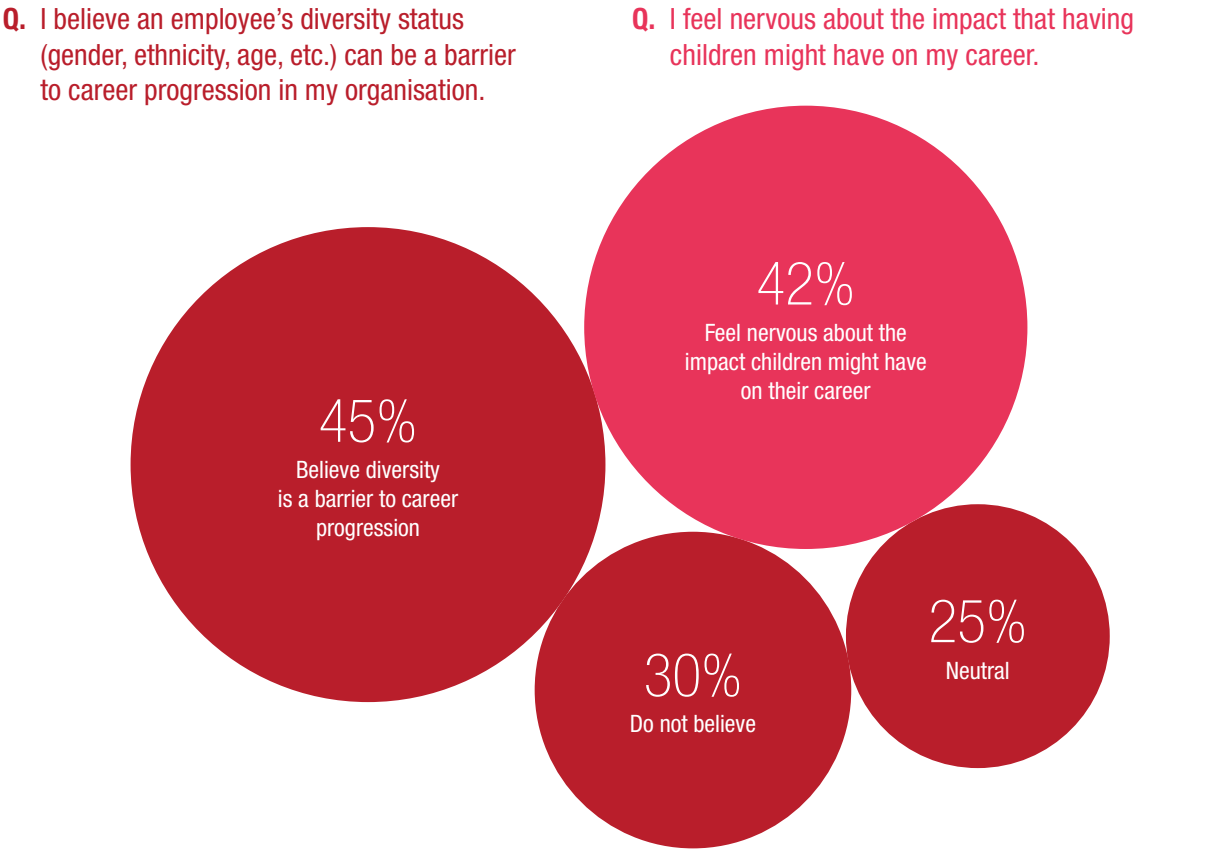


Women are determined to succeed professionally while remaining true to their priorities



Source: PwC, Time to talk survey, 2018. Base: All respondents 3,627, Africa and Asia respondents 1,171.

Nearly half of women believe diversity is a career barrier; they fear the effect a family may have on their careers



Source: PwC, Time to talk survey, 2018. Base: All respondents, 3,627; women with no children, 1,463.

At the same time, the survey shows that many professional women are deeply frustrated with their conditions of employment, and skeptical of talk of change. These attitudes stem from long experience — companies have been talking about gender balance for decades — and from pessimistic predictions of how long it will take women to reach equality. According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2017 Global Gender Gap report, which measures the participation gap, the remuneration gap and the advancement gap, women lag men by 58% overall and are further behind in developing countries.⁴ This is a systemic issue that cannot be attributed to individual circumstances; it is endemic to organisational structures, cultures and practices. WEF concluded that at the current rate of change, we won't see gender equality in the global workforce for at least another five generations.

It's not surprising that women in our survey report low levels of trust in what their employers say about valuing and promoting women, when they see what companies actually do.

51%

of women said they feel their employer is doing what it takes to improve gender diversity.

42%

of women said they were nervous of what having a child would do to their careers.

48%

of new mothers said they were overlooked for career advancement because they had children.

“

I was told there is the ‘risk’ of me having kids in the future. Even if not everyone is frank enough to say it out loud, I think this has an influence on my career or on the career opportunity of every woman.”

Banking/capital markets professional,
Germany

“In my organisation, married women are not recruited and as a single woman, you are made to sign an agreement that prohibits you from getting married for at least two years after accepting the job. Men don’t sign this agreement and married men are freely employed without any hitches. I think this is unfair.”

Public-sector logistics professional,
Nigeria

The work/life balance and its effect on career progression presents women with a complex conundrum. Our survey respondents want to succeed and rise up the corporate ladder, but they want jobs they enjoy and better options for managing the demands of work and home life. Organisations need to break away from historical behaviours and embrace a holistic approach to diversity, which means addressing these three essential areas — transparency and trust, strategic support and life and family care options — simultaneously in order to produce the kind of healthy ecosystem that gives greater satisfaction and fulfilment for women and in turn will lead to greater success for their employers. We would argue that when the problems are defined in an open and transparent way, and the prerequisites for success as described here are identified and in place, women of all generations and their employers, working together, can come up with the right solutions to address issues of gender equality in the workplace and empower female advancement. So, as women progress in their careers, can organisations rise to the occasion?

An aerial photograph of a desert landscape. The terrain is sandy and light-colored, with several dark, winding roads or paths. A large, dark, irregularly shaped rock formation or sand dune is visible in the upper left quadrant. The overall scene is arid and open.

Transparency and trust

A two-way street

Around the globe women unequivocally identify greater transparency as the critical step employers need to take to improve career development opportunities (58%).

We define transparency as a way of conducting business in which employers offer their staff a clear understanding of the expectations on both sides of the employment equation.

The employer provides consistent, accurate, accessible information about career progression and pay scales; they conduct open conversations with employees on where they stand and what is expected of them to advance. This outcry for greater clarity is a sign of the times. In the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, nearly seven out of 10 respondents say that building trust is the number one job for CEOs.⁵

Although in PwC's 21st CEO Survey 53% of business leaders said being transparent about their diversity and inclusion programmes is a way to build trust with their employees and 44% said it was important in building trust with their customers, the message is not universal and it is not strong enough.

45%

of women believe an employee's diversity status (gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation) can be a barrier to career progression in their organisation.

“

Across the PwC network, we know our people expect on-the-job learning, a tech-enabled environment, personalised development, transparency, and consistency. To be the leading developers of diverse talent, we need to not only meet our people's needs, but empower them to own their development and to grow as leaders. That's why at PwC we're driving a culture that fosters real-time development, where our people learn, grow and lead, at all levels, every day.”

Julie Gordon, Global Talent & Impact Leader,
PwC

“Women need to prove they deserve a promotion; men are promoted because they believe in their potential.”

Purchasing professional in agriculture,
Brazil

We have to talk about performance and pay

Clearer, more open information about performance benchmarks will help everyone, men included, better understand the dynamics of what it takes to advance and progress. This greater transparency is just one part of the puzzle and must work in parallel with efforts to mitigate potential unconscious biases and gender stereotypes that have traditionally impacted career progression.

PwC Netherlands introduced an independent third-party observer to partake in all promotion committees to call out any unconscious bias and help drive the goal of promoting women. Since its inception in 2015, targets have been met, a third of all partner and director appointments have gone to women and staff report greater confidence in leadership's commitment to diversity.

Pay is an even more pervasive issue. It's not easy to talk about salaries inside and outside work for ingrained cultural reasons, which perpetuates a lack of transparency about pay. This can have unintended consequences. For example, there are those who believe pay secrecy is a ploy to save money, even if there's no proof: from May 2015 to May 2017, PayScale, a compensation data and software company, asked roughly 930,000 people “How do you think your current pay compares to other employees like you?” Over two-thirds of respondents inaccurately reported their market position, with the vast majority saying they were underpaid when they were getting market rates.⁶ Research shows people who know what their co-workers are paid perform better.⁷ In 2007, Glassdoor burst on the scene with a web platform that allowed people to post anonymously about their workplace experiences, including what they earned. Now 50 million unique users log in monthly. Glassdoor has become an informal but systematic vehicle for comparing workplace pay scales and other elements of value to employees. According to many in HR, candidates frequently reference it in job interviews.



The shift to greater transparency is slow although in some places this shift will be mandated. Since 2013, two-thirds of OECD members have introduced new policies on pay equality and in Australia, Germany, Japan, Sweden and the UK some employers will now, by law, publish calculations every year showing the gender pay gap.^{8,9}

In the UK, the introduction of annual publication of mandatory pay gaps has highlighted some significant gaps in some sectors (particularly financial services), and many organisations have taken both steps to explain the reasons for the gaps and the opportunity to put in place diversity and inclusion programmes to make progress on the pay gap. Employers need to be cognisant of the reputational risk that comes with such transparency and communicate how they are addressing such challenges.

“

Transparency about performance benchmarks ensures that leaders and employees are both on the same page as to what ‘success’ looks like at their company. Our research finds that such feedback is essential for career progression, especially for minority employees. When leaders publicly and transparently speak about the need for pay equity reviews and bias mitigation strategies, they build trust with employees who are looking for leadership’s acknowledgement of these issues.”

Sylvia Ann Hewlett, CEO,
Center for Talent Innovation

Women, traditionally, are not self-promoters although when they do speak up they get results. Our survey shows that women would approach a promotion opportunity in the following ways:

44%

of women would expect their hard work to be recognised as a symbol of their promotion aspirations and for their employer to approach them.

39%

said they would put themselves forward for a promotion if they met all of the job criteria.

17%

of women, a much smaller margin, would step up even if they didn't think they met all the criteria.

This can put women at a disadvantage and reinforces stereotypes and bias in managers. Too often organisations will not challenge this. “Human resources have got a really important role to play here to bring this information to light and be sure that people are equipped with what they need,” said Karina Govindji, Global Head of Diversity & Inclusion at Vodafone, which has mandated bias-awareness training for its senior leadership. In one video, a woman manager discusses how a returning colleague who has had a baby won't want to travel. Most people do not spot this as bias.

The lesson: don't make assumptions. Yes, we want women to self-advocate more. But inclusiveness must also be ingrained within the capabilities of people managers, so they are more instinctively attuned to identify the best talent for an opportunity, be that people who shout loudest, or people with capabilities, potential and their heads down.

Organisations must factor implicit bias into decisions related to promotions. It is poor practice, for example, to have all-male promotion panels. The onus is on organisations, not just women, to take responsibility for taking down the barriers to progress. As Carol Stubbings, Global Leader of PwC's People and Organisation practice put it, “Never let your ambition outweigh your ability. But women quite often underestimate their ability, so they don't fulfil their ambition. It's important having mentoring and good female leadership programmes to constantly tell these people that they are really good, they are really valued, they've got a great skill set that will take them far in the organisation.”

Human resource departments should explicitly set new parameters and systematically check that there are uniform criteria by which the organisation can assess employees, and that employees know what the criteria are. Can your talent articulate what “high performance” looks like? Is the leader overseeing career development also the leader assessing performance reviews? Answering these questions will go a long way toward building trust.

“

It is so encouraging to see such high levels of female confidence and ambition. Employers must focus on creating an environment where women — and men — can have open and unambiguous conversations on performance and progression benchmarks. But greater transparency must also go hand in hand with efforts to mitigate unconscious biases and stereotyping that could impact career progression. This will support a workplace culture where all talent can fulfil their potential.”

Sharmila Karve, Global Diversity & Inclusion Leader, PwC





Strategic support

Networks mobilising women

Women won't succeed without formal and informal support networks. To support and reinforce a woman's self-belief and self-advocacy there needs to be a blend of workplace and personal relationships and support. In the workplace, the critical issue is finding the right mix of push and pull to help women simultaneously realise their personal and professional ambitions. Providing this level of support might seem complex, but it can be done. Men have had it for years.

Think of this strategic support structure as a series of circles. In the middle is the individual woman: an ambitious skilled professional who needs the confidence to put herself forward to achieve her career and personal aspirations. Fundamental to this is the support she gets from the circles around her: her workplace and personal support networks.

In the workplace, she not only needs a manager who will help develop her talent and advocate on her behalf, but a series of informal and formal support people and programmes. She needs role models of both genders to look up to and learn from, mentors who help her navigate the path to success and sponsors who can push her to the next level: a network of advocates either in informal or formal groups with whom she can share experiences and seek advice.

In the world outside of work, the third circle, she needs a supportive network, from parents to partner and friends to peers that reinforce her career ambitions and work/life decisions. For example, women might need to enlist family members and other people to take on more home life or caregiving responsibilities in order to allow her to be successful at work. Interestingly, 84% of the women in our survey in a relationship identified as being part of a dual-career couple and 80% of the women in the survey said they have support from their family and/or partner in their career ambitions.

On February 7, 2018, Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and a globally recognised pioneer in promoting women in work, launched a new mentoring initiative called #MentorHer, specifically aimed at men. LeanIn.org, the foundation she created to promote women in work, had picked up troubling signs that the #MeToo movement was sparking a backlash: men were backing away from engaging with women in the workplace.

#MentorHer

“If men think that the way to address workplace sexual harassment is to avoid one-on-one time with female colleagues — including meetings, coffee breaks and all the interactions that help us work together effectively — it will be a huge setback for women. This undoubtedly will decrease the opportunities women have at work. The last thing women need right now is even more isolation. Men vastly outnumber women as managers and senior leaders, so when they avoid, ice out or exclude women, we pay the price. Men who want to be on the right side of this issue shouldn’t avoid women. They should mentor them.”

Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook,
Founder of LeanIn.org



Speaking up for yourself

— ask and you might get

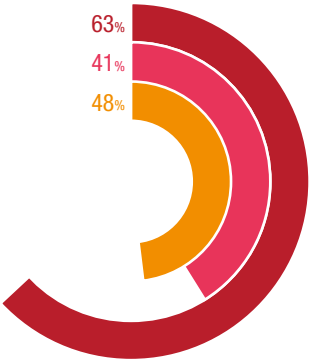
As the survey data shows, women tend to expect to be approached for a promotion or shy away from roles for which they don't feel they meet all the criteria. Creating dialogue between women and their employers to discuss aspirations, performance and needs is a critical element of career success. Self-promotion is frequently highlighted by women as outside their comfort zone. However, there is positive news. Women are becoming more proactive in negotiating for themselves and they are seeing results.

At least half of the women in our study are opening up discussions with their employers and proactively pursuing and negotiating for raises, promotions and the career-enhancing experiences so critical to advancement. And we observed a strong positive correlation for women who negotiate for a career-enhancing action and getting what they ask for. They are receiving opportunities at greater frequency than those who do not negotiate.

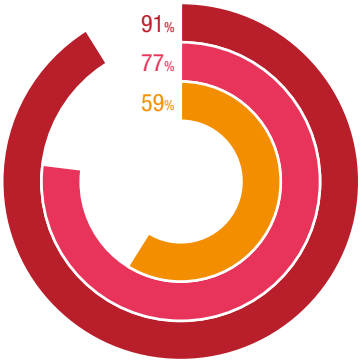
Self-advocacy — negotiation pays off

Negotiated for career opportunity ● Obtained career opportunity in the last two years ● Obtained career opportunity after negotiating for one ●

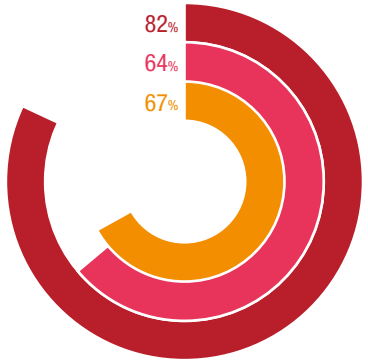
A promotion



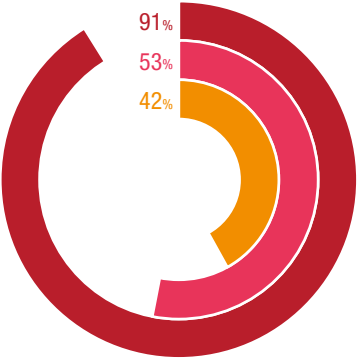
A pay raise



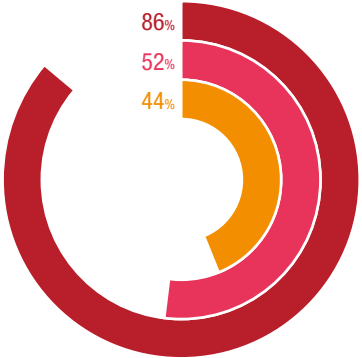
Training or development opportunities required for advancement



Assignment to a high-visibility project or client



A stretch assignment



Source: PwC, Time to talk survey, 2018. Base: All respondents, 3,627.

Women can't count on success and fulfilment unless men help them. This is not an admission of weakness; it is simply a matter of math: there are many more men in positions of power than women and more women who need sponsorship than women alone can support. If men abrogate their responsibilities to help the women junior to them, then the gender gap will persist and the old boys' network will prevail.

As part of this, business leaders also have to recognise harassment and bullying are unacceptable in the workplace. One-third of women in the survey said they had experienced verbal abuse/bullying and one in four experienced sexual innuendos/harassment in the past two years. Employers should actively work to change the culture where these actions can happen.

In the last year more than 350 CEOs in the US, including Tim Ryan, Chairman of PwC US, have taken the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion pledge to advance diversity and share programmes that work.¹⁰ It's a smorgasbord of ideas from bias training, to how-tos for setting up networking groups for minorities, and includes a variety of work/life balance initiatives too. It's also a start to a conversation that needs to continue to find out what works.

The most critical element of a trusted working relationship between employer and employee is this continuous, open communication channel where priorities and goals can be shared freely.

Our data show there is positive correlation between women whose managers provide career opportunities and women who have confidence in their ability to lead and rise to the most senior levels with their current employer.

59%

of women say their managers give work experiences that provide accelerated developmental opportunity.

61%

of women say their managers recognise their work and give them exposure to senior leaders.

60%

of women say their managers understand and support their career aspirations.

Overall, we see women in developing countries reporting higher access to career opportunities than in the developed world.

Getting to know employees, understanding what they need to succeed and helping them secure that support are musts for sustaining a talent pipeline. These require investment of time and energy, but they are too important to overlook because they are a key part of what helps networks mobilise for women.

“

Leaders need to work outside their comfort zone and pick people for opportunities in a non-biased way. Look at the list of people and intentionally choose someone you might not have thought of on your own. Little things like that can help reduce bias.”

Reid Carpenter, head of the Katzenbach Center, a part of PwC that studies corporate culture and leadership

Sponsorship and role models

Our research shows that only 54% of women see role models like them in senior management, not surprising given the fact that women are so often under-represented in leadership positions, but an indication that more needs to be done to boost mentorship and sponsorship for women. “I left my first job at an investment bank because there were no female Managing Directors I could relate to,” said one survey respondent. Where were the women who could answer questions that all women face? Will having kids hurt me? Can I stop travelling and still make partner? If I do go on a flexi-time, will my bosses still take me seriously?

There are attempts to change this. Unilever, for example, identifies women with leadership potential, sends them on a specially designed training programme and specifically targets confidence building in their daily work. The company is close to gender parity in management ranks, up from 38% in 2010.

Ideas outside of the box

- An accountable mentoring or sponsorship system where the mentor/sponsor is measured on the progress the mentee makes to give the mentor/sponsor both accountability and an incentive to be involved.
- Managers must commit to putting all potential candidates on opportunity lists when it comes to the next promotion, stretch-assignment or profile opportunity. This will prevent the reliance on “system one” instincts and mitigate any potential unconscious bias in the decision-making.
- All promotion discussions would start with a spotlight reminder on how to raise awareness of unconscious bias and how to mitigate against it, and assess real-time KPIs to reflect on whether promotion outcomes are representative of promotion pool demographics.





Life, family care and work

Balancing priorities

Demographic shifts have had a significant impact on the makeup of the global workforce in recent decades, and employers need to catch up. There has been a tidal shift in the number of CEOs now focused on gender diversity and female advancement around the globe.¹¹ But diversity and talent strategies still remain largely unfit for purpose.

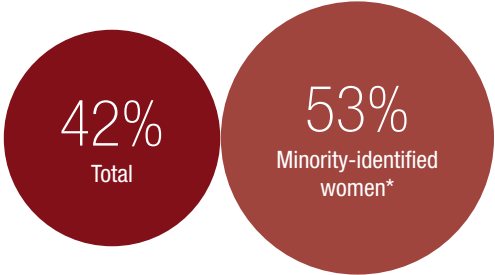
Women are having children later in life. The mean age in OECD countries rose roughly four years to 29 from the 1970s to 2015, with highly educated women waiting until their 30s to have children.^{12,13} Women today are also more financially empowered. They are likely to be part of a dual career couple — which was the case for 84% of those in our survey who said they were in a relationship. Of the mothers in the survey, 38% said they are the primary earner in their relationship. Of those without children, 62% said they earn equal to or more than their partner/spouse.

This has important implications for women and employers. By the time they first become mothers, women will have established careers and employers will have invested significant time and resources to develop this talent pool. Supporting a family and other personal commitments are often dependent on earning power. Mothers do not want to opt out of their careers because their employers rely on outdated stereotypes and employment policies that penalise motherhood.

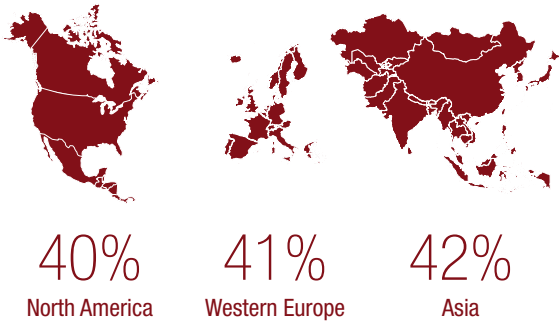
Although governments are mandating more family-friendly solutions and many organisations now devote serious resources to supporting parental leave policies and flexible working conditions, this has not convinced everyone. Of the women surveyed, 42% said they fear the career effects of having children; 48% of new mothers returning to work felt overlooked for promotions and special projects. In addition, 37% of new mothers said they did not take the full maternity/paternity/adoption leave they were permitted because of career pressure, feeling this would undermine their standing at work. Employers must proactively address these concerns or they and their female employees will face a lose-lose predicament: highly skilled talent will leave and women will not fulfil their full potential. “It’s important to frame this discussion about diversity in terms of talent. You don’t want to lose the women because you have invested so much in them,” said Isabel Fernandez-Mateo, Adecco Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at the London Business School, whose research looks at gender diversity in top management.

The motherhood penalty — *alive and real*

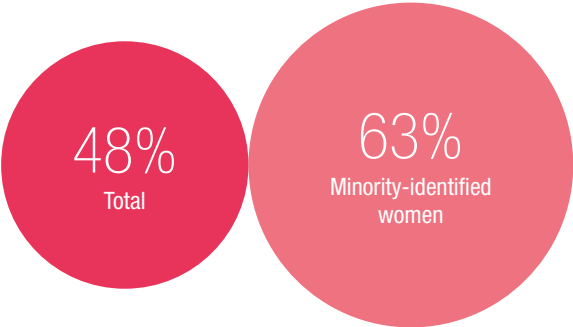
Women who fear the impact of starting a family on their careers (% who said yes):



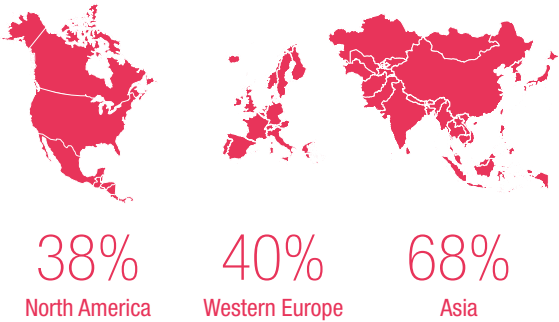
Women in North America, Western Europe and Asia who fear the effects of starting a family on their careers (% who said yes):



Mothers who felt overlooked for promotions/special projects (% who said yes):



Mothers in North America, Western Europe and Asia who felt overlooked for promotions/special projects (% who said yes):



*Women who identified themselves as an ethnic or racial minority in the country where they worked. Source: PwC, Time to talk survey, 2018. Base: All respondents, 3,627.

Work/life by design

Companies will need a fully integrated approach that links transparency and support networks with work/life balance arrangements. Here are some innovative ideas to think about:

An off- and on-ramp strategy

In 2015 Alcoa of Australia surveyed expectant parents and found a fifth of managers were not keeping in touch with employees on parental leave which made employees anxious. They introduced a comprehensive toolkit to assist managers with keeping communication channels open.

Flexibility and advice

When exit interviews at the international law firm Orrick showed work/life balance prompting promising women to leave, it introduced generous parental leave benefits (22 weeks and nine months job protection) and a Leave Liaison officer to help the transition back to work. During the first month back all primary caregivers, male or female, get a 50% workload expectation at full pay and flexible hours. In 2016, 20% of new partners had used the flexi-system.

Making work family-friendly

DBS, a leading financial services group in Asia, is committed to providing an inclusive work environment where every employee can develop professionally and personally. Instituting family-friendly policies, including flexible time, part-time, work-from-home and sabbatical leave arrangements, is part of how DBS meets the needs of its diverse workforce. It has also established a return-to-work programme to support the re-entry of parents into the workforce. DBS was named Asia's best employer 2016 – 2017. The goal is to position DBS as an employer of choice for women in the region. It's working: currently 60% of its workforce, 40% of senior management and 30% of its Group Management Committee are female.

Little things that show you care

In summer 2017, Fifth Third Bank, where 60% of its 18,000 employees are women, started a maternity concierge service for pregnant women. The concierge can source supplies, daycare options and pediatricians. The company reports 180 employees have so far used it but it's too early to tell if it has had an impact on retaining women.

Parental transition coaching

To help new parents adapt to life with children, maintain confidence and keep career momentum on track, PwC UK introduced parental transition coaching for all new parents from manager grade and above. Women get four coaching sessions before, during and after returning. New fathers taking longer periods of leave can receive pre- and post-leave coaching. The people managers of these new parents also receive coaching sessions. And for those below manager level there is an eLearning module available.



In companies where senior leadership makes it a priority, policies can be put in place to reassure people with caring responsibilities. For example, at Vodafone, CEO Vittorio Colao has made diversity and inclusion a top priority for the past eight years; today 28% of management is female with a goal of 30% by 2020. There are structural processes in place to allay fears that taking time off to start a family will derail careers when employees return to work. This is combined with the anti-bias training that challenges the kinds of stereotypes that can disadvantage new parents. “It helps reduce anxiety for returning parents. They can continue where they left off,” said Karina Govindji, Group Head of Diversity & Inclusion at Vodafone. There is a global parental leave policy that gives women 16 weeks paid leave followed by a six-month re-entry period where mothers can work four days a week at full pay. “It takes planning but we’ve seen that teams pull together to accommodate new mothers,” said Govindji.

Trust and the myth of flexible working hours

Much has been made of the trend towards more flexible working arrangements to help women juggle the complexities of family life and work. It’s now possible in many parts of the world for women and men to share parental leave; some companies pay for childcare at home so women can work next to their babies; others give childcare vouchers and crèches are more common in the workplace. However, women, and particularly minority women, remain skeptical about how serious their employers are when they say flexibility won’t hurt their progress. Many fear opting for something that helps their work/life balance, which 95% said was important to them, will end up damaging their careers.

This fear is magnified in Asia. The majority of our respondents from China (97%), India (96%) and Singapore (93%) who mirrored the global response that work/life balance and flexibility is important to them, also said it is not available in practice and, further, people who work flexibly (reduced hours or job sharing) are regarded as less committed to the organisation. In China and India, 61% and 54% of employees, respectively, report their organisations do not value flexible working as a way of working effectively.

“My progress is limited by well-intended ‘protection’ from stretching assignments and progress, with my need for flexibility being determined by others as a priority over my ambitions and potential to progress. The two seem incompatible and irreconcilable.”

Public-sector employee,
United Kingdom



Flexibility at work is no longer either a nice-to-have initiative or an optional perk mostly used by women. The common stereotypes around flexibility and importance of face-time are now a fad. The ability to influence the what, how and where to work for employees should be a core people priority and embedded in the business strategy. We need to de-parent, de-gender, and de-age the perception around flexible working. It is critical that we encourage candid conversation about work and family, especially among men, and at the leadership level.”

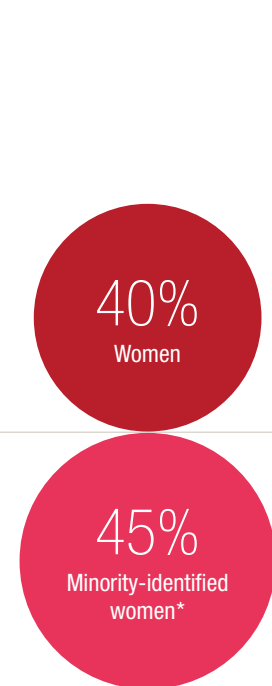
Shveta Verma, Senior Director,
Diversity & Inclusion Programme,
PwC India

Overall, women ranked lack of flexibility and work/life balance as a top-three reason for wanting to leave their current employer, just behind pay and a lack of opportunities for career progression. The combined forces of market demand, technology advancements, and the growing gig economy, have allowed flexibility to become an essential and critical aspect of career support for women in particular, but also for male employees. Organisations will have to address the disconnect between employee values and perceptions and the kinds of flexible programmes on offer.

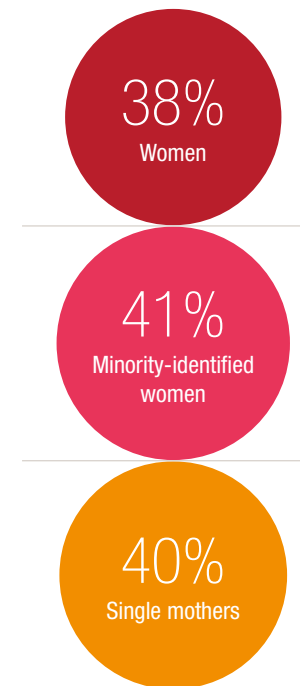
It is fundamental we see employers drive cultural shifts, whereby their people become valued and rewarded for their performance over their presence.

Why flexibility isn't working for everyone

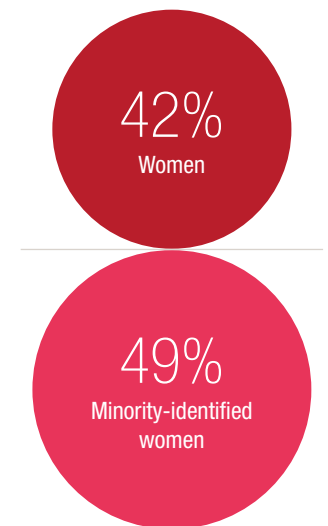
Women who say work/life balance/flexibility programmes and policies exist in their organisation but are not readily available to them in practice:



Women who say that taking advantage of work/life balance/flexibility programmes has negative career consequences at their workplace:



Women who say that people who work flexibly (e.g., reduced hours, job sharing, etc.) are regarded as less committed in their organisation:



*Women who identified themselves as an ethnic or racial minority in the country where they worked. Source: PwC, Time to talk survey, 2018. Base: All respondents, 3,627.

The way forward

We come back here to our three prerequisites for success. If the foundations of transparency and trust are established and women have strong support networks that mobilise for them, then the necessary two-way conversations about caregiving, family and broader life commitments will be easier to hold and more productive.

Personal fulfilment and job satisfaction are at the top of the agenda for women worldwide, but women also want to achieve more conventional measures of success: reward and recognition commensurate with their talent and contribution. They are looking for ways to make every aspect of their employment work for them. Fear of speaking up is diminishing. But there is still a fear of bias and backlash, and there is evidence that this fear is justified.

We've identified the interdependent elements of an ecosystem that have to be in place and in balance for women to succeed. In too many organisations, one or the other of these elements are either afterthoughts or absent. Women say they are not getting what they need. This message is too important to ignore if women are to achieve personal and career fulfilment and organisations are to succeed. Equality can't remain a work in progress; it must become work for progress.



Time to talk



Bob Moritz,
Global Chairman of PwC

For the past five years, PwC has launched a global research report on International Women's Day, which brings to life the career experiences and aspirations of working women around the globe, and the actions needed to help both organisations and women thrive.

We won't achieve gender parity in leadership if we don't all press for progress; to do this in a sustainable way we must target women's advancement throughout their careers. That is why this year's survey focused on women aged 28 to 40. Because it is at this stage we start to see female representation gaps at work widen, and the challenges of combining personal and career priorities increase.

There are a lot of positives to be taken from this year's survey; 82% of women are confident in their ability to fulfil their career aspirations, 77% feel confident in their ability to lead and 73% are actively seeking career advancement opportunities. Women are confident, ambitious and ready for what's next and they are also more proactive in pursuing their goals. They are negotiating for raises, promotions and the career-enhancing experiences so critical for advancement. And it's working: our survey shows that women who speak up and negotiate are getting what they ask for.

The other takeaway is that there is still a huge amount of work that needs to be done. Trust is a big issue for the women in our survey, as is concern over what they see as the motherhood and flexibility penalty. They want to see more transparency about practical issues like performance, career success and progress. It is vital that there is two-way, open dialogue where both women and their employers initiate candid discussions centred on career aspirations and what's needed to close the disconnect between ambition and achievement.

Based on these powerful findings, this report identifies an ecosystem centred on transparency and trust, strategic support and life, family care and work that will help all employers, including PwC, accelerate change.

Leaders around the world must rise to the occasion. But this is not only a question for women and leadership; gender equality benefits everyone, and men must be part of the solution. This is particularly true when it comes to providing women with the strategic support and advocacy needed for career success and progression.

In fact, that's the key message I get from this report: just as companies strive to innovate their products and services to flourish, we as employers need to be innovative about helping women realise their professional goals.

About the survey and the women who took part

The survey went to 3,627 professional working women, age 28 to 40, from more than 60 countries during a two-week period in January 2018. Respondents were obtained through paid research (97%) and social media (3%).

Women from Western Europe, North America, Asia, and Australasia make up 84% of responses. The female age dispersion is balanced across all regions, with the exception of parts of Central America, which had few respondents overall. The respondents represent women working in 27 different industry sectors.

Women’s earning power



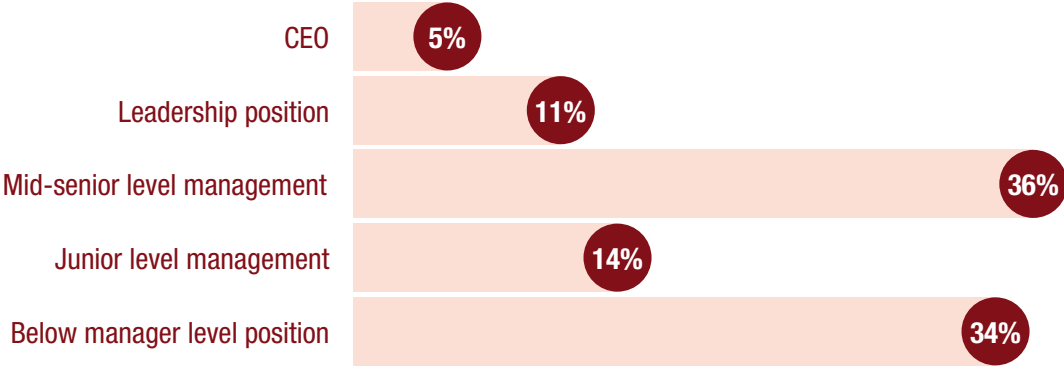
80% of respondents were in a relationship/married and 84% of those were part of a dual career with 36% being the primary earner.



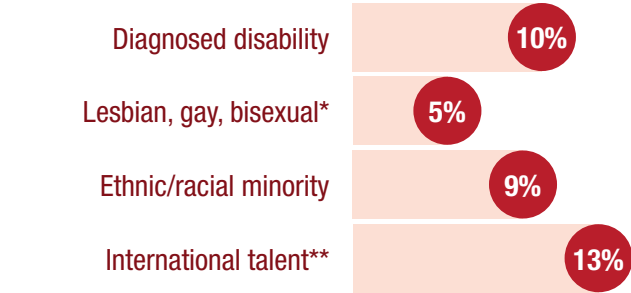
60% of respondents were mothers and 38% were the primary earner in their relationship.

Source: PwC, Time to talk survey, 2018. Base: All respondents, 3,627.

Grade level of respondents



Personal demographics



*This question was only asked in countries where it was legal to do so. **Women who worked in a country that was not their place of birth.

Endnotes

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