Women in Leadership and Gender Parity: Is Change Happening Fast Enough?
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# Women in Leadership and Gender Parity:
Is Change Happening Fast Enough?

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Executive Summary

Workplace equality between the sexes has long been a challenge for organizations worldwide. Women make up almost half\(^1\) of the workforce, yet the majority of them are still not receiving equal compensation\(^2\) or equal opportunities to develop and advance.

While progress has been made through awareness efforts and education, a challenging environment still exists for women – and especially for women leaders aspiring to executive leadership roles. When respondents to Brandon Hall Group’s 2016 Women in Leadership Study were asked to rate their organizations on gender parity, 12% said they had an equal number of men and women in C-level positions. Figure 1 below shows the breadth of the gender parity problem among the executive ranks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1</th>
<th>How Organizations Rate Gender Parity Among Executive Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional: We have at least an equal number of women and men leaders in the C-level positions and recognize the business value of parity.</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average: We do not yet have parity between men and women leaders in the C-Suite, but the ratio has continuously improved over the last 3 years or so and parity is a business priority.</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average: We have more men that women in C-Suite positions but are focusing on actions to significantly improve parity quickly.</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average: We have very few women in C-Suite positions and those who are there have gotten there by happenstance and we do not necessarily see the business value of gaining parity.</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor: We do not have any women in C-Suite positions and are not prioritizing gender parity at all this time.</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2016 Brandon Hall Group Women in Leadership Study (n=397)

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\(^1\)Women comprised 47% of the civilian U.S. workforce in 2015, according to the U.S. Department of Labor

\(^2\)Overall, women earned 78.6% of what men earned in 2014, according to the U.S. Department of Labor
Only 10% of organizations overall, and 12% of high-performing organizations\(^3\), have women in at least 50% of C-Suite positions. This is in spite of the fact that 97% of respondents say that the interest in having women advance to executive positions, including CEO, has remained the same or increased over the past few years. As shown in Figure 2, there are several barriers for women leaders to overcome, the most frequent one being inadequate management of the leadership pipeline.

Another major impediment for women leaders is a lack of development opportunities. Our findings also showed:

- 81% of organizations do not offer core women-in-leadership programs focused on critical skills training.

\(^3\)High-performing organizations are shown through survey results to see overall year-over-year improvement across these criteria: employee engagement, organizational revenue/performance, customer satisfaction, voluntary turnover, and organizational productivity.
• 76% do not provide a mentoring program aimed exclusively at grooming women leaders.

• Three times as many organizations have no women or few women in C-level roles than have at least an equal number of men and women in those positions.

With diversity and inclusion being a critical initiative for many companies, one element of that is creating a culture and atmosphere for women to advance to, and excel in, leadership positions. We have seen great examples of diverse leadership teams cascaded throughout an organization. However, these examples are still too limited and gender inequality continues to present a cultural divide among peers, creating distrust and friction that ultimately derail organizations from achieving their greatest potential.

“The heart is in the right place, but change is not happening as fast as it can. There are still a lot of cultural biases that often hold women back,” said Sonia Dua, an India-based Vice President at Genpact, a global business process management and services corporation.

This report seeks to reveal the reality of gender inequality in leadership, available development opportunities, and effective methods to reduce gender biases to help advance aspiring and qualified women to achieve their greatest potential for themselves and their organizations. The report is based on results of Brandon Hall Group’s 2016 Women in Leadership survey of 420 respondents from 26 countries and more than 30 different industries, plus more than 25 interviews with women leaders. (For more details, see Research Methodology, page 39.)
Current State

Business success is all about people – making sure you have hired the right people, and developed and retained great talent to reach and exceed business goals. According to several of Brandon Hall Group’s research studies in the last year, people strategy has supplanted business strategy as the most important strategy for achieving success.

Unfortunately, people strategies are not yet having their desired impact. Our 2015 State of Leadership Development Study showed that 84% of companies will be negatively impacted by a lack of quality leaders within the next two to four years.

Many factors impact an effective leadership development strategy, ranging from competitive environments, global workforces, dispersed geographies, and understanding and awareness of diversity and gender needs and development opportunities.

A critical question organizations should ask is: If almost half of our workforce is made up of women, should we offer targeted development programs just for women, or just development programs available for all qualifying candidates?

You will find that our research will validate the need to support both types of development.
1. **70% of Companies Have a C-Suite Featuring 25% or Fewer Women**

As with any core organizational initiative, the direction must come from the leaders at the top. How this group models behaviors and decision-making is crucial for determining the direction of any action, including those concerning gender equity. The data shows that just 14% of companies have a woman serving as the Chief Executive Officer, and only 9% are strongly considering a woman as the immediate successor to the current CEO. In the C-suite as a whole, results are similar (Figure 3, next page).
Despite making up about half the workforce, women are consistently underrepresented in the upper ranks of organizational leadership. Most companies have between 1% and 25% representation, which is a far cry from the level of parity that is needed. This is echoed by the succession planning piece of the equation: only one-third of companies have one or more women being groomed for executive roles.

### 2. Most Organizations Struggle to Build a Leadership Culture for Women

Our survey asked respondents to respond to a series of statements that indicated their organizations’ level of commitment to enabling the development of women for key leadership roles. On only one statement – “Our culture
embraces women in leadership roles” – did more than half of respondents (58%) answer in the affirmative. Only 45% of organizations indicated that they made a “good effort at advancing women into senior leadership roles.” These and other responses (See Figure 4 below) illustrate how far most organizations have to go to create a culture that supports gender parity in top leadership roles.

In subsequent interviews with several respondents, they explained the challenges they face in developing women leaders. Here is a composite of a variety of responses:

- Business must find the right talent that matches the culture of the organization. Many younger women go to school and may get degrees that match certain careers, yet will join the company and if certain departments are still male-dominated or the culture is
non-collaborative and controlling, the majority will shortly leave the organization. Reasons include the stress of the job, feeling inadequate or not part of the team, not knowing how to communicate efficiently and set proper expectations for boundaries, and factors within the company that conflict with their definition of work-life balance.

• Managers don’t want to hire or promote individuals based on gender, but want to find the best qualified person. If there is not a proper selection and grooming process in place to manage recruiting and succession planning, organizations tend to follow the same male-dominated hiring patterns.

3. Companies Struggle to Hire Female Technical Talent

While women are increasingly getting degrees in high-technology fields and traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering, there are still not enough qualified women ready for leadership roles to make gender parity in leadership realistic in technical fields. Only 35% of organizations hire men and women at the same rate for technical roles. (See Figure 5 on the next page).

This means special efforts are needed to change the status quo, such as the efforts made at Vectren, a Fortune 1000 energy holding company headquartered in Evansville, Indiana. Through its utility subsidiaries, the company distributes natural gas to approximately one million business and residential customers in Indiana and distributes electricity to 141,000 customers.
Chris Hilbert, Senior Talent Management Administrator at Vectren, says the company recognizes the importance of a talent strategy in building a high-performing and sustainable organization. This strategy includes building a diverse and inclusive work environment that will contribute to the solutions.

As part of that strategy, the company offers job rotation opportunities and has been very active in promoting female talent in engineering, finance, and energy, leading to promotion of women into several different leadership roles.
Hilbert said the leadership team has made a concerted effort to focus on its succession planning and development process and believes in the importance of a diverse slate of candidates. Potential is based on candidates’ potential to lead, not their gender or ethnicity. Vectren continuously assesses people’s potential and development needs and offers exposure to new possibilities.

Candidates are identified for development that includes the opportunity for expansion of a current role, or internal movement to build new skills and assess leadership capabilities. From exposure to leaders and different areas of the organization, women gain awareness of opportunities
not normally considered in the past for female leaders and the possibility to lead a power plant or operational role.

4. **Small Firms More Likely to Achieve Gender Parity in Leadership Roles**

Large organizations are more likely to offer opportunities for targeting women leaders than smaller firms, but apparently, it’s not enough to make a difference. When asked about the level of gender parity among leaders, small companies were more than twice as likely to rate themselves above average or exceptional than their larger counterparts.

![Figure 6: Gender Parity in Executive Roles by Company Size](image)

*Source: 2016 Brandon Hall Group Performance Management Study (n=282)*
Figure 6 compares gender parity self-perception among all executive roles in small, mid-size, and large organizations. Specifically in the CEO role, 29% of small companies have a female CEO, compared with 8% of large firms and 12% of mid-size firms.

There are several possible reasons that smaller organizations have more gender parity, including:

- Smaller companies have less bureaucracy in hiring and promoting high-potential talent.
- Women may have greater opportunities to be an intricate part of making decisions and play many roles in a smaller organization, which gains greater visibility and recognition of their capabilities.

5. High-Performing Organizations Have Different Cultural, Philosophical Views

Other than process-driven issues, we also see perception playing a significant role in the advancement of women leaders in the workplace. Many of the questions we asked companies about philosophies and approaches pointed to underlying factors causing many of the issues we have explored here.

But there is a definite split when it comes to high-performing organizations (HiPOs)⁴ and the rest of the pack. In some cases, there is a 20-point or higher spread differentiating this group from other peers (Figure 7, next page).

These types of belief systems and cultural norms not only shape the way organizations approach their pipelines of female leaders -- it shapes the organization and its performance as a whole. The processes themselves can’t be corrected without significant attention to these belief systems and philosophies that drive everyday decisions.

---

⁴High-performing organizations (HiPOs) are shown through survey results to see overall improvement across these criteria: employee engagement, customer satisfaction, voluntary turnover, organizational revenue/performance, and organizational productivity.
Figure 7: Culture of Gender Parity Among Leaders (HiPOs vs. Others)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High-Performing (HiPOs)</th>
<th>Other Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our culture embraces women in leadership roles</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We make an effort to advance women to leadership roles</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The succession process is transparent to all, including women</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2016 Brandon Hall Group Women in Leadership Study (n=83)

Culture and Processes Lead to Barriers to Success

For the 88% of companies that have not yet achieved an equal playing field among male and female executive roles, it appears that there are significant, systemic barriers to success, as shown in Figure 8. This section discusses in detail each of the barriers.

Inadequate Management of Leadership Pipeline

Just over half of companies believe that the biggest issue facing the advancement of women is simply inattention. It is likely that every organization has capable female leaders somewhere within its ranks—it is another matter entirely to believe that the organization is set up in such
a way to support, encourage, and ensure their successful preparation for senior leadership roles. This was the top response for large and mid-size organizations.

Brandon Hall Group’s 2015 Succession Management Study reported that 51% of organizations identified developing successors as the highest priority in support of their succession strategy, yet one out of three organizations do not have a formal succession management strategy and only 5% of organizations have fully automated their succession management. Furthermore, our Women in Leadership study showed that only 38% of organizations believe their succession practices are transparent to everyone, including women. The bottom line is that only 37% of organizations surveyed are grooming at least one woman for C-suite positions. The idea that the workplace is getting a lot better for women can be a false fulfilling prophecy if women and organizations become complacent in

![Figure 8](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Barriers to Leadership for Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate management of leadership pipeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little, if any, targeted development to grow women’s leadership capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of role models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of gender diversity awareness among management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of appreciation for expertise women can offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of flexible career and work models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of expressed desire/assertion among women to ascend to a top executive role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2016 Brandon Hall Group Women in Leadership Study (n=341)
believing that the status quo is acceptable when there is significant evidence of inequality.

Whether you have a somewhat effective succession management strategy or are just beginning, the table below will help you by identifying leading practices for gender parity in succession management.

**Figure 9  Leading Practices of High-Performance Succession Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Drivers</th>
<th>High-Performance Succession Management Leading Practices</th>
<th>Gender Parity Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
<td>Applies to all critical workforce segments and all key job roles at all levels (Not just managers in the top 2 to 3 levels)</td>
<td>Is there unequal representation of genders? If so, in what functions and at what level? Don’t be afraid to speak up and engage in tough conversations about how to make a change. The first step is identifying the current situation, have a vision for where you see the change happening and incorporate incremental adjustments that lead to significant change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Process**    | • Is transparent, and succession candidates and succession participation requirements are broadly communicated to throughout the organization  
• Is implemented across the entire enterprise (not only in select business units, functional areas, or geographies)  
• Identifies critical workforce segments and key job roles prioritized for current and future business success  
• Specifies key capabilities/competencies for critical workforce segments and key job roles  
• Defines key criteria for identifying talent as high-potential (not selecting high-poten-tials subjectively in one’s own image)  
• Includes a cascaded talent review process  
• Assesses succession candidates’ development progress based upon specific and objective data related to key capabilities/competencies and adapts where necessary | • The process for selecting candidates are transparent for all genders  
• Gaps are clearly documented based on objective data and facts, not gender biases  
• Gender topics around biases and barriers are imperative to cover during planning meetings that lead to actions for improvement  
• Skill gaps should be identified to help resolve issues with qualified candidates in the pipeline  
• If you are introducing gender targets, create a plan to execute and that hire and promote the best candidate, not just women, otherwise they will not be effective leaders and will lack the respect of their peers, leaders, and reports  
• Make sure you align with the talent management strategy |
| **Technology** | Is enabled by technology to allow:  
• A consistent and enterprise-wide application  
• An enterprise-wide view of all succession candidates  
• Full integration of succession management with all other talent management processes | • If there is a lack of system in place, then for the short term documentation needs to be shared in some collaboration tool and available enterprise-wide  
• Reports are easily made available to offer insight around gender equality |

**Targeted Development of Women’s Leadership Capabilities is Minimal**

45% of organizations are not offering or supporting target-ed development opportunities for women. While we know that leadership development has been adopted by many organizations, the programs do not intentionally target
Women still struggle to find role models who they can relate to and learn from. ... They see these hard-charging women at the top as larger than life, but the path to getting there is unclear.

Women for development and advancement. Whether by overt or inadvertent exclusion, this is leading to a lack of representation of women in higher-ranking positions. This was the most common issue for small organizations with fewer than 1,000 employees.

**Lack of Role Models**

Four in 10 companies believe that a lack of role models is to blame for low utilization of women in C-level positions. It’s no surprise that this is a contributor since just 14% of companies have a female CEO, and there is low penetration in the C-suite as well. Great leaders need to incorporate a sense of their style; however great leaders -- men and women -- all have had inspiring mentors and role models who they have aspired to be like. Women still struggle to find role models who they can relate to and learn from. Young women may be reluctant to pursue the path of climbing up the corporate ladder because they may think that it might not be attainable to have both a career and family. Other reasons may be that they believe they can’t handle the stress. But in reality, many women never had role models who encourage them along the way. They see these hard-charging women at the top as bigger than life, but the path to getting there is unclear. These biases may be apparent because they may not have seen their mother or other women close to them in leadership roles. Also, women tend to be competitive with each other, and some find it hard to learn or get support from other women in the workplace.

Many of the women we interviewed for this study struggled with their confidence -- even women with PhDs -- because they felt they had to be assertive or attain a particular style they were not comfortable with so they could better align with men in the workplace. It is imperative
that women leaders be direct and confident without feeling the need to be overzealous. There are many different leadership styles that women can exercise to be effective.

Amy Dreher, a seasoned professional who advanced to a VP level at two organizations, finds that there is a blurring of the line between personal and professional that gets in the way of women advancing in their career.

Dreher acknowledges that Millennials and Gen X have a work-life blend mindset but she says that blurring those lines can get in the way of advancing as a leader. Particularly in large enterprises, Dreher says there needs to be an understanding of formality and boundaries in the workplace. To put it simply, there are basic business protocols and etiquette that need to be maintained. While at work or dealing with business, consistently recurring personal obligations can diminish a woman’s credibility.

Dreher recalls a time where she was taking a business call with an employee who was working from home that day. On that call, the employee had her child crying in the background, unexpected visitors at the door and other personal matters to attend to. The call was constantly interrupted and business was the last focus – although it was the middle of a work day and it was a business call.

It’s important for women leaders to understand how to speak the language of business and how to better manage personal life through that language of business, Dreher said. Large enterprises have certain corporate cultures and employees need to take that into consideration when undertaking leadership in that environment. What you aspire to be (and where you aspire to be it) needs to align and be compatible with your personal values if you are going to be a successful leader, Dreher said.

Lack of Gender Diversity Awareness within Management

Diversity training is the number one targeted development opportunity offered exclusively for women. About
one-third of companies create a unique diversity and inclusion group dedicated to women leaders as a way to support the aspirations of this segment of the workforce. Diversity programs, if not delivered carefully, can lead to continuing separation among genders and ethnicities in the workplace. The purpose of the programs is to create awareness around gender biases, and solutions to effectively deal with them.

**Lack of Appreciation of Expertise Women Can Offer**

Five out of 10 companies don’t believe that they are making a good effort in advancing women in leadership roles. However, 60% of those organizations feel their culture embraces women in leadership roles. There is obviously a huge disconnect, which is a result of a poor talent strategy and succession process.

Many of the women we interviewed for this report indicated that their managers had told them they didn’t think they had the ability, interest or business or financial acumen for leadership. One woman, who requested anonymity, related what her manager said after a presentation she gave: "You knocked it out of the park. If I had known that you were this knowledgeable of the numbers, we would have had more discussions around the critical issues of the business and finance.” Our study revealed that many of these biases still exist across a large number of organizations.

**Lack of Flexible Career and Work Models**

A little less than one-third of respondents said a lack of flexibility in the workplace was a barrier to women in leadership roles.
Kelly Watson, Managing Partner, Orange Grove Consulting and co-author of *The Orange Line: A Woman’s Guide to Integrating Career, Family, and Life*, said there is a work-place bias against work-life flexibility for both genders.

“There is this assumption that women (especially moms) need flexibility, which our research uncovered is a massive bias problem that holds women back. Because when you need flexibility, you signal you are somehow less committed to growing your career, which is false. And our new research on men has revealed that there is also this assumption that men are the providers, so they need to be ‘all in’ on their careers and don’t need a life. This is holding them back from getting to be more involved with their families and having the robust life they want to have.”

Education needs to be provided to men and women – and employers -- about these biases so we can open up new possibilities for both genders.

*Lack of Expressed Desire Among Women to Ascend to Top Executive Roles*

Managers may assume that women don’t desire to advance, or they don’t think a woman is capable of taking on more responsibilities because she has a family. The women that we interviewed express that it is not that women don’t want to advance, it’s that they aren’t self-promoting themselves or asking for a promotion, where men are more assertive with negotiating and speaking up.

Women who have achieved success have learned – through coaching, mentoring, training, and trial and error -- to be resilient, assertive, and self-confident. Bridgit McDermid is an excellent example of being resilient and moving on from a toxic organization.
Breaking Through Barriers

The most encouraging piece of our Women in Leadership research revolves around the ways companies are making efforts to improve gender parity and the utilization of women in senior leadership positions.

On the downside, in many cases these methods are not widely used, they are not blended with more effective methods, and they are not supported by top management and organizational culture.

BRIDGET MCDERMID
Senior Manager, Digital Fluency Strategy
TD Bank Group

Like many other women, Bridget Mc Dermid is aware of the criticism that women receive for being too emotional or too aggressive when it comes to business. Often it is perceived that women try to compensate so the men won’t drown them out. However, McDermid takes a different approach – instead of trying to be overly assertive, she makes sure to act in a confident manner and contribute as a partner at the table.

McDermid went on to say that being in male dominated environments was beneficial for her because there was no cattiness. As a result, she was able to flourish in her positions and move up in her career.

Not all experiences, however, were favorable. McDermid did have an experience with a previous employer regarding apparel at work where her boss had demanded that she forego the company uniform because he preferred a form-fitting style for the women employees and insisted that she purchase a particular style of clothing with her money and bring it in for approval. McDermid parted ways with that organization shortly after that incident.

Those experiences have taught her first-hand about the stigmas that exist and how to navigate through them while building relationships. Throughout her career, Bridget has been identified as a top performer – and has worked collaboratively and transparently with her current employer to articulate her career ambitions and establish a progressive development plan to strive for an Assistant Vice President position within the next 12-18 months. Had her previous employee had a better culture in place to support and develop women, they would have never lost a great talent.
That said, for companies that are trying to eliminate the gender disparity, this list (Figure 10 above) – along with insights and examples -- provides a menu with great options to prioritize the growth and development of female leaders.

**Diversity Training**

Nearly 50% of companies offer diversity training to help employees understand the value of a diverse workforce. If diversity training is not delivered well, however, it can have the opposite effect instead of creating awareness and inclusion; it can lead to further dividing genders or ethnic groups. But there are some companies, such as Genpact, that are bringing together women to address real issues and challenges that are unique to them.
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Sonia Dua, VP & Training Leader/Insurance, at Genpact, based in India, said Genpact has been proactive, through several training initiatives (above), to ensure that unconscious biases don’t creep in that can impact the workplace environment and create barriers to inclusion in hiring, promotion and development.

Dua said there is a lot of positive movement for developing women leaders, particularly in Europe, where she finds slightly more women leaders in operational roles. While “the heart is in the right place,” she said, change is still hampered by cultural biases. “In India, young girls
are taught to think a certain way that certain jobs are for men, and certain ones are for women, so they grow up lacking the confidence or exposure. These biases exist not only in India but also around the world.”

**Diversity Targets**

Virtually 40% of companies are introducing diversity targets as a way of enforcing gender equality. An increasing number of the major global organizations are setting gender equality goals, which is driving managers to rethink their recruiting, compensation and overall development needs.

As much as women want to advance they want to make sure they do so based on their abilities, so when introducing diversity targets companies need to make sure they are hiring and developing based on capabilities of the person, not the mandate.

Accenture is on the path to improving gender equality by driving change across all functions of the enterprise in hiring, encouraging, and retaining talent women.

Katharina Heidrich, Senior Manager, Accenture Strategy, said the team is entering into unchartered waters considering not many organizations can effectively recruit females in male-dominated industries. Many of the applications are still mostly from men. Accenture targets universities to identify high potential students; there is equal representation of genders in the fields of math and science, but shortly after women enter the workforce they tend to move into careers in teaching, caring and non-technical.
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Accenture's target by 2020 is to increase the percentage of women to 40%. The firm this year, for the first time, raised the percentage of new hires to 40% women. Several approaches are underway at Accenture:

- There is an established ‘Women Initiative’ offering in-house global mentoring programs only available to women.
- “Maximize Your Career,” specific coaching for high-performing female senior managers with the goal of creating a strong global network to share experiences and learn from senior female leaders.
- Training offerings (available to both men and women) covering topics such as work-life balance, stress management, healthy living, career planning
- Accenture Strategy is establishing a diversity initiative focusing on women in leadership

For the 13th consecutive year, Working Mother magazine has included Accenture in the “100 Best Companies for Working Mothers. Consulting is a male dominated culture that requires a fair amount of travel. Accenture is working to make it easier for women to feel comfortable about topics around pregnancy, working part time and needing support.

Heidrich said Accenture targets universities to identify high-potential female students. There is equal representation of genders in the fields of math and science, but shortly after women enter the workforce they tend to move into careers in teaching, caring and non-technical, she said.

Heidrich, who consults with clients in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, said the market is changing, and there is more pull for female talent, the need to connect with clients, and become more diverse. The change is happening, but not fast enough, she said.
“Accenture is working toward fundamentally changing gender equality in an environment that in theory may seem simple but in all practicality, this will not be an easy journey,” Heidrich said.

**Networks Focused on Growing the Skills of Women Leaders**

About 40% of organizations offer exclusive networking groups to bring women together to share and learn from each other as well as inspire women leaders. Some companies even use special tactics to raise awareness of the women who are interested in climbing the executive ladder. The most common method is through simple networking groups (53%). About one-third of companies create a unique diversity and inclusion group dedicated to women leaders as a way to support the aspirations of this segment of the workforce. This is relatively easy: it only involves laying the foundation and creating an environment where this type of community can flourish.

![Figure 11](source: 2016 Brandon Hall Group Women in Leadership (n=211))
Creating a women’s network for sharing best practices and support is an easy way to start paving the way for women to take on higher levels of leadership responsibility. Women we interviewed who have been involved in either leading or participating in networking groups for women find them helpful and empowering. There are some common concerns, including that the groups don’t address enough of the real issues and get to the root-cause. But these groups are still empowering for women.

At Jackson National Life Insurance Company, an internal women’s network was developed about three years ago and has had a positive impact.

**Case in Point: Jackson**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Lansing, Mich.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year founded</td>
<td>1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>4,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Assets</td>
<td>$218.9 billion (as of September 20, 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Insurance, variable, fixed and fixed index annuities and institutional products, asset management and retail brokerage services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td><a href="http://www.jackson.com">http://www.jackson.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Initiatives</td>
<td>A women’s program, launched about three years ago, that is available to women across the distribution branch of the company. It focuses on careers in the industry and leadership advice for women in financial services. The program helps attract new talent, retain talent, address cultural biases, and empower women. The group has an annual meeting and less formal monthly meetings. Topics include work-life balance, empowerment, and financial industry career advice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jackson National Life Insurance Company 2016
Allison Pearson, VP of the National Sales Desk at Jackson National Life Distributors LLC (JNLD), said the program has been positively received and is even gaining interest from some men who find the additional perspective of women’s issues applicable to their own careers. The program has had a good impact on the business as well.

While the majority of the financial services industry is still primarily focused on engaging with men, women are usually the financial decision makers in a majority of households, Pearson said. “As a result of this insight from the women’s group, Jackson developed presentations and tools to help Jackson employees connect and communicate with women to engage with them in a more meaningful way and establish a relationship,” she said.

**Mentoring Programs Exclusively for Women Leaders**

Brandon Hall Group's 2015 State of Succession Management survey confirms that succession management continues as one of the most important elements in ensuring leadership and business continuity, yet 84% of organizations still suffer from too few, or no, a ready talent for critical roles. Only 37% of companies have women currently being groomed for executive positions. Only 10% of organizations have women in at least 50% of the C-Suite. The number one reason holding women back from C-suite roles is a lack of succession management for the leadership pipeline.

Lindsay Currie, Director of Stakeholder Engagement at the Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society, said one of the biggest needs is mentoring specifically aimed for women leaders.
“Although it’s hard to set time aside to accomplish this, it is one of the most vital pieces of being a successful leader,” Currie said. “It’s also important to have both male and female mentors – to gain different perspectives and acquire a variety of skills and advice. It would also be beneficial to have mentors in and out of one’s particular field.”

“The concept, format, and expectations of mentoring should be communicated clearly and efficiently to both the mentor and the mentee,” Currie said. “Mentoring programs are crucial so that next generation leaders also understand that they have to contribute and work with their mentees to attain a favorable professional relationship. Having the right mentors available can prove to be a catalyst for change in engagement and cultures in the workplace.”

**Recruiting Targeted Specifically for Female Talent**

About 13% of companies are using role models to do
internal marketing campaigns to brand the company as a place that women can develop themselves and advance to higher levels of achievement. Leveraging examples of successful women role models are an excellent way to engage and attract female talent. However, only two out of 10 companies are tailoring their recruiting efforts specifically for women, and if companies want to make sure they are getting the best female talent then the messaging and recruiting approach may need adjustment to resonate with women candidates. Women are not asking to be treated differently, however, just fairly.

The elements above are also important to men, but how you describe and emotionally connect them to women will be different. If your organization does not exhibit some of the behaviors, then only emphasize the ones that are apparent, but don’t be misleading because then you’ll set a tone for mistrust, which eventually leads to talent attrition.

**Offer a Core Leadership Development Program Specifically for Women**

Only 19% of organizations offer leadership programs focused on critical skills training for women. In a poll (n=67) we conducted of attendees to our Women in Leadership webinar, 80% felt that organizations should offer programs specifically targeted for women.

The women leaders we interviewed for this report also overwhelmingly agreed that there should be programs available to women to help them build the skills needed to succeed and advance in the workplace. However, these women leaders also stressed that development and mentorship opportunities that integrate men and women cohesively are also needed.
Niki Buchanan has had favorable experiences climbing the leadership ladder throughout her career. She was coached on many communication and critical thinking skills that are considered especially important to women leaders in predominantly male workplaces.

These skills included how to be comfortable being vocal, how to have a clear and open dialogue, and also how to communicate effectively with men. One example: Because men tend to like facts, lead with facts to start the conversation and then state your case. That has proven to be very effective.

However, the training was most helpful when Buchanan was offered an executive position. She had developed a close working relationship with the senior executive who offered her the job; they had commonalities with their children as well as other topics. When he offered her the C-suite position, she was happy to accept, however not without insisting on transparency and equality. She clearly and openly expressed that she should be receiving the same pay as male executive peers. At first, the executive chuckled uncomfortably but because of their existing relationship, Buchanan she was able to speak with him candidly.

Buchanan went on to discuss the issue of unequal pay for women in these exact situations. Having children (girls) of his own, she expressed how she hoped that by the time they make it to that level of leadership in their careers, they no longer have to face the same bias.

Although these conversations are extremely uncomfortable and don’t always end in a good way, Buchanan was fortunate enough to be prepared to tackle these tough topics through effective coaching and encouragement from other women leaders throughout her career – proving how essential these capabilities are in leadership.

Through our survey and qualitative interviews with women leaders, we developed several topics that **learning opportunities for women** should include:

- **Confidence building**
  - Learn how not to continuously need or seek external validation
  - Learn not to underestimate capabilities. Women tend to underestimate their capabilities and men overestimate, which can hinder women when asking for a promotion or raise or new project.
Conflict resolution
Learn how to be persuasive.
Learn how to give direct feedback – be clear in your purpose

• Mentorships
Men and women mentors can be very effective

• Coaching
Scenario-based learning using real business situations to solve problems and drive creativity

• Women networking groups
53% of organizations find these systems helpful in building awareness for aspiring women leaders

Neddy Perez, a talent and diversity executive, developed a Women’s Leadership Program while she was at Ingersoll Rand that improved retention of women by 70% and increased promotion by 67%. The program was launched in Europe in 2012 and 2013 and then implemented in the U.S. and Latin America in 2014 and 2015. A total of 128 women from across the company and various business sectors completed the program.

“At first women resisted the program – ‘why do I need an exclusive program’? You need to get across the message – you are not broken, but there are cultural biases that are unique to genders and cultures that may inhibit an individual from advancing,” Perez said. “If programs are not directly tied to succession planning, or linked to other critical talent development factors, then these types of women’s leadership programs will not be effective.”
Case in Point: Ingersoll Rand

The women in the Corporate program had to meet the following requirements:

- Selected as high potential through their succession planning process
- Written summary of accomplishments
- Recommendations from their manager
- In current job for at least one full year
- The criteria for emerging leaders – women 30 under 30

Goals:

- Connect men and women across different levels of the organization, and provide senior-level male mentors/sponsors to women in more junior roles.
- Introduce role models -- successful women who shared their stories in manufacturing.
- Increase the men’s understanding on the unique challenges that women are faced with to create awareness and create better communication.
- Provide women an opportunity to work on active business cases that were outside of their comfort zones; provided opportunity for women to get comfortable with business risk and be exposed to other aspects of the company.
- Training offered to women included: introspective self-assessments, personal life/work balance management, risk taking, networking and project management.

Results:

- Action learning projects resulted in cost savings, revenue generation, increased employee engagement and retention. “If programs are not directly tied to succession planning, or linked to other critical talent development factors than these types of women’s leadership programs will not be effective,” Neddy Perez said.

Conclusion

There’s no denying that although there are many excellent efforts under way to advance women leaders in the workforce, there is still plenty of room to add to, improve, and optimize those efforts. Now that we have a better understanding of what the landscape looks like, organizations and individuals alike can be better equipped to make these critical changes. But where do we start?
Brandon Hall Group’s
Critical Calls to Action

For the Organization

1. Educate and provide gender awareness and sensitivity training

2. Offer coaching and mentoring programs

3. Encourage in-house networking groups exclusively for women

4. Encourage discussions around building bridges, discovering commonalities and developing empathy for genders so they can appreciate each other in the workplace and communicate more effectively to drive greater results

5. Ensure that your succession strategy does not hinder building your leadership pipeline; if you are not grooming, or identifying enough qualified female candidates to advance, you need to rethink your succession and talent strategy.
Brandon Hall Group’s Critical Calls to Action
For Aspiring Women Leaders

Seek out opportunities to:

1. Educate and challenge yourself – don’t accept the status quo
2. Make sure your self-story doesn’t hold you back
3. Be a role model and an inspiration to other women
4. Become a mentor and create change
5. Align and help shape the surrounding culture in your organization and community
Brandon Hall Group’s Research Methodology

Brandon Hall Group’s online Women in Leadership survey, conducted April-June 2016, gathered 420 responses from 26 countries and more than 30 industries. In addition, 25 qualitative interviews were conducted to add insights to the data.
About Brandon Hall Group

Brandon Hall Group is a HCM research and advisory services firm that provides insights around key performance areas, including Learning and Development, Talent Management, Leadership Development, Talent Acquisition, and HR/Workforce Management.

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 20 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

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