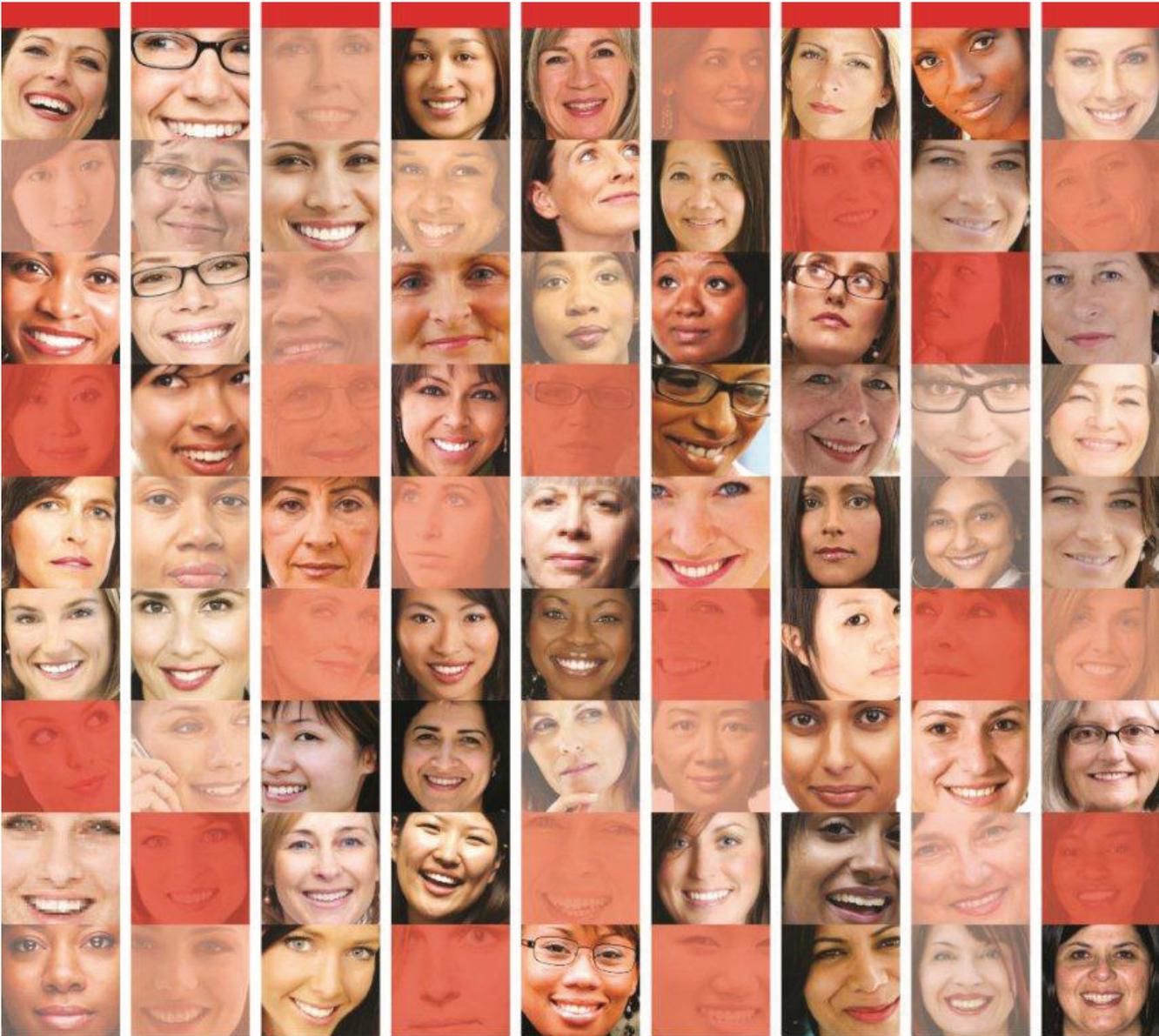


Unlocking the full potential of women at work

Joanna Barsh
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Unlocking the full potential of women at work

Corporate America's business case for developing, retaining, and advancing women is strong and continues to get better. Leaders make gender diversity a priority because they see the prize: a talent advantage that's hard to replicate. But few companies are winning that prize. The top circles of leadership remain male bastions; women make up just 14 percent of Fortune 500 executive committees, and there are few women CEOs. Although corporate leaders are working hard to change this, progress remains elusive.

But below the surface there is good news: several companies are bucking the trend and women are advancing. Based on an in-depth investigation of 60 leading companies, our research reveals that many organizations are closer to unlocking the full potential of women at work than the aggregate numbers indicate. A few are well ahead, with senior leaders building a more open, accepting, and inspiring leadership culture. Diversity of thought thrives in such places, fueling creativity and innovation. Women, men, and their companies benefit as more talent rises to the top.

Last year, McKinsey & Company served as research partner to *The Wall Street Journal's* Executive Task Force for Women in the Economy. Our message was straightforward: women have fueled the growth of the US economy and its largest corporations. Furthermore, much evidence supports the business case for gender diversity—in a nutshell, diverse leadership generates stronger business results. We argued that leaders should focus on their middle managers, creating opportunities that would encourage women to accelerate their professional growth on a course to the top, overcoming barriers that companies, and women themselves, put in the way.

This year, we undertook a more ambitious US-based research project with the help of 60 corporations, almost all in the Fortune 500 or of similar size. See Exhibit 1 for a list of participating companies that agreed to be named.

Exhibit 1

Our research incorporated the perspectives of many leading companies.

Select participants that agreed to be named

Alcoa ¹	Citigroup ¹	The Hartford	Sodexo
Adobe Systems	Coca-Cola	HCL Technologies	Tesoro ¹
Aetna	Cognizant ¹	Humana	Thomson Reuters ¹
Aon	Con Edison ¹	J. P. Morgan Chase ¹	Time Warner ¹
Advanced Micro Devices	CVS Caremark	Johnson Controls	Time Warner Cable ¹
Amway ¹	Dana ¹	Kaiser Permanente ¹	UL
Baxter	DirectTV	Kelly Services	United Parcel Service
The Blackstone Group ¹	Dow Chemical Company	Kimberly-Clark	US Bancorp
Bosch	Duke Energy ¹	Land O'Lakes	VSP Global
Calpine ¹	Ernst & Young ¹	Lear	WellPoint ¹
Cardinal Health ¹	Express Scripts	Magellan Health Services ¹	Whirlpool
Carlson	Ford Motor Company	MasterCard	Yazaki
Caterpillar	General Motors	Michaels Stores ¹	
Chrysler Group	Genpact ¹	Monsanto	

¹ Member of *The Wall Street Journal* CEO Council.

With the help of more than 350 executives at these companies, we were able to explore talent pipelines and gender-diversity practices in depth. We interviewed CEOs and senior business leaders, human-resources and diversity professionals, and well-respected female executives. We surveyed more than 4,000 employees at 14 companies on their career aspirations, ambitions, and attitudes; at least 300 entry-level and midlevel men and women from each company responded. In addition, we drew on the contributions of leading experts, including those from Catalyst and the Center for Talent Innovation, a host of academics, and McKinsey's Women Matter core team.

What did we learn? First, the starting position is tough for most companies. Women are entering in large numbers (more than 325,000 women have entry-level positions at these 60 companies), but in aggregate, the pipeline suffers just as many leaks and blockages as we found last year. Many women opt to take staff roles, get stuck in middle management, or leave their organization without giving the company a chance to address their concerns.

Second, it's even clearer that changing the game for middle managers is a crucial piece of the solution. Nearly 140,000 women have already made it to midlevel management at these companies—about one-third of the women professionals in these organizations. But only about 7,000 have become vice presidents, senior vice presidents, or members of the C-suite. Finding ways to help women in the middle stay in the game and advance to higher levels—particularly through their child-raising years—would reshape the pipeline at these companies and go a long way toward bringing more talent to the top.

Third, several participating companies demonstrate that success is within reach. These companies are more diverse than their peers, and they got there in different ways. Some attract a high percentage of women to entry-level roles. Some have been able to increase the odds of promotion for women to mirror those for men. Some have found ways to keep women in line roles. And some already have significant numbers of women at the top, positioning the company for continued success.

Fourth, through more than 160 interviews with senior business and HR executives, we identified an integrated approach to addressing the barriers that hold women back: top management must be hands-on and visibly committed to achieving the gender-diversity goal; leaders should crack the code on sponsorship, holding all senior leaders accountable for creating opportunities for talented women; they must make diversity an explicit focus of talent-management processes, supported by regular discussions, granular data, and follow-up; they need to measure progress against stretch goals at every level; and diversity staff must have the clout to keep a spotlight on the issues.

The practices that drive success may sound familiar, but the magic begins when leaders achieve real diversity of thought. Each company's transformation plan depends on its industry context and starting point—but wherever companies are today is a great place to start.

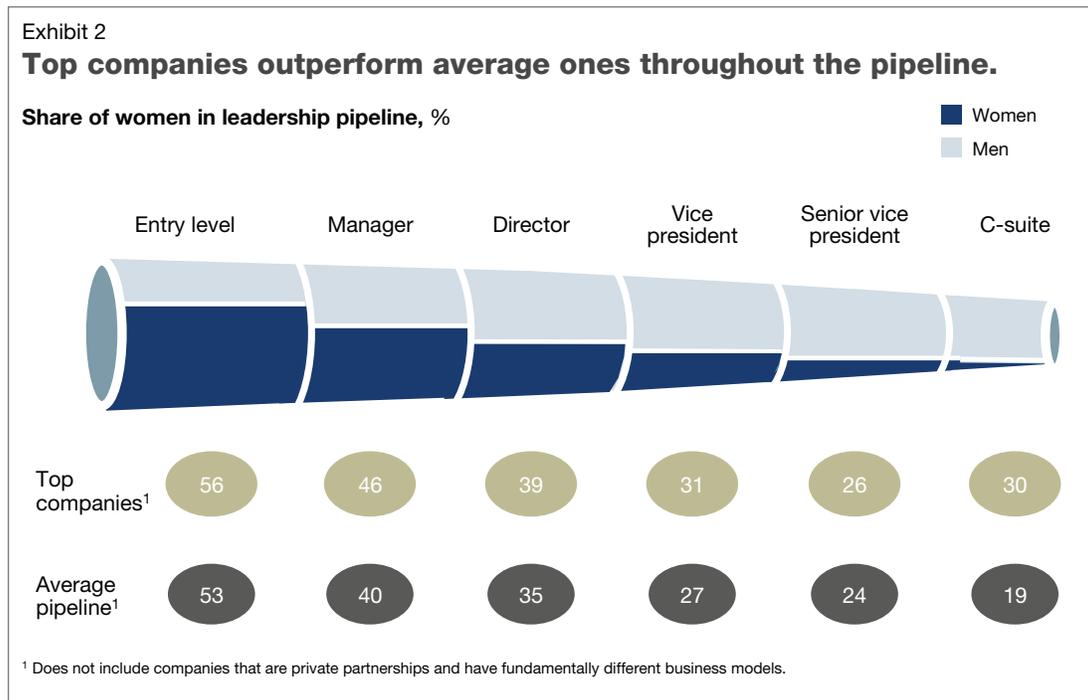
Tremendous untapped opportunity

More than 80 percent of participating companies' HR leaders believe that gender diversity is a business imperative. CEOs articulate simple, compelling rationales, such as "getting the best brains to work on the problem" or having a workforce that better matches customer demographics. When we asked for the business metrics that proved the return on investment, one senior executive told us, "It's common sense—those who tell you they need more are just looking for an excuse not to act."

As almost all participants have made gender diversity a priority, this year we decided to start by understanding what great looks like. Working backward from company outcomes, we chose four metrics to measure gender-diversity success and found 12 companies among the 60 surveyed that met at least three of these standards:

- **A starting position that reflects the talent.** We set the bar at the Fortune 500 average share of women accounting for 53 percent (or more) of entry-level professionals or at women having the same odds of advancing to the manager level as men; 31 companies met or exceeded this cutoff.
- **Better odds of promotion.** Based on figures from the top third of participants, we identified companies in which women’s chances for advancing from manager to director and then to vice president were at least 85 percent of men’s chances for doing so; 20 companies met or exceeded this metric.
- **More women at the top.** Based on figures from the top third of participants, we set this metric as having at least 22 percent female representation on the executive committee; 19 companies met this bar.
- **Women in the line.** Finally, again based on figures from the top third of participants, we looked for companies with at least 55 percent of women vice presidents and senior vice presidents in line positions; 20 companies made this cut.

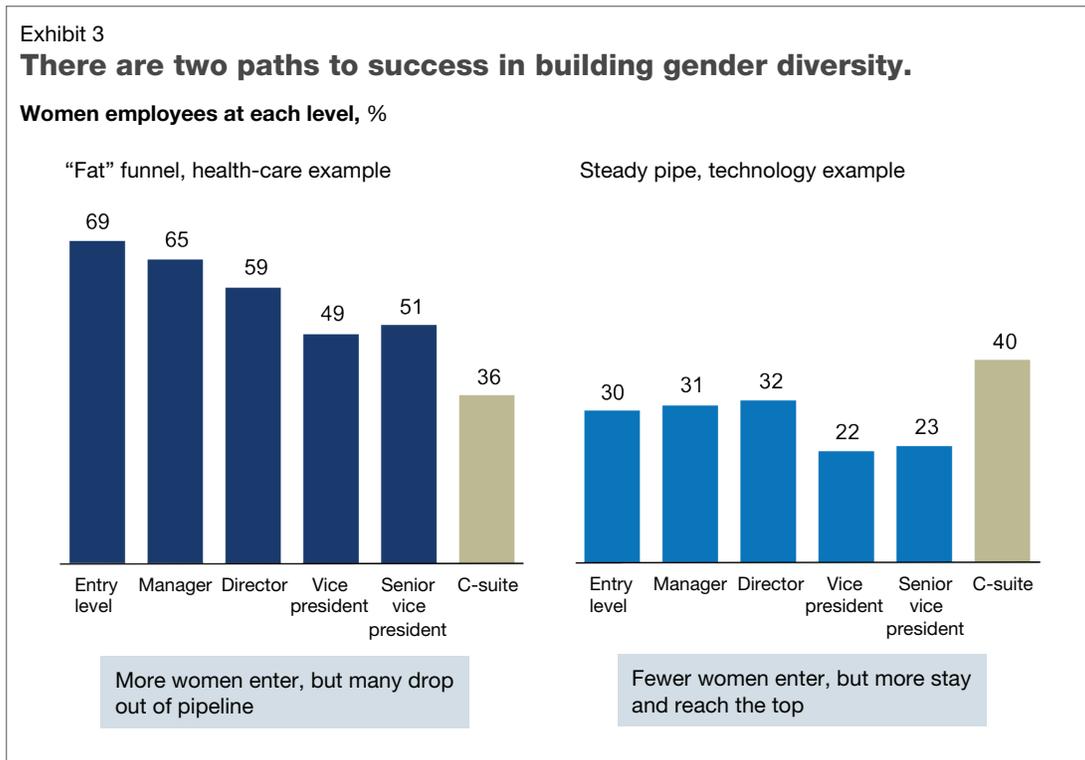
Almost every participant achieved one of these metrics—in fact, 52 companies did. About half of the participants achieved two—27 companies did. We raised the bar to three of the four conditions, and 12 companies rose to the top. They outperformed the pool’s average by a significant margin, especially at the highest levels of leadership. Small improvements along the pipeline really do make the difference (Exhibit 2).

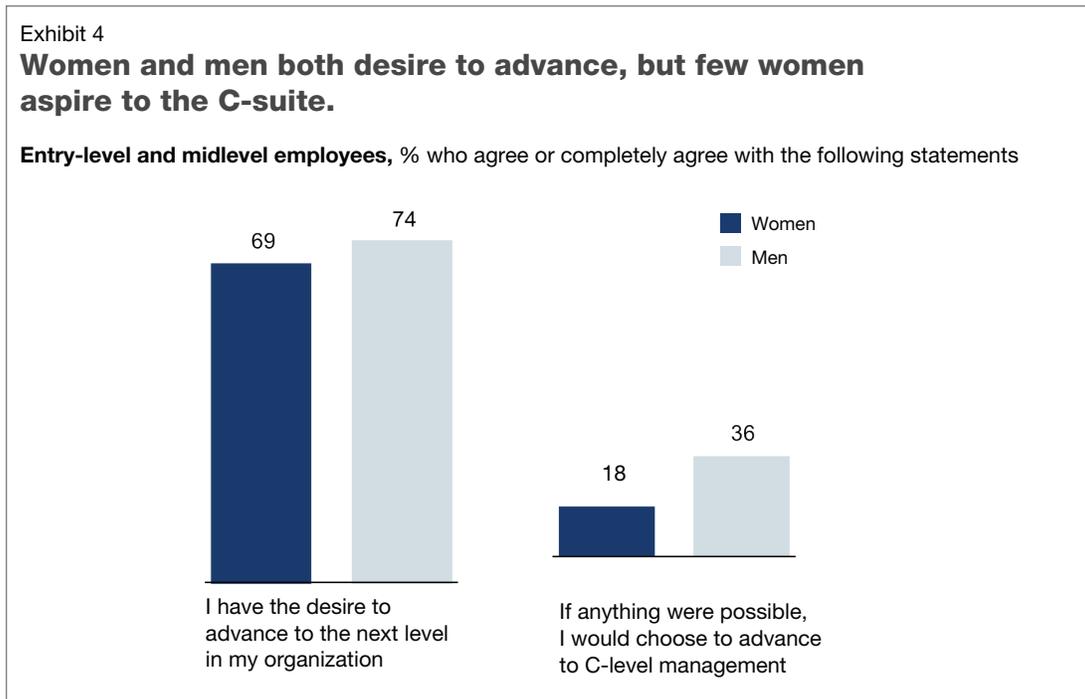


Within these 12 companies, we saw that there were two different paths to success:

- **'Fat' funnels.** Some companies drew in a remarkably high percentage of women, well exceeding 50 percent, probably because they offered entry-level jobs that women tend to prefer, such as those in health care or retail management. Although many women left or became stuck at lower levels, the companies nonetheless got more women into senior roles—in some cases, making up as much as 40 percent of those in the top ranks. In turn, those women were strong role models, showing younger women that success was within reach.
- **Steady pipes.** These companies initially took in a smaller percentage of women but kept the mix of women and men steady at the level of vice presidents, senior vice presidents, and even the C-suite. Companies that draw on engineering or technical skills may find this model more realistic. Interestingly, although these companies start from a lower base, they achieve the same goal of advancing more women to the top, possibly because women who choose these careers are committed from the start.

Neither path is clearly superior (Exhibit 3). The right choice depends on a company's industry context and its starting point. If a company is a natural funnel, it might choose to focus on recruiting and helping midlevel women develop their skills. If a company takes in less than 30 percent of women, it can review its practices at every level to remove the barriers that discourage all but the most resilient women.





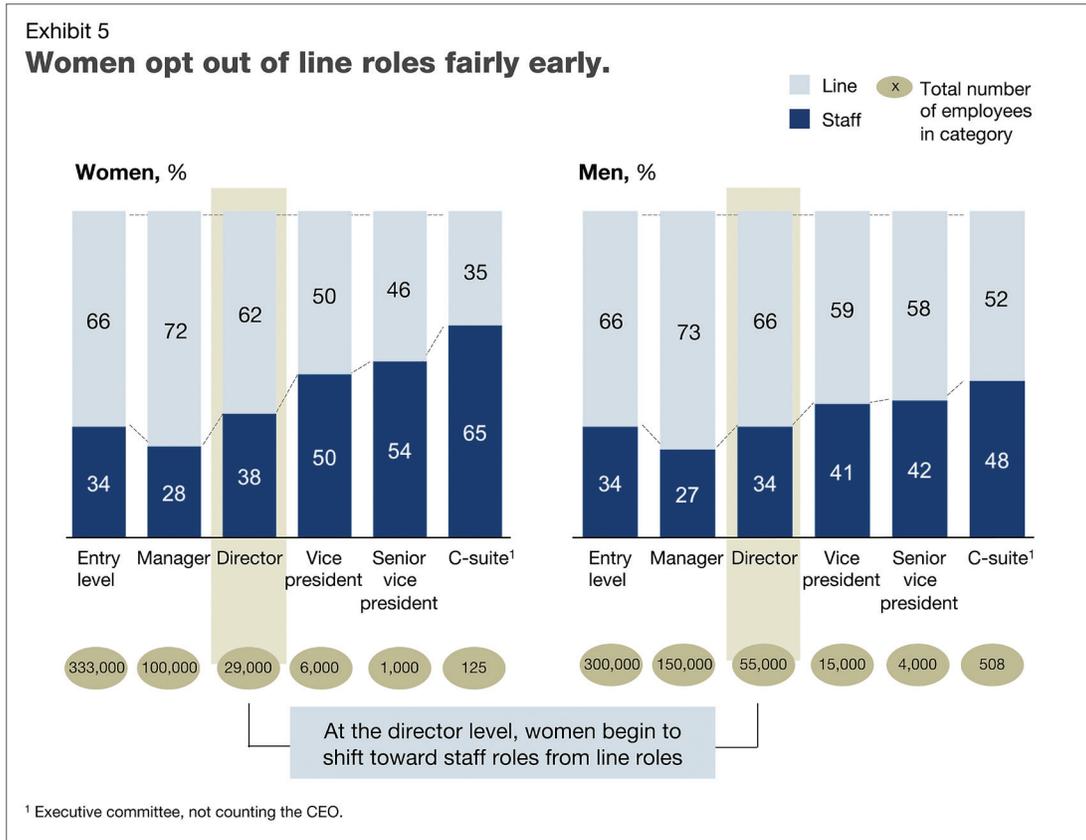
This year's research also reinforced the importance of focusing on middle management, the level at which interventions can make the greatest difference. In the average company, a 10 percent boost in the odds of women advancing from manager to director and then VP would yield an additional 90 female executives, including 5 SVPs and 1 executive-committee member. The pipeline, too, changes. That 10 percent turns into a 4 percentage point increase in women VPs and SVPs and a 3 percentage point jump in C-suite women.

We know that midlevel women and men share a strong desire to advance to higher levels, but relatively few aspire to make it to the C-suite (Exhibit 4). Still, companies can build on women's short-term aspirations to motivate them and help them grow into directors and vice presidents; each step builds confidence for taking the next. In parallel, senior leadership can embolden highly talented women to aim higher.

Stubborn barriers

Many executives, men and women, were excited about the possibility of making real strides and developing clarity about where the opportunity lies, but we also heard from those who shared personal disappointment about their own companies' lack of progress. Despite investment, women opted for staff roles, quit, retired, or even settled in. Hard-won advances to the executive committee were often followed by departures. Seasoned and caring leaders privately wondered if the barriers were too significant for victory ever to be declared.

Last year, we identified four barriers to women's advancement: structural obstacles, lifestyle choices, institutional mind-sets, and individual mind-sets. Leadership teams have been working hard at removing them, addressing the lack of sponsorship, limited flexibility, and unconscious biases. This year we learned those barriers are deeply intertwined, making them even harder to eliminate than we had thought.



To take one example, women shifting into staff roles as they advance is not an issue in and of itself. But last year, we saw that two-thirds of women on Fortune 200 executive committees were in staff roles, and they have far lower odds of advancing to CEO than those in line roles. This year, we were able to explore the disparity between men and women at every stage of the pipeline (Exhibit 5).

Early in the pipeline, women and men are distributed across line and staff roles at similar levels, but women begin a steady shift into staff roles by the time they reach the director level. Structurally, women do not have the same opportunities to benefit from sponsor discussions, and so they lack support to stay in the line. Line jobs are less flexible than staff jobs, so as women form families, staff jobs look more appealing; well-intentioned leaders often do not even ask mothers to consider a tough assignment. And women know that line jobs carry greater pressure. The more issues like this we explored, the more we found the four barriers working in combination to make the problem impenetrable. Our new research underscores how entrenched they are:

- Structural obstacles.** Although CEOs made gender diversity a priority in more than 80 percent of our 60 participating companies, only about half of employees from those companies agreed that the CEO is committed to the issue. Seeing is believing—and there are few women at the top. Our recent interviews underscored the fact that it is simply harder for women to get into the right networks of powerful executives and to cultivate sponsor relationships.
- Lifestyle choices.** About half the women we surveyed said that they are both primary breadwinners and primary caregivers. Most of the men who are primary breadwinners are not primary caregivers. Accordingly, women may choose to slow their careers or shift roles to increase predictability and lessen

travel. In this context, the fact that only 3 percent of managers (women and men) work part-time and that less than 1 percent of more-senior executives work part-time makes balance tough for mothers. While some companies have created flexible work arrangements, part-time plans remain elusive.

- **Institutional mind-sets.** Used to successful executives being—and acting like—men, leaders expect women to model the same behavior. As one CEO told us, “Women don’t knock on my door the way men do or ask for advice. I wish they were more proactive.” And when leaders pay attention to the differences, they may respond in ways that limit the options for women who can juggle family and work. One leader told us, “For one opening, we had an employee who was highly qualified—she was running operations in Asia. However, we didn’t ask her if she would be interested in the position, since she was pregnant and we assumed that she wouldn’t want to move.”
- **Individual mind-sets.** Indeed, even among the successful women we interviewed, more than half felt they held themselves back from accelerated growth. Most said they should have cultivated sponsors earlier because a sponsor would have pushed them to take opportunities; too often, these women said, they did not raise their hands or even consider stretch roles. And when surveyed, more women than men reported that they would likely move next into support roles.

Women who are making it work

Despite the barriers, we also know that a lot of women have successfully entered leadership ranks. Our interviews with 200 women executives offered encouragement. Each participating company identified three or more women for interviews—drawing women from all functions and with a variety of experiences, succeeding regardless of the odds. Indeed, these women were chosen by HR leaders for their potential to reach the executive committee. They are strong directors, vice presidents, and senior vice presidents.

The first thing we noticed is their collective accomplishment: 70 percent had experienced accelerated progress early in their career, 79 percent had line experience, and 90 percent had significant sponsorship—often while raising families (83 percent have children). And there were many different paths to success. Some women were serial entrepreneurs; some worked their way up from the factory floor. Others joined companies as functional experts in law, HR, or communications and gradually took on broader leadership roles. Just as there is no single “right” path for a company, there is no one formula for a successful career.

CEOs and senior executives who work with these women noted that they were no different from successful men; a results orientation, coupled with the ability to grow and take risks, can distinguish great performers from average ones. We were struck by the very observation that these women did not stand apart from their male counterparts. By and large, these women adapted to the male environments in which they operated and overcame extraordinary challenges through stamina and sheer grit. That’s what it took to succeed.

What sets these women apart is their strong belief that they are making a difference, their ability to turn adversity into learning opportunities, their persistence in building relationships with sponsors and others, their willingness to step outside their comfort zones, and the positive energy that comes with loving their work. They also share a set of foundational strengths that fueled their growth:

- **Robust work ethic.** They are consistently willing to go above and beyond what is asked of them to get the job done: “I was always the person that turned off the lights. Work has always been my first priority.”
- **Results orientation.** They have a relentless focus on performance and improving the bottom line: “My view of success is all about adding value. I love the direct impact on profitability.”

- **Resilience.** They persevere in times of adversity and stay the course through true grit: “You have to be strong enough to do what’s right. The strength comes from within. I’ve had many failures along the way.”
- **Persistence in getting feedback.** They work to continually improve their own performance by actively seeking out their blind spots and looking at feedback with a growth mind-set: “I have found feedback from men to be incredibly helpful. Women tend to side with me, whereas men give me the candid perspective I need to change.”
- **Team leadership.** They inspire, motivate, and lead teams: “I want to make people better—it’s the people that make the company. I help them have the courage to stretch and grow. I challenge them and don’t let them fail.”

Better yet, many see themselves as sponsors for a new generation. They believe that helping younger women adopt new mind-sets and behaviors will be instrumental to advancement. First, many wished that they had developed confidence in their abilities earlier; they would have taken even more risks than they did. In the words of one woman, “I have told myself that this person doesn’t want to work with me or that I wouldn’t get that role. It is a record [playing] in my head, and I didn’t test [the message] to see if it was true.” Second, professionally, these women learned the importance of letting senior leaders know their goals: one said, “The minute I became directive about what I wanted, my career went on the fast track.”

Their final words for us were telling—they were split on personal aspirations for reaching the C-suite, as Exhibit 6 shows. The women who aimed to join the C-suite were passionate about the company and their work, and they saw leadership as the best way to make a big difference. Those who did not share this goal pointed to politics, for the most part. When asked what it would take to make the executive committee more

Exhibit 6

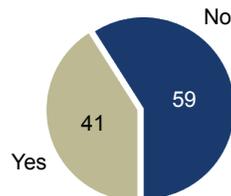
Even successful women executives offer mixed responses.

Why do you want to join the C-suite?

- “I enjoy creating a workplace —making decisions that affect people’s lives for the better.”
- “I think I have a strategic mind and good business acumen and I understand people; I could have a big impact putting that together. It would be rewarding to have the business be successful and to create an engaging work environment for our employees.”
- “I love being on the inside circle and making decisions. I love seeing how it all goes on. It’s daunting, but I’m an information junkie. I want a seat at the table.”

Do you aspire to be part of the C-suite?

% of successful women



Why are you *not* interested in the C-suite?

- “I’m happy doing what I’m doing. I have 600 employees I manage, and I love interacting with them and giving them purpose. I want to leave a legacy of a sustainable, profitable business.”
- “When you see it up close ... it’s not clean at the top. Motives are not always enterprise-related. It’s more about personal agendas.”
- “My ego aspires to make it happen, but my authentic self is not sure if it is worth it. It would require me to do more and more politics, and I don’t want to. I don’t enjoy that.”

attractive, they touched on openness and honesty, authenticity, and teamwork. Their responses should spark a good discussion about what top teams might do to improve their effectiveness and, in turn, inspire more women and men who care deeply about unlocking the potential of those they lead.

How companies can go from good to great

By synthesizing our research—pipeline data, HR questionnaires, interviews, and employee surveys—we identified five practices that are consistently tied to success at hiring, retaining, and promoting women. CEOs and senior executives told us that these practices made a real difference and helped to drive change; HR professionals discussed successes and explained how inspiring they were when they were implemented; and successful women enthusiastically described their experience with them.

- **Hands-on leadership, starting at the top.** Leaders must invest personal capital and actively role model the desired mind-sets and behaviors to build a more open and accepting culture. When a CEO is the chief advocate and storyteller, more people believe that gender diversity matters. The difference between committed CEOs and others is subtle: the former make the goal clear and specific, and they tell everyone about it, while the latter fold “women” into “diversity” and “diversity” into “talent,” diffusing focus. In addition, hands-on CEOs reach out to get other senior male leaders involved in the effort, making them catalysts for change. These leaders recognize that gender diversity starts with personal consciousness; once they are committed to the issue, they encourage others to shift mind-sets and behaviors in support of the cultural transformation.
- **Diversity leadership with clout.** Successful companies appoint well-respected managers to shine the spotlight on diversity issues and help maintain vigilance cycle after cycle—another way to help build change-management capability. HR leaders point to the issue of quality over quantity when it comes to gender-diversity programs; they report that only 30 percent of their companies’ gender-diversity programs are of high quality and well implemented today, which highlights the need for vigilance. Diversity executives cannot change this by themselves, but they can guide the organization in the process, for example, by making explicit the hidden mind-sets that emerge in talent-management discussions. As one HR executive put it, “The only way you change unacceptable behavior is to call it out and make sure there are consequences to make the individual stop acting that way.” This takes courage, but it also takes clout. Successful diversity professionals draw on currency as peers to senior leaders from prior line experience or long-term relationships. They recognize that their reputations are on the line for driving impact.
- **Pervasive sponsorship.** Sponsors create opportunities for high-potential women (and men); while some executives make it to the top without sponsors, most gained new opportunities, active support, and advocacy from such relationships. Great sponsors believe in the talented women they help, open the door to growth opportunities, counsel them through valleys and peaks, and advocate for their advancement. Of course, these relationships are hard to institutionalize, and HR leaders reported that formal sponsorship programs have had mixed success at best: natural sponsor relationships predated programs, and many new connections lacked chemistry. One company did much better when the CEO and the diversity leader personally took hold of the sponsorship program. They selected a group of high-potential women and invited them to spend significant time with the top team at exclusive conferences. The CEO also spent a significant amount of time sharing the company strategy and explaining how the business operated. Women in that program really got to know the CEO and senior team members—and vice versa. Most of these women soon moved up the ladder.
- **Robust talent management.** Companies that recognize talent management as an essential pillar of company performance have the fundamentals in place, but those that excel at promoting women take it a step further. They adapt existing recruiting, promotion, and succession-planning processes to call out performance with regard to gender diversity (and in some cases other aspects of diversity).

As always, what's measured is what matters, and over time new standards can affect practice and culture. Detailed data are shared broadly so that everyone has the facts. Discussions are scheduled regularly. The business executives responsible for a function or division report on progress and setbacks, engaging with senior leadership on problem solving. In consequence, the leaders get to know the women in their organization and strategize with them about potential career moves. They become sponsors as appropriate and are, at minimum, accountable for what happens next.

- **Strong accountability supported by data.** While most interviewees reject quotas as having unintended consequences in the United States, top companies set aspirations, goals, or targets. They establish a common fact base for comparisons across the organization and in regular performance dialogues at every management level. To preserve the quality of talent decisions, they carefully determine decision rights to assure that women are considered for promotions and treated fairly in reviews. But holding leaders accountable is just one way that data help. Although many companies have not yet linked performance to compensation, leaders down the line take the discussion seriously and are expected to follow up as a matter of course.

Wherever you are, it's a good place to start

Given all the hard work on gender diversity so far, it's fair to ask when results will start to show. One encouraging sign we found was how much progress can be made in five years. Working with 23 companies that provided 2007 and 2011 data, we found a visible improvement across the average pipeline. At the executive-committee level, for example, these companies only replaced a small percentage of men with women; they increased the share of women by adding seats at the table. Some of these companies were funnels and some were pipes. As companies improved, more of them became "pipe-like"—with an implicit focus on retention.

No two companies will start this journey from the same point. Each company's combination of industry, heritage, location, regulation, and aspiration is unique. That said, all companies are on a similar transformation journey. Companies can take a handful of practical steps at any stage: just getting serious about accelerating progress, scaling up successes to move the needle, or embedding the change to sustain the transformation.

Getting serious

Companies in this stage may be thinking about gender diversity for the first time or getting serious after several attempts to promote it. The senior team should focus on building the foundations for success:

Declare gender diversity a business imperative. Companies embarking on this journey need to move gender diversity from one of a number of talent initiatives to a specific, company-level business imperative—one that leaders are measured against in performance reviews and benefit from supporting. Companies in industries that attract many women may aspire to pull more women through the belly of the pipeline. Companies that thrive on specialized talent (people with technology degrees, for example) may decide to focus on winning an "unfair share" of women recruits (shaping an environment that women prefer). Our counsel is to understand the link between business performance and women, specifying the goal that makes the most sense for the business.

Build awareness of the business case. Being hands-on is important from the outset. Top teams need an exciting and meaningful story to compel managers down the line to shift their mind-sets and behaviors. The most compelling stories combine good data, a focus on women (rather than on diversity of all kinds), and a strong link to business performance. Whatever the case, it must make sense to rational business executives down the line, who must understand and commit to it.

Introduce performance dialogues. Companies in the early stages of a transformation should expect leaders to report on and discuss how they are doing against gender-diversity goals and the actions they plan to take to further these goals. As senior leaders conduct fact-based discussions, they will begin to spread practices that drive success and to help address root causes.

Develop a strong data set and inventory of practices and policies. As noted earlier, detailed data are crucial to robust talent management. It is important to look under the hood of the averages. With the right data, companies can celebrate the success of some units and address the issues of laggards together, as part of holding managers accountable and reinforcing a new mind-set and culture. Additionally, top teams should review and either confirm or revise existing policies in line with gender-diversity aspirations and the business case.

Scaling up

Companies in this stage have some successful programs in place and want to scale them in order to move the needle on relevant goals. The key is making execution more consistent across the organization:

Drive the management focus down to the front line. Companies do this by sharing the story of the business case broadly; adapting recruiting, promotion, and succession-planning processes to incorporate good data on gender diversity and high-potential employees at lower levels; and expecting sponsors to provide stretch experiences. These tactics are particularly important for midtenure women (since the pool is large and they have a longer runway to accelerate).

Focus on helping women gain broad line experience early on. This should include international stints as appropriate. Top teams and sponsors in leadership positions can accelerate women's growth so that once women begin to form families, they will already have some of the prerequisites for advancement. International experience is one good example: moving women earlier in their careers may be easier to do. Individuals with the robust work ethic of the successful women we met will embrace the challenge. And over time, seeing more women in these positions will help shift everyone's mind-set.

Recognize champions meaningfully. Celebrating success publicly is good for everyone, but it is also critical to engage and recognize the senior leaders (often men) who are putting their necks on the line in other ways. Performance-management processes are an important tool in this regard. The companies that have linked incentives to increasing gender diversity have seen significant progress without risking quality (because of checks and balances such as promotion-decision committees). Many companies, seeing great results in pockets of their organization, can use regular talent discussions to extend that success across geographies and business units.

Embedding transformation

Companies in this stage have proved they can succeed. They make talent a true source of competitive advantage. Regardless of the shape of their pipelines, they have a good number of women at the top, with even more advancing. The challenge for companies at this stage is to "hardwire" the changes to sustain this cultural transformation. Only a few companies have reached this stage thus far; for those hoping to join their ranks, we look to other kinds of transformational-change programs for advice:

Role model at the top. It is up to the CEO and top team to live the desired shifts in mind-sets and behaviors—for example, being respectful of differences, listening deeply, and remaining aware of the personal thoughts and feelings that limit their leadership effectiveness. Great role models are not perfect; they are human. What stands out is their ability to learn and adapt.

Invest in leadership development. Gaining consciousness and being able to master one's own transformation is crucial. Great leaders start with themselves; only later do they take on the broader institutional transformation. By bringing a new language and norms to the table, they create a culture of openness and acceptance. It is particularly important to find a sufficient number of middle managers who are living the desired behaviors; this can help companies reach the tipping point.

Hardwire the shift. Over time, what once seemed like a significant effort will become natural as diversity is embedded in management processes. Reinforcing what great looks like will bolster success: having diverse teams is the most obvious means of doing so, but incorporating diverse backgrounds and experiences, building consciousness in how people approach business problems and leadership, and even prizing diversity of interests can all contribute. Over time, diversity of thought will simply be part of the organizational DNA. As one executive said, "This is just the way we operate."

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Helping talented women develop and advance promises significant economic benefit to companies. But too many women don't want to reach the top. Many love what they do and believe they are making a difference where they are—remember, only 41 percent of the 200 successful women we interviewed said they aspired to join the C-suite.

If corporate leaders commit to changes that inspire more top women to stay the course through years of family responsibilities and competing interests, then all women *and* men benefit. It's not easy, but the successful companies and inspiring women we met this year reinforce our belief that it is possible. And when a critical mass of high-performing men and women middle managers strive to grow and contribute at higher levels, the company builds an advantage that's among the hardest for competitors to copy. Now that's a goal well worth leadership time and attention.

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