Women and Men in U.S. Corporate Leadership

Same Workplace, Different Realities?
INTRODUCTION
Although women occupy one-half (50.5 percent) of managerial and professional specialty positions in the United States,¹ they hold only 15.7 percent of corporate officer positions in the Fortune 500 (up from 8.7 percent in 1995),² and 13.6 percent of board directorships (up from 9.5 percent in 1995).³ They hold only 7.9 percent of the Fortune 500 highest titles, and represent only 5.2 percent of top earners.⁴

Rampant speculation exists as to why there remain such small numbers of women at the top. Some say it is because women do not want to serve in leadership roles, while others think women do not have what it takes to get there. Some believe women possess the necessary skills, but other demands compel them to “opt out.” Still others believe that subtle, yet pervasive, barriers remain in the way of women who have the skill, desire, and ambition to occupy the top jobs. This study provides hard data that speaks directly to this debate and many other issues related to women in the workplace.

We find, for example, that women do want to serve in the most senior leadership roles within an organization. In addition, women and men have equal desires to acquire the CEO job. The similarities between women and men executives do not end there. They report similar levels of work satisfaction, reasons for why they would potentially leave their companies, and strategies for advancing.

At the same time, some striking and important differences between women and men executives also exist.⁵ While both groups have overcome barriers on the way to their current positions, women report facing a host of stereotypes and environmental challenges that their male colleagues do not. In addition, women have made more trade-offs and adopted more strategies to achieve balance than their male counterparts.

These findings represent a new level of knowledge about women executives. Previously, Catalyst investigated the reasons for women’s underrepresentation in senior roles by asking women, themselves, about barriers to advancement. We also queried CEOs about their perceptions on this issue. In 1996, Catalyst published the findings of the pioneering study, Women in Corporate Leadership: Progress and Prospects. The study examined the attitudes and experiences of executive women working in Fortune 1000 companies, and compared them to the perceptions of Fortune 1000 CEOs. That report became a highly regarded benchmark among employers, across industries and geographic boundaries. Catalyst replicated the study in 2003, asking women and CEOs the same questions, to assess whether any change had occurred since 1996.

However, we knew that to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of executive women, we need also explore the perceptions and experiences of executive men. With this study, Catalyst goes that one step further by comparing the attitudes and experiences of Fortune 1000 women and men executives directly below the CEO level. As a result, we can assess the impact of gender on shaping senior executives’ work lives and attitudes.

⁵ When we note that there is a difference between women and men, we mean that that difference is statistically significant. When we find that a relationship is statistically significant, we know that that relationship is not random, i.e., it is meaningful. For example, when this study reveals a statistically significant difference (at p<.05) between men and women on some variable, the difference is positive and significant at the 95% level. This means that there are less than 5 chances in 100 that this difference would not be observed should we repeatedly test this connection.
We have opened a new chapter in our understanding of women in the workplace. We now know that women and men generally have the same goals—and use the same advancement strategies—but face very different barriers in their careers. These findings represent a call to action—for organizations and for women and men, themselves—while pinpointing specific areas in which making change is necessary. These changes necessitate, among other things, creating more inclusive environments; implementing more open career development and advancement processes; and reinforcing communication mechanisms across gender and functional areas to facilitate increased understanding.

DEMOGRAPHICS
Women and men in this study share similar backgrounds and characteristics. Women's median age is 47, and men’s is 51. They are highly educated, with 59 percent of women and 55 percent of men holding graduate degrees. All hold positions at the vice president level and above, and most are within two reporting levels of the CEO.

Most respondents are white, while one in ten (10 percent of women, 10 percent of men) are people of color. Almost all of the men (97 percent) are married or living with a partner, while a lower percentage—but still a majority (81 percent)—of women are married or living with a partner. Just over one-half of women (51 percent) and men (57 percent) have children living with them.

KEY FINDINGS

Work Satisfaction and Retention
- Women and men are satisfied with most aspects of their current jobs. The only area in which less than a majority (23 percent of women and 17 percent of men) are satisfied is with the availability of mentors.
- Women and men report the same top reasons for potentially leaving their current jobs: to make more money and to gain new skills and greater advancement opportunities.

Strategies for Success
- Executive women and men cite similar strategies for their success: hard work (73 percent of women and 70 percent of men), managerial skill (87 percent of women and 88 percent of men), performing on high-visibility assignments (82 percent of women and 75 percent of men), and demonstrating expertise (81 percent of women and 80 percent of men).
- To facilitate their advancement, the majority of women (81 percent) also developed a style with which male managers are comfortable.

Aspirations to Senior Leadership
- The majority of women (55 percent) and men (57 percent) want to occupy the most senior role (CEO or equivalent) within an organization.
- Women who have children living with them are just as likely to want the corner office as those who don’t have children living with them (55 percent and 46 percent, respectively).
As they advance to senior levels, women confront the same barriers as men; however, women also confront an additional and even more pervasive set of culturally-related barriers—such as exclusion from informal networks, stereotyping, a lack of role models, and an inhospitable corporate culture—than are experienced by very few men.

### Barriers to Your Advancement (strongly agree/agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Your Advancement</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion from informal networks**</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-based stereotypes**</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of role models**</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of line experience*</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying style different than organizational norm</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness of organizational politics</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of mentoring*</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhospitable corporate culture**</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunities for visibility</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to personal/family*</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of challenging assignments</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of desire to reach senior levels</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race-based stereotypes</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of ability to reach senior levels</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment*</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective leadership style</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant difference at p<.05
**Significant difference at p=.000
It appears that men executives do not recognize many of the challenges faced by their female counterparts. In fact, women are much more likely than men to see barriers to the advancement of women within their companies. For example, even though both women and men agree on the top barrier to women’s advancement—a lack of significant general management or line experience—a significantly higher percentage of women (79 percent) than men (63 percent) cite this.

Furthermore, women’s and men’s views diverge tremendously in some areas related to work culture and environment. Women are far more likely than men to cite barriers such as: a lack of awareness of organizational politics (57 percent of women, compared to 22 percent of men); exclusion from informal networks (77 percent of women, compared to 39 percent of men); stereotyping of women’s roles and abilities (72 percent of women, compared to 44 percent of men); and lack of opportunities for visibility (51 percent of women, compared to 22 percent of men).

Balancing Work and Personal Life

In general, women and men have used very different strategies to balance their work and personal lives. Women also used more balancing strategies than their male counterparts.

In order to achieve balance between their work and personal lives, women were significantly more likely than men to: employ outside services for domestic help (84 percent of women, compared to 48 percent of men); share personal responsibilities with a partner (66 percent of women, compared to 53 percent of men); use childcare services (45 percent of women, compared to 12 percent of men); rely on supportive relatives other than their partner (22 percent of women, compared to 3 percent of men); and curtail personal interests (56 percent of women, compared to 41 percent of men). In addition, women were significantly more likely than men to not have children (27 percent and 3 percent, respectively), to postpone having children (20 percent of women, compared to 10 percent of men), and to not marry or postpone marriage (13 percent of women, compared to 3 percent of men). They also were more likely than men to take a leave of absence from their jobs or to have had a gap in their employment.

Men were significantly more likely than women to hand over personal responsibilities to their spouses or partners (37 percent of men, compared to 28 percent of women), and pursue personal interests (72 percent of men, compared to 60 percent of women).

Despite the fact that women have made significantly more choices and trade-offs than their male counterparts—in both their work and personal lives—the large majority of both groups are comfortable with their choices. About three-quarters of women (73 percent) and men (71 percent) are comfortable with the trade-offs they have made.

METHODOLOGY

These findings are based on data from surveys completed by 705 senior-level women and 243 senior-level men. Those surveys were mailed in summer and fall 2002. Findings also are drawn from 33 interviews during summer 2003—20 with senior-level women and 13 with senior-level men.
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