



Myths and barriers preventing the progression of women

Analysis and solutions



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As the 2020-2021 Covid pandemic shut down schools, closed shops and forced millions of people to work from home, women began dropping out of the workforce at unprecedented rates. Working mothers, women in senior management positions and women from historically marginalised communities made up the majority of this global ‘she-cession.’*

Over the past several decades, due to the concerted efforts of women’s rights advocates, lawmakers and corporate DEI leaders, women’s representation in boardrooms and executive suites has been slowly rising. But the pandemic has exposed just how fragile these gains are and reminded us just how far we still have to go to achieve gender parity.

To cement the progress we have made, and to continue to build on it, we need to be unflinching and intentional. There has never been a better moment than now.

The pandemic may have magnified long-standing inequities and laid bare the deep divides and what is broken in our society – but it also exposed what is possible!

We learned that organisations can pivot, in ways that were previously unimaginable, as they did in response to the pandemic. Almost overnight, companies around the world devised new ways of delivering services – from telehealth to online classrooms to ‘click and collect’ and express home delivery. Perhaps the clearest example was the speed at which organisations embraced a remote working model in countries and industries where it was previously considered anathema. Employees and employers were abruptly forced into remote work with no warning or well-planned roll-out of the change initiative. What was once considered impossible was suddenly possible. And what was striking was that employees said they were more productive and expected flexible and remote working to continue. This crisis presented an opportunity to reinvent how work is done.

We know now that we are capable of radical change. So, what do organisations need to do to unfreeze how they approach and operationalise gender diversity? What must we do to ensure

gender diversity at the top of organisations and in board rooms? How can we move from conviction to action?

On the individual level, it is time to open ourselves to new ways of understanding identity and inequality. We must always remember that our identities are intersectional. Women are never women only. Each woman’s experience of the workforce is shaped by her multitude of identities – cultural, national, racial, socio-economic, religious, sexual, physical and generational. When we understand the intersectionality of our identities, we are better able to understand and dismantle the barriers to gender diversity. We are compelled to take an inclusive and holistic approach. And to do so we need male allies. Men who are curious enough to examine and eliminate their biases. Men who are courageous enough to seek out disruptive experiences and to speak up for what’s right. And men who are committed enough to take action to address gender inequities.

At the organisational level, we need to be willing to dismantle the systems that have privileged men. Leaders need to examine how their institutional cultures and processes have reinforced systems that disadvantage some and favour others. It takes courage for leaders to disrupt those same systems that have supported their own success. It means considering the differences in men’s and women’s career trajectories, provoking a broad-based shift in mindset, and setting precise, targeted and

“Women are never women only.”

Foreword

ambitious goals. It means re-imagining leadership models to be more encompassing of leadership competencies that women excel in. And it means embedding gender diversity into every aspect of our organisations' systems – from our mission and internal processes, to our role in our communities and in our world.

“It takes courage for leaders to disrupt those same systems that have supported their own success.”

Organisations need to engage with the public sector. We need to speak up on issues. We need to take a stand. We need to do what we can. We can hire refugee women, we can support women's education in sectors where they are under-represented, we can join others in public commitments to women's progress. But most importantly, organisations must move from performative action to sustainable progress so that the next global crisis does not see us backsliding.

Governments also have a critical role to play by demanding pay equity, enforcing quotas for the representation of women in senior leadership positions and board rooms, and requiring data transparency.

Historically, crises have dramatically changed social models. After World War II, mothers redefined their role as they started joining the workforce. As a matter of survival, organisations took equally bold action in response to Covid-19 by reshaping their operating models.

As the world regains its footing, we must ensure that women are not left behind in the workplace, excluded from sought-after jobs or penalised in their pay. We must foster inclusive cultures that support working women and encourage their advancement. This is the moment! Organisations must seize this opportunity to be bold and ambitious, to reset behaviours and mindsets, and to reinvent systems to be truly inclusive and equitable. Transformation happens at the intersection of people and processes, and it is work that is ongoing. Let us be a part of this turning point in history. Let us look back on this time as the moment when gender diversity became so deeply rooted at the top of organisations that in the crises of the future, women are there, at the forefront of creative and inclusive leadership, to help steer us through.



Dr. Rohini Anand

Former SVP Corporate Responsibility and Global Chief Diversity Officer at Sodexo and Senior Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisor at Rohini Anand LLC.

*An economic downturn where job and income losses are affecting women more than men.

Introduction

Stubborn facts and persistent myths

The benefits of gender diversity (and diversity in general) are well documented: better organisational and financial performance, increased innovation and more effective teams are measures of success that have been repeatedly confirmed by numerous studies of companies with a mixed management team. However, it is clear that gender inequalities persist at all levels, with a very low share of women on executive committees and among CEOs worldwide.

Today many managers, including in large multinationals, have taken this issue very seriously and support the implementation of gender diversity and equity policies in their organisations. Faced with the need for a wide range of actions and the challenge of slow progress, they recognise, however, that it is difficult to assess whether the measures implemented are the right ones, and so often revert to a stock solution to guide choices and decisions. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, as each situation and each corporate culture calls for an arsenal of targeted measures, all of which share the need to adjust or compensate for a fundamentally ‘unfair’ system, a social and professional playing field riddled with constraints, cultural beliefs and unconscious biases.

This publication, “The myths and barriers that hold back women’s careers: deciphering and solutions”, developed by Mazars in partnership with the Observatory for Gender Balance, addresses CEOs who want to make concrete progress on equality in their organisation. They will find in it an update on the state of gender equality in international and European companies, a view from first-hand experience to help understand the persistent myths that might explain the slow progress observed within management bodies, as well as testimonies from experts and CEOs, who share their perspectives, discoveries, observations, difficulties, solutions and convictions in this long journey towards equity. They will also find in this publication a link to a practical tool to understand if they have put in place the ‘right steps’ in their company.

Understanding and addressing the myths

Given the slow pace of change, we wanted to understand the persistent myths that may be slowing down companies’ efforts to promote gender diversity. Among the preconceived ideas identified, we analyse eight myths in particular, including:

women are less ambitious; there are no competent women in the talent pool; quotas and binding targets are not meritocratic; and motherhood is not compatible with a top management career. We interviewed specialists in the field and here we share their views on these myths and the obstacles, as well as their solutions to ending the biases and false beliefs – and building more inclusive, better performing workplaces.

You will also discover the testimonies of four CEOs who share their awareness, their journeys, their difficulties and their deeply held views on gender diversity. It is striking to note in all these accounts the same sense of sincerity, humility and determination.

In conclusion, we focus on the importance of not only the commitment shown and example set by leaders, but also the changes needed in companies’ culture and working practices.

It is true that many companies are implementing gender equality measures, yet the results are not always there. In this area, it has been shown that it is not so much the number of measures as their relevance that matters in achieving progress.

Managing gender diversity: a leadership skill

Since managing diversity and inclusion has become an essential skill for managers, just like company strategy or P&L management, Mazars has joined forces with the Observatory for Gender Balance to develop a self-assessment tool for managers. This concrete, educational and practical questionnaire will allow users to quickly assess the relevance of the actions implemented in their organisation. It is now available online on our website, [Diversity and inclusion - Mazars Group](#), as well as in the ‘[Green Book](#)’, the Observatory’s guidance on gender equality.

We hope that reading these will offer managers a new perspective on an issue that is not itself new.

Cécile Kossoff, Global Diversity and Inclusion Leader Mazars Group

Facts and figures

When we look at the evolution of gender diversity in the international, European and French economic landscapes, we can be pleased with the progress made. We should recognise and celebrate it, as it clearly marks a step forward in awareness and mobilising companies and governments to address a problem affecting our economy and more than half of the world's talent.

While women represent nearly 60% of higher education graduates, they remain vastly under-represented in corporate leadership. In 2019, only 20% of board members worldwide were women.

In Europe, since 2010, the proportion of women on non-executive boards has more than doubled (from 11.9% to 30.6% in 2021). These improvements in women's representation on boards have been greatest in countries that have imposed binding quotas, including France, Italy, Germany and Belgium.

By 2021, France had become the most advanced country in this respect, with 46% of women now sitting on executive boards, driven by the Copé-Zimmerman law. By contrast, in 2010, only 12.5% sat on the boards of the SBF 120 (the French stock market index).

However, the increasing proportion of women on executive boards has only had a limited effect on the proportion of women in management positions. It was expected that the introduction of a gender quota for board members would also increase the proportion of women in executive committees. But this has not been the case: in 2019 women still represented only 17.4% of the executive committees of Stoxx Europe 600 companies, and only 22% in February 2022.

Similarly, in 2019, 4.7% of Stoxx Europe 600 companies had a female CEO and only 6.8% in 2021, rising to 7.5% in February 2022. The SBF 120 had 11 women CEOs or chairwomen of management boards in 2019, 13 in 2021 and 14 in 2022.

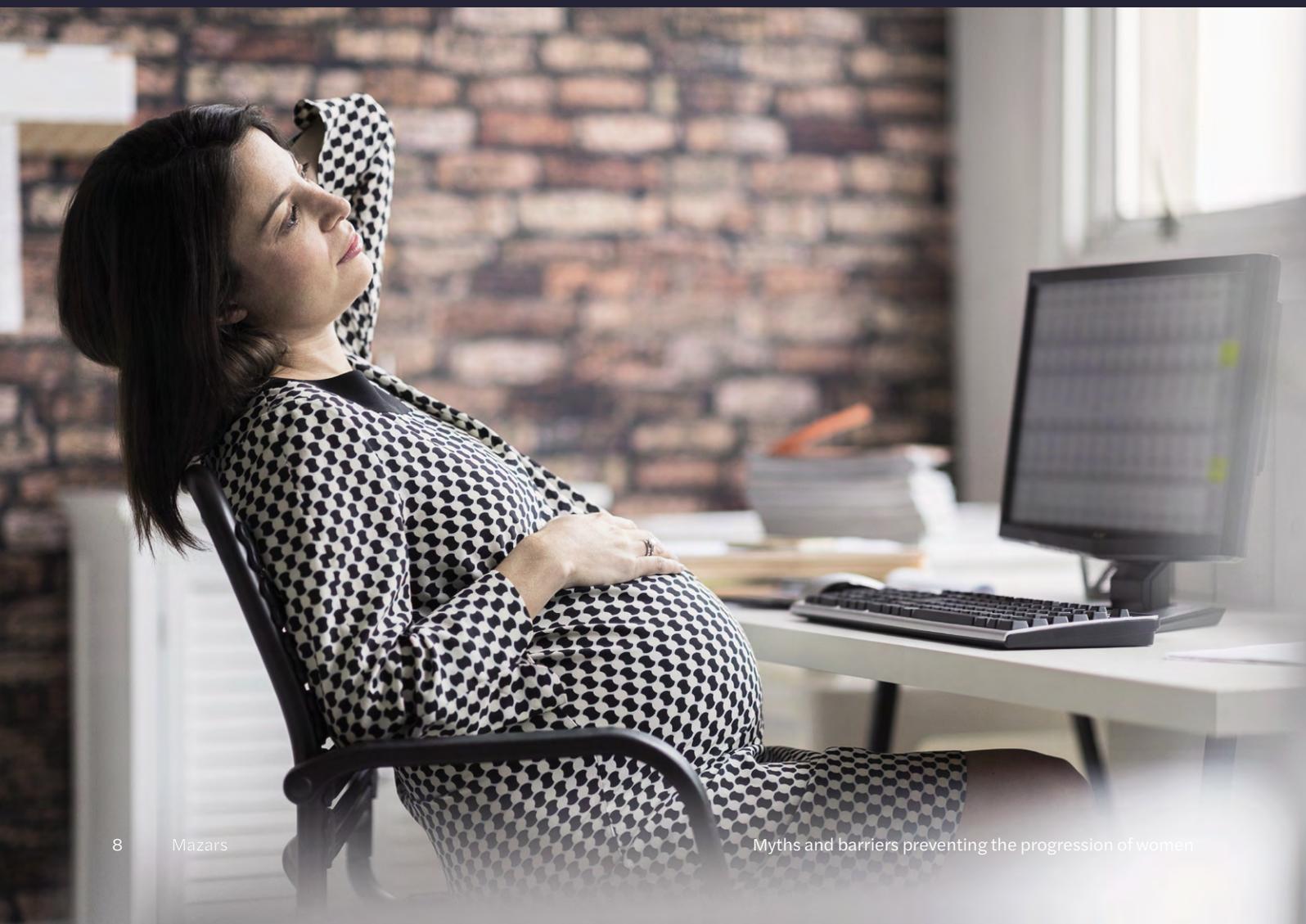
In 2021, Fortune announced a record number of 23 women CEOs heading the top 500 globally ranked companies. This number remains low despite a significant increase from 2020 (when there were only 14 women CEOs).

Sources : Ethics & Boards, 2021-2022 ; Fortune 500, 2021.



Gender myths in question

The Observatory for Gender Balance, which works to promote sustainable progress in gender balance, is made up of 15 recognised experts on the subject of gender equality, whose views and experiences regularly inform the work of this ‘think-and-do tank’. As a partner of the Observatory, Mazars wanted to gather the views of some of these experts on the stereotypes and biases that are common and persistent in companies, and on the remaining obstacles to increasing gender diversity in organisations. In this chapter, we have put together a series of interviews and articles offering multiple perspectives on gender-related myths and obstacles, hoping that these visions will fuel debate and accelerate the awareness necessary for gender diversity to progress in organisations. We would like to thank the experts from the Observatory and Mazars for their hugely inspiring contributions, which we have organised around eight major myths.



Gender myths in question

“I would like to support women but...”: perspectives from men on gender bias

Our colleague, Christin Drüke, Partner for Diversity and Inclusion at Mazars in Germany, has conducted a series of interviews with men in leadership positions in order to gather their personal views and their assessment of the common prejudices that undermine women’s careers around the globe.

This article summarises the perspectives of ten male senior leaders who work in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, which she collected by asking them to reflect on the statement, “I would like to support more women, but...”.

Most common myths and barriers highlighted by men:

Flexibility requirements and work-life balance:

- “Sometimes there is a lack of acceptance of part-time working mothers (and fathers) by clients and colleagues.” (Simon, a partner of a consulting firm)
- “There may be a reluctance to offer management positions to people if it is known that they are about to have or start caring for small children. This applies to both men and women.” (Sebastian, a banker)
- “Time availability is an important criterion and therefore part-time can be an obstacle to targeted promotion and development.” (Jérôme, a management consultant)
- “If I make a career, then my family may fall by the wayside. If I am there for my family, this is usually at the expense of my career. Both can definitely be achieved at the same time, but this requires some arrangements and successful examples of combining both remain the exception.” (Jérôme, a management consultant)

Insufficient pool and lack of female candidates in the industry or sector:

- “We don’t get enough applications from women in the financial advisory sector. This is probably due to the fact that men are very much ‘number-heavy’ and perhaps our topics are generally less appealing to women.” (Bertrand, a management consultant)
- “Some roles are not seen as relevant for women: women are often in support functions (e.g. HR) but not in operational ones. In our industry women are accepted only in certain functions (as sales or HR) but not in development or production.” (Jean, a CFO in the chemical industry)



Christin Drüke

Partner for Diversity and Inclusion
at Mazars in Germany

“30% of the men interviewed said that there should be no ‘but’ in the statement. They said they loved working with women because they are often well-organised, empathetic, determined, and listen to clients and colleagues. However, they all recognised that a number of barriers make it more difficult for women to take on leadership positions.”

Gender myths in question

“I would like to support women but...”: perspectives from men on gender bias

Social pressure and culture:

- “Men, on average, find it much easier than women to spend less energy and time on family and childcare and to focus on their career.” (Fabian, a lawyer)
- “There are still some countries where women are not accepted as business partners (e.g. in Korea).” (Jérôme, a management consultant)
- “Women are often reluctant to follow a career that competes with family. Many women put family first and inevitably their jobs and especially their careers second.” (Jérôme, a management consultant)

Confidence levels:

- “Women quite often don’t pursue career opportunities as assertively as men do. They are less willing to lead challenging projects because they think that they are not sufficiently qualified.” (François, a member of a management team in the electronics industry)

- “Men tend to see a more senior position as desirable without any further consideration.” (Fabien, a lawyer)
- “Many women shy away from advancing to leadership positions and leave the corresponding positions to their male peers virtually without a fight.” (Simon, a partner of a consulting firm)
- “Men tend to question less their ability to succeed.” (François, member of a management team in the electronics industry)

Perceptions about leadership styles:

- “Men seem to find it easier than women to be proactive in presenting themselves for a job. This is often seen positively as being assertive and having strong leadership skills.” (Fabien, a lawyer)
- “I don’t like women who seem to adopt male attributes to be more successful.” (Jean, a CFO in the chemical industry)

What companies should do as a priority – six key tips that can make a difference

1. Change the culture and attitudes by systematically including women when we appoint project leaders, without requiring more credentials.
2. Ask women twice to apply to a project or a position because they often feel less confident about their chances of success than their male counterparts.
3. Remove any link between the appraisal process and career breaks. Quite often women are no longer part of the talent pool during parental or sabbatical leave.
4. Hold leaders accountable by setting precise and ambitious goals (e.g. nominating both a man and a woman for promotion) that are linked to performance bonuses at management level.
5. Set clear directions from the top, e.g. as CEOs, show a strong commitment and ask HR to set up programmes that support parents in combining their family and their career.
6. Encourage the sponsorship and empowerment of women by the board of directors and senior management.



Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Let's change our perspective and hear from female leaders and diversity experts, who demystify eight preconceived ideas, decipher the mechanisms underlying these beliefs, and provide concrete solutions to reset the way people think.



Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 1: “Women have no ambition”

Interview

Ingrid Bianchi

Founder and CEO of Diversity Source Manager



Ingrid Bianchi, Founder and CEO of Diversity Source Manager (which uses diversity as a lever for managerial innovation), debunks the myth according to which women are less likely to rise to management positions because they are less ambitious than men. For more than 17 years, she has coached female leaders and future leaders in their career paths, advising companies on how to broaden and innovate their recruitment processes to select the best candidates while diversifying their talent pool.

A long-perpetuated stereotype

Society has long imposed the belief that women have limits in their professional lives. Women are locked into a family role – a responsibility seen as difficult to reconcile with ambition. If a woman wants to ‘climb the ladder’, it will be considered detrimental to her social role and incompatible with society’s vision of a woman’s life (let’s say it: ‘mother’). Yet for men, society allows them to be both a father and an executive. Can a woman have it all? In cultures and societies around the world, the answer is usually no. Whilst for men, ambition is seen as a quality, for women it is mired in ‘guilt’, and it is internalised as such, conflicting with the idea that ‘she belongs at home’.

Reinterpreting the meaning of ambition

The myth is so ingrained in society that women themselves wonder if they can really have a family and a career at the same time. Women have internalised that it is their duty to take care of children. That is where they are perceived as ‘legitimate’, not at the head of a company. This explains the permanent feeling of needing to ‘prove oneself’ an injustice that can lead women to suppress and diminish their true ambitions.

Finally, for a woman, there is always a negative side to ambition: if she has too much of it, she is perceived as bossy, aggressive, masculine and selfish. It is also commonly believed that a woman with too much ambition may not have a spouse or ever experience motherhood. For a woman, the notion of being ambitious and having a career at the highest level always implies a sacrifice. Women have a duty to reorganise their careers whilst men do not. Why? Most men will be fathers too one day.

In reality, the problem is not ambition; it is the interpretation of ambition, which exposes women to implicit criticisms that they are confronted with very early on in their careers. The consequence is that they very quickly reach the glass ceiling, usually after their second position.

Right from the start young female graduates face internalised guilt and justify that it is OK if they do not earn as much, or develop their careers as quickly, as their male counterparts. Yet statistics show that women and men have the same level of ambition. So, what can we do to stop the perpetuation of this myth at a time when many young (and not so young) men are claiming their responsibility as fathers and are calling for a more shared role?

An unprecedented opportunity to change mentality

The need for change is becoming increasingly evident with each passing year. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted and reinforced some of the problems and inequities surrounding family responsibilities. On a positive note, enforced remote working as a result of the pandemic has driven companies to rethink how to evaluate performance, shifting the focus away from ‘presence in the workplace’ to ‘competence in the job’. The crisis has removed the link between presence and performance: it is possible to change the way we work and still get the results we want.

The role of companies

It is now up to companies to seize the opportunities that have emerged from these developments and change from the inside.

Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 1: “Women have no ambition”

Gender diversity is a matter of managerial innovation. It is important to identify where the glass ceiling is in a company and then work to break it. The issue lies in the performance model; it is about creating an environment that recognises a diversity of styles and points of view. We need to seek out women who have not applied for positions they are capable of filling and make appraisal teams and managers aware of how women function differently. We need to stop expecting more proof from women: no one is born a CEO – you become one!

“Gender diversity is a matter of managerial innovation.”

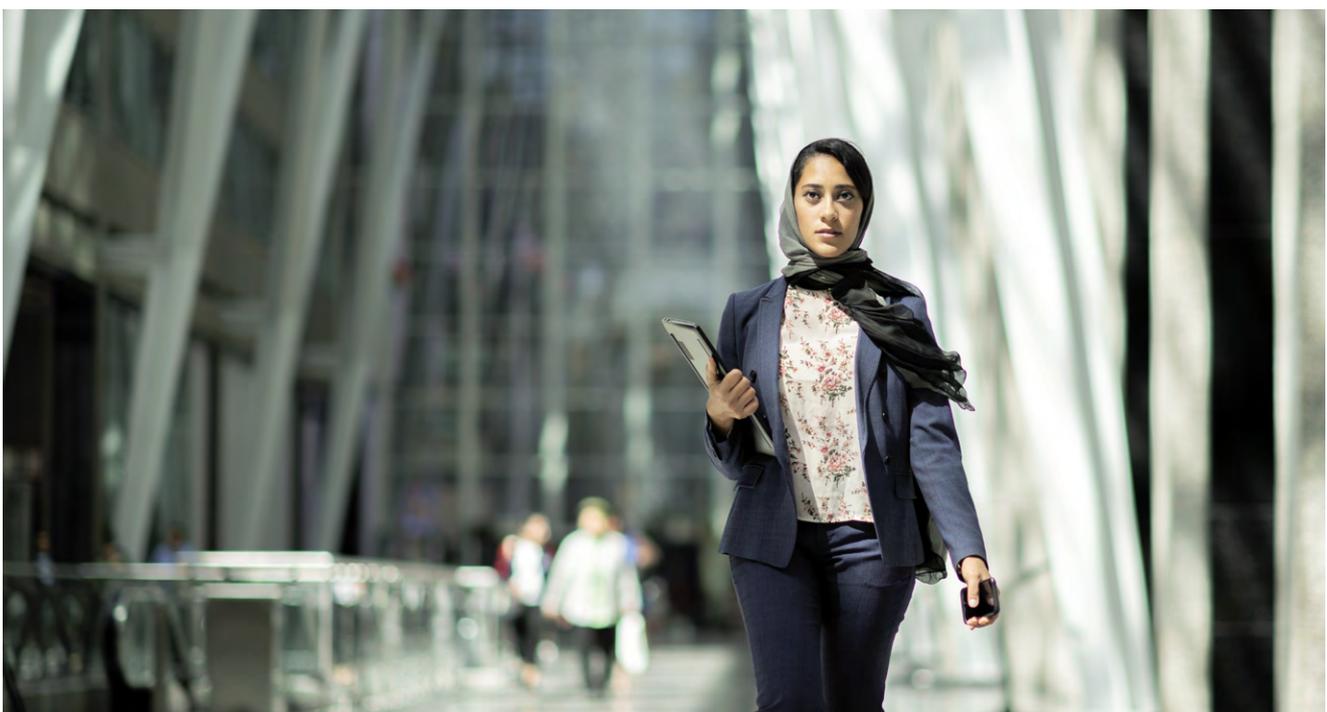
Networking and mentoring are crucial elements of the process – they are tools for cultural transformation. But we need to go further: we need sponsors as well as mentors, and we need to put in place innovative mechanisms to help women internalise their legitimacy and their ability to

“No one is born a CEO – you become one!”

succeed; and to ensure that they don’t self-sabotage or put more pressure on themselves than necessary in order to succeed in executive positions. We must prevent them from exhausting themselves in attempting to prove their competence and encourage them to surround themselves with expert teams. Above all, we must reinvent ambition and success in a balanced model which the company is happy to promote.

A wish for the future...

We need to collectively think about the leadership of tomorrow and the types of leaders we want at the top of our organisations. Women represent 60% of graduate talent, it is unacceptable to fail to support women recruited in junior roles who wish to take up management positions. Managerial innovation is the key to progress. It is time to change our mindset and our outlook, to integrate styles that differ from the outdated, dominant ones, and look for new ways of achieving performance.



Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 2: “Motherhood is not compatible with a leadership position”

Interview

Aurélie Leblanc

HR Manager for Senior Executives and Managers
Crédit Mutuel Arkéa Group



Aurélie Leblanc is the HR Manager for Senior Executives and Managers at Crédit Mutuel Arkéa Group. She previously held the role of Manager for Diversity and quality of work life. In this role, she conducted a study within the group to identify the obstacles that block internal mobility, particularly for women. The survey identified six main obstacles to women’s progress: maternity, prejudice (sexism and bias), insufficient networking, ‘gendered’ jobs, salary gaps and self-censorship. Particular attention was paid to motherhood and the myth that women cannot have a family and hold management positions at the same time.

Motherhood and self-censorship: how our vision of performance holds women back

Motherhood, along with the phenomenon of self-censorship, has often hindered the career progress of many women, and continues to do so. From the very start, there’s this idea that women cannot have a family and hold management positions. For a long time, this notion has not only been accepted by society, but it has also been internalised by women themselves.

Why is this belief so ingrained in society? Like many cultural norms, shifting this view requires systemic change and a new approach to a whole series of similar preconceptions. Here, it is essentially a matter of rethinking how we view productivity and how we define performance.

Very often, women who are considering or are being considered for management roles doubt themselves. They doubt their ability to combine responsibility to a team or a profit and loss statement with that of a young family, wondering how to manage both at the same time and questioning whether they can succeed without sacrificing one or the other. These questions are less common among men. In addition, when women look around the office environment, they see very few other women with children in leadership positions. Without role models, it is difficult to break the cycle of self-censorship. It’s not motherhood itself that is the problem – it’s how it fits into our current view of productivity and the way we think about performance.

Rethinking productivity, and embracing the individual as a whole and in his or her uniqueness

The link between productivity and motherhood remains a major issue for two reasons: first, it stigmatises women, who on average are much more likely than men to take on domestic work; and second, it reinforces a view of performance that is solely financial in nature or a simple bookkeeping exercise. There are an infinite number of factors that could influence an employee’s productivity: pointing to maternity leave as the main obstacle is a discriminatory practice because it directly targets women.

“There are an infinite number of factors that could influence an employee’s productivity: pointing to maternity leave as the main obstacle is a discriminatory practice because it directly targets women.”

Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 2: “Motherhood is not compatible with a leadership position”

It is essential to rethink managerial culture and implement more balanced leadership models. It has been proven that a good work-life balance benefits all: an employee who is happier in life is more productive at work. The approach of management must therefore evolve to consider the uniqueness of each individual, allowing for each person, whatever their constraints or choices, to contribute and be recognised for their performance. It is in fact a question of destigmatising maternity leave by instead recognising the specific needs of each individual.

“With regards to maternity, we need to demystify the idea that it is an added complication for the team.”

Building a more inclusive workplace: training managers

Building a more inclusive workplace requires both cultural and structural change. Companies must empower women (as well as men) to achieve their personal and professional goals, and this requires proper training for managers. The Crédit Mutuel Arkéa group has created a network of ambassadors, as well as training programmes for managers on gender diversity, maternity, self-censorship and sexism.

With regards to maternity, we need to demystify the idea that it is an added complication for the team, and instead welcome the news and consider it as a normal life event that can be well managed, using the right approach, the right organisation and the right tools. Managers learn not only to better manage the logistics around the absence, but also to communicate with compassion and to detect and overcome self-censorship. Women tend to feel guilty about leaving their teams for an extended period of time, so managers have an important role to play in reassuring them and listening to their concerns. In our group, regular meetings are held with women before and after

their maternity leave, and managers consciously work to mitigate any feelings of guilt.

Reframing motherhood so that it is no longer viewed as problematic

Culture and law are evolving, and the increasing uptake of paternity leave will reduce the stigma of maternity leave. To embrace this, Crédit Mutuel Arkéa has launched an awareness campaign around the ‘second parent’ to highlight the role of the father, through a series of humorous videos that normalise parental leave and the sharing of family responsibility.

Society has built a solid foundation for cultural change and it is time for companies to catch up. Implementing parental leave balances the way men and women are perceived, including in the hiring process. A young woman will have to worry less about discrimination in recruitment related to motherhood if paternity leave becomes the norm.

Trusting and managing unique talents

To move forward, women can and must have confidence in their abilities and fight against fears to allow themselves to go where they want. Companies, for their part, must improve the working environment to create an inclusive culture that allows all people with talents to express their uniqueness. Diversity is a source for strong performance – it must be acknowledged, welcomed and nurtured.

“A young woman will have to worry less about discrimination in recruitment related to motherhood if paternity leave becomes the norm.”

“Women can and must have confidence in their abilities and fight against fears to allow themselves to go where they want.”



Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 3: “The invisible woman” or “We can’t find competent female candidates in the talent pool”

Interview

Armelle Carminati-Rabasse

President of the Social & Managerial Innovation Commission of MEDEF, France’s leading employer organisation and business network



Armelle Carminati-Rabasse is the President of the Social & Managerial Innovation Commission of MEDEF, France’s leading employer organisation and business network. She is also the founder and CEO of Axites-Invest, a Venture Capital fund intended to accelerate the impact of humanist entrepreneurs, and she sits at the French High Council for Professional Equality. With more than 35 years of managerial experience on five continents, she has had significant exposure to innovation and the war for talent, as an engineer, as Managing Director of Retail and then Global Human Capital at Accenture, and as a member of the Executive Board of the Unibail-Rodamco Group.

Hidden in plain sight

Women represent half of the population, and even 55% of university graduates in France, yet they remain ‘invisible’ in positions of management, be it in companies or in various sectors of society. At first glance, they may seem just as visible as men, as the rare appointments to prestigious positions tend to make a lot of noise (as was the case when the CAC 40¹ went from one to three female CEOs, which was publicised in two separate announcements at the beginning of 2022); but in reality, they are often ‘hidden in plain sight’. In many fields, standards are defined in relation to male norms, sometimes dangerously omitting women. This is the case, for example, with seatbelt safety standards, which use only male crash-test dummies; and it is also common in medical research where drugs are predominantly tested on male animals. In fact, this biased conception extends to positions of power, where we intuitively imagine the prototype of the ‘inspirational leader’ as a heroic figure, with ‘the shoulders for the job’ and a ‘booming voice’, hence associating a male figure with the promise of effective leadership.

This monolithic idea of performance is viewed through a faulty lens that ultimately leads to blindness: we no longer see women as potential candidates because the idea doesn’t cross our minds, nor do we seek them out where they are. We are so used to looking in the same pools that we don’t even realise the opportunities we are missing – invisibility is so deeply ingrained that we are blind to it. Recruiters, employers and managers

can miss half of the potential talent albeit in good faith. Even those who, due to labour shortages or necessity, previously recruited someone with an atypical profile – or, even better, the ‘historical’ prototype – fail to open their recruitment approach in the long-term, convinced a happy coincidence will solve the problem of recruitment. The implication of this observation is simple: finding women to fill the roles from which they are absent requires a deliberate effort – achieving diversity is worth the extra mile!

Viewing work through a different lens

This is why it is important to have the right tools when recruiting, and in promoting and supporting change. Achieving gender diversity at all levels requires dedication, a strategy, evaluation and the willingness to achieve results without compromising or giving up. It would be a mistake to think that this is a ‘soft’ subject because it is linked to human matter. In fact, it is a skill that requires working on human perception (motivations, cognitive biases, neuroscience, leadership skills), and also on the processes that will allow for real cultural change.

“Finding women to fill the roles from which they are absent requires a deliberate effort – achieving diversity is worth the extra mile!”

1. A benchmark French stock market index

Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 3: “The invisible woman” or “We can’t find competent female candidates in the talent pool”

The first step in combating the idea of the ‘invisible woman’ is to name the problem, systematically and frequently, so that this invisibility is acknowledged. Beyond objective and factual data, we must learn to paint a picture that invites collective action and goes beyond observations and dismay at what we see. For example, a speech that focuses on how women earn 25% less than men will be both guilt-inducing and victimising, whereas reframing the message to state that men earn 33% more than women highlights an inequity that must be addressed collectively. Once awareness is established, we must work on correcting our approach and changing our perspective to find the best potential candidates.

Expanding the pool of talent

Questioning biases embedded in specific terminology can help broaden the search for talent. For example, the word ‘engineer’ may suggest a direct link to the so-called ‘hard’ sciences, but if we break down the qualities sought in the profiles of engineers, a variety of qualities emerge, e.g. diligence, curiosity, analytical abilities, problem-solving.

Breaking down the expectations behind these blended phrases allows us to broaden the search for talent without being locked into restrictive terminology, meaning we can look for women in fields that suit this type of profile. The ‘must-have’ pathways to access certain industries create a specific barrier to the upward mobility of women, given that in some countries such as France, young women represent only 28% of engineering trainees. By broadening the research fields on the basis of desired competencies and skills, a more varied pool of candidates can be explored.

“We must work on correcting our approach and changing our perspective to find the best potential candidates.”



Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 3: “The invisible woman” or “We can’t find competent female candidates in the talent pool”

The choice of words will also be critical to promoting change. For example, when the École Nationale Supérieure en Génie des Systèmes et de l’Innovation (ENSGSI) in Nancy changed its name by replacing the ‘I’ that stood for ‘industrial’ with ‘I’ for ‘innovation’, applications from women poured in. At the same time, the school set a quota and quickly reached 46% of female applicants, while maintaining an objective and qualitative selection process where only the best candidates were admitted. It is possible to reconcile quotas and meritocracy by adjusting the tools and context to create a truly level playing field.

Eliminating unnecessary barriers

Creating a level playing field requires questioning the conditions on the field. Too often, women are blocked by unnecessary barriers that have little to do with skills issues. For example, in 2019 an astronaut was unable to complete her mission in space because there simply was no space suit designed to fit her body shape. Similarly, École 42² has increased its attractiveness to coders and inclusion of girls by simply equipping more showers with hair dryers to better accommodate candidates during the recruitment process.

All of these inclusive (and in no way anecdotal) details of the ‘employee journey’ need to be systematically revisited if we are to overcome the challenge of gender.

“It is possible to reconcile quotas and meritocracy by adjusting the tools and context to create a truly level playing field.”

Rethinking ‘proof of performance’

It is also a matter of rethinking the criteria for determining excellence in performance. The notion of performance has long been associated with attributes such as always being available, and competitiveness, with a premium placed on working long hours and being demonstrably visible. If the same criteria are always used to recruit, evaluate and promote tomorrow’s leaders, people with the same profiles will always be recruited, even though

they may not be well adapted to tomorrow’s world or today’s crises. To avoid cloning, we must consider other attributes, such as the ability to manage uncertainty and to handle doubt, which can be an asset when the stereotype of blind infallibility shows its limits; or recognising that good leaders may be the ones who know how to listen and remain humble, whether they are a man or woman. The Covid-19 crisis has prompted us to rethink leadership: today the leader is someone who recognises the possibility of error and uncertainty and who can lead their troops through the fog.

Moreover, we can no longer continue to ask women to ‘prove their performance’ in advance – a recruitment concept that keeps them out of management positions through self-censorship. How can you prove to yourself that you can play if you’ve never been allowed on the field? It’s time to open up the game and let more women participate fully through a well-sponsored quota policy, rather than waiting to recruit female executives only when the argument for recruitment is beyond dispute.

Convincing women

Trying too hard to justify the recruitment of women to key positions can also have an adverse effect: women tend to over promise to prove their legitimacy and ‘over-deliver’, with the frequent risk of burning out because they want to do too much, too fast. It is essential to reassure female candidates that they are worthy of management positions: enlightened leaders must take the (rather unusual) time to ‘sell’ promotions and convince women that they will succeed, that they will not be left alone at the front and that the offer made to them is a conscious, considered and calmly taken decision. If we want to hire different profiles than the usual suspects, we need to use different approaches!

A wish for the future...

We need to create environments where individuals, whether men or women, feel that they can come as they are and bring their unique qualities, and therefore their strengths in full. I wish more men would understand that achieving equality for women will bring more freedom for men: if women are allowed to sit at the same table, men will feel more freedom to come as they are, thus broadening everyone’s opportunities to succeed.

2. Top renown coding school in Paris, created in 2013

“Good leaders may be the ones who know how to listen and remain humble, whether they are a man or woman.”



Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 4: “Women are risk averse”

Expert insight

Hortense de Roux

Lawyer specialising in business litigation, Partner at Ashurst LLP and President of Grandes Écoles au Féminin (GEF)



Hortense de Roux is a lawyer specialising in business litigation. She is a Partner at Ashurst LLP and President of Grandes Écoles au Féminin (GEF), an association dedicated to the place of women in the professional sphere. GEF was created in 2002 and brings together former graduates of the Ecole Polytechnique, Centrale, Mines, Ponts, Essec, ESCP, HEC, Sciences Po, INSEAD and ENA. GEF’s work is based on three main areas: (i) background studies, including their 8th study, “Gender diversity: a strategic asset in the face of risks for organisations?”, published in 2022, (ii) meetings with men and women who count and (iii) a hackathon weekend dedicated to women entrepreneurs.

A deeply rooted stereotype despite an opposing reality

We conducted our eighth GEF study on gender stereotypes and the results overwhelmingly show that risk-taking does not depend on gender: only 3% of respondents consider that gender influences risk-taking. In other words, women and men are clearly taking the same risks.

So why is there a belief that women are more cautious and less prepared to go against the flow than men? Unquestionably because the relationship to risk depends on personality, education and culture. However, gender is also shaped by education and culture.

Thus, there are as many relationships to risk as there are people and paths. Each individual learns the two main dimensions of risk, which are perception and appetite for risk, in a way that is personal and not determined by gender.

While risk behaviour cannot be pigeonholed by gender, social constructs are so deeply rooted that they become second nature – a woman may be risk averse because it is a learned behaviour. This conditioning reflects the failure of society to change these social constructs. Men and women agree that taking risks requires, above all, self-confidence, responsibility and courage. But while men prioritise responsibility, women consider courage to be most important. This reflects their differing relationship to failure: men seem to be freer with regard to the consequences of the risks they take, whereas women think that they must arm themselves with courage in order to face the

potential for failure, which would serve as punishment for the risk taken. Thus, we could describe two types of relationships to risk: one based on conquest, the other on caution.

Of course, not all women or men will have the same fear of risk, not because they are women or men, but because of their own individual paths. Gender is not experienced in the same way by all; rather it has a part to play, in the same way that education, and social and cultural background do.

Why is this stereotype a barrier?

The relationship with risk is unclear and this ambiguity is closely linked to the impermanent nature of risk. Ultimately, there is always the potential for risk in any situation and depending on the outcome of the situation, the risk will either materialise, resulting in failure, or it won’t, resulting in success.

Risk is at the heart of how well organisations perform. Indeed, it is vital for their development. Therefore, having this stereotypical view of the relationship to risk constricts men and women and limits the potential for risk that is necessary to ensure the success of the company.

How to get out of this bind?

When organisations face risk, it is clear that gender diversity is an asset, as it has a positive impact, in particular on innovation and cooperation, which are two levers for growth. As each person has a different relationship with risk, gender diversity allows these different relationships to become reconciled and intertwined.

Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 4: “Women are risk averse”

Thus, difference is not a problem but an asset, provided that there is no social or cultural asymmetry between the two. Undoubtedly, the ‘all-conquering’ approach to risk, which is associated with the men, must not be valued in a way that is detrimental to the more ‘cautious’ approach often associated with women.

To overcome this barrier, it is necessary to experiment with a real and sustainable mix of approaches and not just an equal balance. Two people who share the same academic and professional background will certainly share a similar relationship to risk, regardless of their gender. Therefore, the question of gender must be transcended by treating men and women equally so that gender is no longer an issue. To allow for the expression of individual qualities and skills, gender must take second place. However, isolating a woman or man in a meeting where the majority of individuals are of the opposite gender almost inevitably makes that individual a prisoner of her or his gender and the associated stereotypes.

“To allow for the expression of individual qualities and skills, gender must take second place.”

“It will be difficult for an organisation to improve its risk management if it does not address the corresponding hidden barrier, namely the fear of failure.”

To reap the benefits of gender diversity, organisations must achieve true diversity, where no male or female participant feels like a minority because of his or her gender. It is on this basis that individuals can free themselves from stereotypes and display their individual and collective talents.

Finally, it will be difficult for an organisation to improve its risk management if it does not address the corresponding hidden barrier, namely the fear of failure. The managerial capacity to build trust and allow for mistakes to be made within teams is a decisive factor in encouraging sharing and innovation.



Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 5: “Part-time work is not compatible with leadership roles”

Expert insight

Virginie Chauvin

Partner at Mazars in France and a member of the Executive Committee



Virginie Chauvin is a Partner at Mazars in France and a member of the Executive Committee. She has spent her entire career at Mazars, where she chose to work part-time for 15 years to spend more time with her three children. When they grew up, she came back full-time and was appointed a leader of the banking division, which she developed for four years before joining the Mazars Executive Committee. She is now responsible for the Audit and ESG business lines.

“How can you offer responsibilities to someone who does not have the priority of working one hundred percent of his or her time?”

The choice to work part-time is often equated with a disengagement from the company, a demonstration that work is not the priority. But does an individual who wishes to have a slightly different work-life balance become less relevant, less efficient or less effective? Office culture has long shaped how individual performance was assessed, because the usual ways of working would be thrown into disarray by individuals who asked for a slightly different work-life balance, sowing doubts about the real motivation to participate in corporate life.

This view is particularly problematic for women’s careers and upward mobility in the professional sphere, as women are considered in many societies to be primarily responsible for raising children and assume two to five times more family tasks than men, depending on the region of the world. To avoid mothers being penalised in their careers by parenthood while fathers advance in theirs, we must question the legitimacy of the link between working time and performance.

Does working part-time imply the end of professional development?

Too often we see individuals who are not offered promotion because of their part-time work. It is assumed that time is the primary indicator of motivation and that performance and time are intimately correlated.

In this scenario, we no longer look at the performance of part-timers, but instead focus on their limited availability to work, which is considered an ‘anomaly’ of the system.

This mental association triggers a vicious cycle that acts as a brake on performance, with the individuals placing themselves on the edges of the system: they become less present in the company and participate less in the daily life of the business and social interactions with colleagues, instead focusing on executing tasks that have been entrusted to them. They are less involved in the day-to-day discussions that determine the future of the company, they are seen less, and they are more easily forgotten when it comes to supporting career development.

What if part-time work was a source of wealth for the company?

Let’s look at it from a different angle: when we interview part-time workers, they often feel so indebted to this ‘privileged’ treatment that not only do they want to show that they have not lost their professional commitment, but they also try to be very efficient. Indeed, is it really possible for a system where only working long hours equates to a satisfactory result to be efficient and productive? The choice of part-time work is often dictated by personal aspirations in the search for an overall work-life balance, in which a person’s professional life is one component, but not the most important.

Individuals who work part-time remain invested in their company but simply wish to clarify the rules of the game regarding their availability.

Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 5: “Part-time work is not compatible with leadership roles”

By rejecting classic patterns of behaviour and the conventional definition of ‘the successful leader’, this different way of seeing the world of work can actually be an asset by bringing in different points of view, from people who diversify their sources of fulfillment and are more detached from the world of work because they spend a little less time in the workplace yet, without being absent from it. This is a form of diversity, and we know that diversity contributes to performance.

Moreover, this choice is rarely ‘forever’, as it often corresponds to a stage in a person’s life, and this detour from the conventional career path can be regenerating: when individuals who worked part-time make the choice to return to full-time for reasons that are not simply financial, they can be fully relied on to give their best and participate enthusiastically in the company’s development. They are grateful to have been able to benefit from this period of a small change in their working lives and are ready to commit themselves with renewed energy.

“The culture of face-to-face meetings that we have known for so long is starting to fade away.”

Situations are never permanent – careers are long, and for a company it is important to be able to identify the best potential over time. The assessment of people’s talents must be made on objective grounds and not rooted in misconceptions about the relationship between performance and working time.

Might the Covid-19 pandemic have contributed to a change in mentality?

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that we are able to continue to work and build the future of business by not all being in the same place at the same time.

Even if we don’t want to reduce our working life to a virtual world through the screen, the culture of face-to-face meetings that we have known for so long is starting to fade away.

The transition from a culture of presence to a culture of results has made it possible to better understand the real value delivered by each person, regardless of the time worked, and has enabled us to think about professional development primarily according to observed individual performance and skills of each person.

Encouraging different career paths by finding solutions tailored to each life style helps to demonstrate that it is possible to progress along different paths. Continuing to promote part-time professionals and supporting a return to full-time work by giving the employee increased responsibilities can help people understand that career paths are not set in stone and that everyone can forge their own path. By doing so, the company shows its support for different styles and paths and creates new types of leadership models, which is conducive to accelerating diversity.

A career is not a sprint, it’s a marathon

Rethinking the notion of career is of fundamental importance and provides a clear foundation on which to build. As in a marathon, it is not a matter of racing ahead at full speed all the time, but rather a journey in which individuals get to know themselves and to manage their careers over time. Listening to our needs is what makes us strong, and if the need is a period of part-time work, it is important that companies manage performance and talent development by integrating part-time work into career paths and officially considering it as a source of value and it is beneficial for everyone.

Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myths 6 and 7: “Gender inequalities are mainly found at the top of the corporate ladder” and “There are men’s jobs”

Interview

Anne-Sophie Nomblot

President of the SNCF Gender Diversity Network



Anne-Sophie Nomblot, President of the SNCF Gender Diversity Network, has been a passionate member and ambassador of the group’s gender diversity network for several years. Through her experience at the SNCF, she tackles two common myths: that the glass ceiling is only found at the top of the ladder, and the notion that there are jobs that only men can do.

Discrimination starts on the ground

Very often, the debate on gender equality in companies focuses on managerial functions and the difficulty women have in gaining management positions. In reality, inequalities and difficulties exist well before. There is not only a glass ceiling, but multiple barriers that make women’s work more complicated and hinders their full participation and advancement. To address the barriers women face, we must demystify the idea that gender diversity is a problem only at the managerial level.

“We must demystify the idea that gender diversity is a problem only at the managerial level.”

There are a myriad of obstacles within the day-to-day operations, and leaders who want change need to be aware of the ‘details’ in which inequalities are often hidden. For example, one might think that gender diversity is an issue that can be addressed simply by changing hiring practices. However, by taking a closer look at ‘the situation on the ground’, SNCF has discovered unexpected obstacles that women daily face in their working lives. Discrimination is sometimes found in the most trivial details, such as the lack of women’s changing rooms in railway stations, or absence

of mixed gender toilets. As we took a closer look, we noticed, for example, that the safety clothing needed on site was much too large for women in charge of train maintenance, as it was designed for a male body shape. As a result, women had to resort to altering the clothing at home or wearing a belt to try to secure their tools.

These problems may seem insignificant to some, but it is important that they are taken seriously. These are real-world experiences that may slip under a manager’s radar and yet they can pose safety concerns and make a job – and therefore career success – more difficult for women.

We can see that inequalities appear at levels far removed from management functions. If we want to encourage the development of gender diversity at the top of the ladder, it is essential to understand what is happening at each rung below.

Jobs for men?

Many of these inequalities are also widespread in environments that have been ‘set’ for men, and while employee profiles are diversifying, practices are not changing. Some jobs, such as train conductors, have historically been seen as men’s jobs. However, today, there is no reason why women cannot drive trains as easily as men can: the work no longer requires the physical strength that it did when trains ran on coal, and working hours are not necessarily a problem for women – after all, ticket inspectors are as likely to be women as they are men. Although everything was initially designed with men in mind, it is time to demystify certain gendered occupations and to invite more women into them, which will allow

Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myths 6 and 7: “Gender inequalities are mainly found at the top of the corporate ladder” and “There are men’s jobs”

“Discrimination is sometimes found in the most trivial details.”

practices to evolve. It is important that women allow themselves to pursue jobs perceived as masculine, including jobs in the digital economy and environmental sectors, as well as jobs that are more broadly technical, because these are the jobs of the future.

Dig into the details of discrimination using the right tools

In order to better fight against discrimination at the level of details, the SNCF Group has developed an internal survey involving all levels of the company. Each business unit within the group received a diagnostic questionnaire to assess its specific problems and needs when it comes to gender issues. In doing so, we were able to understand our issues in a very concrete way. This tool was divided into two parts: a questionnaire for the business units themselves to understand what was already being done, and another given to its male and female employees. By allowing each unit within the company to compare itself with similar units, they were able to set up their own action plans in consultation with employees. Among other steps, they then developed workshops to combat sexism, enhanced facilities in women’s changing rooms, and shared information on the terms and conditions of paternity leave. Throughout the implementation of the action plans, the units set out their priorities and involved all staff.

A holistic approach: sharing best practices for the benefit of the entire organisation

The survey results not only allowed each entity to identify where problems resided, but it also gave the group an opportunity to work with each person on their unique situation and suggest ways this could be improved.

A holistic approach helps identify problems that may be systemic and offers ways of addressing them across the organisation. For example, in

identifying an issue at one location, the group can ask other facilities if they had properly interviewed women returning from maternity leave. This type of exchange brings to light ideas that may not have been considered before. In general, it is very useful to maintain an open dialogue between all parties to share best practices.

Involving all levels of the organisation

Encouraging the involvement of everyone in the organisation accelerates gender diversity and ensures that no group of people within the organisation is forgotten or ignored. These types of widespread initiatives create an environment where everyone has a voice and help establish a level of trust in sharing experiences and raising real issues and concerns.

Some advice...

It is essential to tackle gender issues across the board by interviewing women and men at all levels of the organisation. This approach has enabled us to discover issues that we were not aware of and that our group is now able to resolve the right way, and in all group entities. Our approach also presented the opportunity to talk about gender diversity within our group at all levels and address questions such as why gender diversity is important, what preconceived ideas there are, where change needs to start, etc. In doing so, we were able to engage all employees with this issue, which is a top priority for the SNCF Group.

Gender myths in question

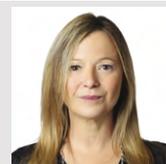
Eight myths busted

Myth 8: “Quotas are not meritocratic, are unfair to men, and risk pushing incompetent women into key positions”

Expert insight

Cécile Kossoff

Global Diversity and Inclusion Leader of Mazars Group



Cécile Kossoff is the Global Diversity and Inclusion Leader of Mazars Group, where she also holds the position of Group Chief Brand, Marketing and Communications Officer. She joined Mazars in July 2018, after 12 years at McKinsey & Company, where she served as Director of Marketing and Communications, first in France and then worldwide. During her 12 years at McKinsey, Cécile co-directed and co-wrote the “Women Matter” series of research, which established the link between gender diversity and business performance and developed a comprehensive approach to the measures needed to implement and achieve change.

I started working on diversity issues in 2007, and I remember the fierce debates surrounding the drafting of the Copé-Zimmerman law, which, for the first time, imposed quotas for women in administrative and supervisory boards. I remember my difficulty in forming an opinion on this subject. Nobody likes quotas because we like freedom, and we want to believe that good intentions will be enough to create the changes that our world requires; or hold onto a fear of compromising quality to box-ticking of quantitative targets. But let’s be clear: with regards to gender balance in top management, the business case, calls for change and the numerous initiatives that companies have put in place are not enough to move things forward in a significant way. Quotas imposed by the Copé-Zimmerman law have produced results in boards. Likewise, we see that large companies that have set binding objectives that impact senior managers’ remuneration have achieved more visible and faster results than others. Quotas, like any target-based mechanism tied to bonuses or penalties, have a virtue: that of forcing individuals and organisations to take action to achieve a non-negotiable goal.

When it comes to gender balance, the idea of quotas continues to cause upset, because it is associated with a perverse outcome where merit has no place, with the risk of ‘incompetent women’ being appointed to management positions. This legitimate fear does not account for the temporary nature of any goal or quota.

This is not about promoting unprepared or incompetent candidates to an executive role overnight; rather, this journey is about improving the talent pool to expand the choice over several years while continuing to recruit on a competence basis. We must also be careful about how we approach some highly-technical industries where women are badly under-represented. Often the lack of diversity in these talent pools can be found at the source: in education.

The end or the beginning of meritocracy?

A quota is nothing more and nothing less than a target accompanied by an obligation to succeed or face penalties. Clear goals have always been an effective way to set the expectation, move the company in the right direction, monitor progress and adjust plans to deliver the results. Believing that introducing female quotas for promotions will play against the principle of meritocracy suggests that quotas are unfair to men.

“Are we confident that the current system is fair to women, that they operate on a level playing field?”

Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 8: “Quotas are not meritocratic and unfair to men, and risk pushing incompetent women into key positions”

But are we confident that the current system is fair to women and that they operate on a level playing field? Or that the appointment of an overwhelming majority of men to executive positions is done on an objective basis and on merit alone? Are women struggling to reach management positions today because they do not have the skills or is there a malfunction in the development mechanism preventing 60% of the world’s graduates from rising to top executive roles?

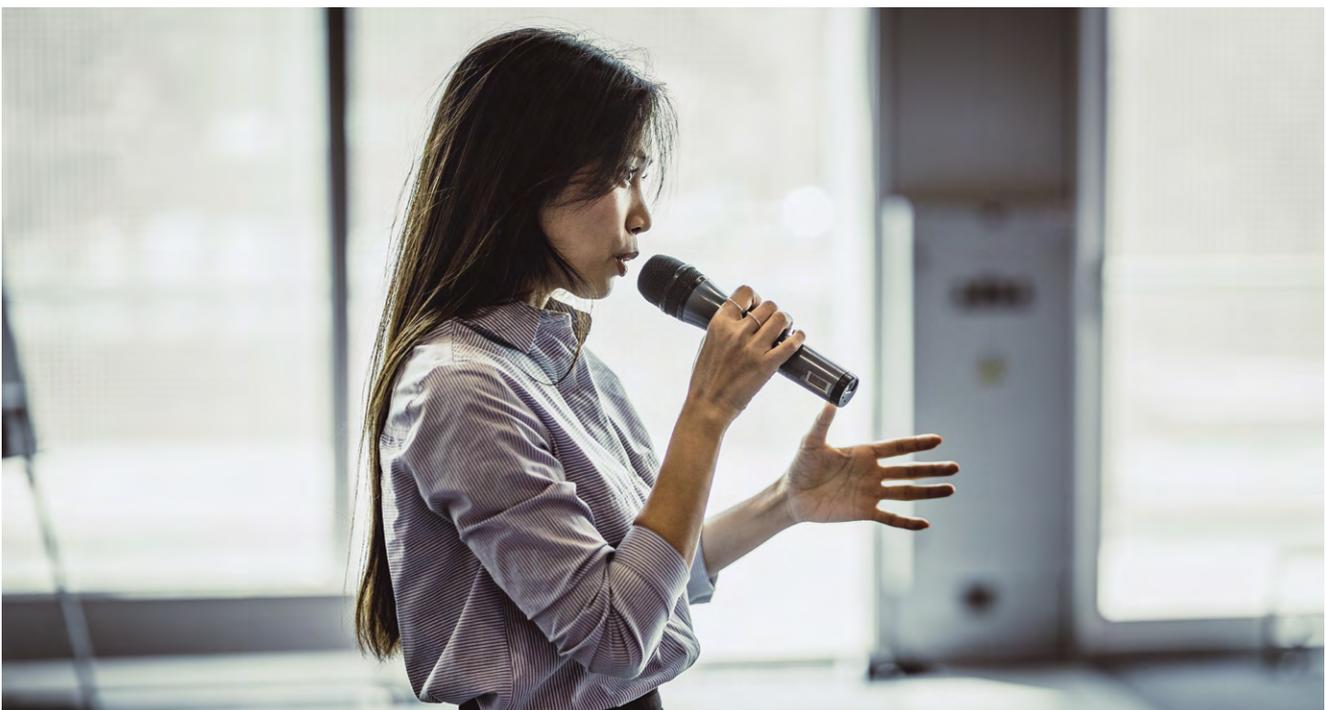
An unequal playing field

Those who blame quotas for creating injustice tend to deny the inequalities and unfairness of the current system and consider that women and men are on an equal field. But we know that men do not face the same, multiple hurdles that women face, related to motherhood, culture and unconscious biases. Setting gender quotas is not about giving more fuel for women to run faster than men, but rather removing the extra weight from their shoes so that the race eventually gets fair.

Are men, who currently hold the majority of management positions in companies, really better leaders than women or do they simply outnumber them in the upper pool of candidates because female talent have opted out or were not well and fairly supported?

“Setting gender quotas is not about giving more fuel for women to run faster than men, but rather removing the extra weight from their shoes so that the race eventually gets fair.”

Do the doors of executive committees open more to men because they are better suited to meet the needs of the company or because it is simpler, less risky or more in line with common expectations? Or do they open more to men because it takes more effort to find women in the industry or at this level of the pyramid? If the current mechanisms for promotion were based on merit and fairness, then why do we struggle so much to support women even though they are graduating in greater numbers? Why, when the number of women at the bottom of the corporate pyramid is so vast, are we unable to raise them up to senior management positions within our companies?



Gender myths in question

Eight myths busted

Myth 8: “Quotas are not meritocratic, are unfair to men, and risk pushing incompetent women into key positions”

Traditional career paths are further out of reach for women because mothers often carry a double responsibility towards both family and the workplace, when fathers are not forced to choose between their career and their children in the same way. The reason for this is that the business world was designed to meet the lifestyles and needs of some, and as a result, the model tends to exclude others. Any talent that doesn't fit into long-established practices will have a much harder time developing and succeeding. Binding targets have proven themselves, not at the expense of meritocracy but by forcing companies to move the lines of the dominant model – to rethink their culture and processes, using more neutral, objective and effective mechanisms for talent management and promotion, and making advancement possible for all talents, not just those that fit into the existing mould.

“The quota is in no way an end in itself: it is the kick-starter to a more efficient and fairer talent management and promotion policy.”

Making quotas an opportunity to improve talent management

The condition for achieving this virtuous circle is to use quotas in a thoughtful and smart way. We often hear women say, “I don't want to be regarded as a diversity quota – I want to be chosen for my competencies, and not just because of the quota.” Yet, quotas and competencies are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, when implemented well, a quota can be a powerful means to mobilise a company towards change and improvement, objectivise the decision-making processes and implement best practices that guarantee a fair playing field. One must not misunderstand the function of a quota: having a binding objective is not the end game, it just sets the expectation for the future. But then, everything has to be done to reach this goal. The quota or objective must always be set with a realistic time frame and relevant action plan for achieving results. Quotas alone can be counterproductive and must therefore be supported by awareness-building and education programmes addressing the gender gap and creating culture change. Quotas are not meant to blindly propel unprepared talent into key positions; rather they simply initiate a dynamic review of HR processes and policies to identify what is not working in the corporate talent elevator. Well received and well supported, the quota proves to be a fantastic opportunity to look at the needs, constraints and motivations of the talent pool, and adjust the environment to allow a greater range of profiles and skills to grow, flourish and succeed. The quota is in no way an end in itself: it is the kick-starter to a more efficient and fairer talent management and promotion policy.



Gender myths in question

Can artificial intelligence free decisions from unconscious bias?



Cristina Lunghi
Doctor of European Law
Founder of Arborus³,
Creator of the International GEEIS label.

The Covid-19 crisis, as we know, underlined and reinforced gender inequalities, but it brought to light the limits of an ecosystem dominated by the male gaze – and this was especially true in the field of artificial intelligence. In environments that operate in silos, where myths and unconscious biases interfere in decisions, a technology that would allow us to ‘objectivise’ the human gaze would be welcome – particularly when it comes to evaluating or recruiting talent. But unfortunately, such a technology cannot be beneficial if we don’t address the source of the problems we hope to solve. In fact, it has been shown that far from reducing the risks of bias, AI tends to reproduce them.

Let’s take a look at equality in the recruitment and promotion of women and men. In 2018 and 2019, we saw that the recruitment algorithms used by Amazon and Google led to significant discrimination against women. The reason related to the fact that the databases used included many more men than women, because women in the tech sector are under-represented. On top of this, the profiles selected included mostly white people. With biased algorithms⁴, artificial intelligence reproduces and feeds the flaws and stereotypes already existing in our society. If we want AI to live up to its great potential, we must be careful that this powerful tool does not become a new source of chaos that could amplify existing imbalances. And too often, women in particular are the first to be affected. In the case of recruitment algorithms, the data sets on which the models were based were skewed towards an overwhelming number of white male faces, which meant that the profiles of non-white women in these models would face double the discrimination.

In the same way, women are often excluded from certain professions where they are already rarely represented, further compounding the issue. Again, this stems from the under-representation of women in the employment data available in certain sectors. The effect can be even more perverse in the case of a company that has set up quotas for women yet is unable to recruit them due to the flawed algorithm. Another risk of AI exclusivity lies in the lack of a shared vision between women and men on the very design of AI tools, which again stems from the low presence of women in related professions.

To keep up with the changing landscape of the 21st century, it is urgent and imperative that women are stakeholders in the fourth industrial revolution⁵. To address this urgent issue head on, during the full pandemic lockdown, Arborus launched the first “International Charter for an Inclusive AI” in partnership with the Orange Group and under the aegis of the Secretary of State in charge of the Digital Transition, alongside the Ambassador and Secretary General of the UN World Conference on Women. The objective of the charter is to raise awareness and train all stakeholders, at the local and international level, on the risks of non-inclusive AI and to organise the implementation of inclusive AI on the basis of a set of seven principles⁶. In parallel, Arborus has launched the GEEIS-AI label to initiate assessments based on the charter’s commitments. To move forward, we must ensure that equal treatment is effectively implemented in all sectors of the economy and at all levels without delay.

3. Arborus: NGO created in 1995, specialising in equality and inclusion – www.arborus.org

4. GEEIS: Gender Equality European & International Standard whose audits have been entrusted to Bureau Veritas Certification.

5. The participation of women in AI is less than 17% in France and Europe

6. First International Charter for Inclusive AI: <https://charteia.arborus.org>



Testimonials from CEOs: awareness, beliefs and practical advice

Four CEOs recount their personal experiences of gender diversity issues through their responses to four questions:

- How did you become aware of the gender diversity issue?
- What difficulties do you most often encounter in addressing this issue?
- What actions are the most effective in achieving lasting change?
- What advice would you give to leaders who want to advance equality?



Testimonials from CEOs: awareness, beliefs and practical advice



Véronique Bédague
Managing Director of Nexity

A graduate of the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris and the École Supérieure des Sciences Économiques et Commerciales (ESSEC) and an alumnus of the École Nationale d'Administration, Véronique Bédague has been Managing Director of Nexity since 19 May 2021.

She joined the Nexity Group in 2017 as Corporate Secretary and member of the Executive Committee having previously served as Executive Vice President of Nexity, in charge of the Corporate and Community Client division from 2019, and then the Institutional Client division from July 2020. She is also the Chair of Nexity Entreprise, appointed in November 2021. In addition, she previously served as President and CEO of Nexity Immobilier d'Entreprise from March 2018.

Before joining the Nexity Group, Véronique Bédague had a career as a senior civil servant. Notably, she served as an economist at the International Monetary Fund in Washington, D.C. between 1994 and 1997, Advisor to the Minister of Economy, Finance and Industry Laurent Fabius from 2000 to 2002, Director of Finance for the City of Paris from 2002 to 2007, Secretary General of the City of Paris under Bertrand Delanoë from 2008 to 2014 and Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister from 2014 to 2016.

1. How did you become aware of the gender diversity issue?

My belief is that gender diversity is essential to living in a peaceful society. It is not only a question of representation or visibility, but also a commitment to act for the benefit of all. In part, my involvement in public service stems from this awareness. Today, companies are contributing, through their best practices, to codify measures that promote equality, and we should be happy about that! When I arrived at Nexity, many gender diversity initiatives had already been put in motion, and I used these as a foundation in continuing to advance the drive for gender equality in the workplace.

2. What difficulties do you most often encounter in addressing this issue?

To put everyone at ease, we started by addressing the pay gap. This has symbolic importance and

acts as both part of the problem and the beginning of the solution. But, in my opinion, we need to go much further and address the overall imbalance in remuneration, which stems from a lack of women in management roles. For this reason, it is important to set quantifiable objectives in this area. We should not be afraid to implement proactive policies to facilitate the promotion of women to top management positions. We need to find the right people and encourage them to seize opportunities that they might not have considered for themselves! Everyone benefits from living in a balanced environment.

3. What actions are the most effective in achieving lasting change?

I am convinced that gender diversity issues must be taken to the highest level by involving boards of directors and executive committees. At Nexity, we have worked with these bodies to define our action plan for workplace equality. Likewise, having set targets for both senior management and the general workforce is essential to kick-starting the initiative and helps achieve our goals more quickly. Looking at our own experience at Nexity, in four years we've gone from having 23% to 36% of women in our Club 1797, which brings together the group's top management. To further support this momentum, it is important to provide women with a platform to share their experiences of different career paths. The feminisation of certain professions has led us to produce a series of videos entitled "Women in the field", which has already inspired many women.

4. What advice would you give to leaders who want to advance equality?

Not to be afraid! And to match words with actions. This is essential to engaging all employees within the company. At Nexity, we have chosen to set up a mixed network so that everyone feels included and involved. In the same spirit, we consulted with employees in developing a charter, "Together for Inclusion", which was approved by the Executive Committee and senior management. It is subject to the support of employees, meaning everyone is able to have their say in defining inclusive measures and engage in their day-to-day application. Working collectively to embed this initiative within our company reinforces our sense of pride.

Testimonials from CEOs: awareness, beliefs and practical advice



Hervé Hélias
CEO of Mazars Group

Hervé Hélias is the CEO of Mazars Group. He joined Mazars in 1986 as a fresh graduate from HEC, one of Europe's leading business schools. Over his more than 30-year tenure with the firm, he has occupied some of the most demanding leadership positions in the partnership. As a Partner in audit, he signed some of Mazars' largest clients, including BNP Paribas. He was the Global Head of Banking from 2005 to 2009. From 2009 to 2012, he served as Head of the Global PIE Business Unit. And from 2012 to 2016, he served as both Managing Partner of Mazars in France and Group co-CEO. In 2016, Hervé was appointed CEO of Mazars Group, and, from 2018 Chairman and CEO of the Group Executive Board. A founding father of Mazars University, consistently and personally committed to the development of Mazars' talent and diversity, Hervé remains focused on making Mazars a school of excellence and great place to work.

1. How did you become aware of the gender diversity issue?

Historically, our sector – audit, tax and advisory – is a very male-dominated world, and when I joined Mazars at a very young age following my studies at HEC, I evolved in a predominately male environment. This male-dominant culture was not new to me: I had also experienced it in my personal and family life. So I was not naturally aware of gender issues, and I came to awareness rather late. A stint in the HR department allowed me to understand that women were under additional work pressures because of motherhood but fathers were not under the same pressure level. The 'glass ceiling' would materialise by women dropping out of the workforce at certain levels. I only became fully aware that this is a structural issue which must be addressed as any critical business issue, when I became CEO of the group a few years ago. I found myself on stage with nine men who made up our Group Executive Board, and we had invited a panel of female associates to testify. These women expressed

a discomfort that was eye-opening for me, and which only confirmed an unacceptable fact: half of the talent in our group was leaving the ship before reaching the partner level. I decided that we could not continue to leave half of the world's talent out of our decision-making positions. Beyond equality and fairness, this is a business concern. It is no longer possible to operate in a male vacuum. Diversity is a source of openness and better performance – it allows for richer exchanges, new visions, and less biased decisions. Today, it has become a general management issue, which must be addressed at the highest level.

2. What difficulties do you most often encounter in addressing this issue?

The greatest difficulty in leading such a profound change in culture is making people understand the urgency of the matter and instilling this awareness in the management teams. Without this first step, it is very difficult to take action. In our multicultural organisation, composed of business partners who vote on decisions and drive the development of our group, the need to convince is even more critical. Another difficulty lies in the international nature of our group, with its cultural differences: the action plan cannot be the same everywhere; rather we must take an adjustable approach, which can translate into very different local realities; for example, in South Africa, ethnic diversity. Finally, the third difficulty is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, nor is there a single solution or a silver bullet: you have to pay close attention to both specific moments in the career and life cycles and whole series of events. I have noticed three key moments in a career path where the risk of dropping out for women is greatest. The first is linked to motherhood – too often in our societies, children and family continue to weigh more heavily on women than men, and female professionals often find themselves suffering from a double burden. We therefore need to improve the balance between work and family responsibilities, build flexibility in careers and schedules, support parenthood for both parents, and value men as fathers. Secondly, leadership styles are different, and when women rise to higher positions, they do not express their ambitions and opinions in the same way. We need to get to the heart of what women want to say, invite them to the table and the

Testimonials from CEOs: awareness, beliefs and practical advice

discussion and build their self-confidence. Finally, when they make it to executive committees, they often find themselves isolated or in a small minority, which can be a traumatic experience and result in failure. We need to be aware of all these pitfalls so we can act on them.

3. What actions are most effective in achieving lasting change?

The first task is to put the issue on the agenda at the highest level of management. It must be a top priority for the entire executive committee. Once this is done, it must stay there as a priority: you have to keep the issue alive, visible, loud and clear. There can be no success without indicators that mark the starting point, how we are progressing, and what areas need to be fixed or improved, and when. To achieve results, it is important to share figures and make everyone responsible and accountable for achieving progress. This also involves linking incentives to bonuses, for example. I have also noticed the power of 'reverse mentoring', i.e., a double coaching programme between women and men to create a mutual understanding. Finally, and on a very important note, we must help women (who often undertake more family responsibilities than men) juggle their different responsibilities. For example, promotions must not be different because of maternity; a woman should be able to regain the

same responsibilities when she returns from leave; working hours must be arranged and flexibility must be organised to allow for a healthy balance between family life and the professional responsibilities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has established more flexibility in ways of working and removed the link between performance and presence in the workplace. We must build on these lessons to construct a better vision of tomorrow's world of work that is more in line with the needs of individuals – for women, but not exclusively. This will improve the overall talent value proposition.

4. What advice would you give to leaders who want to advance equality?

As CEOs, I believe that we must take ownership of the issue personally and directly, rather than by simply delegating responsibility. We then must give ourselves the means to succeed, by surrounding ourselves with experienced individuals - someone who has the right emotional distance to manage this cultural change carefully but with conviction. It is important to take the time to discuss, listen, read, understand and dig deeper. It is a complex subject, which requires a personal journey, with moments of truth and a paradigm shift. In essence, it is a journey that transforms you as an individual and you need to be open to new discoveries.



Testimonials from CEOs: awareness, beliefs and practical advice



Eric Labaye
President of École Polytechnique
and the President of the Paris
Polytechnic Institute

Éric Labaye has been the President of École Polytechnique since September 2018 and the President of the Paris Polytechnic Institute, which was created in May 2019 and includes École Polytechnique, ENSTA Paris, ENSAE Paris, Télécom Paris and Télécom SudParis. Prior to his appointment as President of École Polytechnique, Eric Labaye was a Senior Partner at McKinsey & Company, where he served as Managing Director of the French office, before becoming a member of the Global Executive Committee and Chairman of the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), the firm's macroeconomic research institute. During his years at McKinsey, he initiated and co-directed the "Women Matter" research programme, which has served as a blueprint for the management of many major companies in addressing gender issues.

1. How did you become aware of the gender diversity issue?

In 2002, I was appointed Managing Director of McKinsey's France office in Paris which at the time had 26 partners, including one woman. Very quickly, I realised that there were as many women as men hired in our firm – as in many other organisations – yet barely 4% were in management bodies. If the problem is not at the source, it is in the process. The world needs all kinds of skills, and it is crucial that we understand why the corporate ladder is not working. Women represent more than half of the world's graduate population, and we know that girls do just as well in school as boys, so there is no reason why they can't develop and succeed equally. Addressing this issue is a matter of fairness and also responds to the need for talent. In 2007, we launched the first in a long series of global studies on gender issues at McKinsey and were able to establish concrete and indisputable facts. We demonstrated the importance of diversity to organisational performance, measured the

gender gap on numerous social and economic indicators, analysed the obstacles and barriers that hinder and complicate progress for women in companies, and in turn identified a set of measures to be implemented to achieve the necessary change.

2. What difficulties do you most often encounter in addressing this issue?

As in any cultural change, the most complicated part is awareness. It is difficult to succeed in changing mentalities in a group that has its own long-established vision on a matter, especially when the vision is based on the principle of merit. It is important to help people understand that the implementation of specific measures does not compromise these principles – on the contrary, it allows for greater fairness. It must be explained that in women's career paths, a series of events make progress more difficult, and that we lose female talent, because it was not identified that the steps were greater for them as a result of the multiple constraints and barriers that they face across their career paths, but that men do not have. The difficulty is therefore to make people understand that helping women advance their careers is indeed fair and that it is a way to reinforce meritocracy. Once the problem and the mechanisms are well understood, all that is left to do is work! It's in the execution that pitfalls often lie. Many companies have put measures in place to promote women into management positions, but results are slow to materialise, often because this change requires a comprehensive plan to make a real, systemic transformation – one that is visible and sustained.

3. What actions are most effective in your experience?

Diversity must become and remain a priority topic on the strategic plan of CEOs and executive teams. Strong conviction is essential, and achieving results must become an absolute priority for the management. I am also a big believer in an individualised approach. The ultimate goal is to help all talented people succeed by seeking to understand the constraints and needs of each individual. Finally, and most importantly, it is about changing work environments and culture,

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acting on everything that represents ‘penalties’ for women, including: banning 18:00-20:00 meetings, integrating flexibility into schedules and careers, changing policies to take into account the needs of everyone, and reviewing promotion processes to neutralise the impact of maternity on career development. We must also create role models and give visibility to inspiring women. Finally, let’s not forget to put in place recruitment processes that reduce bias, such as deciding whether a woman will be able to combine her role as a mother with her work role – we rarely ask this question of a father!

4. What advice would you give to leaders who want to accelerate change?

It is the CEO’s firm belief and commitment that makes the difference. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to this problem; rather it is the sum of all actions that can make a difference. The key is a change in mindsets. Strength of conviction and a firmness in identifying the mechanisms of change are essential to leading progress. It is a matter that requires the continued vigilance of leaders, who must make it a priority in a way that is visible to all employees.



Testimonials from CEOs: awareness, beliefs and practical advice



Michel Landel

Ex-Chief Executive Officer of Sodexo, Sponsor of the Observatory for Gender Balance, and independent Administrator

Michel Landel spent 35 years at Sodexo, where he assumed the role of Chief Executive Officer during his last 12 years. In that position, he led a proactive gender diversity policy that lifted Sodexo to the top of the rankings for women in management. Now a sponsor of the Observatory for Gender Balance, he continues to work for the advancement of women and diversity.

1. How did you become aware of the gender diversity issue?

I have always been aware of this issue thanks to my wife, who is personally very committed. My engagement started when I was appointed Head of North America at Sodexo in 1989, as my wife gave up her job in France to follow me, and a significant event rattled me without warning. When the company bought part of Marriott International's business, we inherited the serious discrimination that came with it, which resulted in extremely intense and painful legal proceedings. This experience contradicted Sodexo's values and cost us dearly, but we learned a lot. It was at the end of this process that I decided to appoint a manager dedicated to equality and recruited Rohini Anand, who has stood beside me and led our group's diversity and inclusion strategy with great merit.

2. What difficulties do you most often encounter in addressing this issue?

In regards gender diversity, the most important challenge is to convince the people around you to get on board. This is a social and cultural problem which has its roots outside the company. Historically, we live in a world made for men, by men, and the difficulty is therefore in reshaping this culture into a better, more inclusive one that will allow women to assume the roles they can and must take. That's why progress has been slow. Today, we are seeing changes and an increase in awareness, but it's still slow going. In my case, I was first challenged to convince the management committee in the

United States and then to implement actions that targeted the problems encountered – changing the culture or mentalities is not an exact science! On top of this, results are not always guaranteed, or are slow to show up, which tends to create fatigue.

3. What actions are the most effective in achieving lasting change?

The first step is to put in place dedicated resources at the right level – that is, reporting directly to the CEO. Then you need to define and communicate clear objectives and monitor progress: you only successfully achieve what you successfully measure. And to do so, it is important to put incentive mechanisms in place such as bonuses linked to progress. Training leaders and managers is also key – you need to get them to question themselves and their visions. The company should be a place where differences are taught to be accepted and even valued. It is also important to understand and take into consideration the key moments in a person's life, such as the desire to create a family. It is not easy to combine a career with raising children and this is often where women are penalised in their careers, as they are the ones who assume this responsibility most of the time. Training on unconscious bias is essential, as is considering cultural specificities by adapting to the contexts and practices of the different countries where you operate.

4. What advice would you give to leaders who want to advance equality?

Change requires multiple actions over time. It is a long-term effort and investment that demands perseverance, courage and sometimes a fight – to maintain the budget dedicated to gender diversity, for example. We must provide the means and act consistently at all levels of the company, without complacency and with absolute commitment. We must never accept what is unacceptable. It is the determination shown, and example set by the managers that will make the difference.



Conclusion: a top management topic

It is clear that organisations at the top in diversity rankings all benefit from the strong commitment of their CEOs. This commitment at the very top is the *sine qua non* condition fostering strong engagement from the senior management team and all managers. This chapter provides practical advice for leaders who wish to create positive and lasting change and stresses the importance of leading by example and communicating internally. It also suggests to focus less on reinforcing female leadership skills and more on changing the work environment and business practices.



Conclusion: a top management topic “As a leader, where do I start?”

On 27 January 2011, in France, the Copé-Zimmermann law setting up female quotas in companies' boards of directors came into effect. Ten years later, on 24 December 2021, the Rixain-Castaner law imposing gender quotas for management teams was enacted.

Since its adoption a little over a decade ago, the Copé-Zimmermann law has been unanimously accepted, and as a result France has become a world leader in the gender diversity of its boards of directors. Currently, within the CAC 40, there is 46% women representation, up from 20.8% in 2011. Yet despite making significant progress, one of the objectives of the Copé-Zimmermann law remains unattained: gender diversity within the executive committees of the CAC 40 was expected to follow on from the greater diversity of boards, but women representation currently stands at only 22%.

To address this continuing issue and accelerate gender diversity in governing bodies, the Rixain-Castaner law, which was enacted on 24 December 2021, mandates that governing bodies of companies with more than 1,000 employees, have a minimum of 30% women by 2027 and 40% by 2030. Potential sanctions will be capped at 1% of the total wage bill.

France leads the way

There is no European law on gender diversity at the level of senior management, only urgings to adopt the right (i.e., diverse) models of governance. The new law is almost a global first. The only other country in the world to have legislation at this level is Germany, which introduced legislation in January 2021, which applies to listed companies and companies with more than 2,000 people and requires that management boards comprising three or more people have at least one woman.

An essential lever of diversity

CEOs are left with the tricky question of methodology: what should be done to achieve our gender diversity objectives? We see that the organisations leading the way in diversity rankings all benefit from the strong commitment of their leaders. Commitment at the top is considered to be the *sine qua non* condition fostering the engagement of the senior management team and all managers, which in turn justifies and legitimises internal actions whilst at the same time motivating teams.

A few simple actions can have a major impact

But where to start and what does it mean to ‘commit’ when you are a CEO? It is first necessary to take the time to understand personally – then with the senior management team – the critical challenges raised by the questions: why diversity? What is the urgency? This approach involves training sessions and discussions with peers around stereotypes, gender bias and the differences in experience between women and men, in order to become ‘bilingual’; it is also critical to fully understand the barriers, the drivers (performance, ethics, CSR), the levers of change and best practices in gender diversity; and finally it means choosing the leadership model that you want to promote in your organisation.

The image CEOs project and the example they set are also important: the vocabulary used, the commitments made, the sponsorship of women with high potential, the refusal to participate in exclusively male panels and the zero-tolerance sustained towards unacceptable behaviours – all of which contribute to create collective awareness. The regular review of the gender diversity progress by the ComEx is also a strong sign of commitment.

At the same time, CEOs must regularly show commitment through internal and external communications. And this approach must be supported by a series of personal actions, such as, “Never failing to give women the floor during meetings”.

The allocation of resources to the people in charge of diversity is of course a determining factor, i.e., a budget and HR staffing commensurate with the size of the organisation. The commitment of CEOs and their management team greatly facilitate the implementation of fast-track measures and the development of new internal processes. A precise roadmap can then be mapped out!



Marie-Christine Mahéas
Head of the Mazars Centre for
Diversity and Inclusion and
Coordinator of the Observatory for
Gender Balance

Conclusion: a top management topic “Let’s fix the environment, not the women”

Gender diversity in top management has been a subject of debate for over 15 years, and progress is very slow. The mistake is to think that this topic is a ‘female’ issue. It is not, or not only. It is about inclusion and successful management of talent – a skill that the leaders of today and tomorrow need to understand and learn to master.

There is no silver bullet to make change happen, and we also know that change is not going to happen naturally. Governments can help with policies and infrastructure that help increase the participation of women (and parents) in the workforce, or with childcare support to allow more women to embrace a career with confidence.

Corporations need to put in place processes that are fair and free of bias, as well as measures that help remove the barriers and discrimination against women from being a mother; train their leaders on unconscious bias; and provide the flexibility which women and any parent need to succeed in their way to the top. Over the years, many companies have had programmes in place to help women navigate an environment that was unfriendly to them, fit for those who don’t have to bear a double responsibility of family care, and did not take into account the constraints that they faced, helping them to become more assertive or to strengthen their ‘leadership’ skills. This helps, of course, but companies need to shift their focus

of effort from ‘fixing women’ to ‘empowering them’ and ‘fixing the environment’. This is not just a female issue. Ultimately, it is about creating inclusive work environments where women (and any other individual who does not fit into the ‘dominant’ model) can contribute and succeed. It is about changing the model, the way we work, and the way we think about performance. Finally it is not about making an exception for women in an uneasy and tough world, but about making that world inherently better and more attractive for all.



Cécile Kossoff
Global Diversity and Inclusion
Leader, Mazars Group

Appendix: have you implemented the right measures?

Many companies are implementing gender diversity measures, but the results are not always there. In this area, it is less the number of measures than their relevance that counts in achieving progress. Companies now need to understand whether they are putting in place the 'right' actions. The Observatory for Gender Balance has collaborated with all its members to identify six measures that have proven their effectiveness in accelerating gender diversity in companies. As a partner of the Observatory, Mazars has proposed to turn these six measures into a self-assessment questionnaire that enables CEOs to quickly evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the actions implemented in their organisations.

Appendix: have you implemented the right measures?

Gender diversity in action: self-assessment questionnaire for business leaders who want to accelerate gender diversity

A joint initiative by Mazars and the Observatory for Gender Balance

Because managing diversity and inclusion has become an essential skill for managers (much like strategy), Mazars and developed a [self-assessment tool](#) to be used by CEOs and senior management. This questionnaire allows leaders to quickly evaluate the relevance of the gender diversity actions implemented in their organisation.

The Observatory for Gender Balance, with all its members, has identified six measures which have proven to be effective in accelerating gender diversity in companies. These measures are presented in a 'Green book.' The self-assessment tool co-developed by Mazars and the Observatory for Gender Balance has been designed as a practical tool that allows managers to quickly assess the relevance of the actions implemented in their organisation and the effective implementation of these six measures.

- 1 Demonstrate the strong commitment of CEOs**
The commitment of the top management and more generally of his or her team is essential to give impetus and perpetuate policies in favor of a better gender balance.
- 2 Make a lasting change in culture, towards a culture of inclusion**
This measure proposes to implement a gender balance awareness plan with a systemic approach, composed of three priority levels: the Gender Balance justification, the gender bias and stereotypes, and the promotion of inspiring role models.
- 3 Take into account the difference between female and male career cycles**
Career differences lead to variations in work availability and career advancement. This measure aims to raise the awareness of HR and management, to improve organizational processes, by facilitating, for instance, access to "springboard positions".
- 4 Set precise and ambitious individual Gender Balance goals**
This measure recommends the systematic integration of Gender Balance criteria into managerial goals, with quantified and dated objectives. It also proposes to index variable compensation based on the achievement of these objectives.
- 5 Share Gender Balance indicators dashboard**
A dashboard of Gender Balance, shared internally and externally, allow the identification of obstacles to professional equality, to support management and employee awareness and promote the best practices identified in the organization.
- 6 Generalize the use of inclusive language**
This measure advocates among other things to feminize job titles, preferring the term Gender Balance to feminization, banishing negative expressions and promoting skills before gender, at all levels and in all publications of the organization.

The Observatory for Gender Balance Committee

Sponsor of the Observatory for Gender Balance



Michel Landel, Ex-Chief Executive Officer of Sodexo, Sponsor of the Observatory for Gender Balance, and independent Administrator

Eight partners



Sophie Audebert, Director of Human Resources – Nexity Group



Marc Bourgain, Director of the Quality of Life at Work and Diversity department within the HRD – SNCF Group



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Supported by the Institute for Responsible Capitalism, sponsored by Michel Landel, independent Board Member and former CEO of Sodexo, and co-directed by Caroline de La Marnierre and Marie-Christine Mahéas, the Observatory for Gender Balance is a think and do tank that brings together companies active in the field of gender balance, as well as recognized experts in the field. Its objective is to make rapid and sustainable progress in gender balance within organisations by producing concrete recommendations for decision-makers, companies and institutions. The Observatory also brings together within its Executive Club corporate executives who accompany, deepen and amplify the work aimed at advancing gender balance.

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