

Leadership, Skills and the She-Cession – What Next for Progress to Parity?




While many of the trends we were seeing before the crisis have accelerated – like digitization and the rise of remote working – one has hit reverse and taken us back decades. The risk of a “She-Cession” is real. Not only have women taken on more at home, but the pandemic has impacted roles predominantly held by women. In the last 12 months, organizations digitized and transformed at speed and scale as the way people work, consume and socialize went virtual overnight. The pandemic simultaneously triggered the biggest workforce shift since WWII, with industries like retail, hospitality, entertainment, travel and even manufacturing, all of which employ higher proportions of women, freezing overnight, while others (e.g., technology, logistics, healthcare) experienced immediate and overwhelming demand.

Data is beginning to show that women will be impacted longer term by the economic and social crisis

- With more than 1.5 billion children out of school worldwide,¹ many working mothers are juggling full-time careers while taking care of children and teaching from home. In Europe and Central Asia, 25% of self-employed women lost their jobs, compared to 21% of men.² And in the U.S., 1 in 3 working mothers has considered leaving the workforce or downshifting their career because of COVID-19.³
- Women already took on much of the caring responsibilities at home; now they have become teachers and carers for elderly relatives, all while balancing remote work or juggling roles which have to be done in the workplace. Men have taken on more home responsibilities during the pandemic too – just to nowhere near the same proportion as women.

Sectors most impacted by COVID-19 employee higher percentages of women:

Accommodation and food services	Administration and business services	Clerical roles
59%	54%	63%

Meanwhile, demand for cyber security experts, app developers, warehouse and driving roles soared – all roles predominantly held by men⁴



We are at an inflection point. Employers must meet the call to support the women in their workforces, both personally and professionally. More attention must be paid to the re-balancing of family care responsibilities and careers, and a greater focus must be placed on changing prevailing gender dynamics in the workplace.

¹https://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~md738/research/Alon_Doeplke_Olmstead-Rumsey_Tertilt_COVID_2020.pdf ²<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women> ³<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace> ⁴http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_G6GR_2020.pdf

01 Heading Back to the Office... Not So Fast



Work from home is good for women, right? It's complicated. Even before the pandemic, women took on the lion's share of responsibility in caring for children and elderly relatives. That imbalance has grown even more lopsided during COVID; in the U.S., mothers have spent 15 hours more per week than fathers on household tasks and education as compared to fathers.⁵ And traditional work schedules do not always accommodate the childcare gap. As we prepare for a hybrid future, we have to be careful to avoid a two-track workplace: men in the office, women at home, where they may miss out on networking and development.

Men and women have different reasons for heading into the office:



Women:

More appreciative of the office as a means of separating work from home

Men:

More likely to want to be in the office for visibility and promotion

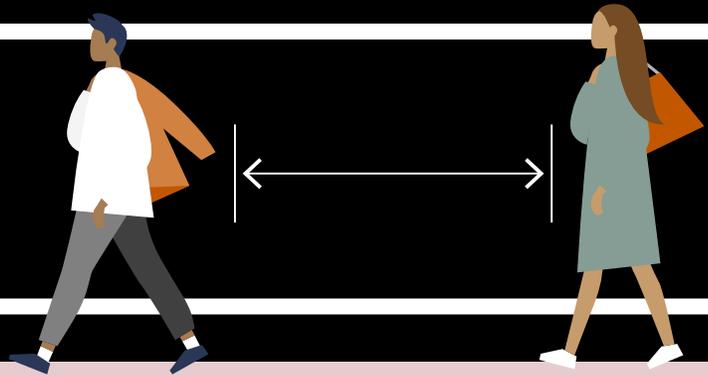
Trust Me, I'm Committed

Prioritizing presenteeism over performance has held women back, yet the good news is this moment could change this for the better. Trust is now front and center for employee and employer. The days of looking to see which employee is in their office or beating the boss into work disappeared in an instant...and was replaced with trust. Performance has replaced presenteeism and employees everywhere are cheering from the front lines. Now contribution and skills are the new currency.



Almost half of men (46%) feel positive about returning to the workplace, the same is true for only one-third of women (35%).

02 Mind the Leader Gap



Women leaders – from New Zealand’s Jacinda Ardern to Germany’s Angela Merkel – have won praise for their handling of the COVID-19 crisis. And in May 2020 the number of women running Fortune 500 companies hit a new high. Yet this isn’t enough and isn’t always reflected down the corporate ladder.

Our research is clear: When it comes to leadership, women are not looking for favors, just a level playing field. We found that established female leaders acknowledge familiar obstacles throughout their career, including: lack of role models, gendered career paths, and a lack of access to sponsors and influential networks.⁶



believe flexible working is key to getting more women into leadership.

This One Size Fits One approach requires a culture that values performance and output over presenteeism.



say that better policies would reduce gender bias.

They believe One Life is more than a Millennial aspiration. Female Leaders realize the benefit of blending work and home too.

When we asked Millennial women what most supports women in leadership, they said flexibility – in other words, outcomes that allow them greater control over how and when they get work done.



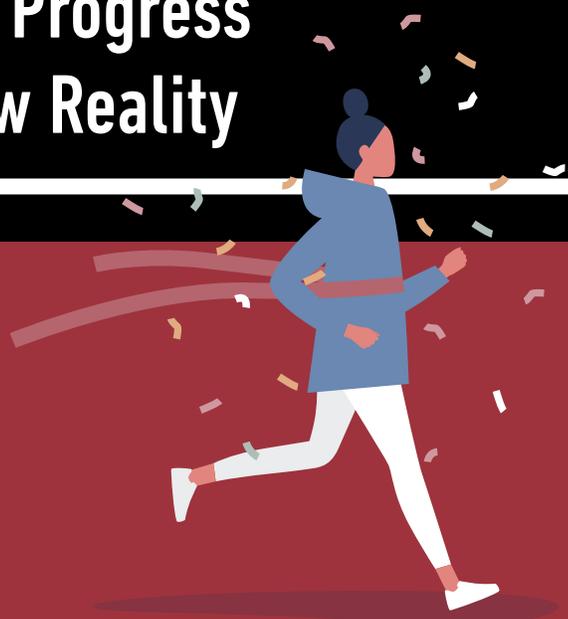
The Future Is Balance – What Works for Women Works for Men Too.

Millennials – both female and male – are optimistic that workplaces will be flexible in the future. They expect them to accommodate One Life – the integration of work and home, rather than requiring a balancing act. They see technological advances and the decoupling of work and location as beneficial to both business and family.

With a longer working life and later retirement ahead, Emerging Leaders especially emphasized the need to plan and manage career “waves,” not ladders. Millennials are preparing to run a work ultramarathon, and they want the flexibility to switch gears at different stages and to have One Life that allows them to pursue goals professionally and personally, when it suits them. Millennials are aligned on their goal and intent on changing the way work gets done. They are confident they will be the generation that shifts mindsets, changes culture and achieves parity.

03 10 Ways Employers Can Progress Gender Parity in the New Reality

Helping women upskill and adapt to a fast-changing world of work will be one of the defining challenges of our time. Now is the time to reset for the new reality and make the progress the next generation of women in the workplace need to see.



01

Know the “why.”



Advancing toward gender parity in the workplace is far more than just “the right thing to do.” The data is clear: Companies with women at the top perform better. Having more women in the workforce and in leadership positions improves⁷ productivity⁸, share performance, and business results⁹.

02

Set women up for success.



Recognize the obstacles women historically face at work – lack of role models, gendered career paths, and lack of access to sponsors and influential networks – and identify ways to remove each of these. This starts with active listening; the best bosses are asking women what they need to succeed.

03

Make work-from-home work.



Understand that remote working does not occur in a vacuum. Find ways to build flexibility into roles previously seen as inflexible. Take active steps to challenge any embedded assumptions about the gender-normative roles of parents so that those norms do not drive the way managers and colleagues perceive remote working by men and women and what they expect of them.

04

Ask “why not?”



Succession planning must be bolder. Instead of saying, “She doesn’t have the experience,” ask, “What do we need to make it work?” Challenge assumptions. If we think it is possible, we can make it possible.

(Continued...)

05

Leadership needs to own it and measure it.



To demonstrate commitment to getting women into leadership, change must be led from the top. Leadership must also be held accountable by making progress measurable.

06

Make it count.



Leaders must know exactly where they need women to be. Looking at macro numbers is not enough. Articulate a talent legacy – how things will change and what it will look like by when. Plan for it as if it were a strategic business priority or investment. True change takes time, focus and discipline.

07

Focus on output.



Upgrade your performance evaluation processes and metrics to ensure a focus on outputs and, crucially, do not include assessments from periods of lockdown when childcare was unavailable.

08

Identify adjacent skills sets.



Identify adjacent skillsets for new roles, and importantly demonstrate how short bursts of training and upskilling can accelerate people from one job to the next.

09

Remember learnability will be the great equalizer.



Now is the time to focus on helping employees develop technical skills at speed and scale, while also hiring people with learnability – the desire and ability to learn new skills. This can make a real difference in shaping a future in which everyone can be ready for high-growth roles.

10

SOFT SKILLS

Hire for soft skills.



When looking for those employees with learnability, look for soft skills like communication, collaboration, creativity, curiosity. These are the most valued – and the hardest to find – human strengths in today's job market and employees who have them make smoother transitions to new roles or careers.