

# Women in the Workplace

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2025

## About the study

Women in the Workplace is the largest study on the state of women in corporate America.<sup>1</sup> Over the past 11 years, more than 1,000 companies and almost 500,000 employees have participated. For this report, we collected information from 124 organizations employing approximately 3 million people, surveyed 9,500 employees, and conducted interviews with 62 HR leaders. In 2015, LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company launched this annual study to provide companies with the insights and tools to advance women in the workplace.

Sign up to participate in the 2026 study at [womenintheworkplace.com](https://womenintheworkplace.com).

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## Corporate America risks rolling back progress for women

This year, only half of companies are prioritizing women's career advancement, part of a several-year trend in declining commitment to gender diversity.<sup>2</sup> And for the first time, there is a notable ambition gap: women are less interested in being promoted than men.

When women receive the same career support that men do, this gap in ambition to advance falls away. Yet women at both ends of the pipeline are still held back by less sponsorship and manager advocacy.

This is a solvable problem, but it requires a greater investment in women's careers at a time when a number of companies may be deprioritizing them. Some have already scaled back programs beneficial to women like remote work, formal sponsorship, and targeted career development, and HR leaders worry about the long-term impact of changes like these for women.

Corporate America has made real progress in women's representation over the past decade—and companies that prioritize gender diversity see bigger gains. For companies that lost focus this year, 2026 should be the year of recommitting to women in the workplace.

## PART 1

# Employee experiences

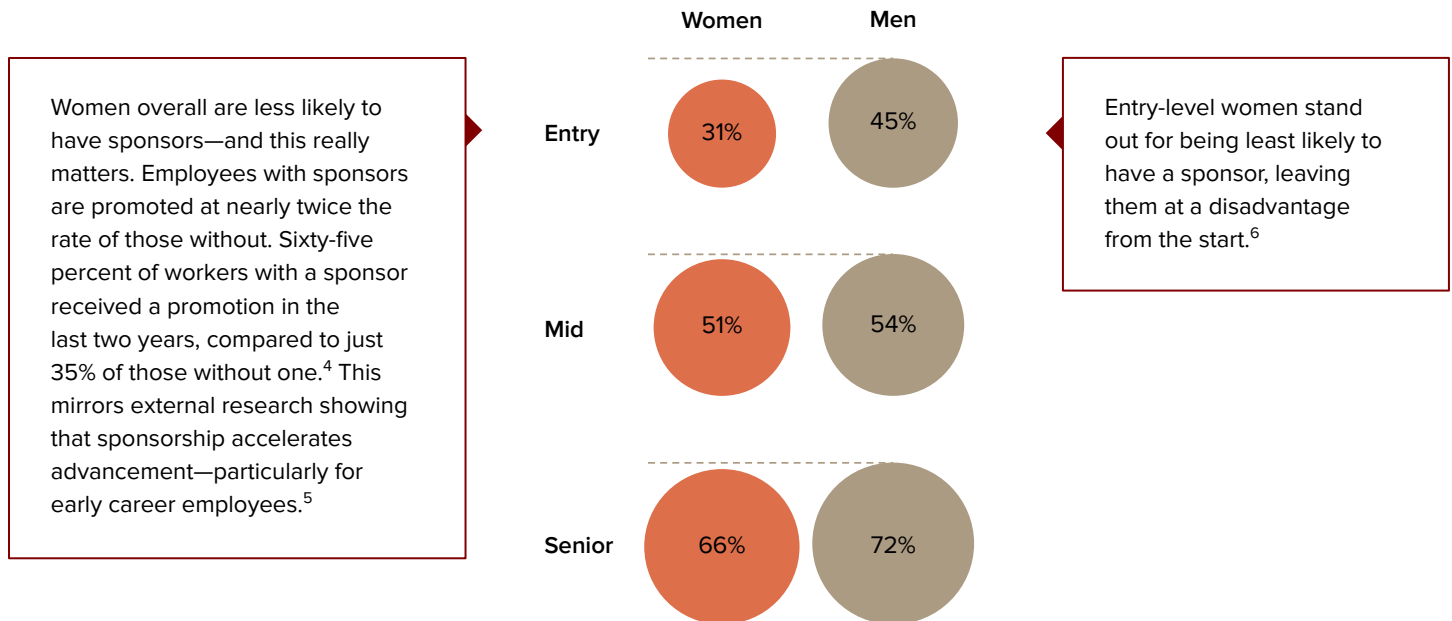
Women still face an uneven playing field, with less career support and fewer opportunities to advance.



# Women get less of the sponsorship that opens doors

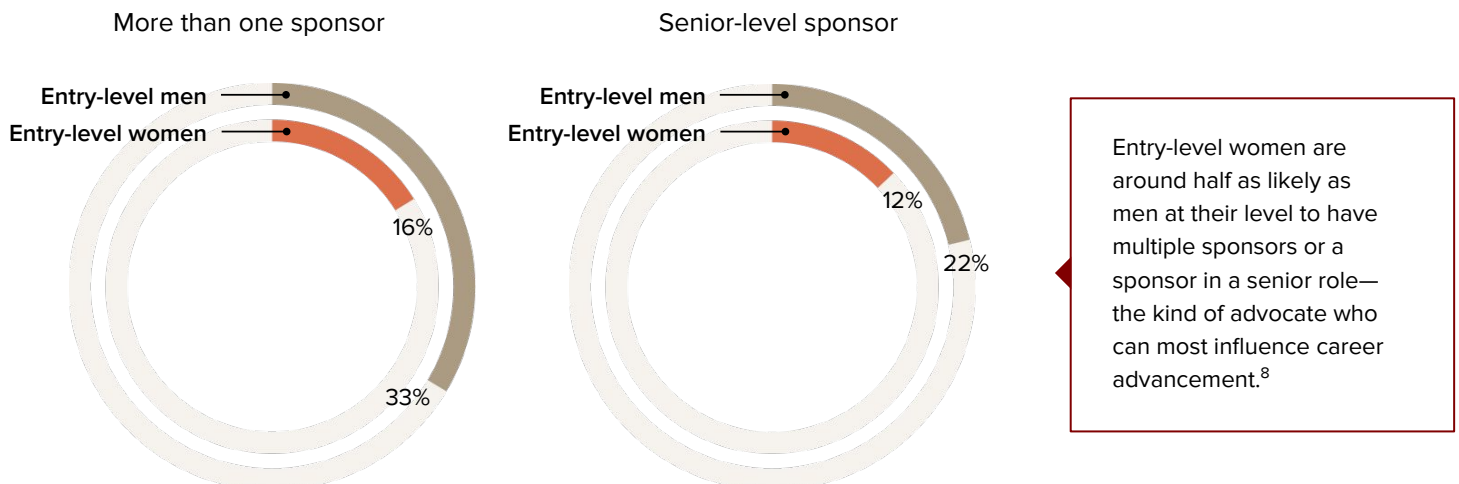
## Women are less likely than men to have a sponsor ...

% of women and men by level who have a sponsor at work<sup>3</sup>



## ... And entry-level women miss out on the most impactful kinds of sponsorship

% of entry-level women and men with multiple sponsors or a senior-level sponsor<sup>7</sup>

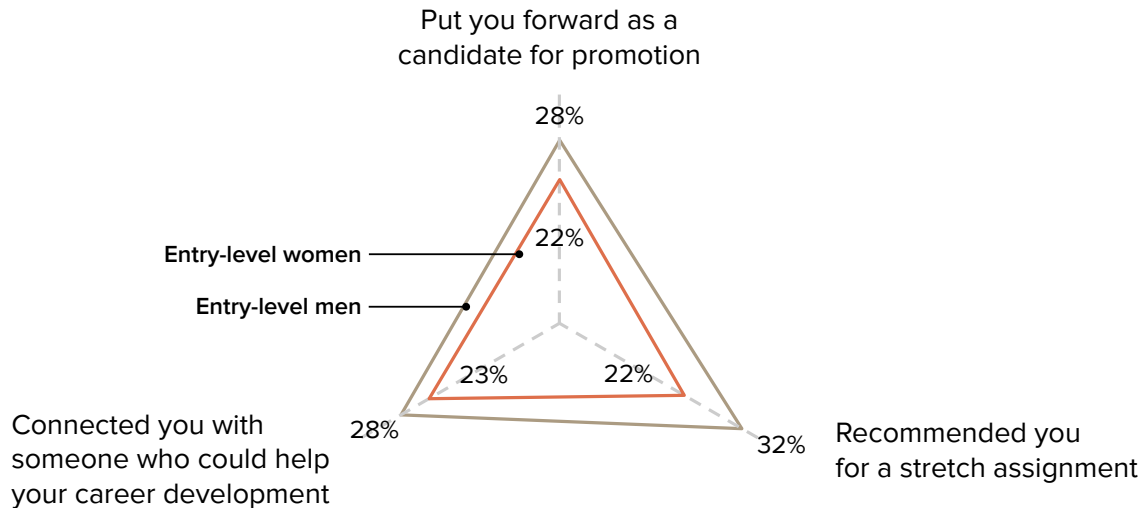


**Multiple sponsors—and sponsors in leadership—have even more impact.** When employees have senior-level sponsors, they are more likely to have been promoted in the last two years than employees with sponsors at lower levels. And when employees have multiple sponsors, they are over twice as likely to be promoted than employees without.<sup>9</sup>

# Entry-level women miss out on key opportunities

Women at the entry level are less likely to get help from more senior colleagues ...

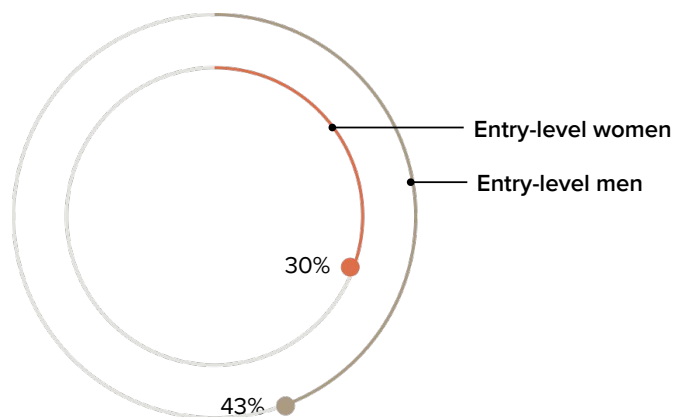
% of entry-level women and men who have received the following support from a senior colleague who is not their manager<sup>10</sup>



Even when they aren't formal sponsors or managers, senior colleagues can play a pivotal role in helping early career employees advance.<sup>11</sup> Yet entry-level women are less likely than men to receive this kind of critical support.

... And are less likely to receive promotions

% of entry-level women and men who have received a promotion within the last two years<sup>12</sup>



Entry-level women are less likely than men to be promoted within the entry level. In addition, they face a “broken rung” at the first major promotion from entry level to manager—a pattern that has held for 11 consecutive years.<sup>13</sup>

**Entry-level women may be limited by less exposure to AI.** Only 21% of entry-level women are encouraged by their manager to use AI, compared to 33% of men at the same level—and there is a strong link between using AI and feeling optimistic about its impact.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps as a result, only 37% of entry-level women believe AI will improve their career prospects, compared to 60% of employees overall.<sup>15</sup>

## A CLOSER LOOK

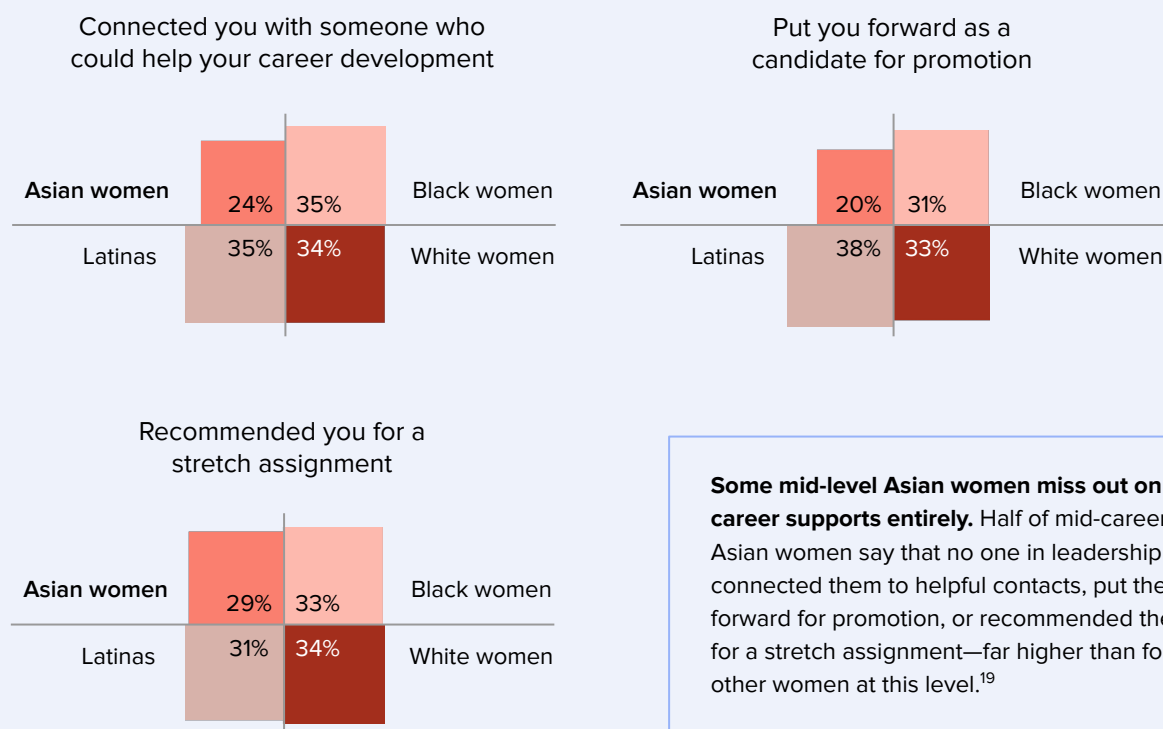
## Asian women face barriers to advancing to leadership

At mid-career, Asian women receive notably less support from senior colleagues than other women at their level. And the same trend holds for day-to-day manager support: mid-level Asian women are less likely to have a manager who regularly focuses on their career advancement or provides actionable feedback.<sup>16</sup>

These factors likely have a concrete impact on their career advancement: across five years of pipeline data, Asian women are less likely than women overall to have received a promotion to the VP level.<sup>17</sup>

### Mid-level Asian women receive less career-building support from senior colleagues

% of mid-level women, by race, who report receiving any of the following from someone in a more senior role who is not their manager<sup>18</sup>



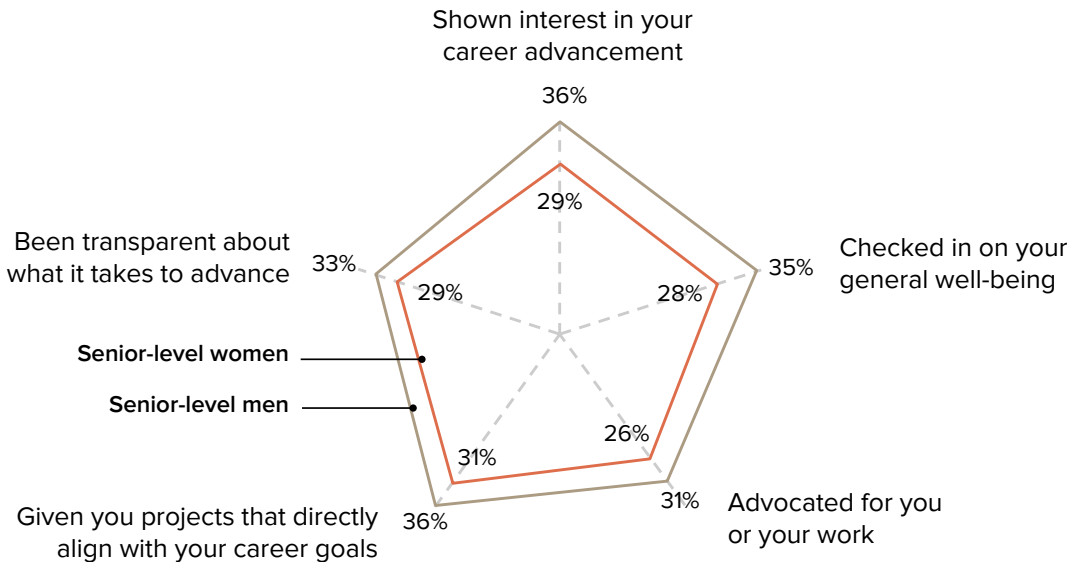
**Some mid-level Asian women miss out on key career supports entirely.** Half of mid-career Asian women say that no one in leadership has connected them to helpful contacts, put them forward for promotion, or recommended them for a stretch assignment—far higher than for other women at this level.<sup>19</sup>

**Bias still impacts Asian women.** Research shows Asian women are often held back by biased assumptions that they lack the assertiveness needed for senior roles. And when Asian women do act assertively, they can face pushback because they are defying expectations. This double bind—being judged whether they speak up or stay quiet—makes gaining visibility and advancement more challenging.<sup>20</sup>

# Senior-level women get less fundamental career support

## Women in leadership receive less consistent support from their managers ...

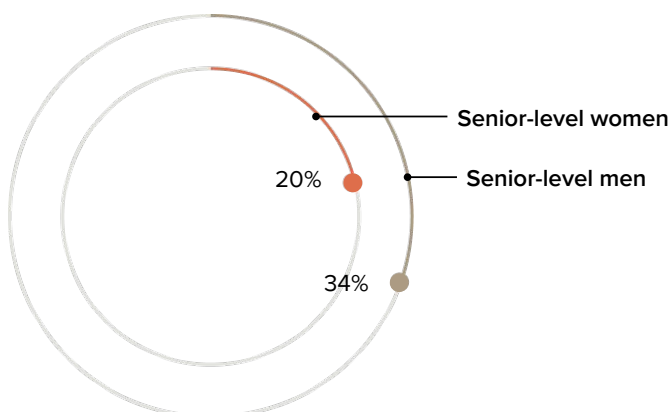
% of senior-level women and men who have consistently experienced the following support from their manager in the last 12 months<sup>21</sup>



Women in leadership get less consistent support from their managers across a range of actions. Since managers are key to employees' advancement, these disparities may limit women's opportunities at the top.<sup>22</sup>

## ... And are less likely to receive training opportunities

% of senior-level women and men who were offered the opportunity to participate in a leadership and/or career training in the last two years<sup>23</sup>



Women at senior levels miss out on valuable training. Men at their level are far more likely to be offered the chance to participate in leadership or career training—at a time when it can be critical for their progression.<sup>24</sup>

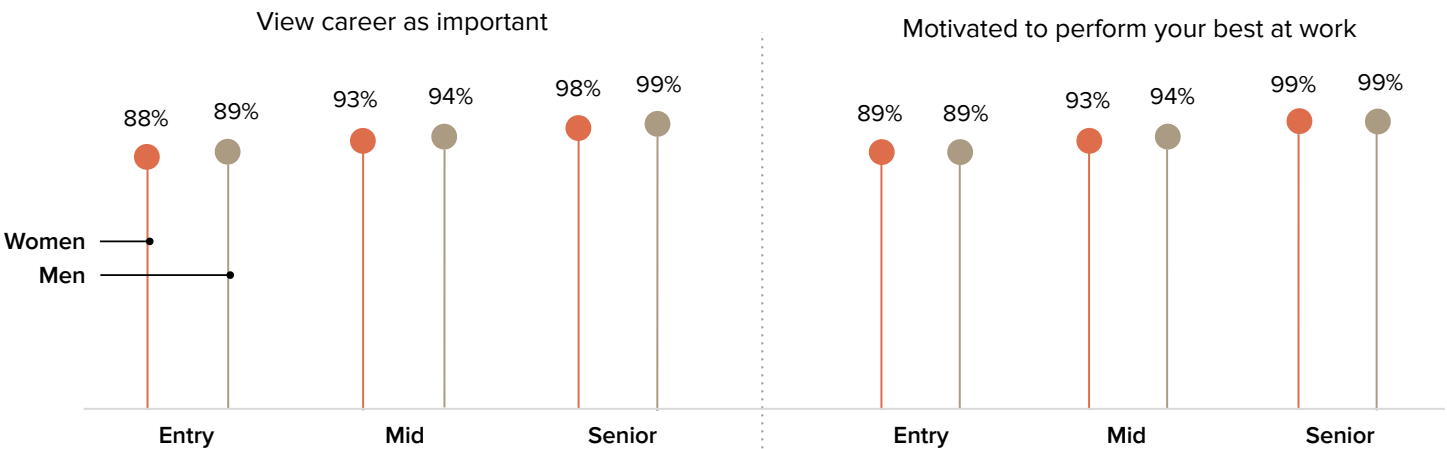


# Women are highly motivated—but less likely to want a promotion

Women and men at all levels are very committed to their jobs. But there is a notable gap in desire to advance this year: 80 percent of women want to be promoted to the next level, compared to 86 percent of men. And the gap is widest at entry and senior levels.

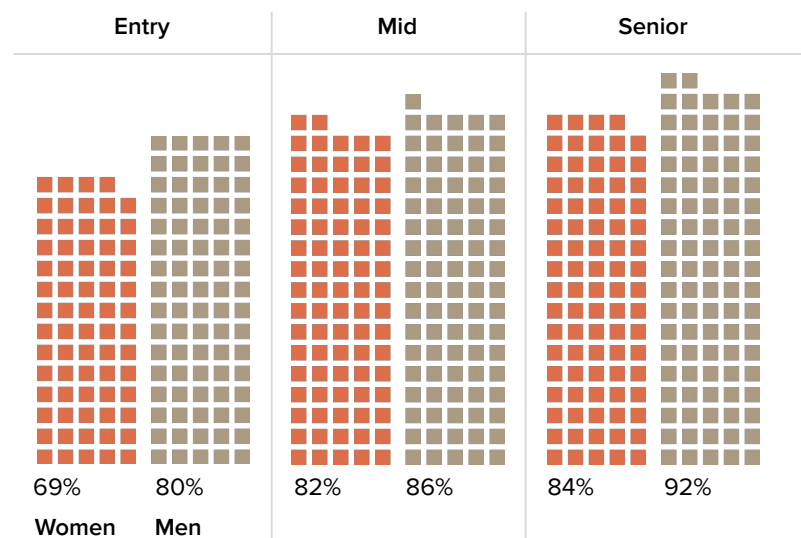
## Women and men are equally dedicated to their careers ...

% of women and men by level who view their career as important and are motivated to perform their best at work<sup>25</sup>



## ... But women are less likely to want a promotion

% of women and men by level who want to be promoted to the next level<sup>26</sup>



Women in leadership who don't want to advance see a harder journey to the top<sup>27</sup>

	Senior-level women	Senior-level men
Don't see a path to promotion that feels realistic	11%	3%
Have been passed over for promotions	18%	12%
Think more senior people are burned out or unhappy	21%	11%

**Latinas stand out for wanting to advance.** Nearly 9 in 10 Latinas want to be promoted to the next level, more than any other group of women.<sup>28</sup>

## A CLOSER LOOK

## Unpacking this year's ambition gap

At this unique moment of change and uncertainty in the workplace, there are likely many factors getting in the way of women's ambitions to advance. Here's what stands out in our data:

**Career support is strongly linked to desire to advance.** When women and men have sponsors and receive similar levels of support from managers and more senior colleagues, they are equally enthusiastic about getting promoted to the next level. The gap in desire to advance falls away.<sup>29</sup>

**Entry-level women face an opportunity gap.** Women at this level are far less likely than men to be people managers: only around one-third of entry-level people managers are women. As a result, far more entry-level men are on a path that can lead to promotion. When entry-level women serve as people managers, they are equally as likely to want to be promoted.<sup>30</sup>

**Women in leadership see a steeper path forward.** Senior-level women who are reluctant to advance are more likely to think top roles are unattainable and that employees in the top jobs are burned out and unhappy. Compared to other employees, senior-level women also stand out for high levels of burnout and concerns their gender will impede their advancement.<sup>31</sup>

**Women continue to shoulder more responsibilities at home.** Almost 25 percent of entry- and senior-level women who are not interested in promotion say that personal obligations make it hard to take on additional work—versus just 15 percent of comparable men. This maps to findings from previous years that show women do significantly more housework: in 2024, women with partners were more than three times as likely as men with partners to be responsible for all or most housework.<sup>32</sup>

**Young women are particularly ambitious.** At the entry level, women under 30 are more interested in being promoted than young men. But for employees who are over 40 and still at the entry level, there is a wide gap: 52% of women want to advance, compared to 71% of men. The drop in ambition appears to be fueled in part by the limited career support older entry-level women receive—far less than younger women and men of all ages.<sup>33</sup>

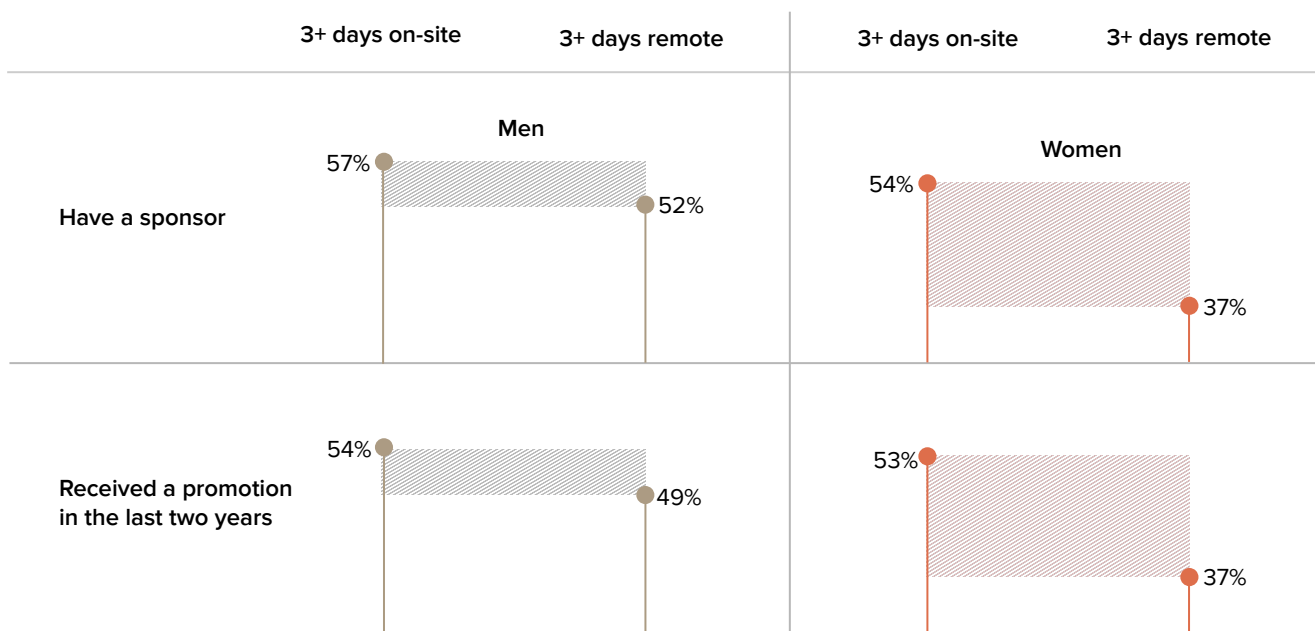
## Flexibility stigma may be limiting women's advancement

Women who work remotely most of the time are less likely to have a sponsor and far less likely to have been promoted in the last two years than women who work mostly on-site. In contrast, men receive more similar levels of sponsorship and promotions regardless of where they work. This pattern suggests that women may be disproportionately impacted by flexibility stigma: the unfounded belief that employees who make use of flexible work options are less committed to their jobs.<sup>34</sup>

**Flexibility stigma** is one of the biggest factors holding women back at work.<sup>35</sup> When women use flexible work arrangements, coworkers often assume they are less engaged and productive, while men's commitment is taken for granted.<sup>36</sup>

### When women work remotely, they often miss out on sponsorship and promotions

% of women and men by working arrangement who report that they ...<sup>37</sup>



**Flexibility stigma appears to especially impact women early in their careers.** Entry-level women are far more likely than other employees to work mostly remotely—and when they do, they are nearly 1.5 times less likely to be promoted than women at the same level who work in the office. In contrast, entry-level men are promoted at similar rates regardless of where they work.<sup>38</sup>

A CLOSER LOOK

# Employees overwhelmingly see the benefits of a fair and inclusive workplace

Most employees agree that workplaces should be fair, respectful, and encourage a diversity of ideas

% of women and men by level who agree with the following statements<sup>39</sup>

“

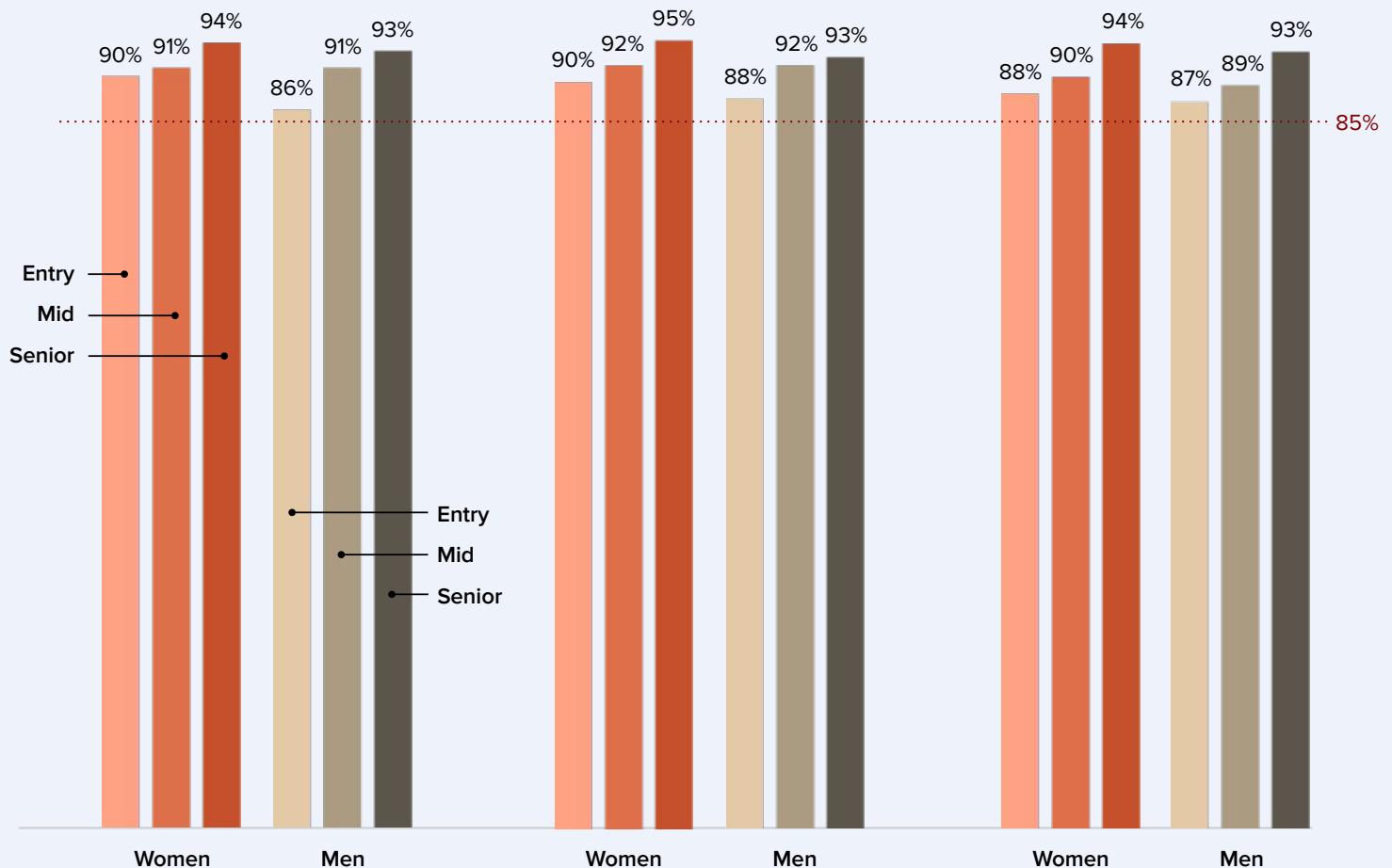
Hiring and promotion processes should be free from bias and favoritism”<sup>40</sup>

“

When employees feel respected and valued, they are motivated to do their best work”

“

A variety of perspectives leads to better decision-making and outcomes”

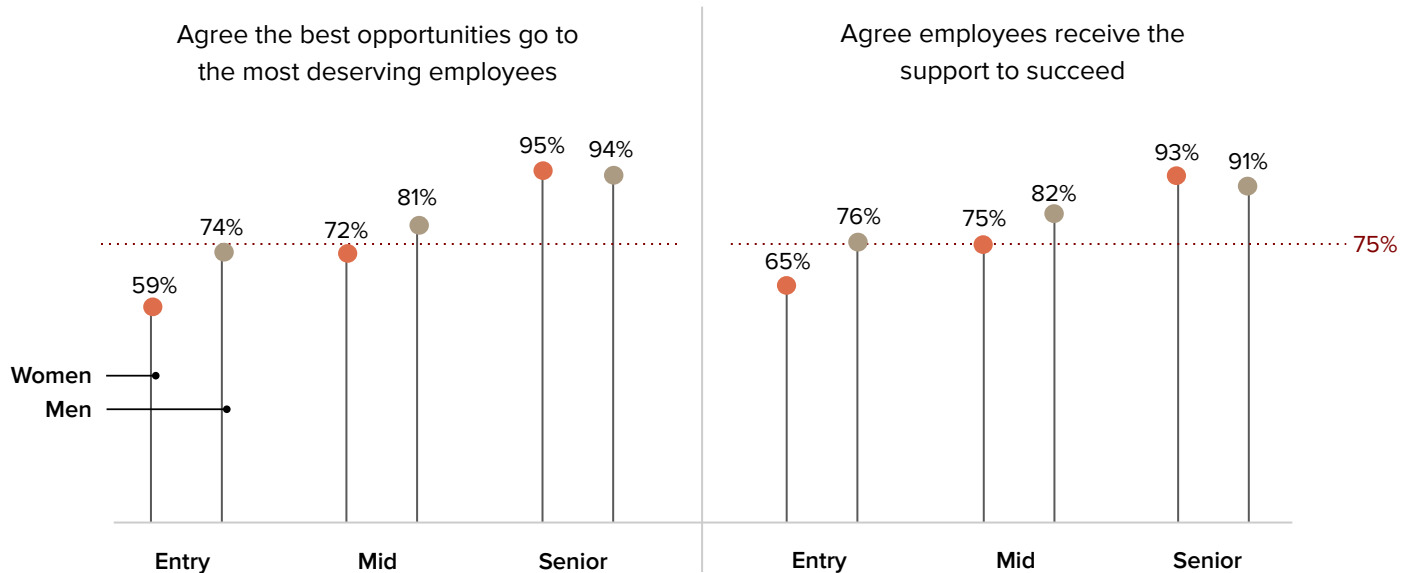




# Women are more likely to see an uneven playing field

## Early and mid-career women are less likely to view opportunities as fair ...

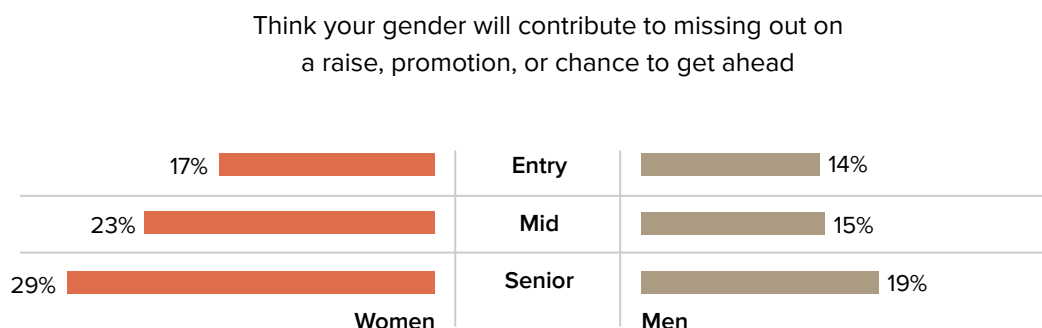
% of women and men by level who agree with the following statements<sup>41</sup>



Entry- and mid-level women are less likely than men at the same levels to believe opportunities for career support and advancement are fair—with entry-level women standing out as least optimistic about these issues. In fact, at the entry level, women are the most likely of any group to say these opportunities are not fair.<sup>42</sup>

## ... And women are more likely to worry their gender will make it harder to advance

% of women and men by level who think their gender will contribute to missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead<sup>43</sup>



Senior-level women stand out for thinking their gender will limit their advancement, perhaps because they have been in the workforce longer and experienced more headwinds.<sup>44</sup>

Some men worry their gender limits them—echoing other research that men think they have fewer chances at leadership roles than 20 years ago.<sup>45</sup>

## A CLOSER LOOK

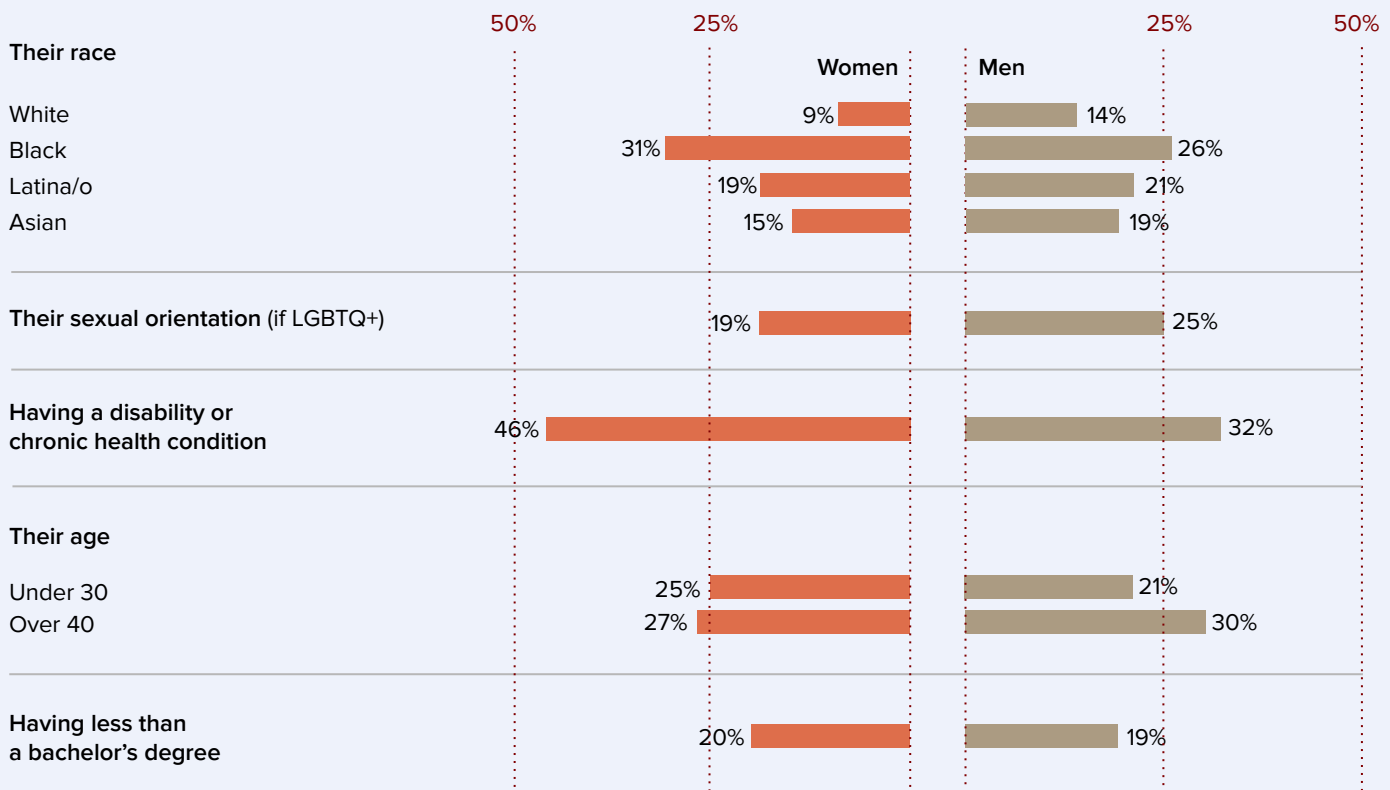
## Many employees believe aspects of who they are could hold them back

Half of all employees worry that one of their personal characteristics—such as their race, age, or sexual orientation—could limit their opportunities to advance. Most notably, more than 1 in 3 employees with a disability or chronic health issue think this way—and this is especially true for women with disabilities.

**Women with disabilities are right to be concerned.** Research shows that women with disabilities are more likely than men with disabilities to have coworkers doubt their competence or assume they're more junior than they really are.<sup>46</sup>

### Employees worry that parts of their identity will lead to missed opportunities

% of women and men by identity group who think the following personal characteristics will contribute to missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead<sup>47</sup>



**Black women stand out for being concerned their race will hold them back.** Almost 1 in 3 Black women express this worry—far more than Latinas and Asian women.

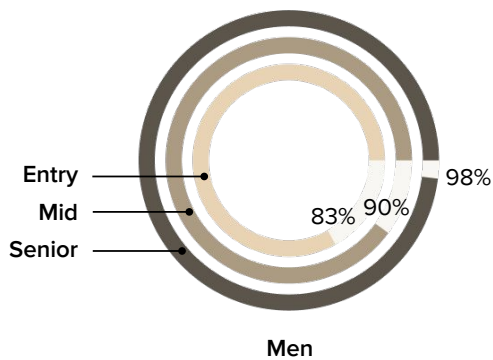
## Many women feel less able to speak up and take risks

Although most employees feel valued at work, women outside of leadership are less comfortable asserting themselves

% of women and men by level who agree with the following statements<sup>48</sup>

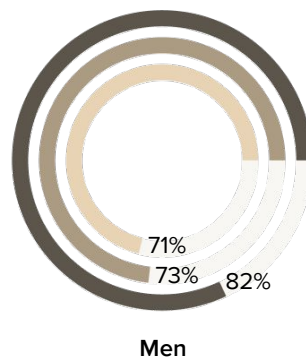
“

I feel respected and valued at my organization”



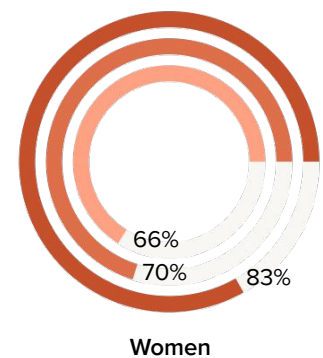
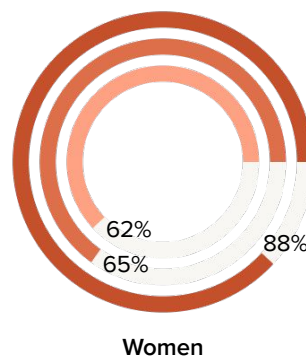
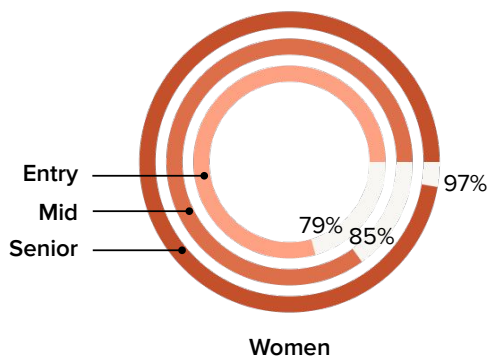
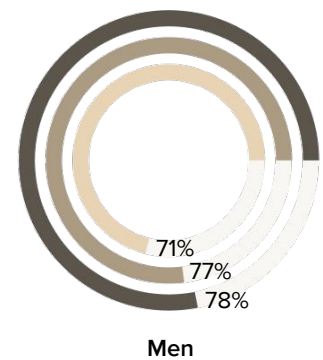
“

I feel safe to take risks and make mistakes”



“

I feel comfortable disagreeing with others”



Most employees at all levels feel respected and valued at work—and this optimism rises with seniority.

Entry- and mid-level women are less likely to feel they can disagree with colleagues or make mistakes. This hesitancy is consistent with research showing that women are more likely to have their competence questioned or face more scrutiny for missteps—which can lead them to hold back.<sup>49</sup>

**Women leaders are notably assertive.** Senior-level women stand out for being comfortable challenging the status quo, suggesting that those who reach the top develop significant resilience.<sup>50</sup>

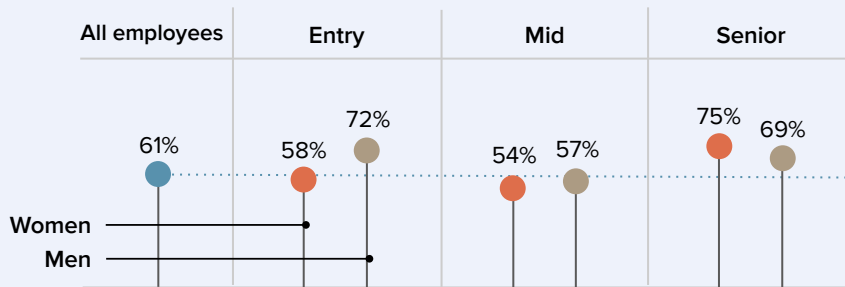
A CLOSER LOOK

# Employees faced a year of especially high burnout and job insecurity

The past year brought unusual pressures for employees and the highest levels of discontent in five years.<sup>51</sup> In particular, senior-level women—who have long been more burned out than others—are experiencing higher burnout than ever.<sup>52</sup>

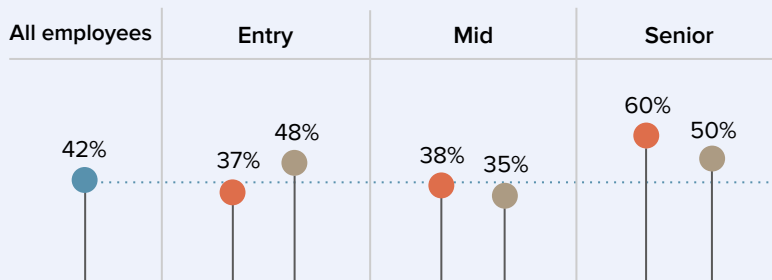
## Many employees are worried about job security ...

% of women and men by level who say they are concerned about their job security and/or prospects of finding a new job, if needed<sup>53</sup>



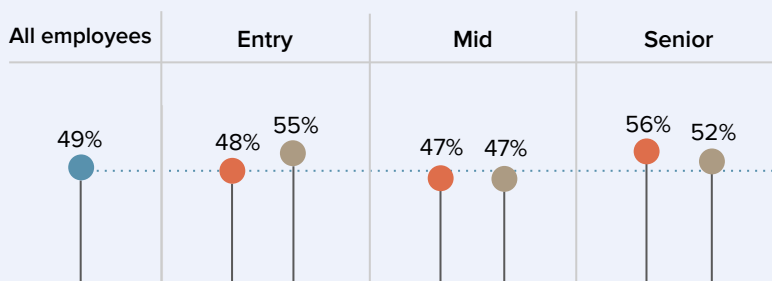
## ... Are struggling with frequent burnout ...

% of women and men by level who have frequently felt burned out at work in the last few months<sup>54</sup>



## ... And have considered leaving their organization

% of women and men by level who have seriously considered leaving their organization in the last year<sup>55</sup>



**Women in leadership with shorter tenures have been particularly hard hit.** Among senior-level women who have been with their companies five years or less, 70% have experienced frequent burnout, and 81% are concerned about job security. These high levels of concern align with research that shows women often face extra scrutiny when they're new to organizations and have to work harder to prove themselves.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, when women and men in leadership have longer tenures, their levels of burnout and job security are quite similar.<sup>57</sup>

**Black women in leadership face especially high burnout and job insecurity.** Almost 8 in 10 senior-level Black women have been frequently burned out in the past year, and even more are concerned about their job security—more than other senior leaders.<sup>58</sup>



## PART 2

# Pipeline and best practices

Women remain underrepresented at all career levels—and company commitment to their advancement appears to be declining.

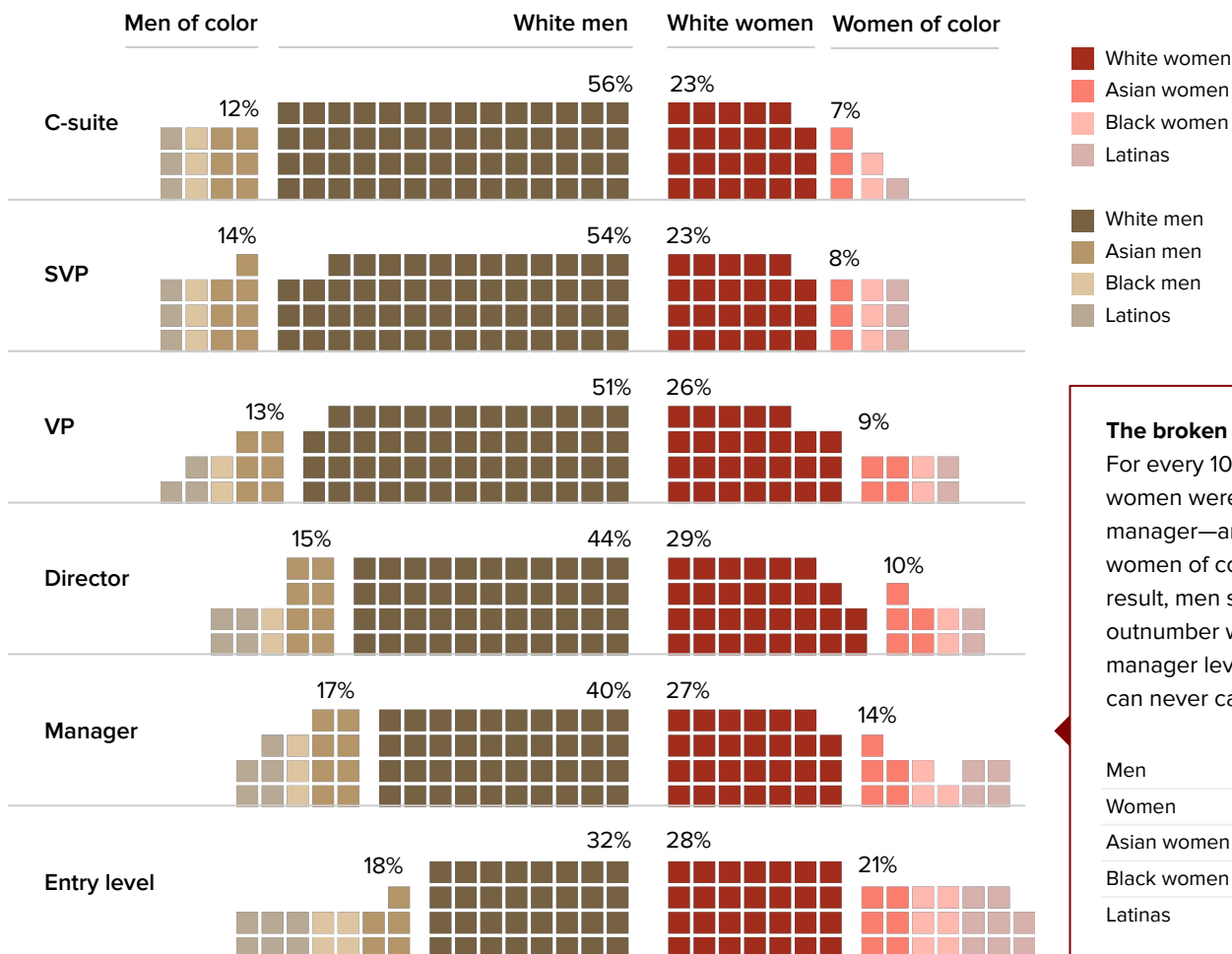
# Women are still underrepresented at every level

For the 11th consecutive year, women remain underrepresented at every level of the corporate pipeline—especially in senior leadership, where they hold just 29 percent of C-suite roles, unchanged from 2024. The “broken rung” at the first step up to manager also continues to hold women back.

In addition, these numbers may paint a rosier picture than reality. The companies that shared their pipeline data this year have a higher representation of women compared to typical companies from 2021 to 2024.<sup>59</sup>

## State of the corporate pipeline at the start of 2025

Employees by gender and race by level on January 1, 2025. Each square equals 1% of representation.<sup>60</sup>



### The broken rung persists.

For every 100 men, only 93 women were promoted to manager—and even fewer women of color.<sup>61</sup> As a result, men significantly outnumber women at the manager level, and women can never catch up.







Men	100
Women	93
Asian women	82
Black women	60
Latinas	82

## High-performing companies see better results for women

Since 2021, high-performing companies—those with a greater representation of women across levels—have seen accelerated progress.<sup>62</sup>

### The representation of women has increased more quickly at high-performing companies

Representation of women by level over time at companies in the top and bottom quartile for women's representation

	Entry level		Manager		Director		VP		SVP		C-suite	
	Top 	Bottom	Top 	Bottom	Top 	Bottom	Top 	Bottom	Top 	Bottom	Top 	Bottom
2025	63%	40%	57%	33%	52%	34%	49%	29%	46%	25%	38%	23%
2023	58%	43%	51%	36%	47%	33%	44%	36%	38%	21%	33%	27%
2021	57%	42%	52%	33%	45%	31%	40%	24%	36%	18%	31%	22%
% point change 2021–25	+6pp	-2pp	+5pp	0pp	+7pp	+3pp	+9pp	+5pp	+10pp	+7pp	+7pp	+1pp

These best practices are much more common at high-performing companies<sup>63</sup>

#### Best practices most strongly linked to a higher representation of women:<sup>64</sup>

- » Treating gender diversity as a high organizational priority
- » Having a company leader focused on fostering diversity and inclusion
- » Senior leaders being held accountable for advancing diversity and inclusion
- » Senior leaders communicating that disrespectful behavior is not welcome in the workplace
- » Consistently using clear criteria for hiring and promotions
- » Reminding evaluators about how to avoid bias before the hiring or promotion process begins
- » Having established mechanisms for surfacing bias in hiring and promotions
- » Tracking hiring and promotion outcomes to identify ways to make process improvements

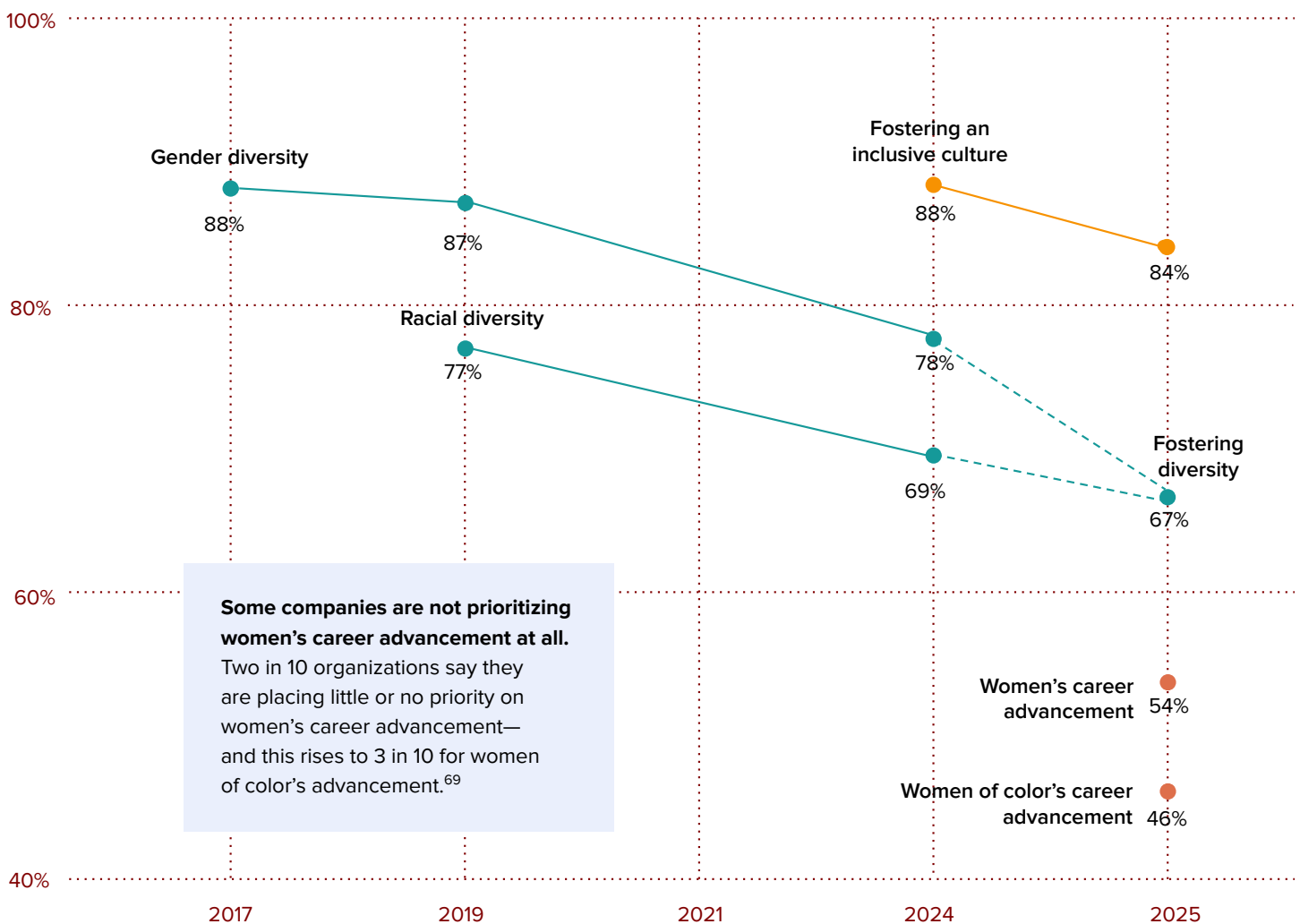
## Companies may be at risk of overlooking women

A majority of companies say diversity is a high priority this year, and more than 8 in 10 remain committed to inclusion. However, commitment to women's advancement is much lower: only about half of companies say women's career advancement is a high priority, and fewer are prioritizing women of color's advancement. This matters: companies that place a high priority on gender diversity and women's advancement see larger gains in women's representation.<sup>65</sup>

**To put this in perspective:**  
In 2021, 90% of companies said diversity and inclusion was a high priority.<sup>66</sup>

### Commitment to women's career advancement lags behind commitment to inclusion and diversity<sup>67</sup>

% of companies over time that have placed a high priority on the following at their organization<sup>68</sup>



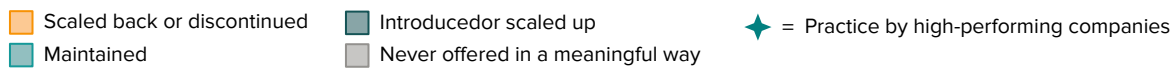


## Some companies are scaling back programs that are beneficial to women

Most companies are maintaining their efforts to support career advancement and foster a supportive work culture, but several changes may disproportionately impact women. While a majority of organizations are continuing to invest in diversity and inclusion, at least 1 in 6 have cut staff or resources. Moreover, some companies have scaled back or discontinued career development programs with content designed to support women, and there has been a notable decline in remote and flexible work options—which research shows can be especially helpful to women’s success at work.<sup>70</sup>

### Shifts in company policies and programs over the last 12 months<sup>71</sup>

% of companies that report the following changes at their organization in the last year<sup>72</sup>



#### Efforts to support career development

Skill-building and upskilling programs

6% 55% 34% 5%

Leadership training

9% 53% 38% 0%

Formal sponsorship programs

13% 42% 6% 39%

Career development programs that include content tailored for women

13% 55% 8% 25%

Funding for individual career development (e.g., certifications, career coaching)

8% 72% 13% 8%

#### Investment in fostering diversity and inclusion

◆ Staff and resources focused on supporting diversity

19% 72% 9% 0%

◆ Staff and resources focused on supporting inclusion

14% 80% 6% 0%

#### Efforts to support an inclusive culture

Employee resource groups (ERGs)

3% 78% 13% 6%

Training on how to identify and interrupt workplace bias

19% 64% 14% 3%

Training on how to be an ally and/or foster inclusion

16% 61% 16% 8%

#### Recruiting and hiring practices

Recruiting to ensure job applicants with a wide range of backgrounds

5% 86% 5% 5%

◆ Clear evaluation criteria set before candidates are considered

2% 88% 3% 8%

Quantifiable measures for evaluating applicants (e.g., ratings of 1 to 5)

0% 77% 8% 16%

Bias training for evaluators

6% 73% 6% 14%

◆ Tracking who is hired to ensure outcomes are fair

6% 80% 2% 13%

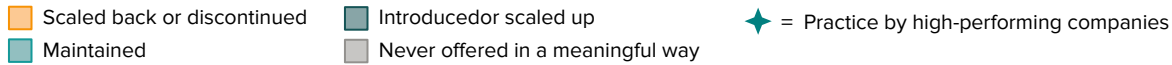
“

We don’t have a women’s leadership program anymore—and we had to reimagine our women’s leadership training. We took elements of the training and shared it broadly through our ERGs. It means some of the content is still available to women—but it’s informal, rather than a comprehensive program.”

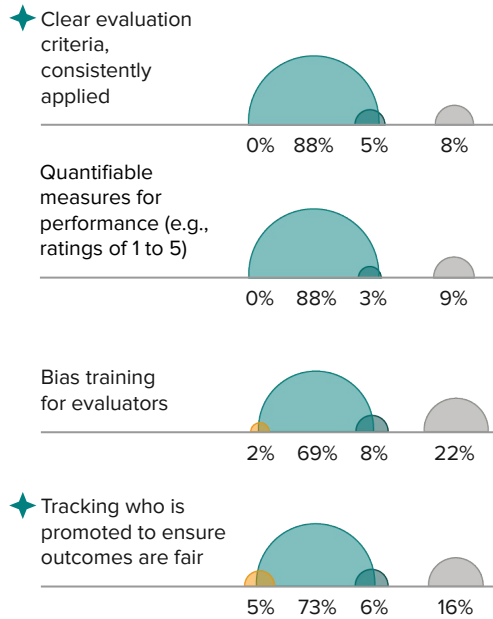
—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

## Shifts in company policies and programs over the last 12 months

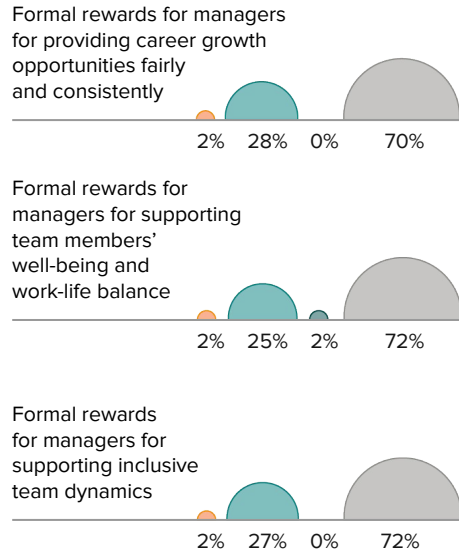
% of companies that report the following changes at their organization in the last year



### Performance review practices

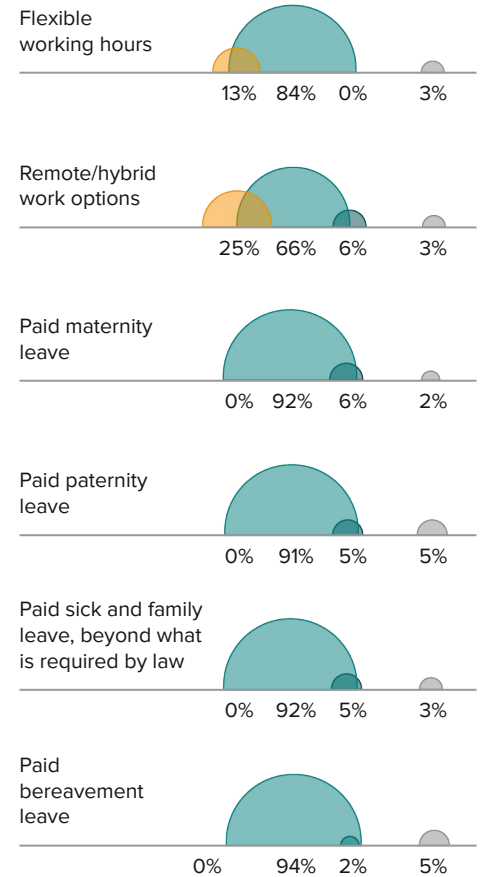


### Incentives for managers



**Manager incentives lag.** Only around 1 in 4 companies are maintaining formal rewards for managers who invest in people management and fostering team inclusion. Moreover, a majority of companies have never offered meaningful incentives in these areas—which might explain why many employees report they're not receiving consistent manager support.<sup>73</sup>

### Employee benefits



## PART 3

# Solutions

The fundamentals of a thriving workplace remain the same as ever: fairness of opportunity and an inclusive culture.

# Roadmap for fairness and inclusion

## Commitment from senior leaders

Like any successful effort, improving workplace culture depends on active, visible support from senior leaders.<sup>74</sup>

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### FAIRNESS

## Fairness of opportunity

Lack of career opportunity is the number one reason people leave their jobs—above pay, benefits, and flexibility.<sup>75</sup>

### STRATEGY 1

Ensure hiring and promotions are merit based

(PAGE 27)

### STRATEGY 2

Equip managers to support career development

(PAGE 32)

### STRATEGY 3

Foster authentic sponsorship

(PAGE 36)



### INCLUSION

## An inclusive culture

When employees feel respected and valued, they are motivated to do their best work.<sup>76</sup>

### STRATEGY 1

Activate employees to foster inclusion

(PAGE 39)

### STRATEGY 2

Strengthen ERGs to build community and empathy

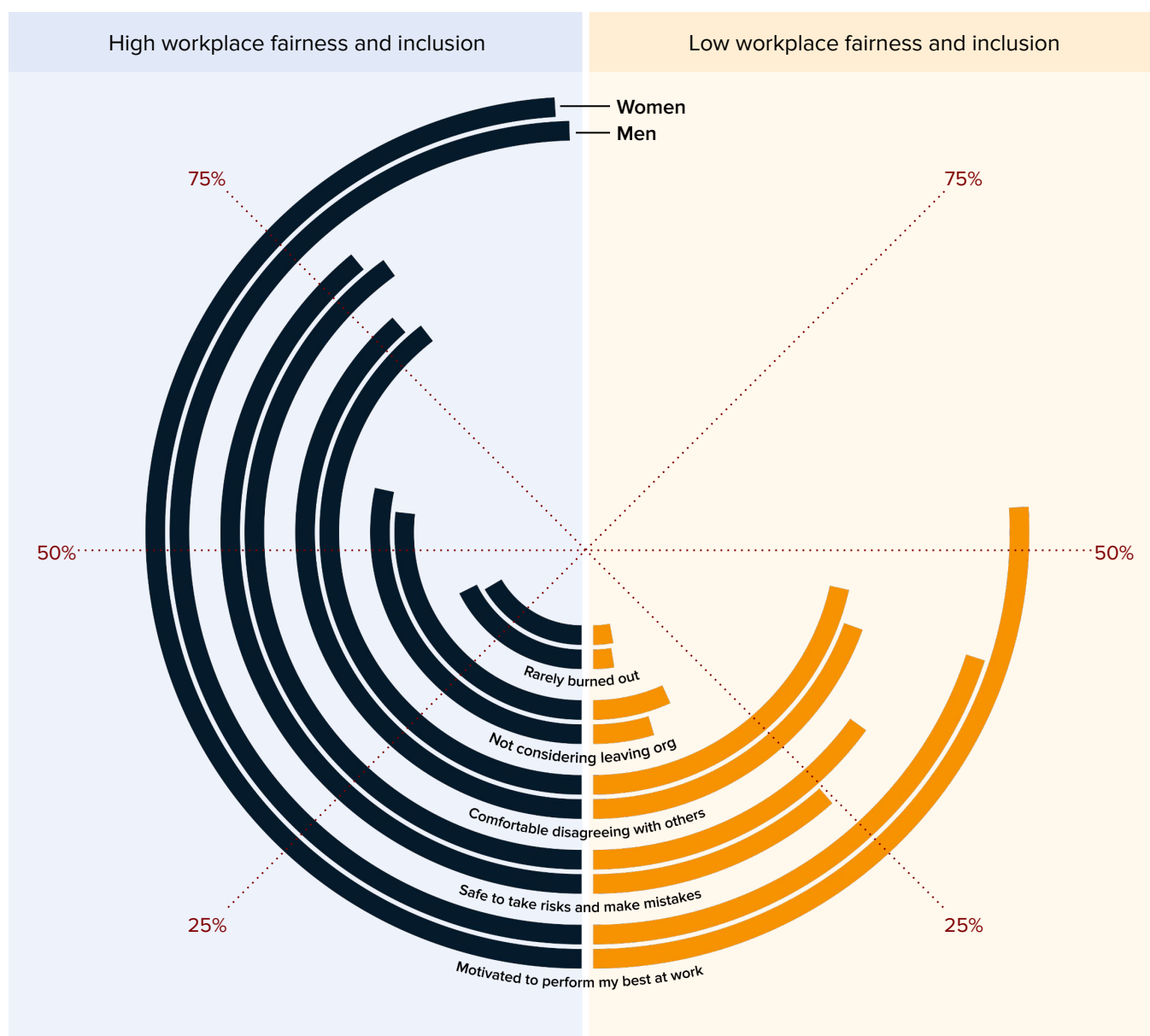
(PAGE 44)

## A fair and inclusive workplace leads to better outcomes for everyone

When employees see their workplace as fair and inclusive, they are at least twice as likely to feel motivated to do their best work, comfortable taking risks, and able to speak up in dissent.<sup>77</sup> They're also significantly less likely to feel burned out or consider leaving. These outcomes strengthen employee morale—which leads to stronger retention, higher productivity, and greater innovation.<sup>78</sup>

### How employees feel when they observe high and low levels of fairness and inclusion

% of women and men who report high versus low morale on various metrics when they see their workplace as high or low on fairness and inclusion<sup>79</sup>





## A CLOSER LOOK

## Senior leaders play a critical role in the success of fairness and inclusion efforts

Decades of research show that senior leaders play an essential role in any operational and cultural change.<sup>80</sup> When senior leaders are strong advocates and model the right behaviors, they create the conditions for real progress.

### What this looks like:

- » **Give leaders the full picture.** Research shows senior leaders are more engaged when they have clear visibility into the state of fairness and inclusion in their organization—like data on hiring and promotion outcomes and insights from culture surveys.<sup>81</sup> Leaders are also more likely to be motivated when they grasp the costs of failing to act, such as falling behind on innovation or losing top talent.<sup>82</sup>
- » **Ask leaders to speak up.** Leaders are most effective at activating employees when they talk often and authentically about why change is needed.<sup>83</sup> Two approaches to speaking out have high impact: sharing personal stories, and describing how inclusive practices benefit everyone.<sup>84</sup> For example, leaders might share research showing that fairer promotion processes make the path to advancement more visible for everyone.
- » **Ensure leaders know the impact of leading by example.** Research shows that role modeling by senior leadership is a key driver of lasting change.<sup>85</sup> When leaders actively support fairness and inclusion—such as attending optional trainings and mentoring junior employees of all backgrounds—they set a clear expectation for others. People are far more likely to adopt new behaviors when they see them practiced consistently from the top.<sup>86</sup>

HR leaders named “sponsorship from senior leaders” as the top driver of success in new initiatives to foster fairness and inclusion—above any other factors.<sup>87</sup>

Only about 1 in 3 senior leaders is a woman, but 79% of senior-level men believe women are well represented in leadership.<sup>88</sup>

“

Most of the senior C-suite are actively sponsoring ERGs and engaging in programming. It sends a strong signal.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

## STRATEGY 1

# Ensure hiring and promotions are merit based

## Why this matters

Hiring and promotions are the main levers of advancement. When these processes aren't fair, companies miss out—talented job candidates may be passed over, high-performing employees may end up in roles where they have less impact, and employees may lose motivation and consider leaving.<sup>89</sup>

## ■ The implications for women

- » Women continue to be underrepresented at every level of corporate America and continue to face a “broken rung” at the first promotion to manager.<sup>90</sup>
- » Major studies show that women can be held to different hiring and promotion standards—for example, women tend to be promoted based on what they've already accomplished, whereas men tend to be promoted based on their perceived potential.<sup>91</sup>

Only 30% of entry-level women say they've received a promotion in the last two years—compared to 43% of men at their level.

WiW 2025<sup>92</sup>

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## What companies can do

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- 1.1 Put comprehensive best practices in place
  - 1.2 Broaden your talent pool
  - 1.3 Ensure hiring and promotion practices are working as intended
  - 1.4 Leverage AI thoughtfully in hiring and performance reviews
-

1.1

## Put comprehensive best practices in place

When it comes to initiatives to strengthen fairness in hiring and promotions, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Research from Stanford shows that best practices are far more powerful when implemented together.<sup>93</sup>

### How to take action:

It's most effective to adopt this full set of research-backed practices —not just one or two.<sup>94</sup>

- Take steps to ensure job applicants with a wide range of backgrounds
- Set clear evaluation criteria and consistently apply them
- Anonymize résumés and work samples in hiring
- Establish quantifiable measures for evaluating applicants or employees (e.g., ratings of 1 to 5)
- Offer bias and inclusion training to evaluators
- Track who is hired and promoted to ensure outcomes are fair

In a Stanford study of performance reviews, subjective comments about women dropped from 14% to 1% when companies implemented clear evaluation criteria and trained managers to use them consistently.<sup>95</sup>

“

We developed a competency-based interview guide to support hiring managers and we're redoing anti-bias training for hirers under the title 'effective and fair hiring.'”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

1.2

## Broaden your talent pool

Taking steps to recruit from a wider range of sources can dramatically improve the quality and diversity of applicants.<sup>96</sup>

### How to take action:

- **Be intentional about candidate qualifications.** Review which qualifications are essential and which might be unnecessarily limiting. Major companies like Delta, Google, and IBM have dropped degree requirements for a range of positions, including sales supervisors, event planners, and computer programmers.<sup>97</sup> These companies say it's helped them fill positions that were previously hard to staff.<sup>98</sup>
- **Review job postings to ensure language doesn't inadvertently deter candidates.** AI tools can help, or you can ask employees from a range of backgrounds to vet ads for potentially off-putting turns of phrase.<sup>99</sup> For example, terms like "native English speakers" can discourage fluent non-native speakers, while "work hard, play hard" may deter caregivers.<sup>100</sup>
- **Encourage referrals from different backgrounds.** Referrals often yield high-quality candidates and reduce hiring time—but unless companies emphasize the importance of bringing in candidates from a variety of backgrounds, they can unintentionally reinforce existing networks.<sup>101</sup> It's also helpful to explain to employees that hiring a wider range of talent leads to stronger, more innovative teams.<sup>102</sup>

**What HR leaders are saying:** Companies are partnering with external recruiting agencies and women's professional organizations to attract more women of color and more women with specialized skills.

At companies that scaled up efforts to recruit a more diverse workforce in the last year, employees are almost twice as likely to believe that the best opportunities go to the most deserving employees.

WiW 2025<sup>103</sup>

In a 2023 survey, 55% of hirers said they had expanded their hiring pools by eliminating degree requirements for at least one role.<sup>104</sup>

“

We use AI tools to scan job postings and flag gender-coded words, replacing them with neutral alternatives.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

1.3

## Ensure hiring and promotion practices are working as intended

Companies may adopt strong hiring and promotion practices on paper, but they are not always implemented effectively. Even when companies report having fair practices in place, employees often say they aren't applied consistently.<sup>105</sup>

### How to take action:

- **Create checkpoints.** Add real-time checks to ensure that key practices are being reliably followed. For example, before approving a promotion, managers should double-check that the employee has met all of the performance requirements.
- **Ask for a rationale.** Put a process in place that prompts evaluators to explain their hiring and promotion decisions. When people are expected to account for their decisions, they're often more objective.<sup>106</sup>
- **Enable upward feedback.** Make it easy for employees to highlight when process steps have been missed or they've seen a lack of fairness in decision-making. Consider offering feedback tools that allow employees to remain anonymous to encourage candid input.
- **Track and audit outcomes.** Regularly review hiring and promotion data. If there are signs of unfair or unjustified results, find out why and make process adjustments.

Across multiple years of *Women in the Workplace* research, company and employee perceptions of hiring and promotion practices diverge. Far more companies report that they've implemented each practice than employees say happens in reality.

WiW 2016–2024<sup>107</sup>

“

We're holding ourselves accountable by sharing hiring and representation data with our board on a regular basis.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

“

We revised promotions to include more voices. And our executive team now discusses all promotions—they don't just rubber-stamp things—to reduce bias.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

1.4

## Leverage AI thoughtfully in hiring and performance reviews

As AI becomes more ingrained in HR processes, it also carries the risk of unintentionally amplifying bias.<sup>108</sup> Applying AI responsibly can help organizations hire and promote people more efficiently, fairly, and inclusively.

### How to take action:

- **Actively guard against bias.** When wielded effectively, AI can identify job candidates who might otherwise go overlooked and reduce subjectivity in hiring and performance decisions. However, because AI models learn from historical information, they can also reproduce and exacerbate unfair patterns from the past.<sup>109</sup> To minimize this risk, it's critical to train AI models using diverse and varied datasets. In addition, companies should audit hiring and evaluation outputs regularly to check for bias—for example, confirming that candidates with similar qualifications are recommended at similar rates regardless of demographics.
- **Establish clear guidelines for using AI.** To guard against the over- or unintended use of AI in hiring and performance evaluations, companies should develop policies that outline where AI can add value and where human judgment and oversight are critically important. Currently, only 1 in 10 companies have clear policies guiding AI's role in performance reviews, and only 5 percent are training managers on the ethical and appropriate use of AI in this process.<sup>110</sup>

Six in 10 companies have not assessed the impact of AI on fairness in hiring and promotions.

WiW 2025<sup>111</sup>

Only about one-third of companies have assessed the impact of AI on women's job security and opportunities to advance.

WiW 2025<sup>112</sup>

## STRATEGY 2

# Equip managers to support career development

## Why this matters

Managers are central to their reports' career growth, but recent research shows that managers are stretched thinner than ever.<sup>113</sup> Partly as a result, fewer than half of employees say they consistently receive any one of the key manager supports that drive advancement—such as showing an interest in their development or offering clear guidance on how to advance.<sup>114</sup>

## ■ The implications for women

- » When managers support their advancement, women are significantly more likely to receive a raise or promotion compared to women whose managers don't. They are also more likely to feel comfortable speaking up and taking risks.<sup>115</sup>
- » When women receive the same career support as men, they are just as ambitious to be promoted to the next level.<sup>116</sup>
- » Women at the entry level—a stage when advocacy is essential for advancement—are less likely than men to receive critical opportunities, like stretch assignments, that managers can provide.<sup>117</sup>

94% of employees say they would stay longer at workplaces that invest in their development.<sup>119</sup>

When managers support their career development, employees are far more likely to feel their workplace is fair—which drives employee motivation and loyalty.

WiW 2025<sup>120</sup>

“

Managers play a pivotal role ... when they don't show interest in development or provide guidance, women fall behind disproportionately.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

## What companies can do

2.1 Provide managers with the time and tools to offer high-quality support

2.2 Empower managers to distribute opportunity fairly<sup>118</sup>

## A CLOSER LOOK

## In the past year, few employees received regular support from managers

Only about a third of employees say they receive consistent support from their managers

% of employees who say their manager has consistently done the following in the last 12 months<sup>121</sup>





## 2.1

## Provide managers with the time and tools to offer high-quality support

Most managers are already taking steps to support their team's growth. But employees aren't consistently experiencing that support.<sup>122</sup> This suggests that managers need more dedicated time, tools, and training to make employee career development and well-being part of their everyday interactions with their team.

### How to take action:

- **Free up managers' time—and ask them to invest more in employee growth.** Companies should work with managers to minimize the time spent on routine tasks so they can focus more on connecting with their teams—coaching people, getting to know their strengths, and understanding what they need to do their best work.
- **Establish clear expectations for manager check-ins.** It's helpful to routinize these check-ins—for instance, align them with quarterly planning—to ensure they happen consistently.
- **Train managers to be effective coaches.** While some managers have a natural gift for inspiring and developing people, many do not. But research shows that these skills can be taught, and that training managers has a lasting impact.<sup>123</sup> Organizations can start by embedding high-quality coaching and development training into onboarding for all new managers.
- **Provide career development resources.** Easy-to-use tools—for instance, standardized scripts for career conversations—can make it less labor-intensive for managers to offer meaningful support.

Managers spend just 7% of their working hours on their reports' career development, citing a lack of time and resources as the top reasons why they don't do more.<sup>124</sup>

A Gallup study found that after managers were trained in career development, their teams had higher motivation and performance, and lower turnover—and these effects increased over time.<sup>125</sup>

#### What companies are doing:

A global bank reviewed 130 tasks performed by managers and identified those that could be delegated, automated, or eliminated. This approach freed up one day per week for managers to dedicate to team development.<sup>126</sup>

## 2.2

## Empower managers to distribute opportunity fairly

Multiple studies show that employees often receive uneven feedback, coaching, and access to career-advancing opportunities from their managers.<sup>127</sup> Managers often rely on gut instincts when evaluating potential, and although it's usually unintentional, they may invest more energy supporting people who are similar to themselves.<sup>128</sup>

### How to take action:

- ➔ **Ensure managers provide effective feedback to everyone.** Managers should give all team members clear, concrete, and actionable feedback that supports their growth—but research shows that women may not always get this.<sup>129</sup> Companies can help by offering guidance on what effective feedback looks like—and what to avoid, such as vague or generic comments that don't point to next steps. In addition, companies should consider developing performance review templates that solicit specific input on the skills each employee needs to advance.
- ➔ **Help managers fairly distribute stretch opportunities.** These high-visibility assignments are powerful career accelerators, but entry-level women get fewer of them.<sup>130</sup> To close this gap, encourage managers to share stretch opportunities with all eligible team members and reinforce why they're so important. And make sure they know to focus on skills—and not on personal preferences or arbitrary criteria—when they're deciding who gets these opportunities.

Only 22% of entry-level women say they've been recommended for a stretch assignment by a more senior colleague, compared to 32% of men at the same level.

WiW 2025<sup>131</sup>

Only 30% of companies offer formal rewards to managers for providing career growth opportunities fairly and consistently across their team.

WiW 2025<sup>132</sup>

## STRATEGY 3

# Foster authentic sponsorship

## Why this matters

Employees with sponsors tend to advance faster and feel happier in their jobs.<sup>133</sup> But not all sponsorship is equal—when relationships are authentic and build genuine trust, they last longer and produce better results.<sup>134</sup>

## ■ The implications for women

- » Women are less likely than men to have a sponsor—meaning they miss out on the opportunities that sponsorship provides.<sup>135</sup>
- » Women are also less likely to have sponsors in senior leadership—which means they lack access to the people who can open the most doors.<sup>136</sup>

Employees with sponsors are nearly twice as likely to have been promoted in the last two years.

WiW 2025<sup>137</sup>

Overall, men are more likely than women to have sponsors. This gap is widest at the entry level, where just 31% of women have a sponsor compared to 45% of men.

WiW 2025<sup>138</sup>

## What companies can do

- 3.1 Strengthen formal sponsorship programs to build lasting connections
- 3.2 Use training to unlock the full potential of sponsorship
- 3.3 Broaden access to informal networks
- 3.4 Encourage employees to connect across differences

3.1

## Strengthen formal sponsorship programs to build lasting connections

Formal sponsorship programs—when designed well—are essential to creating opportunities for employees to learn and advance.<sup>139</sup> To ensure they're set up for success, companies should invest in matching employees with leaders who are well positioned to help them.<sup>140</sup> It's also important to set clear guidelines on what's expected of sponsors and sponsees and define what success looks like, such as more stretch assignments or faster promotions. In addition, regular check-ins to gauge progress and gather insights to keep the sponsor-sponsee relationship growing can help.<sup>141</sup>

### What HR leaders are saying:

With the shift away from career development programs designed for women, HR leaders worry that women will continue to lack the senior-level support crucial to their advancement. In addition, many HR leaders specifically point to the decline of formal and informal sponsorship programs as cause for concern.<sup>143</sup>

3.2

## Use training to unlock the full potential of sponsorship

Training should be a requirement for both sponsors and sponsees—not just a “nice to have.” For example, sponsors should be coached to reserve time each month to check in with their sponsee and take at least one action to offer support. And sponsees should learn how to ask sponsors for what they need, make it easy for them to take action, and know the importance of reporting back on outcomes.<sup>142</sup>

Only 58% of companies have a formal sponsorship program—and only half of women employees have a sponsor.

WiW 2025<sup>144</sup>

## 3.3

## Broaden access to informal networks

To give junior employees more access to senior colleagues, companies can host networking events during the workday—making clear that participation is encouraged. One company, for example, holds monthly “cake parties” to bring colleagues together in a relaxed setting. In addition, companies should look for opportunities like alumni and industry networks to help employees connect with potential sponsors outside the organization.

“

We’re creating sponsorship and exposure opportunities for women at the director-plus level to join board and executive conversations where male peers already have access.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

## 3.4

## Encourage employees to connect across differences

People often sponsor colleagues similar to themselves, yet research shows sponsorship relationships are not any more effective when sponsors and sponsees have shared identities or experiences.<sup>145</sup> Companies should encourage leaders to sponsor coworkers from different backgrounds and give them tools to do this well, such as conversation prompts to help establish an initial connection and deepen it over time. It’s also helpful to remind leaders of the value of reaching beyond their usual circles—not only are they creating opportunities for employees who might otherwise be overlooked, they gain insights that can strengthen their own leadership and improve organizational performance.<sup>146</sup>

**Lean In Circles help companies tap into the proven benefits of peer support.<sup>147</sup>**

Lean In Circles create a space for small groups of employees to come together to learn new skills, give and get advice, and encourage each other to take action. Circle members consistently report that they learn how to be more effective and inclusive leaders. And Circles have a particularly meaningful impact on the women who participate in them: 98% credit their Circle with a positive change at work, such as having a stronger network and feeling their company is more invested in their success.<sup>148</sup>

Learn more at [leanin.org/circles-for-companies](https://leanin.org/circles-for-companies).

## STRATEGY 1

# Activate employees to foster inclusion

## Why this matters

Inclusion is not a slogan—it's a business strategy. It determines how supported people feel and how meaningfully they can contribute.<sup>149</sup> Many studies show that inclusion drives better outcomes: it fuels higher employee motivation and loyalty—as well as business results like productivity and innovation.<sup>150</sup>

## ■ The implications for women

- » Studies show that teams with a mix of women and men outperform homogenous teams—but only when everyone feels included and that their ideas count.<sup>151</sup> On inclusive teams, women's contributions are more likely to be heard and acknowledged, allowing them to participate fully and influence decisions.<sup>152</sup>
- » Bias continues to limit women's opportunities at work.<sup>153</sup> For instance, women are often held back by assumptions that they are less naturally suited for leadership than men.<sup>154</sup> But in an inclusive culture, this kind of biased thinking is more likely to be challenged.

Employees at companies that have expanded inclusion programs in the past year—like ERGs and allyship trainings—are nearly 1.5 times more likely to feel respected and valued than those at companies that have scaled back these programs.

WiW 2025<sup>155</sup>



Our journey on inclusion and belonging is the right one. Investing more has provided a competitive advantage for our organization.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

## What companies can do

- 1.1 Articulate a positive vision of an inclusive culture
- 1.2 Empower managers to lead inclusively
- 1.3 Choose culture and inclusion trainings that really work
- 1.4 Create incentives that encourage inclusive behavior

### What HR leaders are saying:

Some initiatives once labeled diversity and inclusion efforts are now being incorporated into core business functions. HR leaders believe these changes make inclusion initiatives more central to the organization, potentially allowing them to reach more employees. However, HR leaders worry that some workers question whether these changes mean companies are moving away from previously stated commitments to diversity and inclusion.

1.1

## Articulate a positive vision of an inclusive culture

To make inclusion a reality, companies need to clearly define it in their values or code of conduct and describe how employees can make it part of their daily practice. Clear expectations give everyone a shared roadmap and empower them to take action.<sup>156</sup>

These core principles are the building blocks of an inclusive culture—and it helps to be specific about what success looks like and how employees can take action:

Principle	What this looks like	Examples of actions employees can take
<b>Acceptance</b>	Company leaders and communications consistently make clear that people of all backgrounds are appreciated and welcomed.	Employees should be intentional about who's invited to meetings to ensure a range of perspectives—and structure meetings so everyone has a chance to be heard.
<b>Respect</b>	Employees treat others' time, contributions, and expertise as valuable—for example, by listening attentively, giving credit where it's due, and avoiding interruptions. They also know how to recognize and combat disrespectful behavior when it occurs.	If someone is spoken over, employees can say, "I'd like to hear the rest of [Name's] thoughts." And if a disrespectful comment is made, they can respond with a clarifying question like "What makes you say that?" This can help to surface and challenge underlying assumptions.
<b>Empathy</b>	Employees should approach each other with genuine curiosity and a commitment to understanding each other's lived experiences—and follow up with supportive words or actions.	Employees should make an effort to notice when colleagues may be getting excluded—for instance, if a coworker often misses work-related social events. They can check in to see if anything is preventing the colleague from participating, listen actively, and offer to adjust the timing or logistics so the person can join.

**McKinsey's research shows that inclusion comes from two sources: from colleagues and from the organization.** Their framework allows companies to assess whether employees feel both valued by colleagues and welcomed by their company.<sup>157</sup>

Learn more at [mckinsey.com/measuring-inclusion](https://mckinsey.com/measuring-inclusion).

## 1.2

## Empower managers to lead inclusively

Managers shape how inclusion comes to life for their teams. The ways that effective managers lead—treating everyone with respect and creating opportunities to hear everyone’s best thinking—set the standard for their team.<sup>158</sup>

### How to take action:

- **Provide ongoing, manager-specific training.** Offer research-backed training that gives managers concrete tools for building empathy, addressing disrespectful behavior, and ensuring everyone feels welcome and comfortable speaking up.<sup>159</sup> For example, managers might learn how to use project debriefs to identify ways to bring more perspectives into future work. To reinforce these skills, companies should embed this training into manager onboarding and follow up with annual refreshers to keep skills active and relevant.
- **Equip managers with the tools to build inclusion day-to-day.** Provide ready-to-use resources that make it easier for managers to engage their teams in creating a respectful and welcoming environment. These might include shared norms for inclusive meetings; talking points to help managers explain how respect and empathy help the team perform better; and prompts managers can fold into one-on-one conversations to check on the well-being of their team.
- **Train managers to welcome dissent and boldness from everyone.** Teams perform best when employees feel able to speak up freely.<sup>160</sup> To support this, managers can learn to respond positively to mistakes—by helping employees to fix the issue rather than assigning blame—and to praise reports who advance novel ideas, challenge assumptions, or drive change. In addition, managers should also know how to recognize and intervene when women are criticized for assertiveness or penalized disproportionately for mistakes.
- **Make inclusion part of every manager’s mandate.** Clearly communicate that cultivating an inclusive culture is a key managerial responsibility, and build culture and well-being goals into managers’ performance reviews. Although few companies do this, research shows that when managers are evaluated on how well they foster inclusion on their team, they are far more likely to prioritize it.<sup>161</sup>

**What companies are doing:**

A Fortune 500 company recently changed how managers are evaluated: in addition to rating their business outcomes, performance ratings now focus on how managers achieve results and implement company values—such as fairness—based on 360-degree feedback from their team.<sup>162</sup>



1.3

## Choose culture and inclusion trainings that really work

Many inclusion trainings are ineffective or can even leave employees feeling defensive, rather than supported and equipped to act.<sup>163</sup> But research also shows that a subset of well-designed trainings really work: when trainings focus on active participation and real-life problem-solving, they can meaningfully improve how employees show up for each other.<sup>164</sup>

Here's what to look for when evaluating bias, allyship, and other trainings:

Effective trainings should ...	Avoid trainings that ...
... Acknowledge that participants generally have good intentions and want to make a positive difference—so they don't feel accused or blamed.	... Put participants on the defensive by focusing on how they are doing—or thinking—the wrong things. <sup>167</sup>
... Focus mainly on concrete steps employees can take in difficult situations—for instance, what to say and do if a coworker has been treated with disrespect. <sup>165</sup>	... Emphasize abstract concepts without much reference to realistic workplace situations.
... Spend most of the time on active employee participation—discussion, brainstorming, or journaling—and ask participants to come up with solutions. Research shows this leads to far greater employee buy-in—especially for sensitive initiatives that employees may initially resist.	... Offer participants little opportunity to participate and generate ideas themselves. Studies show that passive delivery of sensitive content can leave employees feeling apathetic or even hostile. <sup>168</sup>
... Include a compelling selection of realistic stories and concrete examples to engage employees' emotions.	... Overwhelm employees with data—and include little storytelling. <sup>169</sup>
... Consist of live sessions with trusted facilitators, as research shows that this greatly increases employee buy-in. <sup>166</sup>	... Have no live component—for example, consist of video only.

“

If we want to see real behavior change, we have to teach people to practice inclusion—not just sit through one-off trainings. It takes repetition, immersion, and learning woven into everyday work.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

1.4

## Create incentives that encourage inclusive behavior

Every employee has the power to shape workplace culture. Small, everyday actions—such as inviting diverse perspectives, addressing disrespect, and showing empathy—can foster stronger collaboration and improve company culture.<sup>170</sup>

### How to take action:

- ➔ **Embed inclusion into employees' everyday work.** The effects of inclusion trainings tend to wear off over time—and when trainings are one-off sessions, it can signal that the topic is not a priority.<sup>171</sup> To address this, companies should fold inclusive skill-building into regular processes that involve all employees, like onboarding and annual reviews.
- ➔ **Define success and track outcomes.** Companies can measure impact by outlining the progress they want to see and collecting employee input before and after implementing new efforts to foster inclusion.
- ➔ **Build inclusion into performance expectations.** Employees are more likely to follow through on inclusion when it's part of how their performance is judged.<sup>172</sup> To facilitate this, employees should have inclusion goals—such as mentoring colleagues or running inclusive meetings—and their performance reviews should include prompts to gauge progress toward these goals.

“

We always go back to our underlying cultural ethos of inclusion. And so, starting with onboarding, we talk to employees about our inclusive culture.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

“

We're focusing on inclusive leadership and inclusive products, and we're reviewing every training program and event to ensure the language is aligned with inclusion.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

## STRATEGY 2

# Strengthen ERGs to build community and empathy

## Why this matters

Research shows that employee resource groups play a powerful role in helping employees feel connected to their colleagues and their company.<sup>173</sup> For many, they are also a source of informal mentorship and professional advice.<sup>174</sup> Today, as ERGs open their doors to all employees, companies are rethinking how these groups can continue to create a space for employees to share their experiences and feel a sense of belonging.<sup>175</sup>

91% of companies have maintained, introduced, or scaled up their ERGs in the past 12 months.

WiW 2025<sup>178</sup>

## ■ The implications for women

- » Since women tend to have less access to sponsorship and other kinds of support from senior colleagues, the career advice and practical help offered by ERGs can be especially valuable.<sup>176</sup>
- » Like all employees, women benefit when they have spaces to discuss workplace challenges openly and get advice from others who have faced similar situations.<sup>177</sup>

### What HR leaders are saying:

At companies that have opened up women's ERGs to all employees, HR leaders are optimistic about opportunities for men to learn more about the challenges women face and become more involved in developing solutions. However, some are concerned that ERGs no longer provide spaces for employees to share experiences with others of the same identity.

## What companies can do

- 2.1 Ensure ERGs are set up for success and aligned with inclusion goals
- 2.2 Set ground rules to create trust
- 2.3 Consider adding ERGs organized around shared interests

2.1

## Ensure ERGs are set up for success and aligned with inclusion goals

In addition to making sure ERGs are well resourced and thoughtfully marketed to employees, companies should take steps to align ERGs with their inclusion goals, such as developing clear mission statements for new and existing ERGs and creating opportunities for company leaders to contribute to and learn from these groups.<sup>179</sup> Given it's not yet clear how recent changes to ERGs will play out, companies should also check in regularly with ERG leaders and survey participants to make sure the groups are fostering valuable learning and connection.

“

We've been doubling down on ERGs. We're doing more large events with subsidized budgets, more in-person events, and activities that bring together multiple ERGs. We're supporting more high-quality speakers, and we're now marketing ERG events to clients and partners, so people are able to network.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

2.2

## Set ground rules to create trust

Many companies are now looking for new ways to ensure ERG members feel comfortable sharing and learning together.<sup>180</sup> As a result, some ERGs are putting group norms into writing, including expectations for respectful language and confidentiality. Some groups also bring in expert facilitators to guide conversations, especially when they are on more complex or challenging topics.<sup>181</sup>

“

Our women's belonging group runs mentoring circles and networking, open to all employees but centered on women's experiences.”

—HR LEADER, WiW 2025

2.3

## Consider adding ERGs organized around shared interests

Recent research points to the benefits of employees from different backgrounds coming together around shared interests and goals—it can be a powerful way to build empathy and encourage allyship.<sup>182</sup> To facilitate these types of connections, some companies are piloting purpose-centered ERGs around topics like inclusive leadership, health and well-being, and community service.<sup>183</sup>



## The decisions leaders make now will determine the future of women and the workplace

We're at a critical moment. Corporate America is at risk of backsliding on women, just as AI is reshaping how we work. What leaders choose to do in 2026 will have a lasting impact.

Companies that truly invest in women will benefit from the full force of their talent and leadership.<sup>184</sup> Companies that wield AI with purpose will build systems that root out entrenched biases and enable and inspire employees to do their best work. And those that get both right will win the war for talent and outpace their competitors.

## Acknowledgments

LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company would like to thank the 124 companies, 62 HR leaders, and approximately 9,500 employees who participated in this year's study. By sharing their information and insights, they give us continuous visibility into the state of women in the workplace and the steps companies can take to achieve parity for all women.

We would also like to thank Qualtrics and Dynata for their help in conducting the surveys for this study and Getty Images for providing the photography used in this report.

### Additional Resources for Companies

Lean In runs programs that advance women and improve the culture of work—and they're available at no cost, because we believe every company should have the tools to build a fair and inclusive workplace. **Lean In Circles** bring small groups of employees together to learn new skills, give and get advice, and encourage each other to take action. Circle members consistently report that they learn to be more effective and inclusive leaders—and 98 percent of women credit their Circle with a positive change at work. **50 Ways to Fight Bias** is a great addition to existing bias training. Rooted in research on what makes inclusion trainings effective, the program includes specific, research-based recommendations for what employees can say or do to address the biases women experience at work. Reach out to [partners@leanin.org](mailto:partners@leanin.org) to learn why thousands of organizations use our programs and how to tailor them for your company.

McKinsey & Company has a strong track record of helping institutions modernize their talent, business processes, and organizational cultures to unlock performance and inclusion. For more than two decades, **McKinsey's Organizational Health Index (OHI)** has helped more than 2,600 clients globally strengthen the cultural foundations that drive performance. This survey-based diagnostic measures management practices, mindsets, and behaviors that shape organizational health, with deep dives on organizational and employee readiness to adopt, scale, and capture value from AI. Our award-winning leadership programs equip leaders with the networks, capabilities, and mindsets needed to drive lasting impact. Through the **Connected Leaders Academy**, more than 108,000 leaders from over 1,400 organizations have built skills and confidence to lead authentically. Offered at no cost, this suite of programs helps professionals connect identity, authenticity, and leadership. In service of accelerating talent pipelines, our program **People Leadership Edge**, tailored for mid-level managers to early senior people leaders, fosters the leadership skills and tools needed to motivate teams, foster collaboration, and enhance performance. Learn more about McKinsey's client service and insights on people and organizational performance at [mckinsey.com/how-we-help-clients](https://mckinsey.com/how-we-help-clients).

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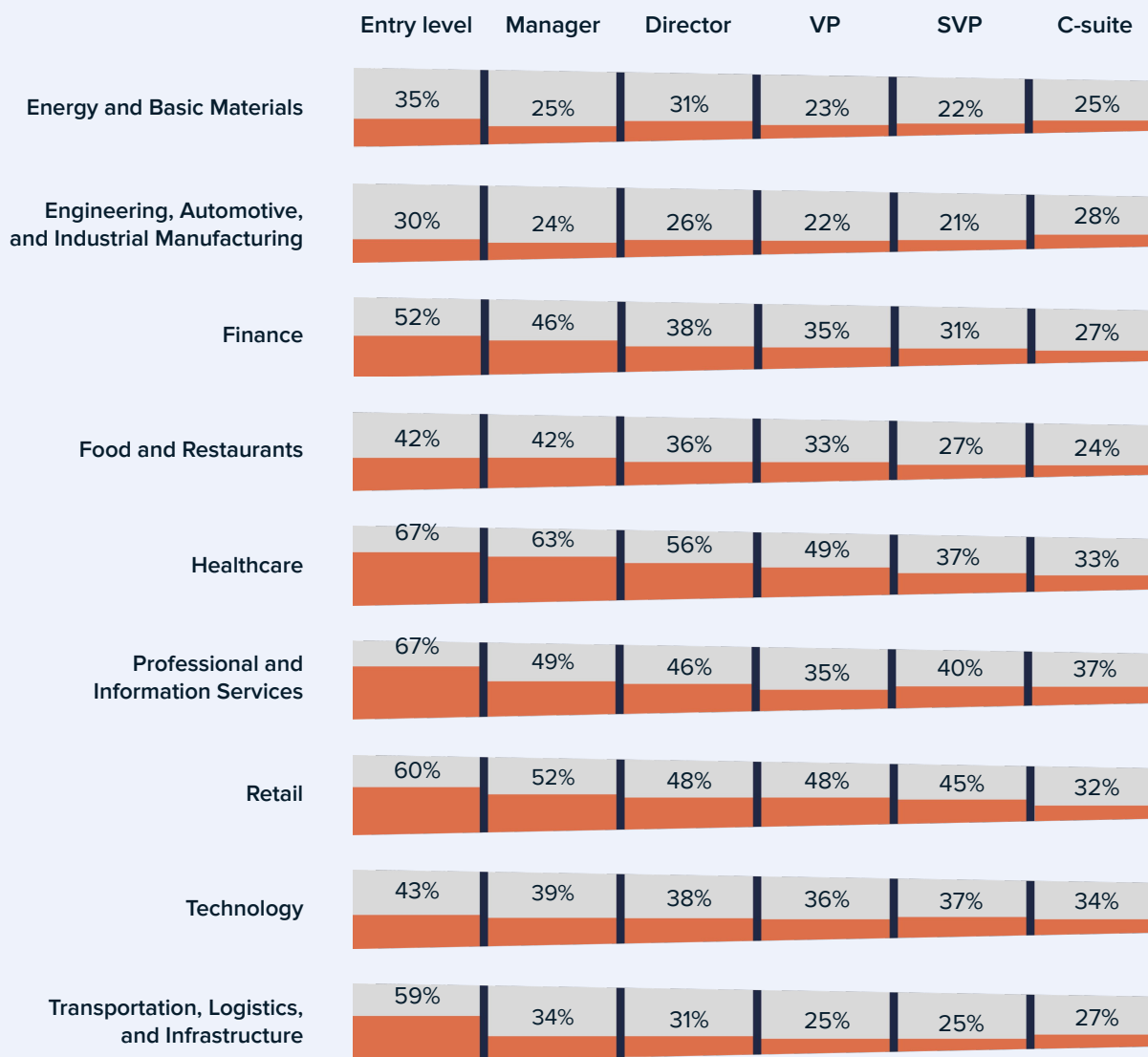
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## CORPORATE PIPELINE BY INDUSTRY

## Industries have different talent pipelines

Although women are broadly underrepresented in corporate America, the talent pipeline varies by industry. Some industries struggle to attract entry-level women (e.g., Energy and Basic Materials, Engineering, Automotive, and Industrial Manufacturing), while others fail to advance women into middle management (e.g., Transportation, Logistics, and Infrastructure) or senior leadership (e.g., Healthcare, Finance). Due to the smaller sample size of participating organizations, 2025 talent pipelines are reflected at the Fortune 500 level for statistical significance.





# Methodology

## RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

This report is informed by research conducted with 124 companies across the United States and Canada, building on comparable studies led annually by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org since 2015, as well as earlier research undertaken by McKinsey & Company in 2012. Participating organizations from the private, public, and social sectors provided data on talent pipelines and/or anonymous data on HR policies and programs. To capture broader insights into the current workplace environment, an anonymized survey was conducted with approximately 9,500 employees to assess their workplace experiences. Pipeline data provided by companies were grouped by industry to establish benchmarks enabling peer-to-peer comparisons where applicable.<sup>185</sup> The distribution of participating companies by industry is as follows:

- Energy and Basic Materials—16
- Engineering, Automotive, and Industrial Manufacturing—10
- Finance—27
- Food and Restaurants—9
- Healthcare—21
- Media and Entertainment—4
- Professional and Information Services—6
- Public and Social Sector—4
- Retail—7
- Technology—15
- Transportation, Logistics, and Infrastructure—5

Participation in the study was voluntary and based on organizational interest. Companies joined either in response to invitations from McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org or by indicating interest through the public study website. Talent pipeline data were collected between May and September 2025 and reflect the representation of women and men as of December 31, 2024, along with personnel movements—including promotions, hiring, and attrition—during calendar year 2024. Consequently, these data do not reflect any changes occurring in 2025. The HR survey was anonymously conducted between August and September 2025, with HR leaders and professionals providing information on company policies, programs, and priorities. In addition, a third-party survey panel collected employee workplace experience data between July and August 2025. All datasets represent point-in-time snapshots, capturing company-reported information and employee perspectives as of the time each survey was conducted.

## PIPELINE DATA AND ANALYTICS

### Overall Metrics

All pipeline metrics—including representation, promotion rates, hiring shares, and attrition rates—were calculated individually for each participating company. Company-level results were then averaged within each industry, and each industry's data were weighted according to the 2025 composition of the Fortune 500. This weighting approach ensured that no industry was disproportionately represented and that overall trends more accurately reflected the broader corporate landscape based on each year's company sample. The industry distribution of the Fortune 500 used for weighting is as follows:

- Energy and Basic Materials—17.2%
- Engineering, Automotive, and Industrial Manufacturing—10.4%
- Finance—18.6%
- Food and Restaurants—7.4%
- Healthcare—9.0%
- Media and Entertainment—2.0%
- Professional and Information Services—5.0%
- Retail—16.6%
- Technology—10.4%
- Transportation, Logistics, and Infrastructure—3.4%

# Methodology

## Definition of Job Levels

Companies categorized their employees into six levels based on the following standard definitions, considering reporting structure and salaries. The levels and definitions provided were:

- L1—Executives: CEO and direct reports, responsible for company operations and profitability (board members are not included in our primary analyses unless they are also employees)
- L2—Senior vice presidents and other similar roles: senior leaders of the organization with significant business unit or functional oversight
- L3—Vice presidents and other similar roles: leaders within the organization, responsible for activities/initiatives within a subunit of a business unit or function, or who report directly to senior vice presidents
- L4—Senior managers/Directors: seasoned managers and contributors, with responsibility for multiple teams and discrete functions or operating units
- L5—Managers: junior managers and contributors, responsible for small teams and/or functional units or operations
- L6—Entry level: employees responsible for carrying out discrete tasks and participating on teams, typically in an office or corporate setting

## Metrics and Analytics

Talent pipeline data captured information for both women and men, including overall representation, line versus staff roles, race and ethnicity, and, where available, functional areas such as marketing, sales, and engineering. Companies also reported the number of employees hired, promoted, and exited—disaggregated by gender, race and ethnicity, and, when provided, by function and voluntary versus involuntary attrition.

Promotion rates were calculated as the number of promotions into a level divided by the number of employees of the same gender at the level below at the beginning of the year. Attrition rates were calculated as the number of employees of each gender who left a level divided by the number of employees of that gender at that level at the start of the year. All submitted data underwent consistency checks, and inconsistent data were excluded from analysis.

## Quartiles and High-Performer Practices

- **Analysis of Women's Representation (2021–2025)**  
Women's representation data from 2021 to 2025 were analyzed to identify top and bottom quartiles of company performance each year. Companies were ranked by their cumulative outperformance relative to their industry benchmark—at the most granular level possible—across job levels L2–L6. For each quartile, women's representation was calculated as the average representation of all companies within that quartile at each level.
- **Linking HR Practices to Performance**  
HR program and policy data were linked to these quartiles to determine the share of companies within each quartile that had implemented specific practices. The analysis used 2024 as the endpoint, the most recent year with identifiable data linking talent pipeline and HR program information, and 2021 as the starting point, the first year with a consistent survey format.
- **Identifying High-Performer Practices**  
A practice was considered high performing if the implementation rate difference between top- and bottom-quartile companies was statistically significant in 2024, and the 2024 gap was at least 25 percentage points.

# Methodology

## EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE SURVEY AND ANALYTICS

### Survey Participation

Approximately 9,500 employees participated in an anonymous survey administered by a third-party panel. The survey included questions across a range of themes, such as perceptions of companies' responses to the evolving landscape of diversity and inclusion initiatives, overall job satisfaction, flexibility and remote/hybrid work, career advancement, well-being, equity, mentorship and sponsorship, and the workforce impacts of AI. Respondents also provided demographic information, including gender, gender of primary manager, race/ethnicity, age, disability status, sexual orientation, role, family status, and household characteristics and responsibilities.

### Survey Analysis and Reporting

Survey results were reported as unweighted averages. Most questions used a five-point labeled response scale (ranging from "Disagree strongly" to "Agree strongly"). Unless otherwise noted, analyses combined the top two and bottom two response categories (for example, "Agree somewhat" and "Agree strongly").

Differences between genders or other demographic groups are highlighted only when they are substantial and reliable. Specifically, all reported differences are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level and/or represent a minimum gap of 5 percentage points, unless otherwise specified. When comparing results across years, a 5-percentage-point threshold was also applied, and analyses considered data trends and variability across all available years. Because the set of participating companies may vary from year to year, some differences may reflect sample composition or random variation. Wherever possible, findings were validated by triangulating data from multiple sources to confirm trends and strengthen the robustness of insights.

## HR PROGRAMS AND POLICIES SURVEY

HR professionals anonymously submitted information on their organization's gender diversity policies and programs, resulting in 70 responses. Not all participating companies provided talent pipeline data. Reported figures represent the percentage of responding organizations that indicated having a given program, policy, priority, or position, calculated out of the total number of companies that submitted HR program and policy data.

## HR LEADER INTERVIEWS

To complement the quantitative analysis, individual interviews were conducted with more than 60 HR leaders representing a diverse range of industries. Interviewees were selected to ensure coverage across different sectors and organizational contexts. The discussions explored responses to the evolving landscape of diversity and inclusion initiatives and broader workplace themes, including increasing women's representation in senior leadership, strengthening organizational commitment to gender and racial diversity, and the importance of workplace flexibility, particularly for women. These interviews provided deeper context and insight into the quantitative findings from the HR survey and informed the development of recommendations for organizations. All interviews were conducted confidentially.

# Endnotes

1. This report contains stock photographs for illustrative purposes only. Images do not reflect the identities of the individuals involved in the study. In this study, “women” includes cisgender and transgender women. “Women of color” and “men of color” include Black, Latina/o, Asian, Native American/American Indian/Indigenous or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, or mixed-race people. Due to small sample sizes for other racial/ethnic groups, reported findings on individual racial/ethnic groups are restricted to people who are Black, Latina/o, and Asian.
2. In this report, “companies” refers to the subset of companies that participated in the Women in the Workplace survey. Data reported for the 70 companies anonymously surveyed as part of this study.
3. Full question: “Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?” Respondents selected: “Yes, I have multiple sponsors” or “Yes, I have one sponsor.”
4. Full question: “Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?” Respondents selected: “Yes, I have multiple sponsors” or “Yes, I have one sponsor.” Full question: “In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization?” Respondents selected: “You received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level).”
5. Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *The Sponsor Effect: How to Be a Better Leader by Investing in Others* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, June 18, 2019).
6. Entry level is defined as an individual contributor responsible for carrying out discrete tasks and participating on teams, typically in an office or corporate setting (e.g., business analyst, software engineer, paralegal, operations support). Mid-level is defined as a manager: junior people manager or senior individual contributor responsible for small teams and/or functional units or operations (e.g., product manager, store manager, supervisor, senior engineer). Mid-level also includes senior manager/director, defined as a seasoned manager or individual contributor responsible for multiple teams and/or discrete functions or operating units (e.g., regional manager, chief scientist, division manager). Senior level is defined as VP, SVP, or C-suite (or equivalent role).
7. Full question: “Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?” Respondents selected: “Yes, I have multiple sponsors” or “Yes, I have one sponsor.” Full question: “Do you have at least one sponsor in any of the following roles?” Respondents selected: “Someone in a VP or SVP role” or “Someone in a C-suite role.”
8. Herminia Ibarra and Nana von Bernuth, “Want More Diverse Senior Leadership? Sponsor Junior Talent,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 9, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/10/want-more-diverse-senior-leadership-sponsor-junior-talent>.
9. Full question: “Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?” Respondents selected: “Yes, I have multiple sponsors” or “Yes, I have one sponsor.” Full question: “Do you have at least one sponsor in any of the following roles? Select all that apply.” Respondents selected: “Someone in a VP or SVP role” or “Someone in a C-suite role.” Full question: “In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization?” Respondents who selected “You received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level)”: Employees with a senior-level sponsor, 69%; employees with a non-senior-level sponsor, 59%; employees with no sponsor, 35%; employees with multiple sponsors, 73%.
10. Full question: “In the last 12 months, has someone in a more senior role than you (other than your direct manager) done any of the following for you? Select all that apply.” Respondents selected: “Put you forward as a candidate for promotion,” “Connected you with someone who could help your career development,” and/or “Recommended you for a stretch assignment.”
11. Full question: “In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization? Select all that apply.” Respondents selected: “I received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level).” Comparison of employees overall who received a promotion by employees who have no senior colleague support (19%) and employees who received 3+ senior colleague supports (71%). Senior colleague support full question: “In the last 12 months, has someone in a more senior role than you (other than your direct manager) done any of the following for you? Select all that apply.” Respondents selected: “Put you forward as a candidate for promotion,” “Connected you with someone who could help your career development,” and/or “Recommended you for a stretch assignment.”
12. Full question: “In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization? Select all that apply.” Respondents selected: “You received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level).”
13. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2024*, October 2024, <https://leanin.org/women-in-the-workplace/2024>; *Women in the Workplace 2023*, October 2023, <https://leanin.org/women-in-the-workplace/2023>; *Women in the Workplace 2022*, October 2022, <https://leanin.org/women-in-the-workplace/2022>; *Women in the Workplace 2021*, October 2021, <https://leanin.org/women-in-the-workplace/2021>; *Women in the Workplace 2020*, October 2020, <https://leanin.org/women-in-the-workplace/2020>; *Women in the Workplace 2019*, October 2019, <https://womenintheworkplace.com/2019>; *Women in the Workplace 2018*, October 2018, <https://womenintheworkplace.com/2018>; *Women in the Workplace 2017*, October 2017, <https://womenintheworkplace.com/2017>; *Women in the Workplace 2016*, October 2016, <https://womenintheworkplace.com/2016>; *Women in the Workplace 2015*, October 2015, <https://womenintheworkplace.com/2015>.
14. Full question: “Which of the following has your organization done related to the adoption of AI?” Respondents selected: “Your manager has encouraged or facilitated your use of AI.” Full question: “How often do you use AI to accomplish any part of your job?” Respondents selected: “At least once a week,” “At least once a day,” “Less than once a month,” “I’ve never used AI at work.” Employees who often use AI selected: “At least once a week” or “At least once a day.” Employees who rarely use AI selected: “Less than once a month” or “I’ve never used AI at work.” Full question: “Do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will have a positive, negative, or no impact on the following.” Options: “Your employability over the next few years (i.e., how relevant your current role or skills will be),” “Your likelihood of being promoted over the next few years,” “Your long-term career advancement (i.e., how far you’ll progress),” “Fairness in the workplace (i.e., how decisions are made about who gets hired, promoted, staffed on projects, etc.).” Respondents who selected “Very positive impact” or “Somewhat positive impact” for the following options: “Your employability over the next few years (i.e., how relevant your current role or skills will be):” 77% of employees who often use AI, 29% of employees who rarely use AI; “Your likelihood of being promoted over the next few years”: 72% of employees who often use AI, 25% of employees who rarely use AI; “Your long-term career advancement (i.e., how far you’ll progress):” 73% of employees who often use AI, 27% of employees who rarely use AI; “Fairness in the workplace (i.e., how decisions are made about who gets hired, promoted, staffed on projects, etc.):” 71% of employees who often use AI, 25% of employees who rarely use AI.
15. See previous note for full questions. Career prospects specifically reference your likelihood of being promoted over the next few years.
16. Full question: “Which of the following actions has your manager taken consistently in the last 12 months? Select all that apply.” Respondents who selected “Shown interest in your career advancement (e.g., proactively ask about your career goals):” Asian women, 27%; Black women, 33%; Latinas, 32%; White women, 33%. Respondents who selected “Provided specific and actionable feedback to improve your work or performance”: Asian women, 28%; Black women, 38%; Latinas, 36%; White women, 34%.
17. Unpublished data, LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2025*; *Women in the Workplace 2024*; *Women in the Workplace 2023*; *Women in the Workplace 2022*; *Women in the Workplace 2021*. Across five years of pipeline data, Asian women are promoted at a higher rate than women overall at manager and director levels, but at a lower rate as VP, SVP, and C-suite.
18. Full question: “In the last 12 months, has someone in a more senior role than you (other than your direct manager) done any of the following for you? Select all that apply.” Respondents selected: “Connected you with someone who could help your career development,” “Put you forward as a candidate for promotion,” and/or “Recommended you for a stretch assignment.”
19. Full question: “In the last 12 months, has someone in a more senior role than you (other than your direct manager) done any of the following for you? Select all that apply.” Respondents who selected “No one in a more senior role has done any of the above,” referring to “Connected you with someone who could advance your career,” “Put you forward as a candidate for promotion,” and “Recommended you for a stretch assignment”: Asian women, 51%; Black women, 35%; Latinas, 30%; white women, 36%.
20. Justine Tinkler, Jun Zhao, Yan Li, et al., “Honorary Whites? Asian American Women and the Dominance Penalty,” *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 5 (April 4, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023119836000>; Negin Ghavami and Letitia Anne Peplau, “An Intersectional Analysis of Gender and Ethnic Stereotypes: Testing Three Hypotheses,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 37 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684312464203>; Asia Eaton, Jessica Saunders, et al., “How Gender and Race Stereotypes Impact the Advancement of Scholars in STEM: Professors’ Biased Evaluations of Physics and Biology Post-Doctoral Candidates,” *Sex Roles* 82 (June 3, 2019), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-019-01052-w>.

# Endnotes

21. Full question: "Which of the following actions has your manager taken consistently in the last 12 months? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "Shown interest in your career advancement (e.g., proactively ask about your career goals)," "Been transparent about what it takes to advance," "Given you projects that directly align with your career goals," "Advocated for you or your work," and/or "Checked in on your general well-being." "Been transparent about what it takes to advance" is not statistically significant. Results for "been transparent about what it takes to advance," not statistically significant.
22. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2022*; Tony Simons and Quinetta Roberson, "Why Managers Should Care About Fairness: The Effects of Aggregate Justice Perceptions on Organizational Outcomes," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88 (June 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.3.432>; Jixia Yang, Zhi-Xue Zhang, and Anne S. Tsui, "Middle Manager Leadership and Frontline Employee Performance: Bypass, Cascading, and Moderating Effects," *Journal of Management Studies* 47 (April 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2009.00902.x>.
23. Full question: "In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "You were offered the opportunity to participate in leadership and/or career training."
24. Christina N. Lacerenza et al., "Leadership Training Design, Delivery, and Implementation: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 102 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000241>.
25. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My career is important to me." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel motivated to perform my best at work." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat."
26. Full question: "Do you want to be promoted to the next level?" Respondents selected: "Yes, I would like to be promoted."
27. This question was gated and only asked of those who gave the following answers to the full question in the previous note: "No, I would prefer to stay in my current role," "No, I would prefer to move to a different role at the same level," or "Not sure." Full question: "Why don't you want to be promoted to the next level? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "I don't see a path to promotion that feels realistic for me," "I've been passed over for promotion(s)," "People at higher levels seem burned out and/or unhappy in their roles."
28. Full question: "Do you want to be promoted to the next level?" Respondents who selected "Yes, I would like to be promoted": Latinas, 88%; Black women, 82%; Asian women, 80%; White women, 79%.
29. The five supports most strongly correlated with interest in being promoted at each level were used to create a composite indicator for receiving at least three of these supports; interest in being promoted was then examined by composite status for women and men.
30. Full question: "Are you currently responsible for any of the following?" Respondents selected: "Managing a team (one or more full-time employees)." Full question: "Do you want to be promoted to the next level?" Respondents who selected "Yes": Entry-level women people managers, 91%, compared to entry-level men people managers, 90%.
31. Full question: "Why don't you want to be promoted to the next level? Select all that apply." Question gated to respondents who selected: "No, I would prefer to stay in my current role," "No, I would prefer to move to a different role at the same level," or "Not sure" to the question "Do you want to be promoted to the next level?" Respondents who selected "I don't see a path to promotion that feels realistic for me": Senior-level women, 11%, compared to senior-level men, 3%. Full question: "Why don't you want to be promoted to the next level? Select all that apply." Respondents who selected "People at higher levels seem burned out and/or unhappy in their roles": Senior-level women, 21%, compared to senior-level men, 11%. Full question: "Going forward, do you think that any of the following personal characteristics will contribute to you missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead at your organization?" Respondents who selected "Your gender": Senior-level women, 29%, compared to senior-level men, 19%. For data on burnout, see page 16.
32. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2024*.
33. "Men of all ages" compares women over 40 to men over and under 40. Full question: "Do you want to be promoted to the next level?" Respondents who selected "Yes, I would like to be promoted": Entry-level men under 30, 85%, compared to entry-level women under 30, 92%.
34. Ely, "What's Really Holding Women Back"; "The Flexibility Stigma," special issue, *Journal of Social Issues* 69 (June 2013), <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15404560/2013/69/2>.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Full question: "How often do you usually work on-site right now each week (assuming a five-day work week)? Select all that apply." Respondents working 3+ days remotely selected: "Never—I work completely remotely," "Less than once a week (e.g., once or twice a month)," "1 day," or "2 days." Respondents working 3+ days on-site selected: "3 days," "4 days," or "5 days a week—I work completely on-site." Full question: "In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization?" Respondents selected: "You received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level)." Full question: "Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?" Respondents selected: "Yes, I have multiple sponsors" or "Yes, I have one sponsor."
38. See previous note for composite of remote vs. on-site work. Entry-level men working 3+ days remotely, 27%; entry-level women working 3+ days remotely, 43%. Full question: "In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization? Select all that apply." Respondents who selected "I received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level)": Entry-level women working 3+ days remotely, 25%; entry-level women working 3+ days on-site, 33%; entry-level men working 3+ days remotely, 44%; entry-level men working 3+ days on-site, 43%.
39. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Respondents selected "Agree strongly," or "Agree somewhat" to the following: "Hiring and promotion processes should be free from bias and favoritism," "When employees feel respected and valued, they are motivated to do their best work," and "A variety of perspectives leads to better decision-making and outcomes."
40. Bias is defined as a set of assumptions and attitudes that are often based on stereotypes and inaccurate generalizations. In the workplace, bias can manifest in unfair hiring and promotion decisions, unequal support, or disrespectful and undermining comments and actions. For more detail on the biases that women most often face at work, see Lean In, "Gender and Unconscious Bias Training: 50 Ways to Fight Bias," <https://leanin.org/50-ways-to-fight-gender-bias>.
41. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your organization? The best opportunities go to the most deserving employees." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Full question: "How fair do you believe your workplace is (i.e., all employees receive the support they need to succeed and similar opportunities to advance)?" Respondents selected: "Very fair" or "Somewhat fair."
42. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your organization: The best opportunities go to the most deserving employees." Respondents selected: "Disagree strongly," or "Disagree somewhat." Entry-level men, 12%; entry-level women, 23%; mid-career men, 9%; mid-career women, 16%; senior leader men, 2%; senior leader women, 2%. Full question: "How fair do you believe your workplace is (i.e., all employees receive the support they need to succeed and similar opportunities to advance)?" Respondents selected: "very unfair," or "somewhat unfair." Entry-level men, 11%; entry-level women, 20%; mid-career men, 9%; mid-career women, 17%; senior leader men, 2%; senior leader women, 3%.
43. Full question: "Going forward, do you think that any of the following personal characteristics will contribute to you missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead at your organization? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "Your gender."
44. Anne M. Koenig et al., "Are Leader Stereotypes Masculine? A Meta-Analysis of Three Research Paradigms," *Psychological Bulletin* 137 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023557>; Laurie Rudman, Corrine A. Moss-Racusin, et al., "Reactions to Vanguard: Advances in Backlash Theory," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 45 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-394286-9.00004-4>.
45. Pew Research Center, "Men More Likely Than Women to Say Men Are Doing Worse Today in the Workplace, Higher Education," October 14, 2024, [https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/10/17/views-on-the-progress-men-and-women-have-made-in-different-areas/pst\\_2024-10-17\\_men-masculinity\\_3-02/](https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/10/17/views-on-the-progress-men-and-women-have-made-in-different-areas/pst_2024-10-17_men-masculinity_3-02/).
46. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2019*; *Women in the Workplace 2022*.

# Endnotes

47. Full question: "Going forward, do you think that any of the following personal characteristics will contribute to you missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead at your organization? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "Your race/ethnicity," "Your sexual orientation," "Your religious beliefs," "Your age," "Your parental status," "Having a disability or chronic health condition," and/or "Your educational background." Full question: "Do you consider yourself to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community?" LGBTQ+ employees selected: "Yes." Full question: "Do you consider yourself to have a disability?" Employees with a disability selected: "Yes." Full question: "Which of the following best describes your highest level of education?" Employees with less than a bachelor's degree selected: "Some high school," "High school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED)," "Some college," "No degree," or "Associate degree."
48. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel respected and valued at my organization." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your organization: I feel safe to take risks and make mistakes." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your organization: I feel comfortable disagreeing with others." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat."
49. Mark L. Egan, Gregor Matvos, and Amit Seru, "When Harry Fired Sally: The Double Standard in Punishing Misconduct," NBER Working Paper Series, Working Paper 23242, March 2017, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w23242>; Victoria L. Brescoll, Erica Dawson, and Eric Luis Uhlmann, "Hard Won and Easily Lost: The Fragile Status of Leaders in Gender-Stereotype-Incongruent Occupations," *Psychological Science* 21 (2010), <http://gap.hks.harvard.edu/hard-won-and-easily-lost-fragile-status-leaders-gender-stereotype-incongruent-occupations>; Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know* (New York: NYU Press, 2014); Robin Ely, "What's Really Holding Women Back," *Harvard Business Review*, March 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/03/whats-really-holding-women-back>.
50. Alicia R. Ingersoll, Alison Cook, and Christy Glass, "A Free Solo in Heels: Corporate Risk Taking Among Women Executives and Directors," *Journal of Business Research* 157 (March 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusres.2023.113651>.
51. Full question: In 2025, "In the last 12 months, have you seriously considered leaving your organization?" Respondents selected: "Yes—and I have taken steps to find a new job (e.g., looked at job postings, spoken to recruiters, applied for roles)," "Yes—but I haven't taken steps to find a new job," "Yes—to start my own business or pursue self-employment," or "Yes—to leave the workforce for personal reasons (e.g., caregiving, health, education)." In 2024, full question: "In the last year, which of the following have you considered?" Respondents selected: "Leaving your organization." In 2023 and 2022, full question: "In the last year, which of the following options have you considered?" Respondents selected: "Leaving your organization." In 2021, full question: "In the last year, which of the following have you considered?" Respondents selected: "Leaving my company/department." In 2025, 2024, 2023, 2022, and 2021, full question: "In the last few months, how often have you felt burned out (i.e., emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted by overwork or stress) at work?" Respondents selected: "Almost always" or "Often." In 2025, 42%; in 2024, 36%; in 2023, 34%; in 2022, 34%; in 2021, 39%. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Job Openings and Labor Turnover—July 2025," U.S. Department of Labor, July 2025, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/jolts.pdf>; LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2024*; *Women in the Workplace 2023*; *Women in the Workplace 2022*; *Women in the Workplace 2021*; *Women in the Workplace 2020*.
52. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2024*; *Women in the Workplace 2023*; *Women in the Workplace 2022*; *Women in the Workplace 2021*; *Women in the Workplace 2020*.
53. Full question: "Currently, how concerned are you about your job security and/or your prospects of finding a new job, if needed?" Respondents selected: "Somewhat concerned" or "Very concerned."
54. Full question: "In the last few months, how often have you felt burned out (i.e., emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted by overwork or stress) at work?" Respondents selected: "Often" or "Almost always."
55. Full question: "In the last 12 months, have you seriously considered leaving your organization?" Respondents selected: "Yes—and I have taken steps to find a new job (e.g., looked at job postings, spoken to recruiters, applied for roles)," "Yes—but I haven't taken steps to find a new job," "Yes—to start my own business or pursue self-employment," or "Yes—to leave the workforce for personal reasons (e.g., caregiving, health, education)."
56. Williams and Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work*.
57. Full question: "In the last few months, how often have you felt burned out (i.e., emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted by overwork or stress) at work?" Respondents who selected "Often" or "Almost always": Senior women who have worked at their organization for more than five years, 54%, compared to senior men who have worked at their organization for more than five years, 49%.
58. Full question: "In the last few months, how often have you felt burned out (i.e., emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted by overwork or stress) at work?" Respondents who selected "Often" or "Almost always": Black senior-level women, 77%. Full question: "Currently, how concerned are you about your job security and/or your prospects of finding a new job, if needed?" Respondents who selected "Somewhat concerned" or "Very concerned": Black senior-level women, 84%.
59. Approximately 45% of companies this year would have either surpassed or been the same as our top 10% companies in women's representation last year, indicating that we had an overrepresentation of high-performing companies. Additionally, expectations for 2025 top-quartile performance were forecasted using year-over-year growth rates and the compound annual growth rate for the 2021–2024 period. Actual performance in 2025 outpaced estimates from both approaches.
60. Pipeline data in this report are based on data from the end of 2024 and do not reflect changes through 2025. The total percent of women and men per level in the race and gender pipeline may not sum to overall corporate pipeline totals, as the race pipeline does not include employees with unreported race data. Some percentages may sum to 98% or 101% due to rounding. The sum of women and men who are Black, Latina/o, and Asian may not sum to the listed women of color and men of color, as women of color and men of color include Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, Native American/American Indian, Indigenous North American, First Nations, or Alaskan Native, and more than one race/ethnicity.
61. The broken rung represents the ratio of promotions to manager, assuming equal numbers of each group.
62. A "high-performing company" is defined as one of the 25% of participating companies each year with the highest representation of women and women of color across career levels (excluding C-suite). A "low-performing company" is defined as one of the 25% of participating companies with the lowest representation of women and women of color across career levels (excluding C-suite). A company's performance on women's and women of color's representation was analyzed against its industry's benchmark at each level. All participating companies were given a rank and put into quartiles based on their degree of cumulative outperformance of their industry across all levels. To measure real progress, we examined a smaller group of 74 companies that participated in both 2023 and 2025. These companies showed growth in women's representation (+1–5 percentage points across levels), indicating that there are genuine gains and not just changes in the participant pool leaning toward more high-performing companies.
63. Women's representation data from 2021 to 2024 were analyzed to identify top and bottom quartiles by company performance, where performance is measured by representation of women relative to industry benchmarks. HR program and policy data were linked to determine the share of companies implementing specific practices. A practice was considered high performing if implementation differences between top and bottom quartiles were statistically significant in 2024 and the difference in participation between the two quartiles was at least 25 percentage points.



# Endnotes

64. 2024 HR Best Practices Survey, company best practices determined by answers to the following. Full question: "How much of a priority is gender diversity for your organization right now?" "High" indicates respondents selected "A top priority" or "A very important priority." Full question: "Do you have a Head of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion or equivalent position?" Respondents selected: "Yes." Full question: "Which of the following are held accountable for performance (or lack thereof) on diversity metrics or goals?" Respondents selected: "Senior leaders (Vice presidents and above)." Full question: "Which of the following does your organization currently do to address disrespectful behavior in the workplace?" Respondents selected: "Senior leaders communicate that microaggressions aren't welcome." Full question: "Which of the following does your organization do to ensure fairness in promotions?" Respondents selected: "Required use of clear and consistently applied criteria for promotions." Full question: "Which of the following does your organization do to ensure fairness in hiring? Please select all that apply." Respondents selected: "Establishing clear and specific evaluation criteria before any candidates are considered." Full question: "Which of the following does your organization do to ensure fairness in promotions?" Respondents selected: "Reminders about how to avoid bias before the evaluation process begins." Full question: "Which of the following are true about performance reviews at your organization?" Respondents selected: "There is a mechanism for surfacing biased comments or evaluations." Full question: "Which of the following does your organization do to ensure fairness in hiring? Please select all that apply." Respondents selected: "Having someone who is not directly part of hiring decisions sit in on candidate reviews and is specifically tasked with calling out potential bias." Full question: "Does your organization monitor hiring outcomes by any of the following?" Respondents selected: "Gender or other demographics (e.g., percentage of interviewees and hires who are women and/or from underrepresented groups)" and/or "Differences in performance ratings and/or salary for comparable jobs." Full question: "Which of the following diversity metrics does your organization track?" Respondents selected: "Intersection of gender and race/ethnicity (e.g., women of color)."
65. See note 62 for definition of high-performing companies.
66. In 2021, full question: "In general, how much of a priority is diversity, equity, and inclusion to your company?" Respondents selected: "A top priority" or "A very important priority."
67. In 2025, full question: "How much of a priority are the following for your organization right now?" Options: "Women's career advancement," "Women of color's career advancement," "Fostering diversity," and "Fostering an inclusive culture." In 2024, full questions: "How much of a priority is gender diversity for your organization right now?," "How much of a priority is racial diversity for your organization right now?," and "How much of a priority is building an inclusive work environment for your organization right now?" In 2019, full question: "How much of a priority are the following for your organization?" Options: "Gender diversity" and "Racial/ethnic diversity." In 2017, full question: "How much of a priority is gender diversity for your company?" Options: "A top priority" or "A very important priority."
68. The distance between time markers on the horizontal axis does not scale to match the timeline.
69. Full questions: "How much of a priority are the following for your organization right now? Women's career advancement," "How much of a priority are the following for your organization right now? Women of color's career advancement." Respondents selected: "Not a priority," or "A slightly important priority."
70. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace* 2023.
71. Full question: "In the last 12 months, how has each of the following changed at your organization?" Options: "Flexible working hours," "Remote/hybrid work options," "Paid maternity leave," "Paid paternity leave," "Paid sick and family leave (beyond what is required by law)," "Paid bereavement leave," "Skill-building and upskilling programs," "Leadership training," "Formal sponsorship programs," "Career development programs with content tailored for women," "Funding for individual career development (e.g., certifications, career coaching)," "Staff and resources focused on supporting diversity," "Staff and resources focused on supporting inclusion," "Formal rewards for managers for providing career growth opportunities fairly and consistently across their team," "Formal rewards for managers for supporting team members' well-being and work-life balance," "Formal rewards for managers for ensuring team dynamics are inclusive," "Hiring process: Recruiting to ensure job applicants with a wide range of backgrounds," "Hiring process: Clear evaluation criteria set before candidates are considered," "Hiring process: Quantifiable measures for evaluating applicants (e.g., ratings of 1 to 5)," "Hiring process: Bias training for evaluators," "Tracking who is hired to ensure outcomes are fair," "Performance review process: Clear evaluation criteria, consistently applied," "Quantifiable measures for performance (e.g., ratings of 1 to 5)," "Performance review process: Bias training for evaluators," "Tracking who is promoted to ensure outcomes are fair," "Employee resource groups (ERGs)," "Training on how to identify and interrupt workplace bias," and "Training on how to be an ally and/or foster inclusion." Respondents selected: "Unsure/We've never offered this," "Scaled back," "Discontinued," "Maintained as before," or "Introduced or scaled up." Due to rounding, some company policies and programs may not sum to 100.
72. For company action labels, for "Scaled back or discontinued," respondents selected: "Scaled back" or "Discontinued." For "Maintained," respondents selected: "Maintained as before." For "Never offered in a meaningful way," respondents selected: "Unsure/We've never offered this."
73. Full question: "In the last 12 months, how has each of the following changed at your organization? Formal rewards for managers for providing career growth opportunities fairly and consistently across their team." Respondents selected: "Maintained as before" or "Unsure/We've never offered this." Full question: "In the last 12 months, how has each of the following changed at your organization? Formal rewards for managers for supporting team members' well-being and work-life balance." Respondents selected: "Maintained as before" or "Unsure/We've never offered this." Full question: "In the last 12 months, how has each of the following changed at your organization? Formal rewards for managers for ensuring team dynamics are inclusive." Respondents selected: "Maintained as before" or "Unsure/We've never offered this." Full question: "Which of the following actions has your manager taken consistently in the last 12 months? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "Shown interest in your career advancement (e.g., proactively ask about your career goals)," "Been transparent about what it takes to advance," "Given you projects that directly align with your career goals," "Advocated for you or your work," "Helped you navigate organizational politics," "Provided specific and actionable feedback to improve your work or performance," "Helped you balance work and personal demands," and/or "Checked in on your general well-being." Respondents who received five or more of these actions: Men, 19%; women, 18%.
74. Bryan Hancock and Bill Schaninger, "The Elusive Inclusive Workplace," McKinsey & Company, March 23, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-elusive-inclusive-workplace>; Brooke Weddle, John Parsons, and Wyman Howard, "Five Bold Moves to Quickly Transform Your Organization's Culture," McKinsey & Company, May 17, 2024, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/five-bold-moves-to-quickly-transform-your-organizations-culture>; Nicola Busby, *The Effective Change Manager's Handbook: Essential Guidance to the Change Management Body of Knowledge*, 1st ed. (United Kingdom: Kogan Page, November 3, 2014).
75. LinkedIn Learning, *2019 Workplace Learning Report*, 2019, <https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/amp/learning-solutions/images/workplace-learning-report-2019/pdf/workplace-learning-report-2019.pdf>; Kim Parker and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Majority of Workers Who Quit a Job in 2021 Cite Low Pay, No Opportunities for Advancement, Feeling Disrespected," Pew Research Center, March 9, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/>; Beth DeCarbo, "Lack of Growth Opportunities Is a Big Reason Why Employees Leave Jobs. Here's How to Change That," American Psychological Association, July 2, 2024, <https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/growth-opportunities>.
76. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel respected and valued at my organization." Respondents who said "Agree" selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Respondents who said "Disagree" selected: "Disagree strongly" or "Disagree somewhat." Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel motivated to perform my best at work." Respondents who selected "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Respondents who feel respected and valued at their organization, 98%; respondents who do not feel respected and valued at their organization, 52%. Drew Goldstein, David Mendelsohn, and Julia Sperling-Magro, "Personal Experience of Inclusion: Critical to Win the War for Talent," McKinsey & Company, August 9, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-organization-blog/personal-experience-of-inclusion-critical-to-win-the-war-for-talent>.
77. Fair opportunity is defined as giving women comparable, unobstructed access to the same chances for hiring, development, advancement, and recognition as their counterparts who are men—and avoiding subjective judgments based on gender bias or other factors.
78. Richard Steele and Brooke Weddle, "Insights to Shape Organization Culture for Success," McKinsey & Company, August 5, 2024, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-organization-blog/insights-to-shape-organization-culture-for-success>; Hancock and Schaninger, "The Elusive Inclusive Workplace"; see more on data in note 77.

# Endnotes

79. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel respected and valued at my organization." For high workplace fairness and inclusion, respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." For low workplace fairness and inclusion, respondents selected: "Disagree somewhat" or "Disagree strongly." Full question: "How fair do you believe your workplace is (i.e., all employees receive the support they need to succeed and similar opportunities to advance)?" For high workplace fairness and inclusion, respondents selected: "Somewhat fair" or "Very fair." For low workplace fairness and inclusion, respondents selected: "Somewhat unfair" or "Very unfair." Full question: "I feel motivated to perform my best at work." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Full question: "I feel safe to take risks and make mistakes." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Full question: "I feel comfortable disagreeing with others." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Full question: "In the last 12 months, have you seriously considered leaving your organization?" Respondents selected: "No." Full question: "In the last few months, how often have you felt burned out at work?" Respondents selected: "Almost never" or "Seldom."
80. Busby, *The Effective Change Manager's Handbook*; Dame Vivian Hunt, Lareina Yee, Sara Prince, and Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, "Delivering Through Diversity," McKinsey & Company, January 2018; <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity>; Hancock and Schaninger, "The Elusive Inclusive Workplace."
81. Busby, *The Effective Change Manager's Handbook*.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Tessa Basford and Bill Schaninger, "The Four Building Blocks of Change," McKinsey & Company, April 11, 2016, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-four-building-blocks-of-change>.
86. Ibid. Busby, *The Effective Change Manager's Handbook*.
87. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2021*.
88. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2024*.
89. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your organization: The best opportunities go to the most deserving employees." Respondents who said "Agree" selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Respondents who said "Disagree" selected: "Disagree strongly" or "Disagree somewhat." Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel motivated to perform my best at work." Respondents selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Respondents who agree the best opportunities go to the most deserving employees, 98%, compared to respondents who disagree the best opportunities go to the most deserving employees, 71%. Goldstein, Mendelsohn, and Sperling-Magro, "Personal Experience of Inclusion"; LinkedIn Learning, *2019 Workplace Learning Report*.
90. See pipeline data on page 18 for more details.
91. Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, John F. Dovidio, Victoria L. Brescoll, et al., "Science Faculty's Subtle Gender Biases Favor Male Students," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 109 (2012), <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1211286109>; Rhea E. Steinpreis, Katie A. Anders, and Dawn Ritzke, "The Impact of Gender on the Review of Curricula Vitae of Job Applicants and Tenure Candidates: A National Empirical Study," *Sex Roles* 41 (1999), [https://www.igh.cnrs.fr/images/docs/pdf/sax\\_roles-1999.pdf](https://www.igh.cnrs.fr/images/docs/pdf/sax_roles-1999.pdf); Shelley Correll and Caroline Simard, "Research: Vague Feedback Is Holding Women Back," *Harvard Business Review*, April 29, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/04/research-vague-feedback-is-holding-women-back>; Alan Benson et al., "'Potential' and the Gender Promotion Gap," *American Economic Review* (March 4, 2024), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4747175>.
92. Full question: "In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "You received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level)."
93. Shelley J. Correll, "Reducing Gender Biases in Modern Workplaces: A Small Wins Approach to Organizational Change," *Gender and Society* 31 (December 2017), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/089124321738518?journalCode=gasa>.
94. Ibid.; Daan van Knippenberg, Lisa H. Nishii, and David J. G. Dwertmann, "Synergy from Diversity: Managing Team Diversity to Enhance Performance," *Behavioral Science and Policy* 6 (2020), <https://behavioralpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Synergy-from-diversity-Managing-team-diversity-to-enhance-performance-1.pdf>.
95. Nadra Nittle, "The Language of Gender Bias in Performance Reviews," Insights by Stanford Graduate School of Business, April 28, 2021, <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/language-gender-bias-performance-reviews>.
96. Majeda M. El-Banna, Intima Alrimawi, Kristie Davis-Collins, and Keisha Rollins-Monroe, "Recruiting and Retaining Diverse Faculty and Students: Strategies for Success," *Teaching and Learning in Nursing* 20 (July 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2025.02.034>.
97. Michele Hujber, "Bachelor's Degrees Are No Longer Required for Many Jobs," SSI, August 22, 2024, <https://ssi.org/blog/bachelors-degrees-are-no-longer-required-many-jobs>.
98. Ibid.
99. Joyce C. He and Sonia K. Kang, "Debiasing Job Ads by Replacing Masculine Language Increases Gender Diversity of Applicant Pools," *Psychological and Cognitive Sciences* 122 (February 10, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2409854122>; Mariagrazia Squicciarini, "The Weight of Words: Gendered Language and Women's Participation and Positioning in the Labor Market," UNESCO, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.54678/SYJ07943>; Benson et al., "'Potential' and the Gender Promotion Gap."
100. Ibid.
101. Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook, "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001), <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415>; Payscale, "Why Relying on Referrals Could Hurt Your Efforts to Hire a Diverse Workforce," January 31, 2018, <https://www.payscale.com/compensation-trends/referrals-hurt-diversity>.
102. T. M. Arun and Rojers P. Joseph, "Gender and Firm Innovation—A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda," *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research* 27 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-08-2019-0480>; Christian R. Østergaard, Bram Timmermans, and Kari Kristinsson, "Does a Different View Create Something New? The Effect of Employee Diversity on Innovation," *Research Policy* 40 (2011), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/smi.1955>.
103. Full question: "Which of the following have increased, stayed the same, or decreased in your organization over the last 12 months? Recruiting and hiring practices designed to foster a diverse workforce." Respondents selected: "Increased significantly" "Increased somewhat" "Decreased somewhat" or "Decreased significantly" Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your organization: The best opportunities go to the most deserving employees." Respondents who selected "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat": Respondents at organizations that increased recruiting and hiring practices designed to foster a diverse workforce, 92%, compared to respondents at organizations that decreased recruiting and hiring practices designed to foster a diverse workforce, 52%.
104. Intelligent, "Nearly Half of Companies Plan to Eliminate Bachelor's Degree Requirements in 2024," July 23, 2024, <https://www.intelligent.com/nearly-half-of-companies-plan-to-eliminate-bachelors-degree-requirements-in-2024/>.
105. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2024*; *Women in the Workplace 2023*; *Women in the Workplace 2022*; *Women in the Workplace 2021*; *Women in the Workplace 2020*, *Women in the Workplace 2019*, *Women in the Workplace 2018*, *Women in the Workplace 2017*.
106. J. B. Williams, "Accountability as a Debiasing Strategy: Testing the Effect of Racial Diversity in Employment Committees," *Iowa Law Review* 103 (2018), <https://ilr.law.uiowa.edu/sites/ilr.law.uiowa.edu/files/2023-02/ILR-103-4-Williams.pdf>; Mina Ličen and Sergeja Slapničar, "Can Process Accountability Mitigate Myopic Biases? An Experimental Analysis," *Journal of Management Control* 33 (January 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00187-021-00330-7>.
107. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workplace 2024*; *Women in the Workplace 2023*; *Women in the Workplace 2019*.



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108. Elisabeth K. Kelan, "Algorithmic Inclusion: Shaping the Predictive Algorithms of Artificial Intelligence in Hiring," *Human Resource Management Journal* 34 (April 24, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12511>.
109. Ibid.
110. Full question: "Which of the following best describes how your organization is managing the use of AI in performance evaluations? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "We have clear policies guiding AI use in performance reviews" and/or "Managers are trained on ethical and appropriate use of AI when evaluating employee performance."
111. Full question: "If your organization has assessed the future impact of AI, what impact has it predicted for each of the following areas? Fairness in hiring and promotions processes." Respondents selected from the following options: "Very positive impact," "Somewhat positive impact," "No impact," "Somewhat negative impact," "Very negative impact," or "Unsure of impact."
112. Full questions: "If your organization has assessed the future impact of AI, what impact has it predicted for each of the following areas? Opportunities for women to advance" and "If your organization has assessed the future impact of AI, what impact has it predicted for each of the following areas? Job security for women." Respondents selected from the following options: "Very positive impact," "Somewhat positive impact," "No impact," "Somewhat negative impact," "Very negative impact," or "Unsure of impact."
113. Matt Prosko, "Thawing the Frozen Middle," BTS Insights, 2017, [https://btsspark.org/docs/default-source/white-papers/bts\\_thawing-the-frozen-middle\\_insight\\_-001.pdf](https://btsspark.org/docs/default-source/white-papers/bts_thawing-the-frozen-middle_insight_-001.pdf); *Harvard Business Review*, video based on the article "AI Could Liberate 50% of Managers' Time," by Vegard Kolbjørnsrud et al., <https://hbr.org/video/5240597305001/artificial-intelligence-could-give-managers-half-of-their-time-back>.
114. Full question: "Which of the following actions has your manager taken consistently in the last 12 months? Select all that apply." Respondents selected from the following options: "Shown interest in your career advancement (e.g., proactively ask about your career goals)," "Been transparent about what it takes to advance," "Given you projects that directly align with your career goals," "Advocated for you or your work," and/or "Provided specific and actionable feedback to improve your work or performance."
115. Career development manager actions is a composite of: "Shown interest in your career advancement (e.g., proactively ask about your career goals)," "Been transparent about what it takes to advance," "Given you projects that directly align with your career goals," "Advocated for you or your work," "Helped you navigate organizational politics," and/or "Provided specific and actionable feedback to improve your work or performance." Full question: "In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization? Select all that apply." Respondents who selected "You received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level)" or "You received a raise beyond a standard cost-of-living adjustment": Women who did not receive any career development manager actions, 60%, compared to women who received any career development manager actions, 77%. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your organization: I feel safe to take risks and make mistakes." Respondents who selected "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat": Women who did not receive any career development manager actions, 52%, compared to women who received any career development manager actions, 73%. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your organization: I feel comfortable disagreeing with others." Respondents who selected "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat": Women who did not receive any career development manager actions, 61%, compared to women who received any career development manager actions, 76%.
116. The five supports most strongly correlated with interest in being promoted at each level were used to create a composite indicator for receiving at least three of these supports; interest in being promoted was then examined by composite status for women and men.
117. Full question: "Which of the following actions has your manager taken consistently in the last 12 months? Select all that apply." Respondents who selected "You were given a stretch assignment (i.e., a project that builds skills or encourages growth and development)": Entry-level men, 35%; entry-level women, 30%.
118. In this report, fairness refers to objective, repeatable processes that are applied at each stage of decision-making—for example, before hiring (e.g., setting transparent criteria), during reviews (e.g., applying consistent metrics), and after onboarding (e.g., providing equal access to development).
119. LinkedIn Learning, *2019 Workplace Learning Report*.
120. Employees with manager support for their career development are employees who received 3+ career development manager actions. Full question: "Which of the following actions has your manager taken consistently in the last 12 months? Select all that apply." Respondents selected three or more of the following options: "Shown interest in your career advancement (e.g., proactively ask about your career goals)," "Been transparent about what it takes to advance," "Given you projects that directly align with your career goals," "Advocated for you or your work," and "Provided specific and actionable feedback to improve your work or performance." For employees who believed their workplace is fair, full question: "How fair do you believe your workplace is (i.e., all employees receive the support they need to succeed and similar opportunities to advance)?" Respondents who selected "Somewhat fair" or "Very fair": Employees who received 3+ career development manager actions, 87%; employees who received no career development manager actions, 56%; DeCarbo, "Lack of Growth Opportunities Is a Big Reason Why Employees Leave Jobs"; Smet, Dowling, Hancock, and Schaninger, "The Great Attrition Is Making Hiring Harder."
121. Full question: "Which of the following actions has your manager taken consistently in the last 12 months? Select all that apply."
122. See career development supports on page 33.
123. Gallup, "A Great Manager's Most Important Habit," May 29, 2023, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/505370/great-manager-important-habit.aspx#:~:text=In%20each%20study%2C%20we%20had,copy%20of%20Culture%20Shock%20today>; Anthony M. Grant and Margie Hartley, "Developing the Leader as Coach: Insights, Strategies and Tips for Embedding Coaching Skills in the Workplace," *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice* (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2013.824015>.
124. *Harvard Business Review*, "Artificial Intelligence Could Give Managers Half of Their Time Back."
125. Gallup, "A Great Manager's Most Important Habit."
126. Emily Field, co-author of *Power to the Middle: Why Managers Hold the Keys to the Future of Work* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2023), personal communication with Dr. Mary Noble-Tolla, August 29, 2024, based on in-depth interviews with major corporations.
127. Lori Nishiura Mackenzie, JoAnne Wehner, and Shelley J. Correll, "Why Most Performance Evaluations Are Biased, and How to Fix Them," *Harvard Business Review*, January 11, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/01/why-most-performance-evaluations-are-biased-and-how-to-fix-them>; Correll and Simard, "Research: Vague Feedback Is Holding Women Back."
128. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, "Birds of a Feather."
129. Correll and Simard, "Research: Vague Feedback Is Holding Women Back."
130. Full question: "In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization? Select all that apply." Respondents who selected "You were given a stretch assignment (i.e., a project that builds skills or encourages growth and development)": Entry-level men, 35%; entry-level women, 30%; Shannon K. Gilmartin, Samantha Brunhaver, Sara Jordan-Bloch, et al., "The Right Way to Implement Stretch Assignments," *Harvard Business Review*, May 28, 2025, <https://hbr.org/2025/05/the-right-way-to-implement-stretch-assignments?ab=HP-hero-latest-2>.
131. Full question: "In the last 12 months, has someone in a more senior role than you (other than your direct manager) done any of the following for you? Select all that apply." Respondents selected: "Recommended you for a stretch assignment."
132. Full question: "In the last 12 months, how has each of the following changed at your organization? Formal rewards for managers for providing career growth opportunities fairly and consistently across their team." Respondents selected: "Maintained as before," "Introduced or scaled up," or "Scaled back."
133. Hewlett, *The Sponsor Effect*; Dixon-Fyle, Dolan, Hunt, and Prince, "Diversity Wins."
134. *Harvard Business Review*, "How to Do Sponsorship Right," November–December 2022, <https://hbr.org/2022/11/how-to-do-sponsorship-right>.
135. Full question: "Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?" Respondents who selected "Yes, I have multiple sponsors" or "Yes, I have one sponsor": Men, 56%; women, 50%.
136. Full question: "Do you have at least one sponsor in any of the following roles?" Respondents who selected "Someone in a VP or SVP role" or "Someone in a C-suite role": Men, 35%; women, 30%.

# Endnotes

137. Full question: "Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?" Respondents selected: "Yes, I have multiple sponsors" or "Yes, I have one sponsor." Full question: "In the last 2 years, which of the following happened at your organization? Select all that apply." Respondents who selected "You received a promotion (i.e., moving up a job level)": Employees with at least one sponsor, 65%; employees with no sponsor, 35%.
138. Full question: "Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?" Respondents selected: "Yes, I have multiple sponsors" or "Yes, I have one sponsor."
139. Hewlett, *The Sponsor Effect*; *Harvard Business Review*, "How to Do Sponsorship Right."
140. *Harvard Business Review*, "How to Do Sponsorship Right."
141. Herminia Ibarra, "A Lack of Sponsorship Is Keeping Women from Advancing into Leadership," *Harvard Business Review*, August 19, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/08/a-lack-of-sponsorship-is-keeping-women-from-advancing-into-leadership>; Wendy Miller and Wieske Heinen Elgün, "Leveraging Sponsorship to Build Experience Capital," McKinsey & Company, April 14, 2025, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/people-in-progress/leveraging-sponsorship-to-build-experience-capital>.
142. Hewlett, *The Sponsor Effect*; *Harvard Business Review*, "How to Do Sponsorship Right."
143. This statement is based on in-depth interviews conducted with HR leaders working in the private sector in 2025.
144. Full question: "In the last 12 months, how has each of the following changed at your organization? Formal sponsorship programs." Respondents selected: "Introduced or scaled up," "Maintained as before," or "Scaled back." Full question: "Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?" Respondents selected: "Yes, I have multiple sponsors" or "Yes, I have one sponsor."
145. Hewlett, *The Sponsor Effect*.
146. Teresa Almeida et al., "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Is Not Bad for Business: Evidence from Employee Review Data for Companies Listed in the UK and the US," The Inclusion Initiative at the London School of Economics and Political Science, October 2024, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/asset-library/news/not-bad-for-business.pdf>; Arun and Joseph, "Gender and Firm Innovation."
147. Research shows peer mentorship leads to longer-lasting relationships and is just as effective as traditional mentorship. Kathy E. Kram and Lynn A. Isabella, "Mentoring Alternatives: The Role of Peer Relationships in Career Development," *The Academy of Management Journal* 28 (March 1985), <http://www.istor.org/stable/256064>; Elijah G. Ward et al., "Goal Attainment, Retention and Peer Mentoring," *Academic Exchange Quarterly* (Summer 2010), <https://onlinelibrary.com/doi/10.1080/00020170.2010.500000>; Learn more about Circles at [leanin.org/circles](https://leanin.org/circles).
148. Lean In, 2024 Community Circles Survey (unpublished survey).
149. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel respected and valued at my organization." Respondents who said "Agree" selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Respondents who said "Disagree" selected: "Disagree strongly" or "Disagree somewhat." Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel motivated to perform my best at work." Respondents who selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Respondents who feel respected and valued at their organization, 98%; respondents who do not feel respected and valued at their organization, 52%. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel respected and valued at my organization." Respondents who said "Agree" selected: "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat." Respondents who said "Disagree" selected: "Disagree strongly" or "Disagree somewhat."
150. Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel motivated to perform my best at work?" Respondents who selected "agree somewhat" or "agree strongly": Respondents who feel respected and valued at their organization, 98%, respondents who do not feel respected and valued at their organization, 55%. Steele and Weddle, "Insights to Shape Organization Culture for Success"; Hancock and Schaninger, "The Elusive Inclusive Workplace"; Balazs Vedres and Orsolya Vasarhelyi, "Inclusion Unlocks the Creative Potential of Gender Diversity in Teams," *Scientific Reports* 13 (August 2023), <https://arxiv.org/abs/2204.08505>; Henrik Bresman and Amy C. Edmondson, "Research: To Excel, Diverse Teams Need Psychological Safety," *Harvard Business Review*, March 17, 2022, <https://hbr.org/2022/03/research-to-excel-diverse-teams-need-psychological-safety>.
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154. Madeline E. Heilman, "Gender Stereotypes and Workplace Bias," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 32 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2012.11.003>; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, et al., "Reactions to Vanguard."
155. Full question: "Which of the following have increased, stayed the same, or decreased in your organization over the last 12 months? Programs designed to foster an inclusive culture (e.g., ERGs, allyship trainings)." For "increased these offerings," respondents selected: "Increased significantly" or "Increased somewhat." For "decreased these offerings," respondents selected: "Decreased significantly" or "Decreased somewhat." Full question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel respected and valued at my organization." Respondents who selected "Agree strongly" or "Agree somewhat": Increased programs designed to foster an inclusive culture, 96%; decreased programs designed to foster an inclusive culture, 67%.
156. Busby, *The Effective Change Manager's Handbook*.
157. Goldstein, Mendelsohn, and Sperling-Magro, "Personal Experience of Inclusion."
158. Busby, *The Effective Change Manager's Handbook*.
159. Tara Van Bommel, "The Power of Empathy in Times of Crisis and Beyond," 2nd ed., Catalyst, September 14, 2021, <https://www.catalyst.org/insights/2025/empathy-work-strategy-crisis-executive-summary>; see the next page, "1.3 Choose culture and inclusion trainings that really work," for more detail.
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174. This statement is based on interviews with over 30 women leaders with experience in the diversity and inclusion space, conducted between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2022, to inform Lean In's leadership training program, the Women at Work Collection, <https://leanin.org/women-at-work>.
175. This statement is based on in-depth interviews conducted with HR leaders working in the private sector in 2025.
176. Full question: "Do you have a sponsor at work (i.e., someone other than your direct manager who actively advocates for your career advancement and/or creates opportunities for you)?" Respondents who selected "Yes, I have multiple sponsors" or "Yes, I have one sponsor": Men, 56%; women, 50%. Full question: "In the last 12 months, has someone in a more senior role than you (other than your direct manager) done any of the following for you? Select all that apply." Respondents who selected "Put you forward as a candidate for promotion," "Connected you with someone who could help your career development," and/or "Recommended you for a stretch assignment": Men who received two or more actions, 33%; women who received two or more actions, 28%.
177. This statement is based on interviews with over 30 women leaders who have experience in the diversity and inclusion space, conducted between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2022, to inform Lean In's leadership training program, The Women at Work Collection, <https://leanin.org/women-at-work>.
178. Full question: "In the last 12 months, how has each of the following changed at your organization? Employee resource groups (ERGs)." Respondents selected: "Introduced or scaled up."
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183. Recommendation based on off-the-record interviews with HR leaders at four major companies, conducted between January 1, 2025, and September 30, 2025.
184. We define "invest in women" as ensuring that women receive access to workplace support, training, and other resources at comparable levels to men.
185. Benchmarks for industries with fewer than five companies are unavailable.