



WHITE PAPER

Women in the Workforce: A Skillsoft® survey report

skillsoft

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 2015 survey includes feedback from 486 women in North America (79%), Europe/Middle East/Africa (15%) and Asia/Pacific (6%). The results both reflect and support recent research surrounding inequality in the workplace and the need for organizations to implement long-term solutions.

The results also align with a recent McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) report that finds: “Gender inequality is not only a pressing moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge. If women—who account for half the world’s working-age population—do not achieve their full economic potential, the global economy will suffer.”¹

¹ *The power of parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth. McKinsey Global Institute, 2015.*

1. WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE TODAY?

ANSWER		%
Work/home balance		63%
“Glass Ceiling” or “Boys Club”		53%
Unequal pay for equal jobs		50%
Lack of mentors/sponsors		37%
Lack of promotion opportunities		30%
Retaining high potential women		29%
Women stuck in low challenge roles		18%
Gender discrimination in the workplace		14%
Other		7%

Key findings: A majority of respondents identify work-life balance as the most important issue facing women in the workforce. This aligns with the findings of the September 2015 McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) report, *The power of parity: How advancing women’s equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth.*² The MGI findings show 75% of global unpaid work is done by women.

“75% of the world’s total unpaid care is undertaken by women, including the vital tasks that keep households functioning such as child care, caring for the elderly, cooking and cleaning. However, this contribution is not counted in the traditional measures of GDP. Using conservative assumptions, we estimate that unpaid work being undertaken by women today amounts to as much as \$10 trillion of output per year, roughly equivalent to 13% of global GDP.”³

“A lot of the time the biggest challenge is making a choice – family, home, or career. Men just don’t have to make the same choice (all things being equal) so the first choice is career.”

Survey response

² *Women in the workplace.* LeanIn.org and McKinsey, 2015.

³ *The power of parity: How advancing women’s equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth.* McKinsey Global Institute, 2015.

2. “THERE IS AN IMBALANCE OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN BUSINESS TODAY.”

How much do you agree or disagree with the above statement:

ANSWER		%
Strongly agree		44%
Agree		48%
Neither agree nor disagree		5%
Disagree		<3%
Strongly disagree		<2%

Total exceeds 100% due to rounding

Key findings: There is no doubt that the workplace is imbalanced. Most respondents (92%) agree or strongly agree with the statement that there is a lack of women in leadership. This perception conforms to current statistics. Women make up just 5% of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies and 17% of the corporate board members among Fortune 500 companies.⁴

“I think there needs to be a complete redress of what is required of senior leaders in general to balance having a family (both male and female).”

Survey response

3. WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION, HOW EQUAL IS THE BALANCE OF MEN AND WOMEN IN SENIOR LEVEL POSITIONS?

ANSWER		%
More men in senior positions		87%
Equal numbers of men and women		7%
More women in senior positions		4%
Don't know		2%

Total exceeds 100% due to rounding

Key findings: Survey responses are in line with what researchers know to be true in today's workplace: men far outnumber women when it comes to senior leadership roles. Given this imbalance – what resources and support are available to organizations to prepare women for advancement?

4. HOW WELL DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION ADDRESSES AN UNEQUAL BALANCE OF MEN AND WOMEN IN SENIOR LEVEL POSITIONS?

ANSWER		%
Excellent		1%
Very good		7%
Good		20%
Fair		40%
Poor		31%

Total equals 99% due to rounding.

Key findings: From a macro perspective, 71% of respondents feel that there is not enough being done (fair and poor) within their organizations to address gender imbalance. What actions can organizations take to remedy this imbalance?

“Closing the global gender gap could deliver \$12 trillion to \$28 trillion of additional GDP in 2015.”
McKinsey Global Institute

5. “IT IS IMPORTANT THAT MY ORGANIZATION HAS PROGRAMS SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT DEVELOPING WOMEN LEADERS.”

Where does the above statement rank as a business objective?

ANSWER		%
Extremely important		16%
Very important		37%
Neither important nor unimportant		29%
Not at all important		9%
Very unimportant		9%

Key findings: Just over half of the respondents (53%) say it is very or extremely important to have programs specifically aimed at developing women leaders as a business objective. Women in today’s workplace see the potential of their role in growing the global economy.

6. DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION HAVE A STRATEGY IN PLACE AND/OR PROGRAMS SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT DEVELOPING WOMEN LEADERS?

ANSWER		%
Yes		1%
No		7%
No, but we would like to plan		20%
No, and we don't have any plans		40%
I don't know/not aware of any programs		31%

Key findings: Only about one quarter of respondents felt their organizations had a strategy in place to develop women leaders. Another quarter were not aware of any programs. While these programs may exist, visibility may be an issue. There is a gap between what employees have identified as an important objective (see Question 5) and how many organizations are meeting this need.

“There are unofficial women’s groups within our company but the company does not specify certain programs for women-only development.”

Survey response

“I was just part of a corporation-wide meeting announcing a ‘Women in Leadership’ program to allow women in the company with high potential to get on a leadership track overseen by high-level mentors.”

Survey response

7. ON WHAT LEADERSHIP LEVELS DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION TARGET LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN?

ANSWER		%
C-suite		21%
Senior/executive		59%
Mid-level leader		66%
First-time leader		43%
Individual contributor		31%

Respondents were instructed to select top three answers. Results exceed 100% due to multiple responses.

Key findings: The largest proportion of responses (66%) indicates that organizations are primarily targeting mid-level leaders for women-specific programs. Organizations need to make greater strides and commit to developing women throughout their career cycles. While development is needed at all levels, it is important for organizations to assess how they choose senior leaders and what can be done to provide equal access for women at the highest levels of leadership.

8. WHAT TYPES OF LEADERSHIP TRAINING ARE PROVIDED IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

ANSWER		%
Informal, social networks, affiliation groups, online communities, etc.		75%
Off-site conferences or events		58%
Self-paced eLearning		55%
Instructor-led training (classroom based)		53%
Blend of format (ILT) and eLearning programs		38%
Executive education programs		35%
Other		7%

Respondents were instructed to select top three answers. Results exceed 100% due to multiple responses.

Key findings: Online learning is gaining traction as a means to deliver stand-alone training or as a complement to traditional instructor-led training.

“We have several groups and programs. Women are developed and prepared, but few moved into senior positions.”

McKinsey Global Institute

“At the current pace, it will be more than a century before there is gender equality in the C-suite.⁶”

LeanIn.Org and McKinsey

9. DOES YOUR COMPANY OFFER A FORMAL MENTORING OR SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM FOR WOMEN MANAGERS AND LEADERS?

Organizations can offer both mentorship and sponsorship programs. While a mentor helps you to navigate your career and provide guidance, a sponsor is a senior leader who uses influence to advocate so you can obtain high-visibility, promotions or jobs.

ANSWER		%
Yes, a formal mentoring program		16%
Yes, a formal sponsorship program		0%
Yes, both formal mentoring and sponsorship		5%
Plan to implement a formal mentoring or sponsorship program soon		5%
No formal programs, but informal support is offered		26%
No formal or informal programs offered		36%
Don't know		12%

Key findings: Most respondents do not have access to any formal development programs. This presents a huge area for improvement across organizations. Both mentorship and sponsorship can help women train to advance within their organization. Recent research shows female professionals underestimate the need for sponsorship. Women tend to shortchange the importance of sponsorship and making connections in the workplace. Studies also show that historically women have reported a more difficult time finding mentors than men do, which has led to a number of mentoring networks aimed specifically at connecting women with female mentors and could in part explain the low number.

10. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING COMPETENCIES WOULD BE MOST VALUABLE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION TO FOCUS ON WHEN CREATING A WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE?

ANSWER		%
Executive presence		39%
Building visibility		37%
Sponsorship/mentoring		30%
Self-promotion		27%
Career planning		25%
Work-life balance		24%
Confidence		22%
Organizational change		17%
Risk taking		15%
Delegating/managing others		14%
Communication		14%
Resilience		12%
Negotiation		12%
Networking		9%
Other		3%

Skillsoft survey respondents know what's needed to move their careers forward. **39%** of women identify executive presence as a key leadership competency.

Respondents were instructed to select top three answers. Results exceed 100% due to multiple responses.

Key findings: Survey respondents are aware that developing a strong executive presence should come first. “Executive presence will not earn you promotion after promotion, but lack of executive presence will impede your ability to get as far as you want to go...” Sylvia Ann Hewlett⁷

Women know what’s needed to get ahead. Are organizations meeting their needs?



11. THE FOLLOWING PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE TO WOMEN WITHIN MY ORGANIZATION.

ANSWER		%
Conferences		47%
Academic/degree/certificate programs		45%
Personal/professional networking		43%
Corporate-sponsored leadership training programs		42%
Mentors and/or coaches		37%
Association memberships		37%
Professional workshops, seminars (out of office)		36%
Professional workshops, seminars (in office)		32%
None of the above		13%
Other		6%

Respondents were instructed to select top three answers. Results exceed 100% due to multiple responses.

Key findings: Organizations offer a variety of development opportunities and respondents noted in open responses that these opportunities are not gender-specific. Providing leadership development training is important to all employees. Organizations are investing in all employees - but what needs are specific to women leaders and how can organizations meet these needs?

“The pipeline for female leaders seems to be widening. Women have made significant gains in educational attainment in recent decades, better positioning themselves not only for career success but also for leadership positions.⁸
Pew Research Center

⁸ *Women and Leadership: Public Says Women Are Equally Qualified, but Barriers Persist. Pew Research Center, 2015.*

CONCLUSION

The Skillsoft survey responses align with current research identifying gender inequality in the workplace as a challenge to all organizations. From entry-level to C-level positions, women workers are facing more barriers and advancing more slowly than their male counterparts. Respondents note that even when training is available, the opportunity to advance and to apply skills may not be.



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