

Elevate the System



We do not need to change women —

we need to change systems.

Research Partners:



The journey to elevate women is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic necessity.

The title of this compelling research report, "Elevate the System," carries significant meaning. To "elevate" means to hoist, lift-up, or exalt. A "system" refers to interacting and interrelating components where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The scientific evidence supporting the wide-ranging business and societal benefits of high inclusion and equity among women is incontrovertible.

Yet, in 2024, we still find ourselves emphasizing the need to elevate women in the workplace and beyond. It is imperative to change the systems that hinder their progress. Persistent

gender stereotypes and biases, such as affinity bias — favoring those who resemble ourselves — continue to obstruct women from reaching their full potential in workplaces dominated by male leaders.

This report presents a compelling blueprint for actionable steps that we all need to take to unlock the full capabilities of women in today's world. The time has come for us to embrace this goal with renewed commitment and vigor. By doing so, we not only advance the cause of gender equity but also drive greater innovation, productivity, and societal progress.

While this research originated in Asia Pacific, its findings resonate globally. The journey to elevate women is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic necessity. Together, let us rise to the challenge and create a future where every woman can thrive and lead, contributing to a more equitable and prosperous world for all.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'David G. Altman'.

David Altman
PhD, Chief Research and Innovation Officer



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Challenges and Realities

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Inclusion Has Become a Dilemma

Challenge:

With increased focus and investment on women leadership, why are we still struggling to get more women into senior roles?

Reality:

Inclusion has become more complex and challenging to navigate.

2

Leaders Must Mind the Hidden Gap

Challenge:

With all leaders facing similar hurdles in their sprint to senior positions, how can organizations make progress in ensuring a level playing field?

Reality:

The hurdles that women leaders need to jump are considerably higher.

3

Feminine Superpowers Are Getting Women Leaders Into a Bind

Challenge:

The Double Bind and Double Flex lead women to burn out at a faster rate.

Reality:

Feminine strengths are becoming essential in the AI Era, yet women often do not get credit for displaying them.

4

Women Leaders Need to Ask For More

Challenge:

Challenging job assignments and increased exposure tend to be key experiences that propel careers forward, and yet women are more reluctant to take them up.

Reality:

Overall, women are being offered more, but are asking less.

5

We Must Elevate the System

Challenge:

Without removing systemic barriers, we can not fully tackle the internal barriers that hold women back.

Reality:

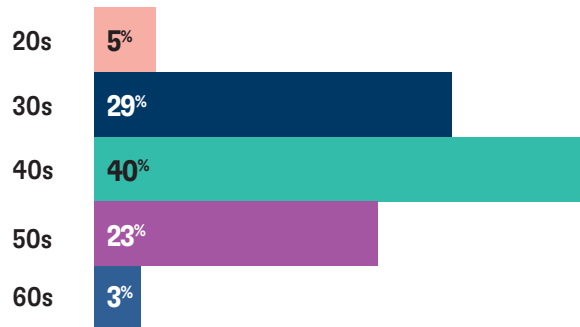
We do not need to change women, we need to change systems.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

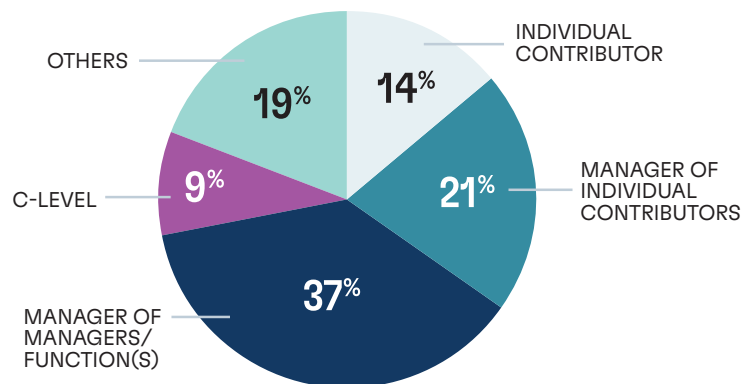
SURVEY (NOV. 2023-MAR. 2024)

894 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

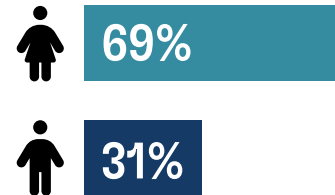
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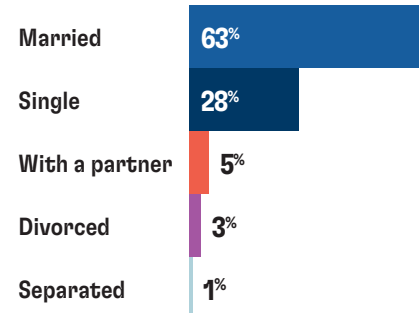
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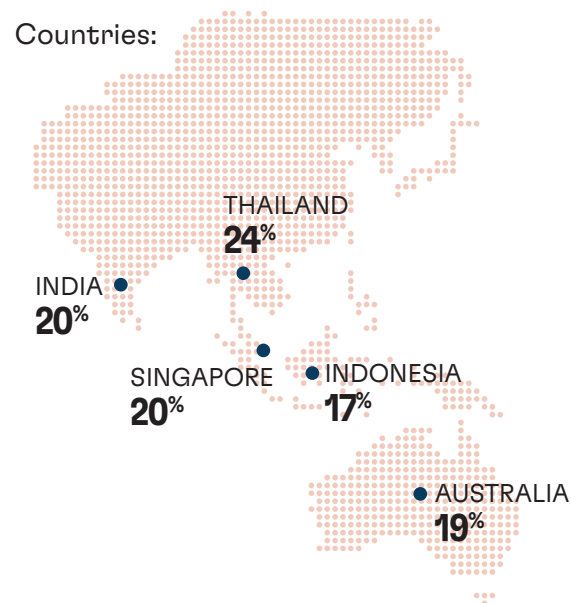
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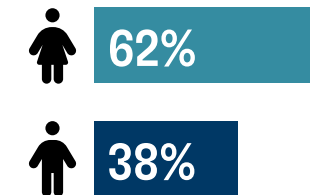
Countries:



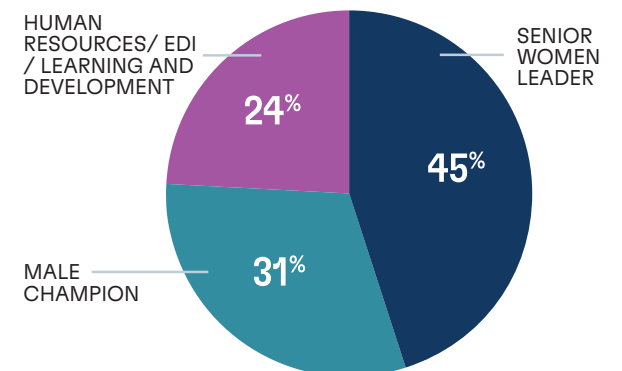
INTERVIEWS (NOV. 2023-MAR. 2024)

71 NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES

Gender:



Profile of Interviewees:





1

Inclusion
Has Become
a Dilemma

“Is there real inclusion? Board culture and top team culture play a big role in whether female leaders are really being heard or not. There are many cases where women are there, but not really heard.”

Board Member, Services Industry and Non-Profit Sector, Singapore

“The DEI agenda may be diluting the women leadership agenda because it’s trying to cover so many things right now. In Asia we are still fighting gender inequality. Maybe we need to get that right first before moving on to all the other things.”

Partner, Leadership Advisory Firm, Singapore

Challenge:

With increased focus and investment on women leadership, why are we still struggling to get more women into senior roles?

Reality:

Inclusion has become more complex and challenging to navigate.

With over 4 decades of research in women leadership, informed and supported by numerous women leadership programs across the world, we have witnessed several peaks in progress and most recently a slowing pace in the gender equity agenda. According to the [World Economic Forum](#) it will now take 149 years to close the gender gap in South Asia and 189 years to close the gender gap in East Asia and the Pacific.

Women continue to be under-represented at top levels across the private and public sector. According to Fortune, in 2023, women represent only 10.4% of Fortune 500 CEOs. There is also more definitive evidence that the barrier to progress is [not due to a lack of ambition to get to the top](#).

Studies on the benefits of women in leadership consistently indicate having women in top leadership positions is associated with better

firm performance and lower risk. As a result, many organizations and governments have made more significant investments. Most recently a broader equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) agenda has in some ways diluted focus on women leadership and a growing EDI backlash seems to be getting in the way.

To dive deeper into the current reality, we surveyed 894 and interviewed 71 women and men living and working in Asia Pacific. We sought to better understand whether some of the factors that were holding women back and gaps in perception between men and women have improved or gotten worse since we conducted our 2020 [Overcoming Barriers to Women’s Leadership research](#) in Asia. In this report we also delve into the rise and realities of dual-income households and in Asia.



EQUITY IS AN 'ONION'

Leaders must peel layers of safety, pay, development equity

When hidden gaps arising out of biases are left unaddressed, the outcome is inequity. Inequities faced by women in the workplace (and in society) are well known and include:

- Lower pay and lower-status jobs
- Fewer opportunities for advancement
- Discriminatory practices
- Less access to decision making roles
- Being on the margins of social networks
- Greater difficulty in being accorded authority and legitimacy
- A lack of family-support and infrastructure
- Managing a greater domestic burden

LAYERS OF EQUITY

SAFETY

42% In **MOST** workplaces, women are hit-on or harassed related to their gender.

14% In **MY** workplace, women are hit-on or harassed related to their gender.

PAY

55% In **MOST** workplaces, there is a gender pay disparity.

27% In **MY** workplace, there is a gender pay disparity.



DEVELOPMENT

68% In **MOST** workplaces, men and women have equal opportunities.

88% In **MY** workplace, men and women have equal opportunities.

Question: Select the response that best represents your opinions regarding gender equity in the workplace.

Figure denotes % of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing to the statements



“On the surface, many leaders may think that their organization does not have a gender equity issue, but if you peel the onion then you will find that there are always underlying issues. For example, everyone has unconscious bias, so there are always assumptions we make towards women, and men, which influences our decisions everyday. We train not just our leaders, but all our employees, on unconscious bias every year.”

Male Champion, Technology Sector, Thailand

With hidden gaps and barriers at multiple levels, identifying actions that will really make a difference has become more complex. Safety, pay and development are 3 of the critical layers. Organizations committed to gender equity need to address each layer separately. While safety may be an issue in certain locations for example, pay or opportunity may be the challenge in certain functions of the organization.

Surface layers of the equity onion are easier to see. More leaders rated their workplaces higher

on visible aspects of equity like development opportunities. Fewer leaders rated their workplaces high on more subtle aspects like pay, where information is generally not shared, and on safety, where there tend to be more barriers to report gender-related harassment.

Overall, the leaders we surveyed viewed their workplaces as more equitable compared to other workplaces. We also found significant differences between men and women in how they view these critical layers.

DIFFERENT LAYERS OF EQUITY ARE PERCEIVED DIFFERENTLY



Figure denotes % of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing to the statements

Perceptions of safety, pay, and opportunity equity differ significantly among men and women. Male leaders are less likely to perceive safety-related issues in the workplace compared to women. Creating a safe working environment free from harassment is key to attracting women to the workforce.

Male leaders are only almost half as likely to notice gender pay disparities. Gender pay equity is crucial because it ensures that men and women receive equal pay for equal work and it ensures that talent is retained in organizations. Equal pay promotes fairness, reduces economic disparities, and contributes

to a more just and inclusive society. Closing the pay gap benefits individuals, families, and the overall economy. In her Nobel winning work, Claudia Goldin states that in the past, [gender wage gaps](#) could be explained by education and occupation but earning differences between women and men today are found in the same jobs.

Equal opportunity for both genders in the workplace is key to fostering fairness, diversity, and productivity. When everyone has the same chances to succeed, it promotes innovation, reduces discrimination, and creates a more inclusive work environment.



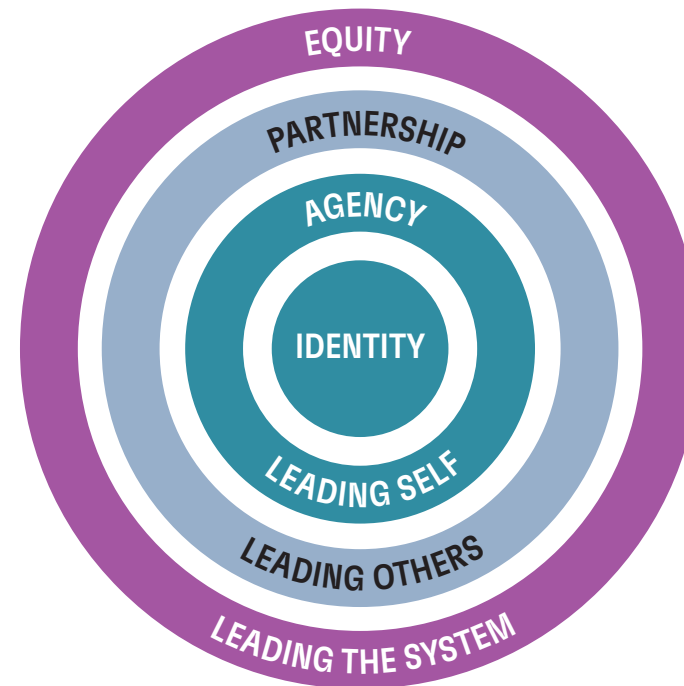
Awareness of and addressing the various layers of equity are closely related to issues of identity, agency and partnerships. Equity allows everyone to embrace their authentic selves, fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth. Comfort with individual identity also enhances confidence. Gender equity empowers individuals to exercise agency over their lives and

make informed professional and personal decisions. Equitable partnerships are about recognizing shared responsibilities, shared decision-making power and respect for each other's aspirations. They lead to better personal and professional outcomes and innovative solutions.

Leading Self

Identity is how individuals perceive themselves and their roles in society.

Agency is a perception of control over one's actions and their consequences. It involves a sense of independence to leverage skills and strengths in a work role as well as the ability to positively affect the environment to achieve goals.



Leading Others

Partnerships are about recognizing shared responsibilities and influencing to ensure their equitable distribution among partners and collaborators.

Leading the System

Layers of Equity provide the context in which an individual operate. Often provided to an individual, the individual has the choice to either adapt themselves to the context or adapt the context to them.

IDENTITY

Women tend to have some ambivalence towards leadership and power, which comes from societal norms, beliefs about women in leadership and a lack of female role models in positions of authority.

There are multiple restrictive messages that are internalized by women leaders that result in limiting beliefs, hesitation in asking for what is needed and advocating for themselves. In many cases women do not have the space to reflect on the collection of beliefs they are carrying and how these play out and impact their career and life.

Among our survey respondents, men and women indicate that they spend equal amounts of time reflecting on their values, priorities and redefine them as they go through life transitions.

However, women seem to face significantly more internal conflict and struggle in prioritizing and living a life that is consistent with their values and priorities. A higher rate of value conflicts leads to more energy taken up to surface and resolve these conflicts. Ultimately, they can end up going against their own values more often and as a result are more likely to burn out or drop out.

Struggling with conflicting values and how I prioritize them



30%



42%

Struggling to live a life that is consistent with my values and priorities (not other's expectations and priorities)



30%



44%

Figure denotes % of respondents selecting some extent, great extent, very great extent to the statements



AGENCY

Agency forms the core of deep work that women need to engage in to make the right choices and decisions, as well as advocate for what they believe in.

When women are able to align their aspirations to their core beliefs, they begin to set a compelling direction and build their comfort and confidence in areas where they would have otherwise not ventured.

Women experience more constraints and fewer choices and feel weighed down more often. These constraints can be driven by internalized limiting beliefs and by collectively held beliefs and practices in the organizational system and culture. There is a common theme of feeling torn in making tradeoffs between own needs and the needs of others around them.

INCLUSION HAS BECOME A DILEMMA

Feeling weighed down by surrounding constraints, that it is a “limited” or “no choice” situation



39%



50%

Feeling torn in accepting the trade-offs between meeting own needs and the needs of others



34%



45%

Figure denotes % of respondents selecting some extent, great extent, very great extent to the statements

PARTNERSHIPS

The right partnerships are essential for success in the world of work and life.

Women tend to have strong connections when it comes to support networks and operational networks. However, their strategic networks tend to be weaker. Strategic networks are important in getting the right big picture business information at the right time and more importantly in influencing key decisions. Women are more likely to end up with passive networks, due to a hesitation to ask for help or seek support.

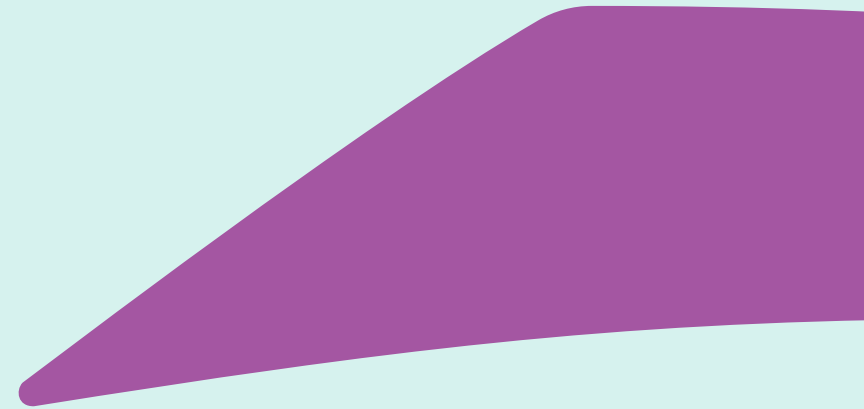
"The presence of extended family and domestic helpers in Indonesia provides women with greater flexibility in managing family responsibilities alongside their careers. With this support, Indonesian women can focus more on advancing their careers, whereas women in developed countries may face more obstacles in balancing family and career responsibilities concurrently."

Senior Woman Leader, Education Sector, Indonesia



2

Leaders
Must
Mind the
Hidden
Gap



Challenge:

With all leaders facing similar hurdles in their sprint to senior positions, how can organizations make progress in ensuring a level playing field?

Reality:

The hurdles that women leaders need to jump are considerably higher.

MIND THE HIDDEN GAP

Be aware of 'push' and 'pull' factors constraining the leadership journey

We've identified 2 types of factors that combine in subtle ways to create roadblocks for women leaders: pull factors and push factors.

Pull factors are internally driven – the limitations women place on themselves, pulling them away from leadership roles or actions. Identify and Agency that we discussed in the earlier section could be considered pull factors.

Push factors are externally driven – the limitations placed on women by others in their network, their organization, and the society or culture. And the 2 are intertwined, as women respond to and shape their context.

We asked our respondents to rate a number of push and pull factors and the extent to which they believed that each of them hinder women from progressing to senior leadership roles.

COMMON PUSH AND PULL FACTORS CONSTRAINING WOMEN LEADERSHIP GROWTH

PUSH

Society, organizational and family-related constraints that limit women in their leadership journey

Society

- Societal expectations related to family responsibilities
- Societal expectations around behaviors

Organization

- Organizations lack formal programs
- Organizations do not provide flexibility
- Organizations have a male-centric culture
- Selection bias
- Lack of equal opportunities

Family

- Men unaware of biases
- Men in family do not support women leaders

PULL

Self limiting thoughts that constrain women in their leadership journey

Self/internal

- Women underestimate their ability to lead
- Women prioritize family over work
- Women lack ambition
- Women lack capability

TOP 5 FACTORS HINDERING GROWTH OF WOMEN LEADERS

To what extent do you agree that these factors hinder women from becoming senior leaders?



	
HE SAYS	SHE SAYS
66% Society expects women to take on more family responsibilities	Society expects women to take on more family responsibilities 78%
55% Women prioritize family over work	Men are unaware of biases they hold against women 68%
49% Our society expects women to behave in a particular way	Our society expects women to behave in a particular way 61%
48% Men are unaware of biases they hold against women	Organizations lack formal programs that support women leadership 61%
43% Women underestimate their ability to lead	Women prioritize family over work 59%

Figure denotes % of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing to the statements

“I've observed that some women are very talented and capable but they lack self-confidence and they have a mindset that they can't do it.”

CHRO, Financial Services, Thailand

“There are times a senior woman leader with great capability would refuse to even apply for a senior position. Somehow there is a real hesitation. I had a capable team member who told me, I am willing to do a bigger job at the same level and we can review the promotion part later. Women tend to carry a high risk perception about senior roles than men.”

Male Champion, Fintech Sector, India

While the hurdles women must jump continue to be considerably higher, we see signs of progress compared to 2020. There are still significant gaps in perception between men and women when it comes to male managers supporting women in the workplace and selecting and promoting women, however the gaps have decreased from around 30% to 20%. Both women and men recognize the push factors, the systemic barriers rather than the pull factors, internal barriers, getting in the way the most.

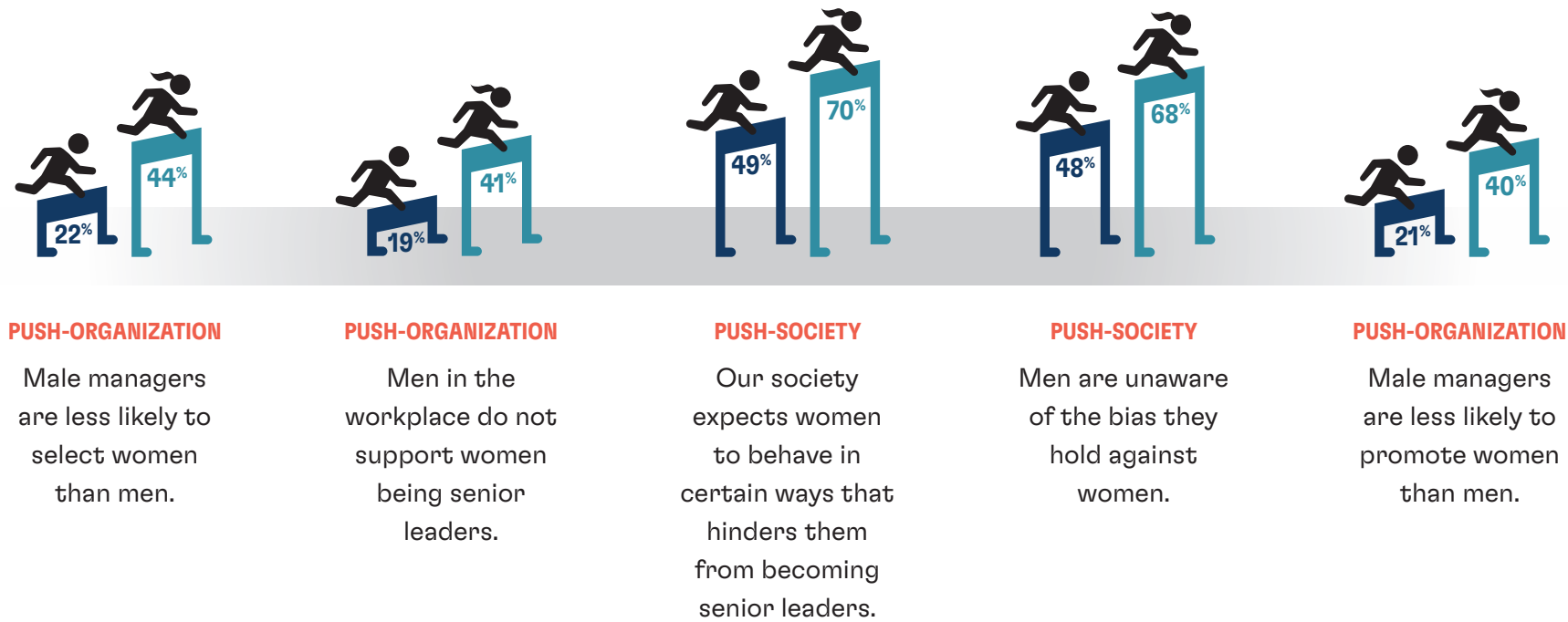
“It's about how people perceive women versus men, for women the judgment is already there and the women have to prove those wrong.”

Male Champion, Technology Sector, India

TOP 5 GAPS IN PERCEPTION

To what extent do you agree that these factors hinder women from becoming senior leaders?

(Figure denotes % of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing to the statements)





"If you are an executive leader, you're working from 7 o'clock to whatever time at night; they own your time. So how do you care for parents? How do you care for kids? How do you care for yourself, your partner, the house and be an executive leader? When we talk about the lack of women in leadership, until we change how executive teams work, the ways that they work, in terms of the hours, and the way in which their time is owned, I think we are going to struggle to get women into this space more often. It's quite a systemic problem."

Inclusion and Diversity Manager, Non-for-profit, Australia

All respondents were asked to identify the barriers that may be limiting the growth of women leaders. The barriers fall under 4 broad clusters.

First, the societal barriers that center around the caregiving and other responsibilities that women experience, as well as social expectations of certain behaviors.

Second, organizational barriers that are systemic in nature including the processes and cultural nuances.

Third, barriers that emerge from family systems and focus on awareness of biases and support provided by men in the family.

The first 3 clusters categorized as the "Push Factors" are external to women and tend to push women behind in their path of growth.

The **fourth** cluster includes factors that are internal to women and is categorized as "Pull Factors". These include the internal thoughts and feelings of women that constrain their career advancement.

The survey response suggests that both men and women are aware of these barriers but women's awareness of these is significantly higher. This brings us to the reality that the "Push" and "Pull" factors are seen by both genders, but the hidden gap sits in the increased intensity that women experience of these barriers.



3

Feminine
Superpowers Are
Getting Women
Leaders Into a Bind

Challenge:

The Double Bind and Double Flex lead women to burn out at a faster rate.

Reality:

Feminine strengths are becoming essential in the AI Era, yet women often do not get credit for displaying them.

The focus on masculine rationality has for hundreds of years been the dominant leadership and management style globally, defining and setting the accepted ways of working in our governments and organizations.

As a result, the quest for power, productivity and profits has taken top priority. At CCL, we believe a healthier balance is urgently needed, where feminine values can play a bigger role, particularly in leadership, to focus more on well-being of people, communities and the planet, and help to address increasingly complete societal and global challenges.

“The real superheros are the women who do this on a daily basis, who don’t cry out for attention. The women who start small businesses because they see the need in the community. Because all they want to do is give their children a better life. The women who ask for so little and do so much.”

Board Member, Services Industry and Non-Profit Sector, Singapore



What are the most common feminine Superpowers we observe in our organizations today in Asia?

- **Re-building culture, supporting people, and cleaning up organizational messes.**
- There is general consensus that [women leaders are more empathetic](#). Both men and women believe that women managers better support their career development.
- Women tend to display stronger **social and emotional skills and capabilities**.

All of these Superpowers create a stronger organization for the long term delivering beyond short-term gains.

In an AI Era, functional skills are becoming less important, and social and emotional skills are rising in importance. While feminine strengths are beneficial, they too frequently get women into a bind. In their quest to really be of service and demonstrate their worth and value, women leaders are more susceptible to being everything to everyone both at home and in the workplace. We also know that expectations for women to display good organizational citizenship behaviors are higher. Yet, women are often not rewarded in the same way men are when they are [good organizational](#) citizens.

In dual-career households, women tend to flex more. Especially in Asia women feel they need to be very good at what they were traditionally 'supposed to do', which is look after the family and take care of the household. And they also need to be very good at what they want to do, which often is the career. They will often do more and better to prove themselves on what is often an unfair playing field that favors men. Women tend to overcompensate in their career. So the combination of both of these puts a tremendous stress on the dual-career household women.



“In an Asian context there are opportunities to get help or support. Whether it's the extended family or a helper – women must be willing to let that happen. Sometimes there's a lot of support, but the woman still takes a step back in career because she isn't comfortable having other people take care of certain aspects - they won't do it the way she would.”

Board Director and Adjunct Professor, Singapore

THE DOUBLE BIND AND DOUBLE FLEX

Because women are often evaluated against a 'masculine' standard of leadership, they are left with limited and unfavorable options, no matter how they behave and perform as leaders.

The *double bind* is when men and women are rated differently for the same behavior. There is often a disconnect between what we want leaders to be and what we want women to be.

- Women conforming to gender = not good leaders
- Women conforming to leadership roles = not good women

The *double flex* is when women overcompensate, taking on too much of the responsibility both in the workplace and at home. The tendency to protect others and pick up the pieces and the messes often leads women to burn out and ultimately opting out of dropping out of key roles and career paths.



Double Bind (blue)

- We expect women to be caring, empathetic, sensitive, careful, follow the rules. Yet when they do that they are seen as soft, conforming, lacking strength and strategic thinking
- They are either seen as not good leaders or not good women



"Some of the solutions could be simpler if you go deeper, e.g. could be as simple as helping the woman manage the expectations of people around them and stop trying to be everything to everyone."

Partner, Leadership Advisory Firm, Singapore

Double Flex (green)

- Due to role expectations women take on more roles than men
- They end up stretched across roles, increasing the risk of burn out, physical and mental health issues, and opting out or dropping out of key roles



THE RISE OF DUAL-CAREER HOUSEHOLDS IN ASIA

Across the region we can see an increasing number of households where both partners work full time.

Have these dual-career households provided better conditions or a better ecosystem of support for women to get ahead? We explored this question with 1/3 of our survey respondents who identified as being part of a dual-career household.

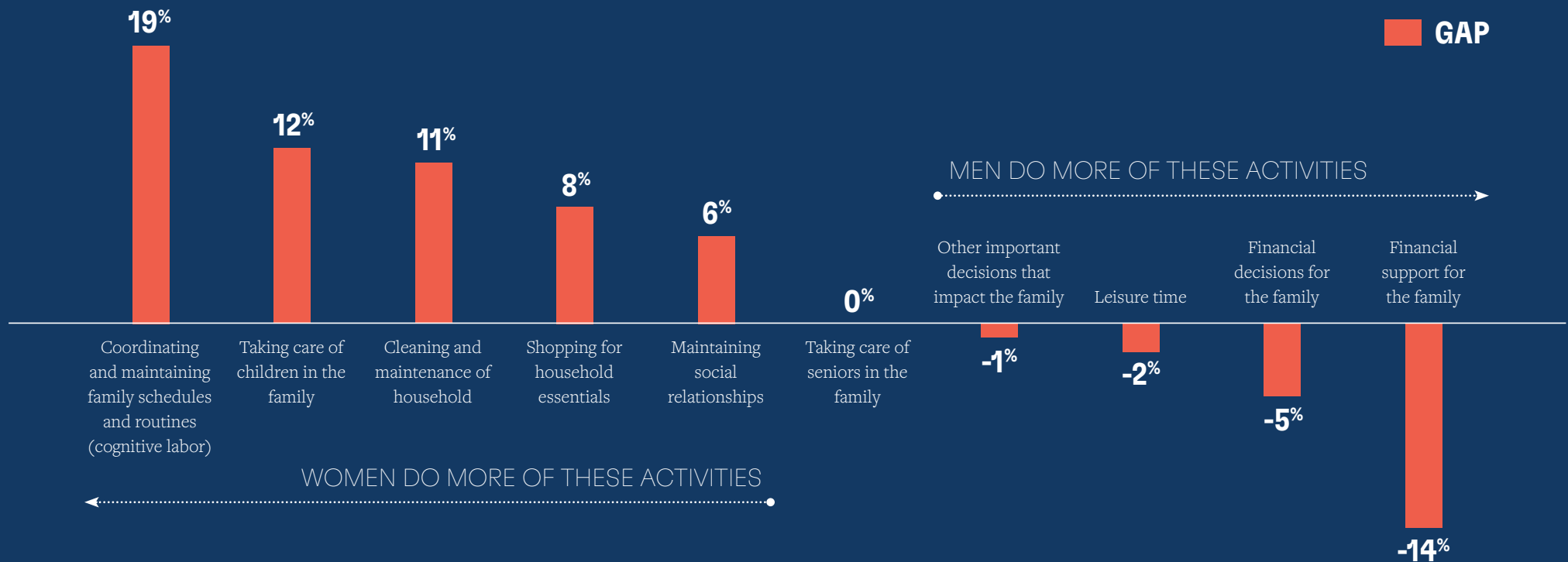
Not surprisingly, women leaders report taking significantly more responsibility than their male spouses and partners in child-care and activities to keep the household running. Even when men in these dual-career households are co-parenting and are very willing to contribute to the household duties, the woman somehow by default takes on the leading role and the bulk of the burden. Interestingly, we found that it is the cognitive burden of coordinating, giving each person instructions and maintaining all the schedules and routines that seems to take the biggest toll and can lead women leaders to burn out or derail.

Having an ecosystem of support, affordable help and family members who can step in, eases a lot of the pressure and is more common especially in certain countries. Setting clearer and more deliberate agreements of how to co-lead the household or co-parent may be a bigger part of what's needed for dual-career households to bring out the full potential of women leaders.

DIVISION OF ACTIVITIES IN DUAL-CAREER COUPLES

How are the following activities divided between you and your spouse/partner (total 100%)?

(Gap = % of activity that women say they do - % of activity that men say they do)



"Men also have to re-invent who they are – their role at home and at work. And we need to help them do that."

Regional SVP People and Organization, Multi-national Technology Conglomerate, APAC



4

Women
Leaders Need
to Ask For More

Challenge:

Challenging job assignments and increased exposure tend to be key experiences that propel careers forward, and yet women are more reluctant to take them up.

Reality:

Overall, women are being offered more, but are asking less.

Both the men and women leaders see challenging job experiences as far less important to their career development than courses and developmental relationships. However, our research tells us that challenging experiences, like overseas postings, are essential for leaders to propel their career forward.

According to the 70-20-10 rule, a holistic and effective approach to development based on our [Lessons of Experience](#) research, leaders learn and grow from 3 types of experience, following a ratio of:

- 70% challenging experiences and assignments
- 20% developmental relationships
- 10% coursework and training

FACTORS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

How important are the following opportunities for your career advancement?

96%	Raise - increase in salary	BENEFITS
92%	Leadership development training	COURSES
91%	Promotion - moving up 1 or more levels	JOB EXPERIENCE
84%	Flexible schedule	BENEFITS
84%	Informal mentor - someone higher up to confide in and offer advice	PEOPLE
83%	Sponsor - someone higher up to advocate for you at work	
74%	Paid opportunities for educational coursework	COURSES
57%	Opportunities to travel	JOB EXPERIENCE
44%	Assignment in a foreign country	

(Figure denotes % of respondents rating the statements important/extremely important)

HOW DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS

70

EXPERIENCE

20

PEOPLE

10

COURSES

The 70:20:10 rule provides an excellent guide to the combination of opportunities in the system that are needed to really break through the barriers. An opportunity that must be made equally available to both women and men are challenging and complex assignments that lead to promotions and increases in salary. At the same time, the true nature of leadership is relational. Relationships are the connective tissue that promotes flourishing, at the individual, team organizational and societal levels. Informal mentors, sponsors and coaches must be available for both men and women leaders. Leadership development training is seen as one of the top 3 most important factors for career development, along with promotion and increases in salary.

“One notable difference between men and women lies in the perception of seeking promotion or sponsorship for career advancement. For men, requesting promotion or sponsorship is not considered taboo or stigmatized. Conversely, women often hesitate due to concerns about how they will be perceived. This hesitation stems from societal gender norms, wherein women are expected to be more considerate of others' opinions about them.”

Senior Woman Leader, Technology Sector, Indonesia

“Part of this is not lack of will, but maybe lack of consciousness or feeling that you want to put extra effort in this area. You could say that if you ask a man and you ask a woman and the woman says no and the man says yes, you have provided equal opportunity. You asked both candidates, right? But did you provide equal communication, that may be the question to ask. You're saying, "Well, I asked her once and she said no. So, I'm not going to pursue it." But maybe I could ask twice more before I make my decision.”

Male Champion, President APAC Region, Consumer Products company



Men and women leaders, are both offered opportunities much more than they ask for.

The gap between men and women in being offered and asking for is much lower in people related opportunities like support from mentors, sponsors, and in benefits like salary increase and flexible schedule.

There does exist a significant gap between men and women in being offered and in asking for job related opportunities like

leadership development training, promotions, opportunities to travel, overseas assignments, and paid educational coursework.

FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE

Flexible schedule is offered the most for both men and women compared to all the other development opportunities and 84% of leaders see it as an important or extremely important factor in career advancement. There is growing evidence that hybrid work and flexible

schedules are helping and will continue to help the broader equity, diversity and inclusion agenda; for example, enabling young mothers to manage their multiple responsibilities more efficiently as they return to work. At the same time, in-person exposure in the workplace is proving crucial for reaching senior leadership roles and must not be overlooked.

ASSIGNMENT IN FOREIGN COUNTRY

While it appears that women leaders are being offered foreign country assignments and opportunities to travel, women leaders are asking less and are more reluctant to take up these opportunities.

Based on CCL's [Global Asian Leader 2.0 research](#), overseas exposure remains 1 of the top 3 success factors for promotion into regional and global roles. Women leaders' reluctance to go for these assignments is closely linked to family considerations related to schooling and spouse or partner's career. These factors can also be barriers for men leaders however, the negative impact is more pronounced for women. We need more targeted interventions for women leaders to step into such assignments.



5

We Must
Elevate
the System



Challenge:

Without removing systemic barriers, we can not fully tackle the internal barriers that hold women back.

Reality:

We do not need to change women, we need to change systems.

“The practice of setting hiring targets alone should stop. It's good to set targets because it allows for measurable impact, but it's not enough to set targets alone. Leaders have to set the tone from the top to ensure that there is a culture of inclusion within the organization. Setting targets alone will only encourage people to check the box.”

Male champion, CEO, Financial Services, Thailand

ELEVATE THE SYSTEM

Men, women, organizations must champion for equity

We ask too much of women and not enough of men. On every continent, including Asia, women spend more time than men in unpaid caretaking activities, which increased with the pandemic. Work / home tensions may be the critical factor for women's "stalled" career progress.

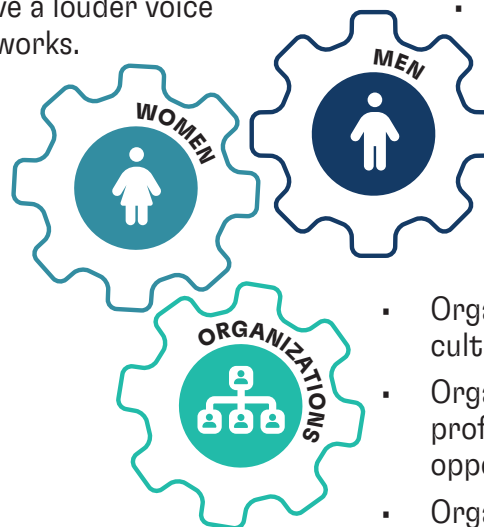
While it's important to avoid reverse discrimination, and ensure men continue to have equal opportunities in the workplace; leveling what has been an uneven playing field for decades does require significant systemic changes that can only be successful if both men and women leaders at the top and throughout the organization are on board.

Because the roles that men and women play are intricately entwined, they require a united approach for real change to happen. Research shows that mixed-gender coalitions have greater legitimacy in advocating for gender equity.

Focusing on a partnership model, at work and at home, gives individuals greater capacity to define their roles in ways that fit their strengths and aspirations, increasing work-life balance, satisfaction, resilience and performance.

TO SEE MORE WOMEN TAKING LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THE NEXT 5-10 YEARS, WHAT ARE CHANGES THAT NEED TO HAPPEN?

- Women need to support women.
- Women need to equip themselves with leadership competencies.
- Women need to be more confident, have a louder voice and build networks.
- Men need to be educated about moving beyond bias.
- Men at home need to support women's career advancement.
- Men in the workplace need to support women's professional growth.



- Organizations need to create a culture that embraces diversity.
- Organizations need to provide professional developmental opportunities for women.
- Organizations need to implement gender-neutral Human Resource processes.

'You brought yourself up – are you bringing 5 other women up with you? How many do you need to bring with you to finally reach that point where it will be parity? It's not enough to bring only yourself up.'

Board Member, Services Industry and Non-Profit Sector, Singapore

OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO RAISE THE LEVEL OF ACTION AND ADVOCACY



Figure denotes % of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing to the statements

"Men may be threatened by women who are domain experts and willing to work extremely hard. Networks that supported them in the past may not be quite as strong."

Regional SVP People and Organization, Multi-national Technology Conglomerate, APAC

When we think about allies, both mentors and sponsors play an important role. While there is some overlap between the 2 roles, they are distinct in the type of support they provide.

Mentors provide guidance and support, whether around a specific need or for ongoing development. They listen to their mentees' experiences and give constructive, direct, and honest feedback.

Sponsors are advocates who actively work to advance the career of their "sponsee," touting their accomplishments and potentials, connecting them to others in their network, and recommending them for bigger roles. A sponsor pushes their "sponsee" to take on challenging assignments and actively advances their career progressions — including in off-the-record or closed-door meetings with other leaders.

Since the people who can advocate and create opportunities for others have some level of authority in an organization, they are likely upper-level leaders — people in power. So while sponsors are important for men, they are critical for women. Yet men are more likely than women to have sponsors. Women tend to have mentors, but not many sponsors. Mentoring at all career stages is important, but without sponsors who take that next step to advocate on their behalf, women are at a disadvantage.

ACTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

1 

Activate agency by asking for the levels of autonomy and support you need, as well as challenging and stretch assignments that match your individual strengths

2 

Develop your authenticity and identity by building in time for reflection, so that you can constructively work through conflicting values and priorities

3 

Systematically build your connections and strategic networks, first ensuring you have the right sponsors and then adding in mentors and coaches

4 

Speak up when you witness systemic barriers that get you or other women leaders into a double bind and ask for the help you need to avoid double flexing

1

Measure women's representation and participation in more holistic ways, beyond and in addition to high level quotas and targets

2

Enlist male allies, raise awareness and provide support for some of the challenges they face to be an ally

3

Elevate and reward men and women who champion women leaders in high profile forums that will make a difference

4

Invest in leadership development training that includes structured sponsorship in addition to mentoring

"Male allyship: whether we like it or not, the majority of the most senior leaders are still men. We are going to need them to flex without feeling insecure in their own jobs. The journey of women advancing brings a lot of insecurity for men in their own jobs. The organization needs to look at and help men manage these male insecurities and make them feel more comfortable. Otherwise they can't really be an ally."

Partner, Leadership Advisory Firm, Singapore

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Research Partners



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