Who holds the key to closing the skills gap?

Explore how corporates, entrepreneurs and governments can collectively harness the power of the female wave in the workplace.

HOW LONG UNTIL GENDER PARITY? PUT GENDER ON YOUR AGENDA.

YEARS  MONTHS  WEEKS  DAYS  HOURS  MINUTES  SECONDS
117  11  03  04  8  58  34

Let’s speed up the clock #WomenFastForward

The better the question. The better the answer. The better the world works.
# Contents

- Introduction 01
- Executive summary 03
- Context and hypothesis 07

## Entrants
- Express 15
- Experienced 20

### Digital technology as an enabler 25
### Media as an enabler 28

## Five recommended actions 31
- Acknowledgements 32
The World Economic Forum (WEF) predicts that it will take 117 years to close the global gender gap as it currently stands. While the gaps between men and women in terms of health and educational attainment are narrowing, the gaps in terms of economic empowerment and political participation are actually getting larger.

As the mother of four – I have a daughter and three sons – I feel frustrated that none of my children, my grandchildren or great-grandchildren will live to see gender parity. But let’s go beyond the personal level. A study of 95 countries conducted by the McKinsey Global Institute has found US$28 trillion would be added to global GDP by 2025 if women and men contributed equally to the workforce. Just to put that figure in context, it’s an increase of 26%. We can’t afford to wait.

In April 2015, EY launched the Women³. The Power of Three forum, part of our Women. Fast forward platform, to bring together leaders from corporate, entrepreneurial and government organizations from across Europe, the Middle East, India and Africa (EMEIA) and to leverage their differing perspectives to accelerate gender parity. After examining a number of different challenges to women in professional roles, Women³. The Power of Three focused the last 12 months on how we could better leverage the skills of women throughout their entire career to close the global skills gap and support economic growth. Through 10 Regional roundtables with more than 150 leaders and surveys of over a further 1,000 organizations across EMEIA, Women³. The Power of Three developed a set of recommended actions on how corporate, entrepreneurial and government organizations could better support women.

At the Istanbul Summit in November 2015, over 100 delegates from 23 countries prioritized five critical actions to hasten change. These actions complement many of the policy recommendations that the W20 made to the G20 in support of gender parity. But they are clear actions that governments, corporates and entrepreneurs can bring forward. They address the three stages of a woman’s career, the power of the media and the potential of digital.

This was just the start of our journey. Women³. The Power of Three will reconvene in 2016 with corporate, entrepreneurial and government leaders across EMEIA, and for the first time, with leaders in key locations in Asia-Pacific and North America. These sessions will be focused on implementing our actions at the local level, where The Power of Three (corporates, entrepreneurs and governments) are most impactful. The time for action is now.

Julie Linn Teigland
Managing Partner, EMEIA Accounts, EY

---


Who holds the key to closing the skills gap?
Laura Liswood, Secretary General, Council of Women World Leaders

It isn’t hard to see the economic potential of women – there are over 3.5 billion of them in the world. They are already the world’s greatest consumer market since they make 70% of purchases of discretionary consumer goods and their financial clout is increasing all the time, especially in developed markets. In one in three families in the US, the wife is the main earner, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Despite their apparent influence on the world economy, nearly half (45%) of women still don’t participate in the formal workforce. Therefore, one of the big questions of our time has to be: where would we be, economically and socially, if women participated in the workforce in greater numbers than they do now and at levels that do justice to their true ability and potential?

That’s why I congratulate EY on undertaking this important initiative that develops actionable solutions to accelerate gender parity so that women can play a key part in plugging the skills gap, which in turn accelerates global economic growth. This movement stands out for the way in which it has harnessed the views of leaders from corporate, entrepreneurial and government organizations across EMEIA to come up with practical actions to drive and measure change.

I therefore call on everyone, regardless of where they live and the type of organization that they work in, to get behind these actions. The economic empowerment of women is absolutely critical to business innovation and productivity, poverty eradication, the formation of progressive social policies and the creation of a world that is richer in every sense.

5 “Why aren’t there more women in the workforce?,” Fortune (accessed via fortune.com/2015/03/05/women-in-the-workforce, 5 March 2015).
Executive summary

Context and hypothesis

In 2014, the WEF predicted that it would be 80 years before gender parity could be achieved, according to the economic, educational, health-based and political indicators at the time. Just a year later, in 2015, that forecast changed to 117 years.

So how can we achieve gender parity when “business as usual” is failing to close the gap both within individual organizations and across nations? At EY, we decided to drive change at the local level by bringing together committed leaders from corporates, entrepreneurship and government.

In 2015, EY established the Women³. The Power of Three, a forum for female and male leaders from corporate, entrepreneurial and government organizations across major markets in EMEIA. The forum first met in Brussels in April 2015 to explore practical recommendations for accelerating gender parity by better leveraging professional female talent to plug the skills gap. These recommendations all required corporates, entrepreneurs and governments to work together. Crucially, the forum resolved to focus on exploring and refining the following hypothesis:

To effectively develop the critical skill sets women need to thrive in the changing workplace and to address the myths and assumptions that create barriers, the Power of Three must come together to:

- Examine how to create an ecosystem that supports women professionals throughout their careers
- Discuss the critical workplace skills and how they can be developed

This is where the Power of Three is at its most transformative.

Our Brussels working group session confirmed that the skills gap cannot be plugged simply by focusing on just one part of a woman’s career. Women’s careers typically have three stages — entrant, express and experienced — and women have different needs at each stage. We see women’s careers as being similar to ocean waves — building, rising, cresting and even crashing to form new swells, with multiple forces affecting the crest height of a woman’s career or the speed of each cycle of waves.

Digital technologies and the media are important enablers and influencers of change. Growth in the use of digital applications and approaches provides women with the opportunity to develop essential skills and career paths while the media have the power to overcome cultural assumptions and present visible role models.

The recommendations outlined below came from:

- A series of 10 Regional roundtables where local leaders from corporate, entrepreneurial and government organizations came together to discuss recommended actions to accelerate gender parity
- A survey of over 1,000 corporate leaders and entrepreneurs
- In-depth interviews with selected government leaders

In November 2015, Women³. The Power of Three brought together over 100 delegates from 23 countries who met to strengthen and prioritize the recommendations developed in the roundtables. The group prioritized five specific actions — from a selection of around 20 — and identified these as the actions that Women³. The Power of Three should take to drive the change needed to plug the skills gap and thereby accelerate gender parity.
Five recommended actions

We present five actions for driving change to accelerate gender parity. Three actions are aligned with each of the main stages of a woman’s career – entrant, express and experienced – and two actions are aligned with the key forces influencing women’s careers – digital technology and the media.

1. **Entrants**

Women entering the workforce are typically in their 20s. They have completed tertiary education, and they have set goals in a similar way to their male counterparts. Research shows that while 43% of women aspire to hold top management positions during their first two years in the workforce, this figure drops to 16% by the time they have been employed for five to seven years. While the technical skills learned in tertiary education are sufficient for both men and women to succeed in these formative years of their careers, the lack of role models within organizations and the absence of a supportive environment are among the major barriers hindering women’s success, just as their wave should be building momentum.

Our discussions highlighted the need to identify and celebrate the efforts of those individuals and organizations that are committed to female talent development. Without a critical mass of identified leaders and role models, as well as champions focused on gender parity and developing women in professional roles, the pace of change will not accelerate.

Creating an “employer of choice award” to recognize organizations with women advancement and supportive environment programs is our top choice for accelerating entrant women. Unlike other award programs, which may be seen as superficial or based on policies, this program is focused on the progress women are making in the organization, and the active participation and encouragement of line managers to champion and support women throughout their careers.

To have the greatest impact, the award needs to be global and linked to a quality accreditation that measures performance. It should also have a media program built around it to showcase examples of women who have succeeded as a result of their organization creating a supportive environment rather than just drawing up policies.

2. **Express**

Express women are advancing rapidly through their organizations, moving along the swell of the wave, and are typically in their 30s and 40s. At the same time, many of them are rising to the challenges of being caregivers while dealing with cultural myths and assumptions about such roles. The currents in the wave create counterforces that push and pull express women in different directions.

While the environment is important for entrant women, it is even more critical for express women. Since both women and men at this career stage are likely to have parental or other caregiving responsibilities, they need organizations to recognize their various roles and provide them with appropriate support. They also need positive reinforcement from line managers and to see male and female role models who demonstrate that the organization will support them to balance all their responsibilities effectively.

It is crucial to enhance the number and the visibility of both senior female and senior male role models within organizations. While many governments and organizations have policies that promote supportive working environments – and thereby the creation of role models – they often do not enforce these policies effectively. As a result, forum participants argued that governments should insist on adherence to all relevant policies.

To monitor progress, governments are advised to require organizations to include the growth and advancement of women among their indicators of success and to report on the progress that they have made. The remuneration of executives and other leaders should also be linked to how the organization performs in this respect.

---

6 “Everyday moments of truth: Frontline managers are key to women’s career aspirations, Julie Coffman and Bill Neuenfeldt,” © 2014 Bain & Company.
Experienced

As women reach the crest of their careers, they have a number of options, including holding further senior management positions or developing “encore” careers such as starting an entrepreneurial venture or becoming a board member. Yet, in practice, organizations tend to place limited value on the knowledge and skills that experienced women bring. Meanwhile, our forum participants agreed that women themselves often struggle to understand how they should address this stage of their career.

Neglecting the economic potential of experienced women is not something that most of the world can afford to do, especially in developed markets where populations are aging. In emerging markets such as India and Africa, where a high percentage of the population is young, it is also critical to engage and involve experienced talent in new initiatives and programs within organizations, and in actively mentoring younger workers – both men and women.

Digital technology as an enabler

The potential for digital technology to be a powerful enabler for women at every career stage was one of the forum’s most significant findings. This is because digital technology is one of the external forces that can help a woman’s career wave to build momentum. Women consumers are great users of social and mobile technologies globally. The number of women studying technology or working in technology-specific roles is small, however, and in some locations it is declining.

The majority of the new roles that will be created between now and 2020 will have a technological component – but this technological component will not necessarily entail coding or other technology-specific skills. Instead, the roles will focus on using technologies to facilitate processes. There is clearly an opportunity for women to create new career paths and to differentiate themselves within their organizations by incorporating digital skills into their existing skill sets and roles. Yet this is not happening at present, so forum participants believed this was a large opportunity that is being missed.

The new digital landscape also provides female entrepreneurs with the flexibility to start businesses with a relatively small amount of investment and to sell their goods or services across geographies. It is essential, however, that they know where to find the right technical resources and support to be able to scale their businesses and develop their businesses into market leaders.
Media as an enabler

Like digital technology, the media can have both a positive and a negative influence on women’s career waves. Unfortunately, at present the media in their broadest sense play a major role in perpetuating female stereotypes and myths about women in the workplace. The forum discussed how they tend to take a very different approach to portraying or reporting on female leadership compared with male leadership.

The barriers that the media present to women are also inherent within the media industry itself. Women are less likely than men to both write the news and present the news. Furthermore, while the media feature men of all ages who are in varying physical condition, they typically feature women who are young and in peak physical condition. Indeed, besides a few notable exceptions, older women are largely excluded from broadcast media of all kinds. This invariably has a significant impact on how women are portrayed by the media.

The media need to take the lead in giving visibility to women in business. They need to realize that they have a role in changing mindsets and actively address this by flagging the broad range of achievements of women in business on a consistent (daily) basis – achievements that go largely unreported at present.

At our Istanbul forum, we discussed a number of options for addressing how the media can be transformed from being a barrier to women’s progress in the workplace into being an enabler of it.

As our recommended action, we identified the creation of a digital platform that ranks the media according to the level of gender parity that exists within their reporting. The platform, which could be a website or another tool, such as a database, would use a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to rank the different media channels. An example of a KPI would be the number of women who are featured in the business section of a newspaper on a regular basis. The platform would also have a “call out” function that allows individuals to participate in the discussion using social media.

Following the in-depth deliberations that took place over the course of 2015, Women³. The Power of Three asks you to support these five actions to better harness women’s talent in order to close the skills gap and thereby accelerate gender parity. It is a huge economic opportunity that the world cannot afford to miss out on.

You can find out more about Women³. The Power of Three at www.ey.com/womenpower³
Can it be possible that women lost 30 years of progress toward equal economic and political participation with men in just 12 months?

Unfortunately, according to the WEF, that is precisely what happened in 2015.

In 2014, the WEF predicted that it would be 80 years before gender parity could be achieved, according to the economic, educational, health-based and political indicators at the time. Just a year later, in 2015, that forecast changed to 117 years.

While gender inequality is a challenge to address, it is also one of the greatest economic opportunities facing the world today. Although different studies come up with different figures for the global economic cost of gender inequality, it is clear that presently this cost runs into trillions of dollars.  

“Because women account for one-half of a country’s potential talent base, a nation’s competitiveness in the long term depends significantly on whether and how it educates and utilizes its women.”

World Economic Forum (WEF), *The Global Gender Gap Report 2015*

---

Women³. The Power of Three

How can we achieve gender parity when “business as usual” is failing to close the gap both within individual organizations and across nations? At EY, we decided to drive change at the local level by bringing together committed leaders from corporates, entrepreneurship and government.

In 2015, EY established the Women³. The Power of Three, a forum for female and male leaders from corporate, entrepreneurial and government organizations across major markets in EMEIA. The Power of Three refers to the combined forces of corporates, entrepreneurs and governments. We have incorporated these forces into the name of our forum because activists representing each force are our key drivers. The forum is an integral part of EY’s Women. Fast forward platform, which aims to accelerate the process of achieving global gender parity.

Women³. The Power of Three first met in Brussels in April 2015 to explore practical recommendations for accelerating gender parity by better leveraging professional female talent to plug the skills gap [See box — What is the skills gap and why does it matter to women?]. These recommendations all required corporates, entrepreneurs and governments to work together. Crucially, the forum resolved to focus on exploring and refining the following hypothesis:

To effectively develop the critical skill sets women need to thrive in the changing workplace and to address the myths and assumptions that create barriers, the Power of Three must come together to:

- Examine how to create an ecosystem that supports women professionals throughout their careers
- Discuss the critical workplace skills and how they can be developed

This is where the Power of Three is at its most transformative.

Our Brussels working group session confirmed that the skills gap cannot be plugged simply by focusing on just one part of a woman’s career. Women’s careers typically have three stages — entrant, express and experienced — and women have different needs at each stage. We identified these stages as follows:

- **Entrant**: women entering the professional workforce after tertiary education levels, through their first five to seven years of employment
- **Express**: women who are advancing through their organizations to achieve leadership roles and responsibilities
- **Experienced**: women who are nearing the completion of their first career or tenure as a senior leader or seasoned professional

The working group session also developed a short list of factors that influence women’s careers and development. These are:

- **Critical workplace skills**: the advanced skill sets required in the workforce today and in the future, including both technical skills and progressive skills
An enabling or supporting environment: an environment within an organization or country that supports the development of women throughout their careers

We see women’s careers as being similar to ocean waves – building, rising, cresting and even crashing to form new swells, with multiple forces affecting the crest height of a woman’s career or the speed of each cycle of waves. Corporate, entrepreneurial and government organizations can affect women’s career waves in the same way that the forces of nature can affect ocean waves.

Digital technologies and the media are important enablers and influencers of change. Growth in the use of digital applications and approaches provides women with the opportunity to develop essential skills and career paths while the media has the power to overcome cultural assumptions and present visible role models.

Methodology

To learn more about the perceptions and attitudes regarding what is needed to accelerate the development of female talent, EY undertook the following activities:

- We conducted a survey in July and August 2015 in which we interviewed more than 1,000 professionals (men and women) from corporate and entrepreneurial organizations in 12 countries. The questions focused on which factors are most important for women professionals at each career stage and how women could develop essential skills.

- We held a series of 10 Regional roundtables across EMEIA between May and October 2015. At these roundtables, local leaders from corporate, entrepreneurial and government organizations came together to discuss recommended actions to accelerate gender parity.

- We performed a number of in-depth interviews with policymakers and leaders across governmental functions.

During the course of our investigations, we discovered that women in different countries have very similar issues. Therefore, it is possible to tackle those issues in a consistent way while allowing for specific cultural variations.

In November 2015, Women³. The Power of Three brought together more than 100 delegates from 23 countries, who met to strengthen and prioritize the recommendations developed in the roundtables. The group prioritized five specific actions – from a selection of around 20 – and identified these as the actions that Women³. The Power of Three should take to drive the change needed to plug the skills gap and thereby accelerate gender parity. While we met in Istanbul, the W20 was also finalizing its policy recommendations for the G20 Antalya Summit.

What is the skills gap and why does it matter to women?

The global skills gap is the difference between the skills that employers around the world want in the workforce and the actual skills that the workforce has. This could be due to a lack of education, a lack of appropriate skills, or a mismatch between the skills that the workforce has and the skills that it needs. The lack of skilled workers is already a major hindrance to growth in many markets, and the problem will become more severe in the near future. Estimates suggest that, by 2020, more than 60% of the new jobs created will require skills that less than 20% of the workforce possesses. Since women make up half of the world’s population, and they actually outnumber men in both university attendance and graduation, they can make a vital contribution to plugging the skills gap – but only if the right environment exists.


EY Women. Fast forward

Accelerating achievement of gender parity – within EY and in business at large – is not just a fairness argument but an economic imperative. It is key to building a better world.

Through Women. Fast forward, our global platform for women in business, and investments such as Women³. The Power of Three forum, we strive to improve the working world for women and call on others to put gender on their agendas. Through personal commitment and purposeful action, we can create a ripple effect that not only advances women in the workplace today but also redefines opportunities for future generations of women. Together, we can forge a lasting legacy of growth, increased prosperity and stronger communities throughout the world.

Join us: ey.com/womenfastforward
The W20

EY is a founding supporter of the W20, a G20 engagement group designed to help achieve global growth through the economic empowerment of women. Formed under the auspices of the Turkish presidency of the G20 in 2015, the W20 will create policy recommendations for the G20 countries to adopt, policies that will promote gender inclusiveness and gender equality.

Following the W20’s first-ever summit in October 2015, it issued a set of 10 policy recommendations. They are:

1. Address women’s economic empowerment through strengthening linkages between education, employment and entrepreneurship.
2. Support work and life balance by developing and improving infrastructural mechanisms for social care (child, elderly, sick and disabled care).
3. Increase the number of women both in public and private sector leadership positions.
4. Ensure women’s access to financial and productive assets as well as to markets.
5. Eliminate workplace discrimination, enforce legal rights and promote equal opportunities.
6. Strengthen women’s economic, social and political networks.
7. Support women-owned enterprises and innovation.
8. Promote women’s leadership in creating sustainable consumption patterns and green growth.
9. Deliver adequate social protection and improve working conditions for women.
10. In order to develop a monitoring framework, on the basis of available data sets and empirical studies, the G20 should develop a scorecard using a set of key indicators.

9 “W20 Summit Communiqué,” W20 Turkey (accessed via w20turkey.org/event/october-16-17-w20-summit, 16 October 2015).
Entrants
The wave starts to build

“We need to implement systematic programs that show women in the first five to seven years of their career that there are spaces and opportunities for them in the future.”

Caroline Jenner, CEO, JA Europe

Develop and roll out an employer-of-choice awards scheme to recognize organizations focused on women’s advancement and supportive environment programs.

Entrants are women who are entering the professional workforce after tertiary education, through their first five to seven years of employment. Typically in their 20s, they have completed tertiary education and they have set career goals in a similar way to their male counterparts.

Background

In theory, the outlook should be bright for entrants since, on paper, they rival entrant men in terms of experience and skills. By some measures, they even exceed them. For example, every single member State within the European Union has more women enrolled in tertiary education than men.

Yet, it is clear that women face obstacles in the first five to seven years of their careers – just when their wave should be building in momentum – that prevent them from fulfilling their true economic potential. Research shows that while 43% of women aspire to hold top management positions during their first two years in the workforce, this figure drops to 16% by the time they have been employed for five to seven years. Evidence suggests that new female entrepreneurs are less likely to grow their businesses through acquired capital or by taking on partners than male entrepreneurs.

So which factors affect the way in which the wave of an entrant woman develops in power, height and shape?

Plugging the skills gap

At our Brussels working group session, we identified that while critical skills are essential for both female and male entrants, tertiary education institutions are currently not equipping them with the skills that they will require as their career progresses beyond the formative years.

These skills include the ability to manage others in a fast-changing global environment, to influence and negotiate, to lead and to strategize. In addition, educational institutions are not explaining the importance of self-promotion and how having a strong personal brand can enhance professional credibility; they are thus failing to equip entrants with entrepreneurial skills.

10 “Everyday moments of truth: Frontline managers are key to women’s career aspirations, Julie Coffman and Bill Neuenfeldt,” © 2014 Bain & Company.

Furthermore, even in countries with advanced education systems, women are noticeably underrepresented in fields such as engineering and technology. In the UK, for example, the enrolment rate of women in engineering and technology degree courses was 15.5% in 2012–13, down from 15.6% in 2003–04.  

Skills were also highlighted by our survey. Overall, critical skills were identified as the second most important factor for plugging the skills gap, selected by 37.5%, although it was the top factor for entrepreneurs, with 43% making it their first choice.

Our Russian roundtable, which focused specifically on entrepreneurial women, further validated the importance of critical skills to entrant entrepreneurs. It highlighted that women need access to educational programs that equip them with the practical skills that they will need to succeed in entrepreneurship. They also need the opportunity to learn from more established entrepreneurs so that they can discover what makes a business successful.

While it is very important that entrants possess the right combination of technical and business skills, there is another factor that is even more crucial in determining how the entrant wave builds in momentum. That factor is the environment.

Significantly, the concept of the environment extends way beyond the individual workplace that the entrant has joined. It also spans the broader economic and social context, including factors such as cultural myths and assumptions, the creation and enforcement of effective policies and regulations by governments, the opportunity to network and connect with other business leaders and entrepreneurs both domestically and internationally, and the grounding that is provided by the education system. National and organizational cultures often influence decisions about career paths and opportunities, although line managers and supervisors rarely give this conscious thought. Research suggests that the most influential force in an individual’s career, especially for women, is their first manager or supervisor.

Remuneration is another important consideration. Evidence suggests that a large percentage of women do not start their careers at parity with men in terms of responsibilities, roles and salaries. In many countries, the gap begins as soon as women enter the workforce. According to The Global Gender Gap Report 2015 from the WEF, the economic gap between men and women has only closed by a meager 3% over the past decade with the average woman now earning what the average man did back in 2006 for doing similar work.

Cultural perceptions around how appropriate it is for a woman to ask for a pay raise means that remuneration is an issue at the start of women’s careers and remains one throughout their working lives. Studies by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government found that women were more likely than men to be penalized for initiating negotiations for higher pay. This is a very serious concern since the outcome of women earning less than men is that they are inevitably seen as less valuable in the workplace.

Equal pay is not the only barrier that entrants face. Other barriers take the form of hiring managers who recruit in their own image and the use of language in recruitment, performance management and promotion practices that reinforces the perception that a certain type of candidate is preferred. Lack of senior female role models within the organization is also a significant barrier since the presence of such role models is vital to giving women the confidence to reach the top.

Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Chair of the Women in Parliaments Global Forum, who was interviewed for this report, highlights that women are tuned in to the barriers that exist at a very early stage in their career. She says that young women are often biased since they consider that they may have caregiving responsibilities in future — if they don't have them already — and this impacts the career choices that they make. “They plan their lives,” she says, “which

Which factor is the most important to address to help plug the skills gap for entrant women?

- 41.1% said supportive environment and infrastructure.
- 40% of female respondents say critical skills.
- 44% of male respondents say supportive environment and infrastructure.

is why large numbers of women enter public administration. They think that once they have a family, a career in public administration could offer security that is not available in the private sector.”

This observation is backed up by the findings of our Middle East and North Africa (MENA) roundtable. The roundtable highlighted that women in the Region tend to prefer working in the public sector above the private sector because they like the working hours and facilities that are on offer.

Unfortunately, however, it seems that even the allegedly family-friendly environments offered by governmental organizations are not creating equal opportunities for men and women. “At entrance level within the European administration, you have almost 60% women,” says Koch-Mehrin. “Then, a few years later, when you come to head of unit, you only have approximately 25% women. So something happens in that time. Why do men get promoted and not women?”

Interestingly, men appear to be tuned in to the importance of the environment to entrants. Our survey found that 44% of male respondents thought that the supportive environment and infrastructure were most important factors to address in order to help plug the skills gap for entrant women.

Our survey also found that women who were in the express career stage were more likely than entrants themselves to see the supportive environment as the most important factor for entrants. It is likely that this is because their own experiences allow them to recognize a need that younger female professionals do not yet perceive. Our survey supports the view expressed in academic studies that entrants can be unwilling to believe that forces other than their own competencies and capabilities have an impact on their careers.

In our roundtables, participants reinforced the need for more champions for women at the beginning of their careers, and emphasized that these champions could be women as well as men. Our discussions also highlighted the need to identify and celebrate the efforts of those individuals and organizations that are committed to female talent development. Without a critical mass of identified leaders and role models, as well as champions focused on gender parity and developing women in professional roles, the pace of change will not accelerate.

What women need

Women’s ability to develop the critical skills that they need to succeed is being constrained by the environments in which they live and work. It is crucial to recognize that the environment has an impact long before women set foot in the workplace. Their families and their experiences of the education system – from as early as kindergarten – shape their expectations of the world.

At our Regional roundtables, the specific needs of entrants were explored. Our Greek roundtable emphasized that entrants need better support systems, including guidance from mentors and access to role models, in order to develop. It also identified that young professional women need international experience that will expose them to new ideas and mindsets. Furthermore, they require universities to equip them with the essential entrepreneurial, leadership and personal branding skills that they can draw on as their careers develop.

At our MENA Regional roundtable, a lack of affordable childcare and difficulty accessing appropriate transportation were highlighted as barriers to entrants. Childcare is expensive in the Region and, while some governments legally require organizations that employ a certain number of women with children to have their own onsite childcare facilities, health and safety requirements make it difficult for organizations to comply with the law. In addition, public transportation is not very reliable and it is not accessible in some areas. Coupled with lack of affordable childcare, this puts a heavy financial burden on women who want to enter the workforce. Some women choose not to work as a result.

The MENA roundtable therefore emphasized that women’s remuneration should be equal to men’s and that they require affordable childcare and transport so that it is economically worthwhile for them to work. They also need the opportunity to work flexibly and should be able to rely on governments to enforce childcare policies. Meanwhile, female entrepreneurs need recognition for their businesses.
Role of the Power of Three

During the course of our deliberations, we identified a number of ways through which the Power of Three could accelerate entrant female talent in order to plug the skills gap:

- **Governments** could ensure that women have affordable childcare and appropriate transport to travel to and from work in all Regions.
- **Governments** could introduce gender equality dashboards so that they can track key gender indicators relating to recruitment, promotion and pay.
- **Corporates and universities** could establish centers of excellence where entrants are able to access mentoring from senior executives.
- **Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs** could work together to create road shows that visit universities so that entrant women can connect with senior role models.
- **Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs** could find ways to connect the existing networks that support women so that they can get assistance from both within their own country and outside.
- **Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs** could help establish an awards program that recognizes employers that have created a supportive environment for women.

The findings from the Regional roundtables on entrants were explored in more detail at our Istanbul forum, along with the findings of our survey and our interviews with government leaders.

One option that we considered in Istanbul was turning universities into centers of excellence where entrant women could meet with mentors, role models and other stakeholders who could play a vital role in their development. We also looked at creating an organizational model wherein a business can thrive while adopting an integrated approach to family care.

The recommendation that came out as the top choice for allowing entrant women to progress, however, was creating an “employer of choice award” to recognize organizations with women advancement and supportive environment programs. Unlike other award programs, which may be seen as superficial or based on policies, this program is focused on the progress women are making in the organization, and the active participation and encouragement of line managers to champion and support women throughout their careers.

During the Istanbul discussion, forum participants highlighted that both men and women have familial responsibilities and that they will both therefore benefit from award programs that encourage employers to create a more supportive environment, including the provision of day care facilities for children.

To have the greatest impact, the award needs to be global and linked to a quality accreditation that measures performance. It should also have a media program built around it to showcase examples of women who have succeeded as a result of their organization creating a supportive environment, rather than just drawing up policies.
“If you change the accountability in the system, you should be able to produce more role models.”

Professor Linda Scott, DP World Chair for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford

Increase the number of visible role models, including women and men, by developing and then applying organizational standards and certification of processes and procedures supporting women's promotion to senior levels.

Express women are women who are advancing through their organizations to achieve leadership roles and responsibilities. They are also entrepreneurs who are running fast-growing businesses. At the same time, many of them are rising to the challenges of being caregivers while dealing with cultural myths and assumptions about such roles.

Typically in their 30s and 40s, express women are moving along the swell of the wave. The currents in the wave create counterforces that push and pull express women in different directions. So instead of reaching new heights, this is often a point when women's career waves start to break.

Background

Lack of direct support from line managers is a major reason for the drop in advancement of mid-level women in organizations, according to the Final Cracking the Code report produced by the 30% Club, a group set up to accelerate progress towards better gender balance at all levels within organizations. In 2012, research by US online compensation data provider PayScale found that, on average, women's salaries start to plateau when

they are 39 while men’s pay continues to grow until they reach the age of 48.\textsuperscript{16} Meanwhile, female entrepreneurs struggle during this crucial period to get the financial and strategic support that they need to scale up their businesses and to generate greater economic wealth for their communities.

As they approach their peak, express women need corporates and governments to create organizational and social policies that provide them with the flexibility to follow a variety of career paths and routes to achievement. They also need to be given the encouragement and the means to mentor younger women, and to act as a role model to them.

Women who are at the express stage of their careers often see entrepreneurship as an increasingly attractive option. It is important, however, to ensure that women are making positive choices to become entrepreneurs, not taking it as the default option because they have been pushed out of the workplace.

It is also critical to ensure that those women who embrace entrepreneurship get the support they need to scale up their businesses. Access to finance continues to be a significant issue for female entrepreneurs in many markets. According to McGraw Hill Financial, as many as 70% of women-owned small businesses in the developing world lack access to financing.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, some countries also impose onerous burdens on all business owners in the form of high-taxation regimes, exchange controls, excessive red tape and cumbersome labor laws.

### Plugging the skills gap

At our Brussels working group, we identified that women in this career stage are typically juggling heavy commitments at work and at home. They are also coming up against myths and cultural biases in relation to how their responsibilities outside the workplace (such as caring for children or elderly parents) impact their commitment to their jobs. As a result, we noted that while the environment is important for entrant women, it is even more critical for express women.

Our survey also emphasized the importance of the environment to express women. Overall, 42.1% of respondents consider a supportive environment as the most important factor for expressing women. This is an interesting contrast with the findings for the entrant career stage where men were more likely than women to prioritize the environment as being the most crucial factor for entrant women.

Another intriguing disparity in our survey was the differing views between respondents from corporate organizations and entrepreneurs with regard to the factor that is most likely to accelerate express women. Some 46% of corporates cited a supportive environment and infrastructure as crucial—which was perhaps to be expected—while 43% of entrepreneurs said critical skills were important. Furthermore, entrepreneurial respondents were far more likely than respondents from large corporates to consider dispelling cultural myths and organizational assumptions about women as being a critical factor to address. Overall, this appears to be an area that warrants further research.

Since both women and men at this career stage are likely to have parental or other caregiving responsibilities, it is clear that they need organizations to recognize their various roles and provide them with appropriate support. They also need positive reinforcement from line managers and to see male and female role models who demonstrate that the organization will support them to balance all their responsibilities effectively.


What women need

Our Regional roundtables validated our survey findings with regard to the importance of supportive environments to express women.

At our Turkish roundtable, participants emphasized that a supportive environment begins early – at home. They said that having both family encouragement and a good education had contributed to their success and given them the courage to seek out higher roles and persevere in the face of adversities. In particular, they identified the importance of their mother as a role model.

The Turkish roundtable also found that women need access to good networks, practical support to encourage them to aim for higher roles and to prepare them for these positions. They also need senior female role models and a flexible environment that can help them balance work responsibilities with other personal responsibilities.

At our Italian roundtable, participants highlighted that leadership models and organizational structures in every sector tend to be geared toward what has traditionally been regarded as a male, rather than a female, way of working. This is a particular issue when women are primary caregivers because they must overcome the cultural stereotypes that they are mothers first and workers second.

As a result, the Italian roundtable found that organizational cultures should be redefined and made more flexible so that they fit with the responsibilities of women and men in today’s environment. It also noted that the advancement of women can be hindered by the fact that both men and women can react negatively toward women who try to negotiate higher pay.

Our Russian roundtable emphasized that female entrepreneurs need practical support in running a business. This support could take the form of coaching, experience exchange, lectures, mentoring and seminars. The aim would be to equip women with the financial, leadership and management skills that they need to found and scale up their own enterprise.

Overall, our Regional roundtables emphasized that women and men need governments and organizations to enforce policies that give all professionals greater flexibility with regard to when, where and how they work. These policies could, for example, provide for on-site day care or, in the case of private day care, align the timing of day care with the actual hours that professionals work. They could also ensure that women at every level of the organization are treated equally with men in terms of pay, performance appraisal and opportunities for promotion.

Monitoring is necessary to ensure that good policies are put in place and enforced. It also provides transparency and ensures that gender parity is accurately measured. Recognizing the significance of monitoring, our roundtables recommended that organizations should be obliged to disclose information on the gender balance at every level of their workforce.

Creating a supportive environment for express women also entails ensuring that more senior women are visible within organizations. Most organizations have too few senior female leaders at present, and, even where women do hold high-level roles, they are not always sufficiently visible to their male and female colleagues. Organizations need to support female leaders so that they can become noticeable role models for junior professionals. Male leaders also need to act as role models by accelerating entrant and express women and championing women at every career stage.

Role of the Power of Three

During the course of our deliberations, we identified a number of ways through which the Power of Three could accelerate express female talent in order to plug the skills gap:

- **Governments** could apply quotas to compare and measure how many women at each level are employed by an organization.
- **Governments** could support female entrepreneurs by introducing business-friendly incentives – such as tax relief for research and development – and creating a more flexible labor market in general.
- **Governments** could subsidize the cost of childcare facilities by contributing to the fees or making them tax-deductible. They could also introduce tax benefits for organizations that employ large numbers of women or recruit women to senior or specialist positions.
- **Corporates and educational institutions** could create coaching and mentoring programs to support women to progress further in their careers and to network with others.
- **Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs** could work together to redefine organizational structures so that they are more flexible and take into account the caring responsibilities of both women and men.
- **Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs** should ensure that their talent management processes are well structured and transparent so that women understand what it will take for them to advance.
Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs need to enforce the policies and regulations that are already in place at national and organizational levels for the hiring, development, retention and advancement of professional women.

Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs should engage male leaders to act as advocates of culture change within organizations and promoters of women’s access to executive careers.

Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs could liaise with non-governmental organizations to create a female network of mutual support that operates across organizations, countries and industries. Executive women within this network could act as role models and mentors to express women.

The significance of a supportive environment for express women was explored in depth at the Istanbul forum. Participants discussed how both men and women could be made more accountable for increasing the number of women who are promoted through to senior leadership and how progress toward gender parity in both nations and individual organizations could be encouraged, measured and monitored.

It is crucial to enhance the number and the visibility of both senior female and senior male role models within organizations. While many governments and organizations have policies that promote supportive working environments – and thereby the creation of role models – they often do not enforce these policies effectively. As a result, forum participants argued that governments should insist on adherence to all relevant policies.

To monitor progress, governments are advised to require organizations to include the growth and advancement of women among their indicators of success and to report on the progress that they have made. The remuneration of executives and other leaders should also be linked to how the organization performs in this respect.

View from an entrepreneurial leader

Changing mindsets is critical to narrowing the skills gap for express women, according to Belinda Parmar, the founder of Lady Geek – a boutique consultancy that helps its clients to use empathy to drive commercial success. “Women need to understand their potential and companies need to understand what women bring to the organization,” Parmar explains. “Women need to feel that they belong in the workplace and they need to be promoted on potential, not on actual skills. We need to create empathic cultures where women can flourish and thrive.”

The search for belonging and the opportunity to have a voice are often what lead women to become entrepreneurs, Parmar continues. “Women want to be marshals of their own destiny. As entrepreneurs, they feel they can have a bigger voice and they feel that they can build something that they are proud of.”

Asked why many female entrepreneurs don’t scale up their businesses, Parmar cites three reasons. The first is lack of access to finance, the second is an unwillingness to take a high level of risk and the third is a fear of losing their sense of intimacy with their business. Nevertheless, she believes that if workplaces in general can be made more appealing, female entrepreneurs will be more attracted to the idea of building larger businesses.

Five out of the ten most empathic companies on the Lady Geek Global Empathy Index, an index of 160 large listed companies globally, are technology companies based in Silicon Valley. Parmar believes that other organizations can learn from the way that these technology leaders empower their female employees. “They do everything from your laundry to freezing your eggs,” she explains. “They do everything they can to make their culture more appealing to women.”
The secret to female success in Africa

The barriers to women’s ascension to CEO positions in Kenya’s largest corporations is the theme of a research paper18 that has been written by Nancy Onyango, EY’s Governance, Risk & Compliance Leader for Africa.

For her paper, Onyango studied the top 50 companies in Kenya, including many multinationals. Her research focused on four key factors that impact a woman’s ability to break through the glass ceiling in the country. These four factors are:

- **The individual herself** – her attitude, confidence, choices, approach to making decisions and leadership style
- **Societal pressures** – the cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes that impact women, including the role of women in family and childrearing
- **Organizational structures** – recruitment, retention and promotion of women as well as international assignments
- **Governmental barriers** – failure to implement good employment laws or to effectively monitor existing laws and regulations on gender parity in the workplace

What Onyango found was that while it is possible to influence individual and institutional attitudes, trying to influence societal thinking takes a long time. Respondents to her study felt that society tends to perceive certain professions as being more women-friendly than others. They also believed that society still associates good leadership with masculinity. Unfortunately, this societal thinking can then create barriers within the individual’s own mindset.

Furthermore, Onyango discovered that while the government did not pose significant barriers to women becoming CEOs, it could nevertheless take actions that would support women’s ascension to senior leadership. These included amending existing employment legislation, considering affirmative action, and collecting and publishing gender statistics for all organizations to encourage and reward exemplars so that others may follow their example.

Onyango highlighted that childcare is not a huge burden in Africa because professional women have good domestic and family help. They also have the financial means to pay for excellent childcare if necessary. Interestingly, the respondents she spoke to revealed that spousal support played a crucial role in their career progression. Indeed, their experience indicates that the choice of partner is the biggest career decision that a woman can ever make.

---

18 “Barriers to women’s ascension to CEO positions in Kenya’s largest corporations,” © 2016 Nancy Onyango.
“Women should know the opportunities available to them throughout their career. Their career doesn’t have to be a linear path. There can be a sideways trajectory but they have to know that is open to them.”

Elizabeth Isele, Founder and President, eProvStudio/Senior Entrepreneurship Works

Establish intergenerational hubs to incubate experience.

Experienced women are women who are nearing the completion of their first career or tenure as a senior leader or seasoned professional. In theory, they have a number of options including holding further senior management positions and developing so-called “encore” careers such as starting an entrepreneurial venture, becoming a board member or taking another professional role.

Yet, in practice, organizations tend to place limited value on the knowledge and skills that experienced women bring. Meanwhile, our forum participants agreed that women themselves often struggle to understand how they should address this stage of their career. Even when experienced women are in senior roles, they often hold positions that do not do justice to their true ability. Furthermore, in many sectors, such as the media, experienced female role models are scarcely visible.

Globally, there is still an alarming shortage of women in senior leadership positions. According to analysis by CNN Money, women hold just 14.2% of the top five leadership positions within S&P 500 companies. Furthermore, just 8% of companies worldwide with revenues of at least $500 million have a female

CEO, according to a survey by Weber Shandwick.20 A study by Bloomberg also found that female executives earn around 18% less than male executives.21 The situation is little better in the public sector. EY’s Worldwide Women Public Sector Leaders Index 201522 found that while women account for 49.7% of the overall public sector workforce, they represent just 24.9% of public sector leadership across the G20.

Despite the focus within developed markets on finding more women to serve as non-executive directors on company boards, experienced female entrepreneurs — who have a wealth of wisdom to bring to the table — often struggle to secure these opportunities because of the strong, inbuilt cultural bias among boards and headhunters toward hiring men with listed company experience.23

Neglecting the potential for experienced women to contribute to the global economy is not something that the world can afford to do, especially in developed markets where populations are aging. In emerging markets such as India and Africa, where a high percentage of the population is young, it is also critical to engage and involve experienced talent in new initiatives and programs within organizations, and in actively mentoring younger workers — both men and women. As the Global Gender Gap Report 2015 from the WEF highlights: “In aging economies, as labor forces shrink and talent shortages emerge, women’s integration into the economy is key to promoting dynamism.

At our Brussels working group session, it became clear that the experienced career stage offered one of the most exciting opportunities to achieve change and accelerate gender parity by plugging the skills gap. We focused on the importance of senior women in the workplace and examined how we could achieve change that would allow women to continue to ascend in their careers or to transition into different roles if they prefer. Longer lifespans mean that we need to change our attitudes towards retirement and our expectations of professional women who are in the run-up to retirement. Since many people have neither the inclination nor the means to spend as many as 30 or 40 years of their life in retirement, this makes them a valuable pool of talent that organizations can draw on if they are willing to invest in developing those individuals’ skills.

Research already shows that having a diversity of age and experience within the workforce fosters collaboration, communication and productivity, which are great benefits to employers. A 2011 study of 321 companies with revenues more than US$500 million found that 85% of executives agreed or strongly agreed that diversity is key to driving innovation in the workplace.24

Plugging the skills gap

At our Brussels working group session, we identified that today’s increasingly flexible economy presents a host of opportunities for experienced women. Thanks to huge advances in technology, they can provide their services on a freelance or consultant basis or become entrepreneurs and thereby generate additional wealth for others.

Digital technology also presents women who have a lack of experience, or outdated experience, with the opportunity to reinvent themselves as digital leaders or digital entrepreneurs. Indeed, digital technology can be a powerful enabler for experienced women provided they can develop the right skills to take advantage of it although it presents great risks to those who don’t (for more, refer the next chapter). Therefore, experienced women need support to attain the digital skills — and other critical insights, such as how to build a portfolio career — that will allow them to succeed, regardless of whether they are still pursuing a first career or have moved on to a second or third career.

Our survey also emphasized the importance of critical workplace skills for experienced women. Overall, 41% of respondents identified critical skills as the most important factor for plugging the skills gap with entrepreneurs even more likely than corporate respondents to see this as vital.

23 Time for diversity © 2014 EYGM Limited.
Female and male respondents were almost equally likely to see critical skills as the most important factor for plugging the skills gap at this career stage, which probably reflects the appreciation that both genders have of the necessity for skills that allow them to transition to further careers.

Experienced women are keen to participate in the economy, and they constitute a huge pool of untapped talent. If this talent is properly harnessed, our forum participants felt, they have the potential to unleash a huge amount of know-how and experience in the same way that a wave exerts its force when it hits the shore.

**What women need**

Participants at our Brussels working group session argued that a flexible economy means that employers need to take a flexible approach to employment. This might mean revising job descriptions to allow for job sharing so that experienced professionals and entrants could share a role and transfer knowledge between one another in the process. We believe that the concept of transferring knowledge is key to allowing women of all ages to succeed.

At our Regional roundtables, we explored the needs of experienced women in more depth. Skills were highlighted at the Netherlands roundtable although participants emphasized that rather than developing new skills, experienced women often needed to know how they could repackage their existing skills in order to embark on a new career, perhaps as an entrepreneur, a non-executive director or a self-employed consultant. They may also need to gain additional skills in areas such as digital and social media.

The significance of male champions was also emphasized by the Netherlands roundtable, which noted that if a senior male leader shares his own experiences of being a member of a diverse board or management team, he could potentially have a big impact on the perceptions of others.

The German roundtable emphasized the general lack of visible senior women within most organizations, pointing out that this shortage leads to women believing that it is not entirely possible for them to achieve the goal of becoming executive or non-executive directors. Participants said that in order to create more role models – particularly female role models – organizations should focus on gender-oriented succession planning and middle managers need to be given KPIs relating to the development of female talent within their teams. The German roundtable also highlighted that experienced women are often excluded from male-dominated networking groups.

An issue that came up at the Polish roundtable was that besides equipping women with critical skills, there is an urgent requirement for cultural assumptions about older women in the workplace to be addressed. The retirement age for women in Poland was 55 during the Communist era. Although legislation will bring in equal retirement ages for men and women, men currently do not retire until 65 while women retire at 60. So there is still a societal perception that women who are aged 50 and older are at the end of their careers and they tend to be overlooked for senior leadership positions.

Participants in the Polish roundtable pointed out the shortcomings of this attitude. They highlighted that women aged 50 or older have extensive knowledge and experience. They have also reached a point in their lives where they don't necessarily have caring responsibilities to extent that they did previously. This means that they have more time to devote to their professional career or to their business.

Professor Danuta Hübner, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs for the European Parliament, who was interviewed for this report, also highlighted the issue of cultural assumptions. “In the case of men, age is seen to increase their value,” she says. “In the case of women, it is often seen as diminishing their value. For women at the top, all these culturally biased assumptions can play a very important role. We need to be stronger about dispelling them.”

Our Nordic roundtable stressed that diversity needs to be embedded within the culture of an organization and senior leaders should set the right tone at the top with regard to gender equality. As a result, the CEO and senior leadership team need to be ambassadors for diversity and not just see diversity as an HR initiative. It can be challenging to lead diverse teams, however, which is why some leaders may need an education on how to do it.
Participants to the Nordic roundtable also pointed out that experienced women could be subject to unconscious bias and excluding behavior in the workplace. For example, they might be asked about their willingness to travel or be expected to join the rest of the board in a sauna or on a hunting trip without mindful consideration being given to gender or personal preferences.

It was evident from all our discussions that experienced women face a wide range of barriers in the workplace so while skills are important, they are just one element of what is a very complicated equation.

**Role of the Power of Three**

During the course of our deliberations, we identified a number of ways through which the Power of Three could accelerate experienced female talent in order to plug the skills gap:

- **Governments** could require organizations to set and publish clear targets for gender parity at every level within their workforce. They could also put more pressure on boards to appoint experienced women.

- **Governments** must give experienced women greater access to new career opportunities by raising or removing compulsory retirement ages and making changes to tax incentives and medical insurance cover so that experienced professionals become more attractive to employ.

- **Governments** should urge their education systems to provide more targeted services to experienced professionals so that women can continue to develop their skills and be supported as they transition into new roles.

- ** Corporates** must have well-balanced board nomination committees because nomination committees have a major role in driving better gender parity.

- **Corporates** should ensure that the bonuses of executives, senior managers and HR professionals reflect how organizations perform against gender targets.

- **Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs** should ensure that their leaders act as genuine ambassadors for diversity and embed it within the cultures of their organizations. They should also appoint ambassadors to champion experienced women in the workplace.

- **Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs** should explore how they can retain and develop experienced female talent within their organizations. This may be through offering training and the opportunity to upskill in digital.

> **Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs** could combine to create an academy that educates women on how to succeed in very senior roles.

During our discussions, we explored the notion of capitalizing on experienced women’s knowledge in more detail. We also examined how we could unlock capacity for growth for both experienced women as well as for women across the express and entrant career stages. As a result, we identified the potential for an intergenerational hub or an accelerator. This is where the digital and social media experiences of entrants can be combined with the life and work experiences of experienced women to the benefit of both parties in a commercial context.

Knowledge exchange formed the basis of our recommended action because participants felt that it could ignite positive change within the workplace in all organizational contexts – corporate, entrepreneurial and government. To date, this opportunity has not been readily available since we are only witnessing the first wave of senior women progressing through the workplace in major numbers across geographies. So forum participants felt that we should harness this opportunity.
The importance of female role models in India

Time for Diversity, a paper published by EY in 2014, examined how diversity could be used to improve the performance of corporate boards. The Indian board members that we spoke to for the paper highlighted that there is an even stronger economic imperative for boardroom diversity in rapid-growth markets such as India than there is in more developed markets. In India, women are way behind men in terms of labor force participation — according to the World Bank, their level of participation stands at just 27%.25 Speaking at the W20 launch, Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, said that India’s GDP, which currently stands at US$1.9 trillion, could expand by 27% if the number of female workers increased to match the number of male workers. There is a strong need for companies that are based in India and other rapid-growth markets to have senior women on their boards who can act as role models. Role models are critical to encouraging more women to join and progress through the workforce, and contribute to economic growth.

View from a corporate leader

Global corporates such as Unilever recognize that gender balance in their workforce is a crucial driver of business success. Within this overarching goal, they realize that the disproportionately lower representation of women at senior levels is a particular challenge that needs to be addressed as a matter of priority. For example, while 45% of Unilever’s managers globally are female, this percentage decreases at the more senior levels of the business.

“It is very important to have women at senior levels within organizations for a number of reasons,” says Ritva Sotamaa, Unilever’s Chief Legal Officer. “Firstly, experienced women, with their wealth of knowledge, boost top decision-making teams. They bring fresh perspectives and they help the right conversations to take place, which allows the best results to emerge. Additionally, it is also important to keep investing in experienced women to ensure that we have role models for other women."

Unilever has a number of different initiatives aimed at helping the organization to achieve gender balance. Examples of these include using metrics to hold the company’s leadership to account over gender diversity and the implementation of specific programs that support the recruitment, retention and development of female talent. Unilever also offers inclusion awareness training to its employees to help create an environment, where diverse opinions can be freely aired. “We don’t think there is any one silver bullet,” explains Sotamaa. “We think that the critical thing is to have a comprehensive strategy for tackling the issue and to come at it from many different angles.”

Sotamaa argues that the gender gap will only close if women know that it is possible to develop and progress at every stage of their careers and if their employers value them for who they are. Governments can lead the way with this approach, she says, by being transparent about how many women they employ at different levels within public administration, including the highest positions. They can also call on corporates to be transparent about the gender make-up of their own workforces. Greater transparency should lead to the talents of women of all ages being put to better use, leading to greater economic productivity across sectors and ultimately higher global economic growth.

“The research and data are now irrefutable. For the world to progress both financially and socially, gender parity is crucial,” says Sotamaa. “It would be really regrettable not to tap in and leverage this opportunity to drive inclusion.”
“Almost every discussion that we’ve had about gender parity has come back to options that are digital.”

Cheryl Miller, Executive Director at the Digital Leadership Institute, Brussels and CEO at Zen Digital Europe

Digital technology as an enabler

“Create a digital platform that links female entrepreneurs with funders, mentors, coaches and other enablers.

The potential for technology to be a powerful enabler for women at every career stage was one of the forum’s most significant findings. Technology surfaced as an important topic at our Brussels working group session. This is because digital technology is one of the external forces that can help a woman’s career wave to build momentum. Women consumers are great users of social and mobile technologies globally. The number of women studying technology or working in technology-specific roles is small, however, and in some locations it is declining. At our UK roundtable, we explored technology in depth, focusing specifically on digital technology and on the career possibilities that digital technology offers to express and experienced women.

Why is digital technology so critical to accelerating women and generating economic growth? Obviously digital technology is the defining megatrend of our age and it has already transformed both workplaces and our personal lives. Furthermore, the majority of the new roles that will be created between now and 2020 will have a technological component — but this technological component will not necessarily entail coding or other technology-specific skills. Instead, the roles will focus on using technologies to facilitate processes. There is clearly an opportunity for women to create new career paths and to differentiate themselves within their organizations by incorporating digital skills into their existing skill sets and roles. Yet this is not happening at present, so forum participants believed this was a large opportunity that is being missed.

The new digital landscape also provides female entrepreneurs with the flexibility to start businesses with a relatively small amount of investment and to sell their goods or services across geographies. Furthermore, since the mainstream workplace continues to provide challenges to women who want to build their careers, they are instead increasingly choosing to advance as entrepreneurs. Many are building digital businesses — an opportunity that did not exist in the past. Women don’t need to be technological experts to build great digital businesses, they just need to be able to work with the experts. It is essential, however, that they know where to find the right technical resources and support to be able to scale their businesses and develop their businesses into market leaders.

While digital technology has the potential to transform career outcomes for women, the evidence suggests that the environment is already excluding women — and in large numbers. According to the European Commission, only 30% of the approximately seven million people working in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector in the EU are women. Furthermore, the commission emphasizes that women are especially underrepresented in decision-making positions.

Who holds the key to closing the skills gap?

The economic significance of this is underlined by a European Commission study of women active in the ICT sector that was published in 2013. The study found that there would be an annual boost of €9b to the EU's GDP if more women were allowed to enter the digital jobs market.27

Ultimately, forum participants concluded that digital technology could be both an opportunity and a threat. Unless women succeed in understanding the opportunities and how to position themselves as leaders with digital skills and knowledge, or as digital entrepreneurs, men will continue to dominate in this space. At the same time, governments and organizations have a responsibility to ensure that women are neither intentionally nor unintentionally excluded from becoming digital leaders. Inherent bias and issues such as male-oriented industry jargon continue to act as barriers to attracting female talent to the opportunities offered by digital technology, and this needs to be addressed.

Plugging the skills gap

At our UK roundtable, we examined the reasons why women are not taking full advantage of the technological revolution. We found that while women are avid users of technology, they don't tend to see themselves as influencers or makers of it. Furthermore, they are put off by the concept of “technology” without considering or understanding the opportunities that digital technology, in particular, can present to them.

A major reason for this is that the language surrounding both technology and digital acts as a barrier to women. Widespread use of jargon in product and job descriptions — rather than more accessible language — makes digital appear complex and impenetrable. Therefore, women think they need to be able to code or be technical specialists in order to have digital leadership skills. Instead, what they really need is to be able to ask the right questions so that they can identify the benefits, value and opportunities associated with products and services that are based on digital technology products and services.


What women need

Technology and digital both need to be demystified so that it is clear that technology is just one component of a digital strategy. There are many more components besides technology and these components are often accessible to a broad range of people. Technology is about the “what”; so it encompasses the computer networks and software upon which a digital strategy relies. Digital, however, is more about the “how”; so it encompasses websites, mobile apps, social media and other tools that are used to build relationships with stakeholders.

Digital's power as an enabler of communication means that it is already widely used in functions such as communications, marketing and HR where women tend to work in large numbers. Women outside these functions should also realize that digital presents a huge opportunity for them to accelerate their careers. Ultimately, becoming a digital leader is not about retraining as a technological specialist; it is about women incorporating digital skills into their existing skill sets.

For female entrepreneurs, digital technology gives them the flexibility to start a business with a relatively small amount of investment and to be able to sell their goods or services around the world. Women don't need to be technological experts in order to build great digital businesses — they just need to be able to brief technological experts in order to do the work for them. It is essential, however, that they know where to go to find the right technical skills and support to enable them to grow their business and develop it into a market leader.

At present, women are not taking advantage of the business opportunities that digital technology generates, primarily because they do not know how to access them. This exclusion, which is largely the result of the language and behaviors that currently dominate the sector, needs to be addressed rapidly if we are to plug the skills gap and accelerate the achievement of gender parity in the workplace.
Our UK roundtable emphasized that we need the language surrounding digital technology to be made more accessible to women. Technology providers should clearly articulate the benefits that their products or services bring and the language in job descriptions should emphasize the creativity and purpose of digital roles. Furthermore, the roundtable found that express and experienced women need competent support to develop confidence in their digital fluency. For example, reverse digital mentoring could help them to understand the opportunities that come with being a digital leader or entrepreneur.

Role of the Power of Three

During the course of our deliberations, we identified a number of ways through which the Power of Three could ensure that digital technology is an enabler for female talent — especially talent at the express and experienced careers stages — rather than a barrier:

- **Governments** could require listed organizations to report on how many women they employ in digital roles. They could also publish their own data on how many women they employ in digital roles and ensure that they work with some digital suppliers that are women-owned or employ at least one woman.

- In addition, **governments** could also gather data from across different sectors to compare the digital capability and advancement of women within different organizations. This data could then be published in the form of a gender index as part of sustainability reporting.

- **Corporates, entrepreneurs and governments** could champion “disruptive recruiting” and focus on changing the language used in job descriptions so that women see digital roles as being a good fit for their skill sets and a place where they belong. For example, the terms “analyst” and “engineer” can be potentially off-putting.

- **Organizations in every sector** could commit to adhering to the principles of “information is beautiful” (informationisbeautiful.net) whereby facts and data are visualized in simple and clear diagrams. These principles could be used in technology-related training manuals.

The forum identified a clear need to work with governments to promote awareness of existing funds among female entrepreneurs, to explain to investors why women-led businesses are good investment opportunities, and to match female entrepreneurs with potential funders as well as with coaches, mentors and other entrepreneurs. We propose the need for a digital platform to address this globally and locally and would look to governments to develop, host and promote such a platform.

While some social platforms for female entrepreneurs already exist, there is an absence of official mechanisms connecting them to each other and to other programs supporting female digital entrepreneurs around the world. Many female entrepreneurs are not aware of the financial, operational and personal support available to them, particularly in the digital space, which can empower them to build and scale their businesses.
Media as an enabler

“We need to have metrics that show which media organizations pay attention to gender parity. Once people see them, they will see that there is a problem there.”

Dr. İtir Erhart, Associate Professor, Department of Media & Communication Systems, Istanbul Bilgi University

Create a digital platform that ranks the media on the level of gender parity in their reporting, with KPIs and a “call out” function.

The media in their broadest sense – advertising, broadcast, film, print and social media – play a major role in perpetuating negative female stereotypes and unhelpful myths about women. They frequently take a very different approach to portraying or reporting on female leadership compared with male leadership. Often they even overlook the achievements of women altogether.

For example, at our German roundtable, participants commented that when newspapers write about a woman in business, they have a tendency to comment on whether she is married and has children, with the implication being: how can she do this job if she has family responsibilities? Men do not get assessed in the same way.

According to the Global Media Monitoring Project 2015, women make up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news — exactly the same percentage as in 2010. The gap between coverage of men and women was widest in news about politics and government where just 16% of the people being covered were women. Economic coverage was only marginally better with women being mentioned in 21% of stories.\(^{26}\)

Not only are women less likely to make the news than men, they are also less likely to present the news and to write the news as well. The Women’s Media Center in the US researched 27,000 pieces of widely read and viewed media content in 2014. It found that 62.1% of those with bylines, on-camera appearances and producer credentials were men. Furthermore, female journalists were more likely to report on lifestyle, culture and health rather than politics, criminal justice or technology.\(^{29}\)

An additional concern is that older women are less likely to appear in the media than male counterparts of the same age and they are not promoted as positive role models. The UK-based campaigning organization Women in Journalism has found that 60% of female journalists aged over 45 have been discriminated against due to their age while 71% worry about being forced out of their careers when they reach their 40s and 50s. Meanwhile, nearly half (49%) said that there were no older female role models in their offices.\(^{30}\)

---


\(^{29}\) The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2015, The Women’s Media Center.

The situation within the film and television industry is just as concerning if not more so. Women are underrepresented both as directors and protagonists. For example, a recent US study has revealed that across the 1,300 top-grossing films from 2002 to 2014, just 4.1% of all directors were female.31

Plugging the skills gap

Like digital technology, the media are a powerful force that can create momentum to build women’s career waves. Yet they should be much more aware and active of their role in changing mindsets and prioritize giving visibility to female talent that otherwise goes unrecognized.

“The media shape the views and opinions of the public at large and they have a significant influence,” says Ritva Sotamaa, Unilever’s Chief Legal Officer, who was interviewed for this report. “So it is important that the media make themselves fully aware of the various dimensions around this topic and its importance for all of us, irrespective of where we are or what we do. They then have the ability to increase awareness and galvanize action.”

During our Regional roundtables, we discussed how we could engage the media to change perceptions around women at every stage of the career wave in order to plug the skills gap and accelerate the achievement of gender parity in the workplace.

Participants made a number of suggestions including lobbying the media to change the language that they use when reporting on women, working with strong social media influencers to raise awareness of women’s achievements, targeting the scriptwriters who create the content for television programs and working with male and female ambassadors to write articles and give interviews to the media.

What women need

The media need to urgently rethink the way in which they portray women and the workplace, and demonstrate that they are committed to challenging existing cultural stereotypes. The German roundtable suggested that businesses should work with the media to create a “pledge” whereby the media commit to abide by a gender-neutral reporting policy and stop using language that reinforces existing cultural stereotypes.

31 “Gender & Short Films: Emerging Female Filmmakers and the Barriers Surrounding their Careers,” Stacy L. Smith, Katherine Pieper, Marc Choueiti, Ariana Case.

As our Greek roundtable highlighted, the increasing power of social media means that female leaders need to be educated on how they can use the platform to enhance their own personal branding and visibility.

Role of the Power of Three

During the course of our deliberations, we identified a number of ways through which the Power of Three could ensure that media are an enabler for female talent:

- **Governments** could conduct social media campaigns to raise awareness about the achievements of women.

- **Governments** could create quotas that relate to the representation of women in the media. They could also hold roundtables with senior leaders to discuss how media channels report on women.

- **Governments** could sponsor television programs that use solid research to show the benefits of employing women aged 50 and older.

- **Governments** could create tax incentives to encourage film studios to work with female directors. These could be similar to the New York State Film Tax Credit Program, which encourages film production in New York State by offering a 30% tax credit toward qualified production and post-production costs that were incurred in the state.
At our Istanbul forum, we discussed a number of options for addressing how the media can be transformed from being a barrier to women’s progress in the workplace into being an enabler of it. The key options we looked at included creating quotas on representation of women in the media, using tax incentives to encourage film studios to work with more female directors and implementing an international media code of ethics to address gender representation in advertising, broadcast and film.

As our recommended action, we identified the creation of a digital platform that ranks the media according to the level of gender parity that exists within their reporting. The platform, which could be a website or another tool, such as a database, would use a set of KPIs to rank the different media channels. An example of a KPI would be the number of women who are featured in the business section of a newspaper on a regular basis. The platform would also have a “call out” function that allows individuals to participate in the discussion using social media.

The platform could potentially collaborate with organizations such as the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and UNESCO’s Global Alliance on Media and Gender.

The interactive nature of the digital platform would mean that it differs from the existing Global Media Monitoring Project, which is a research study that is carried out every five years. In our fast-moving digital age, having the ability to tap into up-to-date information and take immediate action will prove a powerful tool in holding the media to account with regard to gender parity.

- Corporates that are also media organizations should publicize the success stories of female entrepreneurs across all media channels, including women’s magazines.
- Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs could demand that the media abide by a code of conduct with regard to how they report on women in advertising, broadcast and film.
- Governments, corporates and entrepreneurs could back a platform that ranks media channels against a set of KPIs when they report on women.
Five recommended actions

Following the in-depth deliberations that took place over the course of 2015, Women³. The Power of Three presents the following five recommended actions as powerful options for plugging the skills gap and accelerating the achievement of gender parity in the workplace.

1. **Entrants**: develop and roll out an employer-of-choice awards scheme to recognize companies with women advancement and supportive environment programs. (Aligns with W20 recommendation: Support work and life balance by developing and improving infrastructural mechanisms for social care (child, elderly, sick and disabled care).)

2. **Express**: increase the number of visible role models (including women and men) by developing and then applying organizational standards and certification of processes and procedures supporting women’s promotion to senior levels. (Aligns with W20 recommendation: Increase the number of women both in public and private sector leadership positions.)

3. **Experienced**: establish intergenerational hubs to incubate experience. (Aligns with W20 recommendation: Address women’s economic empowerment through strengthening linkages between education, employment and entrepreneurship.)

4. **Digital technology as an enabler**: create a digital platform that links female entrepreneurs with funders, mentors, coaches and other enablers. (Aligns with W20 recommendations: Address women’s economic empowerment through strengthening linkages between education, employment and entrepreneurship and ensure women’s access to financial and productive assets as well as to markets.)

5. **Media as an enabler**: create a digital platform that ranks the media on the level of gender parity in their reporting, with KPIs and a “call out” function. (Aligns with W20 recommendation: Eliminate workplace discrimination, enforce legal rights and promote equal opportunities.)

We are very excited about the progress that Women³. The Power of Three has made to date and we look forward to the next steps on the journey.

Using our global reach, EY will advance these actions onto the world stage, and work with corporates, entrepreneurs and governments to influence and accelerate change at a local level. We ask you to support these actions and to join us on our journey to achieve gender equality by accelerating women to plug the skills gap.

You can find out more about Women³. The Power of Three at [www.ey.com/womenpower3](http://www.ey.com/womenpower3)
Acknowledgments

This paper, and the work of the Women³. The Power of Three forum in 2015, would not have been possible without the support of many committed individuals and organizations. A heartfelt thank you goes to all of them for their energy, enthusiasm and time.

A special thank you goes to Professor Linda Scott who has given so generously her precious time to shape the forum and the various reports we have produced. A special thank you also goes to Elizabeth Isele for her boundless energy, insight and optimism as we have developed our ideas.

We would also like to thank:

- Women³. The Power of Three anchor participants: Professor Danuta Hübner, Marriët Schuurman, Ritva Sotamaa and Esther Vergeer


- Dr. Paola Subacchi and Stéphane Dubois at Chatham House

- Bloomberg Television: our Istanbul forum media partner

- The EY Women. Fast forward stakeholder group and project team

- All the Women³. The Power of Three forum participants who attended the Brussels working group session, the 10 Regional roundtables and the Istanbul meeting

- The W20, KAGIDER, the B20 and the C20 for their work on gender parity

- Sally Percy, the author of this report

We hope that this report will serve to heighten awareness globally that plugging the skills gap by accelerating educated, skilled female talent is a huge economic opportunity that the world cannot afford to miss out on.
Who holds the key to closing the skills gap?
About EY

EY is a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services. The insights and quality services we deliver help build trust and confidence in the capital markets and in economies the world over. We develop outstanding leaders who team to deliver on our promises to all of our stakeholders. In so doing, we play a critical role in building a better working world for our people, for our clients and for our communities.

EY refers to the global organization, and may refer to one or more, of the member firms of Ernst & Young Global Limited, each of which is a separate legal entity. Ernst & Young Global Limited, a UK company limited by guarantee, does not provide services to clients. For more information about our organization, please visit ey.com.

© 2016 EYGM Limited.
All Rights Reserved.

EYG no. DK0140

BMC Agency
GA 0322_04280

ED None

In line with EY’s commitment to minimize its impact on the environment, this document has been printed on paper with a high recycled content.

This material has been prepared for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be relied upon as accounting, tax, or other professional advice. Please refer to your advisors for specific advice.

ey.com