

McKinsey Global Survey results

## Moving mind-sets on gender diversity

*To ensure that corporate culture supports—not hinders—the ability of women to reach top management, companies must address mind-sets and develop a more inclusive, holistic diversity agenda.*

**Female executives are ambitious** and sure of their own abilities to become top managers, though they are much less confident that their companies' cultures can support their rise. In our latest survey on gender and workplace diversity,<sup>1</sup> the results indicate that collective, cultural factors at work are more than twice as likely as individual factors to link to women's confidence that they can reach top management.

According to our previous surveys on the topic and our 2012 analysis of more than 230 European companies,<sup>2</sup> many organizations are implementing measures to increase gender diversity within their management teams. Indeed, majorities of executives have said in earlier research that their companies had implemented at least one measure to recruit, retain, promote, and develop women—yet few companies have seen notable improvements as a result. The 2013 results confirm that, beyond specific actions, culture has a critical role to play in either supporting or hindering efforts to advance diversity.

The responses suggest that mind-sets and company culture are significant in affecting women's confidence to achieve their career goals; they also highlight the particular aspects of corporate culture that make it most difficult for women to reach the top. Yet there is still a

<sup>1</sup>The online survey was in the field from August 20 to September 6, 2013, and received responses from 1,421 executives (624 men and 797 women) representing the full range of regions, industries, company sizes, tenures, and functional specialties. To adjust for differences in response rates, the data are weighted by the contribution of each respondent's nation to global GDP.

<sup>2</sup>For more, see the full report, *Women Matter 2012: Making the Breakthrough*, March 2012, [mckinsey.com](http://mckinsey.com).



notable gap in how men and women regard the gender-diversity problem. Men are much more likely than women to disagree that female executives face more difficulties in reaching top management, and men see less value in the diversity initiatives that can correct the gender imbalance.

**What women want**

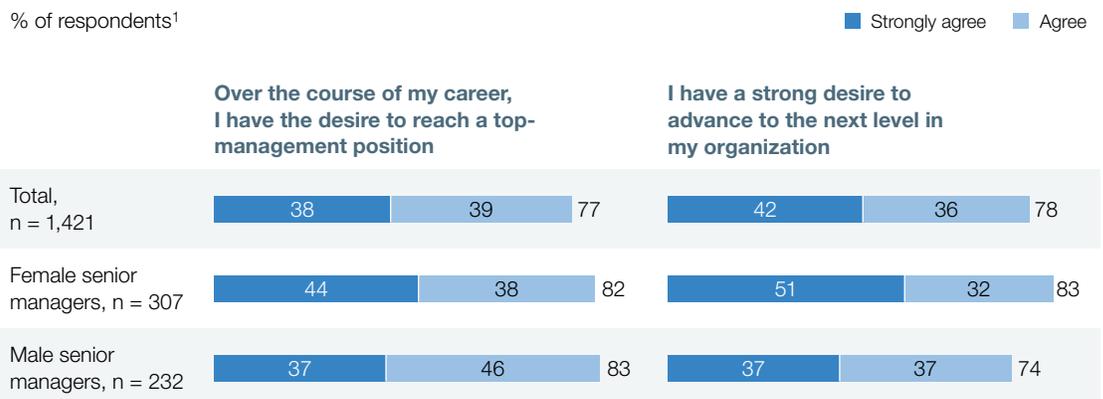
At the individual level, female respondents report that their career ambitions are just as high as those of their male peers.<sup>3</sup> Seventy-nine percent of all midlevel or senior-level women say they have the desire to reach a top-management position over the course of their careers, compared with 81 percent of midlevel or senior men. Looking at responses from the senior executives who are one step away from the C-suite, women are more likely than men to strongly agree that they have top-management ambitions and want to advance in their organizations (Exhibit 1).

Women are also ready to do what it takes to achieve their ambitions. Nearly two-thirds of both male and female executives say they are willing to sacrifice part of their personal lives to reach a top-management position. What’s more, three-quarters of women—a slightly higher share than men—say they promote themselves and communicate their ambitions to direct supervisors and others at the top, while 45 percent of women (and 48 percent of men) say they have proactively asked for promotions.

<sup>3</sup>This finding tracks with the results from our February 2013 survey on workplace diversity in Latin America, in which 79 percent of female executives said that if anything were possible, they would choose to advance to C-level management; 73 percent of male executives said the same. See Manuela Artigas, Heloisa Callegaro, and Maria Novales-Flamarique, “Why top management eludes women in Latin America: McKinsey Global Survey results,” mckinsey.com, August 2013.

Exhibit 1

**Women’s career ambitions exceed those of their male peers.**



<sup>1</sup> Respondents who answered “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “don’t know/not applicable” are not shown.



Yet female executives are much less certain they will reach the top: 69 percent of midlevel or senior women say they are confident they will succeed in reaching a top-management position, compared with 83 percent of their male peers. To better understand what affects confidence levels among women, we identified two sets of factors that can drive or inhibit career success: those that center on personal actions, desires, and initiative to advance, and those that reflect the organizational environment in which executives work.

Of the female respondents who want to reach the C-suite, we compared those who believe they will succeed with those who do not—looking specifically at how each group perceives these individual and collective factors. The responses from the two groups of women differ much more when they consider the elements related to corporate culture rather than individual factors. On average, the differences suggest that collective, cultural factors weigh more than twice as much as individual factors on women’s confidence to reach top management (Exhibit 2).

The more confident women are more likely to report, for instance, that their companies’ prevailing leadership styles are compatible with women’s leadership and communication styles, that their corporate cultures are compatible with gender-diversity objectives, and that women are just as likely as men to reach the top at their companies. So while women have the ambition and are ready to do what it takes to succeed, collective factors have a strong role to play in building (or undermining) the confidence these executives need to get to the top.

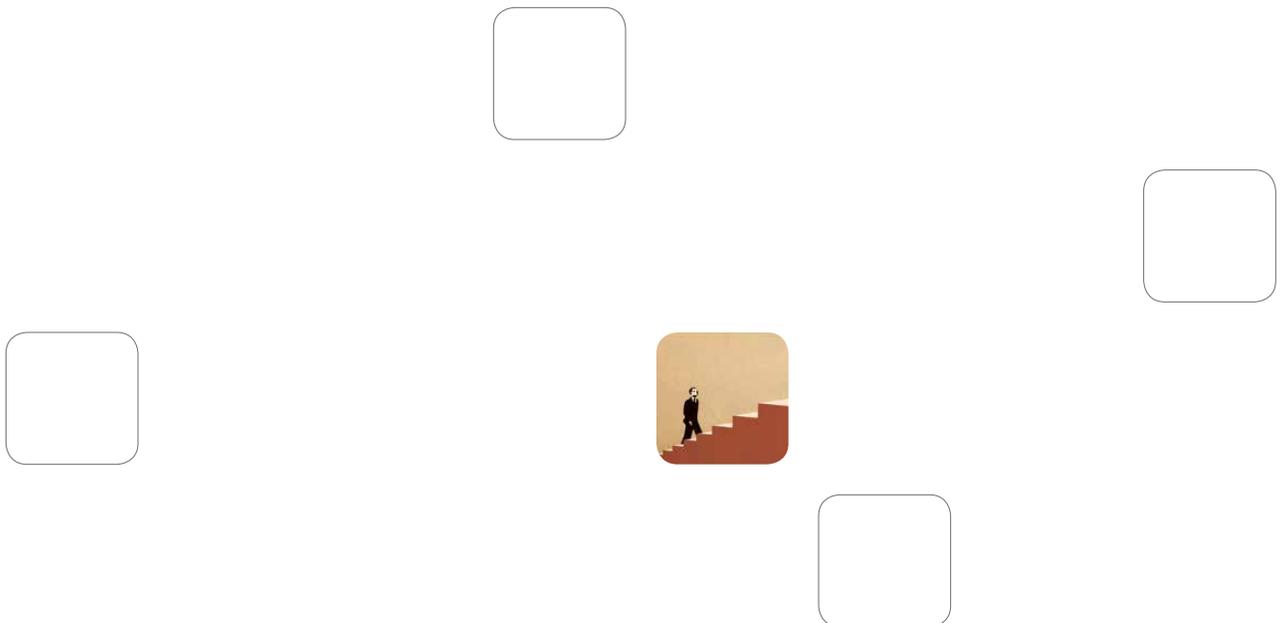
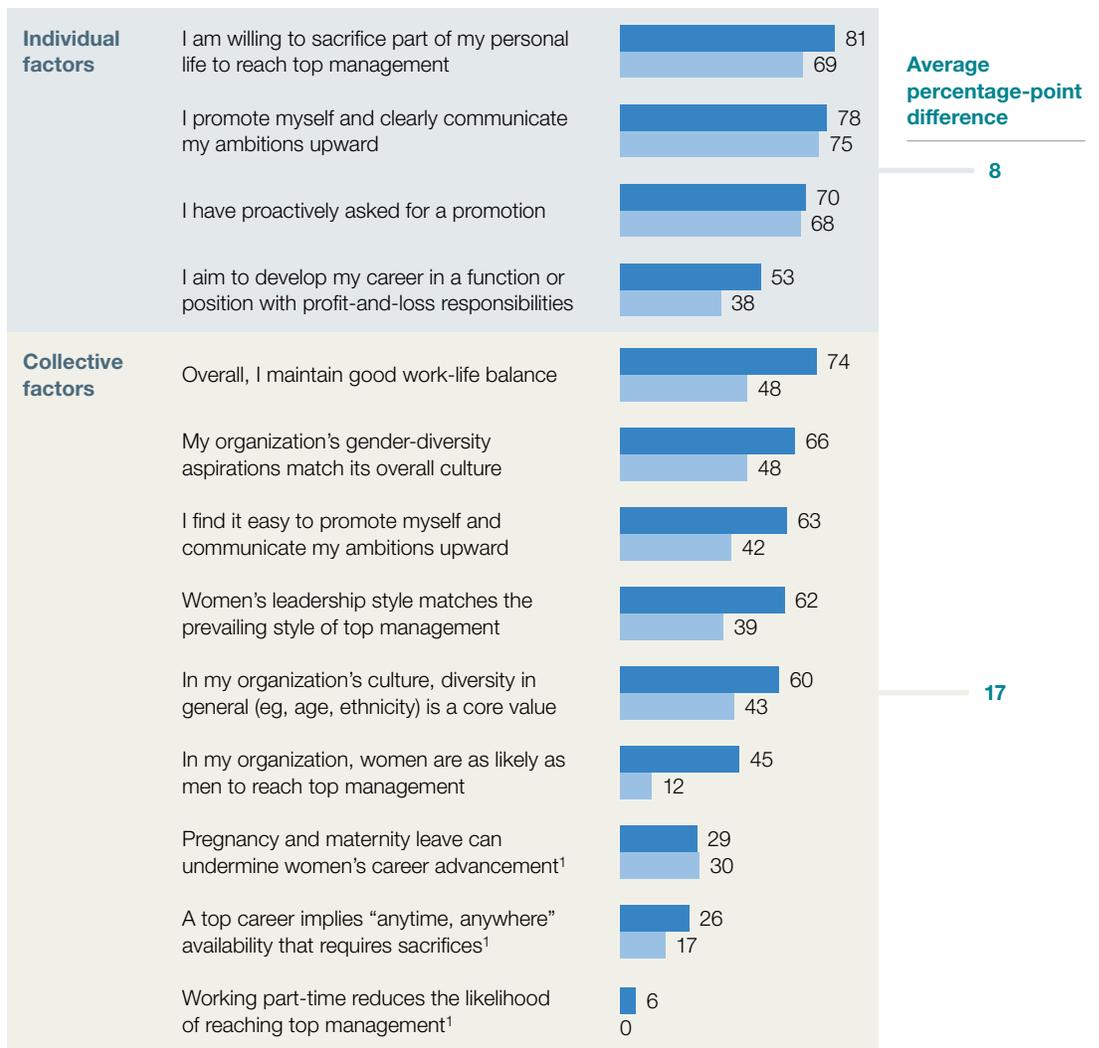


Exhibit 2

**Women’s confidence to reach top management depends more on collective corporate culture than on individual factors.**

% of female respondents who agree with the following statements

■ Confident to succeed, n = 430  
 ■ Not confident to succeed, n = 113



<sup>1</sup>To compare responses to questions that were framed in a negative way, the “disagree” responses are shown.



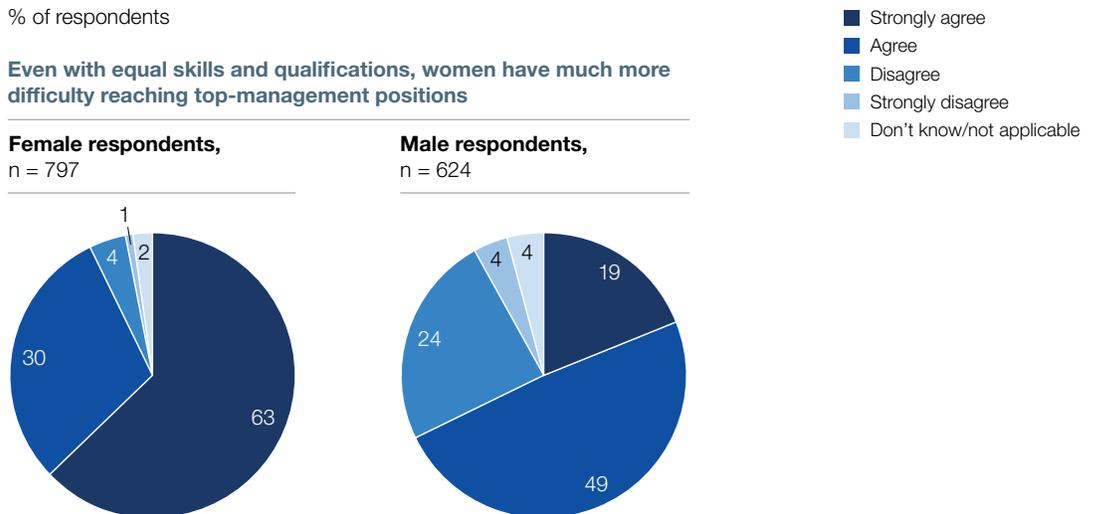
**Challenges of company culture**

Significant hurdles in corporate culture stand in the way of women reaching top management, according to respondents. One is a lower level of engagement and support on the part of men. While three-quarters of men agree that diverse leadership teams with significant numbers of women generate better company performance, fewer recognize the corporate challenges that women face. Just 19 percent of male respondents strongly agree that reaching top management is harder for women, and they are almost six times more likely than women to *disagree* (Exhibit 3).

<sup>4</sup>This result is consistent with our earlier research: when asked about the biggest barriers to increasing top-management diversity, for the fourth survey in a row, respondents most often cited the “double burden” syndrome, in which women must balance work and domestic responsibilities.

Another challenge is the performance model that many companies adhere to. Most men and women agree that a top-level career implies “anytime, anywhere” availability to work, and that this standard imposes a particularly severe penalty on female professionals. When asked whether having children is compatible with a top-level career for women, 62 percent of all respondents agree, while a much larger share (80 percent) says so for men.<sup>4</sup>

Exhibit 3  
**Men are much less aware than women of the challenges female employees face at work.**



Flexible working conditions are not necessarily the answer, though. While part-time opportunities may get more women into the company, at least 90 percent of men and women say part-time work reduces the likelihood of reaching top management. At home, women also feel less supported than men do, a difference in views that is greatest right before the C-level: 89 percent of male senior managers say their partners or spouses support their career advancement and help them manage work and family life, while 71 percent of senior-level females agree.

Last, current views on female leadership—and the behaviors that top managers should display—also pose a challenge. While nearly all male and female executives believe women can lead just as effectively as men, male respondents are not as strongly convinced (Exhibit 4). The results also suggest a lack of diversity in leadership styles: almost 40 percent of female respondents believe their leadership and communication styles don’t fit with the prevailing habits required to be effective top managers where they work.

**Moving the needle through inclusivity**

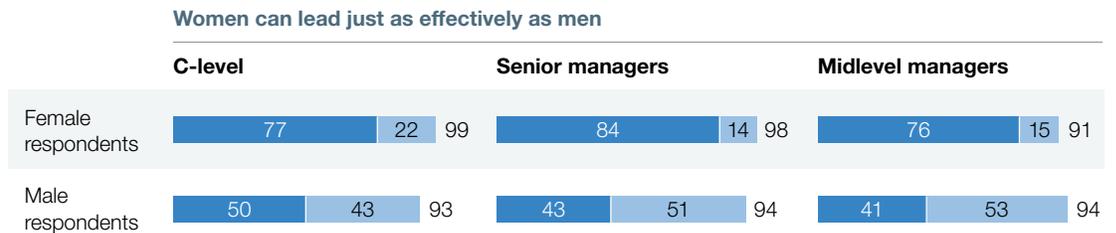
When asked about the most important drivers for increasing gender diversity at the top, executives identify two in particular: first, strong CEO and top-management commitment, and second, a corporate culture and mind-sets that support gender-diversity objectives. Along with

Exhibit 4

**At all levels, the views on leadership ability diverge by gender.**

% of respondents,<sup>1</sup> by tenure

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree



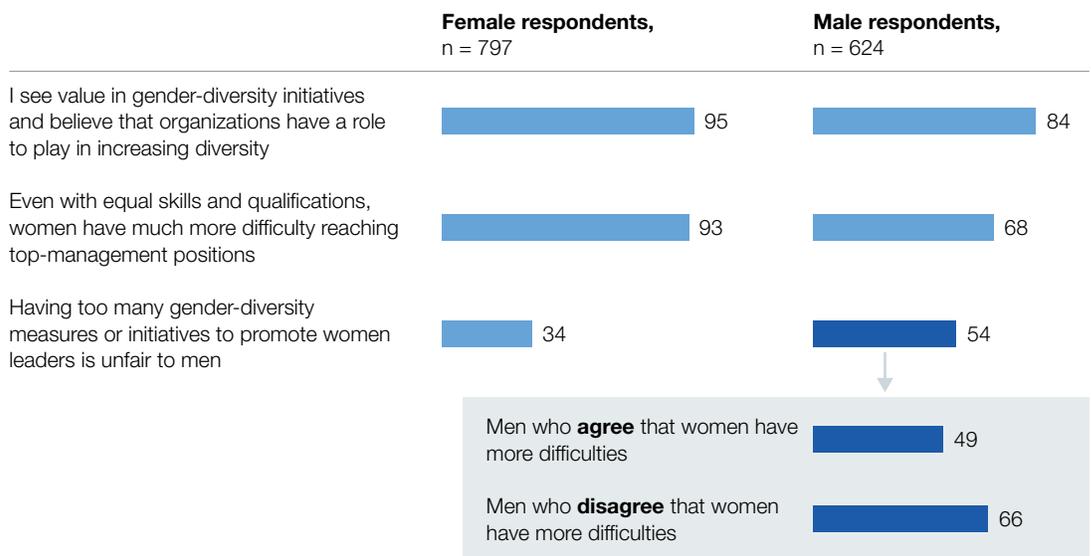
<sup>1</sup> Respondents who answered “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “don’t know/not applicable” are not shown.



Exhibit 5

**Among male executives, skepticism about gender-diversity issues still lingers.**

% of respondents who agree with the following statements



<sup>1</sup> Respondents who answered “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “don’t know/not applicable” are not shown.



our earlier research and experience, the latest survey results confirm that there is no single way to make change happen; companies need a whole ecosystem of measures. However, change starts at the top—and respondents recognize how important this leadership support is.

To implement the ecosystem approach that diversity-friendly culture and mind-sets can reinforce, a key is increasing the inclusiveness of gender-diversity programs. For many respondents’ organizations, there is a clear need to engage male executives, given that men are notably less likely than women to see value in diversity initiatives, less aware of the challenges women face, and more likely to think that too many measures that support women are unfair to men (Exhibit 5). This last belief, about unfairness, is especially common among the men who are less aware of the challenges women face. Unless more men (and men at the top) actively support a gender-diversity agenda, our experience suggests that nothing will change. Ultimately, what is good for women will also be good for men—and for corporations.



### Looking ahead

- *Increase male sponsorship.* One specific way to include more men while generating more support is through sponsorship. Professional women tend to lack effective sponsors who advocate for them and make sure they have access to all possible opportunities—a disadvantage that could lead to more women dropping out of the pipeline before they reach top management. Therefore, including more men not only as mentors but also as true sponsors<sup>5</sup> could provide more support for women *and* engage more men on the diversity agenda.
- *Diversify performance models.* Another way companies can make diversity programs more inclusive is by evolving performance and leadership models so they are more gender neutral (that is, so they offset the negative impact of maternity leave and work flexibility on career tracks). They can also use evaluation criteria that value a wide range of leadership habits and techniques. Beyond the implementation of specific measures to recruit, retain, promote, and develop women, companies need to create a corporate culture that welcomes various leadership styles.

<sup>5</sup>For more on sponsorship and the distinction between sponsors and mentors, see Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor: The New Way to Fast-Track Your Career*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013.

For more on this research, download the full report on which this survey was based, *Women Matter 2013—Gender diversity in top management: Moving corporate culture, moving boundaries*, on [mckinsey.com](http://mckinsey.com).

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