What holds women back?
Women and men's perceptions of the barriers to women's progression

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About Opportunity Now

Opportunity Now empowers employers to accelerate change for women in the workplace because it makes good business sense. We work with our membership of 350 employers, from the UK’s largest to some of the smallest in the private, public and education sectors to offer tailored, practical and pragmatic advice on workplace issues.

Opportunity Now is part of Business in the Community, a registered charity. Business in the Community mobilises business for good. Our members commit to take action on the key issues of today, be they people or planet, and create a unique platform for collaborative action.

www.opportuninynow.org.uk

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Written and analysed by Judith Cherry, Opportunity Now
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Chair’s foreword

As the chair of Opportunity Now I am passionate about the need to address the barriers to women’s advancement in the workplace. The UK’s competitive advantage is dependent on us better utilising the talents of all individuals. But the statistics are very clear – there are just not enough women in senior positions in UK organisations and the current pace of change is too slow. We simply cannot risk wasting the talents of another generation of women.

This research shows that women believe that the barriers to them progressing their careers have not diminished in the last five years; in fact some of them have increased. They see balancing work and family as the biggest barrier and the next most significant barrier is the perception of others that they are less committed to work as a result of this balancing act. As a society and an economy I believe it is vital that we find a way of better allowing individuals to raise families and fully participate in the labour market.

At Opportunity Now we have been at the forefront of promoting a more agile approach to the way work is organised. We maintain that flexible working should not be considered as an employee benefit or a begrudging adjustment for those on the "Mummy Track", but should be considered through a lens of business flexibility and a way of working that delivers tangible benefits to employers and employees alike.

This research also shows that there is still a very large gap in the perceptions between men and women when it comes to potential barriers to advancement. It is clear that many men just don’t understand what it feels like to be a woman at work. If we are to move the dial in the right direction and increase the number of women in senior roles within our organisations then we need to work on men’s understanding. Without men being actively involved in the dismantling of the barriers, progress will continue to be slow. I hope you will find the insights within this research useful. We have included a set of clear recommendations, which highlight the actions we believe employers should take. At Opportunity Now we are committed to helping employers make better use of the skills and talents of all individuals. This will in turn lead not only to more diverse organisations, but to more successful and more dynamic organisations.

Alison Platt, Chair of Opportunity Now and Divisional Managing Director, Europe & North America, Bupa
Executive Summary

This research investigates men and women’s perceptions of the barriers to diversity and women’s progression in Opportunity Now organisations. It follows up similar research conducted in 2005 and allows us to track progress over the last five years.

The most striking trend in this research is the fact that men are consistently less likely than women (in most cases less than half as likely) to recognise any of the barriers to gender diversity and women’s progression.

For example:

- Women have to balance work and family: 82% of women recognise this as a barrier but just 54% of men
- Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments: 57% of women recognise this as a barrier but just 20% of men
- Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models: 52% of women recognise this as a barrier but just 26% of men
- Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s roles and abilities: 49% of women recognise this as a barrier but just 14% of men
- Personal style differences: 48% of women recognise this as a barrier but just 21% of men

Neither the barriers nor the perception gap have diminished over the past five years and in some cases the situation has got worse. Women from Black and Minority Ethnic groups are significantly more likely than their white colleagues to experience these barriers.

The implications of failing to address this issue go far beyond the disappointments and frustrations of these women's careers. We risk wasting the talents of another generation of women and leaving the board rooms of UK organisations without the diversity of skills, talents and experiences that will enrich decision making, enhance innovation and make the UK more competitive in the future.

Organisations need to tackle these barriers through work in the following areas:

- Raising awareness
- Setting targets
- Developing leadership
- Encouraging role models
- Tackling unconscious bias
- Finding mentors and sponsors
- Giving women a voice
- Providing women with a platform
- Mainstreaming agile working

1 Line Managers and Diversity Making it Real, Opportunity Now, 2005.
Why did we conduct this research?

This research investigates men and women’s perceptions of the barriers to diversity and women’s progression in Opportunity Now organisations. It follows up similar research conducted in 2005\(^2\) and allows us to track progress over the last five years. This is timely research because, despite a decade in which gender diversity and corporate governance have been under the spotlight, women are still under represented at the top of UK organisations. Since 1999 the number of women on boards of FTSE 100 companies has increased from 7% to just 12.5% and in executive board positions they still number only 5.5%.

Opportunity Now members outperform FTSE 100 companies. Amongst all our members 22% of our boards are female. Women comprise 17% of our private sector member’s boards and 12% of their executive directors, twice the number in the FTSE as a whole. This is good news. However, at this rate of change, it will still take decades for Opportunity Now members to achieve gender balanced boards and even longer for the rest of the UK to catch up.

Table 1 Current percentage of directorships held by women\(^3\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Percentage of Directorships Held by Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Now</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTSE 100</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTSE 250</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Achieving balanced boards requires a pipeline of women progressing through the organisation. For this to happen women need to be equipped with the skills and experience to make them “board ready” and organisations need to develop a culture which recognises diverse talent and values different models of leadership. This research investigates the leaks in that pipeline. It assesses the barriers which women face at middle management level where many women’s careers stall.

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The barriers to women’s progression

The term “glass ceiling” was coined in 1984; 16 years later a combination of workplace attitudes and inflexibility still limit women’s careers and many men are not aware of them. The most striking trend in this research is the fact that men are consistently less likely than women (in most cases less than half as likely) to recognise any of the barriers to gender diversity and women’s progression.

Table 2 Barriers to progression: comparing male and female responses
Balancing work and family emerges as the most significant barrier by some margin for both genders. However whilst 82% of women recognise this as a barrier the same is true for just 54% of men.

“Some women feel exhausted by the battles they face in the workplace - especially when they chose to work flexibly to manage work/life balance. For those trying to progress there is often a lack of senior management support for promotion or development. There is also the problem of 'long hours culture'. As a wife and mother I work extremely hard to balance my time and simply cannot work excessive hours.” **Female manager**

“It is not a lack of senior or visibly successful female role models that is the barrier, but a lack of such role models who also have caring responsibilities outside work and keep a reasonable work/life balance. The women who do achieve senior positions mostly seem to all work silly hours, at the drop of a hat and don’t have young children or other commitments outside work as well.” **Female manager**

Family also features in the second most important barrier; the perception that women are less committed to work because of family commitments. In fact, with the exception of a lack of role models, the other barriers found at the top of the list are all about the way women believe that they are perceived by men at work: stereotyping of their roles and abilities and of their aspirations for promotion and the difference in their personal style which holds them back. All of these factors play a part in what is now commonly described as unconscious bias.

“The world of work has been built by men for men and therefore even women may subconsciously have a more positive attitude to males and/or male behaviour. Women are also not interested in 'playing the game' the way men do. Letting women in makes men feel deeply uncomfortable at senior levels although they would never say so.” **Female manager**

“In this business few women seem to make the jump from the historical “family mother” role to a professional person as committed to their role as the other team members”. **Male manager**

“I don’t believe there are any barriers within our organisation to women making career progress; I do however feel that there have been occasions when the wrong women have been selected for posts on the basis of bias.” **Male manager**

Two areas of risk for employers emerge from these findings. Although at the bottom of the table, one in five women believe that discrimination by line managers at the point of promotion is a barrier to progression and just over one in ten cite bullying and harassment as a barrier. Both of these have the capacity to involve managers in internal grievance procedures and, in the worst case, in employment tribunals.

“I’ve been told a number of times recently that women get ahead because they flirt their way, or sleep with their boss. Also that management pander to women because they can ‘screw up’ a man’s career very easily i.e. start an harassment case because they’re annoyed! These sorts of attitudes still exist and make it difficult for women to put up with work environments over a long period of time, meaning they don’t get promoted.” **Female Manager**
Changing perceptions from 2005 to 2010

Sadly there has been little change in women’s perceptions of the barriers since this survey was last conducted in 2005. Women are more likely to see successful female role models than in 2005 but balancing work and family seems to have become a more significant barrier in the last five years.

Table 3 Top 10 barriers to progression: comparing female responses 2005 and 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>% Female respondents agree/strongly agree 2005</th>
<th>% Female respondents agree/strongly agree 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women have to balance work and family responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s roles and abilities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal style differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s aspirations for promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of mentoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are not given the same opportunities as men to work in high risk/high reward areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of line managers to see women’s advancement as their responsibility</td>
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</table>

There has been little change in men’s views over the last five years:

Table 4 Top 10 barriers to progression: comparing male responses 2005 and 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>2005 Male Respondents</th>
<th>2010 Male Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women have to balance work and family responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s roles and abilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal style differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s aspirations for promotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of mentoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women are not given the same opportunities as men to work in high risk/high reward areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of line mangers to see women’s advancement as their responsibility</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Male respondents agree/strongly agree 2005

% Male respondents agree/strongly agree 2010
Barriers to Progression: differences between the public and private sectors

There is very little difference between the perceptions of women in the private and public sector with the exception of role models and mentoring. Women in the public sector are less likely to see the lack of role models as a barrier than their private sector colleagues but more likely to view the lack of mentors as an issue.

Table 5 Top 10 barriers to progression: differences between the private and public sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Women in Public Sector</th>
<th>Women in Private Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women have to balance work and family responsibilities</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal style differences</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's aspirations for promotion</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of mentoring</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are not given the same opportunities as men to work in high risk/high reward areas</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of line managers to see women's advancement as their responsibility</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions of women from Black and Minority Ethnic groups

Women from Black and Minority Ethnic groups are significantly more likely to recognise almost all of the barriers to women’s progression. The lack of role models is a particular barrier as is the reality of balancing work and family and also the perception of a lack of commitment due to this. Personal style also emerges as significant although BAME women are no more likely than their white colleagues to view stereotyping of their roles or aspirations as a barrier.

“A lack of senior ethnic managers also prevents equal opportunities and diversity”

Female manager

“As an Asian female it’s the double whammy” Female manager

Table 6 Top 10 barriers to progression: comparing White and Black/Minority Ethnic female responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>% White female respondents agree/strongly agree</th>
<th>% Black and Minority Ethnic respondents agree/strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women have to balance work and family responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s roles and abilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal style differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s aspirations for promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of mentoring</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Women are not given the same opportunities as men to work in high risk/high reward areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of line managers to see women’s advancement as their responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions of women working part time

Women working part time are more likely to recognise all of the barriers compared with their full time colleagues. Particularly important, not surprisingly, is the perception that they are less committed due to family commitments and also the stereotyping of their aspirations for promotion. This reflects the reluctance of many organisations to promote women working part time into more senior roles. Interestingly, they are also significantly more likely to believe that managers do not see women's advancement as their responsibility.

“Flexible hours and family responsibility are the most significant barriers I have experienced. As a highly qualified manager I am excluded from opportunities to progress on the basis that the vast majority of positions at management level require full time hours.” Female manager

“Being part time appears to stop you having any chance of promotion unless you go full time again therefore often women’s careers go on hold when they have a young family.” Female manager

“Many women are perfectly capable of progression and have the support, but they are not interested in advancement and are happy with the work life balance they have; it's not that they are constantly discriminated against.” Male manager

Table 7 Top barriers to progression: comparing women working full time and part time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Women working part time and other patterns agree/strongly agree</th>
<th>Women working full time agree/strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women have to balance work and family responsibilities</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s roles and abilities</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal style differences</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s aspirations for promotion</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of mentoring</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are not given the same opportunities as men to work in high risk/high reward areas</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of line managers to see women’s advancement as their responsibility</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions across the generations

Looking at respondents over and under 44 years old it is striking how little difference there appears to be in perceptions across the age ranges. Women in the younger age group appear to be slightly more sensitive to the perception that they are less committed to work due to family commitments but amongst the men there is almost no difference in perception. This undermines the commonly held belief that a younger generation of men in the workplace are more sensitive to equality issues.

“I believe that as a woman once you are the ‘wrong’ side of 40 you are forgotten, or not taken completely seriously should you apply for promotion or change in your career path. It sometimes feels that the ‘higher’ regional management (mostly men) think that just because you are in your 50’s that you are looking forward to retirement and that any career advancement requests are not serious.” Female manager

Table 8 Top 10 barriers to progression: generational differences among women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women have to balance work and family responsibilities</th>
<th>Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments</th>
<th>Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models</th>
<th>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s roles and abilities</th>
<th>Personal style differences</th>
<th>Stereotyping and preconceptions of women’s aspirations for promotion</th>
<th>Lack of mentoring</th>
<th>Women are not given the same opportunities as men to work in high risk/high reward areas</th>
<th>Exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence</th>
<th>Failure of line managers to see women’s advancement as their responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>women over 44 agree/strongly agree</td>
<td>women under 44 agree/strongly agree</td>
<td></td>
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5 Unfortunately the sample size at the bottom and top of the age ranges was too small to make a meaningful statistically significant comparison of responses for those under 30 and over 60
Table 9 Top 10 barriers to progression: generational differences among men

- Women have to balance work and family responsibilities
- Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments
- Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models
- Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities
- Personal style differences
- Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's aspirations for promotion
- Lack of mentoring
- Women are not given the same opportunities as men to work in high risk/high reward areas
- Exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence
- Failure of line managers to see women's advancement as their responsibility
Conclusions

It is disheartening that from a woman's perspective the barriers to her progression have diminished so little over the last five years. It is equally disheartening that the gap in perception between the men and women remains so large. The proverb which suggests that to understand a man, or in this case a woman, you need to walk a mile in his shoes is well illustrated here. Many men just don't understand what it feels like to be a woman at work. To engage men in diversity initiatives, organisations need to work on this understanding; otherwise, diversity will always be viewed as "lip service" to HR or preferential treatment. Without men actively involved in dismantling these barriers and challenging the preconceptions and stereotypes which hinder women's progression, little will change.

The top barrier to progression remains balancing work and family. It is depressing that women still pay a career penalty for having a family. Some will cite "choice" and suggest that sacrificing progression at work for a family life is an acceptable trade off but it is one that leaves organisations and the UK as a whole poorer. The implications of failing to address this issue go far beyond the disappointments and frustrations of these women's careers. We risk wasting the talents of another generation of women and leaving the board rooms of UK organisations without the diversity of skills, talents and experiences that will enrich decision making, enhance innovation and make the UK more competitive in the future.

Recommendations

Raise awareness

Effective diversity programmes require all employees to recognise the need for change and become involved. In particular, engaging men is recognised as an important pre requisite for successful change and research indicates that this is best done by building their own sense of fairness. This research is a powerful catalyst for action: showing that, whilst diversity structures and processes are in place, organisations must guard against complacency. The research shows that there is still a gulf between men and women's experiences at work. Employers should use this to generate discussion about how both men and women's behaviour is affected by gender norms and stereotyping. This will help to get men involved in changing culture rather than simply being viewed as part of the problem.

Set targets

The slow pace of change over the last few decades undermines the assumption, once commonly held, that it was just a case of women working their way up the pipeline and into the board room. This report indicates that the barriers which prevent this have not diminished in the five years since this research was originally conducted. If we are to do better over the next five years then organisations need to do more to force the pace of change. Many of the barriers highlighted in this report require behavioural changes, but experience suggests that if we rely on awareness raising and sharing best practice then the pace of change will remain glacial at best. Organisations are caught in a vicious circle: there are not sufficient numbers of women at senior levels to force a change of culture and behaviour and whilst the prevailing culture presents barriers to women's progression, there are unlikely ever to be. Targets are a way of breaking out of this circle and forcing the pace of change. Meaningful targets for the recruitment, retention and development of women send a clear message that diversity is a business issue which should be measured, accounted for and remunerated in the same way as other business issues.

Leadership

Leaders play a key role in setting the culture of an organisation. Leaders need to be vocal and visible in their support of diversity and in their challenge to unacceptable behaviours. Even more importantly they must display more inclusive leadership behaviours such as recognising the strategic importance of diversity to the business, being open to change, valuing people and valuing difference, being aware of their own unconscious biases, and being able to inspire and lead others to do the same.

Role models

Leaders also have an important part to play in finding and supporting female role models. The lack of female role models reflects a lack of women at the top. But there can also be reluctance among those women who have made it to speak up. Leaders can help with the latter issue by personally inviting women to play a more active role in gender diversity in their organisations and publically supporting their decision to do so.

Tackle unconscious bias

Many of the barriers in this report are a manifestation of what is now commonly termed unconscious bias: the assumptions and attitudes which shape all of our behaviours without us even realising it. For example stereotyping of roles and abilities emerges as an important barrier. Thus, where women are frequently stereotyped as warm and friendly and leaders are stereotyped as tough and strong, women will find it hard to progress, as will men who do not fit the mould. This benefits neither women nor organisations.

Tackling unconscious bias in organisations can be a powerful lever for change. It allows organisations to move away from polarised and pejorative debate about discrimination to a discussion of fairness and inclusion, recognising, for example, that a different question would have revealed just as much unconscious bias from the female managers in this research as they perceive is displayed by the male managers.

Many organisations have undergone unconscious bias programmes and training, designed to raise awareness among individuals of their own bias and how this impacts on their behaviour. This is most effective when undertaken by senior leaders first and then cascaded through the organisation. This work needs to be underpinned by longer term work on developing inclusion competencies in the organisation. Binna Kandola in his work on eliminating bias in organisations identified the key inclusion competences to be:

- Developing people
- Valuing individuals
- Championing diversity
- Strategic diversity focus.

Mentors and sponsors

Lack of mentoring emerges as a key barrier. Research indicates that mentoring systems are likely to work in different ways for women and men. Women are likely to have mentors who act as coaches and provide a sounding board, whereas men are more likely to have mentors who act as sponsors and take responsibility for championing their advancement through an organisation. Mentoring schemes could be more effective if they were assessed according to the success or failure of senior male mentors in supporting their women mentees into senior positions. This is already done at IBM, where it is explicit that women mentored under the FTSE 100 Women at
the Top scheme should be promoted within a year, and accountability mechanisms are invoked if this has not happened. This does not restrict the choices available to those making board appointments, but it does make it more attractive for those holding power to advocate for women.

Give women a voice
One way of changing behaviour is to personalise people’s understanding of the issue – facts and figures about women’s progression in an organisation may not break through, where an understanding developed through a personal story will. There is a range of evidence from employers that creating spaces for women and men to speak about their experiences within an organisation can be transformative in developing understanding and changing attitudes. Reverse mentoring programmes for example, enable senior managers to personalise their understanding of the barriers that more junior colleagues from underrepresented groups face.

Provide women with a platform
Women have the skills and competencies to progress into senior leadership positions. However often they just don’t get noticed. For women with agile working patterns, visibility is even more problematic. Providing women with a platform to demonstrate their abilities is vital. Mentors acting as sponsors can help with this. Encouraging women to get involved in extracurricular activities to raise their profile is also important. Women’s networks have a role to play, where they provide the chance for women to meet and work with senior leaders they would otherwise not come into contact with. Most important however is to make sure that diversity and balance is considered when managers are allocating work and pulling together project teams. Agile workers in particular often miss out on high profile opportunities. Providing managers with support and guidance to manage agile working effectively so that all team members contribute and can be recognised is vital, as is a clear articulation from senior managers of the business case for a good gender balance of skills, experience and perspective, and a willingness to challenge those who regularly sideline female talent.

Mainstream agile working
Balancing work and family remains the top barrier for women. Research indicates that women still retain primary responsibility for managing care and domestic arrangements. However there are some signs that this is changing. As men start to take on more of these responsibilities, this juggling will also act as a barrier to their careers, unless employers radically change their attitude to agile and flexible working.

Opportunity Now research indicates that employers and employees will never reap the potential benefits of agile working whilst it is viewed as an employee benefit rather than a fundamental rethink of the way we work. Organisations who have successfully embedded agile working have changed the way work is organised; shifting focus from jobs to tasks and from individuals to teams. This promotes clarity and transparency about the way that work is organised and provides managers with far more flexibility of resourcing. This approach, which recognises that many employees can and should work flexibly, offers the best chance of moving flexible working away from “the Mummy Track” to a new way of working that offers better results for both individuals and employees.

Resources for employers
Opportunity Now provides many resources for tackling the challenges raised by this report. Please visit www.opportunitynow.org.uk

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Methodology and profile of respondents

This survey replicates a question in previous Opportunity Now research conducted in 2005\textsuperscript{12}. The survey was posted on the Opportunity Now website from July to early September 2010. Opportunity Now employers were invited to distribute the survey link among 200 male and 200 female middle managers. Middle managers were defined as those in the first or second level of management with line management and some delegated HR responsibilities. 857 managers responded.

Employment Sector
- 49% from the private sector
- 41% from the public sector
- 10% from the Not For Profit sector

Gender
- 43% were male
- 57% were female

Working pattern
- 84% work full time
- The remainder worked mostly part time or compressed hours

Ethnic group
- 95% classify themselves as White British and Other white background
- The next largest Ethnic group was Asian Indian at 2%.

Age
- 18-29 years – 5%
- 30-44 years – 49%
- 45-60 years – 44%
- Over 60 years – 2%

Disability
- 3% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability

\textsuperscript{12} Line Managers and Diversity: Making it Real, Opportunity Now, 2005.
Opportunity Now is part of Business in the Community

We inspire, engage, support and challenge companies on responsible business, working through four areas: Marketplace, Workplace, Environment and Community. With more than 850 companies in membership, we represent 1 in 5 of the UK private sector workforce and convene a network of global partners.

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