Rewriting the rules: a guide to closing the gender gap in 2021

JUGGLE GUIDE

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Contents

Introduction

This paper examines the gender gap and self-promotion in detail, exploring the reasons why women are still underrepresented in leadership roles. Here we present findings of research that has been conducted into how men and women are rewarded differently in the workplace, in turn shattering the illusion that women are simply "not very good" at self-promotion.

We then outline our recommendations of how companies and aspiring leaders can take practical steps to shift away from seeing self-promotion as a leadership attribute. We suggest a more conscious and objective framework for promoting male and female leaders.

Finally, we explore what this all means in the context of COVID-19: how the working landscape has changed and the impact this has had on the gender gap. This section will discuss the link between flexible working and gender diversity, and the predicted demise of presenteeism.

Although we write this from years working in and observing the business landscape, we believe the framework applies to any leadership structure.

Female leaders today
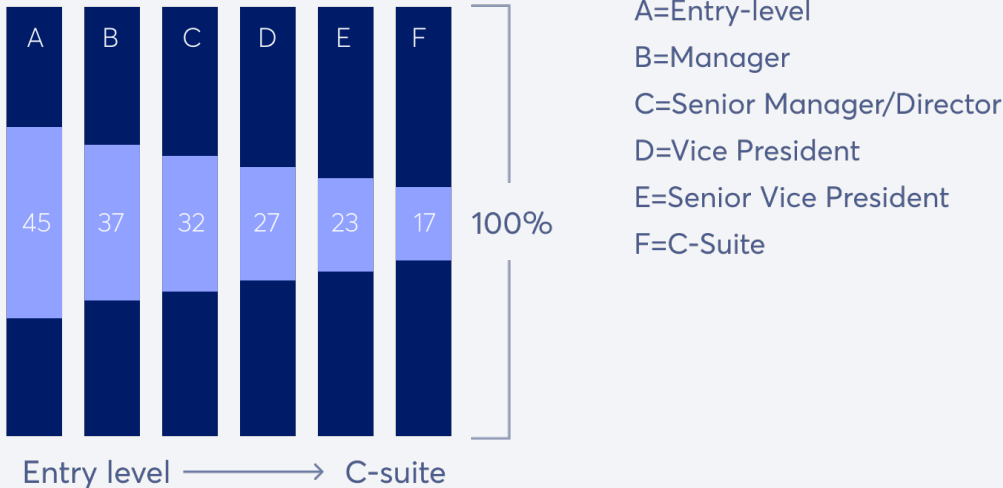
Where we are in numbers

Gender diversity is still a boardroom issue in most companies today. Progress has been made to some extent due to the ongoing work of activists. The 30% Club, for example, is a group committed to achieving a <u>30 percent share of women on boards for FTSE 350 companies</u>, which they achieved in 2019 - up from 9.5 percent in 2010 when the group was founded. In most other sections of the corporate hierarchy however, progress has been unforgivably slow.

> **"Thirty per cent is the number at which a minority group starts to become heard and considered – that target is our floor, not our ceiling."**
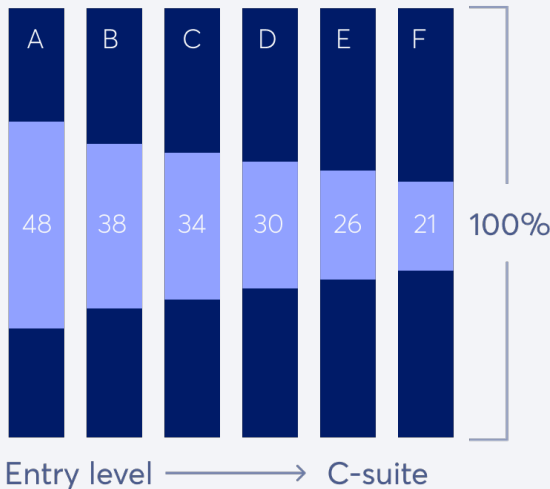>
> **- Ann Cairns of the 30% Club**

Representation of women by level, % of employees

Women in 2015

A	B	C	D	E	F
45	37	32	27	23	17

100%

Entry level ⟶ C-suite

A=Entry-level
B=Manager
C=Senior Manager/Director
D=Vice President
E=Senior Vice President
F=C-Suite

Women in 2019

A	B	C	D	E	F
48	38	34	30	26	21

100%

Entry level ⟶ C-suite

Source: 2019 McKinsey & company and LeanIn.org Women in the Workplace study

"It's clear that more fundamental action is required if we are to successfully close the gap in 10, not 100 years."

- Romanie Thomas

The 100 year gap

Despite efforts from activists and serious boardroom conversations, the gender gap remains stubbornly large. It is clear that more fundamental action is required if we are to successfully close the gap in 10, not 100 years.

None of us will see gender parity in our lifetimes, and nor will many of our children. That's the sobering finding of the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, which reveals that gender parity will not be attained for 99.5 years.

WORLD
ECONOMIC
FORUM

The landscape in the world of private, fast-growing companies is much worse. Female founders received just 2.8 percent of venture capital funds invested in 2019 and decision-makers within these funds were 90 percent male (Source: Pitchbook/Tide/Carta).

In the UK, female-led startups get just 1p of funding for every £1 invested by venture capitalists, research commissioned alongside the 2017 Budget found.

The role that institutional structure and attitudes play in perpetuating the gap

Yet the female leaders that we see today in the spotlight are thriving - captured here by Forbes' now-famous headline earlier this year during the Covid-19 crisis.

If women are succeeding on the world stage when they get there, what is preventing more of them from reaching that point in the first place?

A large portion of the answer lies in what we would categorise as structural reasons: working patterns, childcare and home labour. This paper deals with reasons relating to attitudes; namely the perceived qualities of leadership and how that in turn negatively impacts gender diversity.

The input needed to change structures and attitudes can collide, but it is the latter that proves harder to shift. For example, although governments can take firm measures on forcing companies to report on their gender pay gap, **without an attitudinal shift we see high levels of non-conformity and misreporting.**

> **"When you are a mother and a founder, if you drop the ball on one thing you can feel like everything is spiralling out of control. It's not! Women — the only way to do it all is by remembering you're human and mistakes are normal."**
>
> **- Anouk Agussol, Founder and CEO of Unleashed**

Women and self-promotion

Are women worse at self-promotion?

A prevalent argument amongst leaders, male and female, is that men are far better at self-promoting than women. As self-promotion is widely seen as critical to achieving greater levels of seniority, the onus is placed on women to improve their self-promotional skills in order to achieve career progression.

An important way in which this manifests is when women ask for promotions and salary increases. Recent studies reveal that women do ask for advancement, they just don't get it, and one HBR study shows that men rate their performance 33% higher than equally performing women.

This demonstrates that the problem is not that women don't self-promote, but that in comparison to men they are always going to be underestimating their performance. An HBR piece titled "Why Women Stay Out of the Spotlight At Work" identified a few pressures that affect how women self-promote at work, which are unrelated to character. We have summarised them here:

1. Unfair risk-avoidance

While those surveyed recognised that being less visible made a promotion less likely, they were more concerned that going against social norms could lead to greater penalisation. This was after seeing female colleagues receive backlash for acting assertively.

2. Parenthood

Women, and especially women with children, disproportionately shoulder household tasks. Most women assumed that by keeping a low profile at work they would have more freedom to manage their home and childcare responsibilities.

3. Personal taste

Most women preferred a leadership style centred on mission and community, rather than self-promotion.

Early in their careers, women do self-promote, but they can quickly learn that this behaviour is not rewarded with a promotion in the same way that it rewards their male counterparts, and consequently they tend to retreat and stop doing it. The answer is not for women to become better at self-promotion - to encourage women to hone a

skill that will not serve them well in today's environment feels counterproductive.

The real answer lies in recognising talent without self-promotion. This isn't a straightforward task in our modern working society, where shouting loudly about one's achievements has become the norm. By understanding why and how self-promotion continues to have a hold on what we characterise as good leadership, we can begin to unravel the gender gap in business leadership.

"One of the criticisms I've faced over the years is that I'm not aggressive enough or assertive enough, or maybe somehow because I'm empathetic, it means I'm weak. I totally rebel against that. I refuse to believe that you cannot be both compassionate and strong"

- Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand

The role that gender plays in leadership attributes

A fascinating study conducted in 2018 demonstrates the issue well. It discovered that women and men in C-level roles both tend to display what the researchers considered as typically 'masculine' traits, such as extroversion, autonomy and 'emotional stability'.

Below is a table of leadership qualities that Cornell University entitled, "Women Take Care, Men Take Charge: Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed". The study showed that certain behaviours are associated with "taking care" and others with "taking charge", while some sit in between. The study further found that "taking care" behaviours are often stereotyped as feminine, whereas "taking charge" behaviours are often stereotyped as masculine.

Leadership Behaviour	Feminine 'Take Care'	Neutral	Masculine 'Take Charge'
Consulting Checking with others before making plans that affect them.	✔		
Delegating Authorising others to have substantial responsibility and discretion.			✔
Influencing Upward Affecting others in positions of higher rank.			✔
Inspiring Others Motivating others towards greater enthusiasm for, and commitment to, work by appealing to emotion, values, logic, and personal example.	✔		
Intellectually Stimulating Exciting the abilities of others to learn, perceive, understand or reason.		✔	
Mentoring Facilitating the skill development and career advancement of subordinates.	✔		
Monitoring Evaluating the performance of subordinates and the organisational unit for progress and quality.		✔	
Networking Developing and maintaining relationships with others who may provide information or support resources.	✔		
Planning Designing objectives, strategies, and procedures for accomplishing goals and coordinating with other parts of the organization.		✔	
Problem Solving Identifying, analysing, and acting decisively to remove impediments to work performance.			✔
Rewarding Providing praise, recognition, and financial remuneration, when appropriate.	✔		
Role Modeling Serving as a pattern standard of excellence to be imitated.		✔	
Team-Building Encouraging positive identification with the organisational unit, promoting cooperation and constructive conflict resolution.	✔		
Supporting Encouraging, assisting, and providing resources for others.	✔		

In the highlighted, connected boxes (see influencing vs inspiring, and delegating vs team-building) **we can see that men's behaviour makes them more visible to the decision-makers, whereas women focus more on the success of their team.** Both approaches have merit and good leaders have strong skills in all of these areas, but as a society we reward people who are more visible and manage their own brand effectively, meaning that the masculine approach will be noticed more frequently than the female approach.

Please also remember that when someone's behaviour goes against a stereotype, it is often criticised and can face backlash. The solution here is not only should leaders be trained and developed in all of the above skills, but companies also need to construct frameworks to assess people that are not reliant on bias, stereotypes or gut feelings.

The "double bind" dilemma

The "double bind" dilemma is when women are perceived to demonstrate too many "take care" behaviours, which are considered passive. Yet, if they are perceived to demonstrate too many "take charge" behaviours, they're considered too harsh. The takeaway here is you are "damned if you do, and damned if you don't".

Two crucial factors exacerbate the double-bind dilemma:

1. **Female leaders are still more highly scrutinised and less trusted than men, which is holding them back.**

2. **Perceived good leadership qualities have historically been labelled as 'masculine'.**

As a woman, when you display these 'masculine' traits, rather than being seen as a leader, you're judged for being too authoritative,

power-hungry or not 'nice' enough (Elizabeth Warren being a good example of this). On the flip side, demonstrating 'feminine' qualities such as compassion, kindness, empathy, which are crucial to leadership, does not earn respect from the decision makers, because they are less visible qualities. Role models such as Jacinda Ardern have helped to welcome in a new style of leadership, one that celebrates more feminine qualities. As these qualities become more recognised and more valued in companies, we could start to see a shift in the number of women progressing to middle management and beyond.

And thankfully, growing calls for women to be more self-promotional are likely to continue. For example, Sallee Poinsette-Nash of Brandable & Co has launched a campaign called #StopUndersellingYourself. Aiming to reach a million people in a year through the internet and social media, campaigns such as these could be part of a paradigm shift toward society accepting feminine self-promotion.

> "One of the biggest issues is that you get so many people that don't fall into neat categories of typically male or typically female. It's those people that need greater inclusivity."
>
> - Sallee Poinsette-Nash. Founder of Brandable & Co.

The misperception of risk-taking in women

Risk-taking is a highly visible activity. It is about sticking one's head above the parapet, and a true example of leadership, which is consequently rewarded. Studies have shown that people perceive women to be less inclined to take risks than men, but in fact, their appetite is no different. A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences reveals that risk appetite has nothing to do with our biological sex, but is about our surroundings. Their research found that when given the opportunity, young girls may be even more prone to risk-taking than boys. Given the right environment, women are as innovative and bold as men are perceived to be.

Actionable steps

Collecting data

There's something about 'collecting data' that sounds a little sinister - but when addressing the gender gap doing so can be the difference between success and failure. Without a systematic view of how women in an organisation are working, leaders may rely solely on anecdotal feedback — and these are always at risk of being tainted by bias.

As mentioned earlier, a survey can be effective. Furthermore, a simple tally of how all the women and men currently in your business are working can provide vital information. Are far more women currently working flexibly, on furlough, or on unpaid leave? If so, what do you think this means in terms of company policy? Are these numbers positive, or indicate that something needs to change?

It may also be prudent to conduct an intersectional breakdown of the business — that is, also recording how those of differing race, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion work differently. You may find that certain sub-groups within your organisation are disproportionately bearing the brunt of unpaid leave, for example. But for our purposes, it is most important to see how these factors interplay with being a woman in a professional setting.

Even if your business is small and you can't complete a broad-brush analysis of different sub-groups in this way, knowing how the personal life of employees affects them at work, especially post-pandemic, is crucial. Doing so will allow you to make more informed decisions about how well the business is supporting them and their needs.

Re-imagining what leadership looks like in companies is critical

In order to close the gap, companies need to evaluate which leadership traits are being recognised, measured, and rewarded. This needs to be consistent when hiring new recruits as well as when promoting internally. The checklist below provides the start of this framework:

1. **Who are the leaders in the business**

2. **Write down their top 5 leadership characteristics**

3. **Who are the managers in the business**

4. **Write down their top 5 leadership characteristics**

5. **Who has developed quickly within the company**

6. **What leadership characteristics do they have**

7. **Who has stagnated (management and/or leadership)**

8. **What leadership characteristics do they have**

By going through this process companies will start to build a clearer understanding of what is actually noticed and rewarded in the business. The goal here isn't to build on a certain set of leadership qualities, it's not about creating homogeneity or diversity, it is simply to understand what the individual business perceives to be "good" because that is the behaviour that is rewarded. Only by understanding this can companies really identify where the decision making is grounded in facts (high performance, genuine value), and where it is rooted in bias.

A fairer approach to promotion

In order to work towards a more equal workforce, where a broader range of leadership qualities co-exist, companies need to put in place a process to measure and reward fairly. Behaviours need to be codified, so that new employees are interviewed with those traits in mind, and understand what is expected of them from day one. This behaviour needs to be reinforced throughout the organisation consistently, so that people know certain traits will be systematically rewarded.

For example, delegating without team-building may be identified as a negative leadership attribute that organisations wish to avoid, as it can result in high churn due to staff being thrown in the deep end without enough support or structure. If leaders continue to manage

in this way after the leadership behaviour has been communicated as a negative, they need to be given guidance and direction. Without recognition that a behaviour isn't accepted in the organisation nothing will materially change.

> **By creating a more conscious and objective process, companies are able to move away from the fallibility of human bias**

This works in reverse too. Companies may decide that inspiration will play an important role and part of their business success will depend on the ability to hire the very best creative people. As a consequence, the ability to inspire others to be part of a movement becomes an increasingly important characteristic. As these traits are recognised and rewarded, this will become a respected part of the cultural fabric of the organisation. By creating a more conscious and objective process, companies are able to move away from the fallibility of human bias, where we rely on individuals to self-promote in order to recognise them in the way they deserve.

Juggle survey on gender equality

Juggle has 9,000 professionals and more than 700 businesses in its community. Here's their take.

76% have leadership teams that are majority male.

71% said the burden of homeschooling and childcare was the main factor contributing to women disproportionately losing more jobs during to the pandemic.

82% thought offering flexibility was the key approach companies could take to combat the massive job losses that women are facing.

Part 4:

Post-COVID 19

COVID-19 has only made things more difficult

A recent McKinsey analysis showed that women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable during the coronavirus pandemic than men's: in the US in December, women accounted for 100% of job losses. In the UK, women are 33% more likely to work in a job that is shut down due to lockdown. At the same time, they bear the burden of unpaid healthcare and childcare. This setback follows a five-year period in which progress toward equality in work and society has progressed very little.

The reasons for this are multifactorial. Women are statistically more likely to work in roles that have been hit hardest by the restrictions, whilst the closure of schools and nurseries often leave women handling more than their fair share of childcare. Indeed, research shows that women are four times more likely to leave their job because of caring responsibilities. And once a role is left, the state of the economy makes it difficult to re-enter the workforce.

What actions can be taken now to re-address gender imbalance?

The fight to improve gender imbalance has never been under such pressure, with coronavirus adding another level of resistance to change. Still, here are some initial steps that all firms could take right now:

1. Survey

Finding out who has childcare responsibilities and the home set-up of your employees and colleagues is a great starting point - a simple Q&A is the obvious place to begin.

2. Check-in

People in professional settings are often not forthcoming about issues they're having at home for a number of reasons. Often, it will require line managers to proactively initiate conversations about how childcare (for example) is going, and whether staff members need more support.
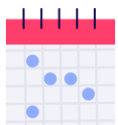
3. Offer flexibility

Flexibility is a simple, yet effective solution. Your team will benefit from additional working flexibility to help them juggle responsibilities — perhaps, for example, an hour off to eat with children in the evening. These kinds of solutions can help reduce stress and bolster productivity.

4. Reallocate work

Businesses could offer to reallocate work to help reduce the burden on those with childcare responsibilities, even temporarily. For example, offering a part-time solution may provide the staff member with the much needed work-life balance they need.

5. Acknowledge your own biases

Studies have shown that even women are more likely to view other women who self-promote as less competent. Upending these prejudices starts within the self, so begin looking for it. And if you're in a position of power, why not consider starting or expanding your unconscious bias training program?

Yet, there have been some upsides

Despite all this, the significant shift towards flexible working since the pandemic is a very promising sign. This change has been adopted by even the world's largest organisations; Mark Zuckerberg now expects half of the Facebook workforce to do their jobs from home and more flexibly within the next decade.

The link between flexible working and making women's working lives easier and more productive is well-documented. The post-pandemic implementation of flexible work will hopefully continue longer-term and for employers who trust their staff there is no reason that it shouldn't.

However, the change must be implemented across the board — for men too. If the shift is more focused around women, there is an ongoing risk that they will continue to bear the brunt of non-work

duties. This is seen at every level, even nationally. As the chair of the parliamentary Women and Equalities Committee Caroline Nokes <u>notes</u>, **"institutional thoughtlessness" has led to government policies being "repeatedly skewed towards men", leaving women's careers as a secondary priority to men's.** This is particularly seen in maternity and paternity leave, where mothers are allowed 52 weeks compared to a father's 2. Such inequalities inevitably create a scenario where mothers are less likely to return to work, whilst fathers are able to continue their careers as normal.

Remote working and inclusion

The connection between remote work and inclusion seems obvious, but still requires explanation. In terms of hiring, remote working has geographic benefits. For example, it can open up roles based in high-rent areas (e.g. London) to those that need to base their life where cost of living is more affordable. Similarly, and as mentioned, it can allow those with childcare responsibilities to be more present at home, cut out commuting time, and more easily balance work and life. Remote working has given employers the opportunity to be more innovative and inclusive in their recruitment, and this needs to be a priority for every company in 2021.

The switch to remote work can also create unexpected opportunities for inclusive behaviour. Indeed, communicating from one's home allows for more expressions of personality and vulnerability. By discussing, for example, their home office set-up over video call, staff may be more open and forthcoming about the challenges they are facing in relation to work or their personal lives.

Similarly, daily calls amongst members can lead to greater communication — staff tend to use a more 'take-it-in-turns' approach on video calls, compared to office meetings where the

loudest voices prevail. The most effective company cultures will realise these emotional, geographical and inclusion-oriented benefits of remote working and augment them in the post-COVID world.

A results-oriented approach

With the right processes flexible working arrangements tend to create working cultures focused on results. If an employee is not in the office or bound by a rigid 9-5 working structure, what they produce and achieve becomes the focus, and this creates goals-orientated management style.

This has a triple benefit for women and men. Firstly, it may allow them to fulfil their roles on their own terms, and at times when they are more productive. More importantly, it can result in a more objective and fair promotion culture, where those who are actually deserving are able to progress. For women who are overlooked simply because they are less inclined to relentlessly self-promote, this is a definite win.

Employees feeling pressured to work for hours and not for outcomes presents a challenge for organisations and employees.

Finally, it can allay concerns about an "always on" culture that many are concerned is encouraged by remote working. With clear goals and targets in place, employees are more motivated to complete their assigned tasks, tick them off their list, and make time to unwind and relax. With the dramatic increase in people working from home, compartmentalisation and a work-life balance are more important than ever. Employees feeling pressured to work for hours and not for outcomes presents a challenge for organisations and employees. A future centred around clear outcomes is therefore one we would all benefit from.

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About The Authors

Romanie Thomas

Romanie is the CEO and founder of Juggle. She started Juggle to resolve the huge gender gap in leadership roles by giving professionals access to flexible working. Today, less than 10% of business leaders are women and her vision is to grow this percentage to 50% by 2027. Romanie has spent almost four years at Juggle deeply embedded in the world of gender diversity and flexible working, and prior to this, placed hundreds of business and technology leaders into companies around the world during her career as an Executive Headhunter.

Emma Jackson

Emma Jackson is a coach for people in the creative and tech industries, having pivoted careers two years ago in order to help people solve the problems caused by modern living in fast-paced environments. With a stint in a government department and a deep background in technology and advertising, Emma is well-placed to understand the issues facing ambitious bright workers. Diversity and inclusion is a life-long interest for Emma and she supports any company with a focus in this area. She continues to do so with investment of time or finances, pro bono work, or access to her network.

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