

July 2019

# viewpoint

## Women at work: as a multinational can you create a workplace where women can truly thrive?

Diversity in the workplace is as big an issue today as it has ever been, as multinationals look to provide equal opportunities for all, reaping the clear benefits it brings to business performance. While diversity is about providing equal opportunities for everyone based solely on talent, potential and ability, the topic of gender equality at work – with a focus on female employees – was the subject at our Women of Work event in Paris this June.

As well as being the key topic of our event, equality for women in the workplace continues to be a widely discussed global issue and regularly makes headline news, mainly for the fact that there is still some way to go.

Just last month it was revealed by the inaugural sustainable development goals (SDG) Gender Index that not one country in the world is set to reach gender equality standards by 2030. These somewhat shocking findings came from a new index created by the Equal Measures 2030 partnership and signed up to by 193 countries in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Also, according to the Index, 2.8 billion women and girls are living in countries that aren't doing enough to improve the lives of women.

These findings are particularly worrying, given that it is 2019 and the issues of gender equality and equal pay have been enshrined in law for over 50 years in many developed countries. The fact that the Index has been set up and organisations are drawing attention to the still staggering gender equality gap is fantastic news, the fact that it is still required, perhaps less so.

The glass ceiling, male dominated organisations and unequal pay are much talked about subjects when it comes to workplace equality, and how to close the gender pay gap and offer equal opportunities at work remains high on the agenda for everyone.



And this has been reflected in recent national government policy as well. In 2017 the UK implemented “gender pay gap reporting” legislation that made it a legal requirement for businesses with more than 250 employees to report the pay differential between their male and female employees<sup>2</sup>— many still do not and there is reason to believe the pay gap has grown since first reported.<sup>3</sup> In 2018 the

French government unveiled an action plan for gender equality in the workplace.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly in the US, a law recently suspended a rule that would compel firms to report similar data to the government.<sup>5</sup>

With roles changing, we are all living and working longer than ever before, and more women are in work, addressing gender equality

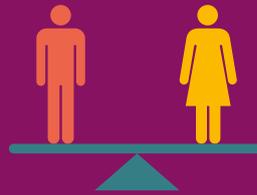
shouldn't just be left to governmental policy. Organisations need to create policies and have goals to create better gender balance in all areas, leaders need to work continuously towards those goals and employees need to understand that their business is working to improve gender equality and be encouraged to do their part.

“...women face an 'uneven playing field' when it comes to the workplace.”

## What do gender diversity and equality actually mean?



Gender diversity is equitable or fair representation of people of different genders. It most commonly refers to an equitable ratio of men and women, but may also include people of non-binary genders.<sup>6</sup>



Gender equality is a political concept that emphasises equality between genders. Gender equality is typically defined as women and men enjoying the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities within all areas of life.<sup>7</sup>

## Getting it right from the start

Defining diversity and equality in the workplace is not an easy task and while no one should be nervous of tackling this issue, ensuring your business leaders know and understand the difference, is vital, if you are to succeed.

Speaking at our Women at Work event, Head of Inclusion and Diversity at Sanofi, Wema Hoover explained why the multinational pharmaceutical company decided to switch the focus to inclusion, rather than diversity.

“I realised I was never going to get a common definition of diversity as it is personal and depends on a person's background, experience, who they've been exposed to and their cultural awareness. We lead with inclusion because it is easier to define for most and if you create an inclusive work environment, all forms of diversity will rise, not just gender diversity.”<sup>8</sup>

## Reality vs perception

Before making any company-wide efforts to redress the gender imbalance, it is worth businesses finding out about the perception of gender equality in their own organisation. McKinsey & Company's Women in the Workplace report showed there could be a difference between what employers and employees think when it comes to their intentions for gender equality.

More than 90% of companies asked said that they prioritise gender (and racial) diversity because it leads to better business results, yet only 42% of employees think that their employer prioritises gender diversity.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, our own research on women at work has shown that there may be a need for organisations to better educate their staff on gender equality. 65% of our 1,000 respondents believe that equal pay is equivalent to workplace equality.<sup>10</sup> If only it was that simple!

The McKinsey & Company report says that women face an “uneven playing field” when it comes to the workplace. “They get less day-to-day support and less access to senior leaders. They are more likely to deal with harassment and everyday discrimination. They often feel the added scrutiny that comes from being the only woman in the room. And understandably, they think it's harder for them to advance.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite this, nearly a quarter (23%) of men we surveyed believe there are no barriers to gender equality in the workplace, compared to just 14% of women who think the same.<sup>10</sup>

“65% of our 1,000 respondents believe that equal pay is equivalent to workplace equality. If only equal pay meant gender equality.”

## 5 ideas for tackling the uneven playing field

While there is no 'quick fix' for making an organisation more gender diverse and there isn't a blueprint that works for every business, there are a few things that can be done to begin addressing some of the key problems that cause the uneven playing field women face in the workplace.



### 1. Set diversity targets and be accountable to them

As well as legal targets and government defined goals, setting internal ambitions is a great way to improve representation of women in more senior positions. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency, a statutory agency of the Australian government, believes that organisations should set voluntary, realistic targets, taking into account their individual circumstances, to help progress towards a more gender equal workforce.<sup>11</sup>

Wema Hoover has a similar view. She explained that Sanofi has the aim of a 50/50 representation of men and women in their senior leadership positions by 2025 and the first key action to achieving this was launching an external communications campaign stating their commitment so they can be held accountable by the market. As well as this, they also communicated their ambitions internally so that everyone in the business is aware of the goal and can track and measure successes.<sup>8</sup>

"Sanofi has the aim of a 50/50 representation of men and women in their senior leadership positions by 2025 and the first key action to achieving this was launching an external communications campaign..."



### 2. Educate and engage your leaders to avoid unconscious biases

Managers and leaders are undeniably vital in driving any organisational change, whether that is a corporate strategy or diversity and inclusion. Our research found that 20% of people think that unconscious bias towards women in the workplace is the greatest barrier to workplace equality.<sup>10</sup> And it's hard to deny that often this bias stems from the top of an organisation.

And while unconscious bias is hard to quantify and track after the fact, by educating leaders to understand the importance of gender equality and avoid these biases, organisations can drive the changes. McKinsey & Company's report says, "until leaders at all levels understand the problem, are trained to help solve it, and are held accountable for making progress—in other words, until companies require that leaders treat gender diversity like any other business imperative—it will be hard to achieve lasting change."<sup>9</sup>



### 3. Provide leadership opportunities for women

The second greatest barrier to workplace equality, according to our survey, is that there are too few senior female role models.<sup>10</sup> Speaking at our Women at Work event, Maria Morris, Board Member at S&P Global and Wells Fargo and former Executive Vice President – Head of Global Employee Benefits and Global Relationship Management at MetLife, addressed the issue of an underrepresentation of women in leadership.

"If you think about the role of leaders, we are there to pull good talent forward and take risks to do it ... I believe it requires creativity to pull some people forward ... for example, understanding their leadership capabilities and perhaps placing them in roles a little earlier than they might be ready for them or better said, in roles that on paper, they are not 100% right for."<sup>12</sup>

Building up a pipeline of female talent throughout the organisation is important too. Whether this is through mentorship schemes or development programmes, women with high potential need to be identified and given the opportunity to develop their leadership skills so they are ready to take the step up when a promotion opportunity does arise.

Maria Morris shared that she did this by creating leadership tables that included the heads of all functions. She said "In a recent role, I had the benefit of building a new senior leadership table. Diversity around the table was critical to me and not surprisingly, we created a leadership table with 50% men and 50% women. I ended up finding that, although many of the women started in more stereotypical female-dominated roles, they were now 'at the table' and could aspire to roles that they would never have aspired to before... plus they developed at the table as equal decision makers."<sup>12</sup>



#### 4. Make the hiring process fairer

And this type of action is crucial as shown by research that shows women are unlikely to apply for a position unless they meet 100% of the requirements, while men will apply if they meet 60% of the requirements.<sup>13</sup> To help attract a diverse range of candidates, it is also important for employers to consider how job descriptions are being written and how CVs are being judged in the hiring process.

According to Glassdoor, there are a few ways to write job descriptions that are more likely to attract a diverse range of candidates, such as:

- using a language analysis tool to help avoid gender biased words
- avoiding superlatives like “world-class” and “superior” as they are likely to turn off female candidates who are more collaborative than competitive
- limiting the number of requirements to those that are actual “must-haves” and separating those that are “nice-to-haves”.<sup>14</sup>

And once you have a diverse pool of applicants, how you judge candidates is important. Maria Morris said looking at “the how” as well as “the what” when interviewing and reviewing applicants is important. She shared that by looking at how someone achieved a target or completed a task, rather than simply looking at what someone has achieved, you are then able to identify leaders with transferable skills, widen your talent pool and have more options for vacant positions.<sup>12</sup> Moving towards these more competency based interviews, rather than purely achievement based, you can judge candidates based on their skills and their potential.



#### 5. Employee benefits

Of course, the benefits you offer are also vital for attracting and retaining talented women. We covered the topic of tailored employee benefits packages for women in our Viewpoint in March and discussed the need for flexibility, both in terms of maternity leave, care leave and remote, non-standard hours of working. This flexibility is particularly important, given that women still tend to be primary care givers for children and elderly relatives. In 2018, 41% of women in UK employment were working part-time compared to just 13% of men.<sup>15</sup>

This is something that Wema Hoover also highlighted when discussing Sanofi’s approach to closing its gender gap in leadership. “We have implemented a global flexible work approach in two parts ‘flex from work’ which was about extending our family leave. It is now just known as ‘family care leave’ which encompasses maternity, paternity and family care leave to support all who need it. There’s no norm in family so everyone needs the time to support their loved ones. The second part of that is ‘flex at work’ which is about empowering our employees to work flexibly and having global guidelines for our business on flexible work.”<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, Sanofi’s approach enables both women and men the opportunity for flexibility and extended family leave. Ensuring that family leave is seen as ‘normal’ for all can help to remove the stigma and the idea that a career break to care for family is damaging to progression and could help to level the playing field for all – men and women alike – as discussed in our April 2017 Viewpoint on unconscious bias in the workplace.

“Whether this is through mentorship schemes or development programmes, women with high potential need to be identified and given the opportunity to develop their leadership skills so they are ready to take the step up when a promotion opportunity does arise”.

While there may be no blueprint for easily improving gender equality in business, the fact that the conversations around this all-important subject are happening is a promising start. Maria Morris said “Talking about publishing gender equality and pay statistics is fantastic but changing the numbers is hard. Changing the outcome is about doing lots of what seem like little things: staying focused on finding high potential diverse talent at all levels, investing in their development and then persistently advocating for them, exposing high potential people to stretch assignments and your leadership table when they more junior so they can develop and get visibility, to name a few... And some final advice for women leaders - we need to continue to take the time to network with each other and build each other up.”<sup>12</sup>

Given the clear business benefits to having a gender balanced organisation, every multinational should be striving for parity and equality of opportunity for every employee within their business, where people are evaluated based on their talent and potential alone.

### Advice for young women hoping to succeed in the corporate world

We asked a panel of successful women what one piece of advice they would give to a 21-year-old entering the workforce, based on their experiences in the world of work.

**Wema Hoover,  
Sanofi**

“If you have the option to take ‘path A’, which is familiar, or ‘path B’ which is unknown but is going to give exponential growth and development opportunities, take ‘path B’. When opportunity knocks, you have to take the leap.”<sup>8</sup>

**Maria Morris,  
Board Member at S&P Global and Wells Fargo**

“I would say believe in yourself. At 21, I don’t think I had the confidence that I have now. If I did, I believe I would have had less hardship getting to where I am today.”<sup>12</sup>

**Nicola Fordham,  
MAXIS GBN**

“I would tell them the statistic about men going for jobs despite only meeting 60% of the requirements. I would tell them that they should just go for it and take the risk.”<sup>16</sup>

**Benedicte Bernaux,  
AXA Research Fund**

“I would definitely give the advice to ask for promotions and for training and not wait to be offered to do something.”<sup>17</sup>

**Karen de Paoli, Aon France**

“I would advise to seek out a woman mentor as it is useful to help get over some self-doubts you may have as a young woman in business.”<sup>18</sup>

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  - 2 Mercer <https://www.uk.mercer.com/our-thinking/explaining-the-uk-gender-pay-gap-reporting-regulations.html> (sourced June 2019)
  - 3 BBC News, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-47252848>(sourced June 2019)
  - 4 Emmanuel Benard, Adélaïde Jomier and Léa Ghoreychi <http://www.mondaq.com/france/x/782744/Employee+Benefits+Compensation/Closing+The+Gender+Pay+Gap+In+France+Get+Ready> (sourced June 2019)
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  - 8 Wema Hoover, Global Head of Inclusion and Diversity, Sanofi, speaking at MAXIS GBN Women at Work event in Paris, 6 June 2019
  - 9 Women in the Workplace 2018, McKinsey&Company
  - 10 MAXIS GBN research, conducted by Citigate Dewe Rogerson, May 2019
  - 11 Australian Government, Workplace Gender Equality Agency <https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/setting-targets> (Sourced June 2019)
  - 12 Maria Morris, former Executive Vice President at MetLife and current Board member at S&P Global and Wells Fargo, speaking at MAXIS GBN Women at Work event in Paris, 6 June 2019
  - 13 Tara Sophia Mohr, Harvard Business Review <https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified> (sourced June 2019)
  - 14 Glassdoor <https://www.glassdoor.com/employers/blog/10-ways-remove-gender-bias-job-listings/> (sourced June 2019)
  - 15 Women and the Economy, House of Commons briefing paper, 8 March 2019
  - 16 Nicola Fordham, Director of Underwriting at MAXIS GBN, speaking at MAXIS GBN Women at Work event in Paris, 6 June 2019
  - 17 Benedicte Bernaux, Research Business Partner in Health at AXA Research Fund, speaking at MAXIS GBN Women at Work event in Paris, 6 June 2019
  - 18 Karen de Paoli, Global Benefits Practice Leader at Aon France, speaking at MAXIS GBN Women at Work event in Paris, 6 June 2019

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