
Women in Leadership Survey Analysis

We recently conducted a survey to gain insight into which factors are connected to the experience of women in the workplace, especially as it relates to leadership and a healthy workplace culture.

Our research shows that there continues to be gaps in gender experiences and expectations when it comes to leadership. We also found evidence that when organizations are committed to equal gender representation in leadership, their employees are happier and the organization is more successful.

Our Research Approach

In our survey, we invited people to respond to 20 statements on a five-point scale, choosing between Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. A full list of the statements can be found at the end of this article.

We collected responses by displaying the survey on our website, sharing it on social media, and emailing our clients and contacts. We did not use a randomized sampling method, so our results cannot be generalized to the broader population within a certain margin of error. However, we believe the results are *practically* significant even though they are not statistically significant. This means the results have produced valuable information and insights into the experience of women in the workplace as it relates to leadership. While we cannot say that our results accurately reflect the opinion of the general population, we can say that they reflect the diverse opinions of the 774 people who completed the survey. Of the survey participants, 93% identified as women; 6% as male; and the remaining 1% as transgender, non-binary/queer, two-spirit, or questioning/I don't know.

Summary of Findings

A strong majority of respondents reported that they believe equal gender representation in leadership is important: 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that equal gender representation was important, while only 13% were neutral, and only 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Our survey data also showed that 68% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with the number of women in leadership roles in their organization.

To our surprise, of people who strongly agreed that equal gender representation in leadership is important, **only 28% strongly agreed that their organization is committed to equal gender representation.** This seems to indicate that, although the workplace may have women in leadership roles and people are satisfied with that number, they still have much work to do in stating and demonstrating their commitment to actively supporting gender equity.

In addition to the quantitative data, we also reviewed a set of qualitative responses. In our review, three main themes emerged that broadened our understanding of women's experience of leadership in the workplace and gave further context to the quantitative data.

First, **when workplaces have women in leadership positions, it should not be assumed that their experiences are the same as their male counterparts.** This highlights the important distinction between *equality* and *equity*. Equality ensures equal pay, equal representation, and equal access to opportunities; equity moves beyond equality to recognize that women have unique perspectives and experiences, and that this uniqueness is actually beneficial. One survey respondent stated, "Women are different, so we need to find value in women expressing different leadership styles."

Second, **gender biases make it difficult for women to know how to behave in ways that advance them in leadership.** Many respondents stated that leadership advancement for women resulted in a catch-22: if they were to choose certain leadership behaviours such as assertiveness, they risked being perceived negatively by those around them. But if they did not choose to be assertive, they would not advance in leadership. One survey respondent stated, "Often it seems that women who are assertive and 'deal' with things are seen as aggressive or 'mean.' The same behaviour by a man is seen as 'assertive' and taking action."

Third, **gender equality is not only a women's issue.** It was clearly stated by respondents that these leadership stereotypes limit all genders and that creating equitable workplaces will require everyone to work together, regardless of gender. As one survey respondent stated, "We must move away from the practice and believe that gender parity in leadership can only be reached through the us-vs-them divide that keeps us from progressive, healthy movement forward."

Empathy, Attractiveness, and Assertiveness Mean Different Things for Men and Women

Our survey data showed that empathy is seen as helpful for both men and women, but more helpful for women. Precisely 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that empathy helps men advance in leadership, while 47% agreed or strongly agreed that empathy helps women advance in leadership. Attractiveness was mainly seen as helpful for women given that 27% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed attractiveness helps advance men to leadership positions, while 41% agreed or strongly agreed that attractiveness helps women.

Assertiveness is believed to be helpful for both men and women, but it is seen as more helpful for men – 73% agreed or strongly agreed that assertiveness helps men advance to leadership positions, while 63% agreed or strongly agreed that assertiveness helps women.

Organizational Responses to Sexual Harassment Matter

Of those who agreed or strongly agreed that leaders in their organization respond to sexual harassment effectively, 65% also agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture. Of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that leaders in their organization respond to sexual harassment effectively, only 17% agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture.

Equal Gender Representation Drives Better Results

Below is a snapshot of the people who strongly agreed that their organization is committed to equal gender representation in leadership:

- 88% agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture.
- 84% agreed or strongly agreed that they have opportunities for leadership development.
- 86% agreed or strongly agreed their team works well together.
- 92% agreed or strongly agreed their organization is successful.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, 91% agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with the number of women in leadership. However, as noted earlier, only 68% of respondents in the total sample reported they were satisfied with the number of women in the workplace.

Lack of Gender Representation Produces Poor Results

Below is a snapshot of the people who strongly disagreed that their organization is committed to equal gender representation in leadership:

- 12% agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture.
- 19% agreed or strongly agreed that they have opportunities for leadership development.
- 39% agreed or strongly agreed their team works well together.
- 38% agreed or strongly agreed their organization is successful.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, only 23% agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with the number of women in leadership. However, as noted earlier, 68% of respondents in the total sample reported they were satisfied with the number of women in the workplace.

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Equal Gender Representation Contributes to Healthy Workplace Cultures

We found that a **healthy workplace culture and having women in leadership are linked**. Of those respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with the number of women in leadership, 60% also agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture. Of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are satisfied with the number of women in leadership, only 29% agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture.

Similarly, **we found that a healthy workplace culture and organizational commitment to equal gender representation in leadership are also linked**. The survey data showed that of those who agreed or strongly agreed their organization is committed to equal gender representation in leadership, 68% agreed or strongly agreed that their organization also has a healthy workplace culture. Of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed their organization is committed to equal gender representation in leadership, only 18% agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture.

The responses in **our survey highlighted the importance of a healthy workplace culture in both the success of the organization, and how well teams work together**. Of the respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture, 95% agreed or strongly agreed their organization is successful. However, only 41% who disagreed or strongly disagreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture stated that their organization was successful. It is worth mentioning that, of those respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture, 89% agreed or strongly agreed their team works well together. However, only 39% of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed stated that their organization has a healthy workplace culture.

In addition, of those respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture, 96% agreed or strongly agreed that they are engaged at work versus only 67% of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that their organization has a healthy workplace culture. This aligns with the research ACHIEVE revealed in 2019, which highlighted the impact of healthy workplace culture on supporting employee engagement. A full explanation of this research can be found in our book, [The Culture Question: How to Create a Workplace Where People Like to Work](#).

Workplace culture is critical in our efforts to promote employee engagement, and as our survey on women in leadership demonstrates, part of a healthy workplace culture includes not just gender equality but also an organizational commitment to gender equity.

Conclusion

Our findings from the Women in Leadership Survey demonstrate that gender representation in leadership matters. **Organizations should focus their efforts and commitment to equal gender representation as part of their strategy for creating and maintaining healthy workplace cultures.** They must recognize that there is still a gap between leadership expectations for men and women, and they must work to address that gap. Leaders must state their commitment to equal gender representation and act on it.

Workplaces that are committed to equal gender representation have happy, satisfied employees and teams that work well together. They have healthy workplace cultures. We believe, and survey participants suggest, that organizations who are committed to equal gender representation will outperform their peers and ultimately have a much greater chance of living out their mission and achieving their vision.

Full list of survey statements:

1. My direct supervisor cares about me as a person.
2. Leaders in my organization communicate the organization's purpose in meaningful ways.
3. Leaders in my organization care about healthy interactions between employees.
4. My organization has a healthy workplace culture.
5. I believe it is important to have equal gender representation in leadership.
6. I am satisfied with the number of women in leadership roles in my organization.
7. Being empathetic helps women advance in leadership positions.
8. Being empathetic helps men advance in leadership positions.
9. My organization is committed to equal gender representation.
10. I have opportunities for leadership development in my organization.
11. Communicating assertively helps advance women to leadership positions.
12. Communicating assertively helps advance men to leadership positions.
13. Being attractive helps advance women to leadership positions.
14. Being attractive helps advance men to leadership positions.
15. Leaders in my organization work to resolve conflict quickly.
16. My team works well together.
17. My organization is successful.
18. Leaders in my organization respond to sexual harassment effectively.
19. I am confident in my own leadership abilities.
20. I am engaged at work.

We thank each of our survey participants for their time and insights.

For inquiries regarding our research, please email us at info@achievecentre.com or give us a call at 1-204-452-0180.