

Up, Out or Different?

The Career Dilemma for UK Women

An in-depth study to get to the heart of what triggers burnout with professionals in UK businesses, identifying trends across family set-ups, industries and seniority of position, as well as offering key insights for employers on preventative approaches to burnout.

FULL RESULTS

with foreword by Helena Morrissey, CBE

Foreword

HELENA MORRISSEY, CBE

CEO, Newton Investment & Founder of 30% Club

In the 18 months since Lord Davies' report and the two years since the launch of the 30% Club, I've witnessed something of an epiphany in British businesses over the topic of women on boards. It's now widely recognised that encouraging and enabling women to progress at every level of a company is good not just for those women but for businesses themselves.

While we still need to work hard to achieve real balance, the pace of change is significant, and importantly, of course, it's been achieved without resorting to the short term and illusory fix of a quota. I'm strongly of the view that if change is to be meaningful, businesses must own and lead the efforts – that way is the only way to achieve sustainable, long term positive changes in corporate culture, more opportunities for women and better results for all.

It's important that this commitment to change comes from the organisations themselves but also that women have the chance to have their say in what this change should look like. This is about making companies a better place to work for everyone, and asking women how they think this can happen is a good place to start.

Everyday Talking Talent work with women across ages, levels and industries, to tackle the barriers to their career progression. By undertaking this survey they sought to benchmark the themes they are seeing throughout their coaching overall. The results offer an insight into the present situation for women in the workplace, as they see it, and their thoughts on future solutions and it gives us a pathway for change that is overwhelmingly unanimous: women from their twenties to seventies, at different levels and in different industries are in agreement on what they believe are the challenges and solutions.

In receiving over 2,500 responses, the research offers a robust understanding of what the needs of these women are, and therefore a high potential value for the UK businesses willing to invest in them. If businesses can be as clear in their actions in these areas for change as the women surveyed are in choosing them, real progress can continue to be made.

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Up, Out or Different?

THE BACKGROUND

The female talent pipeline within UK business has been the subject of much recent scrutiny, especially since the launch of the Lord Davies Report in February 2011.

Mostly, we see gender parity at graduate level, but women's career progress currently narrows to a virtual standstill in the upper echelons of senior management.

Although non-executive appointments have seen a marked improvement, the current level of 6.6%¹ executive board positions filled by women marks slow progress from 5.5% in 2010.

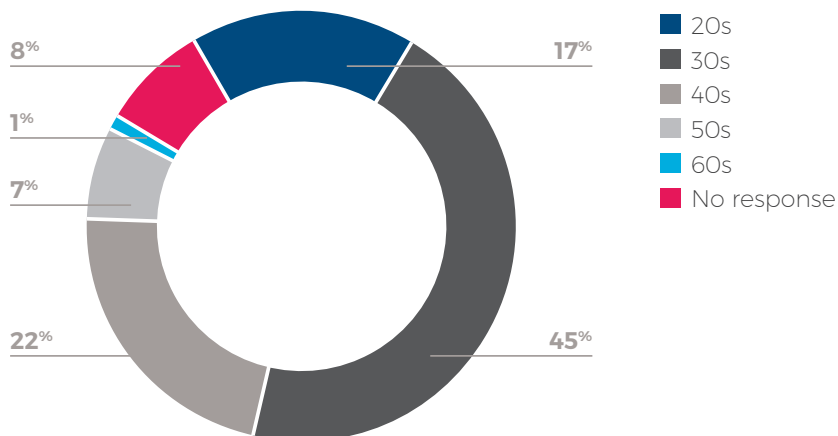
THE RESEARCH

This study sought to further understand the narrowing of the female talent pipeline. Over 2,500 UK working women completed the online survey during June and July 2012. Responses were received from working parents and non-parents, across a range of ages, levels and industries.

The questions asked the women to tell us their key career 'pinch points' - the specific barriers that have prevented or are expected to prevent their career progress, the issues they feel impede progress, and also the skills and support they feel are necessary to help overcome those barriers.

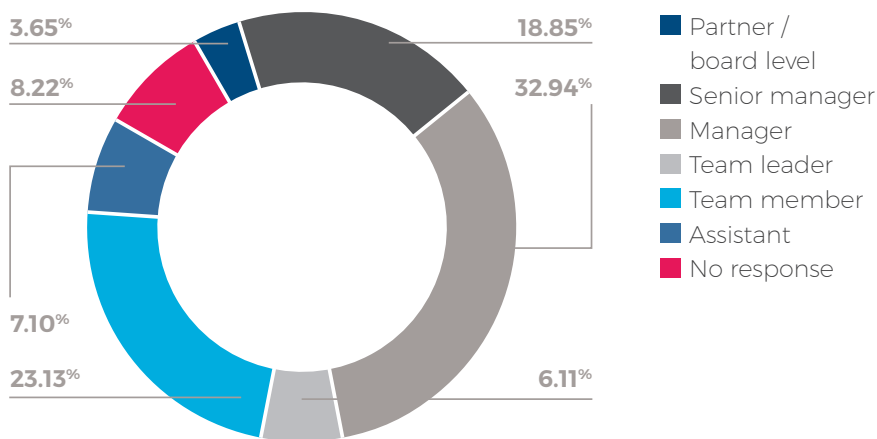
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WHAT IS YOUR AGE

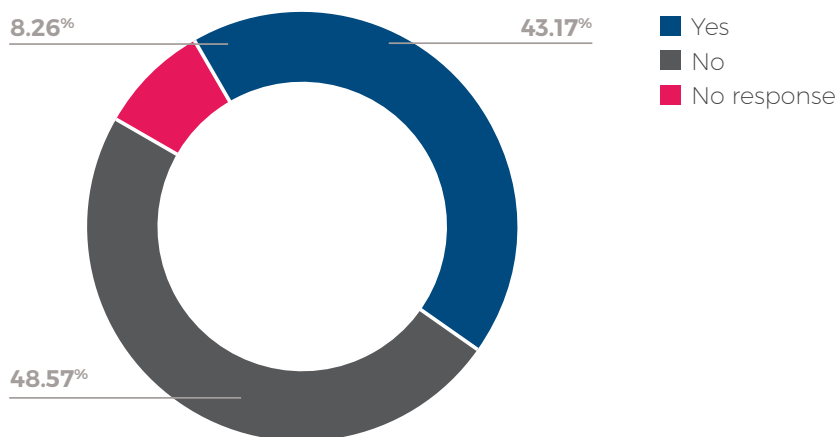


Up, Out or Different?

WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL?



ARE YOU A WORKING PARENT



¹6.6% exec board directors in FTSE100 Boardwatch, Sept. 2012. <http://www.boardsforum.co.uk/boardwatch.html>

The Top Pinch Points

WHICH OF THESE PINCH POINTS (PAST OR FUTURE) DO YOU FEEL PRESENT(ED) SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO YOUR CAREER?



The Top Pinch Points

The most significant pinch points identified as barriers or potential barriers to career progression are:

1. CAREER CROSSROADS: DECIDING BETWEEN UP, OUT OR DIFFERENT.

Of those responding, almost 50% consider career crossroads as a significant barrier to career progress; being the number-one barrier across the age ranges and the majority of levels.

This signals that respondents are considering whether their career will best benefit from progressing up (promotion), out (changing company) or by pursuing a different career altogether. For our respondents to consider this as a barrier, the research suggests a deeper trend of on-going evaluation of career choice, career path and pacing on offer, as well as the level of support provided by managers.

Respondents are seemingly weighing up career options, regularly assessing their career paths and establishing what their own or other organisations can offer. Evaluating choices made, future progress and the confines of certain career paths or working cultures seems significant.

Even those respondents in their twenties, in the earlier stages of career development, ranked this and it shows that a barrier does not have to have been directly experienced for its impact to be recognised.

2. MATERNITY TRANSITION – NAVIGATING MATERNITY / EXTENDED LEAVE, INTEGRATING NEW RESPONSIBILITIES.

This was the second most significant pinch point, with 45 % of all respondents identifying this as a barrier.

Maternity is viewed traditionally as the biggest issue in a woman's career so to some extent this is not surprising. For those respondents who have been through the maternity transition it was the most significant barrier to career progress.

The significance of maternity was recognised by the majority of women responding, regardless of parental status. Working parents identified it as the lead pinch point, but it also featured prominently for those without children in their 20s and 30s, showing that they are considering its potential future impact.

50% consider career crossroads as a significant barrier to career progress.

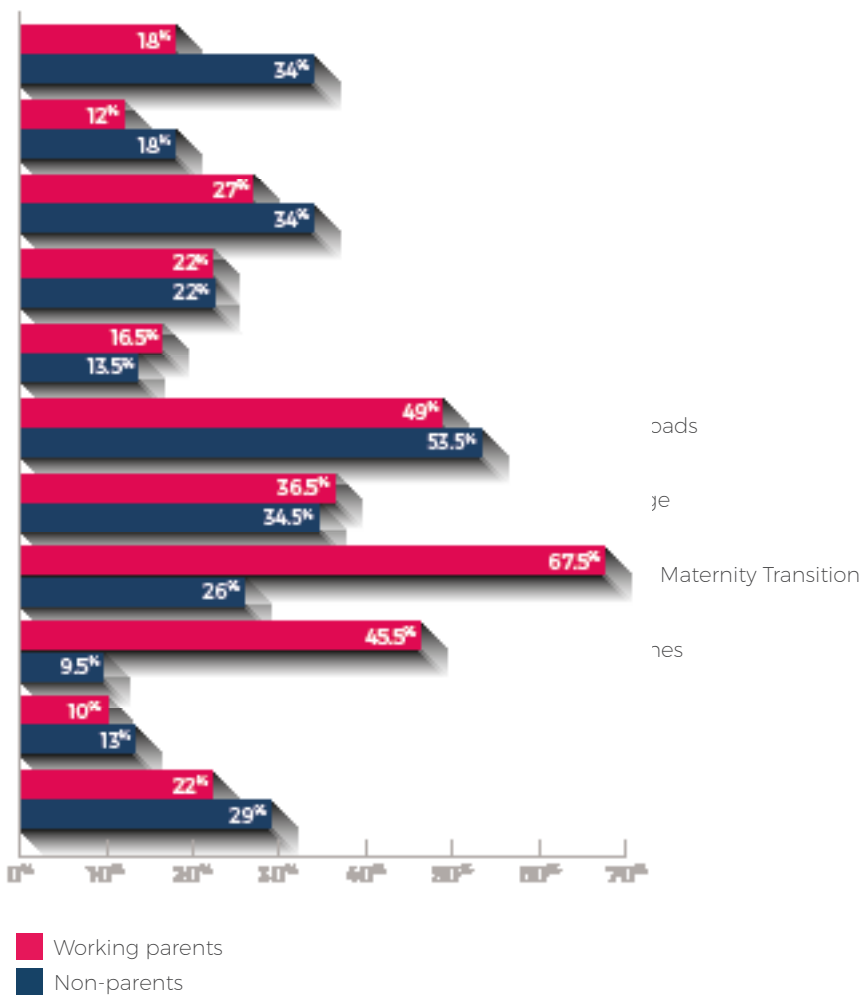
Maternity is the second most significant pinch point.

The Top Pinch Points

3. SIGNIFICANT BUSINESS CHANGE – E.G. RESTRUCTURE, RELOCATION, REDUNDANCY.

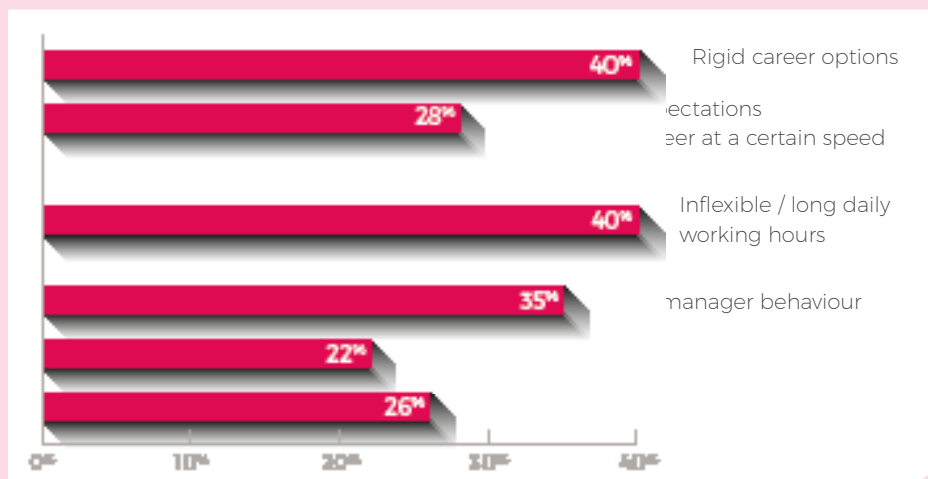
The third-ranked barrier, put forward by 35% of respondents, is focused more externally and is perhaps a reflection of the continuing economic pressures, the recent global recession and its on-going effects.

WHICH OF THESE PINCH POINTS (PAST OR FUTURE) DO YOU FEEL PRESENT(ED) SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO YOUR CAREER?



Top issues impeding career progress

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ISSUES DO YOU FEEL IMPEDE YOUR CAREER PROGRESSION?



Rigid career structures, inflexible and long working hours stand firm as obstacles in the career pathway of the women in our survey. A remarkable 88% of all women responding flagged rigid career options and / or inflexible working as an influence and barrier to their career progression.

The challenge is felt at all ages but peaks for women in their 30s (71% of this segment highlighted rigid career options; 79% inflexible / long working hours) but the majority of those in their 20s have also highlighted these areas, even if perhaps their full impact has been as much seen as felt. These areas remain barriers to progress well into women's 40s when additional parenting milestones add to the desire for flexibility and choice.

Segmenting the data further, the impact is most felt by working parents, for whom the inflexible or long working hours comes out as the main issue just ahead of rigid career options. For nonparents the results showed rigid career options and line manager behaviour as an almost equally strong challenge.

So the need for greater flexibility in approach to the pacing, timing and nature of a woman's careers seems to grow ever stronger, run ever deeper into UK organisations. The view of Generation Y is now well publicised but the research reinforces the need to address their concerns. Which company will take the leap of faith to make a difference, to show themselves as true leaders in offering a flexible career plan?

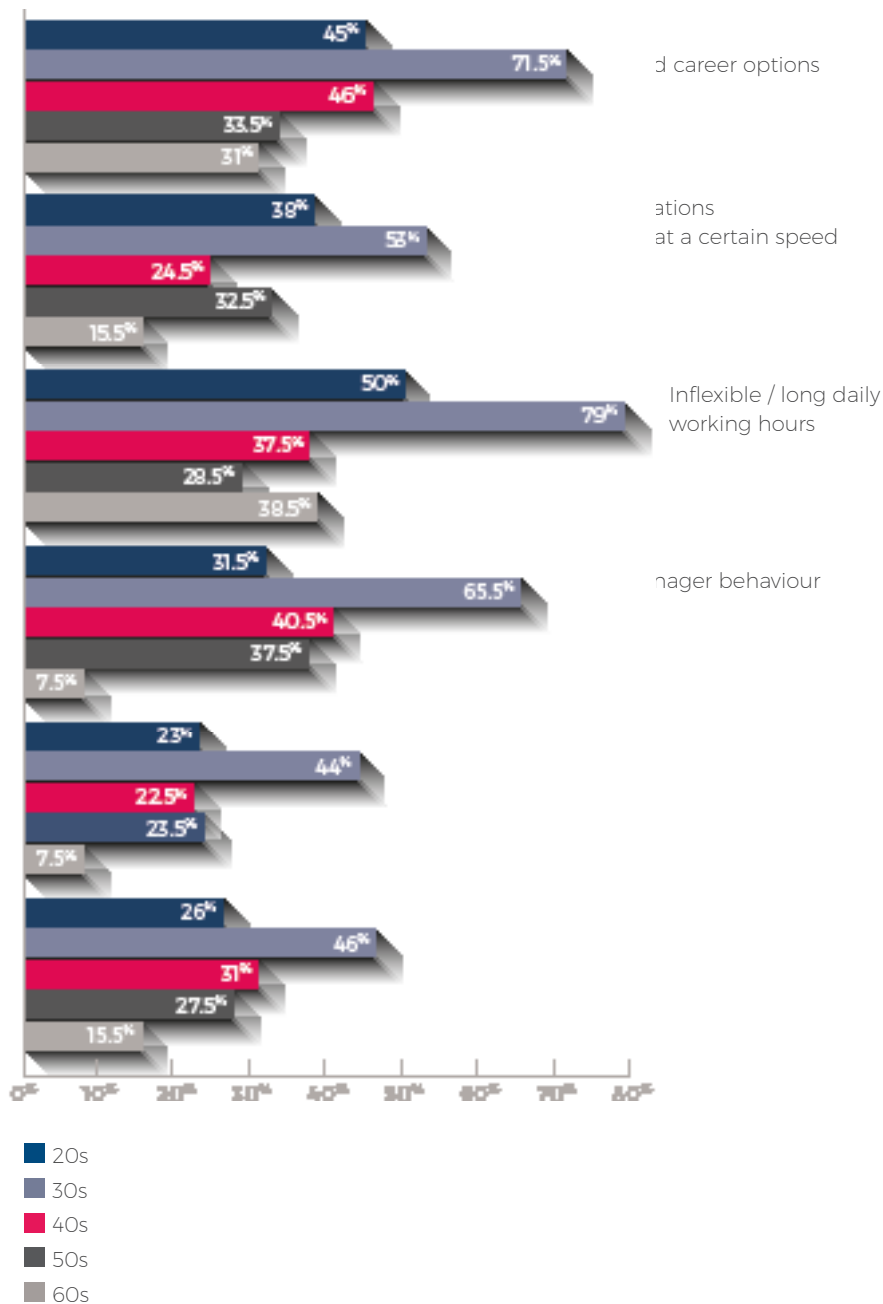
Flexible working is offered more frequently but inflexible / long daily working hours are still an issue according to the research. This is about far more than policy but rather a true integration of culture, policy and practice in line with a reality of what it means to everyone (managers and employees alike) day in, day out. Right now, rigid career paths and lack of flexibility is translating into in or out and, as a result, is failing to offer choices which engender loyalty and offer valued career progression.

Rigid career structures, inflexible and long working hours stand firm as obstacles.

Top issues impeding career progress

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ISSUES DO YOU FEEL IMPEDE YOUR CAREER PROGRESSION?

RESULTS BREAKDOWN BY AGE

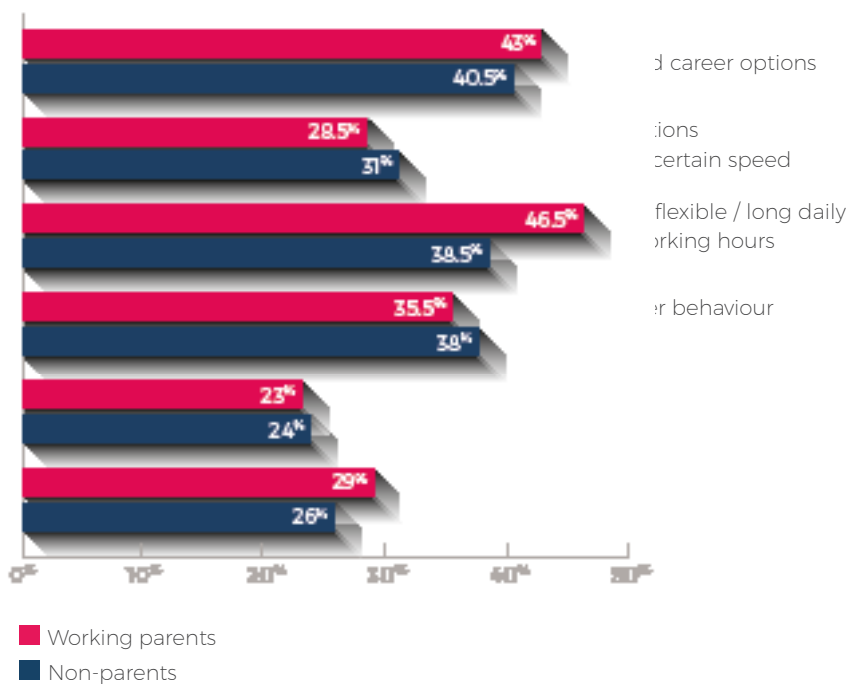


71.5%
of respondents felt rigid career obstacles were the greatest barrier to their careers.

Top issues impeding career progress

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ISSUES DO YOU FEEL IMPEDE YOUR CAREER PROGRESSION?

RESULTS BREAKDOWN BY WORKING PARENTS AND NON-PARENTS

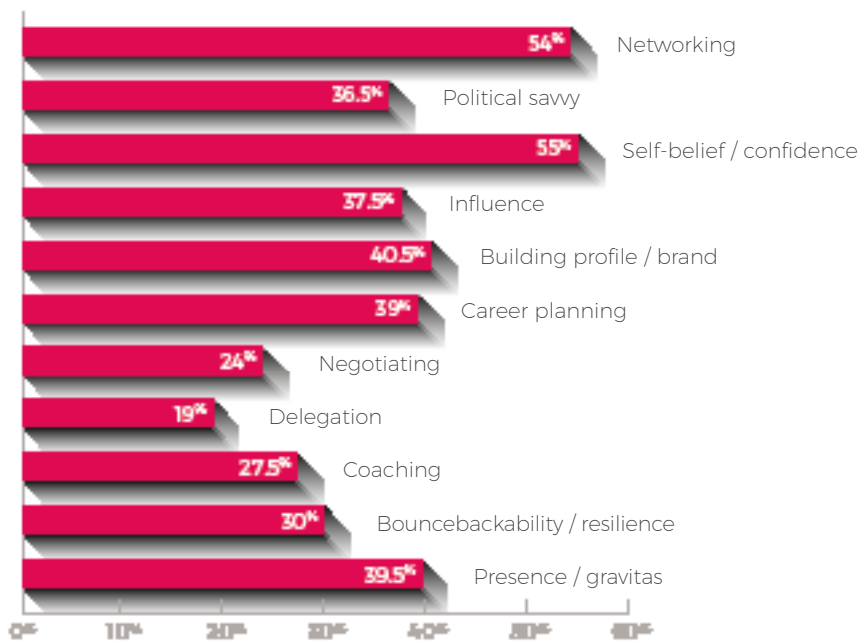


46.5%

of working parents cited inflexible / long working hours impeded their career progression.

Top skills to help career progression

WHICH SKILLS DO YOU THINK WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY HELP YOUR CAREER PROGRESSION?



Interestingly, the skills that the women responding felt would help career progress and overcome the barriers discussed largely focused on behaviours. The more functional skills of the role, such as negotiating and delegating, were not considered as important. Instead, there is a recognition and appetite for behavioural skills that are felt would help most.

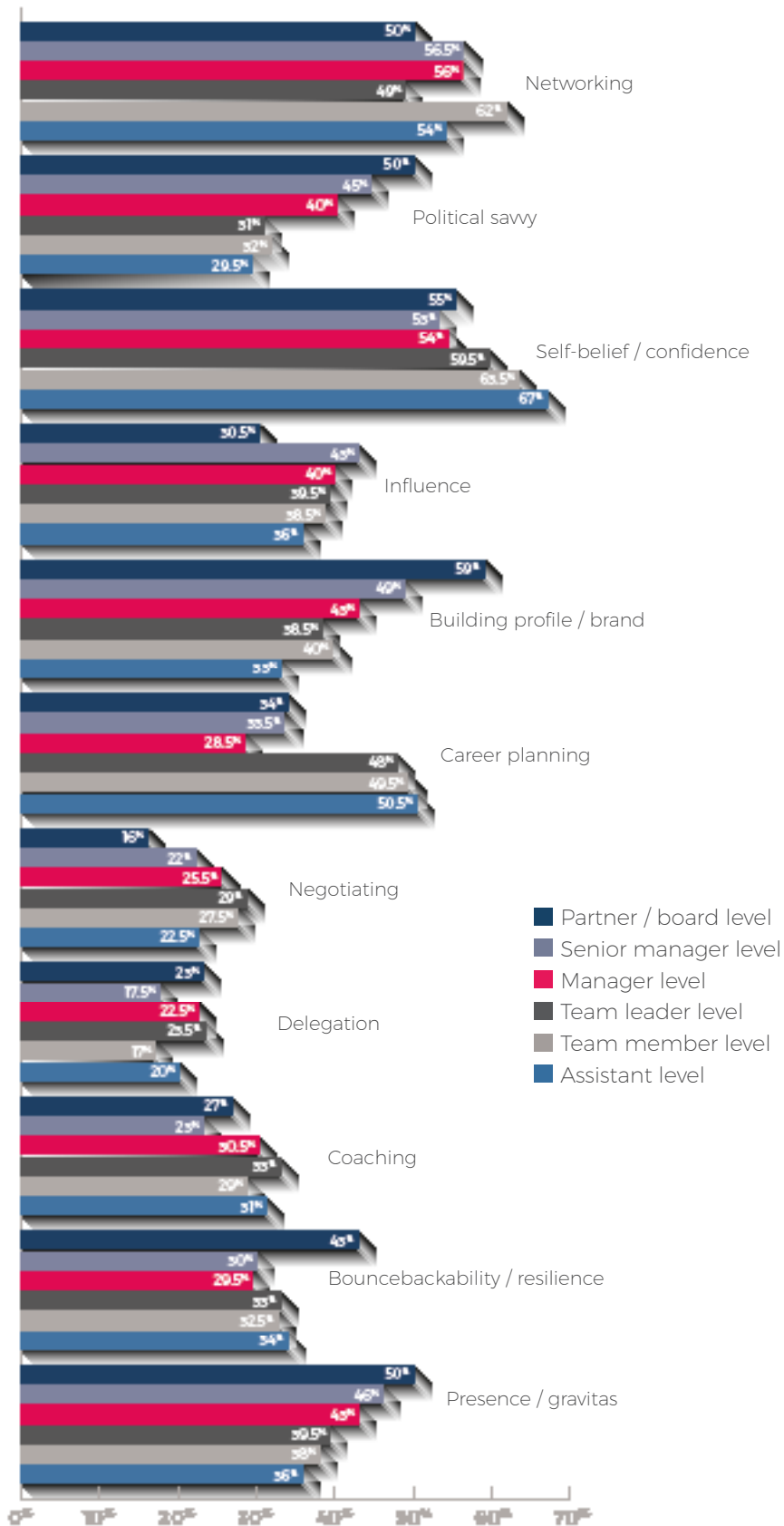
- Over half of the women surveyed (55%), wanted to improve their networking and self-belief / confidence.
- Confidence was the highest ranked requirement for all ages and, even as women reached Partner and Senior Manager level, it remained a priority.
- Networking was the second rated (54%) skill, across all levels of employee, reducing only at partner / board level.
- Building profile and brand (38%) gained prominence in more senior roles responding, as did the desire for greater presence / gravitas.

These often referred to 'softer skills' of self-development and selfpromotion are clearly recognised by our respondents as important skills for progressing to the top, yet do not frequently, if at all, form part of most structured company training programmes, or have not been seen as a priority by women previously.

Confidence was the highest ranked requirement for all ages.

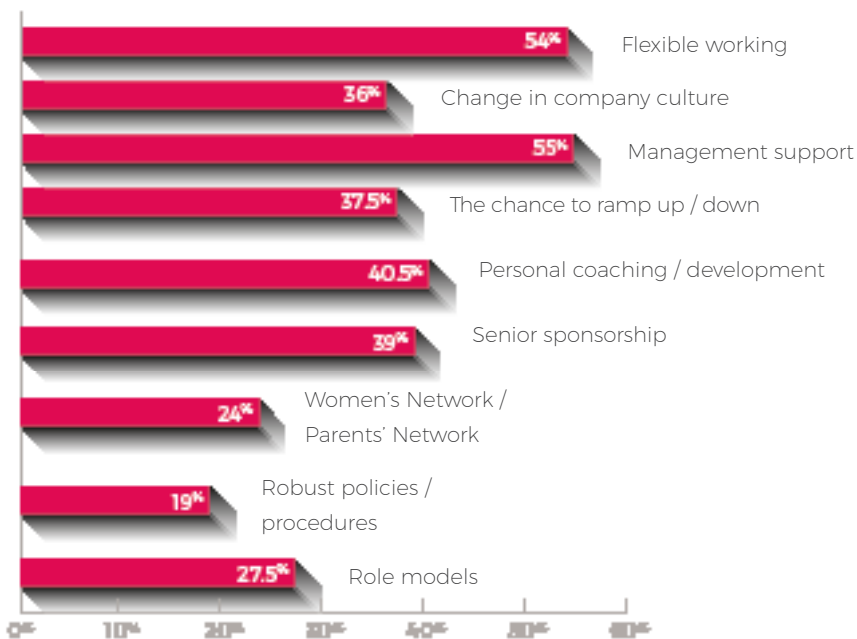
WHICH SKILLS DO YOU THINK WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY HELP YOUR CAREER PROGRESSION?

RESULTS BREAKDOWN BY LEVEL



Top support to reduce barriers

WHAT SUPPORT WOULD HELP REDUCE BARRIERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION?



We asked what support could be provided that would help reduce barriers. Interestingly, both as a barrier to progression and, conversely, as a key support to career success, managerial behaviour and support features prominently throughout. Second, was the feeling that personal coaching and development would help reduce barriers.

Over half (54%) of all responding, especially at the more junior levels of team member and entry level manager, believe greater managerial support would help reduce barriers. For those respondents approaching Board level position, the priority is replaced by a greater desire for role models and senior sponsorship.

Managerial behaviour and support features prominently as a key support to career success.

Top support to reduce barriers

WHAT SUPPORT WOULD HELP REDUCE BARRIERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION?

Although the requirement for managerial support may reduce slightly as roles become more senior, the impact of line manager behaviour on career progression is consistently identified (35% of all respondents) across levels. This is especially so for managers in their 40s and 50s (60%). Importantly, managers need to be supported by the organisation fostering a culture where it actively encourages managers in finding ways to implement policy and procedure in a way that achieves commercial goals yet also recognises the specific ambitions and needs of the female employee. The unconscious or conscious bias towards part-time workers is particularly highlighted by feedback within the research. Yet managerial skill sets need to go beyond that and incorporate full time working parents, addressing the development requirements of the female employee as well as the male.

Clearly, Manager Support (53%) and Coaching / Development (48%) were identified as the support that would most help break down barriers to progression and it is perhaps in these areas that the greatest strides can be made to improve the behavioural skills the women feel are needed. It is clear that the lack of flexibility and rigidity of career paths in many organisations is impacting the career momentum of women. Organisations often have good policies in place but they are not always so easy to translate into reality, particularly in organisations where long working hours are the norm.

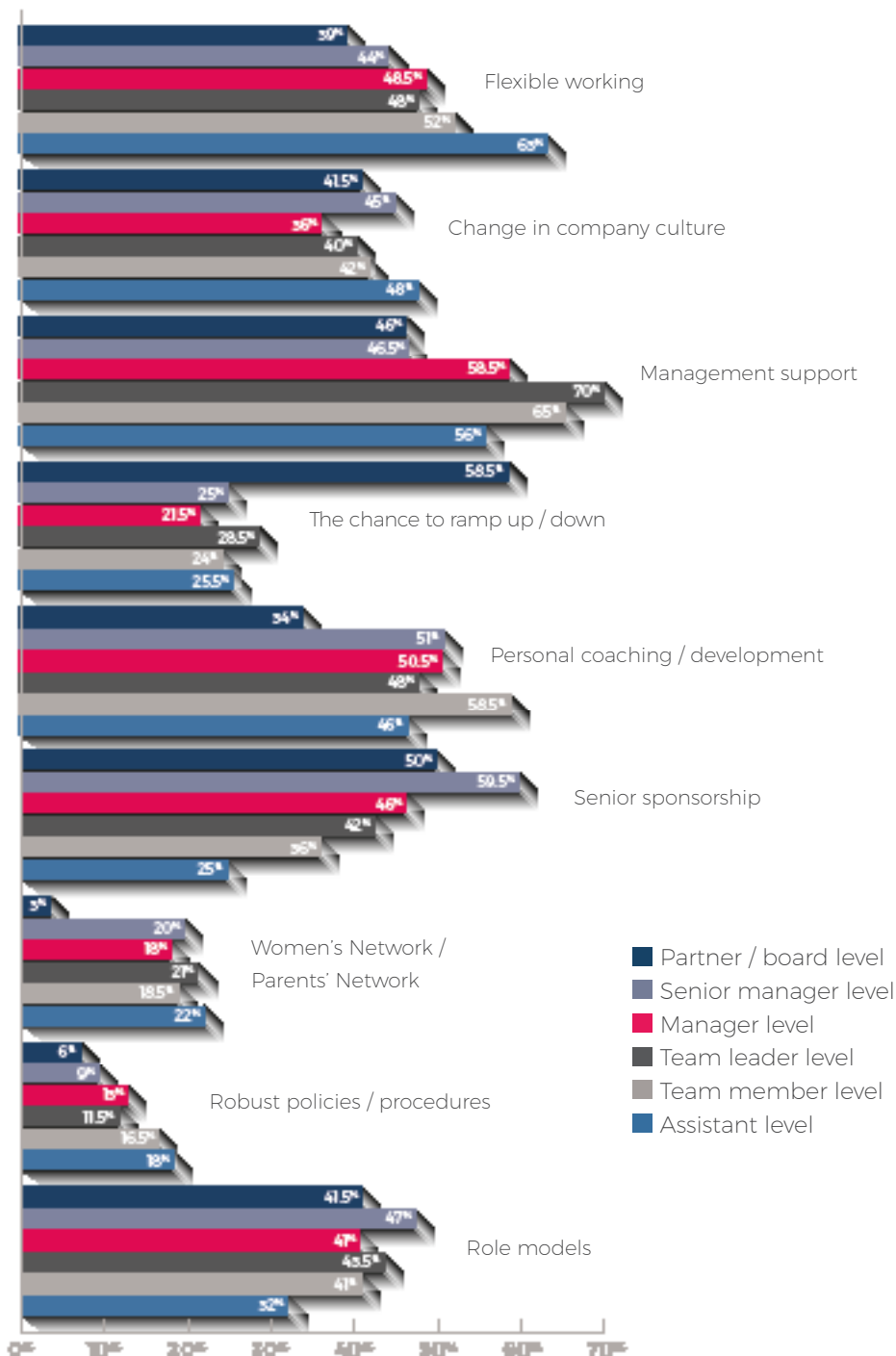
Given that the research highlights the need for employees at a team manager and manager level to receive more support from their managers, it would seem that there are challenges around how to educate managers about the skills and behaviours they need to be able to offer this support. Whether this is general lack of softer management skills or is specific to managing women and their needs is not clear. For more senior individuals, it is less around support and more about the behaviours of the manager; perhaps senior women feel they are treated differently.

The impact of line manager behaviour on career progression is consistently identified.

Top support to reduce barriers

WHAT SUPPORT WOULD HELP REDUCE BARRIERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION?

RESULTS BREAKDOWN BY LEVEL



Summary

The research shows that women want to develop personally and grow at a core level where they can really shift their behaviours, stepping up to the challenges of being a woman in business. The areas highlighted in this study by women of all ages and levels were self-belief / confidence, networking, building profile and brand.

Clearly sought-after by our respondents, this kind of self-development change can be successfully achieved through a more informal approach like coaching. However, coaching is often reserved for more senior individuals and we must consider how we can ensure that younger, emerging female talent might benefit from this as a way to develop and help avoid or overcome some of the challenges they might face.

The research creates a strong picture of the shifts that need to take place at an organisational, manager and individual level to maximise performance. Each individual and stakeholder needs to understand his or her role, be clear on the challenges and receive the appropriate support to enable them to make a difference and change the female talent situation, allowing all to benefit from the positive impacts women in senior positions can have.

To find out more about what we do and our solutions, contact us at:

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