

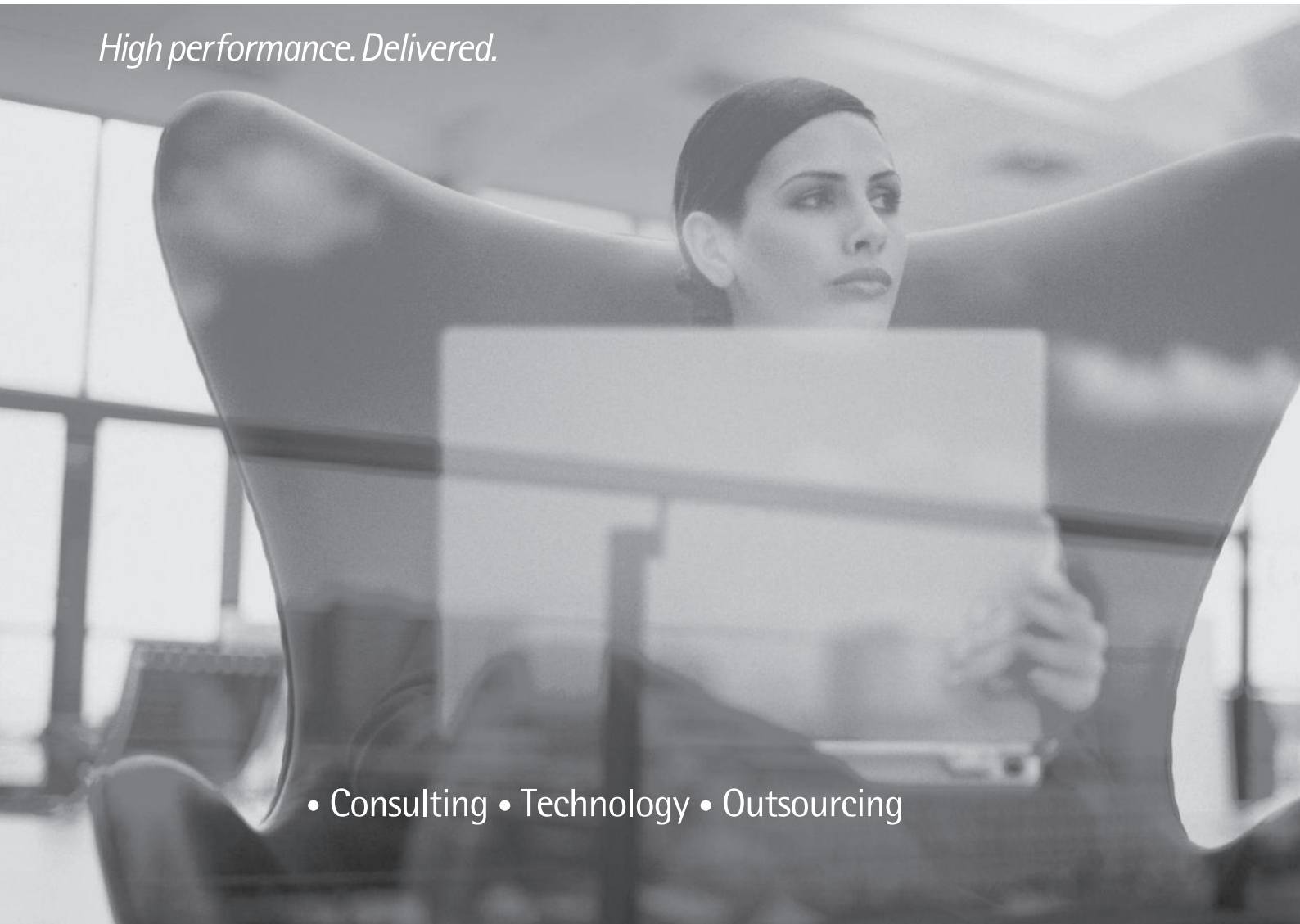
The Anatomy of the Glass Ceiling

Barriers to Women's Professional Advancement

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"A goal without a plan is just a wish."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author and aviator



Foreword

The emergence of women leaders in organizations around the world has changed the working environment and management of even the most male-dominated firms. The changing demographics and labor force are reinforcing this trend and will likely continue to do so over the next decade.

So, are the rules being rewritten by the new women leaders? Are we forever laying to rest the belief that women must "manage like men" to succeed? What role if any does positive discrimination play? And how are organizational policies and practices affecting the ability of women to obtain "C-level" opportunities?

The Accenture study "The Anatomy of the Glass Ceiling" examines the worldwide perception of the unofficial barrier to upper management that certain groups, particularly women, may find difficult to cross.

The "glass ceiling" has consequences not only for the women themselves, but also for the organizations they work for — their reputations and their ability to maximize their productivity and growth.

Companies — and societies — cannot afford to waste the full potential of half of their workforce and undermine their competitiveness. Rather, they need to capitalize upon the skills of women, valuing and encouraging women's professional growth and development. Moreover, they must create a business culture that supports innovation and high performance, which requires many different people with diverse talents and thinking styles.

How close are we to this environment, and what must we do to achieve and sustain it? "The Anatomy of the Glass Ceiling" addresses these questions by examining root causes and offering specific suggestions for change.

I trust you will find the study informative and its insights valuable. The shared challenge of establishing gender equality around the world is something all of us must work to achieve.



Kedrick D. Adkins
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1. The persistence of the glass ceiling

"You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, 'Why not?'"

George Bernard Shaw, dramatist and literary critic

The story of women's advancement toward true equality of opportunity in modern business continues to be impressive and remains a source of hope for women around the world. At no time in history have women been more visible in governmental policy-making and in corporate boardrooms.

However, even in today's most progressive societies in this regard, the role of women is frequently unclear. Legitimate successes are frequently accompanied by ongoing struggles and painful backlash. The reality is that even the most enlightened countries have not achieved true equality in the boardroom. Every available statistical source, as well as anecdotal evidence, shows that women continue to be underrepresented in senior corporate management in every country, whatever its cultural tradition and current legislation. As reported in a recent study by Catalyst, the independent research and advisory organization on inclusiveness, the representation of women in corporate leadership has stagnated for the past several years.

This persistence of the glass ceiling has led a country such as Norway to require each of the 500 companies listed on the Oslo stock exchange to have a board of directors comprising at least 40 percent women within the next two years or face significant penalties.

The concept of the glass ceiling has been used as a metaphor for twenty years now to describe the apparently invisible barriers that prevent more than a few women from reaching the top levels of management. Compared to formal barriers to career advancement such as education, the glass ceiling refers to less tangible hindrances — frequently anchored in culture, society and psychological factors — that impede women's advancement to upper management or other senior positions.

To better capture and analyze the factors constituting the glass ceiling, we surveyed nearly 600 successful business executives who have already made it to the top — both men and women — in six countries in Europe and Asia Pacific:

Australia, Austria, Germany, the Philippines, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. We wanted to know the story behind the mere statistics: Why does the glass ceiling persist? Is it a similar phenomenon across the globe? Is it a given country's support infrastructure — or lack thereof — and cultural traditions that help to maintain the invisible barrier to women reaching the top of the ladder? Could it be that most women themselves lack the tools to crack the hidden barrier? Or have companies institutionalized processes and value systems that perpetuate their male leadership?



Figure 1: Status of the glass ceiling in the countries in focus (selected indicators)

Country	Percentage of women in the labor force		Women's income as a percentage of men's income	Legally mandated parental leave
	Total labor force	Executive managers (for listed companies)	Managerial employees	Length of paid maternity leave
Australia	45 %	10 %	80 %	0
Austria	45 %	13 %	n/a*	16 weeks
Germany	44 %	8 %	90 %	14 weeks
Philippines	39 %	n/a *	n/a *	8 weeks
Switzerland	45 %	4 %	72 %	14 weeks
United Kingdom	46 %	11 %	75 %	26 weeks

*not available

Sources: UN Statistics and Indicators on Women and Men, 2005; Australian Government /Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA), 2004; UK Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005; UK Office of National Statistics, 2005; Zürcher Kantonalbank, 2005; Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2004; Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW), 2005; Kienbaum, 2005

2. Methodology

"What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?"

Vincent van Gogh, artist

Our study is based on a Web-based survey of 590 executives in Australia, Austria, Germany, the Philippines, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Approximately half (48 percent) of all respondents were female. We targeted executives in senior leadership positions: 41 percent of all respondents were members of senior management or directors, 12 percent were either subsidiary or regional heads, and 47 percent were divisional directors. In total, 50 percent work in the services sector, 15 percent work in manufacturing, 15 percent work in the public sector, and 20 percent work in politics and other industries.

We developed the Accenture Global Glass Ceiling Index to measure the relative "thickness" of the glass ceiling by taking into account factors in three dimensions: The individual, the surrounding society in each of the respective countries covered by the survey, and the company. Within each dimension, we identified five factors that can have an impact on a woman's ability to move up the corporate ladder. The objective of our analysis is to understand which of

the dimensions present the biggest hurdles for women's advancement in each country.

The factors within each dimension are:

- **Individual:** Career planning; professional competence; ambition; mobility; assertiveness
- **Society:** Equal rights, promotion programs; equal career opportunities; male dominance in decision making; government support of parental leave
- **Company:** Fluid hierarchies; supportive supervisor; transparent promotion processes; good integration in internal networks; tailored training programs

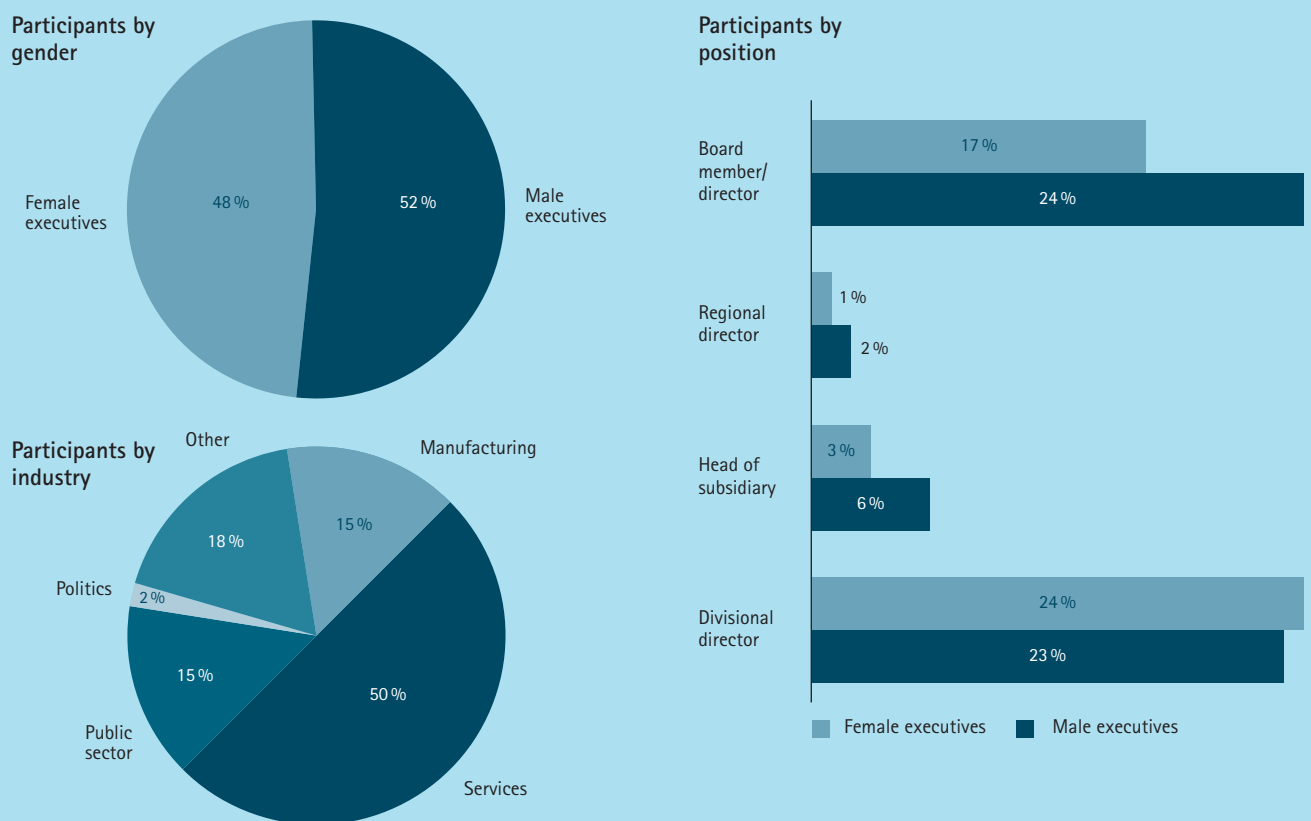
Respondents were asked to score each of these factors in terms of its importance in their career success. We used the delta, or difference, between male and female scores on each of these factors to calculate the thickness of the glass ceiling, with a large delta

corresponding to a thick glass ceiling in the respective factor. We then combined the deltas of the five factors, based on a point rationing scheme, to come up with the thickness of the glass ceiling by dimension.

A high score corresponds to a thick glass ceiling. Thickness is measured on a scale from 0 to 6, where 0 = no barriers to women's career advancement, i.e. no existing glass ceiling, and 6 = highest perceived barriers to women's advancement, i.e. the maximal thickness of the glass ceiling.



Figure 2: Sample by gender, position and industry



3. Profile of successful people

"Start by doing what is necessary, then do what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan order

3.1 How to crack the ceiling ...

Countless guidebooks on career planning claim to reveal the secrets of guaranteed professional advancement. Based on an unscientific tally of the books, articles and papers published on the topic, the pursuit of a successful career seems to be of vital interest to a large number of people around the globe. Readers in Manila, Zurich and Sydney all hope to identify the best skill sets and the smartest behaviors to help them climb the career ladder to achieve their aspirations.

Interestingly, our research found that successful people around the world share a set of common characteristics, beliefs and identity patterns. Therefore, the notion of global business leadership is far more than a nebulous metaphor for globalization — it actually exists in people's backgrounds as well as in attitudes and behaviors.

What do global business leaders have in common? Based on the results of our survey, they are most likely to have middle-class backgrounds, be in stable personal relationships and have children. They are likely to have completed professional training or hold a university degree (most often in business studies). They are confident, believe in their professional competence and have an appetite for continuous learning. They believe their status is a legitimate reflection of their personal career achievements. They are very ambitious, assert themselves when necessary, and are happy to make tough decisions — all the more so as they find emotional support and comfort in their families. They do not count on external assistance (e.g. material support in the form of childcare or other family assistance) to achieve their career plans, but rather rely on their own abilities and resources.

While acknowledging that social background is important for success, they believe that one can overcome a limited background through hard work, dedication and performance. They identify strongly with their companies and are keen to give an appropriate return on the investment the firm is making in them.

Despite the fact that they serve their respective companies with emotional commitment, they maintain a pragmatic view on the corporate environment and understand the importance of being properly positioned to identify and capitalize on career opportunities that arise. The right mixture of "roots and wings" — to use Goethe's famous phrase — seems to be a prerequisite for success across the globe.



3.2 ...and the differences between men and women

Despite the similarities, we found striking differences between female and male executives. Overall, female executives are younger and advance in their careers more rapidly than their male counterparts. However, there are far fewer women at the highest rungs of the corporate ladder. Family commitments and persisting male networks in the corporate world are two often-cited explanations for this disparity.

However, our study shows that the differences between male and female executives lie less in demographic factors like social background, field of studies or marital status than they do in attitudes and behavior patterns. Detailed career planning, ambition and the ability to assert oneself were given much higher scores as prerequisites for success by female executives than by men.

Nevertheless, women feel less secure in their current positions than men do and are less happy with their salaries. This can be taken as an indication that successful women still have to push harder to make their way to the executive suite. In addition, family support overall is of higher importance to women, as support for women's careers still cannot be taken for granted.

Female respondents rated social background as far more influential for career success than their male counterparts did. Female executives tend to focus more on positioning themselves in external networks, whereas male leaders put the major thrust of their efforts into building and nurturing networks within the company. Given the higher percentage of male leaders, we can infer that when it comes to advancing in business, external exposure is still less important than

internal visibility. Another explanation might be that access to internal networks is harder for female executives, and to compensate, they seek to position themselves more actively in the external environment. Going back to Goethe's "roots and wings," the societal and corporate environments make it more difficult for women to maintain and build their personal support systems (family, friendship and professional networks) while pursuing their career objectives.



4. The "Accenture Global Glass Ceiling Index"

"I was always looking outside myself for strength and confidence, but it comes from within. It is there all the time."

Anna Freud, founder of child psychoanalysis

4.1 The index

The Accenture Global Glass Ceiling Index shows the relative influence of barriers within the individual, company and society dimensions (see Methodology on page 6). It shows that the glass ceiling persists in all countries and across all dimensions, but its relative thickness

varies. Our index shows which dimension should be in focus when considering policies to crack the ceiling. In four of the countries surveyed, society presents the strongest barriers to women's success, while in two countries, the corporate barriers are the hardest to overcome.

Figure 3: Glass Ceiling Index – country ranking*

Ranking Individual	
Country	Value
United Kingdom	2.6
Australia	2.8
Austria	3.2
Germany	3.4
Philippines	3.4
Switzerland	3.8

Ranking Company	
Country	Value
Switzerland	3.0
Australia	3.2
Germany	3.4
United Kingdom	3.6
Philippines	3.8
Austria	4.8

Ranking Society	
Country	Value
Philippines	2.8
Australia	4.2
Austria	4.2
Switzerland	4.2
Germany	4.8
United Kingdom	5.0

*0 = no existing glass ceiling
6 = maximal thickness of glass ceiling

4.2 Country profiles

Australia

Glass ceiling dimensions Australia	
Individual	2.8
Company	3.2
Society	4.2

Australian women have the highest self-confidence concerning their own abilities and skills out of all the countries surveyed. They are ambitious, believe in their strengths and are more likely to assert themselves. This is reflected in a very low index score for the individual dimension: The Australian women in our survey do not see limits within themselves. In fact, more than one-fifth of female respondents actually consider their gender to be a career-advancing factor. When it comes to the corporate environment, female executives believe that cracking the glass ceiling requires more effort. They are less happy than men with their tailored training programs and perceive hierarchies to be less fluid. Compared with their male counterparts, they are less likely to feel that professional goals given to them are realistic, feel less secure in their jobs, and are less excited about their tasks and responsibilities.

However, for Australian women, the dimension of society constitutes the main obstacle to successful careers. Overall, female executives in Australia do not feel that they have equal career opportunities in their society and believe that decision-making processes are dominated by men. On top of that perceived disadvantage, while it is now standard for companies to provide three months' paid parental leave to employees, there is no legal entitlement to paid maternity leave in Australia. Obviously, the government does not provide much support in an area that is considered crucial to women's advancement. Interestingly, there are no big differences between male and female executives in terms of marital status or children. Three-quarters (75 percent) of male executives in Australia stated they were married or in a permanent relationship, compared with 70 percent of female executives. And the percentage of executives with children was the same for both men and women, at 78 percent. This does not mirror the public image that successful

women are more likely to be single and without children.

Overall, the main area of focus to minimize the glass ceiling in Australia should be society.

Austria

Glass ceiling dimensions Austria	
Individual	3.2
Company	4.8
Society	4.2

In Austria, the barriers to the advancement of female executives are more substantial than in any of the other countries surveyed. Female executives in Austria feel discriminated against in their overall career paths. They are less likely than men to feel that their positions reflect their achievements and are less happy with their salaries than are men. They perceive the speed of their career development as slower in comparison to men at the same level. Overall, they feel less secure in their current positions than men. Even women who have demonstrated professional management of crisis situations have not achieved the same career progression as male executives, despite the fact that women are called on more often to firefight critical situations.

Within the society dimension, female executives do not feel that they have equal career opportunities and believe they have less influence on decision-making processes than men. Compared with women in Germany or Switzerland, Austrian women believe they have to struggle harder to make their way. They also consider social background to be far more important for careers than do their male counterparts.

Overall, the main area of focus to minimize the glass ceiling in Austria should be the corporate world.

Germany

Glass ceiling dimensions Germany	
Individual	3.4
Company	3.4
Society	4.8

In Germany, both the individual and the company dimensions contribute equally

to the thickness of the glass ceiling. Female executives believe much more strongly than their male counterparts that ambition and the ability to assert oneself are prerequisites for success. Corresponding to public perception, women in Germany have to work harder to climb the professional ladder. In the corporate world, women are much less likely than men to believe that equality is a core value in their respective companies. They perceive hierarchies to be less fluid and promotion processes less transparent than men do. Male executives are also more self-confident regarding their career development. Compared with women we surveyed in other countries, female executives in Germany value the importance of internal networks more highly.

On the other hand, women in Germany appear to be less sensitive to the importance of education as a foundation for future success than women in other countries surveyed. Indeed, female executives do not consider formal education and professional development to be of high importance to their career success. This is mirrored by the debate in educational and political circles in Germany about the tendency for female students to study the "wrong" field for a successful career. Subjects like literature or educational studies, which have traditionally provided fewer career options, continue to attract large numbers of female students, whereas women are still underrepresented in the sciences, technology and business, which typically provide greater job opportunities.

Barriers to advancement in Germany are most prevalent in the dimension of society. Whatever reservations they may have about the commitment of their companies to promoting equality, female executives still feel that equality is achieved to a far greater extent in the corporate world than in society at large. Almost 70 percent of female executives in Germany said they believe that decision making is male-dominated, and 55 percent of female executives believe that targeted promotion of women is insufficient. On the other hand, the differences in family status between the sexes are much less significant than frequently portrayed in the public debate. A somewhat smaller proportion of female executives than male executives are married or

living in stable relationships – 71 percent of women compared with 78 percent of men – whereas the number of female and male executives with children is substantially the same, at 61 percent for women and 62 percent for men.

Overall, the main area of focus to minimize the glass ceiling in Germany should be society.

Philippines

Glass ceiling dimensions Philippines	
Individual	3.4
Company	3.8
Society	2.8

The Philippines have the lowest score for the society dimension in the glass ceiling index of the countries represented in our survey, as female executives there perceive their society to be supportive and open to their advancement. It is likely that the matriarchal traditions of Philippine society and the presidencies of former president Corazon Aquino and current president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo are key factors that contribute to explaining this result, which stands out in comparison with all the other countries we have surveyed. However, this does not apply to the individual dimension to the same extent: Women have to work and push harder than men to climb the professional ladder.

Of the three dimensions under consideration, the corporate world presents the greatest obstacles to women's professional advancement. Female executives in the Philippines perceive hierarchies to be less fluid than the men do. However, corporate support mechanisms like mentoring, female representatives or quotas are implemented fairly broadly. Nevertheless, female executives in the Philippines said they believe that the corporate environment could be more supportive of women.

Corroborating evidence from other Philippine sources suggests that flexible work arrangements would be one such support mechanism, as Philippine women have heavy and time-consuming responsibilities in the care and direction of multi-generational families. Compared with executives in the other countries surveyed, executives in the Philippines –

both men and women – regarded family support for career advancement to be comparatively high.

Overall, the main area of focus to minimize the glass ceiling in the Philippines should be the corporate world.

Switzerland

Glass ceiling dimensions Switzerland	
Individual	3.8
Company	3.0
Society	4.2

Of the six countries represented in our survey, Switzerland has the fewest barriers to female career advancement in the corporate world and the most pronounced barriers in the individual dimension. In their professional lives, Swiss female executives are happier than their male counterparts with personal development plans and training, and also perceive hierarchies to be more fluid than do the men. The women also believe that their careers progress more rapidly than do those of their male peers. Competence is regarded as equally important by female and male executives. Concerning the individual dimension, women focus more intensively on detailed career planning than men do and perceive the ability to assert themselves as a greater career-advancing driver.

Overall, women believe they have to work harder than men do to advance. Society is the dimension that has the greatest impact on Switzerland's glass ceiling. Swiss female executives are less likely than men to perceive equality as a core value in their country, and they believe that women are not promoted accordingly. Swiss women do not believe that they have the same career opportunities as men and feel that decision-making processes in their country are male-dominated. Compared with respondents in the other countries represented in the survey, women executives in Switzerland placed the least importance on family support as a factor of career success.

Overall, the main area of focus to minimize the glass ceiling in Switzerland should be society.

United Kingdom

Glass ceiling dimensions UK	
Individual	2.6
Company	3.6
Society	5.0

Of all the countries represented in our survey, the United Kingdom shows a glass ceiling index with the highest barriers in the societal dimension and the lowest barriers in the individual dimension. In the context of society as a whole, female executives in the UK do not feel that they have the same career opportunities as men. They are not happy with the level of government support for parental leave. Overall, the UK has the lowest score regarding government-sponsored programs for the advancement of women. British women executives feel that there is more equality in the corporate world than in society. They feel more strongly than men that they benefit from supportive supervisors who help them to make their way, but they are less happy than men with their tailored training programs. Overall, women executives in the United Kingdom perceive hierarchies and promotion processes as less fluid than men do.

On the individual level, there is not much difference between the attitudes of women and men concerning the importance of professional competence, mobility or ambition for a successful career. However, British women still feel that they have to plan their careers in more detailed and strategic ways than men do. While there have been discussions in the British public regarding the existence of a "glass cliff" – suggesting that women are given top jobs more often when companies are in critical situations – data from our survey do not support the existence of such a glass cliff. The female executives in our sample are not called to firefight as often as the men, believe their goals are more realistic than are men's goals, and are only slightly less excited about their tasks than the men are.

Overall, the main area of focus to minimize the glass ceiling in the UK should be society.

4.3 Key findings

In addition to broadly shared values across the sample group, we found several common trends across the six countries represented in our survey. In parallel to a slow but continuous increase in women's presence in all sectors of public life – including business, the media, and government – women's self-perception seems to be entering a new phase.

The three key trends we identified in the survey are:

- Gender is no longer believed to be a career-limiting factor
- Internal support mechanisms like mentoring and coaching are not tailored to women's individual needs
- Female executives believe that companies are doing a better job than society in general to promote equality

Gender is no longer believed to be a career-limiting factor

The facts tell a mixed story: In both Scandinavia and Britain, more than one-third of all corporate managers are women. However, women are still clearly underrepresented when it comes to top leadership jobs (see Figure 1 on page 5). Countless papers have examined the obstacles preventing ambitious women from climbing the corporate ladder. The key factors are generally believed to be a lack of support for integrating family needs into the workday, differences in educational orientations, and the persistence of "old boy networks." But what about gender itself, which was long considered the main obstacle for equal participation?

Overall, gender is no longer believed to be the key limiting factor for women's success. Only 20 percent said that their gender limited their career advancement. In some countries, as our survey shows, women believe that their gender

actually helps them advance up the ladder. Overall, 35 percent of female respondents said that gender had no effect on their career opportunities and 25 percent were neutral on this point, while 20 percent said that their gender actually helped their careers. With the exception of men in Australia, overall the men tend to believe more strongly than their female counterparts that gender influences career potential – perhaps an indication that men increasingly perceive women as real competitors. We also noted some interesting differences on a geographic basis. For example, German and Swiss women were more negative than female respondents in other countries when asked whether career opportunities were open to them regardless of gender, while women in Australia and the Philippines were more likely than those in the other countries to see their gender as a career advantage.

Internal support mechanisms like mentoring and coaching are not tailored to women's individual needs

Apart from insufficient societal institutions, many observers have suggested that a lack of the right kind of support within companies is a key factor to explain why only a few women reach the top of the corporate ladder. Successful women credit their advancement far more to their own abilities than to advancement programs in their companies. Overall, 84 percent of female executives surveyed identified personal ambition as one of the main sources of success, and 82 percent said that assertiveness was a key success factor.

However, only 31 percent of female respondents said that existing mentoring programs within their companies play a role in female advancement. In fact, 25 percent of female executives in Switzerland didn't even know whether

Figure 4: Influence of gender on career development
 Percentage of participants rating gender influence as "neutral" or "no influence"

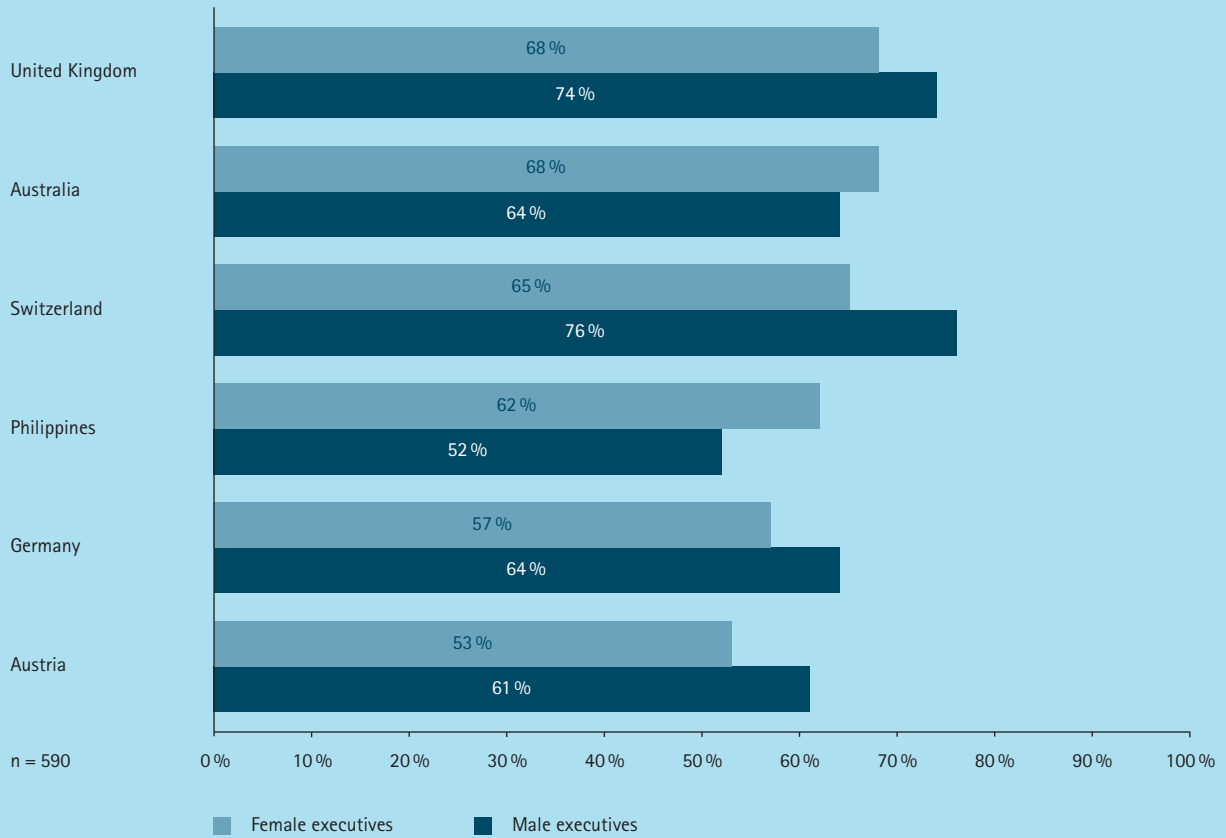
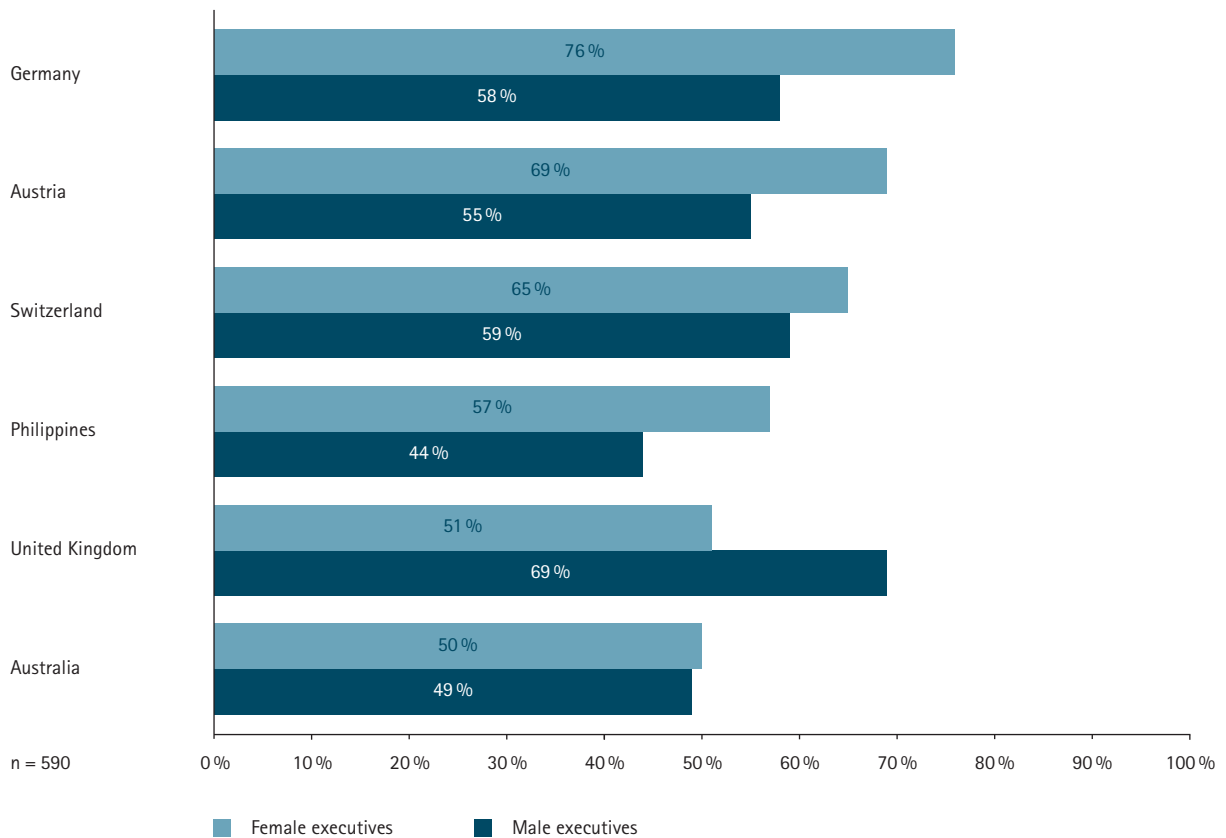


Figure 5: Influence of personal ambition on career development
 Percentage of participants rating personal ambition as "career-advancing factor"



their companies had mentoring programs. Obviously, the “one size fits all” industrialized versions of advancement programs are not what female executives are looking for in terms of support mechanisms.

Female executives believe that companies are doing a better job than society in general to promote equality

Equal rights and equal opportunities have been key demands of women ever since they started to enter public life. Many of these demands have been addressed through changes in legislation in many countries across the globe. Governments have been instrumental in implementing these changes, in response to the demands of a powerful social movement. Regardless of the central role that

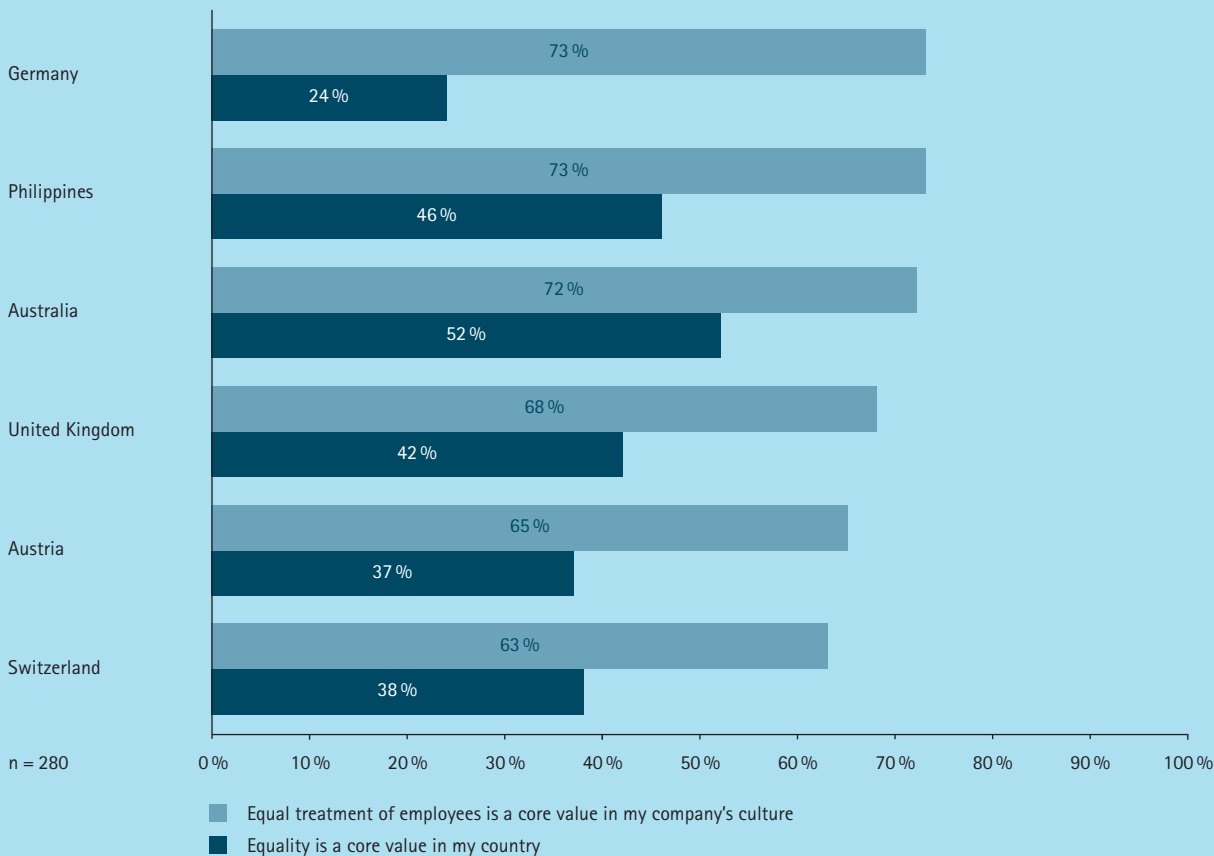
politics plays in laying the groundwork for female equality, our survey shows that women today believe that companies are more committed to, and more effective in, promoting equality than their countries are. Overall, 60 percent of women said they considered equality of opportunity, independent of gender, to be a core value in their companies, whereas only 42 percent of women said that equal opportunity for women is a core value in their countries. Male executives shared the perception that their companies were more committed to female equality than their respective countries: 74 percent said they believe that their companies were committed to equality as a core value, whereas only 54 percent said the same about their countries.

In Germany, the results of the survey on this point are even more dramatic. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of female executives in that country said they believe that their companies ensure

gender equality, whereas fewer than one-quarter (24 percent) of the female executives said they believe that German society promotes gender equality.

However, despite the variations from country to country, the overall conclusion is consistent for all the countries in the survey group: Female executives believe that their companies are more committed to equal rights and opportunities for women than are the countries and the societies in which they live.

Figure 6: Rating of equality policies in company and society – female executives
Top box values (agree / completely agree)





5. Conclusion

"I will go anywhere, provided it be forward."

David Livingstone, Scottish missionary and explorer

Despite the progress that individual countries and companies have made in addressing gender inequality and discrimination, there is still much to be done to achieve true equality in public institutions and in the corporate executive suite. However, the results of our survey provide some direction regarding action that can be taken in each of the three dimensions our study focused on to help women crack the glass ceiling. For instance, in terms of addressing the "individual" dimension's impact on the glass ceiling, we need to realize and accept that women and men have similar concerns and objectives with respect to job security, career goals and life planning. Women need to focus on taking advantage of their individual strengths and opportunities in a changing environment in which their male counterparts can be allies as well as competitors. In this environment, women do not have to overcompensate in terms of ambition and determination, but can focus their efforts on building skills, networks and relationships.

At the same time, companies and other organizations can do their part to promote the advancement of women. For instance, they can raise the profile and effectiveness of mentoring and coaching by tailoring and customizing such programs more to the needs of individuals, rather than using a "one size fits all" approach, which does not appeal to creative and ambitious people.

To achieve this, companies need to provide their senior executives with incentives to participate in mentoring programs, perhaps even tying a portion of their compensation to such participation. In addition, companies should actively monitor and measure the effectiveness of mentoring / coaching programs. This would help to identify the most successful mentoring programs as "best practices" and make them better known and more widely available, including to successful young women executives, many of whom are not even aware of the existence of such programs.

Our study shows that women in all the countries surveyed clearly hold companies in higher regard than their countries at large when it comes to the promotion of gender equality and advancement opportunities (see Figure 6 on page 16). Despite this, governments shouldn't feel that they have no part to play in creating an atmosphere that fosters and promotes gender equality in the workplace. Rather, they should look to the private sector to see what kinds of measures are helpful to promote women and thereby set

examples for the broader society. For instance, government agencies and other public-sector institutions can adapt best practices from companies in order to develop programs to identify and promote potential leaders, including women. More broadly, a public-private partnership would be an ideal avenue to accelerate the transfer of the know-how and experience of companies, which have learned from the necessity of working in international, cross-cultural, multi-disciplinary and results-oriented environments, to public-sector institutions, which lag in many of these fields, including in the promotion of equality of opportunity for women. Our study shows that there is no single factor in any country, let alone in a global comparison, that explains the continued relative underrepresentation of women in the ranks of senior management. Indeed, one striking result of the study is that the female executives surveyed themselves no longer see their gender per se as a necessary disadvantage to the progression of their careers. Cultural traditions about the role of women certainly continue to influence attitudes and behavior patterns of both

men and women, and such traditions may change much more slowly in the broader society than in the environment of many modern corporations. But cultural, or societal, traditions often reflect not only mind-sets, but also divisions of labor and responsibilities that, for very practical reasons, are not easy to change. This is why providing the infrastructure, the resources and the flexibility that allow women — and men — to combine the responsibilities of family and career may be an even more critical factor in facilitating the career advancement of female executives than a narrow focus on attitudes. A number of companies — Accenture itself being a case in point — have developed effective family support programs, which can also serve as best-practice guidance for the broader private and public sectors. But ultimately, effective, broad-based solutions will require active partnerships between the corporate sector and government that take into account the specific needs and conditions of the society in any given country. Such partnerships would surely benefit not only women, but all of society at large.

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