

# Advancing Women In Business Events



GLOBAL SURVEY CONDUCTED IN COLLABORATION WITH



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# BACKGROUND

PCMA Foundation (PCMA) and Business Events Sydney (BESydney) conducted a research project to engage the Business Events (BE) community on specific and meaningful actions that can be taken to advance women into senior leadership roles, specifically C-suite and Board roles, within the BE industry. As an industry dominated by women, the imbalance that exists for females in the top ranks of BE leadership is particularly concerning.

## **This research project focused on the following areas:**

- Understanding the disparity of women in leadership positions
- Barriers that exist for women who wish to advance
- Recommendations for overcoming barriers
- Leadership attributes and skills critical for the future of the industry
- Why women are ideally suited for leadership roles
- Implications for broader DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) efforts

# VISION

***“The Business Events industry is the ideal platform to demonstrate the value that women make every day, and we need to lead by example. Inclusivity and equity are not just the right things to do, they lead to greater profitability, successful organizations, and a just society.”***

Sherrif Karamat, PCMA and CEMA President & CEO

As advocates for furthering the Business Events industry, PCMA and BESydney believe progress toward inclusivity is paramount to ensuring its sustainability. A diverse and inclusive leadership team is not just a strategic advantage but a fundamental necessity for the industry’s continued success. By fostering an environment that values and promotes the unique perspectives and talents of women, we aim to set a standard for excellence and innovation. Guidelines and recommendations for bringing more women into the C-suite fold will be a meaningful contributor to industry progress and momentum.

# PROJECT METHODOLOGY

**This project included research from a variety of primary and secondary sources including:**

- Two in-person global Think Tanks held with male and female senior executives in Washington DC and San Francisco, and one online group in Asia-Pacific (Approximately 10 participants per group, with 60% representation among women)
- Six one-hour 1:1 interviews with female senior executives held in Montreal, Canada
- A global DEI survey conducted in conjunction with PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) published in November, 2023, *Advancing Women in Business Events DEI Survey* (PwC Survey)
  - PwC Survey was completed by 438 respondents in 30+ countries, 96% female, 4% male (PCMA members were invited to take part in the survey.)
  - Regions were segmented into Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, and North America
  - Data was collected between August 7 and October 6, 2023
  - PwC created the global DEI survey of 41 questions with input and feedback from PCMA and BESydney
  - Respondents shared their insights into key topics such as DEI, talent, career trajectories, leadership, mentorship, barriers, challenges, and the work environment
- Secondary research as footnoted, linked, and included in the Resources section in this report's Appendix

A summary of the findings from this research along with recommended actions to accelerate the advancement of women in the Business Events industry is presented in this report.

## **Notes:**

- References to the Business Events industry will be abbreviated as BE industry.
- References to the PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP publication, *Advancing Women in Business Events DEI Survey*, will be abbreviated as PwC Survey.

# INTRODUCTION

According to the [World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023](#),<sup>1</sup> the global gender gap score for 102 countries covered from 2006-2023 stands at 68.6% and it will take 131 years to reach full parity. The report also states that gender parity can have a large impact on whether an economy or society will thrive.

Gender equality in leadership is not just a matter of social responsibility; it is increasingly recognized as a critical factor for long-term business success and financial sustainability. Organizations that prioritize and achieve gender equality at all levels tend to benefit from a more resilient, adaptable, and high-performing workforce. Pay equity is just one dimension that needs to be addressed, but the more women advance to leadership positions, the greater a case can be made for pay equity.

Reducing the inequities of the gender gap in BE leadership means understanding that these barriers are threefold: personal, organizational, and societal.

Personal barriers include ideas such as it's hard to fit in the C-Suite as a woman, the female lifestyle won't be respected, not having what it takes to make it, and other limiting beliefs that can keep women stuck in the status quo.

Organizational barriers include inflexible work arrangements, unconscious bias in recruitment and management practices, microaggressions against women, penalties for not conforming, and unequal access to sponsors and mentors.

Societal barriers are much harder to overcome and include pay inequity, decades of marginalization, and unspoken biases that reinforce stereotypical roles of women as being inferior employees due to the double burden of work and family care that fall to many of them. Even in these days of heightened DEI efforts and attention to gender equality, women still tend to serve as the primary caregivers for children as well as aging parents or family members with special needs.

<sup>1</sup>The Global Gender Gap Index annually benchmarks the current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment). It is the longest-standing index tracking the progress of numerous countries' efforts towards closing these gaps over time, since its inception in 2006. Download the full report at: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>

The BE industry has an opportunity to be bold, challenge the status quo and set forth a vision that addresses these barriers.

The insights shared in this report have resounding implications for overall DEI efforts as well. By focusing on one traditionally marginalized group in the BE industry, we can glean insights and recommendations that will help to inform the larger initiative to promote an inclusive industry that recognizes the benefits to be achieved when we fully leverage the skills, talents, and insights of a diverse workforce. By doing so, not only will we further the goals of the industry and better serve our constituents, but we set a standard of excellence for other industries to model.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PCMA and Business Events Sydney (BE Sydney) conducted a research project to engage the Business Events (BE) community on the specific and meaningful actions they can take to advance women into leadership roles within the industry.

## **The goals of the study were to:**

- 1.** Gather insights from executives about the practical actions that will advance women into leadership roles within the BE industry.
- 2.** Collect best practices based on observations and experience on what is working to advance women in the BE industry.

***The research supported some commonly held notions that apply to women in leadership positions across all industries, namely, that there is a significant gap in representation among women in these roles.***

According to data from LinkedIn as reported by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2023, women accounted for nearly 42% of the global workforce, yet the share of women in senior leadership positions (Director, Vice-President-VP, or C-Suite) is 32%, 10 percentage points lower. A survey conducted by IBTM<sup>2</sup> found out that 77% of people in the event management industry globally are women, yet only 16% of women are represented in leadership roles. Compared to 42% of women in the global workforce generally,<sup>3</sup> more than double that amount (86%) of meeting/event planners in the US are women, according to Zippia.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the disparity of women in the BE industry vs. women in leadership positions within BE becomes particularly striking.

Another finding from the PwC study was that opportunities for career support and development opportunities are limited. Additional barriers to advancement were identified

<sup>2</sup> IBTM, Event Management Gender Equality Report, 2022 <https://ibtmevents.com/blog/ibtm-event-management-gender-equality-report/>

<sup>3</sup> LinkedIn data as reported by the WEF Study, World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>

<sup>4</sup> Zippia.com, Meeting/Event Planner Demographics and Statistics in the US, accessed 1/4/2023, <https://www.zippia.com/meeting-event-planner-jobs/demographics/>



across three dimensions: personal, organizational, and societal/industry-wide. The overwhelming personal distinction, and therefore area of focus for rectifying, was the self-limiting beliefs women tend to carry about themselves vis-à-vis their male counterparts in business.

The PCMA set out to further understand the reasons why this gender gap is so pronounced in the BE industry and recommend a set of actions the community can take to make significant strides to address this inequity.

### **Our research identified consistent challenges in advancing women into leadership roles within the BE industry across regions globally:**

- 1.** Achieving pay equity
- 2.** Flexibility in work hours as women typically bear the double burden of work and family care
- 3.** Lack of opportunities for career progression
- 4.** Shortage of diverse talent represented in the industry, particularly on leadership teams
- 5.** Lack of support for learning and growth, skill development, and mentoring
- 6.** Gender biases inhibiting women from advancing into leadership positions
- 7.** Women's own limiting beliefs about themselves and their ability to compete for or successfully carry out leadership roles
- 8.** Different forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination carried out by management, colleagues, and customers/members

While much is being done to support women as a result of DEI across all under-represented groups, the BE industry is in a unique position to help women advance into leadership roles. Our advice for addressing this gap follows in the Recommendations section of this report.

# FINDINGS

This section presents and discusses the discoveries and observations made during the research phase conducted for this report. As we delve into these findings, the need to advocate for positive change within the BE industry becomes apparent. The goal is to not only recognize existing gender disparities but to also implement targeted strategies that promote equal opportunities for all individuals within the industry, regardless of gender, race, age, disability, or sexual orientation or identification.

Each finding is supported with relevant data, examples, and quotes from the Think Tanks, PwC Survey, and additional thought leadership from within and outside of the industry.

## I. The Gap in Representation of Women in Leadership Roles is Disproportionately Greater for the BE Industry

Not surprisingly, the representation of women in leadership roles can vary across different regions, companies, and sectors.

### ***The Gap Between Women in the Workforce vs. Senior Leadership Roles***

According to data from LinkedIn as reported by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2023,<sup>5</sup> **women accounted for nearly 42% of the global workforce, yet the share of women in senior leadership positions (Director, Vice-President-VP, or C-Suite) is 32%, 10 percentage points lower.** Notably, a survey conducted by IBTM<sup>6</sup> found that **77% of people in the event management industry globally are women, yet only 16% of women are represented in leadership roles.** (See Figure 1)

**Figure 1: Disparity of Women in Workforce vs. Leadership Roles**

	% OF WOMEN IN WORKFORCE	% OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES	DISPARITY (PERCENTAGE POINTS)	SOURCE	SCOPE
OVERALL	42	32	-10	WEF/LINKEDIN	GLOBAL
EVENTS MANAGEMENT	77	16	-61	IBTM	GLOBAL

5 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>

6 IBTM, Event Management Gender Equality Report, 2022 <https://ibtmevents.com/blog/ibtm-event-management-gender-equality-report/>

Looking at the number of women in the BE industry in the US only makes the disparities greater. A separate study by Zippia<sup>7</sup> found **the percentage of women in the events industry in the US rises to 86%, roughly 12% more than those who are considered “event managers” globally.** Compared to 42% of women in the global workforce, more than double that of “meeting/event planners” in the US are women, further underscoring the disparity of women in the BE industry vs. women in leadership positions. It would stand to follow that the more women are in the industry, the more women would be in leadership positions in the US, when in fact, the data point to an even larger gap. (See Figure 2)

**Figure 2: Disparity of Women in Workforce vs. Event Roles**

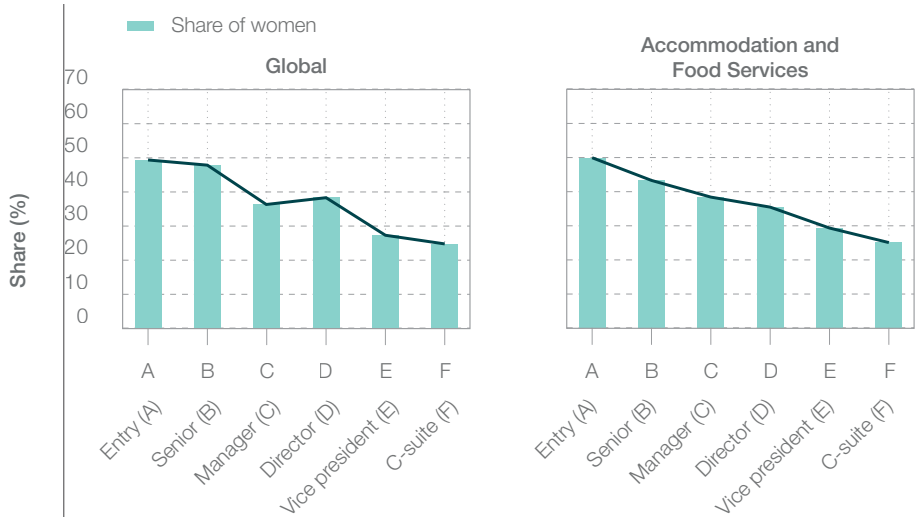
	% OF WOMEN IN WORKFORCE	SOURCE	SCOPE
OVERALL	42	WEF/LINKEDIN	GLOBAL
EVENTS MANAGERS	77	IBTM	GLOBAL
DISPARITY (PERCENT)	83%		
OVERALL	42	WEF/LINKEDIN	GLOBAL
MEETING/EVENT PLANNERS	86	ZIPPIA	US
DISPARITY (PERCENTAGE)	104%		

When you consider the proportion of women in the BE industry overall compared to workforce trends in general, the absence of women in leadership positions becomes starker. In BE management, it initially appears that there is no gender inequality since women constitute much of the workforce. One only need look around at an event to see who is in charge to confirm this statistic.

<sup>7</sup> Zippia, Event Planner Demographics and Statistics in the US, <https://www.zippia.com/meeting-event-planner-jobs/demographics/> accessed 1/5/2024

However, a closer look reveals a significant shift in gender distribution as one ascends the ranks of seniority, as indicated in Figure 3. As you move across the charts from left to right, the levels increase in terms of role seniority but decrease in terms of representation among women. The trajectory is more inversely proportional for Accommodation and Food services compared to the Global findings overall. (Note: Since there was no Events or Hospitality category in the WEF study, we used Accommodation and Food Services as a proxy, since much of this industry includes hospitality, hotel, and catering workers.)

**Figure 3: Representation of Women by Seniority Level**



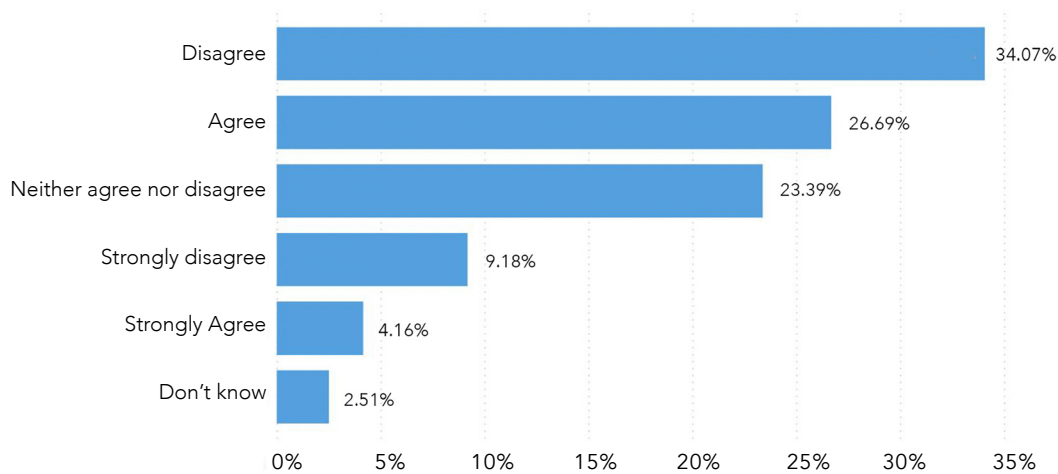
Source: WEF Global Gender Gap Report, 2023

The underrepresentation of women in top-tier positions is a persistent challenge, mirroring broader trends in workplace diversity within the BE industry.

According to the PwC Survey, less than one-third of respondents agreed that diverse identities are represented at the leadership level. (See Figure 4)

**Figure 4, Views on Diversity in the BE Sector**

*Q. Diverse identities are represented at the leaderships level across the Business Events industry*



*Source: PwC Survey conducted for PCMA: Advancing Women in Business Events*

## **II. Career Support and Development Opportunities for Women in BE are Limited**

In the PwC Survey, when respondents were asked if they feel supported by their organizations to advance their careers, the feedback was mixed. Some respondents felt that while opportunities existed, it wasn't clear how they could pursue them, while others expressed that opportunities within their organization were limited.

- 30% of respondents feel that they have the support of their organization to fulfill their career paths, but are not clear as to their next steps
- 28% of the respondents feel that they are clear on their career path but are limited by opportunities within their organization
- 25% agree that they have full organizational support and are clear on their career paths going forward

***Nearly 60% of respondents felt leadership roles at their organization were not available to them, or if they were, that they did not have clear steps on how to advance into them.***

Further, when asked, "What do you think about your career trajectory?" write-in comments from the PwC Survey included:

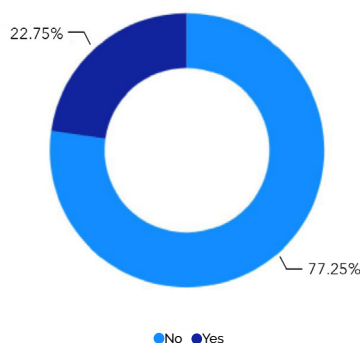
- "C-suite and Board level is white and male-dominated, and I feel there are limited opportunities to achieve any positions."
- "I founded my own business to grow and achieve my professional goals. I wasn't receiving that support from the last few organizations that I worked for."
- "I have nowhere else to go unless I head overseas. I have reached the pinnacle in my sector."

One of the biggest gaps identified in the survey is dearth of options for mentoring and sponsorship programs available to respondents.

- Less than one-third of respondents (31%) said there were opportunities for formal networking provided by their organizations
- 16% said they have access to inclusive mentoring programs
- Only 23% said they were actively involved in such programs if their companies provided them (See Figure 5)
- 6% said they have formal sponsorship programs in their organizations

**Figure 5: Involvement in Mentorship Programs**

**If your organization offers an inclusive mentorship program, are you actively involved?**



**What types of programs (if any), does your organization offer:**

*"CEO invites employees to roundtables for ideas and questions."*

*"Mentoring from team leads. Ability to attend a conference for events and sometimes the ability to take a certification, and of course, networking through our own events."*

*"Buddy system for all, tuition, reimbursement and professional development budget for all."*

Source: PwC Survey conducted for PCMA, "Advancing Women in Business Events"

Certainly, providing robust career support and development opportunities presents significant opportunities for the global BE sector, not just in addressing the gender imbalance within leadership teams, but in increasing the success of DEI efforts.

### III. Identifying Additional Barriers to Advancement

In addition to limited career support and development opportunities, many other barriers to advancement exist for women across the BE industry. It's crucial to identify and address these barriers in order to foster diversity and reap the benefits of gender-balanced leadership teams. Recognizing these barriers allows organizations and business sectors to implement targeted strategies and initiatives to promote equal opportunities.

Here are some common barriers to advancement identified in this research project:

#### **Personal**

- **Limiting beliefs:** Strongly tied to societal barriers, these are ideas often reinforced that it's just not worth it to attempt to overcome the barriers that exist. They could manifest as feelings of not being worthy or qualified, or even fear of success.
- **Feeling unsupported:** The reality of the lack of support in many organizations indicated in our research, coupled with the fact that some women may not have the support of the spouses or family to pursue advanced careers could lead to a reinforcement of limiting beliefs and a desire to maintain the status quo.
- **Lack of confidence:** An article in Psychology Today<sup>8</sup> posited that "women do not lack of confidence in their abilities as much as they lack confidence in whether they will actually succeed in their current environment." The latter is more a factor of societal barriers, still other well-known research as referenced by the Harvard Business Review<sup>9</sup> confirms that men apply for a job when they meet only 60% of the qualifications, but women apply only if they meet 100% of them.

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8 Mira Brancu, PhD., Psychology Today, "7 Myths About Why Women Don't Seek Leadership Roles," <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/new-look-womens-leadership/202104/7-myths-about-why-women-don-t-see-leadership-roles>, accessed 1/4/2024

9 Tara Sophia Mohr, Harvard Business Review, "Why Women Don't Apply for Jobs Unless They're 100% Qualified," <https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified>, accessed 1/4/2024

## Organizational

- **Gender Bias and Stereotypes:** Persistent gender biases and stereotypes may shape perceptions of leadership suitability, leading to unconscious biases in hiring, promotion, and task assignments.
- **Lack of Role Models:** The scarcity of female role models in senior leadership positions can make it challenging for women to envision and aspire to top-tier roles.
- **Implicit Bias in Recruitment Processes:** Unconscious biases in recruitment processes may result in the favoring of certain characteristics or traits traditionally associated with male leaders, disadvantaging qualified female candidates.
- **Inadequate Mentorship and Sponsorship:** A lack of mentors and sponsors can hinder career development and opportunities. Women may have limited access to guidance and advocacy from senior leaders who can help advance their careers.
- **Lack of Learning and Development Opportunities:** Some organizations within the BE industry may be too small to offer access to education or training events, or they are not able to provide the breadth of experience and exposure that medium-to-large organizations can. This has an impact on growth for women in the BE industry wanting to achieve more senior roles.
- **Lack of Flexible Work Arrangements:** The absence of flexible work options can impact women's ability to balance work and personal life, limiting their chances of reaching senior leadership positions.
- **Discriminatory Practices:** One-quarter of respondents in the PwC Survey indicated that they have either directly experienced or witnessed discrimination in their work environment either from management, colleagues, or customers/members. Any type of environment in which someone is made to feel uncomfortable does not lead to a strong sense of loyalty or passion for the organization, much less a desire to serve in its highest ranks.



## Societal/Industry-wide

- **Work/Life Balance Challenges:** The demanding nature of the BE industry, which involves extensive travel and long working hours, can pose challenges for women, particularly those juggling family responsibilities.
- **Limited Networking Opportunities:** Access to informal and formal networks is crucial for career advancement. Women may face challenges in building the same level of professional networks as their male counterparts.
- **The Business Events Industry is Not Well Known:** The level of recognition for the BE industry as a profession outside of the sector itself can vary. In general, the business events industry, which includes event planning, management, and coordination, is well known within certain circles, but its visibility may not be as high compared to more mainstream professions, especially at the high school and college level where career options are being discussed.
- **Salary Inequities:** Unequal compensation or lack of transparency of pay practices discourages women from pursuing leadership roles, knowing that their efforts may not be duly recognized or rewarded.

# RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT

In this section, we discuss some of the strides that are being made to overcome the barriers to gender advancement in the BE industry from a personal, organizational, and societal/industry-wide perspective.

## Personal

While the need for organizational and societal change to overcome gender inequities in the workplace cannot be overstated, the real work cannot be accomplished without women erasing the limiting beliefs that contribute to the status quo. Women on the receiving end of roadblocks to advancement in the BE industry should consider the following recommendations.

### 1. Break habits holding you back from advancement.

In their book, [How Women Rise](#), Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith address 12 habits holding women back from their next promotion, raise, or job. These include reluctance to claim achievements, expecting others to acknowledge your contributions, overvaluing expertise, building rather than engaging relationships and failing to enlist allies from day one. Advancement is a two-way street. It can't be expected to be improved by organizational and societal shifts alone. Women themselves have a role to play in identifying their own limiting behaviors and taking steps to overcome them.

### 2. Find a mentor or mentorship organization that can provide guidance and advice.

There's no need to go it alone and finding other women to serve as mentors or role models should be part of the mindset shift you create. There are ample opportunities for meeting peers in the BE industry, and while the number of women in the higher ranks may be scarce, this doesn't mean there aren't any who are striving to be there and making their own actionable plans for doing so. Seek out these women through word of mouth, trade articles, and by attending BE industry sessions and events. If your efforts are turning up short, this may be an indication you need to start a program of your own to bring more women together.

### **3. Up your negotiation skills to achieve pay equity.**

Part of the disparity in salary inequities comes down to men being more willing to negotiate than women. Train to negotiate by taking classes or workshops, seek out the advice of a professional coach or mentor, and practice role-play situations you are likely to encounter on the job.

### **4. Be the impetus for organizational change in your workplace.**

The next section discusses strategies that organizations wishing to support gender advancement at their own companies can take. Talk to your manager, senior leadership, or HR department if you believe they might be receptive to such actions. Be prepared to cite some examples of success at other organizations, and that you would be prepared to lead or join a task force for addressing the particular issues at your workplace.

## **Organizational**

Many organizations have stated they are committed to DEI efforts, of which gender advancement is one, to create a more equitable workforce. Of the BE professionals who responded to the PwC Survey, 46% agree that DEI is a priority area for the industry, with 26% responding that they strongly agree with this statement. The following recommendations can serve to further an organization's stated commitment to DEI and gender advancement in the BE industry.

### **1. Get buy-in from the highest levels.**

Gender advancement is not a matter for delegation to HR. While input from this function is key as they have the ear of the staff, this commitment has to be led by the CEO, Board, and Executive team to elevate its importance when competing for employee mindshare and time. Only by securing buy-in at the top, can these positions begin to increase representation of women at the executive or board level when there is turnover or new roles are created.

## **2. Offer blended strategies for work/life balance and female-friendly benefits.**

The BE industry should find a way to implement flexible working arrangements to accommodate child or elder care for both men and women. Offering a job-sharing program for women going on maternity leave or fathers on paternity leave is a strong start.

The BE industry, in particular, should consider the travel preferences for women, since travel is often integral to their roles. For example, offer PTO days to compensate for business travel over the weekend, provide additional support staff for travel over a certain number of miles from a woman's home, or offer childcare options for events that run past a certain time. Pooling these resources among companies might be a way to defray some of the costs involved, as companies come together in a show of support for gender advancement.

## **3. Reduce unconscious biases from the recruiting process and within industry ranks overall.**

Implement training programs that foster inclusive decision-making and challenge gender stereotypes in the workplace overall, starting with hiring protocols.

The most effective unconscious bias training does more than increase awareness of bias and its impact, according to an article in the Harvard Business Review.<sup>10</sup> It teaches attendees to manage their biases, change their behavior, and track their progress. It gives them information that contradicts stereotypes and allows them to connect with people whose experiences are different from theirs. It's not just a one-time education session; it entails a longer journey and structural changes to policies and operations—like the standardization of hiring processes, elimination of self-assessments from performance reviews, and institution of incentives for improving diversity.

This can be achieved, in part, by standardizing questions, removing names from resume reviews, and providing diversity training for all those involved in the recruiting process.

<sup>10</sup> Francesca Gino and Katherine Coffman, Harvard Business Review, "Unconscious Bias Training That Works," <https://hbr.org/2021/09/unconscious-bias-training-that-works>, Accessed 2/13/2024.

Partner with HR solutions such as Greenhouse Recruiting's DEI feature set,<sup>11</sup> which provides various tools for organizations to reduce bias during the interview process.

**4. Incorporate DEI training into existing training and development programs.**

Don't just limit investment in training to high potentials or a select group of your workforce. BE organizations can curate learning and leadership programs that target women through free or low-cost outlets like Udemy, Coursera, and LinkedIn Learning. These platforms also offer an array of courses on understanding, incorporating, and managing diversity efforts within organizations, which can be targeted at the executive level.

**5. Conduct regular assessments of career progression paths and implement transparency.**

Set reasonable goals for advancing women and disenfranchised groups within your organization. Measure your progress at regular intervals and report on the results through town halls, employee newsletters, company events, annual reports, etc. Be transparent about your goals, successes, and where there is more to be done.

**6. Work to achieve pay equity at your organization.**

Work to achieve equity in pay levels within your organization, regardless of which gender is selected to fill roles. Conduct regular reviews of salary by different segments. Reward directors who set and accomplish goals that reduce the salary gap. Where appropriate, publish salaries or salary ranges during the interview process.

**7. Offer women coaching to address barriers specific to their gender.**

Female participants in the Think Tanks conducted for this report said they have a hard time promoting and marketing themselves in a way that feels authentic. They also said they have a hard time moving from being an individual contributor to a strategic thinker and director.

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<sup>11</sup> Greenhouse, "Bias-reducing behaviors," <https://support.greenhouse.io/hc/en-us/articles/360004923452-Bias-reducing-behaviors#:~:text=Greenhouse%20Recruiting's%20DE%26!%20feature%20set.access%20to%20interview%20preparation%20materials>. Accessed 2/13/2024.

Help women overcome habits that hold them back and build the mental resilience required to manage the pressures that come with being a senior leader. Include negotiation skills as part of your training efforts and consider courses or sessions that speak directly to the female mindset.

**8. Create a framework for actions to advance women in BE.**

The American Psychological Association<sup>12</sup> offers a framework that underscores the importance of mentorship and supporting organizations, along with allyship among women in the industry, as ways to help advance more women into leadership positions.

## How to help advance more women into leadership



**Identify** potential leaders early.



**Establish** mentorship and sponsorship programs.



**Support** women in joining women-led professional organizations.



**Focus** on allyship.

© American Psychological Association

## Societal/Industry-wide

Of course, the larger challenge remains the barriers women face based on long-held societal beliefs and practices. Changes at both the Personal and Organizational levels will go along way toward remedying these obstacles. Until then, the following recommendations can also serve to shift established mindsets.

<sup>12</sup> Amy Novotney, "Women leaders make work better: Here's the science behind how to promote them," American Psychological Association, March 23, 2023, <https://www.apa.org/topics/women-girls/female-leaders-make-work-better>. Accessed 2/13/2024

**1. Establish a steering committee to address all forms of diversity within the BE industry.**

The American Psychological Association published a research paper, "The road to gender equality: Persisting obstacles for American women in the workforce,"<sup>13</sup> which identified remedies to alleviate microaggressive behaviors and negative obstacles for American women in the workplace. Examples of these remedies include companies creating gender-diverse organizational cultures, being committed to hiring and promoting women for managerial leadership positions, challenging existing corporate identities, implementing positive discrimination practices, and being held to diversity transparency.

While essential to address these challenges at the organizational level, we believe these measures should be considered on an industry-wide level, starting with a steering committee composed of members from different organizations to ensure guidelines are developed and disseminated to the BE industry.

This committee should be made up of men and women to advance this strategic roadmap. The steering committee should be representative of varying ages, gender definitions, and global regions. It should commit to advancing all diverse groups, not just women, while understanding the research and statistics highlighting the inequalities for women in particular.

Part of the mandate for the steering committee should be to recognize and enhance future-forward skills (described later in this report) within the global BE industry leadership pipeline.

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<sup>13</sup> L.L. Palmer, American Psychological Association, "The road to gender equality: Persisting obstacles for American women in the workforce," *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 24(2), 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.1037/mgr0000115>

## **To accelerate the progression of women into senior leadership roles:**

- Focus on actions to fill the executive level and mid-tier level pipeline with strong female talent. Set targets and actively advocate within the industry to uncover talent.
- Where barriers are identified, provide experience, geography, and/or culture-specific solutions to close the gaps. Set regular intervals to report on progress against pre-agreed targets. Be prepared to shift direction as new barriers and roadblocks are discovered. Gender advancement is a fluid initiative.
- Monitor other efforts in the industry and join together—there is strength in numbers all working toward a common goal. Conduct research to learn what works and where past efforts fell short.
- Consider a collective budget secured by contributions by the top companies in the industry who agree to sign a pledge toward gender advancement. The money could be used to create awareness of efforts, skill-based training, virtual or in-person gatherings focused on educating the community, and more.

### **2. Create formal women's mentorship programs/circles locally and globally.**

While these programs exist, too often, they are informal and left up to participants to procure. A formal system needs to be in place for managing the program. These programs/circles need to be leader-led and company-endorsed to establish more accountability.

The program can be used as a vehicle to showcase successful women in leadership positions to provide guidance and inspiration for aspiring female leaders. One such example is Ellevate,<sup>14</sup> a global professional network offering roundtables, squad masterminds, chapter meetups, and community circles for its members. PCMA has a

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<sup>14</sup> Ellevate Network website, <https://www.ellevatenetwork.com>. Accessed 2/14/2024.



women's mentoring ring and Circles program where participants discuss challenges, share perspectives, and gain insights from the collective group.

### **3. Support women-owned businesses in the BE industry.**

Help to diversify supplier selection by actively seeking and choosing female-run businesses as suppliers in your procurement process. Create a guide to women-owned businesses in the industry and encourage the use of these businesses for event needs. Consult this manual from the UN, "The Power of Procurement: How to Source from Women-owned Businesses"<sup>15</sup> as a guide on how to encourage gender-responsive procurement from corporations.

### **4. Create more opportunities for networking outside the BE industry itself.**

The BE industry can use its own knowledge of in-person and virtual events to create opportunities for those in the industry to meet with leaders in other industries to promote their unique skill sets. Give attendees opportunities to make meaningful connections, gain knowledge and skills relevant to career progression, and use social platforms to maintain communication following and in between networking sessions. This could be achieved by asking each attendee to simply state what they're looking for and what they can offer other attendees to fill gaps in their career advancement. CEO mentorship circles<sup>16</sup> can also give women exposure to senior leaders within and outside of the BE industry. This will serve a dual purpose of also elevating the BE industry and its benefits to society in general.

### **5. Identify existing models of success worth replicating.**

PCMA and BESydney are not alone in our efforts to see more women advance in leadership. Understanding other successful programs, whether tailored to the BE industry or not, is essential to find models worth replicating. Three such models uncovered in our research for this report include:

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<sup>15</sup> UN Manual, "The Power of Procurement: How to Source From Women—Owned Businesses, Corporate Guide to Gender—Responsive Procurement," <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/The-power-of-procurement-How-to-source-from-women-owned-businesses-en.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Noah Edis, Together Platform, "Mentoring Circles: What they are and how to start one," August 24, 2022, <https://www.togetherplatform.com/blog/mentoring-circles>. Accessed 2/23/2024.

- **Women at Amazon<sup>17</sup>**

Women at Amazon is a global affinity group for women, non-binary employees, and allies at Amazon.com. With over 80 chapters worldwide, Women at Amazon is committed to attracting, developing, and retaining women in both tech and non-tech roles across all of Amazon's businesses. They are a community for employees across Amazon interested in increasing gender diversity at Amazon. Women at Amazon chapters provide professional and personal support and community to hire, develop, retain, and elevate more women. Their flagship initiatives include events such as International Women's Day and an annual Global All-Hands—with programs focused on recruiting, inclusion, and empowerment.

- **The Champions for Change Coalition<sup>18</sup>**

The Champions of Change Coalition is a globally recognized, innovative strategy for achieving gender equality, advancing more and diverse women in leadership, and building respectful and inclusive workplaces. In the strategy, men of power and influence step up beside women leaders. They form a high-profile coalition to lead and be accountable for change on gender equality issues in their organizations and communities, be they local, national or global.

- **Train and engage men in advocating for change.**

The fight for gender equality does not rest with workplaces, society, or even women. It's a fully united effort. Catalyst, a global non-profit supporting women in the workplace, offers a program called, MARC, Men Advocating Real Change,<sup>19</sup> designed to inspire and equip men to leverage their unique opportunities and responsibilities to be advocates for gender equality in the workplace.

In the ever-evolving business landscape, leaders need a diverse set of attributes and skills to navigate the complexities of disruption, drive innovation, and foster positive organizational growth.

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<sup>17</sup> Women at Amazon LinkedIn page, <https://www.linkedin.com/company/women-at-amazon/>. Accessed 2/13/2024

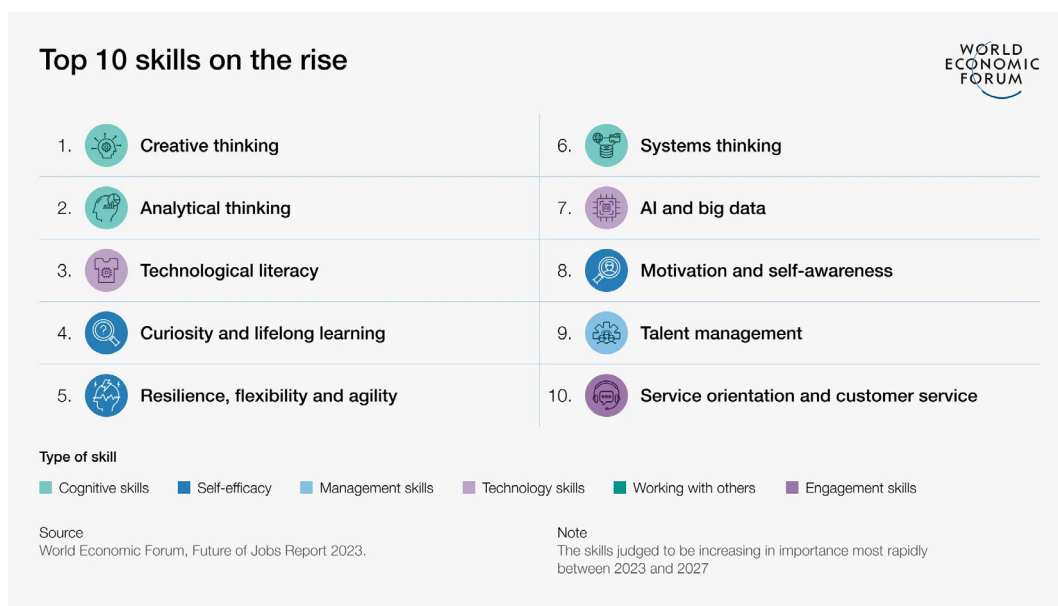
<sup>18</sup> Champions of Change Coalition website, <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/>. Accessed 2/13/2024

<sup>19</sup> MARC by Catalyst website, <https://www.catalyst.org/marc/>. Accessed 2/13/2024.

# LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES & SKILLS CRITICAL FOR THE FUTURE

The World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report<sup>20</sup> estimates that 44% of workers' skills are expected to change in the next five years. This means a drive toward re-skilling our workforces will be necessary, including C-suite and Board Members, regardless of gender.

Creative thinking; curiosity and lifelong learning; and resilience, flexibility, and agility are among the top skills that are projected to grow in importance by 2027, all skills favored by women. (See next section.)



Further, during the course of this research project, the following leadership attributes and skills were identified for leadership development in 2024 and beyond.

- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Leaders must be agile and adaptable to navigate constant change and uncertainty. Flexibility in thinking and an openness to new ideas are crucial.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Understanding and managing emotions, both one's own and those of others, is key for effective leadership. Emotional intelligence fosters better communication, collaboration, and relationship-building.

<sup>20</sup>World Economic Form Future of Jobs Report, April 30, 2023. Accessed 2/13/2023. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023/>

- **Strategic Vision:** Leaders need a clear and forward-thinking vision to guide their teams and organizations. The ability to formulate and communicate a strategic vision is crucial for long-term success.
- **Tech Savviness:** In the post-Covid era, the acceptance of virtual and hybrid environments means leaders today must be comfortable with technology and understand its implications for improving business productivity. This includes an awareness of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, and their potential impact.
- **Innovation and Creativity:** Leaders need to foster a culture of innovation and creativity within their teams. This involves encouraging new ideas, taking calculated risks, and embracing a mindset of continuous improvement.
- **Collaboration and Team Building:** The ability to build and lead diverse, high-performing teams is essential. Collaboration skills facilitate the exchange of ideas and the harnessing of collective intelligence.
- **Cultural Intelligence:** With a globalized workforce, leaders must be culturally intelligent. This involves an understanding and appreciation of different cultural norms, values, and communication styles.
- **Resilience:** Leaders should be resilient in the face of challenges and setbacks. Resilience enables them to bounce back from failures, learn from experiences, and lead with a positive mindset.
- **Ethical Leadership:** Ethical considerations are increasingly important to the workforce of the future. Leaders should prioritize integrity, transparency, and ethical decision-making to build trust and credibility.
- **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Leaders need strong critical thinking skills to analyze complex situations, make informed decisions, and solve problems effectively.
- **Continuous Learning Mindset:** A commitment to lifelong learning is vital. Leaders should be curious, open to new information, and dedicated to staying informed about

industry trends and developments.

- **Communication Skills:** Effective communication is foundational. Leaders must articulate their vision, provide clear direction, and engage in open and transparent communication with team members.
- **Agile Leadership:** Agile leadership involves the ability to pivot quickly, experiment with new approaches, and respond rapidly to changing circumstances.
- **Sustainability Mindset:** Leaders should consider the environmental and social impact of their decisions. A sustainability mindset involves incorporating responsible and ethical practices into organizational strategies.

# WHY WOMEN ARE WELL-SUITED TO LEADERSHIP ROLES

Based on extensive research conducted by Helen Fisher, PhD, (Biological Anthropologist and Senior Research Fellow at The Kinsey Institute), for the book [\*Enlightened Power: How Women are Transforming the Practice of Leadership\*](#), women are uniquely qualified by virtue of their gender, for several of these capabilities, versus their male counterparts.

In her research, Dr. Fisher identified several aptitudes that stem, in part, from women's brain architecture and hormones, skills that leadership theorists now espouse as essential to leadership effectiveness. These include:

## **Web Thinking: Women's Contextual View**

Women tend to think in webs of factors, not straight lines, a term coined by Dr. Fisher as *web thinking*, which simply put, means they gather details differently than men. Women integrate more details faster and arrange these bits of data into more complex patterns. As they make decisions, women tend to weigh more variables, consider more options, and see a wider array of possible solutions to a problem. Women tend to generalize, synthesize, and take a broader, more holistic and contextual perspective of any issue.

## **Mental Flexibility/Creativity**

Creative thinking was the top skill predicted to be on the rise over the next five years, according to the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report. A recent Leadership Circle white paper titled, "Understanding the Differences in Reactive and Creative Orientations Between Female and Male Leaders"<sup>21</sup> found that women score significantly higher than men on all creative dimensions measured.

Dr. Fisher surmises that one creative dimension, the ability to generate new ideas, is the product of women's mental flexibility, as well as yet another aspect of women's web thinking: imagination. If you consider imagination as the capacity to reach into the depths of one's stored knowledge, assemble chunks of data in new ways, examine these myriad

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<sup>21</sup> Cynthia Adams and Lani Van Dusen PhD., "Understanding the Differences in Reactive and Creative Orientations Between Female and Male Leaders," Leadership Circle, 3/17/2022, <https://leadershipcircle.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Research-on-Female-and-Male-Leaders-White-Paper-2022-03-17.pdf>. Accessed 2/13/2024

combinations, and “suppose” how various arrangements might play out, these traits align with what Dr. Fisher has purported to be women’s forte, web thinking.

### **Verbal Articulation: Words Are Women’s Tools**

An exceptional female talent is the ability to find the right word rapidly—basic articulation. Moreover, American women share this verbal fluency with women in Japan, Nepal, England, and every other country where these skills have been tested—most likely because women’s verbal aptitudes are associated with gender differences in the brain, as well as the female hormone, estrogen.

Women are born to talk—a feminine acuity that probably evolved to enable ancestral women to comfort, cajole, and educate their little ones, chastise, even ostracize group members who failed to meet their responsibilities, reward those who did, and maintain harmony in the community. Words were women’s tools. Words still sway minds and hearts. As contemporary women leaders have opportunities to express their “voices” in the workplace, their power will increase.

### **Executive Social Skills**

Women have what scientists call “executive social skills.” From millennia of rearing prelinguistic babies, women have evolved a keener ability to pick up the nuances of posture and gesture, read complex emotions in faces, and hear slight changes in tone of voice. Women, on average, have a better sense of taste, touch, smell, and hearing. They see better in the dark, have better peripheral vision, and remember more objects in the room or landscape.

With these skills, women are built to read minds. So, it’s not surprising that women already hold the majority per of job in the booming service sector of the world economy—another way they lead.

## **Networking, Collaboration, and Empathy**

Along with women's executive social skills are their remarkable facilities for networking, collaboration, empathy, inclusion, and sharing power. Men tend to cast themselves within hierarchies and view power as rank and status; women, on the other hand, form cliques and regard power as an egalitarian network of supportive connections.

These feminine dispositions to work in egalitarian teams, network, and support others are inherent, as women naturally tend to want to and know how to support one another relative to their male counterparts.

According to Dr. Fisher, women who cultivate and embody these attributes and skills are better equipped to lead their organizations through the challenges and opportunities of the future. Continuous self-awareness and a commitment to ongoing development are also critical for leading in dynamic environments.



# CONCLUSION

Recognizing the tremendous value of diversity in global corporate leadership overall, PCMA and BESydney stand united to achieve an ambitious goal based on the feedback gleaned from our research, summarized below. Together, as an industry, we need to raise awareness of the issue both within and outside of the BE community such that we begin to realize measurable gains in:

- 1.** Increasing the representation of women in leadership roles
- 2.** Closing the gender pay gap
- 3.** Promoting flexible working styles, work/life balance, and family support
- 4.** Increasing diversity and inclusion of all marginalized groups
- 5.** Empowering women (removing limiting beliefs)
- 6.** Fostering cultural and societal change that challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes

The good news is, we are making some strides. Insights from [PCMA's Convene Salary Survey 2023](#)<sup>22</sup> found that:

- A stubborn gender wage gap remains for the BE industry, despite the fact that the large majority of event professionals are women. Male respondents earn nearly 5 percent more than female respondents. On the upside, more than three-quarters of respondents, (nearly 90 percent of which are women), have seen their salary increase an average of 8 percent in the past 12 months, and 59 percent expect an increase in the next 12 months.
- Nearly nine out of 10 respondents said their employers have a flexible work policy and two out of five said they get to decide when to work from home and when to be in the office.

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<sup>22</sup>Nearly 850 event professionals participated in PCMA's annual Convene Salary Survey, conducted in early fall of 2023. Eighty-nine percent of respondents were women. Read the highlights or download our report here: <https://www.pcma.org/salary-survey-2023-highs-lows-event-pros/>

- The overwhelming majority of respondents—85 percent—said they pursue upskilling on their own. Slightly under three-quarters of respondents said their employer regularly pays for them to attend educational events, including conferences. (While respectable, this percentage should be higher, considering many of these organizations are in the business of creating revenue-generating learning opportunities for their audiences—so they know full well the value of continuing education.) Some women who responded to the Convene survey echoed a familiar sentiment long held by women in the Business Events industry: “I feel like we make a difference in the world.” How many roles across how many industries can legitimately say that? If we want more women to make a difference, we need to do more.

It should be noted that the burden to help women advance into leadership roles within the BE industry cannot fall solely to women. It is critical that male and female colleagues alike develop a mindset to offer support and development for women to lessen the barriers they currently face.

By working to elevate the industry overall and the value it brings to business and worldwide economies, we can pave the way to reduce the gender gap as well as increase the diversity of all underrepresented groups. Advancing change on the three dimensions of personal, organizational, and societal/industry-wide takes work, but it is not insurmountable. It starts with empowering women to claim their rightful seat at the table, educating businesses as to the value women bring to executive and board-level positions, and advancing the BE industry overall. Only by making demonstrable gains here can we stand a chance of reducing societal and industry-wide biases that have kept women, as well as the BE industry, from progressing.

# APPENDIX

## Background of respondents



96% of respondents identify as female and 4% identify as male.



The majority of respondents are based in the USA (63%) followed by Australia (6%) and Canada (6%). Respondents are based across North America, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East and Africa.



We found that 24% of respondents are directors, followed by managers (19%) and senior managers (18%). 92% of respondents are in permanent positions and 94% work full-time.



74% of respondents have worked in the business events industry for more than 11 years, 12% of respondents have worked in the industry for 6-10 years and 11% have worked in the industry for 2-5 years.



Over half of respondents (51%) work in an hybrid office/home environment followed by 31% who work entirely from home and 16% being fully office based.



10% of respondents identify as differently-abled.



17% of respondents are aged between 26-34 years old.  
17% are aged between 50-54.  
16% are aged between 40-44.



29% of respondents work in organisations that have between 50-249 employees.  
22% work in organisations of between 10-49 people.  
14% work for organisations sized between 250-1000 employees.

# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

(CITED FOR THIS REPORT)

## Research Papers:

- PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP: Advancing Women in Business Events DEI Survey
- [World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023](#)
- IBTM, [Event Management Gender Equality Report, 2022](#)
- American Psychological Association, "[The road to gender equality: Persisting obstacles for American women in the workforce](#)"
- [World Economic Form Future of Jobs Report](#)
- [PCMA's Convene Salary Survey 2023](#)

## Articles:

- Psychology Today, "[7 Myths About Why Women Don't Seek Leadership Roles](#)"
- Harvard Business Review, "[Why Women Don't Apply for Jobs Unless They're 100% Qualified](#)"
- Harvard Business Review, "[Unconscious Bias Training That Works](#)"
- American Psychological Association, "[Women leaders make work better: Here's the science behind how to promote them](#)"
- Together Platform, "[Mentoring Circles: What they are and how to start one](#)"
- Leadership Circle, "[Understanding the Differences in Reactive and Creative Orientations Between Female and Male Leaders](#)"

## Guide:

[UN Corporate Guide to Gender-Responsive Procurement](#)

## Websites:

Zippia, [Meeting/Event Planner Demographics and Statistics in the US](#)  
Greenhouse, [Bias-reducing behaviors](#)  
Ellevest Network, <https://www.ellevestnetwork.com/>  
LinkedIn, [Women at Amazon](#)  
[Champions of Change Coalition website](#)  
[MARK by Catalyst website](#)

## Books:

[How Women Rise](#) by Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith  
[Enlightened Power: How Women are Transforming the Practice of Leadership](#) edited by Lin Coughlin, Ellen Wingard, and Keith Hollihan

# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

## (GENERAL)

- 1.** Wanda Johnson Interview with PCMA Convene Magazine (May 17, 2021), <https://www.pcma.org/wanda-johnson-lifelong-learner-lessons/>.
- 2.** Women Leadership in the Business Events Industry, University of Alabama College of Human Environmental Sciences and University of South Carolina Hospitality, Retail and Sports Management (April 2021).
- 3.** Culture Partners Research Series—The Value of Women in Leadership (2023). *Empower Women, Empower Your Organization*, pp. 1-20.
- 4.** Lauren Romansky, Mia Garrod, Katie Brown, and Kartik DEO (May 27, 2021). *How to Measure Inclusion in the Workplace*. Harvard Business Review, pp 1-7.
- 5.** Seghier, Raphael (March 25, 2021). Podcasting and Gender Equality. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/podcasting-gender-equality-raphael-seghier/>
- 6.** Castrillon, Caroline (2019). Why Women Need to Network Differently Than Men. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2019/03/10/why-women-need-to-network-differently-than-men-to-get-ahead/?sh=25979e2db0a1>
- 7.** Abrams, Stacey Y., Hodgson, Lara, & Cabot, Heather (2022). *Level UP: Rise Above the Hidden Forces Holding Your Business Back*, Audible audiobook.
- 8.** Julia Gillard, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, et al., (2021). *Women and Leadership: Real Lives, Real Lessons*. MIT Press.
- 9.** Owens, Julie E. et al., (2020). *We Are the Leaders We've Been Waiting For: Women and Leadership Development in College*. Stylus Publishing.

# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

## (RESEARCH ON GLOBAL DIFFERENCES)

- 1.** Women in Hospitality, Travel, and Leisure 2020, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (November 2017). <https://www.pwc.co.uk/hospitality-leisure/documents/women-in-hospitality-travel-and-leisure-final-report.pdf>
- 2.** Gender equality through legislation Australia—The Workplace Gender Equality Agency is an Australian Government statutory agency created by the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/about/our-legislation>
- 3.** Research by Kearney shows that Australia is among the leading markets in the world when it comes to gender parity in the workplace, performing ahead of the UK, the US and India, March 18, 2020. <https://www.consultancy.com.au/news/1787/australia-outperforms-us-and-uk-in-gender-equality>
- 4.** UnWomen—Women in power in 2023: New data shows progress but wide regional gaps, March 7, 2023. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2023/03/women-in-power-in-2023-new-data-shows-progress-but-wide-regional-gaps>
- 5.** Deloitte Advancing More Women Leaders in Financial Services: A Global Report, June 16, 2022. <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/our-thinking/insights/industry/financial-services/gender-diversity-in-global-financial-services.htm>
- 6.** McKinsey Global Institute Report: The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia—Pacific. April 23, 2018. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-asia-pacific>
- 7.** Bolt Insight Commissioned by Shape Talent Research Report (August 25, 2023). Three Barriers to Women's Progression. <https://www.shapetalent.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/20230323-Gender-Equality-UK-Report-FINAL.pdf>
- 8.** World Economic Forum (2024). Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses Report. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-lighthouses-2024/>

# ABOUT PCMA

PCMA, PCMA Foundation and CEMA educate, inspire, and listen, creating meaningful experiences where passion, purpose and commerce come together. We are the world's largest community for Business Events Strategists, providing senior-level education, networking, and market intelligence for the global business events industry. Our mission is to drive social and economic progress through business events. Headquartered in Chicago, IL PCMA has 17 North American Chapters, regional communities in APAC, EMEA and LATAM, and members in 59 countries. The Corporate Event Marketing Association (CEMA), a PCMA subsidiary, advances strategic event marketing and marketing communications for senior—level event marketers and industry professionals. Visit us at [pcma.org](https://www.pcma.org/).

<https://www.pcma.org/>

## ABOUT PCMA FOUNDATION

The role of the Foundation of PCMA is to support the mission of PCMA through fundraising and grant-giving focused on scholarships, education and research that will advance the business events industry. Annually the Foundation funds over \$700K in impact, and since 1985 has funded over 2,500 scholarships, 100 research studies and education programs, and \$2.7M in charitable giving.

<https://foundation.pcma.org/>

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<https://www.besydney.com.au/>

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