

A young woman with long dark hair, wearing a white high-collared coat, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is holding a white coffee cup in her right hand. She has a grey bag slung over her shoulder. The background is a blurred city street at night with warm bokeh lights from buildings and streetlights.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

ROBERT WALTERS



FOREWORD

Is gender diversity the metaphoric elephant in the workplace today?

Just as a myriad of cultures make up the fabric of Asia Pacific, conversations and sentiments on gender diversity vary. With the debate ever non-conclusive, the purpose of this whitepaper is to draw results and information from past research, sentiments from our client and candidate database across 10 markets in Asia Pacific, and provide recommendations on empowerment in the workplace. Beyond the focus on gender diversity, we hope the recommendations here can help organisations to start somewhere – to empower women to charge ahead in their careers, developing a new generation of female leaders to create more diverse and successful teams.

SUMMARY

This Robert Walters whitepaper has been created to explore the topic of gender diversity and examine its effects on developing future female leaders of tomorrow. It draws on the sentiments of professionals working across Asia Pacific and provides recommendations on what organisations can do to empower the next generation of female employees into leadership positions.

This whitepaper explores:

- Career priorities of working professionals
- How female leaders are regarded in the workplace
- The need for equal representation of female leaders within an organisation
- What companies can do to empower women in their careers

This whitepaper is based on a survey conducted in January 2016 to better understand existing perceptions of gender diversity across key markets in Asia Pacific. The survey gathered the views of over 4,400 clients and active job seekers across Australia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. Additional interviews and research were collated to complement survey findings.

DO CAREER PRIORITIES DIFFER ACROSS GENDERS?



Working professionals in Asia Pacific – across genders – value jobs that they find fulfilling and rewarding and offer a good work-life balance.

In recent years, the influence of patriarchy in Asia Pacific varies accordingly to the economic growth, culture, and religious beliefs in each country. The diminished but ever-prevalent pressure for women to assume more parental duties over men has led us to question if the career priorities of working professionals differ between men and women.

Interestingly, our results showed that there is little difference when it comes to what working professionals in Asia Pacific value and look for in their careers.

Top career priorities of working professionals in Asia Pacific:

	Women	Men
Working in a job I find fulfilling and rewarding	42%	35%
A good work-life balance	32%	35%
Achieving a senior/leadership role	14%	17%

Most important career progression strategy to women:



A clear path to career progression



Personalised training and development programmes



Leadership programmes that identify and nurture potential leaders early in their employment



KEY LEARNING #1:

Identify the motivational factors that drive employees early in the recruitment process

Understanding what candidates want out of their careers during job interviews will allow hiring managers to better assess the resources and training required to help empower them within the organisation. This leads to a lower attrition rate and better employee satisfaction.



"THERE IS A FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT APPROACH BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN, AND I THINK WOMEN ESPECIALLY HAVE TO PUSH THEIR CASE, EVEN IF IT MAKES YOU UNCOMFORTABLE THAT YOU HAVE TO SPEAK CLEARLY OF YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS. AS A LEADER, SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO BE ASSERTIVE TO BE HEARD."

Mark Gabel
Vice-President Industrial
Aftermarket Southeast Asia

Head of Aerospace
Schaeffler Singapore

THE GENDER DIVERSITY DEBATE

37%

of female respondents surveyed think their current employer has clear and enforced policies on gender diversity, equality and inclusion

Only 32% of respondents agree that women make up more than 20% of leadership positions in their organisations. Additionally, only half of female respondents believe there are strong female leaders within their organisations that they can look up to as role models.

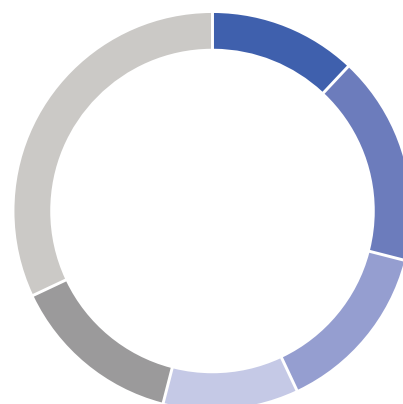
Are there strong female role models in leadership within your organisation?

 YES	Women	Men
	53%	62%

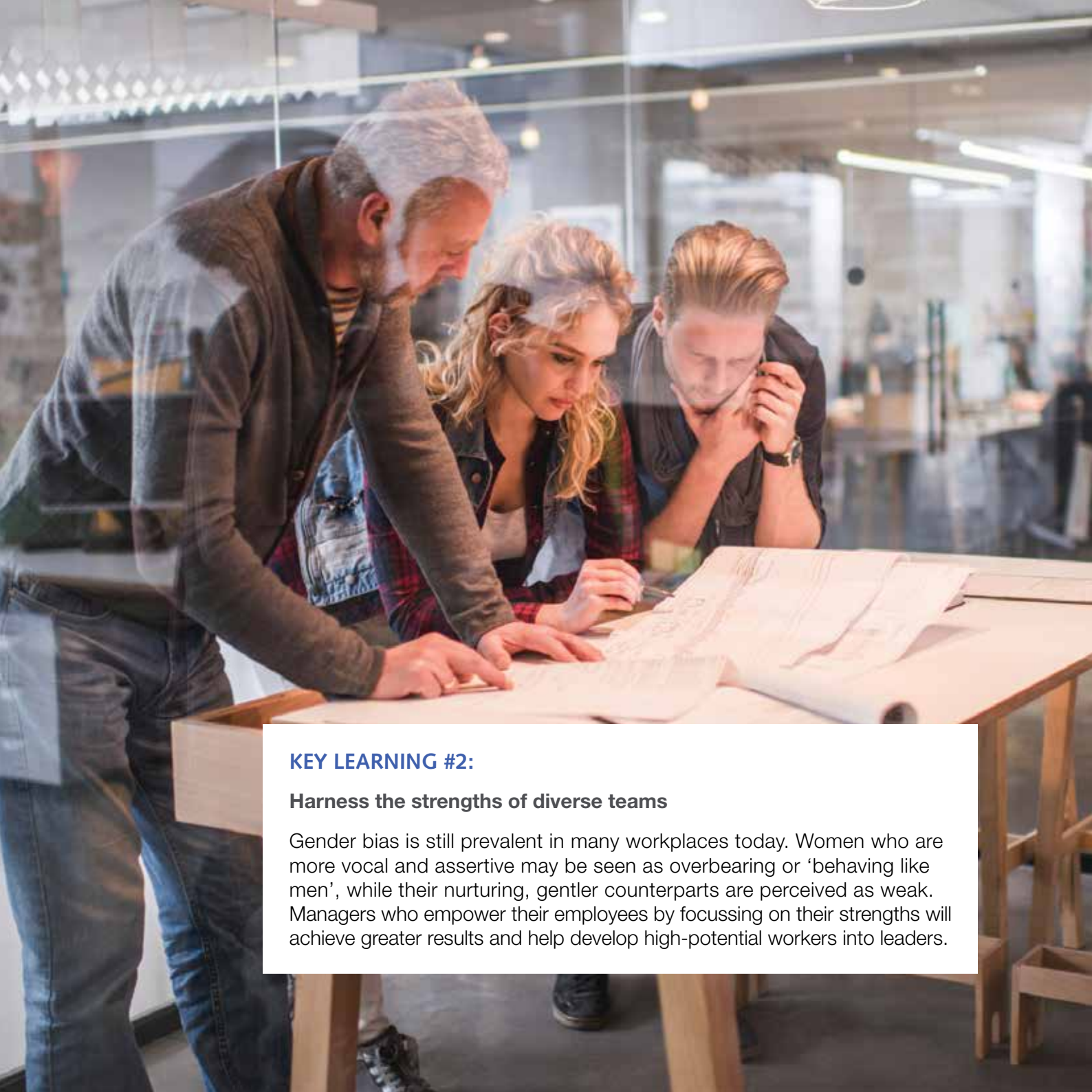
 THINK THERE IS A FAIR AND EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE LEADERS WITHIN THEIR ORGANISATIONS	Women	Men
	39%	53%

Men are more likely to feel there are strong female leaders in their organisations and are 14% more likely than women to agree that there is a fair and equal gender balance in leadership positions.

Percentage of senior management positions currently filled by women:



- 12% Less than 1%
- 17% 1-5%
- 14% 5-10%
- 11% 10-15%
- 14% 15-20%
- 32% More than 20%



KEY LEARNING #2:

Harness the strengths of diverse teams

Gender bias is still prevalent in many workplaces today. Women who are more vocal and assertive may be seen as overbearing or 'behaving like men', while their nurturing, gentler counterparts are perceived as weak. Managers who empower their employees by focussing on their strengths will achieve greater results and help develop high-potential workers into leaders.

IS THERE A NEED FOR GENDER DIVERSITY?

80%

of women surveyed think they are under-represented in leadership positions in business

There have been substantial studies on the positive effects gender diversity has on team performance and success. In a 2014 study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology¹, economist Sara Ellison deduced that having a more diverse group of employees means a more diverse set of skills, potentially resulting in an office that functions better.

A report by the McKinsey Global Institute² predicted that an environment where women achieved complete gender parity with men could increase global output by more than one quarter relative to an unchanged scenario.

However, a McKinsey & Co paper titled 'Unlocking the full potential of women at work' drew attention to the tendency for senior executives to expect female leaders to model the same behaviour as men³. Many successful female leaders adapt to the male environments in which they operate, believing that a typically male-centric, results-orientated approach will aid them in their advancement to senior management.

"MORE EMPLOYERS NEED TO CREATE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE EQUAL GENDER REPRESENTATION."



MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL
MALAYSIA



THINK THERE IS A NEED FOR FAIR AND EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE LEADERS WITHIN AN ORGANISATION

Women	Men
76%	51%

¹Study: Workplace diversity can help the bottom line. (2014, October 6). Retrieved February 14, 2016, from http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2014-10/miot-swd100614.php

²The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth. (September 2015). McKinsey Global Institute. Retrieved February 11, 2016, from <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

³Barsh, J., & Yee, L. (2012). Unlocking the full potential of women at work. McKinsey & Co., 7. Retrieved February 10, 2016, from <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/unlocking-the-full-potential-of-women-at-work>






80% OF WOMEN SURVEYED THINK WOMEN ARE UNDER-REPRESENTED IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN BUSINESS, COMPARED TO 59% OF MEN.

When asked to name the top three reasons why women are under-represented, 51% of all respondents cited family pressures or commitments outside of work, 46% believed it is due to a workplace culture that does not actively foster diversity, inclusion and equality, and 42% attributed it to a preference by management to promote men over women. However, more female respondents believe they are under-represented in leadership positions due to a preference by management to promote men.

“I DON’T THINK GENDER DIVERSITY IS EXCLUSIVE TO ME AS A WOMAN – EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.”

Tricia Duran
HR Director of Singapore and Regional HR Director of Functions Asia, Africa and Russia
 Unilever

Reasons why women feel they are under-represented in leadership positions:

	Women	Men
 A preference by management to promote men over women	52%	42%
 Family pressures or commitments outside of work	50%	51%
 A workplace culture that does not actively foster diversity, inclusion and equality	46%	46%
 Poor leadership and career progression strategies	36%	34%
 Difficulty returning to work after having children	36%	40%



Over half of female professionals in Asia Pacific feel that a preference by management to promote men over women is a key reason why fewer women make it to leadership positions.

In a 2016 working paper by Peterson Institute for International Economics⁴, women in most societies are more likely than men to take on the dual pressures of work and family, and are expected to do so. In societies clear of such cultural bias, women continue to choose to assume a greater share of child care and household responsibilities.

“FEMALE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMES SHOULD BE OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE BUT NOT OVERKILL OR BE SEEN AS A FORMALITY TO TICK OFF ON A CHECKLIST.”



FINANCE PROFESSIONAL, SINGAPORE

KEY LEARNING #3:

Consider flexible working options for both parents

A cohesive strategy for supporting women during maternity leave and providing a structure for their return is vital in combating any loss of productivity or employee attrition. More importantly, companies can extend both adequate leave and flexible working options to working fathers to encourage them to share the pressures of keeping up with family commitments.

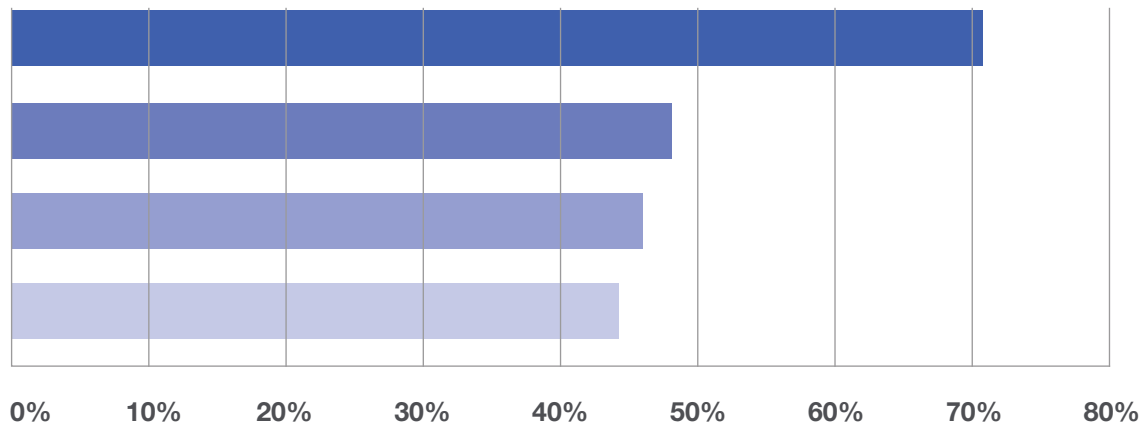


⁴Noland, M., Moran, T., & Kotschwar, B. R. (February 2016). Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey. SSRN Electronic Journal SSRN Journal, 12. Retrieved February 11, 2016.

HOW TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE



Key drivers to facilitate women in their careers



- 71% Mentor or sponsor at senior management level
- 48% Personalised training programmes
- 46% Formal leadership training sponsored by employer
- 44% Networking opportunities within the business - the chance to meet and talk to senior management

⁵Dworkin, T. M., Maurer, V., & Schipani, C. A. (2012). Career mentoring for women: New horizons/Expanded methods. *Business Horizons*, 55(4), 363-372. Retrieved February 4, 2016.

A photograph showing a woman with long dark hair smiling warmly while looking down at something. Another woman is leaning over her from the left, also smiling, suggesting a mentoring or collaborative interaction. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, possibly from a window, creating a positive and professional atmosphere.

KEY LEARNING #4:

Women want to be mentored for success

Women believe in the value of mentoring programmes or sponsorship at senior management levels to aid them in their career development.

Mentorships have been reported to be most helpful in three areas: career planning, coaching and guidance; protection and career risk management; and increasing aspiration levels and providing a role model – according to a 2012 paper by Kelley School of Business from Indiana University⁵.

HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT MENTOR



Establish your objectives

Before searching for a mentor, establish the reasons why you are looking for one. Are you looking for advice on how to become a leader in the workplace, or are you hoping to find an experienced and successful individual to bounce ideas off? Are you seeking networking opportunities, or wish to learn more about starting your own business? Do you want regular catch-up sessions or a mentor you can call each time you are faced with a dilemma? Understanding what you want to gain out of mentoring will increase your chances of finding a mentor well-suited to your needs and expectations.



Mentoring is not exclusive to the workplace

While it may be easier to find a mentor within the organisation you work for, a mentor outside of the workplace can provide more objectivity and fresh perspectives. Seek out potential mentors from the people you meet at business networking sessions, social events, voluntary activities, or other associations you are affiliated with. For tech-savvy professionals, LinkedIn is also a good source for identifying potential mentors within your network of business acquaintances. According to Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer at Facebook in her book 'Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead', an ideal mentor should be someone you already know and have good chemistry or rapport with. "Chasing or forcing that connection rarely works."



Be straight to the point and open to rejection

Arrange for a meeting with the individual you have identified as a potential mentor. During the meeting, explain why you are looking for a mentor, what you hope to achieve from the relationship, and why you believe he or she is the right mentor for you. Be open to the possibility of rejection from individuals who may not be prepared to take on a mentoring role.



Manage expectations

Once you have found someone who has agreed to be your mentor, ensure both parties understand the level of commitment required and establish some boundaries. Do you want monthly meet-ups at a local watering hole or a slightly formal meal every quarter? Can you text or call the mentor whenever you need to bounce off ideas, or is email preferred? Managing these seemingly minute expectations can help prevent any misunderstandings or misalignment of needs, ensuring a more successful and fulfilling mentoring relationship.

“MALE MENTORS IN PARTICULAR CAN ENFORCE AND DRIVE GENDER DIVERSITY.”



FINANCE PROFESSIONAL, NEW ZEALAND



KEY LEARNING #5:

Encourage women to showcase leadership by giving them high-visibility initiatives

Cultivate an environment where women are encouraged to lead high-visibility projects. At global colour and specialty chemicals company Archroma, the HR team has created a high impact elected group of employees to review policies and provide recommendations as part of a Benefit Review Group. A young lady was encouraged to be an active part of the group and presented her ideas in front of the whole office. “This is a great example of someone encouraged to showcase her leadership in front of all senior leaders and employees, making everyone see her in a different light,” said Ravi Bhogaraju, Head of Global HR Textiles & Head HR Asia at Archroma.

KEY LEARNING #6:

Start gender diversity from the top

Whether it's the controversial gender quota imposed in management boardrooms or diversity KPIs, leaders at the top of every organisation should take the lead in ensuring the views and needs of all employees are well-represented.

CONCLUSION

80%

of women surveyed think they are under-represented in leadership positions in business, compared to 59% of men

While the career priorities of working professionals in Asia Pacific are consistent across genders, women in the workplace continue to face issues limiting their growth trajectory within organisations. There is still a dearth of strong female leaders in organisations that women can look up to as role models, but gender diversity has proven to improve team performance and success.

Based on the findings, Robert Walters has identified the following key recommendations to encourage gender diversity and increase overall levels of satisfaction among employees within an organisation:

1. Identify the motivational factors that drive employees early in the recruitment process
2. Harness the strengths of diverse teams
3. Consider flexible working options for both parents
4. Mentoring can aid women in their career development
5. Encourage women to showcase leadership by giving them high-visibility initiatives
6. Start gender diversity from the top

"I THINK THE IMPORTANT THING FOR THE COLLECTIVE IS TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND TO PUT CONCRETE ACTION BEHIND IT. IF YOU DO A LOT OF TALKING BUT YOU DON'T WALK THE TALK, THEN IT'S JUST MANAGEMENT SPEAK – WE SHOULD MEASURE OURSELVES BY OUR ACTIONS NOT JUST INTENT."

Ravi Bhogaraju
Head of Global HR Textiles & Head HR Asia
Archroma

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