



# What Women Really Want From Employers

*How 800+ women believe they could be better supported by employers and ultimately thrive at work.*

In partnership with The Leadership Institute



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# ABOUT WOMEN'S AGENDA

**Women's Agenda is a 100% female-owned,  
independent news hub for career-minded women.**

We publish daily news and views regarding how we live and work,  
and regularly advocate for measures that can better support  
women in the workforce.

We support our journalism by working with clients on strategies they can use  
to successfully engage with this audience through content, bespoke events,  
advertising, sponsorships and research.

# ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

**The Leadership Institute launched in 2017 with the aim  
of creating a singular point of contact for all leaders and  
managers regardless of industry or profession.**

Our team works with managers and leaders, professional associations,  
industry leaders, executive coaches and our own partners and advisory panel  
to curate educationally focused professional development  
and training events.

The Women in Leadership Summit is one such event, featuring inspiring  
keynotes, career-focused case studies, cutting panel discussions and  
interactive workshops. Your leadership journey starts and continues with us  
as we inspire you to become an authentic leader, equip you with the skills and  
strategies to add maximum value to your organisation and show you how to  
cultivate meaningful change for future generations.

2019 sees our biggest line up of speakers yet, including media icon  
Carrie Bickmore and Australian designer Alannah Hill, with over 20 CEOs  
and Managing Directors joining us - we hope you can too!



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# A NOTE FROM THE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

As a leading voice on leadership in Australia, the Leadership Institute wanted to partner with Australia's leading publication on women's issues.

The Leadership Institute and I, as Director, are truly committed to providing training and networking platforms to promote and support women in leadership. This report allowed us insight and understanding into the real issues facing women in corporate Australia.

It was interesting, although not surprising, to see that genuine flexible working opportunities came out as the number one issue facing women at work today.

As a single mother of twin toddlers, I know how difficult it is to find flexibility and balance in my work and home life. This topic comes up with almost every prominent female leader I interview and it's an issue I discuss on a personal level almost every week with my friends, my mother's group and the women that form part of our #wilsummit community.

I'd like to thank everyone that was involved in this research and trust you find the results as enlightening as we did.

There is so much room for improvement in the women in leadership sector, if you want to be part of the change, join me at the Women in Leadership Summit 2019 this September.

Let's do this.

Regards,

**Dana Lightbody**  
Director,  
The Leadership Institute



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# INTRODUCTION

## Genuinely flexible working opportunities trump pay when it comes to what women most want from an employer.

Women also want to see a 'diverse senior leadership team', and clear policies and opportunities for promotions when considering where they will work.

Also up there on the priority list for women, is seeing a company purpose that extends beyond profits alone, as well as leadership that takes a public stand on social issues.

These priorities come up far ahead of workplace perks like an employer run women's network, social activities and free lunches and snacks. And even well ahead of targets for women in leadership.

That's according to the more than 800 responses we received to our survey asking what women *really* want from employers in 2019, in partnership with [The Leadership Institute](#).

The survey delivered a range of insights into the employee benefits that are most important to women, the workplace challenges that have prevented them from progressing in their careers, and what would help them pursue leadership opportunities in their industry.

It found that 'bad management' is the leading barrier preventing women from succeeding in a job or progressing in their careers; with almost nine in ten respondents stating this had held them back.

The survey also asked women which well-known company they would most want to work for – with Google, Atlassian and Qantas receiving the most mentions. Other companies regularly referred to included Virgin, the United Nations, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Amnesty International and Patagonia.

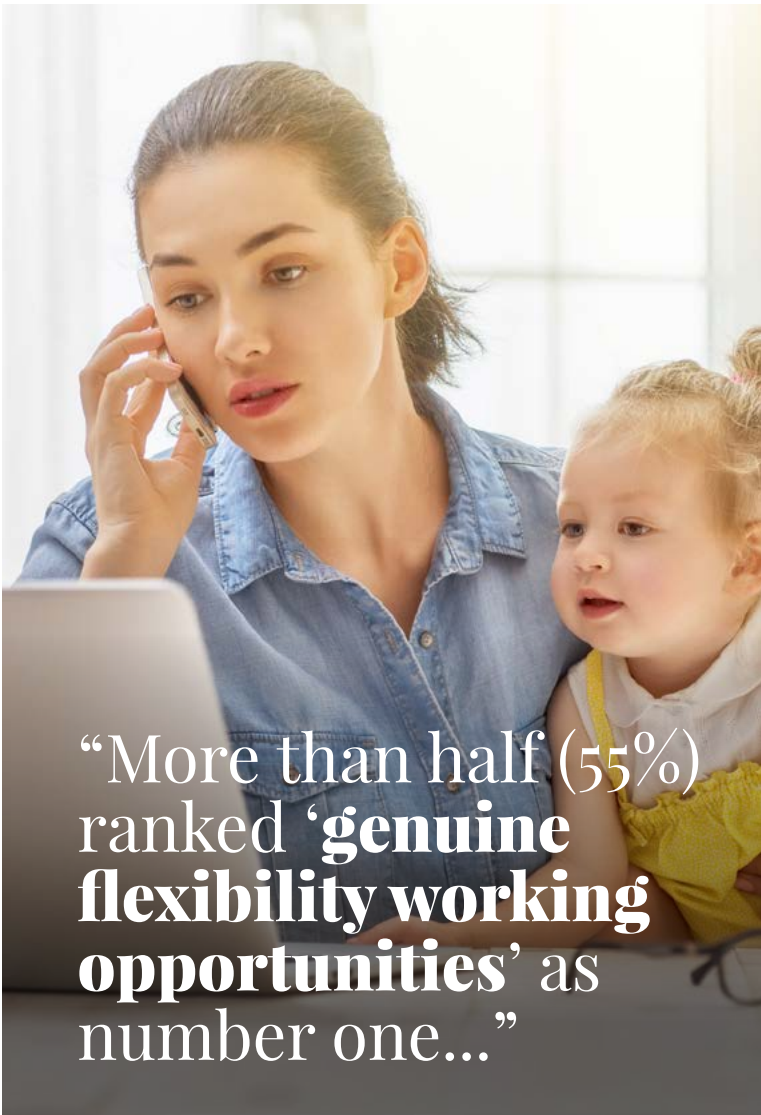


*More than half of those surveyed would be willing to take a salary cut to work for an organisation with proven social, community and environmental commitments and half of women would support a 50 per cent quota for female leadership at companies with more than 100 employees.*

In other interesting take-aways, we found more than half of those surveyed would be willing to take a salary cut to work for an organisation with proven social, community and environmental commitments and half of women would support a 50 per cent quota for female leadership at companies with more than 100 employees.

The results make for fascinating reading and may help explain why women select one employer over another and find more work satisfaction in some workplaces but not others.

Read on to find out more of the drivers and speedhumps for women at work, their opinions on quotas and what they want to see more employers doing to better support women.



“More than half (55%) ranked ‘genuine flexibility working opportunities’ as number one...”

# SO... WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?

We've long seen what employers are willing to do in order to attract and retain the best female talent. From generous training and development budgets to impressive sponsorship programs and great office perks like free lunches; many employers are making significant investments in securing great staff.

But could archaic workplace structures, or misjudged priority areas, ultimately be letting these employers down?

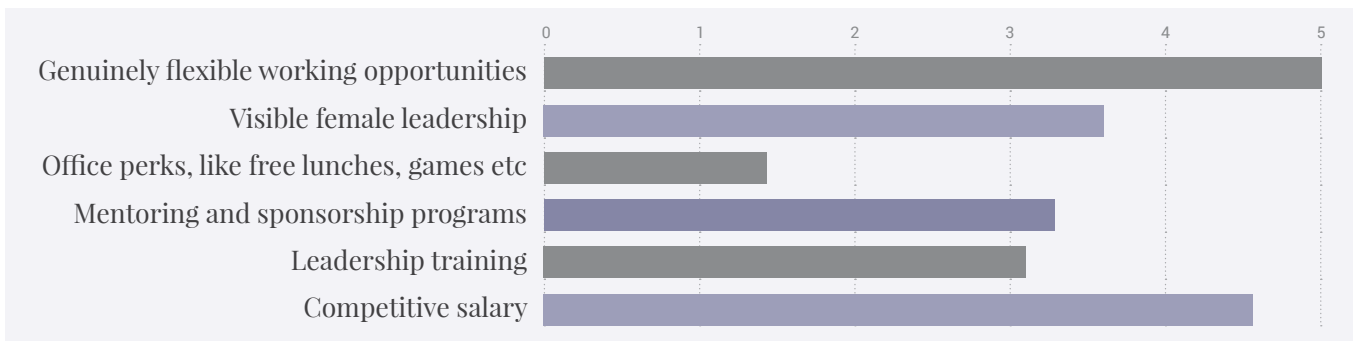
Could genuine flexibility work be the real game-changer for workplaces looking to secure the best talent and invest in women?

We presented six common employment incentives to women and asked them to rank how important each one is to them.

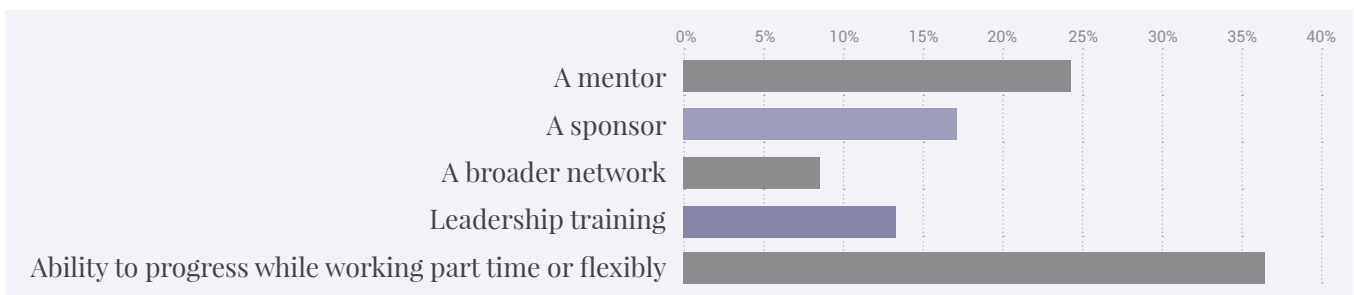
More than half (55%) ranked 'genuine flexibility working opportunities' as number one, followed by another 17% who listed it as the second most important option.

That came ahead of 'competitive salary', listed as the number one incentive by 28 per cent of respondents), mentoring and sponsorship programs (5 per cent), leadership training (3 per cent) and office perks like free lunches at less than one per cent.

Each of these incentives were given a score according to where they were ranked by respondents, on a scale of one to five, with one being not important and five being very important.



Which of the following would be the most beneficial to you if you were looking to pursue further leadership opportunities in your industry?



# THE **FACTORS** **WOMEN CONSIDER** WHEN TAKING A ROLE WITH AN EMPLOYER

Salary will always be a compelling factor when it comes to deciding whether or not to take up a role with an employer, but it's not the only consideration for women.

For women, a diverse leadership team, clear, flexible working opportunities and a compelling company purpose also rate high in importance when it comes to selecting an employer.

Here's how our respondents rated the level of importance of a number of different factors when considering taking a role with an employer.



Very important  
  Important  
  Neutral  
  Not important  
  Not at all important

Clear training and development opportunities



A women's network in the organisation



Clear opportunities for promotion



A diverse senior leadership team



Clear flexible workplace policies



Opportunities to participate in pro bono work



A stated company purpose that extends beyond profits alone



A CEO/MD who takes a public stand on social issues



Free lunches and snacks



Targets for women in leadership



Social activities (after work drinks etc) for employees





# BAD MANAGEMENT: DESTROYING TEAMS AND CAREERS?

In 2019, bad management continues to be getting in the way of women's career progression and job prospects, and therefore adding significant costs to employers in terms of lost productivity and sunken recruitment and training investments.

Almost nine in ten (87 per cent) respondents said bad management has at one point prevented them from succeeding in a job or progressing in their career at a current or former place of employment.

Women also reported high incidences of workplace bullying, with more than half (52 per cent) reporting this has negatively affected them. More than one in five (21 per cent) of women said sexual harassment had gotten in the way of their progression.

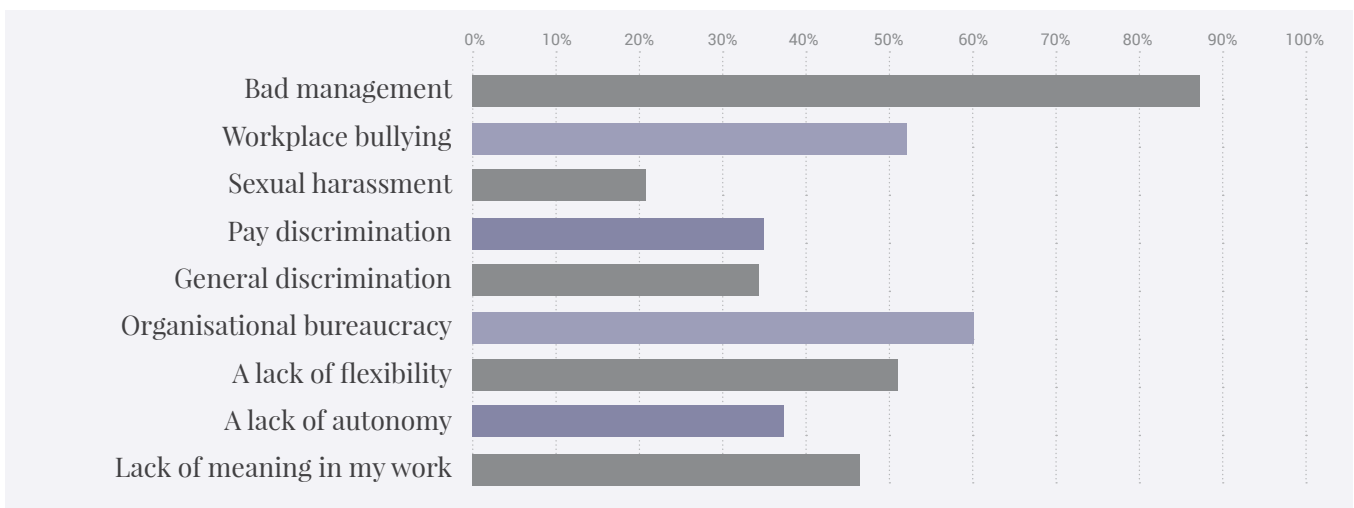
While these were not the leading hurdles reported, the high number of women reporting such factors is deeply concerning, given the long-lasting effects bullying and harassment can have on a career, as well as mental health.

Behind bad management, 60 per cent of respondents listed organisational bureaucracy as getting in the way of their progression – a problem that may be easier for smaller and more nimble organisations to address, but something that continues to plague large, slow-moving workplaces.

Proving the strong desire and need for flexible work again, more than half (52 per cent) of respondents said a lack of flexible work has gotten in the way, followed by a 'lack of meaning in my work' (46 per cent), and a lack of autonomy (37 per cent).

More than a third of women have also been affected by pay discrimination and general discrimination.

**Have any of the following ever prevented you from succeeding in a job, or progressing in your career, in a current or former place of employment? Tick all that apply.**







# MAJORITY FOR QUOTAS

There's a common argument against quotas that claims women wouldn't want to be appointed to a leadership position due to a 'quota'.

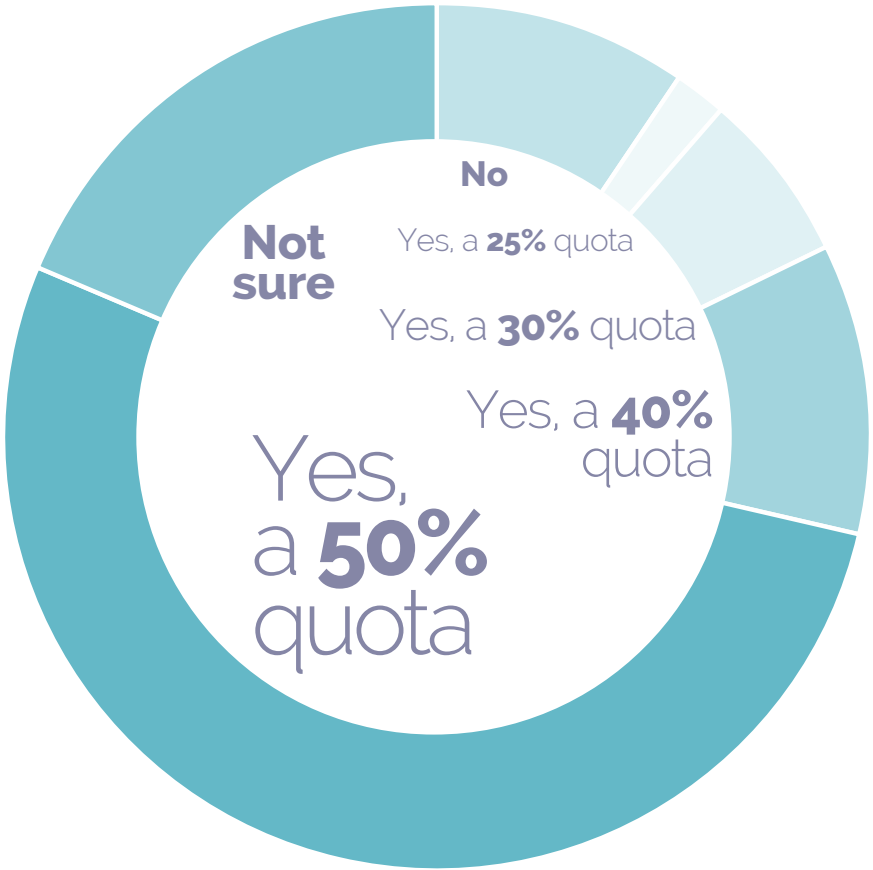
Whether that's true or not, respondents in this survey overwhelmingly support quotas for getting more women into leadership.

More than half of respondents said they would support a 50 per cent female quota for the boards of

ASX 200 organisations, followed by 11 per cent who said yes to a 40 per cent quota.

Just 10 per cent indicated they wouldn't support a quota at all, along with 19 per cent who said they were 'not sure'.

Even more women supported a 50% quota for women in leadership at companies with more than 100 employees.





# GET **GENUINELY** FLEXIBLE

The importance of genuine, flexible work opportunities for women is one of the key findings of this research, so much so that it was the number one workplace incentive and the key benefit that a third of women said would enable them to further a leadership career.

But it's not just a matter of workplaces saying they offer such opportunities, but also actually demonstrating they have good policies in place to support a wide range of needs.

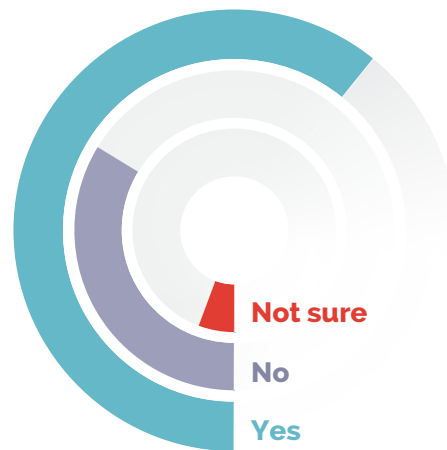
A lack of real flexibility could be costing employers money and the opportunity to access the best talent. Indeed, a massive 61 per cent of women said they had given up or not taken a particular role due to a lack of flexibility.

And when jobs are offered part time or flexibly, it seems plenty of women feel like their careers have stalled or that they are doing lesser work than they would be given, if they were full time.

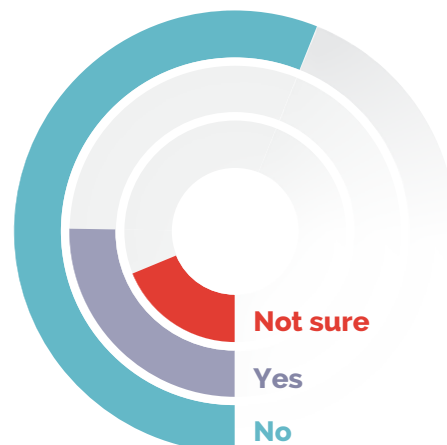
Just a quarter of respondents believe that their current or former employer offers genuine opportunities for staff to progress their careers while working part time.

Flexible work came up again when respondents were asked which of five options would be the most beneficial to them in pursuing leadership opportunities in their industry. 62 per cent of respondents also listed 'clear flexible workplace policies' as 'very important' when deciding to take a role with an employer.

**Have you ever given up a role, or not taken a particular role, due to a lack of flexibility?**



**Do you believe your current or former employer offers genuine opportunities for staff to progress their careers while working part time?**





# PURPOSE MATTERS

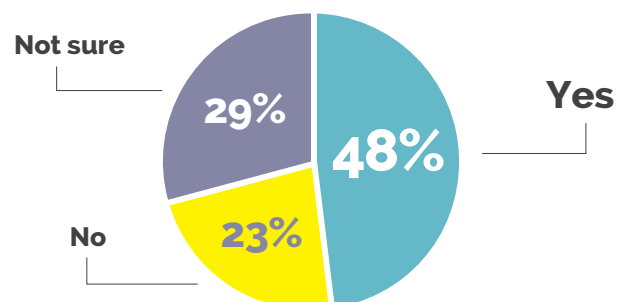
## Does purpose and a sense of **good corporate citizenship** trump money when it comes to where women want to work?

Almost half of women in this study said they would take a salary cut to work for a company with proven social, community and environmental commitments.

That's certainly something employers should want to consider when it comes to analysing the costs of participating in corporate social responsibility.

Also related is the fact XX per cent of women said a CEO or MD taking a stand on social responsibilities is 'very important' to them, along with the XX per cent who rated as 'very important' a company boasting a purpose that extends beyond profit.

**Would you take a salary cut to work for a company with proven social, community and environmental commitments?**





# THE **ONE THING** WOMEN WANT TO SEE EMPLOYERS IMPROVE

*This report has shared numerous ways employers can improve their incentives and cultures in order to better support women, including by weeding out the bad management and addressing their flexible work practices.*

*But what one thing do women want to see workplaces doing?*

*We put the question to women asking for short answers and received 754 responses offering a range of different ideas.*

*Going through the data, we identified a number of core things employers can do.*

## **Equal pay**

Women called for this over and over again, with some suggesting more specific approaches for getting there, including through pay transparency, but offering salaries based on position over a candidate's existing salary.

## **Make progression happen for part time staff**

Similar to the above, women urged that employers offer opportunities – whether it's training, promotion, sponsorship etc – to employees regardless of whether they're working part time or flexibly.

## **Offer clear support for reporting harassment and bullying**

Do everything possible to prevent harassment occurring, but also ensure that there are clear, safe and independent pathways employees can take to report it.

## **Ensure training opportunities for all**

It's not just a matter of training women – although offering leadership training can help – it's about cross-the-board training on everything from good management to understanding unconscious bias, preventing sexual harassment and better understanding the diverse needs of all staff.

## Have a plan

Employers should have a visible blueprint for achieving workplace gender equality, including targets for women in leadership and pay parity.

## Address Unconscious Bias



Make training on unconscious bias available for staff at all levels, ensure leadership supports its importance. Address any unconscious bias occurring at the hiring stage and challenge outdated views of what good 'leadership' looks like.

## Assess executive hires on their record and commitment to achieving diversity

What difference can they prove they have made elsewhere? How much do they really understand the issue?

## Flexible Work

It was clear from the responses to this survey, that addressing flexible work policies is paramount. Women urged employers to not just 'offer' but to ensure flexible work practices were available widely and that careers and leadership opportunities were not hindered due to working part time or flexibly.

Employers will benefit by advertising all roles part time or flexibly, supporting men in working flexibly and moving unconscious bias and stigmas associated with working flexibly. Women also urged employers to trust their staff and to treat them like adults when it comes to managing teams flexibly.

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*“Flexibility but not just because you have kids. I currently need flexibility because of my husband’s working commitments in another city.”*

*“The entire system of career progression needs to change so that men are expected to pursue flexible work so they can fulfil other commitments.”*

## Quotas. Quotas. Quotas

While some women called for targets, several other women said quotas were the key to countering bias and shifting the status quo.

## Walk the talk

Employers love to talk flexibility and diversity, but it's their actions internally that ultimately make the difference. Through this survey, women called for employers to act decisively, to quit the excuses and to clearly implement written policies they have on issues like bullying and discrimination.

“

*“Actual female executive leadership that doesn't feel tokenistic.”*

## Demonstrate diversity, flexibility and good behaviour



Organisational leadership, including the CEO, will largely determine workplace culture, along with what policies are actually taken up,

## Address burnout

Openly communicate with staff to see how they are faring, offer mental health support services and address excessive workloads.

## Subsidised and flexible childcare

A number of women urged employers to consider how they can make childcare more affordable and accessible for staff.



### Stop penalising mothers and those who've taken career breaks

This includes ending everything from pregnancy discrimination, to eliminating the pay and promotion opportunities women lose when taking career breaks.

### Support women in middle management

Women identified this again at a number of levels, noting that it's not enough to simply examine the numbers in senior management. Employers must consider why women might be leaving or feeling unsatisfied and overlooked at the middle management level.



### Ask women what would help

Ensure women at all levels and from all backgrounds are approached. Don't leave it with senior leadership to assume what women need in order to progress their careers.

### Treat all people with respect

Simple enough? And something employers can aim to change immediately.

### Bro culture? Cut it out

The Boys' Club is still alive and well in many workplaces and women want employers to stamp it out, along with any misogyny occurring the office. And stop expecting women to act like men in order to get ahead.



“

*Diversity also reduces the “boys club”. The more this can be limited the more enjoyable the workplace. With a strong boys’ club, as a woman you’re invisible*

### Sponsor women

Respondents listed sponsorship as more important than mentoring; seeing it as direct and fast way to support and propel women.

### Training and development

Offer these opportunities to employees who wish to pursue them, regardless of their parenting status and whether they're working part time, full time or



flexibly.

### Support a diversity of women

There is no one 'woman'. Support women from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, a diverse range of ages and different skills and circumstances. Not all women are mothers and there is no single way that women want to work.

### Help men take the care

Encourage men to take parental leave and support them in taking flexible work and managing responsibilities at home. Ensure male leaders demonstrate flexible work and how they're actively involved in care.



*“Can't be one thing, has to be lots of things working together, otherwise you get backlash against whatever the single thing is.”*

*“Realise that ‘merit’ isn't always noticed in women but rather expected, properly look at their own bias and recognise good performance and when women do extra work.”*

*“Understand mental load of running a household. Provide support when difficult family situations arise.”*

*“Actually put them into leadership positions after training them and not expecting them to perform like men with fulltime housewives at home.”*

*“Pay us the correct rate. Allow us to have maternity leave and return to*

*the same position or one at the same level.”*

### Expand sick leave

Respondents urged for better support for parents looking after sick children, for 'family sick leave', for leave associated with common women's health problems like endometriosis and for employers to consider 'period leave'.

### Gender neutral parental leave

Women urged employers to not only offer parental leave, but to especially address the leave offered to new fathers. Respondents also urged employers to ensure those who take leave can return at the same level and are not then overlooked for promotion



those returning have a clear pathway, and support including with breaks and breastfeeding rooms.



*“Encourage men to take leave for their babies and have flexible work arrangements, including part time.”*

*“Understand mental load of running a household. Provide support when difficult family situations arise.”*

*“Understand the demands on women extend BEYOND what we do at work. That includes Mental Health and other social issues that impact us like trauma, poverty.”*

*“Encouraging men to share the caregiver role with incentives for men in the workplace - e.g. access to*

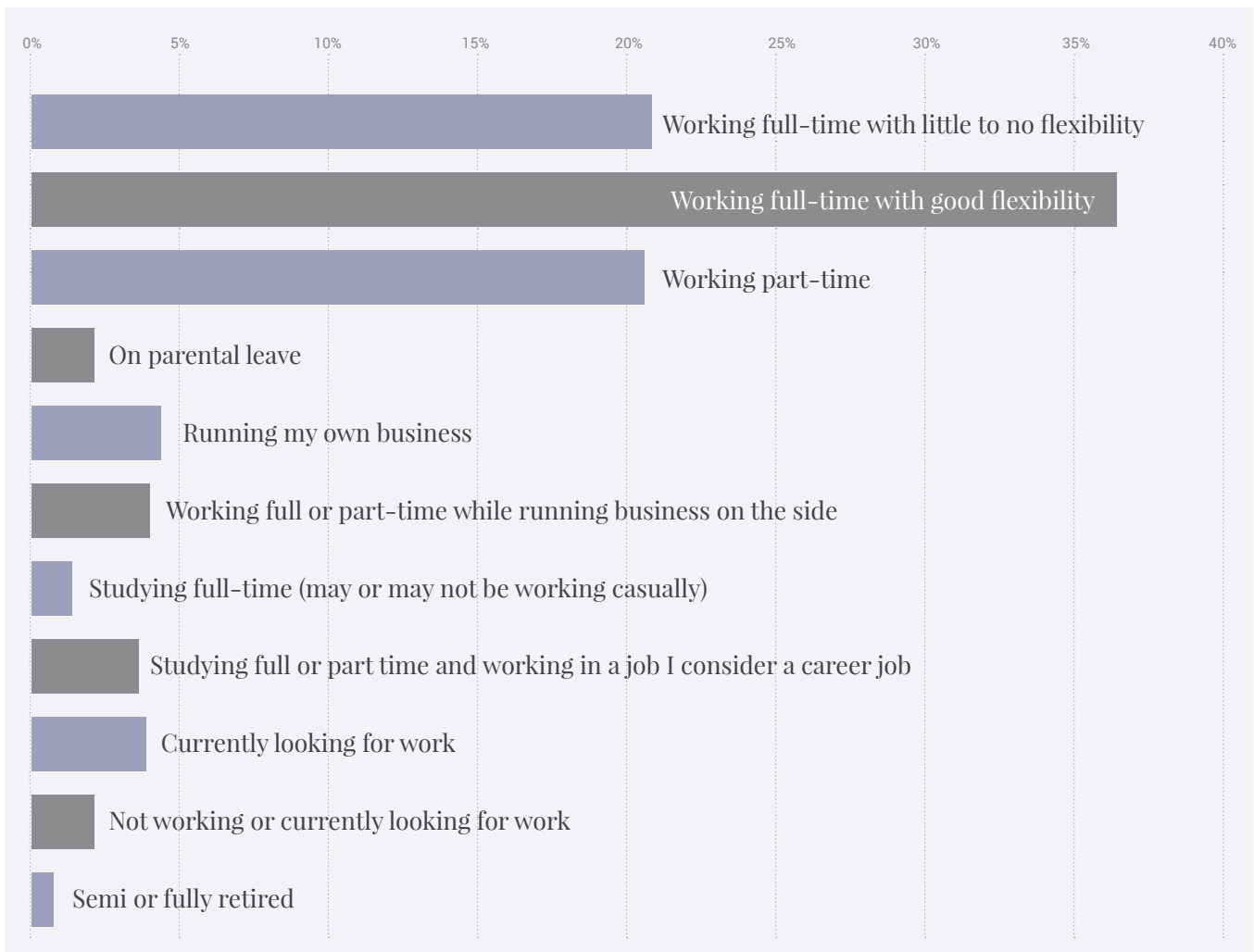


# WHO TOOK THIS SURVEY?

We promoted this survey online in April 2019 (including to our newsletter database and wider across social media) and received 815 responses.

Almost half of respondent (45 per cent) said they currently have staff who directly report to them, with the majority of those managing a team of between two and five. Eleven per cent have teams of more than 11.

One in five respondents (21 per cent) said they are working full-time with little to no flexibility, while another 36 per cent said they are full time with 'good flexibility'. Twenty one percent said they were working part time, with the remainder in a range of different circumstances.







## FINAL NOTES

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**W**e hear a lot about employers promoting their flexible work policies, with 78 per cent of those reporting to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency claiming they have these policies in place.

But how genuine are these opportunities? Are they being taken up by men and women? And can those working flexibly, or part time still be propelled into leadership positions? Does the part time work force have access to training and development, or is this reserved only for those working full time?

Judging by the fact 'genuine flexible work' came up in multiple questions in this study as the key factor women believe would help them get ahead, it seems the rhetoric regarding flexible work is not matching up to the reality.

Employers must consider what more they can do to shift archaic structures in order to help everyone thrive, and to end penalties associated with motherhood, career breaks or needing to take on caring responsibilities outside of work.

Meanwhile, employers also have an opportunity to address the corrosive and possibly hidden problem of bad management in their ranks.

Nine in ten women reported this had prevented them from progressing in their career or job – it could have led to burnout, to being overlooked, to being unhappy, feeling harassed or bullied and ultimately to leaving.

Employers should consider how training (including unconscious bias training) can help managers develop into people who ultimately support and look after their staff, as well as feedback systems that can better identify and address the toxic management they have in their ranks.

Employees must be given safe and confidential avenues for reporting bad management and

employers should consider how identifying a wide range of people for promotion – including those working part time and flexibly – could ultimately contribute to better management culture.

There is no silver bullet for making workplaces better for women – especially when no two women share the same needs and desires – but there are numerous opportunities employers can take to improve their policies, hiring and promotion practices and workplace structures in order to better support everyone.

Rethinking flexible work is obviously one, as is promoting a positive culture of excellent management and boasting a diverse leadership team. But in addition, other options include sponsorship programs, training and development opportunities, promoting a company purpose and visionary leadership, and giving staff clear pathways for promotions.

Quotas could also be a game-changer, and it was interesting to see the majority of women supporting a 50 per cent quota in the leadership teams of large organisations. While a quota would be a significant step, employers could present this as a future option, should the organisation fail to meet targets on women in leadership.

Finally, employees are looking for work with purpose: work that's fulfilling, satisfying and enables them to clearly see their contribution. These respondents said they highly value an employer with a mission that extends beyond profit, and half of them said they would take a salary cut to work for a company with proven community and environmental commitments.

Overall, the survey is an urgent and important reminder of the intense yearning from today's women who want to pursue satisfying and purposeful leadership careers and job opportunities that can enable them to not only earn a salary but ultimately thrive at work.

# ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This research was undertaken by the team at Women's Agenda, published by the independent and 100% female-owned Agenda Media and supported by The Leadership Institute.

We received over 800 responses to this survey between June and July 2019 through a five-minute online survey involving a mix of multiple choice and long-answer questions. We also followed up with a number of respondents who indicated they'd be happy to share more about their future experience and opinions regarding what they hope to see from Australia's employers. We plan to expand upon this data in future iterations of this research.

The data was collated at the beginning of August.

