



The Great COVID Career Reset

Women are rethinking careers.
The opportunity is NOW to overhaul leadership
and everything we know about work.

women's
AGENDA

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media

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Introduction

The full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and their careers is yet to be known.

But what we do know is that women are now rethinking what's important to them in a career as a result of COVID. Indeed, a massive four in five women said as much in response to our November 2020 career survey.

The opportunity is now to harness this rethink and to support women as they move forward in a post-COVID world.

It's essential that employers, policymakers and others understand the new realities for women in this dramatically changed world of work.

We ran this research to provide a snapshot of how women are thinking about their careers, their future ambitions, and their thoughts on the immediate impacts of COVID-19 on their work.

More than 700 women participated in this study and supplied detailed responses on what they want from workplaces now and in the future, as well as their thoughts on the leadership traits and leaders who have been most effective during this period.

Most of the respondents in this survey are working mothers aged between 36 to 55 and nearly 40% have been living in the worst-hit state of Victoria. They were easing out of restrictions at the time of being surveyed.

In effect, many women have been forced to rethink their career paths and consider entirely different jobs and industries. They've indicated that flexibility and working from home are increasingly important after this year, which suggests there's no going back to the old ways of working that too-often neglected those with caring responsibilities.

And, thanks to our respondents, we've also uncovered some of the traits of leadership that women in Australia deem most worthwhile, as well as the leaders they consider to have been most effective during this period and beyond.

Such traits include comparison, open communication, and authenticity. We've listed some of the most commonly cited examples of effective leadership, including Jacinda Ardern, Daniel Andrews, Angela Merkel, Gladys Berejiklian, Penny Wong and others.

We're thrilled to now present the results of our COVID and women's careers report: The Great Covid Career Reset.

It's certainly not one we could have planned at the start of the year, but it's one that proves a massive overhaul of how we work and lead is underway. Never before has the power and potential of the female workforce been more important.

Thank you to Monarch Institute for the excellent support in making this survey possible.

Angela Priestley & Tarla Lambert

CO FOUNDERS, AGENDA MEDIA
PUBLISHER OF WOMEN'S AGENDA

Key Stats

Of **751** respondents identifying as female:

77% said the pandemic period has seen them rethinking what they had previously **expected** or **wanted** from their career

80% said they are rethinking what's **important** to them in their career

35% believe 2020 will be a **"lost year"** when it comes to their career

34% say they now have **more opportunities** available to them, due to major shifts in working from home



2020 leaders identified in survey



Jacinda Ardern

WHY? 'Strong, compassionate, calm communicator. Authentic & empathetic'



Dan Andrews

WHY? 'Courageous' and 'visible throughout with a consistent message'

Derailed career plans and financial security concerns

Much of the devastation from this pandemic has hit people's livelihoods through both job losses and underemployment. A large cohort of respondents in this survey were made redundant at a time when opportunities for travel, business and promotion became suddenly limited. This has forced a concerning number of people to live off of their savings.

Also concerning is the number of Australians who have withdrawn retirement funds through the federal government's COVID-19 early release of super scheme. In July this year, Industry Super Australia reported that

an estimated 480,000 Australians across all ages took out their superannuation after the scheme was introduced. The full impact of this will only be known when this generation reaches retirement age.

This pandemic has pushed many professional women to a crossroads.

Over 75% of respondents have had to reassess what they previously expected or wanted from their careers. Further education has also become a greater priority, with half of respondents reporting they have started upskilling or are considering it.

WHAT RESPONDENTS SAID

“*My future employment is looking less likely as I am over 35 years. I was not eligible for JobKeeper as a casual local government employee so had to live off my savings. I feel that my employment options have significantly decreased.*”

“*It has shaped my career for the worse as the workload has been greatly increased with lack of resources and capability to step up.*”

2020 leader identified in survey



Gladys Berejiklian

WHY? 'Clear, concise, logical and sound'



Women are upskilling

While the pandemic period has clearly been busy, especially for those managing caring responsibilities, it's also seen many women take on opportunities for upskilling.

48% of women have pursued some form of upskilling (including online courses, or a degree) during COVID-19.

52% either agree or strongly agree they are "thinking about upskilling as a result of the pandemic".



2020 leaders identified in survey



Jill Gallagher

WHY? 'Leading for Aboriginal communities in Victoria. Amazing job on engagement'



Kamala Harris

WHY? 'A fresh voice. A new style. Compassion'

The things that matter in a post COVID-19 world



The sudden shift to lockdown, virtual working and little to no face-to-face interaction has been an interesting exercise for employers and employees alike.

Working from home has provided many professional women space from all the noise to really identify what they want and to help set new goals. This has helped some gain clarity about what they are no longer willing to tolerate in their careers and workplaces.

An overwhelming number of respondents say work-life-balance, the ability to work from home and flexible working are more important now than ever before. Having experienced the benefits of these practices this year, many of the working mothers who responded in this survey are hopeful these become permanent so they can balance ambitious careers with family time.

However, working from home was not a positive or productive experience for everyone. Some respondents reported it was detrimental because of the difficulty in being able to focus on work while at home, with other family members, flatmates and others around. Home schooling also made work extremely challenging for many parents.

These burdens along with having to navigate rapidly changing work practices like several Zoom calls a day, has caused burnout in many respondents; all while coping with separation from loved ones, staying safe and making ends meet.

WHAT RESPONDENTS SAID

“It has made me more and less patient, less interested in believing BS [sic] from bosses or service providers in my industry and has engendered, and given time for, more self-belief, recognition and development.”

“My perspective of what is important has definitely shifted and I am looking to make the balance between work and family more sustainable going forward.”

2020 leader identified in survey



Angela Merkel

WHY? 'Speaks of science and truth'

Key findings on what matters most

77% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they'd be "willing to accept less workplace flexibility now than prior to the Pandemic".

80% are "rethinking what's important to me in a career"

75% say flexible work is now "more important" than before the pandemic,

76% say the ability to work from home is now more important.

31% say a job with leadership opportunities is more important.

39% said further education is more important

44% said that looking for a new job is now more important



WHAT RESPONDENTS SAID

“ I now know how much work I can get done working from home as opposed to in the office where I have to be available for colleagues from 9 to 5. On the other hand, I now have to be available for my family from 9 to 5 where it's harder to set boundaries personally.”

“ Before the pandemic I shared most of the primary responsibilities with my husband. Since the pandemic, I now do 90% of primary care even though I'm the primary earner as well.”

“ As an academic, the precarity of my position has been increased due to budget cuts. The hours worked have increased and the numbers of students I deal with in each session has increased. The level of workplace tension is unsustainable and we are being constantly advised that this will 'only get worse in 2021'. This is not good education practice.”

The leadership we need

Through this pandemic and the enforcement of unprecedented lockdown measures, it has become evident to many across Australia what their employers' priorities truly are.

While there have been great displays of leadership and courage, some respondents in this survey have been devastated to watch their workplace leaders move forward with a lack of compassion.

From business to politics, this year has highlighted the crucial need for effective leadership around the world.

Our respondents reported the most effective leadership traits during COVID-19 have been empathy, compassion, communication, honesty, and flexibility. Among the other

perceived critical traits are vulnerability, calmness, and decisiveness.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews and NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian topped the list of most 'effective' leaders this year. And all three align in some way with the general leadership traits that were seen as necessary, particularly on communication.

Their grit and compassion towards acting for humanity despite external pressures and criticism, have ultimately saved lives.

Indeed, the leadership traits recognised by respondents in this survey provide valuable insights into how to lead for what we face in the future.

2020 leader identified in survey



Sally McManus

WHY? 'Stands up and fights for what's right'



The leadership traits that have been particularly effective during COVID-19

EMPATHY

COURAGE

AUTHENTICITY

COMPASSION

HONESTY

DECISIVENESS

COMMUNICATION

FLEXIBILITY

CALMNESS

Where to from here?



2020 must be the year that employers and policy makers reset how they value women's careers.

No longer should women be sidelined because they can't work traditional hours in a physical environment.

No longer can people pretend that they don't understand the time pressures and challenges that come with caring abilities.

And no longer can we rely on the 'strongman' style of leadership that has typically dominated certain segments of society, including business and politics.

We've seen what a fresh style of leadership can do, and it's time to harness it: women are ready and willing to take it on.

We've seen the power of communication, compassion, authenticity. It's time for more of it, particularly as workplaces and governments take on the many challenges to come.

So how can we ensure that women are supported in their careers, across all levels of industry and management?

First, we must consider how women are rethinking their careers: They are placing more value on flexible work and working from home. They are looking for opportunities to upskill and to take on leadership responsibilities.

The old way of working is done. COVID has forced us to overhaul everything. We can't go back.

But we can look to better appreciate and recognise the kind of leadership we've seen excel during this crisis. And we can aim to use new ways of working to tap into a broader pool of leaders to elevate those with the talent we need to move forward.

The findings in this survey also make clear that openness to flexibility, working from home and striking work-life balance can help ensure that women continue to make their vital contribution to Australia today.

Acting on this will require courage from leaders to step up for humanity, to be empathetic and decisive and move forward into a new way of working unlike anything

2020 leader identified in survey



Norman Swan

WHY? 'Consistent. Dedicated to the message and science'

we've seen before.

This is an opportunity.

It's time for those with the power to harness these opportunities to do so. To act courageously, compassionately and decisively in order to usher in a new era of work and leadership that can address the challenges we face now and into the future.

Policy makers and leaders across government and business must prioritise the career needs of women.

Australia's future depends on it.

“ *Covid-19 has forced us to overhaul everything. The old way of working is done. We can't go back.*

But we can take the opportunity to reset, to take the best of what we saw and learnt to drive the future of work and the leaders we elevate and celebrate within it.

WOMEN'S AGENDA



2020 leaders identified in survey



Penny Wong

WHY? 'Inspiring, logical calm, common sense'



Annastacia Palaszczuk

WHY? 'Stuck up for her people despite the criticism'

About our research



Women's Agenda surveyed **751** people who identified as female in November 2020, with the survey promoted across our platforms and more widely across social media.

39% of respondents were living in Victoria during the lockdown period, while **55%** of respondents had a school aged child or younger living with them at home.

The majority of respondents were aged **26** to **46**.

About Women's Agenda

Women's Agenda is a daily news publication for women published by the 100 per cent female owned and run media business, Agenda Media. Our research arm of the business regularly conducts general and industry specific surveys of women in order to determine how they are faring during a specific period of time. Agenda Media also publishes a growing range of vertical newsletters and publications aimed at women, including The STEM Wrap, Women's Health News, The Ag Wrap & The Sporty Wrap.

About Monarch Institute

Monarch Institute delivers real-world education. It starts with the outcomes that real employers want, and works backwards from there. It doesn't believe in courses based purely on intellectual theory and textbook stuff. They deliver courses that are respected by leading employers in their fields.

TABLE 1: AGE BREAKDOWN OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

