

Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

Bolstering the female CEO pipeline: Equaling the playing field and igniting women's potential as top-level leaders

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Abstract

With women representing less than 6% of leadership roles within *Fortune 500* companies, it is evident that organizations are failing to achieve gender equality in their most high-powered positions. While the value of gender diversity in the workplace is widely acknowledged, companies have yet to successfully create environments and opportunities to help systematically increase the representation of women in top leadership roles.

The key research question for this study of current and former female CEOs was: What personal and organizational helps and hinders contributed to the women becoming CEOs? Following that single overarching research question, semi-structured interview questions were derived. The research was designed to develop a more nuanced understanding of:

1. The common personal attributes and workplace experiences that aided and prepared these women to become CEOs.
2. The factors that led to promotions at key junctures in their careers.
3. How the women overcame the organizational barriers they faced.
4. What recommendations we can offer to accelerate development, fill the pipeline, and prepare women for the CEO role.

We interviewed 57 women who have been CEO, 38 currently and 19 previously, at Fortune 1000-listed companies and others of similar size. We underwent in-depth analyses of the interviews to produce recommendations for action by organizations and by women.

Keywords: Women, CEO, advancement, barriers, pipeline