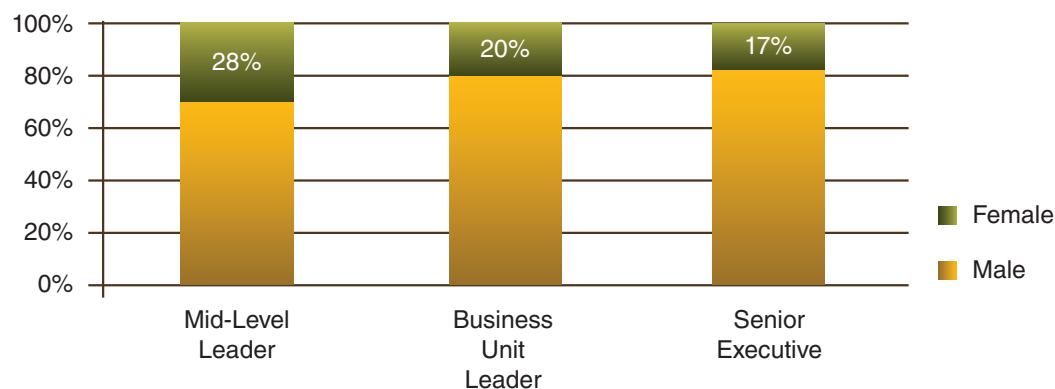




Can Women Executives Break the Glass Ceiling?

In recent years, some women have broken through the glass ceiling to hold senior and C-Suite roles in organizations. However, it remains a very challenging barrier for most women leaders to cross. At higher levels of organizations, the number of women decreases steadily, from 28 percent at mid-level leader to just 17 percent at the senior executive level¹.

Percent of Women at Each Level



What accounts for this difference?

- Are women less skilled or less interested in advancement? Are they less likely to accept opportunities and more likely to interrupt their careers?
- Does the organization offer opportunities for women or are they judged in a biased way?

We examined three areas to learn why fewer women leaders reach the top. What motivates women? In which areas do they show the most competence? What experiences have they pursued in their careers? The results were striking, and identified issues that women leaders (and their bosses) can act on immediately.

¹PDI Ninth House study of 1,472 women with an average tenure of 19.7 years and 5,061 men with an average tenure of 21.6 years. All participants in the study were assessed through a multi-dimensional assessment center at PDI Ninth House. Experiences were measured with the Leadership Experiences Inventory.

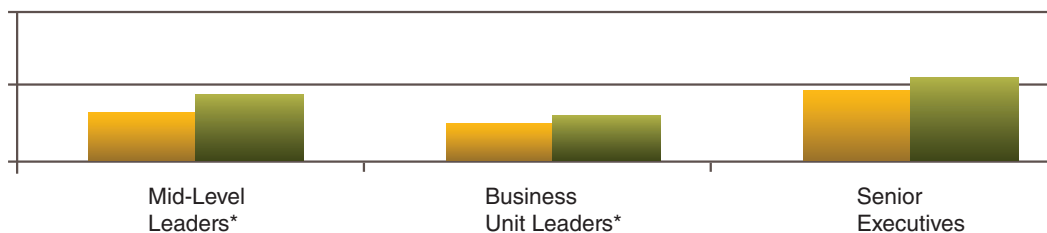


Competencies

Some experts claim that women have an advantage in a post-command and control world, where employee engagement, customer focus, and change are essential. To examine this question, we looked at the competencies of male and female leaders at several levels of the organization, including mid-level leader, business unit leader, and senior executive. Evaluations were based on the leaders' behavior in several business simulations in which they had to address interconnected business and people issues, and short- and longer-term issues. As shown in the graphic below, women scored slightly higher overall at each level than men. Despite this, fewer women advanced to higher levels.

Overall Competency Ratings by Gender

■ Male (N=4129, 3565, 537) ■ Female (N=1630, 906, 109)



Difference is in favor of women at all three levels:

** indicates statistically significant difference*

We also looked at specific competencies for men and women. Across all three levels, women were stronger at building talent, customer focus, and collaboration, areas viewed as important to success in the twenty-first century. Within each level, men were stronger at financials and strategy, two areas recognized as important in senior-level roles. In addition, there was a trend toward fewer and smaller differences between men and women at higher levels.

Women excelled in competencies that are central to employee engagement and customer satisfaction. Men were stronger in competencies that are important for leading full business units and an enterprise, which again, are requirements at higher organizational levels.

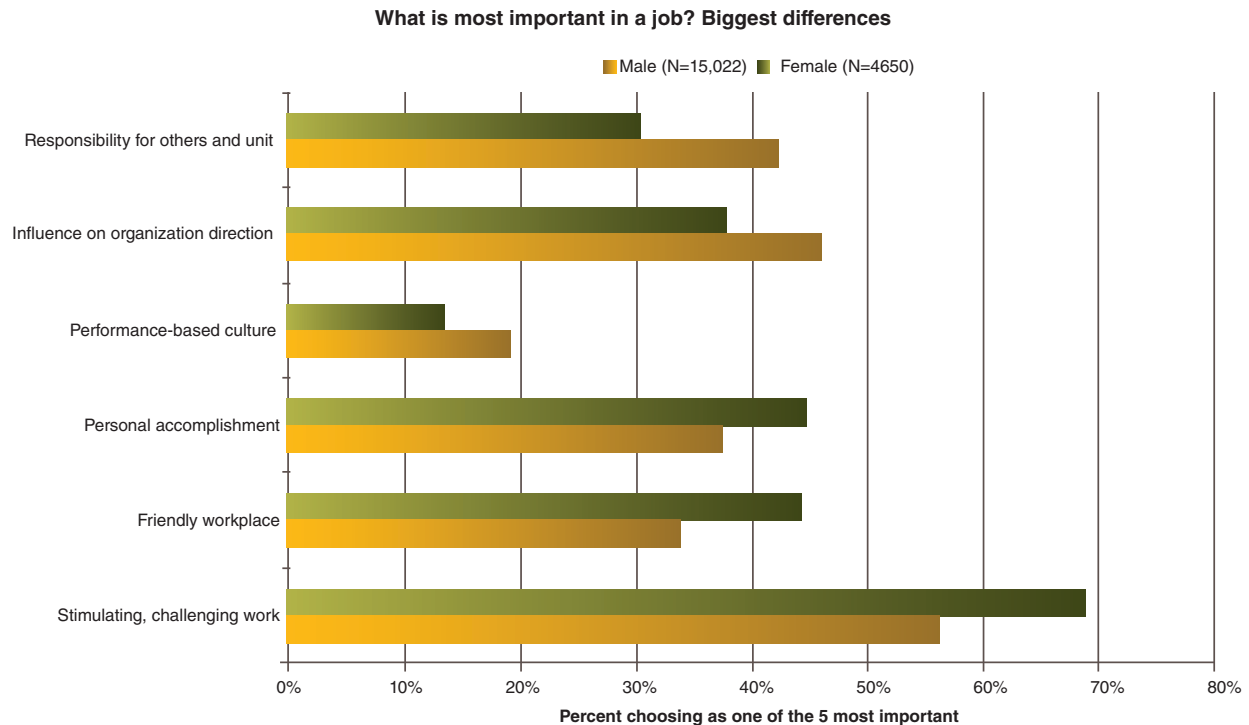
The graphic below shows gender differences in competencies at each leadership level.

	Mid-Level Leader	Business Unit Leader	Senior Executive
Women Higher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet Customer Needs Build Realistic Plans Build Support Develop Others Promote Teamwork Foster Open Communication Establish Relationships Establish Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage and Inspire Promote Collaboration Build Talent Build Relationships Ensure Execution Focus on Customers Inspire Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Organizational Talent Ensure Collaboration Ensure Customer Focus
Men Higher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act Strategically Use Financial Data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply Financial Acumen Lead Courageously 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shape Strategy Apply Financial Insights



Motivators

In our study, we asked men and women to choose five motivators that were most important to them from a list of 19. The rank ordering was quite similar for both men and women. More than 35 percent placed a high value on stimulating, challenging work, influence on the organization’s direction, personal accomplishment, work/life balance, and belief in the mission of the organization. Few chose expert status or stable job with little change as highly important.



Differences also occurred. Men emphasized a broader scope of responsibility, influence, and performance more often, while women favored stimulating work that gives a sense of personal accomplishment in a friendly environment.

The motivators favored by males—broader responsibility and influence on the organization—are more characteristic of higher level roles, whereas stimulating, challenging work and personal accomplishment can be found in many types and levels of roles.



Experience

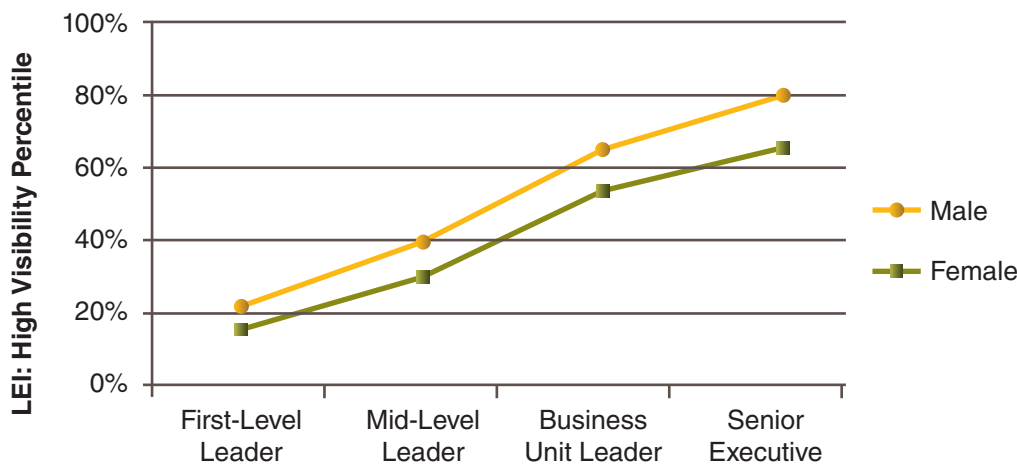
We also compared male and female leaders at several organizational levels in five key areas of experience:

- Business growth experiences
- Operational experiences
- High-visibility experiences
- Self-development experiences
- Challenging/difficult experiences

While men and women were equally likely to gain experience in self-development and challenging/difficult experiences, women had less experience in business growth, operational experiences, and high-visibility experiences.

By far, high-visibility experiences are the most important because they are essential at senior levels. As shown in the graph below, men and women's high-visibility experience is a few percentage points apart at the first level of leadership. The size of the gap grows with each level, until senior executive women report only as much experience in this area as men one level down in the organization. Unfortunately, women are less likely to have the high-visibility experiences that are most important at higher organizational levels.

**LEI: High Visibility
by Level and Gender**





Glass Ceiling Cracked, Not Broken

If women have slightly stronger competencies, why aren't more women leading at higher organizational levels? The answer lies in the patterns of motivators, competencies, and experiences. Male patterns in each area are more consistent with what is required at higher organizational levels.

- Competencies: men show more strength in financials and strategy; women are stronger overall, and particularly strong in collaboration and customer focus
- Motivators: men value responsibility and influence more; women place more value on a friendly workplace and stimulating work
- Experiences: men tend to accumulate more high-visibility experiences; women lag in this area.

In sum, the biggest difference between men and women at senior-executive levels is experience.

Advice to Women: Pursue Experience and Visibility

Women who want to advance to higher organizational levels need to understand the factors that help or inhibit advancement.

- Become aware of the types of experiences desired in leaders at top roles and make career choices based on that knowledge.
- Work with a mentor to identify stretch and developmental assignments that will provide experience in business growth, financials, strategy, and operations, and access to high-visibility roles.
- Be aware of motivations. Women may need to step outside of their comfort zones to get the necessary experiences.

PDI Ninth House can help executive leaders at your organization gain insight, prepare for new roles, and successfully transition into senior levels. For more information, call your local PDI Ninth House office or visit www.pdinh.com.