



accenture

GETTING TO EQUAL 2020

# THE HIDDEN VALUE OF CULTURE MAKERS

Where Culture Makers lead,  
organisations grow twice as fast

 INTO THE NEW

Provocative thinking, transformative insights, tangible outcomes

## About the authors



**Julie Sweet**

Chief Executive Officer

Julie Sweet is chief executive officer of Accenture and serves on the company's board of directors. Prior to becoming CEO in September 2019, Julie served as chief executive officer of Accenture's business in North America, the company's largest geographic market. Previously, she was Accenture's general counsel, secretary and chief compliance officer for five years. Prior to joining Accenture in 2010, Julie was a partner for 10 years in the law firm Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP.

Outside of Accenture, Julie is a leader on topics including innovation, technology's impact on business and inclusion and diversity. She is a member of the World Economic Forum's International Business Council, the Business Roundtable and the TechNet Executive Council. Julie also serves on the board of directors for Catalyst, the board of trustees for the Center for Strategic & International Studies and the board of trustees for the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities—Bridges from School to Work. In 2019, she was named to FORTUNE's list of "Most Powerful Women" for the fourth consecutive year.

Julie holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Claremont McKenna College and a Juris Doctor from Columbia Law School.



**Ellyn Shook**

Chief Leadership & Human  
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Ellyn Shook is Accenture's chief leadership & human resources officer, responsible for helping the 505,000 people of Accenture succeed both professionally and personally. Her global team of HR experts is reimagining leadership and talent practices to create the most truly human work environment, fueling Accenture's differentiation in the market and ability to improve the way the world works and lives.

A member of Accenture's Global Management Committee, Ellyn is a strong advocate for diversity and equality, and Accenture has been widely recognised externally as an employer of choice and for its equality efforts.

A recognised thought leader and author on the topics of future of work and diversity and equality, Ellyn is a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Shaper Community Foundation Board, the Women's Leadership Board of the Women and Public Policy program at Harvard's Kennedy School and the steering committee of Paradigm for Parity. She also serves on the HR Policy Association's Board of Directors and is an active member of the HR50 division of World50.

Ellyn joined Accenture in 1988 and became a partner in 2003. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Purdue University.

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# **THINK YOUR WORKPLACE CULTURE IS INCLUSIVE?**

Your employees might think differently.  
Closing this perception gap will yield  
substantial benefits for companies and their  
employees.



## We are at an inflection point:

**When it comes to workplace culture, there is a large gap between what leaders think is going on and what employees say is happening on the ground.**

**78%**  
of leaders



**32%**  
of employees



78 percent of all leaders feel they create empowering environments - in which employees can be themselves, raise concerns and innovate without fear of failure - but just over one third (32 percent) of employees agree.

In addition, employees care increasingly about workplace culture and believe it's important to help them thrive in the workplace (reported by 83 percent of women and 67 percent of men).

Their voices are rising, loud and clear, while a growing number of companies recognise the importance of equality.

**Yet despite growing awareness, progress just isn't fast enough.**

Why aren't companies more diverse and inclusive, when the business case in favor of a culture of equality strengthens each year? And why is the share of women in leadership positions still so low?

Our survey of senior company leaders and employees dives deeply into the workplace culture perception gap.

Closing that gap will help companies thrive in a hyper-competitive economic environment and benefit all employees. Findings and recommendations from this research can empower leaders to take action, no matter where they are on their journey to a culture of equality.



# **TURNING CARING INTO DOING**

**Today, women are still incredibly scarce at the top, comprising only 2.8 percent of FORTUNE Global 500 CEOs.<sup>1</sup> Just one in five startups has a woman founder.<sup>2</sup>**

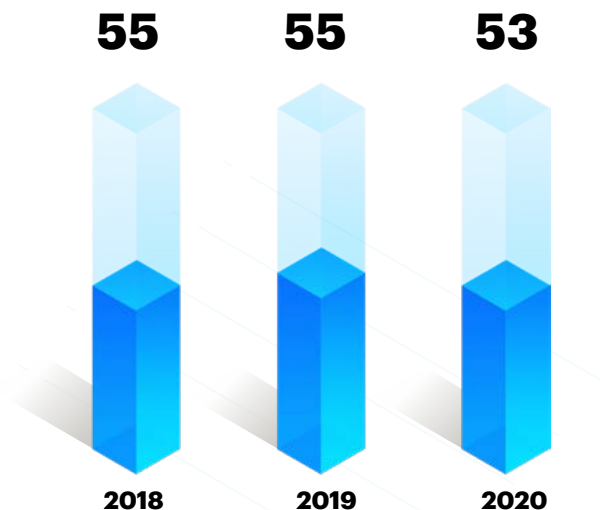
On one level, the message is getting through; our analysis of public company statements over the past decade shows a 30-fold increase in the volume of references to culture. But even still, just one in ten companies mentioned culture publicly in 2019 [see [methodology section](#) for more details].

**In fact, we see no change in leaders' efforts to create a culture of equality.**

For the past three years, we have asked employees to share their perceptions of leaders' actions around building more inclusive cultures. (For example, "Does your organisation clearly state its gender pay gap goals and ambitions?" and "Is your organisation fully committed to hiring, progressing and retaining women?")

We have grouped the answers of nine such questions together to create an overall scorecard. And over three years, the scores are essentially the same:

**Index showing employee perception of leaders' efforts to build more inclusive cultures.**



Score out of 100, where 100 is complete commitment

This pattern is a warning sign for leaders, because employee expectations are only set to increase: We found that a larger percentage of those in younger generations are more concerned with workplace culture than their older counterparts (**75 percent of Gen Z vs. 64 percent of Boomers**).

Culture is a notoriously amorphous concept. But, in our 2018 Getting to Equal research, we identified 40 workplace factors that are proven to positively influence advancement [see [appendix](#) for full list]. The more of these factors there are in an organisation, the stronger its culture of equality, and the more likely it is that all employees will advance and thrive.





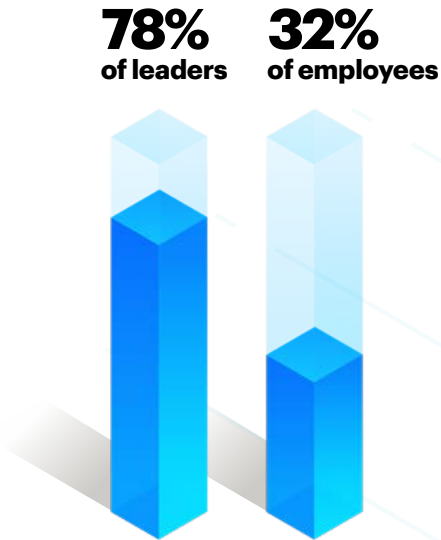
**TWO CULTURES,  
ONE COMPANY?**



**This year, we found that leaders say a culture of equality is important, and they think their organisations are inclusive.**

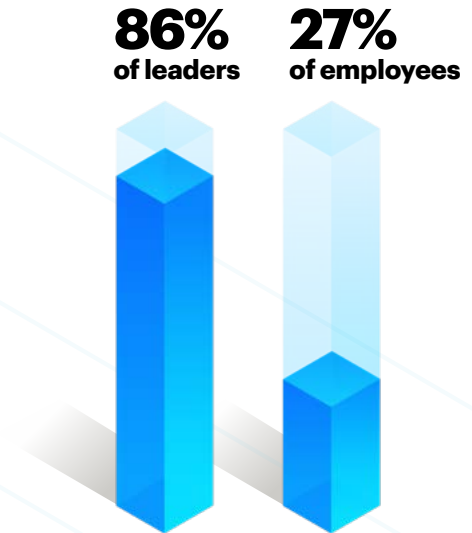
**But employees feel very differently.**

Since we have proven that a culture of equality allows everyone to advance and thrive, the perception gap is noteworthy:



78 percent of leaders feel they create empowering environments - in which employees can be themselves, raise concerns and innovate without fear of failure.

**Just under one third (32 percent) of employees agree.**



86 percent of leaders say employees have good control over when, where, how they work.

**Just 27 percent of employees agree.**

The proportion of employees who do not feel included in their organisations (19 percent), i.e. who do not feel they are welcome at work and can contribute fully and thrive, **is nearly 4x higher than leaders believe (5 percent).**

**19%**  
of employees

**5%**  
of leaders

Approximately two-thirds of employees feel comfortable reporting a range of sensitive issues, such as a concern about their mental health or the behavior of a senior colleague.

**14%**  
below the level  
leaders believe

# To make equality a reality, it has to be a priority.

In **2018**, we identified **40 factors** [see [appendix](#) for full list] that are proven to influence advancement, and we organised them into three pillars:



## **BOLD LEADERSHIP =**

A diverse leadership team that sets, shares and measures equality targets openly.



## **COMPREHENSIVE ACTION =**

Policies and practices that are family-friendly, support all genders and are bias-free in attracting and retaining people.



## **EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENT =**

One that trusts employees, respects individuals and offers the freedom to be creative and train and work flexibly.



And we found that in more equal cultures, everyone rises:

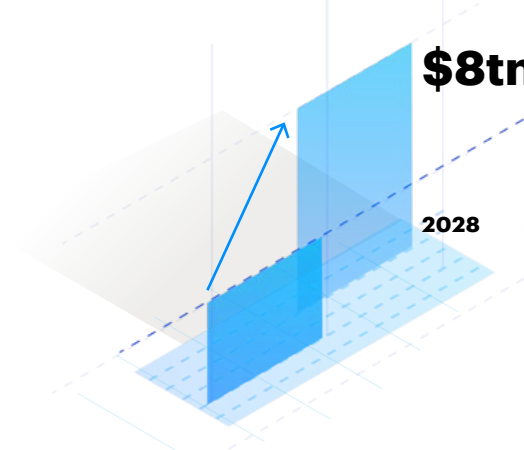


**Women** are four times more likely to reach senior manager and director levels.

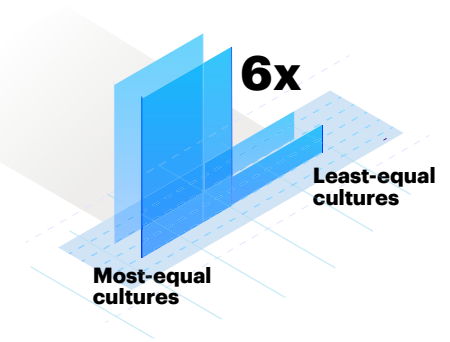


**Men** are twice as likely to reach senior manager and director levels.

In 2019, we found that innovation is a powerful multiplier of growth:



If “innovation mindset” in all countries were raised by 10 percent, **global GDP could increase by up to \$8 trillion by 2028.**



**“Innovation mindset”** (an individual’s willingness and ability to be innovative at work) is **six times higher in the most-equal cultures than in the least-equal ones.**

# MAKE THE WIN WITH CULTURE

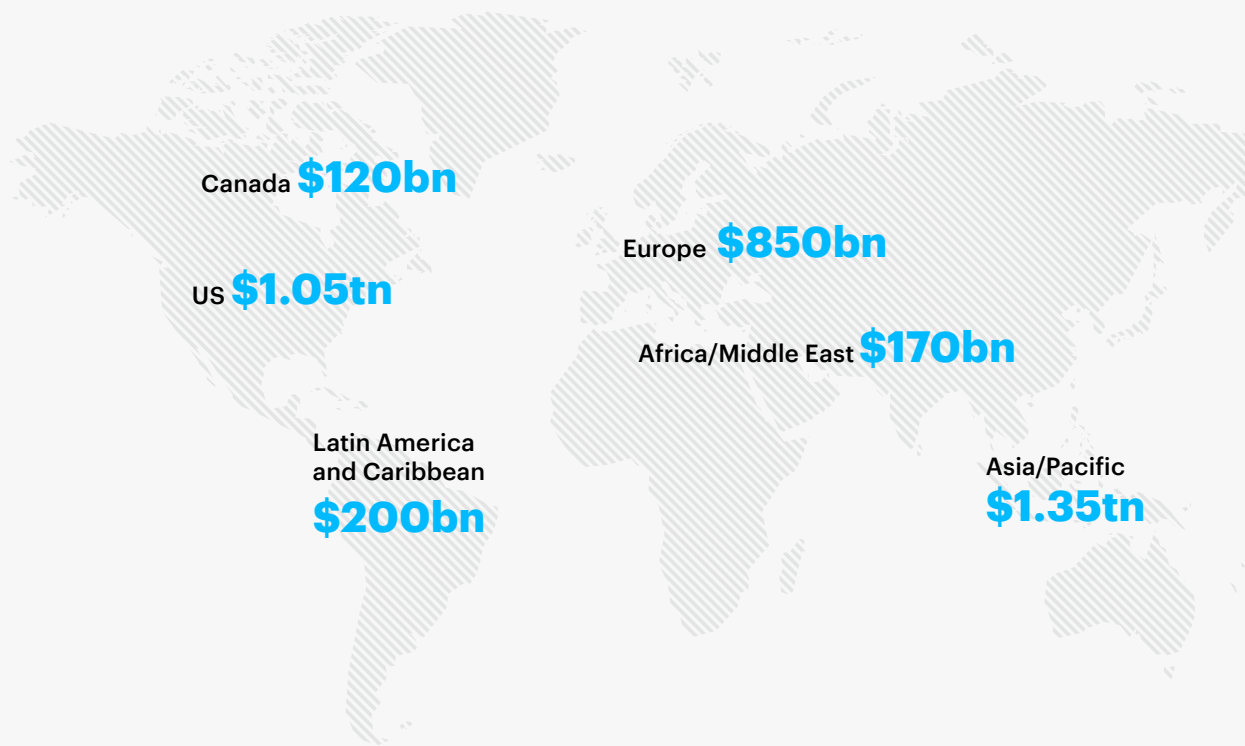
If the leader/employee perception gap were narrowed, employees—and the organisations they work for—could benefit significantly.

**That's because equality = growth.**






## If the employee perception gap were narrowed by 50 percent...

We estimate that global profits would be higher by 33 percent, equivalent to \$3.7 trillion in 2019.



[In USD]

## Employees would benefit, too:

-  The proportion of women who feel like a key member of their team with real influence over decisions would **rise by 53 percent**, from 1-in-5 to over 1-in-3, while the proportion of men who also feel that way would rise by \*5 percent.
-  The proportion of women who have a strong ambition to reach a leadership position in their organisation would **climb by 49 percent**, from 17 percent to 26 percent, while men's leadership aspirations would remain the same.
-  The proportion of women planning to stay with their current employer over the next 12 months would **rise by 4 percent**, from 86 percent to 89 percent. The retention rate for men would rise by 1 percent.

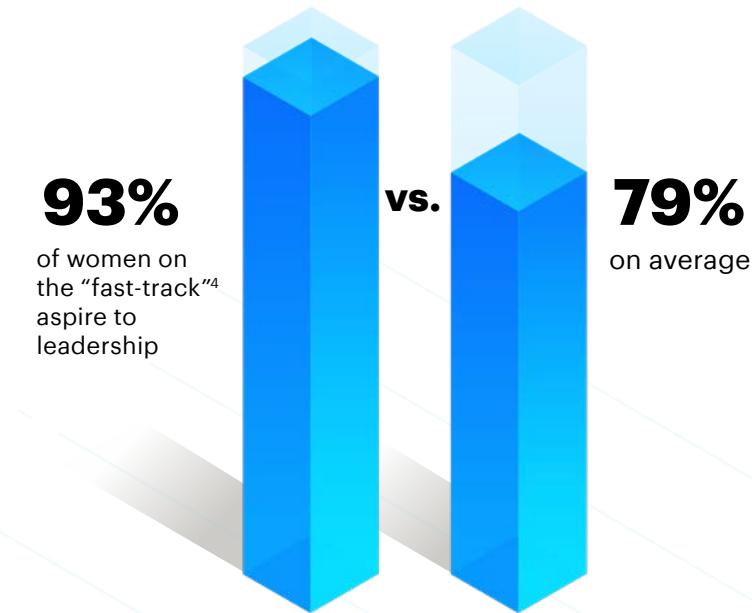


**These factors matter:**

**Studies have shown that feeling more included, for instance, boosts productivity,<sup>3</sup> while having an ambition to reach leadership is important to advancing in an organisation.**

In the past, our Getting to Equal research has looked at the impact of career strategy on women's chances of advancing in the workplace.

**We found that aspiring to leadership had a positive effect on the likelihood of women advancing to manager or higher:**



Given that lower attrition rates also help offset the high cost of recruitment, we estimated how much organisations would save if the expected retention rate of women climbed by 5 percent, i.e. if for every 100 women employed, 89 were retained (instead of 85). Studies suggest the average cost per recruit is equal to 20 percent of their salary.<sup>5</sup> That means that increasing the retention rate of women by 5 percent would save a company employing 50,000 employees, of whom half are women, \$8 million per year.

A close-up portrait of a woman with short, dark, curly hair and glasses. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a blurred blue-grey color with some diagonal lines.

# **MEET THE CULTURE MAKERS**

**A small group of leaders—we call them **Culture Makers**—are ahead of the curve.**

**We looked at leaders along the “say-do-drive” spectrum of commitment to building more equal cultures.**

## **These leaders...**

### **SAY:**

Building a more inclusive culture is an organisational priority.

### **DO:**

Recognise the importance of culture and identify change as a personal goal.

### **DRIVE:**

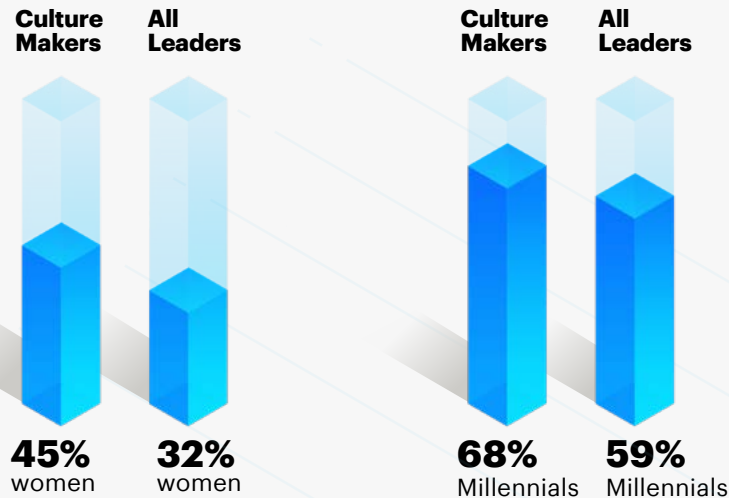
Reward their people for building a more inclusive culture.



# \*Culture Makers make the difference

They are more in tune with the workforce, and they recognise the importance of cultural factors like pay transparency, the availability of family leave and the freedom to be creative in helping employees thrive.

Interestingly, they skew female and younger. They are a more gender-balanced group, since 45 percent of them are women, whereas women comprise just 32 percent of all the leaders we surveyed. A full 68 percent of them are Millennials, compared to 59 percent of all leaders.



\*Findings are based on global data

They are much more likely to have spoken out on a range of issues, including gender equality (52 percent vs. 35 percent of all leaders) and sexual harassment/discrimination (51 percent vs. 30 percent). They hold themselves accountable, leading organisations that are 1.8x more likely to have publicly announced a target to get more women into the workforce.

And they model being the same person both inside and outside of work—85 percent of them believe that senior leaders who talk openly about personal hardships and challenges are stronger leaders.

Notably, they lead organisations that are growing more than twice as fast as those of their peers. **In fact, they report their sales are 2.2x higher and their profits are 3.2x higher.**

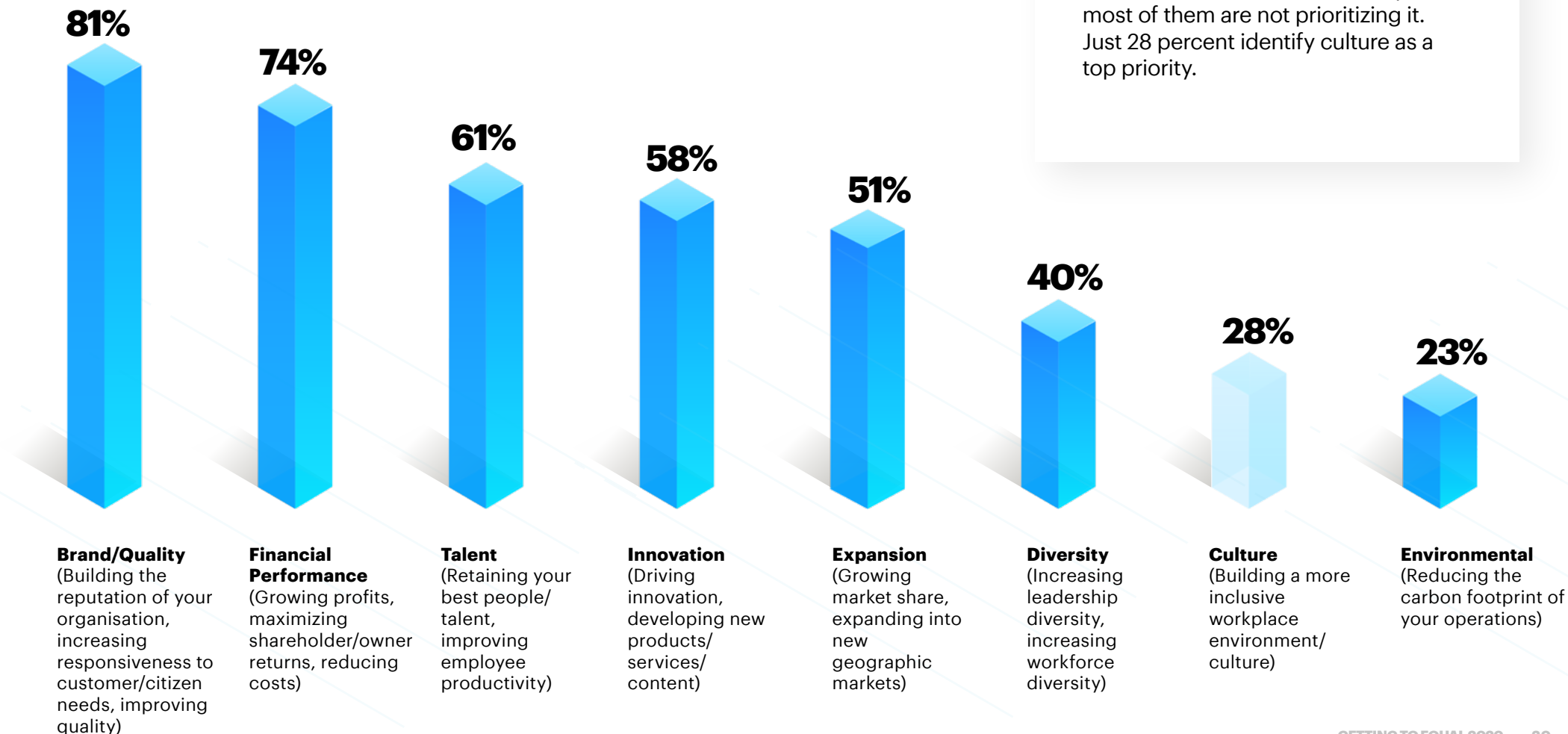
Unfortunately, Culture Makers are still few and far between. Only 6 percent of leaders in our survey (rising to 9 percent of women leaders) reach the standard.



**PRIORITISE  
CULTURE, GET  
AHEAD OF THE  
CURVE**

## Leader priorities:

While leaders think culture is important, most of them are not prioritizing it. Just 28 percent identify culture as a top priority.



## Our research examines the root causes of why culture is low on the list and reveals the hurdles to progress:

We asked leaders around the world who do not have targets in place around building a more inclusive environment—but who think they should have them—what is limiting their organisations' ability to set those targets.



**42%**

said not all of their organisation's leaders believe it's important



**40%**

said it's hard to link to business performance



**38%**

said they have other priorities as a business



**33%**

said it's too hard to measure



## In conclusion

**Now that leaders are armed with an awareness of both the perception gap and the barriers to building more equal cultures, they can “say, do and drive” the behaviors and policies that will close the gap and overcome the obstacles in their organisations.**

If leaders prioritise a culture of equality now, they will create an environment that is more likely to produce the financial results they want and need.

If people feel a sense of belonging and are valued by their employers for their unique contributions, perspectives and circumstances, they are empowered to innovate more. Everyone will rise.

And with more gender-balanced leadership teams, workplace cultures will continue to become more inclusive.

Eventually, leaders will evolve to see profit and culture not as separate endeavors at all, but as tightly interdependent goals, equally crucial to success.



**BRING EVERYONE IN,  
LIFT EVERYONE UP**

## **Ready to build a culture of equality? Make it as important as financial growth, talent and productivity.**

Fostering a diverse and inclusive culture can no longer fall to the bottom of the agenda. It is not only important to growth, it is also a safeguard against risk in a hyper-competitive economic environment.

Creating a culture of equality anchors back to the three pillars our previous research identified—bold leadership, comprehensive action and an empowering environment. The following recommendations outline ways for leaders to take action and drive growth, no matter where they are on their journey.

## BOLD LEADERSHIP:

Creating a culture of equality must be at the top of the business agenda. It starts with the belief that diversity is not only the right thing to do, but a business imperative that is treated the same as any other strategic priority.

This includes:

**Prioritising culture:** Even in challenging financial times, culture must remain a top business imperative like any other, and its importance must be communicated frequently.

**Establishing a roadmap:** Gather your data, establish scorecards, track progress and communicate often with your key stakeholders.

**Holding leaders accountable:** Establish the importance of shared success, rewarding and recognising leaders and teams for progress toward a culture of equality.

## GLOBAL CASE STUDY: **Microsoft**

After years of working to create a diverse and inclusive culture, tech giant Microsoft found it was not meeting its goals, and in some cases losing ground. In 2016 Microsoft made a bold move to energise and spark broader leadership engagement by making diversity one of the strategic performance goals that determine annual incentives. Senior executives are also evaluated on qualitative performance categories related to culture in the context of inclusion. In fact, Microsoft has now made diversity and inclusion a “core priority” for everyone working there, factoring how well employees meet that standard into their performance conversations.

Today, Microsoft has about 22 percent more women employees globally than in 2016, and in technical roles alone, Microsoft has 49 percent more women. Since 2016, Microsoft has seen a 56 percent increase in women executives, and the number of women executives in technical roles has almost doubled in three years, a 95 percent increase. This progress is attributable to many factors and the work of many people, including the work done to engage executives on Microsoft’s broader cultural transformation of which diversity and inclusion is one aspect.



## COMPREHENSIVE ACTION:

While establishing and tracking goals and targets is essential, leaders must go beyond the data to fully understand the perception gap. They should solicit meaningful dialogue with employees that allows them to hear firsthand how included their people feel, identify where gaps exist and focus their efforts to improve.

Consider methods that are:

**Varied:** Standard surveys can be a reliable way to take the cultural temperature of the organisation. But leaders should also consider face-to-face meetings, focus groups, town halls, online listening, employee networks and chat groups.

**Ongoing:** Today's workplaces move rapidly and so should your engagement methods. How employees feel now may be very different from six months ago when a survey was fielded. Leaders must maintain open, two-way conversations with employees to capture feedback in real time and empower leadership to quickly drive change in response.

**Sensitive to all frequencies:** Leaders must devise outreach methods and other ways to allow those who are less vocal, or fewer in number, to be heard.

## GLOBAL CASE STUDY: **Sodexo**

Sodexo set a goal of having 40 percent women at its senior leadership level by 2025. To get there, the company created the Gender Advisory Board "SoTogether" (previously known as SWIFT, Sodexo Women's International Forum for Talent).

SoTogether leads and drives Sodexo's gender equality strategy and provides development opportunities to increase the women's leadership pipeline through mentoring, sponsorship, HR processes, internal programs and active advocacy. Ultimately, the company wants to ensure a better gender balance and have more women in senior positions with profit-and-loss (P&L) responsibilities as well as operational and facilities roles.

Within the US, Sodexo also developed a Balanced Scorecard for Diversity, with a Diversity Index linked to an annual incentive. The scorecard contains both quantitative and qualitative measures. The quantitative measures focus on the distribution of women and people of color within our hiring, promotions and terminations. The qualitative section measures managers' inclusion behaviors over the year, such as whether they attended diversity training or mentored diverse employees.

Today, globally, the company has 60 percent representation of women on its board, 35 percent women on its executive team and 37 percent women in its senior executive roles.

## EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENT:

As our research reveals, leaders and employees can have very different perspectives on workplace issues. Understanding the perception gaps is the first step, but closing them will require leaders to roll up their sleeves alongside employees to encourage and cultivate Culture Makers.

Leaders can drive collaboration by:

**Connecting:** Culture Makers exist in every organisation and at every level. Some may be obvious leaders, while others may need a nudge to step forward. Use inclusion- and diversity-building programs to create opportunities for future Culture Makers to opt-in and take on specific culture-related roles in their offices or departments.

**Co-creating:** Find ways to bring leaders and culture-minded employees together, brief them on the challenges the organisation is facing and work together to develop specific, actionable solutions.

As more people become Culture Makers, inclusion and diversity strategies will continue to evolve and expand, as will the potential of all employees to find meaning, social support and wellbeing at work—while contributing more fully to the growth of their organisations.

### GLOBAL CASE STUDY: **Accenture**

Accenture is committed to accelerating equality in the workplace as responsible business leaders and to drive our innovation agenda. Because we believe a culture of equality is one where everyone can bring their whole selves to work and thrive, we trust, respect and empower our people. We offer them the freedom to be creative and constant access to learning, training and support to help elevate their careers.

Several years ago, we set two clear goals: to achieve a gender-balanced workforce by 2025, and to increase the diversity of our leadership by growing the percentage of women managing directors to at least 25 percent by the end of 2020.

Today, our workforce is 44 percent women and the percentage of women managing directors is 24 percent.

Treating our gender goals like any other business priority, we hold leaders accountable, collect data, measure progress and publish workforce demographics across key geographies.



# **METHODOLOGY**

Our research explored why there continues to be significant gaps in achieving outcomes in workplace equality, despite growing awareness and commitments from organisational leaders. To find out, we built on our Getting to Equal research from 2018 and 2019 to create new data and analysis in three steps.

**1** **Step 1:**  
**Quantifying the perception gap**

In our previous research we identified 40 factors (such as flexibility and being encouraged to take parental leave) that work together to create a culture where everyone can advance and thrive. These factors formed the basis of two new surveys designed to uncover how leaders and employees view and experience them. One survey was completed by 1,748 senior leaders (C-suite and management committee in organisations with 50 or more employees) while the other survey was completed by 30,382 employees, split equally between men and women. The surveys were fielded in 28 markets in October and November 2019 and were completed online. Pairs of questions across the two surveys enabled us to compare what executives say about workplace culture and what employees experience on the ground. Collectively we called these differences “the perception gap.”

**2** **Step 2:**  
**Measuring the impact of the perception gap on employee outcomes**

We used limited dependent variable regression analysis to assess the strength and statistical significance of these perception gaps in relation to employees’ sense of inclusion in the organisation, whether they have a strong ambition to become a senior leader in their organisation and their intent to leave/stay with the organisation in the next 12 months. The model controls for a range of workplace and employee background characteristics such as organisation size, industry, age, gender and education which could also impact the outcomes.

### 3

## Step 3: Measuring the impact of closing the perception gap

We built scenarios and used our models to simulate the impact that a 50 percent decrease in the perception gap would have on employees' sense of inclusion, ambition for leadership and retention (split by gender).

### Impact on recruitment costs:

To calculate the cost savings associated with an improved retention rate we assumed a 50:50 gender split in employees and used data from the Center for American Progress<sup>6</sup> to establish the cost of replacing an employee as being equivalent to around 20 percent of their salary. Under this scenario, increasing the retention rate of women by 5 percent would save a company employing 50,000 employees, of which half were women, up to US\$8million per year.

### Impact on profit growth:

To calculate the relationship between the perception gap and profit growth, we used an ordered logit econometric model to estimate the probability of companies who responded to our survey falling within a (self-reported) band of profit growth (ranging from <-21 percent to >21 percent over the past 3 years), conditional on global revenue, number of employees, industry, and average perception gap. The results indicated that companies with lower perception gaps are significantly more likely to demonstrate higher profit growth. We then

conducted a simulation to estimate how profitability would change if all companies could decrease perception gaps by 50 percent. This suggested a 33 percent increase in average profit growth from 2.6 percent to 3.5 percent.

### Impact on profitability in 2019:

Using our calculation for profit growth we simulated the rise in profits using actual data on EBITDA of all private and public companies globally from S&P Capital IQ for 2019. This points to a boost of US\$3.7 trillion to global EBITDA in 2019 of US\$11 trillion.

**Company statement analysis:** We scanned 230,000 public statement transcripts from 14,300 companies in the period 2009-2019 for a predetermined set of Culture keywords; these included the word “culture” but also those related to our more granular definition such as parental leave and flexible working. Using these keywords and Natural Language Processing allowed us to extract “mentions” of workplace culture by year—in total and by company.



# The 40 factors that influence advancement and characterise a culture of equality

## BOLD LEADERSHIP

- Gender diversity is a priority for management
- A diversity target or goal is shared outside the organisation
- The organisation clearly states gender pay gap goals and ambitions
- Progress on gender diversity is measured and shared with employees
- Leaders are held accountable for improving gender diversity
- A diversity target or goal is shared inside the organisation
- The leadership team is diverse

## COMPREHENSIVE ACTION

- Progress has been made in attracting, retaining and progressing women
- The company has a women's network open only to women
- The company has a women's network that is open to both women and men
- Men are encouraged to take parental leave
- Employees trust that the organisation pays women and men equally for the same work
- The proportion of women in senior leadership has increased over the last five years

- The organisation is fully committed to hiring, progressing and retaining women
- Progress has been made in improving gender equality in senior leadership
- There is a clear maternity policy in place
- Women are encouraged to take maternity leave
- There is a clear parental policy in place
- The organisation hires people from a variety of backgrounds
- Leaders take action to get more women into senior roles

## EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENT

- Employees have never been asked to change their appearance to conform to company culture
- Employees have the freedom to be creative and innovative
- Virtual/remote working is widely available and is common practice
- The organisation provides training to keep its employees' skills relevant
- Employees can avoid overseas or long-distance travel via virtual meetings
- Employees can work from home on a day when they have a personal commitment
- Employees are comfortable reporting sexual discrimination/harassment incident(s) to the company
- Employees feel trusted and are given responsibility
- Employees have the freedom to be themselves at work
- Leadership has a positive attitude toward failure
- Leaders set a positive example around work-life balance
- Networking events with company leaders take place during office hours
- Employees can decline a request to work late without negative consequences
- Employees can decline a request to attend early-morning/late-evening meetings without negative consequences
- Sexual discrimination/harassment is not tolerated
- The company has made progress in reducing tolerance of sex discrimination or gender-biased language
- Company training times and formats are flexible
- Supervisors respond favorably to flexible working requests
- The organisation respects employees' needs to balance work with other commitments
- The organisation has made progress on building a workplace where no one feels excluded

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# REFERENCES

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<sup>2</sup> <https://news.crunchbase.com/news/eoy-2019-diversity-report-20-percent-of-newly-funded-startups-in-2019-have-a-female-founder/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236366/right-culture-not-employee-satisfaction.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Fast-track women typically reach manager level within five years and lead their peer group in terms of advancement in the workplace. [https://www.accenture.com/\\_acnmedia/pdf-73/accenture-when-she-rises-we-all-rise.pdf](https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/pdf-73/accenture-when-she-rises-we-all-rise.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/CostofTurnover.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/CostofTurnover.pdf>

## About Accenture

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialised skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world’s largest delivery network—Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With 505,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.

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