Attracting, retaining and developing a diverse workforce
Kier diversity research report 2019
Historically, the construction industry has lacked diversity within its workforce and amongst its leaders. This needs to be addressed to better reflect society and attract the best talent to join our sector. This is a priority for us at Kier, which is why we launched our industry-wide Shaping Your World campaign to excite 11 to 15-year-olds about careers in the built environment and why I personally lead the diversity agenda within the business. We are making progress but know there is much more to do. Women make up 46% of the UK workforce but only 12% of the construction workforce.

In 2016 we created our Balanced Business Network to promote a culture of inclusion by connecting employees, giving a voice to under-represented groups and delivering real change. Initially the network focussed on understanding the challenges women in our businesses faced but, building on the energy and commitment of our employees and with active leadership sponsorship, the scope has grown, shaping our priorities to increase inclusion and make Kier a great place to work for everyone. We now have an active LGBT+ network building awareness and supporting colleagues, a BAME action group working with schools providing career support to BAME students and some ground-breaking partnerships and initiatives exploring agile working, promoting disability awareness and supporting disadvantaged young people into work. 2019 will see these network groups deliver on their aims across the breadth of our UK business.

During 2018, our gender pay gap reporting and participation in the BP-commissioned Spot the Difference research, looking at the motivations and context for women’s and men’s career choices, provided valuable insights into what might be holding women back. It challenged some of our assumptions and brought energy and focus to our plans, helping to shape the action we have already taken to provide opportunity within Kier. Working with WISE (Women in Science and Engineering), by the end of the year more than 170 women in Kier will have completed a development programme designed to equip them to accelerate their careers and realise their potential.

Recognising the critical role sponsorship and mentoring plays, each cohort has a senior sponsor to support them and we are already seeing the positive impact in their progression.

Business growth and innovation needs diversity of ideas and experience. We have been challenging ourselves to think differently about the skills we need, how we can connect with a broader range of people who could bring their unique experiences into our business and what we need to do to meet their expectations of a modern workplace.

Attracting diverse talent is only half the challenge. Following the Spot the Difference findings, we wanted to understand what ensures that under-represented groups not just join but stay, thrive and succeed in an organisation, leading to this piece of research. With this deeper insight on both the similarities and differences in the barriers and enablers for each group we will hone our plans and target our development approach to create an environment where everyone can succeed.

I hope you enjoy reading the output of this work and that it also provides you with food for thought for your own organisations.

"It’s great to be part of a company that is proactive in moving towards becoming a more diverse business and tackling the issues head on. I found the WISE development programme very useful and was pleased that Kier invested both the time and money in me to develop my skills.”

Caroline Wright, Senior Quantity Surveyor, Kier
Key survey findings

Three key insights have emerged from this research:

Attracting diverse people – means making the working environment more attractive for women and men by increasing flexibility and creating roles that appeal to the specific expectations of each diverse talent group being targeted.

The data tells us: over half of respondents want to work flexibly or already do, and people really want to feel valued, with both women and men ranking this as their number one factor when thinking about success at work (above measures such as salary or performance level).

In Kier: Flexibility comes in many forms which is why we are piloting a range of agile working initiatives in our business to understand what more inclusive workplace practices and how to operational work environments. Our Highways business has been a Disability Confident employer since 2017, enabling people of all abilities to come into the workplace. We need to continue shifting mindsets about what flexibility looks like and the benefits to the business, as well as equipping employees and managers to make it work (see examples under developing diverse people below). We are also looking at how we structure work and define the skills needed differently to broaden the appeal of our jobs and to open up opportunities to a more diverse candidate group.

Retaining diverse people – there are no shortcuts; companies need effective policy and a positive culture and managers who truly value and support their people.

The data tells us: when we asked respondents to rank having a supportive manager, strong policy and a positive culture, having a supportive manager was the top choice. Robust, inclusive policies matter but walking the talk matters more – leaders need to personally role model good practice. This means setting clear expectations, encouraging the right mindset and building the skills set amongst current and future leaders at all levels in the organisation. Interestingly, BAME respondents appear to lack trust in the system and place a higher value on sound policies to back up the individual manager so any corporate approach needs to be nuanced and flexible.

In Kier: A core part of our existing management development offer is equipping current and future leaders and managers to build and motivate diverse teams, to understand how to create a more inclusive work place and how to nurture diverse talent. Inclusion grows when people have the chance to share their different experiences and perspectives. Since 2017 we have been taking our innovative board game ‘Equally Yours’ out on the road across the business, working with teams from Board level to frontline operatives, providing a fun and safe way to break down unconscious bias and build a shared understanding of each other’s experiences in the workplace. This year, building directly on our engagement survey insight, will see us working with managers on the ground, skilling them to take practical steps with their teams to create a more inclusive environment. At the same time, we are making our Diversity and Inclusion policies and guidance more accessible and practical to make it easier for managers to take ownership, and for all employees to understand what they are entitled to experience at work.

Developing diverse people – means full transparency of opportunity, eliminating conscious and unconscious decision bias and tailoring corporate development offers to meet the individual needs of different groups.

The data tells us: ambition is not the issue, with nearly three-quarters of respondents saying they want to progress (with BAME women showing the most ambition of all the groups), but there are different drivers and blockers depending on who you ask. Women, particularly BAME women, value personal development opportunity most highly as a reason to progress while men focus more on the responsibility they will take on. Women and the whole BAME group highlighted the need for a culture of greater equality to make senior roles more appealing. Our data does not tell us whether this reflects experience in trying to progress and being pushed back, or whether they are self-selecting out on the assumption that they won’t succeed due to bias in the system. This is an area we need to explore further in future research.

In Kier: We have set clear expectations for leaders on their role in hiring and progressing diverse talent and are supporting them with the insight and skills to step up to the challenge. Recognising that moving the dial on diverse representation and progression needs targeted development support, we launched our career skills development programme for women in partnership with WISE (Women in Science & Engineering). We are already seeing a positive impact on progression success for the WISE programme cohorts and for female delegates on our broader leadership development programmes. We have been actively brokering mentoring relationships for senior female talent and are trialling reverse mentoring to break down unconscious bias and raise leader understanding. With this research insight we can now refine our skills and career development support and target the content and delivery approach to meet the specific needs of different diverse groups such as BAME colleagues.

“Without diversity we are taking business decisions from only one angle of experience. So how can we expect to be commercially successful without diversity? If we still think that “the diverse talent just isn’t out there” then it is because we are not defining talent effectively or asking the right questions.”

Kirsty Bashforth, Kier Group Board Director and Chair of Safety, Health & Environment Committee
### Attracting a diverse workforce

**What we asked:**

At some point in your career have you, or do you expect to:

- Work part-time
- Take parental leave of more than four weeks
- Take a career break for another reason
- Work flexibly (e.g. change start/finish times or work remotely)

Working flexibly was the most popular of the policies. There is minimal difference in response patterns when different age groups are looked at, so this is not a generational difference. Evidently flexible working is something that is on people’s radar and organisations need to think about how they can make it work.

In terms of supporting diversity, it is worth noting that each policy was more popular with women than men, and the most common reason given for taking up one or more of the policies was ‘family responsibilities’. If organisations can encourage more men to take advantage of policies designed to support both parents, then women may have more choice in working more if they want to and organisations may start to see greater value in promoting these policies for everyone (see the data on privilege and attitudes in section three).

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**Women**

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<th>Men Expect to</th>
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<td>Flex working</td>
<td>Yes 43%</td>
<td>Yes 29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
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<td>Yes 12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;4 weeks parental leave</td>
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‘HR Review in 2018 estimated that working mothers are hit by a £1.3TN loss of earnings due to changes they make once they have children, including having to work part-time and accepting jobs below their experience and qualification level due to a lack of flexibility from employers.'
Following ‘family responsibilities’, ‘work/life balance’ was the next most cited reason for taking up one or more of these policies. Less obvious, however, was that ‘benefits to the business’ and/or ‘the environment’ ranked third, indicating a shift in how people think about their work (particularly in relation to flexible working). Employees are thinking more holistically about how they work and organisations need to meet this demand if they want to attract the best talent.

41% of women answered ‘yes’ or ‘likely’ to part-time working
84% of respondents answered ‘yes’, ‘likely’ or ‘possibly’ to flexible working
55% of respondents answered ‘yes’ or ‘likely’ to flexible working

“In 2015 the McKinsey Global Institute reported that if women were able to make the same contribution to the economy as men, it would increase the annual global GDP by 26% in 2025 (equivalent to $28 trillion). In a more conservative estimation, in which each country matched progress towards gender equality of the best one in their region, the increase would nevertheless be $12 trillion.”

“Being yourself at work is vital to individual and collective success. We are committed at Kier to building a balanced business that supports each of our employees to be the best that they can be.”

Claudio Veritiero, Kier Group Chief Operating Officer and Executive Sponsor and Chair of the Balanced Business Strategy Group
How important are each of these factors when you think of what ‘success’ at work means to you:

- High salary
- Senior role
- High performance
- Being valued
- High impact
- Mastery of a skill
- Wide range of skills
- Being better than others

What we asked:

When we asked people to tell us what success at work means to them, ‘being valued’ was overwhelmingly the most popular response, for all groups. We anticipated that more women than men might rate ‘being valued’ as ‘very important’ and while this was true (by 78% to 69%), it was still the highest scoring response for both genders.

Women were also more likely than men to rate ‘high performance’ as ‘very important’ as a measure of success (45% to 40%), so alongside the importance of ‘being valued’ they want to be able to reference their achievement more than their male counterparts. Similarly, over half of BAME respondents (54%) rated this ‘very important’ compared to 42% of non-BAME respondents. While not an under-represented group, we also found that the younger the respondent, the more likely they were to rate ‘high performance’ as ‘very important’.

The BP-commissioned research into the motivations and context for women’s and men’s career choices in the Spot the Difference survey (2017) identified women as feeling more in need of tangible proof of their capability.

“The Aura of Capability”: Gender bias in selection of a project manager job, APM, 2017, found that women are often deemed less capable than their (equally qualified) male colleagues.

McKinsey’s 2018 Women in the Workplace report found that women are still less likely to be hired into manager-level jobs than their male counterparts; in the USA 62% of manager level positions are held by men as compared to 38% held by women.
Looking at the other responses for ratings of ‘very important’, BAME respondents also rated having a ‘high impact’ more highly than non-BAME respondents by a ratio of 46% to 35% as well as ‘mastery of a skill’ (46% to 29%). They were less likely to say that ‘being valued’ was ‘very important’ than the non-BAME group (61% to 75%).

Taken together, these findings suggest that under-represented groups place greater emphasis on having tangible proof of their capability, which ties to prior research showing that women and BAME candidates are more likely to face bias during selection and in the workplace.

**Success factors rated as ‘very important’ – Comparison by BAME identity**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Non-BAME</th>
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<tr>
<td>Being valued</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wide range of skills</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High salary</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
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**Key takeaways:**

These findings can help employers think about what to focus on as they attempt to attract candidates. Firstly, by thinking more holistically about how roles can be performed in a more flexible way. Secondly, all groups want to feel valued but if an organisation is committed to attracting more women and ethnic-minority candidates they would benefit from also thinking about how they can emphasise opportunities to have a tangible impact through the role and clear measures of success for performance in post, potentially by reframing the measures of success. All of this needs to sit alongside a selection process that is transparent and fair to all applicants.

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5 A survey by The Guardian in December 2018 of 1000 people from minority ethnic backgrounds found that they were consistently more likely to have faced negative everyday experiences – all frequently associated with racism – than white people in a comparison poll. 43% reported being overlooked for a work promotion that they felt was unfair in comparison to 18% of white people.

6 They also reported on a YouGov poll which found that 40% of British people don’t believe people from ethnic minority backgrounds face greater discrimination than white people in areas of life such as jobs, education and access to finance.

7 Research by the DWP found applicants with ‘white sounding’ names were 74% more likely to receive a positive response to their application.

8 The Resolution Foundation published a report on the £3.2bn pay penalty faced by black and ethnic minority workers encouraging organisations to understand their own pay gap by ethnicity.
Section 2

Retaining a diverse workforce

Hiring a more diverse workforce is only the starting point. Once people join the organisation we need to create an environment where each employee can thrive and so wants to stay.

What we asked:

We asked respondents to rank the following statements in order of importance to them:

- Strong policies that positively impact equality, diversity and inclusion (e.g. flexible working, enhanced child friendly/maternity & paternity policies, clear career pathways)
- A clear culture of valuing a diverse workforce (e.g. diversity in the leadership population, perception that promotions are merit-based, leaders who ‘walk the talk’ on equality, diversity and inclusion)
- A manager who is a company champion/standard bearer for equality, diversity and inclusion
- A manager who actively supports all members of their team to fulfil their individual potential

Respondents overwhelmingly ranked an actively supportive manager as their top preference (59%). Comparing by gender showed similar patterns but a different picture emerged when looking at that data by BAME identity. In the non-BAME group 56% put a supportive manager first, while in the BAME group this stands at 33% and on an equal footing with strong policies. Comments provided by BAME respondents suggest that policy is seen as the bedrock from which culture and individual management behaviour grow, and organisations need to set out and enforce clear expectations for all their employees.

59% of all respondents ranked a manager who actively supports all members of their team to fulfil their individual potential as most important.

“I have been managed by those who would see themselves as champions of D&I (e.g. sitting on the right round tables, being visible advocates upwards) but who in their behaviour were completely oblivious to their poor support for these policies (e.g. refusing to move meetings at antisocial times for working parents, being unresponsive to those on maternity leave, being unsupportive of those struggling with pressure/mental health issues).”

A respondent
For me, change must start at the top of an organisation with a very visible and defined commitment to achieving equality. I truly believe that a balanced board translates into a balanced business and I’m proud of the fact that half of our senior team at Kier Living is made up of women. I am not a silent partner in this movement for change and my male counterparts shouldn’t be either. It is not enough to quietly agree, to understand – or even passionately believe – that gender equality can only benefit us all. Instead, we need to step up and speak out. We should be vociferous in our support and relentless in our pursuit of the end goal.”

John Anderson, Executive Director, Kier Living
Section 2

Interestingly, when sorted by age it becomes clear that, following a peak for the 26-35 age group (slightly higher than the under 26 group), the perceived importance of policy diminishes as people get older with over 55s least likely to rank it in first place. While the survey comments don’t elaborate on why this is, it could be that people become disillusioned with the power of policy to affect change the longer they spend in the work force. This would be an interesting area to explore further in future research.

“Without a manager’s support the policies will be no more than words on paper: managers are key. Being a ‘champion’ is not the same as actively living the values you champion.”

A respondent

One clear message came from the data: managers matter. Having a manager who actively supports all team members to fulfil their individual potential is important across the population surveyed. Organisations need to think carefully about who is given managerial responsibility and the development made available to managers, at the beginning of their people management journey and as they progress and take on greater responsibility. However, to effectively retain a diverse workforce, organisations should not overlook the role that clear and coherent policies play in shaping culture and equipping managers to support their people more effectively.

Key takeaways:

One clear message came from the data: managers matter. Having a manager who actively supports all team members to fulfil their individual potential is important across the population surveyed. Organisations need to think carefully about who is given managerial responsibility and the development made available to managers, at the beginning of their people management journey and as they progress and take on greater responsibility. However, to effectively retain a diverse workforce, organisations should not overlook the role that clear and coherent policies play in shaping culture and equipping managers to support their people more effectively.

31Cranfield School of Management have developed an ‘Inclusive Talent Management’ model (Hilary Harris, Kim Turnbull James & Sue Vinnicombe, 2018) from research that identified all elements are closely linked, and organisations must consider individual manager behaviour and company policy and company culture if they are serious about developing a more equal, diverse and inclusive workplace.
Overcoming bias is important for two reasons. Firstly, it avoids hiring mistakes; being biased means we are likely to miss hiring some really talented people. The second reason relates to pure tolerance – being tolerant is morally just.

To overcome bias, we need to understand its origin – psychometric assessments and behavioural models help us to do just that.

Over the years, HR specialisms have evolved significantly. By focusing on the measurement of desirable outcomes, people strategies that create and nurture more of these metrics have emerged. This reflects an important shift in perspective. We have shifted our focus from performance indicators that ‘lag’, to behavioural predictors which ‘lead’.

Overcoming bias is a top priority. We can accelerate progress by addressing the ‘lag’ in this area. We know that lagging with respect to D&I has a negative impact on employee engagement and organisational outcomes. But by the time we receive the most recent employee survey, it’s too late to do anything remedial to address underlying issues. How can we be doing enough to promote D&I if we are only looking at lag indicators in our ‘rear view mirror’?

Creating inclusive environments is more complicated than responding to observable differences in the ‘correct’ manner. It’s about creating an environment where people feel comfortable, safe and rewarded for ‘stepping out’ from the crowd.

We must move beyond traditional metrics of diversity and confront the factors countering inclusion. Our greatest adversary is bias. Bias operates to inhibit the individuality of others, through fear of social rejection. Like personality, the nature and origin of bias is unique – it is shaped by core values and life experiences.

By making unconscious bias training personal and embedding the right behaviours, we help leaders leverage inclusion to its greatest potential.
Anyone who denies what having privilege means is kidding themselves. As leaders it is our responsibility to accept and challenge ourselves, our culture, every recruitment decision and promotion decision.

Last year I did an interview on YouTube called ‘Colour Brave’ where I talked about what it felt like for me being a black female in business. I also briefly talked about how ‘privilege’ can affect your thinking about society and at work. It is something that I believe is important for leaders to understand to create greater diversity and inclusion in the workplace, as well as to have greater humility for society more generally.

The dictionary definition of the word privilege is ‘a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group’. A famous sociologist described the state of having privilege as being ‘like running with the wind at your back, unaware of invisible sustenance, support and propulsion’.

When starting my career, I became acutely aware of what it was like not to have privilege from my own personal experience when I wanted to enter the world of professional services. I went to a recruitment agency 23 years ago to enquire about how to join a large professional services firm and can vividly remember the conversation and feeling as if I was being steered away from considering working for a firm like the one I work today. I was told that I wasn’t the right fit because I had not followed a ‘traditional education’ route. You see, I left school at 16 with average grades; I started my career as an apprentice and didn’t go to University full time (I did a part-time postgraduate). Thankfully, I was lucky that even back then PwC had a different view; I applied directly and was appointed 6 months later, largely based on the fact that they focussed on my work experience, rather than my lack of a ‘traditional’ education.

As I have progressed in my career, I have often wondered whether people who are not judged by the colour of their skin, gender, educational background or sexual orientation realise how lucky they are. That in itself is a privilege – not having to worry or feel self-conscious about what people might think when you walk in a room.

When I talk about inclusive leadership, diversity and wanting to create a level playing field where everyone can thrive, every now and then I will get a comment along the lines of – ‘what does that mean for me as a white male, will I have less chance of promotion’ ‘it’s not my fault that I had a good education’. My response to that is always ‘No, it just means that you will have the same chance as everyone else’.

There are some who believe that ‘privilege’ does not exist and many researchers who say privileged individuals resist acknowledging their privileges because doing so would require them to acknowledge that whatever success they have achieved did not result solely through their own efforts and won’t accept that in part that it is due to a ‘system’ or ‘culture’ that has supported them. Privilege does exist. As someone who now considers myself as having privilege I can see and feel the benefits I have and the opportunities presented to me because of my success, my job title, and now in certain environments my gender.

Anyone who denies what having privilege means is kidding themselves. As leaders it is our responsibility to accept and challenge ourselves, our culture, every recruitment decision and promotion decision. Are we creating a level playing field where no matter where you’ve come from, your gender, the colour of your skin or sexual orientation, you have the equal opportunity to thrive and reach your full potential?

Karen Finlayson is a Partner at PwC. She is currently on the board and Audit Committee of Sheffield Hallam University and was recently awarded Professional Services Senior Leader for 2018 by the British Black Business Association.

Does ‘privilege’ influence diversity in the workplace?

Karen Finlayson is a Partner at PwC. She is currently on the board and Audit Committee of Sheffield Hallam University and was recently awarded Professional Services Senior Leader for 2018 by the British Black Business Association.
What we asked:
Do you currently aspire to progress to a more senior position?
• If yes – what is the most appealing aspect of progressing to a more senior role?
• If no – what is it that doesn’t appeal to you about progressing to a more senior role at present?

The majority of people surveyed would like to go further up the ladder in their chosen field. When we started to break this down some interesting differences emerged. Overall 8% more men than women said they wanted to progress, however when we separated out ethnicity, BAME individuals were 10% more likely to say that they wanted to progress than non-BAME. BAME women were more ambitious than all other groups with 80% wanting to progress to a more senior role.

70% of respondents said yes, they aspired to progress to a more senior position
14% of respondents said no, they did not aspire to progress to a more senior position

65% of women said yes, they aspired to progress to a more senior position
73% of men said yes, they aspired to progress to a more senior position
Overall ‘development opportunities’ and ‘more responsibility’ were the top reasons given in comments about wanting to progress, closely followed by ‘benefits’ and ‘achievement’. However, women are much more likely to focus on development as a reason for progressing than men (with BAME women driving a large part of this difference). Men were more likely to put ‘responsibility’ as their top reason for progressing.

The data indicates that women (and particularly BAME women) want to progress and really value development opportunities so organisations need to think about how best to provide these in order to support the progression of women into senior positions and view this as a steady evolution of aspiration and capability. Just because a woman is setting her sights on the next role rather than looking straight to the top of the organisational chart doesn’t mean she won’t get there at some point. It is also important to understand how women’s likelihood of taking leaves of absence and working flexibly are perceived in the workplace (see section one); are these positive indications of how to ensure work/life balance and effective management of non-work commitments or are they seen as signs of less commitment to the role and career progression?

Of the 17% who said they did not aspire to a more senior role (dropping to 11% once we controlled for seniority and retirement plans), women were slightly more likely than men to have selected this answer. Comments indicated that the majority who do not aspire to progress are content with their current situation, followed by concerns about work/life balance (with more women than men reporting this). However, BAME respondents were less likely to give contentment as a reason, and were most likely to cite not being ready. This links to the need for more tangible proof of readiness for the next role, as in section one. The most common reason given by BAME women for not aspiring to progress was ‘disillusionment’, suggesting that their ambition would be even greater if the system were fair.

Zenger Folkman analysed data from 60,000 leaders and found women outperformed men in 13 of the 16 most differentiating leadership competencies. The women also outscored their male counterparts on the competency of ‘practise self-development’ once they passed the age of 40 (it is equal until that point) so women continued to be focused on their development while men tapered off.
When asked what would make senior roles more appealing, ‘work/life balance’ was mentioned in 29% of responses, followed by ‘benefits’ and ‘support’. There is a clear message that while desire to progress is there, organisations need to think about how they can improve the attractiveness of these positions by looking at how the roles are designed and the organisational culture surrounding them. This is particularly important if promoting diversity is a genuine driver, as women overwhelmingly rate ‘work/life balance’ as the most important factor (for men ‘benefits’ sits alongside ‘work/life balance’ in joint top position). For those respondents who reported themselves as disabled, ‘work/life balance’ was again the top priority. Reframing what is required for the top jobs and what they are about is a necessary precursor to increasing the diversity mix at senior levels.

What we asked:
What would make senior roles in an organisation more attractive to you?

When asked what would make senior roles more appealing, ‘work/life balance’ was mentioned in 29% of responses, followed by ‘benefits’ and ‘support’. There is a clear message that while desire to progress is there, organisations need to think about how they can improve the attractiveness of these positions by looking at how the roles are designed and the organisational culture surrounding them. This is particularly important if promoting diversity is a genuine driver, as women overwhelmingly rate ‘work/life balance’ as the most important factor (for men ‘benefits’ sits alongside ‘work/life balance’ in joint top position). For those respondents who told us that their sexuality was not heterosexual, we found that ‘support’ was mentioned most often. For those respondents who reported themselves as disabled, ‘work/life balance’ was again the top priority. Reframing what is required for the top jobs and what they are about is a necessary precursor to increasing the diversity mix at senior levels.

What we asked:
What would make senior roles more appealing? – Comparison by gender

What would make senior roles more appealing? – Comparison by gender

1The Korn Ferry Institute found that women were less likely to set out for the top job with two thirds of the female CEOs they interviewed not considering it a possibility until someone else suggested it. In part this was influenced by women internalising the norms they saw around them and seeing no women in the senior leadership roles.

“I joined Kier as a graduate engineer and since then have had a growing ambition to become a future senior leader. Fuelled by this, I have sought a broader knowledge of the business both to equip me for potential future roles and to be more effective in my current role. An engineer’s career path is well established but it can be narrow. As my career has progressed I have grown in confidence and become better at expressing my aspirations. This led to a ten-month secondment into the Group Strategy team. My approach isn’t the way for everyone but it has shown that there can be more than one path; giving opportunities to have different experiences and see more of the wider business earlier on in engineering careers will give the business more rounded and better prepared future leaders.”

Olivia Perkins, Chartered Civil Engineer and aspiring senior leader at Kier
When we asked what female and male leaders needed to do to be successful, three categories of responses emerged from the answers: women and men needing the same characteristics (by far the most popular response), women and men needing different characteristics, and women needing to do more than men. Women were more likely than men to give answers within the last two categories.

To look further at this data we also assigned each respondent a ‘privilege’ score where a point was allocated based on membership of the ‘majority/more advantaged’ groups: cisgender male, non-BAME, heterosexual, non-disabled.

Using this lens to look at views on leader characteristics we can see that perceptions clearly differ between those surveyed who belong to all privilege categories and those who belong to between zero and three of the categories. Those in the ‘all privilege’ group were most likely to say that men and women need to do the same things to be successful as leaders. When we probed this area further during the telephone interviews a common response from members of at least one less privileged group was that in an ideal world the characteristics would be the same but that this is not currently the reality.

Clearly perspectives on this topic differ and those who get to typically make more decisions in organisations (with the highest privilege scores) do not necessarily see the world in the same way as those who are more likely to be impacted by the result of their decisions. This echoes the findings from Spot the Difference where men reported more trust in the fairness and effectiveness of the system. Leaders need to ‘walk in the shoes of others’ more effectively to understand the perspectives of those they are leading, as Cliff Bowen describes in his input in section two of this report.

What we asked:

What we asked:
- For a female leader to be successful, what do you believe are the most important characteristics to demonstrate?
- For a male leader to be successful, what do you believe are the most important characteristics to demonstrate?

Characteristics of successful female and male leaders – Comparison by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female respondents</th>
<th>Male respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women more</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Characteristics of successful female and male leaders – Comparison by privilege

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Member of 1+ less privileged groups</th>
<th>Member of all privileged groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women more</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those who said that women need to do more than men to be successful:

- 86% were women
- 14% were men

“It’s a sweeping statement but as a woman in a very male environment I’ve got to work twice as hard. Once you get the credibility it’s great but it’s really hard work to get to that point.”

A respondent

\(^1\text{Cisgender means identifying as the same gender as assigned at birth, as opposed to transgender (identifying as a different gender to that assigned at birth).}\)
Overall, the majority of respondents do want to progress but depending on which group(s) they belong to they face different blockers and have differing motivations for making the move further upwards. As Karen Finlayson so clearly explains, we also need to account for the impact of privilege and the inherent bias this brings to organisational decision making. With this in mind, three clear recommendations emerge:

1. Ensure that job descriptions do not contain inherent bias (e.g. does a role truly need someone who can sit at their desk from 09:00 to 17:30, or could the hours vary?).
2. Base the selection methodology on clearly defined and unbiased criteria that are robustly and consistently measured across candidates.
3. Define and advertise roles to appeal to the widest range of candidates, taking care not to introduce bias through the wording or emphasis.

Key takeaways:
Overall, the majority of respondents do want to progress but depending on which group(s) they belong to they face different blockers and have differing motivations for making the move further upwards. As Karen Finlayson so clearly explains, we also need to account for the impact of privilege and the inherent bias this brings to organisational decision making. With this in mind, three clear recommendations emerge:

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Marjorie Knight is the former Chairman of Kaisen Consulting Ltd.

I've been working for over 40 years to help build a representation of women and minority ethnic groups at senior levels in organisations that’s somewhere close to the proportions of these groups in the workforce. But it hasn't happened yet. As a specialist in leadership assessment and development, I am passionate that the key to change is the leader. And that it is leaders who will create diverse organisations - not policies, processes or data analytics. But until the leaders of our flagship organisations are themselves visible role models for younger members of the workforce, we will never scale up to the degree of change needed to create truly diverse organisations.

In my working life, my observations are that:

• Capturing and analysing data hasn’t worked
• Improved recruitment practices haven’t worked
• Positive discrimination initiatives haven’t worked
• Diversity and inclusion workshops haven’t worked
• Improving awareness of personal biases hasn’t worked and in some studies, has been shown to make things worse!

So I’ve convinced that what’s needed is refreshed thinking to build, as soon as possible, diverse and skilled senior leaders who will drive the change from the top. Drawing from lifelong experience in identifying leaders who can lead in completely new contexts (new markets, new technologies, new operating models, new political environments), here are couple of starter ideas...

Why not start with the assumption that all leaders are biased, but recognise that bias is normal and not about being a bad or unfair person. Bias is the result of heuristics; short cuts in thinking which help us all to cope with cognitive overload. So we simply need to find even shorter cuts to help leaders with picking the right people so the bias heuristic (about background, education, or experience) becomes redundant. As new AI-enabled technology for the assessment of potential becomes more robust, this will offer a fresh opportunity for appointments which break the mould without derailing the enterprise.

Secondly, why not assume that all leaders want to lead versatile, high-performing teams, but don’t know how to do that with very diverse team members – it’s much easier to lead a team of like-minded, aligned people than to integrate the contributions of very different team members into a coherent whole. So there is a straight skill deficit here, not an attitudinal challenge. Leaders need support in developing the skills of listening to and understanding all their people and knowing how to harness the contributions they can offer on an ongoing basis; the evidence is that leaders won’t get good at this on their own.

So to kick start the pace of change, we urgently need to refocus our selection efforts to pick leaders from unexpected backgrounds with the ability to learn and adapt fast and we need to refocus our development efforts away from ‘awareness’ of diversity and bias towards the ‘practice’ of inclusive leadership skills.

So I’m convinced that what’s needed is refreshed thinking to build as soon as possible, diverse and skilled senior leaders who will drive the change from the top.
The 1164 people who completed our survey, and the 10 who took part in a follow-up telephone interview, provided us with a strongly representative cross-section of society that has allowed us to look through the lens of different groups and see how diverse experiences and perspectives have impacted responses to the questions we asked.

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey, pass it on to colleagues, friends and family, and volunteer for telephone interviews.

A note on terminology:

*BAME stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. Where we refer to respondents as BAME, this is because they answered ‘yes’ to a question asking whether they identified as such, and where we refer to non-BAME respondents, these people answered ‘no’ to the same question.

*Transgender people identify as a different gender to the one they were assigned at birth, while cisgender people identify as the same gender as the one they were assigned at birth.
References


10. Turnbull James, K., Vinnicombe, S., Harris, H. (2018). Moving on up (Figure 1: Cranfield Inclusive Talent Management Template). IEDP: Developing Leaders, available online at: https://www.iedp.com/articles/moving-on-up/


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