WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL FIRMS
THE MALE PERSPECTIVE
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In 2011, we launched a research report, ‘Women in Professional Firms: Strategies for Success’. Based on interviews with a range of senior-level women from top firms, the report explores some of the challenges and obstacles to women’s career progression and offers top tips on ways in which women can excel in the workplace.

Whilst the report and the corresponding workshop programme we developed have been well received, the report is based on the female perspective, and the emphasis is placed on what women can do to advance in their careers and reach senior-level positions. Whilst vital, this research excludes the male perspective and sidelines the imperative role that both men and organisations as a whole play in this issue.

This report, therefore, explores a new and different perspective on the reasons why so few women make it to partner or board-level positions, and it offers an alternative vantage point to explore the topics of diversity and inclusion.

This report is based on interviews with senior-level male professionals from top firms, including all of the Big Four accountancy firms and the Magic Circle law firms.

I would like to thank all of the individuals, and their organisations, who generously contributed their ideas and insight to this research report.

Emily Buist

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT ARE:

1. TO GAIN AND SHARE THE MALE PERSPECTIVE ON THE REASONS WHY SO FEW WOMEN MAKE IT TO THE TOP.

2. TO EXPLORE WHAT MEN, AS WELL AS WOMEN, CAN DO TO CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS.

3. TO SUGGEST SOME PRACTICAL AND STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES FOR OUR CLIENTS AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL FIRMS.
### INTERVIEWEES

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<td>Neil Bowden</td>
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### TOP TIPS FOR MEN

- Explore new ways to network that are gender neutral and suit your team and clients
- Expand your professional network to include men and women from a range of different professions
- Be aware of those working flexibly. Ensure important meetings and deadlines are set within their availability
- Be aware of how language can be misinterpreted
- Sponsor high-potential women, as well as men
- Lead by example: be a male role model to younger men within the firm
- Be aware of unconscious bias and its impact within the workplace
- Challenge the way you may perceive motherhood and maternity leave
- Compliment and encourage others
- Speak out against discrimination

### TOP TIPS FOR WOMEN

- Find a sponsor – someone who will actively promote you and open up opportunities for you
- Identify and utilise personal strengths
- Negotiate how and when you work in order to be most productive
- Communicate honestly and openly about what you can and cannot do when it comes to juggling childcare and work
- Exude confidence and take risks
- Remove the notion and pressure of having a linear career path
- Plan your next career move, not your career exit

### TOP TIPS FOR ORGANISATIONS

- Challenge the existing model and your clients. Could things be done better? Differently?
- Appreciate the value of emotional intelligence in the selection criteria for leadership roles
- Embrace a variety of different ways to lead and understand how to manage different personalities
- Utilise technology to assist flexible working but be aware of the flip side
- Partner junior and senior members of staff for a practical learning experience
- Understand the separate training needs of your male and female talent
- Challenge assumptions and ‘group think’ decisions when it comes to recruitment, appraisals and promotions
- Make diversity and inclusion a business objective in the firm’s development strategy
- Ensure that your leaders know what diversity and inclusion look like in practice
- Clarify that your leaders know what skills and attributes they are supposed to demonstrate as role models for the firm
- Clarify the firm’s working expectations with your staff
“Making an assumption about someone’s willingness to do something is a very different thing from knowing factually that someone is unwilling.”

Our research suggests that there are many reasons why there are so few women at the top in professional firms. Our interviewees highlighted the following as career barriers for women.

1. A. THE LACK OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

“There is an expectation for partnership that you have to be 100 per cent devoted to the firm and so anything less than that is considered to be, in many cases, a bit of a weakness. We need flexibility in our days, weeks and life generally. I don't think the partner model accommodates this well at all, and as a result, women struggle to see the advantages of partnership and they also struggle to find suitable role models – women or men that they aspire to be like. This lack of flexibility affects women more than men because the weight of child care still falls on women. Balancing work and home life is still a huge challenge for women.”

“The life we ask our partners to lead is clearly very stressful: there is lots of pressure, you have to be available all over the country and the globe. It is challenging for anyone. So, this clearly has an impact on home life for men and women. If you want to have a good home life, being a partner isn’t the job for you at the moment.”

1. B. NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF WORKING FLEXIBLY

“The problem still remains that flexible working or part-time working is seen negatively. We have to battle this issue of either you are working flat out or you’re not working at all. We have to work on this misconception. Men do more stupid and self-sacrificing things when it comes to work and you can see that in politics and big business.”

2. 24/7 CLIENT DEMAND

“The ability to change the way we deliver our services is constrained by the way we serve our clients. So, when you are doing transactional work, on big deals, to banks and private equity firms and the client requires someone who is going to dedicate themselves to that project 24/7 – that's what we have got to give them. Unless these companies change the way we work in law firms, there isn’t a great deal we can do. This culture has a huge impact on the way we work and can create problems for women because it is still the case that women are more likely to be looking after their families than men are. This is a huge and strained commitment to juggle. There are certain working patterns that are bad for us all and need changing.”
“There is still discrimination against women – mostly by some of the older male partners who think that the top just isn’t a place for women. You just can’t have this attitude in a leader. It comes out in unconscious bias and this is very unhealthy for the workplace. Nobody will ever own up to it, but there it is. Some men wrongly presume a lot about what women can and cannot do, particularly after they have become mothers, and this is wrong.”

“Men can more easily adopt the ‘work’ role simply because it is expected in society. It is expected that men work long hours, under immense pressure, that men travel, that men leave early and are home late. It is simply not expected of women. We need to change this ancient stereotype.”

“I wouldn’t entirely rule out straightforward prejudice and misogyny. That still exists, particularly around the City. It would be naive to think that this has gone, that it doesn’t exist.”

“Stated ambition doesn’t actually equate to ambition. What you say and what you do are two very different things. I think that there are well-motivated people within management positions who believe their partnerships should be collegiate and diverse, and others who, quite frankly, don’t think this and are primarily motivated towards a boys’ club.”

“Organisational culture is also an issue. This is sometimes a leadership problem. Our leaders need to be inclusive, run their teams differently and get the most from a diverse group of people.”
REASONS FOR THE GENDER IMBALANCE: THE MALE PERSPECTIVE

6. A SCARCITY OF ROLE MODELS

“If you don’t have lots of women at the top, then you don’t have a mix of the right role models for more junior people to look up to. But some of the female partners at the top are not figures that younger women may aspire to be like. But maybe that’s not a gender issue. A lot of associates simply don’t aspire to be partners anymore, so it is more about behaviour and lifestyle. They see people at the top working too hard and sacrificing too much – they don’t want that and we shouldn’t be leading like this. So there is a lack of role models for men and women and the added issue of having the wrong type of person, with the wrong type of working attitude, at the top.”

7. CHILD-REARING EXPECTATIONS

“If you want a level playing field, you have to make it properly level. My wife stopped working to look after our children. Had my wife been in a higher-paid job than I was and wanted to return to work shortly after, I would like to think that I would have opted to stay at home and care for the children and she would have gone to work. I don’t actually think this happens at all. The expectation is that the women look after the children and the men go to work. We need to support each other in the home more, not just in the office. We do as well as we can, but we work within statutory and legislative boundaries. We also have the problem that when women return to work, after maternity leave, they are met with an ambush of expectation, worry, and reliability and commitment concerns. If the commitment and drive is still there, there is no reason why they should be treated any differently, because they aren’t working Wednesday afternoons or Tuesdays from 8 until 11. These perceptions build up because they are allowed to build up.”

TALKING POINTS

1. Is the partner role, as firms currently view it, fit for purpose in the job market of tomorrow?
2. How conscious are you of your own unconscious biases? What is your firm doing to raise awareness of the subject?
3. How effective is the provision your firm makes for re-integrating women in the workplace when they return from maternity leave?
"This is not something for women to solve. This is an issue for the men at the top and we need to solve it. This is not about trying to tell women how to survive in a man’s world – this is about changing men to live in a world that is mixed and equal and better for it."

All of our interviewees recognised the vital yet underutilised role that men can play in creating more inclusive and diverse working environments. This chapter explores some of the practical steps that men can take to change and improve working cultures.

EXPLORE NEW WAYS TO NETWORK

“We do a lot of our social networking in the pub or after hours and this can exclude women. So, these working patterns are favouring the lives of men and it has got to change. This is important, especially with a career in law, when you are looking to move from senior associate to partner. Quite a lot of that move is about creating a positive perception of yourself and your network – not just around your work, but how you bond with others. Talking about the latest football match, or going to a rugby match at the weekend with clients, can put you streets ahead conversationally, but often women just don’t get these opportunities. We need to find other ways of networking with business contacts and clients, where personal skills can be exercised.”

“Business development is easier for men. It is easy for us to go to the pub or to go to the footy – for men to be ‘laddy’. This is normal – it’s a group of men! But most women – not all, but most – seem to find it difficult to engage with clients outside the office, especially with male clients. This is a problem for women. But if men are more aware that this can create barriers and uncomfortable feelings for women, this will help. And there should be no eyebrows raised if a female partner asks a male client out for dinner. There is definitely a case for more neutral events. I think clients would love to go to the theatre more, for example. There is a real move away from sport and business. There are also a lot of non-laddish things to do, and we need to grab hold of them. The City is becoming less boozy and less laddish and, to be honest, clients would probably welcome things being done differently when it comes to client hospitality.”

START FISHING FROM A NEW POND

“I don’t think there is one specific reason why there are so few women at the top. I think, first of all, the issue (at board-level) is that most boards are made up of men, and men have all-male networks. So there is the problem: that we keep fishing from the same pond, catching the same fish. If I am a board member and we are looking for a new board member and I go to recommend someone, I go to my network. There’s the problem.”

Creating Diverse & Inclusive Working Cultures: What Can Men Do?
UNDERSTAND THE WEIGHT OF YOUR WORDS

“There is also an issue around the way in which evaluations are conducted. The way in which we value our professionals, I think, is still skewed on the soft skills and leans more towards masculine values. To give you an example, one of the words used negatively about women by men is ‘emotional’. We are starting to get to grips with the idea that approaching problems with a rational and emotional mind is actually highly beneficial, especially when it comes to making decisions about the business and its clients. We have a very successful partner here, who is brilliant with our big global clients because she has a big emotional commitment towards them, and yet you still hear her being criticised.”

DON’T SNUB A DIFFERENT APPROACH

“Don’t interrupt when people are talking – this is an obvious one. But men tend to interrupt some women who perhaps have mustered up the courage to speak up in a meeting. This is so rude and it happens a lot. Also, when a woman brings a new perspective or angle or asks questions that you, as a man, don’t like, don’t react defensively. Listen and appreciate a different approach. Just because someone is saying something you don’t want to hear or they are saying something that has never been said before, doesn’t mean it’s wrong. Men can often react through hurt ego or pride, but this comes across as sexism or rude behaviour.”

SCHEDULE WITH SENSITIVITY

“There are small things we can all do. Don’t put a meeting in the diary for eight in the morning or seven at night, for example. I tend to put big meetings in the diary around 3 or 4 o’clock. If all the big work we do is done throughout the day, then, as a team, there is no requirement to work until midnight. If we put a big deadline in the diary for 8 o’clock in the morning, people will work up to that deadline. But if you put the deadline nicely within the confines of a working day, at the middle to the end of the day, you avoid the guilt for anyone who wants to go home for bath time. This is men and women. By working more flexibly and managing time and workloads better, we could all be a lot happier and guilt free.”
CREATING DIVERSE & INCLUSIVE WORKING CULTURES: WHAT CAN MEN DO?

SPONSOR RISING FEMALE STARS

“Sponsorship has got me where I am. I can think of half a dozen people who have gone out of their way to help me and get me promoted. It is really important. There is a distinction between mentoring and sponsorship. What you want is someone who will stick their neck on the line to help you, and when you screw up, they continue to help you. The problem with sponsorship is that you tend to sponsor people who are like you. Senior men, who are mostly at the top, need to sponsor women, not just men that remind them of their former selves.”

“We may only be appealing to a small slice of society if we carry on leading in this way. Leaders have to demonstrate that there are many ways to lead. My way is one way. We need women and men up here, doing it their own way. We need inspirational people to show it can be done differently. We also have to change the talent pool from which we select leaders. There are often simply not enough women in our pool to pick from. We need to look into this. Leaders like me need to sponsor talented women to make sure that extra support is there.”

BE A MALE ROLE MODEL

“If you are in a meeting and there are three blokes and one woman, and she is at the brunt of all the banter and the jokes, you need to be a role model for the other men. Perhaps they don’t realise they are being hurtful or annoying, as is often the way, unfortunately. But you need to speak up and say, ‘Stop being such a ****,’ rather than the easier option of joining in half-heartedly or pretending that it’s not happening. We know we should be doing something but we keep not doing it. We also need to stop and think more before we respond.”

“In the senior ranks, we need good male leaders, men who communicate the message that we are engaged on this issue and we are doing something about it. Women’s networks do help, but it is just one thing. We have to have targets in place, especially when it comes to recruiting top talent and the talent coming through to partnership. Then you have a better group of people to select from.”

BE AWARE OF THE POTENTIAL FOR MISUNDERSTANDING

“I think sometimes people think unconscious bias is at play a lot more than it actually is. For example, say you were taking some clients out at night, and your senior associate has two kids, and you know she needs to be home by 5 pm. You therefore invite someone else or don’t invite her at all. This is hardly out of spite. This is men being men, I’m afraid. We are practical thinkers. We don’t mean it horribly. If we know you have to dash off, why place added pressure or strain on you? Why bother? You could argue that the lady in this situation should be invited no matter what, but I beg to differ. Should we arrange the meeting for another time so that the senior associate can attend? Yes, or at least try to. But sometimes, there simply isn’t time for this, and we want to keep clients happy. This isn’t sexism, from what I have seen. It is not intentional. The contrary, actually: it is well intentioned. But sometimes these things can be perceived in the wrong way. These events are always getting misunderstood. There is this huge oversensitivity, which we all need to be aware of. I also think women need to be more honest about this and say, ‘You know when you said that – it was really hurtful.’”

“It is simpler than unconscious bias. If I have not had any negative experience in my life, I have a lack of knowledge. If you don’t experience discrimination, how do you know what it looks like and what impact it has on others? It is ignorance. If you haven’t had a direct experience (of a woman being discriminated against in any way), how do you know it is a problem? You don’t. Men need development on this issue. We need to partner and educate one another. Often certain situations need bringing to a man’s attention, so that they can see how what they said or did was inconsiderate or rude, for example.”
CREATING DIVERSE & INCLUSIVE WORKING CULTURES: WHAT CAN MEN DO?

CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD

“I think most men with children would agree that becoming a parent is a huge thing. Becoming a mother is an even bigger thing for women. The problem is that for some reason, within the office, becoming a mother is seen as an escape route, a cop-out of a big career, a negative thing for your career. We should all realise that motherhood is an amazing thing. That women, and especially men when they become fathers, become more mature, less selfish and generally better individuals. It is a life experience, which, if perceived correctly in the professional world and given enough true and deserved weight, could benefit and enhance a career in some ways, not end it.”

COMPLIMENT AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS

“Sometimes all it needs is me or another member of the management team to go to a woman partner or associate and say, ‘I would like you to do this. I think that you are the best-qualified person to do this job. Will you step up to the mark?’ Sometimes that is all it takes for that person to become engaged, to feel more confident and put themselves forward for something that they wouldn’t have otherwise thought to do.”

“Complimenting others is a small step we can all take. To notice others, to notice when a person has done a good job, when someone needs lifting.”

TALKING POINTS

1. In what ways can men be role models in their firms and how can this assist the gender agenda?
2. To what extent does your firm champion gender-neutral business development opportunities?
3. How aware are you of the impact of your language and behaviour in the workplace? When was the last time you assessed this?
ADVANCING IN A PROFESSIONAL CAREER: WHAT CAN WOMEN DO?

“Generally speaking, women are much more reasonable than men. Women work better together and they look at problems not personalities. They look at ways through a net, not at ways to exploit it. These are hugely important characteristics. We need more of this approach and thinking within our businesses.”

Research suggests that some women in professional firms battle with self-confidence, self-promotion and developing business. But did our male interviewees agree with this? They share their thoughts and advice for women below.

FIND A SPONSOR

“I do think that women are often over-mentored and under-sponsored. A mentor is a counsellor who can be helpful, but a sponsor is someone who proactively goes out there for you, points you in the right direction, and gives you opportunities. I had a great sponsor who helped me even when I was two years qualified. He was invaluable. He made sure I got in front of loads of different people and he looked out for me when I was coming up for partnership. Does this happen enough, in the right way, for women? There is the illusion that women need this ‘softly, softly’ mentor approach, when really they need someone to go out and grab a promotion for them, not just hand them a box of tissues and ask them to talk about it. I didn’t find having a mentor very challenging. I think most ambitious people like a challenge. I had a mentor when I first became a partner. It was a sounding board but it was passive. We should be encouraging sponsoring as well as mentoring. We also need to be better at spotting stars earlier. This is also a wasted-talent issue as well as a women’s issue. If people are leaving, we need to know why.”
ADVANCING IN A PROFESSIONAL CAREER: WHAT CAN WOMEN DO?

UTILISE ‘FEMALE STRENGTHS’

“Women can make a very dispassionate case for pursuing a certain course of action. The women I have worked with know when someone is just scared, for example, or doesn’t want to get into trouble. They can read others well, generally speaking. Women bring relationships in this way, through understanding others.”

“Women are very empathetic. I have someone working on a project team who is a new dad. His line manager is a woman and he said to me, ‘I am so pleased that I am working for Katie. She completely understands what I am going through with having a new role as well as a new baby. She has encouraged me to take the paternity leave I am entitled to but also helped me to really excel in my job. Paternity leave has been something that isn’t always socially accepted, but having Katie in play gave me a brand-new perspective and I really appreciated the understanding.’

“Women are, on the whole, better consultants than men, because most difficult consultancy assignments are very political and involve lots of stakeholder management. Women are often better instinctively at handling these situations than men. They are naturally better collaborators and they work together more effectively than men do.”

NEGOTIATE MORE

“Women need to have the confidence to negotiate more, especially around their restrictions on time. One of the things that I think can hold some women back is that they expect their bosses to know everything about them and to have thought through the consequences of everything they ask them to do. So, when the boss asks a woman to work on a witness statement over the weekend, instead of saying, ‘No, I can’t because of X, Y, Z,’ she will say, ‘Yes.’ We all get so worked up about being overworked, especially out of hours, and yet if we all learnt to be a lot more upfront and honest about our commitments outside of work, we would all be better off. It is unhelpful for everyone concerned and generates real negative emotion. It could all be resolved by saying, ‘I can’t work this weekend.’ It doesn’t mean you are any less able at your job or any less hard-working. This is everyone’s responsibility, though, not just women. Men need to be role models in this area, as we also want to have lives outside of work. These are family and societal issues rather than gender issues. We should start helping each other. It is one of the things I think we can all do. Instead of making excuses we need to say, ‘No,’ or, ‘Yes, I am off to see my kids in a play.’ This is something that we all need to learn to work around.”
ADVANCING IN A PROFESSIONAL CAREER: WHAT CAN WOMEN DO?

EDUCATED HONESTY

“Some women do need to be more vocal about what they can and can’t do when it comes to balancing work with their families. But this has to be educated honesty. I think women should be honest about what they want and not be frightened about being more demanding about that. But there is this classic cliché, which in my experience is 100 per cent true, and that is if you ask women if they are good enough for a certain job, they are brutally honest about their self-doubt and capabilities, and they therefore undersell themselves. So honesty is fine, but make it educated, think about it. Men tend to think that they are good enough to do something and they have a go. They will have doubt, too, but they don’t say so. Women tend to be much more thoughtful about it. This can often come across as lack of confidence or lack of qualification even, which isn’t true. So, yes, women need to be honest about certain aspects, but when it comes to ambitions and aspirations they should teach themselves that they are better than they think they are. Either that or men need to teach themselves to be more realistic!”

ACCEPT A NON-LINEAR CAREER PATH

“Women need to actively manage their careers. Don’t be passive about this. But, equally, don’t expect your career, if you want children or a career break, to be linear. I also think women need to say, ‘I don’t want to do this type of work – can you put me on something else?’ Men seem to have a very clear idea of what they want and where they want to go. I think sometimes women can lose sight of this. We need them; they have every right to demand better work if they want it. Women need to speak up more. I think junior associates – men and women – need to be aware that you can get crushed by law-firm culture, unless you take control.”

“You have to want to become a partner and fully understand what that involves. Perhaps the track to partnership is not as short as it is for some; for women, career breaks happen more often, so they need to drop their linear career expectations and expect that it may take longer and they will be coming on and off the fast track to the top. Don’t be disillusioned by having a break. You can come back stronger. This part of the model and the way we think about this needs to change.”

COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND HONESTLY

“We need to communicate more. We need to be explicitly clear that we all have these problems around balancing work and home life. Once you have been in an organisation such as ours for a few years, people rate you and generally want you to stay and succeed. Being open and honest with what you can and cannot do is imperative. It shows self-confidence. We all need to be more honest and open. Any difficulties with working patterns need to be discussed and dealt with for the benefit of everyone involved. We need to have an audit of the way we work. We all need to be more thoughtful about this and realise that the way we are working is presenting barriers to top talent, who are mostly women.”
ADVANCING IN A PROFESSIONAL CAREER: WHAT CAN WOMEN DO?

STAND UP TO THE CLIENT

“You have to deal with difficult clients. There are some clients who think it is fun to meet at four in the morning. I have seen some women who have made a success out of working flexibly, and they will say, ‘No, I can’t meet at 4 am on Tuesday, but I can meet at 4 pm on Wednesday or 2 pm on Friday. This assertiveness with saying ‘I don’t do that’ is really powerful and not as big a deal as you would think. So this is clever. It is not a straight-out ‘No’ – it is, ‘How can we find a way around this?’ So it is about being assertive but is also about giving somewhere else. If you can’t do what is required but you can show that you are giving elsewhere and making up those requirements in other ways, this is good and clients respect this.”

PLAN YOUR CAREER MOVES NOT YOUR CAREER EXIT

“A lot of women in their twenties are already planning when they are going to leave their job to get married and have a family, even before they have met their husband! Whilst it is good to plan, if women are planning when they are going to leave law, and how many years they can stick it before they can let it go, this isn’t right. The mentality is all wrong. They obviously don’t think you can have a successful career and a successful personal or family life. They are seeing their career in law as a time filler before they can go on and do better things. This is all wrong. These women have worked incredibly hard to get into law, and to think they want to throw it all away because the system doesn’t allow them to work in a way that suits them is tough.”

TALKING POINTS

1. How effective are your firm’s sponsorship and mentoring programmes? What actions can be taken to maximise impact and long-term effect?
2. Would genuinely honest communication about wider life commitments be career limiting in your firm?
3. Is your partnership giving female strengths equal weight to male strengths in the selection criteria for senior roles?
HOW CAN ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE OCCUR?

“We cannot say that we are progressive and diverse institutions simply by saying that we are, without having any evidence at all. We are starting to look like Luddites and cavemen and it is just not acceptable anymore.”

Whilst there is a lot that men and women can do as individuals to develop more effective and harmonious working relationships, there is only so much one can do alone. Our interviewees stressed that there are large structural and organisational changes that need to occur alongside individual change, if diversity and inclusion is to truly manifest.

REvaluate YOUR LEADERSHIP CRITERIA

“We have to work hard to discover why leadership roles are attractive or unattractive. These top roles shouldn’t be made attractive to only five per cent of people who are willing to do this by selling their soul.”

“Our system for recruitment into the highly paid professional service world is mainly based on IQ testing. We have our own techniques now for measuring candidates. High on our list now is EI (emotional intelligence). I am yet to meet someone with high emotional intelligence who isn’t an absolutely fantastic operator. I am not convinced that sufficient interviewing and screening stages for promotion have proper tests for EI imbedded in them. We are missing a trick here. Emotional intelligence is needed in business, in dealing with change, with difficult clients, in defusing problems and bringing people together.

“The more we focus on a different leadership criteria, the more we will attract and retain the best people. Once organisations clock this, we will see a transformation in the profession. This is the crux of it.”

“Clients expect their advisors to have diverse, creative and mixed teams full of the brightest and most talented individuals. Partners can’t all be middle-aged, middle-class white men anymore – it is wrong and it doesn’t make sense. We are not getting the best talent and that is what matters. Unless we as firms are able to match that diversity, clients will buy from other organisations who are.”
How can organisational change occur?

Challenger the model and your clients

“There is a temptation to say that’s how it is and there is nothing you can do about it. This is what the clients want and this is how we make money. This is just the easier option, and we all know it’s not the best option. Has anybody ever asked the client if they want to be sending emails at 3 o’clock on a Sunday morning? Or whether they want to work differently? Who changes the system first, though?”

“You could have all the internal initiatives in place that you can think of to improve people’s career progression and the diversity of your firm, but the fact is, if the client isn’t going to change their approach and expectations in terms of how and when we work, then nothing will truly change or get better in professional service firms.”

“I think the billable-hour system will go in time and we should encourage this change. Clients want things to happen quickly, they want to have more predictability on their spend and budget, and they want certainty that they are going to get good value. A different approach and a new way of working could cater to this. Law should be moving to where consulting is. There should be a clear price for the job or jobs at hand upfront. With this comes huge cultural change. The lawyers feel responsible again. Lawyers will get to manage how and when that job is delivered for the cost agreed upfront. This also means we can choose who works and when they work. This power over our projects and how we deliver our services won’t mean a compromise in service or profit but a huge improvement in business and a rise in energy for our lawyers. Consequently, I think the best talent will fight to stay rather than rush to get out. The feeling of being in control again will appeal to lawyers, and they won’t feel like cogs in a machine or participants in a document factory. But there is a lack of trust in the lawyer/client relationship. The client worries that whatever proposition has been put forward will be compromised for the firm. The lawyers are terrified that the client is going to get them to do ten times the amount of work they signed up for. The client won’t let the lawyer fully resource, staff, run and manage the matter … and on it goes. It’s all the wrong way round. Putting the lawyer back in charge and working on fixed-fee work could really change the culture within law firms.”

“We can’t say that we are leaders in our field, that we are innovative and tenacious, if we are afraid of change and afraid of our clients. We say we like to be different but actually we don’t – we all like to be the same.”
How can organisational change occur?

Educate leaders on working with different people

“Managers need to learn how to handle different personalities. If one person is very organised, another is bad at taking constructive feedback and another is highly capable but shy about coming forward – it is our responsibility as leaders to know how to respond to these individuals and bring out the best in them. Diversity is as much about being able to work with different people in a variety of styles as it is about gender.”

Ensure diversity and inclusion is practised

“I think a lot could change if partners asked different people, each time, to work on a deal with them. It is easy to go with someone like you or to always go for the same person. But we need to take the time to think about who has the best skills, who has previous experience and who needs new experience. We need to be much more aware of the day-to-day decisions we make. Not giving someone a chance can really fester. I also think partners need to be actively thinking whether they have a mixed team and, if not, asking themselves where the women are. This thought process, on a reasonably regular basis, is something that individual partners can do to effect change.”

Clarify the meaning of a good role model

“There is a bit of confusion with role models and desirable leadership traits. What is a good role model? Someone who mucks in with the associates and stays in the office until one in the morning? Or someone who goes home at 5 o’clock for bath time, demonstrating that this is acceptable, but, as a result, leaves the associates in the thick of it? Firms need to be a lot clearer about their collective objectives and how they want the associates to see the partners.”

“If role models are important to career progression, we need to look up to the top and ask whether these people really are role models. Being a woman shouldn’t make you a better role model than a man and vice versa. It is the qualities of a role model that are important and that people at the top need to exhibit. The problem is, as partners, we are so busy, and we often forget we are being observed by our juniors and, whether we like it or not, we are their role models. Men and women need to demonstrate the desired leadership skills, and as part of that, they need to show that they are being diverse and inclusive in all their decisions and actions. People watch what you do, not what you say. There is a tendency to talk the talk about diversity and inclusion, but then you don’t actually do it in practice. People find behaviour acceptable when they can observe it in others.”
HOW CAN ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE OCCUR?

UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

“The world is struggling with change. You have businesses that were sitting at the top of the FTSE 100 six or seven years ago who are now struggling to survive. Increasingly, doing business is based on relationships. By this, I don’t mean two people who went to school together giving each other a leg up; I mean networks of respect – genuine networks. I think we do business with someone because we like the person, we trust them, and we can see their credibility. This is all emotional intelligence! I think, I hope, we will see EQ replacing IQ, and if this happens, we will bring in the best talent – more women and a new breed of men. The first firm to put emotional intelligence at the centre of their leadership criteria will clean up.”

EMBRACE A VARIETY OF WAYS TO LEAD

“By not having both men and women at the top of these top firms, we are losing the opportunity to work differently, and therefore better, in one of the most competitive working environments. The more different ways you have to approach things, the better you will be. A law firm that demonstrates that they are committed to this issue and have a deep well of talent they can pull from both genders will have a massive advantage in this increasingly competitive working environment.”

UTILISE TECHNOLOGY FOR CHANGE

“The way this issue will be cracked is through genuinely enabling flexible working. The technology is there and we are not using it. We need more women in IT departments to back this really, as, at the moment, all IT departments are full of men. The first IT business which creates flexible working programmes and online resources for all employees to tap into at home or on the move will make a whole lot of money. There is no reason for us to work the way we are. When we have project-based work, it would be helpful for us all to have a system that we can access, to allow open-source working. This would be useful for men and women. I can do my job because I sit at the top of it and I can access everything I need. For people lower down, this may not be possible. I also think there can be issues with management. It should be OK for someone to leave to collect their children from school. There should be someone there to pick up, to fill in – we need to work together more and be more supportive. Technology will help us achieve this battle with work/life balance. We haven’t yet accepted it or cottoned on. We still think office presence and working round the clock is more productive than carefully managed working hours.”
HOW CAN ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE OCCUR?

BE AWARE OF THE FLIP SIDE OF WORKING FLEXIBLY

“The problem with technology and working flexibly is that it has a flip side. I think technology has enabled us to be switched on all the time, which means we actually end up doing more work and the work/life line gets even more blurred. The fact that we may not be working but we are still getting bombarded with the sound of our BlackBerrys means that we still experience the stress of work when we are not technically working. So, yes, technology may help flexible working, but I think we need to be strict with ourselves – turning phones off during non-work hours, for example, to fully benefit from work/life balance or working flexibly.”

PAIR UP JUNIOR AND SENIOR STARS

“We have to partner senior men with high-potential women in the talent pipeline. This is about recognising that there is a smaller pool of women and putting in place the right resources to make managing that value effective. We need to work in partnership with men and women.”

“We are aware of these challenges for women and we have made it clear that we want to support our female lawyers. We have paired up junior and senior women to talk about some of the challenges still facing women as well as many other initiatives, but really I think there is a further step that society has to take to help support this. In terms of flexible working, some firms make this work, and it is something we are actively thinking about, but this is hard at partnership level.”

EDUCATE YOUR MALE POPULATION

“We have begun to give some thought to how we can educate men: how we can teach them about the impact of their behaviour and language, their actions and attitudes. We now have a male diversity partner who is looking into this. This has been good because we need to think of this issue from the male perspective as well. Men need to work on this, too. Men do need to challenge some of the things that they say in everyday chat which often have strong elements of unconscious bias in them. Being more aware of this is really important. Men need to think about the daily elements of their role in this but also their role at home. I agree that there is more we need to do on the male equation to create a more thoughtful and aware male population.”

EMPOWER AND SUPPORT YOUR WOMEN

“Organisations need to realise that men and women have different needs. Men need to be educated about language and behaviour, but women need support, encouragement and empowerment. These are very different things. Organisations who say they are tackling gender diversity can only say they are when they are looking at both women and men.”
How can organisational change occur?

Challenge assumptions

“Don’t assume that someone is going to leave or not return or that someone doesn’t want partnership. I think we all have a challenge to work harder in this area to ensure that career training and development is aligned to individuals not groups. We want to keep individuals – high-potential individuals – switched on and energised. Partnerships and boards need to start addressing the individual, asking, ‘What do you want and how do you want to do it?’”

CLARIFY RULES AND EXPECTATIONS

“There is a noticeable difference between men and women in terms of rules and expectations. If men want to work from home one day on a particular project, they will just do it. They will speak to a supervisor if they have one, but it is more of a notification, and they usually have a positive reason for doing so, to stop X from occurring. Women don’t do this. They look for the rule. They look for permission to do this. So you end up with a perverse situation, whereby some of the ideas you come up with, which are designed to improve life for everybody, actually only benefit a small few and not the people you were targeting. Clarity from senior management is needed here in terms of rules and expectations. But this is a really interesting example of the differences between men and women in their approach and how they perceive the working environment. Women ask, men just assume.”

Make diversity and inclusion a business issue

“Rather than saying that men are biased and women need fixing, we need to start making a business case for this. At the start of diversity training, we need to make clear that this is a business issue. This is about how you make your firm more profitable, how you make your life easier by getting the best associates for the job, how you ensure that you are being ethical and fair and making business sense. This is how you manage people. You will get far more buy-in and far more engagement from others if you do.”

Talking points

1. To what extent does the service provider/client relationship need to change and why?
2. Are the leadership criteria at your firm effective in reflecting the strength and diversity of your firm?
3. How are you addressing the different professional development needs of the men and women at your firm?
Emily Buist is a professional development consultant and an associate director at SPA, responsible for research development. Emily also designs and facilitates a range of gender diversity and learning and development programmes, which she has run at a number of leading international law and accountancy firms.

Steven Pearce Associates (SPA) is a specialist learning and development consultancy which works exclusively with top professional firms worldwide. For more information, visit www.spa-consulting.co.uk.
WORKSHOP PROGRAMMES
MEN IN PROFESSIONAL FIRMS: LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

This is a workshop designed for male future leaders on the partnership track. The workshop is based on the findings of our research report, ‘Women in Professional Firms: The Male Perspective’, and explores what men can do to help create more inclusive and diverse working environments, which includes:

1. Challenging mind-sets
2. Developing awareness
3. Taking action

PART ONE – FORUM THEATRE

The delegates will observe a role-play scenario performed by professional actors. The scenario will demonstrate the subtle ways in which unconscious bias manifests itself. Participants will be asked to critique the scenario and consider alternative behaviours, attitudes and outcomes.

PART TWO: TAKING ACTION

The second part of the workshop will focus on sharing the findings of the research report and exploring how men can make a difference to workplace culture. Topics may include:

- Being a role model to other men
- Sponsoring a rising female star
- Advocating flexible working
- Speaking out against discrimination
- Helping others reintegrate
WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL FIRMS: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

This is a workshop programme for women looking to advance in their careers. Based on our research report, ‘Women in Professional Firms: Strategies for Success’, the workshop will explore the ways that delegates can:

1. Demonstrate confidence and self-worth
2. Develop a strong and authentic professional persona
3. Raise their professional profile

Through practical and interactive exercises, we will explore these key themes and examine the tools and techniques successful women have used to excel in the professional arena.

ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL MATERIAL

• Negotiating how you work
• Using language effectively
• Managing your career path
• Dealing with the expectations and perceptions of others

This extra material may be particularly relevant to women returning from a career break or maternity leave, who are looking to maximise their reintegration.
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (FIRM WIDE)

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

This workshop, which is intended for a mix of fee-earners and non fee-earners, aims to explore:

1. Fairness, opportunity and respect
2. The difference between “intent” and “impact” in everyday interactions
3. Handling uncertainty with confidence
4. Building a positive work environment

FORUM THEATRE

Participants will watch two short scenes, enacted by professional actors. The scenes are based on research interviews and depict some of the (frequently unwitting) attitudes and behaviour patterns that may be prevalent within professional firms. Participants will discuss each scene and decide which behaviour is inappropriate and whether such behaviour could and should be challenged in real life.

DIVERSITY IN PRACTICE

The rest of the workshop will include facilitated discussions and small group exercises on the following:

• How close is the firm to creating a culture of fairness, opportunity and basic respect?
• What are the current barriers?
• How can the barriers be overcome?
• What can each individual do to respect and understand colleagues and clients better?
STEVEN PEARCE

Steven specialises in building the interpersonal effectiveness of top professionals. He brings a unique combination of experience to executive education, having worked as a professional theatre director for 10 years before making the transition to professional development in 2000. Early assignments included developing experiential learning programmes for Arthur Andersen and HSBC. He became a director of HR consultancy Stratagem, working with a wide range of public and private sector clients, before setting up SPA in 2007. He is an accredited member of the Academy of Executive Coaching and a qualified MBTI practitioner.

EMILY BUIST

Emily is a professional development consultant and an associate director at SPA, responsible for research development. Emily also designs and facilitates a range of gender diversity and learning and development programmes, which she has run at a number of leading international law and accountancy firms. Outside her role at SPA, Emily writes theatre reviews for the regional press and volunteers as a public speaker for a number of UK charities.

STEPHANIE HALADNER

Stephanie practises finance and banking law in-house through Axiom and is a consultant and speaker on diversity. In addition to her work at SPA, she mentors women in law and the professional services and assists individuals in navigating the corporate and personal development worlds. Prior to Axiom, Stephanie practised law at McCarthy Tetrault, Clifford Chance and Latham & Watkins.
WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

“Steven trains groups of our partners and associates in various soft skills, such as Pitching for Business, Networking and Personal Branding. He is a first-class presenter and facilitator with real expertise in his topics. An added bonus with Steven is how he is able to use his acting skills to introduce realistic and useful role plays.”

MATTHEW GORMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CMS LEGAL SERVICES EEIG

“Participating in the workshop led by SPA was a very positive experience. It was practical and engaging. In particular, it is rare to attend a workshop where all the participants contribute to the debate and share their stories. This workshop achieved that. Well done.”

ANGELA CLIST, PARTNER, ALLEN & OVERY LLP

“Steven has consistently delivered fantastic training programmes and always has positive feedback from delegates. He recently delivered a programme for us in Hong Kong which went down extremely well – delegates commented both on Steven’s personable style but also the quality and relevance of the content. Thank you, Steven!”

CLARE ROBERTSON, SENIOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR, STEPHENSON HARWOOD

“This was an excellent workshop offering a refreshingly different perspective from the typical women’s group discussions. Of particular interest were the practical tips, such as how to make an impression in meetings. Stephanie and Emily were knowledgeable and adept facilitators, bringing all of the discussion strands together in a comprehensive format.”

EMMA DANKS, PARTNER, TAYLOR WESSING

“I found the workshop very interesting and we got great feedback from the group. It was really interactive and the facilitators took the time to include everybody’s experiences and opinions. It covered female issues in the workplace without being in any way embarrassing or patronising. Emily is a very competent and personable speaker and very open to input from participants.”

NATALIE WELLS, MANAGER, DELOITTE LLP