

# The Whole Package

Women's career progression in the context of work, home and family.



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The IBM® Smarter Workforce Institute features a multidisciplinary team of expert psychologists and researchers. With offices in London and Minneapolis, the Smarter Workforce Institute oversees rigorous, global, and innovative research and development programs spanning all aspects of human capital management.

**Acknowledgment:** The data analyses for this report were conducted by Dr. Haiyan Zhang of the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute. Further data analytical guidance was provided by Dr. Rena Rasch, also of the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute.



## Executive Summary

Supporting women's career progression in the workplace is an important thing to do to help companies create a competitive advantage. This report is the fourth major publication in a series of white papers and research reports by the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute on the topic of women's careers. It follows:

- a) A white paper on our 11-factor, three-level framework entitled *Women Leaders' Career Advancement: A Three-Level Framework*.
- b) A research report of our 2012 study called *Enabling Women's Careers*.
- c) A study into the business benefits of gender diversity called *The Business Case for Gender Diversity*.

This report reveals the findings of new data-based research into women's career progression, retention, work-life balance and family set-up in the United States and the United Kingdom. The report provides clear actions for organizations to enable women, their managers and HR practitioners to help improve female career progression and retention through focused actions. It also further explores the context in which women's careers take place and examines the role of work-life balance and family set-up.

### Key findings from this report include:

1. There is only a moderate link between being satisfied with one's career progression opportunities and getting a promotion, but career progression satisfaction is the number one driver of retaining women (and men) in an organization.
2. Work-life balance is the second most important driver of reducing women's intention to leave their organizations.
3. The top three drivers of women getting a promotion are critical job assignments, politically-skilled networking and seeking opportunities. These have emerged as top drivers across three separate studies.
4. As men and women get older, they become less satisfied with their career progression opportunities at work. Furthermore, the older employees get, the fewer promotions they have. Across all age groups, however, men fare significantly better than women in both of these career outcomes.
5. Use of one or more flexible work arrangements is linked to better work-life balance and better career prospects, compared with not using any flexible working options at all.
6. Men who report being responsible for the majority of childcare when at home report the highest work-life balance. The age of the youngest child and the number of children do not seem to have any impact on work-life balance for parents.

## ABOUT THE CAREER PROGRESSION SURVEY DATA IN THIS REPORT

In late 2013, we collected data from 3,000 professional and managerial women and men in the United States and the United Kingdom. The sample contains an equal split of 750 women and 750 men in each of the two countries.

We collected this data in order to run a second validation study of our 11-Factor, Three-Level Career Progression Framework, which was first evaluated in our 2012 Report, *Enabling Women's Career Progression*.

In this report, we will outline the main findings from this most recent study and provide recommendations to increase women's career opportunities.

### 1. SLOW PROGRESS DESPITE BUSINESS BENEFITS

Progressing women's careers and increasing the gender diversity of top teams makes business sense. We showed this in our recent report, *The Business Case for Gender Balance* (Wichert, 2014). Using a balanced scorecard approach, we presented global data highlighting the benefits of more gender-diverse top teams for each of the scorecard's four quadrants: organizational performance, growth and innovation, customer orientation and internal processes.

In the same report, we also presented evidence from our 2012 WorkTrends survey of 33,000 workers in 28 countries which shows that creating a strong climate of diversity and inclusion leads to, among other things, almost three times higher confidence in organizational performance, four times higher innovation scores and two times higher customer orientation scores when compared to organizations with a weak diversity and inclusion climate.

Despite this evidence of the benefits of more gender-diverse top teams, the progress of getting women into senior roles has been slow. In its *2013 International Business Report*, Grant Thornton put the average number of women in senior management at 24 percent globally, which represents just a five percent increase over the past nine years (19 percent in 2004). The number of women in senior management in individual countries ranges from seven percent in Japan, 19 percent in the UK and 20 percent in the US all the way to some outliers such as 51 percent in China.

#### Accelerating Change

To help accelerate women's career progression, we believe further attention is required concerning:

- How to both keep women in the work place (retention) and ensure they move up the career ladder (progression).

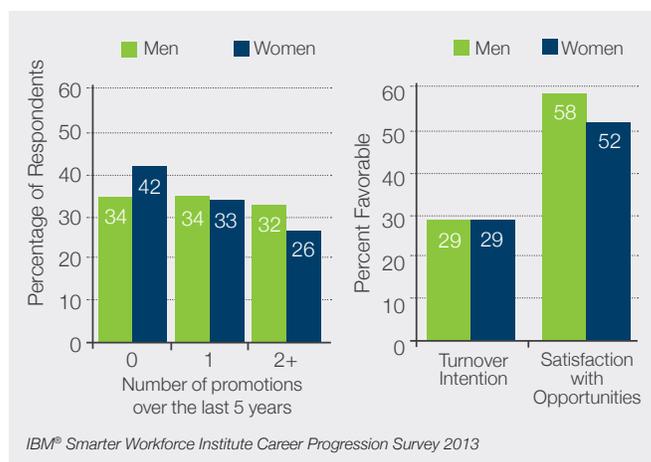
- What impact the interplay between work and non-work related factors, such as family set-up and childcare, could have on women's career progression.

This report presents new data to shed valuable insights into women's career progression and retention as well as the interplay of work and non-work factors.

### 2. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN RETENTION AND CAREER PROGRESSION

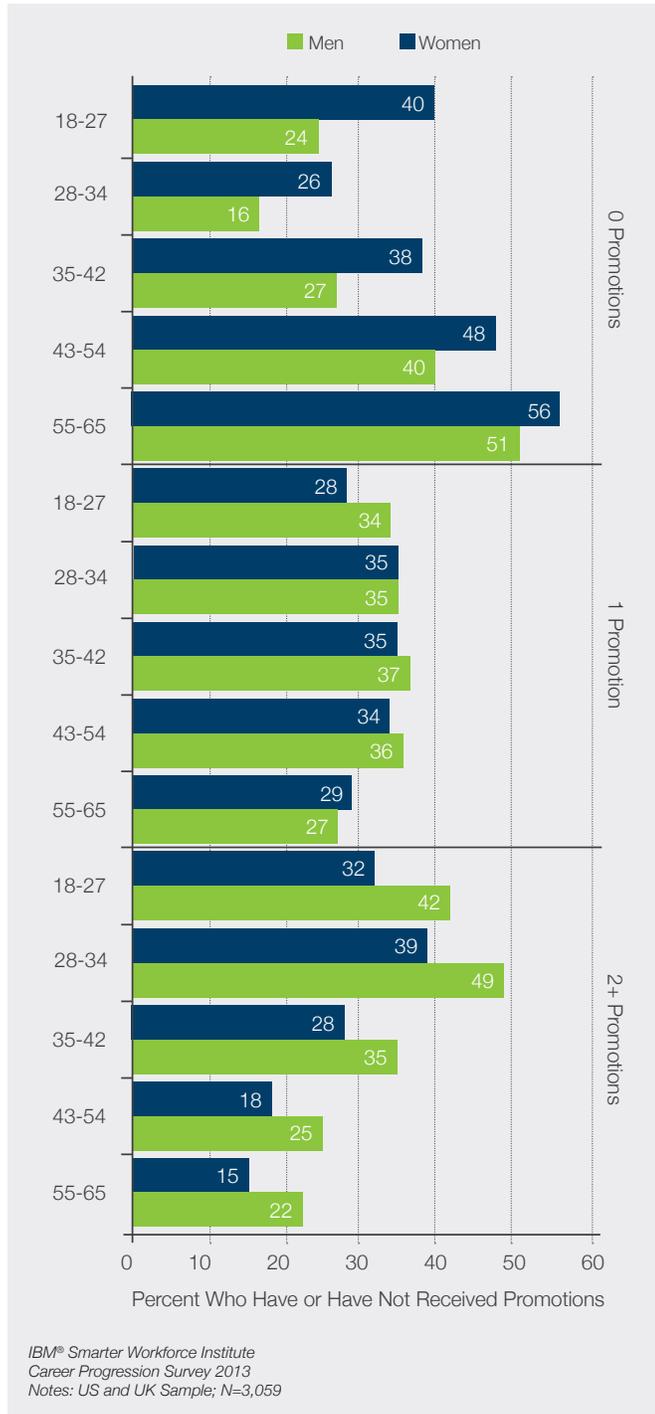
The first piece of evidence confirms what many of us must suspect anecdotally: the career experiences of men and women do differ. Our research, presented in Figure 1, shows that women tend to report less favorable career experiences than men. Women report significantly lower satisfaction with their career progression opportunities. Women also reported a greater likelihood of not having had a promotion over the last five years (42 percent for women versus 34 percent for men) and a lower likelihood of having two or more promotions over the same period when compared to men (26 percent for women versus 32 percent for men). The only exception to these gender differences in our study is turnover intention, where just over a quarter of women and men (29 percent) report their intention to leave their employers within the next 12 months.

FIGURE 1: Career Progression and Retention, Gender Differences



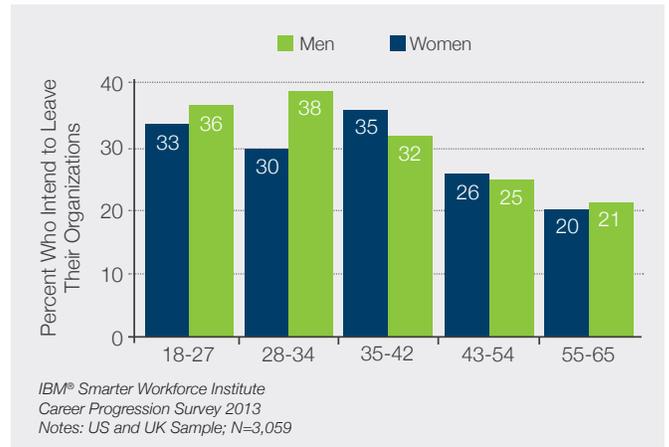
When we look at different stages of careers and consider our data by age, we find that promotion prospects as well as satisfaction with career progression opportunities are generally at their peak for both women and men during the age bracket of 28 to 34 (see Figure 2). They decline steadily from there. Despite this decline, men fare significantly better than women throughout, with one exception: men aged 55-65 are somewhat less likely than their female counterparts to have had one promotion over the last five years.

**FIGURE 2: Number of Promotions Over the Last Five Years Across Age Groups for Women and Men**



However, this decrease in promotions as employees get older does not appear to encourage people to look elsewhere for new opportunities (Figure 3). In fact, with increasing age (starting from age 35), we see a general trend of decreasing levels of turnover intention for both women and men.

**FIGURE 3: Turnover Intentions Across Age Groups for Women and Men**



Because likelihood of promotion appears to reduce with age, it is important that we enable employees to maximize career opportunities in their peak age brackets of 28-34.

Before moving beyond the workplace, and to ensure we know exactly what interventions could address some of the gender differences we have outlined, we first need to develop a more in-depth understanding of the key drivers of career progression.

### 3. WHAT DRIVES WOMEN'S CAREER PROGRESSION?

Our most recent dataset (Career Progression Survey, autumn 2013) which forms the basis for much of this report is the third independent dataset through which we have examined the validity of our 11-Factor, Three-Level Career Progression Framework (Wichert, 2011) as shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4: 11-Factor, Three-Level Career Progression Framework



The two earlier studies were:

- A survey of over 1,000 men and women in UK companies in the summer of 2013, as reported in our *Better Balance, Better Business* White Paper (Wichert, 2014)
- An analysis of 2,500 professional and managerial women and men across the US, UK, Brazil, China and Japan in 2012, as reported in *Enabling Women's Career Progression* (Wichert, 2012).

It is important to note that the results from these three independent datasets (Figure 5) show consistently that the three most important drivers<sup>1</sup> for women's career progression are:

- Critical job assignments.
- Politically-skilled networking.
- Risk-embracing seeking of opportunities.

FIGURE 5: Top Three Drivers for Women's and Men's Promotions over the Last Five Years, Three Independent Studies

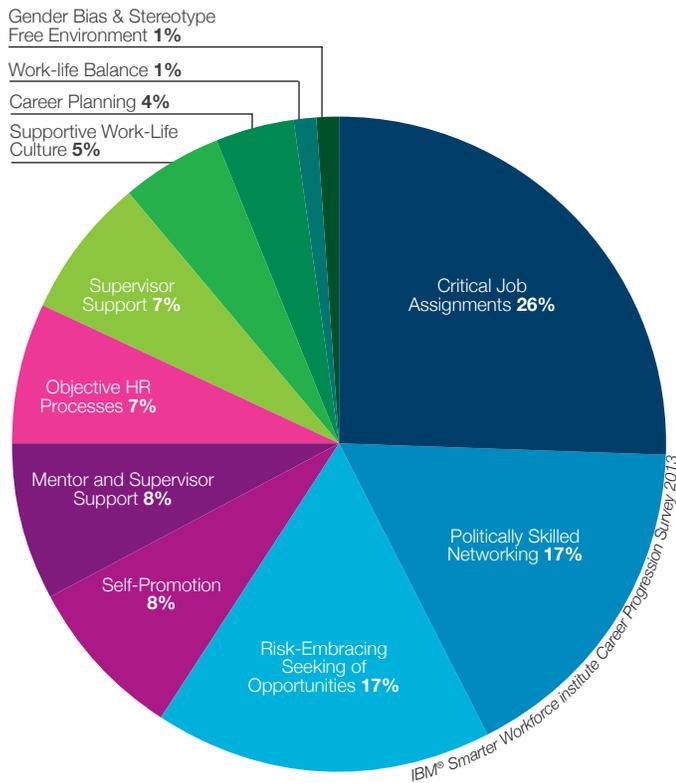
	Autumn 2013 Data 3,000 professional and managerial women and men from US and UK	Summer 2013 Data Over 1,000 women and men from UK	Spring 2012 Data 2,500 professional and managerial women and men from US, UK, Brazil, China and Japan
<b>Women</b>			
#1 Driver	Critical Job Assignments (26%)	Critical Job Assignments (24%)	Critical Job Assignments (26%)
#2 Driver	Politically-Skilled Networking (17%)	Politically-Skilled Networking (15%)	Politically-Skilled Networking (18%)
#3 Driver	Risk-Embracing Seeking of Opportunities (17%)	Risk-Embracing Seeking of Opportunities (12%)	Risk-Embracing Seeking of Opportunities (11%)
<b>Men</b>			
#1 Driver	Critical Job Assignments (21%)	Critical Job Assignments (26%)	Supervisor Support (15%)
#2 Driver	Politically-Skilled Networking (17%)	Politically-Skilled Networking (22%)	Politically-Skilled Networking (12%)
#3 Driver	Supervisor Support (11%)	Objective HR Processes (15%)	Critical Job Assignments (12%)

Please note that the total percentage for some of the pie charts presented in this report may come to 101 or 99 per cent due to rounding

While the results for women are very consistent across the three studies, there is some variability for men's results, particularly in our spring 2012 data. These differences may be a reflection of a more international dataset, which included Brazil, China and Japan in addition to the UK and US. Routes to senior roles for men may depend more on supervisor support in these countries than in the US and the UK. The full set of drivers for women's career progression from our most recent autumn 2013 study is presented in the pie chart in Figure 6.

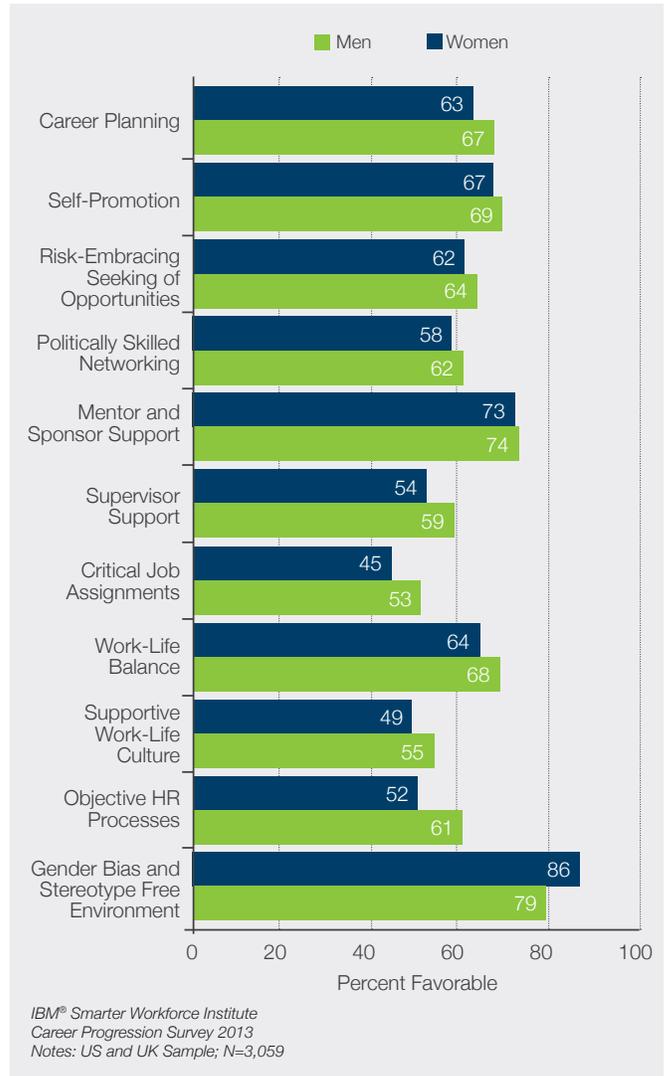
<sup>1</sup>Throughout this report, drivers analyses are reported based on Relative Weights Analysis (RWA), a variation on multiple regression that accounts for multicollinearity. Relative weights approximate the squared standardized regression coefficient if the predictors were uncorrelated. They sum to R squared. We express the raw relative weights as a percent of R squared. In other words, it is not the percent of variance explained, it is the percent of the percent of variance explained.

FIGURE 6: Drivers of Women's Actual Promotions over the Last Five Years



As Figure 5 highlights, the consistent top driver of career progression for both men and women is critical job assignments (CJAs). CJAs are high-visibility roles that enable employees to showcase their capabilities. They include experiences such as stretch assignments, international assignments, operational frontline roles, turning around a failing project, or leading a large-scale change initiative (Wichert, 2011). Despite the clear importance of this factor, our data finds (Figure 7) that women report having significantly fewer critical job roles than their male counterparts (45% for women versus 53% for men).

FIGURE 7: 11 Career Progression Factors, Gender Differences



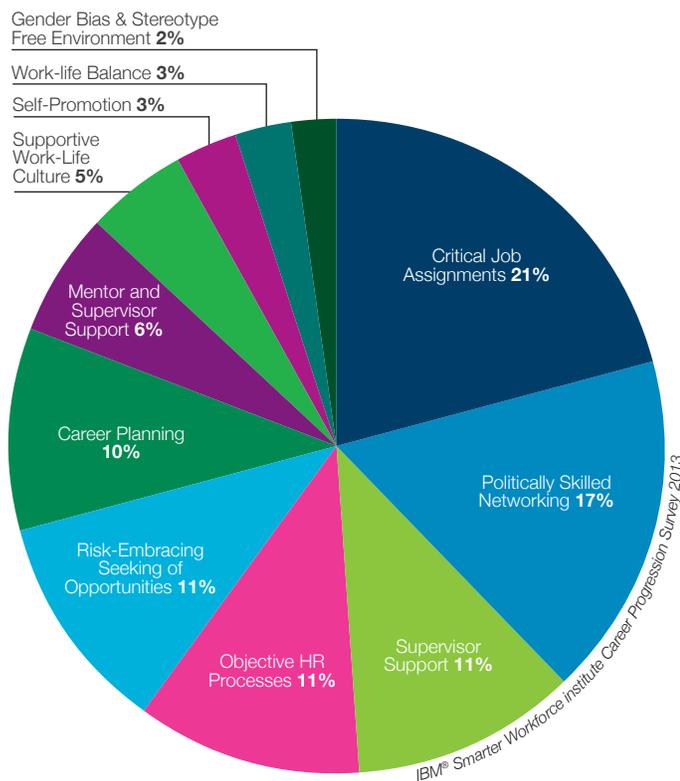
The second most important driver of women's career progression is *politically skilled networking*. This concerns the ability to be "visible" to senior decision makers in the organization who can impact women's careers. Once again, our data shows (Figure 7) that despite the importance of this factor, women report that they engage in less politically skilled networking than their male counterparts (58% for women versus 62% for men).

The third most important driver of women gaining a promotion is risk-embracing seeking of opportunities. This factor concerns women proactively searching for a new career opportunity and going “out of their comfort zone” to advance their careers. The difference in results for women (62%) and men (64%) is very small and not statistically significant, as shown in Figure 7.

Although the differences in scores for men and women are small for some of these drivers, a consistent pattern emerges from the data: women report less positively than men across ten of the 11 factors (Figure 7). Even small gender differences, when considered collectively across many different career-related factors, can present a substantial barrier to women’s career advancement.

Two of the top drivers of promotions among men—critical job assignments and politically skilled networking—are identical to top drivers for women. Two others—supervisor support and objective HR processes—differ from those for women. Our most recent data shows that critical job assignments are the number one driver for men, accounting for 21 percent of the explainable difference between getting a promotion and not getting a promotion (see Figure 8). Politically skilled networking comes in second at 17 percent, while supervisor support accounts for 11 percent.

**FIGURE 8: Drivers of Men’s Actual Promotions over the Last Five Years**



<sup>2</sup> Pearson’s  $r = 0.323$  ( $p = 0.01$ )

These driver analyses provide clear indicators for action that organizations looking to address gender diversity issues in the workplace should implement. In other words, tackling the top drivers is likely to deliver the best results in terms of career progression for women.

#### 4. WHAT DRIVES PERSONAL SATISFACTION WITH CAREER PROGRESSION OPPORTUNITIES?

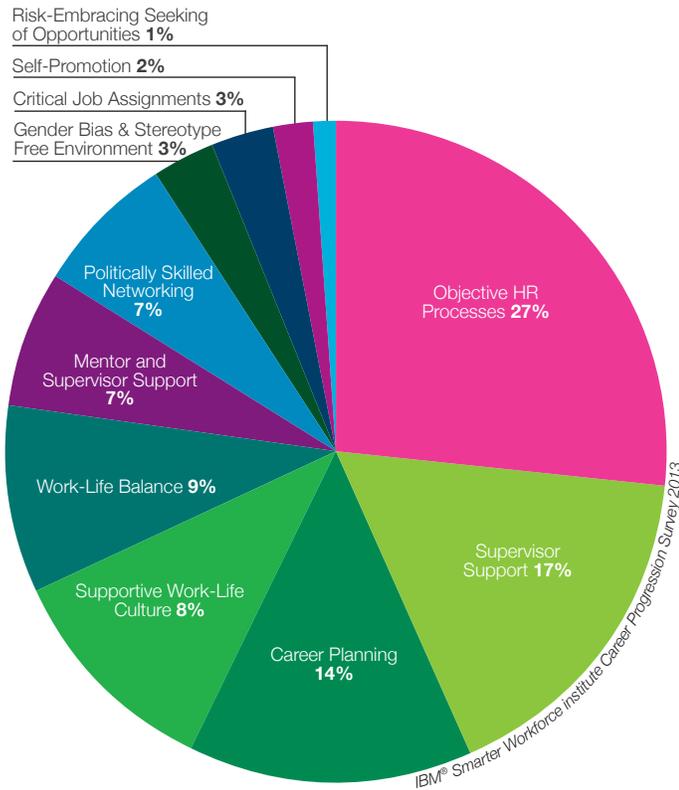
Beyond the drivers of actual career progression, it is important to consider satisfaction with career progression opportunities. As we will see later on, this plays a key role in retaining talented employees. Exploring this outcome measure is also interesting because, as we have found in two previous studies, the drivers of women’s satisfaction with career opportunity are markedly different from the drivers of actually gaining a promotion. The same is true for men, although to a lesser degree.

This difference between *satisfaction* and *actual promotion* is important to note and may account to some extent for the slower progress in getting women to the top; after all, feeling satisfied with career progression opportunities is no guarantee of securing the next promotion. Our data show that there is only a moderate link between the amount of satisfaction we experience for our career progression opportunities and our success in gaining a promotion<sup>2</sup>. The drivers for achieving promotions—critical job assignments, networking, and seeking opportunities—rank very low as drivers for feeling satisfied with our career progression opportunities. This could explain why many organizations struggle to see the desired results of their gender diversity initiatives; perhaps they are focusing on initiatives that make women feel more satisfied, but not on initiatives that drive actual promotions and therefore career progression for women.

This finding shows why it is important to use data-driven approaches when trying to tackle women’s reduced career progression. What “feels right” may not, in fact, lead us to our desired outcomes. As Figure 9 shows, the top three drivers for women feeling satisfied with career progression opportunities at work are:

- Objective HR processes (27%).
- Supervisor support (17%).
- Career planning (14%).

**FIGURE 9: Drivers of Women's Satisfaction with Career Progression Opportunities**



**FIGURE 10: Top Three Drivers for Women's and Men's Satisfaction with Career Progression Opportunities, Three Independent Studies**

	Autumn 2013 Data 3,000 professional and managerial women and men from US and UK	Summer 2013 Data Over 1,000 women and men from UK	Spring 2012 Data 2,500 professional and managerial women and men from US, UK, Brazil, China and Japan
<b>Women</b>			
#1 Driver	Objective HR Processes (27%)	Objective HR Processes (25%)	Objective HR Processes (18%)
#2 Driver	Supervisor Support (17%)	Supervisor Support (16%)	Mentor and Sponsor Support (16%)
#3 Driver	Career Planning (14%)	Career Planning (13%)	Supervisor Support (13%)
<b>Men</b>			
#1 Driver	Objective HR Processes (30%)	Objective HR Processes (24%)	Objective HR Processes (20%)
#2 Driver	Supervisor Support (18%)	Career Planning (17%)	Supervisor Support (16%)
#3 Driver	Supportive Work-Life Culture (11%)	Supervisor Support (16%)	Mentor and Sponsor Support (12%)

The most recent data (autumn 2013 in Figure 10) show that the top three drivers for men's satisfaction with their career progression opportunities are:

- Objective HR processes (30%).
- Supervisor support (18%).
- Supportive work-life culture (11%).

Again, there is a lot of consistency in our findings across the three studies. This consistency strengthens guidance about the most effective interventions for organizations to focus on in order to increase women's satisfaction with career progression opportunities.

While satisfaction with one's career progression opportunities at work may only be moderately linked to gaining a promotion, it nevertheless pays to invest in objective HR processes, equip supervisors with the skills to provide support for their people's careers, and provide career planning opportunities through mentors or coaches. This is because satisfaction with career progression opportunities plays a crucial role in retaining valued employees.

### 5. WHAT MAKES WOMEN STAY AT WORK?

Before organizations can focus on measures to help women progress up the organizational hierarchy, they must hold on to their female talent in the first place.

In our analysis of turnover intentions, we explored a host of factors known to be related to this phenomenon (please see the Attracting and Retaining Employees White Paper series, IBM Smarter Workforce Institute, 2012):

- Satisfaction with career progression opportunities and the number of past promotions.
- Work-life balance, supportive work-life culture and working hours.
- Gender bias and stereotype-free culture and diversity and inclusion climate.
- Supervisor support and organizational career support (mentoring and development programs at work).
- Personal performance ratings and confidence in the organization's performance.

As revealed earlier in this report, women and men report identical rates of turnover intention. Just over a quarter (29%) of men and women indicate that they intend to leave their organization within the next 12 months. However, as Figures 11 and 12 show, the motivators for intentions to leave are somewhat different for women and men.

While satisfaction with one's career progression opportunities and work-life balance are the top two drivers for both women and men, the third most important driver for women is supervisor support whereas for men it is their last performance rating. This means that higher levels of satisfaction with career progression opportunities, work-life balance, supervisor support and personal performance ratings reduce employees' stated intentions of leaving their organizations in the next 12 months.

FIGURE 11: Drivers of Women's Turnover Intentions

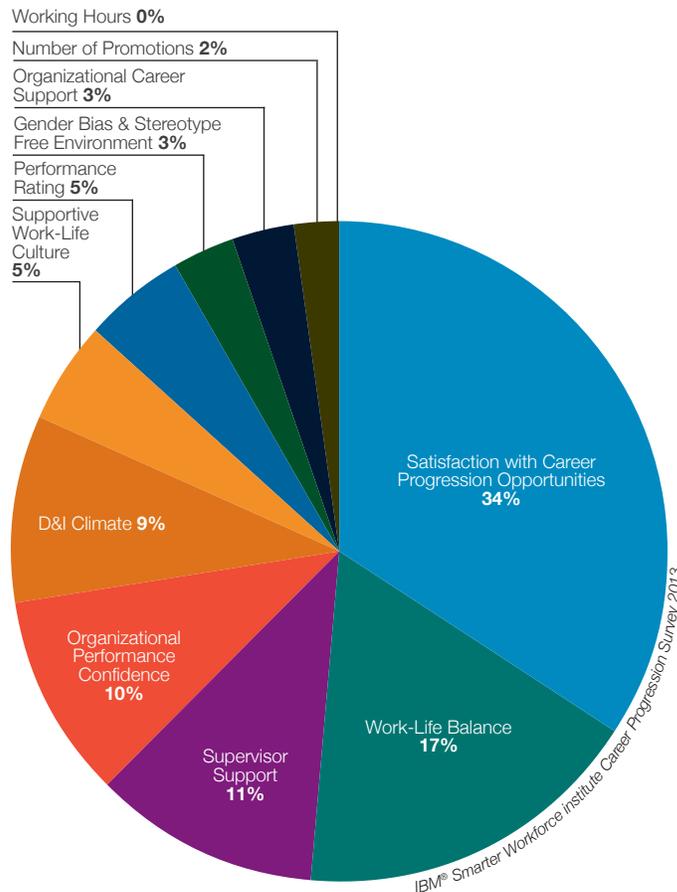
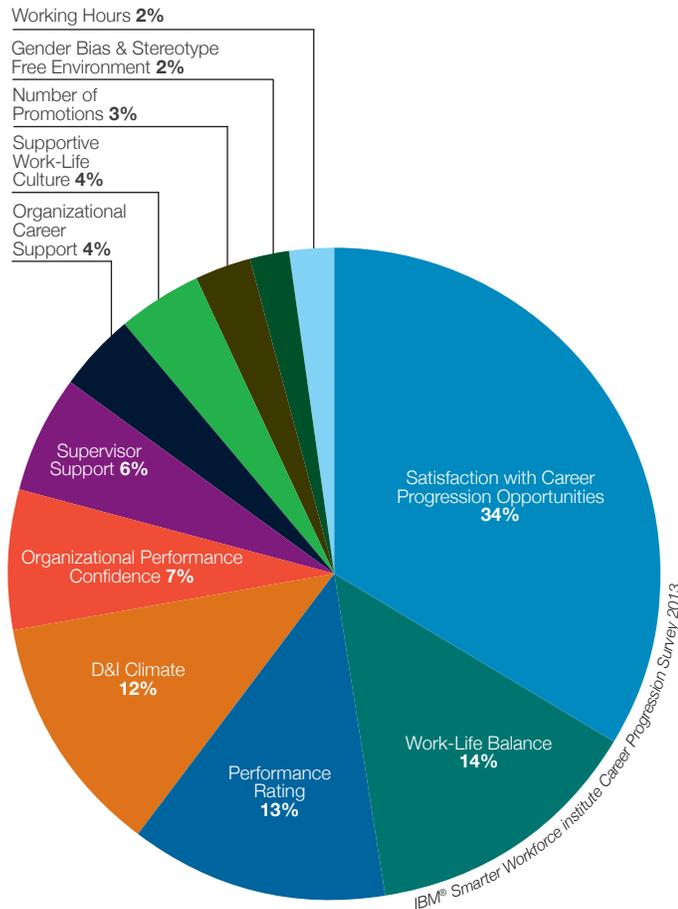


FIGURE 12: Drivers of Men's Turnover Intentions



Interestingly, perceived work-life balance plays a much more important role than actual working hours; it is women's and men's perceived ability to balance their work and non-work responsibilities that play a role in determining whether they are contemplating leaving their organization in the next 12 months rather than the actual hours that they work.

Furthermore, satisfaction with future career progression opportunities is a much more important driver of intentions to leave than past promotions. Evidently, the workers in our sample are much more influenced by the future than the past. Not only that, but for women the support a supervisor provides is a more important influencer of turnover intentions than general organizational support systems such as mentoring and development programs<sup>3</sup>.

In summary, we now have a prioritization of factors that can influence the likelihood of both men and women staying with an organization. This could provide a valuable start point for organizations looking to focus initiatives on retaining women in the work place, but since prioritization can vary by organization, we would always advise running a drivers analysis at an organizational level to check the specifics of that employee population.

## 6. WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

As outlined above, work-life balance is one of the two biggest drivers of women's and men's intention to leave their organization in the next 12 months. Work-life balance and satisfaction with one's career progression opportunities account for about half of the explainable difference between an employee's intention to leave or to stay.

In section four of this report, we examined the drivers of satisfaction with career progression opportunities. In this section, we take a closer look at work-life balance.

In our study, we calculated a work-life balance index made up of three different items:

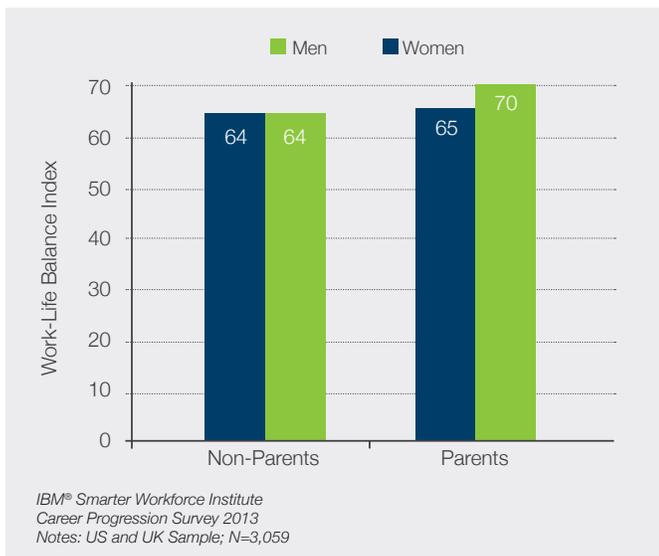
- My life is well-balanced between work, family, friends, and my personal needs.
- My work schedule is flexible enough for me to meet my family/personal responsibilities.
- I can meet my career goals and still devote sufficient attention to my family/personal life.

### Work-life Balance for Parents and Non-Parents

As shown in Figure 13, fathers in our study report higher scores against our work-life balance index than men without children (70% and 64% respectively), whereas mothers and women without children report similar levels of work-life balance (65% and 64% respectively).

<sup>3</sup>Our study shows that confidence in the organization's performance is the number four driver for women's turnover intention and the number five driver for men's. Our other research into employee engagement (which is based on our WorldNorms data) shows that organizational performance confidence is consistently the most important driver of employee engagement, which includes a measure of turnover. While this may seem to be conflicting evidence, it is important to note that employee engagement is a much broader concept, which in addition to a measure of turnover intention, includes a measure of pride in one's company, a measure of advocacy (gladly referring the company to a friend) as well as a measure of overall personal satisfaction with the company as a place to work.

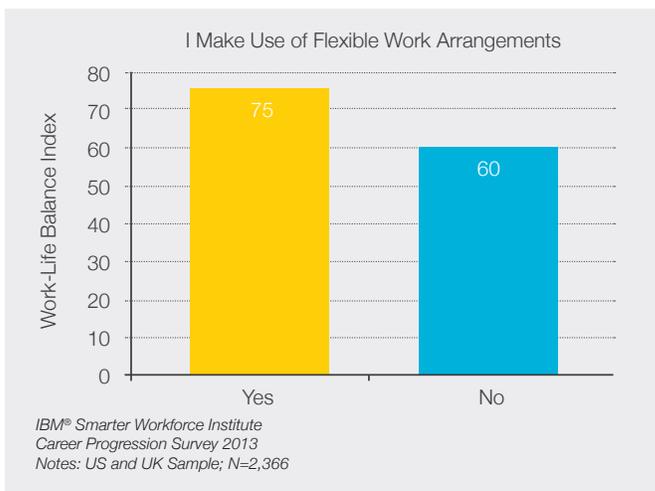
FIGURE 13: Work-Life Balance Index, Non-Parents and Parents



**Optimum Work Arrangements for Work-Life Balance and Career Progression**

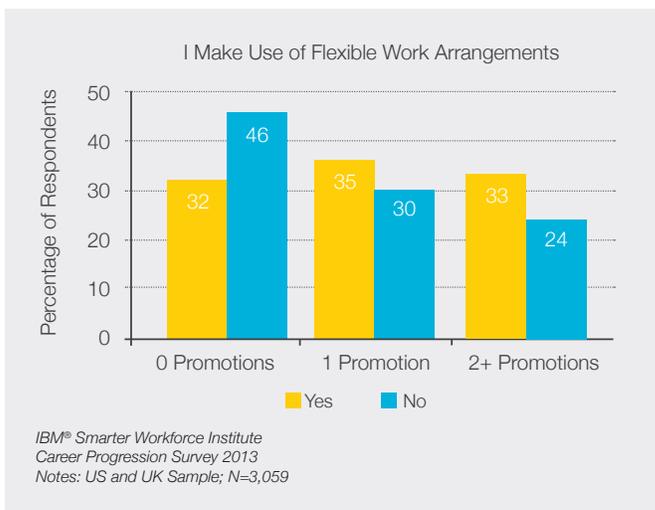
In Figure 14, levels of work-life balance can be seen for respondents who make use of flexible work arrangements and those who do not. Examples of flexible work arrangements included in our study are: flexible start and finish times, working reduced hours, working from home, working compressed hours and job sharing. Clearly, having access to and making use of at least one of these flexible work arrangements leads to significantly increased scores against our work-life balance index than not using any at all (75% and 60% respectively). In short, something is better than nothing when it comes to flexible work arrangements regardless of what type of flexible work arrangement it is.

FIGURE 14: Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements on Work-Life Balance Index Scores



Equally, in addition to favorable work-life balance outcomes, making use of flexible work arrangements is linked to accelerated career progression, as shown in Figure 15.

FIGURE 15: Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements on Number of Promotions over the Last Five Years



Not making use of any flexible work arrangements is linked to a higher percentage of respondents with 'stalled' careers (those who have had no promotion at all over the last five years) than working flexibly (46% vs. 32% respectively). Furthermore, while there is no statistically significant difference in the number of respondents who have had one promotion over the last five years between those working flexibly and those who do not (35% vs. 30% respectively), respondents who make use of flexible working arrangements are significantly more likely to report accelerated careers (having had two or more promotions over the last five years) than those that do not (33% vs. 24% respectively).

In summary, making use of at least one flexible work arrangement is linked to significantly increased work-life balance and better career outcomes.

## 7. FAMILY SET-UP AND LINKS TO SATISFACTION WITH NON-WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Having a balance of work and home commitments is seen as a good thing in our society. We talk about having "work-life balance." Fundamentally, our home life can impact our work and vice versa. That is why, in this report, we consider both work-related factors (as explored in the preceding sections) and non-work related factors (explored in this section of the report). In this report, we refer to non-work related factors as "family set-up." Our family set-up analyses examined a host of different variables such as parental status, partner's employment status, childcare arrangements when at work, childcare arrangements when at home, and housework arrangements.

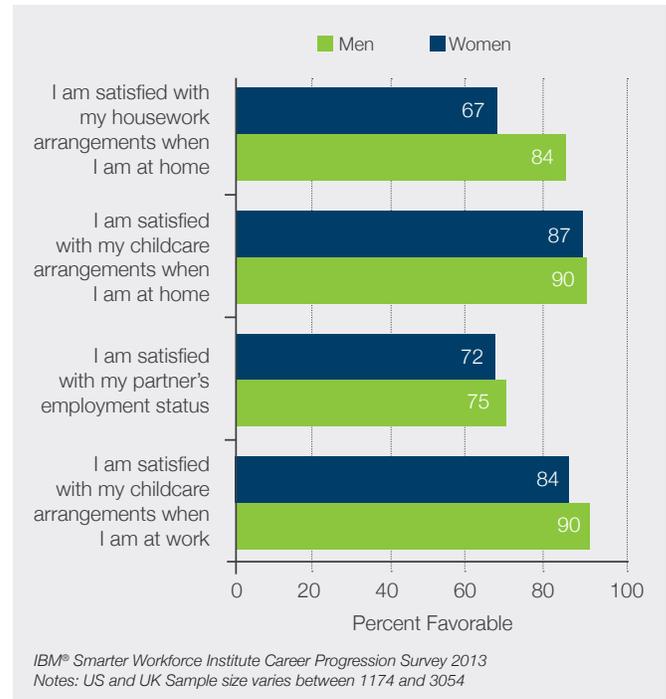
First we examine personal satisfaction with family set-up, and then the impact of family set-up on work-life balance.

### Satisfaction with Family Set-Up

Overall, the respondents in this professional and managerial group are fairly satisfied with their home arrangements as shown in Figure 16.

In general, though, men are more satisfied with their family arrangements than women. The largest gender difference emerged for satisfaction with housework arrangements; women report their lowest satisfaction levels for housework arrangements when at home. Both men and women report their highest satisfaction levels for their childcare arrangements when they are at home.

FIGURE 16: Satisfaction with Family Set-Up



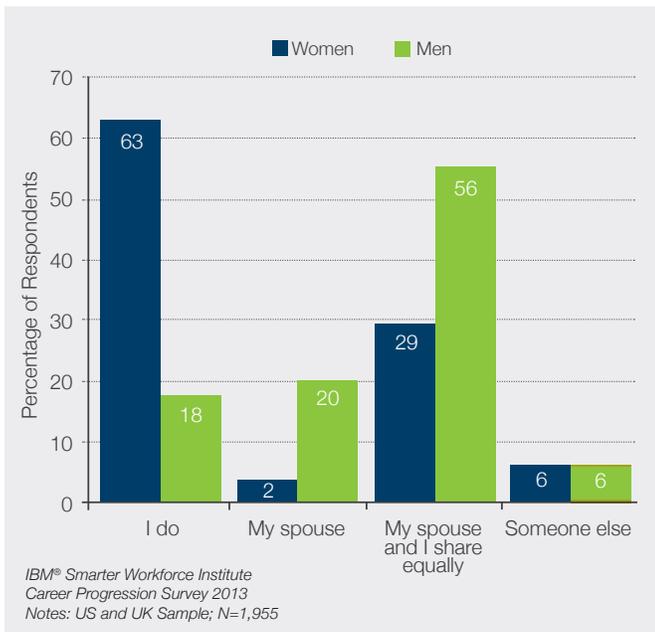
### Partner's Employment Status

Having a partner who works full-time leads to the highest satisfaction with one's partner's employment status. However, when we turn to explore levels of satisfaction with childcare arrangements (at home or at work) and housework arrangements, then respondents who have homemakers as partners report the highest satisfaction levels.

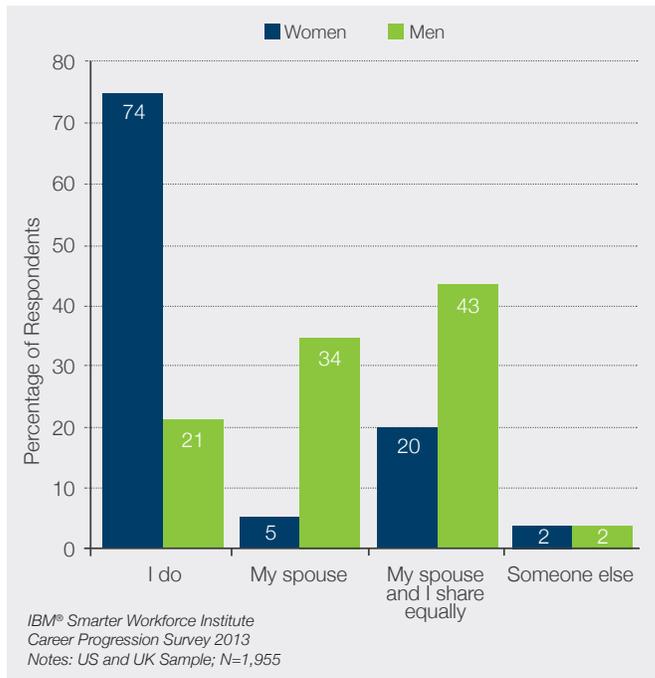
### Childcare and Housework Arrangements

One of the areas of our research that reveals the most significant gender differences concerns childcare and housework arrangements. As Figure 17 shows, almost two thirds (63%) of women in our study state that they are responsible for the majority of childcare when at home while only about one in five (18%) of men say the same. However, a significant number of respondents say they share childcare with their partners—close to one third (29%) of women and more than half (56%) of men state that they share childcare at home with their partners. Finally, while 20% of men say that their spouses do the majority of childcare when at home, only 2% of women agree with this statement. As Figure 18 shows, the pattern for housework arrangements is similar.

**FIGURE 17: Who Provides the Majority of Childcare When You Are at Home?**

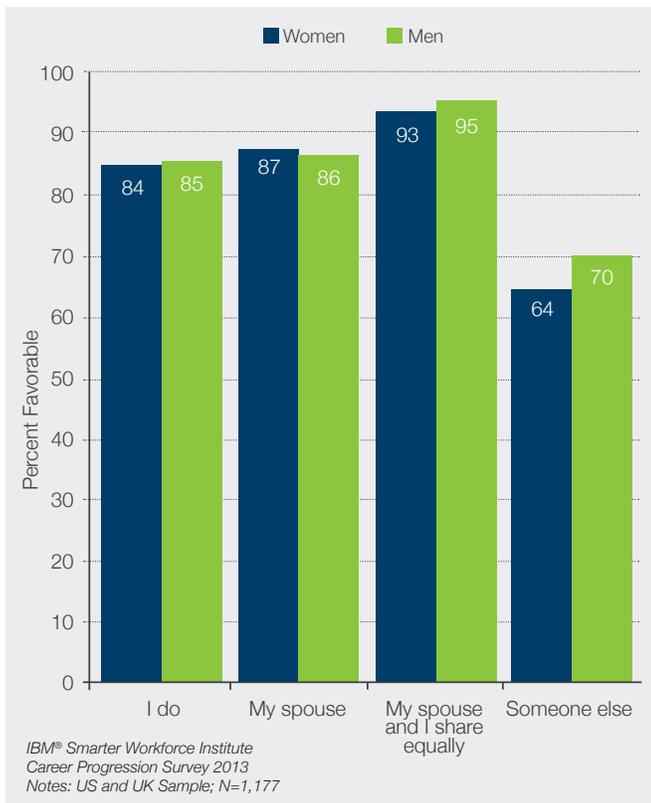


**FIGURE 18: Who Does the Majority of Housework When You Are at Home?**

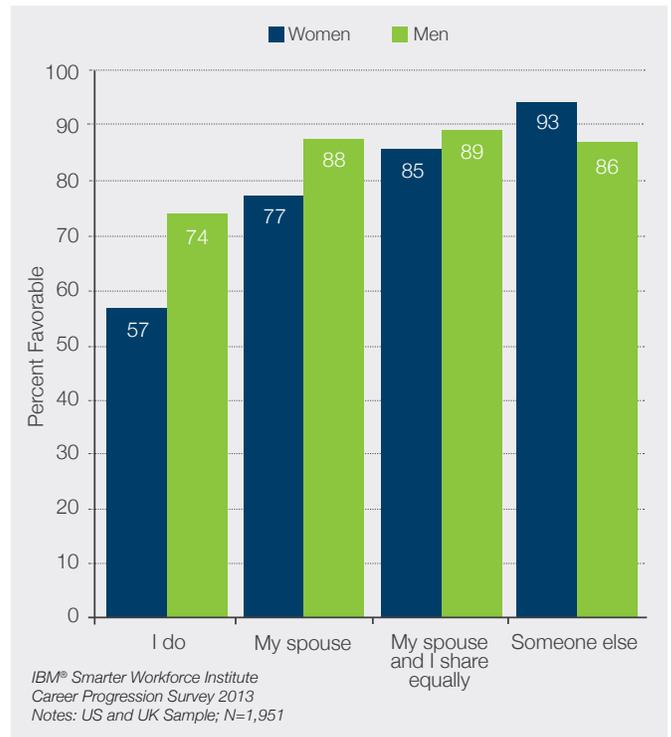


For both men and women the highest level of satisfaction with childcare arrangements at home occurs when both partners share this responsibility (Figure 19). This is followed by “my spouse” doing most of the childcare when at home and then “I do.” Furthermore, while having someone else look after your children when at home leads to the lowest satisfaction levels (Figure 19), having someone else do the housework ranks among the highest satisfaction levels, particularly for women (Figure 20)<sup>4</sup>. Sharing housework equally with one's spouse leads to high satisfaction levels for both women and men (Figure 20).

**FIGURE 19: Satisfaction with Childcare Arrangements When at Home by Who Does It**



**FIGURE 20: Satisfaction with Housework Arrangements When at Home by Who Does It**



These data seem to imply that overall a partnership approach—sharing both childcare and housework when at home—is best for satisfaction.

#### Work-life Balance and Family Set-up

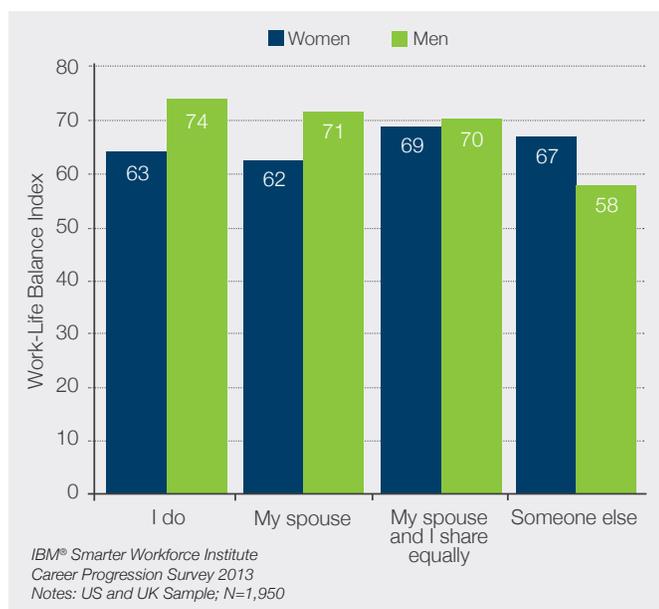
As we have outlined, work-life balance is strongly linked to retention of employees in the workplace. In our analyses, we now bring together work and non-work factors, and consider how family set-up influences our perceptions of work-life balance.

In our research, we also examined the impact of the age and number of children on perceptions of work-life balance. The results reveal that the age of the youngest child and the number of children do not seem to have an impact on the perception of work-life balance. This holds true for both mothers and fathers.

<sup>4</sup>As can be seen in Figures 17 and 18, the number of respondents who answered “someone else” and the number of women who answered “my spouse” are low. Therefore, the results presented in Figures 19 and 20 for these two response categories (“someone else” and “my spouse” for women) have to be treated with some caution.

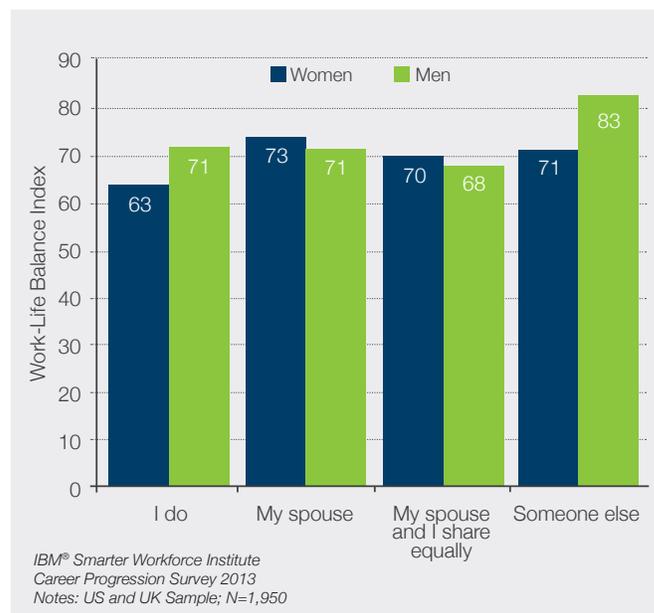
Feelings of work-life balance appear to vary according to who does the majority of childcare when the respondent is at home. Figure 21 shows an interesting result which seems to point to higher levels of work-life balance for men when they report that they do the majority of childcare when they are at home. For men, their lowest level of reported work-life balance emerges when “someone else” is doing that childcare<sup>5</sup>. For women on the other hand, the highest level of reported work-life balance emerges when the childcare is shared equally with their spouse when they are both at home. The lowest level of work-life balance is associated with their spouse doing the majority of childcare when they are at home—a score that is lower than when “someone else” does it. It appears that for women at least, a spouse taking on the majority of the childcare when a woman is at home is the least preferred option.

**FIGURE 21: Impact of Childcare-When-At-Home Arrangements on Work-Life Balance Index Scores**



For housework (Figure 22), on the other hand, the highest level of work-life balance is reported by men if someone else does the housework when they are at home. For women, having their spouse do the majority of housework is the best set up in terms of perceived work-life balance.

**FIGURE 22: Impact of Housework-When-At-Home Arrangements on Work-Life Balance Index Scores**



In summary, working women report most work-life balance when their spouse does the majority of the housework when they are home and when they share childcare with their spouse when they are both at home. For men, on the other hand, greatest work-life balance comes when they do the majority of the childcare when they are home and when “someone else” does the housework.

<sup>5</sup>As can be seen in Figures 17 and 18, the number of respondents who answered “someone else” and the number of women who answered “my spouse” are low. Therefore, the results presented in Figures 21 and 22 for these two response categories (“someone else” and “my spouse” for women) have to be treated with some caution.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Career Progression Survey across the US and UK has shown that career progression is determined by a number of different factors relating to the individual, their work environment and the culture of the organization.

The three key factors for women's promotions are:

- Undertaking critical job assignments.
- Being a politically skilled networker.
- Proactively seeking new job opportunities and taking calculated risks when doing so.

The three key factors for women's satisfaction with career progression opportunities are:

- Objective HR processes.
- Supportive supervisor.
- Career planning.

The three key factors for women's turnover intention are:

- Satisfaction with career progression opportunities.
- Work-life balance.
- Supportive supervisor.

Organizations should focus on developing valued female employees and progressing their careers in addition to simply retaining them—something that appears to happen all too rarely.

Many initiatives are set up to encourage talented women to stay with an organization: mentors who assist with career planning, the provision of flexible working arrangements, direct support from supervisors and various HR processes that are put in place to make the selection and promotion of women fairer. While these initiatives are valuable in retaining women, our research highlights that they are unlikely to be enough to provide real opportunities for promotion and progression.

Outside of work, a shared approach to childcare and housework leads to the highest satisfaction rate.

## HOW ORGANIZATIONS CAN HELP THEIR FEMALE TALENT

The responsibility for career management has increasingly moved from organizations to employees. Nevertheless, organizations still play a crucial role in providing the cultures, structures and processes that enable female talent to work to their best ability. Failure to provide this support can deprive organizations of the benefits of a more gender-diverse workforce, as we showed in our *A Business Case for Gender Diversity* report. The research in this report provides strong and clear guidance on where organizations should focus their efforts to build an environment that allows a diverse workforce—and women in particular—to prosper and reach their full career potential.

- 1) Give women access to critical job assignments.** Access to the right roles not only allows women to develop the right skills, but also enables them to help build strong networks and to demonstrate to senior decision makers that they have the right experiences to take on challenging roles. Unconscious bias and assumptions about what roles a woman may or may not want can reduce the access to these important career-building roles for women.
- 2) Use data.** Help ensure that initiatives that are designed to increase the number of women in senior roles are based on data and rigorous insights into the drivers of women's retention and their career progression. Our research has repeatedly shown that certain interventions are more likely to yield results, but there may still be variations across industries and different types of organizations. Only if an organization understands the precise drivers for retention and progression of its female talent can it become more focused and, therefore, more successful in progressing more women to senior roles.
- 3) Talk about work-life balance.** Work-life balance is a key driver of keeping women (and men) in an organization; it decreases employees' intention to leave. Our work also shows that making use of at least one flexible work arrangement is linked to significantly increased work-life balance as well as increased career prospects. For all of these reasons, it is important for organizations to talk openly about available flexible work arrangements and help ensure that they become the norm for each employee rather than the preserve of working mothers.

- 4) Help enable supervisors to support women's careers.** A supervisor's support of a woman's career is most effective if it goes beyond simply providing career advice. Our work shows that managers need to recognize an employee's full potential, make a personal investment in his/her career, and provide access to critical job assignments in order to increase satisfaction levels with career opportunities. Targeted training of managers as well as an organizational culture that emphasizes talent management can provide a strong foundation, helping enable supervisors to provide career support that is as effective as possible.
  
- 5) Help ensure that each HR process is transparent, objective and fair.** Auditing existing HR processes for transparency, objectivity and fairness—and helping ensure that they are executed to a high standard—can provide quick wins. Gaining an in-depth understanding of how existing HR processes are perceived by the “end user” can help with this fine-tuning process. Additional manager training and clear communication can bring further benefits.
  
- 6) Train mentors and sponsors.** While mentors and sponsors did not emerge as a top driver for women's promotion prospects, they can still play a crucial role in accelerating women's careers if they provide the right support: effective career planning, encouraging women to take risks and seek new job opportunities, and providing access both to senior networks of decision makers and to critical job assignments. Mentor and sponsor support has to be targeted if it is to be more than a “career feel-good factor.” Being clear about what is expected of mentors and sponsors ensures that organizational mentoring and sponsorship programs are as effective for women's careers as possible.
  
- 7) Reduce barriers for women.** Men report more favorably against the majority of the career-related measures in our study. While some of the differences may be small, it is important to understand that many small hurdles build up to create one big hurdle which can significantly slow down women's careers. Running regular surveys or focus groups that examine the difference in workplace experiences between women and men can provide valuable information about the biggest barriers for women and help make decisions about the most urgent actions to be taken. ■

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## About WorkTrends and WorldNorms Data

### WorkTrends

WorkTrends is a research program begun in 1984. In its current form, WorkTrends is a multi-topic survey completed online by a sample of employees representative of a country's working population in terms of industry mix, job type, gender, age and other key organizational and demographic variables. In most countries, survey takers must be adults who work full-time for an organization of 100 employees or more; this threshold drops to 25 employees or more in countries with smaller economies or hard-to-reach populations. The survey has over 200 items that cover a wide range of workplace issues, including senior leader and direct manager effectiveness, recognition, growth and development, employee engagement, customer orientation, quality emphasis, innovation, corporate social responsibility, workplace safety, work stress and performance confidence. In 2012, over 33,000 employees were surveyed.

### WorldNorms

The WorldNorm database contains employee engagement survey data that has been gathered from over 200 companies each year with employees in over 200 countries. These companies range in size from over 300,000 employees to as few as 200 employees (median employee size is 6,000). The current database contains over 250 million responses from approximately five million employees per year. This database has over 736 survey items that measure many important work place issues including employee engagement, employee alignment with corporate strategies, change management, communication, compensation and benefits, company culture, mission and values, customer focus, diversity, inclusion, ethics and corporate social responsibility, future vision, employee growth and development, innovation, involvement, leadership and manager effectiveness, performance management, recognition, quality products and services, safety and physical work environment, teamwork and collaboration, trust in leadership, and work/life balance.





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IBM Corporation  
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Produced in the United States of America  
March 2014

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