Rebecca Knight reports on how best practice has switched to trying to ‘fix the environment’

A woman entered the workforce in the 1970s and, for a few years, engineers introduced her to the workplace. She was seen as a whiz at working, job sharing, and raising children, or cycling. The goal was to help women manage the competing pressures of work and home life, but they became a double-edged sword.

Women who took advantage of the work opportunities were labelled as being on a “mommy track” – a professional path, but one that provides fewer opportunities for advancement. “I was the only woman” says Claire Gruppo, chief executive of a New York-based boutique investment bank. “The message to women was: you can be successful, but not in the top job.”

A better approach to change is debatable. But in the aftermath of a financial crisis that drew a spotlight on poor governance and the dearth of women at big corporations, companies are trying to do better.

According to a survey last month by the consultancy Catalyst, 90 per cent of companies have programs in place to tackle gender diversity. In addition, gender diversity was among the top 25 strategic priorities for more than half of the companies surveyed. Despite the number in 2010 being double the number in 2010, some companies have already made progress with programs that target a specific problem. It is all about the company and the environment,

The companies do that best are the ones that recognize they have issues, and don’t just give the stereotypical response of “let’s put in more diversity and don’t just give the women the same opportunities.”

They not only put in place programs, but they have goals and metrics, and a return on investment analysis to see whether the programs are working and whether the company is being successful.

There are a lot of different approaches but overall, what these companies are trying to do is support women, empower them, and engaged them in the workforce,” says Rebecca Knight, chief executive of Catalyst, the research group that guides women’s advancements in the workforce.

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But the disproportionate number of men on the top management seats need to pay special attention to developing women leaders, Karyn Twaronite, Ernst & Young’s head of executive recruitment. “We know that to become a chief executive you need to have done a tour abroad. I spoke to one male today you need to have done a tour abroad. I spoke to one male chief executive who said ‘we don’t like to ask women [to move abroad].’

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Women’s progress in the corporate world is measured in board seats, and it is poor. While the UK, Germany, and France boast about 25 per cent women directors, in China, only 3 per cent of board members are women; in India and Brazil the figure is 5 per cent, and in Japan below 1 per cent.

But are boards the best proxy for how women have come? They are the primary measure because boards sit at the top and become, quite simply, the face of an industry it’s useful to have on display. It’s also one of the reasons for qualified optimism. One reality to which employers must pay heed is that higher education is predominantly women’s domain, so they already are concentrated in certain functional areas and move in others – are also key.

A lot of this data already exists internally, says Prof Post. “Companies need to pull it together so that they can have a complete picture of how their diversity in the selection of women compares against industry-wide norms.”

Companies with such policies have to describe how their gender diversity training programs work, if one exists, concerning recruitment policies and retention rates would be a good start, along with information on what kind of flexible work arrangements companies offer, and how performance promotion and top assignments are decided. A closer look at boards of women’s chief executive positions would require many more databases by companies. Data on company boards is implemented, and how the company is measured in board seats is also important.

Boardroom numbers are only part of the picture. Measuring progress, according to the University of Notre Dame and Catalyst, corporate boards in the Fortune 500 companies, more than 10 per cent of which have no women on their boards at all. According to data compiled by Catalyst, in the UK, Germany, and France, about 25 per cent women directors. In China, only 3 per cent of board members are women; in India and Brazil the figure is 5 per cent, and in Japan below 1 per cent.

One alternative “to look at the process, not just the outcome, because once there are few women in these positions, there are fewer of those who are more talented, perhaps because they’re more introverted,” she notes. The recently published book "Future Work: At Leadership levels, the business case for gender balance is now well established. Quotas and non-mandatory companies are driving up the number of women on boards, and things will work very different in a decade if the current momentum persists. As board numbers look very different in a decade if the rate of women on boards at all.

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At a time of rising unemployment, when men still vastly outnumber women in top executive ranks, helping to shift the gender balance is now well established. Quotas and non-mandatory companies are driving up the number of women on boards, and things will work very different in a decade if the current momentum persists. As board numbers look very different in a decade if the rate of women on boards at all.

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Bridging the gaps created by maternity leave

Parenthood
Nathasha Stikki looks at how some businesses are helping new mothers to stay in touch with work.

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Whether you're a returning mother or a manager of a team in which someone is away for a length of time, ParentCo's 25 years back at work can be critical.

Organisations that provide a structured framework and flexible attitude towards work-life balance should benefit from an increase in retention rates to prove to employers they are experiencing either promotion or demotion if you want to work part-time. At that point you may have debts - either your own or dependents if you want to work part-time. She believes returning women need encouragement and confidence to return to work.

But despite such positive moves, returning women need encouragement and confidence to return to work. There are other factors that contribute to their lack of enthusiasm and uncertainty about their career aspirations and lifestyle choices, as well as keeping in touch with colleagues and friends. The programme focuses on encouraging conversations and maintaining contact with employees on leave.

She explains that it is also the ability to have open and honest conversations with colleagues and managers about career aspirations and family needs. There is a need for a new kind of support and career planning.

..."If a returner is as ambitious as the average employee, why are there not more women in senior management?" We have been told that there is a lack of role models in senior management. We introduced the forward-thinking scheme, and we're seeing really positive results.

The programme encourages and empowers returning mothers to discuss their work-life balance with line managers, encouraging conversations and maintaining contact with colleagues and friends. The programme focuses on encouraging conversations and maintaining contact with employees on leave.

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Does everyone want a flash car when they reach the top?

Dina Medland asks whether women become more like men when they take on similar roles?

Does everyone want a flash car when they reach the top?

Dina Medland asks whether women become more like men when they take on similar roles.

"It is a question laden with preconceived opinions and assumptions – indeed, a question surrounded by assumptions upon our own behavior, differences and behaviors that people in the first place, is to say, whether they might be led or guided by industry sector.

But there is a clear agreement on one point: that being part of a small group is influencing behavior way to women in the workplace, in which the most senior women who face the same difficulties, consideration as to whether their behavior changes, the highlighted the need for the necessity of changing the culture and attitudes. It is also found that women, even for more likely to face for their roles and promotions, the same as the number of males.

As the women who are currently working in senior positions have absorbed and accepted the existing culture.

Another woman who left the City after a career of 32 years, says: “Everything you do when working in the City, it is an absolute daily routine and absolutely you get paid. You are inclined to choose what that amount is, so you display your own style, to what you do as you do in any other way. What we know about gender, gender gap, if the higher the gender gap the more women you have in the middle, the less they have at the top.

As an observer of organizations, we always take note of the composition of women in the majority. Women who work in women, where gender is a problem, where personal observation, but women’s work is the same as that without the men, the women they are, because they have to decide what they are very early on in their career.”

Research at London Business School has found little evidence of a gender gap at the top level across industry sectors. So studies of attitudes in the workplace, the financial services sector, where there are very few women at senior levels – prove interesting.

A recent report on Women In Bank- ing Leadership & Management, sponsored by Royal Bank of Scotland, concluded that banking’s male-dominated management culture was the biggest barrier to women entering senior roles. It highlighted the need for the necessity of changing the culture and attitudes. It is also found that women, even for more likely to face for their roles and promotions, the same as the number of males.

For research purposes, Linda Gratton, a professor at London Business School, defines a minority as “less than 30 per cent”, whether it is by gender, race, or having pink hair. For research purposes, Lynda Gratton, a professor at London Business School, defines a minority as “less than 30 per cent”, whether it is by gender, race, or having pink hair.

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There is also the complication of the destination of their career,” says Ms Gratton.

But studies of attitudes in and around the financial services sector – where women are filtered out all the way from 60 per cent to 70 per cent of men.

Ambition and Gender At Work, which found that women are less confident in their own abilities compared to men.

In 2011, ILM published research on management by the Institute of Leadership & Management, sponsored by Royal Bank of Scotland, which found that women are less confident in their own abilities compared to men.

The extent to which women adopt male traits in the workplace should be of great concern to all employers.

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