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The Status of Women in the Workplace

Community Research Institute-Johnson Center

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The Status of Women in the Workplace

Research Findings
February 2002

Community Research Institute

www.gvsu.edu/philanthropy/cri



About This Report

Women's Resource Center commissioned this research for the purpose of establishing baseline measures about the status of working women in West Michigan for its Workplace Initiative. The research was conducted by the Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University.

We want to acknowledge our appreciation to the following foundations that made the research and initiative possible. Lead funding came from the **Steelcase Foundation**, **Nokomis Foundation**, and **Grand Rapids Community Foundation**. Additional funding came from **Slemons Foundation** and **Michigan Women's Foundation**.

A special thank you goes to the Workplace Initiative's Advisory Council for providing feedback during the development of the research process. The council will use the findings as a guide for initiative planning.

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About Women's Resource Center

Women's Resource Center's (WRC) mission is to advocate for economic and workplace equality by providing comprehensive employment services and acting as a catalyst for social change.

Since 1973, WRC has been providing women in the community a comprehensive approach to successful employment helping them through various life transitions and assisting them in developing career and life options. WRC helps women at every stage of life achieve their goals and obtain financial independence.

Since 1987, WRC has recognized employers who have made noteworthy contributions to the success of women in their workplace through the annual Employer Recognition Awards. During the 1990's, WRC began working with area employers to recruit and retain women into nontraditional occupations. Most recently, WRC launched the Workplace Initiative, designed to promote the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in the West Michigan workplace.

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Community Research Institute

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The Community Research Institute (CRI) at Grand Valley State University, a partnership between the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, serves the Greater Grand Rapids nonprofit and philanthropic community. CRI's mission is to assist nonprofit organizations with acquisition of information and technical skills that will help to understand the evolving needs of the community, plan programs and solve problems, and measure outcomes.

CRI engages in applied research and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) projects and is a clearinghouse for community data. The CRI web site provides a comprehensive overview of community indicators at www.gvsu.edu/philanthropy/cri.

Questions about **The Status of Women in the Workplace Research Report** may be directed to Cori Scholtens at 336-7211 or scholtco@gvsu.edu.

Status of Women in the Workplace

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Status of Women in the Workplace

Executive Summary

The Community Research Institute, housed at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership at Grand Valley State University, was contracted by the Women's Resource Center (WRC) to establish a baseline understanding of the employment status of women in Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties. This information will be used by the WRC in the implementation of their newly launched Workplace Initiative.

Research Results

A multi-method research effort was designed and implemented. This report describes the results of a mailed survey sent to private, public and nonprofit organizations as well as information gathered from focus groups and trade and professional associations.

Distribution of Women in the Workplace

Women represent more than half (55%) of all full-time positions identified by survey respondents. Minority women hold 7% of these positions. Women hold a larger percent of full-time positions in non-profit organizations (71%) than in public agencies (56%) or private companies (54%).

Women hold 21% of senior level positions (VP and above) in the local private sector; 31% in the public sector, and 45% in the nonprofit sector. Minority women comprise only 2% of all senior level positions. In addition, 50% of management positions across all sectors are held by women; 4% by women of color. Women hold 33% of the top 5 earning positions identified by employers. The larger the organization, the fewer women found in top earner positions. Twenty-eight percent of local employers have no women in their top 5 earning positions.

How Do Women Advance?

Men and women focus group participants identified the same top requirements for advancement into top-level positions: education/credentials, expertise, and experience. They often used the same strategies to advance. However, women felt they had to work harder than their male counterparts to learn the rules and language of a male-dominated work culture and to break into social groups. Both genders identified mentoring, networking, and professional development as key strategies for advancement, but few local employers are offering these resources to their employees. 90% of employers reported having no formal career advancement programs. 27% have some type of informal mentoring and 26% offer some leadership development programs.

Barriers to Advancement

Both men and women acknowledged the sacrifices required of top executives. Men described the culture of executive leadership as accountability to 24-hour, 7 day a week responsibilities with little time for personal life. Executive women confirmed that their work took a toll on family, marriage, friendship, and personal life. Top barriers to

advancement identified by women were a) the attitudes and perceptions of men and the local culture, b) lack of access to the “old boys club”, c) family responsibilities, and d) other women. Men identified a similar list of barriers: a) family issues, b) men and culture’s preconceived attitudes/stereotypes, and c) women as obstacles to themselves and other women. Women of color listed an entirely different group of barriers focused on cultural differences, the lack of generational knowledge, and economic obstacles.

Work/Life Benefits, Programs, and Policies

Local employers offer a range of work/life benefits, policies, and programs to assist employees in balancing work and personal life. Over 75% of all employers offered training and/or professional development opportunities and 401K/retirement plans to their employees. Over half of employers also offered part-time work arrangements, flexible work schedules, maternity leave policies, and leave policies for the care of seriously ill children. On the other hand, three of the top five benefits most utilized by women were offered by only one out of four employers. These included full-time benefits for part-time staff, health benefits for part-time staff, and job sharing.

Distribution of Women across Job Categories & Occupations

Women are most prevalent in office and clerical positions of which they represent 89% of employees. They also comprise close to half of all official/manager and professional positions at 45% and 43% respectively. By contrast, women hold less than 20% of laborer, craft worker, and operative positions. Nationally, nontraditional occupations for women are defined as any job in which women comprise 25% or less of the total employed. Locally, these include dentistry, machinists, architects, industrial, construction, firefighting, electrical, and plumbing, heating and cooling. Manufacturing and truck/bus driver (teamster) occupations are not considered non-traditional for women in West Michigan.

Women on Corporate Boards

Women are more likely to serve on nonprofit boards than on corporate boards. On average, corporate boards had one female director compared to seven on nonprofit boards. Furthermore, women reported not knowing the process for getting onto for-profit boards and men did not know where to look for qualified female candidates.

Solutions

Focus groups gave viable solutions to address the issues. Women want content rich professional development opportunities, avenues for networking, and structured mentoring relationships. Men suggest a list of workplace changes and needed resources such as intentional hiring of women into line positions, more flextime for men and women that is not penalized for use, formal mentoring programs, and a guide that lists local women who are qualified to fill executive and corporate board positions.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The goal of this research study was to gather baseline data on the status of women in the Greater Grand Rapids area workplace. Women and men have identified mentoring, networking, and professional development opportunities as key to workplace advancement. The majority of local employers are not offering these resources. It is recommended that the Women's Resource Center use its resources and platform in the community to educate employers on these keys to workplace success.

Men expressed the struggle private industry employers have identifying women qualified for executive and board positions. Coupled with this is the lack of understanding on the part of women as to how one is recruited onto corporate boards of private companies. It is recommended that the Women's Resource Center consider ways to address these needs. In addition, both men and women are asking for specific workplace related resources to help women advance. It is recommended that the WRC filter these suggested solutions through its mission and the goals of the Workplace Initiative to determine which meet the objectives of the organization.

Finally, it has been requested by several focus groups and is recommended here that the Women's Resource Center help place the status and concerns of women in the workplace onto the public agenda in the local community.

This study provides a glimpse into the climate of the West Michigan workplace for women. It also provides baseline data for future research initiatives. Included in these efforts could be an expanded study of the corporate board, an extended study of minority women in the local workplace, and further study of local work/life issues. These recommendations are a baseline for launching these statistics and insights into action.

Status of Women in the Workplace

Introduction

In 2001, the Women's Resource Center launched a project called the Workplace Initiative with the purpose of improving the workplace climate for women. The intended outcomes are: 1) employer practices that lead to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in the workplace, including women of color and women in nontraditional occupations, and 2) more women in leadership positions in the workplace.

The first phase of the initiative is to gather baseline data on the status of women in the Greater Grand Rapids area workplace. There are various sources of national data about women in the workplace but little local information related to the status of the workplace for women in Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties.

Research Methodology

The Community Research Institute, housed at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership at Grand Valley State University, was contracted to establish a baseline understanding of the employment status of women in Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties. The initial step was to create a foundation of information on the status of women in the workplace from state and national level sources via a literature review. Then, a multi-method research effort was designed and implemented to gather local baseline data as described below.

(1) Identify proportion of women in various management/executive/board positions and employers' workplace practices that attract and retain employees and advance women.

A survey was designed and mailed to human resources directors of approximately 4,750 public, private, and nonprofit organizations located in Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties. These names and addresses were obtained from Seidman Business Services and other databases. Responses were anonymous; their identity was not requested on the survey nor was identifying information coded into the form. A separate return postcard was enclosed so respondents could identify their contact information to receive a free copy of research results and to identify their organization's exemplary programs.

The questionnaire included the following topics:

- Employee Distribution Information; including proportion of women at executive and management levels, as new hires, being promoted, and within specific job categories
- Work/Life Benefits, Programs, & Policies
- Training & Advancement
- Exemplary Programs

After follow-up calls were made to increase the return rate, 294 surveys were returned.

(2) Identify proportion of women in nontraditional occupations

Secondary research was gathered by contacting 49 professional and trade associations, Chambers of Commerce, and non-trade specific agencies in Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties to assess the level of female participation in non-traditional occupations. A short questionnaire was designed and implemented via telephone and/or email. Questions were asked regarding the proportion of women in those occupations and efforts they made to recruit and retain women in the profession.

Most associations and unions reported regional rather than county numbers. All information reported includes at least one of the counties being studied: Kent, Ottawa, or Muskegon. In addition, the percentages given reflect those women that are members of the associations or groups and do not represent every person employed in that industry.

(3) Identify women's and men's perceptions regarding the development and advancement of women in the workplace, including opportunities and barriers to recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in the workplace.

In total, eight focus groups were conducted to solicit participants' perceptions regarding the development and advancement of women in the workplace. Six focus groups were conducted with a total of 51 women executives, managers, and board members from a variety of industries, sectors, experiences, and racial backgrounds. Two groups of women executives, two groups of managerial women, one group of women board members, and one group of women of color were conducted. Two additional focus groups were conducted with a total of 17 male executives. Potential participants were identified by the advisory board for the Women's Resource Center's Workplace Initiative and other sources. Each focus group lasted 90 minutes. Participants' names and organizations are not reported in this study. Participants were offered a free copy of research results.

Table 1: Demographics of Focus Group Participants

	Number of Participants	Percent Non-minority	Percent Minority	Percent from Private Sector	Percent from Public/ Nonprofit Sector
Women	51	76%	24%	51%	49%
Men	17	65%	35%	59%	41%

The discussion of each focus group was centered on four topics: Requirements for Advancement, Current Opportunities to Advancement, Barriers to Advancement, and Solutions: What Is Needed in West Michigan.

Literature Review

National Distribution of Women in the Workplace

According to the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, there were 62 million workingwomen in the United States in 1999, 75% of which worked full-time, 25% part-time. Women comprised 46% of the total labor force, a level that has remained constant since 1994.¹

The majority of the 62 million women were Caucasian (82.3%), 12.9% were African American, 9.1% were Hispanic, and 4.5% were Asian/other.² Even though the majority of the women's labor force was white, African American women had a higher participation rate than other groups. In 1999, the African American participation rate was 63.5% compared with 59.6% of Caucasian women and 55.9% of Hispanic women.³

The greatest proportions of women are employed in technical, sales, and administrative support occupations. Nearly one out of every five employed women worked as teachers, secretaries, managers, administrators, or cashiers.

In 1999, 53.5% of all professionals were women. 39% of all women professionals worked as teachers, the largest occupational group of women professionals. One of the most significant changes for women over the 20th century was the dramatic increase of women managers. In 1900, only 4.4% of managers were women. By 1999, there was a ten-fold increase with 45.1% of all managers in America being women. Women managers most often worked in medicine and health care, human resources, education, and management-related occupations. 60% of women of color managers worked in the three lowest-paying industries: retail trade, professional related services, and finance/ insurance/ real estate. In 1999, 32.3% of all employed women were managers or professionals compared to 28.6% of all men.⁴

By 2008, the U.S. Department of Labor expects women to comprise 48% of the total labor force in the United States, up from 46% in 1999. The largest increase in participation rates is expected amongst Hispanic and Asian women, 48.8% and 45.7% respectively. African American women will increase by 21.1% and Caucasian women by 12.6%.⁵

¹ U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau. (March, 2000). 20 Facts on Women Workers. [Facts on Working Women](http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/Facts_on_Working_Women). <http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/>

² Sourced by Catalyst in [Cracking the Glass Ceiling](#) as: Unpublished Table, Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2000.

³ U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau. (March, 2000). 20 Facts on Women Workers. [Facts on Working Women](http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/Facts_on_Working_Women). <http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/>

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau. (March 2000). Women at the Millennium: Accomplishments and challenges ahead. [Facts on Working Women](http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/Facts_on_Working_Women). <http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/>

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau. (April 2000). Hot Jobs for the 21st Century. [Facts on Working Women](http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/Facts_on_Working_Women). <http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/>

State Distribution of Women in the Workplace

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Michigan's civilian labor force was made up of 5,136,000 people in 1999.⁶ Women comprised 45.6% of the labor force. 83.4% of the women in the labor force were Caucasian. African American women had a participation rate of 54.6% compared with the 44.6% participation rate of Caucasian women.

Of the 2,252,000 employed women in Michigan in 1999, the greatest percentages worked in technical, sales, and administrative support (39%), managerial and professional specialties (29.4%), and service occupations (19%). By industry, 31.7% of workingwomen were in the service sector, 22.3% in the trade industry, and 14.9% in government. 70% of the employed women in Michigan were full-time workers compared to 30% part-time.

Women as Corporate Officers

In 1999, Catalyst, an advocacy organization for women in the workplace since 1962, found that 79% of Fortune 500 companies nationwide had at least one woman corporate officer.⁷ Of all Fortune 500 corporate officers, 11.9% were women; 1.3% were women of color. (A corporate officer is defined by Catalyst as the most visible senior executives that have "policy-making responsibility for the operations of their corporations and the legal power to bind their corporations... ipso facto 'insiders' for certain financial and SEC purposes." [p.20])

In these same Fortune 500 companies, women held 3.3% of the top-earner positions and 5.1% of the most powerful and prestigious titles which Catalyst categorized as chairman, CEO, vice chairman, president, COO, SEVP, and EVP. Of the corporate officers in 1999 who had responsibility for profit-and-loss or direct clients, 6.8% were women compared to 93.2% men.

Work-Life Balance

The Families and Work Institute's 1998 Business Work-Life Study (BWLS) discovered a strong correlation between the proportion of top executive positions held by women and the provision of work-life assistance by a company.⁸ It was found that companies with a larger proportion of top executive positions filled by women offered greater work-life assistance.

The other two characteristics that had the greatest impact on the provision of work-life programs, policies, and supportive work environments were industry type and company size. The Family and Work Institute discovered that industry was the most frequent predictor of work-life support. The finance/insurance/real estate industry emerged as the most generous industry while wholesale and retail trade was the least generous.

⁶ U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Geographic Profile, Estimates for States." <http://www.bls.gov/opub/gp/gpsec2.htm>

⁷ Catalyst. (2000). Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Catalyst's research on women in corporate managements 1995-2000. New York: Catalyst.

⁸ The Families and Work Institute. "The 1998 Business Work-Life Study." <https://swww.igc.apc.org/fwi/pubs/worklife.pdf>

They also found that larger companies were more apt than their smaller counterparts to provide varying work-life assistance such as flexible work options, longer maternity leaves, paternity leaves, leaves for adoptive parents, wage replacement during maternity leave, elder care programs, and employee assistance programs.

Barriers to Advancement

In a survey sent to women executives and male CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies followed-up by in-depth interviews, Catalyst was able to determine the top barriers to the advancement of women by both groups of respondents.⁹ The results showed a great disconnect in perspectives. Women in corporate leadership identified the following to be the top three barriers to professional advancement:

- Stereotyping and preconceptions about women's ability and suitability for business careers.
- Exclusion from informal networks and channels of communication
- Inhospitable corporate culture

Male executives identified the top barriers for women's advancement in the workplace to be women's lack of significant general management and line experience and not enough time in the pipeline. While almost three-fourths of men believed that opportunities for women had improved greatly or somewhat improved over the five years prior to the survey, less than one fourth of women executives believed that opportunities for women to advance into senior leadership in their companies had greatly increased over the same time period.

Women on Corporate Boards

Catalyst also found that in 1999, women held 11.2% of board seats in Fortune 500 companies and 8.5% of board seats in Fortune 501-1000 companies.¹⁰ 84% of Fortune 500 companies had at least one woman director while 9% had multiple women on their boards. 16% of Fortune 500 companies and 38% of Fortune 501-1000 companies had no women board directors.

89% of Fortune 500 CEO's said that the most desirable qualification for a board director was top-level corporate experience. Other top qualifications included international business experience and prior corporate board experience. While 72% reported that recruiting of female directors was a "top priority" or a "priority," the number one reason they gave for women not being on more corporate boards was their lack of top-level corporate experience. Many believed that the availability of qualified female candidates was extremely limited. Other barriers that hampered the recruitment of women onto

⁹ Catalyst. (2000). Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Catalyst's research on women in corporate managements 1995-2000. New York: Catalyst.

¹⁰ Catalyst. (2000). Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Catalyst's research on women in corporate managements 1995-2000. New York: Catalyst.

corporate boards included the difficulty in identifying qualified women and the lack of sponsors for women on corporate boards.

A 1993 Catalyst survey of women board directors showed that females believe the recruitment of women onto corporate boards is hampered by: 1) the board's fear of including women who do not have experience as current board members, 2) companies' lack of knowledge about where to find qualified female candidates, 3) boards' concern that female candidates will have a "women's issues" agenda when they come to the table, and 4) women not being qualified to participate as board members.

Research Results

294 local employers returned the "Status of Women in the Workplace" survey. They represented a wide range of industries:

Top 5 Industries Mentioned

1. Health Care/Pharmaceutical	12.9%
2. Financial Services/Insurance	11.6%
3. Service Industry	10.2%
4. Retail/Wholesale	8.5%
5. Manufacturing	8.2%

The next six mentioned included: Residential/Commercial Construction & Home Improvement, Government, Advertising/Marketing/Sales, Manufacturing, Architectural/Design/Engineering, Arts/Culture, and Legal Services.

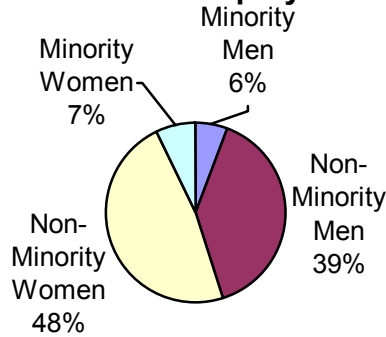
60% of the responding employers identified themselves as private, 16% as non-profit, and 23% as public. Five organizations did not provide sector information.

Almost 76% of responding employers indicated having less than 50 employees. According to MarketPlace Analysis provided by the Seidman School of Business, the distribution of survey respondents was relatively representative of the local business community. Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties have 40,630 private businesses. 78% of those companies have 10 or fewer employees. 91% have 25 or fewer employees. Comparatively, 59% of the private company survey respondents had 25 or fewer employees.

Distribution of Women in the Workplace

The survey respondents represented 56,858 employees; women comprised 55% of all employees and minorities comprised 13%. 55% of the minority employees were female, representing 7% of total employees.

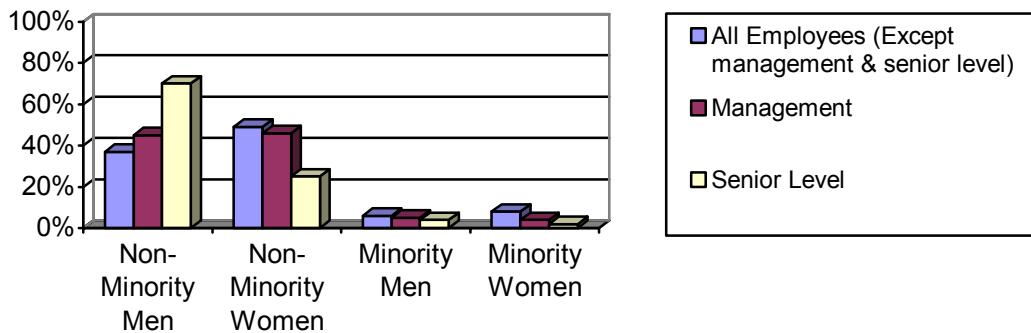
Figure 1: Distribution of All Full-Time Employees



Survey respondents reported a total of 1,054 employees at senior level positions (vice president or higher). 27% of those executives were women, 5% were minorities, and 2% were minority women.

Organizations reported 9,552 management positions. Women held 50% of those positions, 10% were minorities, and 4% were minority women.

Figure 2: Distribution of Employees by Position



The largest percentage of women employees, managers, and executives were found in the healthcare/pharmaceutical industry. 79% of all healthcare respondents were private organizations.

The distribution of women in full-time positions, senior level positions, and management positions fluctuated depending on the size of the organization. Trends from this data indicated that employers with 25-49 employees were least likely to have women in executive positions while employers with 50-249 employees had the lowest percent of women in full-time and management positions.

Private, Nonprofit, & Public Sector Demographics

Comparing the number of women employees across public, private, and nonprofit organizations indicates that women hold a larger percentage of full-time, senior level, and management positions in non-profit organizations than in public agencies or private companies. (See Figures 3, 4, and 5.)

Full-time Employees

Women comprise 54% of full-time employees in the private sector. This compares with 71% of full-time employees in the nonprofit sector and 56% in the public sector. Minority women hold 7% of private, 12% of nonprofit, and 5% of public sector positions.

Senior Level Positions

Women hold 21% of senior level positions (V.P. and above) in private companies, 45% in nonprofits, and 31% in the public sector. Minority women comprise 2% of these positions across sectors.

Management Positions

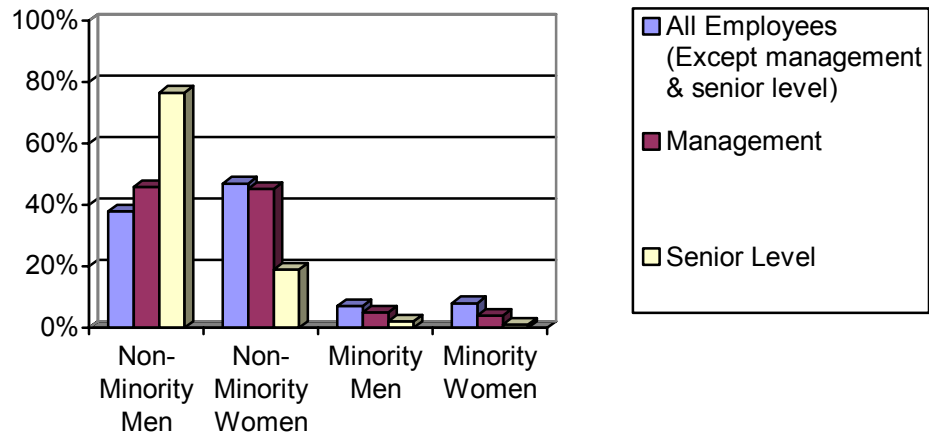
Women hold 49% of all management positions in private companies, 62% in nonprofits, and 55% in public agencies. Minority women comprise 4% of management positions.

Women in Top Salary Positions

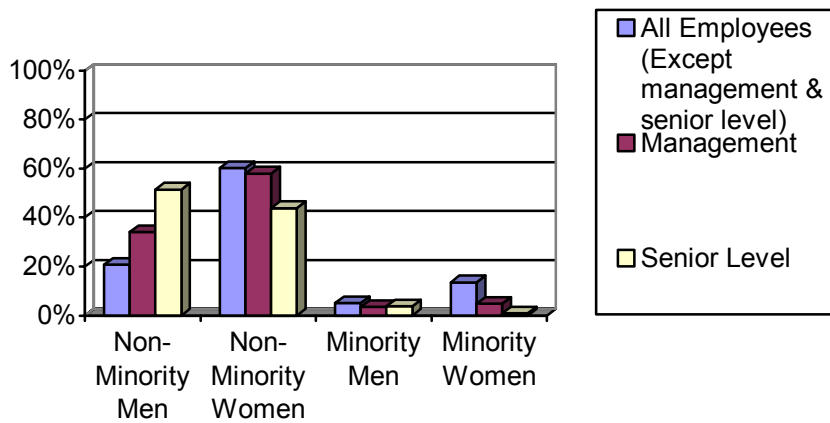
Respondents were asked, “*Of the top five salary earners in your organization, how many are women?*”

- Women held 482 (33%) of the 1,450 top earning positions across the three sectors.
- The larger the organization, the less likely to have women in top earning positions.
- In the nonprofit sector, women held 54% of the top earner positions compared with 28% in the private sector and 32% in the public sector.
- 28% of all employers indicated no women held top earning positions. This percentage was greatest among private sector companies (35%) compared with 27% in the public sector and 4% in the nonprofit sector.
- Healthcare/pharmaceutical and service employers had the greatest percentage of women in top-earning positions. Women held 58% of top earner positions in the healthcare/pharmaceutical sector and 43% in the service sector. (The service sector respondents were 63% nonprofit while healthcare were 79% private.)

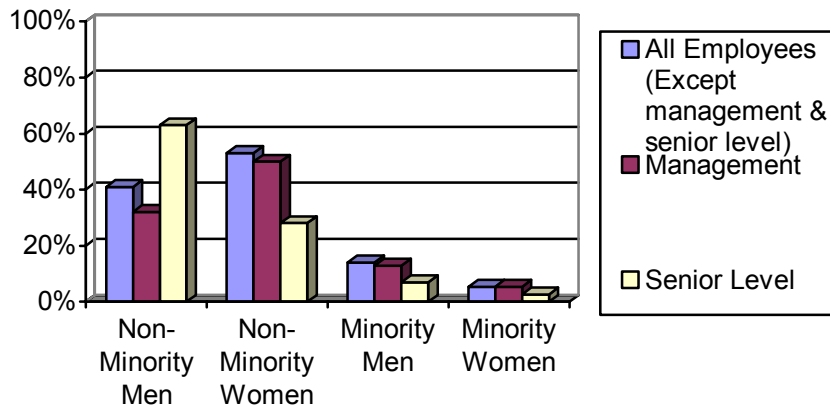
**Figure 3: Private Sector-
Distribution of Employees by Position**



**Figure 4: Nonprofit Sector-
Distribution of Employees by Position**



**Figure 5: Public Sector-
Distribution of Employees by Position**



Workplace Advancement

“How would you define your organization’s requirements for advancement into top-level positions? What does it take to advance into those top leadership positions in your organization?”

Requirements for advancement expressed by women focus group participants fell into two categories, “specified” and “tacit.”

“Specified” Requirements

The first two requirements mentioned in almost every group were: educational requirements/credentials and expertise in the job area.

After these, almost every group mentioned the following required expertise:

- Communication, leadership, and people skills
- Proven track record, experience both within the company and in the broader field
- Problem solving skills
- Being a team player
- Broad knowledge base, being able to converse on all subjects
- Technology and financial knowledge

In addition, other specified requirements mentioned by one or two of the groups included: aptitude/ability to learn, ability to multi-task, discipline, initiative, strategic thinking, negotiation skills, ability to develop business and bring in new clients. Women of color agreed as a group that they must have all of the specified requirements and beyond to be advanced.

“Tacit” Requirements

Other factors in advancement emerged, those that were “assumed” or “unspoken.”

Women in almost every group perceived these requirements to be:

- Assertiveness/initiative/desire: ability to ask for opportunities
- Having the right “fit.” “Think like a man.” “Know the right rules.” “Speak the language.” Ability to get along with men: “schmoozing.”
- Networking/Connections/Relationships “with the right people”
 - Having access to the “Old Boys’ Club.”
 - “You have to be chosen.”
- Global understanding: knowledge of the entire organization and the field beyond your job silo
- Hard work/dedication/commitment to the job and organization. “Willingness to invest time.”
- Image: high degree of professionalism

Women of color mentioned two requirements not mentioned in other groups. The first was the ability to be “bi- or tri-cultural” meaning that you need to be able to relate to the dominant culture by understanding the differences between your own culture and the one

you are moving into. This includes speaking the language of and behaving like the dominant culture while at work. (Tri-culture: one's culture, culture of women, and dominant white culture.)

Other "tacit" requirements mentioned in various groups were a sense of humor, ability to deal with conflict ("don't take it personally"), persuasiveness, visibility in your organization, reputation in the community, ability to "make your boss look good", accepting a broad definition of your position/flexibility, and experience outside of Grand Rapids. "Employers are looking for those with a better understanding of what works in other parts of the country."

Male executive focus groups were asked to respond to the same question regarding requirements for advancement. Their answers were similar to the female participants. They identified education, knowledge, and experience as high qualifiers. In addition to the responses already mentioned by the women, men also indicated innovative thinking, ability to produce revenue, and a person's profile within and outside the organization as requirements.

One male group expanded the concept of having the right executive appearance and presence as understanding that the leadership world is unique; the "game has to be played." There are various levels within an organization, each with specific requirements for performance, behavior, and conduct. Advancing to top leadership positions requires understanding the unwritten rules and behaving accordingly.

Opportunities for Advancement

Women participants in the focus groups listed *mentoring*, *networking*, and *professional development* through continuous learning as the top three resources that had helped them develop the skills and provided the opportunities necessary to advance in their own careers, in addition to "being in the right place at the right time."

In addition, the women of color focus group expressed factors that had helped them advance over the years. Affirmative Action was mentioned as important in helping people of color get out of "pegged positions" for black individuals. One woman candidly explained that her "light skin" allowed her to be counted as a minority on company census statistics but also gave her "the look" employers were seeking. Finally, through the Civil Rights Movement, institutes of higher education provided aid to students of color so they could attend college, a definite resource to advancement.

Male executive focus groups were asked about strategies their organizations use to help women develop the requirements or gain the opportunities necessary to advance into top-level corporate positions. Both the male groups identified the following strategies. Their organizations have:

- Championed and empowered women to become female role models.
- Deliberately hired more women and gave them projects with responsibility.

“I’m a pathfinder. Wherever you see me, you’ll see women and minorities. I don’t set quotas, I don’t set goals, I just recognize that skill comes in all sizes, colors, and genders. That’s the sign of a mature organization.”

- Provided constant training (i.e., helped them learn “the white male dominated business world.”)

Other strategies men expressed provided equality in the workforce by accommodating for the special needs of women such as providing childcare. They also expressed the importance of being sensitive to the needs of their clients when it applies to with which gender they prefer to work.

Training & Advancement

Seventy nine percent of employers offered some type of training or professional development to all or some of their employees. Few organizations (10%) reported having formal career advancement programs within their company. On average, those employers indicated that 57% of career advancement program participants were female.

When asked about specific training and advancement programs, less than a third of companies offered them. Those most often offered included:

- Sexual harassment training (28%)
- Informal mentoring programs (27%)
- Leadership development programs (26%)
- Diversity training (24%)

Smaller organizations offered fewer training and professional development programs.

Strategies Used to Advance

When women were asked what strategies they used to progress in their companies, these five rose to the top:

- Willingness to take risk.
- Assertiveness/being proactive: Ask for advancement, self-promotion.
- Hard work: “Work harder, smarter, and longer” than your male counterparts.
- Develop sports knowledge: learn to play golf, catch the weekend sport scores.
- Networking: develop connections with the right people in your industry

Males most often mentioned *initiative*, the *gaining of knowledge, skills, and experience*, and *relationship building* as the top strategies used to progress in their companies.

Initiative

Men indicated the need to be aggressive, a decision maker, and an initiator as strategies for advancement. Initiative was doing what others did not want to do, being aware of where the opportunities were for advancement and moving there, identifying problems

and fixing them, resolving issues beyond their discipline, and making progress and improvement noticeable by those in leadership.

Gaining Knowledge, Skills, and Experience

Men discussed the importance of continuing to gain knowledge through formal education and technical training. Also important is knowing the areas where improvement are needed and working on them to produce personal growth. Gaining knowledge included finding ways to learn the “territory, game, or culture” of the field and of leadership and acting appropriately.

Build Relationships

Finally, men indicated the importance of building the “right” relationships both inside the organization and within the community. Relationship building included creating a network of people for mentoring in order to learn the “unwritten rules.” Relationship building also included developing effective listening skills and sincerely caring for clients.

Work/Life Balance

Working professionals have used various strategies to balance their careers and personal lives. References to the “Superwoman Syndrome” permeated almost every female focus group during our discussion of work/life balance. Women expressed their internal and external expectations to be able to do it all and have it all, including having a professional life, being the primary caretaker of the home and family, being involved in the community, and having a personal life.

Women expressed great difficulty in balancing work and family responsibilities, which included many sacrifices: friendships, marriage (getting a divorce or never getting married), a clean house, traditional roles in the home, and family time with the kids.

Women had developed many coping mechanisms for the “Superwoman Syndrome.” These top strategies emerged:

- Prioritizing what’s most important and sticking to those things
- Outsourcing: nanny, maid, relatives, on-line shopping
- Creating time in the daily schedule for friends, exercise, walking the dogs, massages, manicure, etc.
- Family support: switching roles so the husband stays home with the kids, relatives help with child care, kids get more involved in home care
- Technology: provided a way to work from home while being with the kids or late at night/early in the morning work sessions to stay ahead of the game.

Another strategy suggested in several groups was the use of family-friendly policies at the workplace. It was indicated that even though companies had the policies available for staff, it was often against company culture to use the policies without criticism.

Work/Life Benefits, Programs, & Policies

Over half of all survey respondents offered the following work/life benefits to all or some of their employees:

- Training & Professional Development Opportunities (79%)
- 401K/Retirement Plan (78%)
- Part-time Work Arrangements (70%)
- Maternity Leave Policies (66%)
- Flexible Work Schedules (65%)
- Leave Policies for the Care of Seriously Ill Children (51%)

Less than 10% of employers offered fitness programs or assistance/referrals/services for childcare, dependent care, or elder care. Trends in the data showed that the larger the organization, the more likely they were to offer a wide variety of work/life benefits, programs, and policies.

Table 2: Work/Life Benefits, Programs, & Policies

Benefits/Programs/Policies	Employers that offer this policy to <i>some</i> or <i>all</i> of their employees	Employees that use the policy	Total users that are women
Training and Professional Development Opportunities	79%	57%	53%
401K/Retirement Plan	78	70	54
Part-time Work Arrangements	70	32	65
Maternity Leave Policies	66	15	54
Flexible Work Schedules	65	58	68
Leave Policies for the Care of Seriously Ill Children	51	12	26
Tuition Reimbursement	44	21	37
Flexible Spending Plans	43	51	49
Paternity Leave Policies	37	5	
Adoption Leave Policies	36	4	17
Job Sharing	25	33	62
Health Benefits for Part-time Staff	24	27	63
Foster Care Leave Policies	23	6	15
Full-time Benefits for Part-time Staff	19	42	67
Telecommuting Options	18	24	47
Fitness Programs	8	29	57
Child Care Referrals, Assistance, or Services	8	10	48
Dependent-care Referrals, Assistance, or Services	7	10	30
Elder Care Referrals, Assistance, or Services	5	5	19

Even though job sharing, health benefits for part-time staff, and full-time benefits for part-time staff were only offered by a quarter or less of the employers, the female employees comprised the majority of users. Women comprised more than 60% of the users for the following benefits:

- Flexible Work Schedules (68%)
- Full-time Benefits for Part-time Staff (67%)
- Part-time Work Arrangements (65%): Offered by 70% of employers but only used by 32% of all employees (65% were women)
- Health Benefits for Part-time Staff (63%)
- Job Sharing (62%)

Barriers to Advancement

Top barriers to advancement identified by women focus group participants were a) the attitudes and perceptions of men and the local culture, b) lack of access to the “old boys club,” c) family responsibilities, and d) other women.

The context of the conversation in the female focus groups centered on their perceptions of what stereotypes men had about them and the ramifications of a male-dominated, conservative, and very traditional West Michigan culture.

Women also expressed their lack of access to the “good old boys’ network.” They said that it is within these relationships that networking and mentorship occur, necessities for advancement. The male/female relations at work were also expressed as a barrier for mentoring relationships. It was shared that these relationships often cause suspicion and unease when others wonder if “something else” was going on. (Also identified by men.)

Other barriers to advancement were those imposed by family and those that women imposed on each other or on themselves, including:

- The “Cinderella Syndrome”: women are less skilled at self-promotion. Women often put their head down, work hard, and hope someone will notice.
- Other women: “Knocking each other down and standing in each other’s way” sometimes due to resentment and competition.
- Self-imposed fear of risk, failure, and conflict; guilt if not able to be the “Superwoman.”
- Struggle with professional image for women: no formal rules on dress or behavior; how to mix femininity with professionalism and assertiveness.

Men’s list of barriers to the advancement of women was very similar to that of their female counterparts. The barriers expressed by men fell into three categories: a) family issues, b) culture and men’s preconceived attitudes/stereotypes regarding women, and c) women as barriers to themselves and other women.

Family

Men perceived family to be a barrier as women try to balance the responsibility of home and children with their professional careers. Included were interruptions in career due to

family responsibilities and a spouse's geographic career move. One group identified that the male society does not place as much value on the role of nurturing and caring for a family as they do on professional careers outside the home, which creates a barrier of its own.

Attitudes/Stereotypes

Preconceived attitudes of men and society create barriers for the advancement of women when expectations of what positions women should be in or what a leader should look like prevent progress. Men said there is a fear that women in leadership positions will break up the "men's club." Men also indicated that women have a different communication style that creates barriers. In addition, the culture of senior leadership in many organizations means no life, no time of their own, and availability 24/7. Women often have various outside responsibilities that do not allow them the capability to be accountable to such rigorous requirements.

Finally, men identified women as barriers to themselves. Women often do not take leadership or authority well from other women. Men expressed the reality of "friction" between female executives.

Women of color listed a completely different group of barriers than women or men in the other seven focus groups. The barriers of this group focused on three areas: cultural differences, lack of generational knowledge, and economic barriers.

Cultural Differences

- Stress caused by a "dual-personality". "At work I have to talk all proper" and at home "people think you're 'too good' or 'so white.'"
- Institutionalized Racism: Lack of accommodation and tolerance for cultural and language differences. Lack of cultural education and awareness in dominant culture.

Lack of Generational Knowledge

- Nobody at home went to college, so "they were supportive of college, but they didn't have a clue" about the application process, financial aid resources, college survival techniques, or even what the college culture was like to offer support.
- Lack of knowledge being passed down regarding trust funds, mutual funds, savings accounts, "proper" etiquette and speech in a professional, white-dominated work environment.

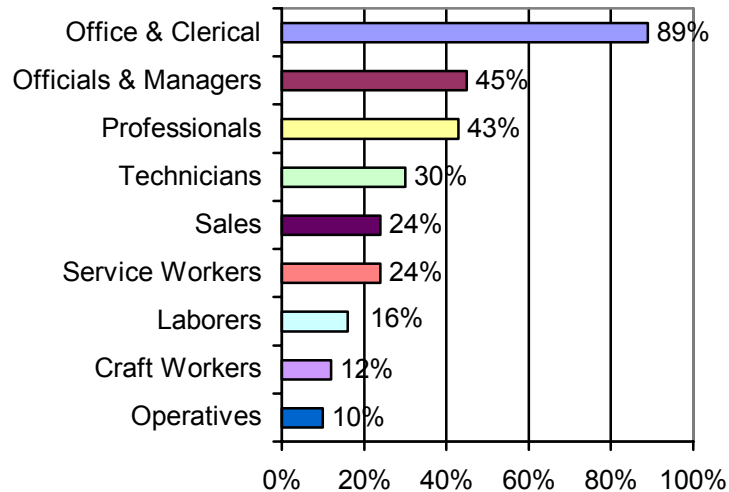
Economic & Other Barriers

- Lack of ability to afford college or pass down financial assets to next generation.
- Lack of knowledge regarding available resources. "Getting the resources to the people and the people to the resources"
- The value of women of color is not "automatically accepted." "Women of color always feel that they have to prove themselves, run faster and jump higher."

Distribution of Women across Job Categories

From the list of EEO job categories given to employers, women were most prevalent in office and clerical positions, of which they represented 89% of employees. Women comprised close to half of official/manager and professional positions at 45% and 43% respectively. Women held less than 20% of laborer, craft worker, and operative positions.

**Figure 6: Percent Women
Per Job Category**



Women in Non-Traditional Occupations

Nontraditional occupations for women are defined by the U.S. Department of Labor as any job in which women comprise 25% or less of the total employed.¹¹ Locally, dentistry, machinists, architects, industrial work, construction, utilities, firefighting, electrical, and plumbing, heating, and cooling can all be considered non-traditional occupations or industries for women.

In addition, it was found that on average manufacturing and bus/truck driver (teamsters) occupations are not considered non-traditional for women in West Michigan because more than 25% of the labor force is female.

Survey data confirmed that manufacturing is not a non-traditional industry for women in West Michigan. Women comprised 29% of all full-time employee positions.

Five of the 17 responding unions or associations are taking direct measures to increase the representation of women in their field. Strategies included having a women's committee and a working women seminar, working with the Women's Resource Center and holding career fairs that target women, having a part-time staff who is responsible for

¹¹ The U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau Website. <http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/welcome.html>

recruiting women through job fair presentations targeting women, placing job postings at women’s organizations, and working with the schools and an apprenticeship program to recruit women. None of the organizations reported any specific efforts for retaining women within their field.

Table 3: Non-Traditional Occupations*

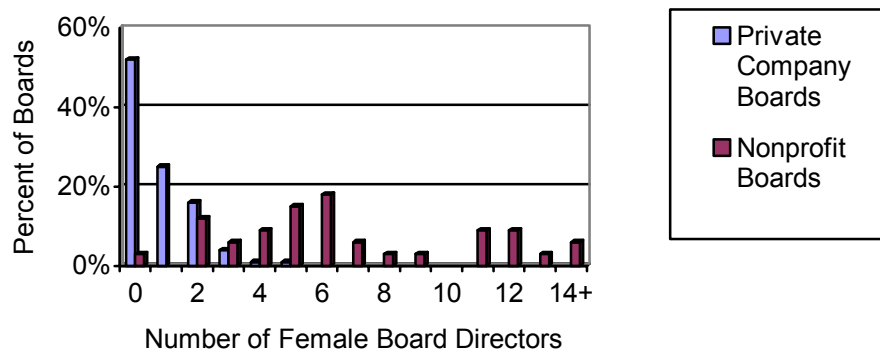
Occupation	% Female	Geographic Reporting Region
Architects ⁱ	7.4%	10 counties including Muskegon, Kent, & Ottawa
Construction	15% ⁱⁱ	5 counties including Muskegon, Kent, & Ottawa
	2% ⁱⁱⁱ	12 counties including Muskegon, Kent & Ottawa
	2% ^{iv}	Lower west side of Michigan, 21 counties
	1-3% ^v	West Michigan (data reported as “local”)
Dentists ^{vi}	22%	Muskegon County
	16%	Kent County
	13%	Ottawa County
Electrical	2% ^{vii}	14 counties including Muskegon, Kent, & Ottawa
	2% ^{viii}	14 counties including Muskegon, Kent, & Ottawa
Fire Fighting ^{ix}	2%	5 counties including Muskegon, Kent & Ottawa
Industrial ^x	0.4%	10 counties including Muskegon, Kent, & Ottawa
Machinists ^{xi}	10-15%	5 counties including Muskegon, Kent, & Ottawa
Plumbing, Heating, & Cooling ^{xii}	0.2%	13 counties including Muskegon, Kent, & Ottawa

*Sources (i, ii, iii, etc.) are located at the end of the report.

Women as Board Directors

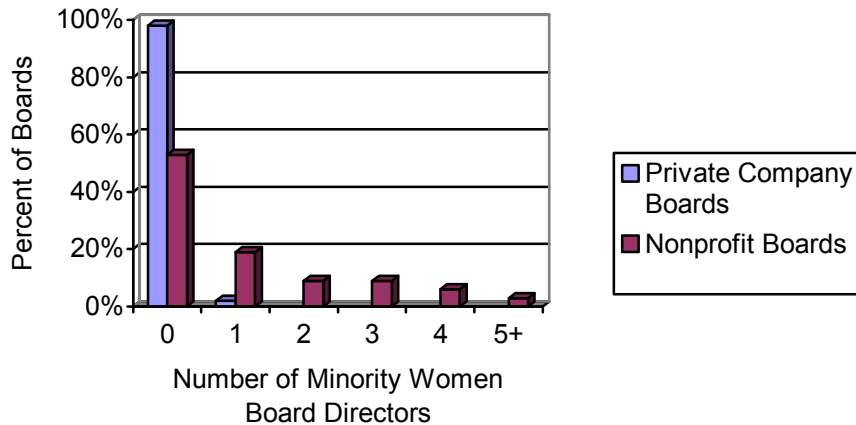
Nonprofit boards had more representation of women as directors than private company boards. The average number of women on a private corporate board was 1, compared to 7 on nonprofit boards. 52% of private company boards had no women directors compared to 3% of nonprofit boards.

Figure 7: Frequency of Women Board Directors



Minority women also had more representation on nonprofit boards than private company boards. Of all the private companies, one indicated having a minority woman board member. 47% of nonprofit boards had at least one minority woman board member.

Figure 8: Frequency of Minority Women Board Directors



Women board members identified four main qualifications that are most desirable for a board director. These included: a) title or position, identified as senior vice president or above, b) connections with those already on a board and/or in various industries, c) skills and experience such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, and financial knowledge, and d) professional accomplishments.

Men agreed and identified a) having a powerful profile filled with a variety of experiences and credentials, b) being in a position of clout, c) knowing the right people, and d) being wealthy as the most desirable qualifications for a board director.

Local women feel “women *are* the nonprofit boards,” but the following things hamper women from being recruited onto corporate boards of private companies. These included:

- Women do not know the process of being recruited onto corporate boards.
- There are few qualified women to sit on corporate boards.
- Men are unaware of or cannot find those that are qualified.

Women also indicated that tokenism, the attitude that “one is enough: one woman, one black person, etc.,” sexism, and racism also prevent women from being recruited onto corporate boards.

Men identified that women’s recruitment onto boards is hampered by their lack of meeting the above stated requirements. “Males are usually the ones with more experience, have the most extensive vitas, and know the right people. They come out on top.” On the other hand, men indicated that women who do meet the requirements are not readily visible; they are not in the appropriate circles to gain due acknowledgment. Both male and female groups said that the same women are always asked to be on corporate boards because others are not on the radar screen of board recruiters.

Solutions

Focus group participants, professional men and women in the community, provided viable solutions and suggestions to address the climate of the West Michigan workplace for women.

Female participants were asked, “*What are the solutions? What kinds of things do women need that would help them advance into top leadership positions?*” They were asked to speak directly to the needs of women in West Michigan.

Suggestions were plentiful across the groups. A strong correlation is evident between what women expressed as being opportunities or strategies they had taken advantage of and what is needed to help women advance. Women participants in the focus groups listed mentoring, networking, and professional development as the top three resources that had helped them advance in their own careers. The same three resources were provided as the top solutions. Women asked for more opportunities for content rich professional development opportunities, formal and informal avenues for networking, and assistance in creating mentoring relationships.

Content Rich Professional Development Opportunities

Women are asking for content rich professional development opportunities that provide a place for networking as a secondary benefit. One example given was a “*Women’s Leadership Grand Rapids*.” Content suggestions included multicultural issues, skill/self-assessment building, mentor-related training, self-marketing, characteristics of new audiences/demographics of new workers/consumers, business “skill sets”, planning tools for an executive career, options for employee programs, issues that increase the value of the company, corporate finance management, emerging trends within the industry, and structured opportunities for executive women to meet potential clients.

Avenues for Networking

Workingwomen are asking for formal and informal avenues for female networking to occur with both females and males. Some suggested keeping it specific to their field or profession while others desired community-wide exposure. Suggested platforms in which this networking could occur included business luncheons, social groups, and content rich professional development seminars. Included in the desire was a “good old girls’ club” of their own.

Mentoring Relationships

Women also are asking for a structured way to establish mentoring relationships. These women not only wanted a male or female mentor for themselves, they were also very interested in providing their expertise and experience to other women, college aged students, and young girls. They expressed a desire to provide female support networks rich in resources for up-and-coming college aged women as they begin their professional careers. These women also desired the opportunity to act as role models for young girls, including minority girls. The role modeling experience would not only provide girls with

examples of women that had succeeded in the workplace but also women that were succeeding in non-traditional positions and industries.

Women provided other suggestions. They asked for the “status of women in the workplace” to be acknowledged as an issue of concern by the larger community and employer groups. One way they suggested this be done was through further education of employers, the dominant culture, and minorities. They asked for employers to receive additional education regarding stereotypes of women, work/life policies, diversity issues, and women as consumers. Women of color asked for the dominant culture to be educated regarding the economic gap and needs of varying cultures through resources such as *Institutes for Healing Racism*. Women of color also asked that education be made available to help minorities gain strategies needed for “success” in the dominant culture, including financial management strategies.

Another suggested way to make the “status of women in the workplace” an issue of concern in the eyes of the public was by showcasing women to the larger community through big events or regular columns in the newspaper or on television that highlight women’s efforts and successes. This would also provide an avenue for role modeling to other women.

In addition, women are asking for policy changes in the workplace that provide work/life benefits as well as promote organizational support for use of the policies. Suggested policy implementation includes ways for professionals to provide employees with more flexibility and additional support of home technology by businesses.

Finally, women are asking for a few things of their own including a Women’s Professional Journal or Website that would become a clearinghouse for opportunities, programs, workshops, and resources specifically geared to women’s needs and issues. They are asking for a networking tool such as a “Who’s Who in West Michigan Women” and an association for workingwomen at all levels of their career.

The solutions provided by men when asked, “*In your opinion what are some of the viable solutions that could assist other companies as they work to recruit, retain, and advance women in their organization?*” can be categorized into two main concepts: workplace changes and needed resources.

Men expressed the need for the following workplace provisions:

- Be intentional when hiring. Hire more women in line positions rather than clerical and staff roles and give them opportunities for advancement.
- Provide more flextime for women without penalties for missed time as long as they are still accountable for the work needing completion. Provide more flextime for men to take over some of the home responsibilities that are automatically given to women.
- Provide formal mentoring programs, childcare, sexual harassment policies, and training (cross-training) opportunities.

- Be aware of gender diversity issues and make them a priority. Know the value that gender diversity brings and the great resource women can be to an organization.
- Create an environment where workingwomen are nurtured and encouraged to grow.

Male focus groups also listed needed resources in the community such as a guide that lists local women who are qualified to fill executive and corporate board positions, a consortium of women organizations that brings ideas and resources together to develop promotion strategies for female executives, and a network for professional business women.

One of the groups ended their conversation discussing the realities of the executive circle culture. Those realities included a 24-hour a day, 7 day a week work life with very little personal time. Two opposing solutions were given. The first said that if more women are going to make it into top executive positions, they must change their lifestyle to conform to the male dominated business world by making work the first priority in their lives, while sacrificing personal time to be increasingly accountable as they get “closer to the board room door.” The other solution required the executive culture to change or at least adapt to allow women’s home and family responsibilities to be accepted and not penalized by the dominant culture of leadership.

In addition to the solutions listed above, women of color provided another group of solutions specific to their articulated barriers.

- “A vehicle to identify sisters in need.” Professional women of color want to mentor/coach young women of color but do not know who needs help.
- Role models that are culturally appropriate and can connect in a “real way”
- A platform on which to celebrate the assets of minority women and girls such as their assertiveness, opinions, and positive self-esteem and body image.
- Resources to help “break the need to succeed based on someone else’s standards” meaning the standards of the dominant culture.
- Continue to value family: “I’m helping to put my nieces and nephews through college.”

Conclusions

Research has been presented on the status of women in the workplace both nationally through literature reviews and locally through primary and secondary research. It has been found that, nationally, women comprise 46% of the total labor force, 45.6% of the labor force in Michigan, and 55% of full-time positions identified by survey respondents in Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties. The participation rate of minority women in the local workforce is similar to national and state levels.

Nationally, 45.1% of all managers in America are women. Locally, women hold 50% of identified management positions. Of all Fortune 500 corporate officers, 11.9% are women. Women comprise 21% of all identified private industry senior level positions

(vice president and above) in Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties. In those same Fortune 500 companies, women hold 3.3% of the top-earner positions while locally they hold 28% of the top-earner positions in the private sector. (The respondents to this study were heavily represented by small businesses, which could account for the significant differences.)

Locally, women are faring better in the nonprofit sector where they hold a larger percent of full-time, management, and executive positions than in the private or public sectors. The same holds true for women of color. Even though minority women are underrepresented in management and executive level positions, their participation rate is relatively equal to non-minority women. Less than 1% (0.4%) of full-time women of color are senior level executives compared to 0.97% of non-minority women. 10.2% of full-time minority women are managers compared to 16.1% of non-minority women.

Both men and women focus group participants seem to understand the same requirements for advancement into top-level positions. “Specified” requirements include: education/credentials, expertise, and experience. Also, they often use the same strategies to advance. Women, though, felt they had to work harder than their male counterparts to learn the rules and language of a male dominated work culture and break into their social group, the “old boys’ club.”

Even though men and women identified mentoring, networking, and professional development as key strategies for advancement, few local employers are offering these resources formally or informally to their employees. 90% of employers reported having no formal career advancement programs. Women executives also articulated the great sacrifice of self, family, and relationships that have been required to be in top leadership positions. Men reinforced the work it takes to be within the culture of top leadership that demands complete accountability to 24 hour - 7 day a week responsibilities. Participants indicated that this culture does not easily allow for the use of “work/life policies” by men or women even though over half of responding employers indicated offering some programs or benefits. Furthermore, three of the top five benefits most utilized by women were only offered by 1 out of 4 employers. These included full-time benefits for part-time staff, health benefits for part-time staff, and job sharing.

Evident, as well, is the existence of barriers that prevent women from advancing. Some of these barriers are caused by “-isms” such as tokenism, sexism, and racism. Others are brought on by stereotypes and attitudes of the culture, responsibilities to home and family, or by women themselves. While men and women named similar barriers that prevent women’s advancement in the workplace, women of color listed an entirely different group of barriers focused on cultural differences, lack of generational knowledge, and economic obstacles.

There are also roles in the local workplace in which women continue to dominate, primarily office and clerical positions. In addition, there are occupations not heavily employed by women, non-traditional occupations such as fire fighting, electrical, plumbing, heating and cooling, and construction. Few local associations and unions have

any direct measures in place to increase the recruitment or retaining of women into these professions.

Finally, women are minimally represented as members of private company boards. Men and women listed the same desired qualifications for a board director, however women do not know the process for getting onto corporate boards and men do not know where to look for qualified female candidates.

Recommendations

The goal of this research study was to gather baseline data on the status of women in the Greater Grand Rapids area workplace. With this data collected, it is essential to determine necessary action steps for recommendation. Recommendations will be highlighted regarding possible steps the Women's Resource Center can take to increase the awareness of "women in the workplace issues" as well as direct attention to the needs and solutions expressed by research participants. Recommendations will also be provided relating to future research possibilities.

For more information regarding the recommendations provided to the Women's Resource Center and their integration of those recommendations into the Workplace Initiative, please contact Deb Bloom at the Women's Resource Center:

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ⁱ American Institute of Architects, Grand Valley Local Chapter

ⁱⁱ Michigan Labor Council AFL-CIO

ⁱⁱⁱ Carpenter's Local Union 100

^{iv} Boilermakers Local 169

^v Association of Builders and Contractors Inc., West Michigan Chapter
Sources of Non-traditional Occupation Statistics

^{vi} Michigan Dental Society

^{vii} International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, West Michigan Local Union 275

^{viii} West Michigan Electrical Joint Apprenticeship & Training Committee

^{ix} Michigan Labor Council AFL-CIO

^x Sheet Metal Workers Local 7

^{xi} West Michigan Labor Council AFL-CIO

^{xii} UA 174 Local