

News Release

Companies lack leadership development programmes for women

Amstelveen, 3 March 2011

Most organisations lack programmes that maintain adequate levels of talented women in the leadership pipeline, according to Mercer research. Mercer's ['Women's Leadership Development Survey'](#)* found that the majority (67%) of the 450 European companies surveyed had no clearly defined strategy or philosophy for developing women into leadership roles and lacked effective early career high-potential identification, diversity sourcing and recruiting, gender-specific learning and development experiences, to support the development of talented women as leaders.

More than two-fifths (41%) of the employers surveyed do not offer any activities or programmes targeted at the development needs of women leaders. While only 21% of organisations said they offer some activities or programmes, such as flexible time arrangements, mentoring and coaching, another 11% said they are planning to add these in the future – surpassing a global average of 6%.

When asked how well the organisational climate supports the development of women, 48% of respondents said to a moderate extent, while 14% said to a great extent, and 25% said to a small extent. Eleven percent said it is not supported at all.

“While there is an apparent lack of concern around most aspects of women's leadership development, there are signs that this is changing,” said Dagmar Wilbs, a Senior Partner in Mercer's Human Capital business. “Women's leadership is increasingly being discussed throughout the business world and starting to gain a foothold on CEOs' strategic agendas. Many countries are also considering establishing requirements for female representation in senior management as part of a larger diversity goal.”

When asked about the types of programmes currently offered that specifically target the needs of women as leaders, the top programs listed by employers were flexible work arrangements, mentoring, coaching and diversity sourcing/recruiting. These same four programmes were identified by respondents as most effective in developing women leaders.

Ms Wilbs commented: “Our research shows that companies are uncertain about what is appropriate and what is effective with respect to women's leadership development. Additionally, when companies do take steps to support women, they often focus narrowly on tactics like flexible work schedules. This may be a good starting point, but not the final solution.”

When asked to identify the top three factors that prevent women from advancing to the next level of leadership the majority of the participants highlighted work life balance (52%), lack of executive support (43%) and unwillingness to relocate (27%).

“The survey points out women’s lack – or perceived lack – of confidence as a significant obstacle in Europe for promotion to leadership. This may to some extent be because of the outdated “male-biased” leadership profiles used in many European organisations” explained Ms Wilbs. “With a continued lack of support from the top for women leaders, these notions continue to perpetuate. Men simply replicate their own experiences by graduating more leaders like themselves into the senior ranks.

“If organisations want to break this cycle and create a leadership profile that truly reflects their current business context and requirements, they must do a better job of identifying high-potential women in the pipeline, investing in their development and moving them into high-level roles.”

A live webcast will be held on Thursday 17 March - Leadership diversity: The challenge of women’s development in Europe. <http://www.mercer.com/webcasts.htm?siteLanguage=100>

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Notes for editors

* The survey was conducted in December 2010 in conjunction with Talent Management and Diversity Executive magazines. It received responses from more than 450 human resource, talent management and diversity leaders at organisations across EMEA. The majority of survey respondents (94%) represented organisations in Europe. The survey included a broad cross-section of industries, with health care, for-profit services, government/public sectors, financial/banking and high-tech/telecommunications organisations representing the largest segments.

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