

# More women in consulting

## An inspirational catalogue



8

TOP INSIGHTS AND  
INITIATIVES  
FROM THE INDUSTRY



Association of Danish Management  
Consulting Firms

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## NEW CATALOGUE

In this catalogue initiatives surrounding wage gap, parental leave, leadership, culture, employer branding, female networks, role models, mentorship and sponsorship and sustainable careers will be presented and discussed.

The catalogue aims to provide insights into enhancing gender diversity in the industry.

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# Introduction

In 2021, the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms published a catalogue of hands-on initiatives, from the industry to the industry, aimed at improving gender diversity within the sector.

## Building on industry experience

A recent survey of 38 member companies explored the implementation of these suggested initiatives. The results are encouraging, demonstrating notable progress across the industry. Many companies report current or planned implementation of these initiatives, highlighting a dedicated focus on progress. For instance, 94% provide check ins with a manager, sponsor or career counselor to ensure ongoing expectations and provide support before, during and after maternity leave, and 88% have a clear and comprehensive anti-sexism policy<sup>1</sup>.

### Important when reading the report:

*Highlighting the importance of curiosity and engaging in critical self-reflection assumptions about your organization. It is crucial to recognize that perspectives can become so deeply rooted that they block you from seeing fundamental issues within the company.*

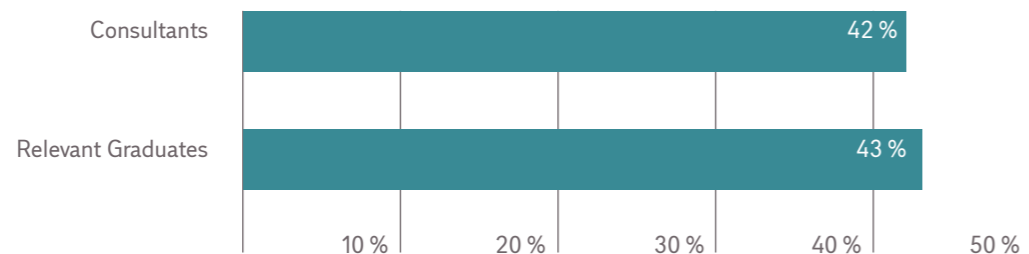
*This catalogue is designed for executives, HR professionals, and other internal leaders and decision-makers with the authority to implement organizational changes within the company. Enjoy the reading!*

*The Board of Directors, the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms (ADMCF) – part of Danish Industry, DI*

However, the industry acknowledges the imperative to expedite progress toward greater gender equality. The continued aim is to enhance gender diversity, retain existing talent and attract a broader, more diverse pool of future talents.

The industry has produced a second volume of the inspirational catalogue, which aims to revise the original recommendations and offers fresh insights through the collection and dissemination of knowledge and experiences gained. The cata-

## Womens representation in the industry



Consultants: Gender distribution for full-time non-managerial employees in the management consulting industry. Data is from 2023. - Relevant graduates: The gender distribution is based on relevant graduates. Relevant graduates are defined as individuals with a relevant educational background. A relevant educational background is defined as one of the three most common degrees among the industry's current employees: 1. Business Economics, M.Sc. 2. Economics, M.Sc., 3. Political Science, M.Sc. Data is from 2023.<sup>2</sup>



*"The work with 'More Women in Consulting' is vital because, as an industry, we have a significant responsibility to advance gender diversity. Ensuring equal opportunities for everyone requires us to critically examine our assumptions and address issues within our organisations. Our board and work group, comprised of representatives from various companies within the sector, illustrate how collaboration among industry colleagues can help us stand stronger together in facing these challenges. This initiative and catalogue represent a major step forward, uniting the industry around this important agenda and showcasing discussions and new initiatives. I am very proud of being part of this work."*

*– Jonas Groes, Ernst & Young P/S (Chairperson)*



*"As both vice chairperson and a dedicated member of the work group 'More Women in Consulting', I've been deeply committed to advancing gender diversity initiatives across the industry. By challenging assumptions and addressing systemic barriers, we are creating pathways to equal opportunities. The collaborative efforts across diverse companies within our sector exemplify how collective action can effectively tackle these challenges. I hope readers will be inspired to take action and continue the work within their own organisations. Enjoy reading!"*

*– Tine Scharf, Rambøll Management Consulting A/S (Vice Chairperson)*

logue specifically zooms in on gender diversity, as a key lever to ensure more diversity and inclusion overall in the industry.

## Implementation of initiatives

It is essential to acknowledge that not every recommendation may be universally applicable or implementable across the diverse landscape of consulting companies.

The industry's inherent diversity, encompassing a spectrum of sizes and structures, implies that working conditions and organizational cultures can vary significantly. Therefore, it is imperative

to approach these recommendations with a holistic perspective, recognizing the interdependence of actions. A very important note here is that the optimal approach for each consultancy would be to investigate own specific challenges before choosing what to implement. Data driven diversity and inclusion is the ideal way of driving the agenda in order to progress in a targeted and resource-effective way; isolate your specific challenges, analyse and prioritize, then choose the initiative that is proven to solve the specific challenges you have, implement and systematically follow-up on progress. Implementing a singular initiative may not yield the desired impact, and success may lie in the collective adoption of multiple strategies. This emphasizes the need for adaptability and customization based on the unique characteristics of each consulting firm.



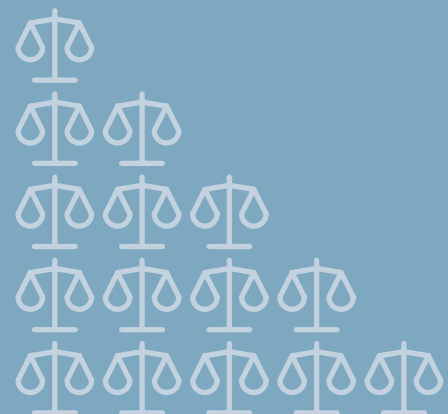
## How to recruit more women to the consulting industry – and make them stay

Explore the initial 15 initiatives within the first inspirational catalogue here

[Click here](#)

# 1. CLOSING THE WAGE GAP

**Discussions on previous and new initiatives**





# 1. Closing the wage gap

Despite progress in gender equality, women in the labor market typically earn 7% less than men in similar roles with equivalent experience and seniority.<sup>3</sup>

While specific industry wage data may not be available, we recommend investigating potential gender pay gaps within your management consulting firm. Should challenges related to gender wage disparities be identified within a company, the subsequent strategies can be deployed to address the gender wage gap.

## From catalogue #1 to #2

As in the first catalogue from 2021, a wage model with a larger fixed payment is suggested to transform work culture and retain more employees. In addition, it proposes the idea of basing bonuses more on teamwork and less on individual working hours. These proposals are still highly relevant.

In the first catalogue, compensation was treated more as a means to an end rather than a standalone initiative. However, recognizing equal pay as a primary objective has been emphasized in this second version of the catalogue.

This catalogue provides a selection of strategies to close the wage gap, drawing on experiences and current initiatives.

Work group representatives Hildur María Hólmarsdóttir from Rambøll Management Consulting and Line Plantener from Bain & Company.



## Discussion of initiatives

### Developing a pay equity framework and conducting regular audits

A standardized approach is necessary to ensure fair and equal pay for the same work or work of the same value for employees in management consulting firms. Notably, several companies in the industry have already implemented such frameworks. To build a pay equity framework, it is crucial to leverage existing transparent performance management frameworks.

**A transparent performance management structure:** The initial step involves establishing a clear job-family hierarchy, outlining specific competencies for each hierarchy level and defining an associated salary band. This hierarchy should

delineate clearly defined competencies for the specific level within the hierarchy and include a corresponding salary band for that level.

**Job evaluations:** Each consulting role is valued based on objective factors such as required skills, responsibilities, and organizational impact.

**Pay structure:** Pay grades are established that define the pay range for different consulting roles and levels. These guidelines and procedures are followed to determine compensation levels, irrespective of factors such as gender. To maintain fair and equal compensation, regular pay equity audits are crucial.



### Pay Equity Audits include:

- 1. Data collection:**  
Gathering detailed data on all aspects of consultant compensation.
- 2. Analysis and equal pay assessment:**  
Scrutinizing the collected data to identify any pay disparities among different consultant groups. If any unjustified disparities are revealed, corrective action should be taken, such as adjusting the salaries of underpaid consultants, revising pay policies, and/or enhancing pay transparency. Please note that unequal pay patterns can be concealed by various factors, such as **fast-track promotions, differing educational backgrounds, and basic averages**. Expanding on the last point, basic averages calculated for each level or role may not accurately reflect discrepancies in compensation. However, conducting a correlational analysis that considers overall seniority, both in general and within the company, as well as the number of periods of leave, could reveal a contrasting outcome.
- 3. Annual follow-up and monitoring:**  
After implementing corrective action, an annual follow-up is necessary to monitor and ensure the continued adherence to equal pay practices as a part of investigating if your pay equity framework has any loopholes.



1. Closing the wage gap

### Ensuring equitable compensation for sales and leadership roles

In the consulting industry, salary levels and bonuses frequently differ among roles. For example, positions primarily focused on client engagement and sales, in contrast to those centred around people leadership and project management, are, based on industry experience, often compensated differently. This disparity highlights the need to place significant emphasis on people leadership, which plays a critical role in client satisfaction, team cohesion, and talent retention. It is essential to recognize that people leadership is not merely a means to ensure a satisfied team but is also a business-critical activity deserving of adequate compensation. Unfortunately, such roles may be undervalued, perhaps due to the misconception that they are primarily feminine activities or characteristics considered "nice-to-have" rather than being recognized for their business-critical nature. Ensuring equitable compensation across these roles is vital, especially when data indicates a gender imbalance in representation within certain positions.

### How do fast-track promotions hide unequal pay patterns?

Concerns about fast-track promotions arise when an employee, already at the highest salary level for their role, seeks a raise. The only option then is to promote them, potentially leading to the perception of a promotion driven by financial considerations. This raises the critical question: Was the promotion solely for the purpose of a salary increase, or was it due to the employee taking on tasks that align with the new role? If it is the former, it hides unequal pay patterns. Thus, it is crucial to examine the time it takes for both men and women to attain promotions.

1. Closing the wage gap

*"We are testing out bias reminders ahead of performance reviews as a tool to create awareness about unconscious bias in situations where it can really make a difference"*

**– Work Group  
More Women In Consulting**



### Women's non-promotable work

An essential aspect of relevant research to be incorporated into this discussion is the No-Club research<sup>5</sup>. The research substantiates that women are disproportionately assigned more non-promotable tasks. Furthermore, they are often compelled to shoulder a higher burden of such responsibilities, and their declination to undertake these tasks is frequently met with more severe consequences than their male counterparts. This implies that women invest more time in tasks that lack commensurate recognition.<sup>4</sup>

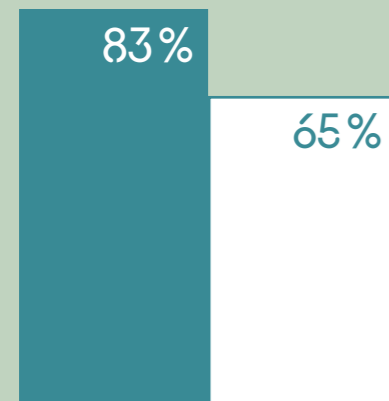
This issue intersects with the considerations outlined earlier: The constituents encompassed in our performance management framework for each role or level, particularly concerning KPIs.

In consulting, performance evaluations, centred on metrics like billing ratio and sales figures, are facilitated by the meticulous tracking of hours spent on projects or administrative duties. This enables the straightforward identification of instances where individuals fail to meet their KPIs, prompting an investigation into the reasons behind such deviations. Gender-based disparities may surface, revealing that women, in particular, bear a disproportionate burden of administrative responsibilities, potentially impeding their success in comparison to their male counterparts.

### Implementing fixed and transparent salary steps

The establishment of fixed and transparent salary steps reduces the risk of wage discrimination and provides consultants with a clear understanding of wage progression. However, in the highly competitive consulting industry, the rigidity of fixed salary levels might restrict a company's ability to retain top talent or attract skilled individuals. Therefore, while this model offers numerous benefits, its potential limitations should be carefully considered.

### Fixed payment & bonus based on teamwork

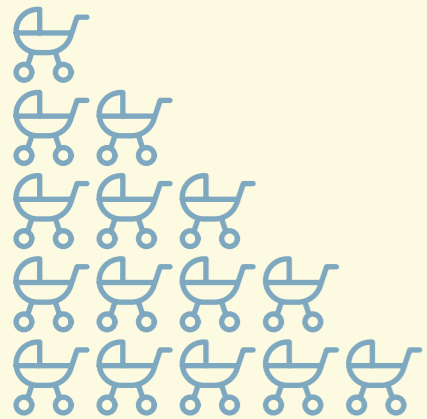


In the last quarter of 2023, a total of 38 member companies from the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms took part in a survey that assessed their advancements in implementing initiatives aimed at enhancing gender diversity. The survey included questions regarding their progress in this area. 83 % of the respondents have already adopted a wage model with a larger fixed payment. Moreover, 65 % of the respondents have already implemented the idea of basing bonuses more on teamwork and less on individual working hours.<sup>5</sup>



Work group representative Hildur María Hólmarsdóttir from Rambøll Management Consulting.

## 2. PARENTAL LEAVE







Work group representative Kirsten Xu from BCG at a 'More Women in Consulting' event.

## 2. Parental leave

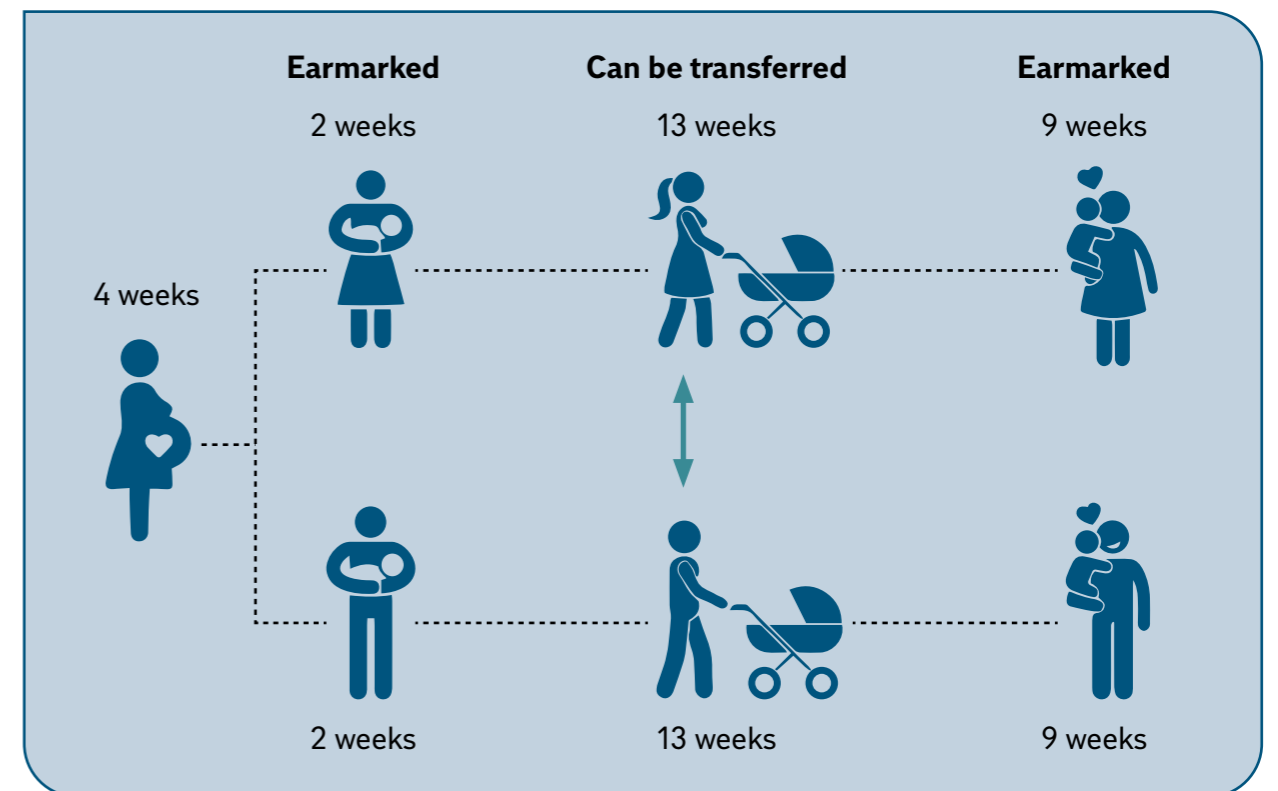
As of August 2022, the parental leave regulation in Denmark was changed, reserving 11 weeks of parental leave to each parent.<sup>6</sup> Preliminary numbers show that men have started to take more parental leave.<sup>7</sup>

According to the new figures from Udbetaling Danmark, fathers are now taking up to 10.5 weeks of parental leave, while mothers take 35.9 weeks. At the same time, the numbers show that nearly half of fathers (49%) take up to 11 weeks of parental leave. Before earmarked parental leave, it was just over a quarter (26.3%).<sup>8</sup> In this context, key considerations involve fathers having better leave options and rights for newborn care, fostering a more equitable balance in recruitment and career development, as fathers are increasingly expected also to be more absent from the workplace, ultimately securing gender equality.

Despite positive strides in this area, challenges persist in retaining young parents returning from parental leave. A survey by consulting agency, VÆRDBAR, found that one-third of respondents

actively sought new employment upon their return, while half considered doing so.<sup>9</sup>

Recognizing the obstacles that women have encountered in advancing their careers when they entered parenthood, the specific conditions and stipulations surrounding parental leave, along with the transitional phases before, during, and after the leave period, are pivotal in our pursuit of gender equality in the industry. Management consulting offers considerable flexibility, both in terms of working hours and project-based work. This flexibility can be tailored to meet the specific needs and preferences of employees, particularly in relation to parental leave. In what follows, we will present strategies for improving the retention of young parents. These strategies will draw on real-world industry examples and research conducted on the topic.



## From catalogue #1 to #2

As highlighted in the first catalogue from 2021, the strategy of gradually reducing workload before the leave and slowly ramping up again after returning remains a prevalent practice in the industry. Alternatively, employees might be given the opportunity to focus solely on internal tasks towards the end of their pregnancy. This approach is particularly beneficial in consulting due to the project-based nature of the work.

In the first inspirational catalogue, parental leave was treated as a standalone initiative. Since then, a growing number of companies in the industry have either implemented or are in the process of implementing changes related to parental leave. This publication aims to share new data, insights, and experiences within the industry on the topic of parental leave.

## Discussion of initiatives

Ensuring equal and appealing parental leave conditions is crucial for the recruitment and retention of young talent. With new parental leave legislation already laying a robust foundation, many consulting firms have taken further steps by offering extended parental leave. This may serve as an encouragement for men to take more parental leave, and thereby contribute to creating a more balanced pipeline for future promotions and equitable compensation. A growing number of consulting firms have also ensured full compensation during parental leave, which is a pivotal element in promoting gender equality.

To support the implementation of parental leave and ease the transition from non-parent to parent, companies can implement a phased parental leave model. This allows employees to gradually decrease their working hours before the leave and slowly increase them upon return. Full pay for reduced hours following parental leave can further facilitate this transition, thus improving retention of new parents. Supplemental staffing, such as an additional 20% from elsewhere, can be a useful strategy to support parents during this period. An important addition to this is to emphasize the need to monitor one-size-fits-all models like this. It is crucial to ensure that these models do not unintentionally lead to new forms of gender inequality, especially if they are primarily utilized by women, potentially establishing an informal division between A and B tracks. Implementing such models also requires careful consideration of their application, discourse, and potential challenges. Despite policies for adjusting work during pregnancy, research warns of a risk: The fear

of reinforcing stereotypes about pregnant employees' work attitudes may compel them to work harder than usual, posing a heightened risk of injury or complications. Acceptance and support from management and colleagues are particularly crucial for pregnant employees to have a positive work experience during pregnancy.<sup>10</sup>

It is essential to recognize that initiatives focusing solely on the functional needs of employees cannot be standalone solutions. Data suggests that women, in particular, place significant emphasis on emotional needs and the current lack of accommodating these.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, functional initiatives should be implemented alongside strategies that address these emotional needs for a holistic and effective approach.<sup>12</sup>

### Emotional needs related to parental leave

The following section is based on the surveys and professional practices from consultancies *Sammen Med Jer* and *VÆRDBAR* along with industry experiences.

Emotional needs can be feelings of belonging, acceptance, love, respect, and value, which are all psychological drivers that foster human well-being. In a work environment, these needs often manifest as desires to be valued, appreciated, and involved in decision-making processes.<sup>12</sup>

Despite their importance, emotional needs are often overlooked in workplaces, as indicated by data from consulting agency *VÆRDBAR*. While employers frequently focus on meeting employees' functional needs, it is the unmet emotional needs as well as gender bias in the form of gendered expectations that commonly prompt women to resign or deprioritize their jobs.

Addressing these emotional needs is particularly crucial in the context of parental leave and can even be more important in attracting and retaining employees than a higher salary. This underscores the importance of enhancing managerial support during this period by establishing an open dialogue and addressing emotional needs related to parental leave.





Work group representative  
Louise Woodgates from KPMG.

### Key initiatives to meet needs during parental leave

- Establishing an open dialogue before, during (if preferred by the employee), and after the transition to parenthood. Emphasizing this initiative is crucial, as it stands out as one of the easiest and most cost-effective measures for companies to address gender equality. Simply ensuring the availability of open dialogue can significantly contribute to tackling this issue. Note that it is important that it is not left to the employee to initiate these conversations.<sup>13</sup>
- Fostering a culture of psychological safety where issues surrounding parenthood can be discussed.
- Extending invitations to social company events during their absence can help employees feel valued and connected, providing a strong incentive to return.<sup>14</sup> The act of extending invitations to social company events necessitates a mutual agreement between the employee and employer.
- Clear expectations for roles with reduced hours are also important. If your company offers reduced hours, it is crucial to clearly define the expectations for a full-time role to prevent additional stress for those delivering

75% or similar workloads.<sup>14</sup> In addition, also clearly establish what reduced hours mean for one's KPIs.

- Moreover, offering professional support to new parents in balancing work and life can establish a foundation of security during challenging times. Training leaders to engage in open and supportive conversations with their employees is essential. This involves addressing challenges and, significantly, fostering positive working environments, especially during significant life changes such as starting a family. Feeling seen and understood is vital when navigating new circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

### Parental leave networks

The management consulting industry has had positive experiences with the establishment of parental leave networks. These networks bring together parents on leave, fostering a sense of community and maintaining a connection to the workplace even during their absence. Additionally, these networks provide a platform for sharing experiences, advice, and support, which can be particularly valuable for first-time parents navigating the challenges of balancing work and family commitments.

A European analysis from 2013 involving 2,400 female leaders who resigned indicated that they primarily left because they did not feel valued or included in decision-making processes. A 2022 survey conducted by strategy consulting agency, BCG, reveals that 78% of Danish women place higher importance on emotional needs, such as respect, than on functional needs, like salary.<sup>11</sup>

**VÆRDBAR** is a leading expert in strategic parental leave management, dedicated to improving talent attraction and retention, and enhancing diversity, equity and inclusive leadership and workplaces.

**Sammen Med Jer** is a consultancy that assists companies aiming to bolster their employer brand, reduce absenteeism during pregnancy, and enhance overall employee well-being.

*"I experienced that the loss of control associated with becoming a mother felt more extreme when wanting to simultaneously nurture one's career, and fearing the consequences that pregnancy can bring... In this context, sparring with someone who understood the situation could contribute to increased well-being in the new dual role as both a consultant and a mother."*

**Consultant and mother<sup>14</sup>**

### Transition initiatives

Implementing specialized programs and coaching support for parents during the transition is a key strategy. A survey from VÆRDBAR based on almost 300 individual parental leave situations, shows that women tend to worry twice as much as men regarding the potential implications of parental leave on their careers. The survey also showed that women were half as likely to discuss their concerns and twice as likely to seek new job opportunities during or six months following

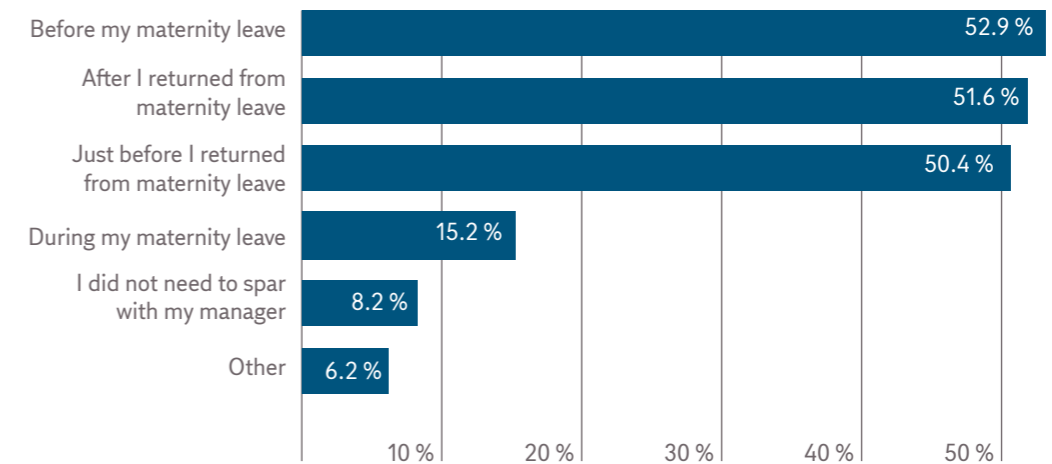
their parental leave. The primary reasons for not sharing these concerns with their superiors include a lack of trust, fear of misunderstanding, and a concern of appearing weak or being negatively judged.<sup>12</sup> It is important to remember that the worries are supported by facts. Research on, for example, the "motherhood penalty", clearly shows that women are being punished career-wise when they become mothers as opposed to men when they become fathers.

**A series of at least four expectation alignment meetings throughout the process is also important:**

1. The first meeting, held when the parental leave or pregnancy is announced, should establish expectations leading up to the leave.
2. The second meeting, held about a month before the leave begins, should finalize the handover, determine the final working day before the leave, and discuss communication during the leave.
3. The third meeting, scheduled about a month before the employee's return, should discuss task portfolios, relevant courses, collaboration with colleagues, and expectations for re-entry.
4. The fourth meeting, held about a month after the return to work, should assess if expectations match reality.

It is also important for the organization to tailor its contact with parents on leave according to their individual preferences and needs, ensuring that they feel supported and valued even when they are not actively working. Again, this entirely depends on prior agreement between employer and employee on the nature of contact during the absence of the employee.

**When did you primarily experience the need for support with your manager regarding maternity leave?**



Source: Barsel på Bundlinjen<sup>12</sup>

The fact that women worry more than men is therefore not a female gender issue, it is due to the actual negative consequences of parenthood that women experience compared to men.<sup>12</sup> Parents who rated their parental leave process as "good" were **50 %** less likely to resign from their jobs during or after their leave. As such, it is crucial to develop a strategic parental leave program. This program should incorporate processes like mandatory expectation alignment agreements and training for leaders in effective parental leave management.



*"My work was an incredibly big part of my identity before I became a mother. And it still is, but it's not the only thing anymore. I am both a mother and a consultant. It felt lonely to suddenly feel that change in me and the change in priorities so clearly. I wasn't prepared for that. I would have liked to have someone to talk to in confidence."*

**Consultant – 1st time mother<sup>14</sup>**

## Industry example

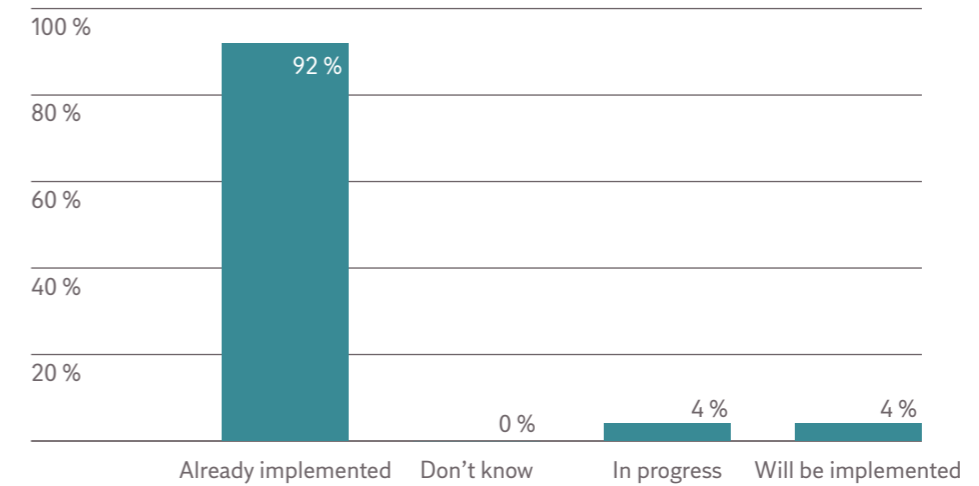
”Employees have access to healthcare guidance. This means that there is an open, honest, and confidential dialogue about everything from contraception, fertility, pregnancy, parental leave, and up to the child’s 10th birthday. This ensures that employees know what to expect and do not go unprepared into life as parents.

The initial conversations are sometimes with health professionals first and then the leader, and others the other way around. However, it is important for success that these conversations take place in parallel. The guidance consists of supporting employees in the process of becoming a family so that they can create an excess on an ongoing basis and see the possibility of a life with both work and family.

It is important to maintain the mental resilience that is needed in a busy everyday life, which can be difficult with small children. Therefore, the healthcare consultations continue until the child is 10 years old, as it provides a safety net for parents to always have someone to ask and seek specific help from.

The conversations with the manager should create a sense of belonging and the desire to continue.”

## CHECK-INS with MANAGER or SPONSOR/CAREER COUNSELOR to ensure ongoing expectations and provide support before, during, and after maternity leave

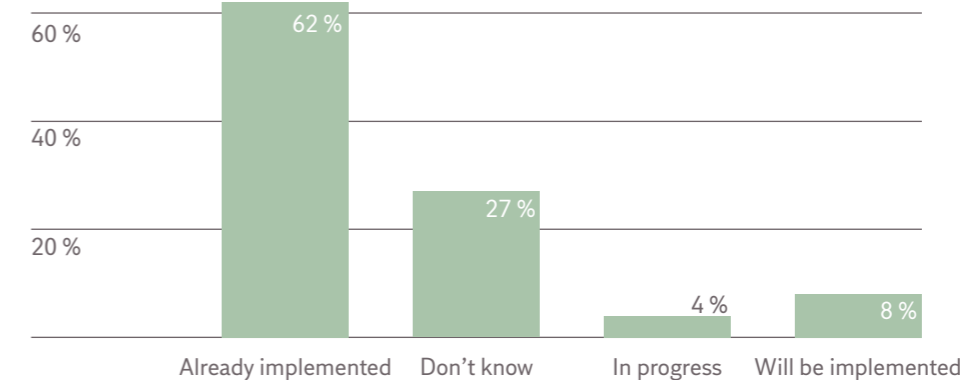


Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm<sup>15</sup>

In a survey conducted in the last quarter of 2023 among 38 member companies from the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms, findings revealed that 62% of the respondents have already implemented measures to reduce employees’ workload prior to their parental leave

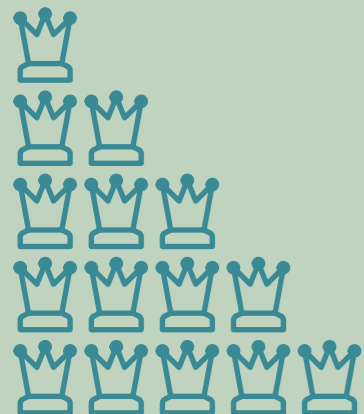
while still receiving full pay. Additionally, 92% of the participants stated that they have established regular check-ins between managers/sponsors and employees before and after their parental leave.

## REDUCE employee’s CLIENT WORKLOAD in advance, while still receiving full pay



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm<sup>16</sup>

# 3. LEADERSHIP



# FROM MARATHON TO SPRINT

## - how to reach gender balance fast

By Heidi R. Andersen,  
Founder of Living Institute

Living Institute  
Diversity Intelligence Consultancy



## 3. Leadership

In the management consulting industry, where client relationships and high-performance teams are crucial elements to a successful business, leadership plays an important role. Leaders must be active advocates for gender diversity, using their influence to drive change, both within their organizations and in their interactions with clients and the wider industry.

The management consulting industry is actively working towards enhancing gender diversity in its leadership ranks. And it is these very top leadership management positions that harbor the greatest potential to instigate substantive change and propel progress in gender diversity.

Without progressive leadership and strategic initiatives, achieving meaningful gender diversity remains challenging. Leadership involvement, including targeted training programs, is crucial for cultivating a supportive environment.

The absence of gender diversity in top leadership reflects organizational culture and affects talent attraction and retention. Clear communication

from top management is essential, involving all employees for inclusive initiatives.

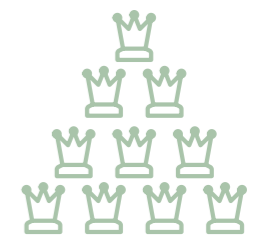
Moreover, top leadership reflects the culture of the organization and significantly influences its perception among current and potential future employees. An absence of gender diversity in leadership can hamper the organization's ability to attract and retain diverse talent.

The resolution to this issue lies in clear communication from top management about the strategy for improving gender diversity. It is important to involve all employees in this agenda to ensure not just diversity, but also inclusion.

### From catalogue #1 to #2

As emphasized in the first inspirational catalogue from 2021, setting concrete targets and follow-ups within the management's strategy remains a critical initiative for fostering greater gender diversity. Clear communication from the full management team to the organization is essential for cultivating an image and employer brand that takes diversity seriously.

This updated edition provides a selection of strategies on leadership and management, drawing on experiences and current initiatives in the industry.



Heidi Rottbøll Andersen from Living Institute at a 'More Women in Consulting' event.

## Discussion of initiatives

### Data-driven approach

A data-driven approach, spearheaded by top management, is crucial to effectively measure the impact of diversity and inclusion efforts in management consulting. This involves the implementation of, and follow-ups on, exit interviews, well-being surveys, workplace assessment data, and sick leave, in addition to other health-related data to which the employee has consented to allow the employer access. All data usage should be in accordance with GDPR and other relevant regulations. By analyzing the data collected, leaders can identify barriers to gender diversity and develop strategies to address them.

### Diversity KPIs

Introducing KPIs specifically tailored to measure gender diversity and inclusion efforts provides a structured approach to evaluating success. These KPIs can encompass various aspects, including recruitment, retention, and promotion metrics, offering a comprehensive view of the organization's commitment to fostering gender equity. To translate commitment into action, organizations can establish gender equity activities and targets. This could involve targeted initiatives to address gender imbalances in specific roles or departments, fostering an environment where everyone has equal opportunities for advancement. By setting realistic goals and ensuring regular follow-ups, companies can continuously advance towards achieving these targets, thereby fostering



Work group representative and Vice Chairperson Tine Schaf from Rambøll Management Consulting.

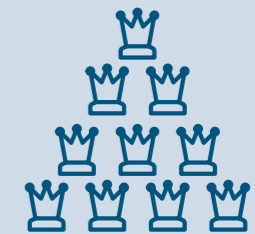
an environment of equal opportunity. It is also important to differentiate between outcome and process KPIs or data points. Outcome KPIs could include measuring the gender split in all organizational levels, while process data points could focus on gender distribution at different stages of the recruitment process.

Incorporating specific gender diversity and inclusion targets into the goal setting and KPIs of partners and leadership can bolster diversity efforts. This not only demonstrates leadership's commitment to diversity but also provides a measurable framework for tracking progress and rewarding leaders who deliver on promises to improve gender diversity. Leaders can champion targeted initiatives to address gender imbalances in specific roles or departments, ensuring everyone has an equal chance of advancement.

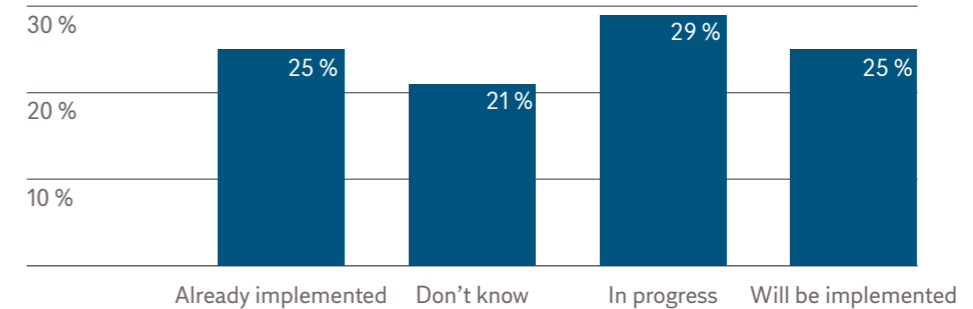
### Leadership training

A pivotal aspect of advancing gender diversity lies in equipping leaders with the necessary skills. Implementing training programs that focus on

how leaders can initiate conversations and create an inclusive environment is essential. This may include adaptive learning modules tailored to address evolving leadership and inclusion challenges, culminating in the development of a new inclusive leadership training program. However, it is important to note that while Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) leaders tend to be women or individuals from other minority groups, serving as token representatives, the responsibility for creating most diversity-related problems does not lie with these groups. Therefore, the commitment to diversity and inclusion must be shared across all levels of the organization, particularly among those in leadership positions who have the power to effect change.<sup>17</sup>



### GENDER DIVERSITY and INCLUSION METRICS with performance evaluations, linking leadership and managerial responsibilities



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm<sup>18</sup>

According to a survey conducted in the last quarter of 2023 among 38 member companies from the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms, 25% reported having integrated gender diversity and inclusion metrics into their performance evaluations for managers. However, 29% of the respondents are currently in the process of implementing these measures, and an additional 25% stated that they have plans to implement them in the future.



# 4. CULTURE AUDIT





Work group representatives  
Kirsten Xu from BCG, Katrine  
Kirk Jensen and Sarah Hald  
Rasmussen from Valcon.

## 4. Culture audit

The consulting industry has historically had a predominantly male workforce and and client base. While the industry consists of almost 40 % women today,<sup>19</sup> remnants of historical and cultural practices persist, posing potential challenges to inclusion and diversity.

For instance, women (and other groups) may encounter feelings of exclusion from specific interactions key to closing business deals due to a lack of access, presenting a challenge in breaking through what can sometimes feel like a "closed club," even if exclusion is unintentional.

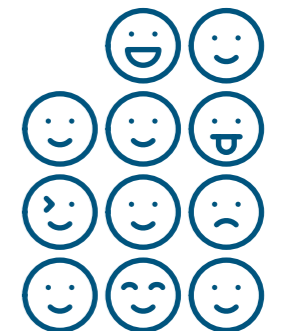
The management consulting industry faces a pressing need to attract and retain a diverse and highly skilled talent pool to meet the growing demand for its services. Additionally, clients place a heightened emphasis on the ability of consulting firms to mobilize diverse teams, expecting a nuanced understanding and adept addressing of their issues and needs for problem solving.

To address this challenge, the industry is committed to reviewing and transforming cultural aspects that may inadvertently exclude certain genders or groups.

Creating a more inclusive culture involves engaging all employees, addressing unconscious bias through recurring training, openness about imperfection and mistakes, acknowledgement of reputational issues, ensuring an equal gender distribution among recruiters for job interviews, and many other initiatives listed below.

### From catalogue #1 to #2

As emphasized in the first inspirational catalogue from 2021, creating a more inclusive culture was highlighted as a key focus area. Emphasis was placed on the role of leadership, implementing indicators, addressing unconscious bias and sexism. All are still highly relevant and most of these initiatives are expanded upon in this or some of the other themes in this catalogue. Additionally, this catalogue proposes new ways of creating a more inclusive culture.





## Discussion of initiatives

### Mobilizing men for gender diversity

Engaging men in the pursuit of gender diversity in the workplace is crucial. Research from BCG demonstrates that organizations that actively involve men in gender diversity efforts report making 96% progress. Conversely, among companies where men are not involved, only 30% show progress.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it can be beneficial to consider how to actively engage male employees in initiatives aiming to improve gender diversity. Encouraging allyship, where male employees actively support and advocate for gender diversity, is essential. Allyship involves individuals, typically from the majority group, actively working to understand and address the challenges faced by underrepresented groups. It is important as it fosters a more inclusive workplace and significantly contributes to improved gender diversity outcomes.

### Addressing unconscious bias

Unconscious bias can significantly influence

perceptions of the "prototype" employee and a "good fit" in a company. Bias training and workshops can address these preconceived thoughts and attitudes, but they need to be executed recurrently and at all levels of the organization to create the desired impact.<sup>21</sup>

### Intake monitoring

Industry experiences indicate that there is now a better balance of genders at the graduate and entry levels. This improvement is due to various previously mentioned initiatives, such as intake monitoring. Intake monitoring is a process of measuring your recruitment intake and identifying where in the recruitment process gender bias occurs. By identifying the stage where the imbalance occurs, specific strategies can be implemented to address the issue. This approach requires regular review and response to the data to continually enhance gender diversity in the recruitment process.

## Common termite bias phrases<sup>22</sup>

Is that your real hair? How do you manage it?

You're transgender? I can't tell. You don't look like it at all!

Happy birthday! Now that you are 30, when are you having a baby?

Stop acting like a man.

You're gay? You should meet my friend Mark. He's gay too!

Are you the new intern? You look so young.

Oh sorry, I confused you for someone else. Would you know where I can find the other Indian woman?

Do you plan to wear that at work?

You are being very loud. Calm down, take it easy.

Why are you so quiet? You hardly speak up.

How do you balance work and family? (when only asked to women and never to men)

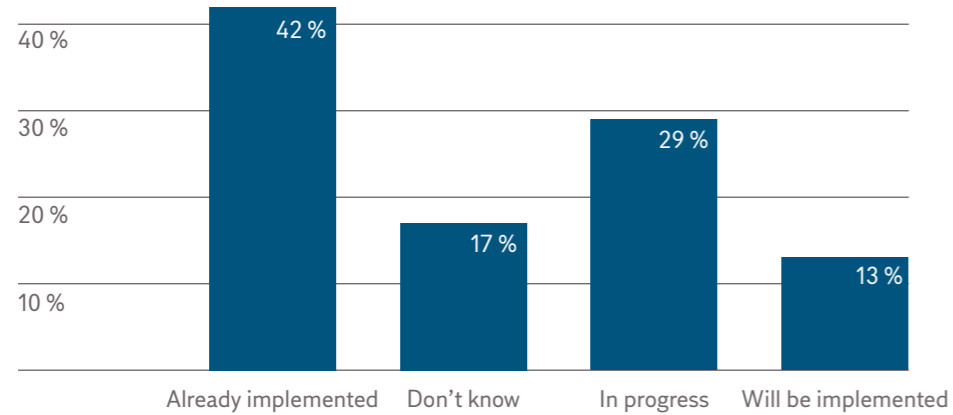
Don't get too emotional.

Everyone can succeed in society if they work hard enough.

**Dr. Poornima Luthra on what to do when we witness or experience 'termite biases'.**

"The next time you witness a termite bias, instead of saying "that was a microaggression" or "you're being biased," ask questions like: "How did you get to that decision/conclusion?" or "I didn't understand the joke, would you be able to please explain it to me?" or "That's an interesting way of looking at it, why don't you tell me more?" Asking the right questions in the right tone can be a powerful way of getting the other person to reflect on their biases without judgement."

**UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING** raising awareness and promote understanding of biases that impact decision-making and behavior



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm<sup>23</sup>

**Creating an inclusive culture**

An inclusive culture retains all employees. This can be achieved by creating psychological safety and experiencing being part of something bigger where one's voice is heard. This can be achieved through EDI Councils, reference groups, institutionalization of employee resource groups, etc. Inclusion is not something that one experiences through strategies and roadmaps, but something one experiences through interaction with colleagues in everyday life, over lunch, at the coffee machine, at meetings, etc.

Based on a survey conducted in the last quarter of 2023 among 38 member companies from the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms, it was found that 42% of the respondents have already completed unconscious bias training within their organizations. Furthermore, 29% are currently undergoing training, and an additional 13% have plans to undergo unconscious bias training in the future.

**The lack of interest in engaging in Inclusion and diversity efforts**

The challenge lies in motivating senior women who are highly focused on being promotable to actively participate in EDI initiatives, a challenge that is equally applicable to many men. This difficulty arises when these initiatives are not seen as directly contributing to their promotability or career advancement.

Senior women, especially those who are ambitious and driven to climb the corporate ladder, may prioritize activities and tasks that they believe will directly enhance their chances of promotion. They may view participation in EDI efforts as valuable but not necessarily instrumental in their personal career progression.

This perception can lead to a reluctance or lack of enthusiasm among promotable-focused senior women (and men) to fully engage in EDI initiatives. Therefore, bridging this gap and demonstrating the tangible benefits of EDI involvement in terms of career growth and opportunities is crucial to overcoming this challenge.



# 5. EMPLOYER BRANDING





Work group representatives Kirsten Xu and Martina Ianev from BCG, Katrine Kirk Jensen and Sarah Hald Rasmussen from Valcon and Hildur María Hólmarsdóttir from Rambøll Management Consulting.

## 5. Employer branding

Significant improvements have been made across the industry in achieving gender balance at the entry level. However, there is still untapped potential to attract a more diverse talent pool. Data shows that 42% of entry-level consultants in the industry are women.<sup>2</sup> This theme will examine the initiatives that have driven this progress and identify the areas where further improvements can be made.

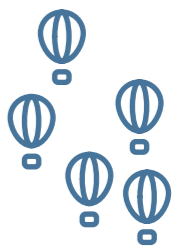
This progress is partially attributed to changes made in the recruitment process, such as the initiative of 'blind recruitment.' However, utilizing blind recruitment poses a built-in dilemma, as concealing gender in applications could potentially hinder the goal of increasing women's representation in the company.

The management consulting industry is committed to attracting top-tier talent, regardless of gender or background. Industry experiences suggest that employers can effectively address this issue through the proper implementation of initiatives such as blind recruitment, redesigning the candidate journey, breaking away from a 'zero mistake culture,' and exploring a different candidate pool.

### From catalogue #1 to #2

In the first inspirational catalogue, certain pitfalls in the recruitment process were highlighted. For example, interview processes and interviews themselves can be conducted in ways that favour men. Job advertisements can also contain masculine words and phrasings, which may deter women from applying.

While these points remain relevant, you will find discussions on how the industry has collectively made significant strides in hiring a more gender-balanced pool of graduates. This catalogue will also explore areas and methods for further enhancing gender balance within the industry.



### Ensuring transparency and openness

Breaking with a "culture of perfection" in the industry, for instance by sharing mistakes and bumps along the way on social media, showcase the company as a place that not only values psychological safety but also prioritizes transparency, authenticity, and continuous learning. This can lead to an increase in the number of applicants, including more female applicants and it may retain existing employees for a longer period.<sup>24</sup>

### Organizational reputation impacts the recruitment process and candidate perceptions

Be transparent and honest about past challenges and emphasize company commitment to improvement. Actively seek feedback from former employees, current staff, and potential candidates to address areas for improvement. This can be implemented as part of the employer branding and as part of the recruitment process.

### Employee referral programs

Another strategy is to introduce employee referral programs at all levels of an organization. Referral programs are initiatives implemented by organizations to encourage existing employees to recommend and bring in new potential hires. Employee referral programs can help organizations attract more diverse candidates. Studies show that such programs are powerful in countering women's hesitancy to apply, providing a familiar connection and, if hired, a built-in mentor for a quick sense of belonging and smooth onboarding. By empowering employees to refer their connections, organizations can tap into a wealth of untapped talent and create a more inclusive workplace. To make these programs successful, organizations should extend them across all levels of the organization and offer rewards for successful referrals. This will incentivize participation and encourage employees to promote their company to their networks<sup>25</sup>.

### Matching candidates and applicants

To foster inclusivity throughout the recruitment process, it is crucial to maintain gender balance at different stages. While the intention is to counteract potential gender bias, it is important to acknowledge that biases can exist among individuals of the same gender. Therefore, the emphasis should shift towards ensuring diverse representation in the recruitment process because we underscore the significance of a balanced interviewer mix, leaving a lasting impression on candidates, especially women, who may find a more meaningful connection when encountering a diverse panel rather than a homogenous group of interviewers.<sup>24</sup>

### Looking into a different candidate pool

Numerous consulting firms highlight their increasing diversity in hiring practices. They aim to attract a broader range of talent, recognizing that recruiting individuals outside the traditional consulting background is necessary for the industry and can enhance retention rates. This is particularly crucial in recruiting experienced female professionals.

As previously noted, there is a growing demand for specialists, including in management consulting. Consequently, these individuals now play a more significant role within consulting firms than ever before.

A new recruitment analysis from consulting agency Ballisager (2023) shows that it is primarily the demand for specialists that exceeds the current supply of labour, affecting diversity in recruitment. Many larger consulting companies are re-evaluating the traditional notion of the ideal "prototype" for a consultant and the concept of the "right fit". These firms are starting to broaden their scope beyond the traditional educational backgrounds from which they have typically recruited most of their management consultants.



## The Diversity Pledge – Danish Industry (DI)

### Maximize value through the tools in the Diversity Pledge

Is your company interested in strengthening diversity, inclusion and equality? The Danish Industry Diversity Pledge is the key to getting started or moving forward with creating more diverse workplaces and making the most of all talents.



### Join the Diversity Pledge

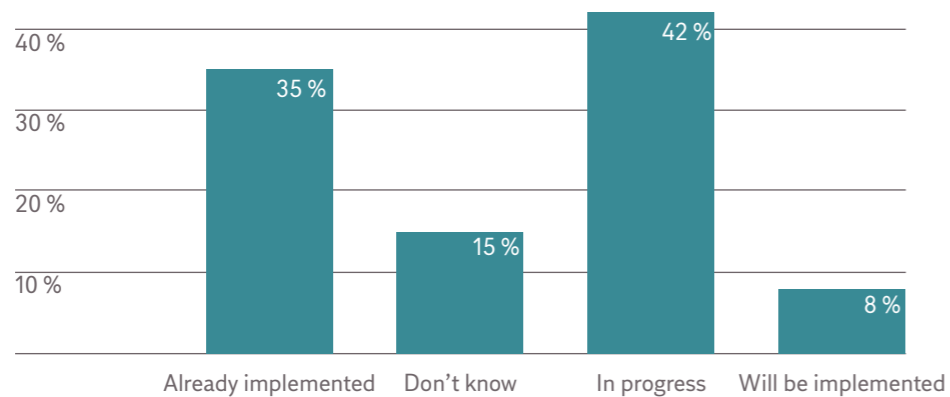
Join DI's Diversity Pledge and get free advice and tools to boost diversity efforts in your company. It is free for all companies and you do not need to be a member of DI.

### Activities and awareness

Being present in many places, for example at events, to open for other talent pools that you otherwise would not have reached, has, based on industry experiences, proven effective. Actively

help the talents to apply for positions as they will not be as inclined to kick the door in themselves compared to talents that the industry has traditionally recruited.

### STANDARDIZED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS and evaluation criteria, promoting fairness and eliminating gender-based biases



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm. In a survey conducted in the last quarter of 2023 among 38 member companies from the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms, findings revealed that 35% of respondents have already implemented standardized interview questions and evaluation criteria as part of their recruitment process. 42% of the respondents answered that they are already implementing these initiatives.





## Discussion of initiatives

### The blind recruitment process

Several consulting firms are exploring blind application processes as a strategy to mitigate unconscious bias and prevent gender-related prejudices. The goal is to minimize the so-called "John vs. Jennifer" trap, where identical resumes have the risk of being evaluated differently because of gender.<sup>26</sup>

However, when implementing blind recruitment tools, it is crucial to establish clear objectives. While they can help mitigate unconscious gender biases, they may not necessarily lead to an increase in the recruitment of women. It is important to recognize the inherent dilemma of concealing gender in applications, as it could potentially impede efforts to improve women's representation. One reason for this is that individuals may still unconsciously infer gender based on other cues in the application, even if it is hidden.

If the objective is to increase the intake of women, there are other initiatives more directly targeted towards achieving that goal than simply concealing gender in applications.

### What is blind recruitment?

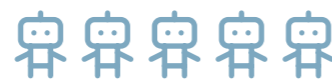
Blind recruitment is a method where personally identifiable information is removed from applicants' resumes and applications during the recruitment process. This information can include name, gender, age, photo, ethnic background and other data that could potentially lead to conscious or unconscious bias. The purpose of blind recruitment is to minimize bias, increase diversity, and improve fairness, ensuring candidates are evaluated solely on their qualifications and skills.

### The John. vs. Jennifer study

Yale University researchers sent out identical job application for a fictional student named John and another named Jennifer to science professors. Despite identical qualifications, both male and female faculty favored John over Jennifer in terms of competence, hireability, salary, and mentoring.<sup>26</sup>

Blind recruitment initiatives can manifest in various forms, including hiding certain information, while still disclosing gender. Additionally, some initiatives may prioritize selecting candidates for graduate roles based on performance-based tests rather than relying solely on CVs or letters of intent.

Industry experience suggests that these changes in the blind recruitment process have yielded promising results in increasing the number of female applicants, particularly at the graduate or graduate-equivalent levels. However, it is important to note that this approach may not be suitable for experienced hires, as work experience and related merits significantly influence the final selection process.



### Gender-neutral job advertisements

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used in external and internal communication, and in the recruitment process, to remove gendered and biased language.

However, a comprehensive study conducted by two professors from MIT Sloan and Michigan State University has shown negligible effects of altering the language in recruitment messages or the gender of the job poster on gender equality and diversity in practice.<sup>27</sup> Simply adjusting language may not lead to the desired outcomes. It is important to recognize that these initiatives

must be complemented by other measures to effectively advance gender equality and diversity in recruitment.

While solely adjusting language may not directly enhance gender equality, it can still play a significant role in shaping a company's employer brand and send a strong signal to potential hires. Considering this, companies can leverage tools, carefully assess wording and consider the perception of their brand to attract a broader talent pool of applicants, thus increasing the number of female applicants.

### Redesigning the candidate journey

Industry insights have shown that by redesigning the candidate journey to become more flexible and adjustable to the specific applicant, companies can attract a more diverse pool of talent and increase the number of female applicants. This can be achieved through a customized approach that considers each candidate's unique needs and strengths. Moving away from rigid schedules and time limitations, candidates can be given more flexibility in preparing and performing tasks, such as case studies. Additionally, personalized training and networking opportunities can be offered to potential hires. It is crucial to recognize that a standardized approach is insufficient

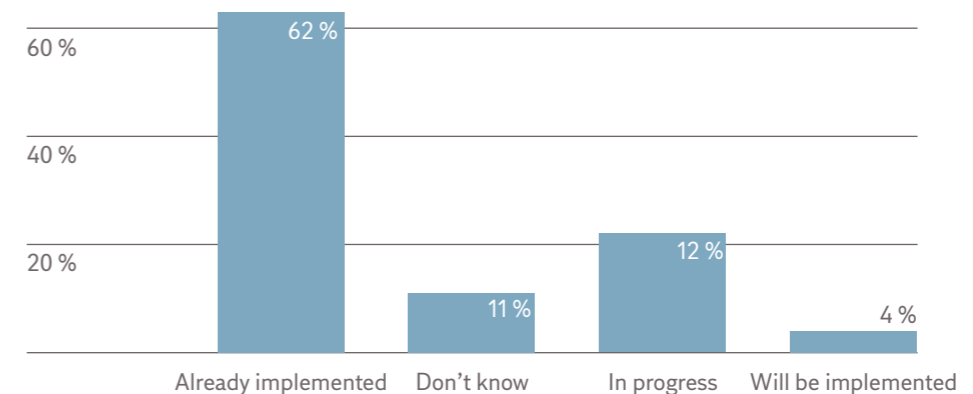
### Redesigning the candidate journey

*"We often see that our candidates come from different starting points in terms of preparation, insight into consulting or what it generally means to be in this industry. To cater for this, our candidates experience a candidate-centric process, where they – both before applying and after securing their interview – are guided through a process, adapted to their needs in terms of preparation and timing. This involves e.g., invitations to events that can help them "unlock consulting" or even support them prepare before applying. It includes necessary case training together with a BCG mentor, who can both help them with case training and general guidance. A mentor is often matched to the candidate based on education, areas of interest (e.g., sustainability) or other topics."*

*– Mona Mosleh, Recruiting and Employer Branding Manager, BCG*

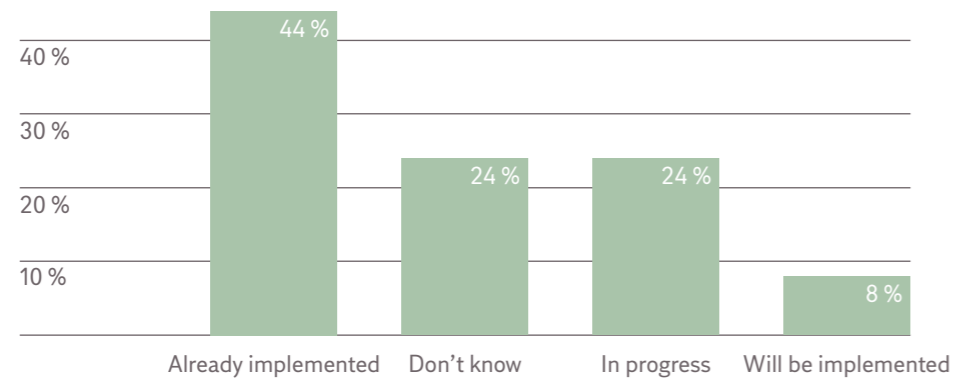
in promoting diversity and inclusion. Tailored strategies are needed to effectively support and prepare candidates. →

### Job descriptions that incorporate GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm

**TARGETS for GENDER REPRESENTATION in recruitment, establishing measurable goals to enhance the representation of women within the company**



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm

→ Harvard University professor Frank Dobbin studies organizations and inequality and conducts research on corporate diversity programs. According to his studies, any kind of recruitment that targets women has a huge effect on not just who comes through the door but also the number of women in management five or 10 years later.<sup>28</sup> Be aware that in a recent ruling by the Danish Equal Treatment Board, targeted recruitment based on gender has been deemed unlawful.<sup>29</sup>

**The blind recruitment process**

*"Our graduate assessment process is based on a number of case interviews, where the candidates solve different real-life cases. Our interviewers do not have access to any information prior to meeting the candidate and will not see the resume or any other candidate documents in the process. In this way, we reduce affinity bias before the interview. The candidate is briefed ahead and prepared to do an elevator pitch. The feedback from both candidates and interviewers has been positive as it creates a more authentic discussion between both parties in the process."*

*– Mona Mosleh, Recruiting and Employer Branding Manager, BCG*

*"We have over the last three years successfully reached a solid gender balance at entry-level across the Nordics – and will organically reach this at higher level in coming years. Next up is diversity in terms of nationality and study background, which will continue to be a priority going forward."*

**The method includes:**

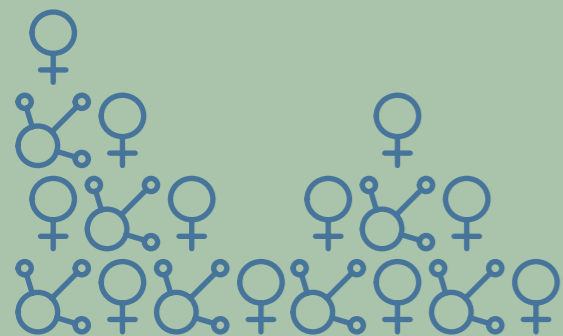
1. Candidates are asked to take an online **analytical/cognitive test**
2. An **automated screening** tool that rates applicants based on online test, grades and school
3. **Defined qualities** required for success in Bain are specifically tested in the process
4. Ensuring that not all qualities are tested in one interview to **reduce cognitive overload**.
5. A **'no-CV'** policy for interview rounds
6. Adding a **behavioral interview** to the classical case interviews
7. **No sharing of interview experiences** before final scores are submitted
8. All interviewers receive **training in unconscious bias"**

*– Line Plantener, Associate Partner, Bain & Company*



Industry Director at the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms, Katrine Ellersgaard Nielsen.

# 6. FEMALE NETWORKS



Work group representatives Kirsten Xu and Martina lanev from BCG, Katrine Kirk Jensen and Sarah Hald Rasmussen from Valcon, Tine Scharf and Hildur María Hólmarsdóttir from Rambøll Management Consulting, Louise Woodgates from KPMG, Kirsten P. Ovesen from Accenture, Line Plantener from Bain & Company and Anne Livbjerg Roed from Implement Consulting Group.



## 6. Female networks

The effectiveness of women's networks in promoting gender diversity has been a topic of debate. This is due to various types of women's networks, each with different functions and purposes. It is important to consider the specific function and purpose of a network when assessing its potential benefits. While certain types of networks may not directly contribute to increased gender diversity, they can still serve other valuable purposes.

It is important to involve men in the efforts to enhance gender equality. Isolated women's networks may not be effective in achieving this goal.

In the following, the focus is on the internal women's networks within a single company, and we are not delving into the broader implications and effects of networks that span across companies or include other minority groups or genders.

The effectiveness and impact of women's networks can vary depending on these factors, and it is important to consider the specific context when evaluating their benefits and outcomes.

### From catalogue #1 to #2

In the previous volume of the inspirational catalogue, the focus was primarily on highlighting the advantages of female networks, with limited elaboration on the topic. However, in this volume of the catalogue, we will delve deeper into both the benefits and drawbacks of such networks, providing a more comprehensive examination.



*We started with the most senior employees from both genders – it showed them importance but also gave room for REALLY important conversations*

*– Henrik Horn Andersen, Partner, Implement*

*The three most important things for us were:*  
1) Making it a 50-50 set-up instead of a purely women-based network,  
2) Adding data to the conversation to make it more fact-based and  
3) Connecting it to creating new commercial networks.

*– Henrik Horn Andersen, Partner & Anne Livbjerg Roed, Partner & Head of HR, Implement*

## Discussion of initiatives

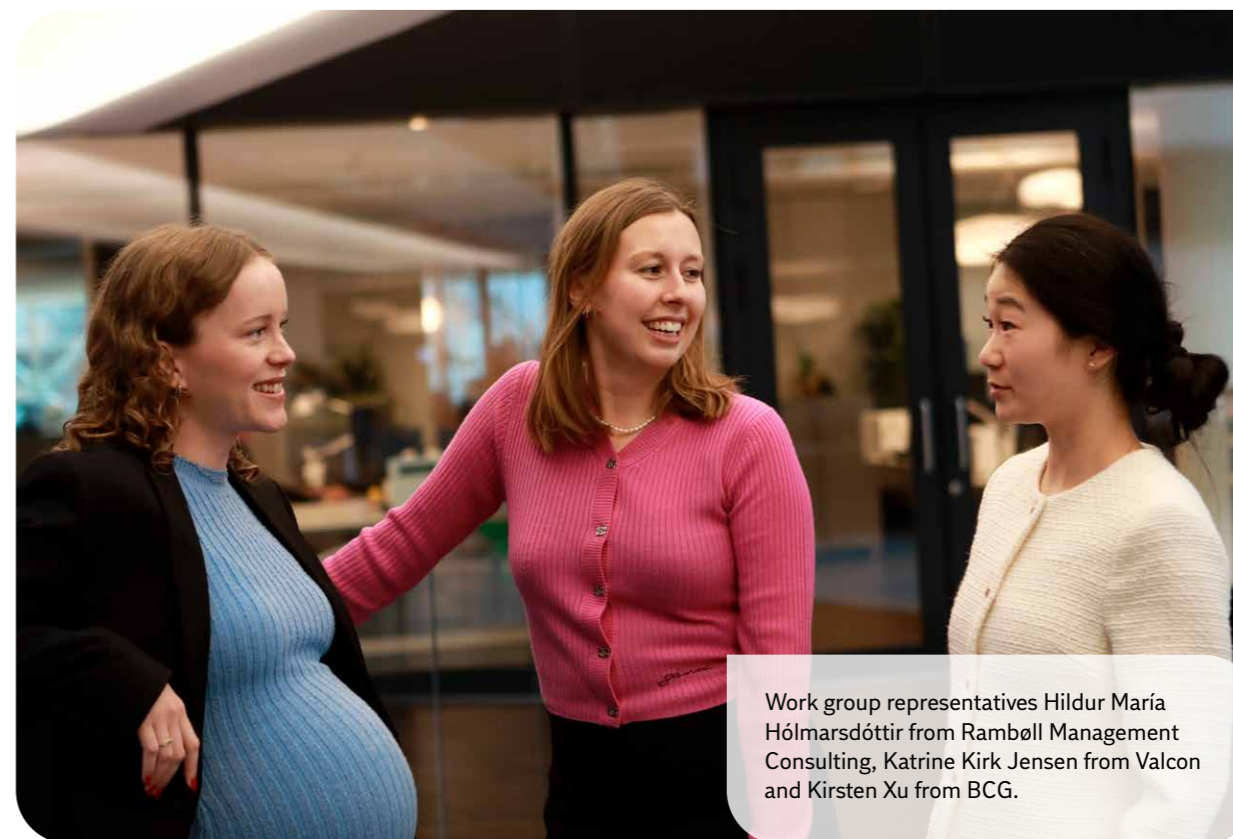
### Social networks function differently for men and women

The KPMG Global Female Leaders Outlook 2023 report revealed that informal male networks have historically existed as steppingstones for career advancement. However, these opportunities cannot be readily replicated for women due to the scarcity of top leadership positions held by women, limiting their ability to offer similar support to each other.

According to a survey conducted by KPMG, at least half of the respondents stated that the so-called "old boys club" still persists in the business world. Additionally, 49% of the respondents reported experiencing support from women's networks that contribute to their career advancement, acting as a counterbalance to the existing status quo, often referred to as the "new girls' club" versus the old boys' club.<sup>30</sup>

### Women need different types of networks than men

An American study from 2019 revealed that men and women have differing networking needs. The study found that men require a network that maximizes their access and exposure to market information, while women have similar needs but also require an additional element. Both men and women benefit from networks that provide access and exposure to market information and a central position within the network. However, women also seek "private information" from close female peers, inside and outside of work, such as insider insights into a company's leadership culture and politics. This is because women aspiring to executive leadership positions often encounter cultural and political challenges that men typically do not face. As a result, having an inner circle of close female contacts who can share private information becomes particularly valuable for women – especially women in the beginning of their career. For example, in situations where recruiters may assume that women are less committed than men, a female friend might offer advice on asking specific questions during an interview to demonstrate serious interest in a position. A male friend, even if well-connected, may not think to provide such advice, as he has not encountered similar obstacles.



Work group representatives Hildur María Hólmarsdóttir from Rambøll Management Consulting, Katrine Kirk Jensen from Valcon and Kirsten Xu from BCG.

The study emphasized the importance of having access to this private information to navigate a professional environment where different standards and expectations are applied to women. Women's networks play a crucial role in facilitating these relationships with close female peers. Furthermore, the study found that the most successful women in the study had close friends who were connected to a diverse group of people. Women whose inner circles consisted

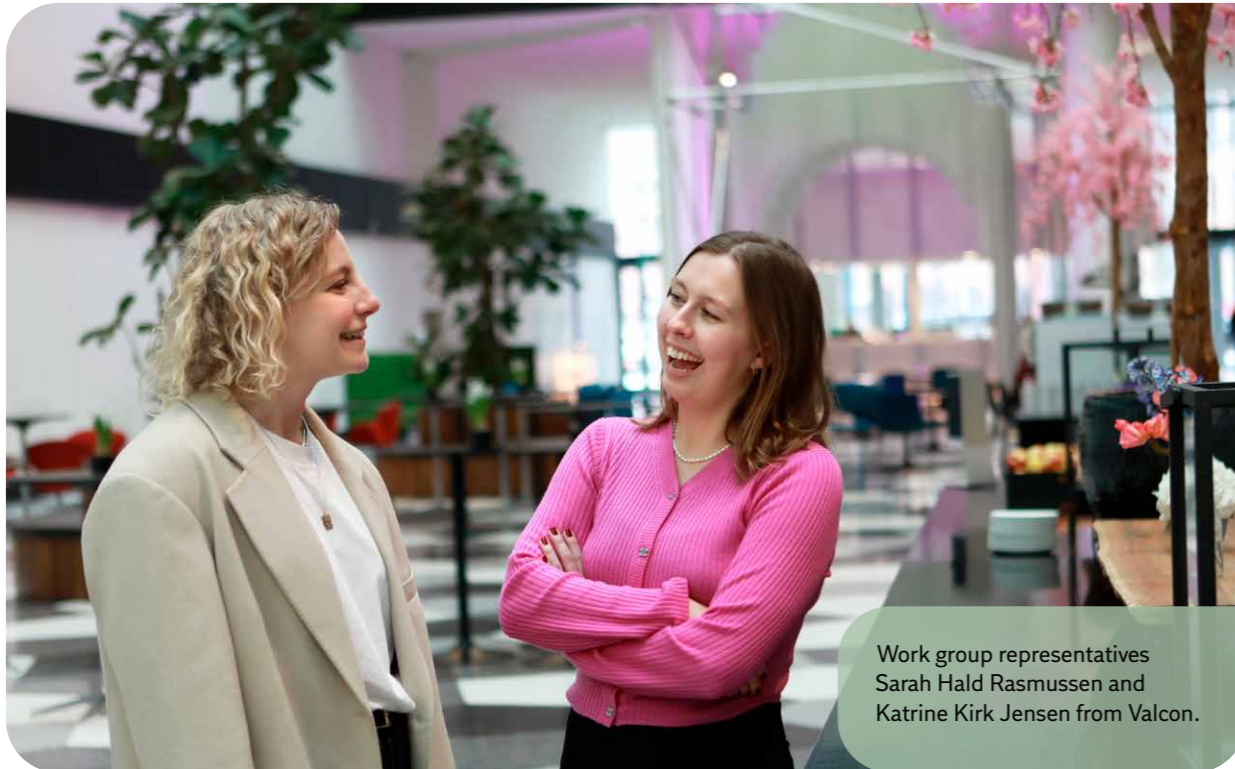
mainly of redundant connections did not perform as well, possibly due to receiving repetitive perspectives.<sup>31</sup> However, this is not a sustainable solution to the problem, as addressing structural gender equality should not be the responsibility of individuals. The study sheds light on the current dynamics of today's networks.

*We are proud of our efforts with "More Women in Consulting" here at KPMG, and we get inspired and energized when sharing experiences and thoughts through our female networks. Being in a setting with so many inspiring people makes us come back enthusiastic and hungry to get even more done.*

*– Markets & Communication, KPMG*

*Structurally, we are still struggling in Denmark to make room for female talent. That is why the Emerging Female Managers programme resonated so strongly with us. This programme paved the way for a fast track to succeeding as managers and harnessing the skills and abilities required to become a part of leadership in a company, breaking down silos and performing intelligently and with impact.*

*– Markets & Communication, KPMG*



### Women’s network creates community, solidarity, and empowerment

Effective women’s networks foster a sense of community, solidarity, and empowerment. It is also a space for sharing gender-specific challenges and experiences. They provide a space where women can engage in discussions, support each other in finding jobs, and share experiences. They also empower women from within, offering a supportive community that inspires action and personal change. Positive experiences from women’s events/networks where one can ask “stupid” questions and be open and honest in an inclusive and safe space. Additionally, women’s networks can provide valuable tips and tricks for overcoming obstacles in both work and family.<sup>32</sup>

Christian Waldstrøm, an associate professor in business management at Aarhus University, has conducted research on women’s networks, particularly in the business sector. He identifies several reasons why women seek out women’s networks.

”Many women join women’s networks to meet other women they can learn from and relate to. The interesting part is that they may not find those women in the networks because they are too busy with their careers, families, and exer-

cise routines to also participate in a women’s network. Therefore, in many women’s networks, there are too many who want to learn and too few who have something to offer,” says Christian Waldstrøm.

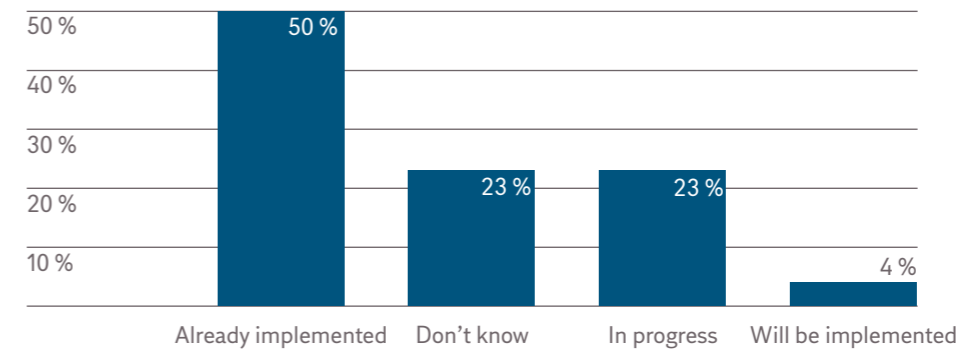
However, there is another factor that holds significance for women.

”Many networks in their presentation focus on being a nice and safe place to be, and one can get the feeling that it is more about the absence of men in the network than it is about the presence of women. It is the absence of men that makes the network safe and allows women to talk,” says Christian Waldstrøm.<sup>33</sup>

### Leadership involvement is crucial

It is important that leadership supports these networks by endorsing them externally and by communicating the purpose openly and clearly. For them to truly work, it also requires follow-up by leadership and for the ideas and solutions generated by women to be considered by relevant decision-makers within the organization. Leadership can also offer support by organising the meetings and ensuring that women have the time to participate in these networks.

### COLLABORATE with external organizations or industry networks, broadening networking opportunities and facilitating exposure to diverse role models



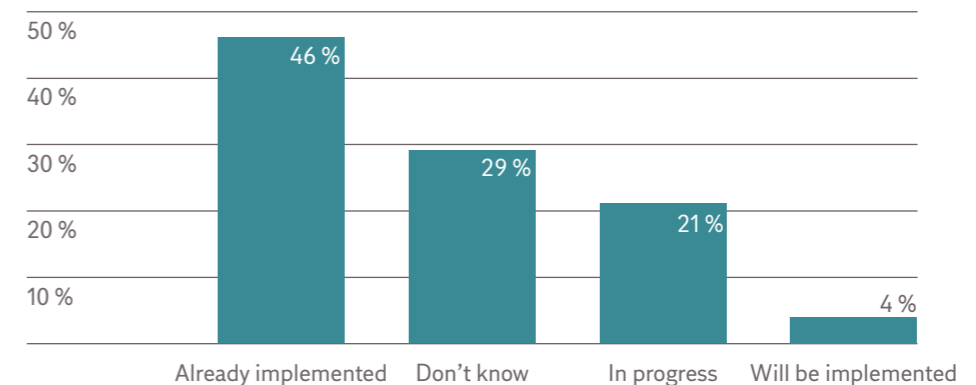
Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm

### For students

The management consulting industry has reported positive experiences with recruitment networks that offer students interested in the industry or a specific company the chance to gain insights and connect with a mentor. These

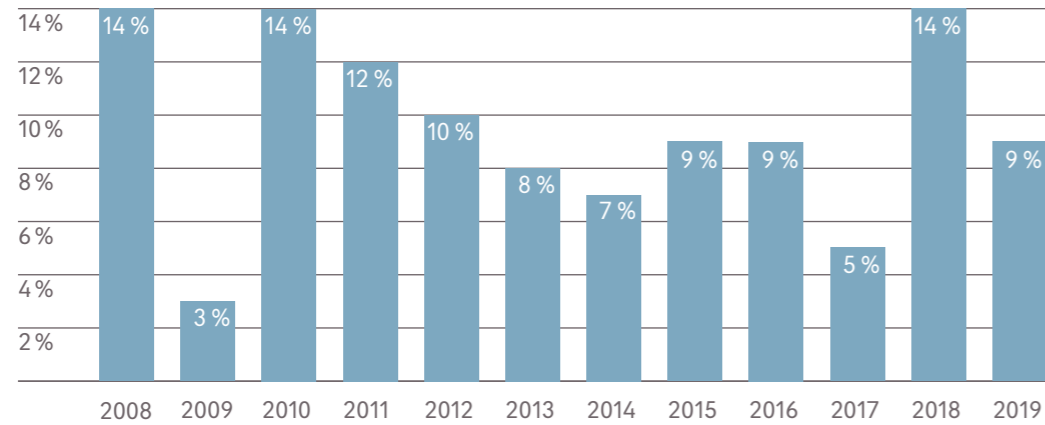
networks also enable access to talent that may not have been reached through traditional recruitment methods. Consolidating recruitment networks for the entire company, rather than specific departments, is advantageous, as students often have not yet determined their desired area of specialization.

### RESOURCES and SUPPORT for EMPLOYEE-LED affinity groups or networks focused on gender diversity and inclusion



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm

### A larger share of women compared to men leave the consulting industry within the first two years



Difference between the share of women compared to men who have left the consulting industry within the first two years (in percentage points)<sup>34</sup>

#### External women's networks

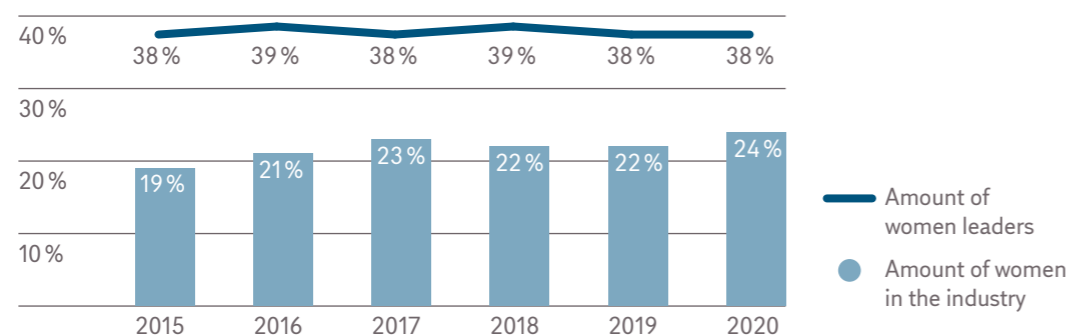
Based on industry experience, external networks for women have proven advantageous in industries with low female representation, such as 'financial services.' These networks facilitate connections among women from different companies within the industry, fostering a more expansive network. These external women-

focused networks aim to support the retention of talented female professionals across organizations.

#### Risks of isolated women's networks

One of the primary risks associated with internal women's networks is the potential to signal that

### Women in the management consulting industry and in leadership roles from 2015 to 2020



Source: Statistic Denmark's register data and DI calculations

addressing gender disparities is solely a women's issue to resolve. Within these internal networks, participants may often find themselves sharing experiences of gender-based discrimination and missed opportunities in the workplace. This is even more pronounced in organizations with few, or an absence of, women in higher ranks, where the disparity is particularly stark and unexplained.<sup>35</sup>

Talented women who participate in these networks may come to believe that their career ambitions cannot be fulfilled within their current workplace, prompting them to seek opportunities elsewhere. According to the 2022 study, 'Women in the Workplace' by McKinsey and Lean In, women are leaving their workplaces in large numbers, often due to a lack of advancement opportunities and support from their leaders. Consequently, despite the well-intentioned nature of women's networks-initiatives, they can inadvertently become counterproductive, undermining efforts to retain and promote talented women.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, internal women's networks remain one of the most frequently implemented initiatives in organisations. If you decide to establish or maintain these networks, it is essential to do so with purposes beyond solely achieving gender balance. From a research perspective there is no evidence to suggest that internal women's networks have an effect on increasing gender equality.<sup>35</sup>

#### Be aware of legal pitfalls

It is important to be aware of legal pitfalls regarding women's networks or similar initiatives that exclude based on gender in your company.

For example, advertising events exclusively for female students through online-based recruitment systems have been found to violate the Equal Treatment Act.<sup>37</sup> In a recent ruling by the Danish Equal Treatment Board, targeted recruitment based on gender has been deemed unlawful.<sup>38</sup> Companies should refrain from seeking participants of a specific gender for events through recruitment platforms. Additionally, requiring CVs and transcripts for event applications may create the presumption of an employment process.<sup>38</sup>

*Within our network, we have two focus areas:*

#### **Visibility and Empowerment.**

*We use our network to raise the visibility of the impressive female role models we have across Accenture from various levels, who not only show leadership through their seniority and achievements but are also subject matter experts or are known for being very good managers.*

*This ensures that our network has more people they can see themselves in, and that everyone can see there are multiple paths to leadership, as well as multiple leadership profiles – there's no one right way.*

*With empowerment, we focus on enabling discussions that matter and that drive impact, whether that be on how to approach self-promotion during the talent discussion process, an open discussion on the different positive and negative experiences both men and women have in the workplace, or sales training.*

*Having these two focus areas has really ensured that we focus on initiatives and dialogues that people really feel have an impact, and that they want to engage with, whether they identify as male or female.*

**Arianne Nolan, Gender Equality Lead Denmark, Accenture**



# **7. ROLE MODELS, MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP**







Work group representatives Sarah Hald Rasmussen from Valcon and Martina Ianev from BCG.

## 7. Role models, mentorship and sponsorship

Supporting the success of talented individuals has long been a primary focus in the management consulting industry. The industry relies on individuals gaining the necessary experience to progress and take on greater responsibilities, which is why there is a strong emphasis on supporting career progression and continuous learning. This focus on talent development is also a major factor in attracting younger talent to the industry.<sup>39</sup>

To facilitate this journey, many companies in the management consulting industry have implemented programs that pair experienced colleagues with less experienced ones with the goal of fostering career progression.

From a gender diversity perspective, it is important to place additional emphasis on designing these programs to ensure that underrepresented groups, in the consulting industry, receive the

equal amount of necessary support. Moreover, it is also important to establish what role models' function is in the industry, an aspect that has long been a focus.

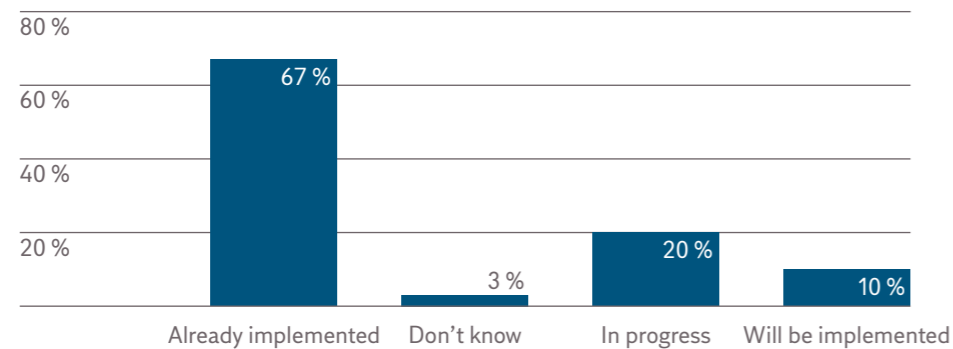
Based on industry experience and research in the field of role models, mentorship and sponsorship, implementing formalized mentorship and sponsorship programs can contribute to improving gender diversity but in varied forms.

### From catalogue #1 to #2

In the first volume of the inspirational catalogue, mentorship initiatives were discussed in the context of general talent development, while sponsorship was primarily focused on senior-level positions, aiming to cultivate a larger pipeline of female talents for leadership roles specifically partner positions.

In this second volume of the catalogue, there is a further exploration of the functions of role models, mentorship and sponsorship. The differences between sponsorship and mentorship are outlined, and additional ways of utilizing them are highlighted. The expanded discussion aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how mentorship and sponsorship can be effectively utilized in various scenarios.

**TRAINING and GUIDANCE** to employees regarding various career paths and profiles, enabling them to make informed decisions about their professional development



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm

## Discussion of initiatives

### Mentorship vs. sponsorship

There is a clear distinction between mentorship and sponsorship. To fully leverage the potential of mentorship and sponsorship, it is important to redefine and differentiate between the two.

### Mentorship

Mentors serve as role models, providing guidance and sharing their experiences and expertise

with mentees. They offer insights, advice, and knowledge within the same field, establishing a longer-term relationship to support the mentees' career journey. Mentorship primarily focuses on personal and professional development through a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and a mentee. Mentors share experiences, provide guidance, and offer valuable insights to navigate challenges and opportunities.

*In EY we work with several programs to ensure development and growth to our employees. One of the programs is our Career Watch program where high performing females work closely with a sponsor through a long period of time. The sponsor is always an internal person and the reason we have chosen the sponsorship model over mentorship is because it is important to have a sponsor internally as this person will advocate for you through your career.*

*– Naja Couriol, HR Business Partner, Talent Team, EY*

*Role modelling is a topic we are very conscious about as we know that having role models is a huge driver for many individuals and especially females have been vocal about the need of female role models. Therefore, we recognize that role models can take various forms, but they are crucial for numerous employees who need to observe how careers can be shaped.*

*– Naja Couriol, HR Business Partner, Talent Team, EY*

### Sponsorship

Goes beyond mentorship by actively endorsing and including individuals in the sponsor's professional network. Sponsors play an important role in advocating for the success and advancement of those they support. They actively promote their achievements and create opportunities for them within the organization. Sponsors put their own reputations on the line to support and promote the careers of those they sponsor.<sup>40</sup> Traditionally, sponsorship has been reserved for individuals deemed as high-potential employees, and these sponsorships have often developed organically rather than through a formal program. However, there is now a growing trend within the industry to experiment with sponsorships for individuals in junior positions.

### High performing females

"High-performing women" refers to a network where membership depends on performance, linking individuals with sponsors, mentors, or career advisors. Successful women can gain substantial advantages from such a network tailored around their achievements, offering chances to connect with sponsors, mentors, or career advisors. This network is exclusive to women since similar networks have traditionally existed for

men, and its purpose is to support the retention of women in their careers.

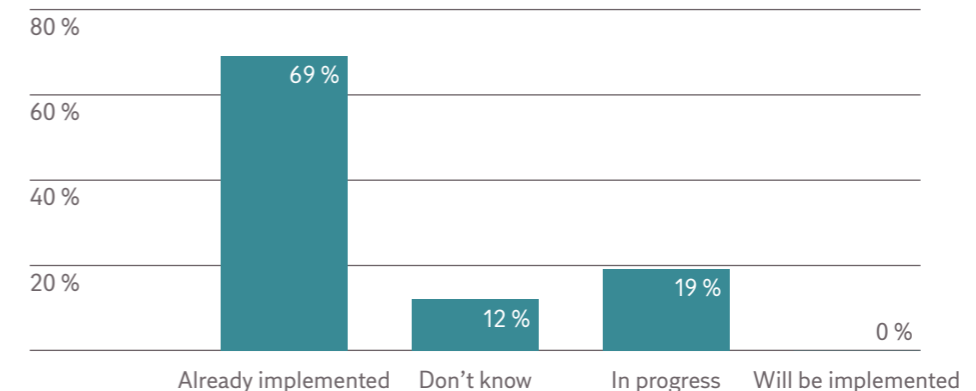
### Reverse mentoring and independent guidance

In recent years, reverse mentoring programs have gained traction as a tool for leadership development and fostering diversity and inclusion. These programs pair senior leaders with junior employees or individuals from different backgrounds, allowing for a two-way exchange of knowledge and perspectives. Reverse mentors provide insights into emerging trends, new technologies, and diverse viewpoints, helping senior leaders stay current and challenge their assumptions. Additionally, having an independent third-party reviewer or sparring partner can offer unbiased guidance and support. This impartial perspective can provide valuable feedback, identify areas for improvement, and help individuals navigate their career paths.<sup>40</sup>

### Role models

Based on industry experiences, having someone at the office who resembles you can significantly impact your ability to see yourself mirrored and realize that similar achievements are within your reach. However, the role model alone does

**NETWORKS** that cultivate connections, provide support, and create mentorship opportunities for everyone



Source: Data collected by the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firm

## EQUALIS' Explainer on role models

| The degree of intervention | Example of activity  | Target group and degree of effectiveness |          |               |
|----------------------------|--|--|----------|---------------|
|                            |  | Children                                 | Students | Adults        |
| Low                        | Presentation/exposure to role models, e.g., through videos or visits                                       | High                                     | Medium   | Low           |
| Medium                     | The role model is a teacher or another professional whom the mentee has direct access to and can talk with | Not examined*                            | High     | Not examined* |
| High                       | Formal mentoring program   | Not examined*                            | High     | High          |

\* Not examined in the included studies<sup>41</sup>

not necessarily contribute to this realization. It depends on the characteristics of the role model and the person you wish to influence.

Having female senior managers or partners can show younger employees that diversity in management is possible within the company. This can be an important first step in attracting and retaining younger talent. In fact, some talented individuals may choose not to join a company if there are no female partners present.

However, it is crucial not just to have female senior role models. Senior men who prioritize

family responsibilities create an environment where all genders can believe that balancing work and personal life is attainable for everyone, not just something that women should be supported with.

### The effect of role models

The following sections are based on the think-tank EQUALIS' findings.

Role model initiatives have the potential for a positive impact. However, when working with role models as a strategy for a more diverse workforce, there are several considerations that

### How to make role model initiatives work?

- 1. Developing tangible efforts:** Initiatives must be substantial and multifaceted, rather than merely showcasing successful individuals from underrepresented groups in sectors and industries.
- 2. Focusing on the target audience:** Understanding the specific demographics and psychological processes of the audience you wish to influence is crucial. What resonates with the target audience varies significantly based on factors such as age, experience, and skills.
- 3. Integrating role model initiatives with other efforts:** Role model initiatives should not stand alone. Addressing bias, dismantling stereotypes, and implementing structural changes are essential for long-term, behaviour-changing effects, rather than just raising awareness or providing inspiration.

*"Having female role models, I can relate to and seek mentorship from is incredibly important to me. However, many women tend to leave consulting around the time they have children, creating a noticeable gap between junior professionals and those at very senior levels. While I greatly value the insights from highly experienced female leaders, I often find myself wishing for mentors who are closer to my level of experience."*

– Katrine Kirk, Senior Consultant, Valcon




need attention. What we find when looking into the literature and research on role models is that these initiatives can have an impact, but mainly for young people. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to these considerations if you want to implement role model initiatives in this context.

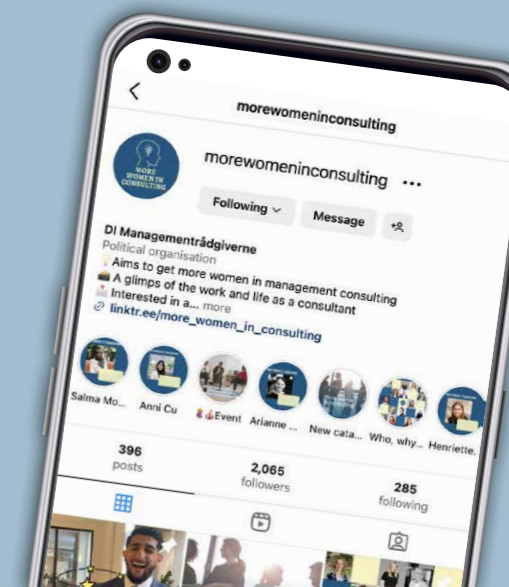
Exposing aspirants to role models may seem like an appealing intervention, but using the concept at lower levels in the intervention ladder can narrow the research evidence considerably. Role model initiatives should be seen as part of a broader range of measures that make industries more attractive to anyone considering them as

a career path. For role model initiatives to be effective, see Equalis' Explainer on role models to your left.

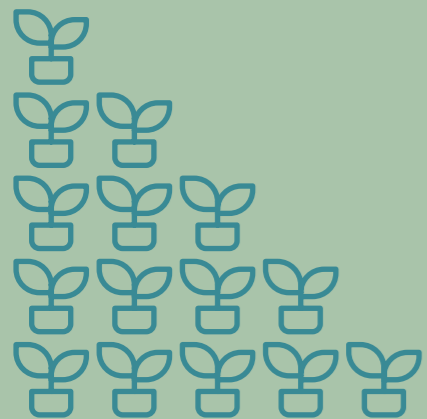
By solely focusing on role models as a single approach to addressing gender imbalances, we risk overlooking structural barriers and systemic biases present in environments with an over-representation of certain groups. These barriers make it challenging for other marginalized groups to succeed, regardless of their motivation or skills. Both cultural and structural changes are needed for real progress in achieving balance and diversity in education and the job market.<sup>20</sup>

## Follow More Women in Consulting on Instagram

-  Aims to get more women in management consulting
-  A glimpse of the work and life as a consultant
-  **Interested in a takeover?**  
Or would you like to nominate a colleague for a takeover?  
Send an e-mail to MR@di.dk



# 8. LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE CAREERS



Work group representatives Kirsten Xu and Martina lanev from BCG, Katrine Kirk Jensen and Sarah Hald Rasmussen from Valcon and Hildur María Hólmarsdóttir from Rambøll Management Consulting.



## 8. Long-term sustainable careers

The demographic shift necessitates longer workforce participation, with new generations having different life and work expectations, posing challenges and opportunities for talent attraction and retention. Currently, individuals under 36 who have worked in the management consulting industry have, on average, stayed in their roles for 2.3 years.<sup>42</sup>

While there is improved gender balance at junior levels, maintaining women in senior roles remains a challenge. This tendency often results in talent loss, particularly when individuals have reached the manager or senior manager level facing pressure and work-life balance conflicts. At this stage, there seems to be an apparent conflict between work and family life, leading to a loss of talent in management consulting because it is untenable for many to stay.<sup>43</sup>

Creating sustainable career paths that accommodate diverse needs can enhance talent retention. However, despite efforts, some firms still lack perceived flexibility in employment conditions. Networking and connection-building platforms can also alleviate the sense of isolation experienced by senior women, addressing the underrepresentation at higher levels.

Understanding employee turnover reasons and implementing cultural and structural changes are crucial steps in fostering inclusive and sustainable career environments.

### From catalogue #1 to #2

Work-life balance was a significant theme in the initial inspirational catalogue, highlighting the need for adjustments in working hours, workload, and performance expectations. However, this publication introduces a new perspective: recognizing that offering alternative career paths is equally crucial. It acknowledges that not everyone should follow the same designated path, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and diversity in career journeys.

## Discussion of initiatives

### Implementing flexible work models

Flexible work arrangements can be structured in various ways. Some companies choose to staff projects with teams that work fewer hours per week but over an extended period, maintaining the same level of quality and meeting the client's requirements. For instance, full teams at 80% capacity (measured in hours, where 100% is defined as 55 hours per week) - this extends the duration of the project slightly, but the client pays less. Implementing 80% teams for junior employees allows for a more balanced workload, reduced stress, and increased job satisfaction. This approach not only benefits employees by promoting a healthier work-life balance but also supports the company's sustainability goals by reducing burnout and turnover rates.<sup>44</sup>

Other organizations offer options such as reduced working hours during specific periods, or hybrid work models where employees alternate between working at the client's site, their own office, and their home office.

The aim of these flexible work models, regardless of the type, is to accommodate the individual needs of employees. Whether it is a parent picking up their children from daycare, pursuing personal hobbies, writing a book, or engaging in volunteer work, these models provide the flexibility to do so. However, it is not enough to simply offer flexibility; it must also be perceived as attractive by employees who may have concerns.

### Remember learning and social interaction in flexible work arrangements

For younger employees, it is also important to have seniors in the office from whom they can learn. Based on industry experiences, younger employees still greatly value coming into the office, seeing each other, and having the opportunity to collaborate with more experienced colleagues. For them, it is also important to offer social events to foster unity, job satisfaction, and a sense of belonging to the company. In this way, hybrid work arrangements and offerings should also consider these aspects.

### A clear transition

Having a clear process for transitioning up or down in work hours, especially before and after events like parental leave, is crucial. This involves having a well-defined model that outlines the steps for ramping up and down effectively. For example, implementing a structured model can guide the process, allocate responsibilities, and determine which roles need to be filled.

Returning to work after parental leave or any extended absence often requires additional support initially.

### The role of management in ensuring the adoption of flexible work models

Leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering cultural acceptance and embracing the opportunities presented, if a company is offering flexible work models.

While employees may find flexible opportunities appealing, they may also be apprehensive about how reduced hours or working from home several days a week will impact their career prospects and advancement. It requires clear communication and support from leadership to avoid creating A and B teams where employees feel anxious about project assignments, promotions, and career prospects. Leadership must actively foster a culture that supports non-traditional work models and offers diverse career paths. This may be achieved through a combination of verbal affirmation and leading by example. Managers and senior colleagues should openly discuss and promote the availability of flexible work models and utilize these options themselves to demonstrate their acceptance to their junior peers.

### Interim internal roles

Another option for achieving a better work-life balance in the consulting industry, which several companies are experimenting with, is the possibility of taking on internal roles for a period. This provides an opportunity for a more structured daily routine where one is not reliant on clients' timetables. However, transitioning individuals into internal roles can be challenging. There is a risk of drifting too far from the commercial aspect, making it difficult to "return" to client-facing roles. To address this, some are experimenting with roles that also involve commercial aspects, allowing individuals to continue contributing to sales initiatives. This arrangement typically involves taking on a role for a limited time period. Currently, efforts are being made to transition individuals into roles that also encompass commercial responsibilities, enabling them to remain engaged in sales activities.

Another approach to achieving a better work-life balance in consulting involves internal roles that specialize in particular competencies. This setup not only structures individuals' daily routines

Based on industry experience, flexible work arrangements have become increasingly common, allowing employees to adjust their work hours to accommodate their personal lives more effectively. For instance, many employees now feel comfortable incorporating activities such as child pickups directly into their schedules, rather than simply blocking off time. This transparency is becoming more prevalent in today's work culture, contributing to a better work-life balance and employee well-being.

– Work Group  
*More Women In Consulting*



but also allows them to focus and enhance their expertise within the organization.

### Consulting is heavily judged by ranks

Consulting is often characterized by a rank-based evaluation system, creating an 'up and out' culture where promotions are expected at regular intervals. To address this norm and the associated pressure, some organizations have successfully adopted a more unconventional approach by offering 'director' and 'partner' titles in innovative ways. This shift not only provides alternative career paths within consulting but also challenges the traditional view that some ranks can be challenging to maintain for several years, and it is essential to shift away from perceiving not getting promoted every 3rd or 5th year as a failure. It is important to emphasize these alternative paths and redefine success beyond a strict rank-based progression model.

**More talents in consulting:  
Love for Talent**

*Achieving greater gender diversity starts with the industry's ability to attract talent.*

*To support companies in this effort, the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms has conducted three analyses highlighting key areas the industry must address to strengthen recruitment and retention strategies.*

**[Read the reports here](#)**



**Specialist track**

Many consulting firms find great success in offering specialization, allowing individuals to choose from five tracks. This approach makes the career path in the management consulting industry more flexible, moving away from the 'up and out' model. It broadens the palette of success and shifts away from the traditional prototype of a successful consultant.

*"In a company as big as Accenture we have many colleagues with very different backgrounds and interests, and we want to ensure that we provide different paths to success that tailor to their interests and strengths. We have therefore sought to move away from a progression model with only one classic route, and introduce tracks with more focus on Sales or Subject Matter Expertise, alongside the classic consulting progression. This has been a great way to enable our people to focus more within the areas that give them most energy and where they most excel – which is ultimately to the benefit of Accenture and our clients"*

**– Jakob Kaad, Managing Director, Accenture**

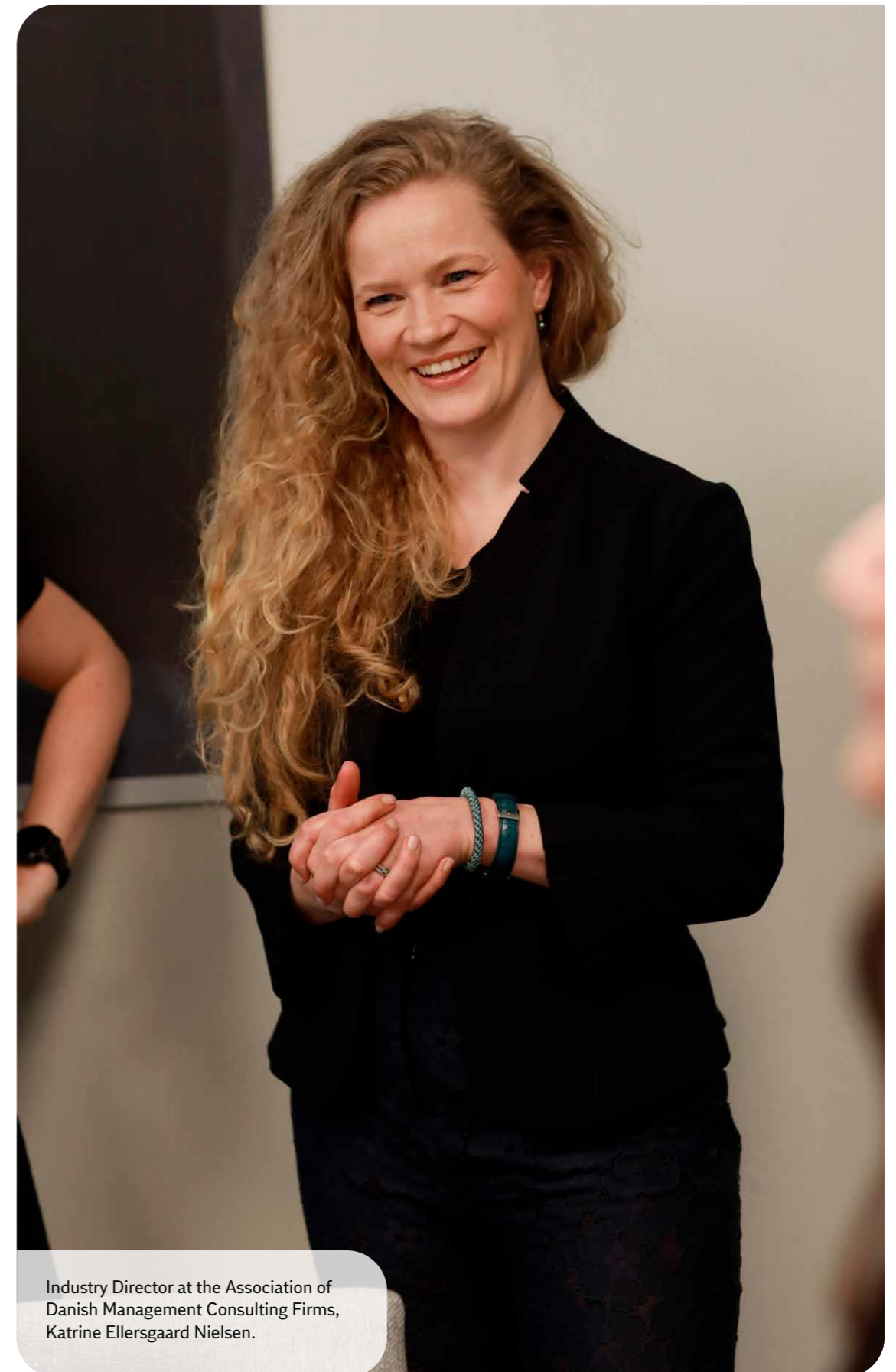
*Our female network for students interested in consulting has been an excellent way for us to engage with impressive and highly relevant candidates. We've seen the real benefits of having students partner with female colleagues who mentor them and provide insights into life as a consultant and at Accenture. Participants are reassured that consulting is absolutely a space where women can thrive, and they can then apply with a clear motivation for why they want to join consulting. I have personally hired several of the participants in my team with great success and see it as a fantastic source for ensuring we continue to get great, diverse talent*

**– Peter Jørgensen, Managing Director, Accenture**

In addition to alternative career paths, there is also a growing need in the industry for more specialists who can bring specific expertise and depth to client projects. This emphasis on specialization further diversifies career options and enhances the overall effectiveness of consulting services.

**Sales training**

As sales is a crucial part of the management consulting industry, it is important for both male and female talents to develop their skills in this area. Some consulting firms focus on training for everyone, while others have a particular emphasis on developing the sales skills of female talents.



Industry Director at the Association of Danish Management Consulting Firms, Katrine Ellersgaard Nielsen.





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