

[International Women's Day](#) (IWD) is a worldwide event that celebrates and recognises the achievements of women across the globe, raises awareness against bias, promotes diversity and champions gender equality.

Although much progress has been made to get more women into the workplace, they remain a largely underrepresented group, with just 11% of female directors in the FTSE 100 being from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

When it comes to asking "why don't women want to work in certain industries?" or "why aren't there more females in leadership roles?" there are plenty of answers.

Among them is the significant gender pay gap, a lack of diversity, a weak talent pipeline, gender discrimination and fewer opportunities for promotion.

Particularly after a career hiatus or extended period of leave, women can often struggle to regain their former position or are often looked over for promotion. Frequently, women have to go back down the career ladder in order to get back into the workforce.

Research by [CIPD](#) states that, "If a woman either leaves the labour market altogether for even a short period of time, or continues to work, but on a reduced hours' basis, she's more likely to be in a low-paid and low-skilled job, and to remain there throughout her working life."

One study suggests that a prime factor behind the high attrition rate of female workers between 30 and 40 years of age, a period considered to be their prime working age, is family life demands.

Women typically spend more time on unpaid domestic and care work than men, which can make it even harder for them to sustain their career in an inflexible or unsupportive work environment.

Without proper support from their employer, starting a family or juggling the demands of family life can often make it hard or even unfeasible for women to re-enter the workforce.

These hurdles can often be a barrier or stop women wanting to return to the workplace or prompt them to seek another job that can better meet their needs and expectations.

## Covid has intensified the challenges working women face

Coronavirus has made it even harder for women to participate in the workplace as women are more likely to have been furloughed or laid off, stalling their careers and or jeopardising their financial stability.

The crisis has also impacted working mothers who have had many of their supports, including school and childcare removed, that made it possible for them to have a job. Without these supports it has become harder for them to balance and cope with the extra demand.

Sadly, the pandemic has prompted more than one in four women to consider scaling back their career or leaving the workforce completely.

If organisational leaders do not take action now much of the progress the UK has made in terms of gender equality and diversity in the workplace could be undone.

Coronavirus has irrevocably transformed the work landscape, changes that would have taken years of incremental adoption have had to happen by necessity almost overnight.

The new workplace challenges we are facing now aren't going to go away, which

means organisations need to rethink how they engage with and support their employees, particularly those whose work life balance has been upended by the crisis.

The extent to which organisations make it possible for women to combine motherhood and other care demands with work will be a crucial deciding factor affecting the size of the female workforce.

## Why does workplace diversity matter?

The short answer is that workplace diversity is a major business advantage. Organisations with high levels of diversity are more inclusive, productive, innovative and are better at competing for the best talent.

Having a diverse and supportive work environment is also a prerequisite for winning today's top female talent, according to a recruitment report by PwC.

Employers that ignore diversity and do not do more to support their female workforce are setting themselves at a disadvantage by having a lop-sided workforce.

When half the world's population is unable to meet its full potential to participate in the workforce, the global economy also suffers.

So, it makes good business sense that organisations invest effort in supporting diversity and removing the barriers that limit women in their careers.

## So, what can be done?

[Company culture](#) plays a huge role in employee experience, from coworker interactions to how projects are delivered, culture sets the whole tone of the

organisation.

Building a flexible, more empathetic and inclusive company culture will help create workplaces where women and other marginalised groups have equal opportunity to thrive, achieve their full potential over the long term, and are able to bring their whole selves to work.

Creating this type of positive and empowering culture will not just help women, it will benefit everyone within the organisation at all levels.

Happy, healthy and engaged workers who feel high job satisfaction and believe they are valued at work benefit their organisation with increased productivity, more [employee led innovation](#), higher retention rates and lower absences.

To guide and craft a company culture that thrives leaders need to authentically buy in to these new core values and lead by example.

Leaders must clearly articulate and regularly communicate what their desired behaviour looks like and similarly, they must make it absolutely clear the type of conduct that is not acceptable.

It's important that people who practise the desired values are endorsed and misconduct is addressed swiftly and effectively.

Transforming an entrenched company culture is not a solo project for one person, leaders need to give all their employees an equal seat at the table and involve them in this process.

Leaders should give their people a voice and actively listen and respond to feedback in a timely manner. Real-time input from employees will help leaders to make more informed and evidence based decisions that will be most impactful in the workplace and yield the best results.

After all, it's the people on the ground who are best placed to know what changes will support and benefit them the most.

## Nurture psychological safety

If organisations want their people all to participate and add their sentiments to the discourse, then it's vital that they have a good level of company [psychological safety](#) - a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

When a workforce has a high level of psychological safety they will feel able to openly speak up, seek guidance, or ask for support when they need it. This confidence can be empowering for people who may be reluctant to be vulnerable at work and help marginalised voices be heard.

Organisations can help nurture psychological safety by providing their people with a platform to openly speak up.

An employee engagement, wellbeing and recognition app like Trickle, removes bias, traditional barriers to communication and enables employers to listen to and work collaboratively with their people to achieve better outcomes for everyone.

With a tool like Trickle, real-time feedback trickles upwards from the ground level and enables employees to reach out to managers at any time in a way that is comfortable to them and have a say on all aspects of the organisation.

This type of dynamic feedback will help leaders gauge how their workforce is really doing and how well they are meeting the needs and expectations of all their employees.

## Adopt a more empathetic approach to leadership

Leaders need to practise more emotional intelligence and empathy when interacting with employees at all levels.

We are living in altered times and leaders should adjust the management style and expectations. A failure by management to adapt will most likely result in more women leaving the workplace, higher levels of employee stress and [burnout](#), and decreased productivity.

Leaders should reevaluate their norms around work flexibility and ensure employees who are struggling with their work life balance are accommodated where possible. It's also important that leaders reassure their people that making use of this flexibility will not reflect poorly on them.

When employees, particularly working mothers, believe senior leaders are genuinely supportive of their flexibility needs, they are less likely to consider stepping back from their careers.

How managers respond will greatly influence how people feel in their role and their opinion of the organisation. If leaders respond in a supportive and constructive way, people will feel safe to flag up issues, potential pain points or ask for help early on before their issue escalates into a larger problem.

## It's time to rethink how we support all employees

The shortfalls in how organisations are currently engaging with and supporting

their employees have been magnified by the crisis. It has exacerbated existing problems and reignited the discussion around the importance of employee support, wellbeing and workplace inclusivity.

Organisations should look at the current situation as a wake up call and opportunity to reconsider the relationship they want to have with their employees and what will happen to their workforce if they don't take action now to address inequality.

The crisis has also proven that remote and flexible working are viable solutions but that they will require a different style of management and support.

Ultimately, what Coronavirus has done is challenge dated perceptions of what a workplace should look like and revealed that we aren't as far along on the road to gender parity and equality as we may have thought.

This hurdle could either derail the progress that has been made or help build better workplaces moving forward.

## How Trickle can help

Trickle is an online workplace engagement, wellbeing and recognition platform used by organisations to connect with their employees to create a high performing and inclusive work culture. With Trickle your people have a voice and a safe space to use it to express their true sentiment, ask for support or seek guidance.

The platform's optional anonymity function ensures that everyone feels secure to share how they're really feeling or raise any issue no matter how difficult. Find out more about how Trickle can help your organisation develop a strong work culture and make things better for everyone.

Get in touch for more information or to [book a short 20 minute demo](#).

Alternatively you can [trial Trickle absolutely free for 30-days](#).