



## Let's welcome millennial women into the workplace

It is time to consider the aspirations and rate of progress of young women in the workplace. These millennial women, born between 1980 and 1995, are our leadership pipeline for the future. By 2020 they are expected to make up one quarter of the labour force.

Currently between 19 and 34 years of age, these women have very different approaches to the world of work from their predecessors. It's time the corporate world took notice.

This is not just about equity targets. It's about a culture shift in the DNA of the company, which recognises the unique contributions that women can make.

We have given a lot of attention recently to women on boards and in executive management. This continues to be important, since change in the top ranks is needed to drive change throughout the company. However, we also need to focus on talented younger women, prepare them for leadership roles and accelerate their rate of progress up the corporate hierarchy.

In South Africa, women now outnumber men by almost two to one in obtaining tertiary degree qualifications. Even in the sciences there is an upward trend. Millennial women are soaring ahead in universities and technical colleges.

To attract this millennial talent – a generation born in an era defined by constant technological advancement and rapid globalisation – demands a different leadership approach.

As PwC states in its 'Next Generation Diversity' report, "To become a change catalyst ... organizations must drive parallel efforts which tackle enhanced leadership diversity in conjunction with systemic change efforts targeting their workforce from day one."

The PwC survey shows that opportunities for career progression and a strong record on equality and diversity are important employer characteristics sought after by female millennials.

More than 80% say these are important factors in deciding whether or not to work for an organization. In addition, millennials "have a strong appetite for working abroad, with 71% keen to do so at some stage in their careers". Yet they continue to face prejudice when it comes to international assignments.

The challenge facing leaders of today is to identify the drivers motivating these women so that they can put in place flexible acquisition, retention and reward strategies that match their aspirations.

The new workplace needs a high-octane mix of talent to deliver the innovations needed to keep business competitive. The potential for high-performance is something that millennial women possess in abundance, but they are also high-maintenance employees.

Long gone are the days of a 30-year career in the organisation. Shorter tenure and alternative employment models have become the norm. The global shortage in highly skilled professions has led to massive skills mobility. And of course, as a result of technological change, skills become obsolete faster.



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Smart leaders are building international assignments into their leadership development plans for women, and using specialised projects as a means both to build skills and hold the attention of highly talented individuals.

A recent Ketchum Leadership Communication Monitor shows that women perform markedly better than men on the four attributes deemed most important for effective leaders. These are leading by example, transparent communication, admitting mistakes, bringing out the best in others, and handling controversial issues or crises calmly. In short honesty, transparency and collaboration matter most.

Let us celebrate the feminine characteristics that women bring to the new world of work, rather than trading in outdated male paradigms. Making the most of female millennial talent will bring rewards both to public and private sector organizations – and the women who work in them.