

# Harvard Business Review

## Executive Summary

### Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership

**When you put all the pieces together, a new picture emerges for why women don't make it into the C-suite. It's not the glass ceiling, but the sum of many obstacles along the way.**

*by Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli*

Two decades ago, people began using the “glass ceiling” catchphrase to describe organizations' failure to promote women into top leadership roles. Eagly and Carli, of Northwestern University and Wellesley College, argue in this article (based on a forthcoming book from Harvard Business School Press) that the metaphor has outlived its usefulness. In fact, it leads managers to overlook interventions that would attack the problem at its roots, wherever it occurs. A labyrinth is a more fitting image to help organizations understand and address the obstacles to women's progress.

Rather than depicting just one absolute barrier at the penultimate stage of a distinguished career, a labyrinth conveys the complexity and variety of challenges that can appear along the way. Passage through a labyrinth requires persistence, awareness of one's progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead. Routes to the center exist but are full of twists and turns, both expected and unexpected.

Vestiges of prejudice against women, issues of leadership style and authenticity, and family responsibilities are just a few of the challenges. For instance, married mothers now devote even more time to primary child care per week than they did in earlier generations (12.9 hours of close interaction versus 10.6), despite the fact that fathers, too, put in a lot more hours than they used to (6.5 versus 2.6). Pressures for intensive parenting and the increasing demands of most high-level careers have left women with very little time to socialize with colleagues and build professional networks—that is, to accumulate the social capital that is essential to managers who want to move up.

The remedies proposed—such as changing the long-hours culture, using open-recruitment tools, and preparing women for line management with appropriately demanding assignments—are wide ranging, but together they have a chance of achieving leadership equity in our time.

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