

# Women in leadership

Why perception outpaces the pipeline—and what to do about it

*More people than ever before believe that women have an equal opportunity to attain leadership positions. But those sentiments haven't been enough to drive significant changes in actual advancement. Biases are still a barrier. To break them down, organizations need to mature their approach to gender parity and create structures and systems that work for women and men.*



## Parity “feels” close but is getting farther away.

In 2019, people across industries said it would take 54 years to achieve gender parity in leadership. Now, they say it’s possible in 10 years, owing possibly to the greater emphasis on women-focused diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. But the optimism is belied by the facts, which show a significant hollowing out of women in the middle-management tiers, putting future leadership attainment in peril. At the current rate of change, gender parity remains decades away.



## The most destructive structural barriers are invisible.

Unconscious biases continue to permeate the workplace, with only 41% of male managers agreeing that their organizations’ leadership believes that women with children are just as dedicated to their jobs as everyone else. The attributes perceived as critical for leadership also remain gendered—men are expected to be results oriented, and women, people oriented.



## The cost of doing nothing is getting more expensive.

More organizations recognize that enabling gender equity and inclusion is good for business. In fact, organizations identified as gender equity leaders report 19% higher revenue growth than others in our sample. But overall, not enough companies act as if their continued growth might depend on it. And, with nearly a third of women saying they may leave their jobs this year, attracting and retaining top female talent is only going to get harder.

*“If you don’t have a systematic way from the ground up to develop the next generation of leaders, it’s not going to get there.”*

**Cynthia Chu**, Chief Financial Officer of Audible

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