

# This isn't about "fixing" our women!

A study looking at the return on investing in  
female-specific leadership development

The EY logo is positioned in the bottom left corner of the page. It consists of the letters 'EY' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The background of the entire page is a bokeh effect of light spots in various colors (blue, green, yellow, orange) against a dark background. A bright yellow diagonal shape cuts across the bottom right, and a series of white vertical lines of varying lengths form a triangular shape on the left side, pointing towards the EY logo.

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"As our title says, this is not about 'fixing our women', but more about recognizing that specialist, focused programs such as these, are one of the strategic enablers that will help us to reach our goal of gender parity at all ranks of EY."

**Mark Otty**  
EMEIA Area Managing  
Partner



# Foreword

In December 2008, we ran our first female-specific leadership program in Europe, Middle East, India and Africa (EMEIA) and, since then, it has gone from strength to strength. Over that time, we have added a further two programs to the portfolio, focusing on high-potential women, from manager through to newly promoted partners. There has been a lot of discussion in the market about the value of such programs, but we have always been convinced that they play a strategic role in our overall objective to achieve balanced teaming at EY. In fact, when we completed a piece of internal research looking at 22,000 global audit assignments, we found that the more gender-balanced teams were more profitable, while retaining a high level of quality.

Of course, we are not only focused on female development, and all of our people have access to leadership programs at both a local and Regional level, as well as globally. However, we have learnt over the last six years that there is a strong business case to create a space for our women to meet and work together, and we have seen this translate into a strong return on investment that clearly benefits both our women and their colleagues across the rest of the organization.

Through this thought leadership, we hope to dispel the myth that “women’s leadership programs are about fixing women.”

Our women’s leadership programs aim to:

- ▶ Demonstrate a commitment to our top-potential female candidates, that they are valued and that we support their further growth and success within our organization
- ▶ Create an environment for networking that builds relationships
- ▶ Create opportunities for our high-potential women to have visibility with senior leadership so that further coaching and sponsorship is promoted
- ▶ Create a platform for women to recognize and capitalize on the unique strengths and attributes that female leaders can bring to the table

Ultimately, we want them to succeed as women, to feel that they can be themselves. We don’t want them to change, we want them to harness the difference that they bring and know that it is valued.

Most interesting for us was the breadth of impact that the programs have had. We heard about it in the interviews with our program alum and saw it in the online survey that we have recently conducted. It has re-energized some of our women, encouraged them to think differently about what they want from their career and how they will achieve it, and has helped them develop strategies that will improve their navigation of the organization. Alum from the programs have decided to relocate countries, take on new products and sectors, start external charitable trusts and launch internal networks.

We do hope you will enjoy reading about our findings and that you will finish this document convinced that there is a strong case for investment in female-specific leadership development.



**Seshni Samuel**  
EMEIA Talent  
Leader



**Fleur Bothwick**  
EMEIA Director of  
Diversity and Inclusive  
Leadership

# Why offer female-specific development?



“Investing in women’s advancement is one of the ways we can help build diverse and inclusive teams. We focus first on having an inclusive work environment, and then enabling our women professionals to further develop the skills they need to succeed in a complex global environment, while also establishing a strong supportive network, to help take their career to the next level.”

Karyn Twaronite  
EY Global Diversity & Inclusiveness Officer





A lot has been written about the positives and negatives of running female-only leadership programs. Some of the pushback against such programs suggests that:

- ▶ It stigmatizes women.
- ▶ It fails to engage the men on the challenges women face.
- ▶ It is unnecessary.
- ▶ It's counterproductive.
- ▶ Women don't want to be singled out.

At EY, in Europe, the Middle East, India and Africa (EMEIA), we believe that the benefits far outweigh these concerns, and we offer three formal programs for our women from manager through to executive director, outlined in the table below.

Manager	Senior manager	
 <b>Navigator</b> 3 x 0.5 day, workshops, live	 <b>Women's Leadership Program</b> 2 days, live	 <b>Realizing your potential as a female leader</b> 2.5 days, live
<b>For female managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Establish and articulate your leadership brand with impact</li> <li>▶ Identify and work on limiting beliefs</li> <li>▶ Build a support network; share feedback and perspectives</li> <li>▶ Set career development goals and create implementation plan</li> </ul>	<b>For high-potential, female senior managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Build your confidence to make a difference, authentically</li> <li>▶ Understand different gender approaches to leadership and careers</li> <li>▶ Identify key challenges and appropriate strategies for success</li> <li>▶ Build a pan-EMEIA support network</li> </ul>	<b>For female candidates more than 80% likely to go through next the partner admissions process:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Enhance communication skills to present yourself confidently</li> <li>▶ Work on your personal brand and how it supports a partnership case</li> <li>▶ Commit to a strategic networking plan; learn from each other</li> <li>▶ Raise your profile with Area service line leadership</li> </ul>

**These interventions do not overlap, but reinforce each other; female potential partners will ideally participate in all of them.**

We believe that female-only leadership programs provide a supportive environment for women to focus on issues in the workplace that are primarily concerned with women – for example, organizational power and politics, working styles and career development. Women's leadership styles tend to be different from their male colleagues, and they can often have different career aspirations.



## Our EMEIA Women's Leadership Program

The first of our three programs was launched in 2008, and 452 high-potential women from across EMEIA have attended the EMEIA Women's Leadership Program to date. It was designed and developed, and is run, at Cranfield Business School in the UK by Professor Susan Vinnicombe and a team of five coaches. Each program lasts two-and-a-half days for up to 25 women. The key objectives are to:

- ▶ Create a space in which participants can explore a diverse range of effective leadership styles and understand the inherent differences in typical male or female strategies
- ▶ Support participants in identifying the key challenges that they face in navigating their career at EY and developing appropriate strategies for success
- ▶ Build participants' confidence to make a difference, both internally and externally, in a way that is wholly authentic
- ▶ Equip participants to assess their current state and identify the appropriate focus for their future development
- ▶ Facilitate the establishment of a collegiate, peer network to provide ongoing support and strategic challenge



**452** high-potential women from across EMEIA have attended the EMEIA Women's Leadership Programme to date.

The program incorporates the latest research on female leaders and includes intensive small-group coaching and exploration of issues. It is extremely interactive, which encourages a high degree of personal disclosure. It is opened by a senior male partner and, on the second night, three female partners are invited to share their leadership journeys. Follow-up coaching sessions one to two weeks post program and six weeks after that are a significant part of the program design.



**Professor Susan Vinnicombe** of Cranfield University developed and now runs the EMEIA Women's Leadership Program and is the author of the annual *Female FTSE Board Report*.

"I ran my first women's leadership program more than 25 years ago, following the publication of Baroness Howe's report highlighting the lack of women at board level. Before that, training targeted at women tended to put the emphasis on skills development or assertiveness, but it seemed to me that the issues women were facing in the workplace were nothing to do with lack of skills or even lack of confidence, and that there was a need to delve deeper to find what was really holding them back.

The question of whether there should be female-only leadership programs has always divided opinion. The fact that we are now

seeing a lot of other schools and institutions developing female-only courses tends to suggest that they work. On the other hand, people will argue that they reinforce barriers rather than bringing them down, or that they do women a disservice by singling them out.

I think it's important to bring women together. Business culture is changing, but the environment is still a challenging one for senior women. Most organizations are male-dominated in terms of design and structure; so most leadership programs are male-dominated by default. Typically, men don't find themselves in situations where they are in a small minority. They don't have that experience of feeling 'other.'

Women have a tendency to internalize their concerns about their careers and how far or fast they're progressing. It's often not until they come together in a safe environment, such as the one we provide at Cranfield, that they realize the issues they're facing might be gender-related rather than specific to them as an individual. One of the great benefits of the program is that it teaches women how to work with and support each other; something they may not always have the opportunity to do in the workplace.

Another major benefit is the opportunity to make new contacts. The program is structured around small coaching groups and the participants share a lot with each other

over the two-and-a-half days. They're asking themselves some big questions: what are my strengths? What are my weaknesses and what can I do about them? How do I need to change if I want that big leadership role? Am I sure I want it at all? The program has a global reach and alum will often come back to talk to the current crop of delegates, so the network is always growing.

The goal of the program isn't to teach women how to be more like men. It's not about 'fixing' the women; it's about 'fixing' the organization. There absolutely has to be buy-in at senior level, and it has to be embedded throughout. One of the reasons why the EY program is so successful is that they are so committed to it. We see that in the partners that come along to take part in the program and talk about why women's leadership matters, and in the process of gathering feedback at the end of each program with the aim of making it even more effective next time.

There's no question that women feel more confident at the end of the program. They're more ready to take ownership of their careers and more confident in their own potential. Simply being invited to take part is a sign that the company believes in them and wants to invest in their careers. I believe it's definitely helped the company hold on to some women who might have gone elsewhere if they had not had this opportunity."

One of the key differentiators of the program is the experience of the small groups that harness both the expertise of the coach and the rich EY background of the delegates. Participants arrive expecting a traditional “training intervention” – the emphasis on working through real personal issues in a confidential and supportive environment comes as a surprise.

## Our Realizing Your Potential as a female leader program

In 2012, the Realizing Your Potential program was launched. The program is aimed at women who are about to enter the partner admission process, recognizes that these women have already been successful in their career and looks at what they need to now do to become successful partners at EY.

By the end of the program, the women will have been given the opportunity to:

- ▶ Enhance their communication skills to best present themselves with confidence
- ▶ Work on their personal brand and how well it supports their partner aspirations
- ▶ Commit to a strategic networking plan, not only with regard to the partner admission process, but to enhance their success as a potential partner
- ▶ Meet, share experiences and learn from their peers on the program as well as visiting female partner role models
- ▶ Raise their profile with the Area or Regional service line leadership

“Companies should encourage women to build communities in which similarly positioned women can discuss their feedback, compare notes and emotionally support one another’s learning. Identifying common experiences increases women’s willingness to talk openly, take risks and be vulnerable without fearing that others will misunderstand or judge them. These connections are especially important when women are discussing sensitive topics, such as gender bias, or reflecting on their personal leadership.”

*Harvard Business Review* in an article called Women Rising – the unseen barriers, September 2013



**Andy Embury** is the Advisory Leader for EMEIA and sponsored the pilot of Realizing Your Potential as a female leader program.

“The impetus to set up Realizing Your Potential as a female leader came from the fact that women were clearly underrepresented at senior level in our partnership. We had a number of very strong candidates who were ready to enter the partner promotion process, but feedback suggested that the quality of mentoring and support available to them was patchy, and that they would value some practical support. Our goal was to ensure that good candidates didn’t trip up for the wrong reasons.

From that initial, very tactical, objective, the program has broadened its goals and remit over the past couple of years. The network has grown with each new cohort that’s passed through, and we now get recently promoted

female partners coming back to share their experiences with participants, which is great. The experience gets richer all the time.

It’s hard to avoid generalizations when you’re talking about the development needs of men and women. To some extent, of course, they are the same; but there are some key differences too. One message that emerges quite clearly from the program is that some women aren’t sure whether they want to take a run at partnership. They don’t know whether they can organize their lives in a way that is consistent with doing a job like that – or indeed, whether they want to.

The feedback we get suggests that women are often happier discussing these kinds of issues in a single gender group. They feel more comfortable about being open and honest and are more able to be supportive of each other. There are differences in behavior between the two genders – assertiveness is the usual shorthand – that can create barriers to that level of openness.

From a purely business perspective, the justification for the program is very simple: we have a problem and we need to fix it. Why? First, it’s critical that our EY teams reflect the makeup of our clients’ teams. Second, the more diverse the team, the richer the mix of attitudes and perspectives and the greater the flow of ideas. Third, many countries are

implementing increasingly robust policies regarding the representation of women at senior level. Finally, particularly in a mature market, it’s vital that we are able to make the most of the talent available to us.

Our target within EMEIA is for 20% of our partner population to be female by 2020. We need to ensure that processes and decision-making throughout the organization are removing, rather than reinforcing, unconscious bias. We need flexible policies and to design senior roles in such a way that women aren’t excluded or put at a disadvantage. Women-only leadership programs are only part of the picture – but they are an important part.

I make sure I attend the program regularly, to keep in touch with the participants and hear their views at first hand. The women I meet are unanimous about the need for the program and its value. It gives them practical skills and insights they didn’t have before. At the start of each program, the question always arises: why is this course for women only? By the end of it, no one is asking that question any more. They don’t need to – the benefits are so clear.”



**Zaid Al-Hadhrami and Hasan Rafiq** are the D&I leaders for MENA and have been closely involved in the roll-out of the Navigator program in the Region.

“We run the three Navigator workshops a month apart to give the participants an opportunity to reflect on what they’ve learned and discuss it with their counselors, leaders and colleagues. When they come to the next workshop, we ask them to tell the rest of the group how their learnings have changed the way they think about the future and how they plan to overcome the challenges they face.

When considering the reasons why we run the Navigator course for women only, you have

to understand the context we are working in here. Concepts such as building a network and developing your own brand are not widely discussed – particularly among women. Above manager level, we are seeing a big drop-off in the number of women, and that is something we need to address.

Initially, there was some resistance. Some of the women who were invited on to the program refused, saying they didn’t want to be given special treatment. We tried to explain that Navigator isn’t about getting extra help. It’s about being given an opportunity that you might not otherwise get, to take a step back, reflect, prioritize and plan.

This is not about ‘fixing the women.’ Unless we look at our working culture holistically, we can invest as much as we like in this kind of training, but we won’t get the results we need. In that sense, something that looks on the surface like it may only be helping women is actually improving things for everyone in the organization.

One very tangible benefit of the program has been to challenge our women’s limiting beliefs – such as the belief that they can’t work

flexibly. We don’t expect our people to be in the office all the time. That might sound like a small thing, but nevertheless, it probably affects women more than it does men. Navigator has helped them to see how those kinds of misconceptions are holding them back.

The aim was to create a space where women felt they could speak openly, and the feedback we’ve had suggests that we succeeded in doing this. Participants said they felt they were in a safe environment, where they could share their feelings – and their frustrations! Program participants have stayed in touch with each other through WhatsApp and Yammer, as well as by meeting up in person. So the program clearly has a role to play in helping to establish a network that women continue to find valuable once they are back in the everyday working environment.

The results speak for themselves: we see it in participants’ attitudes and in their levels of confidence. They’re networking more, seeking out high-profile opportunities and actively supporting their colleagues and the people below them too.”



## Our Navigator program

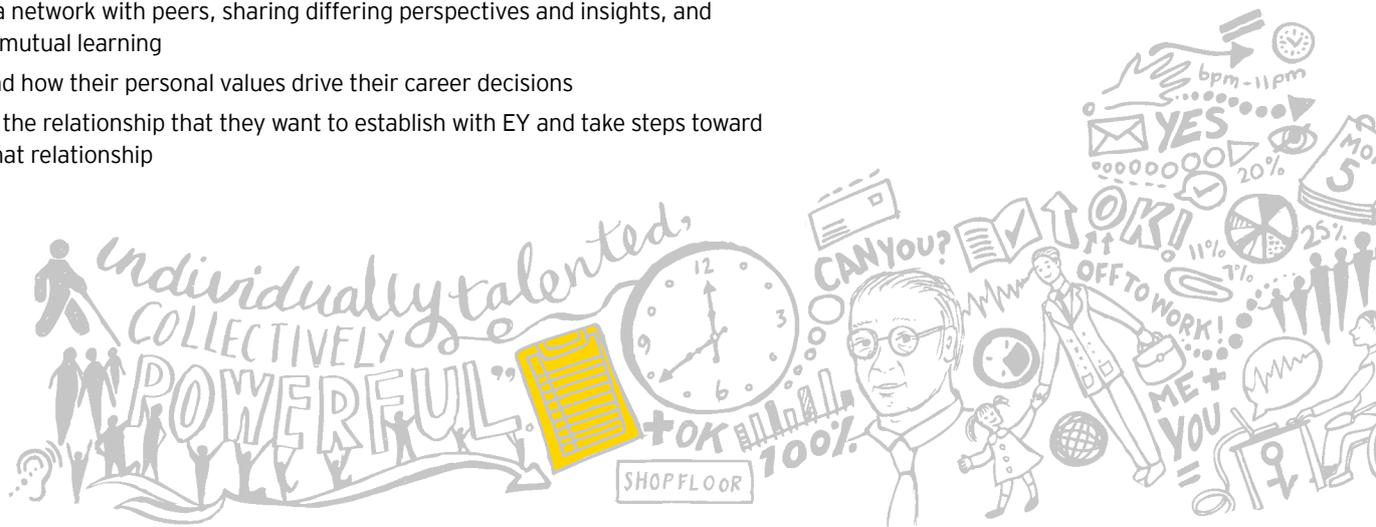
Despite strong representation of women joining EY at graduate-entry level, we recognized that our industry still struggles to retain an acceptable level of female representation at manager level and above. Navigator was designed in 2013 to create the opportunity for our women to develop their networks and discuss and debate the issues they face in progressing their career in cultures that are not necessarily determined by women.

Recommended for female managers and new senior managers who have the potential to progress to a senior leadership position at EY, the program aims to enable participants to:

- ▶ Establish and articulate their personal and leadership brand in a way that increases their impact
- ▶ Establish a network with peers, sharing differing perspectives and insights, and achieving mutual learning
- ▶ Understand how their personal values drive their career decisions
- ▶ Articulate the relationship that they want to establish with EY and take steps toward building that relationship



Navigator was designed in 2013 to create a space where women felt they could talk openly about the issues they face in progressing their career.



# Assessing the value of our EMEIA Women's Leadership Program



"When we help our women grow as leaders, we see the difference it makes in their careers. But we also see that they 'pay it forward' by serving as role models, mentors and sponsors for the next generation."

Nancy Altobello  
EY Global Vice Chair, Talent

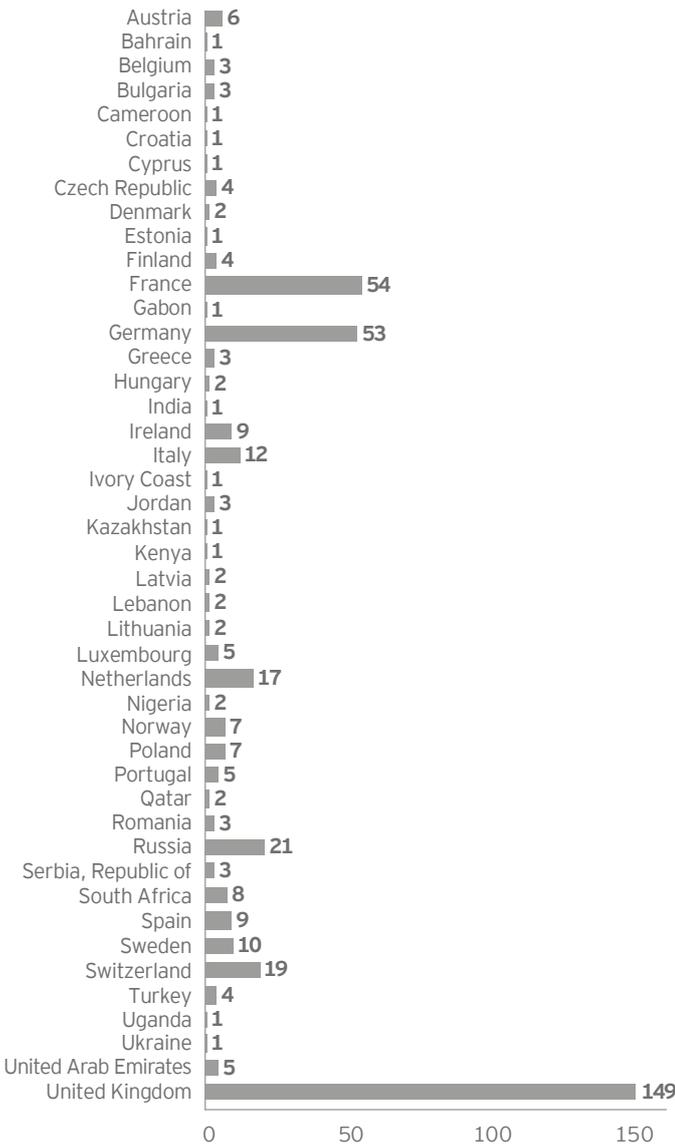




Historically, feedback from participants after each program has been consistently high, and direct benefits that we have noted from the program include an increase in the number of women being promoted to partner, organizational learning about processes and micro inequities that derail high potentials, access to role models and the development of a cadre of change agents. It is also an invaluable opportunity for our women to build their business network across service lines and geographies.



### Participants by country since 2008



### EMEIA Women's Leadership Program post-program average evaluations 2008-14 (out of a total of 10)





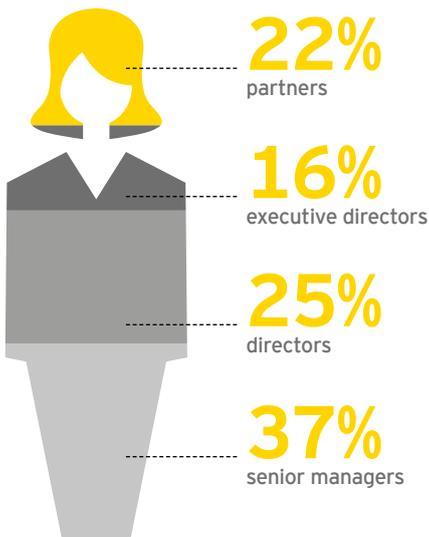
In 2014, we had the opportunity to undertake a review of the program in conjunction with a Professor from Simmons School of Management to better understand the value and impact of the program on the women who participated and on EY.

This study was a combination of one-to-one interviews and an anonymous online survey that went out to the alumni of the program. Questions explored the participants' perceptions of key issues addressed in the program, such as:

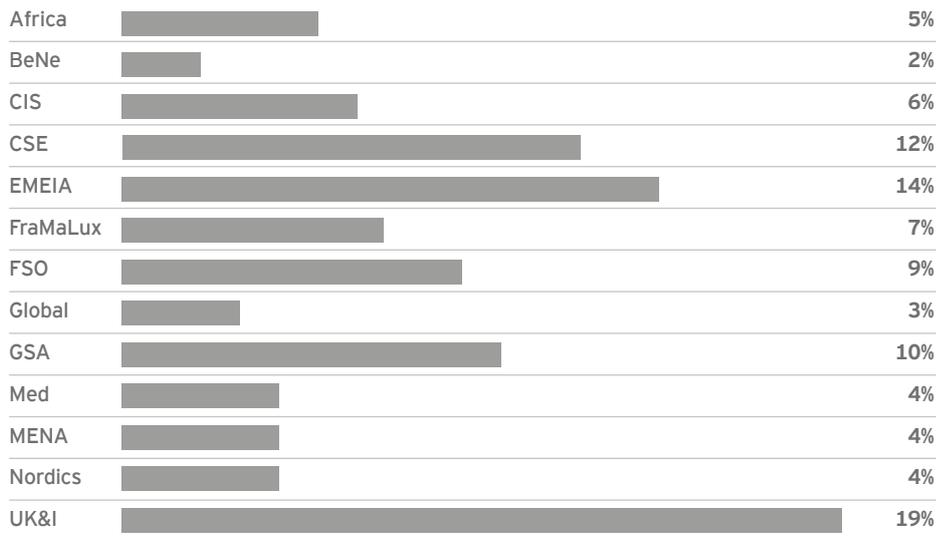
- ▶ Career advancement strategies
- ▶ Perspectives on leadership and women leaders
- ▶ Views of work life integration
- ▶ Personal definitions of success
- ▶ Career concepts
- ▶ Barriers to advancement
- ▶ Overall impact and company benefit
- ▶ Recommendations on how EY can maximize the impact of the program

In EMEIA 134 women across 33 countries and four ranks responded to the survey, and the results were analyzed in light of the program objectives and the latest research on women leaders. Anonymous personal anecdotes and quotes from both surveys and interviews have been used to highlight important findings.

#### Respondents by rank



#### Respondents by Region



"I would not have become a partner without this program."



"I think the key issues for many of the women, and also for myself, are how you understand and start to recognize how you might address some of the challenges that you face in the workplace as a woman."



"It helped me decide not to give up and to help other women."



## Highlights from the research

What we found through the research was that the classic tenets of leadership development that guarantee the importance of a program's outcomes were all present, namely:

- ▶ Supporting the women to understand their own brand and style of leadership
- ▶ Identifying the obstacles to leadership effectiveness
- ▶ Understanding the importance of self-confidence
- ▶ Realizing that the women are already leaders

The top three issues that the program helped our women to address were:

1. Taking proactive control of their career
2. Being authentic and true to themselves
3. Articulating if they wanted to make partner and why

### Key findings that highlight the value of the program include:

- ▶ Ninety-six percent of respondents found the program highly impactful or impactful.
- ▶ Comments such as “best program I have been on at EY,” “excellent program” and “highly valuable” were mentioned multiple times.
- ▶ Many learnt new career strategies – e.g., taking proactive control of their careers.
- ▶ Many felt that they had increased their confidence – e.g., as a result of the program, they better understood their own brand and style of leadership.
- ▶ Many changed their mindset – e.g., realized that barriers to progression can be overcome.
- ▶ Many realized that they were not alone – despite differences in service line, home country and rank, there were many themes that they all identified with.



**Liz Brown** is a former partner at PwC and IBM and the creator of the *Realizing Your Potential as a female leader* program.

“I’ve been interested in the issue of women’s development in the workplace for many years. What really struck me at EY was that, although there was clearly a strong commitment in the organization to bring women on at all levels, they weren’t making the collective progress to partner that you’d expect. I felt that some of this was to do with confidence and agility around career navigation, and that women needed to sharpen their skills in these areas. So I put together a program to try to plug some of those gaps and target the women closest to being in the partner admissions process.

Some of the focus is on areas where women don’t necessarily apply their business skills so well to themselves – for example, women are

great at networking on behalf of the business or the client; they just seem more reluctant to network proactively for themselves. Similarly, women can happily ask for something on behalf of their team, but when it comes to asking for themselves, such as a job opportunity or role, they can hesitate, dither and then compromise. By the end of the program, my aim is that the participants are confident and intentional in their career choices and able to navigate their careers accordingly.

A few of the women who are invited to join the program struggle with the idea of it being for women only. However, so far, every single one has changed their mind. It’s not about being anti-male – far from it! Rather, it gives women the time and space to reflect on, hear from and share with other women, without the pressure to carry on behaving as they normally do in their (mixed) working environment. They need to be able to discuss their experiences openly and honestly. Often, this is the first time these women have been able to sit down with their female peers and it can be a real voyage of discovery, finding out about the challenges other women have faced, the mistakes they’ve made and the ways they’ve behaved in certain situations.

The women who come on this program can expect to be challenged. I’m pretty direct, and participants get plenty of provocation to start

thinking differently if that’s what they need. Very often, we subconsciously adopt strategies for dealing with certain situations; strategies that may not reflect our authentic selves, nor actually help us in the long term. Here, women can look at their own behavior, work out what needs to change and practice things that will help them in the longer term.

You can see that in the depth of insight these women gain, in such a short space of time. It’s not just about figuring out a way to get through the partner selection process; it’s about understanding what kind of partner they want to be. If they have a strong sense of self and a clear understanding of what they can contribute to the partnership, they are more likely to be effective leaders and strong partner role models to those who look at them as they build their own careers – men and women.”

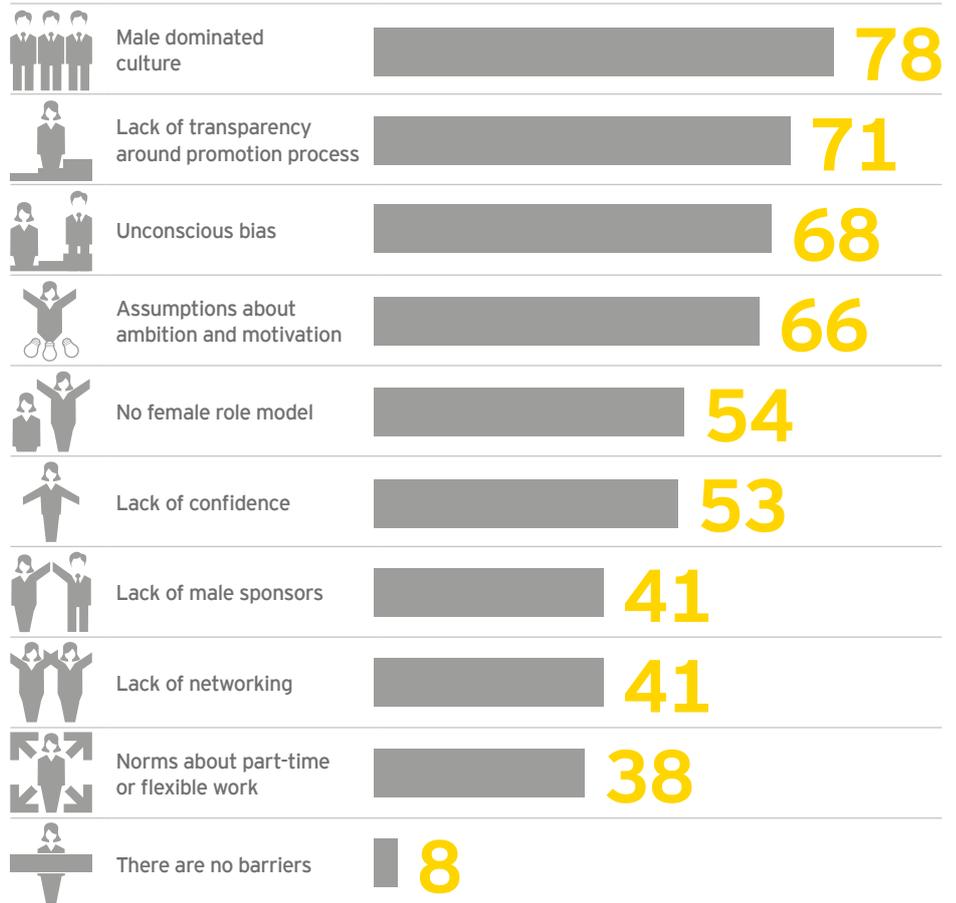


"I never thought about internal brand. As females, we discussed language and how we unconsciously portray ourselves. This made me think about what is my brand and how I want to portray myself."

## What our women said were barriers to their advancement at EY

We asked our women what they saw as barriers to women's advancement at EY. The most frequently cited barriers were the male-dominated culture, lack of transparency around the promotion process and the impact of unconscious bias.

### Barriers to women's advancement at EY



■ Response Frequency



**Maya Ramchandran** is an Advisory partner in EY's Delhi office. She attended the Realizing Your Potential as a female leader program in 2013.

"At the time I went on the Realizing Your Potential as a female leader program, I was a director and I had been with EY for about five years. I found it hugely valuable. It gave me the opportunity to meet and interact

with other women at a similar level from a variety of geographies, which I would not have had if I had attended it in India. It also really highlighted the fact that, as women, we need to be better at promoting ourselves and talking up our own strengths.

In order to deliver that kind of experience, I think the program should continue to be for women only. I'm not convinced women would be as open and willing to share in a mixed group. I don't think that's anything to do with a lack of ambition or competitive spirit – I just don't think men tend to focus on their mistakes or weaknesses in the same way. We were able to be really open and talk these things through.

I came back into the workplace with a much greater awareness of the need to build visibility – effectively, to develop my own

brand. It's not enough to be ambitious; you need to show that ambition. You can't sit in a corner and wait for people to notice how wonderful you are. The program taught me the value of showing aspects of myself that I would otherwise have tended to keep hidden. It's really about understanding the differences between people's working styles and learning how to thrive in the environment in which you're operating.

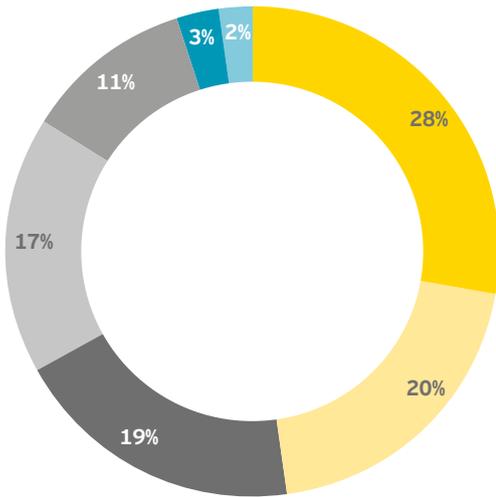
I would like as many of my female peers as possible to attend this program. I want other women to have the same opportunity to form a network as I had and to see for themselves that you don't have to behave like a man if you want to get promoted. The impact has been tremendous. After just three days, the women are more upbeat and more confident about their future."

## How the program changed participants' perception of what it means to be a female leader

We asked participants if the program had changed their perception of what it means to be a female leader.

They told us that they now better understand their own brand and style, as well as the obstacles to their leadership effectiveness.

### How understanding of what it means to be a women leader changed



- Realized I was not alone
- Learned about contributions of women leaders
- Realized importance of female role models
- Become more confident
- Learned how to adapt leadership style to male colleagues
- Nothing changed
- Other



**“What I found most striking was the fact that, despite being on different continents, we face very similar challenges regarding career progression.”**



**“I think it made me more appreciative of the differences in leadership style and that there is nothing wrong with either style, you just have to flex for the other person, either male or female.”**



**Katarzyna Twarowska is a director and leader of Real Estate in Assurance in CSE. She is based in our Warsaw office and also runs the Women Leadership in Business Foundation. She is an alum of the EMEIA Women's Leadership Program.**

“I have been promoted twice since going on the EMEIA Women's Leadership Program and I definitely think that attending the program contributed to my success. For me, the most valuable thing was the opportunity to meet other senior women. In my part of the business, it can be difficult to find female role models.

The women on the program talked very openly about both their successes and the bad times they had had in their careers, and about how they found the confidence to express their opinions and state what they expected from the company. For me, it was particularly important to see how they managed to achieve a work-life balance and to hold down senior positions at the same time as having children and maintaining their personal life.

I came away from the program believing that it is possible to achieve my career ambitions at the same time as holding on to what matters to me as a woman and as a mother. I don't have to behave more like a man in order to be promoted! It also made me more aware of the cost, too: success requires sacrifice and compromise. The program really makes you ask yourself: do I want this? Am I ready for it?

Women communicate in a different way to men and I think we are often motivated by different things too. I'm convinced that there is a place for female-only leadership programs, but I believe they should be part of the mix. Men need to understand the issues that women face, and both genders need to recognize how to turn the differences between them to mutual

advantage. It really comes down to making the best use of the talent that is available to us.

Acting on advice from the program to raise my profile, I have helped to set up and now lead the Women Leadership in Business Foundation here in Poland, which is currently being supported by EY. We work with businesses to help them find ways to make the most of their talent pool and to encourage senior leaders to promote the diversity agenda.

My work with the foundation feeds directly into what I'm doing at EY. For the past couple of years, we've run a very successful mentoring program, working with CEOs and other senior people from a range of organizations, including EY. Now I am planning to roll out something similar in my own office.

I believe that the key to success is to make sure you are looking at issues from as many different perspectives as possible. If you want to innovate, you have to broaden your view. The most effective team is one that is made up of people with different talents, different experiences and different ways of thinking. Understand both your strengths and limitations, and you can get the best out of each other.”



"I came into the program with the vision that I wanted to be a partner and, after the program, my ambition was reinforced after seeing the strength of colleagues and the support that existed."

"It helped to reconfirm that I wanted to be a partner, and that re-energized me."

## What our women did after attending the program

We also asked a series of questions about what career changes our women made after attending the program. Since attending the program:



**25%**  
have since been promoted



**19%**  
asked for additional responsibilities



**12%**  
expanded their area of specialism

We saw that, when we asked the women about their career strategy for advancement prior to the program, they cited hard work and technical competence or skills; something we know is not enough in isolation to drive advancement.



**Peter Haugaard** is the EYU and Talent Development Leader for EMEIA, and is based in Denmark.

"There are definitely issues that surface when you start talking about female-only training and development programs – and they are not just voiced by men. For some women, too, there is a stigma attached to being 'singled out,' and people of both genders will argue that such courses are not necessary. If we recruit roughly equal numbers of men and women, as we now do, then those women will eventually rise to the top.

There is an element of truth to that. If we simply sit back and let things happen, we will eventually achieve equality in the workplace – but it will take time. From a business perspective, we can't afford to wait.

Our competitors will steal a march on us and create a culture that is more appealing to the best and most talented candidates.

And that is really the nub of the issue. It's not about gender, it's about making the most of the talent we have. It just happens that one of our tactics involves investing in a particular group. Why should we shy away from doing that, where the benefit to the business is so clear? After all, we have effectively been differentially investing in male employees for years. What we're doing now is simply levelling the playing field a little.

Women still face very real challenges in business. There are practical considerations, of course – it's still very often the case that women take on a more than equal share of the domestic responsibilities, for example. However, even in an ostensibly very equal society such as the one we have here in the Nordics, there is still a good deal of cultural conditioning to overcome.

One of the most important things these programs do is to give women an opportunity to spend time with their peers and expand their network. One study found that you need around 30% of a leadership group to be made up of a particular group – women, in this

case – before that group stops feeling like a minority. These programs show women that they are not alone.

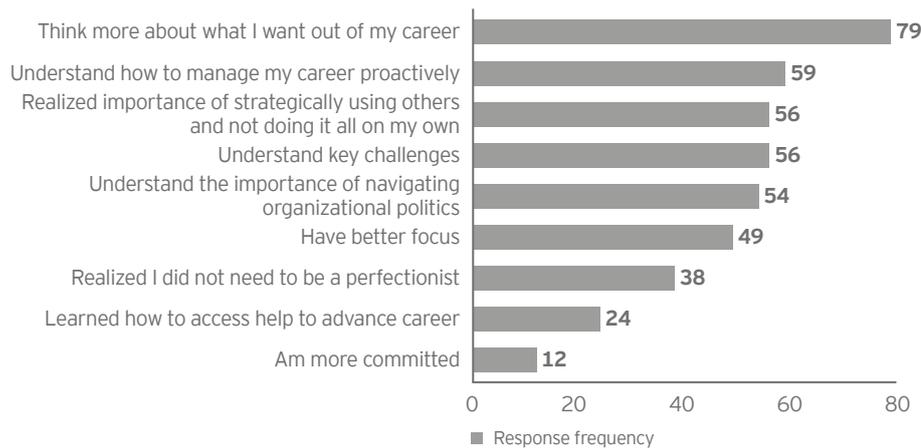
"It's not a rose without thorns, but I do believe it's a worthwhile investment. The EMEIA Women's Leadership Program is a career crossroads, an opportunity to stop and reflect: what kind of leader am I? What kind of leader do I want to be? What kind of changes do I need to make to achieve that? It's another generalization, but I think women are often more reflective of their leadership style, and these programs help them become even more conscious that it is something that is cultivated, not something that is given.

From the feedback I get from women who have attended the program, they really value the opportunity to express and explore some of the challenges they face, and to make a conscious decision about their own personal leadership style. They come away with a different attitude, a new confidence and awareness of where they want to go and how they're going to get there."

## How our women's attitude and behavior changed after attending the program

We were pleased to see that the top change in attitude and behavior after the program articulated by participants was that they now think more about what they want out of their career, understand how to manage their career proactively, realize the importance of strategically using others and not doing it all on their own, and understanding the key challenges facing them as a leader.

### Changes in attitude and behavior after the program



**"It challenged me to see how I could re-engage with my career at EY and find a way forward."**



**"I now felt it was my right to have those conversations around my partnership time line, what it would take and what the level of support was. If I hadn't been on the program, those types of conversations may never have happened."**



**Moira Lawrence is an audit partner based in our Aberdeen office and attended the first ever EMEIA Women's Leadership Program in 2008.**

"Initially, I refused to go on the EMEIA Women's Leadership Program. I wasn't interested in doing something that was for women only. I didn't want to be seen to be progressing because of that, but my misgivings fell away almost immediately, when Susan Vinnicombe started to explain to us how the sessions would be structured and what we could achieve from them. In a program like this, which is all about personal development, the only person that's disadvantaged by not taking part is you – it's not very often that you get to spend that kind of time thinking about your personal development rather than technical training.

The small group format was particularly powerful. I think you're more inclined to share and be open with a smaller number of people. We also got to know each other really well over the course of the program. The idea is that you listen to a talk or lecture, then you go off in your group and discuss the issues that have been raised and how they affect you. It's very personal.

I do think the fact that the program was for women only was significant. I truly believe there is a difference between men and women, in the way we think and the way we present ourselves. I don't think we would have shared as openly and as much as we did if it had been a mixed group. It's a very emotional thing, talking about yourself; personally, I don't find it comfortable at all, but people really opened up and talked about the problems and anxieties they were facing every day; all those things they'd been pushing to the back burner so they could 'get on with it' came pouring out.

The experience was particularly significant for me because I found out while I was on the course that I hadn't made it through to the next stage of the partnership selection process. That really knocked me for six, but being there meant I could really talk it through: why did it happen? What message am I being given here?

What can I do to make sure the outcome is different next time round?

I realized that the way I was presenting myself could be alienating the male part of my audience and that, by making a few changes, I could communicate more effectively without compromising myself or my values. The fact is, my presentation board was all male. So by not understanding how to communicate with them, I was doing myself a real disservice. In that way, the program helped me to understand my male colleagues better too.

When I came back to the business after completing the program, I was in a bit of a spin. I was seconded to a charity for a while then, when I came back, I went through the partner selection process again. I presented to the same group again, making the same case as I had before, but this time I was successful. I believe that the difference was in the way I put myself across. I'm not sure that men need support in quite the same way. Perhaps women just need that bit more reassurance. I truly was totally against women-only programs, events or anything like that, but now I'm an ambassador for the EY Women's Network. I've learned that women's needs are different, and that sometimes we need our own space."

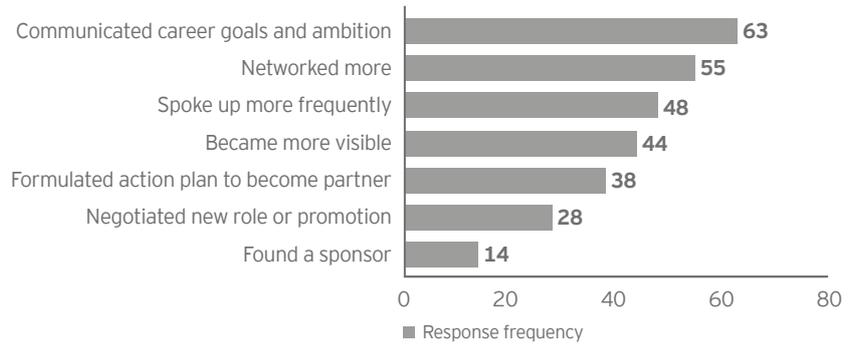


**“Before, I thought there were too many barriers; now, I realize barriers can be overcome.”**



**“It shows EY’s commitment to diversity, gender equality and having females in leadership positions.”**

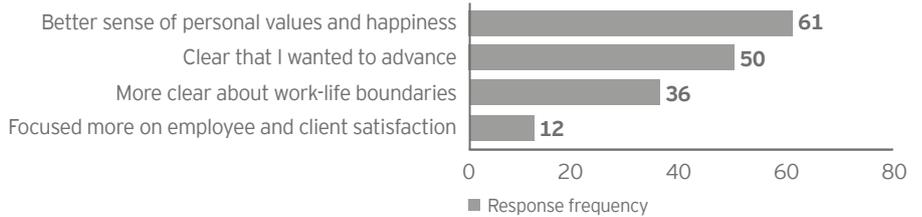
### Career strategy changes after the program



### Participants’ personal definitions of success

Given the program objectives, we also wanted to assess whether our women had changed or modified their personal definitions of success. After the program, the most frequently cited changes were women having a better sense of personal values and happiness, clarity that they did actually want to advance and more understanding about work-life boundaries.

#### Definition of success after the program



**Konstanze Nardi is a partner in Transaction Advisory Services in GSA.**

“I actually turned down the opportunity to attend the EMEIA Women’s Leadership Program at Cranfield because I felt uncomfortable about being treated differently to my male colleagues. When it came to Realizing Your Potential as a female leader, I still had all the same reservations and misgivings but, this time, I wasn’t given any choice!

Now that I have experienced the program for myself, my views on female-only training and development has changed completely. It made me realize that women do think in a different

way and come at things from a different starting point. For that reason, I think it’s right that the business should provide targeted support for women with leadership potential.

For one thing, there is a lack of role models. Even now, as a partner, I don’t have anyone to look up to in my particular area of the business. Another key difference is that men generally seem to find it easier to articulate their strengths and communicate them to other people – with women, there is sometimes a tendency to focus on what we can’t do rather than what we can.

Talking to the other women on the program, one thing that particularly struck me was that we tended to view our achievements as ‘normal.’ The attitude was very much, ‘Well, I’m just doing my job.’ The training helped me understand that all these things are accomplishments that are valuable to the business and that we should be more confident in talking about them.

I was able to apply my learnings from the program directly to my preparation for the partner selection process. I was advised to

think in terms of putting together a board of directors for my own career path. That really made me think about the areas where I particularly needed support and who was best placed to provide it. Then I went to those people and explained why I’d chosen them and what I wanted from them in terms of helping to manage my partner case. Before, I would have just assumed it was enough to be doing a good job. This is also something that I have passed on to the managers and senior managers I work with.

In future, I hope we won’t need women-only programs anymore, because the working environment will have changed to become more equally balanced between the genders. I’m sure that a lot of my male colleagues feel they would benefit from this type of training, too, and find it hard to understand to see why the program should be exclusively for women – they also have concerns and questions regarding how to succeed. I understand and support their view but, for now, this is a great platform for women to better navigate in their career and, for me, was eye-opening and an extremely valuable experience.”

## Benefits of the program to EY

Finally, we asked the women how they felt that EY has benefited from the program and what we could do to maximize its impact.

Almost one-third felt that building a pipeline of women leaders was a company benefit, while one-quarter felt that greater engagement and retention of women is important.

Forty-seven percent of respondents found that the coaching groups they initially worked with were so supportive that they stayed in touch, enabling ongoing business networking across service lines and geographies.

Clearly, the program helped accelerate some participants' ambition to make partner and arguably retained them in EY. People talked about the program coming at a "pivotal point" in their career and "without it, I'm not sure I would have pursued entering the partnership." Comments made in both interviews and surveys expressed how important it was that EY was sending a message about the importance of women leaders with this program.

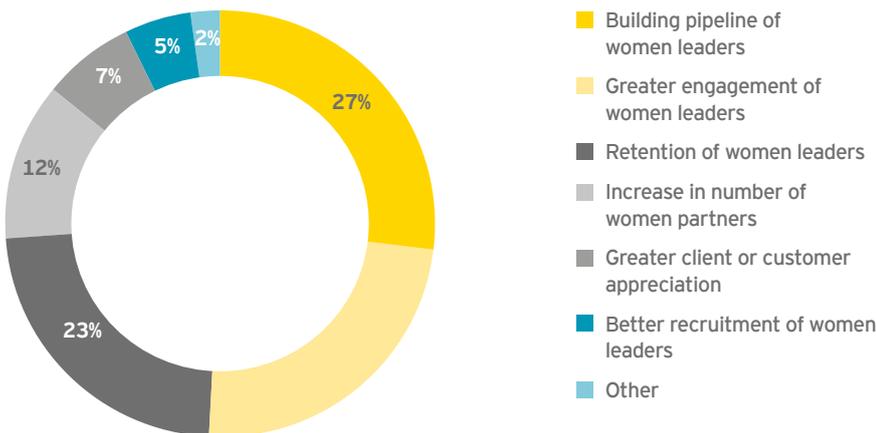
Most recently, we have used the organizational learning from these programs to develop a workshop for our leaders which focuses on debunking some of the myths about women in leadership. We look at topics such as the differences between male and female leadership, the way that ambition manifests in the workplace and the way that women think about taking risk.



"I think they probably get a lot of goodwill from the women, in the sense that they do feel they are being recognized and that the organization is trying to support them through some of these challenges and these issues."



### How has EY benefited from this program?



**Yasmeen Muhtaseb** is an Advisory partner in MENA and is the D&I partner sponsor for the Region. She is also an alum of the EMEIA Women's Leadership Program and *Realizing Your Potential as a female leader*.

"The female-only leadership programs I've attended have been hugely valuable to me. The EMEIA Women's Leadership program had a strong focus on branding and communication

and establishing a network of senior women, and was personalized to each participant. That opportunity to reflect and to share experiences in such an open and honest environment was exactly what I needed at that point in my career.

With *Realizing Your Potential* as a female leader, too, we explored personal and professional issues in real depth. I can't imagine where else I would have had the opportunity to gain those insights into the issues other women in my position have faced and how they have responded to them. Of course, I have a strong network among my colleagues both within MENA and beyond – but the number of women in senior positions is still very small. There are 4 female partners apart from me, out of a total of around 150 partners in my region.

We are working with men every day and in all our other training and development we are in mixed groups, so I don't think it's

fair to say that women-only programs are creating a bubble, or putting us in an artificial environment. In my experience, the programs themselves offer opportunities to share perspectives with men as well as women.

I am now involved in the regional roll-out of Navigator. The feedback has been so positive – women love the format, the topics and the opportunity to share their experiences. We're now looking to widen participation in Navigator. In MENA, when we look at our graduate intake and our consultants, the split is 50/50 between men and women. At manager and senior manager level, women start leaving. So this is the area that we really need to focus on, not because women need special treatment, but for the good of the business. There is clearly a need for targeted support at certain key points, to help women build their personal brand, communicate, network and operate effectively in this particular work environment."

# Summary and conclusions



“Myself and one of the other participants (both of us now are partners) got back to the office and ran sessions about our experience at the program and about what kind of impact it had on us. We want to inspire other women to understand where we are different and what we can do about it.”



While we haven't done a detailed analysis of our other two women's leadership programs yet, we know from formal feedback at the end of each program that they are having a similar positive impact. It is clear that our women truly value and benefit from interventions such as these on multiple levels.

In addition to leadership sending an important message to those invited as part of its efforts to strengthen their leadership pipeline, providing the time and space to assist females in their career focus is critical. It is important to affirm the leadership challenges that women face and provide assistance in taking proactive control of their career, being authentic, articulating the desire and rationale to be partner, and building the self-confidence to move ahead. These critical outcomes of women's leadership programs cannot be underestimated as part of a strategy for building a gender-balanced pipeline and strong female representation at partner and other leadership levels.

The most common learning for participants about being a female leader was that they were not alone. Learning about contributions from women leaders and the importance of female role models were also equally noted as important in a woman's leadership journey.

Concrete career changes made by participants after attending the women's leadership program include putting their hand up for promotion, requesting additional responsibilities and expanding areas of specialism. Specific leadership career advancement strategies used post-program, such as communication of career goals and ambition, more networking and speaking up more frequently, will only enhance the active engagement of women leaders and identification of top talent. These women leaders also have more clarity about their personal values and happiness, their ambition to advance and their work-life boundaries.

On a more personal level, it has been lovely to see individuals embark on their own personal journeys as a result of attending the programs. The thriving women's network in Copenhagen was set up by a woman who attended the Navigator workshops in the Nordics. She wanted to better understand the reasons for why there were so few women in the Danish Advisory practice. The director running the EY Foundation in Poland was inspired to volunteer for the role after realizing at Cranfield that you needed to do more than keep your head down and be technically knowledgeable. An executive director in the UK returned to her service line and asked for an assignment in an emerging market, where she spent four years developing a highly successful business.

Some alum feel they now have a greater appreciation of how they can help other women coming through the pipeline by coaching and counseling.

Participants clearly see the value of the program in building EY's talent pipeline, as well as greater engagement and retention of women and the opportunity to build their brand.

# Some final reflections

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“This is not about ‘fixing the women.’”

Zaid Al-Hadhrami

“It can be a real voyage of discovery, finding out about the challenges other women have faced.”

Liz Brown



“The programs offer opportunities to share perspectives with men as well as women.”

Yasmeen Muhtaseb



“I was against women-only programs, but now I am an ambassador for the UK&I EY Women’s Network.”

Moira Lawrence



“It’s not about gender, it’s about making the most of the talent we have.”

Peter Haugaard

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“Business culture is changing, but the environment is still a challenging one for senior women.”

**Professor Susan Vinnicombe**



“You can’t sit in a corner and wait for people to notice how wonderful you are.”

**Maya Ramchandran**



“With women, there is sometimes a tendency to focus on what we can’t do rather than what we can.”

**Konstanze Nardi**



“Our goal was to ensure that good candidates didn’t trip up for the wrong reasons.”

**Andy Embury**



“If you want to innovate, you have to broaden your view.”

**Katarzyna Twarowska**

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