

Letter of the Month by Gaby Marcon
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It is both surprising and alarming to read the results of both PwC and Grant Thornton's surveys that point to the fact that the number of senior female managers working in medium and large sized UK businesses has stagnated in recent years.

One of the problems seems to be the fact that few senior women are in positions that involve profit-and-loss or revenue generating responsibilities which are critical for advancement to the highest levels. Another factor is that women have been moving steadily into a wider range of professional jobs and gradually swelling the ranks of lower and middle management.

While regulatory mechanisms and legal frameworks, together with a more supportive environment and flexible working hours, are helping women to fully utilize their potential and reach top positions, I believe that meaningful change will take a lot longer to happen than we think and that it may happen quicker in developing countries than in the Western countries.

One of the most critical strategies to address this issue would be to support women employees at an early stage in visible and challenging assignments and to ensure that they obtain experience in a wide range of company operations. Crucial to this is the commitment of top management. Such commitment can only spring from an awareness that competitive companies cannot afford to lose out on women's talents. But equal opportunities and positive action cannot be confined to individual organizations or business initiatives.

The active promotion of gender equality in all areas of education and employment by governments can make a serious contribution towards gender equality at the highest levels of management. Women themselves need to be more pro-active and realize that there are many ways to be successful and they do not have to be linear.

Working in industries traditionally male dominated could be a real opportunity for a women because there are not many women at the top and competition could be less. So, what we need may be more open mindedness on the part of all concerned; women, organisations and governments.