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LEADERSHIP

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Essays *on*
Equality

Covid-19 edition

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Essays on Equality

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Foreword



Julia Gillard
*Former Prime
Minister of Australia
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Global Institute for
Women's Leadership*

As the weeks and months of various lockdowns around the world have gone by, we've seen an abundance of evidence that pre-existing gender disadvantages are being compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Global Institute for Women's Leadership has been among those looking at the varying impacts of the crisis on women and men. In a survey carried out in the third week of May, we found that men in the UK are more likely to think childcare is getting in the way of their jobs – despite women taking on more of it during lockdown.

At the same time, women appear to be carrying out more vital community-minded responsibilities. Seven in 10 say they've offered help to friends, family and neighbours during this crisis, compared with six in 10 men.

The survey also found notable differences in how women and men have been coping with the UK's lockdown and their concerns about life gradually returning to normal.

GIWL will continue to explore how women and men are being affected by this crisis, as well as carrying out research into the measures taken to address the unprecedented changes we're seeing. For example, our Senior Research Fellow, Dr Rose Cook, has recently been awarded a competitive grant from UK Research and Innovation to assess whether the UK's social policy response to Covid-19 has sufficiently taken into account gender in its design, access and impacts.

Meanwhile, in another project, we're using natural language processing techniques to analyse the representation of women in media coverage related to Covid-19 in the UK, US and Australia. At a time like this, the issue of whose voices are heard and which expertise is listened to and promoted is of the utmost importance.

We'll also continue to bring together experts to discuss the gendered implications of this crisis, promote important

research by others, and generally continue to make the case for equality every chance we get.

While many of the immediate impacts of Covid-19 may be negative for women, its long-term legacy need not be. New, more flexible ways of working have become the norm, and we've seen a renewed appreciation for female-led professions, such as nurses and care workers, that are on the frontline of the fight against this virus. We must capitalise on progress wherever we see it and not let the mission for gender equality stall during this time.

To that end, the essays in this collection are intended to shine a light on the gendered impacts of this crisis and, crucially, explore solutions and ways forward.

The contributions touch on a range of issues – from women's expertise and leadership, to girls' education, workplace gender equality and more – all in the context of this pandemic.

Such a seismic event merits our full attention, and I'm glad we were able to dedicate this special edition of *Essays on Equality* to looking at what it means for women.

I hope you find these essays enlightening and informative. If you'd like to pick up any of the themes here, or have any other thoughts, please do get in touch with the GIWL team: giwl@kcl.ac.uk

Julia Gillard

Women's expertise has been excluded from the Covid-19 response



Roopa Dhatt
*Executive Director,
Women in Global
Health*

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world profoundly, causing death and devastation that not only hurts us now but will also scar future generations. This is a break in history, and we must fix the weaknesses it has exposed so that our health and social systems are better able to withstand future shocks. When the applause for health workers ends, we must ensure that the women who deliver health and social care are leading the systems they know best.



Ann Keeling
*Senior Fellow,
Women in Global
Health*

Women hold 70 per cent of health and social care jobs globally.¹ They are 90 per cent of nurses and were 90 per cent of the frontline workers in Wuhan caring for Covid-19 patients. But the extraordinary service of women health and care workers has not earned them an equal say in decision-making: women hold only 25 per cent of leadership roles in health.²

The situation is just as bad when it comes to those working specifically on the response to this pandemic. Although women work at all levels in health security – from the frontlines of healthcare, to research labs and health policymaking – they have not been represented equally in decision-making bodies on Covid-19. In January 2020, just five women were invited to join the 21-member World Health Organisation (WHO) Emergency Committee on the novel coronavirus.³ Only two of the 27 members of the US Coronavirus Task Force are women.⁴ Typically, national Covid-19 decision-making groups have had a small minority of women members. In health emergencies, it seems women are expected to deliver frontline services while men make the decisions that can determine the fate of millions.

Including equal numbers of women in leadership (and women from diverse groups and geographies) in this pandemic is about effectiveness and saving lives, not only representation. Diverse leadership groups make better, more informed decisions. In April, Women in Global Health

launched the Covid 50/50 campaign for a more inclusive pandemic response. Building on Operation 50/50, a crowdsourced list of women health security experts that we launched with the organisation Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security, it includes five asks for more gender-responsive health security, and is designed as a resource for organisations looking for health security experts and media commentary on Covid-19.

The current pandemic makes it clear: it's time to acknowledge that the gender stereotypes and bias keeping women out of leadership and decision-making put us all at risk. We cannot fight a global pandemic by drawing experts from just half the talent pool.

When we raise the marginalisation of women in Covid-19 leadership, typically we are told that “now is not the time for special pleading on women”, and that gender is irrelevant anyway since decision-makers must be “chosen on merit”. But a global pandemic of such severity is precisely the time when health systems must bring all knowledge and talent

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“We cannot fight a global pandemic by drawing experts from just half the talent pool”
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to the table. It is offensive to imply that women do not have merit in this field, and moreover, it is misguided. Women know best the health systems they manage, and they know what works. Whatever we do in health will be done more intelligently if we include women's perspectives and knowledge.

Consider just two of the many areas of decision-making in this pandemic that would have been better if driven by women's experience.

First, we learned from Ebola that sexual and reproductive health services are essential and must be maintained during pandemics and emergencies. Love does not stop during a pandemic, and neither does pregnancy. Maternal deaths and unwanted pregnancies increased during Ebola⁵ because services were disrupted and women could not reach clinics and hospitals. There have been reports from Uganda and Kenya of women dying in childbirth unable to

reach safe delivery facilities during Covid-19 lockdowns. If contraceptive services are not maintained, women and adolescent girls will die from unsafe abortions. Nurses and midwives are the majority of health workers but significantly underrepresented in health leadership.⁶ If nurses and midwives were leading decision-making for Covid-19, it is likely they would prioritise women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. When we ignore female experience, women and girls pay with their lives.

“... if women were better represented in leadership roles, they would surely have acknowledged basic biology”

Second, while the default health worker is a woman, those working on Covid-19 have too often been given personal protective equipment (PPE) designed for men's bodies. This is dangerous as well as inconvenient since ill-fitting PPE increases the risk of infection. PPE designed for men also does not allow women to manage menstruation or other bodily functions. We applaud the UN Populations Fund for dispatching 250,000 sanitary towels and adult diapers for female health workers in Wuhan.⁷ Again, if women were better represented in leadership roles, they would surely

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“Gender inequality in
leadership is bad for
everyone’s health”
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have acknowledged basic biology and ensured safety and dignity for female health workers.

We do not assert that all female leaders are better than all male leaders, but it has been noted that almost all the countries doing best in containing this pandemic are led by women,⁸

and that those female leaders have a leadership style that is more likely to succeed. They do not make analogies with wars and say that “we can beat this enemy”; instead, they put human life first, listening to the evidence, being prepared to take unpopular decisions and communicating them openly to the public, and emphasising a collective approach. We want gender parity in health leadership, but we also want health leaders – whether women or men – to be gender-transformative leaders.

Covid-19 is not a gender war. As we are so often reminded, we are all in this together. Women are asking for equal representation in health decision-making because they want to use their expertise to strengthen and improve care for men, women and people of all genders. Gender inequality in leadership is bad for everyone’s health. Forget women being told to “lean in” – it is time for men to “lean out” and let women get on with saving their lives.

The future of women's leadership is at risk if a generation of girls can't get back to school



Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen
CEO, Plan International

The Covid-19 crisis is taking hundreds of thousands of lives, overwhelming health and protection infrastructures and ruining millions of livelihoods. Its present impact is immense, yet its effect on the future – particularly for girls and young women – may be even more profound. We have a generation of children out of school right now, and too many – especially girls – will never return to education.

With crisis comes the opportunity to create a new normal, and the disruption associated with Covid-19 invites us to reimagine a radically better world. The old normal left a lot to be desired: growing inequality, widespread gender discrimination, spiralling climate- and conflict-driven emergencies, and a crisis of democracy affecting billions worldwide. Yet progress is far from guaranteed – and the new normal could be worse still if we fail to make good choices today.

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“When girls are out of education, they are at real risk of never returning”
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Right now, 743 million girls are out of school.⁹ That’s because 91 per cent of the world’s student population is impacted by school closures in 191 countries.¹⁰ This is not just bad for girls’ learning outcomes today; it is bad for their life outcomes tomorrow. When girls are out of education, they are at real risk of never returning. We know through the lessons of the Ebola outbreak, and recent research,¹¹ that girls out of school are much more likely to experience gender-based violence, child marriage and teen pregnancy. All are life-changing events that are almost certain to hold girls back and keep them from school permanently.

The global digital gender divide is also having an increasingly negative effect. Girls were already more cut off from accessing education online than boys and this is currently one of their best ways to learn. Boys are much more likely to own a smartphone than girls¹² and more

likely to have access to the internet. The reasons for this are deep-seated and stem from pre-existing gender discrimination in families, communities and countries. Where money is tight, and/or there is only one device to go around or parents have fears and worries about girls being online, they will be kept offline. This digital exclusion of millions of girls from education, particularly in the poorest places in the world, is an increasingly acute threat to girls and young women staying connected to school during and after the pandemic.

We must fight hard now to get those in power to focus on the urgent risk of millions of girls losing their connection to learning for the rest of their lives. If we don't succeed, the slow improvements we've seen globally on gender equality will further slip into reverse and the future of women's leadership will also be at risk. We will start to create a new normal that entrenches global discrimination against girls further and deeply undermines their leadership potential.

The immediate challenge is to make sure the international community, donors and supporters are aware of this gender equality red alert. As some countries take the first tentative steps out of lockdowns, at a time when the challenge of Covid-19 is just starting to ramp up in others, the risk is that we get distracted or move on too fast, and too many girls will be left behind.

If we can succeed in holding attention and mobilising the resources of the international community, it is then imperative that governments and other service providers protect families by directly supporting vulnerable households. This will help ensure that they can still afford education for girls now and in the future.

We must also work with governments, education providers and mobile phone companies to make distance education affordable and accessible to all. We must keep girls learning by getting the tools they need into their hands, so they stay connected. We need digital literacy, too, that does not discriminate, giving girls access to digital resources and the

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“We need to make
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knowledge, training, safety and confidence to design and use them.

As we push for this agenda, we must keep amplifying girls’ voices and strengthening their leadership. We need to make space for girls to speak up safely and listen to what they have to say about their education and their futures. We need to use our power to connect girls with decision-makers, opening doors and pulling up a metaphorical seat at every virtual table so that the choices made to support girls to stay in school are the ones girls themselves want and need.

This is not only a way to stand with girls through the Covid-19 crisis, it’s also a way to promote and encourage their leadership now and into the future. It’s vital we start to work with girls so they can help shape the post-Covid world, and to avoid the risk of a new normal that only deepens their disadvantage. There is hope here, and it drives Plan International’s Girls Get Equal campaign to champions girls’ voices, power and leadership in the quest for gender equality.¹³ In this extraordinary and unique moment, we must stand with and for girls to ensure they can stay in school now and keep creating a future in which they are equally seen, heard and valued.



How to make flexibility work for women in the post-Covid workplace



Laura Jones
Research Associate,
Global Institute for
Women's Leadership

Among the alphabet soup of new initialisms and acronyms that has entered our everyday vocabulary during the last few months – R, PPE, WHO – one was already pretty familiar to those of us who research workplace gender equality: WfH.

For those of us lucky enough to be able to do so, working from home has quickly gone from a workplace perk to a necessity. And while making strong predictions of any kind in the Covid-19 era seems foolish, one thing that does seem likely is that just as pandemics from the Black Death to the 1918 flu have shaped labour markets and working conditions, so too will coronavirus. Covid-19 is likely to leave us with a massive increase in those who work from home at least some of the time. This increase in location flexibility might also come with a significant increase in schedule flexibility – control over when you start and end your work.

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“Covid-19 is likely to leave us with a massive increase in those who work from home at least some of the time”
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While nobody would have chosen the current circumstances, in some ways this is a welcome development for workplace gender equality. In the UK, the Women and Equalities Committee has argued that flexible working for all lies at the heart of closing the gender pay gap,¹⁴ and there is evidence to suggest that access to flexible working – both in terms of schedule and location – results in fewer women dropping out of the labour market or substantially reducing their working hours post-childbirth.¹⁵

It is especially welcome if it means an expansion of flexible work to those who weren't previously able to access it, with existing research suggesting that it is currently granted to higher-status employees as a perk.¹⁶

But it's not all good news, and our previous research with senior UK civil servants, as well studies by others, suggests that there are a couple of key pitfalls to watch out for.



Flexible workers often work harder, and longer

“Flexible working is not the answer ... the ask of us now we have technology is just all consuming.”
– Senior Female Civil Servant, HMRC.

In our research, some employees indicated that since working flexibly they were more likely to worry about work when not at work, to say that work was more likely to spill over into other areas of their life, and to feel that they were expected to always be available.

This finding is reflected in a number of other studies.¹⁷ A key reason for this seems to be that those who go from working in a traditional manner to either working from home¹⁸ or working a flexible schedule¹⁹ actually increase their overtime hours.

Gender differences in returns from this extra work

While both men and women increase their hours once they start working flexibly, some research suggests that it is only men who see a subsequent wage increase, with mothers particularly disadvantaged.²⁰ It's not entirely clear why this might be, but one theory is that managers are more likely to see women as working flexibly to meet the needs of their

family, and are therefore less inclined to reward any extra work they do.

In so far as the past is a guide to the future when it comes to making flexible working work, these findings and others suggest some dos and don'ts for building gender equality into the post-Covid-19 workplace.

DON'T: Go back to flexible working as a perk (but choice is key)

While many of us don't have a choice at the moment, at some point it will become possible to return to our workplaces again.

One thing that has traditionally worried workplace gender equality advocates is whether flexible workers are stigmatised – seen as less committed to their career, or on the “mommy track” and passed over for promotion and pay increases. Seeing flexibility as the norm, rather than the exception, is likely to overcome much of this stigma.

So if, post-Covid, we go back to schedule and location flexibility being something that is only allowed for a select few, then this would be a backwards step.

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“... companies will not enjoy the benefits of flexibility if they fail to ensure it can be freely chosen”
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But we should also be wary of moving too far in the opposite direction, as companies realise that remote working works, and office space is expensive.²¹

In our research with senior civil servants, many of them reported negative impacts of flexible working when it was seen as being down to cost-saving rather than because of their needs. It seems plausible that these findings may be generalisable to other professions, and that companies will not enjoy the benefits of flexibility if they fail to ensure it can be freely chosen.

DON'T: Encourage digital presenteeism

Although it's not exactly clear why flexibility increases working hours, the most popular theories suggest that it is down to a need for flexible workers to prove themselves in

return for the opportunity to work in this way. Sometimes this can be implicit, or in other cases, explicit – as some of our civil servants highlighted:

I am definitely more likely to work late in the evening and at weekends to demonstrate my commitment to the job. Upon taking the role I was informed outright that my compressed hours were frowned upon as a sign of a lack of commitment and would not make me a very good role model.

– Senior female civil servant, Ministry of Justice

While the expansion of flexible working in the wake of Covid-19 might lessen this sense of debt, it is certainly likely to be made worse if an increase in home-working is accompanied by increased digital surveillance. Companies offering software that can monitor employees' screen time have reportedly seen a huge uptick in demand.²²

DO: Make it a shared responsibility to make it work

Sociologist Zoe Young has made a career of studying flexibility in organisations. Her work highlights the stresses that come when individual workers assume it is their responsibility to make flexibility work against a background of inflexible workplaces. By contrast, there are greater gains that arise when jobs are redesigned with schedule flexibility or remote working specifically in mind.²³ Perhaps a hard argument to make to those in charge in normal times, the crisis provides a catalysing moment for arguing for this shared responsibility as a business necessity.

In our research with the civil service teams that had made it work, they referenced a collaborative process of co-design:

Smarter working works well for me. Our unit approach was set out by a working group and balances our working needs and personal needs. It includes the words: “We judge performance by what we do, not where and when we do it.”

– Senior male civil servant, Department for Transport

D0: Support middle managers to be supportive

Our previous research suggests that supportive line managers are key to ensuring that flexible ways of work genuinely reduce work-life conflict, but that too often employers implement top-down flexibility policies without fully supporting line managers to enact them.²⁴ Providing training and support to line managers, as well as opportunities for them to discuss new ways of working within teams, can be effective, increasing job satisfaction and reducing burnout and stress among flexible workers.²⁵

It's clear that the coming period holds both challenges and opportunities for flexible working, and those companies that do best will be those who realise that designing flexibility into roles and teams is a skill – one that requires not only investment in technology, but training and development too.

More women in workplace leadership could make the difference post-Covid



Victor Sojo

Lecturer in Leadership, Centre for Workplace Leadership, University of Melbourne, and Senior Visiting Research Fellow, Global Institute of Women's Leadership

As we struggle to imagine what a post-Covid-19 world of work might look like, the disproportionate effects that the pandemic has had on women need to be made visible. We could be living through another era where the hard-fought rights and protections female workers currently enjoy are wound back and future efforts made more difficult.

Many of the problems we are currently seeing have existed for some time: a concentration of women in frontline and caring occupations; their greater share of unpaid care work; their higher representation in precarious jobs; exposure to harassment and discrimination²⁶ and a lack of access to decision-making teams and opportunities to make themselves heard in the workplace.²⁷ However, Covid-19 is exacerbating many of these gender inequities and highlighting the connections between them.



Susan Ainsworth

Associate Professor of Management and Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Melbourne

First, women are disproportionately working on essential jobs that require frontline contact with people who are potentially infected with the virus – from cashiers in supermarkets and early childhood carers, to nurses and doctors in hospitals²⁸ – adding to the occupational hazards to which women are normally exposed.

Second, women were already struggling with competing demands at work and at home; in the current crisis, working mothers are spending longer caring for children and sick relatives, while either having to remain productive or reducing their work hours and taking a pay cut.²⁹ Particularly for single or migrant mothers, this increases the risk that many women will lose their jobs and fall into poverty.³⁰

Third, women are more likely to be employed in precarious and casual roles. In many sectors, casual jobs – such as sessional teachers at universities, beauticians and waiters – were the first to disappear once Covid-19 hit,³¹ leaving significant numbers of women depending on government

support or, as in the case of many migrant workers, without any government support whatsoever.

Fourth, even when they occupy the same professions and level in the hierarchy as men, women are likely to be afforded lower status in workplace contexts. This holds whether women are in so-called “low-skilled” and low-paid jobs or elite professions.³² These conditions mean that, on a regular basis, women are more likely to fear speaking up when they experience workplace discrimination and harassment, and to suffer both negative health consequences³³ and greater penalties once they speak out about these experiences.³⁴ Given the pressures that Covid-19 is placing on the job market, and the many sacrifices employees are being asked to make to keep businesses afloat, women’s exposure to workplace discrimination and harassment is bound to increase.

These exacerbated vulnerabilities for female workers are taking place in an environment where private sector organisations will be concerned with securing their financial position and survival moving forward. Similarly, public sector organisations will be focusing on restricting expenditure.

Unfortunately, these two conditions in the labour market are more likely to hinder workplace gender equality strategies. These initiatives are often wrongly construed as discretionary, not core business, and as having a negative impact on productivity and financial restraint. We have already observed organisations cutting budgets for support that will directly impact women, such as defunding daycare centres, in a supposed attempt to secure their financial position.³⁵

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“... decades of scientific evidence shows that taking steps towards workplace gender diversity does not hinder productivity”
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Yet decades of scientific evidence shows that taking steps towards workplace gender diversity does not hinder productivity. It also finds that such efforts are linked to better organisational governance; social responsibility; greater occupational wellbeing,

in the form of lower rates of workplace sexual harassment and bullying; lower physical and mental health risks for all workers, not just women; and healthier economies, bolstered by higher labour force participation.

Perhaps more importantly, workplace gender inequality is an issue of social justice. Manifestations of gender inequality such as direct and indirect discrimination, and sexual harassment, are clear obstacles to women's access to the many goods of paid work. They also contribute to the pervasive social, political and financial disadvantages women confront on a daily basis. Women have a human right to just and favourable work conditions that do not hinder their and their families' wellbeing.

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“... having women in leadership roles helps to create employment conditions that support women and their families”
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So how can we create workplace conditions that can help mitigate the disproportionate negative impact of Covid-19 on women?

There is, of course, no simple or single answer to this question. However, research shows that having women in leadership roles helps to create employment conditions that support women and their families.



Studies have identified some small differences between men and women in work-related values and leadership styles. While these differences might not manifest in each individual, when collectives are making decisions, it is likely that having a balance of men and women will help create a situation where women's values and needs are not neglected and where the implications of decisions for their welfare are more likely to be discussed.

In the political arena, women in leadership are more likely to advocate for the welfare of women, families and in particular children. Female politicians are also more likely to consult with their electorates before making decisions.³⁶ Similarly, women in workplace leadership roles are more likely to advocate for and implement practices that improve work-life balance for all members of the organisations,³⁷ which have a direct impact on the wellbeing of their employees and indirectly on the welfare of their families.

Female leaders are also more likely to embrace a democratic and participatory leadership style than their male counterparts.³⁸ Such an approach would be crucial in the current situation, where many organisations will have to negotiate with their employees how to navigate an unprecedented crisis in a way that protects the largest number of employees and the organisation from further harm.

Research has shown that organisations with more gender balance in positions of leadership, such as their top management team and boards, have better governance processes and are more likely to engage in socially responsible business practices that are less likely to harm the environment, community and customers.

During Covid-19 and its aftermath, greater representation of women in workplace leadership roles is critical. It is the most straightforward way to help alleviate the disproportionate negative impact of the pandemic on female employees. It might also facilitate a healthier relationship between organisations and the broader community in the future.

Are women leaders really better?



Blair Williams
Associate Lecturer,
School of Politics
& International
Relations, ANU

The Covid-19 pandemic poses a profound challenge for political leaders around the world. Those with populist authoritarian inclinations, like US President Donald Trump and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, have seen their countries hit by medical and economic devastation, while those with a more conciliatory leadership style, like New Zealand’s Jacinda Ardern, have demonstrated how an empathetic, decisive and consistent approach can successfully flatten the curve. Globally, women hold only 7 per cent of government leadership positions, yet four of the top 10 countries identified as frontrunners in their response to Covid-19 are led by a woman.³⁹ A similar pattern can be observed at other levels of leadership, leading to widespread media speculation that women are simply better leaders.

“... women hold only 7 per cent of government leadership positions, yet four of the top 10 countries identified as frontrunners in their response to Covid-19 are led by a woman”

The style of leadership that women more often adopt, in addition to its deviation from the masculine norm, might be uniquely suited to respond to crises like the current pandemic. Ardern’s empathetic, decisive and community-focused approach – for example, implementing a strategy that aims to eliminate the virus while engaging with the public through daily video updates on social media, broadcast from her home – is both stereotypically “feminine” and an effective response to the needs of the situation.⁴⁰ Likewise, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen followed expert advice, closing Denmark’s borders before most other European nations, and has been widely praised for her clear and direct instructions to the public, while neighbouring Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg made headlines for holding a children-only press conference.



The response from German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen has also been intimately informed by scientific expertise. Merkel responded quickly to the crisis, prioritising fast-track testing and drawing on her experience as a research scientist with a doctorate in quantum chemistry to explain the situation to the German people with reassuring clarity. Germany is now in a much better position than neighbouring countries with much smaller populations. Tsai and her Vice-President Chen Chien-Jen, an epidemiologist prior to entering politics, have also garnered global praise for their effective response, preventing the spread of the virus while avoiding mass disruptions to society and the economy, despite their proximity to China.

These quick, decisive and successful responses to the crisis are in stark contrast with those of male leaders who have adhered to a “strongman” leadership style, unapologetically displaying a toxic and retrograde masculinity, as epitomised by Trump and Bolsonaro. Unlike Merkel and Ardern, Trump’s response to the virus has been chaotic, and his lack of strategy catastrophic. We should acknowledge, of course, that the response to Covid-19 in the US has been driven to a certain extent by ideology. Political partisanship has only increased since the start of the pandemic, and recent research has found that Republican governors, regardless of gender, were slower to introduce lockdown measures than their Democratic counterparts.⁴¹ Nevertheless, despite their

deference to Trump, women governors as a rule have not followed his machoistic style of leadership.

Bolsonaro's handling of the pandemic in his country has been just as chaotic as his US counterpart's. He has consistently downplayed the threat from the virus and opposed lockdown measures, with the result that Brazil is now the second country, after the US, to have passed 50,000 official coronavirus deaths. He has even been accused of trying to suppress unflattering statistics about the country's pandemic, after his administration removed historical data relating to the crisis from the health ministry's website and announced it would stop publishing the cumulative Covid-19 death toll and number of infections.

Assessing these contrasting leadership styles and varying levels of success, the media has frequently raised the question: are women simply better leaders? The answer is complicated. While it appears that women leaders have to date navigated the crisis more successfully, this is less likely to be a consequence of innate gendered qualities, and more likely to be down to the influence of gender stereotypes and expectations.

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“... this pandemic
requires a new style
of leadership”
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Research has shown that women are generally expected to be more nurturing, caring and compassionate than men, and that women leaders are associated with similar traits.⁴² In the face of crisis, male leaders may be hampered by expectations that they will exhibit masculine leadership norms such as strength and confidence, rather than the caution and risk-averse traits associated with women. These gender expectations may encourage risk-taking in male leaders concerned not to display “feminine” characteristics and hence be regarded as weak, ineffectual and incompetent rather than authoritative, self-sufficient and strong and confident.⁴³ Ordinarily, all political leaders are expected to display masculine traits regardless of gender.⁴⁴ Yet this pandemic requires a new style of leadership characterised by adaptability, resilience, empathy, compassion, decisiveness, and an ability to collaborate – qualities stereotypically regarded as feminine.⁴⁵ For once, women leaders have the

advantage of gender expectations that are more suited to dealing with crises such as pandemics.

The strongman style of leadership favoured by many leaders in recent years has been proven to be ineffectual, even dangerous, not only because of the authoritarian policies it usually inspires but also because the strength of which it makes a virtue is little more than a charade. The populist ideology espoused by leaders like Trump is based on questioning experts, framing them as sinister “elites”,⁴⁶ while successful countries led by women have navigated their way around the crisis primarily because they accorded these same experts the respect they deserve. Authoritarian male leaders are flailing because of their adherence to rugged individualism and an impermeable tough-guy performance.

Perhaps countries with women leaders are faring better because they’re held to more rigorous standards, exemplifying what is known as the competency bind. This works on the assumption that femininity and competent leadership are mutually exclusive, that a leader can either be “tough or caring”.⁴⁷ Male leaders are therefore presumed to be competent by virtue of their masculinity while women automatically inspire doubt.⁴⁸ Women in politics, and especially women in leadership positions, must therefore work twice as hard as their male colleagues and, even then, they might still be seen as *not good enough*.⁴⁹

For instance, can you imagine Hilary Clinton displaying the hostile arrogance and inaction that Trump has shown throughout this pandemic?

The success of countries led by women reinforces the global need for more compassionate styles of leadership. Contrasting traditional, patriarchal and authoritarian leadership styles, women have generally presented an approach to leadership that’s more effective – one that prioritises communication, empathy, decisiveness and community. These qualities will be essential as we move through this pandemic and, eventually, into the post-Covid era.

There can be no going back to business as usual



Keelin Dunn
UK Women's Budget
Group

As the world faces the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us have been reflecting on policies, social trends and the values that underpin society. Is it enough to go back to how things were, or is this critical moment the opportunity to change and create a better society – one that works for everyone?

There's reason to believe public opinion is shifting heavily towards the latter. Over 80 per cent of Britons want the government to prioritise health and wellbeing over GDP in the post-Covid recovery,⁵⁰ while 72 per cent support a system that ensures everyone who can work has a job,⁵¹ and a majority want climate change to be prioritised.⁵²

The Covid-19 crisis has shown many ways in which the economy is not working, but for women it has never really worked. This crisis collides with pre-existing inequalities, as outlined in a report on the gendered impact of the crisis by the Women's Budget Group.⁵³ Women are doing the majority of care work, paid and unpaid, make up the majority of workers with the highest exposure to the virus, are more likely to work in sectors hardest hit by the lockdown, and make up the majority of those who were already living in poverty, meaning they will find it harder to cope with a fall in income.

Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that among parents in the UK who were in paid work prior to the lockdown, mothers are one and a half times more likely than fathers to have either lost their job or quit since the lockdown began.⁵⁴ They are also more likely to have been furloughed. The same research also showed that mothers are combining paid work with other activities (almost always childcare) in 47 per cent of their work hours, compared with 30 per cent of fathers' work hours.

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"The Covid-19 crisis has shown many ways in which the economy is not working, but for women it has never really worked"
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Many of the most vital roles in this crisis – including care workers, cleaners and supermarket staff – are also the most badly

paid. And women are twice as likely as men to be working in these key worker roles.⁵⁵ Over a million of the jobs at greatest risk of exposure to Covid-19 are classed as low-paid, and 98 per cent of the workers in these jobs are women.⁵⁶

Women are also more likely than men to work in sectors that have been locked down, such as hospitality and non-food retail.⁵⁷ Among young women, over a third worked in sectors which have now been locked down.⁵⁸ As the UK government's furlough scheme is scaled back, there are likely to be widespread redundancies in these sectors, leading to increased unemployment particularly among younger workers and women.

Pre-crisis, 39 per cent of women⁵⁹ (compared with 34 per cent of men) reported it being a struggle to keep up with bills either some or most of the time. The crisis has made things much worse, particularly for single parents, 90 per cent of whom are women. One study by Turn 2 Us showed that two-thirds of single parents anticipated that they would have £1,000 or less in April to live on, and 42 per cent thought they would have less than £500 a month.⁶⁰

Not surprisingly, one third of women are reporting high levels of anxiety, compared with a quarter of men – and this goes up to 56 per cent for women who are key workers.⁶¹



These impacts are exacerbated further by the inequalities faced by migrant women, BAME women and disabled women.

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“These impacts are exacerbated further by the inequalities faced by migrant women, BAME women and disabled women.”
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The lifting of lockdown presents a whole new set of challenges for women.⁶² There are reports that a large number of social care providers may go out of business as a result of increased costs, reduced revenues and widespread staff shortages.⁶³ This will hit women hardest, as the majority of those needing care, the majority working in the care sector and the majority providing unpaid care who will have to fill the gap if services close.

A survey by Childcare Online found that more than 10,000 childcare providers were likely to have gone out of business by the end of the Covid-19 lockdown, with a loss of about 150,000 childcare places in England.⁶⁴ Some schools are opening for certain pupils, but primary school children, aside from those whose parents are key workers, will not be returning to school until September, after the summer holidays. Based on the evidence so far of who has ended up with most of the responsibility for childcare, this risks a two-tier return to work, with men starting to go back while women continue with primary responsibility for childcare.

As we enter this new stage of the crisis, the questions are shifting away from the public health response and moving towards rebuilding what has been damaged, both economically and socially. As these policies are drafted and discussed, it is crucial that we consider who these policies are for. The austerity policies in the UK that followed the 2008 financial crisis disproportionately lowered women’s living standards, particularly working class, disabled and BAME women, leaving them poorer and without vital services.⁶⁵ Rather than falling back into previous habits of prioritising corporations and banks while pushing austerity for everyone else, this is a time to be innovative and implement policies that work for everyone.

The Women's Budget Group's Commission on a Gender Equal Economy has spent the past year collating expert input to create alternative economic policies that promote gender equality across the UK. It will be reporting in September, with a set of concrete ideas for a recovery with gender equality at its heart. This means a care-led recovery, since care has been central both to this crisis and women's inequality more generally. Previous research by the Women's Budget Group has shown that investment of 2 per cent of GDP in the care sector would create twice as many jobs as investment in construction.⁶⁶ Care jobs are also green jobs, so should be central to any conversation about a Green New Deal.⁶⁷

There can be no going back to business as usual. As we face the need for widespread policy reform, we must craft policies that promote, rather than undermine, equality.

Women must play a major role in shaping the post-crisis world



Fiona McTaggart
Chair, Fawcett
Society

There was no comprehensive blueprint on how to deal with the current crisis, and every leader has had to work out how best to tackle the challenge for themselves, drawing on expert evidence and their own experience and instincts. But women are rare at the top of government – and this is a problem. Countries led by all-male teams headed by macho figures like Trump, Johnson, Putin or Bolsonaro seem to be floundering, whereas women-led governments adopting different approaches seem to have managed relatively successfully.

As a recent editorial in the *British Medical Journal* put it:

No discipline has all the answers, and the only way to avoid “groupthink” and blind spots is to ensure representatives with diverse backgrounds and expertise are at the table when major decisions are made.⁶⁸

It is not only powerful women who have proved their worth: those working in the health service, in food shops, or as carers have been essential to our survival. Women who work are more than twice as likely to be in represented in these kinds of jobs as men. 77 per cent of NHS workers are female, and most are mothers.⁶⁹ 39 per cent of working mothers were key workers before this crisis began, compared with just 27 per cent of the working population as a whole.⁷⁰

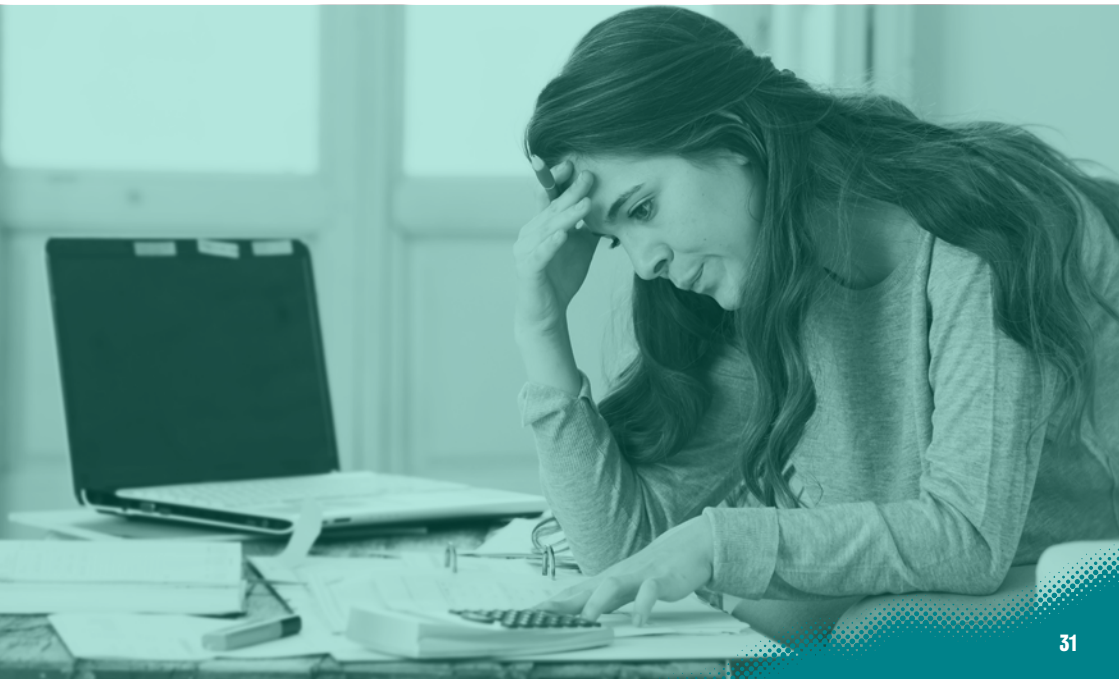
Many of these working women are suffering economically. Of the UK’s two million single parents, over 90 per cent are women and 70 per cent of them work.⁷¹ They are likely to be in lower-paid, less secure work. Women comprise 54 per cent of the 1.8 million people on zero-hour contracts, a group who often had difficulty getting furlough so had to keep working to pay the bills.⁷²

Parents are twice as likely as those without children to struggle to make ends meet during the pandemic. Nearly half (43 per cent) of parents of young children said their

households had nearly run out of money, compared with 18 per cent of other respondents.⁷³ And as the economy gets going again, the pressure on women is likely to grow. Schools are only partially opening; many other forms of childcare are closed, and elderly parents are more dependent. These tasks still largely fall to women, who won't be paid for this work.⁷⁴ Before the Covid-19 outbreak, on average women in the EU spent 13 hours more than men every week on unpaid care and housework.⁷⁵ And though paid work has migrated into the home, there is little evidence that the burdens of unpaid work are being redistributed.

The charity Working Families reports a fourfold increase in calls to its advice line, with “clear evidence that working fathers are not being asked about how they will manage work and care at this time, even when working mothers are being penalised by the same employer.”⁷⁶

Yet there could be good news: the extent of working from home during this time might mean it is no longer viewed with suspicion, and we could see an end to the culture of presenteeism that characterises UK businesses. In December 2019, the government committed to creating a flexible-by-



default labour market. The pandemic has demonstrated how it can be done. But unless the unpaid work which happens at home is shared more equally between women and men, women will continue to lose out.

And for some women, home is a dangerous place: too many have been hurt or died at the hands of the men they live with. Domestic violence charities, expert and underfunded, have been struggling to support women who are locked in with a dangerous man during this pandemic.

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“The value of having women at the helm and working on the frontline has been brutally demonstrated by this crisis”
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It’s easy to get depressed, but as Sheryl Sandberg told Newsweek: “You know how they say never waste a crisis? We need to not waste this moment to fix the structural problems that women face.”⁷⁷

Recent research by ICM for British Future and the Policy Institute at King’s College London reveals that two-thirds of the UK public agree that “the coronavirus crisis has made me value the role of ‘low-skilled’ workers in essential services such a care homes, transport and shops, more than before.”⁷⁸ That shift in public values needs to be built on to improve the pay of this workforce. In a year where gender pay gap reporting is suspended, here is a real chance to improve the pay of some of the worst-paid women. And if men do not take on more of the unpaid work in a family, we must boost the incomes of women through child benefit.

The value of having women at the helm and working on the frontline has been brutally demonstrated by this crisis. Women must play a major role in shaping the post-crisis world, or we risk reverting to the old ways which meant that even when PPE was available to frontline workers, it came in sizes that did not fit women. Work patterns have been shaped around men, too, and it’s time they fitted the people who overwhelmingly do the vital jobs of caring for children and older people: women.

Gender equality in the Covid-19 era and beyond



Shauna Olney
Chief of Gender,
Equality and
Diversity Branch,
International Labour
Organization

In 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) celebrated its centenary – 100 years of social justice, of giving workers and employers a voice, and promoting gender equality. It also marked the culmination of the ILO Women at Work Centenary Initiative, which brought together groundbreaking research, data, learning and insights to better understand why progress for women in the world of work has been so slow, and what could be done to accelerate it. Covid-19 is now putting at risk what fragile progress there had been. A proactive and courageous agenda for gender equality, undertaken with unwavering political will,⁷⁹ is needed now more than ever.

Throughout the Women at Work Initiative, we challenged assumptions, we explored, we listened, we learned. A framework towards a transformative and measurable agenda for gender equality was put forward, focusing on equal employment opportunities, participation and treatment, including equal remuneration for work of equal value, paid and unpaid care work, and violence and harassment.⁸⁰

In 2020, the Covid-19 crisis has put that agenda to the test. However, the pandemic has not only confirmed the relevance of this transformative agenda for gender equality, but also made even more obvious the urgency of implementing it if there is to be a sustainable response to the present crisis and resilience in the face of future ones.

What became clear in the context of the Women at Work Initiative was that there would not be any meaningful progress for women, whether they work in the fields or the boardroom, or through digital platforms, without addressing the care and paid work conundrum.⁸¹ The ILO has been highlighting the need for urgent action “to pursue the high road to care work if there is to be a future of work for both women and men that is decent by design.”⁸²

Of the approximately 136 million workers in the health and social services sectors, 96 million are women.⁸³ The insecure contracts, low pay, long hours and excessive workloads

which characterised these jobs before the pandemic have been exacerbated. Even before the crisis, women performed over 76 per cent of the total amount of unpaid care work.⁸⁴ With confinement measures and school closures because of Covid-19, this has only increased.⁸⁵

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“Covid-19 has amplified in particular the need for more and better care jobs”
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What is no longer in doubt is that much greater investment in care sectors, including health, social work and education, is urgently required. Covid-19 has amplified in particular the need for more and better care jobs. Taking the “high road to care”, advocated by the ILO – focusing on investing in the provision of good quality care and providing decent work for care workers⁸⁶ – would address some of the significant care deficits that Covid-19 has exposed.

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The ILO had estimated that the high road to care scenario would generate 120 million more quality jobs in the care sectors and 149 million indirect jobs in non-care sectors.⁸⁷ Such investment is not a luxury – Covid-19 has shown that it is indispensable to the survival of societies and economies. Investments in infrastructure, social protection and public care services will also support the much needed redistribution of unpaid care work, which is essential if women are to have equal opportunities in the world of work.

Covid-19 has also brought violence and harassment to the fore. Spikes in violence and harassment in their various manifestations have significantly affected women, whether they are working on the frontline of the response, working from home, or at home caring for their families – and often juggling more than one of these roles. Even before Covid-19, healthcare workers were reporting high levels of violence and harassment, and this has increased.⁸⁸ With lockdown measures, financial insecurity, unemployment and other stress related to Covid-19, the number of cases of domestic violence has also soared, disproportionately affecting women.⁸⁹ For many, the home is now their workplace, with the line between the domestic and the work spheres disappearing.

In 2019, the ILO constituents adopted an international treaty with a view to ending violence and harassment in the world of work. The Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206) acknowledge the link between domestic violence and the world of work, including the impact of domestic violence on employment, productivity and health and safety. The Convention provides a clear framework for addressing and preventing violence and harassment in the world of work and calls on member states to recognise the effects of domestic violence and mitigate its impact in the world of work. With the risk of violence and harassment intensifying during times of crisis, the framework set out in the Convention has become even more relevant.⁸⁹

As the world faces a health, human and economic crisis and its ongoing consequences, one of the main issues that is preoccupying people is the impact on their jobs and livelihoods. The reality is that the economic downturn caused by Covid-19 is likely to hit women hardest. The ILO estimates that hours lost in the first quarter of 2020 are equivalent to approximately 130 million full-time jobs, rising to the equivalent of 305 million full-time jobs in the second quarter.⁹⁰ Sectors at high risk of job losses and a decline in



working hours are those representing a significant share of female employment: accommodation and food services; real estate, business and administrative activities; manufacturing; and wholesale/retail trade.⁹¹

Women working in the informal economy are under even greater threat,⁹² with over 40 per cent operating in sectors most at risk of job losses and reduced working hours.⁹³

Women are even more exposed to informality in low- and lower-middle-income countries.⁹⁴ The ILO has highlighted these workers' continuing need for access to healthcare, as well as for income and food support to compensate for lost or reduced incomes, and tailored and gender-responsive measures to mitigate economic damage and preserve employment, including facilitating the transition from the informal to the formal economy.⁹⁵

“We must leverage the experience and insights of this crisis to accelerate change and make a quantum leap for gender equality”

Measures to stimulate the economy and generate employment need to be designed and implemented through social dialogue, to give a voice to workers and employers, and to ensure the needs and aspirations of both women and men are addressed. Policies need to be effective and inclusive and should increase the participation of women in decision-making bodies, including in labour relations institutions, and in trades unions and employers' organisations.⁹⁶

Covid-19 has not fundamentally changed the gender inequalities in the world of work and wider society: it has brought them to the surface, amplified them and made them much harder to ignore. We must leverage the experience and insights of this crisis to accelerate change and make a quantum leap for gender equality. This exceptional opportunity should not be lost.

How business should respond to Covid-19



Sue Asprey-Price
Head of Corporate
Solutions and Board
Member, JLL UK

The “next normal” requires diverse and innovative thinking. That involves collaboration with a wider range of people with different experiences, skills and insights, where speaking up and challenging each other isn’t perceived as dissent but is welcomed.

Covid-19 has provided the backdrop for the largest-ever workplace experiment, accelerating the additional agility many were craving. As a result, around 80 per cent of organisations say they will adopt an element of home-working post-coronavirus, according to JLL research.⁹⁷ The long-term sustainability of this will depend on the extent to which diversity and inclusion is already embedded in strategic decision-making, as well as the organisation’s willingness to embrace a responsible, purpose-led recovery which advocates for representation across environmental, social and governance criteria.

Strength lies in difference

During times of uncertainty we are forced to make multiple decisions under pressure. The circumstances might mean we don’t think as objectively as we normally would. This is also when unconscious bias can come to the fore.⁹⁸ These biases



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“It is only when leadership prioritise diversity and inclusion that notable progress is made”
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can cause us to revert to entrenched ways of working, surrounding ourselves with people who think like us. Strength and innovations lie in difference. And diverse teams equip businesses to better serve a broader customer base,⁹⁹ which is essential for both a faster recovery and to build business resilience.

Diversity and inclusion is an integral part of responsible business

More than a decade on from the global financial crisis, diversity and inclusion has made good progress and is now embedded in the strategic priorities of many businesses. In 2011, just 12 per cent of those on FTSE 100 Boards were women.¹⁰⁰ In the most recent analysis, from October 2019, this had increased to 32 per cent.¹⁰¹ This is thanks to the collective efforts of proactive businesses, governments and charities. While there’s always more to do, there should be no reason why diversity and inclusion is not a core business priority post-pandemic. It will be integral and makes good business sense to the transformation all businesses will need in the next one to three years.

Maintaining momentum on diversity and inclusion

It is indisputable that diversity and inclusion is a requirement of good business. Key actions to drive ongoing progress are:

1. Board-level ownership: It is only when leadership prioritise diversity and inclusion that notable progress is made.
2. Metrics: Measurement drives action. While mandatory reporting of organisations’ gender pay gaps was suspended in the UK because of the pandemic, there is no reason why businesses shouldn’t keep monitoring this data. JLL submitted its gender pay gap report this year.
3. Link diversity and inclusion objectives to pay: For example, JLL’s senior management team, a group of more than 90 leaders within the company, is assessed on their progress on these objectives.

The future of work is key to unlocking a more diverse employee base

Covid-19 will do what years of advocacy failed to do and make agile working the norm. With most organisations now in favour of this additional flexibility, the balance of how, where and when people work has shifted. While physical workplaces will continue to play a vital part in collaboration and learning, one clear benefit in the growth of greater home-working is the expansion of talent pools. This means that parents and those with caring responsibilities could be brought back into the workforce, as many roles would no longer need to be done in the office.

Agile working could also help overcome some of the challenges posed by more traditional ways of working for those with different capabilities, while greater use of technology and remote communication has the potential to increase the participation of individuals from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups. Employees would be able to contribute in new ways, and organisations would increasingly realise how much those with differing capabilities and from different backgrounds are part of the solution.

The future vs the reality

While it's encouraging to think that a positive from the global pandemic would be a more inclusive working environment, it's important to remind ourselves of the realities. According to McKinsey: "... historically, rapid economic and social disruptions and increases in inequality have tended to result in rising distrust and discontent."¹⁰² And as Forbes recently said in relation to Covid-19: "... women are less likely to die but more likely to care". Women are more likely to be key workers, more likely to be in jobs negatively impacted and more likely to undertake "invisible" labour through their caring responsibilities.¹⁰³ All of which puts increased pressure on women trying to juggle a mix of personal and professional demands in the current crisis.

Women well-equipped to lead

This ongoing pandemic requires leaders with empathy, compassion and an ability to show support – skills that

women tend to exhibit more than men.¹⁰⁴ Skills that also align well with what is needed to manage teams remotely. When employees feel supported and are seen by leaders, they are twice as likely to be productive and satisfied by their jobs.¹⁰⁵

Time to re-evaluate the leaders of tomorrow

As the world continues to transform at an unprecedented rate, the leaders of tomorrow must be equipped with new capabilities. Research indicates that core inclusive

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“... diversity and inclusion will be the advantage that helps companies survive and prosper”
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leadership traits are critical. This new type of leadership primarily involves courage, flexibility, collaboration, caring, recognition of collective contribution, and leveraging the thinking of diverse individuals and groups. These are all characteristics of traditionally feminine management. Female leaders are excelling, so why wouldn't businesses reevaluate their leadership teams, assessing their current leadership against the traits required for the next normal?

Diversity and inclusion: the post-pandemic competitive advantage

The pandemic will have a positive legacy for those businesses prepared to re-evaluate and commit to an ambitious diversity and inclusion plan aimed at business resilience and responsible recovery. This can be used to specific advantage in workplace strategies which have been accelerated and have the potential to reshape the way we work. However, employers must appreciate the realities as they seek to implement best practice. As humans, we are not naturally open-minded to difference, and we can find change hard. But the next normal requires us to adapt, and diversity and inclusion will be the advantage that helps companies survive and prosper.

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have fair and equal access to leadership.

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