

Developing Millennial Female Talent ICEDR Global Survey Results

What You Should Know about the Young, Female Talent at Your Organization
By Lauren Noël and Christie Hunter Arcscott

Why study female millennial talent: The millennial majority

Women account for a growing percentage of college graduates worldwide, and roughly half of the workforce, yet at the executive levels, women are few and far between. Solutions to that gap remain elusive and progress has been frustratingly slow.

Another critical talent pool that's captured significant organizational and media attention is the millennial generation, projected to account for 75 percent of the global workforce by 2025. In the coming years, the desires of millennials won't be an aberration, as this generation will make up the majority of the workforce. Cultures, organizational processes, and "how work gets done" will be created by and for millennials. The importance of attracting and retaining these employees has been brought to the forefront of the talent management agenda.

But in our conversations with executives at ICEDR sponsor organizations, we've found that organizations are facing unique challenges at the intersection of these two groups: women millennials. And while women and millennials as distinct groups have been written about extensively, we've found little research focused on women millennials. Furthermore, when it comes to aspects of the talent management life cycle (e.g., recruitment, training and development, retention, advancement) there is little information on how the needs and aspirations of women in their late 20s and early 30s may or may not differ from their male counterparts.

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Our research focus

Our conversations with executives reveal that companies are facing the challenge of retaining high potential women around the age of 30. Thus, we are leading an ICEDR research project to better understand how organizations can put into place the organizational practices and create a climate that attracts, develops, engages, and retains high potential female talent 5-10 years out of university.

Survey results

ICEDR surveyed 164 HR executives at large, global companies to discover the biggest career challenges women 5-10 years out of university face, why men and women at this career stage tend to leave organizations, and to see what initiatives HR professionals are finding to be effective at retaining early career female talent. The main findings of the survey results are below.

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1. Motherhood, managing, and “male roles”: the toughest transitions for women 5-10 years out of university

HR executives report that the three most difficult transitions that women in their late 20s and early 30s face are:

Motherhood. Transition into motherhood and having a family with young children

Managing. Becoming a boss – transition from individual contributor to managing others

Male Roles. Being considered for what has historically been viewed as a male role (eg. tough field assignment)

In particular, the transitions into motherhood and becoming a first-time boss stand out as the most difficult stages for women 5-10 years out of university.

HR executives report that an especially challenging stage for women is their initial return to work after maternity leave. Several respondents mention that women struggle to make the shift from full to part time work when they return to their jobs.

In addition, becoming a boss for the first time is a tough transition for women 5-10 years out of university. HR executives mention early career women may find difficulties winning a promotion over their male counterparts in the first place since they have trouble building the skills they need to stand out, such as the ability to network or advocate on their own behalf.

What’s more, for many women, the two most difficult transition points - becoming a mother and a first-time manager - occur around the same time. Some young women face a perfect storm around the age of 30 when the compounding forces of becoming a mother and a first-time boss collide.

Furthermore, our survey shows that being considered for what has historically been viewed as a “male role” proves tricky for early career women. For example, respondents mention that moving from the city to rural plant location is often not an appealing opportunity for a woman 5-10 years out of university as that may mean spending time away from a spouse or requiring a dual-career couple to relocate.

These three transition points beat out such other tricky career stages as: “changing of roles: transition from first job to a new role,” “transition from university to a first job,” and “being considered for an international assignment.”

Understanding where early career women may stumble is important. Consider McKinsey & Company’s research revealing that “interventions at critical career points can have outsized impact.”¹ Knowing that women 5-10 years out of university are likely to face challenges navigating the “3 M’s”: *motherhood, managing, and male roles* can give HR executives and line managers guidance on where to focus targeted initiatives aimed at increasing the retention of high potential early career women. One point of focus for this ICEDR research project will be how companies can help women 5-10 years out of university navigate these difficult transitions.

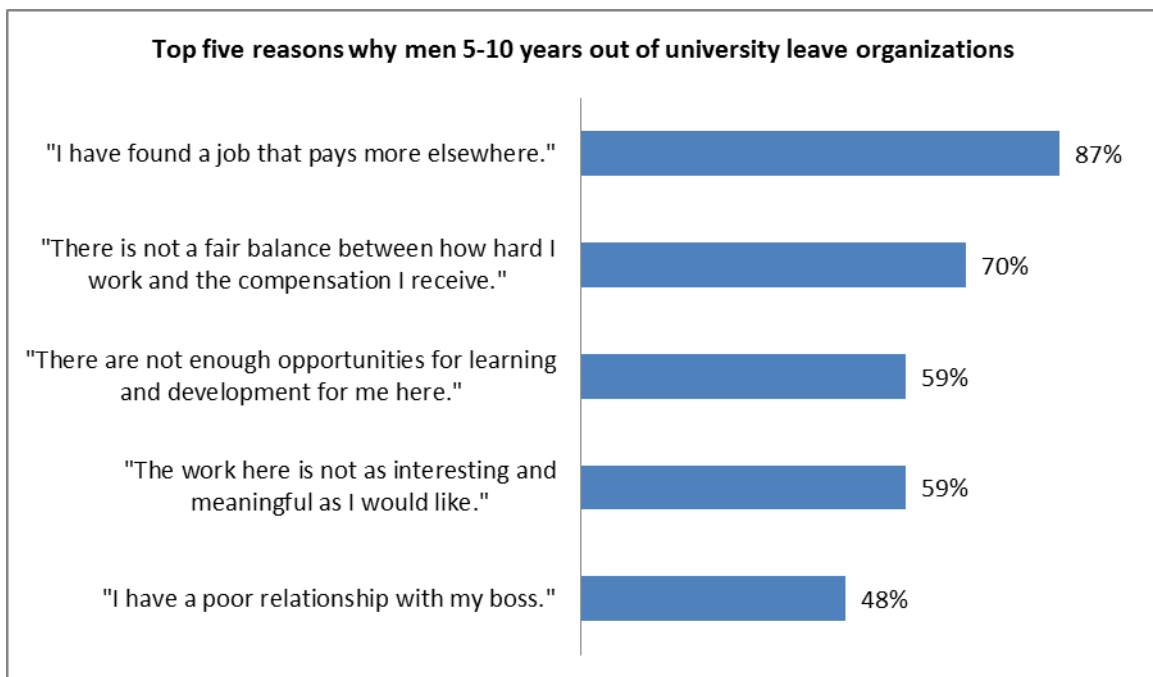
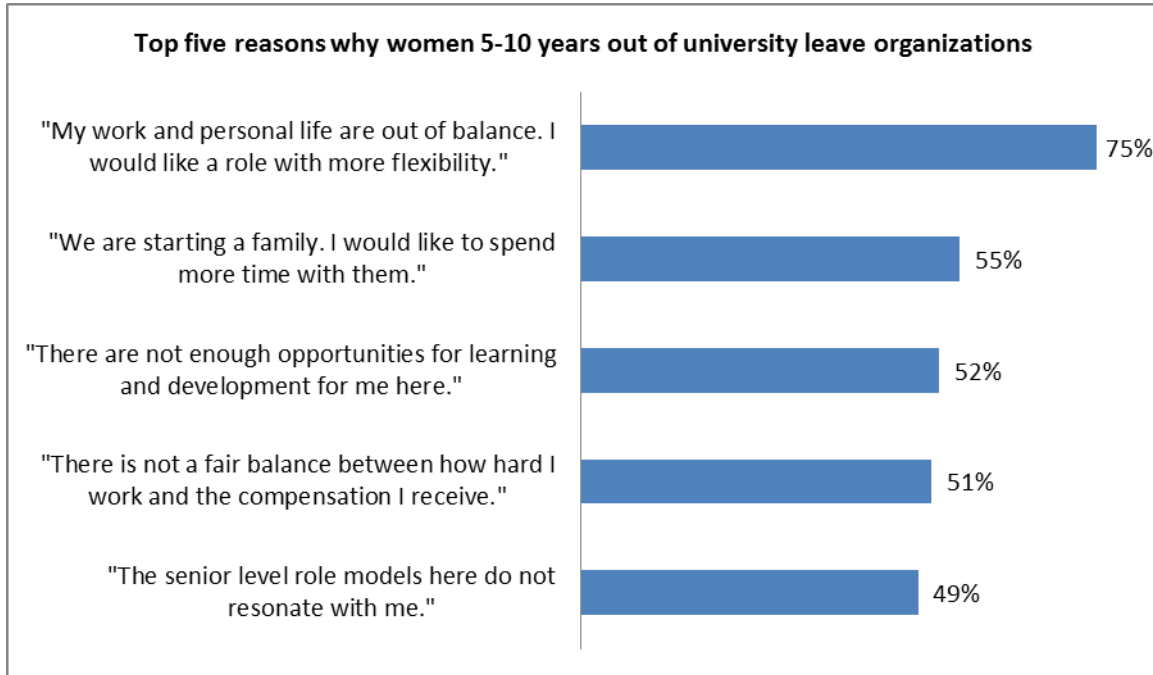
¹“Unlocking the full potential of women in the U.S. economy,” Joanna Barsh and Lareina Yee, McKinsey & Co, April 2011.



2. Men and women 5-10 years out of university leave jobs for different reasons

What are the most common reasons why men and women 5-10 years out of university leave organizations? Our survey data shows that there are some similarities between why men and women in this age group are most likely to head for the exits, but a few differences exist.

We listed twelve reasons why men and women 5-10 years out of university may leave companies and asked talent management professionals to rank the top 5 reasons why they are seeing men and women in this age group depart. The charts below list the percentage of HR executives that ranked each departure reason in the top five for young women and men.



These survey findings reflect that, overall, women at this career stage are most likely to leave due to challenges they face integrating work and life, while early career men are most likely to depart to pursue career advancement opportunities.

The survey comments HR executives shared support the numbers. Many respondents mention that early career women leave when they have found what they deem to be a better work-life fit at a different company. Others state that young women tend to flee when they don't see inspiring senior-level role models in the upper ranks.

Interestingly, when talent professionals explain why they are seeing early career men leave, their comments focus on "opportunity:" described in such terms as better pay, career advancement, or a promotion.

Yet, let's not forget that recent studies have highlighted that millennial males are increasingly seeking roles that enable them to integrate their work and personal lives.² Our survey does not show work-life fit as one of the top 5 reasons why men around the age of 30 depart, but that may change in years to come and is increasingly important to early career men today. Research, such as the world's largest study on millennials conducted by PwC, is showing that millennial *men and women* are increasingly looking for roles that enable them to integrate their work and personal lives.³

Our survey data did bear out two common reasons why men and women 5-10 years out of university are likely to leave: lack of a "fair trade" between workload and pay and a dearth of learning and development opportunities. But, the bottom line is: it's important to note that nuances between why men and women 5-10 years out of university head for the exits may exist.

3. The High Flex Organization: A focus on flexibility is effective at retaining women in their late 20s and early 30s

Much of this research project will focus on success stories and leading practices. We'll dive into companies to investigate the programs and initiatives they are putting in place that are working to retain high potential women 5-10 years out of university.

So, for this survey, we took an initial pulse to see what's working. In short, flexibility initiatives are effective. Nearly 80% of talent professionals ranked "flex time, job sharing, or other flexibility initiatives" as effective at retaining women 5-10 years out of university. Also, consider that 75% of survey respondents mention "my work and personal life are out of balance. I would like a role with more flexibility" as a top 5 reason why young women flee. Putting these two results together shows that flexibility matters.

Consider one survey respondent's comment: "the only reason I'm still at my job is that I can work 7:30am-4pm and work from home 2 days per week."

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²"Meet the New Face of Diversity: The "Slacker" Millennial Guy," *Harvard Business Review Blog Network*, Joan C. Williams, October 14, 2013.

³PwC's NextGen: A global generational study, Evolving talent strategy to meet the new workforce reality.

HR executives are also finding skill building and development programs for young women and a deep commitment to senior-level sponsorship of junior women to be effective.

The top three initiatives that are effecting at retaining women 5-10 years out of university are:



Our ask

As the next step in this research, we are looking to profile companies that have put into place programs, initiatives, and have created a climate that attracts, develops, engages, and retains women in their late 20s and early 30s. We plan to interview companies that have shown success (e.g., increased retention, boosted engagement) helping millennial female talent thrive. We'll also be keeping an eye towards the future and will ask questions around how millennials will change the nature of how we work and shape the talent philosophies of the future.

We'd like to conduct brief interview(s) with HR / talent executives regarding their experiences, programs, and practices and, if possible, to supplement this info with focus groups or interviews with a few women and men in their late 20s/early 30s at the organization. If you're interested in getting involved, please email Lauren Noël, Director of Marketing and Talent at ICEDR at lnoel@icedr.org. Thank you for your interest in this research. We look forward to engaging with you on this important topic.

About the survey

The survey results are based on data collected in June and July 2014 from 164 HR/talent management professionals who work in large, global corporations.

