

Gender Differences in Speed of Advancement

Despite representing nearly 50% of the U.S. workforce, women only represent 15% of the top executive positions within Fortune 100 companies. While scholars have long reported evidence of a glass ceiling effect that limits female advancement, recent research finds that many organizations today have programs to ensure female advancement into top executive positions. However, the factors contributing to the speed of female advancement into such positions are unknown. The authors of a recent study in *Strategic Management Journal* tackle this issue by examining gender differences in speed of advancement to top executive positions within Fortune 100 companies and conditions that shape their trajectories.

Key Takeaways:

- Women advance more quickly to top executive positions within the Fortune 100 than men
- Women who spend more time at a particular company advance more quickly to top executive positions within the Fortune 100.
- Women advance more quickly in firms that have few (zero or 1) women in top executive positions.

To examine career advancement, the authors analyzed biographical information on 1,594 Fortune-100 executives in the top 10 layers of a company's organizational chart from 2001 to 2011. The authors measured speed of advancement by accounting for the year that executives entered the labor market and the year that they were first appointed to a top executive position. Controlling for relevant individual attributes

(e.g. education, functional experience, industry experience, executive tier level), the authors found that women advance more quickly than men to top executive positions. This effect was enhanced for women who had spent more time within their current organization and when there was one or zero women within the top executive positions at their organization.

The authors offer several avenues for future research, including examining whether these results hold when considering companies outside of the Fortune 100. For instance, the authors suggest that companies outside of the Fortune 100 may be less subject to institutional pressures to demonstrate adherence to diversity goals.

Source: Bonet, R., Cappelli, P., & Hamori, M. (2020). Gender differences in speed of advancement: An empirical examination of top executives in the Fortune 100 firms. *Strategic Management Journal*, 41: 708-737.