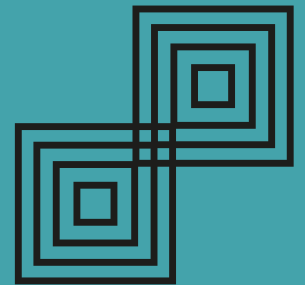


# The Boundaried Worker: Climbing the Ladder



## Background

Gender parity is stalling at best and at worst going backwards. In the UK alone, ECC's research indicates that, across the banking, legal and FTSE 350 sectors, 20,000 women need to be promoted to achieve parity. But given attrition challenges, employees' new expectations and outdated talent models, more than fishing in one pool of 'typical' or 'traditional talent' is needed. Organisations must look beyond to other previously untapped pools of talent.

Women with the skill, experience and ambition for senior leadership have not disappeared from your business. They are still there, but they are stuck or overlooked by criteria used to identify and promote internal talent. To learn more about why segmenting your workforce of women by alternative talent pools is important and why it is essential to build a plan to engage these women, read 'Where have all the senior women gone.'

By reimagining talent as the four different pools ECC has identified through their research, you can take steps to harness their potential. These are the Boundaried Worker, The Overlooked, The Just Leavers and The Lost Leaders. Take note, these categories won't cover every individual, and some individuals will be in more than one. Here we explain the Boundaried Worker.

## Who are the Boundaried Workers?

Boundaried Workers are those with additional commitments - boundaries. Limitations for an individual can arise from illness, religion, or caring responsibilities, among others, meaning men and women can be Boundaried Workers. Whilst men also can become bound by care commitments, after the birth of a child 90% of new fathers return to full-time work, whereas only 20% of women do. Many women become Boundaried Workers at some point in their careers from motherhood, or by caring for elderly relatives, which happens on average a decade earlier than men. In this way, women are often 'bound' by responsibility, which causes a lack of availability of time, flexibility, and geographical mobility.



## **Workplace Context**

The gender wage gap widens significantly and continuously in the 20 years after a family's first child. The evidence shows how alternative work patterns, like flexible or part-time work, and time away from work, account for about half of this pay gap. Further evidence shows how bounded work patterns also shut down occupational progression. So, whilst policies that provide leave or offer part-time or flexible arrangements may have helped women stay in their careers, they have materially impacted women's pay and advancement.

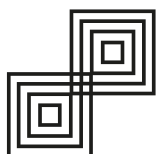
## **Why do Boundaried Workers suffer a lack of attainment in pay and progression?**

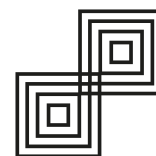
Many significant barriers to women's progression in the workplace arise from the conflict between their boundaries and an organisation's norms of presenteeism and overwork. By contrast, those with a 'boundless' work style who have maximum flexibility and thrive in an 'all-hours working culture' can progress and go on to perpetuate the culture.

Extensive research shows managers as ill-equipped to support individuals navigating bounded work patterns. Colleagues, including managers, often misinterpret and judge Boundaried Workers as lacking commitment, capability, and motivation. Research supports that the existence of a boundary is unrelated to an individual's drive and ambition for their career.

## **How can organisations target this pool of talent?**

If you start by acknowledging there are talented individuals that you have probably missed, you can begin to action plan how to realise this opportunity. This considerable pool of potential talent could help your organisation progress in gender equity if identified and harnessed. Understanding this segment of workers will help you and your leaders broaden their perspectives when they are identifying talent for development, stretch opportunities and progression.





## Actions

1. **If you manage a team**, think about your organisation's culture. Look around at your colleagues. Are there Boundaried Workers? For example, those that work flexibly, what do you think the impact of this has been on their career? Consider what your role is in creating change for them.
2. **DEI, talent and HR people** consider how to unlock the potential in this significant talent pool and how to equip your Boundaried Workers and their managers. Read ECC's explainers on how to:
  1. Build a strategy to support your working parents, because most Boundaried Workers are bound by care responsibilities.
  2. Design development programmes for women, because to tap the potential of Boundaried women, it's essential to help them understand the challenges and how to navigate them.
  3. Develop inclusive leaders and give managers the tools and awareness to make the most of all team members.
3. If you are ready to take the next step and embed a plan for positive change for your organisation then download **ECC's free Gender Assessment Planner**. This evidence-based assessment tool will help organisations to develop and implement a tailored plan for progress in gender parity.