



International Workplace Group

Transforming working life for women

Advocacy, resilience and
the hybrid model

8 March 2022



Meet the panel



FATIMA KONING
GROUP CHIEF COMMERCIAL
OFFICER FOR IWG

Koning's career has gone from strength to strength during her eight years with IWG. After joining the business as Head of Sales in the Netherlands, she's enjoyed a meteoric rise to become Group Chief Commercial Officer and is now responsible for helping companies create people-centred strategies for hybrid working. A passionate believer in the hybrid model, Koning likes to be challenged every day and is a champion of diversity in the workplace.

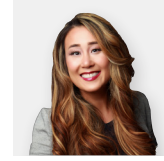
"The shift to hybrid working has helped everyone, but it has specific benefits for women. I'm proud that at IWG we're helping millions of people to work in a different way and explore options that can improve their lives."



ANNELOU DE GROOT
PARTNERSHIPS DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTOR FOR IWG

In a commercial real estate sector traditionally dominated by men, De Groot is a forward-thinking leader responsible for creative deals with a variety of partners. Like many women, she's fiercely ambitious for her career but also committed to spending quality time with her family.

"Success for me is about being able to make an exceptional contribution to our company's results. However, there's more to life than just work and, in the end, seeing my two kids happy is what makes me feel best."



JEN CHO
CEO OF THE WING

Cho is an expert marketer and specialist in multicultural communications, as well as a champion of recruiting and retaining diverse talent. She became CEO of The Wing – a network of women-focused coworking spaces – in February 2022. She has ambitious plans to grow its membership base and expand into territories beyond the USA, with six centres set to open in Europe before the end of the year. Cho is committed to creating environments where women can be the best versions of themselves, but also comfortable enough to ask questions and try new things they might find intimidating in more traditional office settings.

"I believe it's critical that spaces like The Wing exist within IWG. Progress starts with women supporting each other: there has to be solidarity to effect change."





RHEA PENAFIEL

COMMUNITY SALES MANAGER AT
REGUS TOWNSVILLE

Penafiel joined IWG in 2019 as a community associate in one of Adelaide's Regus locations, but when the opportunity to help run Australia's first franchise centre arose it was too good to miss. Penafiel is committed to helping women empower one another and has spearheaded the creation of a local Ladies in Business network that's making a real difference in her community.

"It has just blown up! It's been incredible to see the engagement from local women, and how much support we've received from the people of Townsville."

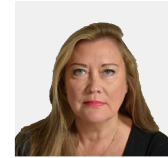


SASKIA GONNISSEN

GLOBAL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION
MANAGER FOR IWG

Gonnissen is proud to be a woman working in the traditionally 'masculine' construction industry, helping to create a new generation of spaces that are fit for the new, hybrid working world. She is seeing the physical effects of the hybrid shift first hand.

"The pandemic has fundamentally changed what people want from their workspaces, and it's exciting to be at the forefront of creating new, innovative locations that are closer to where people live, rest and play."



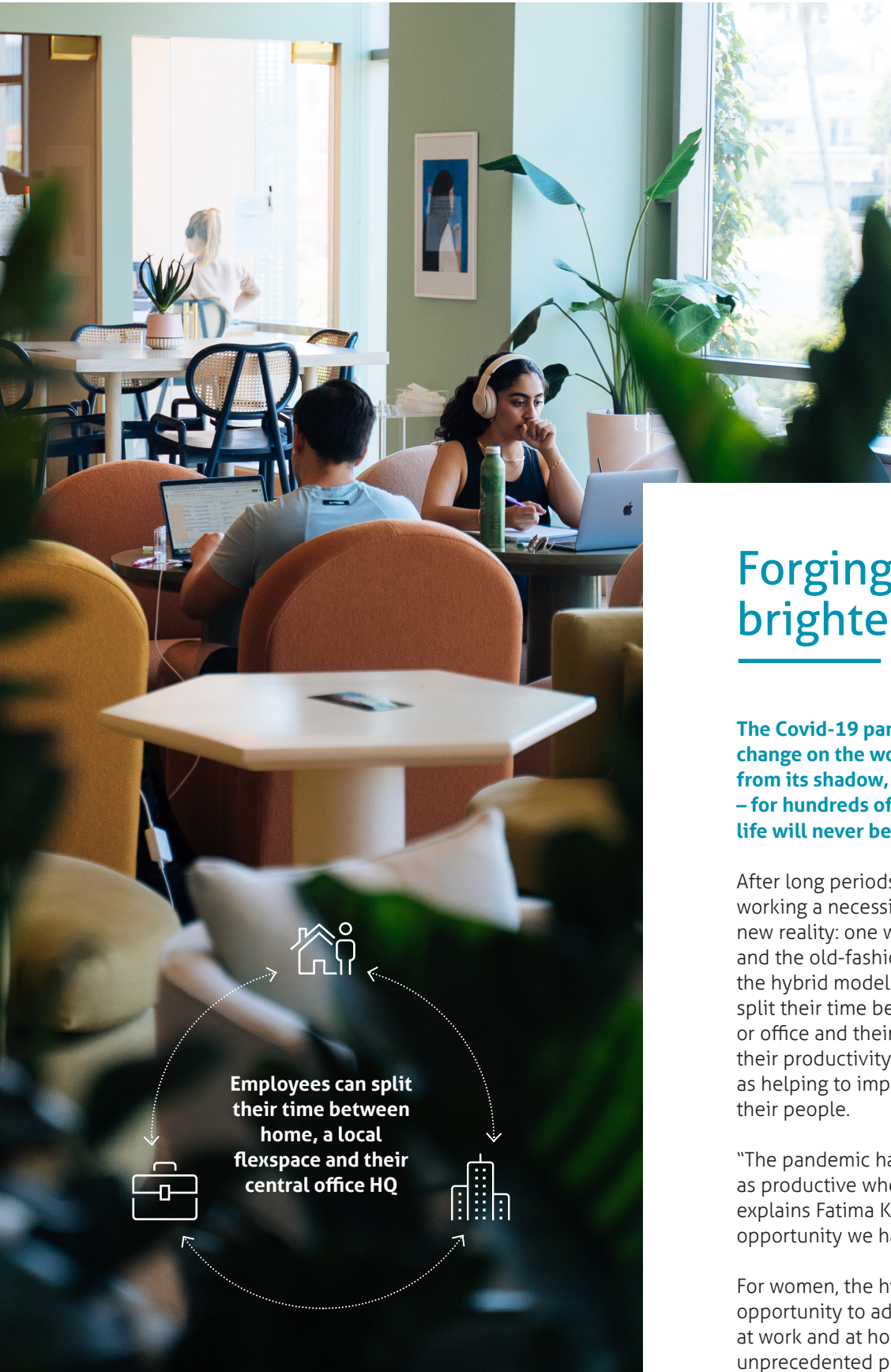
FRANCESCA PETERS

CHIEF TALENT OFFICER AT IWG

Peters plays a vital role in shaping IWG's company culture for a global talent pool of more than 10,000 people, operating in the heart of communities across the world. She strongly believes in the value of a diverse and passionate workforce, spearheading policies to attract and retain talent, while ensuring all have the opportunity to advance and develop their careers with IWG.

"International Women's Day is a chance to shine a light on all the brilliant successes women are achieving – but also to consider what more we can do, how we can push things even further forward towards equality."





Forging a brighter future

The Covid-19 pandemic has wrought permanent change on the world of work. As we emerge from its shadow, it's no exaggeration to say that – for hundreds of millions of people – working life will never be the same again.

After long periods of lockdown made remote working a necessity, we're now adapting to a new reality: one where long daily commutes and the old-fashioned 9-5 have given way to the hybrid model. By allowing employees to split their time between home, a local flexspace or office and their central HQ, firms can boost their productivity and growth at the same time as helping to improve work-life balance for their people.

"The pandemic has proved people can be just as productive when they're based remotely," explains Fatima Koning. "It's highlighted the huge opportunity we have to improve working life."

For women, the hybrid shift represents a crucial opportunity to address existing inequalities at work and at home. We believe it has unprecedented potential to support women's wellbeing, family lives and career aspirations.

In this white paper, we'll address some of the challenges currently facing working women, look at the ways we can support one another and effect change, and explore how the hybrid model can lay the foundation for a new, more modern, more equal world of work.

"The pandemic has proved people can be just as productive when they're based remotely"



The value of women in work

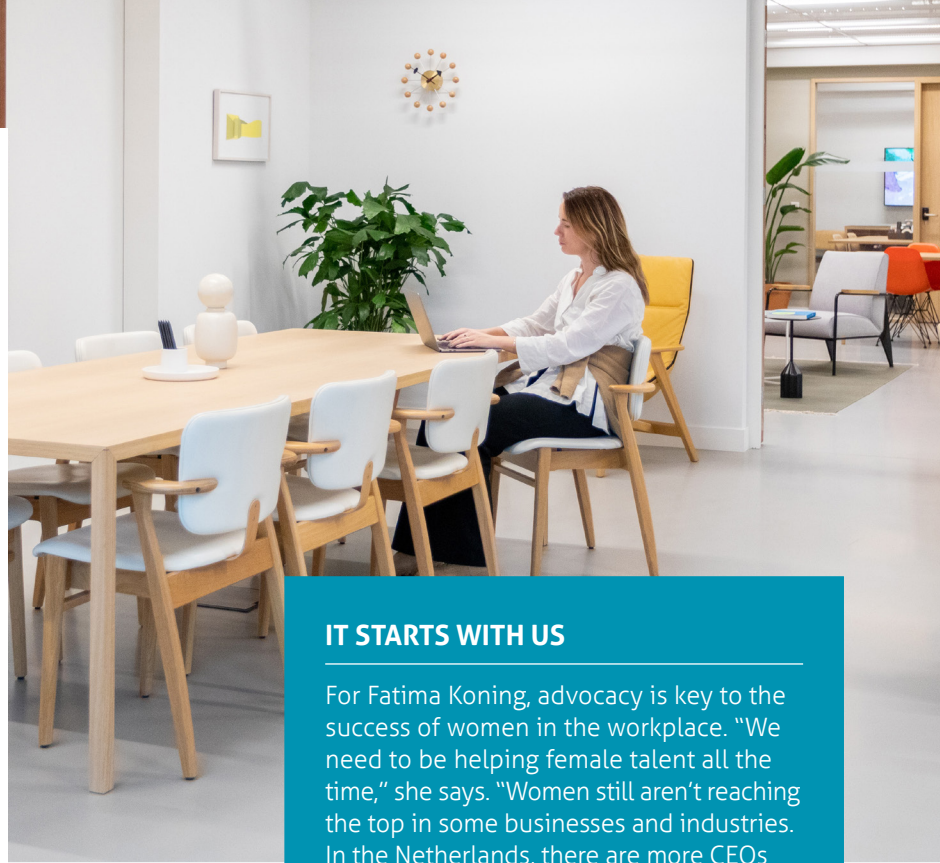
In terms of dollars and cents, it's clear that women add tremendous value to businesses, markets and entire economies. According to analysis by Bloomberg, improving women's access to employment could boost global growth by \$20trn by 2050 – and PwC argues that closing the gender pay gap could increase OECD GDP by \$2trn.

However, the value of women in the workplace goes far beyond their ability to bolster the bottom line. McKinsey's 2021 'Women in the Workplace' study showed that female leaders are more likely to promote the overall wellbeing of people in their workforce, as well as more inclined to offer mentoring and support that falls outside their explicit job responsibilities.

Yet Covid-19 has disproportionately affected women – partly because of existing gender inequalities in society. As Melinda Gates puts it: "When the world's economies were pushed to the brink, it was women who fell over the edge."

Research from McKinsey shows that women's roles were 1.8 times more vulnerable to the crisis than men's – but it isn't just job losses that have affected women's careers over the past two years. A Gallup poll shows that women's feelings of burnout have increased during the pandemic and that the gender gap has widened, with women now significantly more exhausted than their male counterparts.

"Women tend to wear a lot of hats," says Fatima Koning. "And they want to be the best version of themselves both at work and at home. That can be incredibly hard – but the hybrid shift is a great development that's going to make a real difference."



IT STARTS WITH US

For Fatima Koning, advocacy is key to the success of women in the workplace. "We need to be helping female talent all the time," she says. "Women still aren't reaching the top in some businesses and industries. In the Netherlands, there are more CEOs called Peter than there are female CEOs! Women are structurally underrepresented in executive positions, even though diversity at the top is proven to boost performance and profits. We're addressing this at IWG – three quarters of our senior leadership positions are already held by women. It's a priority for me to help make sure other women have the platform they need."

Koning says being proactive is important, too: "Gather a support system around you: go out and find advocates who are going to help you develop your career. Don't wait to be noticed – make sure you're seen!"

For Jen Cho, having male advocates is critical. "In the world we're living in, and in any underrepresented group, there has to be solidarity. It starts with us," she says. "While it's exciting to see so many women becoming CEOs – myself included – the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women. The Wing is all about creating a community where women can come together and try to redress that balance."

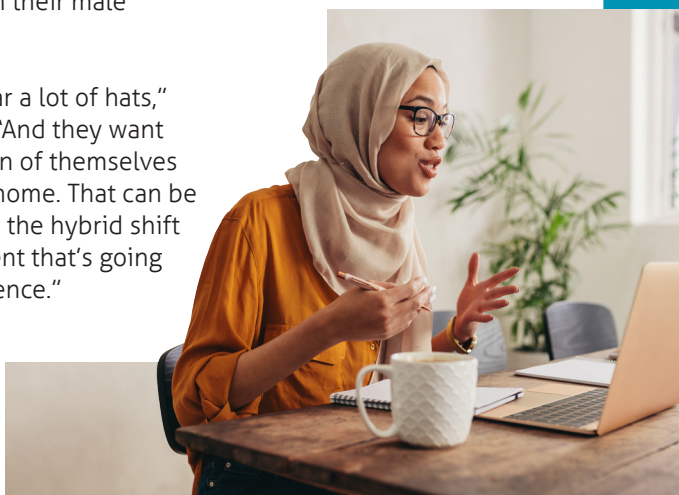
In Townsville, Rhea Penafiel is similarly committed to creating strong, sociable networks of like-minded women. This has paid dividends: her Ladies in Business group now has more than 100 members and has forged links with various charities that are helping to make a real difference in the lives of local people.



Improving women's access to employment could boost global growth by \$20trn by 2050



People experiencing feelings of burnout are 63% more likely to take sick leave and more than twice as likely to quit their jobs



Hybrid working and holistic change

Hybrid working – the post-pandemic model now favoured by millions of people and the firms that employ them – is a key way to combat the so-called 'she-cession'.

Already adopted around the world by companies as diverse as Facebook, Standard Chartered and KPMG, the hybrid model offers an array of benefits. Businesses can shore up profits by reducing their exposure to expensive real estate, at the same time as supporting their sustainability goals by cutting the carbon footprint associated with employees' need to travel.

But the hybrid shift has crucial benefits for people, too. Fewer long commutes means employees can reclaim quality time with family and friends, boosting their emotional wellbeing. The time and money freed up can be spent on mood-lifting exercise, hobbies or preparing healthy meals. Even simply being around our pets more has been shown to reduce stress, increasing our brains' levels of oxytocin, the calming 'love hormone'.

"Covid-19 has accelerated the trend for hybrid working," confirms Annelou de Groot. "My role at IWG is about adding dots on the map – making sure we have the right flexspaces in the right areas. Right now, demand just keeps increasing and our partnerships are helping us to meet that demand."

The division of time between home, the corporate HQ and a local flexible workspace has particular advantages for women who are in situations where, pre-Covid-19, caring responsibilities and domestic work fell mostly on their shoulders. Data from Pew Research Center shows that women are more likely to step back

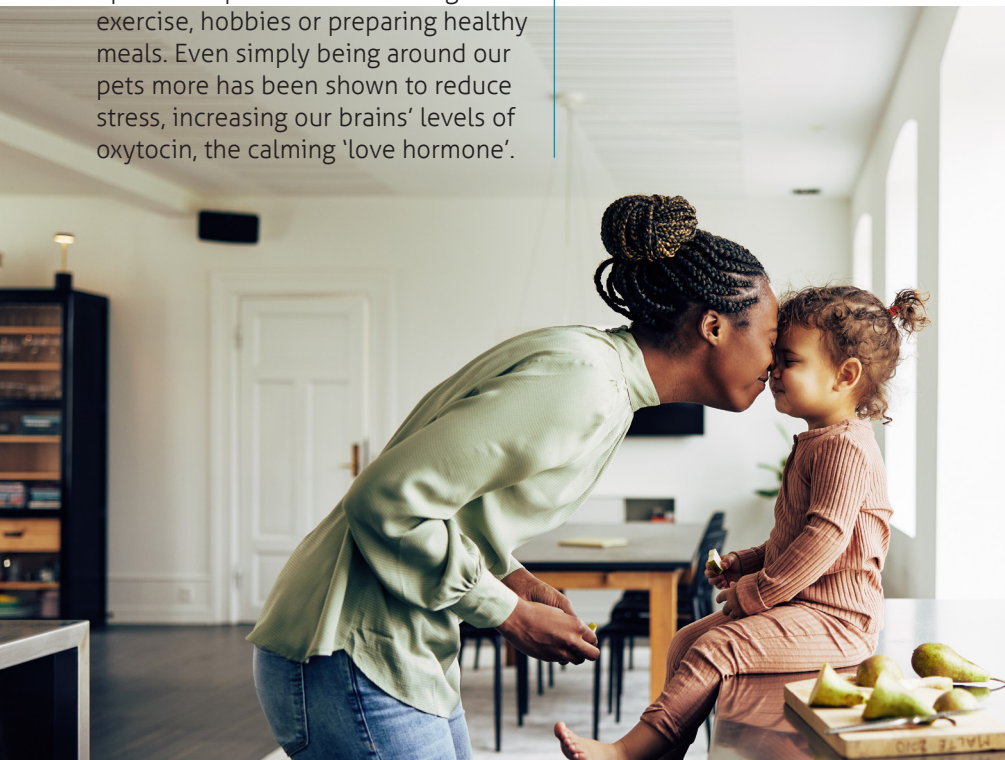
"Fewer long commutes means employees can reclaim quality time with family and friends"



31% of American women who took a career break after having children did so because of a lack of workplace flexibility

from their careers for family reasons, while FlexJobs data found that 31% of American women who took a career break after having children did so because of a lack of workplace flexibility. In a hybrid world, balancing the demands of work and home is made easier.

Perhaps more importantly, where both partners are able to work in a hybrid manner and undertake an equal share of household chores and childcare, a levelling of the playing field is possible. While women may find new freedom and energy to step up at work, their partners – whatever their gender – will be able to enjoy more involvement at home. According to economists from Northwestern, California San Diego and Mannheim Universities, Covid-19 could see a "substantial increase in men's future participation in childcare".



The vital third location



Francesca Peters, IWG's Chief Talent Officer, argues that flexible workspaces are "the vital third location" that allows businesses to offer a convenient, professional environment for employees. By giving staff access to flexspace that's within an easy distance of where they live, firms substantially improve their hybrid working offer.

Working from home offers a variety of advantages, but it can also feel isolating – and 'Zoom fatigue' is a common complaint among remote workers who spend too much time staring at screens. What's more, domestic distractions can become problematic – particularly if, like many home workers, you don't have a dedicated space that's solely used during time spent on your job.

Flexible workspaces provide the opportunity for colleagues to come together in person, at the same time

as offering a break from the domestic environment. This can be especially valuable for women, who traditionally feel disproportionately responsible for home-based tasks such as cooking, cleaning and caregiving.

"I'm proud to be playing a pivotal role in helping to add 1,000 new locations to the IWG network over the next 12 months and beyond," says Saskia Gonnissen. "Helping to bring flexspace to more people, and empower them to work in ways that benefit their health and wellbeing as well their productivity, is truly exciting."



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE WING?

The Wing is a network of women-focused spaces that is set for significant expansion in 2022. Jen Cho's vision is that The Wing provides a place where women can be their best personal and professional selves.

Everything from The Wing's programme of professional development events to its furnishings is designed with women in mind. "In most offices, furniture is built to accommodate the average man, who's around five foot eight in height," explains Cho. "At The Wing, our focus is on women first – so most of our furniture is custom made to fit the



average woman, who's more like five foot four. We considered fabrics, too. Women who might wear skirts or dresses want to sit on something more comfortable, less abrasive. These little tweaks can help to boost focus and productivity."

Meanwhile, the women-focused learning events at The Wing are

proving popular and inspirational. Unsurprisingly, 'fireside talks' from the likes of Halle Berry and wedding-gown designer Monique Lhuillier are sell-outs, but "crypto currency, NFTs and other finance topics have been among our most popular," says Cho. "There is a barrier to entry into these areas for women, and they're often 'owned' by men. Our events create a safe space for women where they can ask questions they might not feel comfortable posing in a more male-dominated environment. We want to help support the unique needs of women, in terms of their ongoing professional development."

Putting people first

For the hybrid model to work optimally, employers need to take a people-led approach – empowering employees to make their own decisions about how and where they work best.

According to Tanuj Kapilashrami, Group Head of HR at Standard Chartered, listening to what employees want is vital. “More than 75% of our colleagues globally want to work flexibly at least 50% of the time,” she explains. “We need to design the future based around what our colleagues want, not our preferences.” As part of its hybrid working strategy, Standard Chartered struck a deal with IWG in 2021 to provide more than 90,000 employees with access to 3,500 flexible workspaces around the world.

Likewise, PwC’s ‘New Deal’ promises ‘empowered flexibility’ for workers. Its hybrid model asks employees to spend 40-60% of their time at the office or on a client site, at the same time as giving them the freedom to decide on their most effective working pattern and the times they work on any given day.

Alongside such empowerment, though, companies must create clear hybrid working plans if they want to ensure the new world of work is a fairer place for women. While the old-fashioned 9-5 left many women feeling stigmatised for leaving the office in time to collect children, an ill-defined hybrid strategy could leave remote female workers feeling similarly pitted against male colleagues who are more frequently seen in the office.

“We need to design the future based around what our colleagues want, not our preferences.”



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THERE'S STILL WORK TO BE DONE IN MANY INDUSTRIES

For Annelou de Groot in particular, working in a male-dominated sector comes with unique challenges. “Tenacity and resilience are absolutely vital,” says De Groot – but these can be difficult qualities for women to cultivate, given that modern society encourages a crippling kind of perfectionism among girls. Spending too much time comparing ourselves to others, particularly via social media, is something De Groot believes can cause problems.

“Of course setbacks will hit you,” De Groot advises. “Just don’t be hit for too long. You must go on: if you believe in something, go for it. I get asked a lot about how it is to be female in my industry, and it’s true that the further up you go the less diversity you see. I recently attended a dinner with 24 white men in their 50s! I was the only woman and, while it’s clear there is work to do, I’m also proud to have claimed my seat at that table. We have a long way to go, and I feel responsible for being a role model for other women – for teaching, for advocating and for showing them what’s possible.”



A new era for equality

As the Covid-19 crisis comes to an end, it's clear that the world of work has reached a seminal moment. While the seeds for the demise of old-fashioned office life were sown decades ago, it took a global pandemic to prove what many of us already knew: digital connectivity means we can be productive from anywhere, any time.

Now, the hybrid model has the power to transform working life. As traditional, gendered divisions of labour fade away, more and more employers are embracing 'the whole person' at work via hybrid strategies that are flexible enough to allow for parents' evenings and medical appointments, but clear enough to ensure productivity is maintained or even improved.

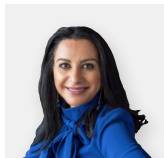
For women – some of whom often feel they're expected to work as if they have no family, but parent as though they have no job – the benefits of this new openness are especially important. If executed well, the hybrid model has the power to transform working life for women, at the same time as delivering lasting change for all working people.

"IWG is a leading provider of hybrid working solutions," says Fatima Koning. "It's a privilege to be part of that, both professionally and personally. I love my daughter and I love my job, and hybrid working empowers me to give the very best of myself on both fronts. I'm proud to be helping millions of other people find that same balance."



What we've learned...

The panel's top tips for working women, based on personal and professional experience



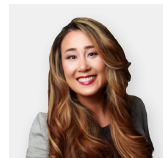
FATIMA KONING

"Stop the noise in your head. As women, we're conditioned from birth – we're told we can't or shouldn't do things because we are female. So listen to your own voice. Stop overthinking and start being bold. Give your opinion fearlessly and – like a man! – don't feel you need to have the answer to every challenge before you meet it. You're allowed to learn along the way."



ANNELOU DE GROOT

"Be persistent, and never give up. Of course setbacks will hit you, but you must go on. If you believe in something, go for it. And be authentic. Don't try to imitate anyone else. There's only one you, and you are perfect just the way you are."



JEN CHO

"Be fearless – seize opportunities when they come along. Make decisions for yourself and trust your instincts. And embrace both good and bad luck if it strikes: it's all part of the journey you're on."



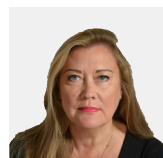
RHEA PENAFIEL

"My advice is to prioritise relationship building. Get to know people and let them get to know you. This is especially important if you work in an industry where you're trying to win clients. People buy from people, so presenting yourself positively really matters."



SASKIA GONNISSEN

"Don't be afraid to stand out from the crowd. Own your individuality. And when something comes along that scares you, turn fear into a motivator: let it inspire you to think strategically and drive you forward, not hold you back."



FRANCESCA PETERS

"When you're just starting out in your career, it can be hard to know where to begin – which qualities to cultivate or what to focus on in terms of your own development. I believe that tenacity and resilience – as well as remaining curious, staying passionate and working hard – are the fundamental bases for success."

