

CRACKING THE GLASS CEILING:

How the hybrid model is empowering women

IWG The Global
Workspace
Leader

In a post-pandemic era, hybrid working is 'non-negotiable' for women pursuing new, ambitious career goals

Meet our experts



FATIMA KONING

Group Chief Commercial Officer, IWG

Fatima'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.

Fatima is a passionate believer in the hybrid model and is a champion of diversity and equality in the workplace. She's seen first-hand the personal and professional benefits the model brings both in her role leading a diverse global sales team across 120 markets, as well as within the organisations that she's supported in the shift to a hybrid working model.



CLAR ROSSO

CEO, (ISC)²

Clar is a cybersecurity expert with more than two decades' experience in her industry. As CEO of (ISC)², she has led the firm to achieve record growth and launched initiatives including the One Million Certified scheme, which provides a pathway for individuals to access cybersecurity education and take the Certified in Cybersecurity exam.

Under Clar's direction, (ISC)² has established a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) team, with the aim of ensuring the cybersecurity profession becomes more representative of the world it protects. Clar has worked in a hybrid manner since 2000 and took the decision to permanently embed the hybrid model of working at (ISC)² when she joined the firm in 2020. She believes the model offers huge benefits in terms of work-life balance and inclusivity.



TRACI MABREY

General Manager, Factiva at Dow Jones

Traci Mabrey is the General Manager of Factiva, a global news and business information database owned by Dow Jones. Traci oversees the reimagination of Factiva as a premium business intelligence tool, ensuring that it evolves to meet the needs of the existing user base and those who will rely on it in future.

With a background in financial technology operations and wealth management, Traci has held leadership roles for the likes of Broadridge Financial Solutions and Thomson Reuters. She is a member of the Women's Executive 50 and the Chief network. In November 2022, Traci was a featured speaker at global technology conference Web Summit's The Fourth Estate track, on a panel discussing How Data Reporting is Changing the News.



FRANCESCA PETERS

Chief Talent Officer, IWG

Francesca's career in HR spans more than thirty years. As IWG's Chief Talent Officer, she plays a vital role in shaping company culture, recruitment and retention policies and the day-to-day experiences of a global talent pool of more than 10,000 people around the world.

Francesca understands the value of a diverse and passionate workforce, and is committed to spearheading policies that ensure all employees have the opportunity to advance and develop their careers with IWG. She believes hybrid working is not only key to staying ahead in the race for talent, but that it is also an integral part of a winning business strategy which puts the wellbeing and productivity of employees at its core.

Embracing the new

The Covid-19 pandemic marked a watershed in the world of work, ushering in a new era for millions of people in countless industries around the world. In particular, it has heralded significant changes for women in the workplace, with the potential to deliver on the promise of equality.



IWG's Empowering Women in the Hybrid Workplace Report – released to mark International Women's Day – reveals that more than half of female workers believe hybrid working has empowered them to apply for a more senior role within their organisation. This highlights the significant impact that the mass adoption of the hybrid model is having on the traditional glass ceiling: the hard-to-see but very real barrier women have long faced when trying to advance at work.



For women, Covid-19 presented a unique set of challenges, but the post-pandemic era offers promising signs of opportunity. While female employees suffered disproportionate job losses at the height of the crisis, USA and UK data indicates that women are returning to the workplace as it recedes. IWG's data shows that, as they do so, more women than ever are making career decisions – switching jobs and even industries – based on whether or not they have access to hybrid working.

world of work



Embracing equity is the theme of this year's International Women's Day, and hybrid working - one of the biggest innovations in the world of work in decades - has the potential to substantially deliver on this vision."

Fatima Koning
Chief Commercial Officer, IWG

Nearly half of the women we spoke to as part of our research are considering a career change that they would not have been able to make previously – and it's the option to work more flexibly that is enabling them to take the leap.

These are incredibly encouraging signs for women, but alongside them a parallel phenomenon is coming into focus: many firms are losing women from senior leadership positions. "This," Fatima Koning explains, "is likely to affect those firms that aren't looking forward – firstly in terms of how, when and where their people work, but also in terms of their cultures."



53%

of women believe hybrid working has empowered them to apply for a more senior role within their organisation



Stemming the exodus of women is vital for businesses that seek to remain innovative, productive and profitable in the new world of work. As Koning points out, "Too few firms have too few female leaders to begin with. A couple of years ago I supported a BrandedU and WOMEN Inc. campaign that highlighted this issue in my home country, The Netherlands: a nation where there are more CEOs named Peter than women CEOs. While this sounds almost laughable, it's a serious issue. Inequality of opportunity reduces productivity, stifles creativity and damages innovation."

Clar Rosso agrees, suggesting that there are practical considerations at play, too. "Research shows that involving more diverse voices leads to more successful conversations. More prosaically, data also shows that diverse workforces have fewer workforce gaps; diversity, equality and inclusion programmes help to minimise staff shortages."

In this white paper, we'll explore why the hybrid model offers a wealth of opportunities for women – as well as how businesses can address existing issues to create modern, inclusive cultures where everyone can thrive.

The Women in the Workplace report from LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company first raised awareness of what its authors call “the great breakup”. Female leaders are now quitting their jobs at the highest rate ever seen - crucially, at a higher rate than men in comparable positions.

THERE'S STILL WORK TO BE DONE

As Traci Mabrey explains, “working women have begun to look at their career along what I call the ‘meaningfulness curve’. This describes the correlation between the meaning of a job role relative to a company, a company relative to its industry, and an industry relative to an interconnected world. However, it also means consideration of what those outcomes offer to a woman’s personal “meaningfulness” goals - for her, her family and friends and the global community.”

The great breakup compounds the

existing problem of women’s under-representation in senior roles, which has its roots in what is often referred to as “the broken rung”. This is the lack of opportunity women face when they first feel ready to step up into management: a point in their careers when, for every 100 men who are promoted, just 87 women move up the ladder.

Rosso says this issue is evident in her industry: “We have more women than ever moving into entry level roles in cybersecurity, but the percentage of

women you see in work diminishes as the jobs become more senior. The playing field narrows.”

Given this discrepancy, it’s no surprise that the researchers also found just one in four C-suite leaders is a woman - while just one in 20 is a woman of colour. “This matters,” explains Koning, “not only on principle, but because diversity in business drives success and helps to establish a healthy company culture.”



Women and work-life balance



The Women in the Workplace report makes clear that women are highly ambitious, but not prepared to sacrifice their wellbeing in order to advance at work. IWG's own data paints a similar picture, with 72% of people saying they'd forgo a 10% pay rise in favour of retaining hybrid working.



The pandemic was an inflection point for this attitude shift: a global crisis that inspired people all over the world to reconsider what really mattered to them. As Microsoft's 2022 Work Trends Index showed, 53% of people are now more likely to prioritise their health over work than before Covid-19.

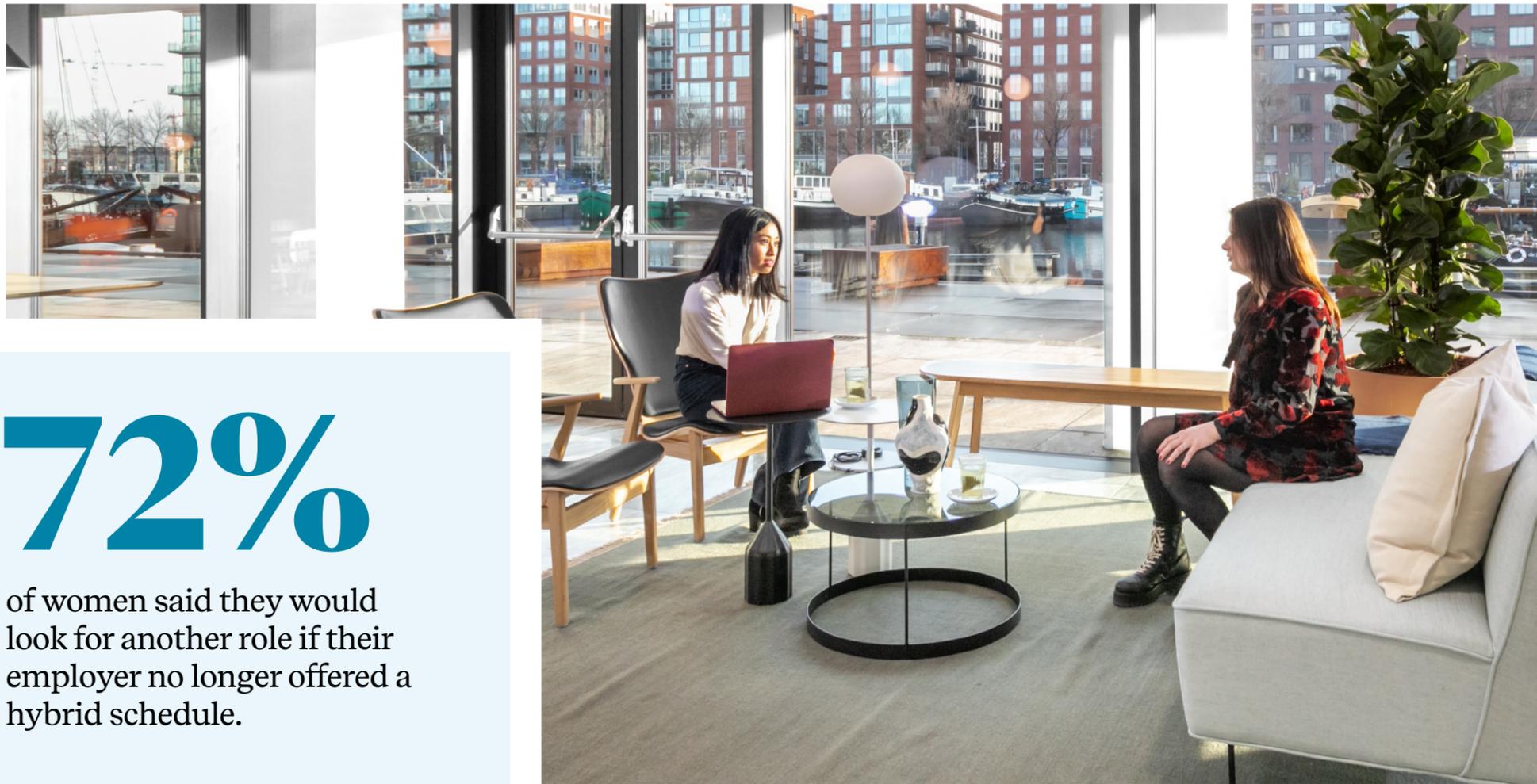
People who were able to work remotely during Covid-19 lockdowns have made clear their reluctance to give up the benefits this brought. IWG's latest survey of more than 1,000 people found that 67% would forfeit part of their salary in order to retain the option of hybrid working. Meanwhile, 24% of respondents making more than \$150,000 a year said they'd give up more than \$40,000 of their salary to avoid returning to the office full time.

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of people are now more likely to prioritise their health over work than before the pandemic.

Of the women we surveyed, 72% said they would look for another role if their employer no longer offered a hybrid schedule. The hybrid model holds unique appeal for women, not least because they still tend to shoulder more domestic responsibilities than men and value the increased flexibility it offers. "In my own life, hybrid working makes a vital difference," says Koning. "I'm able to co-parent my daughter, take good care of myself and progress in my career – priorities that would be far more difficult to manage successfully if I were travelling back and forth to a central office every day."

Mabrey agrees: "The hybrid model has really been a game changer for women. It's given us opportunities to find and execute our boundaries. While the idea of women 'having it all' is appealing, being a working



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The reduction in commuting that hybrid working offers is also especially important for female employees. Exhaustion and burnout rates are highest among women workers, so additional time to spend with family, friends and on self-care can make a crucial difference where it’s most needed.

75% of women who responded to IWG’s International Women’s Day survey reported a better work-life balance thanks to hybrid working. 49% said the model had given them more time to spend on

pursuing personal passions, while 44% said it had improved their mental health.

Rosso is passionate about the “tremendous work-life balance benefits” of hybrid working, and also points out the financial importance of fewer commutes for employees – particularly women, who are already subject to the gender pay gap. “These costs are not inconsequential,” she says, “and for women could swallow a higher proportion of their salaries, pre-Covid.”

It’s clear that the hybrid model is a powerful ‘pull factor’ for women, and should form a key component of any strategy designed to help firms hold on to female talent. Stanford University’s Nicholas Bloom, a world-renowned expert on hybrid working, has found it can reduce

‘quit rates’ among employees by as much as 35%.

Meanwhile, study after study has shown the appeal of hybrid work for job applicants. FlexJobs’ 2022 Career Pulse survey showed that a staggering 97% of employees wanted to work remotely for at least some of the time, while Google search data reveals a huge increase in the number of people looking for hybrid roles online. Use of the term “hybrid working jobs” rose by more than 30,000% between 2020 and 2022.

This comes as no shock to Francesca Peters. “Hybrid working is now considered essential by many job-hunters,” she says. “It’s the benefit that employees are now looking for above all else.”



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Traci Mabrey

General Manager of Factiva at Dow Jones

MAKING HYBRID WORK

Adopting hybrid working is a positive step towards improved recruitment and retention of female talent. However, it's not a panacea: firms need to create their hybrid policies with care, offer adequate training for hybrid leaders and continuously monitor how well the model is working. "As head of a global sales force with teams in 120 markets across the globe," says Koning, "I've learned that leadership in a hybrid world is different to traditional people-management. Building situational, person-centred relationships is a skill to be honed."



Just as importantly, firms must bear in mind that hybrid working can entrench, rather than ease unfairness. This is a risk if policy allows for the development of a 'two-tier' workforce, where some (likely male) employees spend more time at the company HQ than their female colleagues. "Hybrid working is more likely to help level the playing field if male and female employees are encouraged to take up the offer equally," says Peters.

The provision of local, flexible workspace for employees can help to avoid this. By empowering employees to work

from professional environments close to home, firms minimise their exposure to domestic distractions at the same time as removing the burden of a long daily commute. Global corporations including AECOM, Cisco and Dell have partnered with IWG to do just this, providing their people with access to more than 3,500 locations around the world.

"Flexible locations undoubtedly offer benefits," says Mabrey. "A major advantage is that they provide a professional environment in which women can proactively network with

one another." Peters agrees: "The vital 'third location' is a boon for women. Not having to commute gives back valuable time, and gives them the flexibility to balance the demands of work and home more easily." Moreover, she argues, there are additional benefits for couples where both partners work in a hybrid manner. "There's a new level of equality emerging in many homes – especially those where one partner has previously done most of the care-giving and housekeeping," she says.

Above all, argues Rosso, it's vital for companies to ensure that diversity, equality and inclusion are ingrained in every strategy and decision it makes – including those around how and where its people will work. "That clear and strong commitment has to be the foundation of everything – it has to be intentional," she says.

Hybrid policies must be clear and well-defined, then regularly assessed to ensure they're delivering the best for the business and its employees, Rosso suggests. "At (ISC)², we're constantly discussing what problems might develop in terms of diversity and how we can tackle them. We review much of our decision-making for equity before it's announced, including recommendations for promotions and pay rises. To ensure we make the right choices, we ask ourselves, 'Who should be in this conversation? What perspectives are we missing?'"



56

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Chief Talent Officer, IWG

Levelling up the workplace

IWG's International Women's Day study showed that an overwhelming majority of women - 88% - believe that the flexibility offered by hybrid working serves as an equaliser in the workplace. 66% said they felt the adoption of the model led to them experiencing fewer biases at work, whether due to gender, race, or anything else.

These results show the crucial role the hybrid model can play in addressing existing challenges, such as those highlighted by LeanIn and McKinsey. Their report found that inequalities were still rife in many workplaces, with colleagues more likely to question a female leader's judgement or suitability for her role. It also stated that women reported personal characteristics, such as being a parent, have played a part in them being passed over for promotion.

Company cultures that look and sound

fair may not actually feel fair to female workers, explains Peters. "There can be gaps between appearance and reality. What's written in your company handbook doesn't necessarily reflect the experiences of women on the shop floor."

"This is where establishing an open dialogue with employees is vital," says Rosso. "CEOs need to talk - and listen - to the talented women in their workforce. Find out what's important to them, what they want to achieve and what might be holding them back."



THE KEY DRIVERS BEHIND THE RISE OF THE HYBRID MODEL

People

Hybrid working offers improved work-life balance, promoting better health and wellbeing for employees.

Profit

Happier people are more productive. Hybrid working also cuts quit rates, reducing recruitment and retention costs.

Planet

Empowering people to work close to home means less commuting - so companies can reduce their carbon footprints, as well as the size of their offices.

This International Women's Day, it's clearer than ever that women are prepared to vote with their feet when it comes to balancing ambitious career aspirations with their personal priorities. "Women are rejecting cultures that don't serve them," says Koning, "and companies that aren't prepared to adapt will see talent depart in favour of competitors." Mabrey concurs: "While statistics show female leaders are departing their companies, I also see women moving into new roles and embarking on new adventures at an equally high rate."



Supporting success

Firms that will manage to keep female leaders – as well as attract talented women who'll gravitate towards senior roles in future – are those that support them in defining goals, then clarifying how they can be achieved. "There must be a clear path for women so they can understand how to progress and believe that it's possible for them," Rosso says. "At the same time, firms need to make sure there are plentiful opportunities for networking and mentoring. That takes effort in a hybrid world: it requires consideration and action on the part of leaders."

Koning, too, highlights the importance of relationships: "Throughout my time at IWG, I've benefited hugely from the

mentorship of our Founder and CEO Mark Dixon, who's always been a strong ally." Meanwhile, Mabrey is confident that the women leaders of today are well-placed to support those of tomorrow. "Right now, women are proving that they have an extraordinary capacity to lead while offering compassion, insightfulness and the high level of emotional intelligence that workers are craving in the post-pandemic marketplace."

"Many companies are already seeing the value in this new kind of leadership," Koning agrees. "It's all about looking for what you can bring out in someone, nurturing their potential and empowering them to grow."



For Koning, this is the essence of great leadership in a hybrid world: a place where women, in the right roles, could have more potential for personal and professional fulfilment than ever. “Embracing equity is the theme of this year’s International Women’s Day, and hybrid working - one of the biggest innovations in the world of work in decades - has the potential to substantially deliver on this vision,” she says.

“Our latest research is very encouraging. It shows that access to hybrid working is a factor in the making of major career decisions for women: it facilitates a better work-life balance and opens up new opportunities for them. I have felt the personal and professional benefits of the hybrid model first hand, and I’m glad to see that other women are experiencing them, too.”

We help businesses around the world to design, create and embed hybrid solutions that support more than eight million people.

Find out more about what we do at iwgplc.com.

