

Sweeping changes in society mean young women can now leave school or university full of hope and ambition, confident they will be treated as equals in the workplace and qualified to rise rapidly up the career ladder. It seems their expectations are justified: in just eight years, women's representation has doubled among executives and tripled among directors, for example. More women are entering management every year.

All of which would suggest that the notion of a 'glass ceiling', an imperceptible but nevertheless impenetrable barrier that prevents women and minorities from reaching the upper echelons of corporate life, is now an anachronism.

But this doesn't necessarily mean women now enjoy equality. The situation varies greatly around the world, of course, but women's pay usually falls short of their male counterparts. And a global study in 2001, 'Leaders in a Global Economy', found male senior executives have significantly higher status jobs than their female equivalents in every corner of the planet. So what obstacles – both subtle and overt – are holding women back? And do those same factors hinder women at GSK?

Balancing act

'Leaders in a Global Economy' was a study of executive women and men produced by three American organisations – the Families and Work Institute, Catalyst and The Center for Work and Family, Boston College, Carroll School of Management. The women interviewed described the biggest barriers as balancing the demands of work and family, exclusion from important networks and a lack of female role models. Other recent research has revealed a similar picture, with women highlighting five problem areas: work/life balance, an over-emphasis on visibility, informal networks favouring men, lack of transparency about the criteria for promotion and a lack of female mentors.

For women in business, having children seems to be one of the biggest stumbling blocks, because they still tend to bear the brunt of domestic responsibility. Today's women are more

likely than ever to pursue a career after childbirth, but this is precisely the point when the career outcomes for men and women begin to diverge. While women are away from work on maternity leave or bringing up children, some of their peers are progressing into more senior roles. When those women return, they often find colleagues have moved onwards and upwards.

So how does GSK measure up, with its strong global commitment to a diverse workforce?

"Attracting, developing and retaining women is a key business strategy we have focused on for many years," says Dan Phelan, senior vice president, Human Resources. "And we are absolutely committed to the principles of equality of opportunity and equitable treatment. By providing generous maternity arrangements, flexible working, childcare assistance and mentoring, we are working hard to provide an environment where every woman can do her best work and succeed."

Spirit spoke to five successful women within GSK, as well as one just starting out on her career with the company, about their experiences as working women.

Jackie Hunter

SVP, CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR DRUG DISCOVERY IN NEUROLOGY AND GASTROINTESTINAL DISEASES, HARLOW

Years ago a boss asked me if I wanted to be treated as a woman or a scientist – the only bad experience I've had. The company is making a real effort to be more flexible.

Mind you, women leave work early for sports day and they're derided; men do the same and they're virtually knighted. But that's modern society.

Sometimes the company can be insensitive – events designed to thank our partners are always aimed at women, so my husband doesn't come.

Mentoring or women's networks to help us rationalise the guilt would be excellent. So would less flitting all over the globe and fewer late meetings.



In terms of the number of women in management, GSK certainly compares pretty well with international norms. There are two female board members – Dr Lucy Shapiro and Dr Michelle Barzach – and Jennie Younger sits on the Corporate Executive Team. In total, 35 per cent of GSK's managers, 30 per cent of directors and 19 per cent of vice-presidents/senior vice presidents are female – significantly more than average figures. "We started measuring our global senior management population by gender last year and published the results for the first time in the Corporate and Social Responsibility Report," says Dominic Johnson, director of UK policy, employee relations and diversity.

Jo LeCouilliard

VP, VACCINES BUSINESS UNIT, US PHARMACEUTICALS, PHILADELPHIA

I've worked for GSK in the UK, Ireland and the US and my bosses have always given me major challenges.

In my experience, most people working on international assignments are men and their wives rarely work. Certainly my husband has largely sacrificed his career so I could move on.

I don't work long hours and no-one bats an eye if I leave early. I often work at home so I can be around my three children.

Companies should encourage high potential women to make strategic moves earlier, before they have children.



Diana Mackie

VP SWITCH (SWITCH WITH INNOVATION TEAM IN CONSUMER HEALTHCARE), PITTSBURGH

Senior people trust women at GSK, knowing we think creatively about solutions. My bosses have always involved me in the strategic decision making process, which gave me a good understanding of the business and helped me build good networks.

I don't have children and travel extensively with my job – I don't know how parents cope.

GSK should be asking women what they want, from career aspirations to domestic support.

