Study Explores Black Women’s Appetite for Leadership

Black women are more likely than white women to aspire to powerful positions and feel stalled in their careers

NEW YORK, April 23, 2015 - Black women are more likely than white women to aspire to a powerful position with a prestigious title (22 percent vs. eight percent) according to a study released today by the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI). The report, *Black Women: Ready to Lead*, finds that unlike white women, black women perceive a powerful position as the means to achieving their professional goals and are confident that they can succeed in the role. Yet, despite their ambition and qualifications, 44 percent of black women feel stalled in their careers (as compared to 30 percent of white women).

Black women surveyed for the report want five things from their professional and personal lives: the ability to flourish, reach for meaning and purpose, excel, empower others and be empowered, and earn well. Many anticipate that, with power, their value proposition will be fulfilled. Black women without power are 86 percent more likely than white women without power (26 percent vs. 14 percent) to perceive an executive role will allow them to flourish and nearly twice as likely (22 percent vs. 12 percent) to expect that an executive position will enable them to empower others and be empowered. CTI data shows that black women who have attained positions of power enjoy the five things they most want from their careers than women without power.

The report also finds that black women are more determined than white women to maintain their agency, impact, and social values outside of work. Forty-two percent (as compared to 27 percent of white women) aspire to make a significant contribution to their community. Sixty percent aspire to create something meaningful or lasting in their lifetime and sixty-five percent (as compared to 34 percent of white women) aspire to be faithful to their religion.

“Black women are committed and motivated to attain a powerful position not only in their workplaces but also in their communities,” says Sylvia Ann Hewlett, founder and CEO at the Center for Talent Innovation. “With their vision, commitment, and leadership experience, black women represent a pool of would-be executives that multinational companies can ill afford to underutilize.”

Despite black women’s fierce ambition (91 percent consider themselves ambitious) and confidence (43 percent of black women vs. 30 percent of white women feel they can succeed in a position of power), more than half of black women (55 percent) report dissatisfaction with their rate of advancement. CTI research affirms that black women continue to face unique challenges on their path to a powerful position:

- Black women are 26 percent less likely than straight white men to have their ideas endorsed.
- Black women find it extremely difficult to win sponsorship: a mere 11 percent have sponsors.
- Seventy-two percent of black women believe that executive presence at their company is defined as conforming to traditionally white male standards. Additionally, 34 percent of black women say they need to compromise their authenticity in order to conform to the executive presence standards at their company.

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The report points to steps companies can take to address the challenges hindering black women’s advancement into leadership positions. The report features best practice examples from companies that include American Express, Bank of America, Chubb Group of Insurance Companies, Intel, Morgan Stanley, The Depository Trust & Clearing Corporation, and White & Case LLP.

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**Research Authors**

Sylvia Ann Hewlett is an economist and the founding president and CEO of the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), a nonprofit think tank where she chairs the Task Force for Talent Innovation, a group of 86 global companies focused on fully realizing the new streams of talent in the global marketplace. She is also the co-director of the Women’s Leadership Program at the Columbia Business School. She is the author of 11 *Harvard Business Review* articles and 12 critically acclaimed nonfiction books including *Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Winning the War for Talent in Emerging Markets; Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor* (named one of the best business books of 2013); and *Executive Presence* (an Amazon “Best Book of the Month,” June 2014). In 2014, she was recognized as the Most Influential International Thinker by *HR magazine* and won the Google Global Diversity award. Her writings have appeared in *The New York Times, Financial Times,* and *The Wall Street Journal,* she’s a featured blogger on the HBR Blog Network, and a frequent guest on television, appearing on *Newshour with Jim Lehrer,* *Charlie Rose* and *The Today Show.* Dr. Hewlett, who has taught at Cambridge, Columbia, and Princeton universities, earned her BA at Cambridge University and her PhD in economics at London University.

Tai Green, senior vice president of communications for CTI and chief operating officer at Hewlett Consulting Partners, drives corporate reputation efforts on behalf of each brand. She is an expert communicator and has effectively counseled public and private organizations on various issues including brand reputation management and awareness, minority outreach, and human rights. Most recently, she worked as a member of Edelman's Business + Social Purpose practice and served as the day-to-day client contact and account lead on various accounts, driving strategy development and implementation for organizations including AMD, eBay, Xylem, and Microsoft Retail. Green graduated from the University of Maryland with a BA in communication with an emphasis in public relations.

**About the Research**

The research consists of a survey, Insights in-Depth® sessions (a proprietary web-based tool used to conduct voice-facilitated virtual focus groups) involving more than 65 people from our Task Force organizations, and one-on-one interviews with 33 women in the U.S.

The national survey was conducted online in June 2014 among 788 white women and 356 black women between the ages of 21 and 64 currently employed in certain white-collar occupations, with at least a bachelor’s degree. Data were weighted to be representative of the U.S. population on key demographics (age, sex, race/ethnicity, region, education, and income). The base used for statistical testing was the effective base.

The survey was conducted by Knowledge Networks under the auspices of the Center for Talent Innovation, a non-profit research organization. Knowledge Networks was responsible for the data collection, while the Center for Talent Innovation conducted the analysis.

**About the Center for Talent Innovation**
The Center for Talent Innovation is a nonprofit think tank based in New York City. CTI’s flagship project is the Task Force for Talent Innovation—a private-sector task force focused on helping organizations leverage their talent across the divides of gender, generation, geography and culture. The 89 global corporations and organizations that constitute the Task Force, representing nearly six million employees and operating in 192 countries around the world, are united by an understanding that the full realization of the talent pool is at the heart of competitive advantage and economic success.

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