



Businessweek | Modern Management

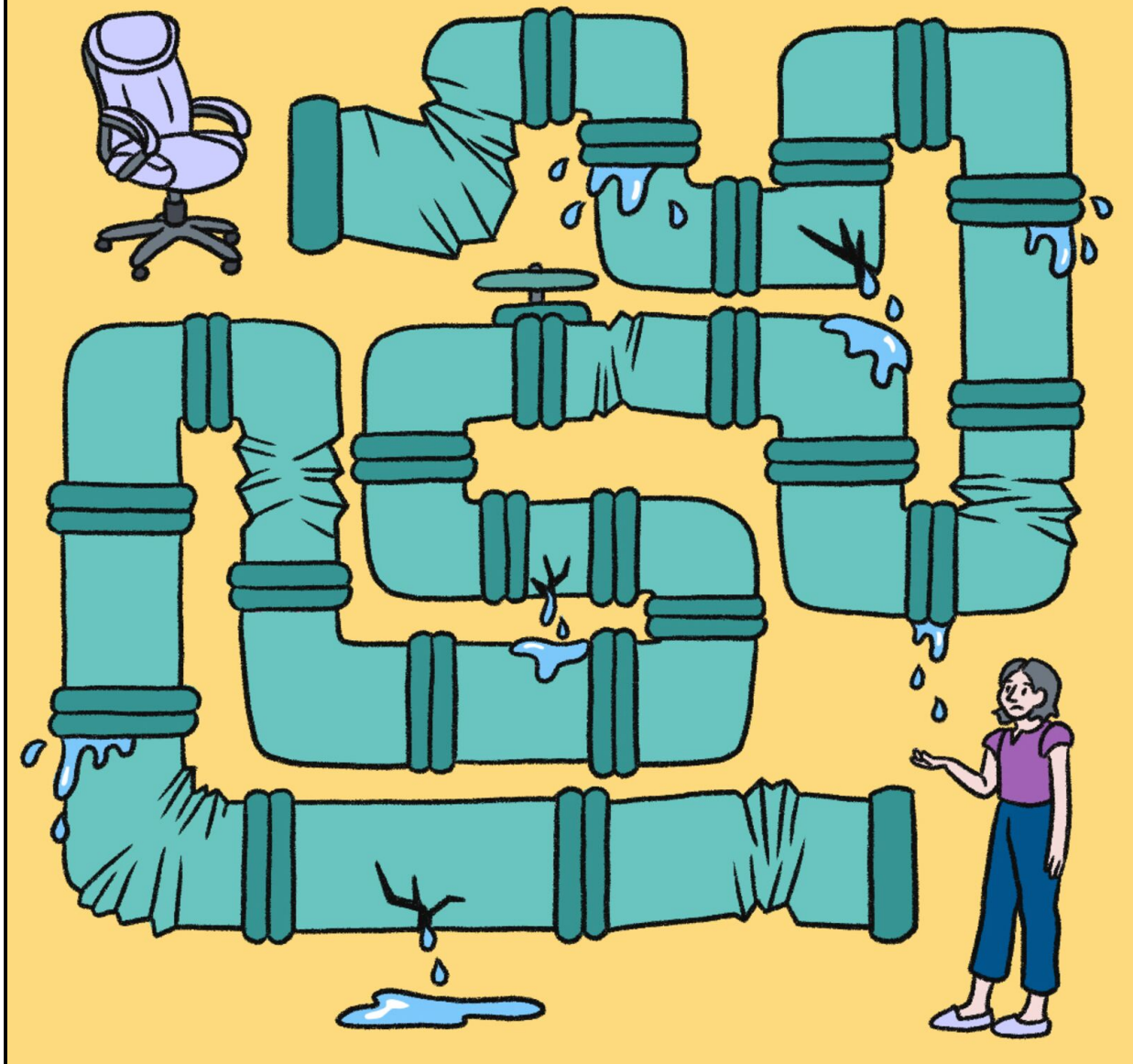
# Women Are Losing Ground in Corporate Leadership. This Comic Explains Why

The so-called ambition gap is really a support gap.

By Aubrey Hirsch

June 18, 2026 at 9:30 PM GMT+8

After years of companies prioritizing diversity and promoting women into leadership roles, the pipeline to the top for women in corporate America is beginning to break down.



The number of women in C-suite roles fell from 2022 to 2023 across the S&P Total Market Index, the first annual decline in two decades.

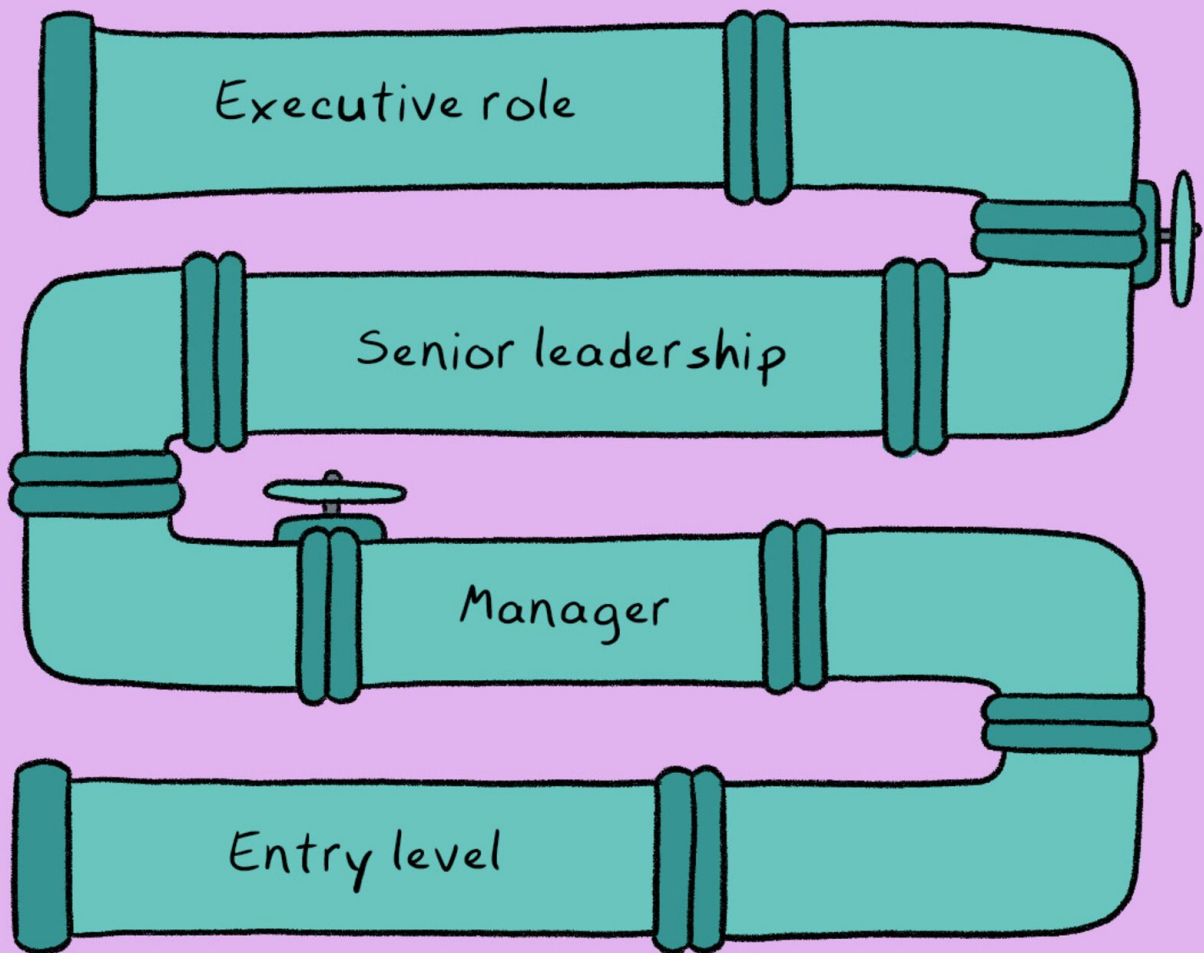
## Growth in Women's Representation Among Senior Leadership Positions



Source: S&P Global

Progress toward gender parity in executive leadership is reversing, signaling an even deeper problem.

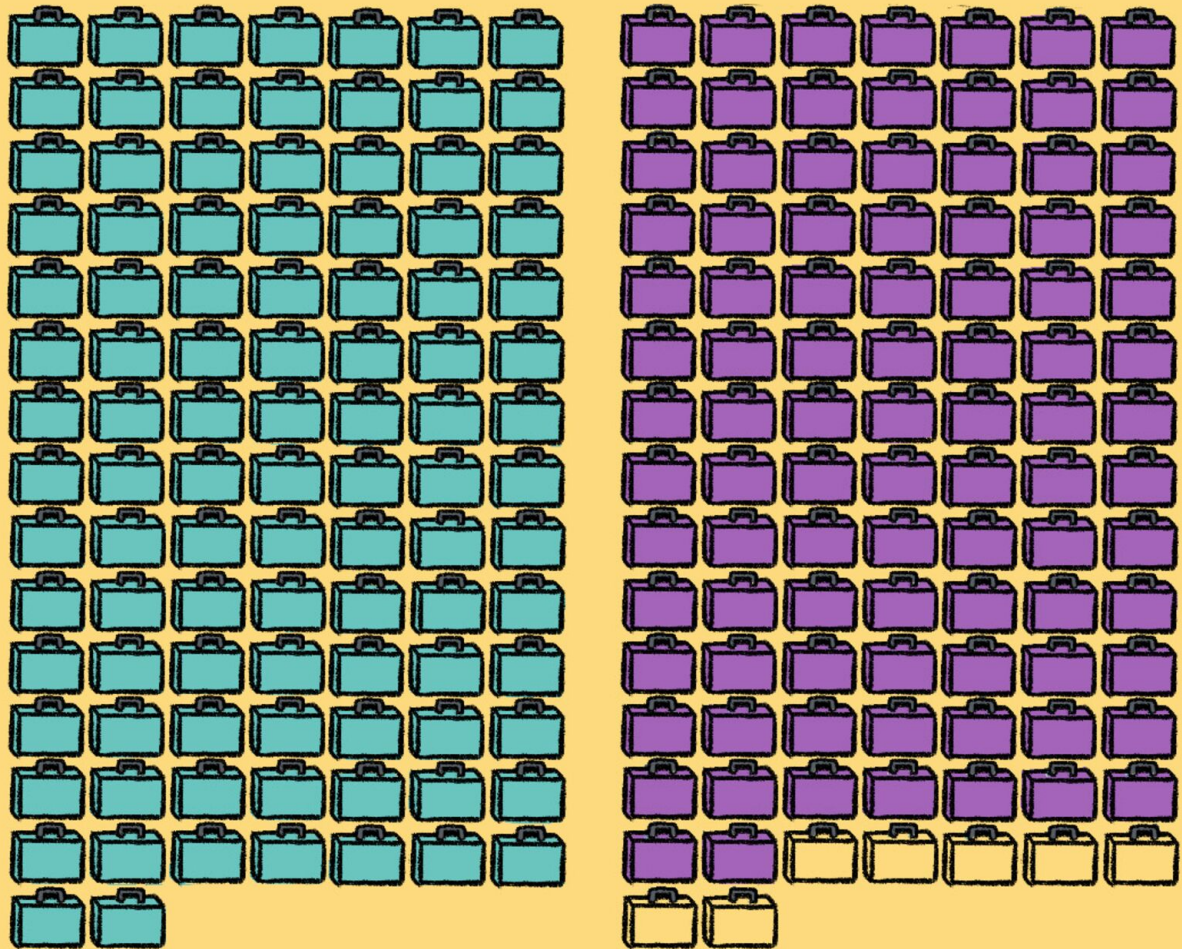
Executives usually have to pass through several tiers of leadership to reach the highest levels.



Because advancement occurs step by step, who ends up at the top is heavily influenced by who's promoted at the bottom.

Women fall behind early in this progression.

Men Women

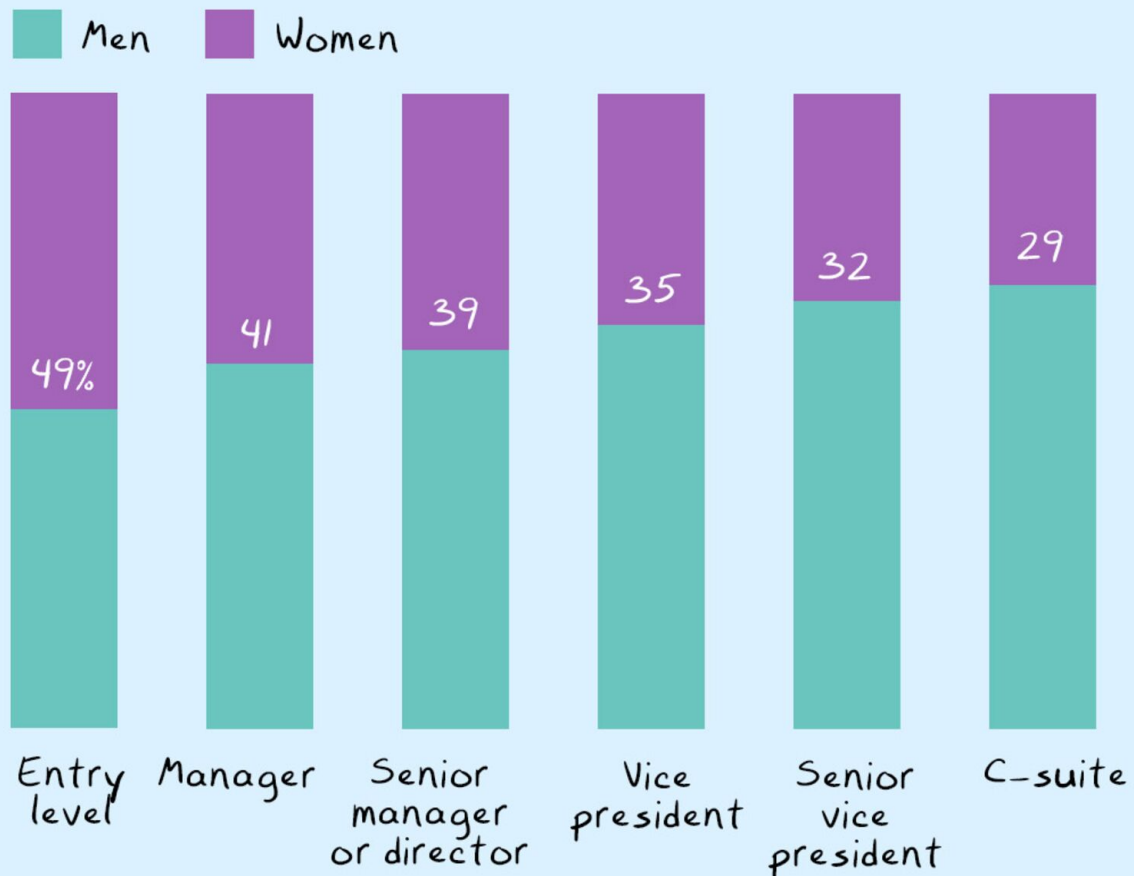


In 2025, for every 100 men promoted  
from entry level to manager,  
only 93 women were promoted.

Source: LeanIn.org & McKinsey Women in the Workplace Report

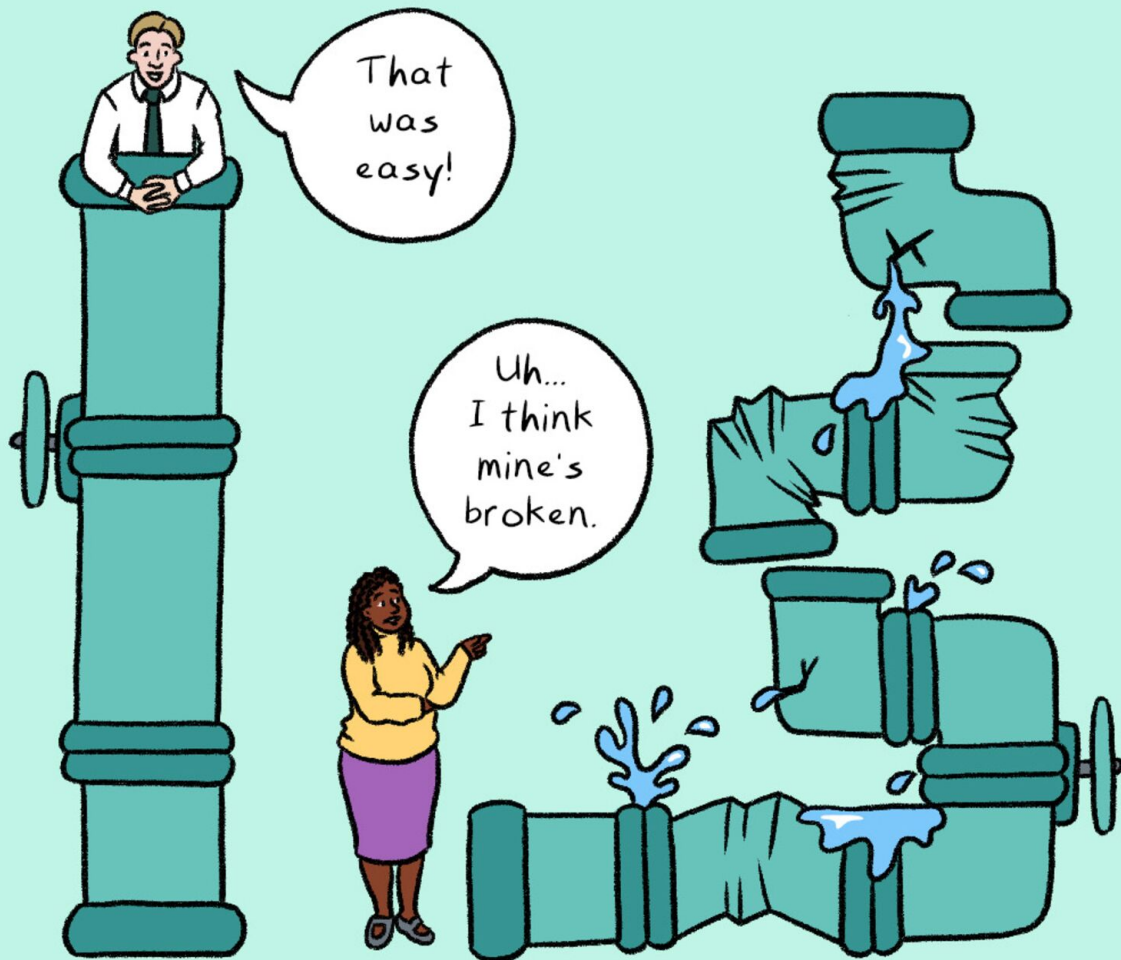
As a result, women are underrepresented at every stage of corporate advancement, and the disparity increases at each subsequent leadership level.

### Share of Employees in Corporate Roles in 2025



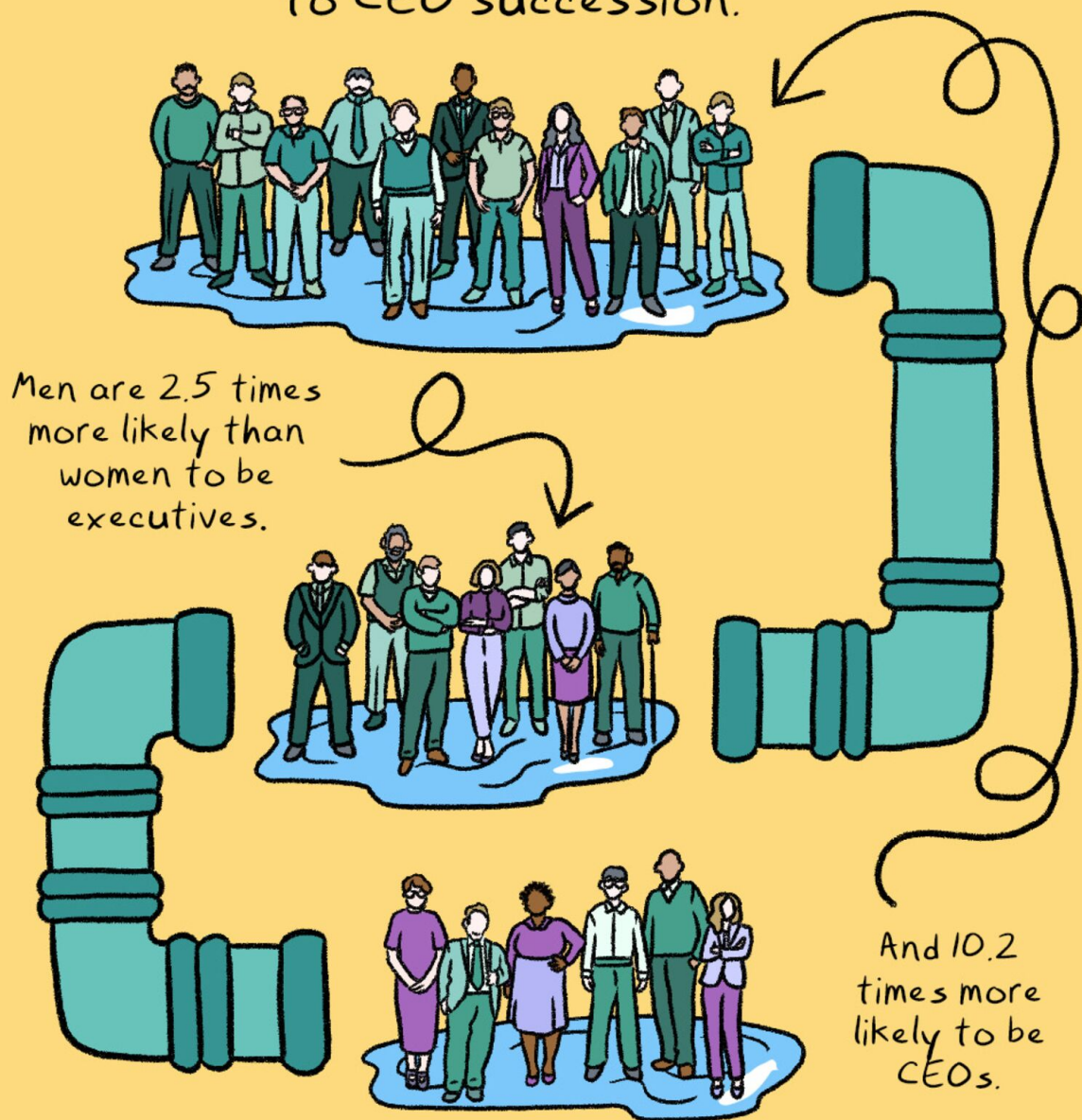
Source: LeanIn.org & McKinsey Women in the Workplace Report

These gaps compound over time,  
resulting in fewer women in senior roles,  
and laying the groundwork for  
long-term leadership imbalance.



Experts agree structural barriers, rather  
than lack of talent, are preventing  
women from advancing.

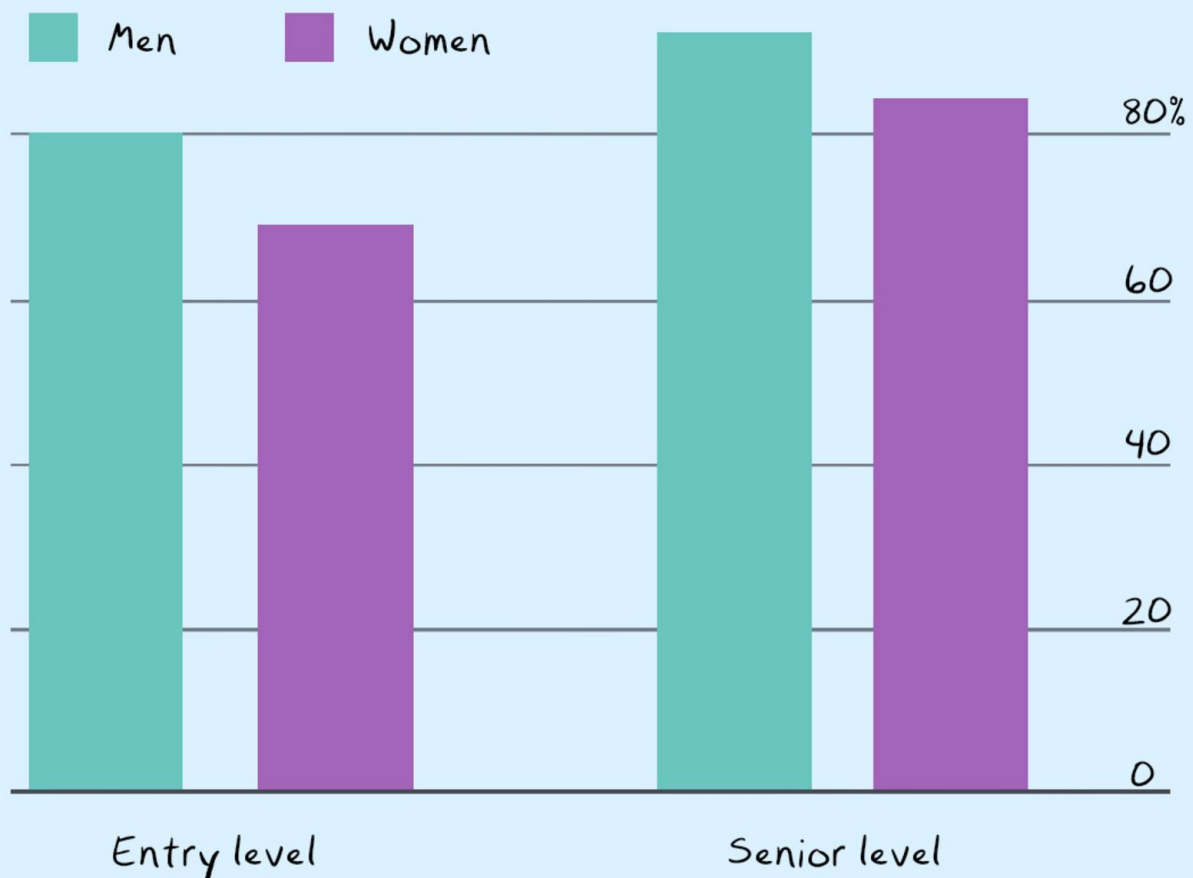
Even when women attain leadership roles, they are often underrepresented in positions that are typical pathways to CEO succession.



Source: S&P Global

Some blame an emerging "ambition gap." Although women are equally committed to their careers, on average they pursue promotion at lower rates than men.

### Share of Workers Who Want a Promotion



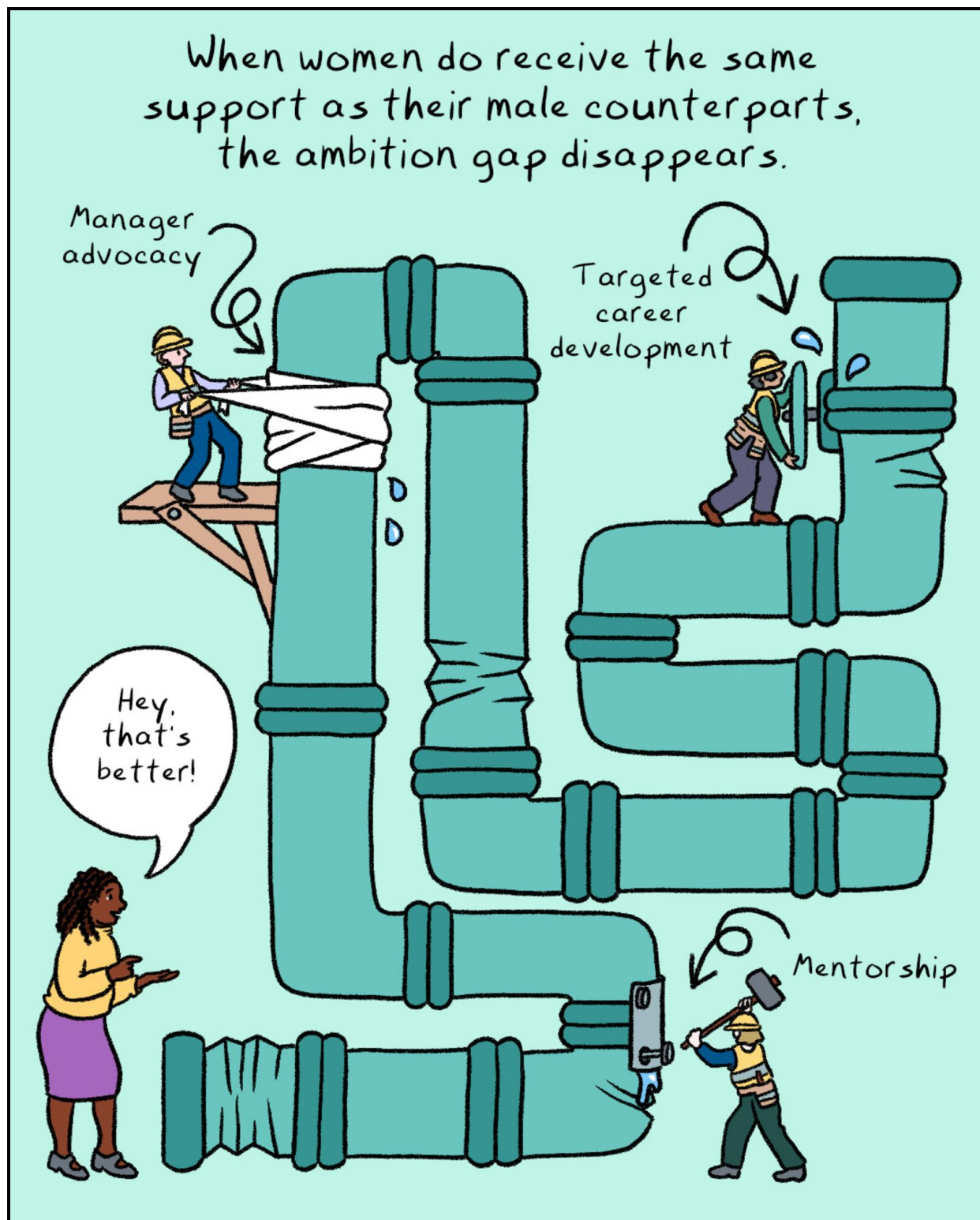
Source: LeanIn.org & McKinsey Women in the Workplace Report

But this so-called ambition gap  
is really a support gap.



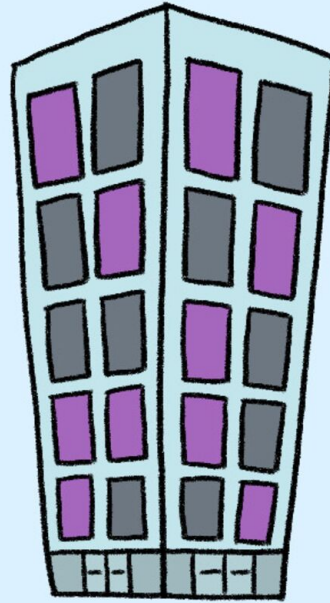
Fewer than a third of women say they feel  
supported by their company's culture.

Source: HiBob US Women Professionals in the Workplace survey



Unfortunately, corporate America's commitment to gender parity is declining.

Only half of companies say women's career advancement is a high priority.



One in six have cut staff or resources for diversity and inclusion.

Source: LeanIn.org & McKinsey Women in the Workplace Report

This stalled progress is coming amid executive orders from the Trump administration that target DEI programs in both the public and private sectors.

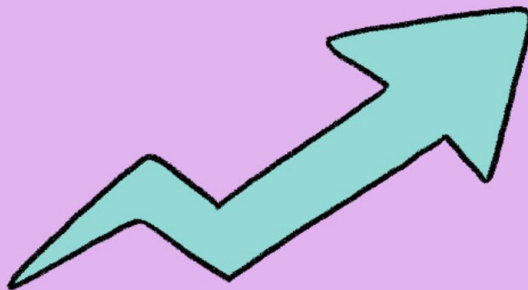


This matters because increasing the number of women in leadership is good for both companies and society.



Research shows that having more women in senior leadership makes companies more profitable, more innovative and more socially responsible.

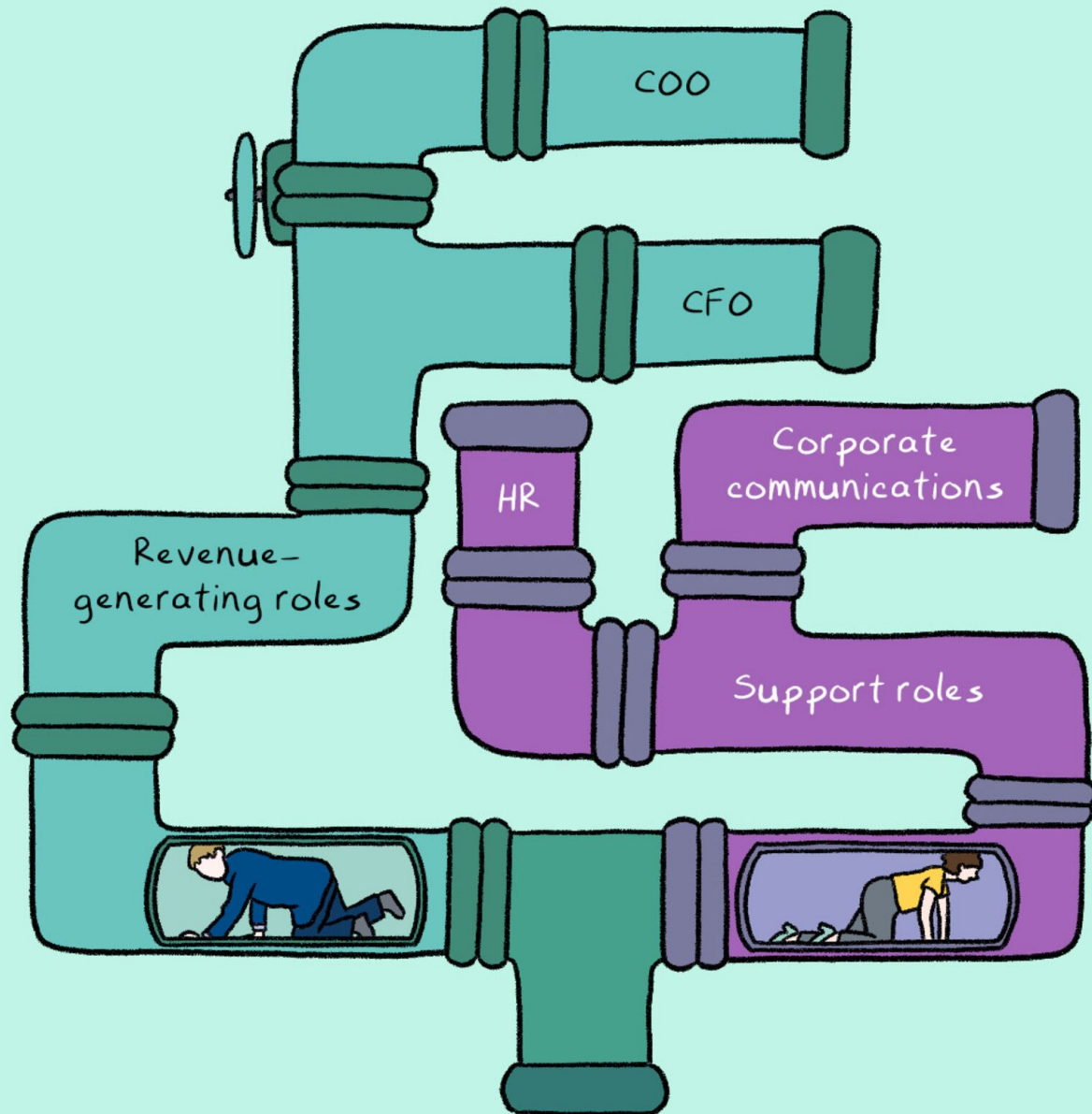
Companies with more than 30% women on their executive teams outperform those with lower representation by 48%.



Those with at least one female founder have a 63% higher valuation than those with all-male teams.

Source: WifiTalents

Yet, instead of being promoted into jobs that lead to CEO positions, women are disproportionately funneled into support roles.

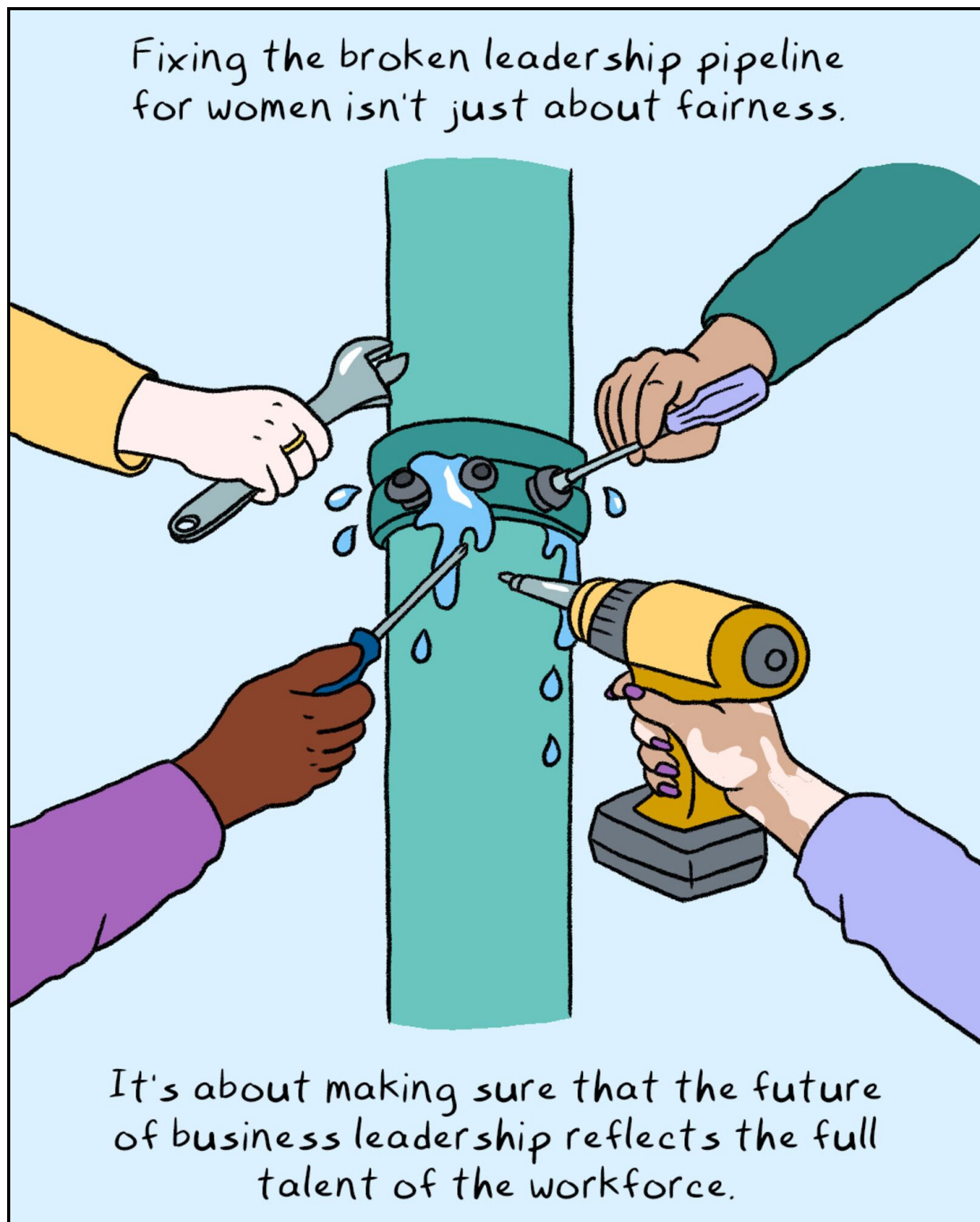


If we continue the current pattern of gaining and losing ground, the US won't reach gender parity in the C-suite until 2073.

And that would still be 15 years before we're projected to close the gender pay gap!



Sources: IBM Institute for Business Value and American Association of University Women



Editor  
Julia Rubin