

CHINA

EXPANDING WORK-LIFE PERSPECTIVES:

TALENT MANAGEMENT IN CHINA

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EXPANDING WORK-LIFE PERSPECTIVES: TALENT MANAGEMENT IN CHINA

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MAKING THE CASE FOR WORK-LIFE EFFECTIVENESS IN CHINA

Work-life effectiveness is a key concern for employees in many Asian regions,¹ where rapidly developing local economies and work cultures often require long hours and overtime.² Despite common global trends, work-life concerns play out differently within various cultural contexts, and companies need to localize their work-life approach within specific settings where they operate.³ Implementing work-life programs requires the thoughtful integration of a global approach with local customs to ensure the strategies make sense in employees' day-to-day lives.⁴

In *Expanding Work-Life Perspectives: Talent Management in Asia*, Catalyst described the perspectives of 1,834 high-potential employees working in Asia and in the context of a U.S.- or

European-based multinational organization. The findings showed that both women and men in these regions were highly driven and interested in getting ahead in their careers and articulated a strong interest in managing work and personal commitments effectively.

In this country profile, we draw from the larger sample to spotlight the experiences of nearly 300 high-potential employees working for multinational companies in mainland China, one of the fastest growing global economies.⁵ Organizations in this region are also demonstrating increased interest in work-life concerns. Respondents in this study were referred by their respective companies as promising future leaders who are among the best and brightest employees.

TABLE 1: FINDINGS AT A GLANCE⁶

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regardless of gender, future leaders in China are highly focused on their jobs and on career advancement. They also report a strong interest in being able to effectively manage work and personal life. • Both women and men experience a mismatch between their work-life demands and the level of flexibility their companies offer, suggesting the need for companies to consider how current work cultures and work-life policies meet the needs of their talent. 	
WOMEN AND MEN IN CHINA	WOMEN IN CHINA
Reported that their current focus is on their job.	Reported higher levels of dual work-family focus.
Stated that they wanted to advance further in their career.	Were less likely to say they wanted to advance to senior/CEO positions in their career.
Said that having a good fit between life on and off the job was very important to them and appreciated their companies' flexibility options.	Were less likely to agree that their employers provided enough flexibility to manage their work and personal lives effectively.

The Work-Life Landscape in China

Demographic and Cultural Elements

With women representing nearly 50 percent of the workforce, China has the highest rate of women's employment participation among Asian countries.⁷ Recent benchmarking data among Asian multinational companies shows that the representation of women at the middle and senior leadership levels has increased considerably since 2009.⁸

The public sector invested heavily in childcare programs to alleviate burdens on working mothers. The accessibility of low-cost childcare and extended family networks provide resources for both mothers and fathers to manage work and family responsibilities.⁹ Part-time arrangements are not very popular or available as a work option in this region.¹⁰ Some have argued that concepts such as “work-life balance” or “work-family conflict” are somewhat foreign to the Chinese work culture; and managing work and personal life assumes a very different meaning than it does in other cultural contexts and requires different approaches.¹¹

Formalized Policies and Legislation

- **One-Child Policy:** Enforced beginning in the 1980s,¹² this policy should be considered for its impact on work-life balance.
- **1994 Labor Law:** This law created special protections for women workers, including prohibiting pregnant workers from working overtime or night shifts, and prohibiting women workers from working in physically labor-intensive occupations.¹³
- **1995 Law on Maternal and Infant Health Care and Female Workers' Labor Protection Regulation of 1988:** These two laws provide additional special protections for women employees, including:
 - Restrictions on employers decreasing salary or firing a woman employee during pregnancy or maternity leave.
 - The requirement that employers provide 90 days maternity leave. A new regulation was recently approved that extends the

leave to 98 days as of the end of 2011.¹⁴

- The requirement that new mothers be granted one hour per day (deducted from the total working day) for one year to care for a newborn.¹⁵
- **Paid Leave Policies:**
 - **Annual Leave:** Five days per year for the first 10 years of employment; 10 days per year for years 11–20; 15 days per year for employees with 20 or more years of service.¹⁶
 - **Public Holidays:** Eleven public holidays per year.¹⁷
 - **Marriage Leave:** Three days for men married at age 25 or younger and women married at age 23 or younger. Employees married at older ages receive 10–15 days.¹⁸
 - **Maternity and Nursing Leave:** Women receive 98 paid days for a normal delivery. Starting at 28 weeks of pregnancy, women workers can take one hour per day of leave until maternity leave starts and, upon return, new mothers can take two 30-minute breastfeeding breaks.¹⁹
 - **Paternity Leave:** Men receive 3–7 days.²⁰
 - **Bereavement:** Employees receive three days for the loss of a spouse or child and one day for the loss of a parent or sibling.
 - **Home Leave:** Employees can receive home leave to visit a spouse or parents living in a different city; the number of leave days varies depending upon the specific circumstances.²¹

Chinese Work-Life Program Snapshots²²

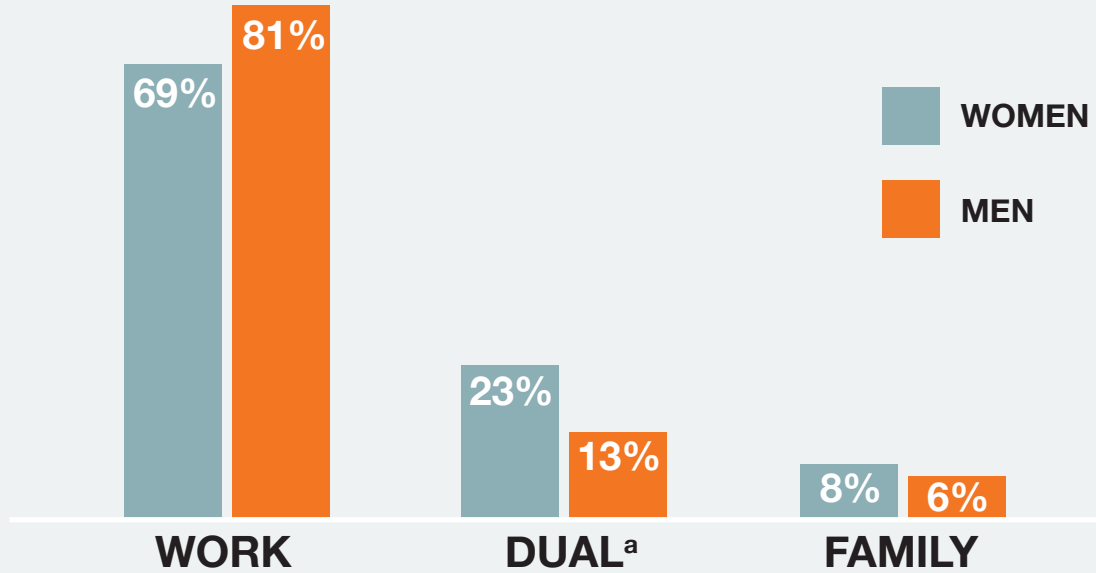
- **Dow and Shell:** Offer flexible working hours and telecommute options.
- **IBM:** Allows employees to telecommute; flexible work schedules, part-time work options and leaves of absence are also offered.
- **Merck:** Flexible work schedules; up to two years of maternity leave.
- **Hewlett Packard:** Fifty percent of employees telecommute up to two days per week.

Women and Men in China Report High Work Focus and Interest in Advancing

When asked about their current work-life priorities, a majority of respondents working in China said that their current emphasis was on their jobs. Approximately one-fifth of respondents reported a dual (work and family) focus. Less than 10 percent reported that their current focus was only on their family.

Gender differences emerged among respondents in the “dual focus” group: 23 percent of women reported a dual emphasis compared to 13 percent of men (Figure 1).

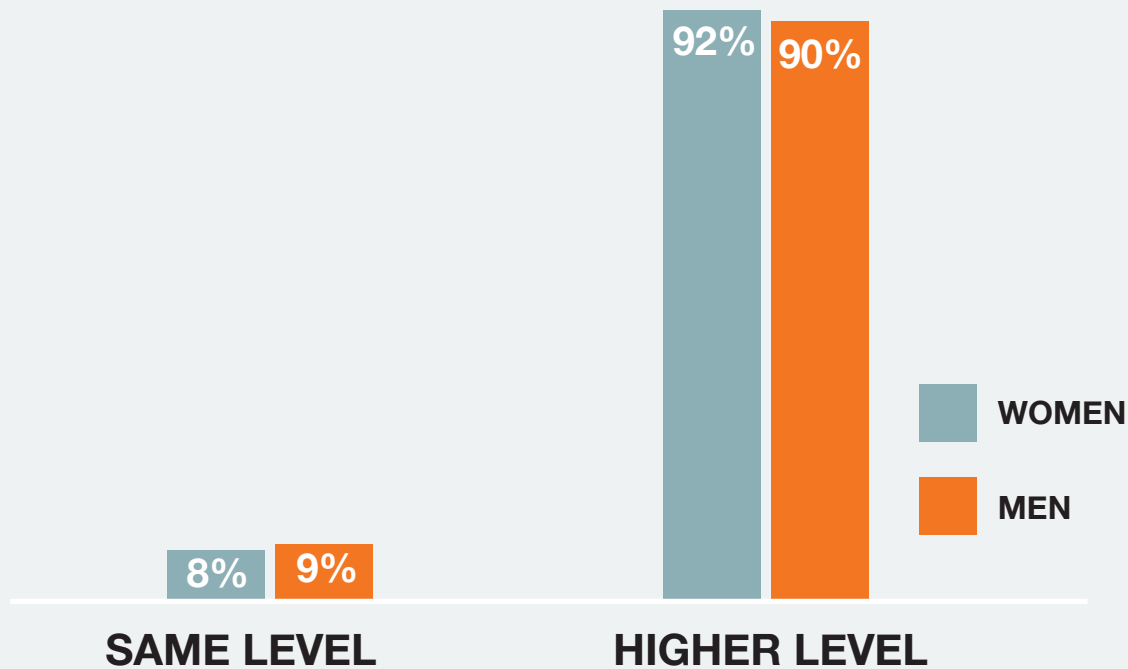
Figure 1: WORK, FAMILY, AND DUAL FOCUS (China, by Gender)²³



^aSignificant differences for $p < .05$

High potentials in China conveyed high levels of interests in advancing further in their careers. On average, 90 percent of both women and men employees reported that they wanted to move to a higher-level position within the next five years.²⁴

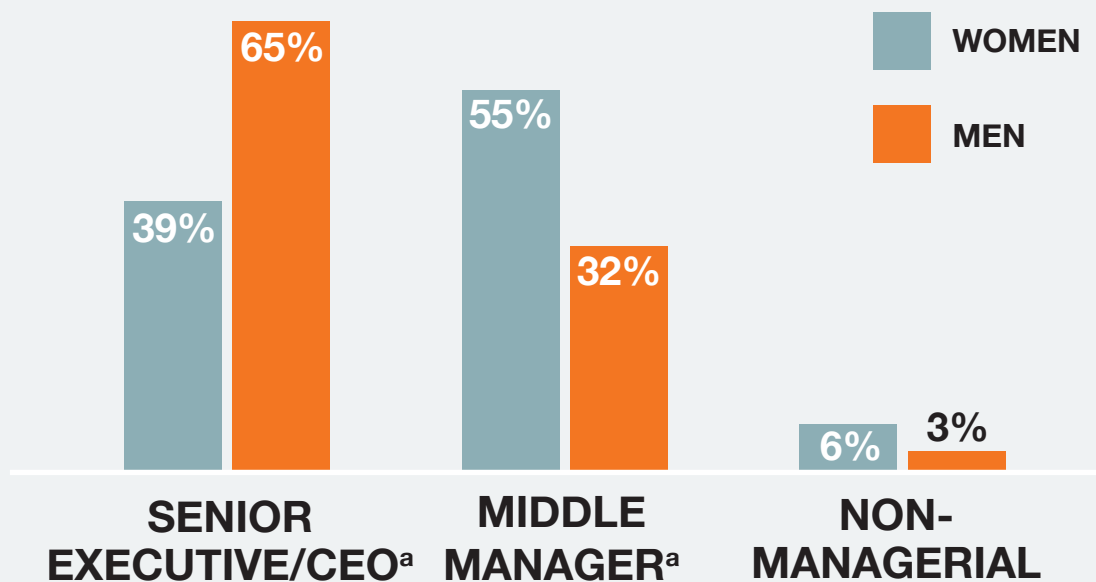
Figure 2: ASPIRATIONS FOR NEXT LEVEL, NEXT FIVE YEARS (China, by Gender)



Gender differences emerged in terms of which level of leadership respondents aspired to achieve in their careers. Men (65 percent) were more likely than women (39 percent) to say they were interested in advancing to executive or CEO roles (Figure 3).

However, both women and men who had reduced their career aspirations to attain more senior positions cited long hours, job pressures, the strain that these pressures may cause on important relationships, and other life priorities as the reasons for their switch in priorities.

Figure 3: ASPIRATIONS, CAREER OVERALL (China, by Gender)

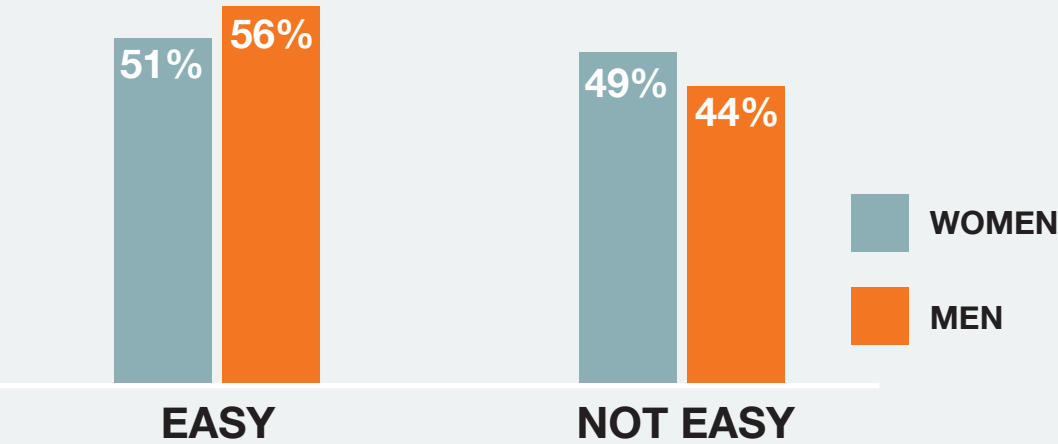


^aSignificant differences for $p < .05$

Women and Men in China Value Their Ability to Effectively Manage Work and Personal Life

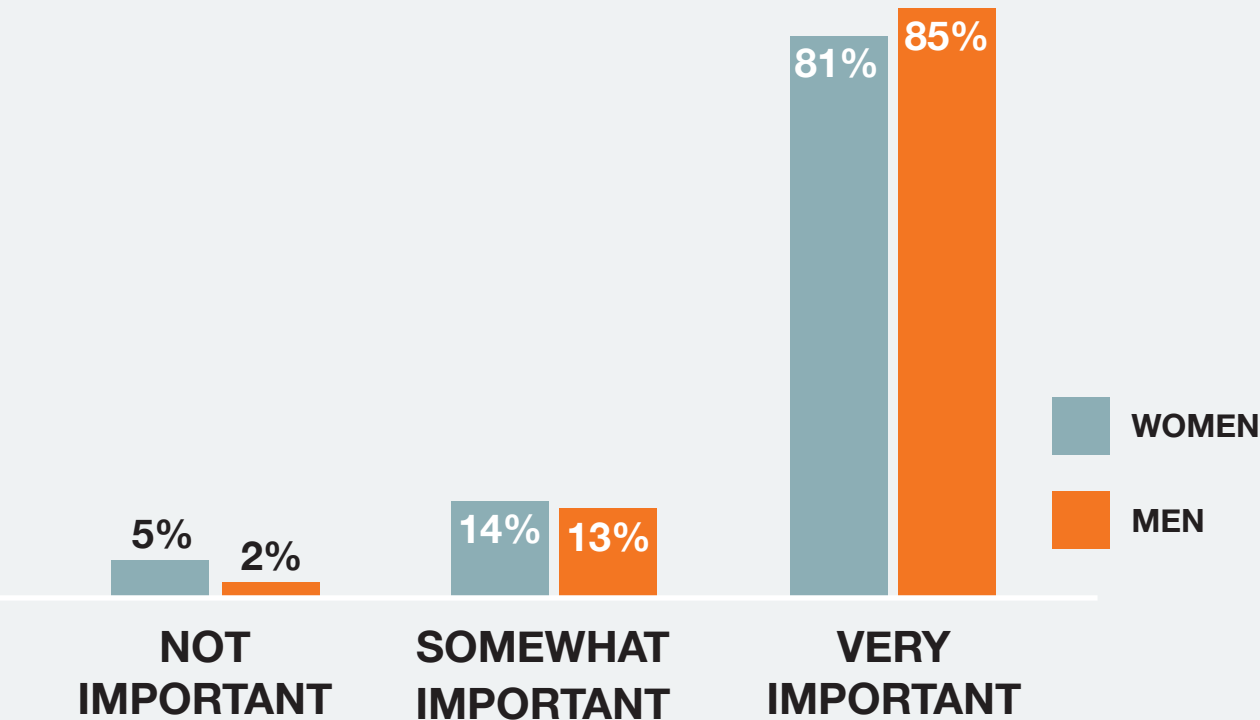
Respondents were fairly satisfied with the ways in which they were able to manage work and personal life. Fifty-one percent of women and 56 percent of men rated managing work and personal life as “easy” (Figure 4).²⁵

Figure 4: MANAGING WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE (China, by Gender)



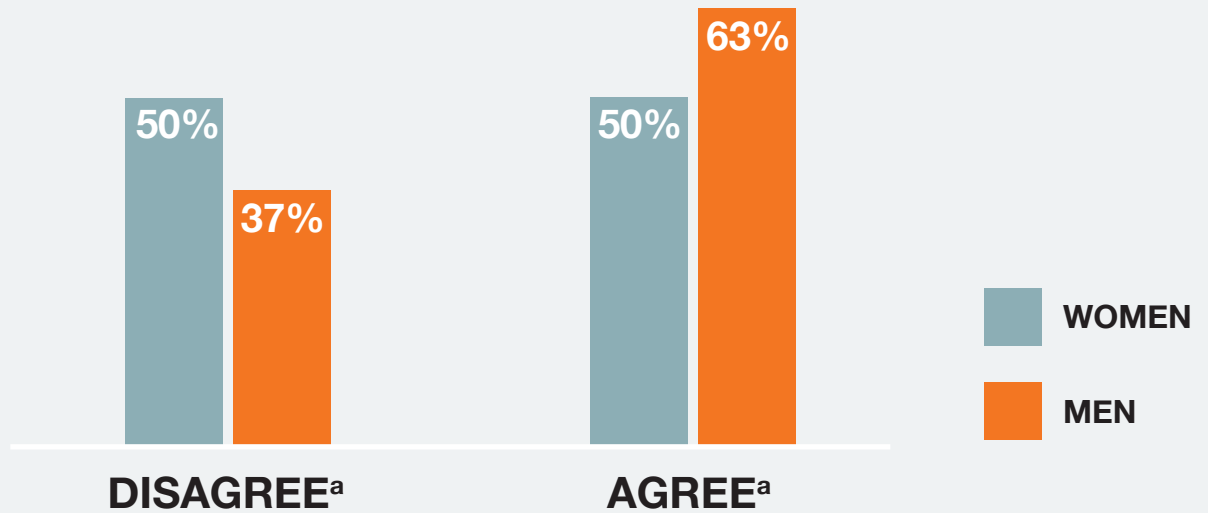
Employees in China clearly valued the flexibility to effectively manage their work and personal lives; regardless of gender, more than 80 percent of respondents said that having a good fit between life on and off the job was very important to them. When averaging women’s and men’s responses, less than 5 percent rated work-life fit as *not* currently relevant in their lives (Figure 5).

Figure 5: IMPORTANCE OF WORK-LIFE FIT (China, by Gender)



About half of respondents were satisfied with the level of flexibility their company afforded.²⁶ However, women were less satisfied than men, i.e., they were less likely than men to agree that their workplace provided enough flexibility to manage work and family demands (Figure 6).

Figure 6: COMPANY PROVIDES ENOUGH FLEXIBILITY (China, by Gender)

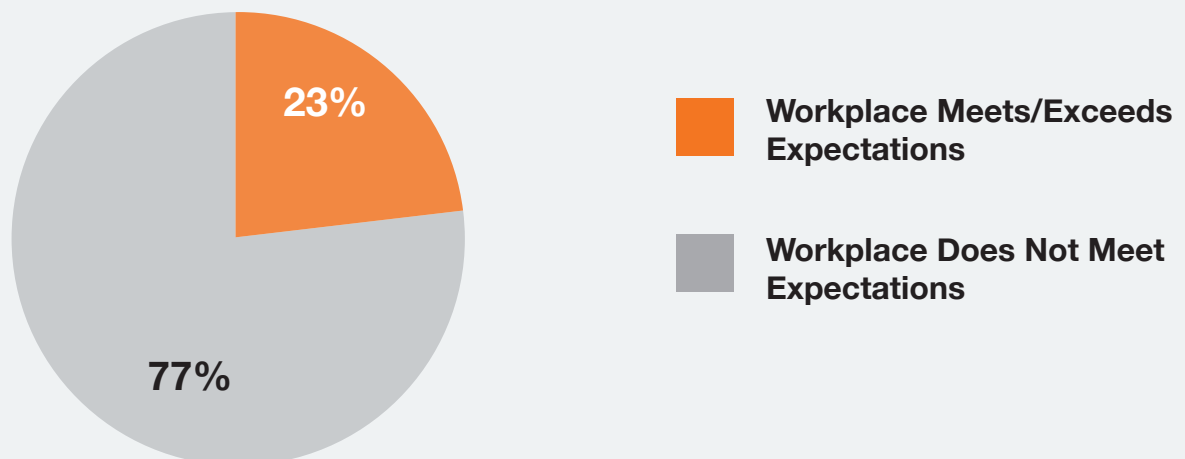


^aSignificant differences for $p < .05$

When comparing respondents' flexibility needs and the ratings of what their companies offered, however, an implementation gap emerged.²⁷ Regardless of gender, 77 percent of respondents reported that the current level of flexibility provided in their organizations did not fully meet their life needs (Figure 7).

Figure 7: GAP BETWEEN CURRENT WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY AND WORK-LIFE NEEDS (China, by Gender)

BOTH WOMEN AND MEN



INTEGRATING GLOBAL AND LOCAL CONCERNS INTO WORK-LIFE FLEXIBILITY PROGRAMS IN CHINA

INSTRUCTIONS: This section includes questions on key dimensions to consider as you integrate both global and local concerns into an effective work-life flexibility program for your organization. Please review the questions, and note your answers in the space provided.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND WORK-LIFE PROFILE

- ▶ What does your employee population look like in this region? Consider characteristics such as gender, age, location, and family status. Focus on those relevant to your location, industry, and business.

NOTES: _____

- ▶ What are the most prevalent work-life needs among your employees? What are their work-life concerns and challenges? Do these needs and concerns vary between women and men? If so, how?

NOTES ON WORK-LIFE NEEDS, CONCERNS, AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES:

NOTES ON WORK-LIFE NEEDS, CONCERNS, AND CHALLENGES OF MEN EMPLOYEES:

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN'S AND MEN'S WORK-LIFE NEEDS, CONCERNS, AND CHALLENGES:

AVAILABILITY AND USE OF PROGRAMS

▶ What work-life programs are offered by your organization?

NOTES: _____

▶ What are the cultural norms regarding using flexible work arrangements?

NOTES: _____

▶ Do employees understand these programs as intended?

NOTES: _____

▶ Do employees talk about using these programs? If so, how do they talk about them?

NOTES: _____



▶ Do employees use the programs that are available to them?

NOTES: _____

▶ List examples of how employees use work-life programs at your company (e.g., for emergencies only).

NOTES: _____



ENDNOTES

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2. Ng; Ng and Vernon; Wharton and Blair.
3. Anne Bardoel and Helen De Cieri, "Developing a Work/Life Strategy in a Multinational Enterprise (MNE)," *Sloan Work and Family Research Network Encyclopedia* (2006).
4. Bardoel and De Cieri.
5. China is among the top 10 countries in the world for GDP (real growth rate) and ranks among the top 50 for industrial production growth rate and in terms of labor force availability. Source: *CIA World Factbook*.
6. This report focuses on the experiences of high-potential employees working in mainland China. For a summary of the research and findings among a larger sample of survey respondents working in Asia, as well as for comparative analyses between China and other individual countries, see *Expanding Work-Life Perspectives: Talent Management in Asia* (Catalyst, 2012).
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19. Russell and Ross. Xin and Dan.
20. Russell and Ross.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Out of the 275 respondents who worked in China, 140 (51 percent) were men and 135 (49 percent) were women. Consistent with workforce demographics in China, the majority of respondents (65 percent) were below 35 years of age, 28 percent were between 36 and 45 years of age, and the remaining 7 percent were 46 or older. Seventy-eight percent of respondents (N=208) were married or partnered and the remaining (N=60, 22 percent) were single, divorced, or separated. Among married/partnered respondents, 172 (83 percent) were in a dual-income family, while 35 (17 percent) said their spouse/partner wasn't currently employed. Fifty-one percent of respondents (N=124) reported having at least one child under 18 living at home and 40 percent (N=108) said that they were also involved with taking care of an older relative.
24. These findings are consistent with what was found in the larger Asian sample as well as with existing literature on the topic. See, for example, "Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia 2011," *Community Business* (September 2011).
25. In the larger sample, China was among the countries with higher ratings of "easiness" managing work and personal demands.
26. Employees in China reported lower ratings of their company flexibility offerings compared to respondents from other Asian countries.
27. A repeated-measures MANOVA was conducted to examine differences in scores of work-life fit values and ratings of workplace flexibility options. In China, this difference was actually lower than in other Asian countries, because on average respondents had lower ratings for their flexibility needs.

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