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ou're a woman. You're European. So why don't you do better at work?

That was the question that MPI, Meeting Professionals International (76 per cent women), and IMEX, the worldwide meetings show, wanted to find out.

than those in the south.

There was one ray of light. Because women define leadership differently to men, it is possible to ensure organisational leadership opportunities are attractive to both. But it's back to friction between the sexes again when company policies appear to influence leadership opportunities for males and females.

Women - and their desire to succeed

They commissioned a study from Association Insights, an independent market research firm, who conducted a survey earlier this year: by telephone; through the Internet which collected responses (two-thirds from females and one-third males); and focus groups with female meeting professionals in Milan and Amsterdam.

The new research is called "Aspiring to Lead in Europe".

If you work for a company with rigid management structures, chances are you'll get fed up and leave. And so will your male colleagues.

While women in the meetings business who desire to be leaders still face barriers, social and cultural shifts are bringing more opportunities.

Those stuffy organisations with rigid hierarchical structures that stick by the rules are losing talent as women walk out to set up their own companies.

The survey confirmed that what makes a good female meetings industry leader is the same as what makes her good at anything - her own desire to succeed and the life decisions she makes along the way.

When men enter the scene, however, the picture darkens. The survey recorded 'appreciable disagreements' over whether women earn as much as men. Only eight percent of females believe they do, while 26 per cent of males believe women are paid the same as them. And in Europe the culture definitely favours leadership opportunities for men over women. Except that northern European women have a greater expectation of reaching career goals

While women surveyed had 0.72 children each, the men admitted to twice as many - 1.38 - which implies more women than men leave or forego positions of leadership on having children.

JoAnn Kurtz-Ahlers, has already succeeded. She is Chair of MPI's International Women's Leadership Initiative Committee and a business owner. "As more organisations move from rigid to more flexible structures, it will create new leadership opportunities for women in the meetings industry, she said.

Ray Bloom, chairman of IMEX, who has a daughter showing every capability of succeeding him, added, "the issue of women's leadership is central to the future success of the meetings industry."

The full report can be downloaded from www.mpiweb.org/resources/wli/wli.pdf

MPI Women's Leadership Initiative and IMEX research reveals opportunities and barriers for women and organisations

