

Women in work: a lifecycle approach to tackling gender inequalities in UK workplaces



International Women's Day webinar

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Image credit: McKinsey & Company, Women in the Workplace report

Accelerate Action for ALL women and girls



- **Equality**
- **Rights**
- **Empowerment**

Two big ideas today

- **Care/ers dilemma**
- **Women's Career Lifecycle Approach**

Gender Equality in the UK: progress and pitfalls

- Overall rank – 14 out of 146 countries
- Educational attainment – 1st (shared with 28 other countries)
- Political empowerment – 18th
 - Women received the right to vote in 1918, 1928
 - 3 female heads of state
 - 29% seats held in parliament
- Economic participation and opportunity- 58th
 - Female employment rate – 71.8%
 - Gender wage gap – 14%
 - Women on Boards – 41%
- Health and survival – 104th
 - Life expectancy – 82 years
 - Maternal Mortality Rate – 10 deaths*

Source: The Global Gender gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum, World Bank and ONS statistics

Gender Equality in the UK: progress and pitfalls

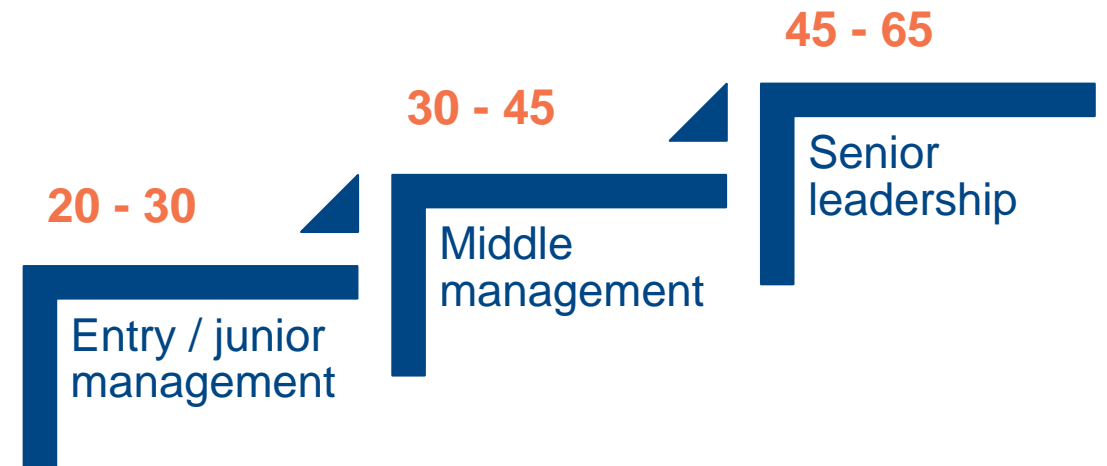
- Female labour force participation rate – 57%
- Women in part-time work – 56%
- Women in gig work – 31%
- Dominant sectors employing women –
 - health and social work (77% of all jobs),
 - education (70% of all jobs),
 - childcare (97% of all jobs),
 - wholesale & retail trade
- Time spent on unpaid care and domestic work by women – 3 hrs 37 mins per day which is 54 mins more than men spend
- 93% women say it is hard to combine a successful career with caring responsibilities



Source: Figure 1, Creating a Caring Economy: A Call to Action, Women's Budget Group, 2020, p. 6

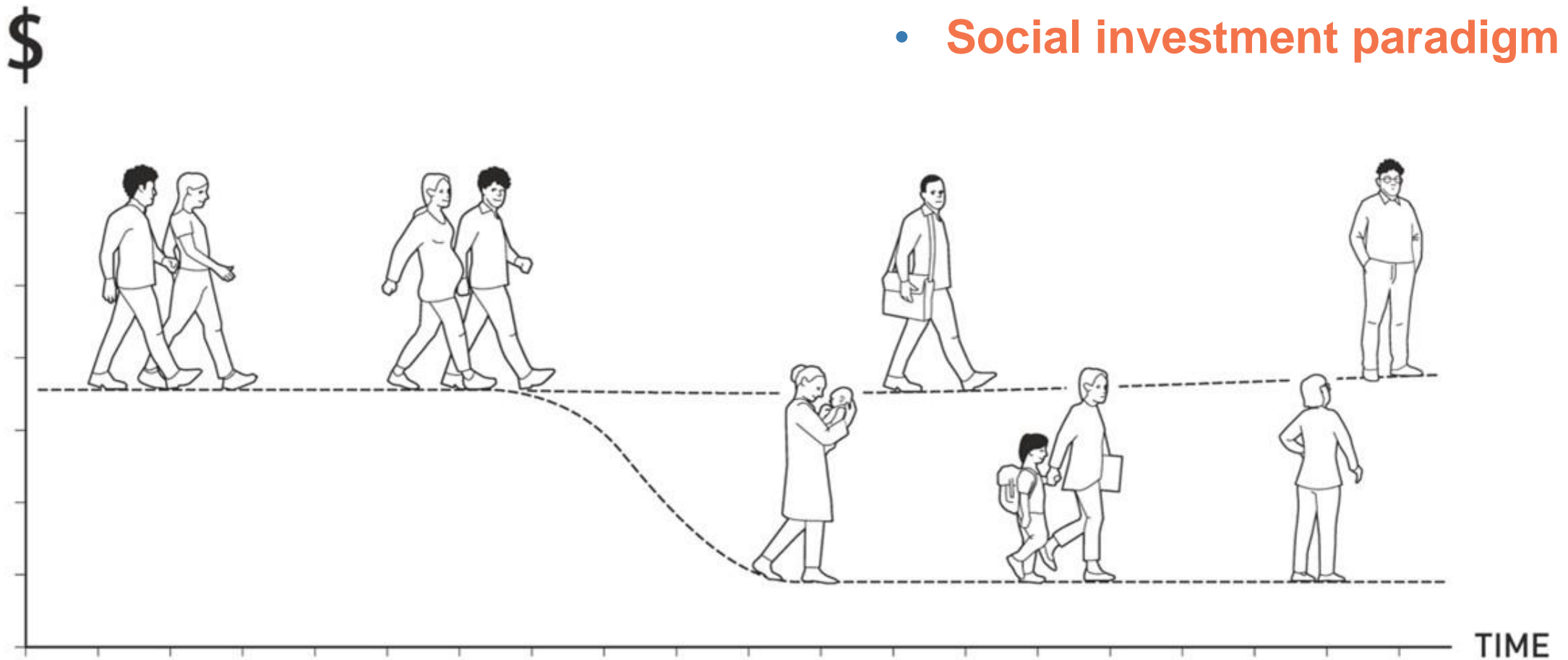
Traditional view of (wo)men's careers

Career Ladders



But what really happens is

- Male breadwinner – female caregiver
 - Social investment paradigm



Systemic barriers stemming from care of others

Over-representation in part-time work

- “*Flexibility is the oxygen of women’s careers*” (Krishnan, 2024)
- Stigma of flexible work - proximity bias (Chung, 2024)
- High incidence seen in health care, GP doctors (IES, 2024), long-term consequences

Motherhood penalties (ILO, 2015)

- Employment penalty – career interruptions, *parenthood effect* or *leaky pipelines*
- Wage penalty – low statutory maternity pay means many return too soon or go into debt
- Leadership penalty – not just *glass ceilings* but also *sticky floors*

Gender norms of “*ideal workers*” and “*greedy jobs*”

- Gender pay gap (Goldin, 1994, IES, 2024) – fatherhood wage premium
- Gender pensions gap (IES, 2023)

Intersectional challenges for women

- with disabilities, health conditions, neurodiversity, etc.

Broader view of women's careers

Jungle gym careers | Squiggly careers | Portfolio careers

The way people think it looks:



How it can also look:



Image credit: LinkedIn, The Path

"Careers are a jungle gym, not a ladder."

- Sheryl Sandberg



Broader view of women's careers

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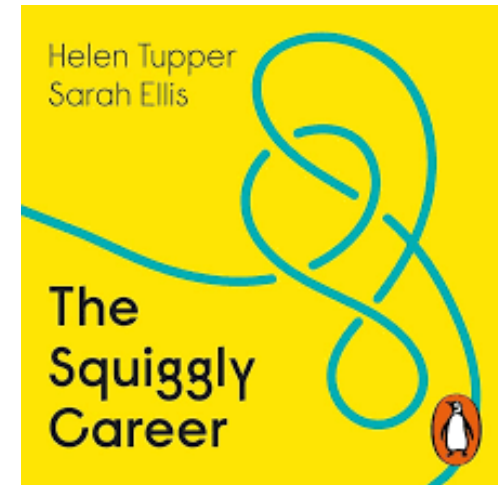
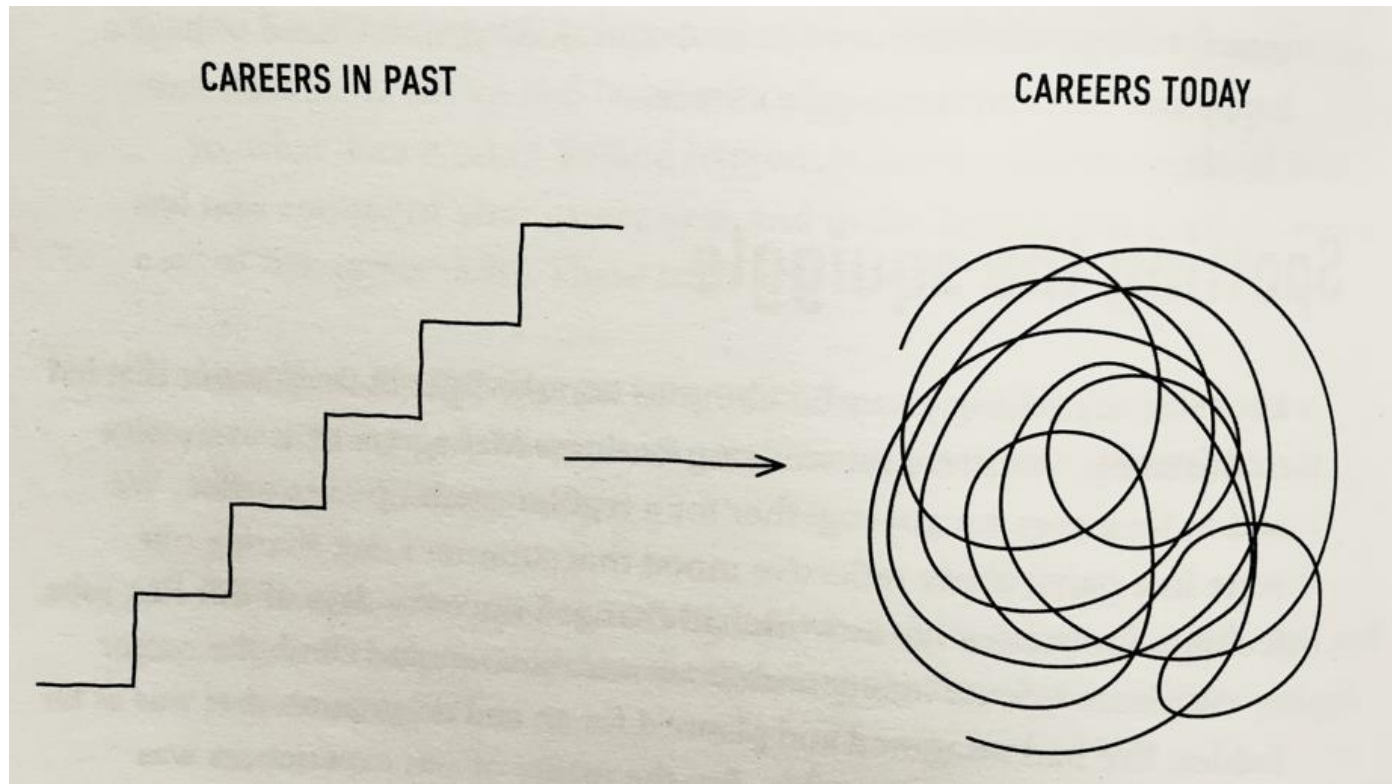


Image credit: The Squiggly Career by Helen Tupper & Sarah Ellis, 2020

Broader view of women's careers

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PORTFOLIO CAREER

A portfolio career involves monetising your skills in many ways and having multiple income sources.

TRADITIONAL WORK



One main job



PORTFOLIO WORK

Multiple sources of income



Work for someone else



Work for yourself



Office-based



Remote



Repetitive daily grind



Every day is different



Image credit: The Portfolio Collective

Systemic barriers stemming from care of self

- Big M
 - Perimenopause, menopause, hormone health
- Other health conditions
- Menstrual health
- (In)fertility, pregnancy support
- Mental health
- Intersectional inequalities and combined discrimination due to age, gender, ethnicity, etc.

The top five reasons young women report being discriminated against whilst looking for work are:



Source: Young Women's Trust, 2023

What has been your experience?

What is going on with maternity pay? Here's why UK women can't afford motherhood

Are you working in a “sticky floor” role at work? Here's how to tell and what to do about it

Youth Voice Census 2024: Anxiety, Discrimination, and Economic Pressures Impacting Young People's Futures

Young British women struggle more than men to progress at work, study suggests

Working from home risks women's career progress, says Nationwide leader

UK awarded its lowest ranking for workplace gender equality in a decade

'Sluggish' pace in tackling gender pay gap and worsening employment levels push UK back to 18th in PwC index of OECD countries

Events

Neurodiversity & Menopause at Work

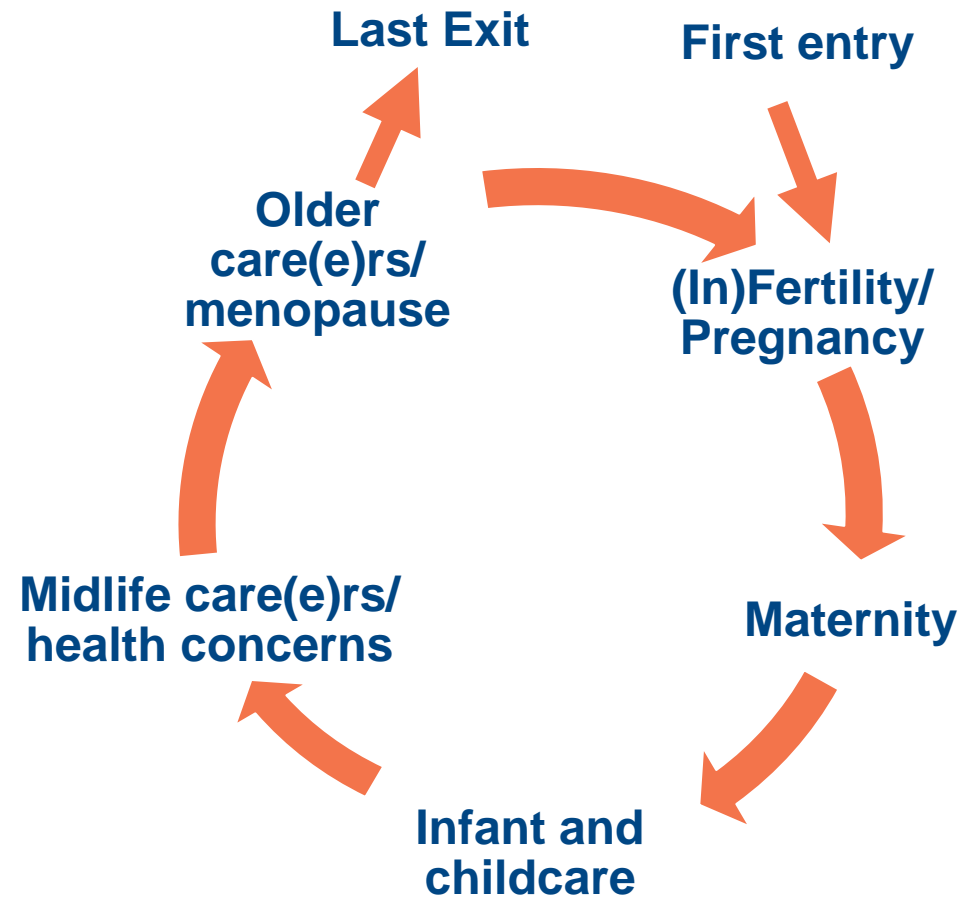
A Lifecycle Approach to women's working lives

Employee Lifecycle



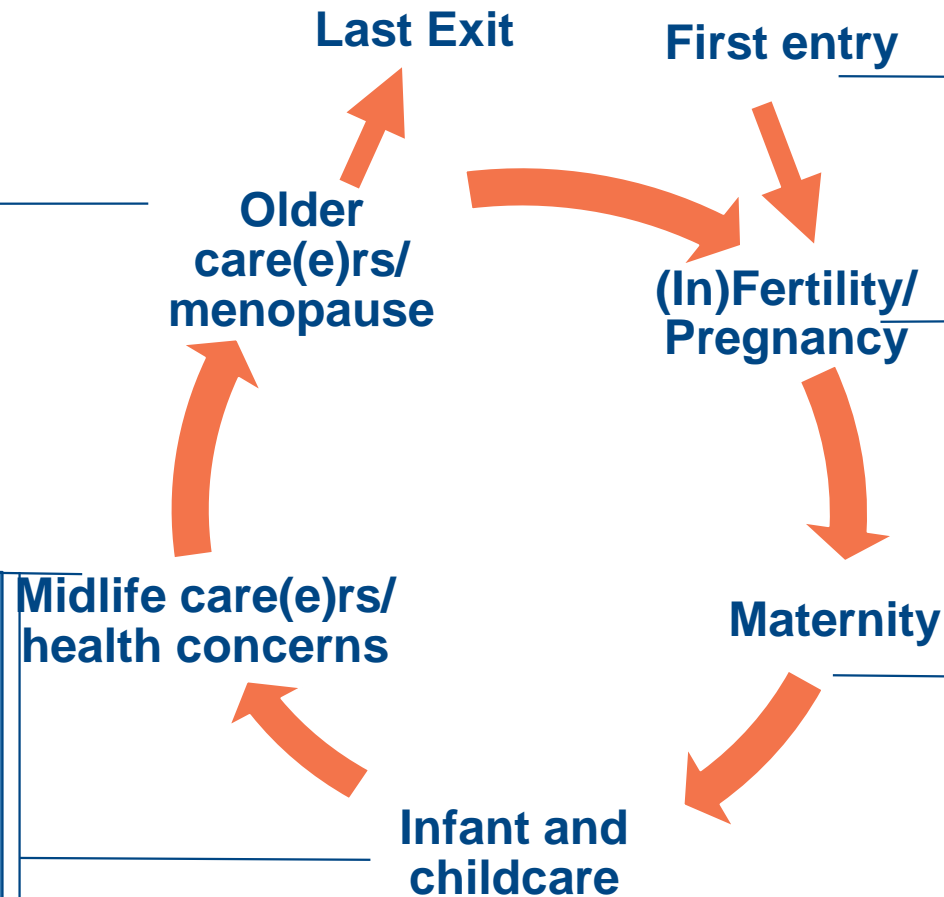
- Systems perspective
- Takes a long-term view
- Anticipates future problems
- Devises solutions for every point in the cycle
- Addresses needs of all

Women's Career Lifecycle Approach (WCLA)



WCLA – insights for action

- Implicit bias – ageism, qualification, experience, energy, stability, loyalty, maturity
- Flexible Working
- Care for grandchildren
- Mid-life MOT – financial/retirement planning
- Access to senior leadership roles
- Menopause support
- Tailor health and wellbeing needs
- Working with disability/ illness like cancer
- Second or third careers, career advancement – reskilling, AI, reverse mentoring
- Nursing breaks, return to work
- Creche/ childcare facilities
- Flexible Working, Hybrid working
- Motherhood penalties in pay and progression
- Wrap around provision – after school, children with special needs



Conceptualised by Dr. Meenakshi Krishnan, IES, 2025

- Early gendered career stereotypes
- Higher proportion in NEET
- Access to Work – attention to intersectional discrimination
- Championing mental and

- Infertility support – IVF, egg freezing, mental health
- Pregnancy Loss / Baby loss - miscarriage, abortion, still birth,
- Parental bereavement leave
- Workplace Adjustments
- Maternity, Paternity leave
- Post-partum health – hormones, depression, nursing breaks/ space
- Return to work – job protection, keep-in-touch days, maternity networks, re-boarding, training
- Shared parental leave

New frontiers

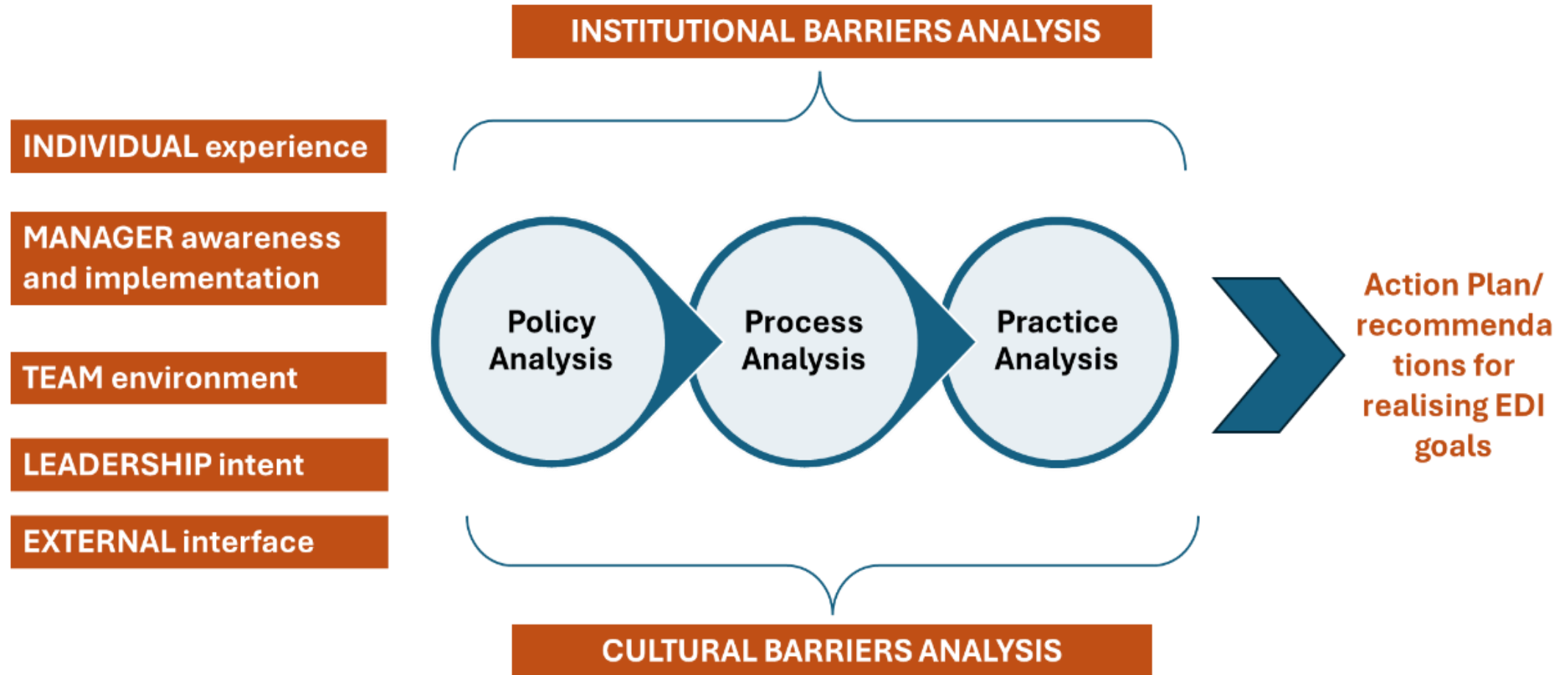
For Policy

- ❖ Day one right to flexible working and Carer leave
- ❖ Attention to health and wellbeing policies like menopause
- ❖ Strengthen employment rights – some impending legislations:
 - Neonatal care leave and pay
 - Day 1 right to unpaid parental leave
 - improve job security for those on maternity and family leave
 - Expanded bereavement leave for family
 - Improved pregnancy loss leave
- ❖ Better funding and access to care

For Practice

- ❖ Proactive role for employers in support
- ❖ Normalise care – by men, by all
- ❖ Build allyship so all benefit
- ❖ Invest in line manager training and awareness - linchpin
- ❖ Tackle ageist bias against over 50s
- ❖ Review pay and progression policies and processes from an intersectional lens
- ❖ Develop senior role models and leadership commitment

Our Policy-Process-Practice Diagnostic Framework helps



Source: IES, 2024

To conclude

"It is another aged fact, in life as well as in racing, that all the worst accidents happen at low ditches and cut down fences. In the same way, you sometimes see a woman who would have made a Joan of Arc in another century and climate, threshing herself to pieces over all the mean worry of housekeeping..."

– Rudyard Kipling, *Watches of the Night*, 1888

"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women."

– Maya Angelou, 1928 -2014

Any questions?

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