

# The Power of Parity

An Interview with Kweilin Ellingrud,  
Senior Partner, Leader of the Life Insurance Practice in North America, McKinsey & Company

**EDITORS' NOTE** Kweilin Ellingrud has broad experience designing and implementing global performance transformations by re-designing operating models and increasing operational efficiency and effectiveness. She improves customer journeys by applying digital, analytics, and process-redesign principles. In addition to her client work, Ellingrud is a member of the McKinsey Global Institute Council, which provides expert input for MGI's research on global economic, business, and technology trends. She also instigated and co-led McKinsey's Power of Parity work on gender equality and improving the lives of women around the world. Ellingrud serves on the board of directors for the Greater Twin Cities United Way and the YWCA of Minneapolis. She has been named as one of Minnesota's top ten corporate women by the magazine Twin Cities Business and as a 2015 Woman in Business by the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal. Ellingrud holds a B.A. in economics and political science and an M.B.A. from Harvard University.



Kweilin Ellingrud

**FIRM BRIEF** McKinsey & Company ([mckinsey.com](http://mckinsey.com)) is a global management consulting firm committed to helping institutions in the private, public and social sectors achieve lasting success. With consultants in more than 133 cities in 66 countries across industries and functions, it brings vast expertise to clients anywhere in the world. McKinsey works closely with teams at all levels of an organization to shape winning strategies, mobilize for change, build capabilities and drive successful execution.

**Will you provide an overview of McKinsey's life insurance practice and how the practice is integrated within McKinsey's other practice areas?**

The life insurance practice at McKinsey is part of the overall insurance practice, along with our property and casualty insurance practice (for home and auto insurance). Life insurance is also deeply integrated with our wealth and asset management practice, as many of the same companies have retirement and insurance businesses. More broadly, all of our industry practices are deeply integrated with our functions, so that would be operations, digital, analytics, strategy, etc.

It is quite seamless and one of the things that clients benefit from is our cross-functional teams and that we pull in as many experts as we need to solve the problem in the right way for the client.

**You are committed to issues around gender and creating gender parity. Have you been happy with the progress being made in this regard?**

No. We are making progress, but far too slowly. We need to rapidly accelerate if we are to achieve parity any time in my three daughters' lifetimes. We have been accelerating our pace of progress internally at McKinsey. We have made huge strides on the recruiting side in our efforts to achieve 50-50 gender parity at intake, and then moving to retention and promotions with more and more women at the manager level, to junior partner, to partner, to senior partner.

The progress has been really exciting and there are many initiatives internally that we've been driving under the broader umbrella of All In, which is focused on gender diversity as well as racial, sexual orientation, and broader diversity.

**Will you discuss the Power of Parity initiative at McKinsey and how this effort evolved the way you had hoped?**

It has actually surpassed my expectations. Power of Parity started as an idea about six years ago. I was at my kitchen table watching a video of Emma Watson address the UN on the topic of HeForShe, which was the global campaign to involve men and boys in gender equality, and I was really inspired and decided I wanted to help UN Women with their strategy. I placed a few calls and literally within a couple of days I was in New York facilitating the growth strategy for HeForShe.

About a year or so into it, I felt like we had made a lot of great allies that cared about gender equality, but that we had not yet made the economic case for why men – male politicians, male CEOs – should care about equality, not because it's the right thing to do, but because it is also the smart thing to do economically.

I asked McKinsey's managing director at the time, Dominic Barton, to invest a McKinsey team to look at the data and the size of the economic opportunity of gender equality around the world, country by country, and

to link that to societal gaps. We found an economic opportunity of \$12 trillion if women were to participate more equally to men in the workplace. We also found that this \$12 trillion is deeply linked to making progress in societal equality.

That was the work that we did in the original global Power of Parity about five years ago. At that time, we released it at UN General Assembly Week, and from there we have done country deep dives. We did a country deep dive in the United States, U.K., Canada, India, as well as a broad scan across Asia, and are now focused on Africa.

In the U.S. deep dive, for example, we go state-by-state and city-by-city for the top 50 cities and say, "Here is how much economic opportunity the state of New York has. Here is how much economic opportunity the city of New York has." This way we can say to a senator or a member of congress or a mayor: "Here's what's at stake, and by the way, here is the breakdown of how many women have attained a high school degree, a college degree, and a postgraduate degree who are not currently in the workplace who would actually want those jobs." Given the historically low rate of unemployment, we need to be using all sources of talent to grow faster.

**You have a strong passion and focus around women in STEM. What needs be done to drive more interest and involvement from women in STEM?**

This is such a crucial topic because STEM is shaping the future of work and the future of our society. Today, only about 20 percent of computer science majors are women. It used to be about 40 percent, so we have had negative progress in computer science. In other sciences such as biology, chemistry and pre-med, for example, we have actually made quite a bit of positive progress.

My hope is that we start to accelerate and attract more women into computer science, and what we find attracts women is when you talk about the ability to change the world for the better at scale. When women interpret computer science as, "Oh, that's what gamers do," or "That's what boys in hoodies in garages do at a startup," they are less attracted to the field. However, when they think about the potential to impact the world at scale and to create solutions that make life better, they are quite excited about the field. ●