



INFLUENTIAL WOMEN IN MANUFACTURING

GENDER DIVERSITY & CAREER DEVELOPMENT  
SPECIAL REPORT

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DECEMBER 2019 // WRITTEN BY AMANDA DEL BUONO

## THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR WAS ONCE THE TOP EMPLOYER IN THE UNITED STATES.

However, during the past decade or so, the sector's employment dominance has waned. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports\* that 716,800 employees were lost between 2008 and 2018. This downward trend is expected to continue at a -0.5 percent annual rate through 2028, with another 640,700 jobs forecast to be lost by 2028, the BLS reports.

As such, building and maintaining a strong, diverse workforce is a key component to longevity and success in the manufacturing industry. Today, manufacturers are struggling to fill vacant positions as their experienced employees retire and they face a shortage of skilled workers to take on these roles. Although automation has stepped in in some instances, it cannot fill all of the vacancies.

In order to analyze how the manufacturing industry and those that serve it are encouraging diversity and development in their workforces to ensure longevity, Putman Media's Influential Women in Manufacturing program conducted its first-ever Gender Diversity and Career Development Survey.

This special report details the results of that survey.

\*<https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/employment-by-major-industry-sector.htm>

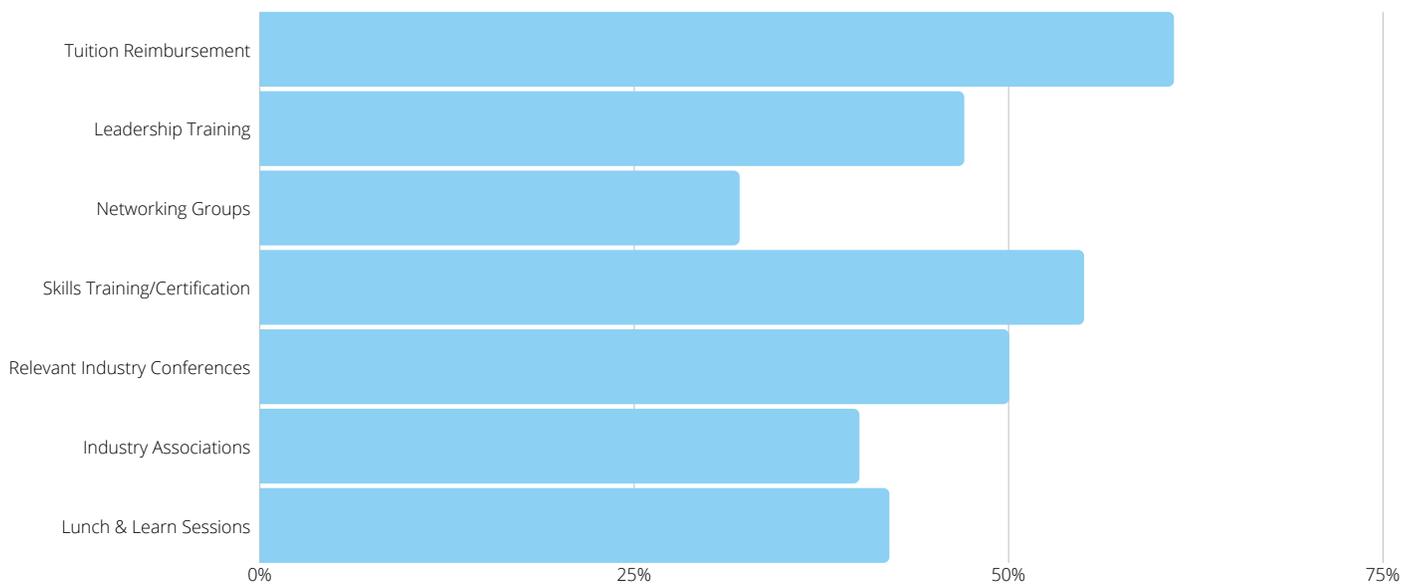
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## THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

It's clear that the workforce landscape is changing within the manufacturing sector. However, it seems many manufacturers aren't actively developing their current workforces to accommodate that change, as survey respondents reported that most of their companies do not provide formal mentorship or leadership development programs. In fact, less than a third of total respondents said that their companies offer formal mentorship programs, and 41 percent said that their companies offer leadership development tracks. Yet, it's important to note that another third of respondents said their companies don't offer leadership development tracks, but they would like their companies to do so.

Those manufacturing companies that do offer career development opportunities are doing so through a variety of means, with the majority of them being monetary support for individual initiatives.

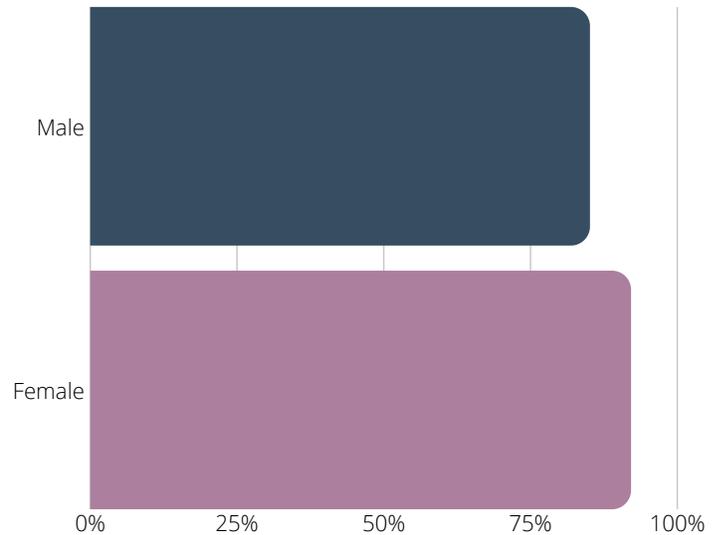
Tuition assistance/reimbursement was the most common career development opportunity indicated by survey respondents, with 61.9 percent saying that their companies offer it. This was followed by sponsorship of participation in skills training/certification programs, with 55.2 percent of respondents saying their companies support this; and 50.5 percent of respondents said their companies offer sponsorship of participation in relevant industry conferences. Leadership training (47.6 percent), lunch-and-learn sessions (42.9 percent), sponsorship of participation in industry associations (40 percent), and networking/employee resource groups (32.4 percent) were also among the most common means of career development support provided by companies in the sector.



# the workforce LANDSCAPE

It's clear that the workforce landscape is changing within the manufacturing sector. However, it seems many manufacturers aren't actively developing their current workforces to accommodate that change, as survey respondents reported that most of their companies do not provide formal mentorship or leadership development programs.

### Who Participates in Career Development?



Respondents from companies that do offer career development and gender diversity initiatives were overwhelmingly supportive of them. In fact, the vast majority (89 percent) of respondents said they've participated in one or several of these career development opportunities, with 85 percent of male respondents and 92 percent of female respondents indicating as such.

Interestingly, the youngest age bracket surveyed (born between 1981 and 2000) was the most apt to participate in company-run development opportunities, with 93 percent of respondents within the age bracket indicating they participate when they can or as much as possible. However, participation in all other age brackets was also strong, but slightly decreased with age, as 90 percent of those born between 1965 and 1980 said they participate when they can or as much as possible, along with 85 percent of those born between 1945 and 1964.

Taking this further, more than 96 percent of total respondents have independently sought out or created opportunities for career development and growth. Additionally, 67.3 percent of respondents belong to organizations outside their companies in order to benefit their career development.

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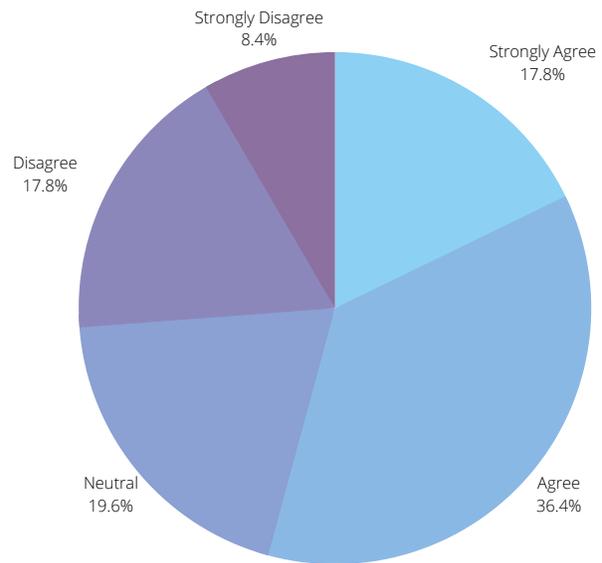
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Despite the high rate of participation in these programs, only about 54 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement, “My company cares about my career development.”

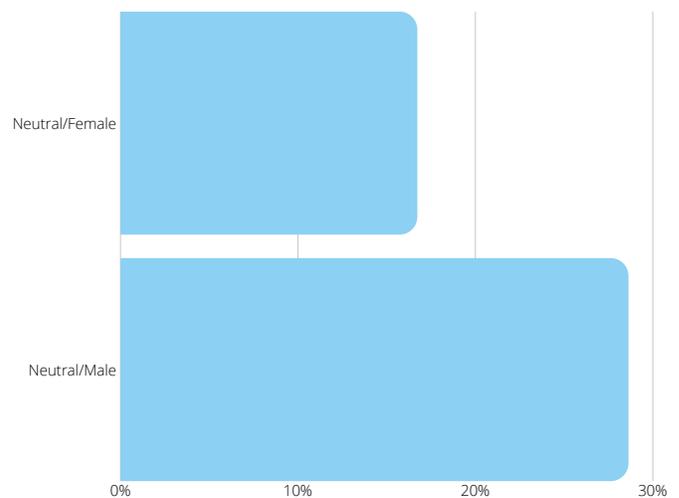
Although just more than half agree, 19.6 percent were neutral, 17.8 percent disagree and 8.4 percent strongly disagree. When broken down by gender, 17.9 percent of both male and female respondents strongly agree, 35.7 percent of men agree, and 37.2 of women agree. Men and women seem to divide on this topic when they don't agree with the statement. Men who weren't inclined to agree with this statement were more often neutral (28.6 percent) than women (16.7 percent), with women being more inclined to say that they disagree with the statement. In fact, 21.8 percent of female respondents disagreed with the statement and 6.4 percent strongly disagreed. For male respondents, this was quite different with 7.1 percent of men saying they disagree and 10.7 percent saying they strongly disagree.

Respondents born between 1965 and 1980 were most inclined to say they disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, and the youngest respondents (born between 1981 and 2000) were most likely to say they agree or strongly agree with the statement.

### My company cares about my career development



### Gender breakdown: Neutral feelings on development



# career DEVELOPMENT

“In my case, I have been selected as a high-potential and have been nominated for leadership training. I think certain individual managers are good at helping people progress, but others are not.”

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## career DEVELOPMENT

Maybe unsurprisingly, the majority of those who disagree or strongly disagree with this statement said that their companies did not offer development opportunities.

Although respondents that have career development programs report that they like them, both male and female respondents noted that access to their companies' programs strongly depends upon individual managers.

One respondent who is actively using his company's leadership development program, summed it up: "In my case, I have been selected as a high-potential and have been nominated for leadership training. I think certain individual managers are good at helping people progress, but others are not."

One female respondent said: "Some managers do well supporting the career development of their people. Leadership tracks are for hand-selected people only, most of them men."

Access to career development opportunities wasn't the only barrier to growth survey respondents noted. Age, ethnicity, gender and company culture were among those listed by respondents.

Age was one of the most common barriers to career growth listed by survey respondents. In fact, those born between 1945 and 1964, 1965 and 1980, and 1981 and 2000 all note age as a limiting factor; however, the 1945-1964 bracket listed this factor most often.

Many in the 1945-1964 bracket simply wrote "Age" or "Age bias" as their biggest obstacle to growth.

"I am too old to pursue other opportunities in my company. I can encourage those that work for me to do more," said one respondent in the 1945-1964 bracket.

The 1981-2000 bracket also frequently mentioned age as an obstacle, but said they felt limited by a lack of experience.

"I am young and inexperienced," said one respondent within the 1981-2000 age bracket. Another asked, "What is my next career step?"

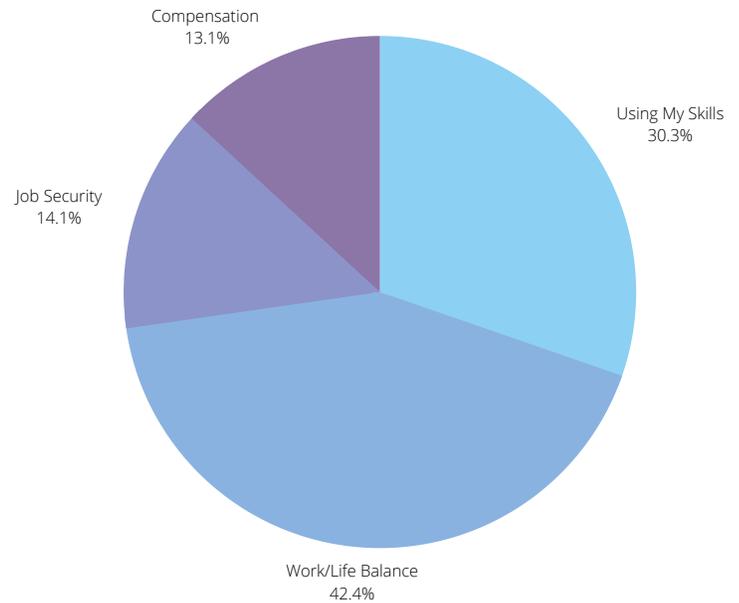
Aside from age, another shared barrier was work-life balance. In fact, this was by far the most important factor considered by respondents when contemplating a new job or career advancement, as 42.5 percent of total respondents (46.4 percent of males and 41.6 percent of females) indicated as such.

"High housing and transportation costs [are the biggest obstacle to my career development]. Sixty-mile one-way commute uses up precious time that I would otherwise use for career development," said one male respondent.

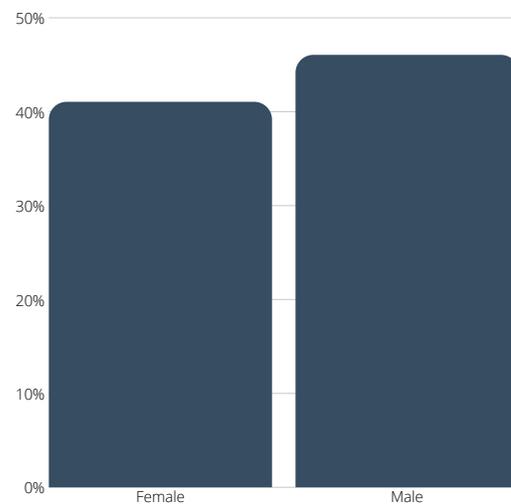
A female respondent echoed similar sentiments. "Time. Life is busy. Other than that, me. When I do have time, learning new things doesn't come high on the list."

Another noted that this is compounded by her age. "[At] my point in life, my husband is about to retire, and I don't want additional stress added to my job. I also care for my disabled mother and don't have extra time."

### What is most important when considering a new job or career advancement?



### The importance of work/life balance between genders



# career DEVELOPMENT

Race/ethnicity was also named among the barriers to career development, but noted as a lesser concern. "Age and gender play a part. Tertiary education, or lack thereof. Ethnicity is also a minor factor," one respondent said.

## GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE WORKFORCE

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Although manufacturing can often be thought of as a male-dominated sector, survey results indicated that women are more often standing alongside men as decision-makers in their companies. Nearly 82 percent of total respondents said that women hold executive roles within their organizations.

Despite this silver lining, only 48 percent of total respondents consider their companies progressive in terms of gender diversity, and many female respondents noted their gender as a barrier to their career development.

Support for gender diversity was stronger among younger respondents, with 85.7 percent of the 1981-2000 age bracket saying gender diversity at their companies is important to them. However, this dropped to 80.8 percent for the 1965-1980 age bracket, and further to 66.7 percent for the 1945-1964 age bracket.

In fact, 20.6 percent of respondents answered “No” to the question, “Does gender diversity within your company matter to you?” These respondents were both male and female, and noted that they don’t hold a bias to women in the industry, but rather want to ensure to most-qualified employees are retained within their companies.

“Gender diversity does not matter, promoting deserving and qualified individuals does. Women are often overlooked as they are not promoting themselves, but rather they are promoting their team’s accomplishments,” one female respondent said.

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gender  
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A male respondent said: "I don't care what gender you are or identify with. I have one criteria, how well they do the job."

Female respondents often noted their gender as a barrier to their career development in the manufacturing industry. Several reported a "boys club" culture remains within their companies.

"Discrimination according to tribes and to families and home origins. Discrimination according to gender. Leaders and managers don't seek career or personal development but they seek money," one female respondent said.

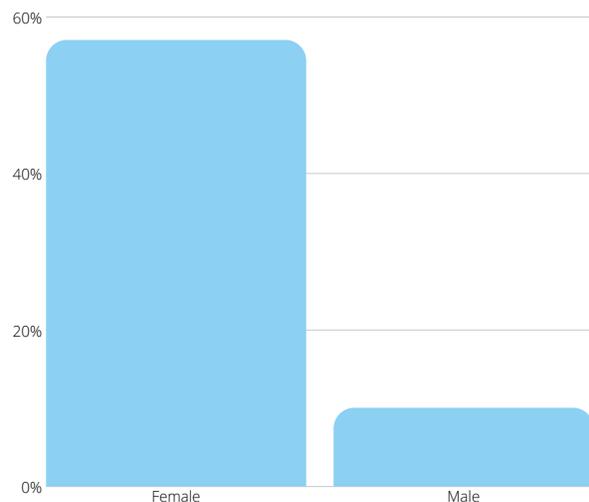
Another said, "I'm the only woman and that has stopped me from being invited to parties, events and meetings that would otherwise further my career."

Male respondents' answers contrasted with those of females, as males often said they did not see any potential barriers to their career development.

"I am an entry-level Maintenance Technician at a large commercial truck assembly plant. The only thing holding me back is lack of seniority. My company is terrific about career growth. My career will grow and get so much bigger," one male respondent said.

Additionally, Women reported feeling a need to prove themselves at a significantly higher rate than their male peers (57.3 percent of females vs. 10.7 percent of males). However, this need seems to correlate with age, considering younger respondents more often reported this need to prove themselves in the workplace, with 50 percent of the 1981-2000 age bracket indicating as such. This compares with 36.4 percent of respondents in the 1945-1964 age bracket who said they felt the same.

### Gender breakdown and the need to 'prove' yourself



One female respondent in the 1981-2000 age bracket said, "I am the only female project manager, and a lot of people don't know how to handle it, so I'm constantly trying to prove myself."

gender  
DIVERSITY

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Female respondents often noted feeling undermined by colleagues unnecessarily second-guessing and double-checking their work.

“As a technical advisor, often times another opinion is sought without my knowledge to verify I know what I am talking about. In reality, a second opinion would be valued by me and I would welcome the team approach,” said one female respondent.

Another female respondent said: “As a woman, I need to prove myself repetitively and I am always subject to questioning even though they assign the most difficult roles to me and they know it will be perfectly done, but it’s like they don’t accept successful women.”

Male respondents’ open answers significantly differed.

“They either like what I do or they don’t. I don’t need to ‘prove’ anything,” said one male respondent.

Another said, “I think everyone needs to ‘prove’ themselves.”

Going further than career development opportunities and women’s roles in the workplace, women note that the wage gap persists.

“Men are paid more, promoted more and listened to,” one respondent says.

This remains a point of contention for many female manufacturing professionals, who are also reporting a higher rate of independent career development.

Although the majority of men and women are actively seeking career development opportunities on their own, 4.5 percent more women than men reported doing so. Additionally, nearly 10 percent more women are members of groups or organizations outside their companies.

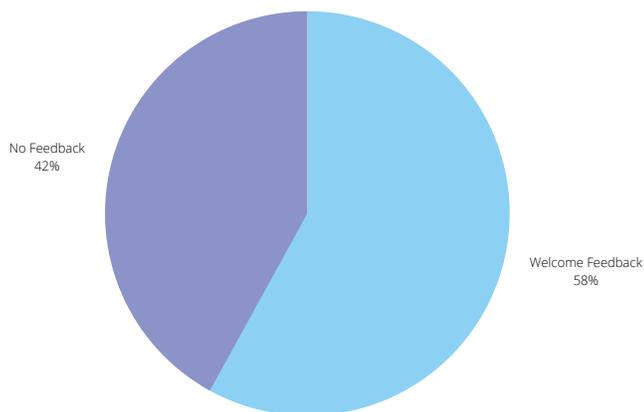
“No matter what you do, they still keep the wages for women below the national average and the men make well above the national average in the same pay category,” a female respondent said.

With this in mind, women frequently said they'd like to see their companies work harder at gender diversity, and several noted a lack of faith in their companies' gender diversity efforts.

“Women's leadership initiatives are purely for press and don't trickle down to the mid-level in my company. We are so big that it is good in certain areas, and down-right bad for other people,” said one female respondent.

Others said that their companies are proactive in encouraging gender diversity within their organizations, or are at least trying to be.

#### Company feedback and gender diversity



Unfortunately, 42 percent of total respondents said their companies do not welcome feedback about their gender diversity practices.

“They welcome feedback, but I think it goes in one ear and out the other like in most large companies,” one respondent said.

So, what do they want? Survey respondents indicate that they want their companies to do more. They want more of what their companies are already doing or, for those companies that haven't implemented any programs, they want them to start offering development opportunities like those listed earlier in this report.

“[I would like to see my company] support middle managers of all ages and genders with leadership training and create opportunities to move up,” one respondent said.

Another said: “More training classes offered internally, more regular discussions of next steps and potential pathways and what I need to do to get there.”

Ensuring managers are concerned with workforce development is another key point respondents made in their open responses about what they'd like to see their companies do.

# gender DIVERSITY

Survey respondents indicate that they want their companies to do more. They want more of what their companies are already doing or, for those companies that haven't implemented any programs, they want them to start offering development opportunities like those listed earlier in this report.

"The company needs to develop a process or program to look at all employees' development rather than leaving it at the manager level, or they need to better train the managers about how to do career development for direct reports," one respondent said."

"On-the-job and industry training that supports specific job functions. When I asked for this, I was told that their generic programs were applicable, they are not," one respondent said.

Another added: "I would like to see my company formally encourage participation in industry courses, organizations and events."

One-on-one training and mentorships were also among the development opportunities survey respondents said they desire.

"Mentoring and actual one-on-one development, helping each person reach their goals, rather than overarching training and seminars," one respondent said.

They also want their companies to encourage diversity of all kinds.

"Enforce equality and justice inside its departments when choosing between employees who should be nominated to the next course or development opportunity. Enforce gender equality," one respondent suggested.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Influential Women in Manufacturing's Gender Diversity and Career development survey was conducted by parent company Putman Media. The online survey was conducted between May and August and included a sample of 108 anonymous respondents.

Seventy-one percent of respondents to the survey identify as female, while 29 percent identify as male. By age, 24.4 percent were born between 1981 and 2000; 51.1 percent were born between 1965 and 1980; 23.7 percent were born between 1945 and 1964; and 0.8 percent were born before 1945.

The majority of respondents indicated they hold mid-level roles within their company, with 67.2 indicating as such. Executive level roles are held by 16.8 percent of survey respondents, and another 16 percent said they are in entry-level or nonsupervisory positions.

Survey respondents represented a range of company verticals and sizes. By vertical, 33.6 percent represented food or pharmaceutical; 29.8 percent represented other discrete manufacturing (e.g., automotive, machinery); 12.2 percent were in the technology space; 9.9 percent identified chemical or refining; 3.8 percent identified services (e.g., finance insurance, etc.); and 10.7 percent indicated other.

When it comes to company size, companies with more than 500 employees were represented by 46.2 percent of respondents. Another 25.4 percent represented companies with fewer than 50 employees. Twenty percent represented companies with 101-499 employees; and 8.5 percent of respondents represented companies with 51-100 employees.

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## survey METHODOLOGY

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