Egon Zehnder International has been partnering with the Financial Times “Women at the Top” initiative ever since its inception three years ago. In 2011, the FT Global Conference was staged for the first time in Shanghai. “The emerging market perspective has enriched this global conference, especially in times when many Western economies are struggling,” commented Cagla Bekbolet, a Turkish consultant working out of Egon Zehnder International’s London office. “As a firm, we are proud to support this initiative.”

Reflecting on the diversity issue from a leadership community standpoint

In her keynote speech, U.S. Ambassador Melanne Verveer said: “We are in a participation age. Everyone, regardless of gender and social standing should participate in the global economy. Investing in women is not just the right thing to do; it’s the smart thing to do.”

Top executives from all continents confirmed that while change was indeed taking place, the overall pace was very slow. While different specific gender-related matters attracted lively debate, as Cagla Bekbolet noted, quotas were not a key issue: “Top women do not want to owe their reputation to quotas.” And Damien O’Brien, CEO and Chairman of Egon Zehnder International and member of the FT “Women at the Top” judging panel, underlined: “Connecting with leaders in the entire world, it is clear that the real issue is how to get more women into top line management roles; the whole debate about quotas is distracting us from the real question.”

Words shared at the FT Global Conference in Shanghai

“Failure is not the opposite of success: it is often the stepping stone to success.”

(Arianna Huffington, President AOL Huffington Post Media)

“I am a big fan of short assignments. Putting together virtual teams can get over the mobility issue which can hold back women.”

(Lorna Davis, Global Biscuits Category Head, Kraft Foods, China)
One of the many leadership topics embraced by the conference theme was the mentoring debate. Data presented at one panel indicated that women are three times more likely to have mentors than men, but only half have sponsors who actually are empowered to make promotions.

Reflecting on his own experience, Dennis Ku, who heads Egon Zehnder International's Shanghai office, pointed out that companies endowed with diverse DNA are predestined to do well in penetrating the highly diverse Chinese market.

More information on the FT ranking can be found at www.ft.com/women-at-the-top.

More information about Egon Zehnder International's commitment as well as numerous engagements like the Rising Talent Initiative and sponsoring of Cambridge PhD-level research on gender bias can be found at www.egonzehnder.com/diversity.