

# 5 Actions to Enhance Leadership Diversity

**Gender parity doesn't happen on its own. It takes a conscious effort and steadfast commitment to change the lack of diverse talent within your upper tiers. Now more than ever, women are ready for their rightful seat at the proverbial table.**

The topic of gender parity is not a concern for just one company, one industry, or even one country. It is a global business issue being discussed worldwide. For many organisations, pushing this initiative can be a challenge, but it doesn't have to be. Employ these 5 steps to balance the gender scales at your organisation.

## 1. Find Your Visionary Leader

How many times has your company said, "We'll start a leadership development programme when we are 'ready'?" The truth is, no company is ever fully ready - especially without developed leaders.

A visionary leader needs to put a stake in the ground. Is that you? Set stretch goals for your organisation, knowing it will require you to be bold. Sharing these goals with the company can be a challenge, but it needs to be proactively addressed. Break these goals down into milestones and building blocks that can be achieved over the course of a year.

## 2. Share The Current Data

As you set these visionary goals, you may fear alienating the existing majority within your company. It's imperative to understand where your workforce is today. Analyse the demographics of your employees at different levels. This data tells a story. While 50% of your overall employees may be

women, what's that percentage at the top management levels?

Sharing it throughout your company allows everyone to clearly see where the gaps are. This starts a rich and meaningful dialogue about what the impact is to the company if you don't strive for gender balance.

Use this telling data as a springboard to motivate people to embrace the change initiatives, helping you build grassroots support and achieve an organisational-wide mind shift. Accelerating the careers of all high potentials will take buy-in at all levels.

## 3. Establish & Celebrate Early Wins

Take time to celebrate milestones as you achieve them. As your female high potentials make small changes to their work style and take on stretch assignments, it's empowering to recognise those small achievements. This reinforces the progress each person is making and gives senior leaders and executives an opportunity to see the diversity initiative in action.

On the flip side, celebrating these wins reinforces to the company that you are committed to seeing the programme succeed.

Another win worth noting – diversity initiatives are attractive to potential employees and customers. Find ways to celebrate your efforts externally so candidates and future business partners recognise the strides you are taking to advance women leaders at your organisation.

## 4. Analyse Organisational Practices

Organisational practices can sometimes be a barrier for women's advancement. We encourage companies to do a check:

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Where do you recruit? How diverse is your applicant pool? Are you attracting as many men as women? What are your interviewing practices?

Dr. Thorsten Thiel, Managing Director at GISMA Business School in Berlin, shared: "In Germany and many European countries, the question around gender equality in the job market is an important point of debate. Things can be done systematically to tackle this issue from a corporate and business perspective".

Another area to analyse is your current employee development programmes. Of the people who are enrolled in your highest leadership development programme, what percentage of them are women? Determine if the criteria for those programmes promotes career growth for women or prohibits it. This goes for your interviewing



and hiring practices, committees, and stretch assignments. Gaining awareness of your current practices can unearth red flags that previously went unnoticed or unaddressed.

### 5. Institute Manager Involvement & Executive Sponsorship

Involving managers and executives in the development efforts increases the woman's visibility. Line managers are an employee's #1 advocate for future growth opportunities – yet can also be the #1 barrier. Connect both the female employee and her manager with a professional coach during your development programme. This third-party coach will do wonders for opening up dialogue about the role of the manager in the woman's career advancement.

If women don't have relationships with various executives within their organisation, they're likely missing out on opportunities for growth. Executives are aware of opportunities for new departments, new roles, or new products; however, they are not always aware of the high potentials who could benefit from these opportunities. Being top of mind with an executive increases the chances of rising female leaders being tapped for that role or project.

Enhancing leadership diversity takes a bold commitment to dive in. The time is

NOW to tap the diverse high potentials at your organisation. Discover the difference an integrated Women in Leadership programme can make among your ranks.

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