

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP – CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

1. Pay and benefits

Workers today expect to “consume” work in the same way they live the rest of their lives. Individual choice and preference aren't just personal, they're professional. Work and personal life are no longer mutually exclusive, they are intrinsically linked. The next generation wants challenging work, skill development and flexibility. While women continue to do most of the [emotional labour](#) and unpaid work at home, it's critical that challenging work come with flexibility. More and more women are taking their careers into their own hands – 40% of businesses are women-owned and the number of female entrepreneurs has skyrocketed by 114% in the last two decades.

The good news – companies that help people work when, where and how it suits them won't just appeal to women. We're increasingly seeing what works for women works for men too, particularly younger workers who expect to spend more time with family, travelling or learning new skills.

2. Focus on succession

Succession isn't just the most watched show of 2020, it also needs to be top priority for leaders. Women make up half of the world's talent pool. In Canada, 50.2% of the college/university educated labour force is made up of women. They have long eclipsed men in earning college degrees, yet women still only hold 25% of leadership roles. Plain and simple, an all-male succession bench simply won't cut it.

To address this, companies need to break down gendered career paths, so women don't get stuck in job silos that are historically female like communications, HR and support roles.

To accelerate women into leadership starts with questioning what is truly required to climb the corporate ladder. Is an extensive finance career needed to be a successful general manager? Will set office hours improve employee productivity? (If you think so, data says otherwise.) Flip the question and ask how it could work, not why it doesn't. Be explicit about where to progress women and help them obtain the skills and experience to manage and drive the business in technical and operational positions.

3. Gender-skills gap

Data tells us that women are under-represented in the roles that are growing the fastest – notably STEM – and that the roles that have historically been held predominantly by women (like business and financial operations, and office administration) are roles most susceptible to disruption by automation. If we do not intervene, the imbalance will accelerate from the double gap.

While we may have reached near parity in the [number of men and women graduating with degrees in social sciences and mathematics](#), today, women make up only 18% of computer science graduates, compared with 37% in the 1980s. In cloud computing, just 12% of professionals are women. Similarly, in engineering: 15% and Data and AI: 26%.

4. Walk the talk

While women and men enter the workforce in roughly equal numbers, women fall behind in promotions from the very first step on the management ladder. We know from our own research that the key to improving these odds lies with senior leaders – male and female – to ensure women are not left behind. As leaders, we all need to demonstrate this is a business priority – by what we say, what we do, what we measure and how we lead.

The single most powerful thing an organization can do to promote more women leaders is to create a culture of “Conscious Inclusion” – building the desire, insight and capacity of people to make decisions. Lead, think and act with the conscious intent of including everyone.

At the dawn of the 2020s, we can't remain rooted in the past. We must hit the accelerator to build an equal and inclusive future. Our economic growth, workforce participation and future generations depend on it.