IN FOCUS

Gender Inclusiveness from the Top Down: Effects on Leadership Pipelines and Workplace Cultures

ABSTRACT

Gender inclusiveness in organizations has been an elusive goal. This white paper will address the gap between top leaders' alignment with business strategy and the achievement of transformational goals related to gender inclusiveness. Although the evidence associated with the business case for women's leadership has been strong, companies and organizations have been slow in moving women through the leadership pipelines into the C-suite. As a leader, have you ever wondered how your organization can realistically achieve its strategic goals for gender inclusiveness? Have you ever felt there is a large gap between the lofty, strategic goals for gender inclusiveness and the actual day-to-day behaviors of managers? This white paper explores how understanding, defining and rewarding the leader behaviors that contribute to gender inclusiveness are important steps in accelerating inclusiveness in organizations. We discuss how leaders have utilized the platform provided by HR processes in talent management, executive development, and succession planning to place women in C-suite roles and advance a culture of gender inclusiveness.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR GENDER INCLUSIVENESS

Gender inclusiveness is viewed as a leadership imperative within organizations today. It is defined as the way an organization configures its systems and structures to value and leverage the potential, and to limit the disadvantages, of differences (Roberson, 2006). Although the practice of gender inclusivity in organizations has been evolving over time, the relative numbers of male and female leaders at the top of organizations tell us that sustainable business transformation related to gender inclusiveness has been elusive. Despite recent imperatives to focus on gender equality, while there is near gender parity for entry-level employees in S&P 500 companies, women currently make up 37 percent of mid-level managers, 25 percent of executive/senior-level managers, 19 percent of board seats, and only 4 percent of CEO positions (Catalyst, 2016).

The implications of a lack of parity between men and women are enormous and represent an important opportunity for economic growth, both in the U.S. and across the globe. Recent analyses have estimated that $12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015). Many studies have shown that gender diversity in boards of directors and corporate leadership roles have positive effects on return on investments and return on assets (Erhardt, et al, 2003; Herring, 2009; Curtis et al, 2012; Woetzel et al., 2015).

Further, it has been demonstrated

globally that women's economic development can drive empowerment and that, similarly, women's empowerment can drive economic development (Duflo, 2012).

For example, studies in India and China have demonstrated that increased economic opportunities for women enhanced women's lives overall (Jensen, 2010; Attanasio & Kaufman, 2009). In addition, evidence from a range of countries shows that increasing the share of household income controlled by women changes spending in ways that benefit children (OECD, 2012). However, expectations for women with regard to household labor, access to resources and access to education may continue to hold them back, even in the face of economic opportunity (Duflo, 2012).

Therefore, while women benefit from economic opportunities, when policies and culture align with these opportunities, they are truly able to thrive and maximize their ability to add to the bottom line. Businesses can learn from economic initiatives worldwide by extending this same logic to the workplace. Providing opportunities for women is one step in the process of truly allowing women to thrive at work. However, creating cultures and climates that support women's advancement is paramount to continued success in maximizing talent development.

THE ALIGNMENT OF LEADERSHIP, CULTURE, AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

Overall, given the evidence that shows that gender parity in the workplace is associated with improved profitability, why and how does inequality continue to persist? It's possible that misalignment exists between organizational goals regarding gender inclusivity and leaders' capabilities for effectively sup-

porting it.

The achievement of transformation and change in organizations to meet the demands of the future is more likely when the change emanates from the CEO and top leaders (Drucker, 1999; Gilley, 2005). In growing organizational capability, i.e. the culture, systems, and processes within an organization, many executives have learned that the HR issues of talent, capability and leadership are critical to success (Gilley, Dixon, & Gilley, 2008; Gilley, McMillan, & Gilley, 2009; Ulrich & Allen, 2016).

In recent decades, HR has enabled a better understanding of the leadership knowledge, skills and abilities that are required for organizations to succeed. As global markets have flourished, there has also been a recognition of the need for organizations to value inclusiveness in order to reflect the diversity of their stakeholders (Roberson, 2006).

As a result, many organizations are now seeking to incorporate gender diversity into their leadership frameworks. Although studies of leadership have made important contributions to the understanding of leadership constructs and their measurement, few (if any) leadership paradigms have been built with gender inclusiveness in mind. For example, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass, Avolio, & Jung, 1999), which encompasses transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles does not include any content relevant to inclusivity with regard to gender or any other forms of diversity.

Similarly, the idea of ethical leadership (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005) includes behaviors regarding "doing the right thing" but does not explicitly include any behaviors which directly address gender, inclusivity, or diversity

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management more broadly. Because of the lack of focus on inclusivity as a key component of positive leadership, the concept of gender inclusive leadership has remained unexamined, which underscores the importance of the current work.

Furthermore, organizations have not yet developed a widespread acceptance of the value added when frameworks are supported by best behavioral practices. There has been a gap, therefore, between espousing the value of inclusiveness and understanding the actual behaviors that leaders must demonstrate in order to achieve inclusiveness in their organizations.

In our research on male champions for women's leadership we have sought to address this gap and to better understand how the alignment of leadership, culture, and talent management may achieve gender inclusiveness in organizations. While the HR systems and tools for leadership development and talent management may provide a "hard-wired" structure for gender inclusivity, it requires alignment with "softer skills" (i.e., the values-driven interpersonal behaviors and actions taken by senior leaders). As outlined above, within most organizations, there are higher concentrations of male leaders than female leaders, particularly in C-suite roles.

Therefore, male leaders may be particularly well-positioned to enhance the likelihood for gender inclusive cultures to thrive. Thus, we focus on the behaviors of male advocates, or champions, within this white paper and will provide vivid illustrations of the leader behaviors through their exact quotations. The daily actions and decisions of male champions reverberate across their organizations through selection and recruitment, succession planning, and day-to-day behavior toward direct reports, teams and organizational leadership. Learning and demonstrating the behaviors associated with gender inclusiveness may create a firm foundation for gender parity in organizations. In the words of one leader, "Our CEO is a good example. He's the first one to go to the women's leadership network and talk about how this is an imperative and a critical business issue. We need diversity in our workforce."

In describing the importance of a leader demonstrating his true values, one CEO said, "The difference really comes when the male leader is actually committed in his own right to pay equity, gender equity, and to making sure that women leaders have the same support and opportunities as male leaders, because he believes in it."

The alignment of leadership, culture, and talent management could be summed up in the observations of one senior executive, "I have really recognized that where we're seeing more inclusive and diverse leadership is when it's looked at as a talent issue."

MALE CHAMPIONS FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Across industries, engaging male champions may be a critical component for achieving gender inclusivity. A study by Catalyst (2009) explored the traits and experiences that motivated men to champion gender equality. However, there is less clarity about which behaviors actually positively impact gender parity in the workplace. We know that there are many male leaders who would like to take a greater role in fostering women's career development within organizations (Valerio, 2009).

However, the range of specific behaviors that male champions actually

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demonstrate to create gender inclusiveness in their organizations has been less defined. If these behaviors are uncovered, male champions may be increasingly likely to serve as key drivers of gender inclusiveness in leadership pipelines.

Our research examines the extent to which gender inclusive leadership behaviors of those in power might lead to more positive organizational outcomes, specifically the behaviors of male leaders at the top of organizations (Valerio & Sawyer, 2016). Our ongoing research asks the following questions: What are the key behaviors practiced by leaders who are demonstrating gender inclusive leadership? What is the impact of these inclusive leader behaviors on their organizations?

For this white paper, we will focus on the following subset of research questions[1]: 1) What are the key patterns of behavior that top leaders demonstrate to support the business strategy and transformational goals of gender inclusiveness? and 2) What do their efforts tell us about the alignment of leadership, talent, culture and organizational design that lead to more talented women in the leadership pipelines and an organizational culture of gender inclusiveness?

To examine our research questions, we interviewed a large group of male champions, who were nominated by high-ranking females, as well as the females who nominated them. The themes related to alignment and integration with gender-inclusiveness which emerged from our analysis of these interviews were:

- Practicing leadership in talent management, resulting in more women in C-suite roles
- Providing formal and informal avenues to achieve gender equality and inclusiveness
- Emphasizing gender inclusive leadership as a key organizational strategy to advance the culture

We will describe each of these themes in more detail below, continuing to provide exact quotations from leaders.

PRACTICING EFFECTIVE TALENT MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP

First, senior male executives placed a strong prioritization on developing talent in their organizations. For example, one of our male champions explained, "I see myself as a champion for talent development, in a broad sense of the word, and that means for females, for males, for different groups that are underrepresented."

Similarly, leaders felt that being inclusive was just smart business. One male champion stated, "I've always used attracting top talent as part of my own toolkit and you can't say that unless you're looking at all talent, in my opinion." Another direct report to a CEO mentioned his active involvement in all of the talent development programs that his company offered, "For high potentials, we have several programs… depending on where you are in your career, and I talk at all of these."

Other senior leaders emphasized the value of consistently available mentoring and coaching for all people and its effects on the culture of the organization, noting, "When diversity is right, when your culture is right…then you re-

[1]To find out which behaviors were viewed as contributing to gender inclusivity in organizations, we interviewed male champions who were nominated by female leaders and the female leaders who nominated them. All 60 of our interviewees were in the C-suite or a couple of levels below C-suite in Fortune 500 companies and non-profit organizations.

ally want to focus on the mentoring and the coaching. And that's for everyone in the group, not just the women."

Similarly, another leader mentioned being focused on the individual, not on the social group they belonged to, stating, "I don't look at it as male or female. It's all individual, you know? What motivates it or inspires them, what's going to get them to the next level…it's never about whether they're male or female." Speaking about mentoring and coaching as if it were part of a personal vocational calling, another leader stated, "You don't get any credit for it at the end of the day, in terms of a performance review or compensation. And so you're either in it or you're not. The first issue is, are you interested in developing someone's career, male or female?"

One of our female interviewees appreciated that male champions were dedicated to developing leaders and didn't treat coaching meetings as unimportant or as secondary to business goals. She recalled, "I've seen male champions make sure that they take time to carry out the formal mentoring program that we have in the company. The time they set aside for that mentoring is considered unmovable. They really take this seriously, put that on their calendar and make it something that they don't change on a whim. They are very committed to making sure that they keep that time on their calendar and provide that level of engagement."

Finally, one female leader summed it up best, saying, "I think that there's just a group of people who don't see race and gender as their first decision criteria. They see talent. And that's even better because you don't want to be put in a position because of your particular diversity category, where you're not qualified

for the job or, if it's a growth opportunity, the person there isn't going to be invested in your success."

Overall, leaders reported that having a strong focus on talent development and on being consciously consistent in their development of all talented people, regardless of gender, ultimately led to gender inclusivity at the organizational level.

PROVIDING FORMAL AND INFORMAL AVENUES FOR CREATING GENDER EQUALITY

Second, while conscious consistency in practices provided a good foundation for leaders supporting talented female employees, it was also necessary to actively create gender equality at work, and to avoid passivity when unfairness was discovered to exist.

For example, many senior executives directly placed a value on fairness as a foundation for talent management practices and procedures. One leader said, "I think the main thing is to create fairness. The first thing that really started me focusing on women was that women weren't being treated fairly. And it's not equally, it's actually fairly."

In addition to making sure that women were being treated fairly, another leader mentioned making sure that women had a seat at the table was of utmost importance, stating, "First of all, it's intentionality. Second, it's having a strategy, like making sure your leadership table is broad enough that it has female leaders as well as male leaders, and developing opportunities for them to lead."

A female leader mentioned the strategic and influential role played by male champions, stating, "Until you get an influential voice in the room saying, 'Hey, really, we need a bigger list,' or, 'Why are we not talking about these other people

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(i.e. talented women)', [it may not happen]. So it really makes HR very happy now because it helps facilitate the role that they [HR] were trying to play. They just didn't have the influence behind it. We have the systems and processes in place… now as we build more of these male champions, the influence is there."

Another male leader shared a similar sentiment, recalling, "I would ask them, 'How come, in the last month, you've gone after X amount of reps, and you haven't interviewed one woman for the position?' I started asking questions like this. I am not expecting them to have the answers. I'm expecting them to know that the next time I ask these questions. You better have the answers, because I already have the data."

Finally, one executive discussed the power of a development program designed to provide a larger perspective for high-potential women to enable them to understand more about [governmental operations] and their organization, which they wouldn't have had exposure to if they were only provided with informal means of development, "It helps them to bring those experiences back to improve their leadership perspective as they talk with others."

In the same vein, a male leader mentioned the importance of truly thinking about women's promotions through the organization, to ensure that they weren't being passed over in favor of less qualified men, saying, "Well, I think one of the most important actions you could take is to make certain that women have the opportunity to take challenging developmental assignments in the organization. They have the opportunity to get what I'll call real promotions. And real promotions are promotions where there

can be one of two outcomes, the person can succeed or the person can fail."

Some leaders even reported displaying very specific behaviors that they believed helped with increasing gender inclusivity at work. For example, one CEO mentioned, "One behavior that I've become more aware of recently is that I have been insisting on allowing women to speak without interruption in meetings. That's really one of the few behaviors that is really strongly gender specific."

Taken together, male champions and female leaders were aware that practicing equality in talent management was important, but that actively addressing bias and creating networks for women to gain access to information to which males already have access was also crucial for supporting female leadership.

EMPHASIZING GENDER INCLUSIVITY AS ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY TO ADVANCE THE CULTURE

Third, many CEOs expressed the need to think strategically about gender inclusivity and to consider the implications for the organization as a whole. For example, a female leader mentioned that, by including women in meetings and conversations about organizational strategy, male champions were creating more inclusive goals, which led to a stronger and more comprehensive strategic vision.

Further, this behavior was also allowing women to more readily understand the organizational politics and structure, which was viewed as crucial for advancement. She said, "So, just the fact that strategic documents are shared with women they trust sheds a whole new light on the context of the company.

And then you know which units are making the large revenue, where the priorities are going to be, and that sheds light on so many levels—what's important to the organization but also where that woman might want to go next, where the money is flowing, and just the ability to understand, when senior people are starting to talk about those things."

Additionally, a male leader mentioned the importance of thinking of gender inclusivity as key to driving organizational success, stating, "It comes from a real commitment to the people who are in organizations, not just the organization."

A female leader mentioned that male champions she had worked with specifically linked diversity strategy to organizational strategy in their conversations throughout the organization, stating, "They are an advocate for diversity. They say, 'Here's why I'm a woman's advocate, because that diversity is needed here'… and being a diversity advocate is the right thing to do. Kind of an ecological thing, it gets into the primary concepts of social science where you want to help the ecosystem. Healthy ecosystems have diversity."

Many also expressed an understanding of the value of metrics as they relate to gender inclusivity—measuring productivity, the impact of diversity efforts, and the presence and promotions of female leaders. For example, one interviewee recalled, "What I saw that really made me realize the value in developing women leaders was when I inherited a female leader as part of a team and introduced another female leader who was also an excellent recruit for that particular role. And then I saw the productivity of the team improve dramatically."

Some leaders spoke about the importance of tracking diversity-related metrics. Specifically, one leader stated, "We have our goals, we track retention and we have our metrics. And we tend to it. We have those processes in place."

Leaders also mentioned that, while keeping track of diversity metrics is important for changing the fabric of the organization, that gender-inclusive policies are also important. A leader mentioned the importance of listening to female leaders and making changes in accordance with their feedback, stating, "We just yesterday announced expanded maternity/paternity leave because we are successful in getting a lot of younger women into our workforce and, you know, we hear loud and clear that a little extra time would enable that."

Finally, leaders also mentioned that once a gender inclusive culture is in place, it becomes self-reinforcing. One female CEO summed up the effects of fostering gender inclusiveness from the top down as she reflected on her own career, "I think that part of the reason for my rise in this organization over the last two decades has a lot to do with the culture. The tone from the top was set by males because that's who was at the top twenty years ago."

One of the male leaders stated that it was important to root the culture of gender inclusivity in simple messages that would help to spread these ideas throughout the organization, saying, "How does being a male champion benefit the organization? It uses 100 percent of the company's resources and not 50 percent."

In all, leaders seemed aware of the fact that holding employees accountable for gender-related metrics was a good place to start, but wasn't enough. Keeping track of gender-related metrics and creating good policies which supported women in the organization provided a foundation for an organizational culture that truly welcomed female leaders. However, main-

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Male and female leaders have reported that learning and demonstrating the behaviors associated with gender inclusiveness creates the firm foundation for gender parity in organizations.

taining a gender-inclusive culture was viewed as crucial in truly transforming the organizational culture to align with strategic gender-based initiatives. In order to maintain gender inclusive cultures, a male leader summed it up best, saying, "From the standpoint of diversity, it's really nice to have a different point of view when you're looking at problems in your business. Having a woman's point of view gives you a whole different perspective. So I think that diversity, not for diversity's sake, but diversity to really have a well-thought-out management organization. I think it's really very important."

THE WAY FORWARD

Overall, many leaders are aware of the pressure that exists within organizations to enact gender inclusive behaviors, but they may be unsure of what those behaviors are. This white paper addresses the gap that exists in many organizations between espousing gender inclusiveness and actually achieving inclusiveness. Organizations need a better understanding of how the alignment of leadership, culture and talent management may help to achieve gender inclusiveness. Many male and female leaders have reported that learning and demonstrating the behaviors associated with gender inclusiveness creates the firm foundation for gender parity in organizations.

Here, we have provided the foundation for understanding how male champions who are particularly good at demonstrating gender inclusivity behave, aligning with their organization's diversity and inclusion strategy. The themes related to alignment and integration with gender inclusiveness in organizations are:

- Practicing leadership in talent management, resulting in more women in C-suite roles
- Providing formal and informal avenues to achieve gender equality and inclusiveness
- Emphasizing gender inclusive leadership as a key organizational strategy to advance the culture

Male champions demonstrated gender inclusive leadership because they viewed talent management as paramount to leadership and were consciously consistent in their talent management practices, regardless of gender. Male champions were willing to speak up when they saw gender bias occurring and actively created support networks and impactful developmental experiences for women who were talented, but were being previously overlooked because of their gender.

Male champions set goals regarding hiring and retention metrics related to gender and enacted gender-friendly policies, but also recognized that thinking strategically about organizational culture created true alignment between organizational goals for gender inclusivity and the behaviors of top leaders.

Male champions recognized that their actions mattered to men and women within their organizations—and they weren't afraid to use their power and influence to set an active example for gender inclusive leadership, promoting organization-wide "champion" cultures for female leaders.

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