

Breaking the Boardroom

A guide for British businesses on how to support the female leaders of the future



Foreword by Ann Pickering, O2 HR Director and member of the O2 board



This is a crucial time for British businesses. With Lord Davies' 25% women on boards target deadline looming, the pressure is on to make sure that we don't fall short on delivering something that, today, shouldn't even be in question.

In an ideal world, there would be no need for targets, no discussion of quotas, and no call for dedicated programmes to support women at work. There would be no discrimination – unconscious, positive or otherwise – no outdated stereotypes and no preconceived notions or snap judgements. Everyone's talent and potential would be rewarded and gender would be irrelevant.

But the reality, as our own research has shown, is that we're still some way off such a workplace utopia. Initiatives like the Lord Davies Report and Think, Act, Report have done a fantastic job of highlighting the importance of this issue and prompting companies both inside and outside of the FTSE 100 to really reflect on the gender imbalance within their workforce.

But, with nearly half of working women saying that all the decision-makers in their company are male, it's clear that not enough women are seeing the impact of this progress. It's our belief that, if we are to achieve sustainable change both now and in the future, employers need to focus their efforts on women at every level of their organisation, creating a strong pipeline of female talent ready to take their seats in the boardrooms of the future.

Workplace diversity has long been a focus for us at O2 as we recognise that, as well as being morally right, it makes good business sense. After all, how are we meant to understand our customers if our workforce doesn't reflect them? One of the initiatives we're particularly proud of is our Women in Leadership programme, which we've found to be a really valuable way of celebrating, encouraging and supporting top talent. We don't claim to be perfect and, like all businesses, have areas where we can do better, but this is something that we're really passionate about getting right.

That's why we've re-designed and are re-launching our own Women in Leadership programme in 2015 for the talented and ambitious women in our organisation who both want and have the potential to climb the ladder. That's also why we've partnered with the CIPD to create this guide, sharing what we've learnt with other businesses and offering advice on how to approach a Women in Leadership programme, regardless of the size of the business. Our hope is that this prompts employers all over the UK to reflect on the support they currently offer to their female employees, what they could be doing differently and, ideally, encourage them to implement a quality Women in Leadership programme that helps women get where they want - and deserve - to be.

Of course we know that initiatives like this can't exist in a vacuum. True and long-lasting workplace diversity requires a much wider cultural shift and a genuine commitment from the people at the top. Without this kind of broader dedication, any positive result from such a programme will be short-lived and fail to make any real impact.

The fact is that the business case for workplace diversity has been proven time and time again. If employers don't give their female employees the right support and opportunities they need to reach the top, they run the risk of missing out on the skills, leadership potential and vision of, not just this generation of women, but generations to come.



Introduction

In 2011, Lord Davies launched his Women on Boards Report challenging FTSE 100 companies to increase the number of women on their boards to 25%. With less than a year to go before the deadline for that challenge, businesses across the country are taking stock of their progress to date.

Since the original report was published, there has been significant progress towards achieving Lord Davies' goals. Not only are there more women on the boards of many UK companies, but more and more businesses are signing up to government-led initiatives such as Think, Act, Report, publicly standing by their commitment to workplace diversity.

But while the business benefits of a diverse leadership are now widely accepted, the most recent forecasts suggest that Lord Davies' original target may be missed. Furthermore, our own research shows that far too many women still don't feel there are enough women in senior positions within their company. Clearly more needs to be done if we are to create the conditions for sustainable, long-term workplace diversity.

45% of women believe that women still aren't occupying enough senior positions

At O2, we recognise the need to take action to nurture a healthy pipeline of talent throughout our business – whether that's men or women – which is why we introduced our own Women in Leadership programme to help achieve this.

While a leadership programme specifically designed for women isn't a remedy to engrained working cultures – nor will it solve issues overnight – implemented properly, such a programme can help talented women reach the senior leadership positions they aspire to.

We know that not all businesses have the resources to implement such a programme from scratch. That's why we have partnered with the CIPD, the professional body for HR and people development, to create this guide to help other businesses create their own tailored programme. In the course of developing this guide we've sought out the views of 2,000 working women, asking them about their career experiences, how their employers' diversity initiatives stack up and what they would want from such a programme themselves.

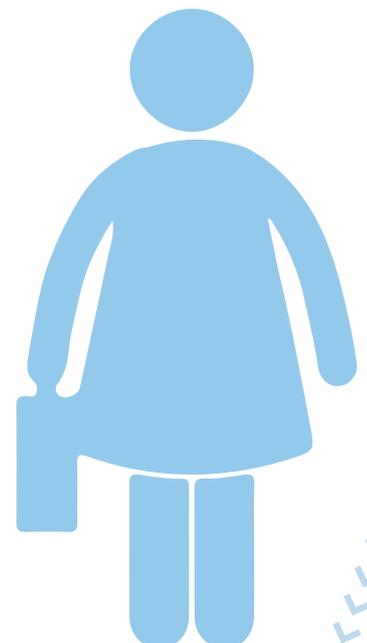
We also established a coalition of contributors, eight senior businesswomen from different industries, businesses and roles. Each contributor provided their own unique insight into their successes and gave their management perspective on the working environment for women seeking leadership development today.

48% of women say the decision makers in their company are male

With the debate around workplace diversity evolving on a daily basis other methods and recommendations will of course need to be considered, but we hope that this guide will provide valuable food for thought for those businesses dedicated to supporting the women within their organisation.

"Any company that adopts a proper Women in Leadership programme is a company to watch. If you look at the most successful companies in each sector, there's almost always a woman on the board. Women bring a different ingredient to the board, so any company that doesn't have a woman at that level – see you later alligator! They'll get left behind."

- Jo Cox, Chief Commercial Officer, Sure



Part One: Laying The Groundwork

For any leadership programme to achieve long-lasting cultural change, it should be based on a number of factors, not least of which is thorough preparation and getting the fundamentals right. After all, there's no point implementing a programme if you don't know what problem you're trying to fix or what might help fix it. Rushing into it or implementing a generic programme not tailored to your business' individual needs is a waste of time and resources.

Consider these three fundamental questions:

1. Where are the gaps?

Take a good look at the structure and make-up of your organisation and assess where its strengths and weaknesses are in terms of workplace diversity. Ask yourself:

- Are there any gender imbalances? At what levels and in what departments?
- Can you pin-point a specific moment or level when women tend to stop progressing? Why is that? Be sure to base this on feedback from actual employees – not just your own assumptions
- Does your organisation have effective support systems in place already? Are they under or oversubscribed? And perhaps most importantly, what do employees think of them?

2. What does success look like for you?

Once you know the challenges you're trying to overcome, it's vital that you understand what you as a business are aiming to achieve, and what your female employees would want from a Women in Leadership programme:

- Take the time to define your objectives and ideal outcomes for the programme from the start. Make sure that it is designed to support, complement, and add value to, your business goals
- Share these objectives with senior colleagues within the business – it's imperative that people at all levels of the business understand the business case for improving gender diversity and are bought into the programmes' objectives
- Consult women working within your organisation to understand what they want from it – pay particular attention not just to the skills and expertise that they want to develop but also the format that would be most beneficial
- Consider running a pilot programme with a smaller group to test your thinking and ensure it'll meet your objectives

3. Who should participate?

In an ideal world, you would offer a place to every woman in your business. But even in the biggest of organisations it is unlikely that there will be the time and resource to offer bespoke leadership development beyond existing people policies. Consider:

- What numbers are realistic based on the objectives you've identified? Defining the needs of the business and aligning the programme and selection process accordingly will deliver a greater return on investment than simply selecting every woman who is good at their job
- What selection criteria will you use? Define a clear definition for who should participate in each stage. And remember, you're looking for someone who is more than just good at their job. It's about leadership potential and drive. After all, just because someone is doing well in their current role it doesn't mean that they have the potential to lead the business – or in fact, would want to!

28% of women want to be a CEO one day

"Women need to understand that it's assumed you're really good at your job. That won't cut it on its own. You also need to be an outstanding influencer, have an impactful, persuasive personal brand, and make sure the right people know you."

- Sarah Brummit, MD, Sarah Brummitt Ltd

The Importance Of Line Management

While a Women in Leadership programme should address the specific needs of those women it seeks to support, businesses must also provide development opportunities to all their employees – regardless of gender, age or position.

Our research found that of those women whose career had not met their expectations, more than a third blamed poor line management for their lack of progression – more than any other factor.

Line managers are at the heart of how employees learn and develop in the workplace. With most development taking place on the job and formal training often initiated by line managers, the importance of good line management cannot be overstated.

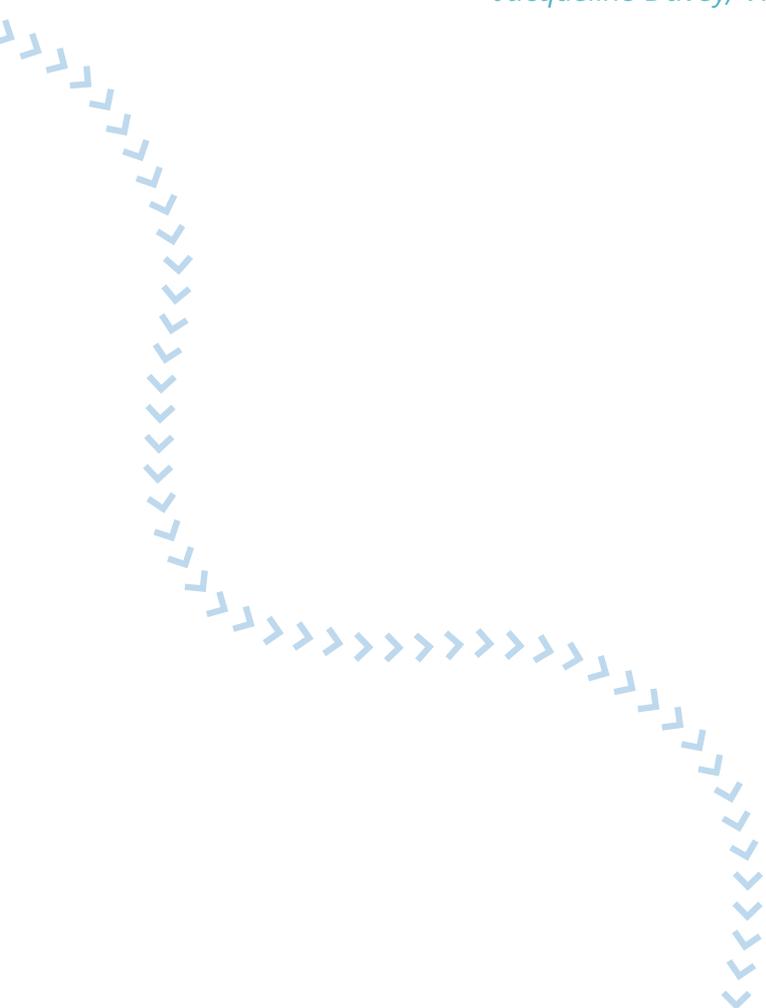
But it cannot exist in a vacuum. Line management has to be based on an agreement of the values and behaviours that need to be embodied from the board down to the front line. There also has to be a clear understanding of what good people management looks like to inform leadership and management development programmes at all levels. Evidence from the government-sponsored Engage for Success movement suggests that inclusive organisational cultures which encourage and enable employees to go the extra mile are underpinned by four key enablers:

- Clarity and buy-in from employees over organisational purpose
- A sense of integrity reflected by the fact that people at all levels are adhering to its stated values in how they behave
- People throughout the organisation feel that they have a voice, and that their views matter and are taken into account
- Good quality line management; managers at all levels who can win people's hearts and minds

All businesses must ensure that the fundamentals of people management are in place before they consider implementing additional programmes such as Women in Leadership.

“You need to be very clear about your ambition and make sure it's well known. Your manager is not a mind reader. He/she doesn't know if you don't tell them. If you want to be on the board – tell them.”

- Jacqueline Davey, VP for Enterprise Sales, IBM



Part Two: Key Development Areas

While there is no 'one-size fits all' approach to creating a programme of this kind, our research has identified three common obstacles holding women back in their career development. These are confidence, networking and being comfortable with being themselves.

That is not to say that other factors such as engrained working practices, discrimination and negative office politics might not still be major obstacles in specific places of work – as sadly is still the case for some women. However, these are the three challenges that have come up time and time again and are therefore clearly essential for any development programme.

Nurturing self-confidence

Our research shows that more than a third of women lack the confidence to put themselves forward for promotion, push for a pay rise or ask for more development opportunities. The magnitude of this is compounded by the fact that even when women feel their career has exceeded their expectations, more than a third attribute it to luck than any other factor. As Christine O'Brien, Partner at Baker & McKenzie, puts it: "We're dealing with a proportion of the population with a genuine disability – an acute lack of confidence. This is the single biggest obstacle that women face."

1 in 3 women attribute their career success to luck

Confidence becomes a greater challenge for women as they gain seniority. Ines van Gennip, Samsung's Marketing Director, IT & Mobile Division, notes that earlier on in a women's career the male / female balance is usually much more even and confidence is not so much of an issue, but the higher up women climb they encounter bigger personalities and become increasingly outnumbered by men, which puts greater demand on women's confidence to feel effective and have presence.

Any Women in Leadership programme has to tackle this issue head on, helping women identify their own individual strengths and empowering them to stand up beside their male colleagues.

Working the room

A quarter of all the women surveyed (26%) said that not knowing how to network with influential people or how to promote themselves with internal stakeholders (23%) was a key factor holding them back in their career. There is an important role for development programmes to help women build their ability to identify and network with relevant individuals, but to also give them the opportunity to build new relationships with peers and superiors inside and outside their organisation.

As well as extending individual influence and forging meaningful relationships, networking is also an important way to raise awareness of different issues. For example, women who have strong networks are more informed about internal politics and are better equipped to navigate the challenges they present.

26% believe not knowing how to network or promote themselves is holding them back

Embracing individuality

Despite the benefits of a diverse workforce being widely discussed, it appears that many women are still conforming to stereotypes of what it means to be a successful woman in business: 41% believe senior women in their place of work conform to the 'alpha female' stereotype, while a quarter feel that failing to become 'one of the boys' is holding them back.

Organisations need to foster an environment in which women don't feel the pressure to act like men – or in any other contrived way – in order to succeed. In fact, our contributors emphasised that women have unique and natural advantages in leadership that need to be celebrated.

While the responsibility is on senior management to create a culture in which women are empowered to be themselves, it's also important that organisations provide support to help women identify their individual strengths and become positive role models to others. Jo Cox, Chief Commercial Officer at Sure, says: "You have to embrace being a woman in a leadership role and understand the strength that gives you. Some women think there's a way to gain leadership by removing those softer elements and behaving like a man, but actually I think I get more out of my team by being a woman. I understand people better, I read my audience well and I have a good gut instinct."

"Within the business world there's been an inconsistency over the years around how women believe they should behave at work to be successful. I've seen examples of women behaving like men and also how they would on a night out with friends. Regardless of gender, it's about being yourself and being professional."

- Anne-Marie White, Head of Client Engagement, Imparta

Part Three: Programme Delivery

While the exact content and format of a Women in Leadership programme should be determined by the individual business' objectives and the needs of the women taking part, our research identified a number of key components that all businesses should consider:

1. Assign mentors

- Almost half (47%) of the women we spoke to said that a mentor was the most valuable thing a Women in Leadership programme could offer them
- Good mentors – either male or female – give people advice on how to build their career through honest feedback and senior management insight. The overwhelming majority of the women we spoke to expressed the importance of individual and personalised support, either in the form of a mentor, coach or official sponsor, over and above their line manager

47%
would
value a
mentor

2. Set clear goals – and a plan to reach them

- Goal-setting is a vital part of any Women in Leadership programme – with 38% of women saying they would value an individual development plan. But goal-setting should be much more than just a personal development plan. It's about getting women to identify where they want to be in 1, 5 and even 10 years time and helping them to get there
- Once goals have been identified, it's vital that either those facilitating the discussion, their mentor or their line manager, help the individual to create a plan that will help them achieve these goals

“Any Women in Leadership programme has to encourage a networking environment, but it's vital that women are encouraged to network intelligently. There's no point networking for the sake of networking – you have to know what you're trying to achieve.”

- Jacqueline Davey, VP for Enterprise Sales, IBM

3. Hold regular peer-to-peer sessions

- Opportunities for women on the programme to come together to share experiences and help overcome barriers or challenges are incredibly valuable, with a third of the women we spoke to feeling a women's network would help them reach more senior levels. Run properly, peer-to-peer sessions provide an opportunity for participants to learn from others at a similar level, network with those on the programme and get honest feedback from their peers
- It's also important that organisations provide these opportunities outside their own workforce. There are plenty of networking organisations that provide meaningful opportunities for women from different businesses and sectors to learn from one another

1 in 3 feel
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Keeping sessions focused and positive is important. Kerrine Bryan, Principal Electrical Engineer and member of the IET, cautions: “While women's networks and peer-to-peer sessions are vital, it's essential that they don't become a soapbox for negative experiences. All this does is foster a culture of 'us versus them' – something that must be avoided at all costs. Rather, these sessions need to be constructive and more focused on what we can learn from each other.”

“As well as learning from peers internally, there's definitely a role for creating opportunities to network with people externally too – whether that's encouraging people to join existing external networking groups or even partnering up with other like-minded organisations to create new groups. Meeting and learning from people working in different environments can be incredibly valuable to both individuals and the company as a whole.”

- Helen Lamb, Executive Director, Managed Infrastructure Services, Fujitsu

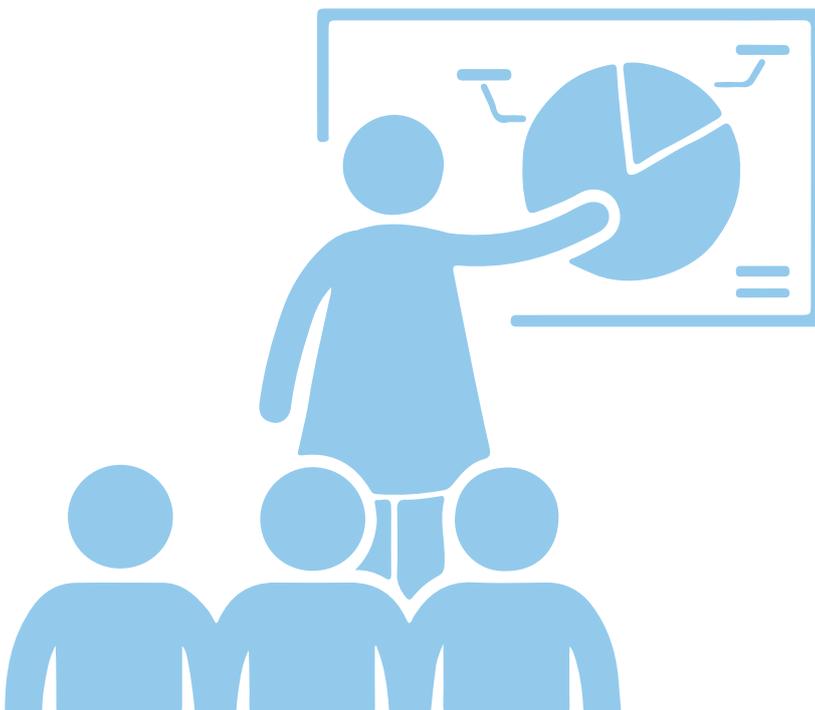
4. Work with credible external trainers

- While not every organisation will be able to afford to recruit and work with external trainers, we know this is valuable to many women. In fact, 39% of women surveyed believe training and coaching from external experts is vital. Examine what expertise you have available to you within your business and map this against the expectations of those on the programme. You may find that having even one well-run external training session can have a huge impact on those involved

5. Make sure participants give back

- Finally, it's important that participants in any Women in Leadership programme understand that, in return for participating in the programme, they will be expected to support other women within the organisation. Our research showed that a worryingly high number of women (32%) feel that senior women in their company don't do enough to support other female employees
- Businesses should make sure that women who take part in the leadership programme complete the virtuous circle, showing an interest in the development of their junior female colleagues and becoming positive role models in their own right

32% feel women in senior positions don't do enough to support other female employees



Part Four: Ensuring Longevity

Finally, it's important that once you've created your Women in Leadership programme, that you take steps to ensure it continues to deliver against your objectives.

1. Get people behind it

It might sound obvious, but it's vital that employers make sure their female employees are aware of the opportunities on offer and are actively encouraged to take advantage of them.

Many women, a quarter from our survey in fact, feel that there is a stigma attached to being involved in these kinds of programmes. This needs debunking. Their value needs to be espoused and that requires advocates from within the programme and at the most senior levels of the business – ideally at CEO or MD level. It's about identifying the game-changers who will help you get traction and credibility.

1 in 4 feel there is a stigma attached to being involved in these kinds of programmes

Sarah Brummitt, MD of her own international leadership and training business Sarah Brummitt Ltd, says: "All businesses need cultural change champions; people in the business who are enthusiastic about developing women and who are willing to help. Culture trumps strategy, and you can't change culture overnight. Employers need to use any opportunity to support and enhance individuals, and this doesn't happen from a simple 'sequence of events'. It has to be more holistic than that."

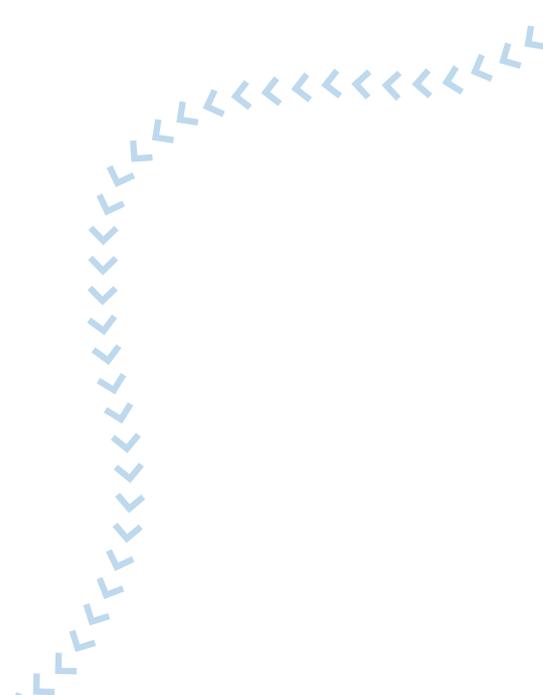
2. Constantly evaluate

Any Women in Leadership programme needs to have some flexibility built into it. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Not only will a programme look very different from business to business, but it may also differ from year to year. Some of the priorities that seem most pressing today are likely to shift in importance depending on the individual strengths of the women involved and the immediate challenges they face.

Track the impact of the initiative on the business and review aspects that don't deliver to make them work better. As with everything in business, you may not get it right first time. If something doesn't work as you expected, review the process and improve it. By asking for feedback from those taking part, you will be in a position to continually improve the support you offer to the best talent in your organisation.

"As a woman, you must be confident of your own leadership style. Decide what it is, work at it tirelessly, and then project it."

- Christine O'Brien, Partner, Baker & McKenzie



Dianah Worman OBE, Public Policy Adviser for Diversity at the CIPD



A stand out conclusion from the research is the key role that good line management plays in enabling women to develop their careers, and the inhibiting effect poor line management can have, hindering women from really reaching their potential. CIPD research (Employee Outlook series, 2009-2014) also shows that good quality line management is associated with greater job and career satisfaction, as well as higher levels of employee engagement – regardless of gender.

Effective line managers equipped with core people leadership skills are essential building blocks for creating inclusive organisational cultures which identify the potential of individuals and provide opportunities for progression based on merit.

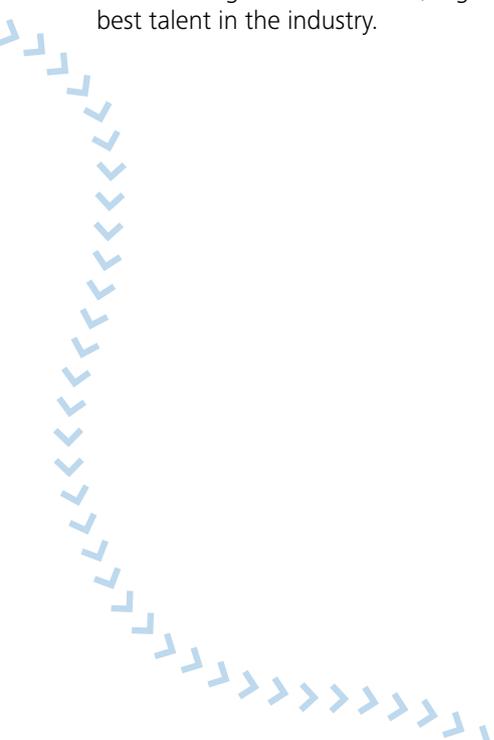
However, the evidence suggests that good line management alone is not always enough.

Too many women are not able to achieve their potential because of a lack of confidence, not knowing how to manage the office politics that can come with a senior role, or inadequate flexible working opportunities, to name a few. Half of the women in O2's research that helped inform this guide said all of the decision-makers in their organisation are male. That is a worrying statistic in this day and age.

The sorts of Women in Leadership programmes set out in this guide can make a material difference, and the recommendations provide a good starting point for organisations looking to improve how women progress to senior roles. We would emphasise the following points.

- Decide what your aims are and communicate your vision for success so everyone knows what it would look like – the initiative should be designed to support and add value to your business goals
- Use hard evidence to inform your strategy – highlight the business case for improving gender diversity at senior levels
- Show how your approach makes a difference and review aspects that don't deliver to make them work better – don't assume or expect to have all the answers from the off
- Aim to be inclusive – ensure your approach does not disengage others outside the programme
- Identify the game-changers to help you get traction and understand the elements of the programme which are likely to be regarded as most impactful
- And lastly, recognise that any initiative of this kind is about creating the leaders for tomorrow, not just replicating those from the past. You have to be clear about the type of leadership you aspire to.

If businesses are to thrive in today's volatile and uncertain world they need to have the most effective leadership they can. Anything that limits an organisation's ability to appoint, promote and retain half of society's potential leaders simply because of their gender has to be addressed. Through implementing initiatives such as these, businesses can ensure that they are recognising, recruiting and retaining effective leaders, regardless of gender, and ultimately are setting themselves up to benefit and prosper from the very best talent in the industry.



Our Contributors

We'd like to thank everyone who contributed to the making of this guide, not least the CIPD and the eight businesswomen who gave up their valuable time to talk to us:

- Sarah Brummitt, MD, Sarah Brummitt Ltd
- Kerrine Bryan, Principal Electrical Engineer (Oil & Gas) & Member of the IET (Institution of Engineering and Technology)
- Jo Cox, Chief Commercial Officer, Sure
- Jacqueline Davey, VP for Enterprise Sales, IBM
- Ines van Gennip, Marketing Director, Samsung
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