

Building Accountability for Progress

The Level Project



Accelerate Equality. Accelerate Success.



What's included?

This document provides an overview for building progressive accountability across your organisation for achieving gender balance.

Introduction

How do you make sure that your organisation continues the focus and effort needed to achieve your objectives in relation to gender balance? Setting targets and goals and being specific about what you want to achieve is a good starting point, but continued focus is driven by accountability. In a work setting, people are motivated by the desire to create a better place to work, but their motivation is enhanced where they know they will be held accountable for achieving their goals on gender balance. Implementing accountability also shows your organisation, from top to

bottom, that this is a serious piece of work for the business. Accountability helps to focus time and attention. This document looks at a progressive approach to implementing accountability, one that aligns with the level of maturity in the organisation in respect of understanding your gender data, implementing goals and/or targets and establishing metrics.

Progressive approach

If we imagine that the levels of accountability can be detailed on a spectrum then we can understand how the stage that you are at in your journey will impact the level of accountability you implement. This matrix helps to illustrate this idea:



	Starting	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
What we are doing	We have started to review our current-state data and to discuss setting targets and goals.	We have set targets for increased representation of women at the top four levels of our organisation.	We are monitoring hiring, promotion and retention metrics for women in the organisation.	Each executive has a clear plan to address, and targets to meet, for their department. We have expanded metrics to all managers.
Level of accountability	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Examples of accountability	Implement timelines for review of data and agreement of targets and goals to hold senior leadership team accountable.	Incorporate reporting to the board once goals and targets have been agreed, including update schedule.	Targets are now set across hiring, promotion and retention. The drivers of representation for each executive and their progress is monitored as part of their performance appraisals.	Achievement of targets and goals related to gender balance are linked to executive performance and impact their compensation and progression opportunities.

- As a guiding principle it should not be the objective to hold someone accountable for something until they have received training to understand what is required of them. This will have an adverse effect.
- It is also important to realise that it is easier to get initial engagement by starting with a low level of accountability, building the level of accountability over time as leaders and managers become more familiar with their role in building greater gender balance.



What type of accountability is suitable for where we are?

Building out the stages identified in the early diagram, there are a number of ways in which we can implement accountability

by level. First, consider the types of metrics: quantitative; the numbers that record change, for example, the number of women in leadership positions, and qualitative; the actions that drive change, for example, running focus groups for women to get their input on barriers to their progression.

Type	Description	Example	Advantages	Disadvantages
Quantitative	Relates to setting representation targets or specific levels of achievement of gender balance in hiring, promotion, retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve 40% female representation at supervisor level by 2023 • Achieve gender split on interview panels and candidate slates for all hires at manager and above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to measure progress • Data-driven approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can restrict measuring progress to metrics that are readily available • Can be difficult to manage and cut data at individual leader and manager level based on population size and resourcing
Qualitative	Executive or manager demonstrates action related to their area of responsibility around specific actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each leader commits to two actions in relation to diversity & inclusion as part of their annual goals • They are held accountable for achieving these goals as part of their performance appraisal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be tailored to a leader's area of need in their division • Not restricted to gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be more difficult to measure progress
Hybrid	Combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, implementing metrics where required and monitoring leader action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit X% women for internships in a department • Conduct skip level meetings in department every quarter to get feedback from a broader set of individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can measure progress • Can be broader in nature than gender • Approach can be adopted at individual team level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires leader to report progress • Requires more resource than purely monitoring metrics

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Then consider where you are on the progress of accountability and consider the following suggestions of quantitative and qualitative metrics which are options at each stage:

Metric type	Starting	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
Quantitative	Assess representation of women at different job levels in the organisation.	Monitor the underlying talent flows of hiring, promotion and retention by department. Set targets ¹ to increase representation by a little every year.	Monitor gender balance in all other areas of employee participation, e.g. development, employee engagement results, take-up of parental leave – take steps to increase gender balance in metrics.	Achievement of gender targets for their area of responsibility is tied to each leader's discretionary compensation. Managers earn additional vacation days for initiatives driving gender balance on their team – these awards are highlighted across the organisation and adopted on other teams.
Qualitative	Each department head hosts focus groups ² to determine barriers to progression with female employees. Completion of the focus groups by department is discussed at senior leadership team meetings.	Each member of senior leadership team leads an element of the plan to address one of the talent flows. Their progress is discussed at senior leadership team meetings and becomes part of their performance appraisal.	Managers set goals in their performance plan outlining how they will drive gender balance in their team; their end of year performance includes an assessment of their progress.	Promotion to each level requires the candidate to highlight what they have done to enhance gender balance in their team.

¹ Targets are determined by taking expected growth over the period, for example, three years, and add a small stretch. Targets should be S.M.A.R.T. see [“Establishing a mentoring programme”](#) for more information on setting SMART goals

² Reference [“Using Focus Groups to Assess Employee Perceptions”](#)

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Below is a full list of areas where accountability can be added to initiatives and goals which are driving gender balance:

Representation

- Set targets for representation by job level and/or by department.
- Review employee engagement results by department and by gender. Hold department heads accountable for addressing any differences in the results by gender.
- Review the take-up of parental leave³ and parents leave⁴ by gender. Hold human resources accountable for initiating programmes of education to encourage a gender-balanced approach to these types of care-giving leaves. Once programmes are in place, monitor for a balanced take-up in each department and discuss variances with department heads.⁵

For the talent flow activities, track and monitor gender balance in the following areas, holding managers and leaders accountable for addressing imbalance and implementing plans to rebalance:

Hiring

- Applications received by department – task department heads with identifying ways to drive change
- Candidates that make it through each stage in recruitment – support managers to identify enhancements to the process, hold them accountable for implementation

³ www.citizensinformation.ie: employment rights and conditions leave and holidays parental leave

⁴ www.citizensinformation.ie: employment employment rights and conditions leave and holidays parents_leave

⁵ Take up of parental leave and other care giving leaves may be impacted by the age profile of the department – take these factors into consideration when reviewing data with managers and remember the data is never the full story!



GROUP ACCOUNTABILITY

For many organisations recruitment, especially to more senior levels in the organisation, involves a group of leaders conducting the interview and making a collaborative decision. In “Removing Bias from Talent Development and Performance Management” we reference calibration meetings to hold managers accountable for consistency in performance ratings. Calibration meetings can also hold managers accountable for consistent approaches to hiring, especially where a manager is asked to explain why all hiring to their team has been male over the last year or why they have not interviewed a balanced slate of candidates. Of course, there may be good reasons why this might be the case, however, don’t underestimate the power of group accountability to nudge managers towards a behaviour.

- Successful candidates in the interview process by gender, as before, hold leaders and managers accountable for achieving gender balance in their teams

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Promotion

- Applications for open roles by gender – task leaders with identifying why women may not be applying for roles in their department and implementing corrective action within a set timeframe
- Proactively monitor gender balance in talent identification exercises – question leaders and require them to provide specific examples of underperformance or development if a candidate is not being identified as talent and the pool is imbalanced by gender
- Track participation by women in key development initiatives, such as manager development programmes, client-facing opportunities, sponsorship programmes, mentoring programmes, reorganisation projects

Retention

- Monitor gender in voluntary leavers from the organisation. Determine if there is a gender imbalance overall or by department. Conduct exit interviews to determine drivers of the imbalance and hold managers accountable for addressing key areas identified.
- Monitor those who will potentially be impacted by involuntary exit. If this exercise is composed by compiling a list of those impacted, monitor the gender split on the list and identify for leaders that this will be part of the process to ensure women are not disproportionately impacted by leaving.

- Expect managers to hold regular engagement with employees that you are working to retain to assess their levels of satisfaction and what proactive action might be taken to retain them.

Development

- Track participation by department on key diversity and inclusion training initiatives. Reporting this participation at senior management level, using a dashboard, as discussed in [“Internal and External Publication of Progress”](#), will aid accountability
- Monitor gender split on key development milestones such as achieving varying levels of technical competence – hold managers accountable for determining how more women might be attracted to technical qualifications where an imbalance occurs

Final thoughts

All activity in the organisation should ultimately be analysed through a gender lens to determine where participation is not present and what the barriers to that participation might be. Monitoring alone or targets alone will not drive change; leaders, managers, and ultimately, all employees need to be held accountable for implementing an approach that promotes and encourages gender balance.