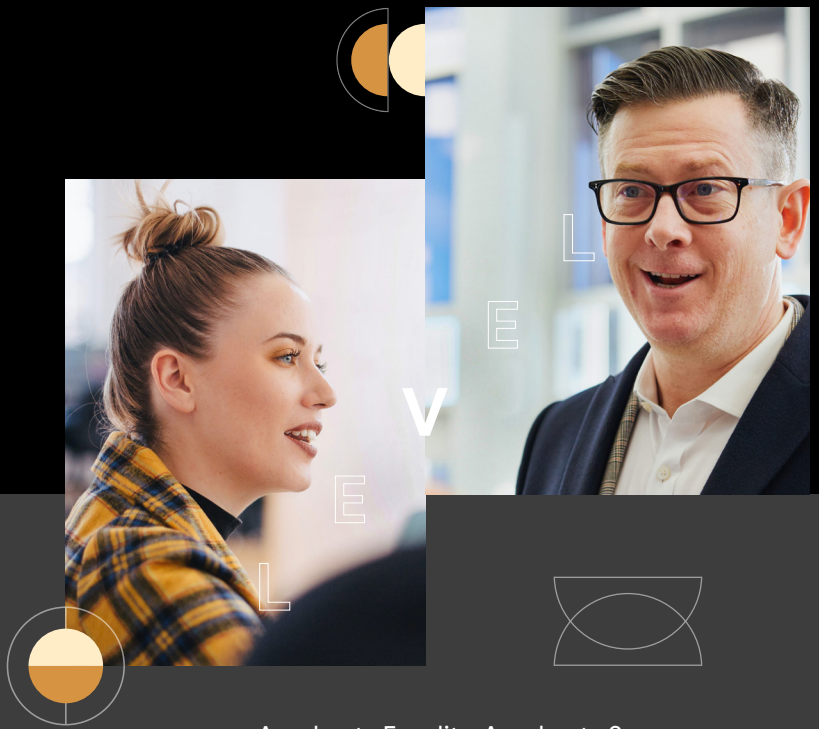


Developing the Internal Pipeline of Female Talent

The Level Project



Accelerate Equality. Accelerate Success.

What's included?

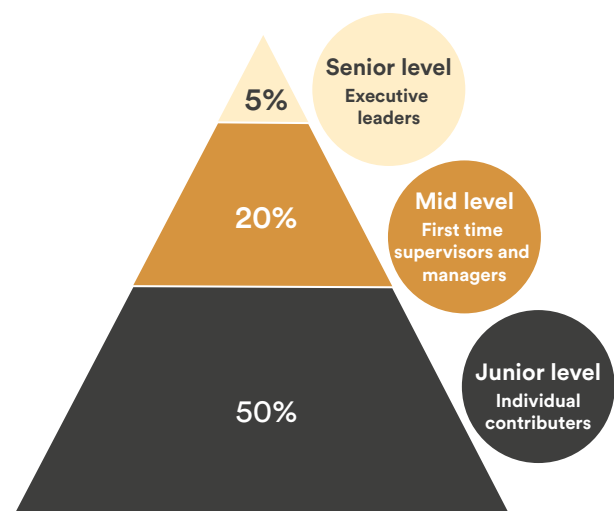
This document focuses on developing a robust internal¹ pipeline of female talent within an organisation and leveraging that internal pipeline to encourage more women to take up senior roles. It also looks at the process of succession planning and how taking a gender lens to this process enhances your probability of a robust and sustainable supply of female talent.

Introduction

Diversity initiatives often focus first on recruitment as a key way to change the diversity profile of senior leadership teams², however, recruitment is just one of the options open to your organisation. One of the more effective and sustainable ways to change the gender balance in your organisation is to ensure that the internal pipeline of talent remains balanced at each stage of progression – in effect, you are implementing a process to not only hire your way to greater gender balance but to develop future women leaders.

What to do:

1. Review the gender representation in your organisation and determine the representation of females at each level. For example, the representation below shows that there are 50% females at the junior level, dropping to 20% at mid-level and to 5% at senior level.



¹ For insight on the external pipeline review the tool Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process

² An impediment to many corporate diversity initiatives is that they focus too heavily just on recruiting

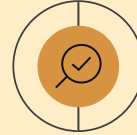
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2. Identify the point where women become less than 50% of your population; in our example, that is at the mid-level.
3. Interrogate your promotion, retention and hiring data into the level where the decrease is first evident to determine which of these actions is driving a decrease in gender balance. Use the [“Data Analysis Template”](#) to conduct this review.
4. Meet with employees at the level where they are 50/50 and get their input on what might be causing the drop in representation. Use the tool [“Using Focus Groups to Assess Employee Perceptions”](#) as a guide for these conversations.
5. Scope out the factors driving the decrease in representation and target activity at those factors, using ongoing monitoring to determine if actions are having an impact.

Below is a list of some of the most common ways in which the gender pipeline can be blocked and some suggested actions. It is important to understand that few of the issues related to gender imbalance are easy to resolve. These action lists are intended to provide you with a starting point for your organisation, and ongoing monitoring will allow you to track what is working and make changes where required.



“TAPPING” FEMALE TALENT

Research tells us that women are less likely to apply for a role where they do not fit all the criteria.

What does this mean for you?

1. Focus your job descriptions on just the skills you need for the job
2. Female employees may need a “tap on the shoulder” to apply for a role if they do not think they are ready

However, please remember, there can be many reasons why someone would select not to apply for the role, it may not be for any of the reasons you think, including a lack of confidence.

Do not make assumptions or assess someone else’s ability to take on additional responsibility because of what you know about their personal circumstances.

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Issue # 1: We are promoting proportionally³ more men than women

Try this:

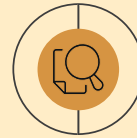
In some organisations, promotion, especially to senior level, happens through an annual process. If this is the case:

1. Create a list of potential candidates for promotion over the next year
2. With the relevant managers review the list for gender balance
3. If the list is not proportional to the available population, ask who's missing and require managers to provide detailed evidence as to why someone may not be ready yet
4. Redress the balance through development and/or visibility
5. Monitor follow-through on the list

If promotion happens through recruitment:

1. Create a list of potential candidates for open roles at a higher level
2. List those that may be ready for the next level
3. Review the list for gender balance
4. If the list is not balanced, ask who's missing
5. Redress the balance through development and/or visibility
6. Follow through on the list by encouraging eligible female candidates to apply

³ Proportionality is calculated by looking at the underlying population that is available for promotion – in our example, 50% of the population are female. If the population is balanced, then a number of promotions over the last year should also be balanced or close to balanced. Full details on how to calculate promotion rates is available in the Data Analysis Template



ASKING FOR INPUT

Drilling down on the output from an engagement survey is a positive action to take where you are trying to determine what might be driving a result, however, be prepared to act! Whenever you ask for employee input you must be prepared to listen, report and act as a result, otherwise you will increase the disengagement of those that have given you input and potentially drive something even more damaging than people leaving the organisation – disengaged employees staying in the organisation!

Issue # 2: Women are leaving the organisation

Try this:

1. Analyse data to identify voluntary versus involuntary departures
2. If there are still proportionately more women leaving than men, meet with employees to gain an insight as to why they might be leaving, you might use the tool “Using Focus Groups to Assess Employee Perceptions” to help

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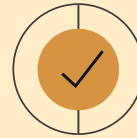


3. Review any exit interview information you might have. Reference the tool [“Gathering Objective Evidence to Determine What is Working”](#) for more
4. Communicate what you have found and what you will be doing to address the issue

Issue #3: Women are “not ready”

Try this:

1. A designation of “not ready” can be given as a result of unconscious bias where a specific vision of a leader is pervasive in the organisation and this vision is male. Given that this bias is unconscious, ask managers to give a number of reasons to justify why someone might not be ready and ask them to commit to a development plan for that individual, monitoring their progress year on year.
2. Where there is an existing leadership development initiative, monitor participation by gender. Where the representation of women is lower in the organisation, consider adding more female representation into the development programme.
3. Identify mentors for individual candidates to help them to bridge the gap. Even where an internal mentoring programme may not exist, it should be possible to identify a suitable individual to mentor and move the individual beyond “not ready”.



ONGOING MONITORING

Where executives are tasked with identifying a balanced slate of successors for the first time be aware that names may be added to the list purely to fulfil the balance requirement. Offset this risk by:

1. Asking executives to provide justification for including someone on the succession plan
2. Monitoring development plans for male and female successors
3. Monitoring who is included or excluded when the list is reviewed annually and challenging exclusions where appropriate

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The role of succession planning

If the gap is occurring at the senior level, there are two ways to close the gap:

1. Recruit females to the senior leadership level⁴ (can be a very expensive option)

Or

2. Enhance your internal female talent pipeline (it takes time to cultivate a pipeline up through the organisation)

In addition to cultivating the pipeline to senior level it is also prudent to pipeline female talent for specific roles. This is executed through a succession plan.

To implement a succession process

1. For the CEO position and each role on your senior leadership team, identify talent from the level below that could step up into the senior leadership role. These successors may be classified into:
 - a. “Ready Now”: can step into the job tomorrow
 - b. “Developing”: requires some development
2. For each role, identify if there is gender balance in the list of successors, which may also be referred to as the “succession pool”
3. Where there is not balance, task the relevant executive with addressing this imbalance by identifying suitable female candidates
4. Where an obvious internal female candidate is not available:
 - a. Review the deeper pipeline to identify talent to fast-track
 - b. And/or work with your internal recruiter or an executive search firm to identify a potential slate of external candidates in the marketplace who may be a suitable candidate for the role
5. Monitor development plans for male and female successors to ensure equality of visibility opportunities and development. Pay particular attention to the type of assignments that you know can lead to promotion in your organisation; more on this is in the resource [“Identifying the Path to Leadership”](#)
6. Track the success of your plan by recording and monitoring where someone moves from a successor role to an executive leadership position
7. Review the plan at least on an annual basis, monitoring where female successors are year on year, to track where and why someone might “fall off” the succession plan

⁴ Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process

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If you already have a succession process.

1. Add a gender lens and ensure that all roles have a balanced slate of successors
2. If the succession plan groups candidates by “ready now” and “developing” or similar, monitor where female successors are represented
3. Monitor development plans for male and female successors to ensure equality of visibility, opportunities and development
4. Track the success of your plan by recording and monitoring where and when someone moves from a successor role to an executive leadership position

Keeping it simple

If you are not ready to implement a succession process in full, you should consider the following at a minimum:

1. Gather your senior team
2. Ask them to identify who they are mentoring or sponsoring
3. Record the list and review the gender representation
4. Address any imbalances that are evident
5. Monitor on a semi-annual basis

Highlight hot jobs

One more tactic to use is to highlight “hot jobs” in your business to up-and-coming women who have been identified as having the potential to be future leaders. There are many reasons why this might be necessary, not least because women will consider a lot of interwoven factors before applying for a role with more responsibility and potentially more workload. There is also a lot of debate about the level of confidence that women have in their own abilities, which may be holding them back.

Regardless of the reasons, if you want more women in your organisation to apply for senior roles you should ensure that they are approached about applying for these roles by their managers. This has been shown to have an impact and will override any perception that a woman is not ready for the role or doesn't have the right qualifications.

“When women know others are giving it a shot even when they don't meet the job criteria, they feel free to do the same.”⁵

As discussed at length in the document [“Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process”](#), introducing short, to-the-point job descriptions will also help, as well as moving away from job descriptions that are “wish lists” and not “need to have” lists.

⁵ hbr.org: why women dont apply for jobs unless they're 100 qualified