



DIVERSITY AT THE TOP: THE IMPERATIVE FOR CHANGE



she loves data



Informatica™

FOREWORD

It all started with a simple question:

Why are there so few women in data & tech



Back in 2016, my co-founder, Pavel Bulowski, and I would attend work meetings or events in the tech industry, and noticed that a majority of the attendees were often men. As we spoke with more people, we were intrigued that many women showed enthusiasm and interest in data analytics and related areas. However, very few knew how to get started or have access to data training. This inspired us to run the first workshop on data analytics and our community of women began. Due to the overwhelming response, one workshop led to another, and then to many more. Volunteers—both men and women—from all over the world came forward to support our cause.

That's how She Loves Data was born.

But real change can only happen when we involve the wider ecosystem in the movement.

Gender diversity, parity and equity have been an area of discussion in many organisations over the past few decades. While commitments and progress were made, the pandemic undid these efforts – once again putting women at a disadvantageous position in the data economy.

In the middle of the pandemic, we decided to organise the Courage Council, which comprises C-level leaders in data and technology roles across various industries, to address the pertinent issue of diversity.

Through this inaugural report—which captures the sentiments and insights of my fellow Council members—we aim to identify key dimensions that are still impeding progress to addressing diversity gaps in leadership. We also identified key and practical solution areas that we can commit ourselves to as we strive to do better in bridging that gap.

We are merely scraping the surface here, but I'm extremely grateful for the commitment that the Courage Council is making to help move the needle on this agenda. We hope to inspire more leaders to join us in this movement, and create ripples of change in their respective organisations to champion more women to be in the driver's seat of the digital economy.

All change starts somewhere, and as leaders, we must always start with ourselves.

JANA MARLÉ-ZIZKOVÁ
Co-Founder and Volunteering CEO,
She Loves Data
Co-Founder and CEO, *Meiro*

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Introducing the COURAGE COUNCIL

The Courage Council—established by She Loves Data—jointly address issues concerning diversity and data. It is designed to be an annual year-end gathering of global C-suites in the data industry, including but not limited to, chief diversity officers (CDOs), chief innovation officers (CIOs), chief executive officers (CEOs) and chief technology officers (CTOs).

Our Council's inaugural agenda, co-organised with [Informatica](#), focused on the diversity gap in leadership.

This document outlines the key summary and proposed action items from the Council's roundtable discussions between October 2021 and March 2022.

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THE “BROKEN RUNG”: gender inequality persists in the boardroom

“

Despite the commitments by corporations to improve diversity in their ranks, women remain underrepresented in the boardroom. They comprise only 19.7% of executive board members,¹ and 25% of executive-level positions.²

— DELOITTE, “*Women in the Boardroom*”



At the heart of She Loves Data is a vision for a future where women are co-drivers of the digital economy. They are not peripheral to, but central partners in the ongoing tech and data revolution.

Despite the commitments by corporations to improve diversity in their ranks, women remain underrepresented in the boardroom. They comprise only 19.7% of executive board members,¹ and 25% of executive-level positions.² Even within that narrow window of opportunity, the pool lacks diversity – with a handful of the same names circulating.

Unfortunately, the “broken rung” phenomenon—where men are more likely to be promoted from entry-level jobs to managerial positions, leading to fewer women in the pipeline for senior management and every subsequent level—continues to persist, especially in technical roles. At this rate, experts estimate that we will not achieve gender parity until 2045.

The pandemic has not helped either. Isolated at home, women found themselves juggling work demands and a disproportionate amount of caregiving and household responsibilities, leading to a mass exodus of women from the workforce. Some observers say societal progress on gender equality has been set back by as much as 10 years.³

1 Deloitte, “Women in the Boardroom”, 2022 Update: <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/leadership/women-in-the-boardroom.html>

2 McKinsey and LeanIn.org’s, “The Broken Rung”, 2019 study: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimelsesser/2019/10/15/new-leanin-study-the-broken-rung-keeping-women-from-management/?sh=7bf520577803>

3 The New York Times, *Pandemic Will ‘Take Our Women 10 Years Back’ in the Workplace* (2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/26/world/covid-women-childcare-equality.html>



Despite the dire state of things, in the early stages of the pandemic, female leaders demonstrated stronger resilience and superior crisis management skills than their male counterparts. Even before the pandemic, numerous studies firmly established that more female leadership is essential for thriving economies. **In fact, by empowering women to participate equally in the global economy, we could add as much as US\$28 trillion to GDP by 2025.**⁴ More gender diverse companies are also 48% more likely to outperform their less-diverse counterparts.⁵

The recently published World Economic Forum *Good Work Standards* report in collaboration with Mercer, states that diversity and inclusion is the important fourth pillar, with prescriptions to: drive equal pay and equitable conditions, build an inclusive culture and inclusive participation, and lastly, make certain that global leadership reflects workplace and market composition.

To ensure that diversity is a cutting theme across organisations, it is necessary to follow certain principles. They include:

- Creating an organisation-wide culture for diversity to thrive
- Ensuring that diversity percolates down from the highest rungs of leadership
- Educating about diversity to ensure empowerment
- Rewiring mindsets to bring about important positive changes around diversity
- Overcoming biases and investing in women

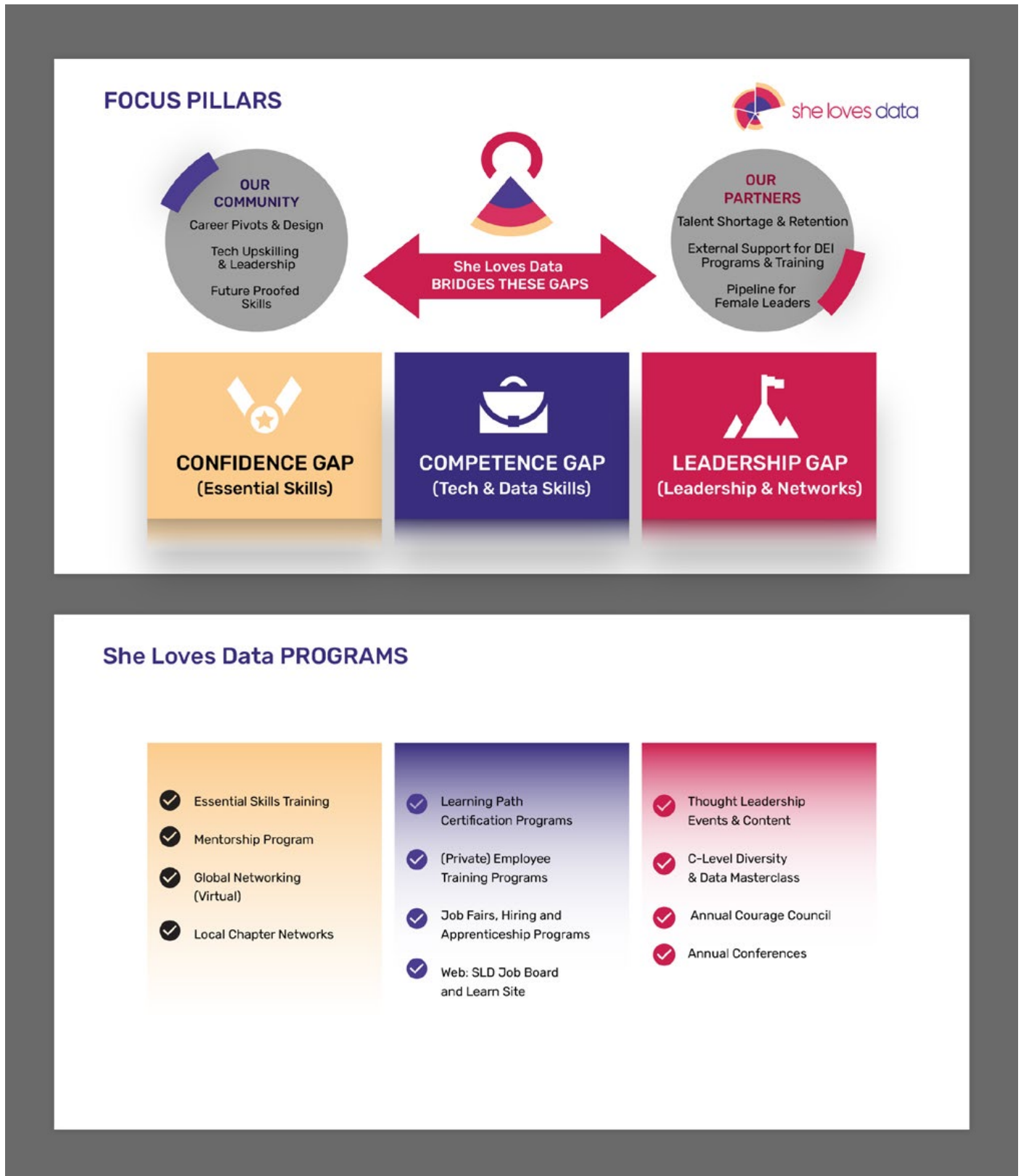
These issues will only become more pertinent as global economies recover from Covid-19, which is why our organisation is focusing on 'diversity in leadership gap' as one of the three key areas to address with our members and partners.

4 World Economic Forum, *This is why women must play a greater role in the global economy* (2018) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/this-is-why-women-must-play-a-greater-role-in-the-global-economy/>

5 McKinsey & Company, *Diversity wins: How inclusion matter* (2020) <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

OUR APPROACH

As the Courage Council, we pledge to contribute to and hasten much-needed changes to policies, systems and mindsets in an effort to advance improvements in gender equality. We believe this is achievable through open dialogue, consistent advocacy and measurable actions.



**PART
01**

Why diversity at the top matters



The data has never been clearer: gender-diverse leadership is good for business.

Yet, leadership teams remain overwhelmingly dominated by men, which has limited the ability of companies to achieve their full potential. In light of this issue, members of the Courage Council's October 2021, November 2021 and March 2022 gathering discussed what gender diversity at the executive level means and can achieve.

Performance gains through diverse teams

Diversity initiatives may often be perceived as a form of corporate cosmetics, but there is evidence that more inclusive leadership results in better performance. Juanita Woodward, principal at research consultancy Connecting the Dots, mentioned that diverse voices enable better decision-making, leading to better solutions and financial outcomes. Her comments are backed by McKinsey research from 2020 that found that organisations tended to outperform their counterparts when they had gender-diverse executive teams (25%) and boards (28%).⁶

“If you build a team of people who are all the same, creativity and innovation suffer,” said Pier Luigi Culazzo, Group Chief Data Officer at Standard Chartered Bank. He cited an example of how IDEO, the designers behind Apple’s first mouse, deliberately chose to hire diversely in order to generate many different approaches to problem solving.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues have become important, non-financial metrics that Celine Le Contonnec, Chief Data Officer at the Bank of Singapore, says have significant bearing on a company’s ability to secure funding.

“A good ESG rating is important if your business wants to get a bigger credit line or more investment – not having a diversified board impacts your rating,” she said.

⁶ McKinsey & Company, *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters (2020)* <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

Undercutting gendered data

One of the biggest obstacles facing diversity champions is the lack of female data leadership, especially in emerging technology sectors such as big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence (AI), which the World Economic Forum (WEF) calls ‘the greatest challenge’ to closing the gender gap.⁷



This has resulted in inherently biased data—also known as the ‘gender data gap’,⁸ a term coined by social activist and journalist Caroline Criado-Perez—that impacts the foundational design of technology and systems. For example, AI-based diagnostic tools were 50% more likely to misdiagnose women if they had a heart attack because most algorithms were trained on male-dominated studies and a lack of sex-disaggregated data sets.⁹



According to Meggy Chung, General Manager for Data Platforms at financial services firm Westpac Group, technology and data are difficult to separate in most modern applications. As a result, many old biases of a typically male-dominated tech world end up being reinforced in data and women are rendered ‘invisible’ from the design of technologies like cars or medicines.¹⁰

“Data comes inherently with bias, and the way to balance out those inherent biases is to be as diverse as you can,” said Chung.

7 World Economic Forum, Having women in leadership roles is more important than ever, here’s why (2020) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/more-women-in-leadership-shouldnt-matter-but-it-really-does/>

8 Wired, Why Everything From Transit to iPhones Is Biased Toward Men (2019) <https://www.wired.com/story/caroline-criado-perez-invisible-women/>

9 Time, We Need to Close the Gender Data Gap By Including Women in Our Algorithms <https://time.com/collection/davos-2020/5764698/gender-data-gap/>

10 Wired, Why Everything From Transit to iPhones Is Biased Toward Men (2019) <https://www.wired.com/story/caroline-criado-perez-invisible-women/>



Having women in the boardroom opens opportunities for the introduction of alternative leadership styles that are more collaborative, democratic and flexible

– **JANA MARLÉ-ZIZKOVÁ**
Co-Founder and Volunteering CEO,
She Loves Data

Modelling alternative leadership styles

Despite the dominance of male representation in the boardroom, studies have shown that more female leadership actually results in better dynamics as there is less competition between members.

Jana Marlé-Zizková, Chief Executive Officer at software provider Meiro and Co-Founder of She Loves Data, cited a study in the Harvard Business Review that found boards with more female representation tend to be more supportive and collaborative, and less combative.¹¹ The same report also noted that women tended to demonstrate a “higher level of understanding of the business,” leading to more productive discussions.

Marlé-Zizková also pointed out that having women in the boardroom opens opportunities for the introduction of alternative leadership styles that are more collaborative, democratic and flexible.

Helping diversity thrive

To be sure, if we want to build a world where women are truly empowered and are not just given lip service, changes at the top levels of management will be essential. Having more female representation in leadership will be crucial to create the necessary environment to ensure those who come after have the opportunities and support they need to thrive, said Haresh Khoobchandani, Vice President, APAC, at software provider Autodesk.

“Part of that is about having diversity in the first place—but the other half is about creating an environment where diversity can thrive,” he mentioned.



11 Harvard Business Review, How Many Women Do Boards Need? (2006) <https://hbr.org/2006/12/how-many-women-do-boards-need>

PART
02

The top five challenges to diversity in leadership

CHALLENGE 01:

Unconscious bias limits the impact of diversity initiatives

Unconscious bias is a major and recurring theme among diversity and inclusion champions. For example, the 2022 International Women's Day was themed #BreaktheBias in an effort to challenge harmful stereotypes that affect peoples' lived experiences in the workplace, schools, and society at large.¹²

“Unconscious biases” are social stereotypes that are held and applied by every person about certain groups of people outside their conscious awareness. These beliefs are far more complex than simple, conscious prejudice, and can often be incompatible with an individual’s consciously-held values. Usually, these biases are developed at an early age and can have real world effects on an individual’s behaviour.¹³

Unconscious bias was the Council members' most-frequently cited challenge to hastening progress on gender equality. During the roundtable, they explored several aspects of this specific form of bias:

Workplaces designed for men

Participants noted that **unconscious biases can create working environments that disadvantage women because they are designed to favour male working styles that prioritise high-performance driven judgments and evaluations.**

“I really think women don't want to stay in organisations where they have to fight and always perform like they're race cars,” said Ladana Edwards, Partner at Deloitte Central Europe.

Marlé-Zizková concurred with Edwards, noting that her race car metaphor echoed her observations on the differences between male and female management styles. With male leaders, she said, “there's this kind of race to compete, to be the first, to win – it's a solo approach.”

In comparison, women tend to introduce a more care-driven culture where collaboration can enable everyone's success. Despite the gap between these styles, Marlé-Zizková acknowledged the importance of having both styles to balance each other out.

However, Chung emphasises the need to make substantial changes at the top because that's where hiring decisions are made. Stalled diversity efforts at the leadership level can inadvertently lead to the perpetuation of unconscious bias against women, and positive bias towards men.

“Until you make changes at the top, you can't really change what's at the bottom,” she warned. “That's something a lot of people don't realise because it's completely unconscious.”

¹² International Women's Day, #BreaktheBias (2022), <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/theme>

¹³ University of California San Francisco, Office of Diversity and Outreach, Unconscious Bias Training, <https://diversity.ucsf.edu/programs-resources/training/unconscious-bias-training>

Cultural differences and nurturing that perpetuate stereotypes

Chung also highlighted the role traditions, beliefs and culture play in encouraging biased perspectives: “In some Asian cultures, an assertive and outspoken woman will be deemed ‘bossy’ or ‘too aggressive’. I’ve actually been called that when I was being no more assertive than my male predecessor. It’s harder for women because of that cultural expectation.”

Marlé-Zizková links existing biases to differences in how boys and girls are raised.

Even if Chung’s experience is limited to her upbringing in Asia, these gendered stereotypes can be replicated in other places in the world. In a University of California study of traditional gender role beliefs, women were generally seen as being caretakers of the home while men’s careers were prioritised over those of their wives.¹⁴ These cultural biases may result in limitations on women’s attainment of a career in STEM or technology, as well as their long term goals.



Hiring practices that enshrine gender bias



Even with a robust commitment to diversity in hiring, there are limitations to these initiatives’ impact in the face of decades’ long damage, said Godelieve van Dooren, the Chief Executive Officer of Mercer’s South-East Asian Growth Markets division. She pointed out that, in reality, word-of-mouth and networking play major roles in promotional opportunities despite the existence of built-in diversity checks.

“The way you get nominated for a promotion in consulting is by working on nice projects, doing well and getting seen,” said van Dooren. “Let’s say I pick Jana for a project because she works fast or maybe I pick Patricia because we get along really well—what did I just do? I killed diversity, though not intentionally.”

She pointed out that these biased, non-malicious decisions “naturally impede a lot of women” because the demanding hours of corporate life are incompatible with their caregiving responsibilities.

14 Frontiers in Psychology, Traditional Gender Role Beliefs and Career Attainment in STEM: A Gendered Story? (2019) <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01053/full>

Is ageism an acceptable form of discrimination?

A somewhat under-discussed form of bias is ageism. It is a very real form of discrimination that pervades workplaces, and is seen as more acceptable than sexism or racism.¹⁵ The problem is especially pervasive in the tech world, where some have reported that opportunities shrink as they age – anecdotes that Woodward said aligned with her own experiences.¹⁶

After all, this is the same industry where a young CEO famously said, “Young people are just smarter.”

Ageism affects both genders, however it’s not surprising that women bear a disproportionate amount of ageist discrimination. When sexism and

ageism are combined, women are at a particular disadvantage because they are relatively slower to embrace tech or are more hesitant to enter the field due to a historical lack of representation, said Marlé-Zizková. van Dooren added that another dimension of ageism may be linked to women’s caregiving responsibilities which begin to increase just as their careers begin to mature.

“Isn’t it insane that we are expected to be at the peak of our careers at the age when you typically have young kids and ageing parents?” van Dooren said. “Why do people have to do everything at the same time? Why can’t men and women take a step back when they want, and return later?”

Internalised misogyny affects everyone

Another challenge brought up was the issue of bias within women against other women.

Khoobchandani shared an anecdote where a woman leader felt as though she did not receive support from other women as she moved up the career ladder. Instead, she felt that other women were undercutting her success.

Marlé-Zizková backed up Khoobchandani’s point. “Sometimes we see female co-workers block other women as they step up in their career because they themselves faced a situation where it was hard for the first woman to reach the top,” she said. “They didn’t see the need to support those who were coming up and basically said, ‘tough luck, you need to go through it the way I did.’ It was shocking for me, but in a way, strangely logical.”



This rather controversial topic reflects what executive coach Mikaela Kiner refers to as a result of “internalised sexism”, whereby women have accepted the notion that success is a limited commodity that one has to aggressively fend off competitors to claim.¹⁷ This damaging behaviour results in a lack of solidarity among women while also inadvertently undermining actual efforts to increase representation at any level.

¹⁵ Stanford Business, Workplace Equality for All! (Unless They’re Old) (2021) <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/workplace-equality-all-unless-theyre-old>

¹⁶ Fast Company, ‘We hire old people’: Job posting for software developer sparks a viral conversation about ageism in tech (2021) <https://www.fastcompany.com/90669478/we-hire-old-people-job-posting-for-softwaredeveloper-sparks-a-viral-conversaDon-about-ageism-in-tech?>

¹⁷ Harvard Business Review, It’s Time to Break the Cycle of Female Rivalry (2020) <https://hbr.org/2020/04/its-time-to-break-the-cycle-of-female-rivalry>

CHALLENGE 02:

What does a successful career look like?



With digitalisation and the lessons of the pandemic, established ideas about what a career should look like is shifting. Jason Tamara Widjaja, Director of Artificial Intelligence at MSD, said this change should also prompt us to update our ideas about what a “successful” career looks like to accommodate new working models and metrics for success.

“We’re going from having a ‘job for life’, to multiple jobs within the same career, to having multiple concurrent jobs, side hustles or startup projects. I myself run a startup on top of a day job, and many others do the same,” he said.

Widjaja’s comments reflect a prevailing sentiment that current discussions around career success are still modelled on outmoded viewpoints. For many women, these rigid definitions of what a career should be can end up trapping them and limiting their ability to expand their visions of what kinds of success they can attain.

A career path might not look so linear in the future. Recent studies have shown that side hustles can improve full-time work performance.¹⁸ Side hustles are also going to be more common due to the volatility of pandemic-induced hybrid work, which could precipitate the beginning of a true flexible work revolution.¹⁹

¹⁸ The Daily Iowan, New research shows side hustles can boost full-time job performance (2021) <https://dailyiowan.com/2021/11/28/new-research-shows-side-hustles-can-boost-full-time-job-performance/>

¹⁹ Harvard Business Review, 11 Trends that Will Shape Work in 2022 and Beyond (2022) <https://hbr.org/2022/01/11-trends-that-will-shape-work-in-2022-and-beyond>

The motherhood penalty

One of the biggest work-related gender equality issues is how corporations have been complacent in updating their human resources (HR) practice to align with the realities of childcare.



Working mothers face disproportionate discrimination, what some call a “motherhood penalty”, whereby they are passed over for promotions, given low-quality work or disadvantaged for requesting flexible schedules.²⁰ The pandemic has only exacerbated these issues, leading to women making up a larger portion of COVID-19-related job losses.²¹

Geraldine Wong, Chief Data Officer at financial services firm and digital bank GXS Bank, shared that when her children were born, her opportunities shrank. Though this is not the case at her current company, for many employers “when you’re pregnant, it’s very natural that companies won’t hire you,” she said.

Woodward said Scandinavian countries offer notable examples for tackling the motherhood penalty. Companies in this region offer the most generous paternity leave benefits in the world because of a strong culture of shared parenting. According to Woodward, policies that support both men and women’s caregiving policies can positively impact how women are treated in the workplace.

²⁰ Bloomberg Law, Discrimination Against Working Mothers Must End (2021) <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/discrimination-against-working-mothers-must-end>

²¹ Brookings, Why has COVID-19 been especially harmful for working women? (2020) <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/>

The mothers who never return

Another HR blind spot that Marlé-Zizková points out is the leaking pipeline of female talent, which she attributes to women leaving their careers behind to care for children or elderly parents and potentially never returning. This phenomenon is illustrated by the “M-curve.”

As described by Woodward:

“The letter ‘M’ has four strokes to it: the first upstroke is the number of women who have entered the labour force, which is roughly 90% of women aged 29-30 years,” explained Woodward. “The second stroke comes down, and what you’re seeing is women leaving the workforce when they have children.”

Typically, most countries experience a rise in female workforce participation (the third stroke) as women re-enter the labour market after they have children, but Woodward said that was not the case in Singapore where participation continued to fall.

Many of these mothers never return because in most cases, HR are not equipped to provide benefits to alleviate child and elder care. “What are the equal opportunities we are creating so [these women] can come back and continue their careers?” asked Marlé-Zizková.

Georges Mao, Head of Marketing Science at Meta, pointed out that many working mothers are not even considered as good candidates by HR because they prefer hires that are “immediately operational.” He said this is a mistake, as a lateral view of career changes reveals that working mothers are often skilled talent with plenty to offer, even in cases of cross-industry transfers.

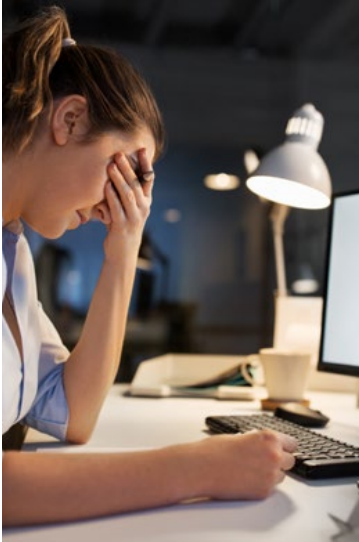


CHALLENGE 04:

Are women self-sabotaging?

As they are considered the more naturally nurturing sex, women are often brought up to consider the comforts and needs of others before themselves. This behaviour can often result in self-

sabotaging, where women fail to look out for themselves, career-wise, said Le Cottonnec. She pointed to one study conducted in Singapore that highlighted how women gained fewer promotions because of a lack of self-advocacy.



“Women kind of wait and expect to be rewarded for whatever they are achieving, without actually trying to push and negotiate for it, which is contrary to our male colleagues’ approach,” Le Cottonnec said, a sentiment that Wong concurred with.

Half the Sky Asia—a platform connecting women to companies with better platforms for women—suggested there is an “entitlement gap” at play here, where women are socially conditioned to feel less entitled than men to raises or promotions.²²

CHALLENGE 05:

Accountability for gender equality remains a challenge for companies

The last challenge is very simple: companies are failing to hold their workforce accountable for violations of their diversity policies. Khoobchandani highlighted that while companies may have the structures and policies needed to support gender equality commitments, they may not necessarily have the organisational discipline to enforce those values and create an environment for diversity to thrive.

“In an organisation, there’s obviously more than just the rule of law, but you can’t have these values and say ‘this is how we operate’ but then not hold people to account,” he explained. “How can you balance accountability and performance?”

However, research shows that companies should not respond to violations with punitive measures. In fact, companies tend to get better results when they allow employees to self-manage in collaboration with diversity managers, and voluntarily participate in diversity training.²³

²² Half the sky, <https://www.halftheskyasia.com/blog/2021/07/exploring-the-reason-why-women-are-now-less-comfortable-asking-for-a-raise-or-promotion-and-what-they-should-do>

²³ Harvard Business Review, Why Diversity Programs Fail (2016) <https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>

**PART
03**

Five solutions for making impactful change today

SOLUTION 01:

Create a culture for diversity to thrive

Ultimately, the success of any diversity initiative will rely on serious culture change efforts. As Khoobchandani puts it, culture, its related values and codes are essential to decision-making, insights generation, and how we work.

“These are important for organisations as they start to scale, so that they can define how they will build diversity and hold people accountable to that standard,” he said. “When you start thinking about codes in terms of culture, then you’ll see how much of it is in how you live those values, and how transparent you are about those conversations.”



Culture is built through connection and communication

For Edwards, open communication is a core component of building a better work culture, especially as we shift away from transactional relationships to a more relational scenario. This is where women are well-placed to thrive and contribute.

“At some point, culture is going to be measured in terms of listening mechanisms, pulse-taking and how you take action,” said Khoobchandani. “Not everything can be measured but, over time, as you listen, as people see that you’re listening and taking actions – that’s the process of building a new culture. Building trust. That manifests in better retention and talent attraction.”

Edwards continued to emphasise that the best conversations can happen by focusing on human connection and communication, all of which needs to flow down from leadership.

“This kind of communication, where people are really listening, doesn’t happen overnight,” she said. “It really comes down to connection, communication and generative conversations.”

Does culture change require data?

Overall, the participants broadly agreed that data is a necessary tool for culture change, but most expressed some reservations about its role in diversity initiatives, especially considering how data can be inherently biased.

Khoobchandani, for one, cautions against over-relying on data without addressing the infrastructure to collect and distribute it. Meanwhile, Le Contonnec pointed out that in many cases, simply having data will not motivate leadership to take the necessary actions, especially in cases where men dominate at the executive level.

“What would be their interest in enforcing more gender diversification?” she asked. Instead, she encourages leaders to look beyond data, and start with strategy and redefining metrics. She added that while it is great to have numbers behind their diversity activities, leaders still have to figure out how those inclusion commitments fit into their overall business strategy.

For example, she shared that because working mothers in her organisation recorded better retention rates than men, it could be more economical to provide longer maternity leave than to rehire for roles left vacant by women.



Not everything can be measured but, over time, as you listen, as people see that you're listening and taking actions – that's the process of building a new culture. Building trust. That manifests in better retention and talent attraction.

– HARESH KHOOBCHANDANI
Vice President, APAC,
Autodesk



SOLUTION 02:

Change starts from the top



Leaders have a unique position to make important decisions that can be leveraged to empower others and catalyse other changemakers to step forward within the company.

– TRACY QUAH

Vice President, Marketing, Asia Pacific and Japan, *Informatica*



A majority of the Courage Council members believe that change has to start at the top, but more than that, leaders can be catalysts, models and effective facilitators of substantial transformation. Woodward gave the example of how Satya Nadella kickstarted a renaissance in Microsoft by setting a tone from the top that eventually trickled down into a company-wide mindset.

Tracy Quah, Vice President of Marketing for Informatica's Asia Pacific and Japan divisions, emphasised that leaders have a unique position to make important decisions that can be leveraged to empower others and catalyse other changemakers to step forward within the company.

Leaders also cannot just dictate what happens from the top. They have to develop an ability to facilitate conversations, environments and movements that can help advance women within their organisation.

"A person doesn't speak up for whatever reason and we judge them," said Khoobchandani.

"But if a leader acts as a facilitator, you can suddenly have a more inclusive way of running things."

SOLUTION 03:

Empowerment through education

The role of education, upskilling and improved HR processes was repeatedly brought up as a starting point for encouraging more diversity in organisations.

For Khoobchandani, diversity initiatives need to be rolled out in tandem with education programmes that help the workforce understand the importance of gender equality and the data behind those issues. Similarly, Edwards suggests that education and more communication can build awareness to overcome dominant, sexist cultures within companies. “How do we create exercises – ways of talking, being and communicating that allows us to step into each other’s shoes?” she said.



Invest in upskilling talent

Today, many of the jobs that currently exist were inconceivable even 20 years ago, which Le Contennec says is a sign that firms need the capabilities to constantly upskill their workforces. She emphasised that this is a responsibility on the part of organisations to ensure the necessary resources and tools are in place to enable this. Her beliefs echo insights by the WEF that “wide-scale upskilling” is crucial to grow global prosperity, especially as the pandemic has accelerated its relevance. Furthermore, should the world be able to upskill 1 billion workers by 2025, the global economy could grow by US\$3.5 trillion by 2030.²⁴

Upskilling should not be confined to lower-level workers either, said Marlé-Zizková, as even leaders need some familiarity with tech and data skills in the face of the digital revolution.

²⁴ World Economic Forum in collaboration with PwC, Upskilling for Shared Prosperity: Insight Report, January 2021, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Upskilling_for_Shared_Prosperty_2021.pdf

The hard stuff is the soft stuff. Fix HR practices.

As an organisation's gatekeepers, HR practitioners need to ensure that the values that enable diversity are reflected in their processes and systems. Mao suggested that diverse candidates or interview pools can ensure women have access to equitable and fair hiring processes. He cites as an example Meta's practice of requiring all positions to include at least two female candidates for consideration.



"We are trying to make sure that we are not creating any additional biases of access that might prevent women from accessing career opportunities," said Mao. Culazzo, on the other hand, suggests that having a diverse panel of interviewers is also an important consideration to ensure that hiring managers are not just looking at candidates with backgrounds similar to their own.

Often, HR practices tend to focus on external hires, but van Dooren suggests there is also significant benefit in hiring from within, and developing existing talent.

"The real issue is whether we are building enough women from within – our promotion practices and career paths for women are designed from a male lens," she said.

One study by Monash University²⁵ suggested a novel solution to the gender imbalance in candidates for leadership positions: if organisations consider every employee as a potential candidate rather than asking them to apply, they can narrow the equality gap at the top. This practice helps undercut women's tendency to underestimate their own capabilities.

Khoobchandani also highlighted the importance of improving HR policies to support pregnant women and working mothers, so as to prevent them from leaving the workforce and abandoning their careers. "We can hire them but how do you keep them?" he asked. "How can an environment support women and allow them to operate within the constraints they are in?"

Marlé-Zizková suggested that hiring processes also need to shift away from focusing on "hard skills and tangible experience" and make space for "essential" or "soft skills" like critical thinking, complex problem solving, flexibility, resilience and others. The WEF suggests these soft skills will be crucial for workers to thrive during post-COVID recoveries.

"The hard stuff is the soft stuff," Widjaja emphasised.

25 https://www.monash.edu/.../data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2368569/14-20-The-Gender-Leadership-Gap.pdf

Prepare more flexible work opportunities

Many women leave the workforce for the very simple reason that the burdens of child and/or eldercare often force them to make the hard decision to abandon their careers.

Woodward shared various anecdotes of women in senior positions who struggled to juggle their personal lives and responsibilities and the demands of full-time work. These stories are not one-offs, but they narrate a wider trend that is only deepening as more women enter the workforce.

Culazzo said these challenges should be a primary motivator for companies to implement flexible work-life balance policies that benefit both men and women. He emphasised that it is not enough to only focus conversations about work flexibility on women as this results in women being framed as the source of the problem.

“In reality, it’s a family problem, so you need to effectively move this bias and help families get the flexibility they need,” he said.

van Dooren goes one step further, suggesting the entire system needs to be revisited so we can redefine how employees’ performances are measured. The current method of measuring employees’ capabilities based on how many hours they spend in the office will no longer work with the advent of remote work models.



“In reality, it’s a family problem, so you need to effectively move this bias and help families get the flexibility they need.

– PIER LUIGI CULAZZO

Group Chief Data Officer,
Standard Chartered Bank



SOLUTION 04:

Coupling beliefs and accountability

“ There is no success without belief. I stay away from terms like ‘allies’ and ‘advocacy’, because you can pay someone to be an advocate, and that is in opposition to deep-rooted belief. There has to be enough within a leader to drive the right thing to do.”

– HARESH KHOOBCHANDANI

Vice President, APAC,
Autodesk



Khoobchandani suggested that regardless of what policy or systems companies want to implement, there is no success without belief. This change requires an effort to “rewire mindsets” to help people understand why these issues are important and worth changing.

He said while certain leaders can use their position to influence change, without belief, diversity issues will not expand beyond a box-ticking exercise.

“This is the right thing to do, and there has to be enough within a person to want to drive that.”

“The moment they understand, the penny drops, and they go on a different path,” he said. “I stay away from terms like ‘allies’ and ‘advocacy’ because you can pay someone to be an advocate, but that is opposition to deep-rooted belief.”

SOLUTION 05:

Taking concrete action – overcoming biases and investing in women

While many of the solutions that have been proposed by the Council members seem abstract, the most effective steps towards progressing the movement for gender equality are practical and can be implemented by anyone. Change—as all Council members agreed—begins with an individual’s determination to challenge their unconscious biases.

“Change can start with anybody. Don’t wait for someone else to take the lead, take it upon yourself,” said Culazzo.

Le Contennec echoed Culazzo’s sentiments and encouraged leaders to be bold to change what they can, where they can, especially around how biased data sets can impact future recommendation engines. For Widjaja, on the other hand, challenging narratives and conventional norms is a useful way to progress diversity issues, especially since many people are willing to listen, learn and pick up on your initiatives.

“Challenge your mental models. Look for people willing to listen to multiply the impact,” Widjaja said.

van Dooren has a simple suggestion for immediate action: sponsor a woman. Not just in terms of mentoring but also the time and resource investments needed to “take one or two women to the next level,” she said. “Be personally responsible for them.”





What's next for the Courage Council



Any serious efforts to move the needle on the diversity agenda has to start with an honest assessment of the progress that has been made so far, a role that this report was designed to fulfill.

However, this report is not the end of the conversation, and merely a prologue to the actions we plan to take in an effort to address the issues raised during the roundtable sessions, especially the solutions suggested in Part 3 of this paper.

As a follow-up to the report, the Courage Council members pledge to run programmes at their companies or those in collaboration with She Loves Data that can be used to glean data on the impact and success of diversity initiatives. These events will be reviewed and reported at subsequent council meetings.

She Loves Data will also look to partner with companies, institutions and industries in order to validate their diversity initiatives and give them exposure. We will also continue our advocacy work, sharing progress updates via online and social channels. Our approach of taking direct action is what sets the Courage Council apart: we seek to not only “walk the talk”, but also be publicly accountable for our actions.

We are in this for the long haul, but we need your help to ensure our mission's long-term success.



How can you help?

The Courage Council welcomes any support from our community to progress gender equality. Here are some ways you can help us in our mission:

- **[Volunteer with the Council.](#)** Help us organise and run our projects.
- **[Add to the conversation.](#)** Regularly visit our Courage Council page to find out more about ongoing projects and updates to the proposed solutions. If you would like to offer suggestions or constructive feedback, you may do so [here](#).
- **[Share this report](#)** on your social media channels.
- **[Participate in our survey](#)** for our next Courage Council topic: #GenerationalDiversity.
- **[Nominate a woman](#)** who needs to have that seat on the board or executive C-Level.

Scan to know more:



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ABOUT INFORMATICA

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ABOUT SHE LOVES DATA

She Loves Data is a social enterprise that inspires women to become active contributors to an increasingly data-driven world. Founded in October 2016 in the smart city of Singapore, we provide free training sessions, workshops, mentorship programmes and networking opportunities that help women upskill and develop careers in tech. Our expanding global presence includes 19 chapters in Australia, Armenia, Cambodia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Slovakia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Visit us on shelovesdata.com to find out more about our programmes, or email partnerships@shelovesdata.com to support them.





DIVERSITY AT THE TOP: THE IMPERATIVE FOR CHANGE



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