

CRF TL&L AND DI&W COMMUNITY EVENT: PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

On 13th March, members from both the CRF Talent, Leadership & Learning (TL&L) and the CRF Diversity, Inclusion & Wellbeing (DI&W) communities met virtually to discuss ways of promoting gender equality through talent management practices. Chaired by CRF Research Executive Molly Bolding, participants discussed strategic challenges to tackling gender equality in talent management, structural barriers to progressing gender equality in the talent space, and talent management's role in building a diverse and inclusive culture. Key considerations resulting from the discussion are shared below.

Data can create a strong case for change. Members agreed on the importance of using evidence or data to clearly highlight gender disparities to leadership and bring a case for change:

One member shared that they enlisted an emerging careers lead to conduct an organisational skills gap analysis. Their organisation then adopted a data-led approach to bridge the identified gaps, including creating apprenticeship schemes tailored to these skills.

- For example, one member stated that they shared disaggregated gender data on a quarterly basis and asked their different business areas to update their plans accordingly.
- However, obtaining this data can be challenging and is not accessible for all organisations. One member shared that, as a small organisation where new opportunities do not come up regularly, it is hard to set numerical targets (instead, they focus on supporting women to build connections and find their community).

Programmes alone are not sufficient: representation and a systematic approach are also critical. Respondents discussed the pressure to create 'female only programmes' and noted that, whilst these programmes have benefits, it's important to adopt a more systematic approach:

- One participant shared that they implemented a female-focused programme which actually had unfilled spaces - they thought this reluctance may be due to a lack of female representation at leadership level. For example, research has shown that the majority of girls leaving school do not aspire to future leadership positions. This resonated with other members, who shared that women and other under represented groups have left their organisations as they do not see themselves belonging there.

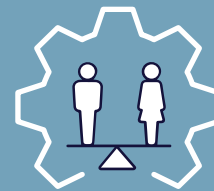
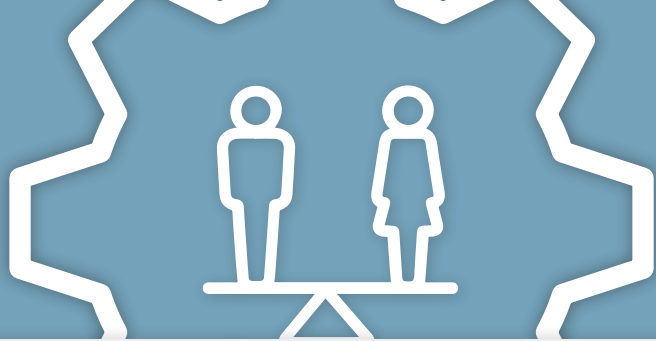
- Another member shared that they have recently begun implementing a series of focus groups to identify the barriers to retention and progression, with the aim that this will inform future actions.

Talent management should be employee-led, transparent and encourage 'hidden talent'. Several participants shared that they are trying to increase diversity through transparency in how their talent management processes work:

- Participants discussed the difficulty in encouraging hidden female talent to rise up in their organisations. Several members shared that they are currently exploring self-nomination for succession plans or development opportunities. For example, one participant said that they have introduced a self-nomination element to a couple of their programmes, which opened up the number of people eligible for an opportunity. However, this did mean that the selection process had to be even more robust, which some felt as onerous.
- Another participant shared that they now ask for expressions of interest for senior roles that are in the pipeline, allowing them to then work with candidates to improve their readiness. This action has received a positive response from women in their organisation.
- One member shared their employee-led approach to talent management, which they hope will address diversity challenges. At their organisation, an employee can highlight when they are interested in a particular career path and then have an open conversation with their line manager about their readiness. They are also trialling promotional panels, which look at people who are ready to move, and evaluate candidates using a portfolio-based approach (rather than a typical interview).
- However, participants highlighted challenges of using an employee-led approach, as research shows that women are less confident than men in putting themselves forward for new roles. One way to counter is through ensuring line managers encourage women to put themselves forward for roles (which also requires supporting line manager capability).

Sponsorship, mentoring, and coaching can support female talent. Members discussed the usefulness of, and ways to implement, mentoring, coaching, or sponsorship programmes. This included the difficulties in defining these and the importance of demystifying the process:

- One member shared that their organisation implements a 12-month sponsorship programme targeted at under-represented groups (including women). There are around 30 places available per year and people self-nominate before undergoing a selection process. They have a clear definition of a sponsor and host an introductory workshop to ensure that both the sponsor and person being sponsored have a similar understanding of the programme.



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- Participants discussed the challenges of ensuring the right type of relationship between the sponsor and the person being sponsored; the sponsor needs to be familiar with the work of the person they sponsor so they are comfortable advocating for them, but they should not be someone who already fulfils a line manager role.
- One member shared that they have previously successfully used 'reverse mentoring,' where they matched leaders with more junior (but specialised) colleagues. For example, they matched digital skills 'experts' with more senior colleagues to build digital literacy.

FURTHER READING

CRF. 2019. **Creating an Inclusive Culture.** Research Report. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/crf-report-creating-inclusive-culture>

CRF. 2023. **Effective Succession Management.** Research Report. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/research-effective-succession-management>

Johnson, W. B., Smith, D. G, and Christensen, H. 2023. **Where Women's Leadership Development Programs Fall Short** [Where Women's Leadership Development Programs Fall Short \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org/2023/01/where-women-s-leadership-development-programs-fall-short)

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The next TL&L community event will take place on **22nd March 2023** and will focus on Mercer's 2023 Talent Trends research.

Sign up now to our Coaching event, in-person on **20th September 2023** and online on **28th September 2023**.

If you have any further questions or comments, please contact CRF Commercial Director **Melissa Bull**, melissa@crforum.co.uk

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