

## The Pathway to Inclusion, with Gender Intelligence®

There is a different conversation that is taking place today on creating inclusive leadership and inclusive cultures. It is between all diverse men and women in the workplace – a transformational conversation that is altering the landscape of business and how we are addressing diversity and inclusion at work. After decades of ineffective window dressing initiatives, finger-pointing, and quotas, a revolutionary and effective approach has come into focus for men and women leaders, one shaped by a greater understanding of our gender differences and the value revealed when we engage those differences instead of trying to ignore them.

This awareness is stirring, growing stronger every day  
in organizations around the globe.

We call this, **Gender Intelligence®**.

## **Breakthrough Insights That Are Transforming Companies**

What is adding momentum to this new conversation on gender are dynamic shifts in thinking—the moments of discovery that we call *Breakthrough Insights*. Leaders and their organizations are realizing that they must become more gender-diverse by becoming gender-intelligent—not because it's a required or fair thing to do, but because it makes economic sense and is therefore crucial to the future of the organization.

### **Transformation Begins with Leadership**

When change rests solely on the shoulders of HR, leaders and middle managers tend to perceive gender diversity as a mandated exercise, disconnected from the key strategies of the organization, and therefore unproductive.

Alternatively, when seen through the lens of Gender Intelligence®, the company's leadership realizes that true diversity—especially that derived from *difference thinking*—is strategic to the future of the business.

### **Numbers Alone Will Not Advance an Organization**

The prevailing belief in many organizations is that when their company achieves greater gender balance at the low to middle levels, then everything else will take care of itself. This will naturally expand the talent pool of women, they will rise to the top, and this will ultimately make the company more competitive, or so the belief goes. But changing the numbers doesn't change the conversation. All it changes is the balance of representation of women to men within the same male paradigm.

### **Meritocracies Based on Gender Sameness Fall Short in Advancing Women**

It is very difficult for many organizational leaders to see the degree to which the competencies on which advancement is based are male-modeled. A woman may have the same level of ability and express the same competency, but just not in a familiar way—the male way. Her evaluations, and her advancement, may suffer as a result.

Company leadership needs to understand how male-dominate thinking may color how women in the organization are scored in their “everybody is equal” system, and consider the subjective expression of those core competencies they are looking for in their talent pipeline.

## **Science Underlies Gender Differences**

Beginning in the early 1990s, neuroscientists across the globe began successfully and convincingly illuminating biological sex differences in brain structure, chemistry, and function. In study after study, findings have shown the variations that occur throughout the brain, informing and influencing the (at times) dramatically different ways men and women communicate, listen, solve problems, make decisions, handle emotions, deal with conflict, and manage stress.

When men and women understand the nature of their gender differences, their lens broadens. They gain greater appreciation for each other’s behaviour and learn more about their own.

## **It is Not Just About Women**

The business landscape has changed dramatically in the past two decades. There have been shifts not only in the composition of the workforce but also in the customer base. It’s not just about women but rather how businesses operate if they are to move successfully into the future.

## **Gender Intelligence® Accelerates All Diversity and Inclusion**

Our approach to Gender Intelligence® doesn’t focus on gender to the exclusion of other diversity issues. It does place purpose and significance though on *leading* with gender, for we believe and have seen that leading with Gender Intelligence® can create a powerful domino effect in positively affecting inclusiveness as a whole, which in turn, accelerates all diversity.

## Fear of Stereotyping Blocks Progress and Understanding

Successful business people, leaders, and educators, out of fear of stereotyping or engaging in discrimination, purposefully ignore and discount the presence of any gender differences and chastise anyone who suggests otherwise. As a result, they lose their ability to discuss, explore, and take advantage of the gender differences hardwired into our brains.

The breakthrough insight is the realization, especially after reading through the science and participating in the discussions, that we are blocking our own learning and understanding; and if we're in positions of power, preventing everyone else's learning and understanding.

## Science Underlies Our Gender Differences

Discoveries by neuroscientists over the past thirty years, involving millions of test subjects in countries across the globe, have illuminated biological sex differences in brain structure, chemistry, and function.

These variations occur throughout the brain, in regions involved in language, memory, emotion, vision, hearing, and navigation. These variations influence the different ways men and women communicate, listen, solve problems, make decisions, lead teams, and manage stress.

### The Bell Curve of Gender Tendencies



When we are speaking of gender differences, we are describing a bell curve of gender *tendencies* in males and a bell curve of gender *tendencies* in females. When you place these two bell curves alongside each other, there is a sizable difference between the average tendency of men and the average tendency of women.

You'll also notice that there is some overlap. In fact, research suggests that about 20 percent of us—one in five—are hardwired more like the opposite gender, but not necessarily in all tendencies.

Given the distribution of human dynamics along this curve, it would be an inaccurate over generalization to claim that all men are one way and all women are another; it would be an even greater inaccuracy to claim that we're all the same.

What we are focusing on are the average, predominant tendencies of men and women, and it's what's revealed in those tendencies that are so strikingly different, meaningful, and worth our understanding.

## **The Complement in How We Think and Act**

When men and women understand the nature of their gender differences, their lens broadens. They gain greater appreciation for each other's behaviour and learn more about their own. Gender Intelligence® exposes and eliminates our blind spots. It lifts us to a new level of conversation and encourages us to include and work with each other more productively. Not by expecting each other to think and behave the same, but rather by finding and valuing the complement in our differences

## **Gender Tendencies in Problem Solving**

Successful problem solving is one of the key competencies in business, yet when there are issues to resolve, it's also the time when gender differences arise. Men are in their comfort zone when a team can quickly isolate issues and zero in. Their advantage lies in speed and focus.

Women's strength lies in their tendency to set issues in a broader context, identifying more opportunities and offering a richer field of solutions. When it comes to problem definition, there are times when narrowing the scope is appropriate and speed is of the essence, and other times when expanding the field is required to fully characterize a complex problem. The wisdom is in knowing when and how to blend both tendencies and not be limited by the belief that one model of thinking is better than the other.

## **Gender Tendencies in Decision-Making**

Men and women oftentimes find themselves on opposite ends in their differences in decision-making styles. It's a natural and highly valuable inclination on the part of men to *narrow down solutions and attempt to implement the best solution as quickly as possible.*

*Conversely, it's a powerful instinct on the part of women to see to it that all voices are heard to get all the ideas out on the table before making a decision. This process allows space for the more innovative approach or a more creative or longer-term solution.*

Women, more often than men, make decisions based on intuition. They may sense that there will be a problem with a recent hire or anticipate an emerging client problem—all based on their sense of the mood and tone of the last interview or client meeting.

When it comes to making decisions, there are times when speed is of the essence and times when greater deliberation is required before making a final decision. What aids the decision-making process is greater communication when identifying solutions to problems. The more solutions identified and explored, the more informed the decision.

## **Gender Tendencies in Leadership**

Studies show that in a business world that is becoming more and more fluid, uncertain, and ever changing, the quality of leadership needs to adapt and help the organization become more effective. As we now know, women and men share a different, though complementary, set of leadership behaviours that are crucial to overall organizational performance.

Women and men—working in unison—bring their strengths in leadership behaviours together, enabling an enterprise to perform well across all the organizational dimensions of favourable work environment, ethical values, motivation, accountability, and innovation.

## **The Business Case for Women and Men in Leadership**

Since the early 1980s years, a growing body of research has consistently demonstrated, that companies that have women representation on their boards and in their senior management realize stronger financial performance. There's a reason the bottom line

improves, and in our work, we have identified four very distinct and significant explanations:

1. Inclusive Cultures
2. Improved Innovativeness and Decision-Making
3. Responsiveness to Markets and Clients
4. Minimized Risks and Costs

## **Inclusive Cultures**

Inclusive cultures source from inclusive leadership, and the pattern of thinking for the past forty years has held that men and women should lead in the same fashion, exemplifying the same time-tested leadership traits. The reality is that the attitudes on what constitutes leadership and the styles of leadership are similar but also quite different between men and women.

McKinsey & Company's periodic study, *Female Leadership, A Competitive Edge for the Future*, surveys 9,000 leaders and managers from around the world to measure the frequency of use of the nine leadership behaviors that tend to improve organization performance and discovered that women apply five of the nine most critical leadership behaviors more frequently than that of men.<sup>1</sup>

All nine leadership behaviors are necessary for an enterprise to perform well on all the organizational dimensions of favorable work environment; ethical values; motivation; accountability; and innovation.

## **Improved innovativeness and Decision-Making**

Behavioural studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Carnegie Mellon University document the presence of "Collective Intelligence" among groups of people who cooperate well, showing that such intelligence extends beyond the subject matter, expert abilities of the groups' individual members and that the tendency to cooperate effectively together is correlated to the number of women in a group.<sup>2</sup>



Their findings show that the IQ of individuals in a group is not as important to innovative thinking and better decisions as how gender diverse the group is. Also revealed in the data was that the greater the gender diversity of a group, the greater its “Collective Intelligence.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Responsiveness to Markets and Clients**

The more a company mirrors its markets demographically, the better positioned it is to sense and respond to evolving market needs. Women represent the largest market opportunity in the world, according to *Forbes* magazine. Globally, they control \$20 trillion in annual consumer spending. In the next five years, it's expected that this number will rise to nearly \$30 trillion.<sup>4</sup>

Yet many of the marketing strategies, selling techniques, and buying assumptions source from the thoughts and behaviors of men and how they're inclined to sell and buy cars, computers, insurance, enterprise-level software, or global consulting services. Companies that employ a gender-balanced workforce—from production and sales up through strategic planning are better able to identify with and understand the demographics of the marketplace they serve and are better equipped to thrive in that marketplace, compared to companies whose solutions and decision-making in product design, marketing, and sales are from the perspective of one gender.

## **Minimized Risks and Costs**

Companies will never grow by acting only out of defense. Nevertheless, there is the risk of litigation that companies face when failing to meet legal requirements. Sexual discrimination, in all its forms, is a factor that is part of a company's risk assessment. Apart from direct costs including legal fees and potential fines, there are significant indirect costs such as bad publicity, loss of market share, and damage to the company's trademark.

Every time companies and their leaders are seen as doing the right thing - and that includes creating opportunities for people from all backgrounds to thrive within the organization - they add to their credibility with key stakeholders and constituents.



## Best Practices for Sustainable Impact

The Gender Intelligence Group recently conducted a study to assess the diversity programs that create a sustainable impact in advancing women into senior management, by data from three technology companies, four financial services firms, and two accounting firms. With all the best of intentions, and implemented by great people dedicated to effecting change, here are the top diversity programs that the companies in the study admit have not produced the desired results.

## What Doesn't Work and Why

### Women's Networks

Women's networks, councils, and chapters that lacked strategy and linkage to the financial objectives of the company ended up becoming no more than social networks. Meetings often became a venue for voicing complaints, but not linked to any initiatives to drive positive change. Many women said that the networks increased their sense of separateness from the rest of the organization.



### Training for Women

Training for women tended to place the onus on 'fixing' women. Many of the companies' management and leadership development programs were initially designed for their male leaders and were now being used to define women's leadership and essentially help them fit into a sameness model—instead of mining for their own unique leadership styles.

## **Focus on the Numbers**

Many companies assume that critical mass through quotas is the answer—that it's just a matter of stepping up their annual recruitment efforts. And the problems they are having with the retention of women hires are assumed to be bad fits or women leaving for work-life reasons.

Tens of millions are spent each year on recruiting more women into companies at the entry level and on hiring them directly into senior management roles. The reality is that over the past 40 years, women have done no better than to represent 22 percent of senior management, which has changed very little in the past 10 years, and less than five percent of CEO positions.<sup>5</sup>

## **Work-Life Flexibility Policies**

These programs are a great value to many women, especially at the entry and mid-management level. The companies in the study used work-life flexibility programs as an engagement strategy to bring young women into a company, but they had little to no impact on advancing women to senior positions.

Even in countries that have legislated for decades that companies must comply with work-life flexibility policies, women's representation in senior management has fared no better than the global average.

## **Women's Mentors**

There were a few flaws that surfaced in mentoring programs. Companies found that their mentors, both women and men, were not trained on the differences that often arise when mentoring women and men.

Moreover, women mentees were matched with women mentors instead of being matched with men. And in many instances, women-to-women matches didn't have the right chemistry and failed.

## **Diversity Workshops**

Diversity and compliance training for men generally created a reverse effect. Men were trained to ignore gender differences and treat everyone the same. They became overly sensitive, politically correct, and afraid to acknowledge any gender differences. Many have difficulty giving critical feedback to women on their teams; and some even admit that they avoid interactions with women, especially in informal settings.

## **What Works and Why**

### **Leadership Accountability**

As a practice, leadership accountability effected the most positive change in the advancement of women into leadership positions. Yes, leaders have been held accountable before and on a variety of metrics. What made the practice of Leadership Accountability the *most* successful across these companies was that male leaders weren't motivated by compliance but rather by a deep personal commitment that came from their greater understanding of the economic value of gender diversity in leadership and knowledge of the biology that underlies gender differences in critical thinking skills.

### **Gender Coaching and Training**

Knowledge building is often overlooked in the execution of personal development initiatives. Gender coaching and training programs were modified to become information sharing and awareness workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions intended to increase leaders' Gender Intelligence® and knowledge of gender differences.

## **Male Sponsorship**

Many companies have mentoring programs, but few have sponsorship programs. And there are a few who have a difficult time distinguishing between the two. Mentoring is long term coaching; sponsoring is personally advocating for an individual—putting your name on the line for that person.

In successful sponsorship programs, male sponsors first act as mentors to their female sponsees, guiding them in the development of their five-year plan and helping them navigate the male modeled business environment and corporate ladder and negotiate the male code along each rung. That inside knowledge that can only come from a male sponsor is invaluable information to a woman being mentored and sponsored.

## **Succession Planning**

Well-intended business leaders often build meritocracies where the talented in the organization—regardless of their gender—are promoted based on their abilities and achievements. Their blind spot is in not seeing the built-in inequalities in their organizations when measuring performance. So, when organizations say they are fair in promoting, they are looking for a very specific set of behaviors that tend to favor male behaviors, often baked into the culture.

The modification in thinking created a gender-mixed and highly diverse slate of candidates. This improved line of sight into succession planning had senior leaders involved in removing similar blind spots in merit-based evaluations, candidate selection, and candidate leadership training and development.

## Call to Action

Gender Intelligence® is a success factor for both women and men. When diverse talents and perspectives are merged into a culture of inclusion that puts skills, professionalism, and profitability first, the result need not be a redistribution of power and resources. Instead, women and men working together can improve competitiveness, customer focus, and bottom-line results through the blending of their different strengths.

Learn more about how Gender Intelligence® is helping organizations uncover their gender blind spots and discover breakthroughs in leadership, diversity, and the bottom line by contacting us at:

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[www.genderintelligence.com](http://www.genderintelligence.com)

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Women Matter 2016 Reinventing the workplace to unlock the potential of gender diversity," McKinsey & Company, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>

<sup>2</sup> "Collective intelligence: Number of women in group linked to effectiveness in solving difficult problems," Science Daily, October 2010, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/09/100930143339.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> "The Power Of 'Just One Woman'," Forbes Magazine, (August 26, 2013) <http://www.forbes.com/sites/85broads/2013/08/26/the-power-of-just-one-woman/#15457e4e7893>

<sup>5</sup> "Women in Business: The Path to Leadership," Grant Thornton International Business Report 2015, <http://www.grantthornton.be/Resources/IBR-2015-Women-in-Business.pdf>