

Gender Intelligence



There's a different conversation taking place today between men and women in the workplace—a transformational conversation that's altering the landscape of business and how we're addressing gender diversity at work. After decades of ineffective 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 North America, Europe, and in organizations around the globe. On an individual level, this new approach is improving communication between men and women. It's resulting in more effective problem-solving, in a dual-sided approach to innovation, decision-making, and in increased satisfaction at work and at home. Company-wide, this revolutionary approach is offering organizations significant strategic and economic advantage over companies that are not yet awake to its profound potential. While other businesses are stuck in conventional wisdom, these organizations are moving forward with confidence into the ever-more-competitive global market, able to leverage fully the efforts of every leader and every member of their teams.

And we need a new approach now more than ever. Consider the amazing social changes that have transpired over the last fifty years compared with where we stand today. In education, we've seen a tsunami of women

attaining university and graduate degrees in virtually every country on the planet; in many of those countries, women have been surpassing men since the 1980s.¹ This flood of ambitious women seeking careers and starting businesses of their own doesn't show any signs of receding. More and more women hold important leadership positions in top companies and in governments alike. Yet, after so much time and effort, one would think that women would be near to an equal level with men in career opportunity, compensation, advancement, and attainment of leadership positions. They are not.

The sobering reality is that although women now represent 50 percent of the workforce, from entry positions all the way through middle management, women have done no better than to secure about one out of every five senior management positions and only one in ten CEO or board-level posts.² After more than forty years of trying to break the glass ceiling, all we've done is push it up. What have we been doing wrong?

The answer is clear! In the past, we've operated from two fundamental beliefs. The first is that balanced gender representation should be achieved in business, government, and education. To achieve that goal requires viewing both genders as identical on the inside. The reach for equal representation has been a tangible and worthy demonstration of our search for gender equity, to be sure. However, we've found that equalizing the numbers doesn't necessarily result in true gender equality or in creating the gender balance we were seeking. Similarly, many believe that treating everyone the same will eradicate bias, another move toward gender equity. Our research and experience show that this is hardly the case. What if the solution isn't eliminating the differences between men and women themselves, but instead learning how to recognize, value, and leverage those differences?

Many companies who call on us have come to the realization that the focus on sameness and equality in representation has done little to produce meaningful change in the upper echelons of the organization. They're finding that quotas don't get them to gender diversity, and that gender diversity doesn't automatically make them become gender-intelligent. And even after setting those quotas, they're not making them. After targeted recruiting and hiring of more women, the companies are simultaneously losing them. Yet too many are still holding fast to their beliefs, suspended in an ineffective but politically correct paradigm. The question is, what's causing their denial?

