



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP AT THE TOP

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SHIFT HR Compliance Training recently commissioned a research report with HR.com called “HR.com’s Future of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging 2024: Revive the Commitment to DEIB Through Better Strategic Alignment Research Report” (“HR.com Report”). Considering the recent attention in the media and online activity around HR, the workplace, and diversity in general, we want to take a few minutes to offer our perspective on some of the findings and supporting data.

KEY FINDINGS ON GENDER REPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP

The study shockingly found that women represent less than 20% of top leadership in one-third of organizations. To break that down for you, for a company with 10 top leaders, only 2 at most are women, while the other 8 are men. Another quarter of organizations said that women only represent between 21% to 40% of top leadership. That means that altogether, over half of organizations only have at most 40% women representation at top leadership levels. Even more surprising is that “despite this, just a third of organizations have a mandate to increase diversity in leadership roles.”

Currently, only one-fifth of organizations have 61% or more women in top leadership positions. Additionally, one-third of small organizations reported that over 60% of their top leadership are women, compared to only one-fourth of mid-sized and large organizations. These statistics highlight the ongoing disparity in top organizational leadership, revealing that most companies have significant progress to make in achieving gender equality.

Distinction Between Large, Mid-Sized & Small Organizations

SMALL ORGANIZATIONS: One-third reported having over 60% women in top leadership.

MID-SIZED ORGANIZATIONS: One-fourth reported having over 60% women in top leadership.

LARGE ORGANIZATIONS: Also, one-fourth reported having over 60% women in top leadership.

These figures show that smaller organizations tend to have a higher representation of women in top leadership roles compared to mid-sized and large organizations.

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF DEIB DEPARTMENTS

In addition to the underrepresentation of women in top leadership roles, many organizations lack a designated person in charge of DEIB. Only about one-fifth of organizations have a DEIB department, leaving approximately 80% of organizations without one. This raises the question: “Are HR leaders sufficiently qualified to handle DEIB, or is there a need for specialized DEIB leaders?” DEIB requires a unique skill set that may be lacking in other HR functions. Consequently, companies may not be operating to their full capability because they are missing a DEIB leader.

Strategic Recommendations by HR Research Institute (HRRI)

To combat this issue, the HR Research Institute (HRRI) has provided several strategic recommendations:

- **APPOINT A DEIB LEADER:** Increase accountability by designating a leader responsible for DEIB initiatives.
- **CULTIVATE AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE:** Focus on practices that foster inclusivity, which can help retain equity-deserving groups.
- **SECURE BUY-IN FROM TOP MANAGEMENT:** Ensure top management supports and aligns with DEIB initiatives to prevent loss of trust and burnout.
- **GATHER DATA AND LISTEN:** Collect data and actively listen to employees to understand the company's current standing with DEIB.
- **EMBED DEIB IN COMPANY CULTURE:** Make DEIB a fundamental aspect of all organizational operations.

Key Takeaways

The key takeaways stem from the importance of integrating DEIB into the framework of all organizations. Here's how to achieve that:

- Build an inclusive environment through inclusive leadership
- View DEIB as an ongoing journey
- Seek expert help with DEIB initiatives
- Embrace and engage in vulnerable conversations about DEIB
- Increase visibility for underrepresented groups
- Hold everyone accountable
- These steps can help bridge the gender gap in leadership and create a more equitable and inclusive workplace.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the underrepresentation of women in top leadership roles remains a significant challenge across organizations of all sizes. The HR.com Report highlights that while some progress has been made, particularly in smaller organizations, there is still a long way to go in achieving gender parity in leadership. The lack of dedicated DEIB departments further exacerbates this issue, underscoring the need for specialized leaders who can drive meaningful change. By adopting the strategic recommendations provided by the HR Research Institute—such as appointing DEIB leaders, fostering inclusive cultures, and securing top management buy-in—organizations can make significant strides toward bridging the gender gap in leadership. Ultimately, integrating DEIB into the core operations of companies is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for building a more equitable and high-performing workplace.

