

# Creating a Positive and Nurturing Environment for Women at Work



While many businesses have made considerable progress on diversity, others remain bastions of masculinity. Prof.-Dr. Dulini Fernando, Warwick Business School, puts the spotlight on the barriers that women face in the corporate world and shares the key areas in which managers can help to change that.



*An alliance with a purpose*

# THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD



## PERCEIVE

with a set of key takeaways



## PROJECT

with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context



## PERFORM

by putting it all into practice using action tips





## ● PERCEIVE with a set of key takeaways

- While women have made substantial inroads into the world of work and organisational hierarchies, many Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) related fields such as engineering, still appear stubbornly resistant to gender diversity.
- Many barriers deter women from establishing careers in a male-dominated context: exclusion of women from male-oriented social networks, long-hours working cultures with social activities taking place in pubs and sports clubs, stereotyping women as technically incompetent, perceiving women first and foremost in terms of sexuality and appearance, among others.
- The micro-environment – the immediate surroundings – that the women work in on a day-to-day basis has a great effect on the way women think, feel, and act. If the micro-environment is sufficiently positive; if the individual gets on well with their line manager and any mentors they have; if they have co-operative supportive and interesting colleagues, all this can act as a buffer against negative forces in the broader organisation.
- It is important that women are offered opportunities to test existing skill levels and build confidence in their own abilities and, in doing so, to create the kind of internal visibility necessary to advance their careers.
- For women who are fearful of being visible, who are not putting themselves forward, possibly because of a lack of self-confidence, managers can help to create a platform. In doing so managers promote career enhancing visibility and access to higher-level networks.
- If women are reluctant to accept higher-level work, managers can provide the necessary encouragement and support that enables women to accept these opportunities. Successfully completing these types of assignments then creates positive reinforcement.
- Women need personalised, constructive, and regular feedback. It should not be an institutional routine tick-box exercise mandated by the organisation, but something that managers put some thought and time into.
- For the recipient, the feedback is invaluable in terms of providing specific tailored advice. It gives the recipient a sense of direction, of where they were, how they could progress, and what they needed to work on in order to improve.
- Women find general peer support useful. Women value support from line managers and colleagues creating an inclusive micro-environment. Everyone makes mistakes at work. How we are treated when we make those mistakes can have a huge impact on employee loyalty, and how the employees feel about the organisation that they work in.
- In STEM professions where there are so few women, role models play a crucial role in overcoming a prevailing sentiment that career progression and success is difficult for women to combine with motherhood and having a family.
- Organisations often adopt the wrong approach to diversity and inclusion – certainly in terms of getting women to continue in STEM-related professions, at least. Diversity and inclusion policies are often set at a very macro, mechanical level. They are directive and have labels attached – policies, regulation, rules, codes, targets.
- Rarely do organisations listen to people speak. Rarely do they obtain the views of the women working there and try to understand what actually matters to those women. To encourage diversity and inclusion, senior management should listen to members of the minority groups that they wish to attract and retain and take HR action based on what they learn.



Read the full article on  
<https://cobsinsights.org/2021/10/14/how-can-managers-create-a-culture-for-women-to-thrive/>



● **PROJECT**  
with food for thought

- Why do you think gender diversity is important for your industry and organisation? What benefits do a gender-diverse workforce bring to the table? How do you create a gender-inclusive culture in the workplace?
- What are the best examples of positive change in workplace diversity that you have noticed in the past five years? Where do you think the company needs to improve the most?
- How can women in the workplace make their mark? What is the management's perception of women in technology or other functions with less women?
- How can you encourage women to be confident about their skills and speak up their views in a male-dominated space while simultaneously educating men to be more accommodating with their presence?

*Thoughts*

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# ● **PERFORM**

by putting it all into practice

## CHECKLIST

- Offer opportunities that will help women boost their confidence. Provide 'stretch' assignments that test existing skill levels and encourage direct reports to stand in for a colleague with more senior responsibilities so that the former can temporarily assume a position of higher leadership.
- Provide the necessary encouragement and support that enable women to accept higher level work. Help set-up a platform and provide access to networks to promote career enhancing visibility. For example, create a women-centered social network inside the company where employees can express themselves.
- Demonstrate interest in the employee's work by taking time to understand the individual's strengths and weaknesses. Discuss knowledge gaps and learning needs in order to help women improve their performance.
- Provide regular, constructive, and personalised feedback addressing important issues that women face – how best to approach a task or what career paths to follow, for example.
- Listen to the concerns of women employees and take them seriously. In the case of mistakes, allay concerns and reassure the employee that they are doing well. In the case of inappropriate behavior, advise the employee of the correct procedures to follow and offer support.
- Make role models more visible. Encourage them to tell their story, to challenge stereotypes by relating their experiences, to explain how they have coped, in order to make the aspiration of combining a respected career with motherhood and family life seem something that is both tangible and achievable.
- Incentivize good practice by recognising and rewarding employees who demonstrate supportive behaviors.
- Create a nurturing culture and environment in which peer support is encouraged and freely given.
- Put in place a customised mentor program where the manager can guide the women employees in times of hardship.
- Request for regular feedback, anonymously if necessary, on the workplace culture and any other concerns that the female employees might have.
- Learn the reasons why a female employee is quitting the job and make sure it is not due to gender related problems in your company/industry.



# Getting involved


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