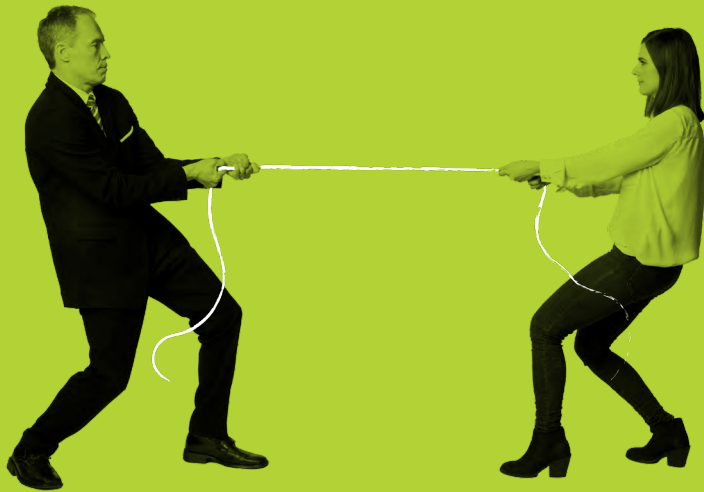




# DIALOGI 2015

**The world is full of opportunities  
– there's plenty of room at the top!**



## FOREWORD

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### **COMPANIES THAT PRIORITIZE DIVERSITY OUTFRAN THOSE THAT DON'T**

Dialogi is an annually recurring public program, with a mission to revolutionize working life. The theme of 2015 Dialogi was gender diversity, and we worked together with ten Finland based companies as well as numerous academic and public administration partners in encouraging concrete actions towards leadership diversity and advancing women in their career.

This summary outlines the Dialogi program outcomes: current challenges for women

regarding career opportunities and recommended actions for tackling them.

Dialogi is facilitated by strategic communications agency Ellun Kanat. Our program partners in 2015 were Accenture, Elisa, F-Secure, Fujitsu, Ilmarinen, Lidl, RAY, Skanska, UPM and Wärtsilä together with Aalto EE and Aalto University.

**Sari Tomperi & Maria Vesanen**  
**Dialogi Program 2015**  
**Communications agency Ellun Kanat**

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

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### **WHY DO WE NEED MORE WOMEN ON THE TOP?**

In our networked world, diversity matters. This is no longer an opinion, but a fact: organizations that prioritize diversity, outrun those that don't. Increasing the number of women in leadership positions comes with several business advantages: attraction of talent, customer centricity, quality of decision making, innovation, employee satisfaction and leadership skills.

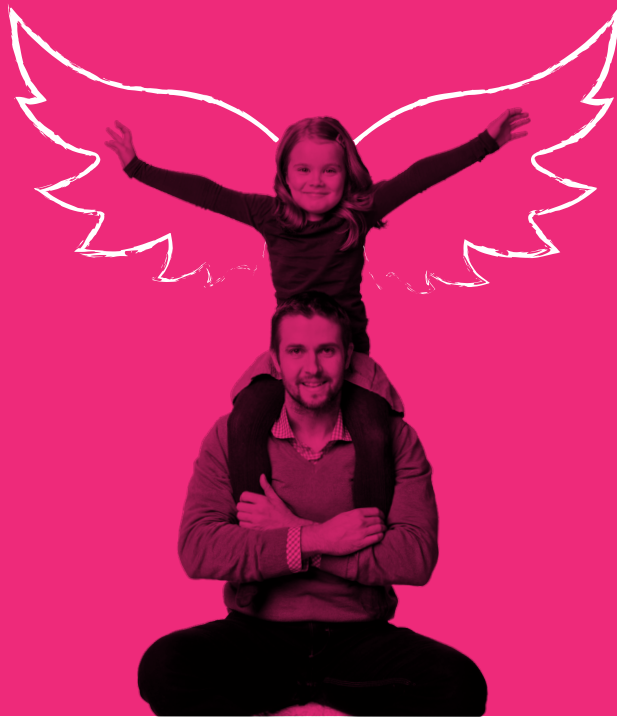
### **WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO CREATE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN?**

The responsibility lies with everyone: obviously with the women themselves, but also employers,

lawmakers, spouses and family members. Especially those involved in the upbringing of children play a key role regarding the future of girls.

The World Economic Forum has estimated that as per the current rate of advancements in closing the gender gap, achieving full gender equality at workplace would take additional 80 years and become reality only in 2095. All companies that took part in Dialogi found this unacceptable, and wanted to commit to actions that would speed up the development.

In the following paragraph we outline the main career-related challenges identified during the program, as well as recommended actions for tackling them.



## OUR RESEARCH

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In the beginning of the program, in autumn 2014, Ellun Kanat and T-Media conducted a survey with 1.437 working-aged, female respondents. In addition to quantitative insights, we gathered hundreds of quotes on women's perceptions on career, opportunities and obstacles. Ellun Kanat also gathered data on program partner organizations and conducted 40+ individual interviews among both male and female employees. Our research formed the basis for two internal workshops that took place in each program partner organization, and where the identified career

challenges as well as solutions were discussed under the direction of an all-female pilot team.

The report is heavily focused on the outcomes for organizations, but as we cannot overlook the importance of societal perspective in women's work life, we will also touch on policies in societal level.

## SOCIETAL STRUCTURES POSE OBSTACLES

Leadership has not changed in the past few years as much as we would like it to. Middle-aged, male, white and power are still largely considered synonymous. Women perceive this stereotypical and one-dimensional social construct of 'right kind of leadership' as a key obstacle to their career progression.

Social constructs, despite how outdated they are, take time to change. As a large part of today's executives fit the profile described above, women struggle to find suitable role models to inspire them. On the other hand, women in executive positions are hesitant to discuss gender as a factor of career planning and progression despite its potential efficiency in questioning prevalent conventions.



*Leadership culture remains quite masculine. Men surround themselves with homogenous individuals - other men - perhaps unconsciously. Women don't apply for executive positions, which might be due to the fact that the opportunities don't seem realistic.*

## EARLY EDUCATION IS SEGREGATED BY GENDER

World Economic Forum has pointed out that the Finnish educational system segregates by gender, and that the impact stretches far into working life. According to Professor Kirsti Lonka, Finnish children are equally skilled in mathematics until the age of 12, after which girls begin to actively dislike natural sciences. By the age of 15, when teenagers make crucial decisions regarding their education and future, gender roles reach their peak. Teachers and parents have a significant impact on the subject the teenagers choose to focus on, and unfortunately some still consider scientific subjects to be better suited for boys.

This segregation has wide impact on working life, especially for male-dominated industries, that have difficulties to find women candidates when recruiting.

## WOMEN AVOID INDUSTRIES CONSIDERED MASCULINE

Lack of women in particular areas of business and science is due to the perceived masculinity and femininity of those fields. Technology companies have witnessed the negative effect of employee homogeneity on financial performance and company culture. Despite few diversity-promoting pioneers, the gender bias is deeply rooted in the male-dominated industries.

It is crucial that the diversity-

promoting actions are communicated to the wider public. Several Dialogi program partners stated they had internally taken action to promote diversity, but their external communication clearly lacked efficiency. Mental images of ping-pong tables and nude calendars need to be counteracted with systematic communication and fresh employer branding.



*It is very difficult to make it in a male-dominated industry. It takes a lot more effort and evidence to prove your worth as woman than if you were a man.*

### UNCONSCIOUS BIASES GUIDE THINKING

Unconscious biases are assumptions and conceptions that we all have but are not aware of. They become harmful, when they affect decision-making and actions. Unconscious biases are closely linked to societal structures mentioned earlier: current power relations and the stereotypical image of leadership nurture our collective prejudices.

The biases present themselves in subtle hints, such as using toned-down or patronizing language with female colleagues, ignoring of women in meetings or not taking women's career ambitions seriously. In worst-case scenarios, professional women are mistaken as trainees or even considered as 'workplace

pets'. It is essential to make concrete changes in company culture and to have strong and visible female role models in order to make diversity in leadership a new normal.



*We have distinct ideas of what a leader or an executive look like: determined and straightforward, a man, physically tall.*

### COMPANY CULTURE FAVORS MEN

The company culture lays the foundation for career opportunities. Often company culture reflects societal structures and dismisses the female potential while promoting masculinity and existing leadership paradigm. Executives must recognize and accept this skew before any changes are possible.

Masculine culture rewards qualities stereotypically considered as male. Those employees that do not fit the mold are often underrated or belittled when it comes to recognition and opportunities.

### BALANCING FAMILY AND WORK IS CONSIDERED A PROBLEM ONLY FOR WOMEN

Company culture defines the qualities of a candidate most suitable for a particular role. According to research conducted by Bain & Company<sup>1</sup>

and McKinsey<sup>2</sup>, if executives are automatically expected to stretch and fully dedicate themselves to their work, women with children are automatically perceived as inferior candidates. According to McKinsey, male candidates with children are significantly less affected.

Parental leave is mainly taken by women and returning to work can be challenging – this is the point where women's careers often come to a standstill due to the fact that companies lack processes for accommodating a returning employee and making sure they get back on track. The employee may be faced with a new job description or a set of responsibilities below her level of expertise.

## HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES MAINTAIN OUTDATED THINKING

### Men Get The Difficult Tasks

In most organizations, operational business skills and P&L responsibilities are emphasized but a structure for job rotation enabling everyone to learn does not exist. Organizational research suggests that tasks are divided in a random manner, and the most challenging ones are more often given to men than women.

Companies often have a shortage in talent management. Despite official processes, talent management is often affected by unconscious biases. Realizing the benefits of diversity and female potential should be a part of HR's responsibility and monitored systematically.

### Recruitment Practices Are Skewed

Recruitment practices and policies may promote the gender bias. If the wording and terminology used in job advertising are perceived as masculine, women are often excluded already in the early stages of recruitment process. Unconscious biases must be recognized in order to avoid any gender imbalance during the interviewing process. Companies should state their wishes regarding a diverse candidate pool to possible headhunters and recruiters.



*Women have a lot of expertise, but it is not used efficiently enough. We must continue to correct this mistake.*

### Inflexible Workplace Caters for No One

As the majority of modern knowledge workers is able to perform regardless of time or place, monitoring of work hours and the obligation for physical presence are admittedly outdated. Some pioneer organizations have already implemented innovative ways of working that pose no other restrictions than getting the job at hand done on time. In Finland we are familiar with most flexible working arrangements, but there is still work to do in implementing them. Women with small children will especially benefit from more flexible ways of working, but of course it's beneficial for everyone.

## **MANAGERS EITHER DRIVE THE CHANGE OR BUILD BARRIERS**

Managers are gatekeepers of career opportunities. Managers should take active interest in their direct reports' ambitions, recognize possible company cultural biases in their own thinking and act as sponsors for female employees who want to advance in their careers.

## **WOMEN HINDER THEIR OWN SUCCESS**

During our program, it became clear that also women have unconscious biases about themselves and their capabilities. Women's career ambitions are often put on hold due to lack of courage, perfectionism and self-criticism. In comparison to men, women are far less likely to brag about their achievements, advertise their personal brand or ask for a promotion or a raise. In order to close the gender gap, each individual woman must also take responsibility in their own behavior, recognize their biases and take required action to change the working life for the better.

<sup>1</sup> McKinsey: *Women matter 2014*

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bain.com/publications/articles/every-day-moments-of-truth.aspx>



# SOLUTIONS: HOW TO CLOSE THE GENDER GAP

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## **ENABLE WOMEN TO RECOGNIZE THEIR POTENTIAL**

Courage and self-confidence come with age, experience and often for women with conscious training, but building them can also be supported from the outside at the workplace. Barriers for self-confidence are often very personal and recognizing them requires systematic self-reflection of strengths and weaknesses. Enjoying one's own strengths while being at peace with the fact that no one is perfect, women can start to take the lead in their own careers. Managers are crucial in encouraging the self-reflection, giving feedback and enabling growth.

## **CREATE ROLE MODELS**

Women desperately need inspiring role models. Workplaces should actively aim to create them by shining light on women's achievements both internally and externally, and

by facilitating women's networking with one another. Presenting diverse leadership has a positive effect on both company culture and women's professional self-esteem, which will encourage them to apply for future executive positions.

## **SUPPORT FLEXIBILITY AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Flexible working arrangements will have a significant impact on women's wellbeing, specifically when returning from maternity leave. Discussions with managers, HR and team members ahead of leave are considered meaningful, and a good way to support the return to work and ensure women getting back up to speed is to maintain regular contact with those currently on leave. Company culture is a key in advocating change - flexible working hours and the opportunity to work from home should not be considered as 'low commitment' but a balanced

working life. Welcome back -events and peer group meetings with other new mothers were also considered as effective initiatives.

## **HR MUST TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE**

### **Female Potential Should Be Recognized And Presented With Challenges**

Women appreciate opportunities for job rotation in order to learn laterally between the departments and functions – suitable processes and initiatives require flexibility and seamless cooperation between HR and managers. Job rotation supporting policies must be openly communicated in order for managers to understand that professional development should always be prioritized over current team structures. Women must be presented with concrete opportunities to showcase their skills and professionalism and to build confidence required for future leadership.

### **Mentoring and Sponsoring Must Be More Widely Leveraged**

Several companies that took part in Dialogi had experiences in mentoring and saw it as one of the most effective ways in speeding up women's career development. Inspired by Dialogi, companies also initiated cross-mentoring programs, where the mentor and mentee were not employed by the same organization.

The underlying idea in sponsoring is to provide women with more broad professional support than in comparison to mentoring –

sponsors can make introductions, act as references for promotion or provide women with direct career opportunities. Mentors provide support and guidance, whereas sponsors make things happen.<sup>1</sup>

### **Recruitment Policies Should Be Free From Bias**

Job adverts should take into account the terminology and wording that might be considered instinctively off-putting for women. Experience, skills and knowledge required for a position should be revised, and both male and female candidates considered equally in the recruitment process without unconscious bias, regardless of the industry, team or role.

<sup>1</sup> McKinsey: *Women matter 2013*

## **SUPERVISORS MUST ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO PUNCH ABOVE THEIR WEIGHT**

Managers responsibility is to both support women in building professional self-confidence and to push them towards challenges where needed. A good manager understands that employees cannot be hoarded – skills and knowledge should and must put into use wherever best suited within the organization. Change in managers' way-of-working could be initiated for example by official written guidance on employees' professional development and diversity.

## **CORPORATE CULTURE MUST SUPPORT DIVERSITY**

### **Executive Engagement Is Key**

Without the C-level engagement, diversity initiatives won't ever take off and the everyday work life status quo will remain. Cultural changes require investments, and the executives must demonstrate their support for change by participating in meetings and events where diversity initiatives are both planned and implemented.

Diverse company culture is built with the same tools than any other culture – by agreeing on objectives and by defining actions and ways of working required to achieve them. What kind of behavior do we want to encourage? What kind of behavior is unacceptable? What does good leadership mean to us?

## **EMPLOYER BRANDING HAS TO ATTRACT REGARDLESS OF GENDER**

Often employer branding for companies in male-dominated industries is skewed towards masculinity, which then women find off-putting in terms of career choices. Diverse company culture requires diverse employees, thus companies should aim to build a brand that is engaging, interesting and attracting to everyone.

## **OLD CONVENTIONS DIE ONE ACTION AT A TIME**

The objective of this publication is to share ideas and best practices for supporting women in advancing in their careers. Societal structures only change through actions: once the significant mass of companies breaking conventions has been reached, the impact will trickle down to rest of the society. In addition to corporate actions, the role of legislation in women's work life requires open and honest conversation – however, effecting this has not been part of the objectives of this program.



# BRINGING CHANGE INTO ACTION

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Improving women's careers prospects and role in work life is a journey, which can be divided into smaller checkpoints like any other large-scale transformation:

## 1. Clarify the Vision and Goals

Where are we headed? What do we want to achieve, both in short term and in long term? What kind of measurable, concrete goals can we set?

## 2. Create Business Case for Change

Why do we need to change anything in? What benefits do we gain as an individual, as a business, as a society? Why should we encourage women into leadership positions?

## 3. Gain Executive Commitment

The management must provide the resources required for the change and clearly and plausibly stand behind it. The message must be clear: any actions not compliant with the new way of working will not be tolerated. Full stop.

## 4. Learnt the Facts

Planning and execution must be based on facts – know the numbers but also listen to weak signals – things are often clearer on paper than in reality.

## 5. Set the Goals

Choose your metrics wisely – you only get information you wish for. Without tangible goals, next to nothing is most likely to happen.

Diversity initiatives and their success must have clear KPIs (and with this we do not mean quotas). Adjust the plan as you go where needed.

## 6. Reward

Always reward based on achievements. Transformations take a long time, and rewards are required to keep your people happy and on board. It might be useful to even attach some rewards directly to the realization of diversity goals.

## 7. Create Diversity-Supporting Culture

If company culture does not support diversity, there will never be sufficient measures to create change. Analyze the current culture with an open mind, and ruthlessly point out anything that does not support diversity. Be meticulous: underlying attitudes and prejudices are tricky to identify. It is always more efficient to tackle root causes instead of symptoms.

## 8. Customized Actions

Focus on actions where they are most needed. The actions vary depending on career level – junior management, middle management or top-level executives.

## 9. Persevere

In the end, success is achieved with a systematic, persistent and innovative implementation of actions. Don't give up.

## THE RESULTS OF DIALOGI 2015:

**10**

specific corporate  
background  
analyses

**114**

individual  
training sessions

**21**

in-house corporate  
dialogue workshops

**57**

MBTI analyses

**110+**

mentor sessions

**50**

media hits

**100+**

ideas for  
improvement and  
tens of actions  
that have been  
implemented in the  
corporations

**1.000+**

personal promises  
to enhance diversity  
and women's career  
opportunities

**TWITTER**

@dialogitweets  
(started at Feb 26th,  
2015): 626 followers,  
484 tweets  
624 retweets,  
869 likes

**FACE-  
BOOK**

Dialogi 2118 likes,  
146 shares

**5.000 +**

individual  
visits on the  
fempower.fi -site

**1.900.000€**

PR value,  
more is coming

**11.000.000**

the number  
of potentially  
reached people  
through  
the media

**REPORT**

a public report  
on the challenges  
faced by women in  
their professional  
careers