

Gender balance interventions in major projects

A study of existing programmes and interventions

Executive summary

The proportion of women in major projects has not changed significantly in the past decade. Whilst companies may be recruiting significant numbers of women at apprentice and graduate level they are not staying in great numbers; they are not getting involved in major projects; and are not achieving leadership positions. This is a problem.

Even without the skills shortages we should be trying harder to engage women in our companies. Evidence indicates that increasing the number of women on boards and executive teams leads to greater creativity, improved problem solving, better decision-making and a better bottom line.

As part of the Major Project Association's Gender Balance Initiative, the Association has undertaken a study to determine where there is evidence of success as well as to identify future research gaps. This report outlines the findings of this study.



Raising the profile

There are a variety of social media campaigns and comms programmes aimed at raising awareness of the significance of gender balance. Often these require a public pledge of support. These all contribute to the conversation around the lack of women in industries related to major projects. On their own, however, they do not make changes.



Do not reinvent the wheel

There are as many gender balance strategies, blueprints, reports and reviews of gender balance good practice as there are professional institutions and special interest bodies in this arena. There is value and great ideas in many of them, but we need to be cautious not to reinvent the wheel each time.



Cross-sector initiatives

At a very high level there are several initiatives which are taking effect. The '30% Club' and 'Women on Boards' seem to be impacting upon the number of women on boards in FTSE companies. There are also a number of good industry-specific accreditation programmes.



The importance of an inclusive culture

Networks and support programmes are unlikely to have an impact upon greater diversity if they are delivered in a culture which is not inclusive of difference. It is therefore important to challenge cultural norms and stereotypes within our industries.



Targets work

Public declarations of top-down targets for recruitment, retention and promotion make a difference.



Mind the gap!

Publishing gender pay gap figures establishes the extent of gendered pay differentials. This can lead to challenging conversations, but can ultimately change stereotypical attitudes and cultures.



Leaders need to take the lead

Leaders cannot abdicate responsibility for this issue to HR teams. They must demonstrate that it matters by taking personal responsibility for the changes which are required. In male-dominated organisations, which are common within major projects, it is even more important to see male champions of change. Those champions need to be 'playing on the pitch' not just 'cheering from the sidelines'.



There is no silver bullet

Use all interventions with caution. From unconscious bias training to mentoring to networks, every initiative or training course has its limitations and is only as good as its application. There is no fix-all except the investment of time, thought and energy.



Be fair and clear

Removing bias and increasing transparency into recruitment and promotion process will make a difference.



Pay and promotion

Despite much discussion about work-life balance, the evidence tells us that women leave companies for exactly the same reasons as men – poor pay and promotion prospects. Being open about your gender pay gap and clear about how you will address it will alleviate some of this leakage.

To read the full report follow [this link](#).

To learn more about the Major Projects Association Gender Balance Initiative follow [this link](#).

The Association has produced a number of reports on the topic of Gender Balance. You can find them via [this link](#).

This is one of many reports produced by the Major Projects Association which you can find [via this link](#).

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