

Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment: The Learning Journey of PricewaterhouseCoopers

MAIN LESSONS

- To produce concrete change, the people driving the diversity agenda must be at the upper echelon of the organization, and gender diversity efforts must be inexorably linked to the business strategy.
- Robust and reliable data should be an essential component of the diversity strategy to enable appropriate self-evaluation and planning.
- Identifying themes/stepping stones in the career progression of the most successful senior women helps focus diversity strategy efforts and increase ROI.



PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS

“I believe the business world of tomorrow will be a much more creative place, not just out of necessity, but as a result of increased and more efficient cross-border cooperation and because all voices – including those of women – will be heard and valued. There is no doubt in my mind that we’ll see much more gender parity in leadership that will come as a result of an inclusive culture and that this culture will foster innovation in unprecedented ways.”

— Dennis Nally
Chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers International

A global leader in providing industry-focused assurance, tax and advisory services, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) employs more than 163,000 people in 151 countries. Women represent over half of their global workforce at the recruitment level, and 15 percent of partners. Although great progress has been made to help women climb the corporate ladder, more work is needed to better tap into this significant talent pool. PwC recognizes this and is committed to ensuring women have the opportunity to build a rewarding career. Not just because it’s the right thing to do, but because it’s a business imperative that affects their bottom line.

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WIN-WIN SITUATION FOR BUSINESS AND FOR WOMEN

- Guided by the belief that its livelihood depends upon a diverse talent pool, PwC has made gender a priority through strong gender diversity efforts globally and in its territories.
- Female partner numbers increased by 20% between 2006 and 2009.
- Rich partnerships with relevant organizations such as Selfina in Tanzania and high-profile research on women in business have established PwC as a thought leader on gender issues. PwC has influenced the global agenda around sustainability and gender through its work on the World Business Council for Sustainable Development Vision 2050.
- Creating an inclusive culture is helping the firm establish “demographic fitness” by ensuring the talent of women is capitalized upon.

The Business Case for Gender

PwC's gender activities are guided by the belief that the organization's livelihood is dependent upon a diverse set of talented people and the knowledge that six people with different ideas are more valuable than sixty people who think the same. PwC's Global Chairman Dennis Nally has said, "A big part of the reason we want women better represented at leadership levels in business is because they bring a different perspective to the table that could lead to enhanced decision-making, more innovation, and ultimately, higher performing teams."

PwC hires women and men at the entry level at an equal rate. However, once women have attained more senior career levels, they leave through voluntary termination at a rate of two to three times faster than men. The reasons for this are complex and include a lack of proactive consideration of females for major assignments, a lack of gender consideration in succession planning, and reticence among senior men to mentor women in leadership. The dearth of female role models at senior levels exacerbates the perception among women that their advancement opportunities are limited. This leads to further attrition and a shrinking pool of female leaders.

To address this problem, PwC firms around the world are investing time and resources on initiatives focused on female talent. Historically PwC had various initiatives, such as women's networks, and work-life balance programs to support and empower women at territory levels. A number of PwC members are known as an employer of choice for women. However, in 2006 PwC's Global Chairman, having heard from a number of senior PwC women, decided that the firm needed to collaborate internationally to address the lack of women in leadership. From the beginning, PwC approached this as a talent issue. With 13% of female partners at the time and very few in leadership positions, PwC knew it could be doing much more to retain and progress its best people. To work towards this goal,

the global Gender Advisory Council was created in 2006.

The Gender Advisory Council is an advisory group that reports directly to PwC's Global Chairman. The council aims to educate, raise awareness around the business case, influence leaders, share best practices, and make recommendations to global leadership about empowering women. It consists of some of the most senior partners (male and female) in each territory, including members of PwC's International Network Executive Team and Global Board. Its membership and reporting structure enable it to wield a tremendous amount of influence on top-down culture. The council is an active body, holding regular virtual and live meetings, with a full time Program Office Leader to drive strategy and communication. "We centralize our thinking and strategy around diversity via the Gender Advisory Council, while leaving the implementation largely to our local practices who know best the nuances of their own legal framework and social realities," explains Dale Meikle, PwC Gender Advisory Council Program Office Leader.

When it was established, the Gender Advisory Council embarked on a rigorous data-gathering exercise in twenty four countries, looking at staff data, issues, and trends such as PwC's annual staff survey, social and cultural norms, legislation on parental leave, as well as the numbers of females in PwC leadership, networking groups, and to what extent gender diversity was a leadership priority in each territory.

To promote and encourage gender diversity, the council has produced a number of tools and communications used by PwC network firms. *The Leaking Pipeline report - where are our female leaders?* was used internally to inform strategy, and more broadly in the gender and business community, helping establish PwC as a thought leader. The report focused on 79 senior women at PwC and helped identify trends in their path to

leadership which the firm then used to drive its gender efforts.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development Vision 2050 is another example of how PwC has influenced the global agenda around sustainability and gender. More than 200 companies belong to the council, and its Vision 2050 document, spearheaded by PwC, highlights the importance of aligning philanthropic and new market development initiatives on educating and inspiring women and girls.

Best In Class Initiatives

PwC believes in empowering all its people to succeed, but experience shows that women often have different challenges than men. These include difficulties in off-and-on-ramping during pregnancy, less exposure to professional networks, and fewer role models. Work-life balance programs have traditionally helped retain women, but can be challenging to roll out due to the industry's busy season, which can be very hours-intensive and can require rigorous travel. PwC firms have been addressing these issues in creative ways, with the Gender Advisory Council serving as a central point for sharing of lessons. One example of a best practice initiative is PwC UK's Women's Leadership Program. This program builds "gender intelligence" of participants through a two-pronged approach of diversity/unconscious bias awareness training, and mentoring. Each female participant receives a senior male sponsor partner whose role is to coach and support the female participant in their career development. The impact of the program has been tremendous. The line of service where the program was piloted had failed to admit a female partner for two years running (2006 and 2007). The year after the pilot in 2008, 20% of the line of service's new partners were women and in 2009, a further 25% of new partners were women – all had

participated in the program, which is now being rolled out firm-wide.

Becoming More Ambitious Around the Gender Agenda

When Dennis Nally became Chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers International in 2009, he felt that the global gender debate had matured since 2006. With intensified globalization, economic shifts in power, and demographic shortages, he wanted PwC to be more ambitious. Under his sponsorship, the Gender Advisory Council is creating accountability around its gender efforts, via regular reporting of gender statistics such as headcount, turnover, promotions, new partners, and women in leadership. These reports, which will cover global averages and key territories, are intended to identify areas of progress and risk. PwC will suggest targets for women in leadership positions and performance metrics that could be integrated into annual reviews. The Gender Advisory Council is also identifying successful local programs, to explore how these could be leveraged and rolled out globally. Diversity is firmly embedded into PwC's talent management processes, so that talented women may be identified and provided appropriate developmental opportunities to cultivate them for leadership positions.

The "next generation" of the council will also include an expanded vision of diversity and inclusion. PwC believes that by encouraging cultural dexterity –the ability to work effectively across multiple dimensions of diversity – it will create a more agile and innovative workforce. Part of the drive for change has come from what PwC leadership perceives to be larger shifts at work.

Empowering Women Externally

PwC supports a number of relevant external organizations. Its sponsorships include The

Glass Hammer, an online community for executive women in finance, law, technology and big business, and the annual Women's Forum for the Economy and Society. PwC also partners with Catalyst, International Women of Excellence, The Arab International Women's Forum, Opportunity Now, and The Boston College Center for Work and Family. PwC is a global advisor to UnitedSuccess, a worldwide network of female entrepreneurs. PwC uses its forensic and assurance practices to help ensure probity and credibility of the network while benefiting itself from the enhancement of women's entrepreneurial skills.

PwC South Africa helps improve the lives of local female entrepreneurs through its Business Skills for South Africa (BSSA) foundation. The BSSA has trained over 20,000 entrepreneurs. The Faranani program (meaning pulling together) is an extension of the BSSA offerings, which develops skills for aspiring women entrepreneurs in rural areas. In 2008, 19 women were trained; the goal is to ultimately train 1,000 women. In addition to the BSSA trainers, three partners contributed 15 hours of their time and seven PwC staff members contributed a total of 116 hours. Prior to training, 52% of participants felt they had poor business skills; after the training 63% felt they had excellent business skills. PwC South Africa also works with POWA (People Opposed to Women Abuse). About 1,300 women are raped daily in South Africa. PwC's emPOWA program develops the skills of abused women to help them get themselves out of their situation by obtaining employment. Through these programs, PwC is hopeful these women will be able to become financially independent and carve out positive futures for themselves and their families.

Global Impact

To measure success, PwC monitors the percentage of women at the partnership level and new partner admissions each year globally and in key territories. They also track the number of women on

leadership teams, attending talent programs, on international assignments and being promoted. Numbers show encouraging progress. Female partner numbers increased by 20% between 2006 and 2009 and are today 15% of the global total. Women are now also represented at the Global Board and Network Executive Team levels.

More broadly, Gender Advisory Council initiatives are having a positive impact across the PwC network. The Gender Advisory Council-produced women's networking toolkit is being used in the Czech Republic, the Middle East, Poland, and South Africa. One networking initiative originating in PwC Austria, which brought female clients together with PwC partners for themed industry events ("Finance, Fashion & Food") was replicated in European PwC member firms such as Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. This direct link between gender initiatives and business relationships and business development helped convince male leaders (who were also invited to attend) how women's empowerment can enhance client connectivity.

In 2006, countries in Eastern Europe lacked awareness and gender diversity programs. They now have leadership support and have launched a women's development program. Three PwC firms in Eastern Europe – Croatia, Bulgaria, and Poland, are led by female senior partners.

Finally, the creation of an external website dedicated to women at PwC, and a gender-themed blog (rated #3 on Google's chart of blogs on gender) has been critical to getting out PwC's messages around diversity and inclusion.

PWC AND SELFINA: PARTNERING WITH WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN TANZANIA

One particularly innovative PwC initiative has been the Ulysses program, which connects PwC staff with entrepreneurs in developing countries. Through this program, a PwC team partnered in 2008 with Selfina, an inspirational female-led organization that empowers poor women in Tanzania through microleasing. German, Nicolas and Dyan, three PwC partners from Mexico, France and the United States spent eight weeks in Tanzania immersed in Selfina's daily workings.

PwC partners learned from a new social and economic environment and an inspirational role model in the form of Selfina's Managing Director, Dr Victoria Kisyombe. The partners shared their business expertise to help Dr Victoria and Selfina address certain organizational challenges, helping her eventually secure her first equity investment when Selfina was sorely in need of additional capital and expertise to grow the business. This mutually beneficial relationship has continued through Nicolas' participation on the newly

created Advisory Board of Selfina. "SELFINA has hugely benefited from this pro-bono work," Dr. Victoria says. "After a thorough study of the operations at SELFINA, their team trained members of staff and also highlighted areas that needed improvement for increasing efficiency and sustainability of the company. The team put together recommendations, which have continued to serve as a very practical and user friendly road map for SELFINA as we continue to serve the women in Tanzania."

Lessons Learned

PwC recognizes that it has come a long way with respect to empowering women, while acknowledging that it still has a long way to go. The following are some key lessons:

- **The people driving the diversity agenda must be at the upper echelon of the organization.** This has had a tremendous impact on leadership buy-in and action. At PwC, top leadership is committed. Dennis Nally sponsors the Gender Advisory Council and regularly participates on gender-focused projects and events, such as the PwC-sponsored 2010 World Economic Forum/CNBC panel debate entitled "The Gender Agenda: Why Sex Matters."
- **Gender diversity efforts must be inexorably linked to the business strategy.** PwC has seen a rise in awareness and credibility of gender efforts when outcomes are palpably tied to bolstering client relationships and winning new business.
- **Smash "unconscious incompetence."** Many of the barriers women face result from incorrect assumptions, such as that they can't or won't want to go on an international assignment. PwC has implemented mandatory bias-awareness

training for all network and global leaders. Reverse-mentoring has proven powerful in educating and enabling both women and men to take an active role in dismantling the aspects of corporate culture which work against women's progression.

- **Communication is key.** By establishing a global gender diversity website, PwC has enhanced its global brand and engaged the next generation in the gender debate.
- **Connect external corporate responsibility initiatives with internal expertise.** The impact of empowering women externally has been heightened by leveraging PwC's knowledge base.
- **Use robust and reliable data to drive the diversity strategy.** PwC has used internal expertise (i.e., actuaries) to deliver robust management data. This has been key in convincing leaders of the business case for change, and to identifying specific risk areas on which to focus attention and prioritize action..
- **Identifying themes/stepping stones** in the career progression of the most successful senior women helps focus diversity strategy efforts and increase ROI.

Going forward, PwC will look closely at diversity in developing markets to which "Western" concepts and tools around gender

equality cannot necessarily be translated. PwC's Chairman has made it clear that the focus on gender diversity will continue to be a priority, which he will personally champion. In his own words, "bad times don't last, but good people do...I believe that PricewaterhouseCoopers will only enjoy success in the long term if we recognize the critical role played by diversity in sustaining an innovative, productive and loyal workforce."

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ABOUT THE GLOBAL PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS FORUM

The Forum is an initiative of the World Bank Group Gender Action Plan to engage private sector leaders in promoting women's economic empowerment. It is one of World Bank President Robert B. Zoellick's six commitments on gender equality. Its members are committed to creating opportunities for women in core business, corporate social responsibility or diversity and inclusion initiatives.

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