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- Increased retention rates, particularly notable among Millennials (22 times)<sup>3</sup>
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Contact us at [cmcinfo@cmcoutperform.com](mailto:cmcinfo@cmcoutperform.com)

<sup>1</sup> A Great Place to Work Report: The Business Case for High-Trust Culture

<sup>2</sup> The Business Case for a High-Trust Culture

<sup>3</sup> Gallup. Trust Is in Decline: Here's How to Rebuild It.

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# In Hybrid Work, Benefits and Drawbacks Will Vary

Just as there are differing likes and dislikes, preferences and needs driving decisions such as where to go out to eat, what movie to see, and what place to travel to on vacation—people have very personal preferences about whether to work in an office, work remotely, or a combination of the two. Hybrid work is seen as a compromise, but then comes the question of how many days in the office versus remote, and if there are drawbacks to working remotely.

According to our cover story, which highlights the results of a survey run by AMA, hybrid work can affect career advancement. While hybrid work is especially valued by mid-career women (who are dealing with the burden of family and household duties), there are meaningful differences between how men and women are benefiting from this work arrangement. For example, far more young men than women are significantly more likely to derive key benefits from in-office work.

As other authors in this issue state, there are ways to overcome these hybrid work discrepancies and good reasons for doing so. Meg Sullivan writes that remote work is an imperative for women, as the flexibility it offers is essential, and women will outperform others if given the room to produce in their own way. Samantha Goldman addresses the disconnection women can suffer with remote work and never seeing anyone in person, and urges them to make in-office days meaningful with networking and making sure the people they need to advance projects with are there. And Rhonda Dibachi says virtual work platforms can blunt unconscious gender bias, especially in the tech industry, by providing a gender-neutral playing field.

Hybrid and remote work are not going away. AMA continues to research ways to improve training and teaching in this environment, to help companies meet their present and future needs.

Christiane Truelove  
Guest Editor, *CMC Quarterly*

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# The Workplace Has Changed— But How Do We Navigate It?

**F**our years after the pandemic turned the world upside down, organizations and professionals continue to search for the best path forward.

"Where should we work?" is as important a question as "How should we work?" There are, in fact, as many different answers to those questions as there are industries and businesses. There was never really a one-size-fits-all office environment, but today there's not even a typical one.

During the first days of lockdown, millions of managers in various industries suddenly became remote managers whether they'd ever managed remotely or not. In many other fields, managers stayed where they were, took extra health precautions, and tried to carry on as usual, doing their best to hold their teams together and redefine their place in the marketplace in the midst of economic uncertainty.

The dust from that storm cloud may have largely settled, but new aftershocks of those tumultuous events are still being felt in all areas of business—including talent development and career advancement. This was made especially clear by the results of AMA's recent survey, *Has Hybrid Work Impacted Career Development?*, which is discussed in detail in this issue's cover story.

Among many other findings, the survey showed that development and advancement in the hybrid age can vary significantly depending on a worker's gender and age, but the remedy to help level the playing field is the same as it's always been. How employees are led, coached, and advanced is based on having the learned behaviors to do so with optimal effectiveness, regardless of work environment. No matter what the circumstances, knowledge is the great equalizer.

A remote leader managing a remote staff needs a specific set of skills to engage and motivate them, just as the manager of a hybrid team needs a different set of skills to engage and motivate workers in their on-again, off-again environments.

And what happens when a manager doesn't believe in training or is resistant to building new skills? Today's dramatic changes in the workplace present an ideal opportunity to look closely and recognize how much more effective a well-trained leader can be in shifting work environments, compared with a leader who isn't prepared.

The proof is always in the business results—and organizations that emphasize the development of relevant new skills for all leaders and employees are invariably the first to see that proof, and reap the benefits of their investment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Manny Avramidis". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Manny Avramidis  
President and CEO  
American Management Association & AMA Global

# How Hybrid Work Affects Career Advancement

BY DAVID CASE



**Hybrid and remote work options remain popular, but a global survey has found discrepancies in how men and women are benefiting from these work arrangements and the effects on team building.**

**T**he American office has changed. Several years after the pandemic emptied offices around the world, and about 300 years after the construction of the first “modern” purpose-built office building, desks remain stubbornly vacant, hovering around 50% occupancy of pre-COVID levels in major U.S. cities.

Despite high-profile efforts by companies such as Amazon and JPMorgan Chase to push return-to-the-office policies, occupancy rates have barely budged in a year. The rise of hybrid and remote options represents a precipitous shift, affecting many millions of workers and significantly changing office culture. Most white-collar workers are staying close to home for at least

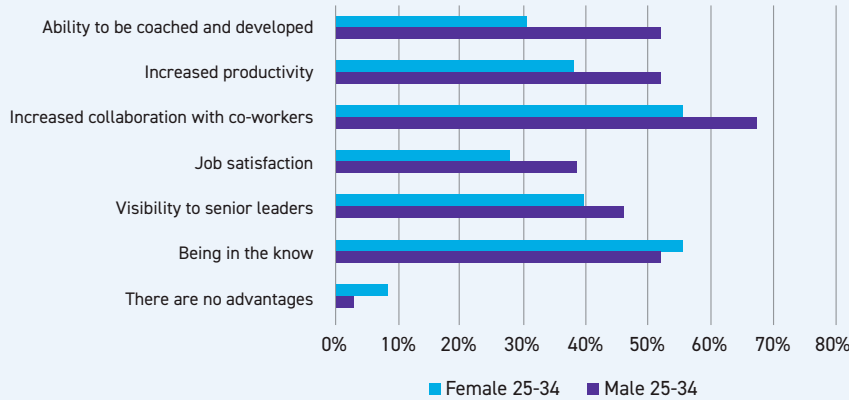
part of the week, interacting digitally from dens, bedrooms, and coffee shops. Perhaps never again will it be normal for most people to commute five days a week.

Instead, organizations are engaged in a dialogue with their employees about when, where, and under what circumstances they fulfill their responsibilities. The notions of being in the same office, the same country, or even what it means to be an employee are being challenged. Rather than meeting in conference rooms and chatting by the coffee machine, the digital cloud has now become the connector for many. On the other hand, attending in-person meetings, having lunch with co-workers,

or stopping by a leader’s office helps build relationships for those who are working in the office.

These changes are having a profound impact, one that organizations need to manage and adapt to. To get a better sense of the effects—particularly on women, but on workplace dynamics more generally—the American Management Association (AMA) conducted a wide-ranging survey of 1,000 U.S. knowledge workers. Respondents split roughly into thirds when reporting that they work in an office five days a week, three or four days, or two or fewer days, and there was a negligible difference between respondents and their supervisors. Surprisingly, for such a

## Advantages of Working in the Office for Early-Career Male vs. Female



radical change, we received a lot of positive news.

The results of the survey are summarized in the whitepaper *How Hybrid Work Affects Career Advancement with Disparities Based on Gender and Age*, available from AMA.

In addition, the findings were presented and discussed at the recent briefing *Success in a Hybrid World: What It Takes to Advance Your Talent*, held in New York City and hosted by the AMA Women's Leadership Center. The briefing specifically highlighted survey data that reflected the impact of hybrid work on career advancement for women, with an expert panel moderating an in-depth discussion among guests from a wide range of industries sharing their own experiences with hybrid work.

AMA found that hybrid work enjoys broad support among women and men, across every age group and with senior and junior employees alike. Hybrid is especially valued by mid-career women, who shoulder an excess burden of caring for children and aging parents, as many family and household duties still fall on them.

But AMA also uncovered evidence of unsettling discrepancies. Notably, we found meaningful differences between how men and women are benefiting from the new, more fluid work arrangement, and in how they regard the office. Among the biggest concerns we uncovered:

- Far more young men than women said they were advancing by working from the office.

- Men are significantly more likely to derive key benefits from in-office work.

- Collaboration and rapport building have suffered setbacks.

- Although training is booming, many organizations are falling behind in preparing managers for the workplace shift and training ambitious employees.

To this point, Kelly Botti, president and chief executive officer of TruMark Financial Credit Union, commented at the New York briefing that the pandemic made clear that many managers are just managing and not leading their people, saying, "Leadership isn't about you, it's about them."

Organizations that fail to manage such discrepancies could jeopardize the progress they have made in promoting equity and could find themselves at a competitive disadvantage.

### Men recognize more advantages of working in an office than women

Some of our most striking findings pertain to the critical differences between how men and women perceive office-based work. This is particularly true for early-career men, who generally spend more time in the office than women.

Fifty-two percent of men aged 25 to 34 work from the office at least four days a week, compared to 46% of their female counterparts, and fewer work two or fewer days from home (28% of men vs. 37% of women).

When asked about the advantages of working in the office, early-career men

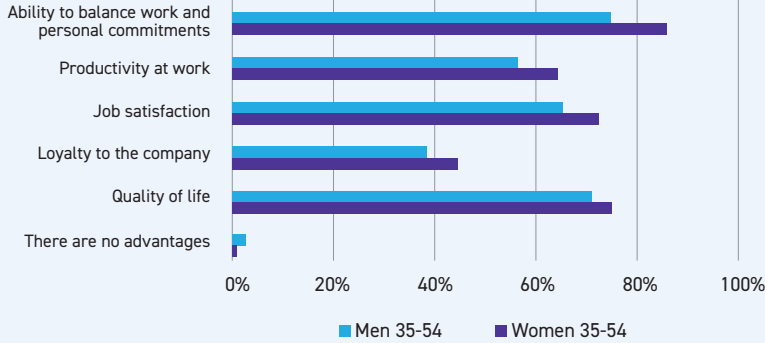
were more likely than women of the same age to report greater visibility to senior leaders (46% for men vs. 40% for women) and substantially more likely to say it improved their job satisfaction (39% vs. 28%), productivity (52% vs. 38%), and ability to collaborate with co-workers (67% vs. 56%).

Most poignantly, early-career men widely believe that they are getting ahead by working in the office: 52% said it improved their ability to be coached and developed, compared to just 30% of women in the same age group.

There are different ways to interpret this 22-percentage-point discrepancy. One possibility is that women don't believe they need to go to the office to advance. In companies with intentional mentoring initiatives or well-developed diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, this may be the case. In the context of historic biases, however, a more likely interpretation is that young women are simply not getting the same advancement opportunities—either in or out of the office—and that systemic gender inequity will persist for yet another generation unless organizations proactively address it.

Given the broad advantages cited by early-career men in the workplace, the most likely conclusion is that the office tends to be an inherently male playing field, more palatable to men and therefore favoring their success. They feel less motivated when working remotely. Men generally feel more at ease in offices, are more productive, and more connected and are better able to advance their careers.

## Advantages of Hybrid Work for Mid-Career Men and Women



This suggests that although women prize workplace flexibility (as we discuss below), the office may be acting as a springboard for young men, helping them advance more quickly. This could be exacerbating the “broken rung” effect, in which fewer women become leaders because they are disproportionately overlooked for critical early-career promotions, from entry level to manager.

Some, but not all, of the stark differences between how early-career men and women viewed the advantages of working in the office persisted for older workers. Men aged 35 to 44 said that working from the office provided significantly greater visibility to senior leaders (50% vs. 37%) and enhanced job satisfaction (40% vs. 27%).

If organizations are going to continue hybrid work—and there are compelling reasons for them to do so, as we discuss below—they need to do a better job of balancing coaching and development across genders. They need to ensure that women are equally comfortable and recognized in the workplace.

This same theme was echoed in the New York briefing. According to one of the expert panelists at the event, Pamela Booker, head of education, Fragrance & Beauty for Chanel, “We had to amp up our ability to listen to our employees. Ask questions and listen closely to them to see what they need.”

The bottom line: If men prefer the office, and it offers them greater advancement opportunities, organizations that favor office work could alienate women and be dominated by men. This would result in

backsliding on DEI and keep more men at the top of the corporate ladder.

### Hybrid and remote work affect team-building capabilities

Teamwork is everything in the modern economy. It’s the bond that keeps organizations functioning effectively, the machine that gets work done, and the magic that turns ideas into innovations. Team building depends on the ability of employees to collaborate effectively and develop rapport with one another. Yet we found that the post-pandemic work arrangement has had an adverse impact on rapport and collaboration.

About half (51%) of respondents who work remotely at least one weekday said remote work hinders rapport building. The proportion jumped to two-thirds (67%) for those who go to an office daily. The more senior the employee, the greater the struggle in building rapport with remote workers, with 65% of executives citing it as an issue. Men reported greater difficulty with this than women, particularly men aged 25 to 34 (67%) and 45 to 54 (57%).

In addition to rapport-building challenges, many respondents (43%) also said that remote work hinders collaboration. Like rapport building, this was more commonly an issue for men (49%) than women (38%) and for more senior employees (65% of executives).

Of course, collaboration and rapport have changed radically since the pandemic, and yet they are integral to the effective functioning of a competitive organization. These days, employees are expected to have both traditional

team-building skills and the self-direction to effectively collaborate from afar.

AMA believes that collaborative success depends on four factors:

- Developing trust, which in a hybrid environment needs to be achieved without face-to-face interaction
- Leading with influence to support teamwork with “soft power,” meaning by inspiring rather than directing
- Working fluidly across boundaries by learning colleagues’ approach to work, collaboration style, and cultural references
- Demonstrating global awareness, so that an individual can be an active, informed teammate and leader.

Our experience has shown that these skills can be developed with the proper training.

In the New York briefing, panelist Marissa Wells, associate director, leadership and learning excellence at Johnson & Johnson, commented, “We aimed to get really intentional with the skills we valued as an organization. Our key categories are effective communication, influencing with and without authority, developing yourself and developing others, and strategic leadership.”

### Hybrid enjoys broad support, particularly for mid-career women

Despite the challenges previously discussed, respondents overwhelmingly cited advantages to a hybrid work environment.

A large majority said that it had improved their organization’s culture (48%) or had not changed it (36%), leaving only 15% who said it had a negative effect. Bosses are on board as well. Among respondents who work remotely at least one weekday, only 11% said their supervisor did not support hybrid work. And the vast majority of workers cited numerous benefits of hybrid work. Roughly three-quarters said it helped them balance work and personal commitments (79%), enhanced quality of life (73%), and improved job satisfaction (70%). Additionally, 6 in 10 (62%) said hybrid work made them more productive.

There was strong support for hybrid work at all levels. Consistent with other studies that found that senior employees



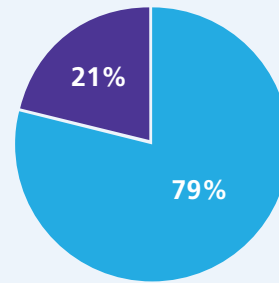
want flexibility, executives expressed strong support for hybrid work. They were slightly more likely than average to say it improved their productivity (68% of executives vs. 62% on average) and their loyalty to the company (46% vs. 43%). Of the 1,000 respondents to our survey, only a small number (23) failed to cite any advantages to hybrid work. The support for hybrid work was so strong that organizations could benefit from carefully honing their flexible working policies to improve the employee experience and optimize recruiting and retention.

We found that hybrid work was particularly important to women aged 35 to 54. In this critical mid-career age bracket, many employees have children and/or aging parents to look after. Other recent surveys have confirmed that this burden falls disproportionately on women. An April 13, 2023 Pew Research Center study, "In a Growing Share of U.S. Marriages, Husbands and Wives Earn About the Same," concluded that "husbands spend more time on paid work and leisure, while wives devote more time to caregiving and housework."

Women in this age group reported in greater numbers than their male counterparts that hybrid work improves productivity (65% for women vs. 57% for men), job satisfaction (73% vs. 66%), loyalty to the company (45% vs. 39%), and quality of life (74% vs. 70%).

Most significantly, this group said that remote work improved their ability to balance work and personal commitments (87% vs. 75%). These results suggest that a thriving hybrid culture is essential to supporting workplace gender equity. While companies cannot directly affect the balance of household labor and caregiving, by implementing flexible work policies they may improve overburdened women's ability to remain on the career path and avoid the burnout that comes from juggling too many demands. It helps the organizations they work for as well. An October 2023 report from McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace 2023," shows that low burnout rates are critical to success. It's important to emphasize, however, that workplace flexibility is not a panacea for the "broken rung" problem, in which

## Lost Opportunity: Respondents Eager to Advance Who Receive Training and Development



■ Yes, I'm receiving training and development ■ No, I'm not

too few early-career women are getting promoted to manager, compared to men.

As for working in the office, we found lukewarm support but far less enthusiasm. Ease of collaboration (63%) and "being in the know" (51%) are the only two advantages reported by a majority of respondents. Otherwise, the benefits of working from an office were underwhelming. Fewer than half said it helped with visibility to senior leaders (42%), coaching and development (36%), productivity (37%), and job satisfaction (26%). About 1 in 10 (11%) said there were no advantages.

### The training gap: Many organizations need to do more to support career advancement

The new normal of flexible work has profoundly changed workers' daily routines. Often, "commuting" now means stumbling from the breakfast table to a home office. Some may be working in their pajamas. Distractions—the refrigerator, a pet, the TV, or even bed—are close at hand. How is this affecting the drive to get ahead?

We found that ambition is alive and robust in the age of hybrid work. More than three-quarters of respondents (77%) said they have a "strong desire" to advance their career. On average, men were somewhat more driven than women (85% vs. 72%), and the desire to advance declines with age. Respondents who work two or fewer weekdays in the office were slightly less likely to want to advance.

Workers are clearly ready to get to the next level, and fortunately most

organizations are doing a better job of harnessing this ambition. Slightly fewer than three-quarters of respondents (73%) said they were being provided with career-building training and development opportunities. As a professional training organization, AMA was encouraged to see such a high proportion. This raises concerns for organizations that are not providing such opportunities: Can they remain competitive? Can their employees keep up? And can they recruit the talent they need without promising them training and development? More to the point, we found that about 1 in 5 respondents (21%) who said they had a strong desire to advance were not receiving training and development. This amounts to a lost opportunity for organizations to get more from employees and could diminish loyalty in a still-tight job market.

To promote equity and ensure that hybrid work achieves its potential, organizations will need to take steps to address this and the other challenges we uncovered. Managers and leaders play a vital role in guiding their organizations through these changes, and now more than ever, they have the responsibility of making sure their organization's employees are being developed, coached, and provided with opportunities of advancement equally across genders and various workplace environments. It is also their responsibility to recognize, acknowledge, and adjust for changes to ensure equal access to senior leaders and equal training and mentoring opportunities regardless of workplace format—remote, hybrid, or in office [CQ](#).

# REMOTE WORK Is an Imperative for Women

BY MEG SULLIVAN

## Why is hybrid work still being questioned? Did we learn nothing during the pandemic?

The lack of acceptance around this new reality boggles the mind. In my opinion, remote work, especially for women, is one of the most significant advancements we've made in the workplace in decades. It demonstrates that businesses need to remain attuned to the needs of their team members for organizations to thrive and retain talent.

### THE FLEXIBILITY FACTOR

In 2020, the pandemic resulted in many women having to step away from their jobs, as noted in an August 2, 2020 article on 19th News ("America's First Female Recession"). More than half of the working women who left the workforce at this time attributed their departure to childcare costs and kids being home from school. The same year, female unemployment reached double digits for the first time since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began tracking women in the workplace, according to BLS Reports in March 2022 ("Women in the Labor Force: a Databook").

This outcome was a disaster for our workforce and for women's financial independence and wellness. In fact, as Ellevest revealed in October 2021, 49% of women said that

their mental health has suffered at the hands of financial stress ("Money Stress Is Hurting Women's Overall Health"). It was also damaging to the U.S. economy since women control the majority of household spending and are the main influencers on how family income is spent. While the most recent statistics show that women in the past three years have recovered the loss of jobs from 2020, not all workers have had equal access to that changed workplace landscape, according to a September 2023 article on 19th News ("The Women's Recession Is Finally Over—but Not Everyone Has Recovered Equally"). Writer Chabeli Carrazana notes, "Black women, in particular, have recovered more slowly considering how hard they were hit by job loss at the start of the pandemic." This is why flexibility is so important for everyone. When given the time and space to manage their lives, often filled with caretaking and household responsibilities, as well as their work, women perform and deliver with aplomb.

### MATERNITY LEAVE

In my experience, this remains particularly true when women take maternity leave, something our entire society needs to celebrate and respect more. As women come back from



maternity or personal leave, we need to offer both flexibility and opportunity. When companies or managers do this, women thrive. As a leader in the legal sector, I often promoted women who were on maternity leave or had just returned because of their extraordinary results and commitment. Working remotely is a mammoth motivator, and I can't imagine why anyone would pass over someone worthy of advancement or demote or fire them just because they had a baby, were on leave, or were working more from home. It's inequitable, unfair, and a waste of high-performing talent.

For new or less-experienced team members, remote work should have more structure. Scheduling regular check-ins as well as one-on-one face time with their supervisors is critical throughout their tenure. This kind of framework provides the direction and mentoring needed for team members to be successful and keeps their onboarding running smoothly beyond their first few weeks in a job.

## THE BROKEN WORKPLACE

We've been hearing a lot about the "broken rung," referring to the ladder of advancement for women. Frankly, much of this seems to be focused on fixing women and not addressing the real flaws that exist in the workplace itself. There is still an image of only one type of leader, which is a huge mistake in terms of organizational performance. There must be diversity of leadership—including women and especially women of color—with different approaches and ways of doing things and a variety of strengths to help a business succeed in today's complex environment.

For women, this is critical because we need role models to help us evolve, strengthen, and raise our voices and advance to more senior roles. To be clear, women are hugely talented with great skills and are ready to go. They haven't always been given the opportunities and space to shine. There's no need to fix women—what we need to do is make the right accommodations in the workplace that foster advancement for all.

## COMPENSATION AND TITLE

Some studies have shown that women in particular, as Pew Research noted in April 2023 ("In a Growing Share of U.S. Marriages, Husbands and Wives Earn About the Same"), are concerned about remote work and compensation. But how is that relegated to women only? Every individual regardless of gender should care about receiving proper compensation for their work. And that compensation needs to be fair, gender agnostic, and equitable.

Women are also concerned about the importance of one's title, assuming that if responsibilities widen they should receive a more senior one. However, since hierarchical structures vary by organization, I believe team members should care more about compensation than the actual job title. After all, it's one's experience and responsibilities that sell you as a candidate for new roles down the line. Compensation explains your market value.

Often throughout my career, I chose responsibility and compensation over title because the organizations I worked for weren't capable of keeping up with my ascent and ambition.

When I spoke to both recruiters and competitive firms about my personal market potential, they understood that given the breadth of my contributions and responsibilities, I would need a different title and positioning than the one I was currently holding. My compensation also helped tell that story.

## THE LEARNING GAP

To continue to rise, we all need to be continuous learners. Good leadership is a muscle that needs constant attention and exercise, yet the learning and development areas of many organizations have started to take a backseat in terms of priority. It's curious that many companies will spend time and money on training technical skills, but when it comes to developing their next group of leaders, which has a direct effect on their future, they give little attention at all.

Following an old model of promoting people because of their tenure or skill level is a mistake because neither has anything to do with being an effective leader. I once reported to someone who was great with numbers, but when it came to emotional intelligence, serving as a role model, and overall innovativeness, he was lacking.

Many leadership skills need to be shown, taught, and nurtured. How can leaders be great communicators who possess emotional intelligence when they don't know what that is or it's not in their existing skill set? Women tend to excel at emotional intelligence but need other leadership skills, such as decision making, negotiating, navigating social and political situations, and strong communication, to succeed.

## ROLE OF THE FEMALE MIDDLE MANAGER

When I think about the teams I've led and the large organizations I've worked for, I see the necessity of a layered workforce. Otherwise, you just can't get the work done in an orderly fashion. There's nothing worse than a manager having 35 direct reports; these managers can't do their job properly because they spend too much time on people management issues and not enough time on producing themselves. That's why the middle-manager role can be an important one for women looking to ascend the ladder.

Although corporate structures have gotten flatter and many middle managers have been squeezed out, I would argue that there's a place and a need for middle managers. If women were



“If women were given the opportunity early in their career to hold a management role, they would be better prepared for bigger leadership opportunities.”

“Women benefit dramatically from the flexibility of working remotely and hybrid work environments and will outperform others if given the room to produce in their own way.”



given the opportunity early in their career to hold a management role where they're starting to produce serious collective results as opposed to just being an individual contributor, they would be better prepared for bigger leadership opportunities.

Having a middle manager takes some pressure off senior leadership. Any more than eight direct reports is unwieldy. It's very hard to be truly helpful on career paths, provide good advice, direct people to thrive, and deliver results all at the same time. I'm not a fan of middle management just for the sake of having it, but I am a fan of using it as a steppingstone to further leadership.

Senior leaders need to be accessible to everyone, even if they're not managing them. Your door needs to be open. People need to feel like they can talk to you about anything, should they have a concern or an idea. Sometimes when you have layers, approachability gets lost, and senior leadership is only focused on their direct reports. That's a mistake.

In my last corporate role, I would get out of my office, sit at a desk in the open plan, and work side by side with team members who didn't report directly to me. During COVID I made open coffee times available to anyone on the team to schedule themselves in for a virtual catch-up. Additionally, I made it a point to show up and participate in social gatherings of the team so I could get to know everyone personally.

## VIRTUAL COLLABORATION

What we all learned during the pandemic was that it is possible to collaborate virtually. It is possible to work on projects, run innovation sessions, and manage teams effectively from afar. These new skills don't disappear. Everyone demonstrated during COVID that they could be productive, and there were few situations where it was impossible. There are, of course,

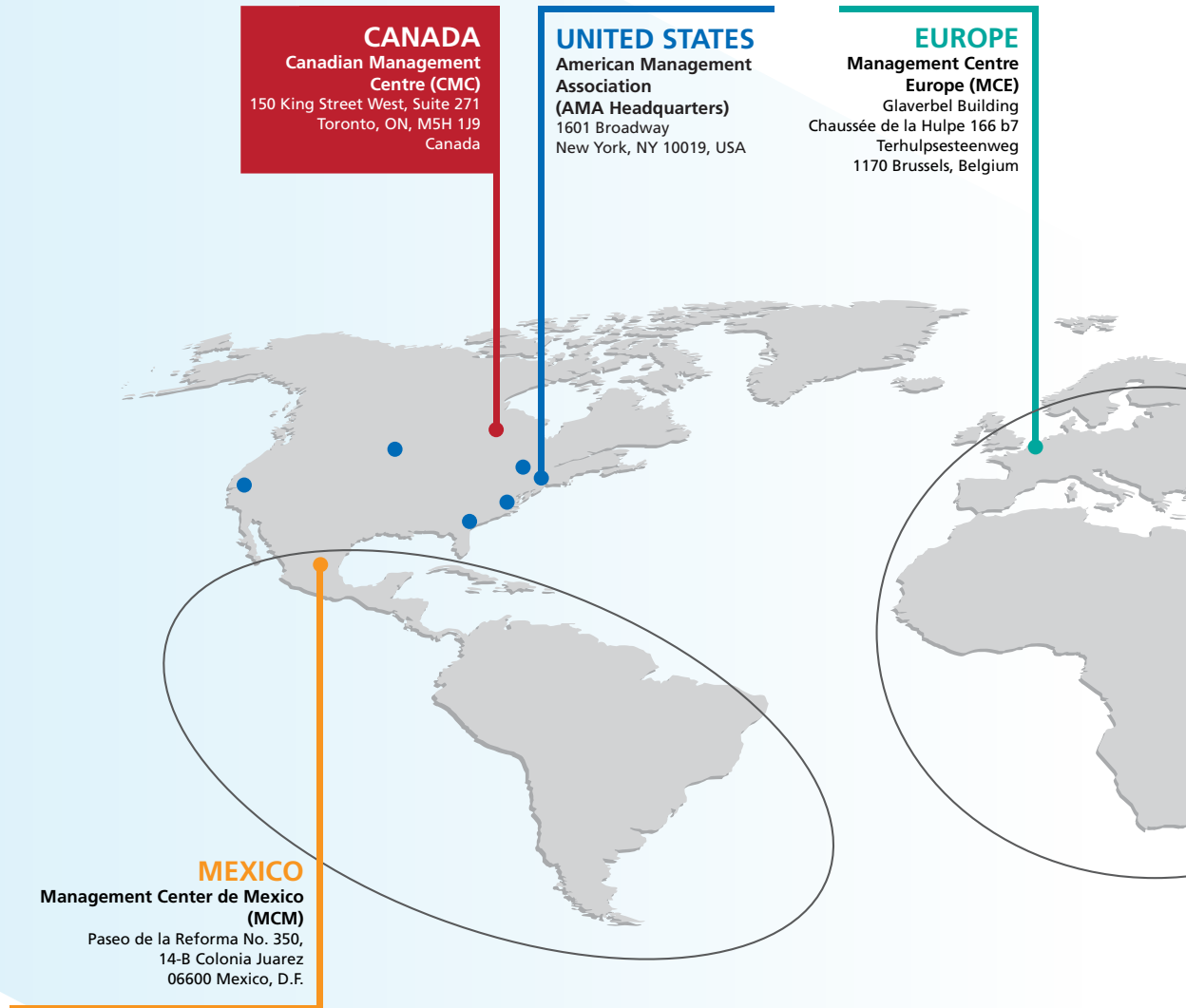
specific jobs where you need to be in a location, such as manufacturing, hospitality, healthcare and safety providers, and lab researchers, to name a few. However, lots of important work can be done, and done well, virtually.

Although I am a fierce promoter of remote work and flexibility, there's nothing better than getting together in person every now and again. The best way to build a relationship is through face-to-face interaction where we get a chance to understand each other better. If you're going to have people go into the office, why don't you all go in more or less at the same time? That creates its own sense of camaraderie. Also, it's important to set aside a little time for the personal. Think about how you get to know an individual and what's happening for the person that day. I like to start calls that way. The first five to 10 minutes of your call is about them as an individual versus whatever the job is at hand.

Working remotely and offering hybrid work environments are key to having a motivated and dynamic workforce. Women benefit dramatically from this kind of flexibility in their lives and will outperform others if given the room to produce in their own way. There seems to be an old leadership fear that we must go back to the way things were done before. Why can't we move forward with proven new models and up our game as leaders? If we are clear about expectations, define timelines, ensure virtual collaboration tools are in place, and communicate effectively, women will finally have a more equitable work environment given the demands on their time. We all win. [CC](#)

*Meg Sullivan is the founder and CEO of The Quorum Initiative, an organization that aims to empower executive women and provide the encouragement, support, and resources for them to reach higher, break down barriers, and blaze trails for generations of women to come.*

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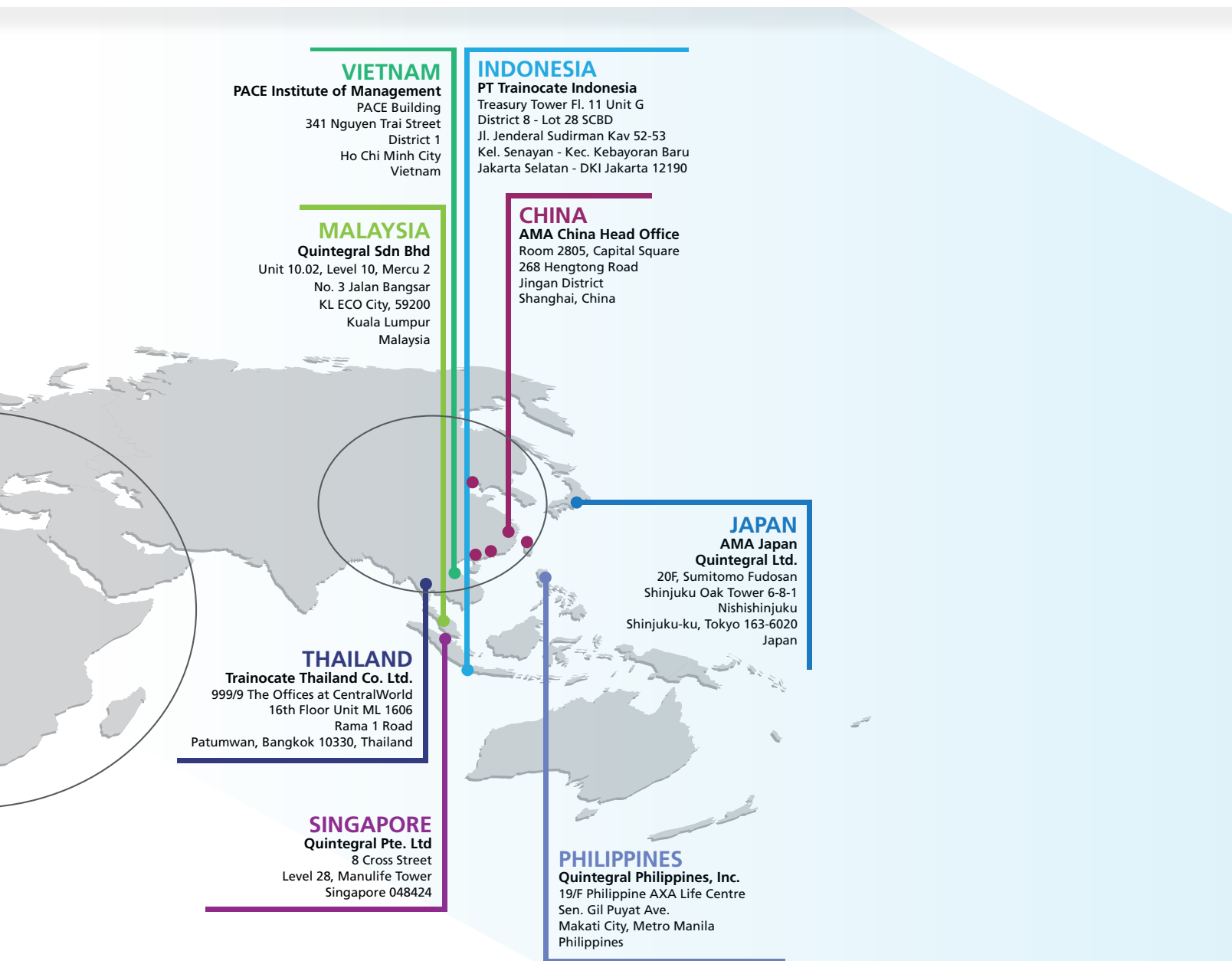
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# Powerful Communication Tools for WOMEN LEADERS

BY DEVIN PARTIDA

Women in leadership often have to do twice as much work to receive the same accolades as men.

Communication tools and strategies are proven ways to simplify their professional hardships and streamline their upward climb.

Women are less inclined to take up space or express themselves in leadership positions because they are the minority. According to McKinsey & Company's "Women in the Workplace 2023" report, only 28% of C-suite executive roles were filled by women in 2023. Many believe they must alter their communication styles to align with men's to be heard.

Many women find themselves the only female leader in their workplace. They are surrounded by men, so they often have to fight for space. When they prioritize networking with their team, stakeholders, and peers, they increase their influence and make their communication impactful.

Women leaders will strengthen the communication channels they have built if they go one step further and leverage their role as a mentor. Employees will view known mentors as more approachable and will be less likely to associate their leadership style with negative characteristics or stereotypes.

A female-led mentorship can also pave the way for other women to progress professionally. As Zachary Amos notes in his May 2020 piece for ReHack, "Technology and Gender Inequality," deep-rooted biases often deter women from pursuing professional goals, leading to inequality in the workplace. A direct, equitable communication channel demonstrates strength and authority, prompting them to strive for—and feel more comfortable in—management positions.

Notably, strengthening communication channels is incredibly beneficial. As the technology company Box wrote in an April 21, 2023 blog piece, "What Is Collaboration?," workplace collaboration improves employees' job satisfaction because it changes how they view work. Women in management can lead their organizations to success if they strategize correctly.

## COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Dynamic communication tools are crucial for workplace engagement and collaboration. They include:





**Instant messaging.** An instant messaging platform is as advantageous as it is practical. It allows women leaders to have their finger on the pulse of the workplace. Even if they do not respond to every message immediately, they still gain insight—and are seen as approachable.

**Social intranet.** Organizations can leverage a social intranet to eliminate top-down communication, enabling employees to share their thoughts freely. It accelerates the development of team-wide connections, strengthening professional bonds. As a result, the deep-set belief that women leaders can be either competent or likable—not both—dissipates faster.

**Videoconferencing.** Videoconferencing enhances visibility. It lets women leaders view and respond to others' reactions, forcing staff to engage transparently and not misbehave behind their backs. This way, they can monitor subtle body language and facial expressions to tailor their communication style in real time.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Women leaders can use a range of communication strategies to succeed:

**Abstract speaking.** Abstract language is a common speaking tactic. According to Cheryl Wakslak and Priyanka Joshi in "Research: Men Speak More Abstractly Than Women," a December 2, 2022 article about their work in *Harvard*

*Business Review*, people tend to associate abstract speaking with authority and leadership qualities. Since women favor concrete speech, they come off as less assertive. Shifting their communication style increases their standing among employees.

**Positive interruption.** Men often interrupt women. Sometimes, it stems from a need for dominance. However, it usually is a result of thoughtlessness. Female leaders should politely but firmly speak over them to assert their presence in the boardroom. Most will recognize their social blunder and stay silent.

Women leaders can mitigate potential social penalties by remaining positive while addressing the person who interrupted them. Acknowledging their contribution and telling them their input will have a bigger impact once they have the floor to themselves softens the blow.

**Emotional intelligence.** A study highlighted by CNN in December 2022 ("All Around the World, Women Are Better Empathizers Than Men") shows women are consistently more cognitively empathetic than men. Women leaders can use this to their advantage to strategically communicate. Instead of entering a conversation to "win" and establish dominance, they should consider the other person's thoughts and emotions. This way, the dialogue is more productive.

**Eye contact.** Women leaders have to walk a fine line when addressing their subordinates. If they are viewed as too



“When women fill C-suite executive positions, their workplace becomes more accepting of change and refocuses on internal development.”

overconfident or shy, they get stuck with stereotypical gender labels. Eye contact is a strategic middle ground—it is assertive without being too confrontational.

## TIPS ON SPEAKING AND ENGAGING AS WOMEN LEADERS

Women leaders looking to cultivate their unique voice to better engage with their subordinates, peers, and stakeholders should consider these proven approaches:

**Lead by example.** Women have impactful, unique voices. According to Corinne Post, Boris Lokshin, and Christophe Boone in an April 6, 2021 *Harvard Business Review* article (“Research: Adding Women to the C-Suite Changes How Companies Think”), when women fill C-suite executive positions, their workplace becomes more accepting of change and refocuses on internal development. As a result, upper management views innovation from their perspective.

Female leaders should use this phenomenon to their advantage. They can inspire others to follow if they demonstrate diversity, equity, and inclusion in their communication. Leading by example will engage their team and peers more effectively.

**Use inclusive language.** Professionals often use words like “ladylike” to describe female leaders and “manpower” to refer to their teams’ success. Women can better cultivate their unique voices by eliminating stereotypes, assumptions, and biases hidden in professional language.

Women often receive more praise for completing traditionally feminine tasks, which are considered less valuable to the

workplace. Eliminating these unconscious gender biases through inclusive language can enhance their collective engagement.

**Communicate expectations.** A study in the August 5, 2021 *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (“My Fair Lady? Inferring Organizational Trust from the Mere Presence of Women in Leadership Roles”) found that when women enter a C-suite role, employees begin to anticipate fair treatment and subordinates are more likely to view them as trustworthy than men, regardless of their position in the organizational hierarchy.

Since employees are more willing to trust a woman, they will likely be more accepting of company policies coming from female leaders. Women should take advantage of this and clearly define their expectations early on. Doing so can enhance long-term workplace engagement.

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Adopting effective communication tools and tactics to enhance workplace engagement and strengthen professional bonds is crucial for long-term success. Women leaders who strategically leverage them can improve their standing among peers and may have an easier time asserting their presence in male-dominated spaces. [CC](#)

*Devin Partida is the editor-in-chief of ReHack.com and is especially interested in writing about BizTech and women in business. Her work has been featured on Entrepreneur, Forbes, and Nasdaq.*



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Does Hybrid Work Stifle  
Career Advancement—  
**PARTICULARLY  
FOR WOMEN?**

BY SAMANTHA GOLDMAN



# Hybrid isn't new. That is, it's not new, but it's the new normal.

The hybrid work movement accelerated during the pandemic, but in many organizations, we've been doing it all along. This is especially true at enterprise companies, where you may have had team members in different locations, sometimes in different areas across the world, going back well before 2020.

The real adjustment was having to be fully remote while working from home. We were all shook up initially and then realized that hey, we can make this work. The lesson is that it's not really where you work, but in fact how you work—the methods and practices that you put into place—that makes all the difference.

An important insight we've gained is that for women, being in a more flexible work environment has given them the ability to take on roles that they may not have before. And they want to take on even more. In fact, McKinsey & Company's "Women in the Workplace 2023" study found that after the pandemic, roughly 80% of women expressed a desire to be promoted to the next level, compared with 70% before the pandemic.

This is even more true for women of color—88% expressed ambition for promotion, showing that the pandemic (and increased flexibility) didn't dampen women's career aspirations.

That's something that has proven true for me, but it has also meant that I've needed to adjust the way I engage with and lead my teams.

## SOLVING FOR GROWTH AND CONNECTION

Distributed work isn't all upside, however. Something that I think really affects everyone, from a community perspective, is the disappearance of the "coffee chat" or water-cooler-style conversations that help form relationships, especially early in your career.

I've seen younger people, who are still trying to figure out their networks, mostly impacted by this. And I think it's on companies and the organizations within those companies to help identify other ways that we can create those moments for people. (Think: getting team members who live in the same area together on a regular basis, forming interest-based groups or channels, and even holding team or company offsite get-togethers.)

But it's not only companies' responsibility to help foster this kind of connection. This new environment has also forced women to create more networking opportunities for themselves within their company. What's important to note here is that it's not just about clocking in, clocking out, and how many days you're in the

office. Rather, are the people that you need or want to connect with going to be in the office that day?

I tell women this: You need to take the initiative on that. You need to find those people. You need to reach out to them. You need to make the time because you're not just going to walk by them in the hallway and be able to have that quick conversation.

As an example, we're a fully remote company at Mural, but there's been an employee-driven initiative to open up two small offices—one in San Francisco and one in New York City—where we're giving people the option to go in so that they can connect with their colleagues. It's something that leadership is proud to support and get involved in, because we see how our employees are taking that initiative and wanting to build connections with their colleagues and also across departments.

Rather than a rewind to the "old ways," the way we're approaching this is as an opportunity for growth by trusting our employees to know how best to manage their time—and what time is best spent together versus working remotely.

## DISTRIBUTED WORK IS THE FUTURE: WOMEN CAN LEAD THE WAY

As more women take on leadership roles, hybrid and distributed work enables us to lean in to our strengths, build new skills, and grow—while taking advantage of greater flexibility.

**Flexibility.** When it comes to flexibility, basically everyone agrees it's important, regardless of gender. I know a lot of women who have children and need to get home right after work. The same McKinsey study I referred to earlier found that "flexibility is especially valuable, with 38% of mothers with young children stating that without workplace flexibility, they would have had to leave their company or reduce their work hours."

In the "before times," when you had to be in the office every day, commute to work, clock in and clock out regardless of the shape of your work, all of this dampened women's ambition and put unnecessary restrictions on the way we work together. Now, I'm able to create a much better work-life balance—and it's more about creating the schedule that works for me.

And I'll go one step further: On a personal note, I'm pregnant! In our distributed work setup, I'm in control and able to decide when and how I tell people my news (welcome to my circle of trust). A friend and CEO told me that she went through the majority of her pregnancy without most people at her company knowing that she was pregnant. About a month before she went on leave, she informed the full company and made sure everyone understood

the plan for while she was on leave. This ensured that no one treated her differently because she was pregnant.

Being able to work from home while pregnant has been amazing. Something as simple as scheduling doctor's appointments and not having to worry makes such a difference, not only for my career but also for my personal life. Knowing that I can adjust my schedule as I need to makes me feel incredibly fortunate. On the flip side, as I think about returning to the office after maternity leave, I'm actually excited to have an office to go to. There are also benefits to compartmentalizing my workday and family time—the key factor is that I'm entrusted with making those judgment calls myself.

That's what employees want—and we're proving that it works better every day.

**Intentionality.** As a leader, it's more work to be intentional, but the best leaders are intentional ones. They're constantly thinking about how to improve things for their team and exploring different practices and structures that help work make sense for everyone.

So as a leader in a hybrid setting, you can't just do what you've always done. You need to change the way you work. If we're coming into the office, then—why is that? What, specifically, do we do on those days? With your weekly team meetings, how do you zero in and make sure that your other leaders or your direct reports know what to expect?

Recently, I was at a dinner with several other chief marketing officers. One particular connection of mine was talking about how she and her team are coming back into the office—they go to the office two or three days a week now—and how they have very programmed days together.

They've adjusted their calendar and their ways of working so that their time together is purposeful and focused. It can be as simple as saying something like, "OK, Wednesday is going to be an in-office day. What do we all do every Wednesday together to make sure that it makes sense for us to be in the office, versus just changing the location of where someone's desk is?"

But being intentional about your time together doesn't mean that 100% of your time is "productive," in the sense that it's directly related to business outcomes. You need to bring the same level of intentionality to how you build relationships and create an environment where people are comfortable being themselves.

For example, I take 30 minutes a week now to do "Coffee Chat Fridays" with the team—and this is something that I love and make space for because we're a remote team. It's my opportunity to have conversations with the team that are intentional, yes, but aren't formal.

And, if you do it right, you'll find that it actually does help the bottom line as well.

**Structure.** There's a simple Mural template that I like to use every week for my meetings with our VPs and direct reports.

This quick meeting template helps me prioritize and gives us a shared frame of reference for the rest of our week. It's also really important that I understand what is happening in a person's life outside of work—the type of things I might have caught up on when grabbing coffee on Monday morning. Lately, our favorite weekly icebreaker has been "What's high priority for you this week: at work and at home?"

Using this kind of format is especially important in a distributed context, because your team also knows what to expect and there is transparency and alignment across all the strategies and tactics that go into any successful campaign or product.

Those aren't things that I purposely did before. The same goes for team check-ins. In the past, I didn't say to myself, "It's Monday—I need to meet with all of my direct reports and check in with them on anything they want to share about their personal lives." Now, it's a natural aspect of most of our meetings.

By creating structure, you're able to become a better leader. Instead of worrying that people won't speak up because they're uncomfortable in the environment or there isn't a natural-feeling way to do it, it's about building systems that create those opportunities. I didn't use this much structure before coming to Mural, but now I can't imagine a meeting without it.

Templates and shared visual workspaces also help decision making in a distributed work environment because it's critical to get the blend of synchronous and asynchronous right. With structure, everyone can stay on the same page, regardless of what time zone they're in. We can still build that shared understanding and alignment, and move forward faster on projects because structure facilitates better teamwork.

Without it, we know teamwork isn't working. That's something that adversely affects women more than men as well—our own Teamwork Research Report found that 56% of women experience burnout due to poor teamwork, versus 49% of men. And this is true regardless of where they work.

As women are taking on more leadership roles in an evolving, but still flexible, environment, we need to make sure that we're intentional about what we're doing, and that we're changing the way we lead to best fit where work is going.

What that means is, we need to start putting these practices into place so that we can be amazing leaders for today—versus reverting to old habits or feeling bound by tradition rather than what we know works now. We're just scratching the surface of what's possible. It's not time to turn back. Distributed work is the future, and women are well positioned to be the next generation of business leaders. So let's give them the training and tools they need to make teamwork work, for everyone. [CQ](#)

*Samantha Goldman is the chief marketing officer at Mural. She leads a global team of marketers responsible for developing and executing Mural's brand, product marketing, and demand generation strategies, as well as driving member growth, engagement, and retention.*

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# Unconscious Bias

## Women in the Hybrid Tech Workplace

BY RHONDA DIBACHI

In the technology industry, unconscious gender bias has been and continues to be an unspoken, persistent issue.

This article focuses on how hybrid work models can be leveraged by women in tech today to mitigate these biases, based on my own observations and research. With the generational changes in the perception of women in tech, confronting these biases head-on can be counterproductive and relying on company edicts is naive, especially in environments where such issues are not openly acknowledged. The tech workspace is notorious for just such an environment.

### UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE TECH WORKFORCE

In the tech industry, a persistent undercurrent of conscious and unconscious gender bias has long been a problem. It used to be overt, but in the face of increased workplace regulations to protect women, it has gone underground in the last several decades. This is a subtle bias, affecting opportunities and advancement for women in a field traditionally dominated by men. Hybrid work models, which have been introduced since the pandemic, are a significant shift in workplace dynamics. This new work model can be used by women in tech to improve their

work experience, gain better career advancement opportunities, and reduce the hazardous effects of unconscious gender bias. It seems the perfect juncture, providing flexibility to women while allowing them to fully participate in the work environment. The hybrid model can give women in tech a potential new tool to minimize the triggers their presence can sometimes cause. But it also brings new opportunities for gender bias to harm a woman's career.

My insights into this issue stem from a career spanning decades in tech, where I have experienced firsthand both the blunt-force trauma of overt misogyny in the workplace as well as the subtle oppression of unconscious bias. As a young woman working at a nuclear power plant in Limerick, Pa., I saw and experienced gender bias. It was blatantly obvious. As the sole woman engineer among dozens, I often heard men questioning the intellectual capabilities of women in engineering. This overt skepticism about women's place in tech persisted well into the 1990s, with debates in tech magazines openly questioning whether women even "belong" in IT or computer science. Over





the years, there has been a slow yet perceptible shift in these perceptions. The blatant bias of earlier decades has morphed into the more subtle discrimination of unconscious bias.

### **HYBRID WORK: THE POSITIVE ASPECTS**

Hybrid work models can be beneficial for women in tech. This model offers a level of flexibility that works well for women, who often juggle multiple roles both professionally and personally. It allows for a more balanced approach to managing work-life commitments. In my years of managing diverse teams, I have consistently found women who are mothers, especially those with at-home children, to be among the most diligent and efficient workers on my team. Their ability to organize, focus, and optimize their time is unparalleled. They are the epitome of no-nonsense professionalism, bringing a level of dedication and efficiency to the job that others often lack. Hybrid work amplifies these strengths by providing them the flexibility to excel in both their professional and personal lives.

### **INCREASED GENDER-NEUTRAL VISIBILITY THROUGH VIRTUAL PLATFORMS**

In a hybrid work environment, interactions are warped and filtered, particularly in how we perceive and engage with others. Virtual platforms level the playing field in some respects. For instance, in videoconferences, physical attributes such as height or stature, which might subconsciously influence perceptions

in an in-person setting, become less pronounced. Everyone, regardless of their physical presence, occupies the same amount of screen space.

This feature can be at least equalizing, and at best empowering, especially for women. It minimizes the traditional, often gendered dynamics of a physical meeting. The tall, imposing figure no longer dominates the room, and the quieter voices can contribute. Virtual interactions can filter the personality or gender of an individual, reducing the “femaleness” or “maleness” of a person, which, in a biased environment, can sometimes work to a woman’s advantage, allowing her work and ideas to take center stage.

A video representation of a woman is also less triggering to some. A woman’s face on the screen is less “female” than one in person. There is no perfume or lotion to smell. Clothing cues are minimized. Even high-definition video flattens a face and makes it more neutral. For women in the tech workplace, a videoconference can be used to overcome colleagues’ strong unconscious gender biases.

### **HYBRID WORK AS A TOOL FOR MENTORSHIP**

Hybrid work environments can also be useful to a woman in tech in the area of mentorship. It is not just former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence who is needlessly prudish when dealing with women in social-adjacent engagements. Some senior men hesitate to initiate a mentoring relationship with a younger woman. This

misguided fastidiousness can be mitigated in a virtual setting. Videoconferencing and other remote communication tools offer a less public, more controlled, and blameless environment for mentorship. Mentorship can be highly effective in career advancement, and the hybrid work environment offers opportunities to attract mentors that otherwise would be unwilling to expose themselves to others' biases.

The flexibility of hybrid work can be useful for pregnant women or new mothers. It allows them to maintain their professional visibility and involvement without inadvertently triggering a bias due to a pregnancy's visible manifestations.

## OBJECTIVE PERFORMANCE METRICS IN HYBRID WORK

A hybrid environment can work in a tech woman's favor by changing the way productivity is measured. In a traditional tech work environment, performance metrics are influenced by many factors besides pure output. Many of these factors, including time spent in the office or time talking about video games, have nothing to do with performance.

Hybrid work, with less face time, pushes the focus toward more objective metrics based on output and results. It forces managers to rely on results, first and foremost. This shift can be a significant equalizer in mitigating unconscious gender bias. When the emphasis is on the quality and impact of work rather than on physical presence or subjective perceptions, it levels the playing field. This works in a woman's favor in the tech workplace, where results are typically less subjective than in a non-tech workplace. Marketing or media performance, for example, are based on more subjective results, such as perceived creativity.

## THE CHALLENGES OF HYBRID WORKING

Hybrid work comes with many opportunities, such as flexibility, gender-neutral visibility, increased mentorship opportunities, and objective performance metrics.

It also brings up significant new issues, particularly when it comes to collaboration and synching up with team members. According to a March 2023 article from Gallup ("How to Make Hybrid Work for Women"), while hybrid work can boost individual productivity, it may lead to decreased collaboration and coordination challenges within teams. This leads to hybrid workers enjoying fewer career advancement opportunities. That, along with the unconscious gender bias prevalent in tech workplaces, can severely limit a woman tech worker's career.

A study from Qualtrics and theBoardlist in August 2020 ("Not in the Same Boat: Career Progression in the Pandemic") noted that 34% of men working remotely with children at home received a promotion, compared with just 9% of women in the same situation. The same study found that, among remote workers, men received a pay increase twice as often as women, at a rate of 26% compared with 13%. This disparity is exacerbated by the existing unconscious gender biases in the tech industry.

Hybrid work's challenges are the other side of the coin to opportunities. Increased flexibility leads to less cohesion within the group, resulting in decreased career advancement. This is exacerbated if the employee is a woman.

## STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HYBRID WORK

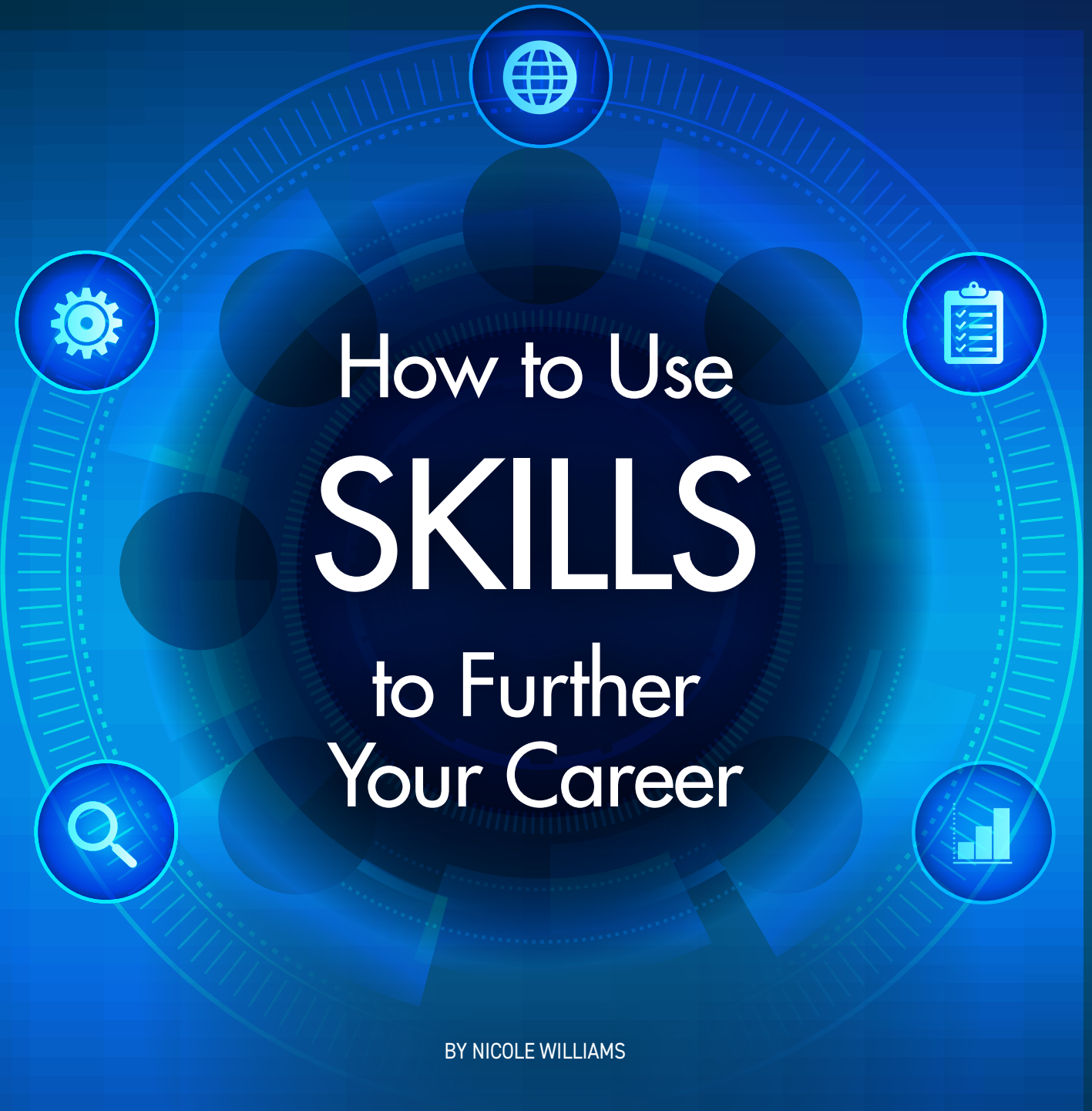
Women in tech can use these facts about hybrid work to intelligently select the best work mode for doing a particular task or interacting with a particular colleague. Balancing tasks between remote and onsite work can improve the outcome of each. On in-office days, women should work on tasks that maximize face-to-face interactions and build strong networks with supportive colleagues, while minimizing interactions with colleagues who have strong unconscious biases.

Performance reviews, critical meetings, and high-stakes presentations should be handled in person to ensure that their contributions are fully recognized and accurately attributed. Negative results can be refuted more efficiently in person. Allies can be more easily recruited. Conversely, remote workdays are perfect for tasks requiring deep concentration, solo research, or administrative duties. They are also perfect for interactions with biased colleagues because a screen representation can be less triggering and minimize nonverbal messaging. This dual approach gives women in tech another tool to manage and grow a strong professional presence while reducing their exposure to potential bias in day-to-day interactions. They can use the new hybrid work model to turn off triggering mechanisms through remote work and videoconferencing. The emphasis on objective performance metrics in a hybrid environment can help level the playing field, putting the focus on results as opposed to other unrelated metrics. The flexibility of hybrid work and the focus on objective results can present a woman's contribution in a stronger light.

I have not talked about management training, networking, or self-care. These are important, but I believe handling unconscious gender bias in the tech industry requires more than just waiting for organizational policies to come in and save the day. Women in tech should view hybrid work environments as a powerful tool to take charge of their own careers. The hybrid work model can showcase their competence and prepare them for greater challenges.

I am proud of the new generation of women in tech. My daughter-in-law doesn't react the way I was taught (made) to react if overlooked in the workforce. The new generation is bold and unapologetic in their approach, hopefully proving through their actions and results that they are an indispensable part of this industry. It's time to stop tiptoeing around the issue and assertively claim our space in the tech world. [CC](#)

*Rhonda Dibachi is the co-founder and chief executive officer of HeyScottie, an artificial intelligence-powered platform delivering superior sourcing options for manufacturing finishing services. She started her career as a nuclear engineer and is now a champion for AI and sustainability in the manufacturing sector.*



# How to Use **SKILLS** to Further Your Career

BY NICOLE WILLIAMS

Skills promise to be a great leveler, removing biases from hiring, learning, performance, and remuneration decisions.

By breaking work down into its most fundamental parts—the tasks that need to be done and the skills required to achieve them—employers hope to improve workplace equity, diversity, productivity, and retention.

According to Deloitte's January 2023 article ("Navigating the End of Jobs") on this skills-first approach, 41% of organizations have increased financial performance, 33% have increased retention, 26% have an enhanced ability to anticipate future disruptions, 26% have more agile workforces, and 26% are more innovative. As employees, understanding this shift is vital since the skills-first approach is gaining momentum, with 93% of leaders stating that moving away from the job construct will be important to their organization's future success. If you get ahead of this transformation now, you will be well prepared when all employers use skills as the main way work is allocated and career opportunities are offered.

## HOW TO GET STARTED

Informing employers, whether present or future ones, about your skills can be relatively easy. Most of us will use a resume to introduce ourselves and our capabilities. Putting skills front and center within your CV is a simple, immediate way to future-proof it for the skills-first transformation. Highlight skills that are relevant to the role you want (and if you don't know what these skills are, look to job descriptions or ask peers, managers, and mentors for advice).

It's a good idea to put this "skills" section near the top of your resume, listing specific skills (such as Python, technical writing, or public speaking) and, if relevant, some indication of your level of expertise (such as completing a boot camp or building a website). Ideally, you don't want this to be a long list of skills with little relevance or context. Focus on applicable skills for each role that you're applying for and an example of how a skill was applied or the level that you're at. For example, if you are applying at a Paris-based company, you can put "French (conversational level)" among your relevant skills.

Be prepared to expand on your list of skills during an interview with examples of when you have used them and the results achieved. Focus on a clear ROI (return on investment) that will give an interviewer a good idea of what you could potentially achieve in a role. If you're going for a promotion or lateral career move, the same approach applies. Tell them about how you have applied a skill, such as team management or emotional intelligence, and the results that you achieved through it.

## CAREER PROGRESSION BASED ON SKILLS

If you're already in a role and are looking for new opportunities to grow and further your career, skills will also prove helpful in performance and progression discussions. Before such meetings, prepare evidence of any learning that you have done to build new skills or deepen existing ones, plus on-the-job experiences that back up your theoretical knowledge. This doesn't necessarily mean tasks you've completed in your

current role—you can highlight a stretch assignment, side project, or volunteer activities that you believe provided you with practical applications for your skills.

Compile your evidence in a skills portfolio, which is also known as a skills profile or skills passport in some organizations. This portfolio provides a single place for you to track your skills, and you can easily share it with your manager or department leader. It will follow you throughout your career, becoming more detailed with each learning experience and career step.

In a performance discussion, you can use your portfolio to highlight specific skills you have built that are positioning you for more challenges and opportunities. Your manager might then offer you further learning resources to prepare you for your next career step, or you may have acquired enough new skills and experience to be promoted. Alternatively, if you discover in the course of your skills development that you are more interested in a different career route, you can build skills that are relevant to your new, aspirational career path. You can then leverage these new skills for a lateral move. This approach will also help employees who need to reskill due to automation eliminating their original role.

## CONTINUOUS UPSKILLING IS VITAL

Speaking of learning, it's essential that you cultivate a habit of lifelong learning. This will help you continuously build skills that can future-proof your career. If you are regularly learning new things, you will be better prepared for significant developments like the rise of generative AI (and all other forms of AI).

Learning new skills and deepening your existing ones can also help you feel more confident amid an uncertain economic and technological backdrop. Even taking a couple of hours each week to develop new skills can add up to notable progression over a year.

## MANY LEARNING OPTIONS

If you're going to stick to something long-term, it needs to be enjoyable. Therefore, pick learning methods that suit your learning style and fit in with your other commitments. Luckily, there are numerous accessible and affordable learning methods available today. There are online learning platforms that offer industry-specific and skills-based courses, MOOCs, apprenticeships, micro-credentials, boot camps, and informal learning resources like podcasts, books, and videos. Having a mix of different learning resources keeps things interesting and varied so that learning doesn't feel like a chore.

It also allows you to match your learning content to your desired skill and required level. Leadership skills can be continually honed over time by listening regularly to expert advice via podcasts during your commute and by taking courses. Coding skills may require you to dedicate time to complete a boot camp. A set of skills needed to launch a new sales strategy may involve enrolling in an academy to learn alongside your colleagues.

“Experiential learning, in the form of stretch assignments, internal redeployments, side projects, volunteering, mentoring, and teaching others, can help provide a real-world element in your learning.”



These learning resources are a powerful way to refresh and sharpen your skills since they focus on one or two competencies at a time. This means you can build deep skills in a specific area such as coding or cybersecurity in a relatively short timeframe. Of course, these efforts come to nothing if you aren't tracking your learning and skill progression in a skills profile. If you are engaging in many different kinds of learning simultaneously, you need to make note of everything you are learning and how you are applying those skills in the real world so that you can talk about it with managers and colleagues to drive your career forward.

## SHOW REAL-WORLD RELEVANCE

Highlighting your skills via a resume or skills profile is half the equation. The other half involves showcasing your skills and proving to a hiring manager that you can perform them on the job. It's one thing to learn about the theories of public speaking, it's another to stand behind a podium and capture an audience's attention.

Experiential learning, in the form of stretch assignments, internal redeployments, side projects, volunteering, mentoring, and teaching others, can help provide this real-world element in your learning. It also gives you success stories to tell during an interview or performance discussion. Your employer might have an internal talent marketplace that integrates with your learning platform and other HR tools to bring your attention to relevant internal opportunities that you can be involved in. If not, don't be afraid to ask your colleagues and wider network for extra tasks that align with the skills you're building and the career step you want to take. You can also look for aligned volunteering opportunities. Sitting on a charity board, for example, can give you valuable strategic leadership experience that you can then apply in your day job.

## THE ROLE OF YOUR NETWORK

It's been mentioned several times, but your peers and mentors are going to be vital in your skills-based learning journey. Mentors, especially those in roles that you aspire to, can be a valuable source of insight into the skills you should focus on building. They can also inspire you to advocate for yourself

and your skills and to assess when you are ready to take a new career step. Three-quarters of senior leaders say that mentoring has been critical in their career development.

Likewise, your peers can help you identify your skill strengths and weaknesses and brainstorm different career opportunities. They can also recommend learning resources that worked well for them or share their knowledge and skills. More people actually prefer to learn from their peers and teammates than from any other learning source. Peer learning groups can also be a safe space to practice soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, feedback, and collaboration.

## WHERE SKILLS ARE GOING

We are still at the beginning of the adoption curve with the skills-first approach, but increasing numbers of organizations are using skills as a deciding factor in their people decisions. The simple truth is that traditional ways of hiring, upskilling, rewarding, paying, and assessing performance are no longer fit-for-purpose in an ever-changing, AI- and technology-driven world. Skills gaps are hindering business growth, productivity, innovation, and transformation, and the C-suite is looking for any way to plug them. It makes sense, therefore, to look at skills themselves and see where they can be deployed within the organization to have the greatest impact. It's where the world is headed since the skills gap is only going to grow over the coming years.

You will encounter the skills-first approach at some point in your career. Prepare for it now by thinking about how you're building skills in your current role, seeking out new ways of developing skills, and evidencing this. When your employer or future organization wants to look at your potential and progression in a skills-based way, you will have a strong body of skills evidence to show them. [CC](#)

*Nicole Williams is chief operating officer of Degreed, a technology suite that combines lifelong learning and data-driven development so organizations can accelerate workforce capabilities for greater impact and make skills the heart of all work.*

# How Digital Leadership Is(n't) Different

BY MOSTAFA SAYYADI

In today's digital economy, leaders must develop technologies to increase their companies' market value.

I propose that this digital leadership requires certain solutions, which I have based on interviews with senior managers from eight countries. Leadership in digital technologies can help businesses to achieve sustained change and, overall, a higher degree of effectiveness. In the absence of effective leadership, companies cannot achieve a high degree of competitiveness and market value and implement successful change to adapt to the digital economy.

Effective leadership in the use of digital technologies is one of the most important issues that organizations face today. The economy is more digital than ever, with digital technologies helping many organizations solve issues such as cybersecurity and operational risk management. One remaining question is whether replacing analog systems with digital technologies may cause the prices of products and services to increase. This may be true at first, but the digital divide is here to stay. Therefore,

leaders must find a way to learn to effectively deploy these technologies.

Many executives are familiar with leadership surveys developed by scholars, and this article is not about measuring aptitude or defining leadership styles. It is about getting the information needed to be successful in the right hands of executives worldwide. The question raised here is, how can executives effectively lead companies in today's digital economy? In interviews with 81 managers and senior managers in a wide range of industries from eight countries (China, South Korea, and six European countries), I found there is a significant relationship between market value and the effective use of digital technologies. Many development sessions are built around new systems and better and improved ways of conducting business. As organizations develop their effective use of digital technologies, their market value will grow.



Companies that focus only on profitability without considering the importance of digital technologies achieve a lower market value than their competitors.

How can leaders effectively deploy digital technologies to increase their organization's market value?

## LET THE DATA SPEAK

The senior managers I spoke with say there are several logical reasons why companies that are leaders in the effective use of digital technologies have higher market values. The first is that the companies achieve a quality of performance that the competition is unable to imitate. This gives the organizations a high level of competitive advantage.

When companies announce they are deploying new digital technologies to reduce costs, the announcement often triggers a temporary bounce up in the stock price. But organizations that can effectively use digital technologies are more likely to reduce costs compared with other organizations.

For example, I found that many successful organizations in East Asia, especially in countries such as South Korea and China, develop digital leadership as an important weapon in competition with American, Australian, and European organizations. They drastically reduce costs and increase

their profit and market value. Also, Korean and Chinese organizations have brought the leadership of digital technologies to a level of optimal performance that can minimize the time between the product development lifecycle and the management of relationships with customers and the supply chain of goods and services. This eventually adds to their flow of cash more quickly.

## HOW LEADERS CAN BETTER DEPLOY DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

My research also suggests that leaders who make certain moves can help their companies better use and deploy digital technologies. Leaders need to design and implement an integrated information technology system that allows the organization's departments and employees to communicate with each other all over the world.

This integrated and extensive system, which leads to the growth of complexity and competitive advantage of the organization, also reduces the chance of competitors imitating them. Additionally, this integrated system helps the growth of innovation by allowing ideas to be shared and enhancing communication. A successful example of this integrated information technology system can be seen in Alibaba, which compared to many of its international competitors, such as

“Leaders must be aware of the importance of digital technologies in the company’s market value and the vital role of solutions that can facilitate the organization’s leadership in these technologies.”



Amazon, has reached an amazing level of cost reduction and innovative growth.

Another suggestion is to use new project management techniques to design a culture that is suitable for supporting the use of digital technologies in organizations, with techniques such as those espoused in James G. Clawson’s *Level Three Leadership: Getting Below the Surface* (Pearson, 2011)—vision, purpose, values, stories, music, and symbols. The training and development of human resources should also become an inseparable part of a company’s strategic leadership.

Additionally, organizations must maximize the role of digital technologies in the supply chain and communications with customers so that costs can be reduced as much as possible. Companies such as Walmart, Target, and Kmart Australia have mastered the supply chain relationship and will only work with vendors that can meet their expectations. Lastly, train the leaders actively involved with information technology at their companies with management and business methods so that the best possible results can be achieved.

Executives can now see that leaders can make a fundamental change in the processes by which a company serves its clients. Success is more likely when digital leadership is used to change organizational processes. Without a grasp on this one tenet, leaders are bound to fail.

Leaders must be aware of the importance of digital technologies in the company’s market value and the vital role of solutions that can facilitate the organization’s leadership in these technologies. All must embrace the notion that digital leadership is a crucial part of effective leadership in today’s economy, as companies need to become more focused on long-term goals and develop and prioritize digital technologies in their macro development strategies.

Becoming a digital leader is of great benefit to managers. As Nancy Koehn, author and professor at Harvard University, stated in Harvard Business School Online’s Business Insights blog in 2019 (“Authentic Leadership: What It Is & Why It’s Important”), “It’s what we’re thirsty for now, we are looking for leaders who can help us make a leap of faith and be integral to creating a better world, and to believe this is worthy of doing so and possible.” Regardless of the corporate position you are in today, attempt to develop digital leadership and improve your emotional intelligence so that you can be a successful, lasting, and influential leader. [CC](#)

*Mostafa Sayyadi works with senior business leaders to effectively develop innovation in organizations and helps companies—from start-ups to the Fortune 100—succeed by improving the effectiveness of their leaders. He is an author and a longtime contributor to business publications.*



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# It's All About the Words Redefining Diversity

BY PAUL SARVADI AND ELI JONES



# Whoever said, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” didn’t know what they were talking about.

Our words contain enormous power—power to heal and power to harm. Words matter. Think about it. Through the ages, words have built societies, destroyed nations, defined cultures, and started wars. It’s words that describe how we feel, bringing dimension to what we think. Words have built up, but they have also torn down. Words matter a great deal, and the man or woman who can choose just the right word at just the right time has a skill greatly desired by others. There’s even an ancient proverb that says, “Like apples of gold in a setting of silver is a word appropriately spoken” (Proverbs 25:11, CJB).

It’s all about the words you use, what you mean by those words, and why you chose those particular words in the first place. It’s about how you say what you want to say and even when you decide to say it. What does the word mean? What did it previously mean? What might it mean going forward? Definitions can be all over the map. Our logical starting place is to spend some time taking a closer look at the meanings of the terms we are using. Socrates even said it this way, “The beginning of wisdom is the definition of terms.”

The first step toward lasting change is to look closely at the language. We believe there’s a need to use words that propel us toward unity. Words like diversity, equity, and inclusion are good, but they fall short in describing the change we want to see to get results. They may be suitable as a starting place but not as a route to lasting change.

In our view, the words commonality, equality, and cohesion do a much better job in describing this change, and we’re eager to show you why we believe that. We want to take some time to explore the definitions of these six words: diversity, commonality, equity, equality, inclusion, and cohesion. That way you’ll be able to make up your own mind about which words seem to create the energy and set goals that fit best for you.

We’re more convinced than ever that commonality, equality, and cohesion are the better terms to energize your company, and we’re going to explain why we believe that to be true. We believe that commonality, equality, and cohesion (CEC) effectively raises the bar for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Having said that, we both want to make sure you know that we are not down on or in any way against the original unifying goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are contrasting the terms to purposefully clarify the potential outcomes of using these terms in the workplace. Which terms are likely to be better to cause the behavioral changes we want to see and drive the performance we want to achieve? Like we’ve said, DEI

has served well as a good starting place. But we’re interested in raising the bar.

We think we can do better. And the way we get started is by choosing better terminology.

## DIVERSITY DEFINED

All right, so let’s get into the details. Which word works better, diversity or commonality? We like the word diversity, and we understand the historical reason for the term and the goals associated with it; we just don’t think it’s enough to get us to where we want to go. Merriam-Webster defines diversity as “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements, the state of being diverse.” The dictionary goes on to list some synonyms like variety, assortment, a mixed bag.

Again, we believe that diversity is a good thing. It’s good to have diversity, to have variety, to have an assortment. But isn’t there more to it than that? Is it just about having the right folks at the table? Certainly, that’s the first step, but that can’t be our end goal. Just having a variety of people around the table doesn’t get you near where you want to be. You haven’t done anything yet. You’re just at the starting point.

Put another way, diversity isn’t a high enough goal. Have you ever set a low goal but ended up missing it anyway? In that event, what have you accomplished? Not very much. But what if you missed a much higher goal? In that case, even though you fell short, you still achieved quite a bit. That’s what we’re advocating here. We think diversity by itself is too low of a goal.

Diversity, by definition, is only focused on the static condition of being different and encouraging the desire to have a wide variety of people working together. This is a good start, but a higher goal is needed to create a true team environment. Do we believe in diversity? Absolutely! We believe in 100% diversity. All of us are different, unique individuals with our own set of traits, beliefs, tendencies, and preferences. Even in identical twins, the differences can be staggering. They may look alike on the outside, but they are two completely different human beings inside—diversity. Certainly, differences are even wider and more pronounced when people come from different cultures and backgrounds. The broader the diversity, the more important and necessary it is to introduce commonality.

## COMMONALITY DEFINED

Now let’s take a closer look at the word commonality and what it means. The dictionary defines commonality as “A feature or



“Diversity is about determining and even highlighting our differences, but commonality is about taking the next step, reaching deeper for a point of understanding.”

purpose that is shared by two or more people or things. The fact of shared interest, experiences or other characteristics with someone or something.” We like that. When you start seeing words like purpose and shared, it sounds much more like a higher calling, a much stronger word than just diversity. Now let’s look at some of the synonyms of commonality: common denominator, congruity, similarity, equal, parallel, resemblance. From the definition and synonyms, it’s plain to see that commonality is focused on a shared purpose that extends beyond our differences.

Now we’re getting somewhere! If we can see and understand and appreciate each other’s differences (diversity) but go beyond that to discover a shared purpose (commonality) that extends beyond our differences, now we’ve genuinely got something. Now we have a team.

Now we have two sides of a coin; a whole that has real potential.

Once we found the definitions and synonyms, we also looked at some examples of how to use the words in a sentence. We uncovered another interesting layer of meaning for us to consider. One of the dictionaries used the word commonality in this sentence: “They found a commonality in discussing their experiences.” Read that again. Using the word in that context, you’d conclude that at least one of the purposes of exploring our differences is to find commonality, to see where our different experiences have led to the same conclusion or led to the same understanding.

Diversity is about determining and even highlighting our differences, but commonality is about taking the next step, reaching deeper for a point of understanding. We can’t just settle for talking differences, differences, differences and think we’re going to get anywhere. There must be a desire to come together to discover experiences that we all share. That’s commonality, and that’s what makes it a much more powerful

word to describe where we want to end up than just diversity alone. When we experience commonality, empathy is naturally introduced. When we all get to know each other and find out what we have in common, we develop care and concern for one another.

That’s how it is supposed to work. The more you know about somebody, the more you can walk in their shoes a little bit, and the more you can see what’s going on in their lives. That’s when care and concern are a natural outcome. Another dictionary we looked at gave this example: “There are some commonalities between the different stories.” So commonality builds upon the differences; it doesn’t ignore them or set them aside or pretend they’re not there. Commonality is all about building upon and going beyond our differences, which ultimately affects our attitudes and behaviors. And it’s our attitude toward each other and how we behave toward one another that gets us where we want to go, on our way toward lasting change. [CC](#)

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