

CEO Champions: Can disruption accelerate inclusion?

Once again at the Women's Forum Global Meeting, the CEO Champions workshop harnessed the presence, thinking and commitment of senior leaders in a unique peer-to-peer exchange on creating the diverse organisation of the future. At the workshop, informed by research and analysis from McKinsey, there was a wide-ranging discussion on how accelerating automation and technological change will transform our economies and how we work under the theme of *Thinking out of the box: can disruption accelerate inclusion?*

McKinsey tells us that we are on the cusp of not just an evolution in the nature of work, but a revolution driven by technological advances – nearly 60% of occupations could see 30% of tasks automated. Women are over-represented in jobs that are likely to be destroyed, as well as being over-represented in those areas where jobs will be created. What's more – many are in jobs whose dominant skills (social, emotion, cognitive and digital) will be in high demand. Much of the discussion centred around how best to take advantage of this opportunity.

The challenge and opportunity of transparency

- It's not always easy, but communicating clearly about the sources of growth and disruption – both internally and externally – is critical to empowering people within our organisations. This responsibility extends to the board level and is crucial to our ability to balance short-term focus with the long-term reality of disruption. Companies must be frank about the scale of change and actively engage women – as well as men – in shaping this revolution in work. Changes are happening all around us, and we can make it clear that it's not a threat but an opportunity.

Re-skilling with purpose

- Organisations are already updating not just skills in STEM, collaboration and critical thinking but also their concept of roles to focus on the requirements of a new world – as well as redesigning workflow processes. However, gender does not always figure prominently as a consideration in these redesigns. Senior leaders can support HR in understanding their key role in a vision of re-skilling so that they are equipped to proactively lead the charge. Some participants mentioned focusing on returners as an important opportunity, as well as how vital it is to support women at inflection points in their careers. New technology platforms will be crucial for connecting employees to global assignments and development opportunities.

A chance to change everything

- If everybody has to re-train to take advantage of broad-scale disruption, this creates an opportunity to level the playing field and filter out biases in our existing development programmes. We can challenge our headhunters and internal recruiters to be more creative and inventive in not only bringing us the skills that we need, but also in improving strategic hiring of an agile workforce through the use of data. Other strategies include reverse mentoring programmes to ensure we maximise the ideas and opportunities provided by incoming generations and using new technologies like AI to help better understand how re-skilling programmes can help us achieve gender parity. It's not just a question of financial investments but also personal commitments by leadership in terms of time and development.

It's our hope that when this extraordinary group comes together again next year they can show each other concrete progress on all of the points above. We hope that CEO Champions will continue to prove that leaders of all types – both men and women – can come together as champions to imagine and create the diverse organisations of the future.