



BREAKING GROUND

Foundations for greater gender diversity
in Engineering and Construction

PART ONE

GENDER DIVERSITY IN E&C: SOLVING A DEEPLY INGRAINED PROBLEM

It is no secret that women are underrepresented in executive roles within global engineering and construction (E&C) companies, but tackling diversity barriers is essential to the future prosperity of an industry that national economies rely on.

Diversity is not just a moral obligation or the right thing to do from an ethical standpoint – it's an economic imperative, powering more profitable, innovative and creative businesses. Yet in the backbone of the global economy, the E&C industry, its lacking presence is threatening to do great damage. It must fall to those at the top of organisations – chairs, NEDs, CEOs,

group HR directors and all executives – to drive the change required.

Through this report, supported by interviews with 24 female E&C CEOs and executive leaders and a range of quantitative data, Savannah Group explores the sheer scale of the challenge and an actionable roadmap to achieving better diversity.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The E&C industry is one of the worst-performing industries globally when it comes to female representation at all levels, yet it contributes heavily to economies and has much to lose from a skills crisis.
- The diversity challenges are extensive, including not only issues that affect other sectors, such as flexibility and unconscious bias, but also deeply entrenched cultural problems and a reputation for aggression.
- E&C boards and executive teams serious about improving their diversity credentials and female talent pipelines must commit to a range of measures, strong cultural change led from the top and ambitious, accountable targets.
- Higher female representation at the executive level can create a waterfall effect through the entire organisation.
- Individual company efforts, on their own, will not be enough to drive the necessary change. What's required is universal acknowledgement of the scale of the problem and a collective shift towards the solutions.

THE STATE OF PLAY

One of the most vital industries, fuelling the prosperity of every nation, is facing a crisis. Around the world, construction is a major contributor to GDP, including 10% in the European Union, yet in the area of gender diversity it is beset by challenges like no other.

Estimates of female representation in the UK's construction industry range from 12.5% according to GMB, the construction union, to ONS figures of 14%, and only 1% of workers on building sites are women. Official figures in the US are even lower, showing just 9.9% female representation in the construction industry and 3.4% in the construction trades. In Australia, the proportion of women in the sector has fallen over the past 20 years, from 13.8% to 12%, according to Randstad.

This lack of gender diversity is almost exactly replicated in the engineering sector, which is 13% female in New Zealand and even in higher-performing countries such as Sweden, representation sits at 26%. Engineering UK research found nearly half of 16 to 19-year-old females think they could not become an engineer and only a quarter of girls would actively consider a career in the field. Combined, the engineering and construction (E&C) industry has a mountain to climb to catch up with the advancements that others have made when it comes to gender diversity.

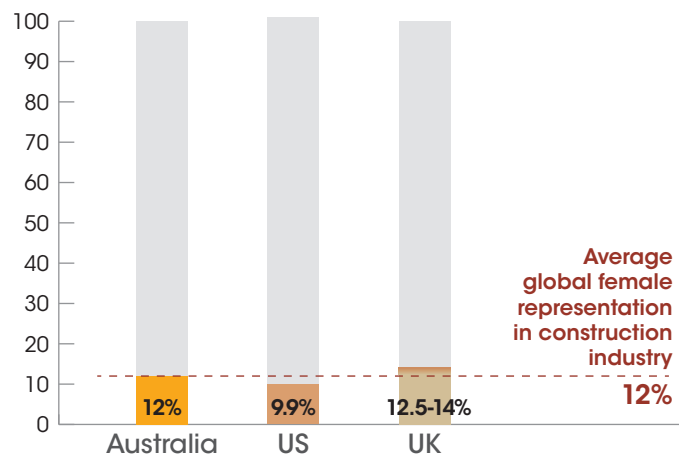


Chart 1
Female Representation
in Construction Industry

“ Combined, the engineering and construction (E&C) industry has a mountain to climb to catch up with the advancements that others have made when it comes to gender diversity. ”

The problem goes beyond diversity in itself. With 22% of construction workers aged over 55, and a poor pipeline of young people joining the workforce, the industry is facing a significant skills shortage. In growing regions, such as Asia-Pacific whose construction market is expected to reach \$14 trillion this year, up 40% from 2017, filling the skills gap is an absolute imperative. To do so, however, the E&C industry must solve its image problem, with a third

of people aged between 13 and 22 telling the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors they do not perceive it to be diverse.

This dual problem of gender balance across boards, executive teams and senior positions coupled with talent pipeline issues stemming from lack of industry attraction across all levels needs to be taken seriously if the sector is to progress and perform well.



MOVING THE DIAL ON DIVERSITY

That's not to say efforts, and indeed progress, are non-existent in the E&C industry. A 2020 survey by risk management assessor CHAS found that 15% of companies have introduced dedicated programmes to employ more women, and larger employers are committing to determined targets on female recruitment.

Meanwhile, colleges, apprenticeship providers and E&C leaders themselves are taking to schools to challenge perceptions and encourage young women to consider a career in the industry. Though school-age girls may appear a long way from the executive tier of E&C companies, engaging with students at this age can positively shape the future of the sector.

Almost a third of jobs in Crossrail, one of the UK's largest infrastructure projects of a generation, are filled by

women, and Tideway CEO Andy Mitchell has set the target of achieving gender parity on his vast project by 2023. Furthermore, a study by construction careers specialist Go Construct found that 37% of people entering the industry from higher education are now women.

This is all decent progress, despite other sectors advancing further. At the start of 2020, while McKinsey research showed a third of companies in the US still had no women at all on their executive teams, gender diversity in the workplace was clearly trending in the right direction. Between 2014 and 2019, female representation on exec teams in the US and UK rose from 15% to 20%. Meanwhile, Savannah's most recently published quarterly analysis of appointments to FTSE 350 boards, for the third quarter of 2020, showed that 51% of NED appointments were female.

REVERSING PROGRESS FOR WOMEN

Unfortunately, however, the Covid-19 pandemic is now set to unwind years of steady advancements and could even set the gender balance progress back half a decade, according to McKinsey, with one in four women in its 2020 Women in the Workplace study considering downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce entirely. This rises to one in three among mothers, with the majority citing childcare as a primary reason.

“ Though it can’t be denied that there have been some E&C successes in the diversity space over the last decade, the reality is total female representation numbers have barely budged. There are a good many diversity ‘initiatives’ throughout the sector now, but efforts are siloed and individualistic. ”

Yet the inhibitors to gender diversity in the E&C industry stretch beyond flexibility for new mothers returning to the workplace. In a 2020 study by Randstad,

72% of women in construction said they have faced discrimination in the workplace, with four in ten on the receiving end of inappropriate comments or behaviour from a male colleague. Meanwhile, 42% have been passed over for a promotion or project, up from 25% when the same study was conducted 15 years prior.

Indeed, when survey respondents were asked why they leave the sector, the biggest reasons were its male-dominated culture and outright discrimination, cited by 47% and 38% of women respectively. The lack of flexible hours (35%), childcare costs (33%) and poor maternity rights or pay (22%) followed after.

Though it can’t be denied that there have been some E&C successes in the diversity space over the last decade, the reality is total female representation numbers have barely budged. There are a good many diversity ‘initiatives’ throughout the sector now, but efforts are siloed and individualistic. A collective commitment akin to the Hampton-Alexander Review for gender diversity in UK boardrooms or the Parker Review for ethnic diversity would drive change more rapidly, but until one emerges there is very little accountability for inaction.

BEGIN WITH THE BASICS, BUT DON’T FORGET CULTURE

Providing a better environment for women to work in starts with the basics. In 2019, the trade union Unite launched a construction period dignity campaign calling on building sites to commit to clean lockable female toilets, hand washing facilities, sanitary products and sanitary disposal units. Yet the 2020 research by CHAS suggested this is an area where many sites are still lacking.

The largest problem, however, is the hardest to change: culture. Although more women are needed at all E&C levels, change must come from the top-down. An inclusive culture is crucial to both attracting and retaining female talent. Simply recognising a male-dominated culture can bring positive change, but more attention is clearly needed by executive teams. Poor attitudes must be challenged and a more professional culture promoted, with a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination.

Tim Shaw of Savannah Group has interviewed 24 female CEOs and executive leaders in the E&C industry, identifying what factors contributed to their development, the barriers they have faced along the way and, most importantly, what they believe executive teams and boards can do to better support and advance women into senior roles. Crucially, higher female representation at the executive level can create a waterfall effect through the entire organisation.

The interviews expose the challenges faced by a rare group of women who have made it to the upper echelons of the E&C industry and, having trailblazed a path, now offer invaluable advice for both employers and female and male colleagues alike. Through this report, they call for strengthened accountability for improving female representation from entry to senior level, promotion of a fairer, more open environment that confronts discrimination and unconscious bias, and a truly systematic, business-led approach to diversity and inclusion.

PART TWO

A WOMAN'S WORK: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO SUCCEED

Today's crop of executive female leaders in the E&C industry is small yet highly distinguished. To get there they have had to smash through barriers and demonstrate enormous resilience.

"I looked around and there were about 40 of us in the room and I was the only female." It's a depressing tale that could be told by any woman in the E&C industry. This one comes from Cath Schefer, executive vice president and chief operating officer for Stantec's global operations, though it is accompanied with a silver lining. "It was during a meeting with a major client and it was actually their CEO who brought it up," says Schefer. "I hadn't even noticed. He said, 'We should really do something about that.'"

The moment, which only happened last year, is largely indicative of where the E&C industry is up to in its relationship with diversity and inclusion: a

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growing recognition from the top of businesses that something needs to be done, but little active progress. "I look at our annual gender pay gap reporting and say it's not good enough; we're not making enough progress," Schefer adds. "It's such a busy job and sometimes you lose sight of the fact you need a really strong plan if you want to genuinely change things."

WOMEN OF STEEL: THE POWER OF RESILIENCE

Resilience is a common trait among the women interviewed for this report, especially as they sought to bounce back from hardship or bad experiences. There are near-universal recollections of men responding angrily to words they would be fine hearing from another man, and in other instances memories of blatant discrimination.

Dervilla Mitchell, Deputy Chair for Arup Group, recalls telling a site manager in Dublin that steel reinforcement had not been installed according to the drawing. "He came at me with a steel bar, shouting 'I've been 30 years in the industry and a young girlie will not tell me what's right and wrong'," she says.

On another building site, a worker pointed at Cindy Wallis-Lage, who is now president of Black & Veatch's global water business, and said: "I didn't know you had resorted to sending young secretaries to do jobs." Elsewhere, one female E&C director remembers a managing director saying she had no hope of promotion because she's female and "that's the way it is", while another was told by her CEO, after having

to explain to him she was not the office admin person, that "you are a female and will never get anywhere".

Several of our interviewees had to face down doubt from men before proving their leadership capabilities. When Dawne Hickton, who is now chief operating officer of the critical mission solutions group at Jacobs Engineering Group, previously became a CEO, there were "a lot of grumblings" from male colleagues. "Even though I was better qualified than the man I was up against for the role, there was this assumption that what he had would make him better at the job than me," she says. When Ina Brandes became president of Central Europe at Sweco AB, it was a similar story: "A number of middle-aged men were utterly shocked that it could happen."

Adversity is familiar among many of the interviewees, though the resulting resilience also has its value. "This is definitely an industry that requires resilience, especially for women, but everything negative I've experienced has strengthened me in the workplace," says Susan Reisbord, CEO of Cardno. "There is no scar that hasn't served me."



WRITING OFF MOTHERS

Unsurprisingly, other setbacks occurred when women returned from maternity leave. Schefer looks back on a period of disillusionment when she had to give her job over to somebody else and felt “overlooked” on her return: “It is much more flexible now, but it was almost like, let’s forget all that great work you’ve done.” When Cathy Travers, now managing director UK and Europe at Mott MacDonald, returned to work, she requested a new challenge and a bit more money to cover nursery fees. “You’ve been no use to me on maternity leave,” came her boss’s blunt response. “It was the first time I had felt somebody saying something overtly sexist to me. It was a really tough period and I suspect it is a time a lot of women challenge themselves as to why they are doing it.”

Flexibility, of course, is a major issue holding women back in all industries, let alone one that has traditionally suffered from an innate lack of it. Contractors, in particular, are expected to be on site up to 8pm during the summer, with the programme director opening the gates first thing in the morning and closing them at night. While other sectors have been forced to embrace flexible working during the Covid-19 pandemic, accelerating acceptance of its merits, there are fears that the E&C industry’s recognition as ‘key workers’ has seen it move in the opposite direction, cementing rigid mentalities.

Two women had to take time off early in their careers due to overworking, with Marije Hulshof, global director, industry and buildings, at Royal HaskoningDHV, attributing her “hitting a brick wall” to the balancing act as a young mother. “I was working all the time and worrying about how I was going to complete everything. I would be on vacation with my family thinking about the work I had to do in the evening. I would put my daughter to bed at 9pm and turn my laptop on to write a trade proposal.” The stress and exhaustion meant she “had to stop” for a short time. “I guess it’s what we now call burnout,” adds Mary Ann Hopkins, chief growth officer at Arcadis, who also drove herself too hard. “I took stock of my mental health and made sure I took care of myself.”

UNBALANCED WORKLOADS

Overworking is a key theme that runs through the interviews, with most of the women feeling they had to work harder than men to reach the same level. “If I compare to my male counterparts,” says Anna-Lena Öberg-Högsta, president of Europe and managing director of Nordics at Golder, “their wives are not working which means they can pour in 24/7 because their family is being taken care of in the background. I have one job at the office and then another when I come home. It means I have to work much more.”

The sentiment isn’t only felt in relation to juggling work and family life, which of course many men have to do today too, but also to ensure naysayers are proved wrong. Wallis-Lage says she’s worked harder to never be on the receiving end of a comment like “I knew a female couldn’t do that job”, which she’s heard being said about other women. Louise Adams, chief executive for Australia and New Zealand at Aurecon, adds: “I’ve always felt I had to be a little better than anybody else around me in order to succeed.”

Fiona Cousins, who leads the sustainability team in Arup’s New York office, calls it a survival tactic. “Women get used to having to be extraordinarily technically robust,” she says. “It’s something Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May were known to do when prime minister – always ensuring they were ahead of the brief. I definitely did an enormous amount of reading so I was technically robust on some things that everybody else was BSing their way through. It is very hard work to be always ahead of the game.”

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Whatever you call it, it's an unfortunate knock-on effect of **unconscious bias, a major, invisible blocker to truly achieving diversity in the workplace.** If a woman doesn't complete a presentation for a meeting, Öberg-Högsta says, she's unprepared, unfocused and not able to deliver. If a man doesn't, "he's busy, engaged in other work and we should be glad he's spared time for us". She adds: "We're viewed completely differently which means, as a woman, you have to be more prepared than your male colleagues."

We still, as a society, picture strong leaders being men, says Chantal Sorel, former president of SNC-Lavalin Capital: "When you do onsite work, I can tell you it's not for the faint-hearted, and

unconsciously people are still prone to not putting a woman in those situations, thinking she cannot take the fight." That goes for women too, with Hannah Hamling, former president of Golder's Asia-Pacific region, adding: "It's really important we're aware of our own biases – we've got to embrace and support other women."

Adams refers to a "systemic level of comfort with the white middle-aged alpha male leader" which exists at the executive level in most organisations. She recalls a time of tension between two senior leaders, one male and one female, which was becoming unmanageable. In a conversation with a male colleague about the situation, unconscious bias was clearly evident. "He said there's no way we can lose him but I'm not fussed about her. My view

was the opposite. I said we are both more comfortable with the person that is more like us and this is where we have got to challenge ourselves as an organisation so we don't let this stuff slip in. It's why diversity in boardrooms is so important because a male-dominated board will always be balanced against women."

Hickton also ensures she challenges her team on unconscious biases. "I ask them: who do you invite to your house for dinner? Your friends you grew up with, most likely, who look like you and think like you, and you are probably hiring people in the same mould – we're most comfortable with the people most like us. We live in this echo chamber and consequently we bring that to work. We have to fight to overcome unconscious bias."

PERPETUATING AGGRESSION

Such biases also, unfortunately, further perpetuate the E&C industry's problematic reputation for aggression. "When you only hire people in your own image, what you bring is ego and aggressiveness and people who make clans or groups," says Chloé Clair, CEO at namR (formerly CTO at Vinci Construction). "If you have a diverse team, everybody is with each other. They don't have a natural person to partner with. I don't want to hear anyone saying there is a lack of different people we can get; it is not true. I have a small team and it represents men and women from different origins and backgrounds."

It's clear the aggression issue falls predominantly on the contracting side of the E&C fence, and it's wildly off-putting even to the women who have already ascended the industry, let alone those yet to enter it. "People scream at each other and the language is bad, the perspectives are different," says Cousins. "It takes an awful lot of sticking to your guns and not being riled up." Despite her success on the engineering side, Hulshof admits: "I would never go into that environment – I'd be totally ineffective."

The personal setbacks outlined in this chapter, when grouped together, may imply a high prevalence of ornery male colleagues, so it is important to note they were always caveated with assurance that the extreme incidents were isolated, atypical and less common today. **Many also noted the importance of male allies, mentors and advocates through their careers,** as well as their fondness for the E&C industry in general and the positive, tangible purpose it serves in society. Yet while unacceptable experiences may be the exception, not the prevailing trend, it is crucial they are called out because they reflect a persistent culture and the scale of the gender diversity problem faced by the sector today.

PART THREE

WALKING THE TALK: ACTION POINTS FOR BETTER DIVERSITY

Boards and executive teams wanting to improve diversity can commit to a roadmap of strategic and organisational goals for building and nurturing pipelines of high-potential women.

TRUST IN FLEXIBILITY

Male-dominated industries are too often guilty of overlooking flexible working options and sticking with traditional models. When women leave the workforce to start a family, **there needs to be a clear route back into roles of a comparable seniority with flexible work patterns**. Maternity return programmes, which have matured in industries such as financial services, are a great way of doing this. Mott MacDonald has led the way in E&C with its 'Re:Connectors' programme.

In many sectors, the Covid-19 pandemic has gone a long way to eradicating the archaic opinion that someone must be physically present among colleagues to be 'working'. The E&C industry must catch-up with the reality because it's a poisonous view that fuels gender bias. A woman is not working less if she has children, and it falls to employers to implement both a structure and culture that

ensures staff are recognised for their performance and potential, not time spent in the office.

"Mothers will make the hours to work – don't worry about that," says Hulshof. "Employers just have to provide flexibility. I had a boss who came into the office at 9.30am because he had breakfast with his kids and took them to school. By doing that, it was so easy for everyone to do the same. Leadership is crucial."

Wallis-Lage adds, "I still hear people saying jobs can't be that way or the project manager has to be there all the time. No, they don't, especially now with all of the collaboration tools we have. There is no reason you can't be in communication. We work very hard in our company to try to drive flexibility but it is difficult getting a more senior generation to accept that and trust the young generation."

INCREASE VISIBILITY OF FEMALE ROLE MODELS

It has become a familiar adage in diversity and inclusion circles, and must be understood by every company in every sector: **you can't be what you can't see**. The impact of a lack of female leaders spreads way beyond individual companies or industries, all of the way to school-age girls considering their career options. If they look at a sector and see nobody like them, why would they want to join it?

“If you see no women engineers, how can you project yourself being a woman engineer? We must support all efforts to make women more visible.”

Our interviewees had to climb the industry mostly without female role models, but their achievements, if promoted and celebrated appropriately, mean today's younger generation of women have something much more tangible to aspire to. Successful women in the E&C industry should be championed regularly and consistently, with valuable insights into how the best in the sector made it to the top.

“If you can't see female leaders are there and their strength and performance, you can't aspire or learn to be like that,” says Claire Johnston, managing director for Google Development Ventures at Lendlease. Chloé Clair speaks of engineering specifically: “If you see no women engineers, how can you project yourself being a woman engineer? We must support all efforts to make women more visible.”

PROMOTE THE INDUSTRY BETTER

Visibility is not just important when it comes to promoting female role models, but also showcasing what the E&C industry actually entails. It's important that senior management teams seek to dispel many of the myths that deter women from the industry. That means helping educate schools and parents on what can be expected, and normalising the practice of encouraging young girls to consider E&C as a career.

“We have to get people past seeing engineering as a boiler-suited, not particularly interesting profession,” says Mitchell. “Engineers are addressing massive issues like climate change, making a real difference to society. Young people, schools and parents need to see the range of opportunities. We bring them to our office, show them our work and they can see how exciting it will be.”

That promotion should continue through all levels of the industry with events and networks that bring women together and give them a larger voice. The more women who join the industry, the faster a critical mass of females can be formed, which accelerates the cycle of improving the overall culture for diversity, bolstering internal succession pools with more female talent, and helping those already in the sector feel they have a prosperous, positive long-term future ahead.

“We need to extend some of the magic and the delight that you get working in the industry,” says Dr Anne Kerr, managing director for Greater China and global head of cities at Mott MacDonald. “You can travel the world and see edifices that have been created by your colleagues, in many different places. There is a huge sense of pride. Getting more of that magic out into the open is very important.”

ADVOCATE AND MENTOR

Many of our interviewees expressed fortune or gratitude for having been strongly advocated throughout their careers. Internal sponsorship, as well as mentorship, is tremendously powerful, and it can come from female and male allies. But in a male-dominated industry, real diversity progress relies especially on the support of male execs, rather than only seeing it as a women's campaign.

"It can't always be the woman executive who is striving for better diversity," says Hopkins, who previously rose from entry level to federal group president at Parsons. Mitchell adds: "It seems to lose strength if it's always the same person, so we need male advocates too. One of the benefits I found was simply having a senior person who I could talk to honestly and they just empathised with me."

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Mentorship or internal sponsorship doesn't necessarily need to come in an official capacity, but it's certainly an area where men who believe in diversity need to lean in. "There were four or five people who did a good job of ensuring I was, not necessarily looked after, but appreciated at some level," says Cousins. "Some opportunities came my way which wouldn't have done without senior sponsorship."



OFFER EXPOSURE THROUGH STRETCH ASSIGNMENTS

Giving more opportunities to women doesn't just mean hiring and promoting them when deserved, but also offering them stretch assignments that increase their exposure to the wider business in parallel with their current role. Such assignments provide women with more breadth of experience, putting them in a better position for elevation when promotion opportunities do arise. Crucially, opportunities for stretch assignments should be presented early in their career.

Sometimes it's as simple as offering ad hoc opportunities to rising stars. "Asking me to do Heathrow Terminal 5 was a strong example of that," says Mitchell, who thrived on the high-profile assignment. Eva Hinkers, chair of Arup's Europe Region, meanwhile, benefited from exposure to the group board through a mentoring programme for senior women. "That definitely gave me a better insight into their thinking and connectivity to some of the individuals," she says.

Hopkins also believes her career escalation was accelerated by programmes at Parsons that gave stretch assignments to early-career talent. "They had a leadership council for high performers between ten and fifteen years into their career who would work on specific topics each quarter, alongside their job, and then present them to the executive committee, including the CEO. It provided a lot of exposure and put you in the succession pool for leadership opportunities."

SET TARGETS – AND WORK HARD TO HIT THEM

Quotas and hard targets for female representation may not be popular among all executive teams, but they are necessary for providing the accountability required to drive real change. Forcing hiring managers to have diverse shortlists encourages them to make job adverts more inclusive in the language used. HR directors increasingly advocate blinding CVs and conducting unconscious bias training that challenges stereotypes.

One female exec whose company has shied away from targets disagrees with her employer's stance: "I think some feel that women don't want to be a statistic or, understandably, don't like tokenism, but that's why you have to get the messaging right. I'm saying now that I want to see diversity on all shortlists."

At a recent **webinar on Gender Diversity in the Boardroom hosted by Savannah**, the panellists all strongly believed in the role of targets to provide milestones, and to make sure diversity is measured and talked about in the language of the business. As one panellist pointed out, all key performance measures are target driven and if it is important to the business then management should be expected to measure the performance to provide an understanding of where they are at and a clear sense of where they need to be in order to be successful and competitive.

It's impossible to improve diversity unless candidate pools have diversity in them. When Hickton became CEO of RTI International Metals, all of her direct reports were white men, but as openings came up she would not consider a shortlist of candidates unless a woman was on it. "I'd say, 'Go back to the drawing board.' And almost every time they came back it was the diverse candidate that actually ended up better qualified than their original list."

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DEMAND MORE AND PROJECT STRONG MESSAGES

Targets are a formal mechanism of demanding better from people. Management teams that view diversity and inclusion as a tick-box exercise, or simply pay lip service to it, will never drive real change. Whether targets are implemented or not, it's crucial that strong and genuine messages of diversity and inclusiveness are projected from the very top of organisations. Executive management teams and boards need to be absolutely clear that they want diversity, and then act on it decisively and authentically. By doing so, they will soon find they are able to both attract and retain better talent.

"When I went on maternity leave to have my children, paid maternity leave wasn't yet offered in our sector but the CEO at the time offered me it as the first female in our business," says Lara Poloni, president at AECOM. "It sent out such a strong message in our company that we were one of the leaders in the E&C sector to offer that. On a personal level, I appreciated that. It was a big symbolic commitment that the company wanted to retain women like me." Hinkers remembers similar support: "I always got respect, no matter what my personal situation was. If there hadn't been that, I might not be with the company today."

It's also crucial that boards and management teams extend their high expectations beyond their own organisation and into their supply chains.

“Customers have got to demand a more inclusive, diverse supply chain. You have to hold your supply chain to account.”

PART FOUR

DOING WELL BY DOING GOOD

Most efforts to improve gender diversity are likely to be in vain if executive teams are not doing it for the right reasons or understanding the business value.

Through the chapters of this Breaking Ground report, we have identified the significant diversity problem facing the E&C industry, channelled through the challenges of its most successful female leaders, and offered action points for chairs, NEDs, CEOs, HR directors and other executive leaders to drive change. However, real change is a non-starter if the business leaders looking to improve their female representation don't understand the scale of the problem. Diversity is not just a social agenda – the right thing to do in a moral sense – it's an economic imperative.

Evidence from numerous studies suggests that **businesses with greater diversity in their workforce outperform less diverse peers both on financial metrics and when it comes to innovation**. According to research by McKinsey, company profits and share performance can be close to **50% higher when women are well represented at the top**. Organisations in the top

quartile for gender diversity on executive teams are 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the bottom quartile, and the greater the female representation, the higher the likelihood of outperformance.

A study by Harvard Business Review determined that women score higher than men in most leadership skills. These include softer qualities like building relationships, developing others, collaboration and teamwork, but also skills that have been especially vital during the pandemic including resilience, innovation, championing change and taking initiative. Furthermore, senior-level women can have a beneficial impact on company culture, more likely to embrace employee-friendly policies and sponsor other women, creating a positive spiral effect. Diversity of people ultimately translates to diversity of thought, leading to better decision-making. This means companies can't afford to lose current female leaders, let alone fail to attract and promote new ones.

STEP UP OR FALL DOWN

There are two clear paths ahead. If E&C chairs, NEDs, CEOs and HR directors recognise the scale of the diversity problem, and indeed opportunity, and do all they can to address it, they can leverage the pandemic to reinvent the way they work so it's more flexible and sustainable for everyone. If they don't, the consequences could not only damage the progress executive teams have already made in addressing the gender imbalance, but organisations and the economy as a whole. It's a moment requiring long-term thinking, creativity, strong leadership and laser focus on the value of women to E&C businesses.

"The gender diversity issue is a very slow process," says Hinkers. "But what I find hugely encouraging is that we are now hiring at least 50% women at Arup. If we get this right over the next few years, making sure all these women we've employed stay on and progress, even if their personal circumstances might change, I am confident that in ten years it will be a very different world. But we need to get the next few years right."

While such individual efforts from leading E&C companies and their executive teams are vital, even more important is consistency and alignment across the industry. Singular initiatives like the Considerate Constructors Scheme, which seeks to raise industry standards, have dealt with poor behaviour and challenged negative perceptions that taint the sector. Yet, as our interviewees testify to, it can still be an aggressive sector to work in.

A COLLECTIVE VOICE

Tackling a deeply ingrained industry culture requires collective effort, and that means common targets to work towards with genuine accountability for failure. In parallel, it's vital that the industry leaders engage proactively and positively with school-age girls, showcasing visible female role models and the exciting opportunities a career in the E&C sector presents. There also needs to be more clarity on succession opportunities and a highly focused effort on identifying high-potential leaders earlier in the process. There are many strong women in functional roles, but companies must be clear on the succession paths and the optionality around the various routes of climbing to the top.

"I don't want to be remembered for being the first female president at Black & Veatch," says Wallis-Lage. "I want to be remembered as a strong leader. The day I hope for is when I never have to hear it again because it has no bearing; it has become accepted. It might not happen in my tenure but I will do all I can to ensure it will in the future."

With its strong board practice and efforts to improve gender diversity holistically across corporate organisations, Savannah can be a vital thread of consistency through every part of the E&C sector looking to improve senior female representation. A concerted effort, joined-up approach and consistent global voice around the value of diversity will help the industry enhance its image, talent pipelines and, ultimately, profitability.

5 QUESTIONS BOARDS AND EXECUTIVES SHOULD BE ABLE TO ANSWER

1. Do we have an honest understanding of where our organisation is in regards to gender balance?
2. What should our gender diversity targets be and what is our strategy to get there?
3. How do we identify and nurture female talent?
4. What could we do better in regards to addressing gender imbalance in our business?
5. Is our recruitment and selection process for senior executives reflective of our gender balance targets?

For more information, visit savannah-group.com

ADVICE FROM THE TOP

What advice do our contributors have for females wanting to advance their careers and for Boards and Executive teams looking to encourage their female talent pipeline?

1. Believe in your ability

"Women are always too careful – it is a cliché but you see it happening," says Hulshof. "A man meets six out of ten requirements for a job and goes for it while a woman only will if she meets all ten. I used to be the same but I learnt to trust my own ability to learn new things and develop myself." Ivy Kong, CEO at engineering consultancy WSP in Asia, resonates: "When I was offered the role to lead WSP's Asia business, I struggled a lot on assessing whether I was competent to take up the role." And Poloni has also been a victim of imposter syndrome: "I have been guilty of not backing myself or in a way that maybe a man might." If you don't back yourself, how can you expect someone else to?

2. Take risks

"I never planned my career," says Travers, which is a sentiment shared by other interviewees, "but what I did do is always say yes when offered an opportunity or challenge. If you are not willing to put yourself out there, you won't get noticed." Don't be afraid of taking a jump because "the net will always appear somehow", Öberg-Högsta adds, while Mitchell asks: "What have you got to lose? Try it out and see what happens. When opportunity knocks, you have to take it, even if you don't think you are qualified because the chances are you can do it."

3. Put your head above the parapet

"As women, we often wait for someone to come and find us," says Hanne Christensen, CEO FORCE Technology. If you want something, there is no shame in making it known. "Don't leave people guessing," Adams adds. "Shout loudly and proudly." Clair recalls reading Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* and realising where she was going wrong. "I was going into meetings in which I was one of the most important people and instead of sitting at the table I was sitting at the side because I felt it was polite," she says. "Don't sit at the side – push yourself to the front and be vocal." Hinkers adds: "Don't be too shy; be demanding." Liz King, Group Head of Excellence at Mott MacDonald echoed

this sentiment. "I just went and asked for a divisional role. The next thing I know, I'm Divisional Director of Transport Planning and Aviation. This confidence eventually led to me leading teams in India, Africa and Dubai."

4. Seek out promotion

Women tend to be more likely than men to wait to be promoted, according to the interviewees. "I speak to a lot of women who say they have been speaking to their line manager about career progression for 18 months and nothing is happening," says Adams. "Expecting your line manager to make the next move in your career doesn't necessarily make a lot of sense, particularly if they don't want to lose you." Hopkins has often encountered women who don't want to let down their manager by moving into a different role: "Sometimes you have to put yourself first. That's hard for some women to do." Cousins adds: "There was a point I looked around and said I was as good as anybody else. I told the chair of the firm and he said, 'Yep, you're right.'"

5. Network

Building a network around you, both internally and externally, can be highly beneficial to your careers. "I am a big believer in what goes around, comes around. I help others, they help me," says Travers. Spreading your network and meeting new people can help put a pathway into place, says Adams, while Hopkins encourages women to speak at conferences. "I hated public speaking but I forced myself to do it. If you just sit at your desk and you only know the five people around you, that's going to be really limiting."

THE CONTRIBUTORS



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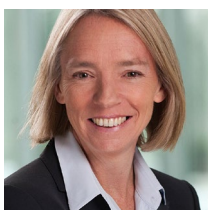
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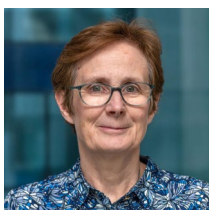
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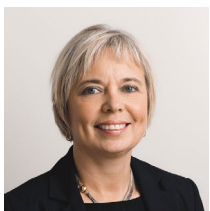
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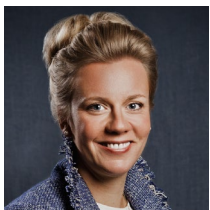
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THE AUTHOR



Tim Shaw

Partner, Board and Industrial Practice

Tim is a Partner in the Board and Industrial practice at Savannah, where he focuses on Infrastructure, Construction & Services. His deep expertise across the built environment stems from over 20 years in organisational and leadership development, executive recruitment, benchmarking and assessment. This has led to over 300 successful appointments with FTSE 100 and Fortune 500 organisations, as well as family businesses, private equity firms, infrastructure, and pension funds.

Tim's expertise spans engineering and construction to operations and maintenance. He has undertaken extensive work more broadly in surface transportation, airports, ports, utilities, renewables and energy.

Before joining Savannah, Tim was a Partner at Korn Ferry leading Infrastructure, Construction & Services across EMEA. Prior to this role, he co-built the global Infrastructure practice at Heidrick & Struggles.

Tim feels privileged helping his clients identify and develop the people who are driven to deliver a better world, in which we live, work and travel.

“The Hampton-Alexander Review team would like to congratulate Savannah Group for excelling in their work to further diversity and inclusion in the recruitment of senior leaders at Board, Executive and direct report level.”



ABOUT SAVANNAH GROUP'S BOARD PRACTICE

Savannah Group has the proven experience, knowledge and intelligence to advise and assist Chairs, CEOs, HRDs and shareholders in building effective boards and top management teams. To discuss how we can help, please contact one of our Board Practice members.



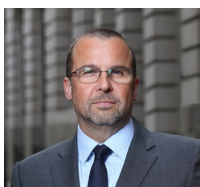
Fiona Motley
Partner

Fiona has over 20 years' experience within global executive search and has successfully managed a broad range of Board and senior level appointments across multiple sectors and geographies. She has an extensive Board network and places Chair and Non-Executive Directors for FTSE 100, FTSE 250, FTSE Smallcap and private equity backed businesses. Functionally, Fiona has a strong international track record within HR and as a Partner within Savannah she specialises in senior HR roles in addition to Chair and Non-Executive appointments.



Tim Clouting
Partner

A Consumer specialist, Tim has extensive experience working globally with brands across many subsectors such as Leisure, Travel, Hospitality, Gaming, Omni-Channel Retail and Consumer Goods - advising global organisations on a wide range of executive resourcing, talent management and senior leadership issues. Deep functional expertise particularly around marketing, customer experience, digital, commercial, through to general management/operations and legal, compliance and regulatory affairs.



Chris Donkin
Partner

Chris brings experience of over 500 Board and senior executive searches to his role as Head of Executive Search and the Industrial Practice at Savannah. His particular sector focus covers automotive and mobility, aerospace and defence, and wider manufacturing and engineering services. He advises clients operating at the intersection between established industrial markets and disruptive new technologies and was acknowledged recently by the Financial Times as "one of industry's leading head-hunters."



Tim Shaw
Partner

Tim is a Partner in the Board and Industrial Practice, where he leads our focus in Board and senior level appointments in Infrastructure, Construction & Services. His deep expertise across the built environment stems from over 20 years in organisational and leadership development, executive recruitment, benchmarking and assessment. This has led to over 300 successful searches with FTSE 100 and Fortune 500 organisations, as well as family businesses, private equity firms, infrastructure and pension funds.



Louisa Perry
Partner

Louisa brings 25 years of experience in executive search focused on hiring at board and leadership level within global and domestic organisations. She has specific expertise in hiring Chief Information Officers, Chief Digital Officers, Chief Data Officers, Chief Technology Officers, Chief Information Security Officers and their leadership teams.



George Williams
Partner

George is a Partner in the Sport, Media and Entertainment practice. He has a track record of recruiting board and executive talent into many of the sector's most innovative organisations. He works on a global remit and has a particular specialism in the sports industry.



Savannah Group is one of the most dynamic boutique firms operating in the global executive search, advisory and interim management business. We work with leading Fortune 500, FTSE 350, Public, Private Equity and Venture Capital Firms along with their portfolio companies, focusing exclusively on senior roles and looking to identify and build relationships with candidates we consider to be in the top ten percent of executives in the market.



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