YeS Employment + Entrepreneurship

LESSONS LEARNED

Advancing Women in STEM

WHAT IS ADVANCING WOMEN IN STEM?

YES' Advancing Women in STEM initiative, launched in 2017, was created to provide recommendations and test solutions to key challenges compromising women's retention and access to leadership positions within STEM industries. One of the project's main objectives was to support a team of "change agents" within select pilot companies as they created internal initiatives to support female employees, and influenced organizational functions and structures that hindered inclusion and equal access to opportunity. Outlined below are the outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations identified by the leaders from the three piloting companies, GSoft, IC Axon and OneSpan.

Pilot company leaders discuss the lessons learned at SAP Canada

Pilot company leaders and committee members with keynote speaker, Dr. Gina Cody

1. **Surveys are an invaluable tool not only in establishing a baseline, but also in creating lasting impact**

   - Surveys can be used as a low-cost way to aggregate employees' opinions and perceptions, determine company's blind spots, and identify priority areas for Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives

   - Surveys can create awareness around specific issues, for example, microaggressions or intersectionality

   - They are also a tool to begin a conversation and create a common language around D&I initiatives

   - Surveys are a useful way to track progress and impact, and use this information in the development of a strong business case supporting future initiatives

2. **Safer Space Initiatives influence the creation or modification of internal policies or procedures**

- Safer Space meetings promote information-sharing, mentoring and networking across departments and levels within the company

- Safer Space initiatives allow for immediate employee feedback and for co-creation, thus increasing interest and engagement

- Holding regular safer space meetings has shown:

  i. An increase in trust to report issues to HR

  ii. An increase in the perception that leadership are committed to the advancement of women in STEM and gender equality

  iii. An increase in the number of women requesting professional development and training

  iv. An increase in the number of women in leadership positions speaking up on behalf of colleagues

  v. An increase in the number of women saying they feel more confident to ask for promotion

- Safer Space meetings are an opportunity to identify additional barriers to women that were not previously identified by leadership

  vi. Addressing these barriers leads to the creation of more inclusive policies, which in turn promotes employee retention

3. **Initiatives facilitating the parental leave process improve employee satisfaction and promote retention**

- Building communication skills around parental leave encourage proactive conversations about parental leave, easing the pressure off the employee and ensuring they feel supported throughout the process

- Developing and implementing a Parental Leave Job Aid structures the process for employees, their managers, and HR pre-departure, during leave and after return

  i. Items to be discussed may include: amount of contact on leave, what support during the leave looks like, pre-departure send-off, return to work meeting to discuss hours, flexibility needs, return options, changes to the role, professional development

- The tool also helps with business planning, particularly for team leaders or managers going on a leave, as it ensures a smoother return

- Ideally, the tool is used to create an inclusive view of parental leave by taking into account same-sex parents, adoptive parents, trans parents and normalizing the idea that men also take parental leave. Making a provision for individuals who have lost their child is also important.

- Amending a current company policy and providing a parental leave top-up for both men and women is another way to initiate systemic change within the organization

4. **Internal mobility programs can have tangible impact on the advancement of women in STEM fields**

   - Accompanying employees who want to transfer into technical roles is an example of a procedural change that can impact women in STEM

   - Providing an employee with a transition plan and a mentor, along with establishing milestones is a way to ensure the transition serves both the individual's and the business' needs in a systematic fashion

5. **Collaboration with other champions of advancing women in STEM initiatives is invaluable, as it promotes knowledge-sharing and co-creation**

6. **Including men in the conversation around systemic change lessens feelings of discomfort and alienation, which are detrimental to any organizational change**

7. **Systemic change is a long-term objective - it is important to identify small wins and build on them**

   - Oftentimes anecdotal evidence and personal testimonials can have lasting impact and can provide inspiration for other women – find ways to share them

   - Acknowledging concrete steps taken to promote the advancement of women in STEM, along with the seemingly small wins, helps keep the momentum and engagement and wards off the fatigue Diversity & Inclusion champions may feel

   - Celebrate your wins