

Enhancing Social Capital for Female Professionals

Primary Stream: EDI - Inclusive Leadership and Organizational Transformation

Other Stream: EDI - Gender Equality, Intersectionality, and Community-Driven Change

Abstract: This PDW aims to increase the knowledge and importance of strategically enhancing social capital for female professionals who are traditionally excluded from organized networks. This workshop will provide insights into the evolving concept of social capital and its significance for career development and advancement in organizations, irrespective of industry. Participants will be afforded an opportunity to comprehend how social capital can add value beyond human capital, such as: give access to networks and future opportunities, build interpersonal relations and ties with sponsors, gain trustworthiness through networking, foster professional development, and therefore act as a tool for social inclusion. Through a gender lens, participants will have the opportunity to map their own social capital, engage in interactive discussion about benefits and challenges of networking and a safe space to share lived experiences to co-learn and support each other. Furthermore, participants will gain in-depth understanding of the uniqueness of building both formal and informal network for social support that has positive effects on both personal and professional development. Thus, by having the knowledge and tool for enhancing social capital, participants will feel empowered and motivated to take charge of their career development and advancement. This workshop is designed for participants identifying as the female gender in effort to address gender inequities in organizations. Female professionals from all levels are encouraged to participate, especially early career female professionals, in aim to build inclusive organizations and societies.

Motivation and Interest for PDW:

Gender inequality remains a dire fact as no country to date has achieved gender parity. Data shows that women and men are not represented equally in organizations and societies (Perez, 2019), not even in the gender-equal Nordic countries (Grand & Tahlin, 2017). While women have made tremendous progress since the 1970s marking their entry into the labor market and signifying an historic beginning of their career journeys, the existing discrepancy in workplace gender equality remains daunting. One critical measure of this inequality is the present underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Schein, 2007), creating a ‘gender gap’ in higher levels in terms of “formal power and authority, high status, and high incomes” (Billing & Alvesson, 2014: 201). Although there is high visibility of women in mid-managerial positions, the data shows that the advancement to leadership roles is “slow and uneven” across the globe (Schein, 2007: 7). Yet, women’s career success into leadership is critical to achieve equal opportunity and gender equality (Schein, 2007) in both organizations and society.

It further remains a fact that women are exceeding men in higher education, have a close parity in the labor-market participation, and are highly represented in middle-management (Gillard & Okonjo-Iweala, 2020: 19-27). Nevertheless, it still begs the question, why are women not reaching the top echelons of the organizations? It is from this point of interest that the importance of DEI work in organizations and gender inclusion of female professionals becomes a tool for mitigating gender bias, sex discrimination and systematic bias that creates inequities. It is therefore imperative to understand women’s career trajectories and life choices while supporting them in their personal and professional development. One critical tool of support is enhancing social capital as part of the career/leadership capital, which some scholars argue are crucial for women’s career development and advancement (O’Neil et al., 2008).

In this sense, it is of high importance to offer female professionals the right skills and tools that can support their career trajectories (Gorska et al., 2022). Social capital for female professionals not only acts as a space to network and gain opportunities, but as a tool to build strong relations both inside and outside

the organization that can support work-life balance, personal development and career choices, as well as offer a space to voice unique challenges (i.e. being a mother, menopause, burnout, social exclusion, facing master suppression techniques, gender bias experiences). Hence, social capital becomes a powerful tool of asset and resource that female professionals can utilize for their career growth.

Workshop Format

Part 1. Welcome and Team Building (20 minutes)

- **Enhancing Psychological Safety:**
 - Introduction and Overview
 - Activity: Speed Networking

Part 2. Understanding Social Capital and Gender (30 minutes)

- **Presentation and Knowledge Sharing**
 - **Video/Story Sharing**
 - **Interactive Activity**
 - Beyond Meritocracy

3. My Professional Development and Storytelling – Overcoming Barriers and Challenges (20 minutes)

- Presentation: Power of Storytelling
- Activity
 - Mapping My Social Capital (bonding, bridging and linking and road-mapping weak and strong ties for enhancing personal and professional social capital)

4. Practicing Self-Leadership (10 minutes)

- Being change agents and leading self
- Self-awareness and reflection for self-leadership

5. Action Planning and Commitment (10 minutes)

- Reflections and Wall of Commitment
- Key Take-Aways and Closing Remarks

Workshop Overview

Workshop Goals:

1. Gain in-depth knowledge of persisting gender inequality in organizations and new ways of working for career development and advancement for female professionals.
2. Equip participants with tools to enhance social capital, take charge of their career planning and give skills to seek sponsors and mentorship for personal and professional development.
3. Enhance self-leadership and empower female professionals to be change agents and amplify voice for gender equality.

Workshop Details:

1. Welcome and Team-Building Exercise (20 minutes): This block will set the stage for the PDW with an introduction and purpose of the workshop and help participants to build psychological safety that will foster trust and facilitate interactions and dialogue for lived experiences. The speed networking activity will participants to have informal and quick introductions with as many participants as possible that not only eases inclusion, but paves the way for creating a safe, inclusive and engaging environment. Participants will be guided with three introductory questions (such as name, role, hidden talent or best

place I've visited, career goals) to facilitate the conversations in a speedy manner. Afterwards, participants will write one career goal on a sticky note and post it on the wall for later activity.

2. *Understanding Social Capital and Gender (30 minutes)*: This block will offer a short introduction into the research about 'women doing careers' and why the gender perspective is critical for both research and practice. The presentation will emphasize the notions of social capital and the traditional social exclusion of women from traditional networks such as the 'old boys club'. It will further highlight the importance of social capital as a tool for career development and advancement and how female professionals are utilizing different ways of networking, building relations and creating social support systems. Participants will interact by sharing what assumptions and challenges they have regarding *building social capital* and share their lived experiences (if any) to support each other.

Speaker for Social Capital and Gender:

- Haffsa Rizwani, Partner and Co-founder, Inclusive Impact, Sweden. PhD Scholar, Henley Business School, University of Reading, U.K.

3. *My Professional Development – Overcoming Challenges and Barriers (20 minutes)*: This block focuses on taking actions that are within our control and reach, while simultaneously addressing challenges and barriers. The speaker for this session will share her personal story of building inter-personal relations and networks in different stages of career impacted by moving organizations (academia) and countries. Participants will then work with a *social capital template* to map out their networks, both informal and formal as well as both personal and professional – taking a holistic approach to support female professionals. During this session, participants will as well identify one key stakeholder to contact as either mentor, personal support, professional development to encourage participants with meaningful actions for career growth.

4.

Speaker for My Professional Development and Storytelling

- Sana Ahmed, Lecturer (Learning Coach), Henley Business School, University of Reading, U.K. PhD Scholar, Henley Business School, University of Reading, U.K.

5. *Practicing Self-Leadership (10 minutes)*: This block will empower participants to practice self-leadership to enhance social capital by focusing on the following four elements: their learning and development, their motivation and energy drivers, self-awareness (strengths and weaknesses), and goal setting for career growth and priorities. In this session, participants will work another template and identify one action for each element. The speaker will support participants with the meaning and definition of each element to enhance understanding of how to conceptualize and practice self-leadership.

Speaker for Practicing Self-Leadership:

- Haffsa Rizwani, Partner and Co-founder, Inclusive Impact, Sweden. PhD Scholar, Henley Business School, University of Reading, U.K.

6. *Action Planning and Commitment (10 minutes)*: This last block will briefly summarize the workshop with key take-aways and ask participants to individually reflect and write down one key commitment (on a sticky note) that they'll make for themselves as part of their action plan for enhancing social capital. All sticky notes will be posted on the wall, creating the wall of commitment and the group will gather around the wall and share their one key emotion of how they feel post this workshop. The group will also be encouraged to network and make connections for future contact and collaboration.

Workshop Audience: Academic researchers, Doctoral students, Academics with leadership roles, HR professionals, Managers, Diversity and Inclusion Leaders, and Employees

Workshop Duration: 90 Minutes

Workshop Materials:

1. Slides for presentations, with research and practical examples
2. Templates for mapping social capital and self-leadership
3. List of female professional networks around the globe for encouraging networking, learning and empowerment.

Workshop Key Take aways:

- Understanding the persistent gender inequality in organizations and research about how ‘women do careers’.
- Imperative of enhancing social capital for career/leadership capital to support personal and professional development for both academics and practitioner.
- Gain tools to building social capital through a holistic gender approach and empowering self-leadership strategies for career growth.

References:

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