



1. Gender-balanced hiring

Does your organization have a balanced proportion of genders among its staff, or is it disproportionately comprised of men or women? Does it include non-binary team members? Even if the total team composition is a balanced 50-50%, are women or men typically hired for some stereotyped positions (e.g. women in administration, men in IT)? And, is the balance also true in terms of representation of genders at the leadership level vs. the rest of the team?



What do we mean by gender-balanced hiring?

Gender-balanced hiring refers to the deliberate and conscious effort made by organizations to ensure equal representation and inclusion of all genders in their workforce across all roles and levels. Gender-based hiring goes beyond simply hiring more men or women to achieve an overall 50-50 split, to having a balanced representation of men, women, and non-binary individuals across seniority levels and functional divisions.

Why does gender-unbalanced hiring happen?

Hiring is often viewed as a reactive process (i.e. one hires who applies), rather than as a strategic and intentional effort to achieve gender balance and broader diversity goals.

This passivity is a fertile ground for unconscious biases; these are automatic and often unintentional thoughts, attitudes, or perceptions about a person because of his/her/their gender that are deeply rooted in socially constructed ideas stemming from traditions, norms, culture, experience and more generally mental constructs. Given that these biases are unconscious, they can influence any activity of the hiring process, leading to the unintentional favouring of one gender over others. For instance, studies have found that women have 30% less likelihood of being invited for a job interview compared to men despite both candidates having the same characteristics [1]. In a foundational investigation into orchestral hiring procedures, hiding the gender of musicians during auditions resulted in a 50% higher probability for women candidates to progress in the hiring process, significantly increasing their chances of being ultimately hired [2]. As such, gender-balanced hiring practices aim to prevent these traditional or unconscious notions of certain roles being more suitable for one gender over others. It involves conscious efforts to challenge these stereotypes and eliminate unconscious biases throughout the hiring process in order to attain a balanced distribution of talent across all levels/functional areas within an organization.

Why is gender-balanced hiring important?

Implementing gender-balanced hiring is not only about ensuring equal opportunities to applicants. There is ample evidence showing that gender diversity in teams broadens the talent pool and enhances the diversity of perspectives and experiences within a team, leading to heightened productivity and fostering accelerated development among all team members [3]. A diverse team has also been shown to increase innovation, reduce turn-over rate [4], and increase financial performance [5]. A survey conducted among 1.7k companies in eight countries across various industries revealed that, when examining diversity in management in terms of gender, age, national origin, career path, industry background, and education, there is a statistically significant relationship between diversity and innovation outcomes in all countries. The enterprises with the highest levels of diversity demonstrated 19% higher innovation-driven revenues and 9% higher EBIT margins [6] than the others. Hence, gender-balanced hiring not only improves your workplace environment but your company's performance too.

How does one implement gender-balanced hiring?

One of the easiest ways to rebalance one's team composition is to apply gender-inclusive hiring. Fortunately, there are many easy steps that one can apply to adopt more inclusive and unbiased recruitment policies and practices. These include:

1. **Diverse sourcing:** Use a wide range of recruitment channels to reach a diverse candidate pool, including platforms and organizations that e.g. have privileged access to talent pools of the gender you seek to recruit (e.g. connect with women's clubs in technical universities if you want to hire women talent for your IT team).
2. **Gender-smart job descriptions:** Review your job descriptions to remove any gendered language and focus on essential qualifications and skills.

[1] <https://phys.org/news/2019-03-women-percent-hiring-men.html>

[2] <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.90.4.715>

[3] https://www.eu-libra.eu/sites/default/files/article-files/libra_recruitment_guidelines_second_edition_0.pdf

[4] https://buscompress.com/uploads/3/4/9/8/34980536/riber_sk14-026_402-410_.pdf

[5] [https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication Files/An Institutional Approach to Gender Diversity and Firm Performance_4c0479f3-9d13-4af8-82da-7f1713af940d.pdf](https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/An%20Institutional%20Approach%20to%20Gender%20Diversity%20and%20Firm%20Performance_4c0479f3-9d13-4af8-82da-7f1713af940d.pdf)

[6] <https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-and-where-diversity-drives-financial-performance>

- .Be mindful of requirements that may not be 100% necessary but that effectively exclude candidates in a gendered manner. Also, question what image do you project of your company? Do you put salary, competition and progression forward (typically valued by men), or do you show that you also care for the company's culture, and that perks include flexible work conditions, etc. (typically more valued by women).
3. **Anonymized CVs:** During the initial screening, have one person not involved in the selection remove names, age, addresses, and other personal information that may give away the person's gender or personal situation in order to minimize potential bias.
 4. **Gender-sensitive and balanced recruitment team:** Ensure that a diverse team reviews the applications and conducts interviews, including the future managers of the recruited profiles, HR, and possibly other team members. Different perspectives can help reduce bias in the selection process. If you haven't done it yet, make sure to provide implicit bias training to all persons involved in the hiring process to raise awareness about unconscious bias and how it can affect decision-making. You can find our free training for this [here](#).
 5. **Structured interview processes:** Develop guidelines with standardized questions and evaluation criteria to ensure fairness in candidate assessments (e.g. making sure that the same questions get asked to all candidates will help avoid e.g. having team members asking targeted questions about a candidate's personal situation only to women in their thirties for instance).
 6. **Track, evaluate, report and adjust:** Implement a system to track and report on the gender diversity of your candidate pool and actual hires. Regularly review this data to identify trends and areas for improvement (e.g. you could detect that the funnel of applicants is gender balanced until the moment of making the offer, at which point many women decline, pointing at a specific issue at this time of the process). In the longer term, regularly evaluate and adjust your recruitment practices based on feedback from candidates and employees.

How to measure progress and success?

Through our own, LeFil's [research](#), we identified a number of metrics that can be improved through gender-focused initiatives, and which are meaningful to track as you progress with the implementation of your efforts. For some of these metrics, we provide a benchmark value, which is the average that close to 100 ventures like yours recorded after having worked on this topic. These metrics are:

Metric	Benchmark
Proportion of men/ women among staff	42% women
Proportion of men/ women among leadership	38% women
Annual growth rate in earned revenue	71%
Staff satisfaction	82%
Proportion of staff trained in gender mainstreaming	59%
Staff productivity	N/A

Case studies



Attracting more women water technicians by Cova

Cova revamped its hiring and training policies for its technical field team to achieve higher women's representation and boost productivity levels.

Cova (formerly EOS International) is a social enterprise that provides innovative water solutions to rural communities in Central America by installing cost-effective chlorination systems in community water tanks. It also provides maintenance training, technical assistance and water quality monitoring through regular site visits by a network of local technicians, with the aim to make communities self-sufficient and able to maintain their water system within two years. Through this approach, Cova provides sustainable access to safe drinking water, improving the quality of life for rural communities.

Cova's team took part in our Gender Mainstreaming Workshop and realized that there was a gender imbalance among its water technicians, known as circuit riders, as only 21% of them were women. Circuit riders have to travel daily by motorcycle to visit rural communities, an activity that is typically seen as more suitable for men. As a result, Cova was mostly receiving applications from and hiring men candidates. The venture set out to correct this imbalance and increase women's representation among its water technicians. Besides promoting gender equity and fighting stereotypes, Cova also aimed at improving its team's productivity thanks to increased diversity. To do so, Cova:

- reviewed its hiring practices for the circuit rider position, including the processes for job creation, job promotion, candidate search and employee selection, adjusting them to reduce gender biases and seek out women candidates in particular
- set a target to have at least 50% women's representation among new hires
- provided gender-sensitive leadership training to its circuit riders, to facilitate the interaction with local communities for staff of both genders.

Through these efforts, Cova was able to increase the proportion of women circuit riders by 17% (from 21% to 38%); in particular, new hires were 75% women. Staff productivity (defined as the average number of activities performed by circuit riders on a monthly basis) also increased by 9%. Despite ongoing challenges in attracting women candidates, Cova remains committed to achieving gender balance. The venture also introduced gender training as part of its standard technical training for all new hires.

Reducing gender-stereotyped hiring by Suyo

Suyo managed to better balance the proportion of men and women within its various teams, in particular reduced stereotypical employment (e.g. women in administration and men in operations) by reviewing and revamping its hiring process, as well as sensitizing its team on the topic of unconscious gender bias.

Suyo is a social enterprise that offers real estate formalization services in Colombia, at a lower cost and higher success rates than other players in the market. Its service portfolio includes appraisal services, nomenclature certification, legal study of the property, mortgage constitution and transfer of inheritance rights. Formalizing one's property results in numerous benefits, such as access to credit and subsidies, the possibility of selling or renting out parts of it, formalization of assets, evading possible evictions and red tape, etc.

Suyo's team took part in our Gender Mainstreaming Workshop and realized that, while the team seemed overall balanced in terms of gender composition (51% women and 49% men), there were significant differences across teams. For example, women made up 75% of the employees in the administrative department, while in the service departments there were only 31% of them. Moreover, in the operations department, despite having a greater women's representation overall, the engineers tended to be men while the assistants were mostly women. Based on this diagnostic, Suyo's team decided to review and adapt its hiring process to remove the gender biases that resulted in gender-stereotyped employment, with a view to reach a better gender balance not only across teams, but also within each team. Thanks to these efforts, Suyo also aimed for higher staff satisfaction and productivity. To do so, Suyo:

- conducted an initial diagnostic to identify all the gender biases in Suyo's hiring process
- changed the process as follows: first, its human resource team filters the candidates considering gender-sensitive guidelines and criteria, and then the teams needing the new personnel conduct standardized tests and interviews to select the best candidates
- carried out thorough research about gender biases within the organization. The results were documented and compiled in a report that was shared across the organisation
- developed and rolled out workshops on unconscious bias for the human resource team and the leadership
- created specific guidelines to avoid gender bias in new job descriptions, focusing on using gender-neutral language, and putting forward benefits and a culture that would be attractive to both men and women.

With these changes, Suyo was able to increase the percentage of women in management to 66%, and achieved an equal gender split within the operations team in just over a year. Also, 84% of the employees stated that they had a better understanding of gender diversity issues. Additionally, with just these adaptations, Suyo's employee satisfaction increased, with 79% of the employees rating the work climate as good or excellent. However, the development of this initiatives made Suyo's team realize that more resources and focus were needed to promote the welfare of its staff, improve working conditions and employee satisfaction further. For this purpose, it hired a human resource team in charge of hiring, working conditions, company's culture, health & safety, etc.

Promoting women's leadership in technology by tuGerente

tuGerente promoted women's leadership by redesigning its recruitment and promotion processes, and positioning itself as an inclusive employer in the technology sector.

tuGerente offers a business and financial management software for SMEs based in Bolivia, Peru and Mexico. The platform simplifies information recording, reporting and analysis, thus facilitating inventory, billing, sales and cashflow management. By enabling data-driven decision-making, tuGerente helps SMEs better manage their business and achieve stronger growth.

tuGerente's team took part in our Gender Mainstreaming Workshop, and realized it had a significant gender imbalance in its leadership team, where women represented only 25%. The venture pinpointed two main causes for this imbalance. First, its leadership positions were mostly filled through recommendations, and the team's network was overwhelmingly populated by men. Secondly, the venture noticed that its brand positioning and recruitment communication were skewed towards men. Based on this diagnostic, tuGerente decided to review and adapt its leadership hiring and promotion processes. By removing gender biases, the venture aimed at improving the gender balance among its leadership, as well as reducing the turnover rate. To do so, tuGerente:

- expanded its recruitment channels to attract more women candidates by tapping into new networks heavily populated by women talent (e.g. women in technology groups), and using inbound recruitment tools to reach a larger women audience
- redesigned its job promotion materials, including gender-inclusive language and imagery
- redesigned its hiring procedure, putting more emphasis on external (women) recommendations, and implementing blind CV review in the selection process
- revamped its internal promotion procedures, implementing a gender-inclusive employee evaluation system and developing an internal training program for women staff to facilitate their professional development and career progression
- organized an event on women's leadership in the technology sector, positioning itself as a gender-inclusive employer.

Through this initiative, tuGerente was able to start increasing women's representation in its leadership team (from 25% to 33%, with an ongoing effort to reach 40%). The churn in leadership positions decreased from 44% to 8%. The positioning of the venture as an inclusive employer led to a sharp increase in the proportion of women applicants to all job positions, from 13% to 46%. More broadly, the initiative marked a turning point in tuGerente's culture and internal processes beyond recruitment, leading to a refocus in its product and marketing strategies to attract more women-led SME clients and create new offerings to better serve their needs. Through these efforts, tuGerente aims to further strengthen women-led SMEs while at the same expanding its client portfolio and increasing its revenue.