

■ Gender Diversity in Technology and Advisory

A Management Consultancies Association Toolkit for Member Firms

Developed in partnership with BAE Systems Applied Intelligence

Introduction

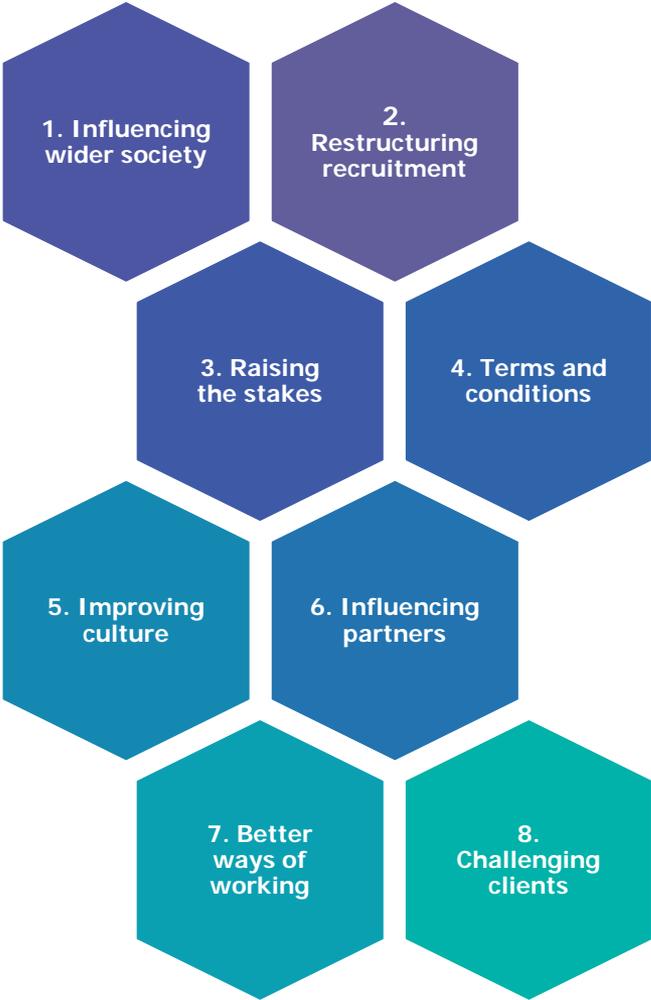
As part of the MCA's Year of Diversity, BAE Systems Applied Intelligence and the MCA hosted a series of workshops for consulting firms and clients on the gender diversity challenges facing the tech sector, digital advisory and management consulting. With the rise of digital, these industries increasingly overlap.

The output from the workshops is distilled here in the form of a toolkit for MCA members. The toolkit is divided into sections or modules. This allows it to be adapted to fit various contexts.

The findings focus on challenges facing women as they navigate paths into science and technical disciplines, into the digital sphere, into digital advisory, and thus into the culture of consulting. Many of the lessons also apply to consulting more generally, as well as to issues facing other diversity categories.

Accordingly, there should be elements within this toolkit that are of use to all consulting practices. These may indeed be especially pertinent to how they evidence their commitment to *Consulting Excellence*, especially pillars one (Ethical Behaviour) and three (Professional Development).

■ Toolkit: Contents





1. Influencing wider society

Getting a significant throughput of women into technology and into digital advisory is a function of wider societal issues, not least overcoming tech's masculine and 'laddish' image. The overwhelming majority of STEM graduates is male. For example, men accounted for 86% of undergraduate degrees achieved in Engineering and Technology in 2016 (1). Many larger consulting firms and specialists run outreach programmes with tertiary education institutions. These could be used to help improve the female graduate pipeline.

Of course it is wrong to assume that a STEM background is essential to work in digital. Many advisory firms need candidates with creativity and imagination to use digital effectively. While these capabilities are found in many STEM graduates, they are not necessarily synonymous with technical or scientific attainment. In any case, waiting for a significant throughput of female STEM graduates might postpone action on female recruitment.

The questions posed in this section of the toolkit are a starting point for addressing these issues. They could also provide the basis for a revised set, which could examine, for instance, how to attract more women into consulting in general, as well as into other technical professions.

References:

- (1) Higher Statistical Education Authority (HESA), January 2017, Table 12a

1. Influencing wider society

STEM subjects are not necessarily the answer to getting more women into technology. Is our firm doing enough to promote discussion, research and debate on the skills we should be targeting?

Are we – or the organisations we partner with or fund – asking women in tech about their backgrounds to understand what has made them successful in the industry?

Do we do enough to support, encourage, even fund non-graduate routes into tech, including apprenticeships and FabLabs?

Do we engage with enough senior men in our education partners to ensure they are promoting careers in STEM to a diverse audience?

Do we encourage speakers (including – even especially – men) at diversity events to demonstrate how unrepresentative technology's laddish image is?

Do we celebrate, or encourage our partners to celebrate, the enormous positive social impact of technology?

Do we do enough ourselves or with partners to promote coding groups for women/mums or to get more women wanting to establish a tech start up?

In our engagements with undergraduate and school communities, do we offer sustained interactions and mentoring?

Do we offer women in our workplace opportunities to upskill in technology and encourage our partners to do so?

Do we encourage our female employees and those in our tech partners to talk about their skills and achievements, rather than just about diversity?



2. Restructuring recruitment

Diversifying the recruitment pool; removing structural biases in recruitment; rooting out and challenging personal prejudice: these have applications well beyond the important business of getting more women into digital consulting. They have the potential to change the gender balance in consulting more generally.

The questions set out in this section should act as a recruitment checklist not just for improving gender representation in digital consulting, but for consulting more generally. They also have applications to many other aspects of the pursuit of diversity and inclusion.

2. Restructuring recruitment

Have we removed names and pictures from CVs?

Do we use female-focused marketing, with women fronting our social media presence and telling their stories about working in the firm?

Are we hiring enough graduates (or even non-graduates) who while they don't have 'paper' requirements (e.g. STEM degrees) have the necessary skills to thrive?

Have we as far as possible made remuneration packages transparent in our recruitment advertising?

Are we advertising our jobs solely in the tech (or professional) press, or do we actively target publications aimed at women?

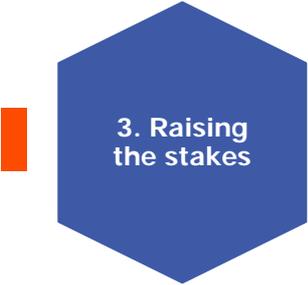
Are we making an effort to attract women returning to work after a career break?

Do we regularly review our recruitment pipeline from application to offer to identify where biases might exist?

Do we use a variety of interviewers?

Do our recruitment teams and interviewers have diversity and inclusion objectives?

Are we changing the applicant pool by actively selecting new recruitment routes and targeting people from non-traditional backgrounds?



3. Raising the stakes

Diversity and inclusion in all of its aspects, including gender, requires leadership. Currently, the leadership across digital advisory and consulting more generally is white, male and middle-aged. It is imperative that this group is fully engaged.

Leaders must have the right incentives to make changes. They need comprehensive information to make good decisions. They must have effective levers of control to make a difference.

But of course, over time, the leadership itself must change. Too few women run digital advisory and consulting functions. We need to understand the impediments they face to advancement and root those out.

As before, the ideas in this section, while immediately applicable to gender diversity in digital advisory and management consulting more generally, have potential applications, with suitable adaptation, to other areas of diversity and inclusion.

3. Raising the stakes

Are the bonuses we pay senior managers linked to SMART diversity metrics?

Do any of our leadership team (men in particular) work flexibly, helping to promote this as a company norm?

Do we use data to inform managers of un-diverse patterns in hiring, promotion or decision-making, or to support efforts to root out unconscious bias?

Do we have reporting mechanisms – e.g. a monthly management report – to track diversity and inclusion progress?

Do we have SMART diversity metrics throughout our organisation that are genuine strategic priorities, evaluated by the senior leadership team?

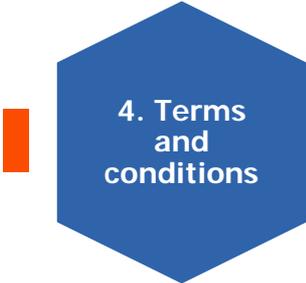
Have we mapped the career paths taken by our business leaders and examined any common factors that may be causing women to be excluded?

Do we have a company-wide diversity and inclusion awards scheme (e.g. D&I champion of the month) sponsored at board/executive level?

Are our leaders open to (and subject to) periodic challenge from the wider workforce on what they are doing about diversity?

Have we implemented unconscious bias training throughout our organisation and especially in our leadership team?

Do our leaders engage in diversity-oriented mentoring programmes and are they incentivised to do so?



4. Terms and conditions

Equal pay for women has been required in law since the 1970s, but has been honoured in the breach rather than the observance. Recent legislation obliges firms of more than 250 employees to publish action plans for pay equalisation.

Yet it is arguable that tech advisory firms, self-styled exemplars of modernity, as well as all MCA member firms (many of which are smaller than 250 employees) committed to the ethical behaviour and professional development pillars of *Consulting Excellence*, should go further. Shouldn't they immediately undertake to eradicate gender-based pay differences altogether?

Some of this is about transparency and brings the topic down to brass tacks: remuneration, Ts&Cs. The ideas in this section are simple, but tough to deliver on. They are immediately applicable to digital advisory and management consulting practices more generally. With adaptation, they could apply to other diversity issues.

4. Terms and conditions

Are we committed to equal pay and to that end do we audit, benchmark and publish our pay rates by gender, and subject them to objective evaluation?

Do we allow and encourage our employees to use Glassdoor?

Are our pay scales structured, transparent, objective and related to rational and justifiable factors?

Have we defined all of our roles as flexible?

Do we have a transparent process for allocating roles internally, for promotion and for assigning people to teams?

Are our job descriptions gender neutral?



5. Improving culture

Rooting out gender imbalances in digital advisory and in consulting generally, or challenging any un-diverse practice, is a function of an inclusive culture. It is unlikely that a firm will make progress on the hard measurable diversity statistics without an inclusive culture. Without that culture, it is equally unlikely that any numerical progress will be permanent.

This next section contains suggestions for fostering a diverse culture. Although they were developed for gender diversity in tech advisory, they can be adapted to make a difference to all diversity challenges.

5. Improving culture

Do we use gender neutral language in all our communications?

Do we celebrate excellent outputs from diverse teams to showcase the benefits?

Do we celebrate inclusivity role models (male and female)?

Do we equip our people with information and statistics about diversity?

To help normalise flexible working, do we offer it to all staff, including men and non-parents, and encourage them to access its benefits?

Do we have lunchtime working sessions on diversity topics?

Do we have Diversity Champions at all grades?

Do we give our staff the confidence to demand diverse practice in all aspects of their working lives?

Do we gather evidence – e.g. quotes – from people about how the absence of a diverse and inclusive culture can make them feel?

Do we make and promote the link between diversity and our commercial success?

Do we have diversity mentoring programmes?

Are we an open, flat, transparent organisation, which treats diversity feedback, even whistleblowing, with respect?



6. Influencing partners

Many digital advisory practitioners, and very many MCA consulting practices, are parts of wider organisations with many divisions. Other parts of the business may be delivery partners, even internal clients. Central corporate functions may control many of the diversity and inclusion 'levers' on behalf of the whole organisation, including the advisory practice. How can these internal partners be influenced?

In delivering digital advisory and management consulting more generally, MCA member firms will engage with a range of external partners and specialists. How can partners be influenced to uphold high standards of gender diversity? Among these partners may be tech specialists and new 'disruptors'. Some larger MCA firms may even fund these start ups or incubate them. As a number of recent scandals show, the tech industry is not without diversity challenges of its own. How can MCA firms encourage diverse behaviours in start ups?

The suggestions and ideas in this section of the toolkit should have very widespread applicability.

6. Influencing partners

Do we take steps to share our diversity lessons with internal partners, explaining how our commitment can help support growth?

Do we promote tech organisations that are doing well on diversity, especially those that are women-led?

Have we adopted the *Consulting Excellence* exemplars relevant to managing and demanding high standards of our supply chain?

Do we help publicise the 'gap in the market' for women-led tech start ups?

Do we use the leverage of our investment in tech firms and start ups to demand minimum standards of commitment to gender diversity ?

Do our staff feel confident enough to 'call out' un-diverse practice by partners, including in other parts of our organisation?



7. Better ways of working

Digital advisors and management consultants in general work in a highly intense culture of projects, milestones and deliverables. The techniques that have been developed over time to meet these challenges – utilisation targets, presenteeism, ‘heroic’ consulting – may not always be compatible with flexible working and the pursuit of gender (and other forms of) diversity.

These practices may also mean that only those who can withstand the most inflexible working challenges, and who thus invariably put their hands up for roles, will thrive.

For over ten years, management consultants have embraced a culture of outcomes: what matters is the positive result for the client and the consulting business. Many have embraced (and even encouraged) clients’ adoption of outcome-orientated commercials, such as payment by results. The mismatch between this development and the culture of heroic, visible, on-site working is obvious.

The suggestions in this section of the toolkit have widespread applicability.

7. Better ways of working

Have we seriously considered whether utilisation targets are the best way to create value for ourselves and our clients?

Do we mean what we say when we argue that outcomes are what matter?

Have we studied our own 'presenteeism', why we cling to it, why clients seem to want it?

Have we invested in the technologies needed to support remote working?

Do we challenge self-selection for tasks by the 'usual suspects', ensuring that roles are widely advertised and that we have an up-to-date understanding of staff capabilities?

Do we take steps to award the less visible project achievements of our advisory team members and draw them to the attention of senior management (e.g. through internal awards)?



8. Challenging clients

Clients may drive 'presenteeism'. They may be conservative, white, middle-aged and male, comfortable with people similar to themselves. They may be used to certain ways of doing things.

Left unchallenged, clients like these could have a detrimental effect on the pursuit of diversity by digital advisory and management consulting practices. But that detriment will also ultimately be felt by the clients themselves.

The suggestions on how clients can be challenged and educated in this section of the toolkit should have widespread applicability.

8. Challenging clients

Do we talk to our clients about their successful, diverse competitors?

Do we engage in early conversations with clients about their working culture and ours, and how they can be aligned?

Do we actively discourage our clients from awarding 'time and materials' contracts?

Do we publicise and celebrate our commitment to diversity and flexible working in our bid documentation?

Do we work with clients to break down projects into manageable, value-creating units?

Do we challenge clients on their ways of working when they are not flexible or value-creating, and present them with different approaches?

Are we transparent with clients about our own cultures and practices, in line with the relevant *Consulting Excellence* exemplars?

Do we invite clients to diversity events?

Do we empower our employees to promote diversity to clients and call out un-diverse behaviour?

Do our senior people step back in client presentations and make sure that presentation teams are a suitable mix (of genders, grades etc.)?