

women IN TELCO

| Key findings report

Pioneering female leadership in the telco sector and driving business value

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Introduction

Diversity in tech - By the numbers

As part of its analysis of sustainability maturity across the telecom industry, STL Partners explores company progress around diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I), explained the consultancy's Research Director Amy Cameron at RCR Wireless News' Women in Telco event.

When assessing a company's DE&I efforts, Cameron said, gender is only one aspect taken into account. "The other things that we look for ... are things like ... ethnic minority representation across their workforce or ... the representation of people with disabilities," she shared, adding that sometimes other criteria like age or representation of LGBTQ+, are also considered. While STL has found

that company commitment to diversity and inclusion is one of the more mature categories under the sustainability umbrella when compared to others like net zero targets and board & employee sustainability incentives, the industry as a whole still falls "below the desired threshold," and that there remains "quite a lot of work to do."

However, reporting on workforce representation is only one side of the DE&I coin. STL Partners also evaluates if a telecom company conducts any pay-gap analysis. "The risk there is you've promoted women to a senior level, but you're not paying them as much as the men. And we don't know whether that's true or not [without reporting]," said Cameron. "STL Partners also looks at proof of progress, which requires a sustained commitment over time, clear targets and ambitions, demonstrable progress

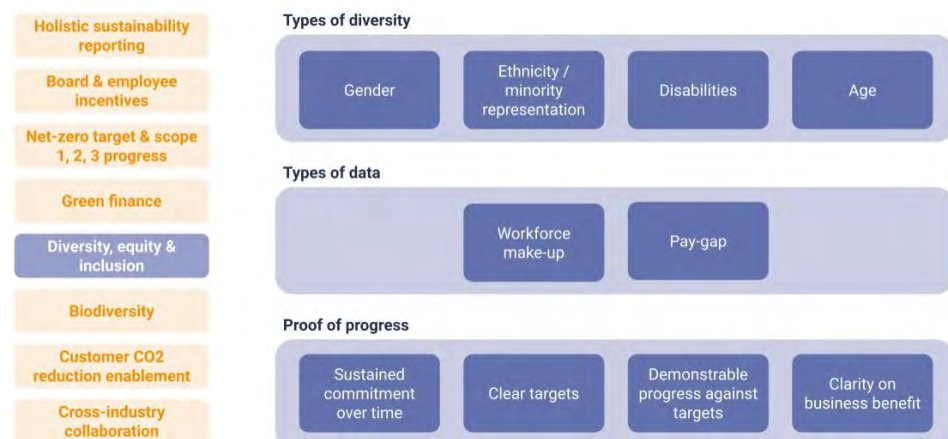
against targets and clarity on business benefits."

With the above in mind, Cameron presented a graph showing that about 17% of the telecom companies examined have "effectively no commitment to diversity and inclusion," while the vast majority — 72% — are in the middle of the pack, where Cameron said that most might mention the importance of DE&I in their annual reports but have no clear initiatives or data that analyzes their workforce makeup.

Of the 24% that make up the upper end of the middle of that pack, she said: "They maybe have data on something [like] the gender breakdown of their workforce, but they don't have any targets, they don't have any discussion of the initiatives ... [or] data on the pay gap analysis."



Diversity is not just about women in telecoms



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Sustainability criteria 5: Commitment to diversity, equity & inclusion



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Just 7% of the telecom companies looked at offer the holistic approach to diversity and inclusion that STL is pcving diversity and inclusion from a gender perspective.

“Even among market leaders, there is still a long way to go,” she then acknowledged, sharing that 19% female representation is the average across the telecom industry, which isn’t particularly impressive.

To bring up those numbers — as well as the increase the representation of other minority groups — Cameron ended the session by detailing where the industry should focus its attention moving forward:

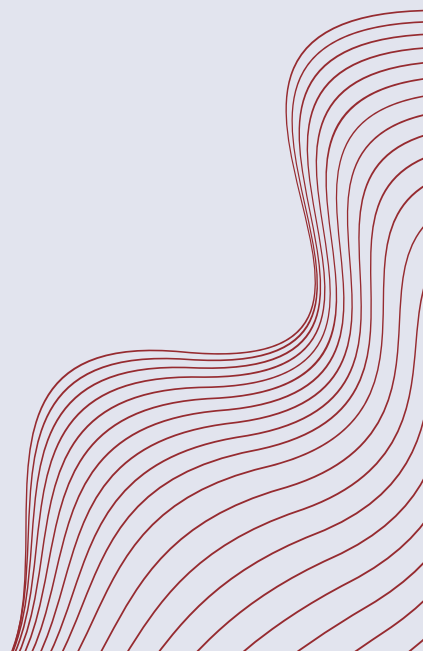
1. Recruiting women at entry level engineering, security & STEM

- positions to ensure equal representation in leadership positions outside of communications and HR
2. Reducing barriers for women returning to work after parental leave
3. Overcoming stigma of reporting disability
4. Improving communication on the business benefits of diversity and inclusion to shift the conversation and focus away from simply complying with policy and social pressure
5. Integrating DE&I requirements into supplier codes, alongside human rights and environmental credentials



“STL Partners also looks at proof of progress, which requires a sustained commitment over time, clear targets and ambitions, demonstrable progress against targets and clarity on business benefits.”

Amy Cameron
Research Director,
STL Partners



The tech workforce post-pandemic:

Where are we now?

According to Cisco Software Engineer Richa Daga, the future of work is hybrid. Sharing results from a global Cisco study that looked at employee perspective of hybrid work, Daga revealed that remote work is overwhelmingly supported and that it even has positive implications for fostering a more diverse telecom industry.

In fact, the survey showed that 62% of employees agree that their ability to work from anywhere impacts

whether they remain at a job, while 78% of respondents believe hybrid and remote working has improved all aspects of well-being, including mental health and social well-being.

“Productivity today has been fueled by employees’ new-found elasticity and an evolution of leadership style,” said Daga, adding, though, that truly supporting the workforce of the future “starts with investing in technologies and tools.”

Seventy-seven percent of those that took part in the Cisco survey stated that tech support is a top priority for working from home successfully, while 53% said increased use

of technology was a critical factor. Daga spoke to the importance of technology and connectivity further: “If companies ... are not supporting that kind of hybrid culture post the pandemic and technology evolution is not being used ... 77% of respondents said that their company needs to rethink their culture ... As any hybrid worker can attest to, connectivity can be a significant issue when working away from the office.

Eighty-four percent say networking infrastructure is essential for a seamless working from home experience ... [and] 62% say suffering connectivity issues on a regular basis is career limiting for remote working.”



Hybrid work and women in the workforce

Cisco ultimately found that a hybrid model can lead to an improved work-life balance without limiting an employee's growth — 79% said that working away from the office improved their work-life balance and 83% said they have been able to learn, grow and succeed in their roles over the last two years. Daga further stated that remote work has also “contributed to an increase in performance.”

Even more than all of that, though, it is becoming clear that hybrid work has the potential to give women in the workforce back some of what they lost during the pandemic. It's no secret that women were disproportionately impacted by the workforce disruptions caused by COVID-19. To illustrate this fact further, Daga referenced a report from the McKinsey Global Institute, which found that women's jobs were 1.8 times more vulnerable to the COVID crisis than men's jobs.

“Women make up 39% of global employment but account for 54% of overall job losses,” Daga said, adding that one major reason for such a disparity was the increased need for unpaid care, a responsibility that is disproportionately carried by women. “This meant that women's employment dropped faster than average,” she said.

Remote or hybrid work, though, offers women — even those still providing additional care or taking on more household responsibilities — with the opportunity to meaningfully enter back into the workforce. That's because working away from an office means more flexibility throughout the day, more time back to focus on growing or learning new skills and the option to cast a wider net when job searching.

“If nothing is done in terms of women's employment ... it could negatively influence ... the economic and social lives of women, as well as economic growth more broadly,” concluded Daga. “By contrast, investing in women and girls in the [pandemic] recovery represents a significant opportunity to improve gender equality and drive inclusive economic growth.”

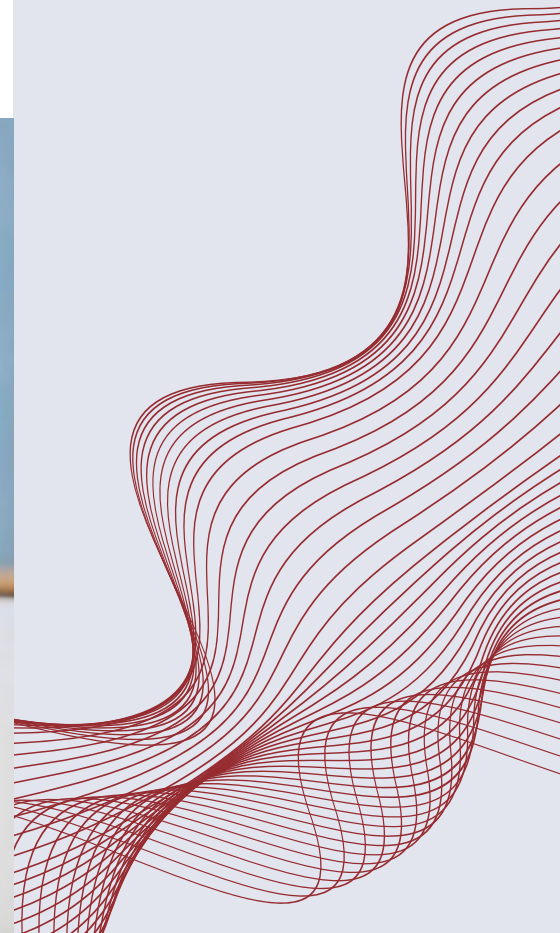


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If nothing is done in terms of women's employment ... it could negatively influence ... the economic and social lives of women, as well as economic growth more broadly.

Richa Daga
Software Engineer Richa,
Cisco

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Mentorship vs. Sponsorship

What's the difference and which is better?

Mentorship: A sounding board

From the perspective of Shazia Zeb-Sobani, VP of network implementation at Telus, a mentor is an “ally” and a “sounding board.” Further, she shared that for young women, having a mentor that is also female can be a critical resource because they may be more comfortable opening up to someone of the same gender. “Women-to-women mentors don’t only play a role to guide the career or give a better vision for young and aspiring wom-

en, they also play a very strong ally, a sounding board, a strong mental support [and] a strong psychological support,” she said.

“[Women] ... bear children ... We have such challenges coming back, integrating into work after maternity leave, or other things that are very specific to women,” she explained. “And even if you have a very strong male mentor or male sponsor, they might not be able to associate with it.” She added, however, that she strongly advocates for both male and female mentors and sponsors because each can play a different role in someone’s journey.

However, as Shalini Palmer, VP of sales in EMEA for Analog Devices, pointed out, there is also a unique benefit associated with male-to-female mentorship situations: “What you’ll find is when men are mentoring women, they start to learn, to understand,” she explained. “So, yes, women-to-women, there’s an empathy about what you may be going through. But actually, it’s a great way to expose and teach and [to] bring knowledge to our male counterparts in terms of what’s needed and how to give feedback.”



Sponsorship: An advocate

While a mentor is great for emotional support and can offer advice and perspective, a sponsor, said Technology Leadership Coach Yota Trom, can “make things happen for you.” That said, these are usually individuals who have networking connections or a managerial role that can benefit your career growth. “[A sponsor] can open the door, can create a new opportunity,” she continued.

Palmer agreed with Thom but added that sponsors also advocate for you when you are not in the room, which she claimed is a “critical” element of sponsorship that is likely not present in a strictly mentorship relationship.

Zeb-Sobani cautioned female event attendees not to “shy away from exploiting” sponsorships, claiming that in general, women are very comfortable using a mentor, but much less comfortable taking advantage of a sponsorship. “Usually, women are very good with the use of [a] mentor and they’re shying away from leveraging the full strength of having the sponsor. And we should never undermine the value and the contributions that we can bring to the sponsor as well, because we can serve as a key enabler at a level where we are to advance their agenda and to advance their strategy,” she said. “So, first of all, be very intentional with getting a sponsor, convert it into a two-way relationship, be an enabler for them, and be bold with your ask and be bold with your positioning.”

Further, because a sponsor is willing to invest in you in a way that impacts their own career, Palmer said that trust and chemistry between both parties is “absolutely key” to a successful relationship. “That person has to be ready to invest in you, to be able to bring you those other opportunities and advocate for you.

And also, they need to have the network that is really going to give you the platform and stage where you want to develop,” she said.

Ok, so which is better?

The simple answer? Neither — you should have both, according to all three panelists.

More specifically, as we grow in our careers, the type of external support that we need changes. “When we are starting out [our] career, maybe having a mentor — someone who is able to advise us, to bounce back ideas — might be more useful because we need that advice until we figure out who we are, what we’re good at, what we’re passionate about, where our heart is,” offered Thom, adding that in this case, having someone there to simply listen and advise us can go a long way. “On the other hand, later on in our career when we have our achievements, we know a little bit better where we are, we might need someone who is actually able to bring change and can make things happen for us.

And this is where the role of the sponsor becomes real[ly] important. Because once you figure out your art, when you know exactly what to do and how to do it well, you need someone who is there to open the door for you.”

Zeb-Soba agreed with this perspective that as an individual advances in their career, sponsorships become more important, especially at the middle or senior management level because by that point, a sufficient network of mentors and advisors has likely been achieved. “At those stages, sponsors can actually play a... more significant and important role for you... They can open the doors that you don’t have access to,” she said.

“Sometimes we might have a person who might be our sponsor and our

mentor at the same time,” said Thom. “And other times, we might just need to find two different people that can help us from a different angle... Someone might be within our department, or we might also need someone who can be external and maybe give us a sense of the industry of what’s happening, what opportunities that are out there. So for me, both of them are equally important but we just need to be strategic [about] which stage of our career we are [at] and what will make the biggest impact and difference.”



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Shazia Zeb-Sobani
VP of Network
Implementation, Telus

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Tips to stay agile in an evolving telecom career

Emerging network trends around virtualization and cloud technology, as well as the shift towards more open and software-defined networks, have led to material changes around how to navigate a telecom career. Below, industry experts provide workforce tips to stay agile and make the most of one of the most disruptive moments in telecom history.

Know your core skills, but be willing to jump in

According to Marc Cohn, head of virtualization at Spirent Communications, because things like network disaggregation and the software-defined networking era are opening up the telecom playing field to new entrants, there are now organizations around the world that previously had little telecom experience who now have new roles to fill. "And that's

going to open the door for a lot of different people," he argued. "It also changes the mindset of those who are consuming technology because now they want to think differently. It used to be they would just go to the trusted vendors, a handful of vendors. But now we're looking at opening up things so that there can be more innovation, and ultimately, the theme of this session, more agility."

"It just seem[s] to be moving at the speed of light," Andy Lee, vice president of operations of Lee Antenna & Line Service, Inc. and Chairwoman at

Women of NATE, commented about the tech transformations hitting the telecom industry. She added that this can actually be a great opportunity for those looking to enter the telecom workforce because entirely new skill sets have become valuable.

"If you think of all the careers that are available now that weren't even a career title 10 years ago, this gives a really amazing opportunity for women to jump in telecom and find a space for themselves," she said.



Cohn agreed, commenting: “We’re on a different timescale. I recall the days where we were on ‘internet time,’ but now we’re on cloud time, and cloud meets telecom means that things are really accelerated ... What it means to the individual is that you really have to think about what core skills do you have.”

But, then from there, insisted Cohn, it’s necessary to have a “growth mindset.”

“Maybe you don’t have all the right experiences, maybe you don’t have the skills, but that shouldn’t prevent you in a time of disruption from just jumping in,” he said. “Nobody’s going to have ‘that’ experience in a new technology area. It’s about the mindset as well as it is about the evolution in technologies and the way business practices work and business models.”

Keep an eye on the horizon

Even as you focus on your core skills and knowledge, Elizabeth Rumsey, CGMA Senior Global Product Manager at Vodafone, emphasized how crucial it is to always think about

where the industry — and the expectations of its workforce — is going. “The telecom sector is absolutely a rapidly evolving one, and I think it’s one of those ones where you have to get comfortable with change ... The role you do today, the technology you work in today may not even be relevant in the industry in 10 years’ time, and so you need to be constantly looking to be ... strategically opportunistic, where you’ve got that eye out on the horizon ... How can I potentially, if the right thing comes up ... pivot and take advantage [of it]?”

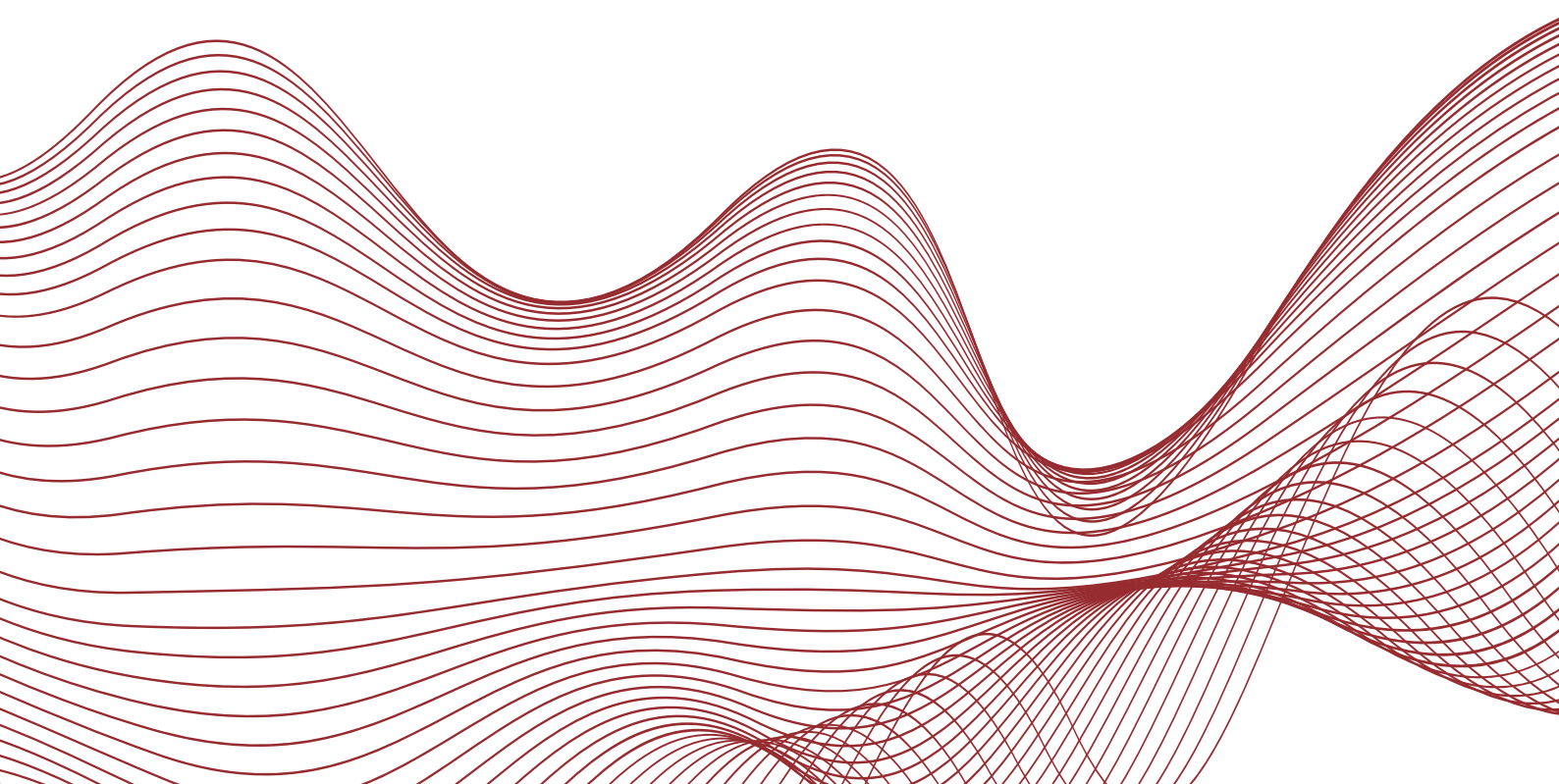
And if you don’t have a forward-looking mentality, cautioned Tinuade Oguntuyi, head of networks and solutions at Information Connectivity Solutions, you might get left behind. “When things change and you don’t move along, you are doing yourself a lot of disservice,” she warned. “You won’t be able to achieve adaptability or agility if you don’t stay [informed on] the news ... And news can come from different ways... I use — through the salespeople — industry notes just to get one or two things so that I’m able to deploy and personally also [be] able to be relevant at any time.”

Find a table to join

Jumping into something new or outside of a familiar skill set can be daunting, particularly for women as they are often outnumbered in the telecom and tech workforce. For Cohn, one great way to build the confidence to make such a leap is to “constantly network,” especially if you’re “considering jumping.”

“Don’t look at networking as ... ‘I need a job, [so] I’m going to network,’” he said. “No, you need to constantly network. That’s the new model for success. Because those individuals that you network with, even though they’re not close relationships in the end, they’re close enough to be able to open the doors that you would never see.”

Lee agreed: “Find a table to join; find a group of women who will support you; keep your eye out for role models; seek out men who will be allies. I think the biggest thing is never talk yourself out of an opportunity. There are new opportunities every single day in our industry.”



Working in a 5G world:

A quick Q&A with weaver labs' co-founder Maria Lema

As networks become disaggregated, it's becoming increasingly important to think about integration, both when it comes to technology, but also within an organization itself. Historically, telecom has been a pretty siloed industry, with workers focusing solely on their part of the network. Is that changing? If it is, is this increased emphasis on communication and knowledge sharing creating more opportunities in the industry for women, and for traits typically considered female?

Disaggregation means more integration, yes, absolutely. The delivery of projects nowadays... involves much more than just networks, and just people that know how to configure a couple of switches. We need to think about software infrastructure, and overall, we need to be thinking more in a product-oriented way. Being... a tech company [is about] building platforms, and in the telecoms industry we have been doing that, but in a very siloed way. Essentially, it's tools and functions, and it's an aggregation of a lot of things. We need to be creating products, we need to be getting user feedback, we need to be onboarding fast, and all in all, I think female talent is extremely [able] to do that precisely. We're excellent managers, we're excellent at making things happen... Delivery now is a lot more challenging. You have more moving plates, and it's easier for us for some reason; maybe because we have to manage families, jobs and all of these things, but we're used to having a lot of things moving at the same time, and making it work. More importantly, we make people talk and collaborate, and that's what great product teams eventually do.

Yeah, absolutely. Shifting from traits to skills, what are some of the new skills emerging in a 5G world? Do you see the promises of 5G in terms of innovation and pushing boundaries as potential key enablers for creating a more diverse workforce?

Interestingly, when I started working in the 5G lab, working more across verticals, and across innovation in different industries, I started to work with a lot more women. Essentially, we were opening up to a lot of other industries, which was great, because it's more like the arts, or getting more feedback from user experience, and stuff like that. Eventually, because it's more diverse industries, it's a more diverse type of people that you get to meet, and of course, more balanced, because in tech, it's just predominantly males. I think the shift from telecoms to a technology company, it's about allowing innovation to happen across different sectors, and again, building those platforms that allow [the creation of] innovation leveraging the power of networks. There are a lot of new skills that are needed in the industry. We have to think from the user perspective. How do we make the user experience more transparent? How do we onboard these users faster, and make this complexity of networks almost transparent for them? There you have people that can come from the arts industry, from the design industry, that can come and contribute with those out of the box ideas into tech.

To bring the conversation to a more practical place: How can women either already in telco or considering entering this space take advantage of or prepare themselves for these tech trends, or maybe these new skills that are needed? What can they do to make sure they're ready for this, and that they're a desirable candidate?

It's this story that we have been talking about for a very long time in the telecoms industry, but it's about partnerships and collaboration. The industry is evolving into a much more close-knit way of companies working with each other, and within the same organization, collaboration. Embracing co-creation and collaboration and partnerships, it is something that is definitely going to put someone at the top of what the industry needs, because we do really need to create that collaborative effort in the telecoms industry, and I think we can definitely shine there.



For leaders: How to build a diverse future

Executives and managers across the telecommunications and technology industries say they are interested in making sincere and impactful efforts to improve the diversity within their companies. But, doing so is often much easier said than done. According to Women in Telco Forum panelists, there are a few key things to keep in mind about how to truly attract and support a diverse workforce.

Expand your idea of diversity

As STL Partner's Amy Cameron discussed at length previously, it is critical to look at diversity holistically. Unfortunately, Carolina Milanesi, president and principal analyst at Creative Strategies and founder of The Heart of Tech, has found that it's very common for tech companies to focus just on gender and race as they look to tick the boxes. "But if you're thinking about gender, you're thinking about race, you're thinking about age, you're thinking about religious or sexual orientation or all the other things that make us individual, unique," she continued.

Cleone Nuttgens-Wright, director of IT delivery at Three UK, thinks that while this certainly leaves many groups unaccounted for, the recent focus on race and gender inclusion has "brought diversity into a sphere where it's not just lip service anymore," and a result, may help the entire industry "surf the back of that and ... broaden our view of diversity."

Focus on EQ over IQ

The panelists also agreed that one sure way to discover more diverse talent is to prioritize emotional quotient, or EQ, over intellectual quotient, or IQ, especially when selecting individuals for leadership roles. "EQ, EQ, EQ," said Stephen Rose, general manager of IBM's Global Telco, Media, Entertainment & Distribution Vertical, adding that if someone is self-aware, they will make for a much better team member and leader.

Milanesi further argued that the way technology is developing requires that we rethink the value of certain skill sets. "Soft skills ... in my opinion are critical skills," she continued. "We need to understand people, we need to be able to connect with people, to get more from people."

Moreso, such abilities are uniquely human and that in the future, when no small percentage of the workforce is made up of AI capable of performing job functions previously handled by people, these "human" skills — true empathy, conflict resolution, compassion, even humor — will become even more valuable in the workplace.

Understand the barriers

One of the biggest — and likely the most obvious — barriers of all, pointed out Rose, is the fact that those responsible for hiring have a pesky habit for looking for something familiar, or as he put it, "something in our own image."

"We've got to make sure that we are not looking for that," he added, emphasizing how important it is to acknowledge and fight against your own biases.

For Milanesi, the biggest barrier is that despite all the talk, she finds that diversity and inclusion is not prioritized enough, especially compared to other corporate social initiatives. "If you take sustainability right now, the dollar sign associated with sustainability is very clear. There's either a growth opportunity or there's a risk mitigation. Either way, you want to invest," she provided. "For diversity and inclusion and equity, I don't think that we get it. I don't think that the majority of companies are there and understand... the impact."

She posited that perhaps this is because diversity is not considered an "international issue," but instead a regional one due to its association with gender and race, dynamics that in many ways are country dependent. "It's kind of odd that we don't understand the power of diversity," Rose mused. "But it seems that it's something that still needs to be continuously educated." Leaders must recognize — and frankly, admit — the ways in which bias that "sits in [an] organization is self-defeating" and lead to damaging "echo chambers," he said.

"And echo chambers are the worst places for innovation and complex problem solving," he cautioned. "We need to make sure that leaders understand that there is an extrinsic motivation for them as individuals, to actually find mechanisms through diversity, to actually come up with solutions, growth, profit ... and added value inside of organizations."



If you're thinking about gender, you're thinking about race, you're thinking about age, you're thinking about religious or sexual orientation or all the other things that make us individual, unique.

Carolina Milanese

President and Principal Analyst, Creative Strategies and Founder,
The Heart of Tech



A Q&A with intel's VP & GM of network & edge compute division Jeni Panhorst

From your perspective, how is telecom doing when it comes to D&I? What positive changes have you witnessed and where do you think the industry still needs to improve?

Representation and pay equity have certainly improved across industries, including telecom, as companies have set and achieved D&I goals, and the dialogue around D&I has become more transparent and collaborative. But we have more work to do, and we have experienced setbacks too. The Brookings Institute, McKinsey & Company and other analysts have published evidence that during the COVID-19 pandemic women across the globe were more negatively impacted than men due to the need to disproportionately absorb more childcare and family care responsibilities as schools and care facilities closed. This impacted progression and overall employment as a result. As we learn from the pandemic, telecom and other industries need to consider the data and drive solutions to recover from these losses and commit to restore progress.

How would you say the increased focus on tech innovation and pushing the boundaries has impacted telecom hiring practices? Are these companies seeking a more diverse workforce?

There is a huge opportunity for telecom at the edge. Edge computing is catalyzing a new cycle of tech innovation, as compute shifts closer to users and devices to deliver exciting new services. The edge also creates opportunities to deploy new solutions to solve global challenges — energy transformation, sustainable agriculture and food security, water management, and low carbon infrastructure, to name a few. These challenges are faced by a worldwide population that is diverse in gender, racial, ethnic, ability and identity. Diversity has been shown to correlate to higher innovation revenue, because workforce representation enables companies to better understand and respond to customer needs.

To overcome challenges and ultimately deliver successful outcomes at the edge and across the tech ecosystem that delivers those solutions requires as innovative and therefore as diverse a labor force as possible.

What are some of the things Intel is doing in D&I that you think are interesting or have the most impact?

Intel's been a leader in D&I for many years — we were one of the first companies to publish a diversity and inclusion annual report and publicly share our diversity metrics. Not only has this kept us accountable, but it has been an

impetus for other companies in tech and other industries to increase their transparency.

Intel invests in several areas, including hiring and retention programs, partnerships with schools to increase the talent diversity, support for women in online gaming communities, and so much more. One great example is Intel's Inclusive Leaders Program (ILP), which I was fortunate enough to be involved in at its inception in 2017. ILP equips Intel employees to develop skills to lead more inclusively by learning alongside their peers in a community. The curriculum meets people where they are on their inclusion learning journey, while exploring key concepts that build a more inclusive environment and drive higher performing teams.



More than 2,000 employees have completed the program, with thousands more in progress.

The post-program surveys consistently indicate that more than 90% agree or strongly agree that they have been able to deepen their skills in leading inclusively, and more than 90% agree or strongly agree that they have been able to positively impact their team.

Tell me a little bit about your telecom journey. How did you get here?

All of my nearly 24 years at Intel have been spent in our growth businesses — networking, communications, IOT and edge computing. I've held numerous roles in our networking business through the years — applications engineering, solutions architecture, strategic planning

and product management. Now as the VP & GM of our Network & Edge Compute Division, my team and I drive the silicon and software portfolio that forms the foundation for network and edge compute infrastructure around the globe. It's exciting to partner with our customers, ecosystem, and end users to innovate next-generation technology that unlocks new opportunities in telecom and many other industries — manufacturing, energy, federal, consumer industries, critical infrastructure and so much more. One of the most exciting parts of working at Intel is the opportunity to drive this innovation at scale.

What advice do you have for a woman looking to begin or advance her career in telecom?

Start with your purpose — this will pro-

vide you with ongoing motivation, lead to greater career satisfaction, and amplify your ability to drive an impact. In telecom, we have such an important purpose: to enable the world to communicate.

Next, learn everything you can about your customers and your ecosystem. Telecom is a tremendously complex industry. Deeply study the challenges your customers are facing, and use that knowledge to unlock new value and opportunity.

Finally, focus on your strengths. Whether your expertise is in technology, business, or operations, build on that foundation and seek out complementary expertise to build out your team to drive results.

Conclusion: The sky's the limit

There was one major takeaway from the Women in Telco Forum that perhaps stood out against the rest. When asked what roles in telecom women should be aspiring to, the Vice President of Intel's Network & Edge Group Cristina Rodriguez simply answered: ***"All of them. Whatever [they] like."*** Women, she continued,

should see ***"the sky as the limit"*** in telecom, even though there is, without a doubt, still work to be done when it comes to gender equality and in inspiring a new generation to join this field.

"There's a lot of people, women and men ... that are very engaged and

very committed to making the industry better," she said, adding though, that these commitments must be genuine and intentional. ***"Let's make the effort to see how many women can be promoted, how many women can be part of the leadership in the industry,"*** she challenged.

Watch Women in Telco Forum 2023 in full, on-demand here:

www.womenintelco.com

