

Helping Women Rise:

How Networks and Technology Can Accelerate Women's Advancement

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Contents

Contents	2
Thank you to our sponsor	3
Key findings	4
Introduction: Networks and gender – Why do we care?	6
How are men and women’s networks different and why does it matter?	7
What should women consider when building their network?	8
Are organizations considering networks today when trying to advance women?	9
About the research	11
Advancing women: Current practices and the opportunity for networks and technology	12
Common practices	13
Novel approaches	54
Case Study: Bringing it all together to advance women at Ford	75
Recommendations for getting started	78
Final thoughts	82
Appendices	83
Appendix 1: What are networks?	83
Appendix 2: Explanation of the Four Foundational Principles	84
Appendix 3: List of all Technology Vendors Featured in the Report	89
About RedThread & Authors	95

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RedThread would like to thank GSV Accelerate for its sponsorship of this research, without which we would not have been able to complete this study.



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Key findings

We identified the following key findings during this research:

Finding #1: Women and men's networks tend to be different, which can have a major impact on access to information and opportunities. Women can address some of these differences if they focus on four foundational network principles:

1. Being central within networks;
2. Having a tight-knit inner circle;
3. Acting as brokers across different networks; and,
4. Serving as energizers within their networks.

Finding #2: Most organizations today are not actively focusing on the role of women's networks – and any associated technologies – in helping or hindering their advancement. This gap represents a significant opportunity for organizations to adjust their practices to help more women rise.

Finding #3: To date, organizations rely on four common practices to help women advance: employee resource groups (ERGs); mentorship and sponsorship; leadership development programs; and conferences. In most organizations, these do not significantly take into account networks or technology. However, we identified steps organizations can take to do so more effectively (see Figure 1, below).

Finding #4: We uncovered two novel practices organizations use to help women rise that take networks and technology into account: gig-work marketplaces and articulating invisible information (see Figure 1, below).

Finding #5: We identified more than 30 vendors offering technology which allows organizations to more effectively use networks to help women advance. However, many organizations do not use existing technology effectively. There is also a real opportunity for technologists to create new tools that could help. We provide ideas on how to address this gap.

Methodology Overview:

- Literature review: 50 articles
 - Interviews: 50 D&I, HR, and technology vendor leaders
-

Figure 1: Summary of common and novel practices to advance women in organizations today

PRACTICES		ACTION ITEMS TO INCORPORATE NETWORKS AND TECHNOLOGY
COMMON	ERGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create personal, meaningful sub-groups that provide leadership opportunities • Encourage and manage toward a diverse ERG • Offer resources to support women becoming energizers
	Mentorship and sponsorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View mentorship and sponsorship in terms of teams, not just one-on-one relationship • Create energizer opportunities within mentorship/sponsorship interactions • Connect women to diverse external mentorship/sponsorship networks
	Leadership development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design programs to intentionally build women's networks • Create earlier-career programs for women • Go beyond traditional approaches to identify program participants • Teach network theory
	Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance on before-event activities • Create follow-up opportunities
NOVEL	Gig-work marketplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing internal gig-work marketplaces • Leveraging external gig-work marketplaces
	Articulating invisible information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify critical information in high-power networks • Identify hidden information in low-power networks • Document all the steps – both formal and informal – in promotion processes and share that information broadly • Take steps to ensure everyone has access to critical information

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Introduction: Networks and gender – Why do we care?

Efforts to improve women's representation in leadership are decades old, yet the numbers remain stubbornly low:

- For every 100 men promoted, only 79 women are promoted.¹
- Approximately 40% of women in senior roles/technical positions report being one of the only women in the room.²
- The World Economic Forum estimates it will take 168 years for North America to close the global gender gap.³

So, why don't we see more women in leadership?

There are many potential answers to the question of why women do not rise at rates equal to men. However, of all the potential solutions, our research identified one we think deserves more attention than it has received to date: women are not gaining access to the information and opportunities they need from their professional networks in order to advance.

Our network connects us to specific groups, people, and information. Inclusion at work – being in the "right" networks – can be a critical factor that influences promotion and advancement opportunities. Unfortunately, research indicates 81% of women report some form of exclusion at work, yet 92% of men don't believe that they are excluding women at all.⁴ This difference highlights the critical, yet less obvious influence of our professional networks.

Women are not gaining access to the information and opportunities they need from their professional networks in order to advance.

Research indicates 81% of women report some form of exclusion at work, yet 92% of men don't believe that they are excluding women at all.

1 "Women in the Workplace," McKinsey & Co., 2018. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2018>.

2 Ibid.

3 "Moving Backwards: Ten Years of Progress on Global Gender Parity Stalls in 2017," World Economic Forum, 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/press/2017/11/ten-years-of-progress-on-global-gender-parity-stalls-in-2017/>

4 "Work with Me: 8 Blind Spots Between Men and Women in Business," Annis, B., & Gray, J., 2013.

Based on our interviews, women tend to advance when three conditions are present:

- People work with them and experience them as equally competent professionals.
- They are given access to opportunities and experience.
- They are included in conversations and have access to information at the right level.

Focusing on networks can help with all these things. More specifically, networks – and the information they carry – are one of the primary ways people learn about career advancement and development opportunities. By being in the right networks, women have an opportunity to work alongside and for others who would support them in their advancement. They also have access to high-quality opportunities and can have the conversations that help them advance.

However, research suggests that women and men’s networks – and the information within them – are different. Understanding these connections between people – who knows whom and why – could help organizations understand why some employees rise and why others do not.

How are men and women’s networks different and why does it matter?

Traditional social dynamics – along with promotion rates, power, and rank – influence the creation and composition of professional networks.^{5,6} In general, as men move up the ranks in organizations, they join higher-status networks with more information and power. They also are more likely to be surrounded by men, because men, statistically speaking, are more likely to be promoted. Women – who tend to be promoted at lower rates – more often find themselves in lower-status networks (which can be women-dominated).

Network status influences the extent to which someone has access to key conversations, information, and projects that would help them advance in an organization.

5 “Poverty and Inequality Report,” Sterling, A., Stanford University, 2018. https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Pathways_SOTU_2018.pdf.

6 “Personal Networks of Women and Minorities in Management: A Conceptual Framework,” Ibarra, H., 1993.

Network status influences the extent to which someone has access to key conversations, information, and projects that would help them advance in an organization.⁷ Since men are more likely to be in those high-status networks, they tend to have access to higher-quality information and gain access to opportunities that support advancement. Women in lower-status networks do not receive the same benefits.

While this is an incredibly simplified version of a very nuanced and complex problem, the key message is that the mechanisms that have created traditional organizational hierarchy, policy, and practice have also created echo chambers that disproportionately benefit men and hamper the advancement of women.⁸

What should women consider when building their network?

The research is great, but what does it mean, practically speaking, for women and how they build their network? For starters, it means understanding that networks – left to haphazardly build by chance – are likely to disproportionately negatively impact women. The good news is that women who use this information to intentionally build their network can increase their likelihood of advancement.

Research^{9,10} reveals there are four foundational principles (see Figure 2) women should keep in mind when building a professional network that can help them advance.¹¹ These four foundational principles are critical for organizations to consider when designing initiatives to help women advance. We will discuss them in that context at further length later in the report. For more information on them, see the Appendix.

Networks – left to haphazardly build by chance – are likely to disproportionately negatively impact women.

7 “Mentorship, Sponsorship and Networks: The Power and Value of Professional Connections,” Bentley University, 2017. <https://www.bentley.edu/centers/center-for-women-and-business/mentorship-sponsorship-research-report-request>.

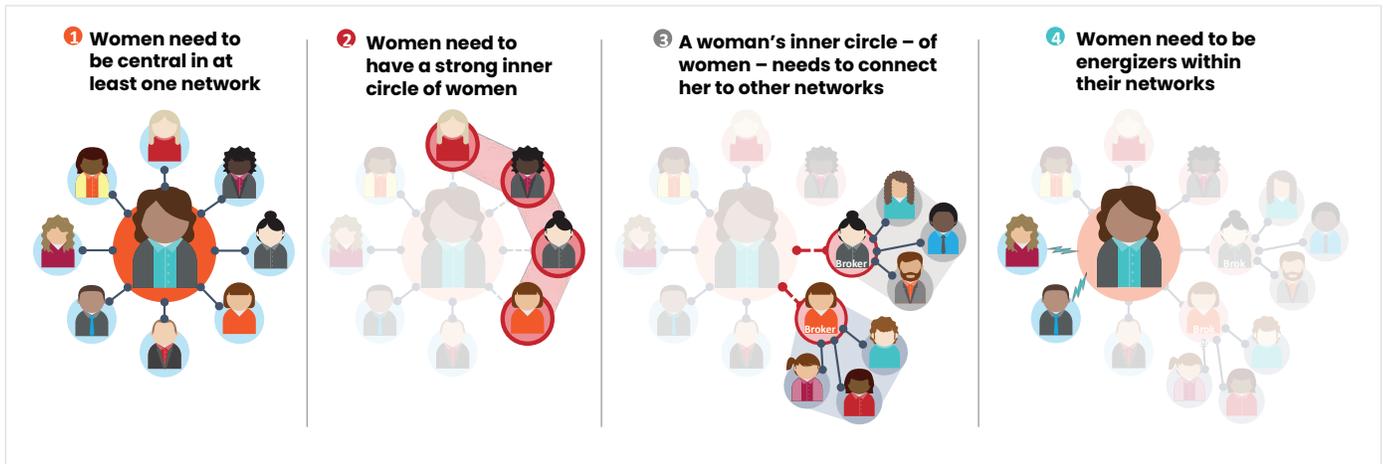
8 “Do Women Suffer from Network Closure? The Moderating Effect of Social Capital on Gender Inequality in a Project-based Labor Market, 1929 to 2010,” Lutter, M., 2015.

9 “A Network’s Gender Composition and “Communication Pattern Predict Women’s Leadership Success,” Yang, Y., Chawla, N., and Uzzi, B., 2019.

10 “Invisible Network Drivers of Women’s Success: How Successful People Manage Collaborative Overload,” Carboni, I., Cross, R., Page, A., and Parker, A., Connected Commons, 2019.

11 For more details on these four foundational principles, see Appendix 2: Explanation of the Four Foundational Principles.

Figure 2: Four foundational principles women should follow when building their networks



Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Are organizations considering networks today when trying to advance women?

Given the huge preponderance of research¹² on the importance of networks in enabling women to rise, we began this study with high hopes of finding many organizations using network theory in their approach to advancing women. Further, most professionals are on various social networks that are technologically enabled, so our awareness of networks – and how they can be accelerated or changed by technology – is higher than ever. Therefore, it seemed logical that a number of organizations would be thinking about gender, networks, and how to use technology to help women rise.

We were wrong. After our 50 interviews with organizations of very different sizes, industries, and geographies, we found that relatively few organizations are thinking about how to help women design and build their networks intentionally. And even fewer are thinking about how to use technology to help. This was deflating.

However, all was not lost. Through our interviews, we gained significant insight into what organizations are doing today to advance women and found some examples of organizations tweaking common practices to account for network dynamics. We also uncovered a lot of existing technology that could help

Relatively few organizations are thinking about how to help women design and build their networks intentionally.

¹² See our literature review on this topic, here: <https://redthreadresearch.com/2019/05/30/wnt-lit-review/>.

organizations evolve their existing practices to help with network dynamics. Further, we identified some novel practices that are showing early promise in advancing women.

In the pages that follow, we describe the common and novel practices for advancing women that we identified through our interviews. For all of these practices, we explain how network dynamics – in particular, the four foundational principles for women building their networks – play out. We further highlight the technology we think could help and give ideas for how new, yet-to-be-invented technology could assist in the future. We provide case examples wherever possible to bring the research to life.

Our hope is that this paper serves as a call to action for all leaders to re-think the practices and technology they use to advance women, and to much more substantially integrate an awareness of networks and how they play out differently for women into their efforts.

We know our connections matter. Both who we know and what those connections provide (information, resources, access, visibility) matter to career progression – so let's make sure that women have the right connections that can help them advance. Our organizations' future successes – and many women's livelihood – depend on it.¹³

Our hope is that this paper serves as a call to action for all leaders.

13 "Research: When Gender Diversity Makes Firms More Productive," Turban, S., Wu, D., and Zhang, L., Harvard Business Review, February 11, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/02/research-when-gender-diversity-makes-firms-more-productive>.

About the research

This research was sparked by conversations with organizational network analysis¹⁴ technology vendors about how organizational networks can differ by gender – and how understanding those differences could provide insights into how and why women were advancing at different rates than men. So, we wondered, who else was thinking about this topic? And could it be a meaningful way to address the gender gap in organizations?

To that end, we published our initial thoughts (which we call a premise) in January 2019. Over the next 6 months, we spoke to roughly 50 organizations and vendors to better understand how they were addressing this issue and what, if any, network-based perspectives they were incorporating. We also dug into the literature,¹⁵ reviewing approximately 50 academic and popular press articles, to understand what we could find on networks and gender. This article is the culmination of those efforts.

¹⁴ Organizational network analysis (ONA) is a method for studying communication and socio-technical networks within a formal organization. This technique creates statistical and graphical models of the people, tasks, groups, knowledge, and resources of organizational systems. It is based on social network theory and, more specifically, dynamic network analysis. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizational_network_analysis.

¹⁵ See our full literature review, here: <https://redthreadresearch.com/2019/05/30/wnt-lit-review/>.

Advancing women: Current practices and the opportunity for networks and technology

In the course of our approximately 50 interviews, we identified both common and novel practices to advance women (see Figure 3). The common approaches consisted of some of the mainstays in diversity and inclusion efforts while the novel practices were more recently introduced but have not necessarily yet proven to be more effective. Our research shows that all these approaches can be much more useful to helping women advance if they incorporate network-focused practices and technology.

Figure 3: Definitions of common and novel practices to advancing women in organizations today

PRACTICES		DEFINITION
COMMON	ERGs	Employee resources groups (ERGs) are typically employee-driven groups, centered around specific concerns or interests (e.g., gender) to help create a more inclusive workplace and provide development and learning opportunity for members.
	Mentorship and sponsorship	Mentorships are relationship-based development opportunities in which one individual helps another navigate their roles and/or career; offering advice, education, and information. The aim of the relationship is development, not necessarily advancement. Sponsorships are typically relationships between a senior, more experienced individual and a junior, less experienced individual with the aim of helping promote and advocate for the junior individual, who may be less connected or visible to others in the organization.
	Leadership development	Explicit attempts to build skills, knowledge, and capabilities of individuals to match the necessary requirements of current and/or future leadership roles.
	Conferences	External or internal events, that are typically larger in scale and duration, to showcase knowledge and current trends in a particular field or industry and usually consist of presentations, panels, and discussions.
NOVEL	Gig-work marketplaces	Creating opportunities for external contingent workers and treating the internal talent as a contingent workforce; creating opportunities for real, meaningful project assignments that are outside the scope of an individual's specific job but would offer development and learning opportunity.
	Articulating invisible information	Identifying knowledge that may not be formally shared and accessible to all individuals but is universally needed to develop and or advance in an organization (i.e., promotion criteria).

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Common practices

Let's first look at the common practices. In Figure 4, we have how those practices can intersect with the four foundational principles to help women advance. A circle icon indicates when the most typical form of a common practice can enable one of the four foundational principles. A triangle icon indicates the common practice will need some network-focused changes to enable one of the foundational principles. If there is no icon, there is no clear overlap.

The common approaches consisted of some of the mainstays in diversity and inclusion efforts while the novel practices were more recently introduced but have not necessarily yet proven to be more effective.

Figure 4: Common practices to advance of women and the overlap with the four foundational network principles¹⁶

COMMON PRACTICES	How organizational practices enable the 4 network principles to advance women			
	CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
ERGs	▲	●	●	▲
Mentorship and sponsorship		▲	●	▲
Leadership development		●	▲	▲
Conferences			●	▲

Potential enablement via a more traditional approach
 Potential enablement when designed with a more network-based approach

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGS)

ERGs for women are incredibly popular, despite some of the debate around their utility.¹⁷ The initial idea, which was to create a shared space for women,¹⁸ has morphed in some organizations into a focus on gender as an inclusive category. However, regardless of the focus of these ERGs, almost every organization we spoke to indicated

¹⁶ We recognize that organizations may use these practices in ways that address the blank spaces. With this chart, we are trying to provide an easy reference guide for how organizational practices can be used to enable the 4 foundational network principles to enable women, given the practices we observed in our research conversations. Please note, while articulating invisible information is important it is more about what organizations can do to promote women and not what enables women to build their networks. Therefore, it does not map cleanly to the four foundational principles and we do show the alignment between these practices and the four foundational principles.

¹⁷ For more information regarding the debate around ERGs, read [Pitting Inclusion Against Diversity](#).

¹⁸ ERGs were originally started for that very reason: to provide a space in which individuals who shared a particular characteristic (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) could come support each other and have a unified voice in the organization.

difficulty in appropriately and effectively including men in the ERG (see our callout, “The role of men in ERGs,” for more information).

Given our understanding of how networks work and how they differ by gender, the women-majority composition of women-focused ERGs can create some real challenges when using these groups to help women advance. For example, if the individuals within an ERG are primarily lower-level employees, these groups are less likely to help women make the connections necessary to rise within their organizations. Further, if the activities within the ERG do not enable members to form meaningful connections, those activities could take up time that individuals could spend on higher-value projects or on other activities that form those connections.

That said, ERGs have great potential to help women advance if designed, executed, and supported appropriately. In fact, if they have the right components, we think that they can be one of the most powerful network-related levers for helping women advance (as indicated by Figure 4). We’ve summarized the most critical components and will dive into them more deeply in this section:

1. Create personal, meaningful sub-groups that provide leadership opportunities
2. Encourage and manage toward a diverse ERG
3. Offer resources to support women becoming energizers

1. Create personal, meaningful sub-groups that provide leadership opportunities

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
▲	●	▲	▲

ERGs can provide women with an opportunity to be central within a network, which can be especially important for women who are not able to do this (for whatever reason) in their day job. To enable this, ERGs need to offer a wide range of meaningful leadership opportunities that allow women to build a strong network with other ERG members. At the same time, ERGs need to enable women to develop a strong inner circle of women (this is an area where ERGs have traditionally shone, given their large composition of women).

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ERGs have great potential to help women advance if designed, executed, and supported appropriately.

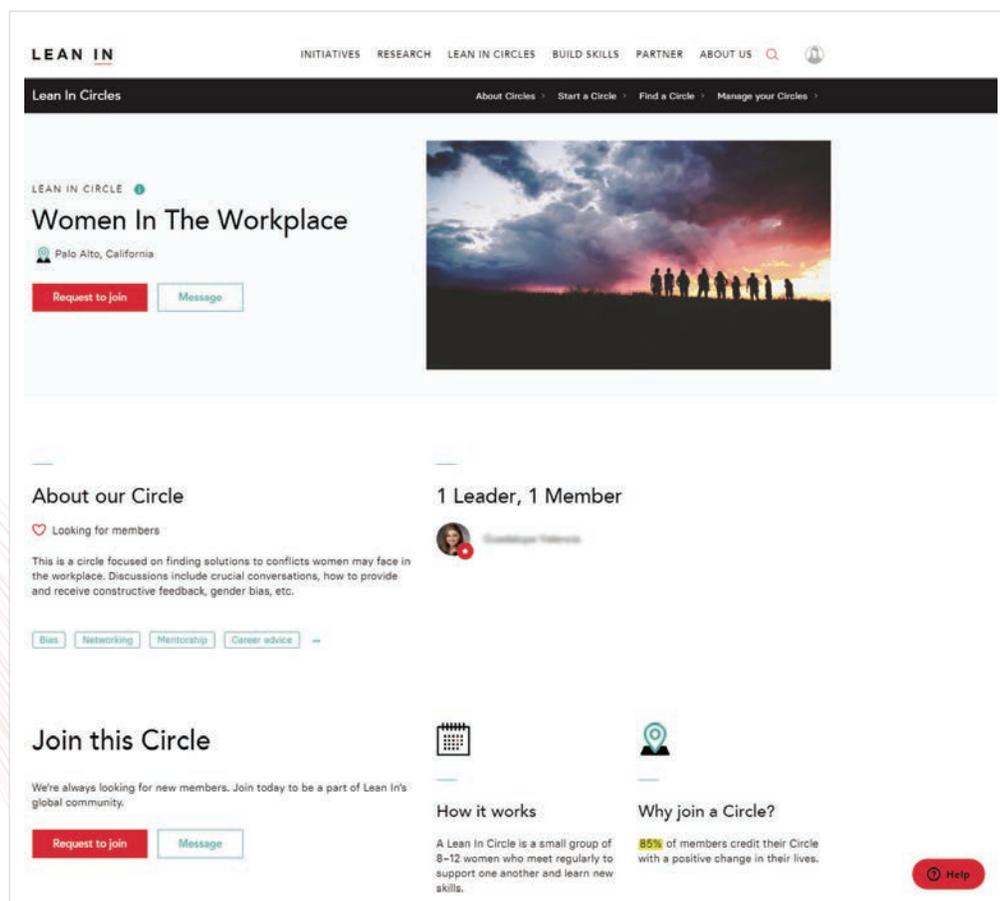
It's critical to make sure that the leadership opportunities and the connections are meaningful.

There are many ways to do this such as creating subgroups or subcommittees focused on specific topics of interest or concern to the ERG, which provide women with opportunities to take on various leadership roles. In some organizations, these groups are subcommittees of the larger ERG leadership structure.

One of the more novel types of subgroups are Lean-In Circles, which are small, intimate, member-driven groups (usually 8 – 12 individuals) that meet regularly to offer mentorship and advice to navigate roles and careers and engage in shared learning and development. These circles can allow women to both serve as leaders (network centrality) and build a strong inner circle of women. Leanin.org offers technology to help Circle leaders and participants manage their Circles and engage in meaningful activities (see Figure 5).

ERGs need to offer a wide range of meaningful leadership opportunities that allow women to build a strong network with other ERG members.

Figure 5: Screenshot of a Lean-In Circle



Source: LeanIn.org, 2019.

Lean-In Circles are clearly not the only way to create these meaningful connections, though. Other smaller types of groups we've heard about over the years include corporate book clubs (small groups coming together to discuss career-relevant books and their implications), peer-mentorship groups (small groups coming together to support each other with advice), and group mentorship (small groups coming together to support each other, but with one or more senior individuals who provide the group with guidance). Note that these groups can be offered to both genders while Lean-In Circles are primarily focused on women.

The role of men in ERGs

Unfortunately, only one in five women and one in three men say that the men in their company regularly participate in initiatives to improve gender diversity.¹⁹ The inclusion of men as allies or partners in the advancement of women was frequently brought up in our discussions. Organizations cited both practical and philosophical reasons for including men in these efforts. In addition, the mechanisms that are used to encourage and maintain the involvement of male peers differs across organizations. Moving forward, organizations need to see the involvement of men as a critical component to an inclusive workforce and need to explicitly understand how and when they will involve men in ERGs, recognizing that it is not an either/or proposition.

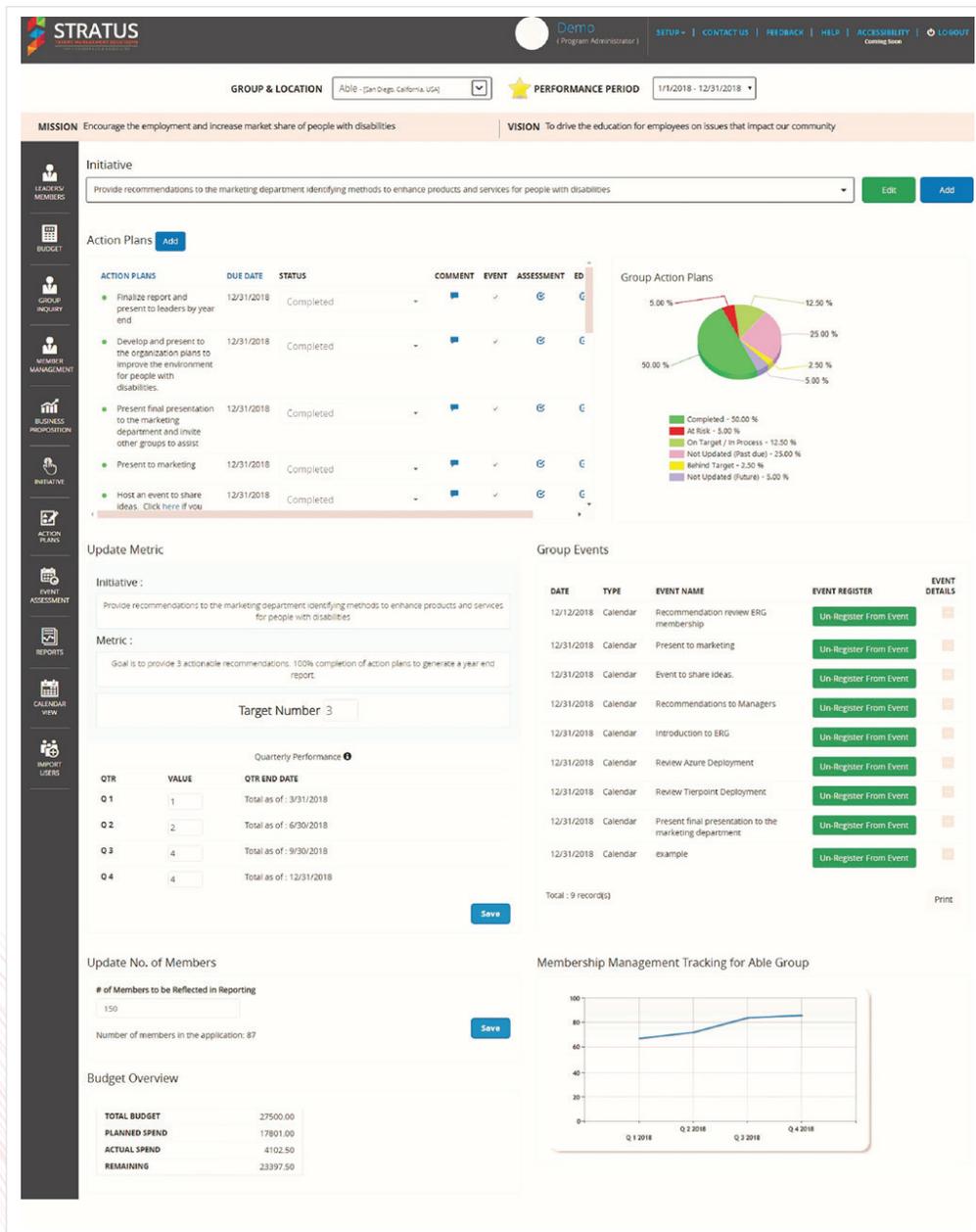
All of these groups and subgroups point to the need to manage the logistics and membership of ERGs. Some organizations, particularly those that are smaller or have less budget, use SharePoint or social media groups (e.g., Facebook for Work or LinkedIn) for ERGs to stay connected and share information.

In addition, there are several different types of technologies that are designed specifically to manage ERGs, which can be useful

¹⁹ "Women in the Workplace," McKinsey & Co., 2018. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2018>.

for making these groups more efficient and effective. Some of the vendors in this space include Affirmity, Diverst, Planbox, and Stratus TMS. For example, Stratus TMS's ERG Insights product allows individuals to manage events, action plans and budgets, and incorporates measurement tools that track ERG performance and impact (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Stratus TMS's ERG Insights Management Capabilities



Source: Stratus TMS, 2019.

2. Encourage and manage toward a diverse ERG

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
▲	●	▲	▲

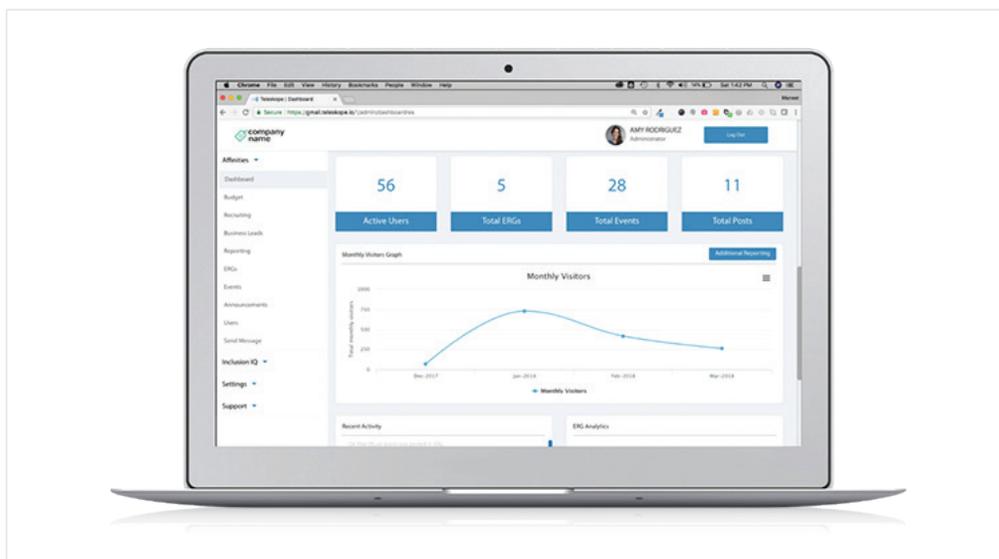
As odd as it may seem to say it (given the topic), we are going to: ERGs need to have a diversity of individuals within them. This means they are comprised of individuals who are diverse on multiple levels, including gender, experience, level, and location in the organization as well as the other traditional diversity characteristics. This allows women to build diverse networks, which will connect them to both higher-power and lower-power networks across the organization.

Beyond recruiting individuals from throughout the organization, how can an organization make its ERGs diverse? This challenge actually represents a prime opportunity to leverage technology. In the simplest approach, organizations could run analyses of the representation of members of existing ERGs, looking at the diversity of levels, functions, tenure, and genders. For example, this analysis might show a strong representation within the ERG from a specific function (e.g., sales), but much weaker representation from another (e.g., operations). Leaders could then actively recruit new individuals from less represented areas to the ERG to ensure everyone has an opportunity to build a diverse network.

As mentioned above, technology vendors such as Affirmity, Planbox, Stratus TMS, and Diverst help organizations track ERG members (as well as manage the logistics of ERGs). This information could then be combined with existing HRIS data to understand more about who is within the ERG. Some vendors, such as Affirmity (Figure 7), can actually do both the ERG management and representation analysis within one system. The majority of organizations, though, will likely have to combine data from multiple sources, working closely with their people analytics teams.

ERGs need to have diversity within them.

Figure 7: Affirmity's ERG management capability



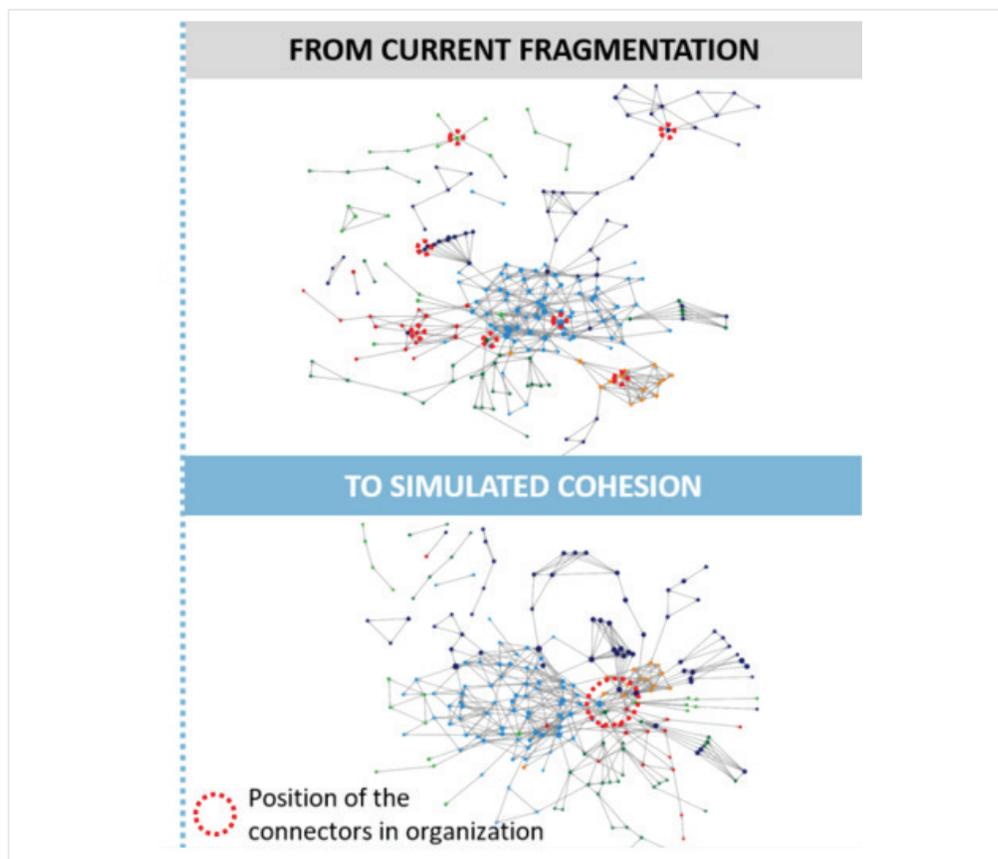
Source: Affirmity, 2019.

Another, more sophisticated, way to use technology to understand the diversity of the individuals – and their networks – within an ERG would be to run a passive or active organizational network analysis (ONA)²⁰ of ERG members. This would allow D&I or ERG leaders to analyze the connectedness of the ERG membership and to identify individuals who could be better connected within the network or those who could take a lead role on bringing more disparate parts of the network together.

There are numerous ONA companies on the market right now, but a few that are specifically focused on using ONA to benefit D&I are Humanyze, Innovisor, Polinode, TrustSphere, and Worklytics (all of which we will discuss in more detail in the sections to come). In the example in Figure 8, you can see how one group is highly fragmented, with the specific connectors being marked in red circles. ONA technology allows organizations to run a simulation of bringing the right people together to increase connectedness and information flow. This type of analysis could be used to help create a more diverse ERG.

²⁰ Organizational network analysis (ONA) is a method for studying communication and social networks within a formal organization. This technique creates statistical and graphical models of the people, tasks, groups, knowledge, and resources of organizational systems. There are two types: active (which rely on surveys) and passive (which rely on “digital exhaust” such as email / chat / Slack communications or other digital data generated by existing technology).

Figure 8: Example of a fragmented and potentially more cohesive network map



Source: Innovisor, 2019.

As the world of people analytics continues to advance, organizations will have an ever-increasing amount of data on their hands, which could be used to help with making ERGs more diverse. For example, in the future, organizations could identify groups of people who are connected to a population relatively under-represented within an ERG and “nudge” them to recruit individuals to the ERG.

Organizations will have an ever-increasing amount of data on their hands, which could enable a range of technology capabilities.

The Creepiness Factor in Organizational Network Analysis

In the course of our interviews, across research projects, we’ve started to hear from vendors and practitioners that are concerned with the creepiness factor of organizational network analysis (ONA). More specifically, how organizations can and should leverage this when collecting employee data. There are two forms of ONA, active and passive. In

general, most people are referring to the passive form of data collection when they bring up these concerns. While passive data collection can be incredibly rich and useful, organizations should ensure that employees are aware this data collection is occurring and offer them the opportunity to opt-out. Offering opt-out options tends to help organizations collect more data, as people are less likely to opt-out, than to opt-in. Lastly, organizations should provide employees with information on why the data is being collected, what specific information is being collected, and how that will be of benefit to the individual and the organization.

Organizations could also recommend different ERG groups or events to employees. For example, if employee data suggests that a particular talent segment (e.g., women at certain levels/tenures/functions) are less engaged, have lower satisfaction or commitment, or report less development opportunities, the organization could send communications suggesting specific ERG-related activities that might be of interest. It's important to note that any of these recommendations should be made at the group level, and not at the individual level.

Company Spotlight: **How Sodexo makes ERGs count**

Sodexo, a food services and facilities management company committed to Quality of Life, is a global, Fortune 500 company with a presence in 72 countries. In North America, Sodexo has roughly 160,000 employees and is headquartered in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

For over 10 years now, Sodexo North America has been leveraging their ERGs to support their business and to help solve business challenges. An example of this can be found in how they have positioned their women's group to help advance efforts around gender balance and equality in the

organization. Their 8 other EBRGs drive similar efforts in support of multiple dimensions of diversity.

As part of the evolution of their Employee Resource Groups, Sodexo eventually changed the name of their groups to Employee Business Resource Groups (EBRG), to reflect the alignment to the business and the expectation that the groups were created to support the business and help solve business problems.

In addition, Sodexo executives serve as sponsors or a co-sponsor of at least one EBRG; highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion and of role modeling commitment from the top. Managers are also held accountable to setting a standard around diversity. Their involvement in diversity initiatives and active participation in things like EBRGs, count towards their diversity and inclusion scorecard achievements.

Sodexo also charges employees annual dues to be an EBRG member – yes, you read that correctly. Sodexo charges a small, annual fee for membership in these groups. This helps the members hold the EBRG accountable and helps the employee to have some skin in the game. It also helps Sodexo have a more accurate read on their data, because membership into a group is not automatically renewed so employees must opt into membership. With more accurate data, Sodexo is better able to understand employee sentiments and trends across specific segments and EBRGs over time.

All these efforts make participation in EBRGs count; whether they count towards performance standards or towards a personal stake in the game. As a result, Sodexo has senior leaders advocating for different groups throughout the organization, have males participating at a higher rate in women-focused groups, and can leverage these groups to address organizational issue more readily.



3. Offer resources to support women becoming energizers

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
▲	●	▲	▲

The final area of opportunity for ERGs is within the “energizer” principle, where women serve as energizers within their networks, helping encourage new ideas. If organizations take some of the steps mentioned above – creating clear leadership opportunities and smaller subgroups – there are numerous opportunities for women to serve as energizers.

One common approach to enabling women to serve as energizers is through ERG-enabled mentorship and sponsorship activities. In fact, mentorship and sponsorship are so important that we have an entire section devoted to them below. However, we did find this nice example from McGraw-Hill on this topic, so we want to share it here.

Company Spotlight:

McGraw-Hill leverages its ERG to formalize mentorship²¹

McGraw-Hill is a learning science company with 5,000 employees and headquarters in New York. They are an example of an organization that carefully crafted and executed mentorship.

Their Women’s Initiative for Networking and Success (WINS) actually helped kick off this initiative by conducting an employee survey to gauge interest in a formal mentoring program. Unsurprisingly, a majority of employees supported a formal program.

WINS volunteered to lead the charge and investigated best practices and what aspects of a mentoring program would work best at McGraw-Hill. Once that was complete, they partnered with a consulting firm to help plan and execute.

²¹ “A Customized Internal Mentoring Solution,” McGraw-Hill, 2019. <https://www.menttium.com/mentoring-client-case-studies/mcgraw-hill/>.

The program targets middle to upper management to promote attraction and retention of diverse talent at this level in the organization. In its first two years, over 350 mentoring relationships were created, and every six months, more mentor relationships are created across the organization.

Importantly, McGraw-Hill's mentorship encourages cross-functional relationships and specifically focuses on giving participants a broadened perspective of the business, which provides participants with access to new, diverse networks and information.

One of the most powerful ways we've seen organizations use ERGs is by enabling their members to leverage the specific insights of their community to help deliver a better product or service. A common example of this is Dorito's Hispanic ERG developing the guacamole Dorito chip, which added significantly to PepsiCo's bottom line.²² Leaders who champion these efforts within the ERG can take on central roles that expose them to a breadth of individuals and ideas, thus representing a prime opportunity for women to be energizers within their networks.

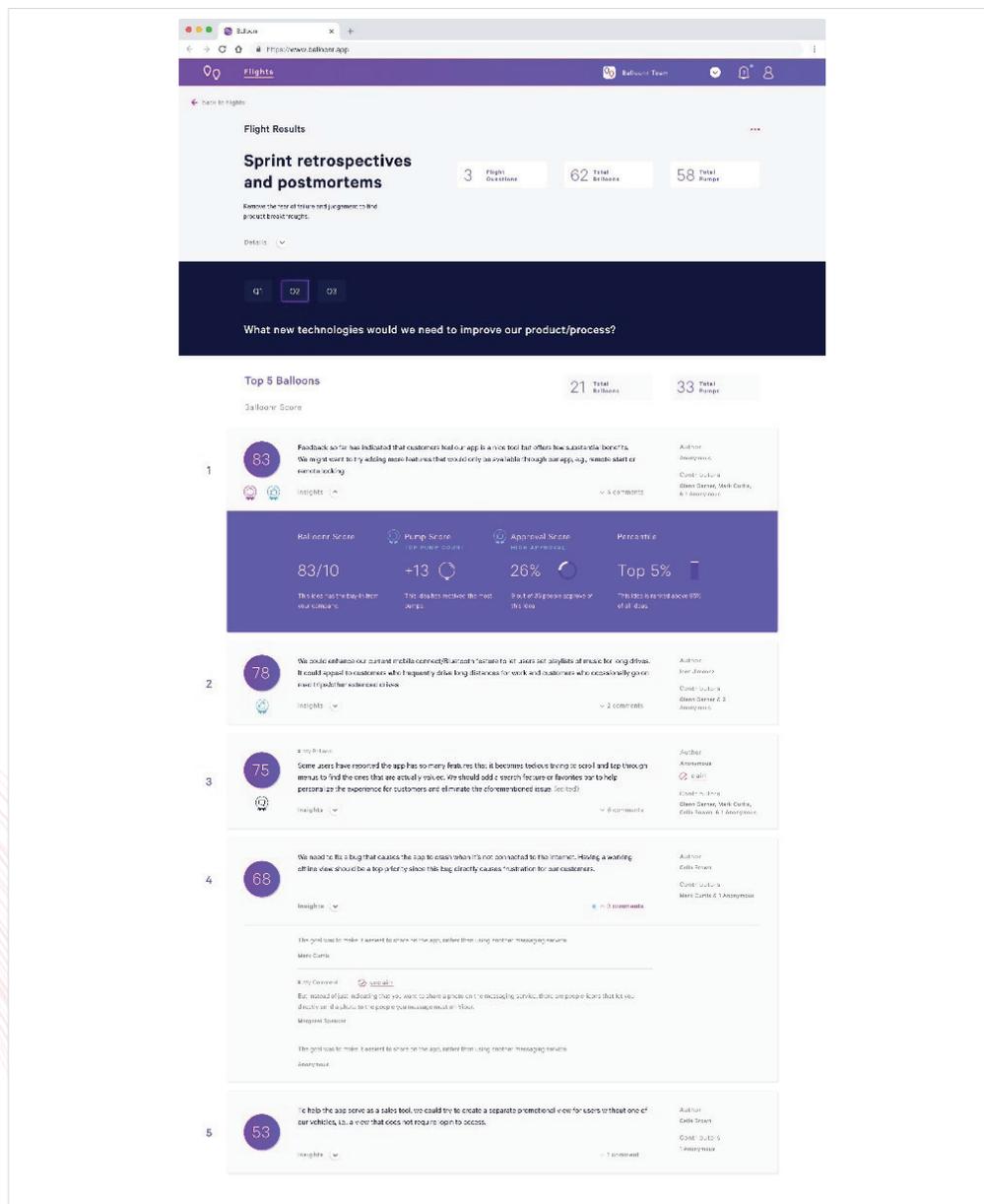
However, not everyone (man or woman) is born knowing how to help nurture new ideas – in fact, some of us seem to come out of the womb as natural critics. ERGs represent a wonderful space for learning how to develop new ideas and innovations, which can be especially helpful in enabling women to be energizers within their networks. Providing resources that help women understand the steps in an ideation process – how to brainstorm and effectively support ideas without overly criticizing them in their infantile stage – could be helpful. This type of support could come in the form of the approaches many ERGs use today: discussion forms, workshops, training, and job aids.

This is also a space where technology could help. There are some new vendors focused on trying to develop and encourage ideation

²² See this article for more detail on the Doritos example as well as other examples of this: "Employee Network and Affinity Groups," Diversity Practices, https://www.diversitybestpractices.com/sites/diversitybestpractices.com/files/import/embedded/anchors/files/diversity_primer_chapter_10.pdf.

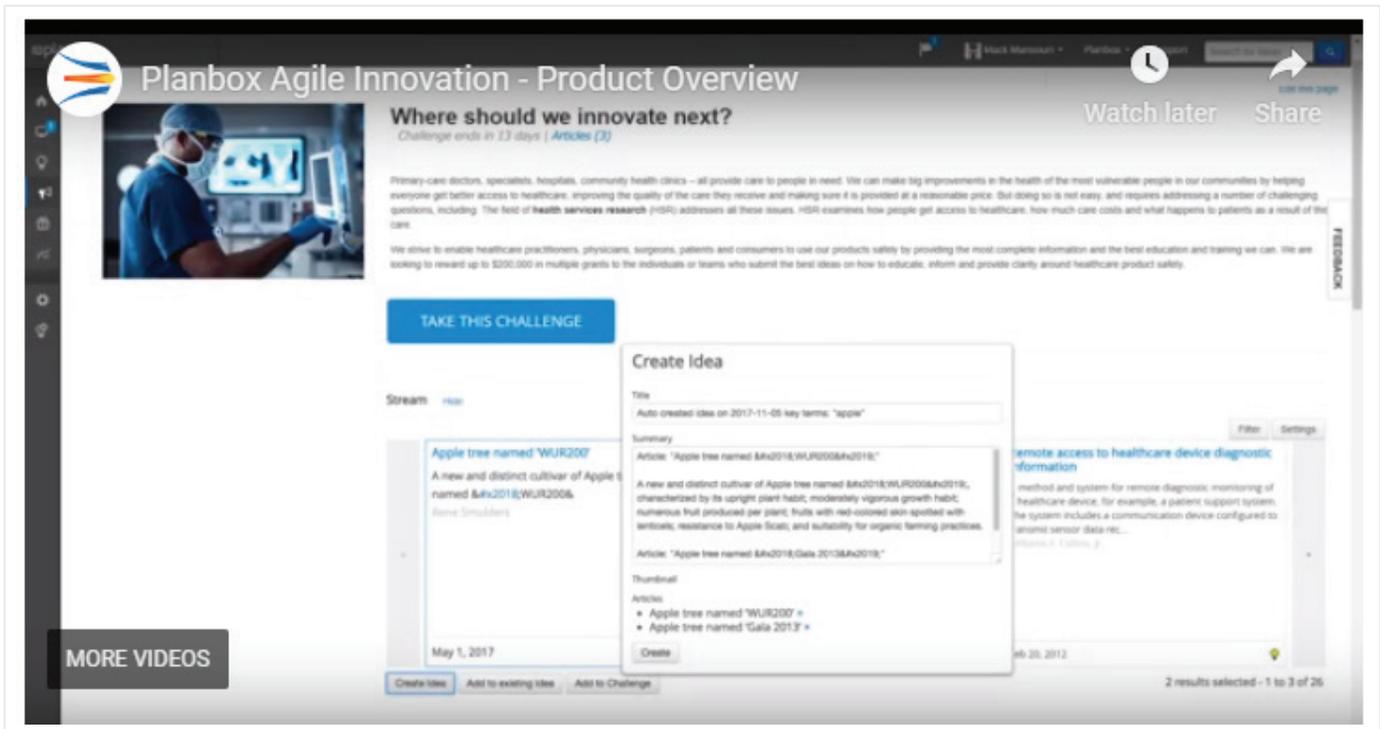
and innovation. Two of them in particular, Balloonr and Planbox, are specifically designed with diversity and inclusion in mind. These vendors allow individuals to conduct online sessions to generate and manage new ideas (see Figure 9 and Figure 10). Employees can use these technologies to anonymously provide ideas and respond to other's suggestions. This helps prevent bias against specific ideas based on who provided them. Both technologies could be leveraged in the context of ERGs not only to harness the collective insights of the group but also give women opportunities to lead and serve as idea-encouraging energizers within their networks.

Figure 9: Balloonr's idea generation platform



Source: Balloonr, 2019.

Figure 10: Planbox idea creation and management



Source: Planbox, 2019.

We've mentioned a lot of vendors in this section. Figure 11 summarizes those we included. Please note, a list of all vendors included in this report is in the Appendix.

Figure 11: Vendors included in ERG section

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION
Create personal, meaningful sub-groups that provide leadership opportunities		Manages ERGs for leaders and group managers to create more targeted and effective activities for members to connect
		Measures impact of D&I efforts and enables ERG membership management, news feeds, and event management to make ERGs more effective in connecting individuals
		Helps organizations and individuals leverage Lean-In Circles by providing tools, guidance, and education how to create and maintain meaningful Lean-In Circles
		Helps organizations manage and appropriately leverage ERGs with event management, information sharing, mentor-matching, and survey-based measurement
		Eases the administrative burden of managing ERGs to make these groups more effective at helping members connect
Encourage and manage towards a diverse ERG		Manages ERGs for leaders and group managers to create more targeted and effective activities for members to connect
		Measures impact of D&I efforts and enables ERG membership management, news feeds, and event management to make ERGs more effective in connecting individuals
		Provides an organizational network analysis platform along with benchmarking and action-based recommendations
		Helps organizations manage and appropriately leverage ERGs with event management, information sharing, mentor-matching, and survey-based measurement
		Network analysis platform that can be used across a number of different data types and formats and can also deploy surveys specifically designed for network analysis
		Eases the administrative burden of managing ERGs to make these groups more effective at helping members connect
Offer resources to support women becoming energizers		Provides a platform for information sharing, collaborative decision-making, and communication
		Helps organizations manage and appropriately leverage ERGs with event management, information sharing, mentor-matching, and survey-based measurement

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP²³

It is no secret that mentorship²⁴ and sponsorship²⁵ can help advance women.²⁶ Despite this insight, there is a high degree of variance in the extent to which mentorship and sponsorship are formally developed and implemented²⁷ across organizations. For example, many organizations simply “encourage” mentorship or sponsorship but have not formalized the program nor offered resources. By contrast, at IBM, any employee who is willing to share their knowledge can sign up to become a mentor or coach. The company even built its own platform, CoachMe, to increase the reach of mentoring opportunities throughout the organization.

This inconsistency in approach means that there is also inconsistency in the effectiveness of mentorship and sponsorship geared toward advancing women. Research by McKinsey & Co. shows that when mentorship and sponsorship activities are left to take place organically, women will get less mentorship and sponsorship than men, as indicated in Figure 12.

There is a high degree of variance in the extent to which mentorship and sponsorship are formally developed and implemented across organizations.

23 While we know that mentorship and sponsorship are different concepts, we have grouped them into one section in this report as many of the network-based approaches can be applied very similarly.

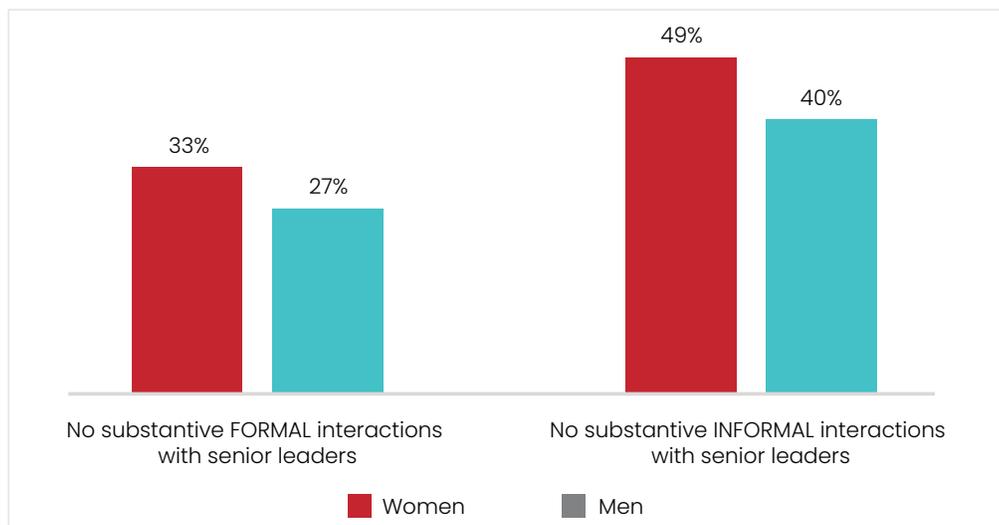
24 A professional relationship between an experienced individual and junior employee(s) to help provide career guidance, advice, and support as a form of career development.

25 A professional relationship in which a senior leader actively advocates and promotes junior employee(s) for career opportunities.

26 Research shows, though, that women are often over-mentored and under-sponsored, which can lead to a lack of advocacy for women for promotion, development, or growth assignments.

27 This variation reflects research that found that roughly half of companies have a mentorship program, but less than a third support a sponsorship program. “Women in the Workplace,” McKinsey & Co., 2017. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2017>.

Figure 12: Those who have never had substantive interactions with senior leaders, by gender



Source: McKinsey & Co, 2018.²⁸

Research also shows that as women rise in organizations, this trend only accelerates.²⁹ This leaves us to conclude that simply encouraging women to have a mentor, encouraging her to attend a networking event, or connecting her to a high-powered individual is not enough. There needs to be a formalized and supported mentorship and sponsorship program.

Company Spotlight:

Equinix's Allies Council helps drive organizational change

Equinix, is a 7,900 person organization that runs a colocation and interconnection platform that extends across 200 global data centers and is headquartered in Redwood City, California.

The Equinix Women Leaders Network (EWLN) is pursuing growth, visibility and opportunities for women to increase business impact. Every EWLN chapter leads the development efforts for that particular region, and EWLN ambassador teams

²⁸ "Women in the Workplace," McKinsey & Co., 2018. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2018>.

²⁹ "Women in the Workplace," McKinsey & Co., 2018. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2018>.

run local events. In addition, EWLN takes on cross-functional initiatives to ensure that the organization – as a whole – can come together to align efforts and push for change at the organizational level. In 2018, one of those initiatives was the creation of the Allies Council.

This Council is a group of SVPs and VPs that came together to discuss gender equality and inclusion at Equinix. The Allies Council works in partnership with the Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging team, which includes members from Human Resources, Strategy, Business Operations, Communications and employee networks like EWLN. As part of these discussions, Equinix recognized that more structure and support could be put into place for initiatives such as mentorship, sponsorship and promotion decisions. In particular, Equinix began to recognize that even though men and women were both participating in a high potential program, data suggested that women were not seeing the same promotion rates as men coming out of the program.

They had a hypothesis that this difference was related to sponsorship. While it was great that the organization was nimble and filling roles quickly, some opportunities were created and filled in the moment in conversations occurring in closed networks. Therefore, the organization was not able to consider all candidates in the same way. This realization pushed Equinix to develop a formal sponsorship program.

Following the high potential program, individuals that are part of an underrepresented group are identified, supported to be sponsor-ready and eligible to have a formal sponsor. Sponsors are not assigned, but senior leaders select an individual to sponsor and continue to leverage the relationship they developed during the high potential program.

In addition to providing sponsorship opportunities, the organization is explicitly trying to create a reciprocal learning relationship that shifts the senior leaders' perspectives. Equinix wants senior leaders to understand what it is like to be in an underrepresented group in the organization and how that might create unique challenges for individuals in their efforts to advance.

To ensure that the program is successful, Equinix is adding structure to these relationships. More specifically, they are hoping to add some boundaries and standards around conversations and connection points, along with training for sponsors and proteges. Lastly, they will measure the value that proteges feel they are getting from the relationship and whether they perceive opportunities and coaching are resulting from this relationship.

Through these efforts Equinix is preparing leaders to be better equipped and more willing to advocate for people that are not in their traditional network. In addition, the organization will be able to take a broader perspective of potential talent.

When we further look at mentorship and sponsorship through a network lens, another challenge becomes clear: the way most programs are set up today creates single points of contact into higher-power networks. This can be problematic because they are also single sources of failure since mentees or sponsees must rely on their mentor/sponsor for support or sponsorship into the network. Further, mentors or sponsors may end up having more mentees or sponsees than they have time to adequately support.

Beyond formalizing mentorship and sponsorship programs,³⁰ companies can focus on ways that mentorship and sponsorship can work from a network perspective. Specifically, organizations can focus on the following:

1. View mentorship and sponsorship in terms of teams, not just one-on-one relationships
2. Create energizer opportunities within mentorship/sponsorship interactions
3. Connect women to diverse external mentorship/sponsorship networks

The way most programs are set up today creates single points of contact into higher-power networks.

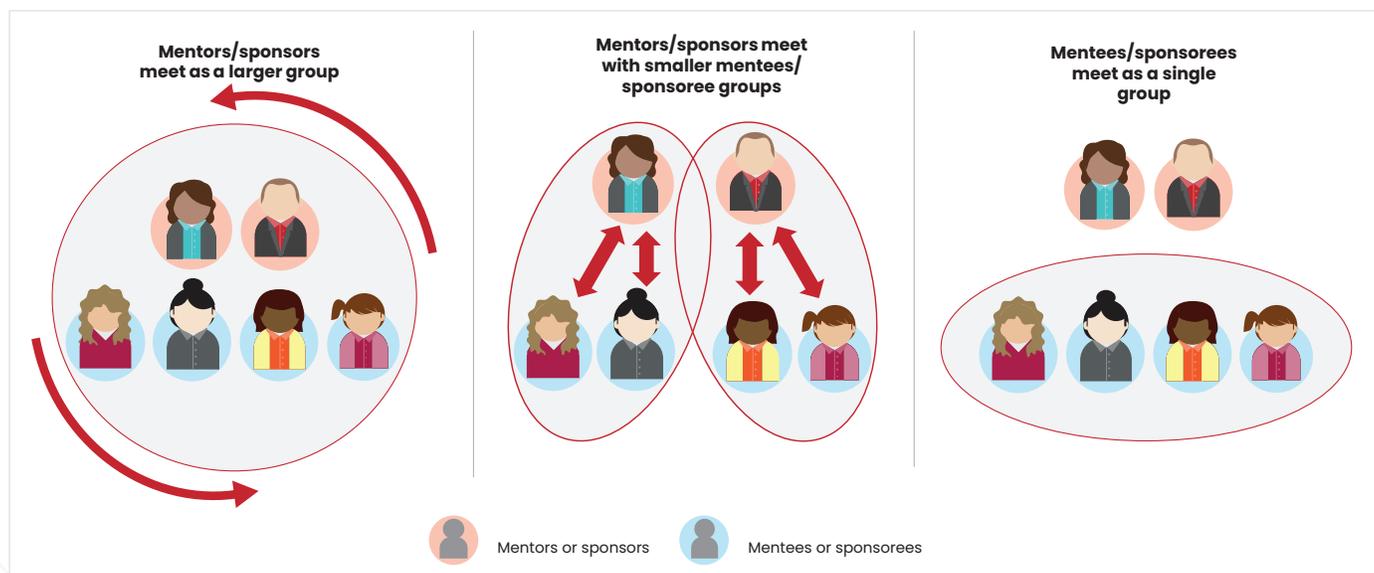
³⁰ Research suggests that formal programs are more successful when standards are clear, training is provided, programs are monitored, and participants are held accountable. "Connections that Count: The Informal Networks of Women of Color in the United States," Giscombe, K., Catalyst, 2006. <https://www.catalyst.org/research/connections-that-count-the-informal-networks-of-women-of-color-in-the-united-states/>.

1. View mentorship and sponsorship in terms of teams, not just one-on-one relationships

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
	▲	●	▲

One way to make mentorship and sponsorship work more effectively is to design programs so they can help women form a meaningful inner circle with women from diverse backgrounds. The most important component of this is to move beyond seeing mentorship and sponsorship as strictly one-on-one relationships and instead, view mentors and sponsors as teams or cohorts. In Figure 13, we have outlined how this could work, where the team meets at times as a larger group, sometimes with one mentor and two mentees and in other instances with just the mentees.

Figure 13: Suggestions for how to take a team-based approach to mentorship/sponsorship



Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

The potential benefits of a team-based approach are significant, in that it can:

- Provide more opportunities for women to form an inner circle with other women who are connected to diverse networks.
- Reduce the burden on any one mentor/sponsor since there would be more individuals to provide advice, support, or sponsorship.

- Create an opportunity for mentees/sponsees to be connected into higher-value networks through more than one individual.
- Enable multiple people to be involved in the mentorship/ sponsorship relationship, which could reduce some of the hesitancy some senior men feel about mentoring/sponsoring women (see call out: The #MeToo backlash).

An example of one organization that has taken a group-mentoring approach is the University of Michigan Department of Surgery.

Company Spotlight:

University of Michigan Department of Surgery takes a group-based approach to mentoring^{31,32}

As academic surgeons begin their career after formal training, there is little time to gain practical skills that help individuals manage research teams, clinical teams, and the project management of these endeavors.

The University of Michigan Department of Surgery, located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, created the Faculty Launch Program: a 3-year, team-based mentorship program for early career faculty members and residents to help ensure successful academic and clinical careers.

Mentees have a team of mentors across disciplines that provide unique areas of expertise and experience. This helps mentees take into account two aspects of these relationships: fit and function. Fit represents how well individuals interact and the dynamics in the relationship. Function represents alignment in expertise and career goals.

Resources and training are provided for mentors and mentees. The mentee, along with faculty advisors, identify the individuals on the mentorship teams. One member on the

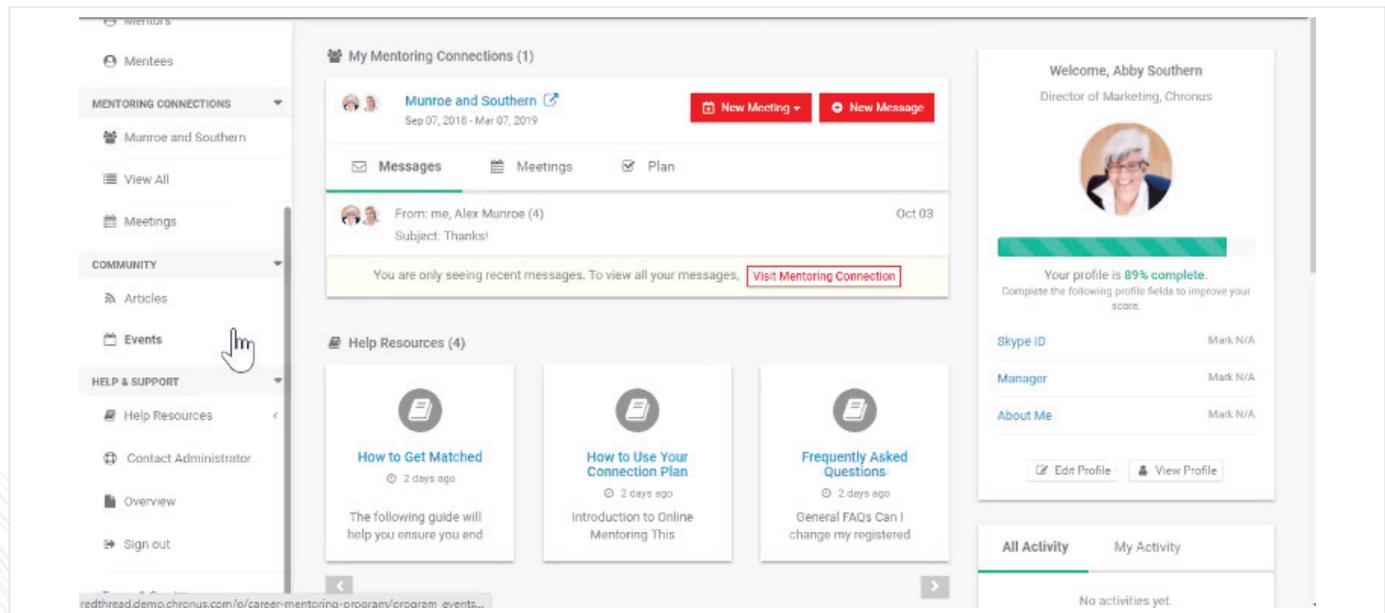
31 "Team-Based Mentoring," University of Michigan Department of Surgery, 2018. <https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/surgery/news/archive/201808/team-based-mentoring>.

32 "Achievement Strategies," University of Michigan Department of Surgery, 2019. <https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/surgery/about-us/faculty-resident-life/our-initiatives/achievement-strategies>.

team serves as the lead to coordinate schedules, bi-monthly meetings, and assignments. Each year, goals, metrics, and deliverables are determined by the mentee and team lead.

One of the most difficult parts about a mentorship/sponsorship program is the logistics of matching and managing the relationships. However, there are a number of technologies that can help alleviate these logistical burdens. Further, current technology helps ensure that women are not hampered by their network and allows them to search for mentors and coaches (internally and externally). For example, Chronus (see Figure 14) offers search capabilities and mentor matching features. In addition to connecting people to mentors in their network, another vendor, InstaViser, integrates its technology into an organization's current work (e.g., Microsoft Office or G-Suite) and helps individuals schedule and manage their interactions with their mentors/sponsors.

Figure 14: Mentor search and matching features in Chronus



Source: Chronus, 2019.

To date, we have not seen technology that focuses on how to match teams of mentors/sponsors to mentees/sponsees, but we imagine that some of the existing technology could be adapted relatively easily to this case.

The #MeToo backlash

While organizations are trying to include men in the discussion of and efforts around gender diversity, some men are hesitant to get involved. Recent research³³ shows that 60% of men now feel uncomfortable being involved in a common work activity with a woman. In addition, senior-level men are far more hesitant to interact with junior women than junior men out of a concern over how it might look. Organizations need men to step up and commit to being part of the solution. Men, particularly leaders, need to be held accountable to how equitable they are in their mentorship and sponsorship activities. Male leaders should also be expected to get involved in gender diversity discussions, programs, and groups throughout the organization. Organizations need to encourage and recognize male leaders that don't use the #MeToo movement as an excuse to not mentor, lead, and sponsor their women subordinates in equitable ways. For men who have concerns about mentoring or sponsoring women in a 1:1 environment, organizations could support some form of group mentoring or sponsorship, similar to that described at the University of Michigan Department of Surgery. This approach would have the additional benefit of helping connect women to multiple leaders, reducing the reliance on a single connection to a higher-powered network.

2. Create energizer opportunities within mentorship/sponsorship

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
	▲	●	▲

It's important to structure mentorship/sponsorship relationships in ways that can allow women to serve as energizers within their networks. This is potentially easiest if organizations adopt the team-based mentorship/sponsorship approach. This would provide

³³ "Working Relationship in the #MeToo Movement: Key Findings," Leanin.org, 2019. <https://leanin.org/sexual-harassment-backlash-survey-results>.

women with a safe group of individuals to try out new ideas. This would allow mentees/sponsees an opportunity to hone their effectiveness at being energizers within their networks.

That said, an organization does not have to adopt a team-based approach to mentorship/sponsorship to introduce the concept of energizers into their mentorship/sponsorship practices. Even with one-on-one relationships, mentors/sponsors could promote their mentees/sponsees within their network as people who are good sounding boards for new ideas. This would give the mentees/sponsees both chances to be energizers and to develop more diverse ties.

To be clear, we did not see any organizations deliberately taking this approach. However, given the existing research, we think it holds a lot of potential, and we encourage organizations to explore it.

3. Deliberately connect women to diverse external mentorship/sponsorship networks

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
	▲	●	▲

Women should not limit their diverse ties or energizer status to inside their organization. While it may seem odd that organizational leaders would support women developing their external network, consider this: research on innovation and agility underscores the importance of individuals having strong external sources of information (i.e., networks) outside of their organization.³⁴ While it is true that strong external networks may eventually benefit women in terms of external advancement, in the meantime, these connections can benefit the organization in terms of new ideas and potentially new talent.

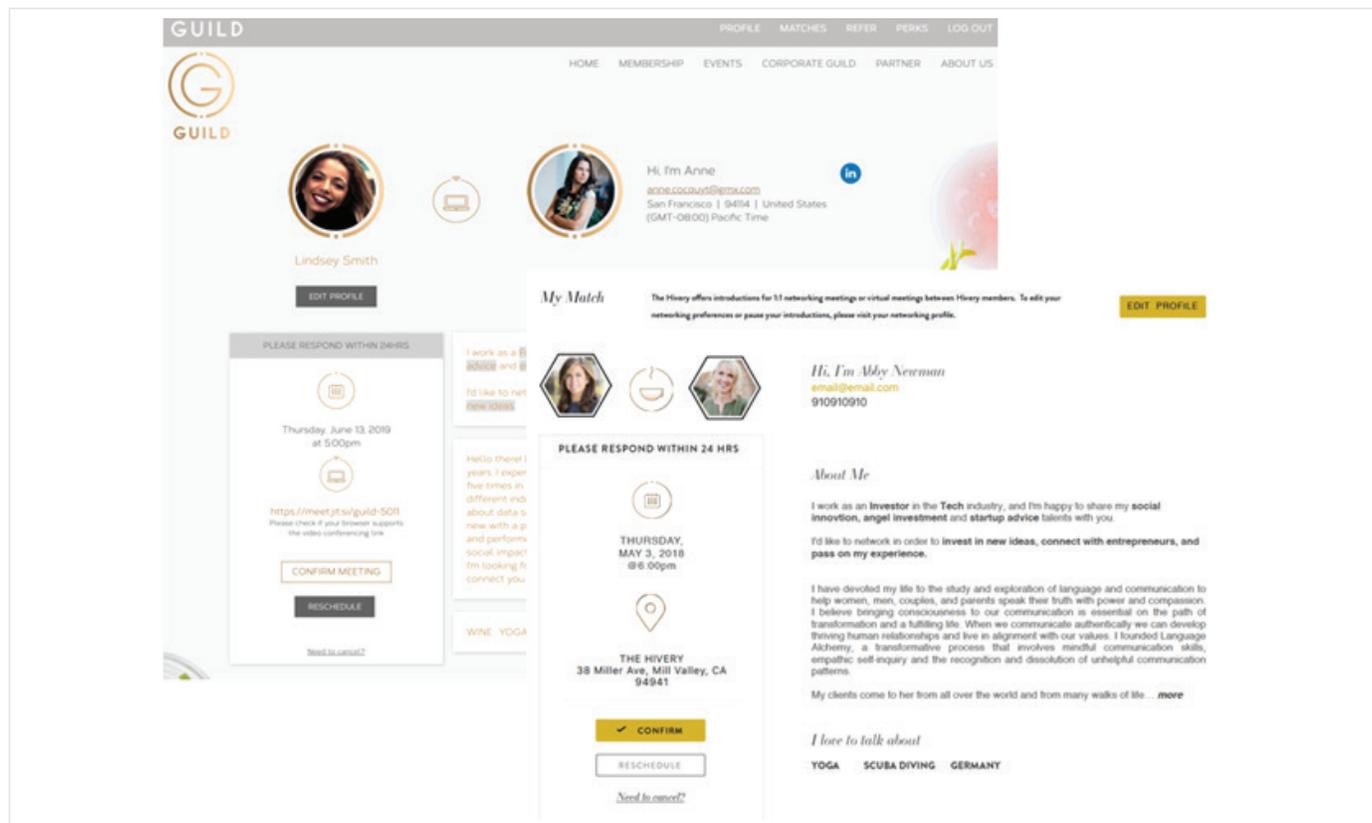
It's important to structure mentorship/sponsorship relationships in ways that can allow women to serve as energizers within their networks.

Women should not limit their diverse ties or energizer status to inside their organization

34 For example, see: "The Impacts of Open Innovations on Organizational Performance: A Perspective Based on Information Technology and Knowledge Ecology," Liang, T., Chen, D., and Pee, L., Thirty Fourth International conference on Information Systems, Milan, 2013. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a9cd/8487ff099ebd901b3695d582b613527fdaa4.pdf>; and "Does External Knowledge Sourcing Enhance Market Performance? Evidence from the Korean Manufacturing Industry," Kibaek Lee, K., Yoo, J., Choi, M., Zo, H., and Ciganek, A., 2016. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0168676>.

There are a number of technology solutions currently available to help with connecting women to mentorship/sponsorship networks. For example, Guild offers networking and mentorship capabilities within the organization and in communities external to the organization (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Example of networking opportunities on Guild³⁵



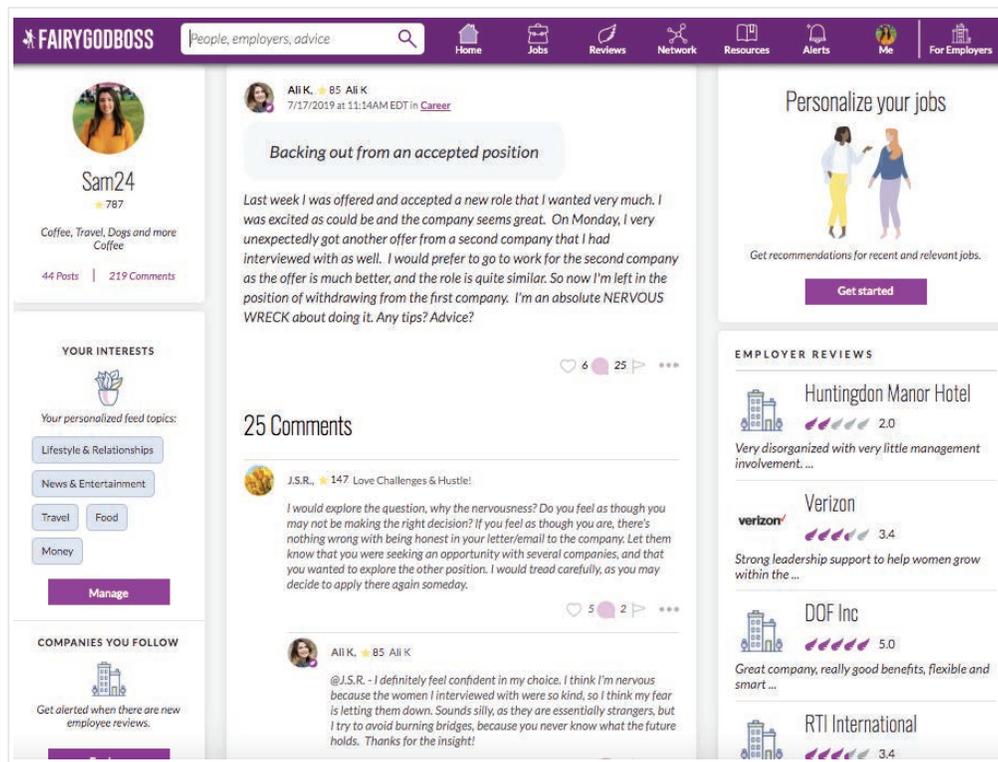
Source: Guild, 2019.

Another vendor, Fairygodboss, provides an external social network for women to connect with others to better understand companies that are supportive of women and to ask the network for help in finding new roles or advice on advancing their careers³⁶ (see Figure 16). In the future, Fairygodboss is planning to launch company-specific communities, which could be used to help find internal mentors/sponsors or uncover invisible information (which we discuss in much greater detail later in this report).

35 "Smarter Networking to achieve your career goals," Guild, 2019. <https://www.letsguild.com/>.

36 "Community Feed", Fairygodboss, 2019. <https://fairygodboss.com/community/feed>.

Figure 16: Developing and leveraging an external network with Fairygodboss



Source: Fairygodboss, 2019.

Lastly, mentoring and sponsorship are personalized forms of development. To that end, mentorships and sponsorship programs alike can leverage technology that helps identify and offer personalized career pathing and development. For example, Landit offers a personalized career pathing experience with executive coaching, targeted skill development, personal branding and more. The platform's board of advisors tool provides guidance and structure on how to manage mentor and sponsor relationships. This can be used in the mentorship or sponsorship relationship to add structure to what tends to be a less formalized practice. Another vendor, Everwise, provides not only a mentoring solution but also a marketplace of development content and curriculum across a number of topics.

We think there's a significant opportunity for technology to help with mentorship and sponsorship in the future. For example, we could see technology enabling individuals to do the following:

Mentorships and sponsorship programs can leverage technology that helps identify and offer personalized career pathing and development.

- Automate agendas for check-ins
- Send pulse surveys about current challenges
- Connect teams of mentees/sponsees with mentors/sponsors based on similar interests and targeted development
- Provide curated content and curriculum

We've mentioned a lot of vendors in this section. Figure 17 summarizes those we included. Please note, a list of all vendors included in this report is in the Appendix.

Figure 17: Vendors included in the mentorship/sponsorship section

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION
View mentorship and sponsorship relationships in terms of teams, not just one-on-one relationships		Supports formal mentoring programs to help organizations connect individuals to mentors, conduct 1:1 meetings, provide educational curriculum to guide mentor sessions in individual or group-based settings; has an additional feature for support circles - much like Lean-In Circles
		Help organizations leverage networks for mentoring and recruiting and provides a platform to help manage mentoring relationships
Deliberately connect women to diverse external mentorship/sponsorship networks	EVERWISE	Provides organizations with the option to formalize their own mentorship or allow Everwise to manage the mentorship program; also provides curriculum for individual and shared learning experiences for individual contributors or leaders
		Provides an external network for women to tap for advice on career opportunities and the culture of organizations; also provides education and opportunities to connect directly with organizations that wish to help women re-enter the workforce
		Provides an external network of women and sends introductions to facilitate 1:1 meetings (virtual or face-to-face) as well as smaller, more intimate events to foster strong inner circle and expand diversity of ties
	Landit 	Provides solutions aimed at both the individual and the organization: individual solutions target career development and advancement through personal branding, goal tracking, and providing a personal board of advisors; organizational solutions focuses on coaching for career development

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

There is significant variety³⁷ in the types of leadership development programs designed to help women advance, including programs that have the following characteristics:

- Focus on women and have only female participants
- Open to everyone, with no gender focus, but participants are selected in such a way as to have equal representation among men and women
- Open to everyone, with no gender focus and no requirement around equal representation

In addition, the ways in which women access these opportunities differs. Some organizations have a process for women seeking out and applying for these programs, while others are based on women being identified as top talent and invited to participate. Still other organizations hold leaders accountable for sponsoring women participants by pushing leaders to seek out top talent, to nominate them for selection, to form relationships with them, and to take responsibility for their development throughout and after the program.

We mention these different varieties of programs because the program type and how women access programs can have significant impacts on the networks women build as a result of the program. To make the most of these programs, we suggest organizations do the following:

- 1.** Design programs to intentionally build women's networks
- 2.** Create earlier-career programs for women
- 3.** Use novel approaches to identify program participants
- 4.** Teach network theory

³⁷ In addition to the variety mentioned, we also found that the structures of these programs also vary greatly from organization to organization. For example, some of these programs are operated by HR or D&I functions, while others are run and funded by ERGs. The length and content of each differs as well, with some programs lasting a few days, while others stretch out for months. In addition, the degree to which organizations rely on external sources to design, develop, and deploy these programs differs. While some organizations use "off-the-shelf" solutions, others design customized programs based on employee input and data.

1. Design programs to intentionally build women's networks

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
	●	▲	▲

Leadership development programs can often have the same pitfalls as women-focused ERGs. Specifically, if program participants are from similar functions, units, or levels, these programs can create echo chambers and restrict women from access to information, visibility, and opportunities to display their talent across the organization.

When these programs are designed to provide visibility, opportunity, and experience, they can enhance a woman's ability to showcase her talent, to collaborate, and to be seen as an energizer among peers. In addition, when organizations are intentional about how they design these programs – specifically ensuring both equal gender representation and opportunities for women to forge meaningful connections with other women – they can enable the creation of inner circles for women without being exclusive to women.

When these programs are designed to provide visibility, opportunity, and experience, they can enhance a woman's ability to showcase her talent, to collaborate, and to be seen as an energizer among peers.

Fixing the woman vs. Fixing the workplace

The initiatives that organizations implement to enable the advancement of women tend to rest on one of two basic beliefs that either:

- The women need to be fixed; or
- The organizational culture, practices, and policies need to change

Organizations may undermine their efforts when they position development as women needing to be fixed. For example, when leadership development programs focus on “business skills for women” or how to “dress for success,” they can be patronizing and discouraging, sending the message that women need to fix themselves or portray themselves in a certain manner.

Organizations can no longer operate from the perspective that women need to be fixed. Not only is this an erroneous conclusion, but organizational policies and practices created in different times have supported cultures in which men have disproportionately benefited. That simply won't work as the demographics, desires, career interests, and expectations of employees change. As one executive put it,

“Quite often there are assumptions made [about what women want]. Careers are going to change, things are going to be fluid, and workplaces will change. People are trying to give advice on how things have been and that is going to change. The future will not look like the past.”

This point underscores the need for organizations to create environments where women can succeed as opposed to always expecting women to adapt and then being surprised when women are not rising within the organization. If organizations keep trying the same approach, they will keep getting the same result.

2. Create earlier-career programs for women

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
	●	▲	▲

Many leadership development programs focus on senior-level women or those moving into senior roles. This can be problematic in that, by this point, the pipeline of female talent has already significantly reduced so the impact of the programs is muted. Even when these programs are offered to women in lower levels, they tend to be limited in scale and focused on a small subset of women.

This problem of focusing too late in women's careers can be magnified when you think about it from a network perspective. Specifically, if women's primary relationships are with other women at their same level or of a similar age, then the examples they are seeing of how to manage their careers are largely homogenous.

One area this may play out, especially for women, is in navigating home and work lives. A majority of the family responsibilities still fall on women. Therefore, they are more often than men faced with the dilemma of balancing career progression while also “holding down the home front”. Without diverse connections to women across the spectrum of career tenure, talented women who may be struggling with the question of whether to leave the workforce or reduce their workload may end up being surrounded by other women struggling with the same question.

These women would benefit from access to diverse perspectives, advice, and resources so they could come to conclusions best suited for their situation. If organizations develop leadership programs that also connect women to others who have grappled with this question, they may be more effective at keeping some of these talented women at their organization or increase the likelihood they will return after taking time away.

3. Use novel approaches to identify program participants

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
	●	▲	▲

As alluded to earlier, one of the challenges with many leadership development programs is that they require a senior leader to nominate people to participate. While this may sound good in theory, it requires nominees to already have a network that connected them to senior leaders who would make the nomination and a manager or network that connected them to the right opportunities to be eligible. Given what we know about how networks vary by gender, we know this is less likely to happen for women.

There are several ways to address this. The first is to make explicit the existence of the program, the requirements for accessing it, and information on how to be prepared to successfully leverage it (this is similar to what we discuss in more detail later in the “articulating invisible information” section). It is critical to make this information widely available so that anyone can find it. A typical place to locate information about a leadership program is within a company’s intranet site.

There may be other locations to share this information, though, that could make it even more accessible. Specifically, there are now a variety of business-specific social networking sites, which claim to offer “real” insight into how work happens at companies. It may be worth considering sharing this type of information in one of these alternative formats. While making this information broadly available may give you a moment of pause, consider the potential benefits to your employer brand: organizations can clearly explain how they invest in women and what they expect people to do to advance.

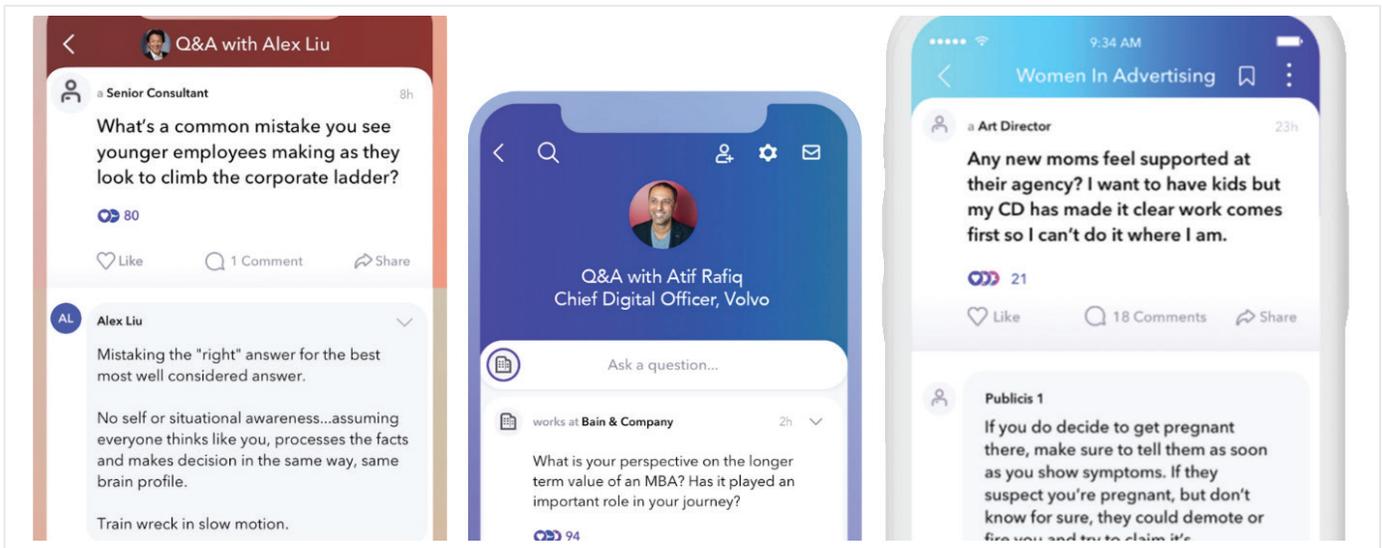
Some of the more obvious business-specific social networking sites to share this on include LinkedIn and Glassdoor. However, other sites such as Fairygodboss or Fishbowl could represent new opportunities to share information about leadership opportunities where people are already talking about them. These sites are designed toward sharing “unvarnished” advice.

For example, on Fishbowl, individuals can direct questions to others in their organization about any topic – like mistakes younger professionals make or the value of an MBA (see Figure 18) or how one accesses leadership opportunities. Women-focused communities can also use Fishbowl to ask questions of other women in the group (also see Figure 18). Further, C-suite leaders can host Q&A sessions on a range of topics, for either individuals only within their organization or for anyone in the industry.³⁸ Finally, Fishbowl also has formal partnerships with a variety of professional organizations such as Time’s Up, which provides a safe space for women in a variety of industries, and The 3% Movement, which pushes forward pay equity.³⁹ These specific communities could be excellent new sources of talent for an organization and an appropriate place to share details about how an organization supports and develops women.

38 “Coaching and Mentoring—at Scale: An A.T. Kearney Partner Takes Over Fishbowl,” Kearney, A.T., September 2018. <https://www.atkearney.com/atkearney-blog/article/?/a/-coaching-and-mentoring-at-scale-an-a-t-kearney-partner-takes-over-fishbowl>.

39 “Fishbowl App Is Highlighting Agencies That Have Taken a Pledge for Pay Equity,” Smiley, M., June 2019. <https://www.adweek.com/agencies/fishbowl-app-is-highlighting-agencies-that-have-taken-a-pledge-for-pay-equity/>.

Figure 18: Example of dialogue in women-focused groups and "coaching and mentoring at scale" on Fishbowl



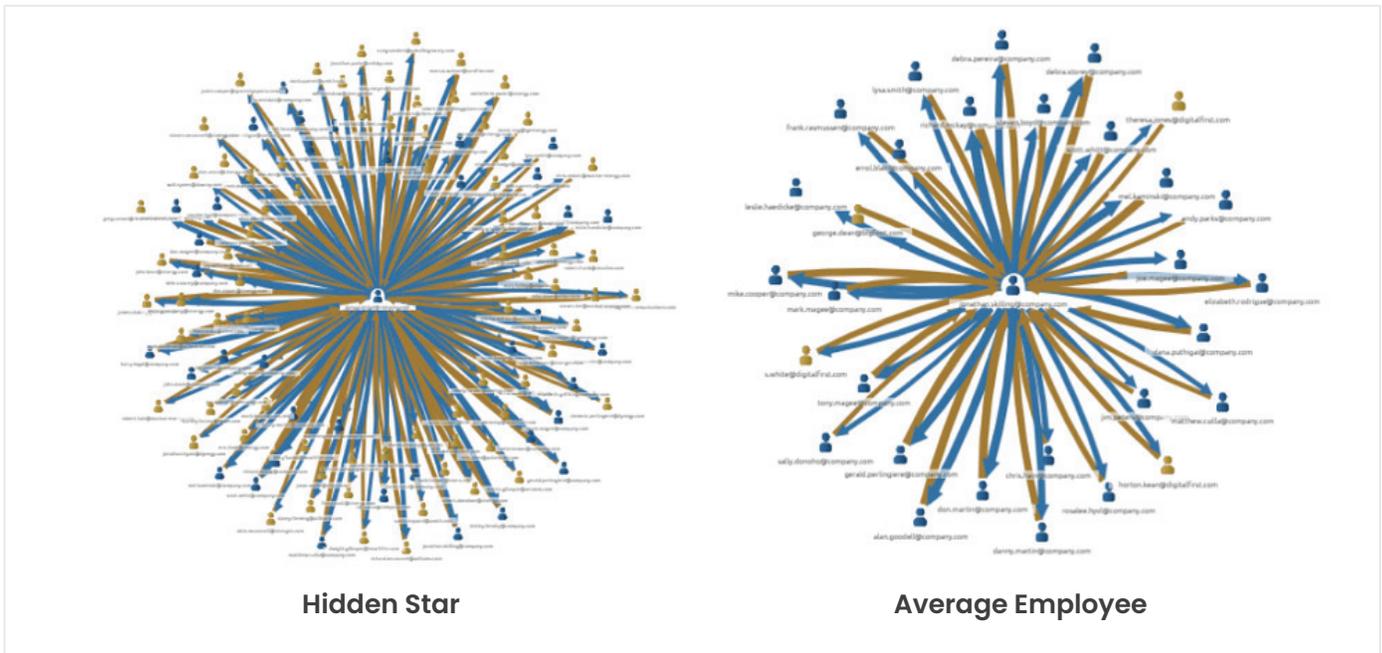
Source: Fishbowl, 2019.

While sharing information broadly may increase the supply of leadership program participants, it is not the only approach to doing this. New technologies are enabling organizations to identify different leadership development or high-potential (HIPO) program participants.

For example, TrustSphere, an ONA provider, believes that HIPOs tend to have more network connections – but those connections may not be part of the network of folks who could nominate them for a HIPO program. To that end, TrustSphere offers a technology that will allow organizations to identify “hidden stars,” (see Figure 19) who potentially should be included in HIPO programs based on overall numbers of network connections (see company spotlight below). This could be a way to identify overlooked female talent.

New technologies are enabling organizations to identify different leadership development or high-potential (HIPO) program participants.

Figure 19: TrustSphere’s approach to identifying “hidden stars”



Source: TrustSphere, 2019.

Company Spotlight:

Ramco Systems uses ONA to identify HIPO trainees

Ramco Systems is a software products and services company with 1,700 employees worldwide and North American headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. They used network analysis provided via TrustSphere to identify High-potential (HIPO) employees.

Specifically, Ramco supplemented traditional performance management data with social capital measures to accurately identify HIPOs from a trainee program to be fast-tracked and further developed. Real-time ONA was used to uncover employee networks, the collaboration patterns, and the influence employees had over others.

Ramco found that their HIPOs were building 34% more working relationships and built 80% more relationships with senior employees. This directly impacted their opportunities for visibility, coaching, and mentoring. In addition, HIPOs

were more likely to have strong relationships with different departments and functions, increasing their access to new and different types of information. Lastly, they communicated with managers at a higher frequency, increasing their visibility and credibility.

By measuring more than just traditional performance metrics and incorporating network-based measures, Ramco was able to see the impact of social capital and use it to identify HIPO talent. This also translated in an increased ability for Ramco to connect with these HIPOs, share relevant information and help these trainees connect to the right networks, and ultimately, contribute to the organization faster.

4. Teach network theory

Finally, and this may sound somewhat obvious, organizations should consider teaching women about network theory and the impact it can have on their professional advancement. Despite the obviousness of this fact, we found very few organizations actively teaching their leaders about network theory. Unilever, featured below, is an exception to this rule.

Company Spotlight: **Unilever teaches network theory**

Unilever, a consumer goods company with co-headquarters in London, United Kingdom and Rotterdam, Netherlands and over 150,000 employees, is an example of iteratively building a development program that balances the organic nature of relationships with the need for formalization and more explicit expectations. Recognizing that women face unique obstacles with regard to their advancement, Unilever has created a program that informs women, in senior roles, about networks and their impact on careers.

Before the three-day program begins, women come in with an understanding of what their network looks like. Once in the program, they are taught central ideas in network theory to

better understand concepts such as closed networks, strong ties, and weak ties.

In addition, they have the opportunity to review a case study comparing different networks to understand the potential impacts of different network structure and composition. Each network creates or impedes opportunities, and the exercises in this program help women at Unilever explore what this means for their individual network.

Women and men network differently, and Unilever is arming their women with the information to understand networks, how they work, and the time/space to reflect on their own network and the opportunities they have to build a more intentional network.

Beyond teaching about network theory, organizations can use technology to provide tools and resources for leaders and employees – women in particular – to conduct an audit of their networks. Organizational network analysis (ONA) is the primary tool we see applied here. This knowledge is helpful when planning out more formalized activities because programs can be created to specifically address any disparities in networks that result in different outcomes between men and women. In addition, this information can be used in trainings to highlight the impact of networks on the advancement of women and can help individuals see how behaviors reinforce and shape their network (see company spotlight, below).

There are a number of different vendors that can help organizations do this analysis. For example, TrustSphere uses ONA to help organizations and individuals gain a better understanding of how relationship networks are operating in real time (see company spotlight, below). Innovisor, another ONA vendor, helps organizations uncover hidden gender issues in their organization such as how often and to whom different groups of individuals collaborate.

Organizations can use technology to provide tools and resources for leaders and employees – women in particular – to conduct an audit of their networks.

Company Spotlight:

Large Consumer Goods Company Combined Leadership Development Program and Organizational Network Analysis to Improve Leaders Understanding of their Networks⁴⁰

One of the world's largest fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies was trying to develop more impactful leadership capabilities within its R&D function. The company identified that competitiveness, performance, and growth were all driven by innovation, and so they needed to upskill the capabilities of its leaders.

Leveraging passive ONA,⁴¹ in conjunction with a new leadership development program, the company sought to measure workforce relationships by baselining 20 leaders' networks (comprising about 200 direct reports) at the start of the program. It then sought to measure changes in the leaders' networks every two months over the duration of the leadership program to understand the following questions:

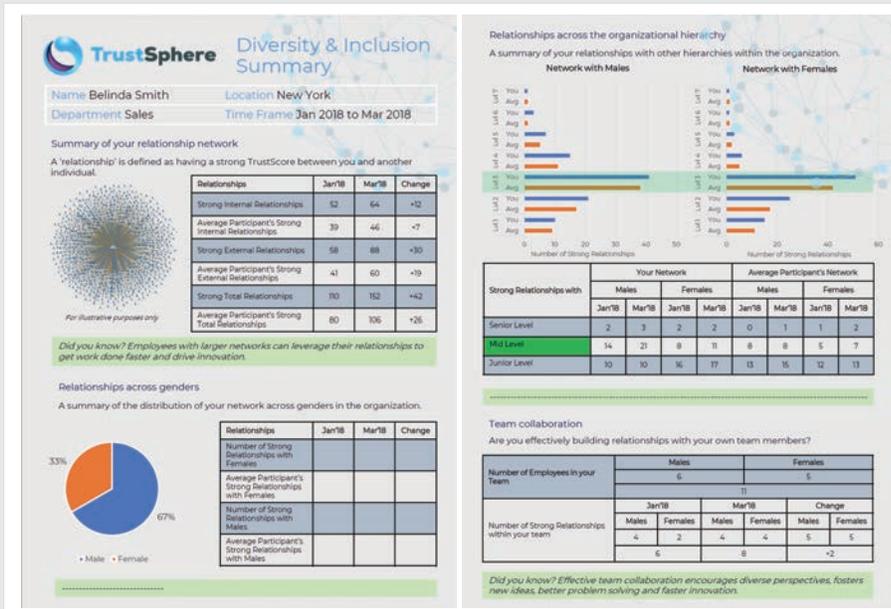
- What networks are the best leaders building?
- Are the leaders' behaviors positively changing?
- How is the leader impacting the team that they lead?

Leadership program participants received individualized network summary reports that measured changes in their own behaviors and networks. An example of one of these reports is provided in Figure 20.

40 "Using Organizational Network Analytics to Measure the Impact of Leadership Development Programs," TrustSphere, 2018. <https://www.trustsphere.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Leadership-Case-Study-201812-1-Letter.pdf>.

41 According to TrustSphere: "Using passive ONA, data was gathered passively, which means it already existed in corporate communication systems being used like email, instant messaging and voice. Hence the data gathering did not require surveys, online forms and questionnaires. As the data is continuously updating, TrustSphere ingested this data and applied proprietary algorithms to measure network changes. The resulting TrustScore measured the strength of every relationship in the network. The resulting Network Impact Score measured an employee's ability to exert influence over their network." See: <https://www.trustsphere.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Leadership-Case-Study-201812-1-Letter.pdf>.

Figure 20: TrustSphere's individual network audit report



Source: TrustSphere, 2019.

The reports also included a summary of cross-business unit relationships, relationships across the organizational hierarchy, and communication within team. Further, leaders received a Team Insights Report, which focused on the impact the leader had on the team and measured changes in direct reports' behaviors, relationships, and networks.

At the end of the leadership development program, the vendor provided a consolidated report. This report outlined the extent to which the program had impacted participants and their networks and these high-level findings:

- 115% change in leaders' own networks
- 38% increase in the number of working relationships with different business units
- 114% increase in the number of strong relationships
- 148% increase in strong relationships with employees at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy
- 40% improvement in their team's levels of collaboration

Clearly, this program – combined with heightened awareness made available through the technology – has an opportunity to change both how people work together and the types of networks they build.

We've mentioned a lot of vendors in this section. Figure 21 summarizes those we included. Please note, a list of all vendors included in this report is in the Appendix.

Figure 21: Vendors included in leadership development section

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION
Use novel approaches to identify program participants		Provides an external network for women to tap for advice on career opportunities and the culture of organizations; also provides education and opportunities to connect directly with organizations that wish to help women re-enter the workforce
		Provides the platform for individuals to connect with others, share information, learn, and stay educated on various work-related topics
		Provides a platform to assess the organizations networks and conduct network analysis using a number of different data points and inputs
Teach network theory		Provides an organizational network analysis platform along with benchmarking and action-based recommendations
		Provides a platform to assess the organizations networks and conduct network analysis using a number of different data points and inputs

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

CONFERENCES

Most companies indicated that supporting conference attendance is the primary way women are encouraged to build external networks. Specifically, conferences were cited as a mechanism to:

- Help individuals gain knowledge and insight
- Ensure individuals stay on top of current thinking and skills
- Connect individuals to a larger network

Obviously, for the sake of this report, the final point is of greatest interest. While conferences are great tools to provide employees with information, there is no guarantee that the connections someone makes at a conference will aid in development and/or career advancement. Simply put – conferences increase the potential opportunity for making the “right” connection, but that’s typically by luck of the draw, not by design or intent.

Organizations and women may get more from conferences when they are armed with information on why and how to intentionally develop a network, what steps to take in advance of an event, and how to extend their connections beyond the conference. To help women get the most from conferences from a network-based perspective, we suggest that organizations do the following:

1. Provide guidance on before-event activities
2. Create follow-up opportunities

1. Provide guidance on before-event activities

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
		●	▲

Many people think that conferences start when they show up on the first day and therefore, fail to complete the preparation necessary to connect with the right people at the event. Organizations may want to consider offering bite-sized resources (e.g., one-pagers or 3-minute videos) to employees on how to get the most of events before they even arrive. For example, these resources could cover:

Conferences increase the potential opportunity for making the “right” connection, but that’s typically by luck of the draw, not by design or intent.

Many people think that conferences start when they show up on the first day and therefore, fail to complete the preparation necessary to connect with the right people at the event.

- Identifying speakers in advance of the event and asking to share a coffee or lunch
- Posting on social media that they will be attending the event and asking if others will be as well and are interested in meeting up
- Connecting with conference organizers to see if there are any volunteer opportunities to:
 - Create and grow a community of attendees on social media before the event
 - Help in a small way at the event to meet specific new people

All these suggestions can give women opportunities to diversify their networks and to energize their networks through their openness to new people and experiences.

We think there’s also an opportunity here for conference organizers and app developers to make technology that can be used to build better networks. For example, before people attend conferences, an app could be used to provide nudges for people that they should meet at the event, based on similar geographies or titles (or potentially interests, which could be identified via LinkedIn profiles or through people’s selection of interests). Further, technology could match people to others who are in the same sessions (based on location services) and who have similar interests.

2. Create follow-up opportunities

INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
	●	▲

No matter how amazing the event, if people do not follow up on those new relationships after the event, they lose a significant opportunity to strengthen their external network. To that end, organizations could create expectations for how women will engage with the individuals they meet at conferences. Again, this could include creating bite-sized learning; sharing ideas for how to build and sustain that external network. Some ideas for what women could do post-conference include:

No matter how amazing the event, if people do not follow up on those new relationships after the event, they lose a significant opportunity to strengthen their external network.

- Forming social media groups or in-person meet-ups for conference attendees to stay connected
- Following up with speakers via online social networks to learn more about their sessions
- Writing about their experience (internal or external blog or on social media) and inviting others to share their reflections or engage in additional dialogue

To date, we have not seen technology that focuses in this space. However, we think there is an opportunity for post-conference technology that can continually nudge and reinforce what was learned and presented at the conference. For example, conference apps could send a nudge reminding the individual to reconnect with someone they met at the conference and share how they have put their insights into action. The technology could send out reminders of key ideas from sessions the individual attended and ask what else they might want to know more about. Development opportunities, based on sessions attended or career interests, could be pushed to the individual throughout the year (other conferences, online courses, books, etc.).

Novel approaches

In the previous section, we covered the more common approaches that organizations have used to advance women. However, new(er) approaches have been introduced in the past few years, and organizations are increasingly investing in these alternatives. These novel approaches include:

- Gig work marketplaces
- Articulating invisible information

We think that these practices can help women build networks that can help them advance (as shown in Figure 22) and expanded upon in the next two sections.

Figure 22: Novel practices to advance women and the overlap with the four foundational network principles⁴²

	How organizational practices enable the 4 network principles to advance women			
COMMON PRACTICES	CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
Gig-work marketplaces			▲	▲
Articulating invisible information				

 Potential benefit with a more traditional approach
  Potential benefit when designed with a more network-based approach

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

GIG-WORK MARKETPLACES

During our conversations, it was often suggested that the way to advance women was to help them gain access to meaningful work in which they can collaborate with new peers and connect with diverse groups and leaders to showcase their abilities. As it turns out, there can be significant challenges to doing this both for employees within organizations and for people who are trying to rejoin the workforce. To that end, we suggest organizations consider

1. Implementing internal gig-work marketplaces
2. Leveraging external gig-work marketplaces

1. Implementing internal gig-work marketplaces

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
		▲	▲

While some organizations have rotational programs or stretch assignments, those interventions do not tend to be broadly available or clearly communicated. Thus, many women are stuck within their existing roles without a way to meaningfully broaden their network and skill set.

⁴² We recognize that organizations may use these practices in ways that address the blank spaces. With this chart, we are trying to provide an easy reference guide for how organizational practices can be used to enable the 4 foundational network principles to enable women, given the practices we observed in our research conversations. Please note, while articulating invisible information is important it is more about what organizations can do to promote women and not what enables women to build their networks. Therefore, it does not map cleanly to the four foundational principles and we do show the alignment between these practices and the four foundational principles.

To address this situation, we'd like to suggest organizations consider using internal gig-work⁴³ marketplaces as an alternative option for women to diversify their network and to show themselves as energizers within their networks. Typically, these marketplaces are seen as part of organizations' learning and development efforts. However, we think they could play an important role in helping to advance women as they could provide a way for women to broaden their network outside of their current team, showcase their openness to new ideas and concepts, and gain new skills through meaningful new opportunities.

Organizations can use internal gig-work marketplaces alternative option for women to diversify their network.

What is an internal gig-work marketplace?

Gig-work marketplaces provide a place within the organization where individuals with small projects can find other employees interested in working on those projects. Therefore, anyone else in the organization who may have some extra time can potentially contribute to this work, while the person doing the work can engage with new people in a meaningful way and learn new skills. The projects are typically shorter in length and represent work that can easily be partitioned into discrete sections. The project owner interviews individuals interested in doing the work and makes the decision of who works on the project. The person wishing to do the project typically needs to get their manager's approval to take on the additional work. The project posting process is typically enabled by technology and made centrally available.

Of course, there are potential pitfalls. For example, if organizations, leaders, and individual women do not carefully consider the type of gig-work they provide and accept, it can result in a lack of substantive advantage in terms of new skills or career development.

43 The Oxford English Dictionary defines the Gig Economy as "A way of working that is based on people having temporary jobs or doing separate pieces of work, each paid separately, rather than working for an employer." Internal gig-work marketplaces take the same concept of temporary jobs or separate pieces of work and make them available to internal employees. See Dan Pontefract's article on internal talent marketplaces for a nice summary: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danpontefract/2018/02/02/why-your-organization-needs-an-internal-gig-economy-platform/#41c16c5779e2>.

Further, without planning, there is no guarantee that these projects will connect individuals to the right networks or create visibility into a woman's capabilities. Simply having a platform or process that connects people to work doesn't cultivate relationships and grow networks. Organizations need to create some structure to help leverage these opportunities into visibility, connection, and relationships.

Simply having a platform or process that connects people to work doesn't cultivate relationships and grow networks.

Internal gig-work marketplaces tend to be enabled through technology that is available across the organization. Some of the organizations we interviewed have leveraged Sharepoint or built in-house platforms to provide a more systematic, standardized approach, as explained in the two company spotlights below.

Company Spotlight: Google's gTech⁴⁴

Google – an internet services and products company, headquartered in Mountain View, California, with 62,000 North American employees – must shift strategies quickly. This requires the reassignment of resources in a cost-effective and dynamic manner. When looking into how to solve this problem, Google realized they could address this issue when solving for yet another problem.

Specifically, Google's employee engagement survey suggested they needed to find a way to increase career and development opportunities for its workforce. After looking into a number of alternatives, Google realized an internal gig-work platform could address the reassignment of resources and create development opportunities.

The solution, gTech, is an internal platform for individual contributors and managers to post and then bid for assignments. Lots of organizations may have internal development opportunities or stretch assignments, but what

44 "Google's Algorithm-Powered Internal Job Marketplace," Keuhn, K, and Kay, R., Re:work with Google, 2018.
<https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/googles-algorithm-powered-internal-job-marketplace/>.

makes Google's solution different is attention to the types of projects on the platform.

Employees are given a variety of opportunities that are pushed to the platform in large batches three times a year. In addition, to ensure fit, a color-coded match score is provided that aligns an individual's experience and the project requirements. Google employees and managers can rank their preferences, and an algorithm matches employees to projects.

Among other important outcomes, the program has increased networking activity, with employees feeling more comfortable connecting with others, talking with managers, and actively seeking new opportunities.

Company Spotlight:

Fostering internal gig-work at Fidelity Investments

Simple solutions can also be incredibly effective. For example, Fidelity Investments, a 50,000 employee financial services company, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, recognized the importance of meaningful voluntary work as a way to get projects done, stretch current capabilities, and identify new talent. As a result, they created an internal gig-work marketplace that they are currently testing.

The internal site provides access and visibility to upcoming and on-going project needs throughout the organization. Individuals can volunteer to join these projects and can be vetted and selected by the project owners. This provides exposure to other parts of the company, builds relationships outside one's immediate network, and provides experience/skill that can help women combat the "skill gap" myth.

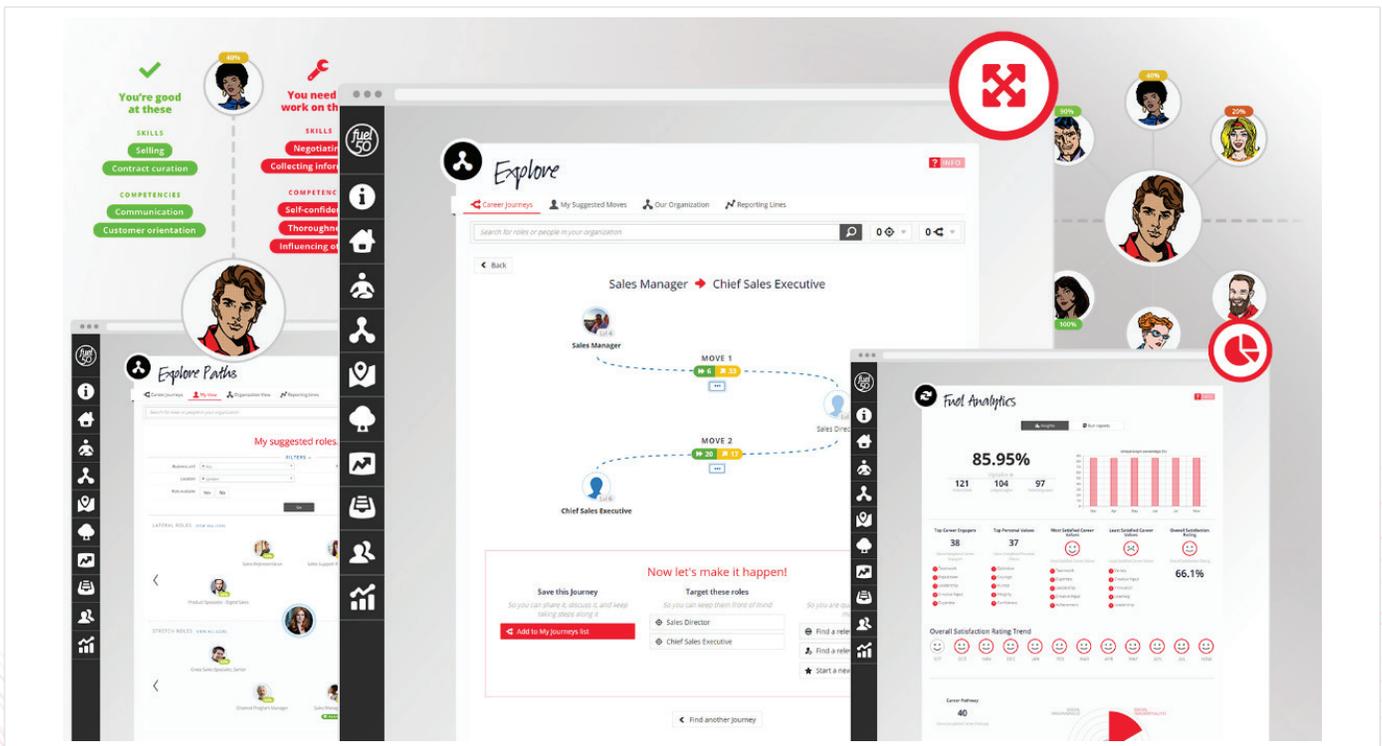
While both Fidelity and Google created their own in-house solutions, vendors are providing solutions that help organizations build an

internal gig-work platform as well. For example, Fuel50 (see Figure 23) recognizes the importance of creating a career-agile workforce. Their solution helps individuals not only identify current skill levels but also articulate what is important to them and their career. This information helps individuals and leaders identify opportunities that align with career interests, experiences, and the things that drive and energize them in their careers.

The platform suggests roles (new positions or gig opportunities), but more importantly it gives individuals visibility to all the developmental gig assignments across the organization. It also gives leaders data-based insights on their talent across the organization on real, meaningful assignments.

Vendors are providing solutions that help organizations build an internal gig-work platform as well.

Figure 23: Determining career energizers and tapping into gig-work with Fuel50

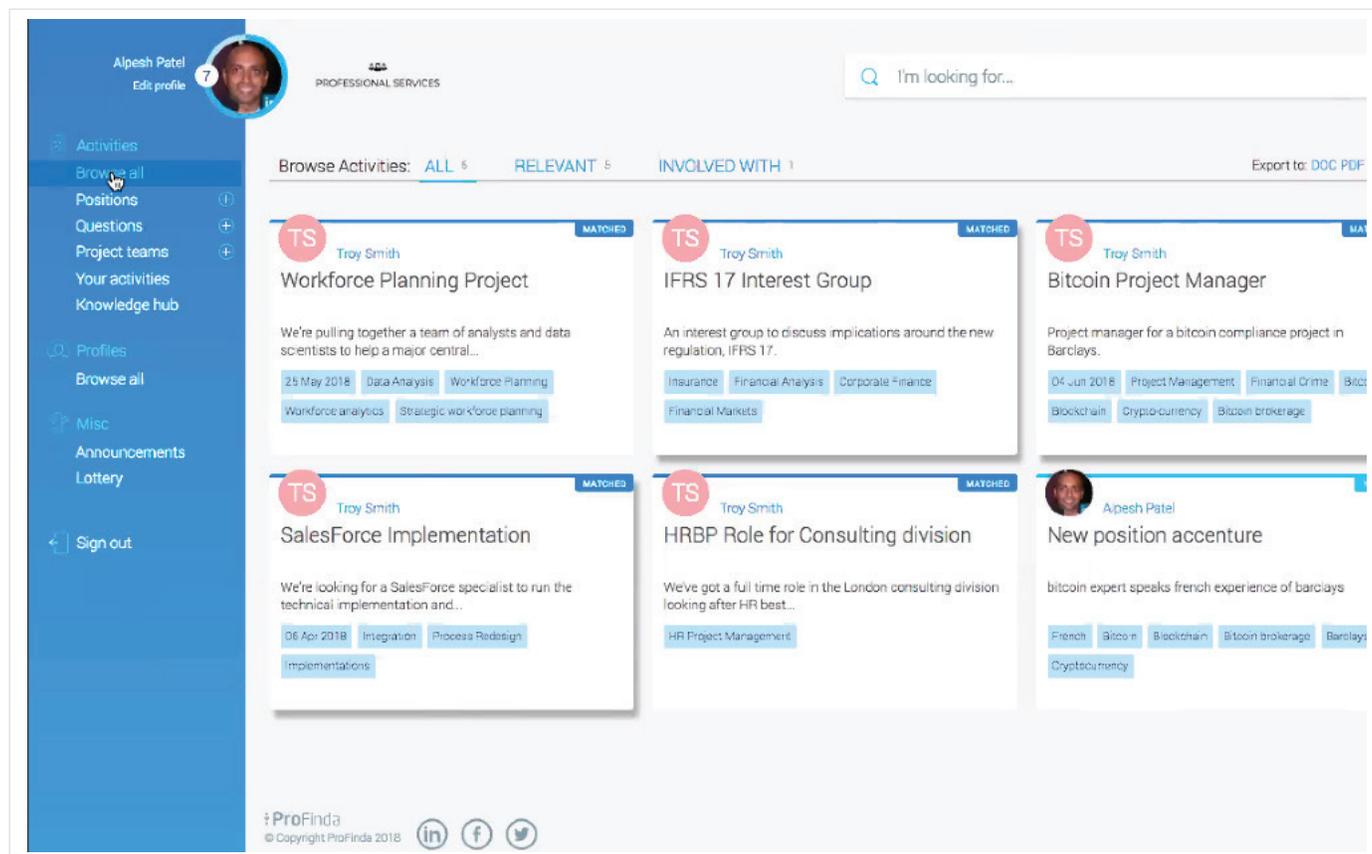


Source: Fuel50, 2019.

Another vendor, Profinda, takes a network-based approach in their offering and matches people to potential projects based on skills. The vendor offers an internal talent marketplace that allows people to see projects coming available and to apply for them. In addition,

the solution also helps organizations identify when an individual will be available for a new assignment (see Figure 24).

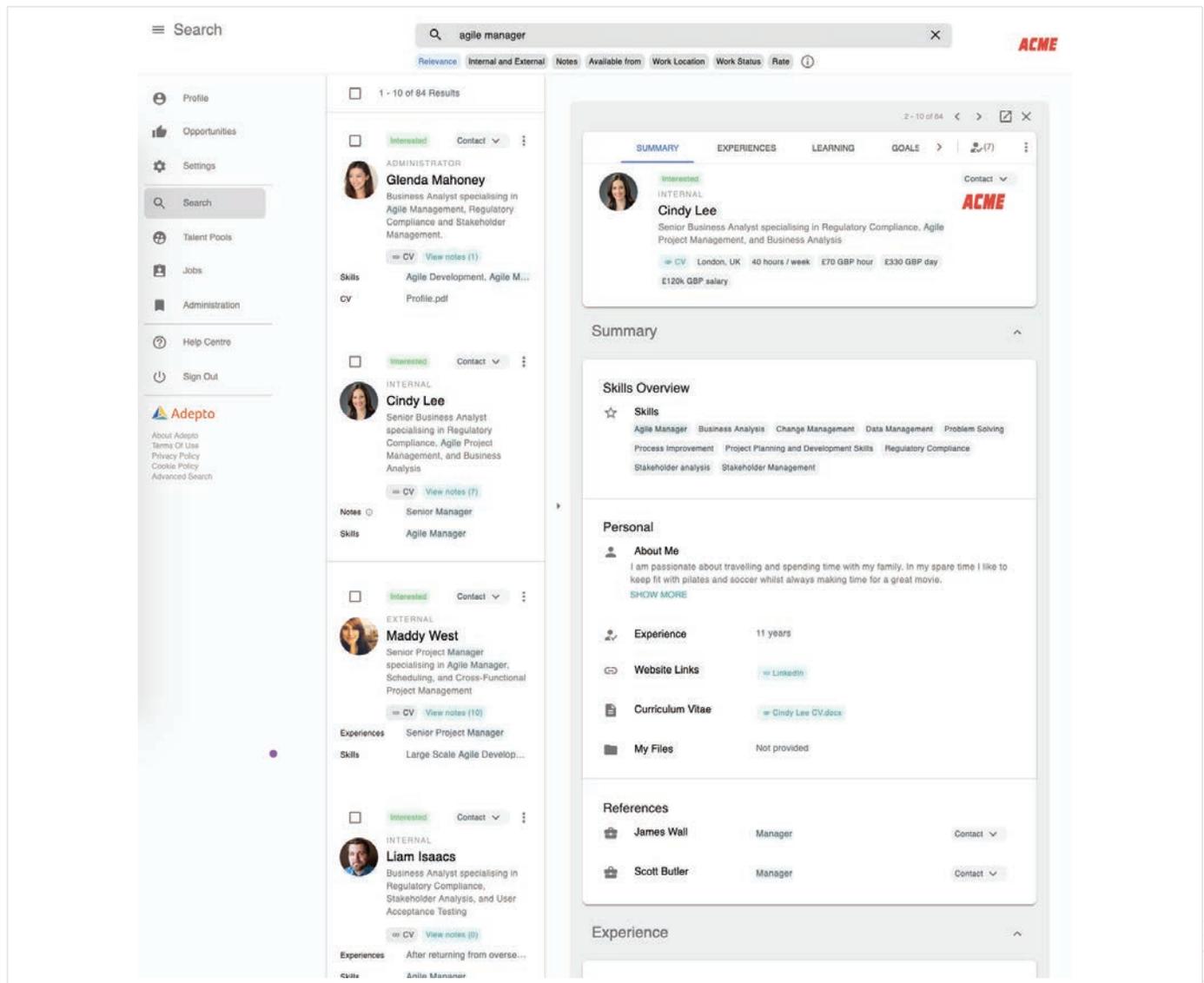
Figure 24: Profinda's skill-based matching



Source: Profinda, 2019.

Still yet another vendor, Adepto, offers what they call a “skills based total talent platform” for a single enterprise, providing insight into “all the talent available... internal and external; past, present and future.” Users can search for individuals by skills, experiences, or qualifications, while workers build their profiles within the system, highlighting that same information and their career/skill aspirations. This type of visibility could make it easier for women to find new opportunities, and critically, make it easier for leaders to access a broader pool of talent for both full-time and project-based work (see Figure 25).

Figure 25: Adepto's search and profile interface



Source: Adepto, 2019.

This type of technology is not exclusive to new(er) players in the technology landscape. Workday has created a talent marketplace that aims to help organizations identify and develop non-traditional talent and SAP SuccessFactors has features that can be used for a similar purpose.⁴⁵

This type of technology is not exclusive to new(er) players in the technology landscape.

In the future, organizations could look at how many women are asking for additional assignments in their development process but

⁴⁵ "Our Vision for a Frictionless Talent Marketplace," Goldt, C., Workday.com, 2018. <https://blogs.workday.com/our-vision-for-a-frictionless-talent-marketplace/>.

are not being given these or are given stretch assignments that are less meaningful than their male colleagues.

2. Leveraging external gig-work marketplaces

CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
		▲	▲

External gig-work marketplaces are much more well-known than internal gig-work marketplaces. With these, organizations can either post projects or search for workers who have the required skills, experiences, or qualifications. Some of the more well-known gig-work platforms include Upwork, Fiverr, Guru, Freelancer.com, and Outsourcely.com.⁴⁶

There is increasingly a niche for diversity-related gig-work platforms. With these platforms, women (or other diverse individuals) can identify organizations that are prioritizing diversity, find projects that are of interest, meet individuals who could be interested in helping them move into the organization, and show their skills and capabilities. In particular, this type of technology could be leveraged for women who are returning to the workforce after an extended break or who have challenges with finding the right organization or network to get started again. This technology can also connect organizations to a diverse talent pool that they would not have been able to purposefully access in the past.

There are a range of tools available on the market. For example, Mom Source Network and The Mom Project are both working to develop deep talent pools that organizations can tap into. Mom Source Network specifically offers resources as well as access to job postings to people who are returning to work from an extended break (see Figure 26). The Mom Project creates Maternityships^{®47} which are time-bound opportunities for new talent (likely another woman who is trying to connect with the organization and gain meaningful skills) to fill a role in the organization while another woman is out on maternity leave. Inclusion.co is another gig-work marketplace, but they focus

There is increasingly a niche for diversity-related gig-work platforms.

46 "18 Upwork Alternatives that Will Help Grow Your Business," Time Doctor, 2019. <https://biz30.timedoctor.com/upwork-alternatives/>.

47 "Maternityship," The Mom Project, 2019. <https://themomproject.com/assets/maternityship-8d0075280cdb6533f7ae05f25d0cff4934b9897869770cebf178bc226576c0c7.pdf>.

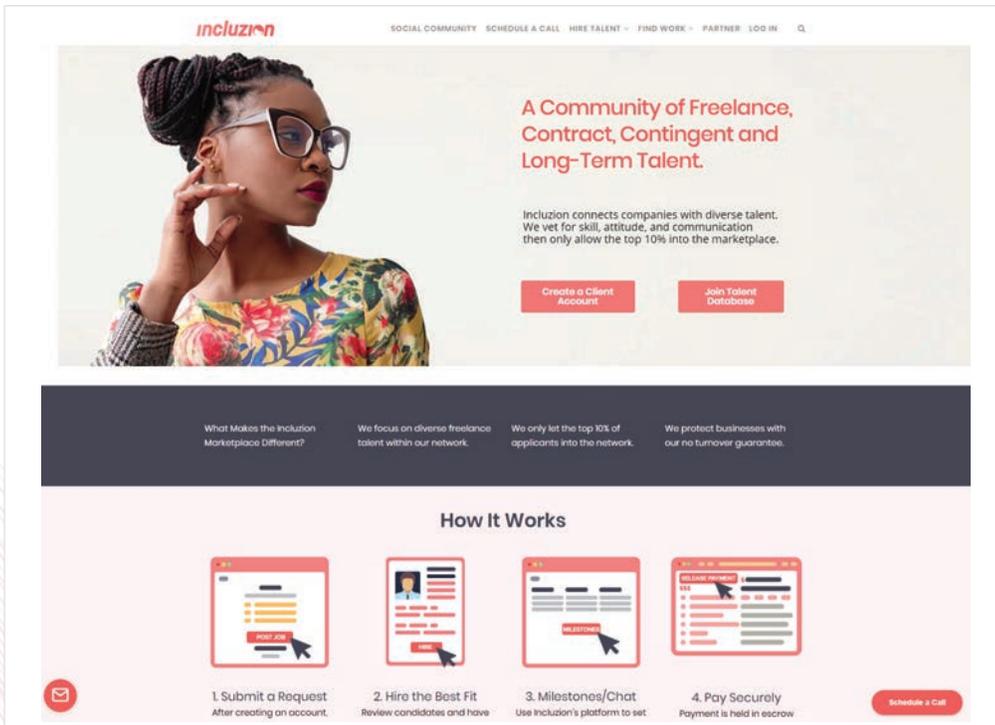
across all diversity characteristics (see Figure 27). All these solutions are designed to help diverse talent gain new skills and experiences while expanding their network and showcasing their abilities.

Figure 26: Description of Mom Source Network’s Returner Programs



Source: Mom Source Network, 2019.

Figure 27: Inclusion.co’s gig-work marketplace



Source: Inclusion.co website, 2019.

We’ve mentioned a lot of vendors in this section. Figure 28 summarizes those we included. Please note, a list of all vendors included in this report is in the Appendix.

Figure 28: Vendors included in the gig-work marketplace section

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION
Implementing internal gig-work marketplaces		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire gig-workers internally or externally
		Has a learning and development feature that helps individuals identify the aspects of careers that matter most to them, connect individuals to mentors, and helps individuals and organizations manage gig-work and development opportunities based on skills and career drivers
		Supports project-based work that can be used in a gig-work marketplace, that matches individuals based on skill and previous project experience, and that helps organizations understand utilization and managers identify upcoming resources
		Features an opportunity for leaders to flag a high-performing, under-placed individual during calibration and promotion processes
		Enables organizations to set-up and manage a talent marketplace that identifies internal talent for development assignments
External gig-work marketplaces		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers
		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers
		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers
		Provides a platform that organizations can leverage for gig-work opportunities to hire contract, freelance, and alternative female talent for short- and long-term needs
		Connects women returning to the workforce with mentors and access to employers that have formal re-entry programs or flexible work opportunities
		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers
		Helps women remain in the workforce and connect them with organizations that want to keep women in the workforce during different stages of life, especially focusing on motherhood
		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

ARTICULATING INVISIBLE INFORMATION

The other novel approach we identified in this research is the concept of articulating invisible information within the organization. One of the benefits of a high-status network is that unwritten knowledge is passed around. Therefore, a key way to advance individuals not in those high-status networks is to make that unwritten information visible. Put plainly, women need to have access to information about the opportunities within an organization, so they can effectively execute them. As one executive we spoke to put it,

“It’s about being intentional – as soon as you give women the information, they’re perfectly capable of being aware and knowing what to do – versus the inequitable [process] that took place in the past.”

However, relatively few organizations made note of this in our discussions, and fewer are taking action to bubble information to the surface and take it out of the informal hallway discussions among closed networks. Perhaps the greatest challenge with this practice is that organizations may not be aware of the information shared in closed, high-powered networks – and may not even have identified the high-powered network. Without this insight, it can be hard to figure out what information should be made visible.

To that end, we suggest the following activities:

1. Identify critical information in high-power networks
2. Identify hidden information in low-power networks
3. Document all the steps – both formal and informal – in promotion processes and share that information broadly
4. Take steps to ensure everyone has access to critical information

While we think these practices are important, they do not map cleanly to the four foundational principles because they are much more about what organizations can do to promote women and not what these practices do to enable women to build their networks effectively. Therefore, we are not going to show the alignment between these practices and the four foundational principles.

One of the benefits of a high-status network is that unwritten knowledge is passed around.

1. Identify critical information in high-power networks

As we've noted below, there is a lot of critical information about how to be promoted and specific career opportunities to pursue available within high-power networks. To make this information more visible, organizations need to both identify high-power networks and to determine the critical information within them.

Organizations can use ONA, offered by companies such as Humanyze, Innovisor, Polinode, and TrustSphere, to uncover some of the hidden networks and the key influencers or connectors within those networks. For example, in Figure 29, we can see a network that has been colored by gender. This visual allows us to see the less connected networks (on the edges), who are the network brokers (the single nodes connecting networks) and the centrality of other networks (how central a node is within the map).

Figure 29: Example of a network map and different silos



Source: Polinode, 2019.

Once these networks are identified, traditional solutions (e.g., surveys, quick pulse polls, focus groups) can be deployed to understand what employees know about specific factors. For example, organizations

may want to know what might influence career progression such as steps for being promoted, how to build support for promotion, and how to identify and access critical development opportunities. Organizations can identify this information and then take steps to make it visible and accessible to the appropriate levels and individuals across the organization through current technologies (e.g., SharePoint sites).

Another approach is to leverage some of the social networking sites (e.g., Guild, Fairygodboss, or Fishbowl, mentioned earlier) to share some of this promotion information more broadly. Finally, interventions that purposely connect people within one network to another (action learning projects, cross-functional projects, internal gig-work, matched mentorship or sponsorship) could help with the sharing of critical information.

There are plenty of other opportunities for technology to be used to make information in high-power networks visible in the future. For example, we have seen prototypes of technology that will automatically flag relevant job posts to employees, highlighting job opportunities that women may not know about from their network or based on their own research.

In addition, there are some technologies (e.g., from Visier, Fuel50, and PageUp People) that highlight, given a specific position, career paths people have taken within the organization. We could foresee that technology being focused specifically for women, helping them see the paths of other women in the organization and illustrating how some of the most senior women in the organization rose. We could also see organizations opening internal blogs or videos to leaders to talk more transparently about how they were promoted and the keys to their rise (highlighting broadly previously hidden information).

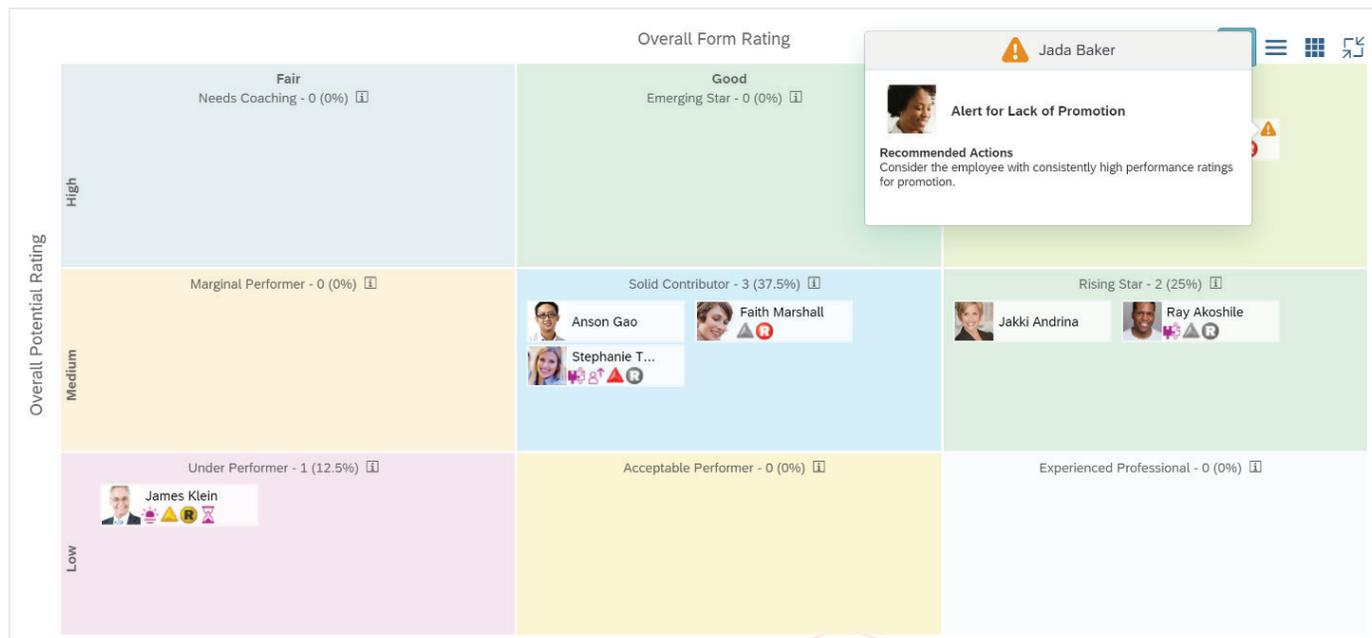
2. Identify hidden information in low-power networks

Interestingly, another type of “hidden” information in organizational networks is who should be promoted or identified as a HIPO but is not because they are not members of a high-status network. There is relatively new technology available to help organizational leaders uncover this information. For example, SAP SuccessFactors’ has a feature that enables HR and leaders, during the calibration process,

There are plenty of other opportunities for technology to be used to make information in high-power networks visible in the future.

to identify if someone has been a high performer for a certain period of time, but not been promoted (see Figure 30). This is especially a challenge for women, because research shows they are more likely to be rated as high performers than men, but less likely to be promoted.

Figure 30: SAP SuccessFactors' calibration flags for performance and promotion

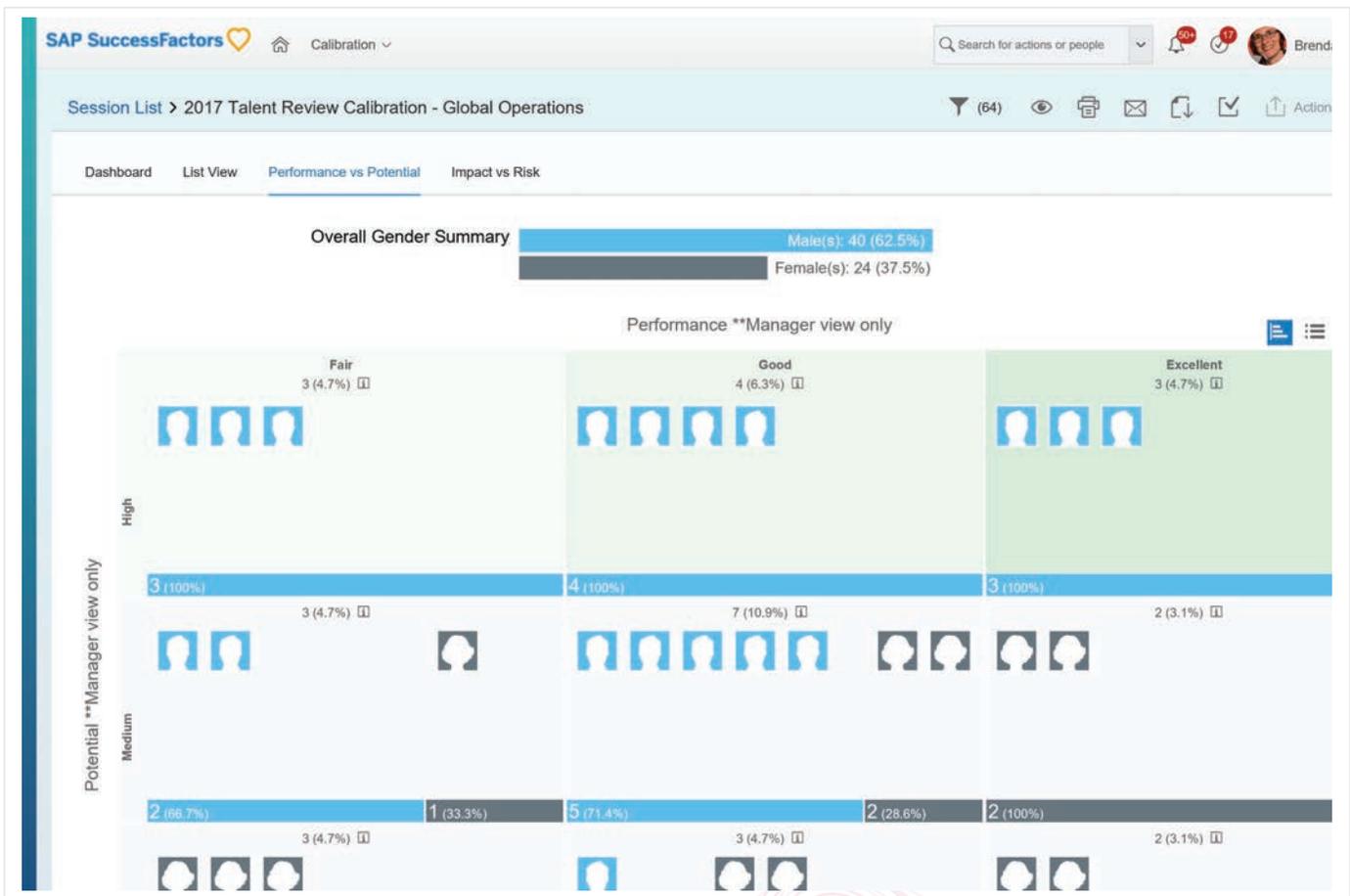


Source: SAP SuccessFactors, 2019.

Other technologies can help identify if women are underrepresented within the HIPO pool. As shown in Figure 31, SAP SuccessFactors provides leaders with a way to compare the total representation with the representation levels in the HIPO pools. In this example of photo-less calibration, you can see the overall population is roughly 38% women, but that no women are identified as high-potential. While this may be known (and potentially appropriate) within a certain group, these technologies can make visible this type of trend across broader swaths of the enterprise. It can also provide an opportunity to re-examine the women who are deemed high-performing and understand what is preventing them from also being labeled high-potential.

Another type of “hidden” information in organizational networks is who should be promoted or identified as a HIPO but are not because they are not members of a high-status network.

Figure 31: SAP SuccessFactors' analysis of HIPOs by gender



Source: SAP SuccessFactors, 2019.

3. Document all the steps – both formal and informal – in promotion processes and share that information broadly

Once the critical information regarding promotion processes is documented, it is important to share that information broadly so that individuals in lower-power networks can access it. Almost every organization we spoke to highlighted their use of basic technologies (e.g., Skype, SharePoint) to share at least some information about promotion or succession processes. However, the challenge is that sometimes the information is too generic or focuses too much on the formal processes instead of the information activities and behaviors necessary for promotion. In the company spotlight below, we share how Ernst & Young LLP (EY) addressed this challenge.

Company Spotlight:

Articulating the invisible rules at EY

All organizations have a process involved in promotion and advancement. Yet, having an outlined process is different than having the information shared, accessible, and known about by everyone in the organization.

As such, Ernst & Young LLP (EY) – a member of the global network of EY member firms having more than 50,000 employees in the United States – has a formal processes involved with promotion. This is particularly true as personnel pursue the path to partner and other senior executive ranks. EY started to notice a pattern: women weren't aware of a specific form that had to be completed as part of the process when going up for partner roles – yet all the men seemed to know this.

In particular, the form asks individuals to identify a recommending partner that can vouch for and speak to capabilities, experiences, and skills – in other words, a sponsor. EY employees need to be aware of the process and the importance of sponsorship well before the form is completed so that individuals can know what is expected for promotion.

Yet, as women were less aware of these processes and, as research has shown, are frequently under-sponsored in a business environment, they were at a disadvantage. Clearly, this was not done intentionally, but women tended to be on the outside of the networks that shared this information – which were dominated by men. Therefore, EY reviewed the information that individuals would need for promotion and explicitly made this known and accessible to everyone at the level and tenure that would possibly need this information.

4. Take steps to ensure everyone is receiving information regularly

While this suggestion seems terribly simple, it can still make a big difference. At its essence, this suggestion is to make sure that all the appropriate individuals are being looped into emails, chats, and meetings.



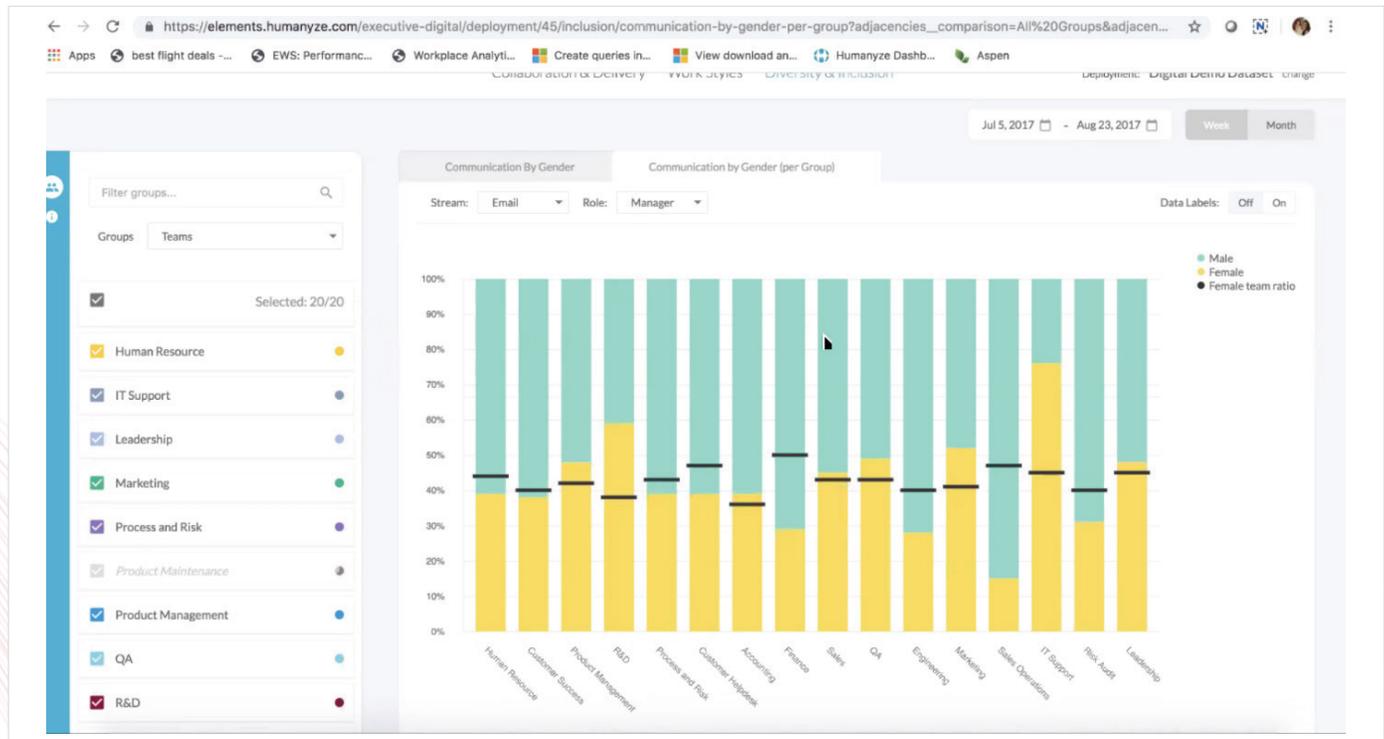
In the course of our interviews, one simple hack to address this problem was shared: to make email lists (e.g., “Senior Leadership Team”) that include everyone, so that women aren’t left off the list when emails are being sent. As one woman stated,

“When the SLT email list was used, I would get all the communications. If people added people by name, inevitably at least one of us women would get left off the communication.”

Make sure that all the appropriate individuals are being looped into emails, chats, and meetings.

There are technological solutions that can help with this issue of communication equality. For example, one technology, offered by Humanyze, can show who is receiving emails or meeting notifications versus who would be expected to receive those notifications, given the group’s gender representation (see Figure 32). The black line indicates the representation level within the group (e.g., for Finance, approximately 50% of the team is women). However, within that Finance group, 70% of the email communications is between men. This could show that women are not being included in important email communications.

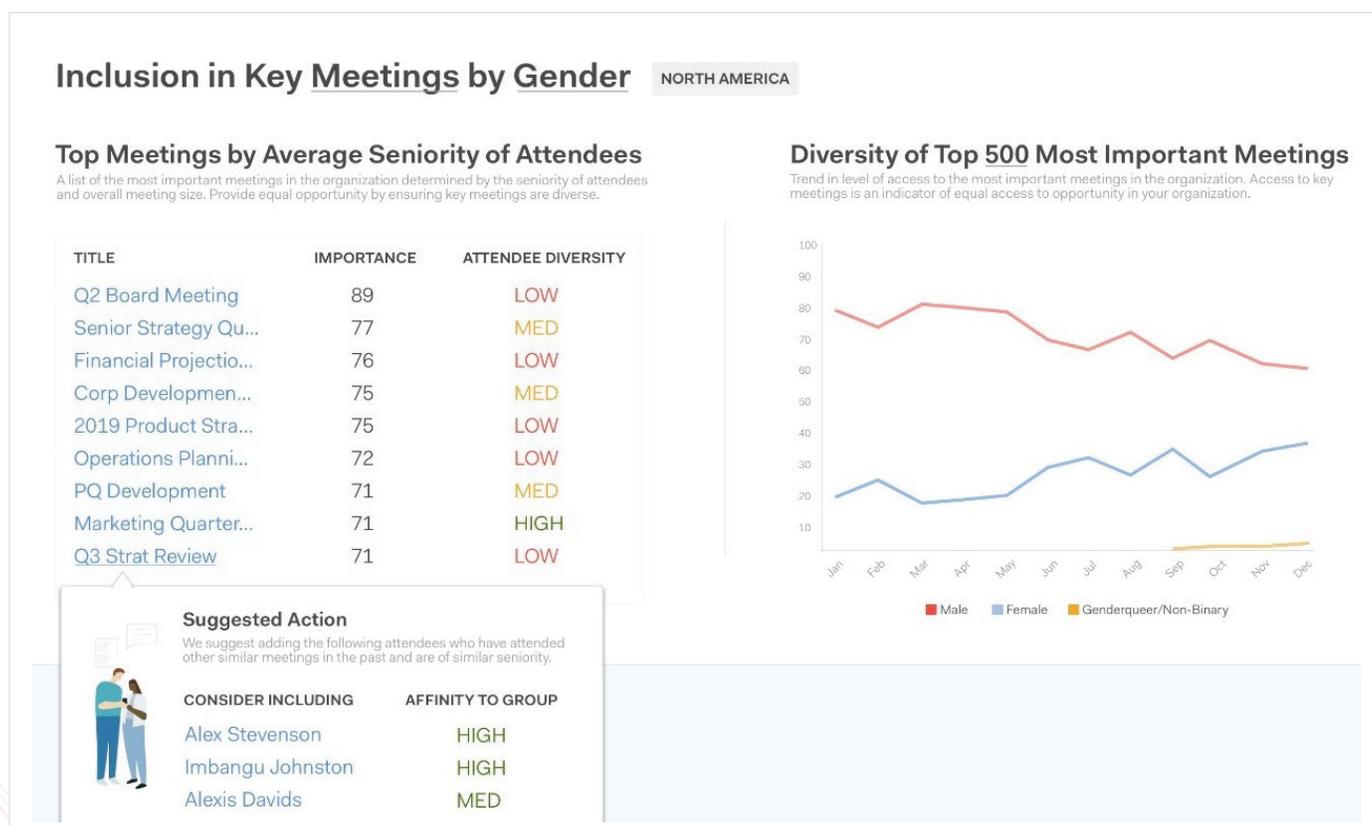
Figure 32: Humanyze’s analysis of communication frequency by gender



Source: Humanyze, 2019.

Another technology, Worklytics, tries to address this challenge by offering email-based nudges for other people to include in a specific email or work event invitation. This technology works by generating a list of the most important work events⁴⁸ in an organization (e.g., key meetings, shared documents, projects, and email threads) and then scoring each work event for diversity by looking at the relative number of differing demographic groups involved in the event. By tracking the average diversity of the organization's most important work events, Worklytics can provide a sense of the level of access to key opportunities for growth within an organization or sub-group.

Figure 33: Worklytics analysis of meeting attendance, by gender



Source: Worklytics, 2019.

We've mentioned a lot of vendors in this section. Figure 34 summarizes those we included. Please note, a list of all vendors included in this report is in the Appendix (see Figure 33).

48 This is done by scoring work events with a weighted function of the seniority of employees involved in the work event, the role they played in the work (e.g., creator vs editor), and the frequency/volume of their contribution (e.g., 50 document edits). See Worklytics.com for more information.

Figure 34: Vendors included in articulating the invisible section

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION
Identify critical information in high-power networks		Provides an external network for women to tap for advice on career opportunities and the culture of organizations. It also provides education and opportunities to connect directly with organizations that wish to help women re-enter the workforce
		Provides the platform for individuals to connect with others, share information, learn, and stay educated on various work-related topics
		Has a learning and development feature that helps individuals identify the aspects of careers that matter most to them, connect individuals to mentors, and helps individuals and organizations manage gig-work and development opportunities based on skills and career drivers
		Provides an external network of women and send introductions to facilitate 1:1 meetings (virtual or face-to-face) as well as smaller, more intimate events to foster strong inner circle and expand diversity of ties
		Provides network-based survey and data analytics; allowing organizations to assess aspects of networks and make data-driven decisions on how to address potential issues
		Provides organizational network analysis platform along with benchmarking and action-based recommendations
		Features help the organization map the career path for critical roles and assesses future talent against the criteria identified in those paths
		Network analysis platform that can be used across a number of different data types and formats, but can also deploy surveys specifically designed for network analysis
		Provides a platform to assess the organizations networks and conduct network analysis using a number of different data points and inputs
		Helps organizations understand the impact of diversity through predictive analytics. For example; highlighting career paths, removing potential bias drivers of promotion to highlight talent on an even playing field, and uncovers whether diverse talent is getting the same development opportunities

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Figure 34: Vendors included in articulating the invisible section (cont'd)

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION
Identify hidden information in low-power networks		Features an opportunity for leaders to flag a high-performing, under-placed individual during calibration and promotion processes.
Take steps to ensure everyone is receiving information regularly		Provides network-based survey and data analytics; allowing organizations to assess aspects of networks and make data-driven decisions on how to address potential issues.
		Data analytics platform that can “nudge” leaders when to take informed actions.

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Case Study: Bringing it all together to advance women at Ford

Ford, an automotive industry giant headquartered in Dearborn, Michigan with 80,000 employees in the United States, recognized the need to tackle gender diversity from all angles. As such, they have taken a multi-pronged, holistic approach, by addressing the following:

- Environment or conditions that might lead to differences in networks
- Number of opportunities women have to connect with each other and with others in the organization
- Potential for top female talent to be a central figure in a high-power network
- Development of a tight inner circle
- Mindsets/attitudes that might contribute to backlash towards women in the organization

Addressing the environment

In efforts to even the playing field to mitigate network differences later in careers, Ford has instituted a number of talent practices. For example, they have addressed gender parity in the talent review process, requiring that all candidate slates have 30% diversity representation. They've taken deliberate actions to address their Global Salaried Gender Pay Ratio, defined as the weighted average ratio of average female salaries to average male salaries within peer groups worldwide, which is now 98.2%. In addition, Ford no longer asks about current salary during the hiring process and provides flexible work options to help both men and women balance work-family needs. They also take the relevant network into consideration when defining diversity. For example, in HR, the minority is men. Thus, this is taken into consideration when looking at diversity within the HR function.

Making changes like this aren't in themselves targeting networks, but they do address some of the variables that may perpetuate differences in networks that can lead to differential outcomes between men and women later.

Increasing the opportunity to connect

In efforts to help give women the opportunities to build their network, Ford has a professional women's network and the central network is championed by an executive vice president. Then, there are several chapters within each function and country.

While they all follow similar frameworks, they are given freedom to address their particular location's needs. These networks support different mentoring initiatives and create Lean-In Circles. Ford is also prototyping a leadership development program for female key talent to empower women to be their true selves and do their best work while also building a diverse pipeline of leaders. These practices help women extend their network, but also create strong close ties to other individuals (in particular women) in their functional and geographic areas.

Becoming central in a high-power network

Ford also seeks to help top talent women move into central positions in high-power networks. Specifically, they have created a "Mustang Council" that is a cross-functional female HIPO group. The CEO meets regularly with this group to create open channels of communication and to seek input and guidance on the development of Ford's gender diversity strategy.

This enables top female talent to gain access to information from the CEO that can help shift power dynamics, increase their visibility among senior leadership, facilitate an inner circle, and put them in central positions in high-powered networks.

Creating an inner circle

When thinking of ways to help women develop a tight-knit inner circle, Ford looked at social dynamics that still disproportionately impact a woman's career. Specifically, women still take more

frequent and often longer breaks from their career as a majority of family responsibilities still fall on women. Thus, they created a re-entry program where roughly 90% of the participants are women.

This program brings in women (and men) who have chosen to leave the workforce for extended periods of time but want to rejoin. New hires in the Ford Re-Entry program get access to mentoring, professional development, and networking opportunities to jump-start their return to the workforce as a part of their six-month integration into the company. By creating cohorts of those re-entering the workforce, Ford provides individuals in this program with immediate connections. Individuals in each group are part of a shared experience and likely have similar concerns and challenges as they re-enter the workforce and can lean on each other as they get back into the swing of work.

Again, this effort creates a close, inner circle that the individuals in this group can rely on, and as they are in different functions, they connect each other to different parts of the organization and with new information and knowledge.

Shifting mindsets and perceptions

As part of their holistic strategy, Ford partnered with an organization to provide an immersive, experiential training opportunity for men in their organization. This training addresses, among other things, unconscious bias⁴⁹ and male privilege. This alone doesn't necessarily create opportunities for women to advance. However, it does increase awareness of and empathy for the unique struggles of women in organizations. As such, it may help mitigate the backlash, referenced earlier, when women network in ways similar to men. In addition, it can help men in organizations understand the importance of male advocacy which can have important implications for sponsorship.

49 While there is debate on the impact and usefulness of unconscious bias training, there is likely a time and place where it – along with other initiatives – is appropriate. However, we should caution that simply instituting unconscious bias training without other practices, is short-sighted and unlikely to lead to any real impact – it might even hurt diversity and inclusion efforts.

Recommendations for getting started

Overall, organizations are making investments to advance women. Yet, many still struggle with getting women into leadership roles. In addition, many of the topics we covered in call-out sections have created a challenging environment for organizations to navigate.

Building on what we've written above, we identified a few good places for organizations to start taking a more network-based approach.

1. Conduct an audit of current efforts
2. Make hidden information visible
3. Include network theory in employee development
4. Restructure sponsorship and mentorship
5. Reimagine the role of technology

Conduct an audit of current efforts

Organizations should take inventory of all their current offerings – both formal and informal to assess these questions:

- How did the organization intend for each initiative to advance women?
- Does each offering, in its current form, primarily connect, develop or advance women?
- To what extent is the offering organic or intentionally-designed and supported?
- What aspects of networks do they address?
 - Network centrality
 - Tight inner circle of women (or individuals with a shared interest)
 - Diverse connections
 - Energizing environment

Taking stock of the current set of offerings and understanding what they were intended to do, what they do, and what aspects of networks they address will help companies identify gaps and current strengths. It will also help organizations see where technology or new approaches may be helpful.

Make hidden information visible

Organizations should find the hidden gems of knowledge and make them accessible and visible across the organization at the appropriate levels. In some instances, this might involve using more modern technology (e.g., network analysis) to understand what is happening within the organization.

Whether aided by technology or not, organizations need to identify a cohort of senior leaders (or influential leaders) and women in high-level positions and survey them to understand what informal information was critical in their advancement and promotion. ERGs could also be leveraged to understand what information women may feel they aren't being given access to and what information they want regarding career progression. Once this information is identified, it can be formally outlined and provided to all employees across the organization, as appropriate.

Organizations should also review current protocols and processes in place for promotion and determine if the process, information, and mechanisms involved are clear, explicitly stated, and accessible. This information should not only be accessible, but individuals should also be made aware of its existence and where to find it.

Include network theory in employee development

We get it: everyone knows they have a network and everyone knows networking (as an activity) can be helpful. But that doesn't mean people understand the power of an intentionally developed and well-maintained professional network. Additionally, individuals don't necessarily have the knowledge of networks to understand their network and how it can be optimized for development and advancement – or how it is hindering these things.

Knowledge of networks and how they operate can be powerful tools for women and can easily be embedded into training,

coaching, mentorships, and sponsorships. In fact, ERGs can be prime opportunities for the distribution of this information.

This information can be especially helpful for managers and leaders as they are often the connectors for their direct reports. If managers are able to recognize their role in helping their female talent develop and maintain critical network connections, they may be able to take a more proactive role. Many managers, well-intentioned, aren't aware of how they can help build networks for their employees.

Restructure mentorship and sponsorship

Organizations should formalize sponsorship and consider group-based mentoring and sponsorship options. Many organizations, at least of the ones we spoke with, are hesitant to formalize sponsorship programs, suggesting that sponsorship should be organic and be built from informal relationships. That's a great sentiment, but as we have uncovered, it's often men that reap the benefits of these informal channels in organizations. Continuing to not formally address sponsorship is likely having a disproportionate impact on women.

Formalized sponsorships can come in a variety of forms, but setting expectations of leaders to be actively sponsoring individuals, providing the training to be a sponsor, and holding them accountable to sponsor can be helpful. In addition, group-based approaches can be beneficial. Managers and leaders, based on pure numbers, are fewer than the individuals needing sponsorship or mentorship. To decrease the burden, consider creating cohorts of individuals that share a sponsor or mentor. This can also help create new connections and access to new information and networks among participants. Consider creating cohorts that are diverse in terms of career desires and function and avoid putting individuals together that are going for the same role.

Here are a few considerations in formalized sponsorships and mentorships:

- Establish a specific time window in which the relationship starts and stops
- Establish ground rules for the relationship



- Use matching technology to help connect people based on career desires, experiences (past and future), and skill (current and stretch)
- Provide training for both individuals – sponsors should know how to sponsor and those being sponsored should understand their responsibility
- Create cohorts to help address any single source of failure

Reimagine the role of technology

Organizations need to review the current technology offerings and look for ways to leverage D&I technology⁵⁰ to aid in the advancement of women. Many organizations are missing an opportunity to leverage people analytics and technology. While most organizations know technology can help, they are not entirely sure what options are out there or where to start.

Technology can easily aid in removing the logistical and administrative burden of ERGs, mentoring and sponsorship (e.g., candidate matching, coaching apps, etc.), and – as we’ve pointed out – can democratize access to key information that is traditionally housed in closed, male-dominated networks.

Network analysis can help uncover the hidden networks operating in organizations and the potential differences between the networks of men and women. It can also help organizations move past “skills” and see paths, roles and connectors that might be critical in pushing women up and throughout an organization.

Technology should be an enabler that supports the initiatives organizations have or want to build, but it shouldn’t be an afterthought. More about D&I technology can be found in our research on D&I technology.

⁵⁰ See our report on D&I technology, here: <https://redthreadresearch.com/2019/02/05/take-two-the-new-di-tech-research/>

Final thoughts

Overall, every organization we spoke to is aware of the importance of gender diversity and the need to invest resources in addressing current gaps in the advancement of women. Many solutions have been proposed over the years but have failed to move the needle. We believe this is because the solutions often fail to take into consideration the dynamic nature of networks, how they operate, and how this information can be used when designing a holistic strategy.

Both common and novel approaches have a place in a well-designed strategy, and we encourage organizations to include both. There is no one best way, but there are ways that might work better than others and help organizations avoid the potential pitfalls we've highlighted in this report.

As network theory continues to advance, new research will no doubt uncover new aspects of networks that impact career advancement. We strongly encourage organizational leaders to begin understanding this area of research.

Lastly, we recognize that many variables are at play in organizations and that there is no cure-all solution to gender diversity that will work overnight. We acknowledge that many factors influence and shape our professional networks and that many of the solutions proposed here work for women and men alike. However, we hope that organizations will use the information here to to rethink their efforts toward the advancement of women. In particular, we hope organizations consider the environment and take a networked perspective to make changes that can place men and women on a more equal playing field.



Appendices

Appendix I: What are networks?

A network is simply a set of people who are connected. In this case, a professional network is made up of all the connections an individual has with other individuals as they pertain to work. This can be internal to the organization or external to the organization. Networks are inherently dynamic because the relationships people have between each other are constantly in flux.

Networks can be thought of from a number of different perspectives. One way is to envision a professional network as being like a subway map.⁵¹ Some stations (i.e., people) are central to the system while others are on the outside. Other stations are connection points between two or more stations, and some are located closer together than others.

Similarly, there are people in any given professional network who are more central in that network, who connect individuals or groups, or who are members of a close, tight-knit group. These networks, much like transit systems, transport something. In the case of professional networks, the relationships between individuals are the channels by which information, access, and visibility are moved throughout the organization.

There are benefits and disadvantages to every position in a network. However, for the purposes of professional advancement, research has uncovered a few reasons organizations should explicitly consider networks in their efforts to promote women.

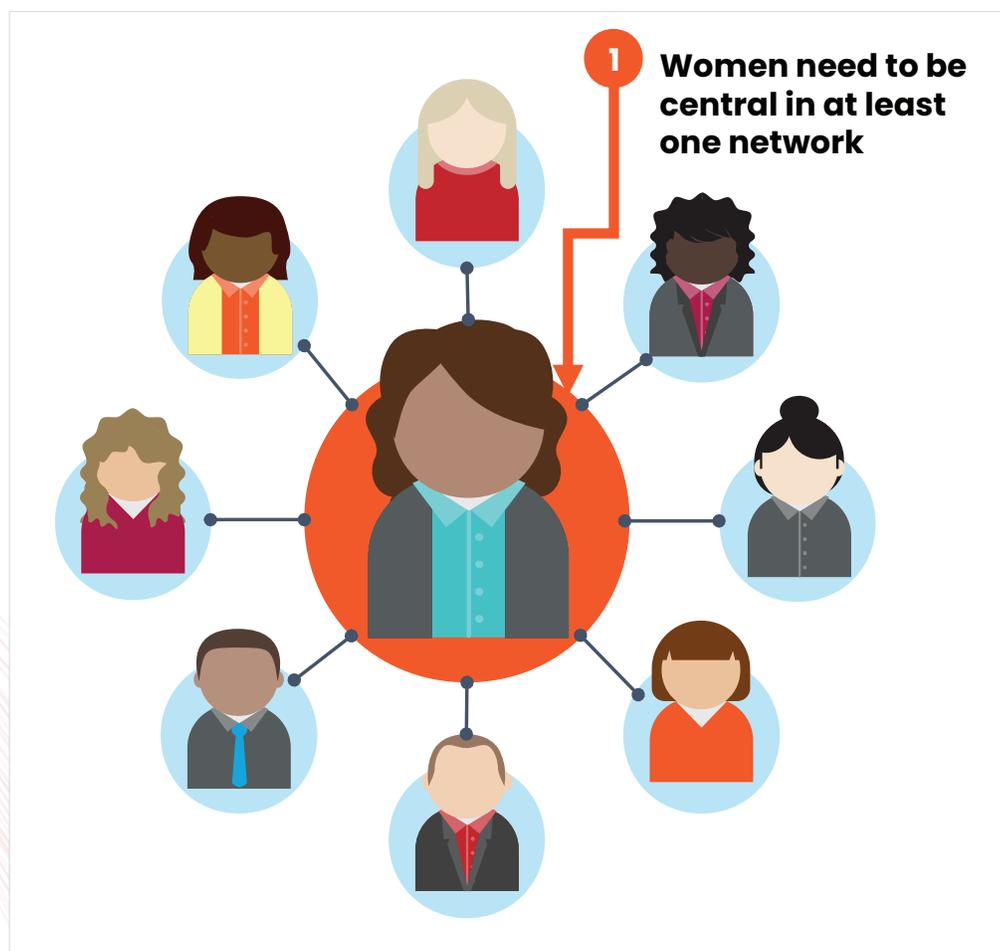
⁵¹ Tobias Stone does a phenomenal job of breaking down networks using the public transit metaphor. We recommend reading or listening to his post “You Thought You Knew About Social Networks.”

Appendix 2: Explanation of the Four Foundational Principles

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE #1: WOMEN NEED TO BE CENTRAL TO AT LEAST ONE NETWORK

Network centrality indicates the influence or importance of an individual within a given network. Centrality in a network suggests that an individual is connected to a lot of other people in the group. These individuals seem to know everyone and are able to connect people to each other. In incredibly simple terms, they are popular. They know a lot of people and the group dynamics often revolve around this individual – at least to some degree (see Figure 35 for an example).

Figure 35: Foundational principle #1 – Network centrality



Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

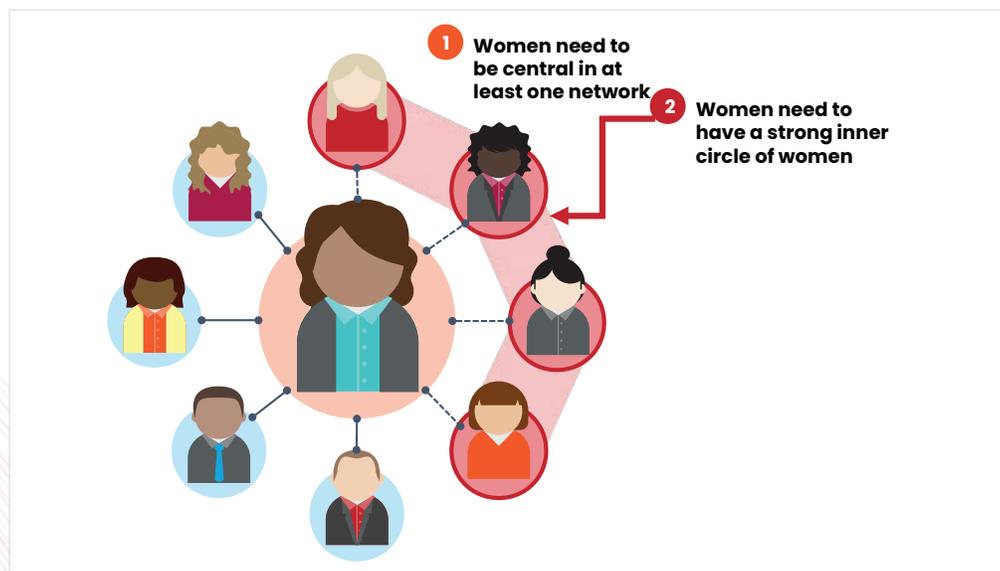
Being in a central position in a network contributes to career success. In fact, a recent study found that centrality was positively related to an increased likelihood of being placed in a high-ranking job/position.⁵² However, centrality alone is not enough. Which brings us to our next foundational principle – a woman’s inner circle.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE #2: WOMEN NEED A STRONG INNER CIRCLE OF WOMEN

Women need more than just network centrality – they need a strong inner circle of women. The same research found that 77% of women who were placed into higher ranking roles “have an inner circle of strong ties to two or three women who communicate intensely with one another.”⁵³

The combination – of network centrality and an inner circle of women – is critical. Women that are centrally located in a network and have a few incredibly close ties to other women in that network are 2.5 times more likely to be placed in a higher-ranking position.⁵⁴ See Figure 36 for an example.

Figure 36: Foundational principle #2 – Strong inner circle of women



Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

52 “A Network’s Gender Composition and “Communication Pattern Predict Women’s Leadership Success,” Yang, Y., Chawla, N., and Uzzi, B., 2019.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

While being central in a network and having a small inner circle of women is important, what this inner circle provides is also important; being a part of a clique is helpful, but not enough. Who the clique knows is also critical.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE #3: A WOMAN'S INNER CIRCLE – OF WOMEN – NEEDS TO CONNECT HER TO OTHER NETWORKS

Specifically, strong female connections need to provide access to new, unique networks or contacts. That is, they bridge the gap between two individuals or networks. This idea is known as “brokerage.”

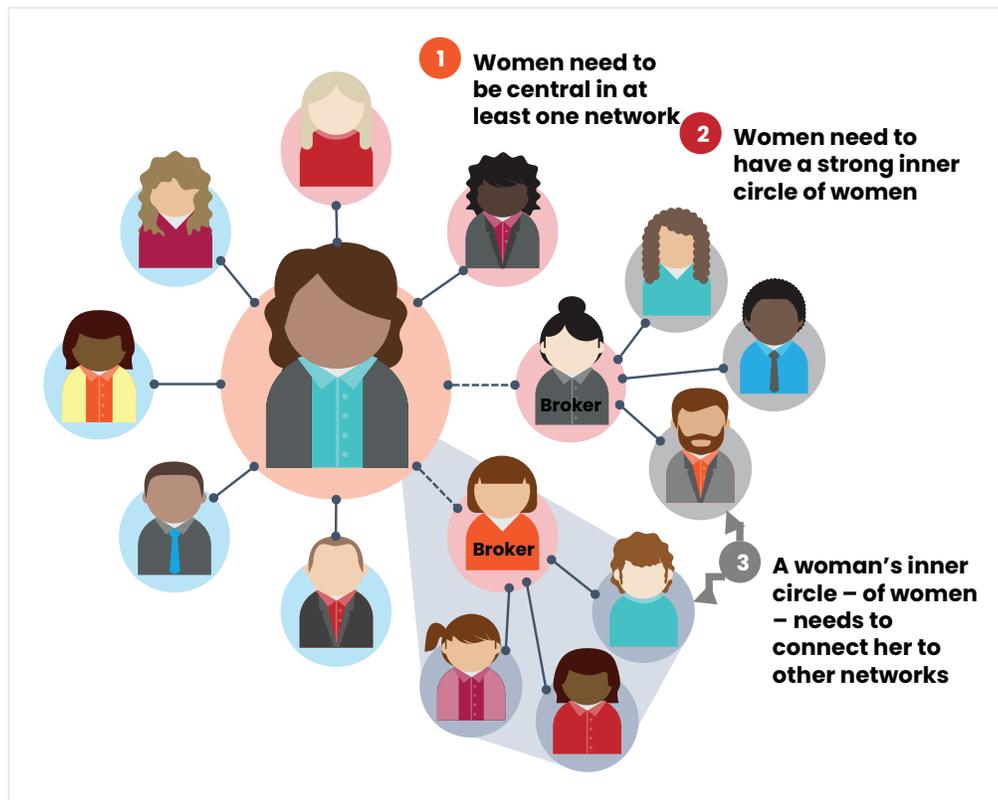
Think of brokers as the kid in high school who played sports but was also on the debate team and had a best friend in the band. They have a unique ability to connect different groups of people, and these connections, though weak, have an important impact on a career.

These weak connections (or ties)⁵⁵ matter because they are the primary ways that we find new opportunities through our network.⁵⁶ Weak ties provide us with new, unique information that we are less likely to get from our inner circle. Being connected to a broker, or becoming a broker, is critical in gaining access to new information, connection, and visibility – which are critical in career advancement. See Figure 37 for an example.

⁵⁵ Weak ties are the connections we have to individuals outside our inner circle.

⁵⁶ “The Strength of Weak Ties,” Granovetter, M., 1973.

Figure 37: Foundational principle #3 – Inner circle connected to diverse networks



Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE #4: WOMEN SHOULD BE ENERGIZERS WITHIN THEIR NETWORKS

If only being central within a network, having a close group of women friends, and making sure that group of friends had diverse networks, were enough. But sadly, it is not. In fact, women – even though they engage in brokerage activities as often as men – often experience backlash when in brokerage roles. Further, that backlash can impact women's performance. There are many theories as to why this backlash occurs, but one theory suggests that it is because being a broker or networking in a way similar to her male colleagues is out of sync with our gender stereotypes.⁵⁷ Simply put, these aren't behaviors we typically "expect" from women.

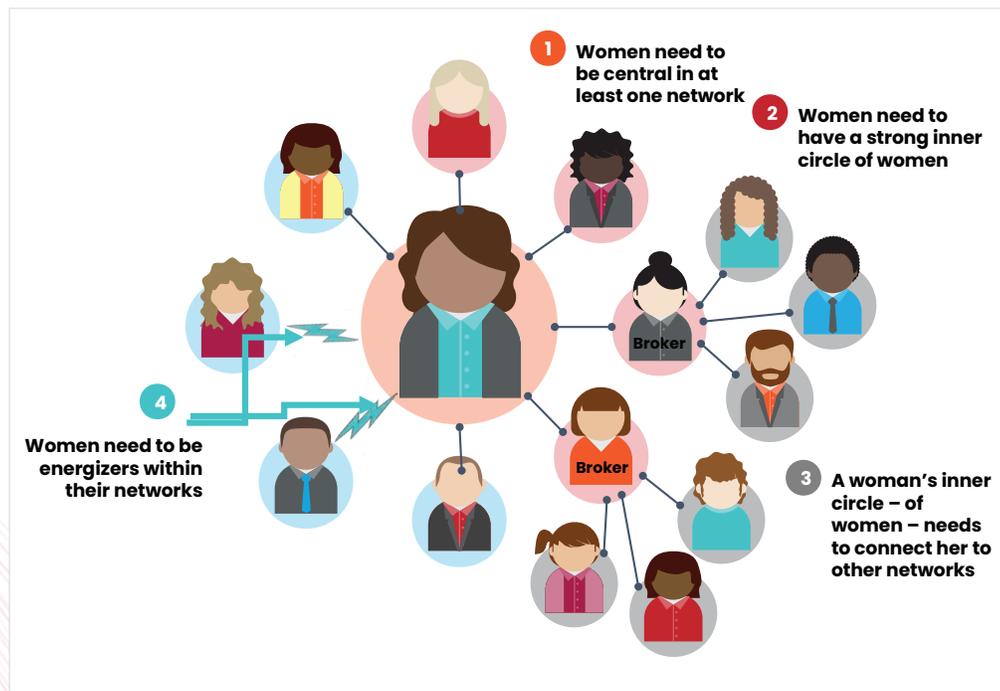
So, how can women be network brokers and reduce (if not avoid) backlash? In an effort to understand the invisible drivers of success

⁵⁷ "Brokers at Risk: Gender Differences in the Effects of Structural Position on Social Stress and Life Satisfaction," Carboni, I., and Gilman, R., 2012.

for women, Dr. Inga Carboni and colleagues looked at real networks in organizations and found one potential answer: become an energizer. Energizers are set apart from others in their network in that they engage with others in a way that builds trust, instills a sense of purpose, and fosters an environment of psychological safety. Because of this, energizers are often presented with new opportunities and information more often than non-energizers. And, here's some good news for women: women have the edge when it comes to being perceived as energizers.⁵⁸

If a woman – who is seen as an energizer – sits in a brokerage role or networks in a way similar to her male colleagues and has access to information others do not, she is more likely to be seen as critical in the exchange and discussion of important ideas and information. This may help mitigate some of the backlash she may get from being a network broker. See Figure 38 as an example.

Figure 38: Foundational principle #4 – Women should be energizers in their network



Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

58 "Invisible Network Drivers of Women's Success: How Successful People Manage Collaborative Overload," Carboni, I., Cross, R., Page, A., and Parker, A., Connected Commons, 2019.

Appendix 3: List of all Technology Vendors Featured in the Report

In the course of this research, we identified a significant number of vendors that can help organizations use networks more effectively to help women advance. Similar to our [D&I technology](#) report, we classified these vendors as the following:

- **“Focus”** vendors: These vendors’ primary business is offering a solution that can help organizations advance women from a network perspective.
- **“Feature”** vendors: These vendors offer features or functionalities that cater specifically to helping advance women from a network perspective, but their primary business includes more than that.
- **“Friendly”** vendors: These vendors do not address helping advance women from a network perspective as their primary focus, and they do not market themselves specifically as doing so, but their features or functionalities could have a positive impact.

In addition, given that we have talked about the four foundational principles throughout the report, we also gave each vendor a color coding as the extent to which the technology addresses the four foundational principles.

CAN EXPLICITLY ADDRESS	COULD ADDRESS, DEPENDING ON HOW IT IS USED
✓	✓

Figure 39: All technology vendors mentioned in this report

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION	SOLUTION TYPE	CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
Create personal, meaningful sub-groups that provide leadership opportunities	 affirmity	Manages ERGs for leaders and group managers to create more targeted and effective activities for members to connect	Network Friendly		✓	✓	✓
	 DIVERST	Measures impact of D&I efforts and enables ERG membership management, news feeds, and event management to make ERGs more effective in connecting individuals	Network Friendly		✓	✓	✓
	LEAN IN	Helps organizations and individuals leverage Lean-In Circles by providing tools, guidance, and education how to create and maintain meaningful Lean-In Circles	Network Focus		✓		
	 planbox AGILE WORK INNOVATION	Helps organizations manage and appropriately leverage ERGs with event management, information sharing, mentor-matching, and survey-based measurement	Network Friendly		✓	✓	✓
	 STRATUS TALENT MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS	Eases the administrative burden of managing ERGs to make these groups more effective at helping members connect	Network Friendly		✓	✓	✓
Encourage and manage towards a diverse ERG	 affirmity	Manages ERGs for leaders and group managers to create more targeted and effective activities for members to connect	Network Friendly		✓	✓	✓
	 DIVERST	Measures impact of D&I efforts and enables ERG membership management, news feeds, and event management to make ERGs more effective in connecting individuals	Network Friendly		✓	✓	✓
	 innovisor	Provides an organizational network analysis platform along with benchmarking and action-based recommendations	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓
	 planbox AGILE WORK INNOVATION	Helps organizations manage and appropriately leverage ERGs with event management, information sharing, mentor-matching, and survey-based measurement	Network Friendly		✓	✓	✓
	 polinode	Network analysis platform that can be used across a number of different data types and formats and can also deploy surveys specifically designed for network analysis	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓
	 STRATUS TALENT MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS	Eases the administrative burden of managing ERGs to make these groups more effective at helping members connect	Network Friendly		✓	✓	
	 TrustSphere Because Relationships Matter	Provides a platform to assess the organizations networks and conduct network analysis using a number of different data points and inputs	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓
Offer resources to support women becoming energizers	Ball@nr	Provides a platform for information sharing, collaborative decision-making, and communication	Network Friendly			✓	✓
	 planbox AGILE WORK INNOVATION	Helps organizations manage and appropriately leverage ERGs with event management, information sharing, mentor-matching, and survey-based measurement	Network Friendly		✓	✓	✓

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Figure 39: All technology vendors mentioned in this report (cont'd)

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION	SOLUTION TYPE	CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
View mentorship and sponsorship relationships in terms of teams, not just one-on-one relationships	 CHRONUS Unleash the Power of Mentoring®	Supports formal mentoring programs to help organizations connect individuals to mentors, conduct 1:1 meetings, provide educational curriculum to guide mentor sessions in individual or group-based settings; has an additional feature for support circles - much like Lean-In Circles	Network Feature	✓	✓	✓	
		Help organizations leverage networks for mentoring and recruiting and provides a platform to help manage mentoring relationships	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	
Deliberately connect women to diverse external mentorship/ sponsorship networks	EVERWISE	Provides organizations with the option to formalize their own mentorship or allow Everwise to manage the mentorship program; also provides curriculum for individual and shared learning experiences for individual contributors or leaders	Network Friendly			✓	✓
	 FAIRYGODBOSS	Provides an external network for women to tap for advice on career opportunities and the culture of organizations; also provides education and opportunities to connect directly with organizations that wish to help women re-enter the workforce	Network Focus		✓	✓	
	 SMARTER NETWORKING to achieve your career goals	Provides an external network of women and sends introductions to facilitate 1:1 meetings (virtual or face-to-face) as well as smaller, more intimate events to foster strong inner circle and expand diversity of ties	Network Friendly		✓	✓	
	 Landit	Provides solutions aimed at both the individual and the organization: individual solutions target career development and advancement through personal branding, goal tracking, and providing a personal board of advisors; organizational solutions focuses on coaching for career development	Network Feature			✓	✓
Use novel approaches to identify program participants	 FAIRYGODBOSS	Provides an external network for women to tap for advice on career opportunities and the culture of organizations; also provides education and opportunities to connect directly with organizations that wish to help women re-enter the workforce	Network Focus		✓	✓	✓
	 fishbowl	Provides the platform for individuals to connect with others, share information, learn, and stay educated on various work-related topics	Network Focus			✓	
	 TrustSphere Because Relationships Matter	Provides a platform to assess the organizations networks and conduct network analysis using a number of different data points and inputs	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teach network theory	 Innovisor	Provides an organizational network analysis platform along with benchmarking and action-based recommendations	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓
	 TrustSphere Because Relationships Matter	Provides a platform to assess the organizations networks and conduct network analysis using a number of different data points and inputs	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Figure 39: All technology vendors mentioned in this report (cont'd)

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION	SOLUTION TYPE	CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
Implementing internal gig-work marketplaces		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire gig-workers internally or externally	Network Friendly			✓	✓
		Has a learning and development feature that helps individuals identify the aspects of careers that matter most to them, connect individuals to mentors, and helps individuals and organizations manage gig-work and development opportunities based on skills and career drivers	Network Friendly			✓	✓
		Supports project-based work that can be used in a gig-work marketplace, that matches individuals based on skill and previous project experience, and that helps organizations understand utilization and managers identify upcoming resources	Network Friendly			✓	✓
		Features an opportunity for leaders to flag a high-performing, under-placed individual during calibration and promotion processes	Network Feature	✓		✓	✓
		Enables organizations to set-up and manage a talent marketplace that identifies internal talent for development assignments	Network Feature				✓
External gig-work marketplaces		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers	Network Friendly			✓	✓
		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers	Network Friendly			✓	✓
		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers	Network Friendly			✓	✓
		Provides a platform that organizations can leverage for gig-work opportunities to hire contract, freelance, and alternative female talent for short- and long-term needs	Network Friendly				✓
		Connects women returning to the workforce with mentors and access to employers that have formal re-entry programs or flexible work opportunities	Network Focus		✓	✓	✓
		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers	Network Friendly			✓	✓
		Helps women remain in the workforce and connect them with organizations that want to keep women in the workforce during different stages of life, especially focusing on motherhood	Network Focus			✓	✓
		Offers organizations the opportunity to access, connect with, and hire external gig-workers	Network Friendly			✓	✓

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Figure 39: All technology vendors mentioned in this report (cont'd)

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION	SOLUTION TYPE	CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
Identify critical information in high-power networks	 FAIRYGODBOSS	Provides an external network for women to tap for advice on career opportunities and the culture of organizations. It also provides education and opportunities to connect directly with organizations that wish to help women re-enter the workforce	Network Focus		✓	✓	✓
	 fishbowl	Provides the platform for individuals to connect with others, share information, learn, and stay educated on various work-related topics	Network Focus			✓	
	 fuel 50	Has a learning and development feature that helps individuals identify the aspects of careers that matter most to them, connect individuals to mentors, and helps individuals and organizations manage gig-work and development opportunities based on skills and career drivers	Network Friendly			✓	✓
	 SMARTER NETWORKING to achieve your career goals	Provides an external network of women and send introductions to facilitate 1:1 meetings (virtual or face-to-face) as well as smaller, more intimate events to foster strong inner circle and expand diversity of ties	Network Friendly		✓	✓	
	 Humanyze	Provides network-based survey and data analytics; allowing organizations to assess aspects of networks and make data-driven decisions on how to address potential issues	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	
	 innovisor	Provides organizational network analysis platform along with benchmarking and action-based recommendations	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓
	 PageUp™	Features help the organization map the career path for critical roles and assesses future talent against the criteria identified in those paths	Network Feature	✓			
	 polinode	Network analysis platform that can be used across a number of different data types and formats, but can also deploy surveys specifically designed for network analysis	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓
	 TrustSphere Because Relationships Matter	Provides a platform to assess the organizations networks and conduct network analysis using a number of different data points and inputs	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓
	 Kisier Outsmart. Outperform.	Helps organizations understand the impact of diversity through predictive analytics. For example; highlighting career paths, removing potential bias drivers of promotion to highlight talent on an even playing field, and uncovers whether diverse talent is getting the same development opportunities	Network Friendly				✓

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

Figure 39: All technology vendors mentioned in this report (cont'd)

CAPABILITIES	VENDOR	SOLUTION DESCRIPTION	SOLUTION TYPE	CENTRALITY	INNER CIRCLE	DIVERSE TIES	ENERGY
Identify hidden information in low-power networks	 SAP SuccessFactors	Features an opportunity for leaders to flag a high-performing, under-placed individual during calibration and promotion processes.	Network Feature	✓		✓	✓
Take steps to ensure everyone is receiving information regularly	 Humanyze	Provides network-based survey and data analytics; allowing organizations to assess aspects of networks and make data-driven decisions on how to address potential issues.	Network Focus	✓	✓	✓	
	 Worklytics	Data analytics platform that can “nudge” leaders when to take informed actions.	Network Friendly	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: RedThread Research, 2019.

About RedThread & Authors



Sure, we're experts in performance, people analytics, learning, and D&I – and we're well-versed in the technologies that support them. But we're also truth-seekers and storytellers in an industry often short on substance, and too full of @#\$%. Our mission (indeed, our very reason for existing) is to cut through the noise and amplify what's good. We look for the connections (or red threads) between people, data, and ideas – even among seemingly unrelated concepts. The result is high-quality, unbiased, transformative foresight that helps you build a stronger business.



Stacia Sherman Garr, Co-founder & Principal Analyst

Stacia is a researcher and thought leader on talent management, leadership, D&I, people analytics, and HR technology. A frequent speaker and writer, her work has been featured in Fortune, Forbes, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal as well as in numerous HR trade publications. Stacia co-founded RedThread Research in 2018, after leading talent and workforce research for eight years at Bersin by Deloitte. Before Bersin, Stacia spent approximately five years conducting research and creating learning content for the Corporate Leadership Council, part of CEB/Gartner. She has an MBA from the University of California, Berkeley, and a master's degree from the London School of Economics.



Emily Sanders, Research Lead

Emily Sanders is a Research Leader at RedThread Research. Prior to joining RedThread, she consulted for The NeuroLeadership Institute and held an analyst role at Bersin by Deloitte. She has experience researching industry practices and trends in performance management, talent management, diversity and inclusion, and career and learning. Emily is currently completing a Ph.D. in Industrial-Organizational (I/O) Psychology at Illinois Institute of Technology and received her M.A. in I/O Psychology from Middle Tennessee State University.

RedThread would like to thank Dr. Inga Carboni, Associate Professor at the College of William and Mary, for conducting some of the interviews and collaborating on some of the analysis shared in this report.