Future-Ready Leadership

TRANSFORMING ORGANIZATION FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Where our organization can step up and seek for higher standards

The materials are designed to encourage organizations to take meaningful steps toward more inclusive leadership structures, strengthen diversity practices, and foster equal opportunities in decision-making roles.
You can take it and adapt to your needs, convincing the organization to seek for more incluse leadership.

CONNECTING WOMEN IN DIGITAL

This slide deck was developed by the European Union funded project “Connecting Women in Digital” (WIDCON) under European Commission grant agreement 101195389. Themetic working group 2 on leadership empowerment was responsible for its development.
The slide decks aims to provide organizations with an initial foundation for understanding and advancing gender equality in leadership. Its purpose is to support awareness-building, reflection, and practical action by offering adaptable content that can be extended, personalized, and tailored for different audiences and organizational levels.

Funded by the European Union

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How to grow together

- Digital transformation is reshaping every industry
- Talent is the primary competitive advantage
- Inclusive leadership drives sustainable performance

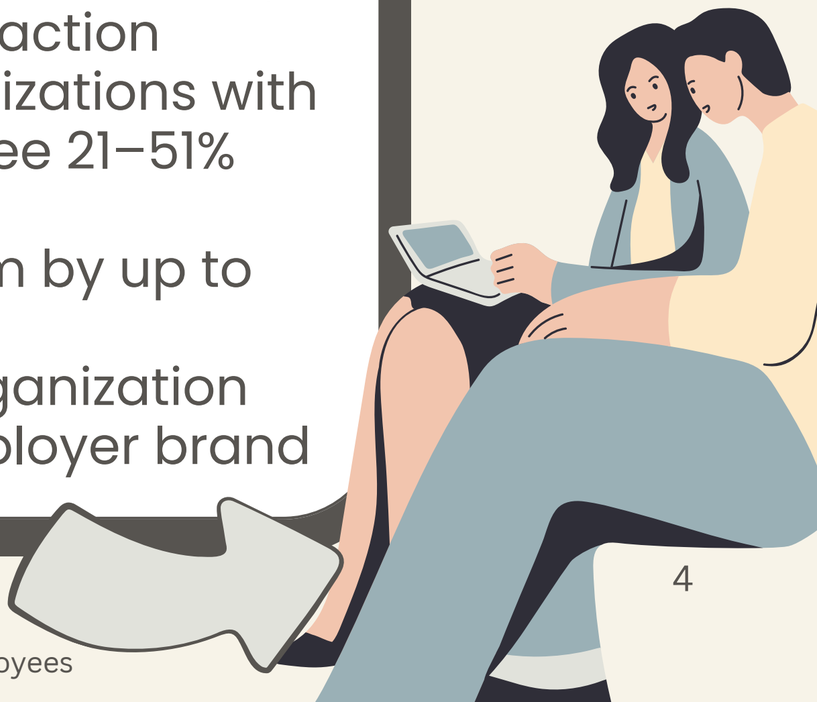
Employee engagement = emotional commitment to the organization's mission and success

Disengaged employees:

- Reduce productivity and business performance
- Increase turnover costs — replacing an employee can cost 50–200% of annual salary
- Lower morale, collaboration, and innovation

Engaged employees:

- Deliver 14–18% higher productivity and 23% higher profitability
- Drive innovation, collaboration, and customer satisfaction
- Stay longer — organizations with high engagement see 21–51% lower turnover
- Reduce absenteeism by up to 78%
- Advocate for the organization and strengthen employer brand



https://www.gallup.com/q12-employee-engagement-survey/
https://financechief.com/news/gallup-the-228m-cost-of-disengaged-employees

Engagement is a leadership outcome

Engagement is primarily influenced by:

- Trust in leadership
- Psychological safety
- Fair opportunities for growth
- Recognition and meaningful feedback
- Clear career pathways

Why diversity matters

Diverse organizations consistently demonstrate:

- Higher profitability
- Better decision-making
- Stronger innovation
- Improved risk management
- Greater employer attractiveness

Diversity in digital = competitive advantage

Homogeneous teams:

- Reinforce blind spots
- Increase bias risk
- Limit market reach
- Produce unconscious bias in data and design

Diverse teams:

- Build better products
- Understand broader customers
- Anticipate unintended consequences

The gender gap in digital leadership

While women enter many organizations at near parity

- Representation decreases at mid-management
- Drops further at senior leadership
- Remains low in executive digital roles

Common patterns:

- Fewer women promoted to first management role
- Slower promotion velocity
- Underrepresentation in high-visibility projects

Structural barriers

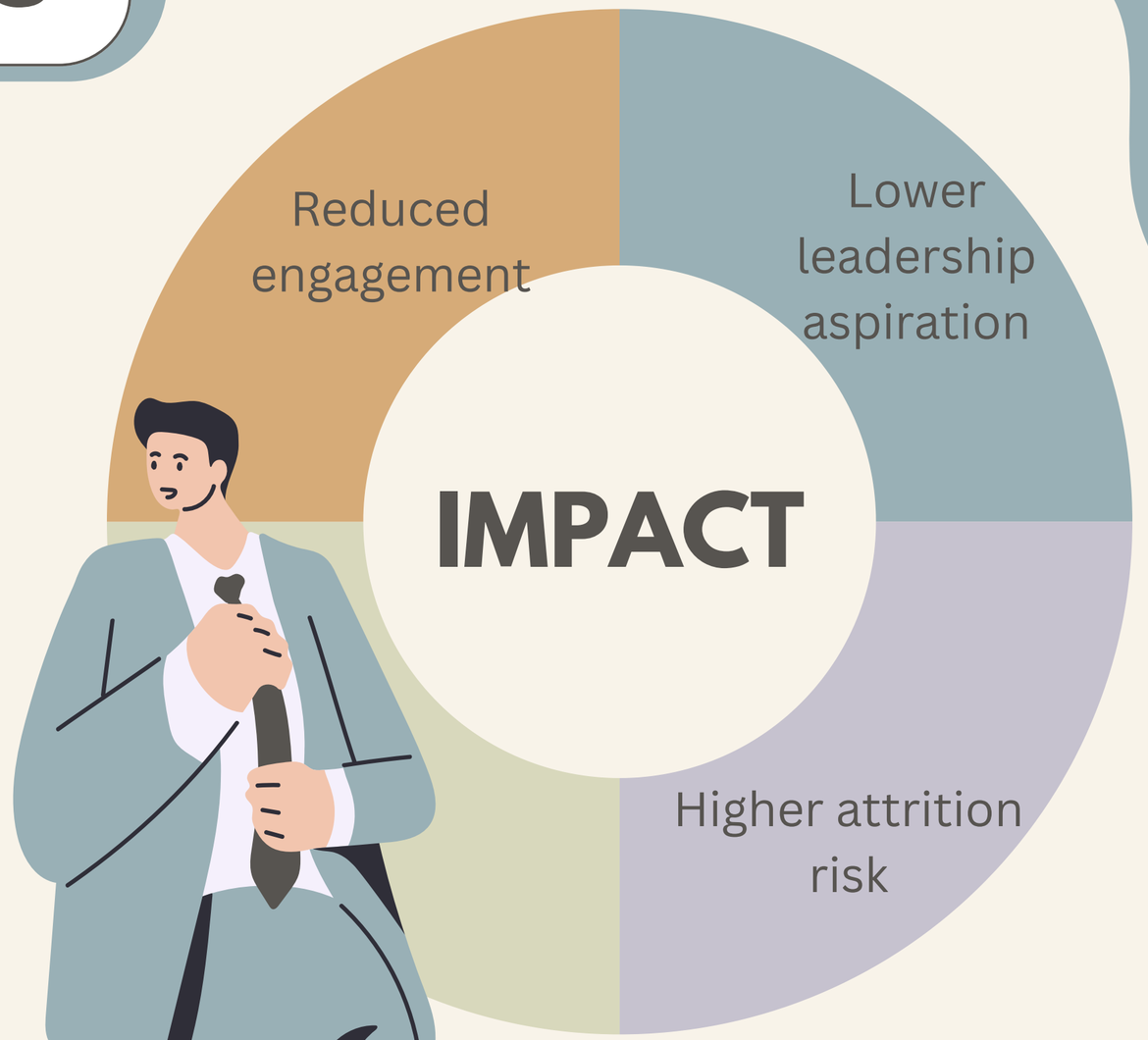
Women in digital often face:

- Unequal access to stretch assignments
- Promotion criteria that reward visibility over impact
- Informal sponsorship networks excluding them
- Biased performance evaluations
- Uneven Access to Opportunities

Cultural barriers

Women in leadership often face:

- Stereotypes about technical leadership
- Higher scrutiny standards
- Confidence penalties
- Work-life assumptions
- Being overlooked in meetings



Inclusivity oriented system

When inclusive digital leadership takes over:

- Innovation increases — up to 10×
- Team performance improves — 17% higher performance
- Engagement rises across all demographics — 5× higher engagement and belonging
- Collaboration strengthens — 29% more effective
- Organizational reputation improves — up to 25% outperform financially

https://quarterdeck.co.uk/articles/should-leadership-be-inclusive
https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact

Action framework

Sustainable change requires action at:

- Organizational level
- Executive level
- Manager level
- Individual level

If one level fails, the system fails

Organizational level actions

Systems and policies that enable inclusive leadership and equal opportunities

1.Transparent and fair talent systems

- Clear promotion pathways with defined criteria and timelines
- Multiple reviewers in hiring and promotion decisions
- Decisions based on skills, experience, and impact

2. Flexible and results-based work policies

- Hybrid work, flexible hours, and remote leadership roles
- Performance measurement by outcomes and KPIs, not visibility or hours
- Employees protection using flexible arrangements from career penalties

3. Institutional diversity and inclusion

- Diversity initiatives linking to innovation, digital performance, and business outcomes
- Metrics tracking such as representation, promotion rates, and engagement
- Balanced participation in strategic initiatives and digital events

Executive level actions

Executives set the tone and accountability for inclusive leadership

1.Champion diversity as a strategic priority

- Communicate diversity as a driver of innovation and business performance
- Equip leaders to confidently explain diversity decisions
- Leadership seminars on the benefits of diverse teams (what we are doing now)

2. Sponsor and advance various leader

- Implement formal sponsorship programs (not only mentorship)
- Pair employees with senior leaders who actively advocate for them
- Encourage executives to promote talent without requiring self-promotion

3. Increase representation and visibility

- Set gender representation targets for leadership teams
- Promote more than one woman at a time into leadership cohorts
- Publicly recognize women leaders' technical and strategic contributions

Manager level actions

Managers translate inclusive leadership into everyday team practices

1. Ensure fair access to opportunities

- Rotate employees into cross-functional and high-impact projects
- Ensure balanced participation in strategic initiatives
- Provide equal access to stretch assignments and leadership opportunities

2. Build inclusive team culture

- Train teams on inclusive communication and recognition practices
- Address exclusionary or undermining behavior through feedback and coaching
- Ensure decisions are documented in formal team forums

3. Support talent development and confidence

- Pair aspiring women leaders with mentors and sponsors
- Celebrate small wins and visible achievements
- Promote a culture of innovation, iteration, and safe failure

Individual level actions

Every employee contributes to building an inclusive leadership culture

1. Build visibility and leadership skills

- Participate in personal branding and storytelling training
- Develop skills in negotiation, assertive communication, and decision-making
- Share achievements through internal platforms and professional networks

2. Support and sponsor others

- Recommend colleagues for projects, awards, and opportunities
- Amplify contributions of others in meetings
- Participate in mentoring and peer support networks

3. Practice inclusive behaviors

- Challenge bias and exclusionary practices
- Avoid reinforcing exclusive informal networks
- Advocate for fair recognition and participation

Measuring what matters

Key indicators to track

- Representation by level (especially digital roles)
- Promotion rates by gender
- Pay equity analysis
- Engagement scores segmented by gender
- Sponsorship participation
- Attrition rates

Risk of inaction

Organizations that fail to act risk

- Losing top female digital talent
- Reduced innovation capacity
- Reputational damage
- Competitive disadvantage
- Regulatory pressure

The future of digital leadership

Further steps

Let’s build a better future
in our organziation

Executives:
Commit. Measure. Sponsor.

Leaders:
Advocate. Model. Include.

Managers:
Promote fairly. Develop talent intentionally.

Employees:
Engage. Amplify. Support.

Thank You

START TODAY, NOT TOMORROW

Need further guidance?

https://widigital.eu/thematic-working-group-2/