

FIRST STEP:

The Link Between Collective Intelligence and Diversity



Diverse Teams Can Lead To:

Improved **DECISION-MAKING**

Increased **BRAINSTORMING**

More **INNOVATIVE THINKING**

Better **PROBLEM SOLVING**

Why should boards of directors and top leadership teams care about gender diversity? Beyond reasons important to their companies—shifting workforce demographics, an increasingly educated talent pool, and the race for talent¹—there is another reason: gender diversity on teams makes the team *smarter*.² Specifically, research shows that gender-diverse groups have higher collective intelligence than homogenous groups.

Collective intelligence refers to how smart a group is. To assess this intelligence, psychologists measure groups' performance on various tasks. Importantly, group intelligence has *less* to do with the intelligence of individual group members and *more* to do with group composition. When a group has a mix of women and men, the group tends to have higher collective intelligence.³

Why Is This?

Diverse groups tend to leverage members' varied experiences, which reduces groupthink and can lead to:

- Improved decision-making
- Increased brainstorming
- More innovative thinking
- Better problem-solving abilities⁴

Scientists believe that a major contributor to group intelligence is the ability to sense group members' emotions—a quality known as social sensitivity. Research shows that, in groups, women are more socially sensitive than men. For example,

women are more likely than men to pick up on social cues that facilitate collaboration, allowing for more balanced conversation among group members.⁵ By encouraging the integration of individuals' contributions to the overall group discussion, the group "gets more" from the team's efforts.⁶

The message, not only for boards and top leadership teams but for organizations more generally, is clear: having gender-balanced teams at all levels of an organization is—quite literally—the *intelligent* choice.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACHIEVING GREATER COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

How can organizations leverage diversity to achieve greater collective intelligence in groups? Here are a few ideas for how leaders and organizations can drive impact:

- Pay attention to group composition when building teams, task forces, councils, and other groups.
- Monitor team composition when assigning collaborative work.
- Learn from other successful examples.
 - Nestlé's *Gender Balance Initiative* focuses on integrating gender balance into all of the company's development programs and internal operations. Every Nestlé business unit is required to have gender balance as part of its business strategy. A key component is Awareness Sessions. Beginning with the Executive Board, Nestlé instituted a series of Awareness Sessions focused on understanding the unique gender-related issues and challenges of each management team, helping to frame gender as a business issue. Approximately 12–15 upper-level managers, most of whom are male, convene for each session, for a total of more than 4,000 participants across the entire company. The ultimate goal of each Awareness Session is for participants to come away with an action plan that includes specific milestones related to increasing gender balance.⁷
 - RBC's initiative, *Client First Transformation: Achieving Business Results and Cultural Revitalization Through Diversity*, embeds diversity and inclusion principles into its approach with employees, clients, and communities. Since 2005, the company has focused on increasing the representation of women and other diverse employees in executive and pipeline positions, developing programs and highly integrated talent management practices to accelerate growth and enable individual and organizational success. Initiatives seek to value and leverage diversity of thought and ideas.⁸

Endnotes

1. Catalyst, *First Step: Women in the World* (2014).
2. Anita Woolley and Thomas Malone, "What Makes a Team Smarter? More Women," *Harvard Business Review*, June 2011, p. 32-33; Catalyst, *Why Diversity Matters* (2013).
3. Anita Williams Woolley, Christopher F. Chabris, Alex Pentland, Nada Hashmi, and Thomas W. Malone, "Evidence for a Collective Intelligence Factor in the Performance of Human Groups," *Science*, vol. 330 (2010): p. 686-688.
4. Woolley et al; Woolley and Malone; Scott E. Page, "Making the Difference: Applying a Logic of Diversity," *Academy of Management Perspectives* (November 2007): p. 6-20; Nicolas Bry, Orange Vallée, and Châtillon France, "Social Innovation? Let's Start Living Innovation as a Collective Adventure," *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Fall 2011): p. 5-14; Toyah Miller and María del Carmen Triana, "Demographic Diversity in the Boardroom: Mediators of the Board Diversity-Firm Performance Relationship," *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 46, no. 5 (July 2009): p. 755-786.
5. Peter Gwynne, "Group Intelligence, Teamwork, and Productivity," *Research-Technology Management Perspectives* (March/April 2012): p. 7-8; Woolley et al.
6. Anita Williams Woolley, Margaret E. Gerbasi, Christopher F. Chabris, Stephen M. Kosslyn, and J. Richard Hackman, "Bringing in the Experts: How Team Composition and Collaborative Planning Jointly Shape Analytic Effectiveness," *Small Group Research*, vol. 39, no. 3 (June 2008): p. 352-371.
7. Catalyst, *Practices: Nestlé—The Gender Balance Initiative* (2013).
8. Catalyst, *Practices: 2010 Catalyst Award Winner RBC—Client First Transformation: Achieving Business Results and Cultural Revitalization Through Diversity* (2010).