

Women in Strategy

Insights from The Barton Partnership's roundtable discussion
in Singapore

Women in Strategy

On Tuesday, 11th June, The Barton Partnership hosted its Women in Strategy roundtable event in Singapore. The discussion explored the importance of diversity, mentorship, and role modelling, whilst recognising and overcoming barriers to progress. We addressed managing remote teams while leveraging technology and embracing inclusivity, the challenges of balancing work and personal life, and the value of vulnerability and authenticity in leadership.

What follows is a summary of the key points discussed during the session:

#1 Diversity and Decision-Making

- Participants discussed the significant benefits to decision-making and outcomes when incorporating varied perspectives and fostering empathy within teams. Diverse backgrounds contribute unique insights that enhance strategy development. True diversity extends beyond visible traits like gender and background, including diversity of thinking. This approach enhances decision-making and business performance by encouraging different viewpoints and challenging the status quo, leading to more robust and innovative solutions.
- **Cultural Differences in Gender Equity:** Cultural differences in gender equity practices were observed across regions. Participants noted certain regions provide better support systems for working women, including access to domestic help and progressive workplace policies. These cultural and structural supports enable women to maintain their careers while managing family responsibilities. However, traditional gender roles and expectations still pose challenges in many regions and industries. In Singapore, for instance, the cultural inclination towards collective family support creates an environment where women can balance career and family effectively.

#2 Support and Sponsorship

- **The Role of Mentorship and Sponsorship:** Support and sponsorship play a critical role in advancing women's careers. Having senior women as role models and sponsors can significantly impact career progression. Both direct sponsorship and indirect support through empathetic understanding and shared experiences are beneficial. Effective mentorship involves actively supporting individuals' professional growth by teaching key leadership skills and offering opportunities to shadow and learn from experienced leaders.

- **Balancing Professional and Personal Responsibilities:** Balancing professional and personal responsibilities remains a significant theme. Supportive teams and leaders who understand these challenges enhance work-life balance and job satisfaction. Inclusive cultures where all genders can openly discuss and manage these responsibilities are vital. Participants noted that in companies where such cultures are nurtured, employees are more productive and loyal. For example, firms that allow flexible working hours and provide robust parental leave policies see higher retention rates and greater job satisfaction among their staff.
- **Sponsorship versus Mentorship:** While mentorship was noted as being vital for career guidance and skill development, sponsorship is crucial for career advancement. Participants shared that male leaders often act as more active sponsors. There is a call for more women in leadership positions to take on sponsorship roles to support and advocate for the next generation of female leaders.

#3 Overcoming Stereotypes and Bias

- **Addressing Gender Stereotypes and Biases:** Addressing and overcoming gender stereotypes and biases in the workplace is essential for creating an inclusive environment. Participants noted that women often face different expectations and judgments than their male counterparts.
- **Authenticity:** Participants discussed the complexities of being authentic and speaking up in the workplace. Women who assert themselves can sometimes face labels such as “aggressive,” which can be detrimental to their careers. Despite these challenges, there was a strong consensus on the importance of authenticity and the need to embrace and express one’s true self, even if it means confronting societal norms and potential negative labels.
- **Inclusive Conversation:** A crucial theme discussed was the importance of involving men in discussions about gender equity. Many men want to support gender diversity but may not know how to do so effectively. This could include encouraging men to take advantage of parental leave and other family benefits and promoting a more balanced and supportive work culture.

#4 Work-Life Balance and Flexibility

- **Strategies for Promoting Better Work-Life Balance:** Work-life balance emerged as a critical issue, focusing on the need for flexibility in work arrangements. Participants shared strategies, such as transparent scheduling, respecting personal time, and accommodating individual needs and rhythms. The consensus was that flexibility is key to maintaining productivity and well-being, allowing employees to work in a manner that suits their circumstances and peak performance times.

- **Practical Solutions to Build Inclusive Workplaces:** Implementing practical solutions such as family care days, flexible working arrangements, and transparent calendars can significantly contribute to a more inclusive workplace. These measures help accommodate diverse needs and promote a supportive culture. Additionally, creating an environment where employees feel safe to express their personal and professional needs can support increased job satisfaction and retention.

#5 Trends and Predictions for 2024

- The role of technology in enhancing productivity was highlighted, particularly the use of AI tools and collaborative platforms. These technologies can streamline workloads, reduce administrative burdens, and facilitate better communication and collaboration. Encouraging the use of technology as a productivity enhancer rather than a threat is essential.
- **Technology for Work-Life Balance:** Participants discussed innovative strategies to leverage technology for better work-life balance. Tools like AI for meeting transcriptions, collaborative documents, and automated scheduling can enhance efficiency and allow employees to focus on high-value tasks. Embracing these technologies can lead to a more flexible and productive work environment.
- **The Future of Work and Technology:** Looking ahead, participants noted that the future of work will likely involve even greater integration of technology. Companies that invest in digital tools and create flexible work environments will be better positioned to attract and retain top talent. By embracing technology and fostering a culture of innovation and inclusivity, organisations can create a competitive advantage and drive long-term success.

The roundtable highlighted the multifaceted impact of diversity, support, mentorship, and technology on women's roles in strategy and leadership. By addressing stereotypes, promoting work-life balance, and leveraging technology, organisations can create more inclusive and productive environments. Encouraging authenticity in leadership is a crucial step towards achieving gender equity. Collectively, these strategies can empower women to thrive in their careers and contribute to their organisations' success.

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