



CXO: Senior Leaders' Roundtable

Event Report

Tuesday 1 November 2023
The Hospitium, York



CXO: Senior Leader's Roundtable

WISE held its exclusive annual CXO Roundtable event, aimed at C-suite leaders and decision makers, at The Hospitium in York.

This event recognised that C-Level staff face a particular set of challenges, responsibilities, and pitfalls when it comes to EDI. Putting women on the agenda and developing a diverse workforce enables an organisation to be adaptable and flexible in these uncertain and changing times.

This in-person event featured two senior leaders from WISE member organisations each sharing how they have worked to recruit and retain women at their own companies; how they have helped to drive forward gender parity; what has worked well, as well as the key challenges they have faced.



The event began with networking and refreshments. After this, WISE CEO Kay Hussain warmly welcomed attendees to the event. Finally, Kay urged attendees to see difficult times as an opportunity for leaders to rethink and transform their organisation's direction and plans. "As leaders, let's be part of the change that we want to see!"

We then heard presentations from two senior leaders of STEM businesses. This report provides a summary of those presentations, their key takeaways, as well as the main calls to action that emerged from discussions.

CXO Speakers



Kay Hussain, CEO WISE Campaign

Passionate about making a difference, Kay's professional career prior to WISE focused on improving the health and wellbeing of people in society, through a variety of senior leadership roles in the Pharmaceutical industry, including board-level roles for the UK & EU.

Kay has successfully led teams in the development and delivery of strategic and operational plans which have enhanced efficiency, team capability, customer experience and profitability of businesses spanning over 20 years. Experience includes start-ups, new product introduction, optimisation and growth, as well as culture change, rationalisation, outsourcing, remediation, and divestment programmes.



Jason Glew, Managing Director, Capgemini Engineering

Jason has over 25 years' experience leading the delivery of ground-breaking safety critical engineering projects across diverse sectors such as defence, aerospace, rail and automotive.

Jason has been part of Capgemini since 2003, holding a series of leadership roles before he moved into his current position as MD of Capgemini Engineering. Jason is Exec Sponsor of the Capgemini Engineering Women's Network, building a close relationship with WISE and is also a judge of the IET Young Woman Engineer of the Year Award.



Suzanne Lowe, Vice President and General Manager, Air Products

Suzanne is VP and General Manager for UK, Ireland, Israel and Italy at Air Products. She is responsible for driving strategy and profitability of the company's Industrial Gases and Electronics businesses. She joined Air Products in 1987 in the Career Development Programme and has since held many leadership positions throughout her 32 years in industrial gasses.

In 2010, Suzanne joined the Homecare Division as Global Operations Director and moved with the business in 2012 when it was divested, and returned to Air Products in 2019 in her current role.

WISE Member - Capgemini

Jason Glew has been Managing Director with Capgemini for two years and Executive Sponsor of the Women's Network for 18 months – a company where 31% of staff are women.

Becoming Executive Sponsor of the Women's Network

"When I was elected as the Executive Sponsor of the Capgemini Women's Network, I thought they obviously couldn't find a woman at executive level to do it! But I later came to see this role differently. It's more about creating cultural change. These issues affect everyone, including men. In fact, men need to be actively included to push for real change."



Why should companies care about gender diversity?

Diverse teams make better decisions and by not attracting women into STEM subjects and businesses, opportunities for different skills and perspectives are lost.

Research shows that companies with greater gender diversity enjoy:

- Smarter decisions
- More effective problem-solving
- "Constructive dissent"
- Enhanced innovation
- Better retention
- Develop more relevant products

* Women in the Workplace 2023, McKinsey & Company

Best Practice

Reflecting on his 18-months as Executive Sponsor, Jason outlined seven key aims that he now feels are required for tackling the diversity challenge in the Engineering sector. Each aim is accompanied by examples of the successful actions that Capgemini have taken, as well as the best practice and learnings developed:

Aim 1: Create a safe space

Capgemini created the Women in Engineering Network (UK and Global)

Aim 2: Be inclusive

Development of open channels of communication. For Capgemini, these included starting group network events; 1-2-1 events; an anonymous feedback platform called Pulse (to anonymously capture experiences related to gender discrimination). Male allies are critical. At Capgemini, there is 50% male engagement for the Women in Engineering Network.

Aim 3: What does good look like?

By outlining its main ambitions, members could begin to benchmark the network's ongoing impact and measure success. These were: awareness, representation, fairness, unconscious bias, company cultural change. Follow the golden EDI rule: Measure it if you treasure it.

Aim 4: Prioritise

Management may have top-down Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for gender diversity. But there's also the importance of looking beyond figures, to really understand why diversity is important. Building and sharing this understanding is a key priority for the gender balance agenda.

Aim 5: Individual change

Engage the actors who can make a big difference on an individual level. For Capgemini, this included line management training, and the development of an allyship toolkit. Mentoring and coaching programmes helped to tackle imposter syndrome, which is disproportionately experienced by women.

Aim 6: Organisational change

To make a lasting change, to embed cultural change into policies, and to push the EDI agenda into the fabric of the company, update HR policies. For Capgemini, these included career breaks, part-time working, fertility, baby loss, menopause support, shared parental leave, gender pay gap.

Aim 7: Societal change

Developed employee outreach to schools.
Starting a WISE membership & joining Young Professional Board (YPB).



Measuring Impact

After having an Executive Sponsor for the women's networks who was able to accelerate and support EDI progress, Capgemini are beginning to see the payoff. Capgemini already has better staff retention – attrition has recovered after COVID, during which time it spiked to 30%. This positive trend is linked to the stronger representation of women employees at Capgemini.

Where are the ongoing challenges?

The challenge remains: how to grow senior leaders enough to change the gender balance at C-Level? At present, the talent pool just isn't there.

Calls to action

- People switch off if you just talk about EDI all the time and you don't take any tangible actions
- Enabling flexible working is good for everyone, but at Capgemini this has been the real turning point for women
- As a sector, we need to think about and address the "broken rung" - the phenomenon where women are promoted at much lower rates than men. Make fixing this a company priority
- Diversity enables "constructive dissent". We need to have people who think differently in the room at C-suite levels

WISE Member - Air Products

Suzanne began her career with Air Products for almost forty years ago. Currently, 20% of employees at Air Products are women – and the company is aiming for 28% by 2025.

The EDI Journey: Sharing Learnings

As Suzanne detailed in her presentation, she has overseen the introduction of a wide range of EDI programmes, including:

- Programmes designed to combat Imposter Syndrome, which is especially prevalent among women
- PPE that is designed to fit women
- Women's Success Network (WSN). The employee resource group successfully drives many of the gender-focused initiatives
- Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging working group. This led to Air Products joining WISE as a member
- Inclusive language campaign which raises awareness around images and terminology that is commonly used but often excludes women
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Air Products started its EDI journey in 1999 initially as an employee-led approach. Today, Air Products has full board level EDI buy-in and a progressive CEO. Having senior support makes it easier to implement actions and the need to focus on EDI never stops as we continue to evolve across the company and in response to societal changes.

"It feels easy to do EDI now, but it hasn't always been like this".



What has worked for Air Products?

- Going virtual during the COVID19 pandemic has allowed us to sustain our business and support our customers
- Air Products invested in Textio, a software that identifies gendered language and presents gender neutral alternatives. This is now used for all job adverts to avoid gender bias
- The importance of leadership team visibility – for example, it's impactful for staff to see



What are the ongoing challenges?

Attracting female employees into operational roles is still a real challenge. Our STEM programmes engage young people from primary school age onwards to encourage them early to consider careers in STEM .

Call to action:

- Businesses must acknowledge and own the power and responsibility they have to shape society and the world.
- Seek to understand your blind spots. If everyone in your leadership team is looking from the same perspective, you will be missing things. Diversity is an asset.
- We need to encourage women to apply to senior level jobs. As companies, we need to be creative with getting more women into leadership jobs.

Key themes from the day

After the presentations, Q&A was an opportunity for the attendees to ask our panellists some of the really hard questions. What follows is a summary of the key themes that emerged from our discussions.

Theme 1 - We can't make progress if we aren't encouraging more girls and women into the STEM sector

Everyone agreed that the current outreach landscape feels fragmented and disjointed. There is a great need to work more cleverly and collaboratively on creating a joined-up and highly effective network for all STEM outreach. As one attendee put it, "we need to get organised".

Call to action: How can we come together as a network of people to work on this issue?

- Are there any backers who can help us with setting this idea of a network up?
- As STEM professionals, we need specialised training about how to engage with young people and do outreach most effectively.
- As a sector, we want to see more senior leaders doing outreach with young girls.



Theme 2 - Board level buy-in for EDI is important, but it's not always integral to the success of diversity programmes

We shared a discussion on the advantages and difficulties of gaining the support of the board of directors in relation to prioritising the EDI agenda, especially in our current climate of economic uncertainty.

Call to action: Don't wait for top-down change or board-level buy in. Make the change yourself today.

- Even if your company doesn't have active board level support for gender diversity, C-Level suite can and should be leading by example.
- Individuals can make a real change, especially if they can futureproof cultural change by working to update company policies.

Theme 3 - How do we manage the backlash that women sometimes experience when they are elected to senior positions?

Whilst companies are working to diversify their leadership teams and improve the gender balance of their workforce, some women in senior positions are negatively perceived and judged as being a "diversity hire".

Call to action: Support women in senior positions at your company as much as possible, to offset and counter this kind of discouragement.

- Making change is painful and there is no way to totally avoid this fact. You have to be willing to make unpopular decisions, especially at the beginning of the EDI journey.
- Wait it out. "Diversity-hire" backlash subsides over time, especially as staff begin to see first-hand the clear benefits of having women in leadership - women often bring much-needed soft skills into a leadership team.
- This is where programmes such as Women's Mentorship can be particularly useful, especially when employees might have lost self-confidence or need extra support due to experiencing micro-aggressions in the workplace.



WISE Campaign

WISE Campaign is a not-for-profit CIC which exists to deliver women-centred equity, diversity and inclusion solutions for the STEM sectors. We support our partners to achieve gender parity and benefit from better productivity, innovation and business performance.

We work with major UK organisations to improve their gender balance and are open about the economic and business benefits of doing so. WISE offer exclusive membership support to over 100 organisations through events, webinars, workshops and training.

[For more information, please visit us at:
www.wisecampaign.org.uk](http://www.wisecampaign.org.uk)

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Roundtable

Many thanks to our speakers and all attendees for contributing to such a lively and dynamic CXO Roundtable

For further information on anything covered here, please contact:

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