

How **gender diversity** makes **financial sense** for **tech firms in 2020**

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Is there a compelling **business case** for **diversity?**

If you offered any board of directors a management strategy that would allow their company to improve their bottom line, make more informed management decisions, increase their customer base, extend their talent acquisition pool, improve retention and improve their reputation at the same time, you would certainly get their attention!

Increasing the percentage of women in the tech landscape, and more importantly, increasing the number of women leading in that tech world, can improve the prospects of tech firms in all these key areas. We've known for years that companies with more diverse boards and teams outperform on every level so why is it that in the tech industry the faces around us all look pretty much, well...monotone?

Is there a compelling business case for diversity?

We have much data around why there is a compelling business case for diverse teams:

- **Revenue:** companies with high gender diversity generate more revenue – statistics show that high-gender-diverse companies deliver better returns and outperform, on average, less diverse companies over a five-year period. Companies that not only hire but also manage to retain more women put themselves in a position to automatically gain a competitive advantage, a benefit that extends to all stakeholders. Companies that effectively use female talent are 45% more likely to report improved market share, according to PWC worldwide research
- **Leadership depth:** men and women see things differently and bring unique ideas to the table. This translates to stronger leadership, client insight and the ability to better cater to your customer base
- **Client insight:** bringing together a mix of genders with various backgrounds and ethnicities to your solutions, translates into a significant kicker in buying power that companies will tap into. If you are designing solutions for humans, you should have internal insights that understand over half your customer base! Customer centric thinking ensures that your solutions have representation of the full customer base
- **Talent acquisition:** appealing to the full workforce directly translates to a larger talent pool. As companies gain a reputation of having a more diverse workforce, they also gain an extremely powerful recruiting tool
- **Talent retention:** staff turnover is expensive. Women who have role models and have a mentor within the company are more like to stay especially during the two main trigger events - in early career and later breaks in career for caring roles
- **Enhanced problem solving:** tech companies win through their ability to solve complex problems, not having diversity of thinking in tech problem solving limits potential as a company and hinders the success of solutions



How the tech **industry stacks** up today

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We need to turn the business case question around and ask ourselves what business case could there possibly be for an entity with a leadership team and employee base that does not represent the world it serves? How sustainable can an entity be that only has deep insight in its product design to half of the client base that it serves?

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How the tech industry stacks up today

The percentage of women in tech, and more importantly women leading in tech, is low by anyone's standards.

The facts themselves are sobering. According to PWC:

- Women currently hold 19% of tech-related jobs at the top 10 global tech companies
- In leadership positions at these global tech giants, women make up 28%
- 3% of females say a career in technology is their first choice
- 78% of students can't name a famous female working in technology
- 16% of females have had a career in technology suggested to them (33% of males)
- 5% of leadership positions in the technology sector are held by women

Currently, the World Economic Forum (WEF) suggests that projecting current trends into the future, the overall global gender gap will close in 108 years.



Why **women in tech** do **not need empowerment**


This is not a message about how women in tech need empowerment. Women who have the skills and ability to code, to engineer, to architect, to create incredible technical solutions, do not need empowerment – they need a reason to choose this industry!

At the heart of the problem is choice and the choices that women can make. Women make choices around career because they have options. They don't choose to work in industries that have negative perceptions around values (thanks Hollywood – all those dark-room-dwelling-nose-pierced-face-tattooed-hacker perceptions aren't helping our cause). Nor do women choose to work in industries where the heroes all look the same and importantly, nor do they choose to work in companies that don't see them for who they are, who don't meet them where they are as women.

A change requires a real and concerted effort. These include actions aimed at young women and girls as well as women who are already in the industry today.

For young women, the focus needs to be on championing skills and changing the perception of the industry as a place that makes sense to a woman for a future career. Awareness of career opportunities is essential (of girls who have not considered an IT career, 69% attribute this to not knowing what opportunities are available to them).

For women already in the tech industry, solving gender imbalance requires confronting work culture, gender stereotypes, increasing recruitment transparency and improving work conditions. Real progress can only be achieved with women and men coming together. We need to come together to create a new image for our industry as one that values the individual and specific contribution that women and minorities make. Inclusivity will require a change in imagery, a change in recruitment language, a change in the faces of the role models.



What can we do to make **significant change?**

Proven ways to get the cultural shift started are as relevant to the tech industry as to most others. It is all about creating workspaces where people can thrive no matter what they look like and by inspiring confidence in female employees and their talents. Some great starting points are:

- **Targeted sponsorship initiatives:** internal sponsorship of talented female employees across the full spectrum of the organisation
- **Visible role models:** creating space for leaders who have walked the same path. Leaders that inspire others create a sense of being seen within the workplace
- **New ways of work:** understanding that although workspaces may feel entirely supportive for a section of your workforce, there is a very real possibility that this same workplace does not feel the same for others. This may require augmenting the culture with investment into parallel ways of work, and targeted plans to encourage the ability for inclusiveness to thrive
- **Acknowledging the social barriers:** simply acknowledging to your workforce that you are aware of the challenges that women face from bias, asymmetrical home responsibility and internal conflicts, goes a long way to creating a culture that is inclusive

Embracing the tech subculture as key enabler for change

In theory, tech is an industry that plays to everything that makes sense for women - it is intellectual, creative, flexible, collaborative, it is accepting of all things geek. It is a career that allows an individualistic approach to how people work, deliver and show up.

But here is where it starts to get complicated - this very industry that holds onto its image of accepting those who are different, the industry that relishes its subculture of celebration of the individual, the industry of Steve Jobs' "crazy ones, misfits, rebels, troublemakers... the ones who see things differently". This very industry does not represent that when it comes to creating spaces that encourage women to thrive. Somehow the tech industry has become all the very same - and that's never good for minorities of any kind.

So how do leaders who embrace diversity go back to this subculture and really embrace the heart of it? Leaders need to be supporting women in their tech careers to ensure that they are able to come back to their authentic selves in the work that they do.



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Their creative, collaborative, intellectual geeky selves. It's this that women in tech need - they need to be seen for the individuals that they are.

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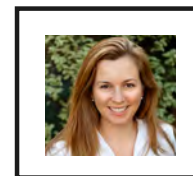
Most importantly, influencers and decision makers need to be encouraging women to listen to their hearts and to embrace the incredible skills that they possess and to choose to bring these skills and capabilities to an industry that we love so much. Within the industry, we need to be supporting one another and helping to create workspaces that allow for inclusivity.

It is essential that we acknowledge the incredible diversity of those that have built the tech industry up to now - and the importance of the impact that those in tech leadership positions have had. It is these very leaders that are responsible for forming the industry of the future and as such the leaders that will create future impact. That impact will be all the more inclusive if tech leaders can focus on going back to the heart of the diversity-embracing culture that this industry started from.

At BBD, we value our ability to recognise each individual. We believe in focusing on the individual and advancing their skills regardless of how they look. Our aim is to attract and retain the best software engineers and make sure that our culture enables everyone to thrive.



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About BBD

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