

Diversity by design



Michael Bell, Korn Ferry, explains how global aviation can be taken to new heights through diversity.

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For several months, the aviation industry has been embarked on a multi-sector, multi-faceted global study of the key enablers and inhibitors of the advancement of women into leadership roles in the industry, with a focus on identifying specific, actionable best practices.

Why was the study – *Soaring Through the Glass Ceiling* – undertaken? Whereas women have made great strides in many professional fields and industries, there remains a gap in critical leadership roles in aviation and aerospace. Simply put, the industry has not kept pace with other sectors on this vital issue.

For example, women account for only 5% of airline pilots (International Society of Women Airline Pilots), and, according to IATA, only about 3% of CEOs in aviation are women. The numbers look somewhat better in air navigation, with female leadership in the range of 15%–25%, depending on the organization. Pockets of success do exist in airports, with female CEOs representing upwards of 30% across major US airports.

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But the progress has not been sufficiently fast, nor uniform. This critical study is a first in many regards, being the first truly global industry study on gender diversity, the first involving almost all parts of the aviation/aerospace ecosystem and the first focused on identifying a comprehensive, actionable set of best practices for all stakeholders.

A key success factor has been the involvement of several major aviation industry and professional associations – Aerospace Industries Association (AIA), Airlines for America (A4A), Airports Council International – World (ACI), Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation (CANSO), International Air Transport Association (IATA), and the International Aviation Women’s Association (IAWA) – all in close collaboration with Korn Ferry.

In this regard, the study has benefitted from the collective experience, expertise, reach, and influence of virtually all elements of the aviation and aerospace value chain.

Activity streams

The methodology for the study has comprised four streams of activity: (i) a global survey of four key stakeholder groups – women, business leaders, human resources leaders, and education leaders; (ii) global interviews of representatives of the same four key stakeholder groups; (iii) case studies of best practice organizations and leaders; and (iv) insights from Korn Ferry’s Diversity and Inclusion Practice.

Judging from the response rate, the industry is hungry to both discuss and make real progress on this important topic. Over 2,400

individuals responded to the survey – a 27% response rate. Over 60 business leaders, including many CEOs, readily agreed to share their time for interviews.

Various ANSP leaders have been active participants in the interviews, including but not limited to those from Airways New Zealand, Air Navigation Services of the Czech Republic, Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, Dutch Caribbean Air Navigation Service Provider, Indra Navia, NATS, and NAV CANADA. Several original equipment manufacturers and service providers to the ANSP industry have also been active participants.

Primary inhibitors

The first goal of the study was to secure an understanding of the actual inhibitors to the advancement of women into leadership roles in the industry. Through a variety of means, the study has identified five primary inhibitors:

1. A lack of opportunity for advancement or upward mobility
2. A lack of female executives or board directors
3. An unclear understanding of potential career paths
4. A male-dominated industry
5. The challenges associated with navigating the double bind - be warm/be tough.

This was born out through the survey results with 49% of female respondents citing the lack of opportunity for advancement as a critical inhibitor. Moreover, only 60% of female respondents feel that their voice is heard and only 34% feel that they are treated similarly to men.

Shifting to potential solutions, our study revealed that the two most important enablers for the advancement of women in aviation and aerospace are the representation of women in leadership and women serving as role models and clear and unequivocal communication that gender diversity is a strategic priority on the part of business leaders.

The more women ascend to leadership and governance roles, the easier it is for others to follow. As such, those organizations that have taken the bold, ground-breaking steps to advance women are accelerating progress for all others. This has been readily demonstrated by Teri Bristol, Chief Operating Officer of the Air Traffic Organization of the Federal Aviation Administration.

As Bristol shares, “Since I was promoted into the COO role, I have made sure that our leadership team is diverse. Although only 18% of the FAA Air Traffic Organization is gender diverse, three of my eight vice presidents are now women. That has set the example for my organization going forward.”

Regarding communication, leadership behaviors count, both substantively and symbolically. When the industry sees leaders both articulate and then act on the value of diversity and inclusion, people take note and act accordingly.

As former CANSO Director General Jeff Poole said, “When I look at the air traffic management industry and at organisations that have been successful relative to diversity, I see that the change is driven from the top – from the CEO and the board. Under their leadership, they have put in place structured programmes to deliver on objectives, with elements across the entire employment life cycle.”

Key findings

The key findings emerging to date from our study can be organized into four broad themes:

Diversity and inclusion is a driver of economic value.

Gender diversity and inclusion become a source of value creation when embedded as the way of doing business.

Diversity and inclusion is informed by analytics.

Organizations need evidence-based D&I strategies, key metrics to measure progress, and stakeholder accountability. The study’s survey has helped to set the data foundation and identify key enablers and inhibitors of progress.

Diversity and inclusion is a shared responsibility.

This includes the need for change and action on the part of all stakeholders – industry associations, business leaders, human resources leaders, women, men, mentors, sponsors, and activists. As an example, business leaders are responsible for removing systemic barriers to women’s advancement and eliminating biases in decision-making. Women are responsible for continuing to tenaciously drive their own development and performance. Men are responsible for understanding the unique challenges women face in the workplace and developing their inclusion skills.

The industry must embrace collective learning and action.

Industry stakeholders will benefit from deeper knowledge and success stories from peers to help each other and the industry make greater progress on gender diversity.

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Credit: Airways New Zealand

Inherent in improving the intake of women into ATM is changing the perception of careers in the sector.

Structure and behavior

Practically speaking, what can, and should, organizations and leaders, at various levels, do to make real progress? Our study has determined that real change in diversity and inclusion (D&I) occurs when actions are taken on a combination of both structural and behavioral dimensions.

Structural means inclusive and equitable structures, processes and practices while behavioral incorporates an inclusive mindset, decisions and actions – both individual and collective.

Our study, to be released in Q3 2019, will highlight specific and actionable potential solutions that are both structural and behavioral in nature across each stakeholder group. Though business leaders are but one of those stakeholder groups, their actions can get the ball rolling.

In terms of behavioral actions, leaders must unambiguously and repeatedly communicate gender diversity as an organizational priority. As Harris Corporation CEO Bill Brown has pointed out, "Every CEO says that diversity is important and most companies have good programs in support of it. But, when I say it, it's personal. I have two daughters and three sisters, and I believe that every woman should have an opportunity to be as successful as I was. When you make it personal, and speak with true passion about it, people hear it."

Similarly, the leadership at Spain's ENAIRE has taken specific action to address the representation of women. María López

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Fernández-Pacheco (Responsible for Corporate Social Responsibility at DG Cabinet Office, ENAIRE) noted, "We now have four women among the 10 members of our management team when just four years ago, we had only one. That should help us attract and select more women going forward. We are also working to establish a network of women to help each other, but also need men to actively help women break through the barriers."

Structurally, gender D&I programs should be integrated into the business, not as standalone/parallel or human resources efforts. "It's also about what you do every day and how you run your business; it's not a fad or something you provide a report to the board on once a year," added Brown.

In addition, D&I must be embedded in all human capital decisions including composition and performance of teams while gender diversity performance should be incorporated into leadership evaluation.

Specific objectives for female representation at all levels is desirable with performance measured against those objectives. Martin Rolfe, NATS CEO said, "Attracting women into the front-line roles has been a historical challenge. We are working hard to get more women involved in STEM (science, technical, engineering, mathematics) roles. This has included signing up for the Women in Aviation Charter, a joint initiative of industry and government in the UK with 48 signatories including NATS. Through that, we have set 5-6 major commitments relative to diversity and now report on our progress on a regular basis."

Inherent in improving the intake of women into the ATM sector is changing the perception of careers in the sector. "We are working to get around the issue of the nerdiness or macho factor of a career in air traffic control," Rolfe continued.

"We are making it known that you don't have to be a plane-spotter to enjoy the business, that you can be an archaeologist and still be an air traffic controller. Part of the solution is getting over the issue of shift work, which can be a real issue for some women."

The full results of the study will provide a robust and striking set of potential actions for all stakeholders to draw on to have a meaningful impact. Taken collectively, these actions should finally give women the wings to soar through the glass ceiling. ➤