INCLUSION, INTENTION, AND INVESTMENT

A Playbook For Retaining Women Working In Tech

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KEY TERMS GLOSSARY

DESIGN
Design is the creation of a plan to build a product, process, policy, or personal interaction.

DIVERSITY
Diversity is relational, it's about the composition of people in your teams, in your company, and in your ecosystem. People aren't diverse, but teams and companies must be.

EQUITY
Equity is in how we design our systems and processes; it's about the way we work. It's the systems and processes that help to uphold commitments to diversity and inclusion. A key distinction to note: equality-inspired design treats everyone the same whereas equitable design works to give everyone what they need to be successful.

INCLUSION
Inclusion relates to the quality of the experience designed for people, whether in their teams, companies, or the products or services shared with the world.

INTERSECTIONALITY
Intersectionality refers to how individual experiences sit at intersections of multiple and overlapping identities and systems of oppression, power, and privilege.

MARGINALIZATION
Marginalization is the treatment of a person, a group, or a concept as insignificant or peripheral.

UNDERREPRESENTATION
Underrepresentation refers to low numbers of a specific identity in a given group, relative to their numbers in the general population.

This resource reflects a particular moment in time, Canada in 2019, and like most things in life, may eventually need updates. Everything changes—from technologies and innovations, to social norms, cultures, and languages. As such, this resource is not meant to be a static guide, but rather a compilation and reflection of our learnings to date.

WHY ANOTHER PLAYBOOK?

Last year, 1,000 people—from startups, scaleups, and large enterprises—gathered in Toronto for the inaugural #movethedial Global Summit to connect, inspire, and contribute to making Canada's technology ecosystem the most inclusive in the world. Despite the energy and enthusiasm for change at the Summit we know that women remain underrepresented and too often, marginalized, in the tech sector.

Women make up 47% of the labour force but represent only 25% in tech[1]. These women often experience bias, unfairness, and lack access to real decision authority. Certainly there's been considerable effort devoted to attracting more women to tech, but what happens once they're in? Often, companies are diverse without being equitable or inclusive. Let that sink in for a moment: a company can have people with a diversity of perspectives and experiences, but if people don't feel supported by systems or processes, or included in the culture, they're going to leave. This is the focus of this playbook: how do we meaningfully retain women who work in tech?

When we talk about "women in tech," for us, *tech* refers to women

technologists and non-technical women working in the field and *women* refers to anyone who identifies as such. We recognize that one size does not fit all when it comes to designing strategies that effectively retain women working in tech. While women may share *some* common experiences related to being underrepresented and marginalized in tech, we know that women also have unique experiences because, well, **we aren't all the same.**

Whether relating to socio-economic status, socialized race and skin colour, sexual orientation, age, body shape and size, or formal credentials, to name a few, no two women are completely alike, and as such, any potential solutions must account for and reflect these differences. This understanding reflects

the concept of intersectionality, an approach that acknowledges the many aspects of a person's identity and the ways that they can come together and create a complexity of experiences and needs[1].

To move the dial, well-intended companies need more than passion and commitment; **they need a plan**. So, together, Feminuity and #movethedial decided to find out what companies across Canada are doing to retain women working in tech and develop an open-source resource with insights and tactics to help companies of all shapes and sizes to take action so we can all accelerate inclusion in the tech sector.

We reached out to industry leaders through partner networks and social media platforms including LinkedIn,

1. In this resource, we separate out the "T" from the acronym "LGBTQ." We do this because being transgender is associated with gender identity, i.e. how people identify as man, woman, or non-binary, as examples, whereas lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer relates to people's sexual orientation, i.e. who people are attracted to and love in the world. We make these distinctions because intersectionality matters.

Twitter, and Facebook to find companies actively taking steps to retain women working in tech in Canada. Through interviews and surveys conducted over the course of four months, we heard from 70 leaders in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Waterloo, Montreal, and San Francisco (with a Canadian office) who shared their experiences retaining women working in tech.

The Playbook is intended as a resource, and more importantly, a call-to-action for companies to take stock of what they are doing well to support the retention of women and to acknowledge the gaps in their current practice. Our hope is that companies will make a commitment to do more, and that they will share, amplify, and normalize practices that support women within the tech sector.

THE NUMBERS

The Canadian tech industry accounts for 5% of the labour force or just under one million people[2]. Women comprise 25% of the Canadian tech sector, and while the tech sector is growing, participation by women has remained stagnant for the last 10 years[3]. Even in 2019, 50% of women still believe that companies in the tech sector do not want to hire them[4]. While much of this research focuses on women, or is gender-centric, these experiences are often particularly acute for women with multiple and intersecting identities, such as women who are also

Indigenous, racialized, or transgender, as examples[5].

The cost of marginalization is quantified through the employee turnover rate. In the U.S., this costs $16 billion every year[6]. People leave tech companies at higher rates in Canada (16.9%)[7] than in the U.S. (13.2%)[8]. Discrimination and unfairness are the most common reasons for people leaving, and may include unfair people management practices and observing or experiencing harassment[9]. These forms of unfairness and discrimination are more likely to be experienced by people who are marginalized and lack instituational power.

The challenge for many companies is to design comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies that are in line with their growth stage and available resources. Canada's small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) employ 99.8% of Canadians and they (SMEs) are not equipped with the strategies and tools to ensure compliance with existing human rights, transparency, and pay equity legislation[10].

On the positive side, companies that are intentional about DEI strategies have a significant competitive advantage over companies who demonstrate the lowest levels of investment[11]. Greater investment in gender-specific efforts positively impacts investors' impressions of a company's ability to "think outside the box," act in an ethical manner, resolve

5%
of the labour force is accounted for by the Canadian tech industry

25%
of the Canadian tech sector is comprised of women

50%
of women still believe that companies in the tech sector do not want to hire them

DISCRIMINATION AND UNFAIRNESS

are the most common reasons for people leaving tech companies

conflict, and avoid negative political attention. As a bonus, stock prices even increase[12].

We know the *costs* of excluding women from tech and we also know the *benefits* of inclusion, but what is less clear is ***how***. How can companies start to design or continue to build on what they have? The idea for this project is born from the desire to better understand what Canadian tech companies are currently doing to retain women and, with a little help, to imagine what's possible.

WHAT WE FOUND

Companies of all sizes bring unique perspectives to the challenge of retaining women in Canada's tech sector. **Startups** that want to attract and retain people are competing against well-resourced scaleups and big tech companies. We found that startups create value for employees by offering flexibility and autonomy. When startups get everyone involved in retention, design diverse teams

and products, and focus on resourcefulness, they are establishing the foundation for inclusive growth.

Scaleups are setting the stage for Canadian tech in the next 20 years by closing the gap between startups and large enterprises in the innovation ecosystem. Scaleups know how important it is to attract and retain women who want to grow their careers alongside the growth of the company. With this in mind, we found that scaleups are focusing their efforts on employee engagement, designing structure around great practices, and learning how an intersectional approach can further support people in the workplace.

Canada's **large enterprises** also happen to be some of Canada's largest tech employers. As influencers, they are setting trends in the tech sector and taking a long-term view on women's career paths. Large enterprises demonstrate how their resources can be invested to prepare women working in tech for the future of work and how their

influence can reimagine existing approaches to mental wellbeing and caregiving to support everyone to better integrate work and life. We found that successfully integrating DEI across large companies is complex and that the role of a Chief Diversity Officer may be one answer.

We recognize that the resources and constraints facing companies of different sizes will influence how they think about and inevitably take action on people-related strategies. We have divided our findings according to size: startups, scaleups, and large enterprises. With that said, the findings are important to companies of all sizes and growth stages.

It is our hope that these lessons will flow in multiple directions so that companies of all shapes and sizes can borrow from each other's experiences.

STARTUPS: INCLUSIVE FROM THE START

We heard from startups with between one and 30 employees, as well as those with between 31 and 120 employees across a range of sectors: HR Tech, MedTech, Construction Tech, FinTech, MarTech, VR / Immersive Technology, CleanTech, FoodTech, AI & Robotics, Digital Identity Software, Digital Marketing, and EdTech. The companies are located in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Québec. Following is what we learned from their experiences about retaining women who work in tech.

RETENTION IS AN "EVERYBODY" THING

WHAT WE FOUND

Leaders in the startup space are optimistic that the small and relational nature of startups can be an asset in developing an inclusive workplace. The startups we spoke with do not have retention strategies for specific groups, such as women technologists, or women in leadership, as examples; instead, most are focused on creating a great place to work for everyone. There is a recognition that retention is about a broader cultural shift that makes creating a positive work environment the responsibility of everyone, rather than just a select few in human resources.

The startups we spoke with are taking steps to build inclusive cultures beginning with their recruitment process. In a small team, one 'bad apple' can spoil the bunch, so to speak, so there is a critical need to support inclusion from the start.

"When people say 'we need more women,' a lot of those people are thinking that it is HR's problem, that HR can fix that. HR is not the only group who affects the culture, environment, happiness, engagement, retention, and wellbeing."

ROBB GILBERT,
DIRECTOR, PEOPLE & CULTURE,
BLUEDOT INC.

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

At **Neovation Learning Solutions**, an education technology company in Winnipeg, Manitoba, any employee may find themselves contributing to the hiring process.

When a prospective candidate is waiting in the reception area, they may find themselves having casual interactions with the *Neovites*, which puts the candidate in an unexpected situation. Most people go into an interview ready to sell themselves to leadership, but if they have arrived early, or if the meeting time is a few minutes delayed, how do they cope with waiting? How do they treat someone who may be perceived as holding an administrative role? Do they look around, curious to learn more, or are they busy on their phone and startled when spoken to? Do they respond to the passing greetings made by staff? How might they deal with an unexpected conversation from someone whose rank within the company they do not know? If anyone on the Neovation team has an interaction with the candidate that is negative, or exceptionally positive, that team member is encouraged to provide that feedback to the hiring team.

This "open feedback" policy has helped the company filter out candidates that might appear impressive to senior leaders, but who have been rude or unkind to people they perceive as having less power. Politeness and positive interactions are two of the many small criteria that have resulted in high retention rates at Neovation.

IMAGINE IF YOU COULD IMPROVE RETENTION BY DEMOCRATIZING THE HIRING PROCESS?

DEVELOP A CODE OF CONDUCT

- Define how you want people to show up and treat each other every day and capture this in a Code of Conduct.
- Facilitate a session with your team to define what an inclusive and respectful environment looks, feels, and sounds like in your company and identify the human qualities and characteristics that support this definition.

IDENTIFY DESIRED QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

- Determine candidate behaviours and interactions that reflect the qualities and characteristics of an inclusive organization (e.g. self-awareness and kindness).
- Solicit input from everyone in the company, at all levels and from all departments, to determine the 'signs' that will indicate whether someone has these qualities and characteristics during the hiring process.

CREATE A BALANCE OF POWER IN THE PROCESS

- Update the hiring process so people with different levels of power (not just senior leadership) are engaging with prospective candidates and sharing their experience.
  - For example, arrange for an impromptu 'meet and greet' between a junior marketing associate and a senior engineering candidate before the formal interview begins.
  - Or arrange an impromptu 'wrap up' chat between a junior developer and a candidate interviewing for the CFO role.

CAPTURE THE MICRO-MOMENTS

- Develop a feedback system, ideally within your Applicant Tracking System, for your team to input their 'micro-moments' with candidates and their assessment of the candidate's display of the core qualities and characteristics outlined in your Code of Conduct.
- Ensure this feedback is weighted in the decision-making process.

DESIGNING DIVERSE TEAMS FOR INCLUSIVE PRODUCTS

WHAT WE FOUND

Startups expressed the desire to be intentional about building diverse teams because they understand that diverse teams are best positioned to build products and services that meet the needs of a diverse and often times global customer base.

Demographic data can provide helpful information for leaders who strive to build diverse teams. However, at this growth stage, many struggle to collect meaningful demographic data. Often times, the small and relational aspect of startups make it difficult for people to feel safe to share personal information. Without demographic data, it can be challenging to build diverse teams, especially as founders are often under pressure from investors to grow quickly, whether to outpace potential competitors or to keep up with the demand for their product or service. These pressures, combined with a lack of data, can result in well-intentioned and thoughtful leaders building teams that lack diversity.

The most effective teams reflect a diversity of people, perspectives, and experiences and without this, startups can miss the mark when it comes to the design of their products and services. While meaningful data can be difficult to collect and time and resources are often limited, startups can still take steps to proactively diversify their teams.

"With over a million members, we have a broad cross section of the Canadian population using our products. This includes people with a wide variety of economic and educational backgrounds, with some of our users in a phase of life where they are rebuilding their credit after a variety of challenges. As we work to build a diverse company, I worry a lot about how we incorporate socio-economic diversity into our workforce and our product design work, particularly given today's environment in which many tech workers command high salaries. The answer so far? We consciously recruit from a variety of backgrounds and also regularly invite in customers for feedback sessions so we can hear first-hand from the full diversity of our user base."

ANDREW GRAHAM,
CEO & CO-FOUNDER, BORROWELL

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

Bridgit, a construction focused project management startup founded by two women, works to expand its pipeline to create a better chance at building a diverse team.

Recognizing that women are less likely to apply for jobs that they do not meet all of the requirements for, Bridgit made a conscious decision to remove the requirement of education/specific past experience from job descriptions in order to increase the diversity of applicants to the company. Instead, they ask questions related to enthusiasm, talents/skills, and work ethic. Although higher education is appreciated and respected within the company, Bridgit's experience demonstrated that many of the team's outstanding members are not formally educated for roles that they excel in. They have found people who are resilient, resourceful, and self-motivated, all bringing unique perspectives and insights to the business.

IMAGINE IF YOUR CUSTOMER WAS FULLY REFLECTED IN YOUR TEAM, EVEN AS A STARTUP?

COLLECT VOLUNTARY DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

• Consider requesting voluntary demographic data from prospective and current employees.

• To do this, draw on voluntary data collection practices used by universities and government.

  · **Learn about why this data capture is so important from OCADU**

  · **Put it into practice using a structure similar to Queen's University**

DIVERSIFY YOUR PIPELINE

• If collecting voluntary demographic data isn't right for your company, work to diversify your pipeline to ensure you have a range of applicants to select from every time.

• Stop recruiting from the same schools or programs as competitors or other companies in the tech ecosystem.

  · You're not them and they're not you, so why have the same recruitment strategy?

  · For example, when hiring engineers, many companies in the Greater Toronto Area look to the University of Waterloo or the University of Toronto. While these institutions are undoubtedly great, they are also costly to attend and many great engineers come from other affordable institutions and programs.

  · Consider new sources of talent including people in transition from other industries: **Lost and Found: Pathways From Disruption to Employment**

• Think about your customers and your product and from there, develop a recruitment strategy that's not only authentic to your company but also challenges the status quo.

IMAGINE IF YOUR CUSTOMER WAS FULLY REFLECTED IN YOUR TEAM, EVEN AS A STARTUP?

CONTINUED

BUILD MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS

- It's not enough to just open up new pipeline sources; companies need to be intentional about new partnerships.

- This starts by working in a collaborative manner with community groups/partners.

  - For example, if you want to build a meaningful partnership with Indigenous communities, the **Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business** (CCAB) has a **Progressive Aboriginal Relations Program** (PAR) that supports companies to design an Indigenous strategy that is led and informed by Indigenous people.

  - In addition, build relationships with leaders such as the **Indigenous Professional Association of Canada** (IPAC) or the **Centre for Indigenous Innovation and Technology** (CIIT).

ELIMINATE EXCLUSIVE OR EXCLUSIONARY HIRING CRITERIA

- Consider your company vision and values, as well as your customers, and determine the criteria that is essential to people's success and then get rid of the rest.

- Focus on minimum qualifications; the ones that can be ascertained from the resume screening process (not preferred qualifications).

- Read through the **language** in your job descriptions and use tools to help you to cut out language that is biased or may be discouraging for underrepresented or marginalized applicants.

  - Try an AI decoder like **Textio** or the **Gender Decoder for Job Ad** to identify gender-biased language.

RESOURCEFULNESS CREATES VALUE

WHAT WE FOUND

Startups are rarely in the position to match compensation packages offered by larger tech companies. In such a highly competitive space, developing and owning a unique value proposition is a critical component for startups to attract and retain people. Some common tactics for startups include offering employees equity in the company or unique benefits that are aligned with the company values (e.g. education reimbursement, opportunities to volunteer, or health and wellness benefits). If startups are not yet able to offer benefits such as medical and dental coverage or parental leave top-ups, it is important to communicate this to prospective candidates and current employees so they can make informed decisions about their career and life plans.

Another common tactic that can create additional value for employees at the startup stage is accelerated career growth. Ensuring women are not excluded from the opportunity to grow quickly and advance into leadership positions can be a unique differentiator for many startups. In fast-moving environments where priorities are always changing, there are many opportunities for women to step into new roles and launch their careers to new heights.

"We have designed unique benefits such as health spending accounts and support for mental health to make sure people feel that work is a place they *want* to be, not a place you *have* to be."

REBECCA TROELSTRA,
COO & CO-FOUNDER, AVENUEHQ

"One of the ways that startups can improve retention is by making sure that career paths are clear and that the opportunity for promotion begins at on-boarding. The timelines for promotion in startups can be much shorter than in larger companies and ensuring that people are well-integrated into the company from the start can significantly impact overall employee experience. It is incredibly important for us that we are very clear with people about their responsibilities, what milestones they have to achieve to progress in their career, and then clearly show them support systems and tools to navigate that path."

KEVIN KLIMAN,
CEO & CO-FOUNDER, HUMI

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

Supporting people in health and wellness is a priority at **AvenueHQ**, a Vancouver-based digital marketing company that supports real estate agents.

The company offers unlimited vacation days and wellness days (rather than sick days), as well as an individual health spending account so that people can make choices about how best to support their own mental and physical health. The company also keeps track of benefits that are not being used. For example, if people are not taking vacation time, this leads to a wider discussion about workload and making sure that everyone has the opportunity to create a work and life balance that supports wellness.

Plum in Waterloo, Ontario is a software startup combining Industrial/Organizational Psychology with Artificial Intelligence to help enterprises match people to jobs where they thrive throughout the employee lifecycle.

As a startup with 22 employees, Plum uses their own technology to match candidates with non-traditional backgrounds to roles where their innate talents such as innovation, communication, and execution make them a strong match. In their experience, this increases the value proposition for people taking the risk of working in a startup by matching them with roles where they have the best chance of success. The platform is especially useful for marginalized people who may not pursue roles where they do not meet all qualifications, but have many other transferable talents that would allow them to thrive in that role. As a result, half of Plum's team are women and 95% of them never worked in a tech company before joining Plum.

IMAGINE IF 'RESOURCEFULNESS' WAS MORE IMPORTANT TO RETAINING WOMEN THAN 'RESOURCES'?

ASK PEOPLE WHAT WOULD HELP THEM SUCCEED

There are many ways to support employees with the resources you have and some flexibility. As examples:

- Adjusted work hours for caregiving reasons

- Scheduling flexibility for medical appointments

- Scheduling flexibility for daily movement

- Access to specific equipment (e.g. noise canceling headphones, standup desks, ergonomic chairs, etc.)

- Access to a private workspace instead of an open concept space.

DISCUSS CAREER GROWTH EARLY ON AND REGULARLY

- Be transparent with new employees about growth opportunities and constraints.

- Try not to make assumptions about people's career ambitions or priorities because assumptions based on stereotypes can contribute to experiences of unfairness in the workplace.

  - For example, don't assume that a woman in her 50's is not interested in further technical training.

  - Some people may prioritize learning a new technical skill over an accelerated promotion or pay increase, while for others, a pay increase may be critical.

- Give employees the opportunity to ask questions about career growth and new opportunities on a regular basis.

IMAGINE IF 'RESOURCEFULNESS' WAS MORE IMPORTANT TO RETAINING WOMEN THAN 'RESOURCES'?

CONTINUED

PROVIDE MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- Connect employees with mentors either inside or outside of the company that are knowledgeable about the areas where they have expressed a desire to grow.

- If there is not a good fit for a mentor-mentee relationship within the company, consider providing access to online apps like **Locelle** that facilitate mentorship opportunities for women in the tech sector locally or **The Collective**, a virtual community hosted by **Women in Tech World**.

CAPTURE AND COMMUNICATE THE 'EXCEPTIONS'

- If you do offer case-by-case support for individual needs such as parental leave top-ups, flexible or remote work arrangements, or mental health support, be sure to track them and when you can afford to, extend these benefits to everyone.

- Be as transparent as possible about the exceptions because people appreciate knowing the limits of what is possible so they can plan accordingly.

SCALEUPS: SCALING WITH INTENTION

The scaleups we heard from are based in British Columbia and Ontario and have between 121 and 500 employees. The sectors covered the following: Customer Experience Tech, Content Management Tech, Entertainment Tech, FinTech, Retail Management Tech, CleanTech, HR Tech, Legal Tech, and Software Development (agencies). This is what we learned from their experiences about retaining women who work in tech.

IT'S ALL ABOUT ENGAGEMENT

WHAT WE FOUND

At this stage of growth, retention is understood through the lens of employee engagement and as a complement to the recruitment function. Why invest in recruiting someone if you're not able to keep them? It becomes increasingly important for companies to not only look at retention trends, but to also understand the experiences and sentiments of current and past employees. If women leave a company because of limited opportunties, or due to experiences of bias, unfairness, or discrimination, the company may be impacted both in terms of their external brand and their ability to recruit in the future.

Technically experienced women are in demand and are often approached by other companies, creating a need for scaleups to track and maintain engagement and commitment. One of the ways that companies keep track of engagement is through regular surveys conducted as frequently as every quarter. In addition to surveys, regular check-ins between managers and employees or an active and open HR team also support women's engagement. It is important to listen to concerns while employees are still engaged, rather than waiting for exit interviews.

Aside from the importance of tracking and listening, many of the companies we spoke with discussed autonomy and flexibility as productive approaches to drive engagement.

"Retention is something we track because it's important to know, but the thing that we can move the dial on, the thing that we can actually influence inside the organization is engagement."

SEEMA LAKHANI,
CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER, WATTPAD

"What I am more interested in is the lasting sentiment that comes from the experience that people have here, and less so about retention numbers."

MARIA CARTAGENA,
SVP, PEOPLE OPERATIONS,
KIRA SYSTEMS

"Retention is a result of engagement. My team thinks about engagement and therefore retention day in and day out. The team thinks about how we are providing growth and development opportunities and how we are creating a safe and inclusive environment where people will want to come to work."

STEPHANIE KESSLER,
DIRECTOR, HUMAN RESOURCES, ECOBEE

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

iQmetrix, a retail solutions software company in Vancouver, engages employees through a self-managed organizational structure that gives everyone flexibility, ownership, and autonomy in their roles.

By breaking the "hierarchical boxed job" description, their team members do not have job titles and instead their roles are made up of different accountabilities. This allows them to take on accountabilities that interests them and let go of accountabilities that no longer meet their personal and professional development goals. This means that everyone is an expert in their own right and people work collaboratively to meet deadlines, leading to a high level of engagement. In the rare case that people do leave the company to pursue higher education or other opportunities, a significant amount return to iQmetrix, in what is known as the "Boomerang Club."

League Inc., an enterprise health OS based in Toronto, offers unlimited vacation to employees so they can better manage their lives and find harmony between their home and work life.

Employees are free to take as much time off as they need as long as they are able to perform the duties and responsibilities of their job. League finds that this flexible model encourages employees to focus on the work they produce instead of simply the number of hours that they are working. For League, this approach demonstrates trust and respect, which has the ability to drive engagement and strengthen people's commitment to the company.

IMAGINE IF MANAGING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT WAS FLUID AND CUSTOMIZED?

DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

Ask people what they need to work at their best:

• Do they prefer full autonomy in their role, clear direction and instructions, or a mix of both structures?

• Do they prefer short, regular training opportunities or more intensive sessions?

• How regularly do they expect performance feedback - weekly, monthly, quarterly or project based?

• Do they need regular interaction with colleagues to feel a sense of engagement or minimal interaction?

• Let people know that their preferences matter and co-create opportunities to meet individual needs.

DEVELOP SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

• Create a system that allows people to voluntarily and regularly update preferences, not just on a survey-by-survey basis.

• To help employees define their needs, create an input form in your human resources management system with a list of possible preferences, support structures, and additional open-ended space.

• Develop an engagement process with managers to ensure they are equipped with the information and tools needed to support employees.

• When companies scale, managers often forget how much uncertainty people have to manage in their personal lives, so **creating a sense of stability can be critical** to engagement.

MAKE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY THE GOAL

• According to Amy Edmondson's research explained in this **HBR IdeaCast**, when people feel psychologically safe they are better able to be honest with their teams and managers, even in difficult situations.

• The ability to have candid relationships is a critical aspect of many high performing and engaged teams and **Google's Project Aristotle** explains how they build these relationships.

RETENTION NEEDS STRUCTURE

WHAT WE FOUND

Scaleups have more flexibility than startups to offer competitive pay and opportunities for growth, yet they are still competing with large enterprises for talented people. Through the process of developing pay bands, companies are taking measures to define the promotion process to remove ambiguity from career progression.

In addition to developing pay bands, companies conduct regular reviews of compensation to ensure there is equity across existing employees, such as those who have been with the company since startup mode, and new hires. Some companies we spoke with are also starting to analyze pay equity across a wide set of demographics.

There is some reluctance from startups and scaleups to develop formal policies for fear of feeling "too corporate." However, the scaleups we spoke with have found that developing formal pay and promotion practices are an example of policy that contribute to the core of their growth and stability. Some structure is necessary to ensure that employees have a consistent experience across the organization as the size and complexity of the business changes.

"The mindset that we have had so far is about being democratic and looking for equity and fairness in all of our policies."

ALEXIS MACDONALD, SENIOR DIRECTOR, PEOPLE OPERATIONS, LOOPIO

"I hope that Change Together, our Diversity Guidebook for startups and scaleups, is having an impact on small companies so that we can all create diverse and inclusive environments from the get-go. I think if there is any impact that we have had on our competitors, it is raising the conversation and making sure people are more aware of this earlier in their company lifecycle."

AMBER AUTHIER, PEOPLE OPERATIONS MANAGER, TWG

"We wanted to be completely transparent. All of our jobs have gone through a job evaluation process and put into job bands and salary ranges all the way up to the CEO. This is shared with the entire organization. We want people to know their earning potential."

MEGHAN SCOTT, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER, WATTPAD

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

Loopio, an RFP Response Software company in Toronto, has a structure in place that ensures managers and employees have quarterly performance alignment reviews.

These conversations create space to discuss the employee's career and future goals. The employee is expected to write down their near-term and longer term mastery goals every quarterin order to prompt an active conversation about what the company can do to support their people while unleashing learning and growth opportunities. This structured approach supports an important collective outlook towards women's career development and retention.

ecobee, a Canadian home automation company, invests in market data to understand and build fair compensation packages across the organization.

This practice aims to correct inequities from other employers and prevent employees, especially women, from underselling themselves. In addition, ecobee has also developed a company-wide skills matrix program that aims to create full transparency of the skills needed for all roles to further reduce biases in promotion processes. This structure drives retention as all employees are aware of what it takes to shift into a new role and understand the skills and competencies for growth inside the company.

IMAGINE IF YOU COULD SCALE EQUITY THROUGH POLICY?

DESIGN EQUITABLE POLICY

• Policies have historically been written to benefit people in power.

• The absence of a formally written policy doesn't mean that a company doesn't have a policy per se; it can simply mean that people work under a set of unwritten assumptions, which often fail to account for privilege.

• To scale equity, policy must unpack assumptions and make clear the 'rules of the game' so that all people understand what is required to be successful.

TAKE A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH

• Data-driven policies can be critical to the success of employees, particularly those who are underrepresented or marginalized in the workplace, so take some time to learn more about **what diversity and inclusion policies employees want and need**.

• Seek the support of human resources and/or legal experts when drafting harassment or any other policies that may require legal advice.

PILOT, TEST, EVALUATE, AND REVISE

• Policies are living documents that should be piloted, tested, evaluated, and revised based on your experience; start the conversation with these **policy writing guidelines**.

• Think about your company culture and brainstorm a few structures that can support and amplify the most highly valued aspects.

• As **Salesforce** has demonstrated, making the decision to close the gender pay gap is a matter of policy, but closing the gap requires data analysis and pay adjustments.

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

• Explain the rationale behind policy decisions so that people understand how and why a policy (e.g., pay bands, anti-harassment, remote work, vacation entitlement and more) is necessary.

• Communicate the policy in creative and interesting ways:

  • A podcast explaining how and why the policy is developed

  • Art installations that visualize company values and aspirations

  • Role-playing and improv workshops to bring situations to life

• Make policy documents available during on-boarding and easy to find and review later.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN ACTION

WHAT WE FOUND

One of the most significant reasons tech companies struggle to retain women is because they tend to treat women as a single group. While *women* share some commonalities, *women*, just like everyone else, are unique. Women who are newcomers or refugees are likely to have distinct needs compared to women who were born in Canada and hold Canadian citizenship. A new mother is likely to have different needs than a woman who has recently had a miscarriage. Women living with physical disabilities are likely to have distinct needs from women who are also neurodiverse. Women who are also trans-identified are likely to have different needs than women who are cisgender or LGBQ+. One size does *not* fit all when it comes to women. It is only when we understand women's unique needs that we can understand how best to retain them.

A key component of inclusion has to do with data, specifically intersectional data. Making sure women are counted beyond their experience as women and taking into account the intersecting aspects of their identities is critical to design effective solutions to retain women. The companies we spoke with are starting to consider the multiple factors beyond gender that shape women's experience in the workplace. At this stage, scaleups are large enough to capture a broader array of demographic information through surveys without compromising employee anonymity. With the right data in hand, companies can launch meaningful initiatives that address a much wider range of needs.

"We try to pick up on things that create barriers to inclusion, including people not having the opportunity to get to know each other within the organization as well as transparency in how decisions are made or how people grow in their role. If we try and pick up on those signals, we can develop strategies that impact women whose identities span across multiple demographics."

GILLIAN JOSE-RIZ, FORMER PEOPLE OPERATIONS, ADA SUPPORT

"Companies simply don't know how to work with the Indigenous community and so we hear skewed numbers, like there are no Inuit women in Canadian tech, but this is not true. There has been a narrative written about Indigenous people in tech and innovation that is 1) not written by Indigenous people, and 2) simply not accurate."

JARRET LEAMAN, FOUNDER, THE CENTRE FOR INDIGENOUS INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

"I love to show people Chimamanda Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story" to help them understand the tendency we have to view people, and certainly women, through a narrow lens. Such a narrow lens doesn't allow us to consider all aspects of a person's identity, it's limiting."

MARINA HARRIS, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, WEALTHSIMPLE

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

Wattpad, a Toronto-based global multi-platform entertainment company for original stories, found that intersectional data has helped them address a unique set of needs.

They conduct regular surveys to understand employee satisfaction and engagement, as well as employees' sense of identity, belonging, and feelings of authenticity at work. They look at the data across a number of groups, such as women of colour, men of colour, parents in the workplace, and LGBTQ+ folks, as examples. In addition to their survey data, they also have voluntary demographic inputs within their Human Resources Management System for employees to self-identify and they've made sure this data is not visible to managers. A product of this approach to data collection and analysis was the launch of their affinity groups that create the space for employees to connect with like-minded people. For example, groups have been formed for women of colour, parents in the workplace, LGBTQ+, and people interested in neurodiversity and mental health. The groups use working hours to conduct meetings and have the financial support to host events that discuss issues that are meaningful to them.

For **Rangle.io**, a web and mobile application development company in Toronto, supporting inclusion is about making sure that marginalized people have the opportunity to pursue careers in technology.

They are a lead partner in the Bridge program, a free 11-week software development and web design program that offers training and development for women, agender, and non-binary people that have already made an investment of their own time to learn tech skills but are having difficulty matching skill sets to market demands. The Bridge program is that final step that brings together technical skills in high demand with professional training and access to tech employers. Intersectional feminism is one of the program's core values.

IMAGINE IF COMPANIES EXCEED THE EXPECTATIONS OF *ALL* WOMEN THROUGH INTERSECTIONAL SOLUTIONS?

LEARN ABOUT INTERSECTIONALITY

- Intersectionality can be a challenging concept for some people to grasp, so if it's a new concept to you, take some time to really understand it.

- Here are some resources to get you started:

  - Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with coining the term "intersectionality" 30 years ago. Check out **Kimberlé Crenshaw's TED Talk** or a fun analogy by **Akilah Obviously** that explains intersectionality through pizza.

  - For a more in-depth study read **Mapping the Margin's Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color**, Crenshaw's pathbreaking paper.

COLLECT QUANTITATIVE DATA USING AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

- Explain the purpose of collecting employee demographic data and communicate how the company will protect people's privacy throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and sharing results.

- Select a surveying tool that meets all accessibility requirements.

- Determine the demographic information you need and learn how to write questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, race, culture, religion, ability, etc. in an inclusive, and culturally and contextually appropriate manner.

- Offer multi-select checkboxes (not single-select radio buttons) unless the options are mutually exclusive (i.e. age ranges).

- Include open-ended spaces for people to self-describe in the demographics and provide people with the ability to skip any of the questions with a 'prefer not to answer' option.

IMAGINE IF COMPANIES EXCEED THE EXPECTATIONS OF *ALL* WOMEN THROUGH INTERSECTIONAL SOLUTIONS?

CONTINUED

COLLECT QUALITATIVE DATA USING AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

• Aside from the quantitative data (demographics and 'sentiment' statements), include some open-ended questions to capture people's lived experiences and other thoughts to humanize the data.

• If possible, add colour and texture to the data by having one-on-one conversations with people, hosting focus groups, or asking people candidly where they would like to see improvements.

CONDUCT INTERSECTIONAL DATA ANALYSIS

• Look for trends across functional teams, offices, and demographic groups.

• While company-wide numbers will be helpful, the most valuable insights often come from looking at the data through an intersectional lens.

  • For example, it is important to consider how *women* as a group feel, and how women who are also racialized, new parents, newcomers, or members of the LGBQ+ community feel, as examples.

IDENTIFY AND LAUNCH KEY PRACTICES

• As an example, a flexible holiday time-off policy ensures that people have the option to take time off for the observances and celebrations that are relevant to them.

• While it is often the norm for North American companies to give people time off for Christmas, many people do not celebrate Christmas and they may prefer to take time off for other religious or cultural dates such as Hanukkah, Ramadan, or Chinese New Year.

LARGE ENTERPRISES: INVESTMENT MEETS INFLUENCE

The large enterprises that we heard from include companies with between 501 and 85,000+ employees with headquarters in Ontario, Alberta, Québec, and San Francisco with Canadian and global offices. These companies are leaders across the following sectors: Banking, Professional Services, Legal Services, Human Capital Management Tech, Ridesharing Tech, Engineering, and Entertainment Tech. This is what we learned from their experiences about retaining women who work in tech.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF WOMEN AND WORK

WHAT WE FOUND

Many of Canada's largest enterprises are also Canada's largest employers of technically trained people. Large enterprises have an advantage over startups and scaleups because they can draw on vast resources to attract and retain people with technical expertise. The companies we spoke with view retention as a long-term strategy as it is not uncommon for people to have careers that last 25 years or longer within their organizations. So what does that mean for women? It means that large enterprises must think about how to support women's careers through a range of different phases.

Companies of this size have the *advantage of being able* to collect rich demographic data and use an intersectional analysis approach to identify nuanced challenges and opportunities. The *challenge is being able to use* these deeply intersectional datasets to facilitate meaningful investment in the career trajectories of women across a wide range of backgrounds, identities, and experiences.

Many of the companies we spoke with have focused approaches for retaining women across various functions, such as women engineers and women in customer support. Some companies have specialist teams that are responsible for implementing retention strategies that involve building women's capacity for skills in high demand, as well as planning for emerging skills that will be needed in the future.

"We invest in identifying and assessing capabilities - both business/ leadership and technical capabilities in our talent, particularly focused on emerging skills, and then we invest in building those skills in our talent and providing opportunities for growth."

DANIELA DE COTIS, VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCES TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS, TD BANK GROUP (TD)

"When you have high performers and top talent, they want to know what is next, how we are going to continue to invest in them, and what opportunities we are going to present to them to continue their growth."

LISA BULL, VICE PRESIDENT, LEARNING EXCELLENCE, CERIDIAN

"For our companies to compete globally we need to have the biggest and best pool of talent to draw from. And, that is 100% of the talent."

COLLEEN MOOREHEAD, CHIEF CLIENT OFFICER, OSLER, HOSKIN & HARCOURT LLP

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Canada discussed their use of promotion and turnover data and how it inspired a significant investment in women's development and retention.

PwC recognized that many women were not advancing from middle management to senior leadership levels, and in many cases, were leaving the company because of the lack of career growth. In response, PwC developed their Women in Leadership Program (WiL), which launched in 2013. The WiL program is an intensive, six-month program that provides personal and professional development. In addition to education and training, sponsorship is also a significant component of the program. The program encourages men to be coaches and mentors. Each program cohort is sponsored by a male and female senior partner. Ninety percent of WiL alumni have remained with PwC to build their careers. PwC has also seen improvements in the retention of women in middle management and in the representation of women in senior leadership and partner-level positions.

IMAGINE IF YOU COULD BE A LEADER IN HELPING WOMEN TECHNOLOGISTS AND NON-TECHNICAL WOMEN PREPARE FOR THE JOBS OF THE FUTURE?

LOOK INTERNALLY

• Start by reviewing your organization's gender gap within the tech function and identify the technical skills that women are missing or lagging behind on.

• Plan for the future by collaborating with your tech leaders to predict the in-demand tech skills of the future that are most likely to be relevant to your organization.

• In addition to the women working in a technical role, identify other functions and groups that would be well-suited to learn new technical skills.

  · Non-technical employees may benefit the most from learning new technical skills.

  · Check out **The Future of Women at Work: Transitions in the Age of Automation.**

INVEST IN UPSKILLING

• Develop a training curriculum or collaborate with an external training partner to develop and deliver a customized upskilling program to women.

• Support external upskilling programs, such as **Palette Skills**, that provide access to technical training for people who are at the midway point in their careers and adapting to automation; or the **Bridge School** which supports women looking to access careers in tech.

• **The Ready Commitment**, TD's corporate citizenship platform, helps prepare people for the jobs of tomorrow by investing in training, entrepreneurship, and small business.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF DEI LEADERSHIP

WHAT WE FOUND

Large enterprises have created structures to manage DEI but in doing so, have also created siloes. What we heard from leaders is that structure, be it policy or programs, that support women working in tech is vital in sending a message that companies are investing in and initiating change. Creating a culture that goes beyond compliance is where newer companies are putting their efforts.

In Canada, the structures that support DEI tend to fall under the purview of HR or people leaders, which can be quite challenging in terms of available capacity and the expertise required. Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) or related titles understand how to get different aspects of their organization to work together in ways they have not done before to scale DEI efforts across their company. Drawing from the experiences of CDOs in the United States, where these roles are very common in tech, may help Canadian leaders understand the responsibilities of and need for this role.

"Imagine a job whose requirements not only rely on improving products and increasing financial success, but also span across hiring and influencing corporate culture. That's what a Chief Diversity Officer does. The role of a CDO is cross-functional; it is both complex and challenging. The role offers immense opportunity to create change — from who we hire to the technology we create."

DANNY GUILLORY, HEAD OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION, DROPBOX

"I create an easier path forward to have the conversations required to find the solutions, but the solutions-finding is everybody's responsibility."

BO YOUNG LEE, CHIEF DIVERSITY & INCLUSION OFFICER, UBER

"Our CEO says, "if you create a culture of compliance, the best you can hope for is compliance." We want to create a culture that is beyond that."

PAULA BLACKMORE-WHITE, MANAGER, PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT, BENEVITY INC.

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

Uber, a transportation technology company with headquarters in San Francisco and operations in Canada and 63 countries around the world, highlights the importance of the CDO in being able to effectively embed DEI across all areas of its large multinational organization.

DEI challenges surface in product development, marketing, supply chain management, and governance, as examples, in addition, to human resources and people leadership. This commitment to embedding DEI across all areas of the business is complex and requires consistent senior and expert-level leadership. The role of the CDO is to represent the authentic voices of employees to leadership and create the space to work through complex DEI challenges that are continuously evolving. CDOs are often the bridge between executive leadership and departments across the company to champion DEI even where priorities conflict.

IMAGINE IF ALL LARGE CANADIAN TECH COMPANIES HAVE CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICERS?

LEARN WHAT A CDO CAN DO

- Understand the role of a Chief Diversity Officer and how it differs from other forms of leadership.
    - **Chief Diversity Officer: One of the Hardest Jobs in Technology**
- Experienced CDOs understand how to navigate complexity and find opportunities to challenge the way that things have always been done by guiding people and systems using DEI principles.
    - **Why Your Company Needs a Chief Diversity Officer**

THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES, PEOPLE LEADERS, TALENT ACQUISITION, AND EXECUTIVES

- HR and people leaders play a critical role in DEI work and must work closely with CDOs, but the roles are not interchangeable as each requires distinct training and expertise.

- Recruitment and talent acquisition leaders are also a critica component of a DEI strategy, but this work must consider all areas of a business (product, marketing, finance, supply chain, etc.).

- Members of the C-Suite or executives who care about DEI run the risk of only bringing certain dimensions of this to the table.

IMAGINE IF ALL LARGE CANADIAN TECH COMPANIES HAVE CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICERS?

CONTINUED

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS AND CHAMPIONS

- Companies cannot expect DEI work to be done effectively off the side of someone's desk, so to speak.

- Too often those who care deeply about DEI focus on one or two dimensions of the work that is relevant to them (i.e. a woman who cares about empowering women but lacks intersectionality in her approach), and this runs the risk of creating exclusion.

- Create space for people within the company to volunteer, champion, or engage in areas that interest them; but do not let this be a substitute for a comprehensive and intersectional approach to DEI work.

MAKE A CASE FOR THE CDO ROLE

- Gather and assess your company's DEI-related initiatives to date to understand where you are and what you need to move forward.

  - **The Business Case for Diversity & Inclusion: Is Your Case Half-Empty or Half-Full?**

- Design the role so your CDO reports directly to the CEO or COO, works cross-functionally, and has time to conduct a fulsome assessment of the company in their first few months to determine the best strategy.

A NEW PARADIGM FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND CAREGIVING

WHAT WE FOUND

Many of the companies that we spoke with, of all sizes, recognize that changing the way companies approach two key experiences—mental health and caregiving—are critical to retaining women in the tech sector. While companies of all sizes should be part of the push to tackle the stigma and breakdown stereotypes, large enterprises demonstrate how resources can be mobilized in different ways to support women in taking care of their mental wellbeing and shifting the responsibility for caregiving to everyone.

In recent years, many more companies are working with benefits providers to expand mental health services beyond basic coverage to benefits that are more comprehensive, including online and in-person mental healthcare for employees and their families. Companies recognize that part of mental wellbeing is also about being able to balance work and life in ways that are integrated and respectful of all types of families and caring commitments.

"We know that every piece of research shows, when you create a caregiver-inclusive culture, women thrive. When you create a culture where men are encouraged to be caregivers, women thrive. We know that women are responsible for 80% of elder care in most countries. We know that when we provide a more elder care-inclusive culture, women will thrive."

BO YOUNG LEE, CHIEF DIVERSITY & INCLUSION OFFICER, UBER

WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING

Ceridian, a global human capital management software company, introduced something called "take two".

If you need two hours to go to a doctor's appointment, to go to a child's soccer game, to go to parent-teacher interview, or anything else that helps you to balance work and life, you can take those two hours by checking with your manager and enter that into the Dayforce platform. "Take two" is in addition to vacation or sick time. By recognizing that people have varying needs, if you are a parent or if you are caring for an elderly parent or someone else who is important to you, this program accommodates that and removes the need to dip into vacation time. "Take two" has become incredibly popular within the company and is widely used.

TD Bank offers employees the ability to take a personal leave of absence not related to maternity or parental leave.

Supporting flexibility is one way that companies can normalize the narrative that taking time away for mental wellbeing or caregiving is part of a career path. At TD, employees who take a year away, have the option to continue to participate in benefits. It is an effective intergenerational benefit that can support people looking after children and/or aging parents but it can also be used to go travelling or volunteer. It is about respecting that people may also need time away that is not related to maternity or parental leave.

IMAGINE IF EVERYONE IS EQUALLY EXPECTED AND SUPPORTED TO TAKE TIME AWAY FROM WORK FOR CAREGIVING AND MENTAL WELLNESS?

CREATE A CAREGIVER-INCLUSIVE CULTURE

- When people, including men, share their caregiving experiences, it normalizes caregiving as everyone's responsibility.

  - Broaden support for caregiving to include people caring for parents and step-parents, ageing family members, children (adopted, biological, and step-children), chosen family, and adult siblings with disabilities, as examples.

- Designate space for caregiving at work to show respect for team members in this role (e.g. breast and chest feeding space, secure refrigerator to store milk, change tables in all washrooms, on-site daycare facilities).

  - Demonstrate practical support for parents by offering inclusive childcare benefits such as those offered by **HELM.life**.

ASSIGN CHORES MORE EQUITABLY AT WORK

- It might seem like a small thing but shifting the responsibility for necessary, but often unrecognized, tasks so they become everyone's responsibility in the workplace sets a new expectation of equity.

- Create a plan for 'office chores and housekeeping' that requires everyone to take their turn.

  - As examples, change the default assumption that it is the most junior woman in the room who will take notes, clean the kitchen after the office party, purchase birthday cakes, and more.

PRIORITIZE MENTAL WELLBEING

- People in tech experience stress, anxiety, and depression at higher rates than the average.
  - **BIMA Tech Inclusion & Diversity Report 2019**

- Developing a comprehensive DEI strategy can help reduce the inequity that negatively impacts mental wellbeing for people working in tech.

- Provide a place for introspection—somewhere employees may pray, meditate, reflect, or be in quiet—will allow team members to bring more of themselves to the workplace.

- Invest in mental wellbeing in the workplace with professional support customized to your company.

  - **CAMH Workplace Education and Consulting**
  - **Mental Health First Aid: Workplace Programs**

NEXT STEPS

The journey to inclusion is not a linear path with a clear destination but rather a commitment that must be continuously renewed. This is the opportunity to truly design equitable systems and processes that do not replicate the inequities of the past but rather create a brighter future, one company at a time so we can all #movethedial together.

RECOGNITION

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