

## Impact Story Support to career development

<p><b>Impact Story</b></p> <p>Support to career development</p>
<p><b>Intervention Definition</b></p> <p>Major life events such as childbirth, as well as care work for relatives, continuing education or accommodating spouses' careers may result in voluntary or involuntary career interruptions in the case of many women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) (Hewlett 2007). Furthermore, male competitors usually get more support from their male colleagues and have better professional networks. Therefore, they have competitive advantages in their careers compared to women, which manifest themselves in greater organisational career mobility and better chances of promotion. Meanwhile, female employees may fall behind in their careers or become professionally stagnated (Patel 2013). Other major barriers to women succeeding in science include their own limiting self-beliefs and low self-esteem, which is often a result of stereotypical gender socialisation from early childhood (Buldu 2006); and the unconscious bias that exists within most organisations (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012). The consequences of all these factors are reflected not only at the individual level, but also in the insufficient female representation in critical roles within several organisations.</p> <p>Career development is a lifelong process involving psychological, sociological, educational, economic and physical factors that interact to influence the trajectory of the individual (Hackney and Cormier 2005, 14). Besides, it contributes to the growth, inspiration and retention of talent in companies, institutions and organisations.</p> <p>„Support to career development" from the gender equality perspective is an intervention that may help overcome the obstacles to women's career progression. It is designed, on the one hand, to assist female employees in developing their professional competencies, leadership skills and self-knowledge; in making and implementing informed occupational choices; and in career planning. Initiatives such as the General Electric Women's Network are intended to serve as frameworks for the self-development of female employees. They use various tools in order to provide a forum for women to exchange ideas, opinions, strategies, and to share experiences on good practice. These tools include mentoring, coaching and networking opportunities; education and trainings; opportunities that allow for interaction between the network group members and the senior executives of the company; thematic events; presence at job fairs; and external relationships with organisations and institutions outside of the company.</p> <p>On the other hand, the initiative "Support to career development" assists organisations and institutions to introduce gender-fair structures for promotion and launch initiatives that create opportunities for outstanding women to obtain leadership positions. A good example of this is the Laura Bassi Centres of Expertise's (LBC) impetus programme, which funds research centres for applied basic research managed by top-level female scientists.</p>
<p><b>Intervention Definition Short</b></p> <p>The intervention "Support to career development" aims at smoothing the career advancement of female employees by fostering their professional development, strengthening their networks, improving their soft skills and self-confidence, as well as by creating more gender-fair organisational environments.</p>
<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Increase the number of women in R&amp;I positions´</li> <li>(3) Boost professional capabilities of women to pursue promotion</li> <li>(4) Implement gender-fair organisational structures</li> </ul>

### Output

The intervention's short-term output is constituted by the introduction of career development interventions and activities such as networking, advising, counselling, coaching, mentoring, training and engagement programmes, which seek to address individuals' wellness, personal growth and professional advancement (Hackney and Cormier, 2005) through all career phases (recruiting, job entry, promotion). Immediate tangible results of this kind of interventions include the number, scale and variety of the programmes and activities carried out. The success rate of the events is reflected in the number of participants and their level of satisfaction. At the organisational level, the main outputs are the measures that aim at ensuring transparency in terms of organisational structure, e.g. target agreements with current and newly hired employees, the development of job descriptions to make career opportunities more transparent, etc.

In the case of the General Electric Women's Network career development programmes include engagement events, festivals, factory visits, round table discussions, presentations by guest speakers, networking events, career path workshops, interactions with the company's senior executives, training programmes, one-on-one mentoring sessions, coaching activities, media trainings, public speaking courses, awareness raising and information sharing events, services such as babysitting arrangements, etc..

The number of the network's membership, especially those women who take an active role in planning, organising and implementing the programmes, and the attendance rate at the events organised by the Women's Network are also outputs of the intervention.

### Output Short

Immediate outputs of the intervention "Support to career development" are constituted by the variety of activities and programmes introduced and carried out in order to foster the career advancement of individuals or certain groups of employees, e.g. women. Outputs also include the number of employees successfully reached by the initiative.

### Output indicators

- 2.2.2. Day-to-day intellectual stimulation
- 2.2.3. Sense of belonging to group
- 2.2.3. Sense of community
- 2.3.3. Possibility to approach senior staff for assistance and tips (measuring the confidence)
- 2.3.3. Acts of support through upper manager
- 3.2.2. Ability to create/enhance/sustain new networks/contacts/collaborations
- 3.2.2. Use of mentoring (promoting of career, obtaining of resources, useful advices, etc.)
- 3.2.2. Identification of useful local "allies" in encouraging GE

### Outcome

One of the main outcomes of the intervention is the professional development and the increased job satisfaction of its beneficiaries. Career development programmes prepare individuals for the changing workplace of the 21st century by teaching labour market changes and complexity of the workplace. Career support activities, especially mentoring, can teach mentees about career 'paths, shortcuts and minefields' within research environments (Kalpazidou Schmidt and Faber 2016). Through its programmes and activities, the intervention "Support to career development" plays a critical role not only in improving women's business practices, expanding their personal contacts and building career opportunities for them, thus facilitating their progression; but also in improving structures within organisations to enable gender equality in career development. Therefore, the creation and operation of more gender-fair structures within organisations is another very important outcome of the measure.

In Hungary, the Women's Network gives the opportunity for female employees to get in touch with colleagues from other departments or units, whom they would possibly never meet otherwise. Personal and professional relationships formed during the events and programmes of the Women's Network often prove to be very fruitful. There are several examples when such relationships lead to professional cooperation, which help the employees manage a task or cope with difficulties at the workplace.

The Women's Network creates a self-organised, self-dependent and supportive community for female General Electric (GE) workers without excluding male employees. It increases the members' sense of belonging and importance, thus boosting their engagement with the company. The Women's Network stimulates unplanned and even unnoticed learning processes within the organisation. What is learned in the non-threatening environment of the network can be utilised routinely and almost automatically in the everyday work.

By equipping talented female researchers with the confidence and skills, they need to thrive in their careers, „Support to career development" enhances the visibility of women in STEM fields. For instance, meetings and mentoring sessions with senior executives of GE ensure that the skills and achievements of talented female employees are noticed by the management. This not only fosters the career advancement of women who take part in the network, but also contributes to the creation of role models who can serve as good examples for other female employees.

Besides, regular contact with colleagues and leaders help female employees to gain an insight into the operation of the company and a better understanding of its strategies, which further improves their chances of promotion and helps them up the ladder of success. Although the Women's Network in Hungary generally has a rather indirect positive effect on the members' career, in a few cases participation in the network can even directly result in promotions.

#### **Outcome Short**

Outcomes of the intervention "Support to career development" include professional development, increased job satisfaction, enhanced visibility, better career planning and career building opportunities, expanded personal and professional contacts and networks, fruitful professional collaborations, new role models, strengthened working and leadership skills, and fostered career advancement.

#### **Outcome indicators**

2.3.2. Implementation of new tasks/responsibilities

3.1.1. Attractiveness and personal motives to take up leadership positions

3.1.1. Tangible examples of leadership development skills in daily work

3.2.1. Ability of managing budgets is improved

3.2.1. Knowledge of own discipline is deepened

3.2.1. Improved understanding of different departments/sections culture and procedures

3.2.1. Improved voicing opinion/confidence to argue one's position

3.2.1. Improved self-promotion skills

4.2.1. Rating of communication paths and transparency regarding decision-making bodies

#### **Impact**

By enhancing women's professional growth, providing role models, developing new and existing talent, cultivating leadership competencies, and creating a transparent organisational envi-

ronment the measure aims at promoting a fair and appropriate status of female scientific researchers (Peterson 1996). It is a valuable tool for attraction, promotion and retention of talented and competent female workforce. Its major impact is the increase in the number of women in decision-making and leadership positions within organisations that operate in STEM fields. E.g., the General Electric Women's Network has been recognised globally as one of the most effective voluntary women's networks, and the single-digit percentage of female top managers within the company grew to more than 20% in about 15 years. The Women's Network does not have a say in hiring and promotion decisions, but on the long run, it helps to build a bigger pipeline.

Furthermore, the counsellors and the managers of career development programmes, as well as the Human Resources (HR) professionals and recruiters may generally learn about the struggles and the gender challenges female researchers have to face in the workplace. Besides, they become more aware of their own unconscious gender biases (Correll 2017). These feedback mechanisms can be very beneficial, not only to the women who participate in the programmes, but also to the organisation.

Initiatives such as the General Electric Women's Network of Hungary and FEMtech Career of Austria contribute to a more colourful and diverse community within the organisation. The gradual, but perceptible changes in the organisational culture and the operation of the institutions constitute one of the main indirect impacts of such initiatives. In addition to improving the position of female employees, the General Electric Women's Network may also set a good example for other companies in the private sector through its best practices.

By broadening knowledge, skills and abilities, improving decision making skills, increasing self-esteem and motivation, building interpersonal effectiveness, maximising career opportunities and improving employment marketability the intervention encourages and assists female employees to perform research in an enhanced spirit of responsibility, which may be mirrored in the overall performance of the company. Expected impacts of the measure that are directly linked to Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI) include a more sustainable and socially relevant research activity carried out by the company, an enhanced innovation driven by the diversity of GE and the increased scientific and economic competitiveness of the company in the long run.

#### **Impact short**

In the long term, the development of women employees regarding their professional activity, self-confidence and leadership skills leads to a more proportionate female representation in STEM and in leadership positions. This may bring about changes in the organisational culture, which results in an enhanced spirit of responsibility, a more sustainable and relevant research activity, and a strengthened overall research performance. These improvements and changes constitute the main impacts of the intervention "Support to career development".

#### **Impact indicators**

- 1.1.1. Horizontal/vertical segregation in positions
- 1.1.1. Success rates of men and women applicants to positions
- 1.1.2. Increase in leadership positions by women who participated in the programme
- 1.1.2. Taken up leadership positions such as rector, associate professor, dean/associate dean, centre director, head of department, leader of research
- 1.1.2. Composition of boards or committees
- 1.1.2. Percentage of professional staff at employment levels
- 1.2.1. Relation between gender composition and success rate of the candidate pool
- 4.2.1. Perceived extent and pace of cultural change on organisational level

5.1.2. Scientific collaboration across disciplines on new, high-risk ideas

5.1.2 Cross-country (also beyond EU) and cross-disciplinary research and innovation networks (incl. SMEs)

### **Policy Context**

As the case studies "General Electric Women's Network" and "FEMtech Career" point out, the research and development system is dominated by the Business Enterprise Sector (BES) in many European countries. Measures that belong to the category "Support to career development" are typically initiated within organisations, and therefore they are planned and implemented at an institutional level. Since the Women's Network was established by one of the world's largest private companies and it has been operating in a corporate environment ever since, it is not possible to examine its functioning and achievements independently from the industrial background. Due to the international character of the Women's Network, the outcome and impact of the intervention is much more affected by the organisational culture of General Electric than by the national context. However, policy regulations such as compulsory quotas to increase the proportion of female members in the supervisory boards of companies can influence the impact of this kind of interventions.

It can be stated that according to the RIO (Research and Innovation Observatory) country reports, one of the main challenges for some European countries' RTDI system is sustaining the supply of human resources in the sector. The insufficient representation of female employees in STEM fields is a key aspect of this issue.

### **Organisational Context**

The interventions "Support to career development" cannot be examined out of their organisational context. Structural changes toward an equal and gender-fair organisational setting are essential. However, fulfilling the simultaneous requirements of excellence and equal opportunities is only possible under the condition that there is a satisfactory number of women within a given organisation who have both the ambition and the ability to become leaders. The interventions "Support to career development" facilitate the attraction and the professional development of women employees, thus helping the organisations meet the above-mentioned condition.

The General Electric Women's Network programme is a good example of this. On the one hand, prohibition of discrimination on any ground is included in General Electric's Code of Conduct. On the other hand, the company intends to operate on a meritocratic basis, which means that the more deserving the employee is, the faster he/she can move up the career ladder, regardless of his/her demographic characteristics.

The Women's Network has a very special characteristic: though it was originally initiated from the top down, it has always been operating from the bottom up. This guarantees a steady support from the management and a democratic and self-organised way of functioning at the same time. The recruitment of members and the operation of the network are based on persuasion, collaboration and teamwork. Participation in the network is voluntary, but highly supported by the leaders. In addition to the above-mentioned organisational aspects, the implementation of the measure would not be possible without a corporate background, thanks to which considerable resources are allocated for the purposes of the Women's Network. Funding for organisational change is the key aspect of the FEMtech Career Program, as well. Financial support contributes to these initiatives' potential to have significant impact on gender equality.

In some cases, female researchers might need gender-specific programmes to bring out their best professional self and performance. A planned sequence of activities and experiences is needed to achieve specific competencies such as self-appraisal, decision-making, goal setting, and career planning. Qualified leadership, effective management, accountability and programme improvement based on results of process/outcome evaluations are key components of successful career guidance. Furthermore, counselling programmes require a team approach

where certified counsellors are central to the programmes. Counsellors should continuously update their professional knowledge and skills and do regular follow-ups with their clients. Finally, adequate facilities, materials and resources are also needed for effective career support.

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