

**T**HROUGHOUT my career I have worked closely with dozens of industry leaders across the UK, helping to identify best management practises to deliver sustainable business behaviours; helping businesses to understand how they can best foster female leadership has been central to this endeavour and I'm truly excited by the renewed vigour placed on this issue by leading business women and politicians such as First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and McKinsey UK managing partner Vivian Hunt.

I don't want to dwell on the virtues or pitfalls of gender pay gap reporting in this article, but rather focus on some insights into how organisations can foster female leadership and the benefits it brings to any organisation, public or private. The opportunity cost is clear; there is a proven commercial imperative for realising women's potential in the workplace, through increased productivity, better balanced and inclusive workforces and ultimately more successful businesses that are better places to work and where careers are advanced.

McKinsey has some fascinating insights into how businesses can measure their female talent pool and how successful they are at bringing women up from the ranks into senior leadership or executive positions. By mapping this pathway, organisations can better understand what internal barriers may exist or identify what initiatives may be needed to help women succeed.

Another critical enabler is also the mentor or sponsor. Many organisations seem to think that role models alone are enough to point colleagues in the right direction. This approach is not enough. So much personal and professional experience is lost and not passed on in the workplace, and while instinctively, many women believe they can benefit by being mentored by other women business leaders, research also proves that this is true. Much more can also be done by businesses to ensure a proper mentoring programme can break down gender biases and pass down knowledge and experience between men and women and vice versa.

I spent more than ten years at Business in the Community where we helped members get to grips with how they can monitor changes in [www.insider.co.uk](http://www.insider.co.uk)



# Business can only benefit if it fosters female leadership

By JANE WOOD

**Pay reporting may often be viewed as a blunt instrument, but it is the first step towards identifying where change needs to happen**

their organisations from their gender equality and diversity programmes over a period of time which enabled them to demonstrate the positive impact it had on their business. Only by applying meaningful metrics can chief executives and boards monitor progress and provide confidence back to their employees that positive drivers of change are having an impact. A virtuous circle.

I'm now delighted to be at BT, which, as a leading business in the STEM sector has long-term initiatives – TechWomen, furtHER and STEM Returners – which are helping us to retain and nurture valuable female talent.

This year the British Quality Foundation, Training Journal and Inclusive Companies recognised us for providing best in class diversity development programmes for women which is something we are very proud of.

Critical to BT's approach is understanding and tackling identified organisational barriers to female progression which our own women told us they experience. This includes identifying personal barriers too – such as lacking confidence and credibility (known as the imposter syndrome), effective career planning, managing conflict and influencing senior people.

BT has designed TechWomen to address these challenges. Launched in 2017 it builds on our previous Women in Technology programme. It is a leadership development programme, designed specifically for women working in key commercial, operational or technical roles.

The programme has been extraordinarily successful and has doubled in size this year – from 360 to 760 members and is open to all colleagues.

Gender pay gap reporting may often be viewed as a blunt instrument, but it is the first step towards identifying where organisational change needs to happen. It requires tough conversations internally, but the rewards are self-evident when successful initiatives help overcome unconscious biases that can let women, and the businesses they work in, thrive. ■

*Jane Wood is director of nations & regions at BT*