

## Does Your Organization Have a “Pyramid Problem?”

You’ve seen (in diagram I-1 and in the introduction to *Difference Works*) the Catalyst data showing the pyramid problem in the Fortune 500. Not all industries or organizations have a challenge with engagement and retention of women. Many do. This material is to help you:

- Find out whether or not this is a challenge in your organization;
- Understand, if you do have a pyramid problem, how big a problem it is and where it does and does not exist in your organization; and
- Take steps to understand the causes and nature of the problem.

First, you need to collect some data.

- What is the percentage of women vs. men in your organization? You may want the percentages for the overall organization, divisions, geographic locations, functional groups, or other sub-sets of the organization.
- Create a diagram that reflects the levels in your business or in the groups into which you divide the larger organization—for example, hourly employees, supervisors, salaried managers, mid-managers, directors, vice presidents, and on up the organizational hierarchy. What is the percentage of women vs. men at each level?
- Are there more women at the lower levels than at the upper levels? Where are they represented proportionally to their numbers at the entry level? Where are they under-represented? Are they over-represented at any level?
- When you place the information on percentages on the organizational levels, what shape emerges?
- Compare the turnover rates for women vs. men in the various sub-sets and the organization overall. Go back at least five years if possible. Is there a trend? Do women leave at a higher rate in most years? Do they leave at a higher rate in some groups than in others?
- Administer a survey that measures engagement, commitment, and intent to stay. (Examples are the Gallup Q-12, at <http://www.gallup.com/consulting/52/Employee-Engagement.aspx>, and the McBassi People Index, at

[http://www.mcbassi.com/services/services\\_Organizational\\_Assessments.php](http://www.mcbassi.com/services/services_Organizational_Assessments.php).) Be sure you construct the survey so you can cut the results by gender, age, division, or management chain, etc.

Second, analyze what the data tell you.

- Do you have data showing different relative percentages of women, or different turnover rates of women vs. men, in different management chains? If so, can you hypothesize about reasons that women are moving up or staying longer in some groups or functions than in others? Is it possible that some managers create inclusive environments while others do not?
- What does the employee survey show are the issues correlated with low engagement or low intent to stay?
- Conduct exit interviews with the women who leave. To assure candor, you might consider having a disinterested third party conduct the interviews; assure that the responses given will be kept confidential and anonymous. Have the interviewer(s) summarize what they heard in general terms. What do the interviews indicate cause women to leave? Did the women feel they could succeed in their jobs, for instance? Did they feel they had access to networks and key relationships (that is, was the comfort principle a factor)? Did they believe their contributions were appreciated? Does any of the information emerging from interview summaries surprise you?
- In the areas where women have been most successful and in which their turnover rates are relatively low, interview the women. Ask what they think is working, what they like about the organization, and what makes them want to stay.

Third, take action.

- Craft your actions based on what the interviews and surveys indicate are causes of disengagement and lack of retention. Create targeted initiatives to correct those things that lower engagement and retention.
- Reward and make “heroes” of the managers in groups with good statistics. Have them share best practices with other managers.

- Provide resources to managers whose statistics don't take advantage of gender diversity. *Difference Works* provides resources for them, such as
  - Information to convince these managers that it is simply good business to create inclusive work environments.
  - Exercises and tools to increase their awareness and their ability to model inclusivity and increase engagement and retention.

If the data and analysis show that your organization has a “pyramid problem,” I hope the business case in *Difference Works* helps you commit to increasing engagement and retention of women. And I hope the tools offered there help you create an inclusive culture that gets great results—because men and women achieve them together! Feel free to contact me through the website [www.difference-works.com](http://www.difference-works.com).

