

# CEO Roundtable Report

**LEAD Network Annual Conference**  
Düsseldorf | October 2023

Report on the 11th  
CEO Roundtable

# Introduction

On October 13th, 2023, during the LEAD Network annual conference, we gathered over 40 CEOs and senior leaders from Europe to participate in our bi-annual CEO Roundtable, sponsored by Henkel.

The Roundtable was centred around how CEOs can take an active role in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion, and focused on 5 core practices:

- 1 DEI Performance Management**  
Treating DEI like a business initiative, elevating and measuring this strategic imperative.
- 2 Inclusive Policies**  
Diligently supporting policies like enhanced family leave.
- 3 CEO-championed sponsorship programmes for women**  
Actively leading sponsorship programmes to advance women
- 4 Role-modelling**  
Being an energetic, visible ally and implementing inclusive policies within his/her own team (walking the talk).
- 5 Signing the LEAD Network CEO Pledge**

# Introduction

The session was chaired by Carsten Knobel, CEO of Henkel, and co-moderated by Allyson Zimmermann, CEO of LEAD Network, and Sarah McGowan, Partner at August Leadership.



**Carsten Knobel**

CEO  
Henkel



**Allyson Zimmermann**

CEO  
LEAD Network



**Sarah McGowan**

Partner  
August Leadership

The goal of this CEO Roundtable was to collectively learn about and share proven practices on demystifying diversity, equity and inclusion, in an action-oriented, concrete way. In setting the context for the discussions, the co-moderators discussed why so many DEI initiatives fail, from a lack of metrics in place to measure outcomes, to DEI being treated as a 'nice to have' side project rather than a key business imperative.

Participants then took part in multiple break-out discussions with fellow senior leaders from different companies, where they covered everything from how to deal with so-called 'anti-allies', to how to increase their company's attractiveness to top candidates through DEI efforts. They were encouraged to be vulnerable, to share their own company findings, questions and concerns, and to learn as much as possible from their peers.

And keeping with the wider conference theme of Doing Not Trying, after the breakout groups, CEOs were given this question to mull on:

**What is one thing you can take back into your company to propel DEI forward?**

# Core Practices

## DEI Performance Management

A 30-year longitudinal study showed that companies with clearly established DEI goals saw representation increase at **double the rate** vs companies that didn't set goals; and those who didn't leverage data also saw reduced retention of underrepresented populations.

(Source: Kalev, Alexandra and Dobbin, Frank. "How companies should set – and report – DEI goals" Harvard Business Review. September 29th, 2022)

### Easy actions

- 1 Understand your current data**  
For each demographic category, gather facts on representation by level, turnover by level, promotion rates, hiring rates, and engagement data.
- 2 Identify patterns with the data**  
Where are breakdowns in promotions, lower hiring rates, higher turnover, or lower engagement scores? Often a third party can help conduct statistical analysis which gives deep insights into your data.
- 3 Complete the LEAD Network Gender Diversity Scorecard and Maturity Benchmarking tools**  
These free-to-partner tools provide insights about how your DEI results stack up within the industry, and your organisation's position on the DEI maturity curve.

# Core Practices

## Flexible Policies

Being more flexible in our approach reduces turnover: **80% of employees** say they'd be more loyal to their employer if they provided flex work arrangements. Remote work options are especially important for women, who experience less burnout and increased job satisfaction when they can work the way they want.

(Source: Michelson, Joan. "How small companies can offer great paid leave programs" Harvard Business Review. January 7th, 2021)

### Easy actions

- 1 Listen to your employees**  
Ask employees via focus groups or town halls what is important to them in the way of flexibility. Try not to pass quick judgement – really take in what they say and learn from their insights.
- 2 Experiment with one or more of your policies**  
Institute a small expansion to parental leave (i.e. paternity) and encourage fathers to leverage it. This shows that DEI initiatives can be beneficial to men and women of all different backgrounds. Survey your employee response to this change and share successes.
- 3 Measure results**  
Gather data from your engagement surveys specific to those who have taken a leave of absence in the past 1-2 years. Measure the impact of utilisation on engagement rates.

# Core Practices

## CEO-Championed Sponsorship Programmes

Research shows that men benefit far more from networking than women. Women are 20% less likely than men to have a strategic network of sponsors and **1.5 times less likely** than men to have received advice on how to advance. Formal sponsorship programmes targeted toward women make an impact—companies with these programmes **promote more women** at all levels.

(Source Seramount)

### Easy actions

- 1 Champion a formal sponsorship programme**  
Require each of your leaders to learn what it means to be a sponsor and to take on this role with 2-3 women in your organisation. They should meet regularly with sponsees and bring visibility to these women and their accomplishments.
- 2 Integrate this sponsorship programme into talent planning practices**  
Report out on how sponsors and sponsees are during regular succession planning meetings. Track who is being sponsored and ensure that all high potential women without sponsors are assigned one.
- 3 Pay it forward**  
Create a programme for those who have been sponsored to mentor or sponsor others.

# Core Practices

## Role Modelling

CEOs play a critical role in driving DEI results. You have the single most direct opportunity to create change, as you are responsible for the composition of the executive team, running critical meetings, and setting the strategic agenda for the company. You can make a difference through your actions!

### Easy actions

- 1 Take time to learn from employees in underrepresented/marginalised groups**  
Hold meetings, listen to the issues, and act swiftly to make change for marginalised groups in your organisation.
- 2 Ask how you can be a better DEI champion**  
Gain insights from employees, your peers, and your board. Make the changes they suggest.
- 3 Read up on the issues facing marginalised groups**  
Read books, articles, listen to podcasts. Educate yourself on the experiences of those who are different from you.

# Core Practices

## Signing the CEO Pledge

Signing a public pledge like the LEAD Network CEO Pledge brings accountability to your organisation and shows that you take DEI issues seriously. To date, over 60 CEOs have signed this pledge.

### Easy actions

- 1 Discuss the Pledge with your broader organisation**  
Make it known internally that you have signed the CEO Pledge and show your employees what it means to take action in this way.
- 2 Publicise the Pledge**  
Include the CEO Pledge in your annual report so that your customers, shareholders and other stakeholders see that you take this issue seriously.
- 3 Report your progress against the Pledge actions**  
Communicate how you're doing against the commitments in the Pledge. Be transparent, open, and unafraid to say you can do more, and be better.



# Key Takeaways



## Measure what we treasure

CEOs generally agreed that measuring DEI initiatives via a variety of metrics is critical. Promotion rates, L&D programme participation, engagement survey rates by demographic group are some of the metrics that are key to track and hold teams accountable for.



## Women are not a homogeneous group

While this sounds like an obvious statement, there is the danger at company level of 'assuming' all women employees would like certain measures to be introduced, or would benefit from certain processes. Instead, it's critical to give a voice to those around you, to collect as many voices as possible to add to the conversation, instead of categorising all women employees under one umbrella.



## Learning is the CEO's core responsibility

While it's a good start to want to be an ally, there is always more learning to be done. A key takeaway discussed during the CEO Roundtable was that it's important not to get ahead of ourselves, and to remind ourselves that we don't know what we don't know. This is why it's vital that women from all backgrounds are represented and consulted when key decisions are being taken, and that they are listened to. While so-called 'anti-allies' are always a danger, those who proclaim to be allies but whose actions don't follow their words are arguably more harmful to the cause.

# Key Takeaways



## CEOs should lead by example in allowing people to fail & learn

This goes for taking (measured) risks at work, but also in DEI initiatives. One of the biggest threats to diversity and inclusion efforts is employees being too 'scared' to speak up for fear of saying the wrong thing, offending people, or using incorrect language. Instead, CEOs should model a culture in which everyone assumes each other is doing their best and has the right intention, and if people do slip up (using incorrect pronouns, or mistakenly using language that isn't inclusive) they are coached and given the chance to do better next time. It's about progress, not perfection, and recognising that we are all on a journey and missteps will happen. It's what we do with the misstep that matters most.



## The keys to an inclusive approach to recruitment

It was generally agreed that middle management is the biggest problem area when it comes to gender parity — partly because it's easy to make excuses that people don't have enough experience to move up. Inclusive recruitment involves bringing additional people into the hiring process beyond HR and panel interviewers, like at L'Oreal, or using a 'panels for promotion' approach. This involves Line Managers advocating and sponsoring their staff through giving 5-7 minute presentations explaining why their candidate deserves a promotion, rather than using a forced ranking system.



## Taking a 'glocal' approach to parental leave policies

While global policies should provide a framework and set the expectation for company family leave policies, gaps also need to be closed on a local level. There are many cultural implications to be taken into consideration, and taking a local approach is a better way to increase parental leave take-up, as these cultural implications can be dealt with individually. Role modelling is needed by senior leaders to encourage more men to take parental leave — one executive shared a story of their CEO calling up new dads and actually asking them to take leave to help set this precedent.

# Key Takeaways



## Job sharing as an attractive reintroduction to the workplace for new parents

Job sharing could provide the answer to parents looking to balance a career with looking after their new babies. A number of companies with executives present at the CEO Roundtable have been experimenting with different approaches to job sharing. One particularly successful example was from Unilever, whose representative discussed 2 x 60% roles (1,2 FTE), with two people sharing a senior executive role, sharing one email, and being completely in sync when it comes to meetings.



What's next?



# What's next?

We are planning more CEO Roundtables due to the continued positive response. An in-person roundtable will be held on 2nd October in Budapest, and the next virtual Roundtable will be held in May (date TBC).

Virtual Roundtable

May 2024

In-person Roundtable

October 2024  
Budapest



# Session Feedback

The session was rated highly by the participating CEOs, with 95% of them saying the roundtable was either very good or outstanding, and 90% of them feeling that they learned new insights they can easily apply back on the job. Finally, 90% of the CEOs stated they would attend another CEO Roundtable in the future.

"I really appreciated getting to know my peers, meeting new contacts, and learning key insights from this session."

"This was an open, transparent, safe exchange where we were able to discuss how executives can be better enablers for diversity, equity, and inclusion."

"The CEO Roundtable was a practical discussion, supported with very useful handouts. I learned a great deal from the break-out sessions where I was able to openly interact with my peers."

# Background

The CEO Roundtable was started by Frans Muller, CEO of Ahold Delhaize, in 2017. Since then, this semi-annual event has been shepherded by Mick Broekhof, one of the founding members of the LEAD Network. The Roundtable has become a unique forum for senior executives within the European consumer packaged goods and retail industry, bringing together retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and service providers.

Our aim is to build a dynamic community of CEOs and regional presidents who are not only committed to making diversity and inclusion a strategic priority at every level of their organisation, but who want to steer the whole industry towards gender equality.

Meetings of the Roundtable typically involve individuals from around 40 different companies. In a 'safe haven' environment, participants talk frankly about their personal challenges and successes, with a focus on practical actions that others can put to good use within their own organisations.

## Learning takes place at three levels:

- 1 Individual**  
Taking personal action to listen, learn and adjust. Being a role model for your team and company in the area of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.
- 2 Institution**  
Adopting company-wide changes that improve DEI across all business processes (not just HR).
- 3 Industry**  
Acting collectively with other CEOs to make industry- and region-wide progress on inclusive policies, making our industry more attractive to diverse talent.



If you have any feedback on the latest CEO Roundtable or ideas for future CEO activities and events, please contact Allyson Zimmermann: [allyson.zimmermann@lead-eu.net](mailto:allyson.zimmermann@lead-eu.net)

# CEO Roundtable Participants 2023

## Participants

**Adam Birkett** Cargill

**Adrian Studer** Ecolab

**Alasdair Hamblin** CHEP

**Aline Santos** Unilever

**Aline Seifert** Alliance Healthcare Germany

**Andrea Neri** Campari

**Ayla Ziz** Danone

**Bjorn Jensen** Coca-Cola Company

**Bogdan Savin** PepsiCo

**Carsten Knobel** Henkel

**Charmaine England** Kenvue

**Chris Beetge** OFI

**Christian Rahmig** SC Johnson

**Darina Stoyanova** Prestige 96

**Elisabeth Araujo** L'Oréal

**Helle Valentin** IBM Consulting

**Inge Demeyere** Cargill

**Javier Hernandez Reta** Duracell

**Julie Lin Teigland** EY

**Julien Hemard** Pernod Ricard

**Katie Moran** Kimberly-Clark

**Marc Fischli** Criteo

**Mareike Mende-Ratnam** Douglas Group

**Mick Broekhof** LEAD Network

**Mike O'Riordan** Ingredion Incorporated

**Murat Koc** Barilla

**Noel Keeley** Musgrave Group

**Olena Neznal** Diageo

**Oswald Barckhahn** Beiersdorf

**Paola Pomi** Sinfo One

**Paolo D'Orso** Reckitt

**Paolo Lanzarotti** Asahi Europe & international

**Piers Heaton-Armstrong** Amazon Advertising

**Rafael Oliveira** Kraft Heinz

**Ramjeet Kaur Virik** FrieslandCampina

**Sam Dhingra** HighRadius

**Sandra Kottenauer** Manor

**Stephane Grenier** Amazon Advertising

**Tim Brett** Pladis

**Tracey Countryman** PA Consulting

**Wai-Chan Chan** Consumer Goods Forum

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## Co-moderators

**Allyson Zimmermann** LEAD Network

**Sarah McGowan** LEAD Network

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## Table Moderators

**Radia Ahsan** Unilever

**Karin de Koning** Beiersdorf

**Jo Haffenden** LEAD Network

**Tetyana Kretova** LEAD Network

**Dorottya Zalay** LEAD Network

**Catherine Bullen** LEAD Network

**Stina Hotine** LEAD Network



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