



Thoughts

DOUBLING DOWN TO DOUBLE UP GETTING TO GENDER PARITY IN THE TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE INDUSTRY

It's a challenge reported by most technology companies: the extreme difficulty finding enough [qualified people](#) to do all the work that needs to be done. And it is only going to get more difficult.

In this IM Thoughts paper, we lay out a solution that is simple in nature yet will take hard work and dedication to achieve: we can double the number of resources available to the infrastructure industry by bringing the representation of women and minorities in our ranks to social parity.

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IM Women had its first official meeting on July 27, 2017. The conversation among participants, who are listed below, provided inspiration for this paper.

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DOUBLING DOWN TO DOUBLE UP

It's a challenge reported by most technology companies: the extreme difficulty finding enough [qualified people](#) to do all the work that needs to be done. And it is only going to get more difficult.

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RECRUITMENT: BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE TALENT PIPELINE

Throughout the extended recovery from the 2008 market crash, tech has had a great run. Some even [call it a bubble](#). But, while we have had an [historical rise in stock values](#), [rising employment](#), and [unprecedented growth in tech employment](#), what it really means is that we have jobs to do. Which also means there is increased competition for talent within our own industry as well as from other industries.

While many industries and segments, including tech, look outside national boundaries to fill talent gaps, even these efforts have fallen short of fully meeting demand. And in a global marketplace, without addressing more fundamentally the structure of the labor market, competing for talent is still a [zero-sum game](#).

Currently, the tech industry relies heavily on a very narrow demographic. [Minorities are underrepresented](#) in tech compared with their rates of college graduation. Women are also poorly represented. [According to one report](#), while women make up a supermajority of professionals, women are represented in only about 25% of IT jobs. And, according to founding Infrastructure Masons Board Member Maricel Cerruti, within infrastructure the [numbers are even lower](#).



As an association dedicated to advancing the careers and talent pipeline for infrastructure industry professionals, Infrastructure Masons has an opportunity to think differently and more strategically about the problem of talent development, and in so doing, perhaps fundamentally change the structure of the market.

GENDER PARITY SUCCESS STORIES

While low representation of women and minorities has stymied tech and infrastructure for years, we can learn from cases where the trend has successfully been reversed. For instance, in the Computer Science Department at Harvey Mudd, [now more than half the graduates are women](#). At MIT, 49.5% of its mechanical engineering students are women.

What did these schools do? Among other things they took a proactive approach to directly addressing not only academic but also cultural issues and biases. Infrastructure Masons can do the same to lead change in our industry as well.

OUR 50% SOLUTION

To be effective, change needs to start well before the hiring process (some would argue early in the hiring process). Our work should begin at the very beginning of the pipeline – in schools. That is why the Infrastructure Masons Education Committee and IM Women are working together to help drive some of the cultural elements necessary for effective change.

Among our strongest proposals is that we adopt what we're calling the "50% solution." In every education activity led and/or funded by iMasons – from data center site visits, to mentoring programs and internships, to scholarships – we will ensure that at least half of the participants are women.

In the future, we plan to work closely with our Education Partners like SMU, Colorado School of Mines, University of Illinois Urbana Champagne, USC, and Oregon State to increase outreach to women both within STEM majors as well as those just entering college and



looking to decide on a major. What could be more powerful to a young woman deciding a career path than going to hear a speaker from Infrastructure Masons and seeing a version of her future self among her peer group?

BEYOND THE 50% SOLUTION

IM Women, led by [Mercy Manning](#), is among our most ambitious and potentially impactful programs in doubling the talent base of Infrastructure Masons. And we're not stopping there. We're planning to partner with other groups, such as [Silicon Harlem](#), to expand outreach programs and increase the diversity and therefore the scope of our engagement with underserved communities.

We are also planning to produce a Diversity in IT Infrastructure Hiring Toolkit for hiring managers to help overcome the biases, often subconscious, that perpetuate the status quo – and help hiring managers understand the importance of gender diversity metrics, and then how to fulfill those goals.

RETENTION: SUPPORTING WOMEN ALREADY IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE INDUSTRY

The lack of gender diversity in the pipeline for infrastructure talent is one key source of the problem. The other is the rate at which women who start out in infrastructure leave the industry – attrition rates in tech for women (41%) are more than double those for men (17%), according to a [2016 study](#) by the National Center for Women and IT.

So in addition to the 50% Solution described above aimed at building the pipeline of women in infrastructure, IM Women is also developing plans to enhance retention through support for women already in the industry so that they stay and grow. To that end we are pursuing a number of ideas, including:



1. Development of an **IM Women Speakers Bureau** to promote women currently working in IT infrastructure as thought leaders in their areas of expertise and potential speakers for conferences and as contributors to industry publications
2. Production of a **Women of Infrastructure video series** featuring women in various roles and at various stages of careers in infrastructure (because, as they say, “You can’t be what you can’t see”)

CONCLUSION

Increasing the number of women in technical infrastructure is not only a social imperative, it is a business imperative if our industry is to continue its current growth. Addressing global demand means increasing the diversity of our workforce through activities stretching deeply into the education pipeline. As the current infrastructure workforce edges ever closer to retirement, the situation will only become more dire. For these reasons, Infrastructure Masons is committed to bringing the industry to gender and social parity. It’s a long road ahead and achieving our ambitious goals will take a lot of hard work and dedication. But for the good of the industry, and the good of society, it is work we are excited to take on.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

IM Women is a dedicated group, but we can't achieve the goal of gender parity without your help.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Please leave a short comment on our blog, tweet us your thoughts [@InfraMason](#), or share in one of our members-only LinkedIn groups (for [end users](#) or [partners](#)). In particular, we want to hear from you:

- Is the 50% Solution the best way to tackle the challenge?
- What else should we consider?

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HELPING OUT? PARTICIPATE

If you are passionate about joining IM Women, please send a note to admin@imasons.org expressing your interest. We want both women and men to participate, from end user and partner organizations. We're all in this together!

JOIN

Infrastructure Masons was established to provide infrastructure executives and technical professionals an independent forum to connect, grow and give back. If you're not already a member, learn the benefits of joining at <https://imasons.org/join/>.



ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE MASONS

Infrastructure Masons is a group of industry professionals who design, build and operate the technical infrastructure of the digital age. Established in 2016, Infrastructure Masons is where technical professional connect, grow and give back. Among the 1,200 members are leaders of some of the largest and most advanced technical infrastructure portfolios in the world, representing over \$100 billion in infrastructure projects in over 130 countries. Learn more at <http://imasons.org>

ABOUT IM THOUGHTS

IM Thoughts are papers written by members to share problems, concepts, and ideas. Our End User and Partner Members have unique perspectives and insight built from their extensive experience. The intent of these papers is to stimulate discussion and debate to help advance the industry.

Content is owned by the author(s) who assumes all liability from opinions expressed within the papers. <http://imasons.org/pubs/thoughts>

ABOUT IM WOMEN

IM Women is a group of Infrastructure Masons dedicated to increasing the number of women in technical infrastructure by both encouraging more women to enter the industry and by supporting the few women who are already working in the industry (currently just 10%) to stay and succeed. IM Women is pursuing that goal through two core areas of activity: Recruitment and Retention. To learn more or get involved, contact admin@imasons.org



FOUNDING PARTNERS

iMasons efforts are funded by membership dues, events, corporate donations, and Founding Partner Sponsorships. As of this publication iMasons' [Founding Partners](#) include:



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