Fostering Gender Inclusivity in the Data Center Industry:

A D D R E S S I N G   W O R K P L A C E   I S S U E S   F O R   W O M E N

P R E P A R E D   B Y :

iMWomen

Abstract

The data center industry has emerged as a crucial backbone of the digital era, playing a pivotal role in managing and processing vast amounts of information. However, this growth has not been without challenges, particularly in attracting new talent to the industry. Particularly the industry suffers multiple years of static attraction and retention of women in the workforce.

This paper explores the current workplace issues faced by women working in the data center industry and proposes three strategies to remedy these challenges. By addressing gender disparities, fostering an inclusive environment, and promoting professional development, organizations can create a more equitable and thriving workplace for women in the data center sector.

Throughout 2023, iMWomen conducted an anonymous survey of over 500 women in the industry, across multiple global locations, we've zero'd in on specific themes which - when remedied - helps move our industry forward. The intention of this white paper is to provide helpful solutions that company leaders can implement to become a more attractive workplace for all, including women, thus increasing productivity and growth.

Introduction

The data center industry is at the forefront of technological advancement, yet it is marked by a gender disparity that hampers its full potential. It is widely understood through years of research and results that companies who welcome inclusion tend to have less difficulty in attracting talent, they benefit from increased staff retention, an enhanced reputation, increased innovation, and overall benefit from better company performance. Despite the data center industry being seriously hampered by a lack of talent, bringing in more women is a solution that is often overlooked.

This whitepaper aims to help find solutions to bringing in more women, increase retention, and benefit from stronger company performance. Through our survey, we uncovered that women working in data centers often encounter various workplace issues, ranging from gender bias and stereotyping to limited opportunities for career advancement. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is crucial for promoting diversity, fostering innovation, and ensuring a sustainable and inclusive industry
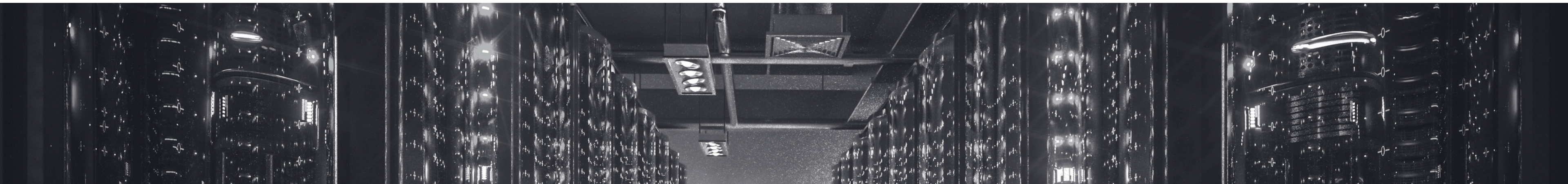
Questions

Simple, yet direct questions were asked across the world at data center conferences where iMWomen hosted events.

Because iMWomen strives to create solutions that the industry can benefit from, only these 3 questions are the cornerstone of the findings and recommendations of this white paper.

1. Barriers
What barriers to entry are there for women entering Digital Infrastructure?

2. Cause for Leaving
What is the leading cause of Women leaving Digital Infrastructure?

3. Grow Industry
What is one idea to bring more women into the industry?

Current Workplace Issues for Women in the Digital Infrastructure Industry:

After evaluating the quantitative and qualitative results of the survey, we found a few consistent themes surfacing.

Gender Bias and Stereotyping:

Women in the data center industry frequently face gender bias and stereotyping, perpetuating the perception that certain roles or tasks are more suited for men. This bias can limit women's opportunities for professional growth and recognition.

Limited Access to Training & Professional Development

Women often encounter barriers when seeking access to training and professional development opportunities in the data center sector. **19% of women surveyed consider entry to be a barrier due to education, lack of experience, training or expertise.** This limitation can hinder skill development and impede career advancement, creating a cycle of inequality.

Lack of Representation in Leadership Positions:

From the survey, "**Relatively few women in the industry to begin with, so fewer women see this as an industry for them**".The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within the data center industry is a prevalent issue. The absence of female role models and mentors can make women reluctant to enter an organization or industry, can hinder career progression for women, and contribute to a less inclusive workplace culture.

Recommendations

According to the 2022 Uptime Survey Report, women continue to be underrepresented in design, build and operations of data centers globally. (See Infographic footnote 1)

We also see a few changes which can have a long-lasting positive impact, there are fewer companies with no women and more companies with women in leadership roles. iMWomen encourages leaders in the industry to build on this upward momentum, and increase attraction, retention, and progression of a significant part of the workforce by implementing the following 3 key recommendations:
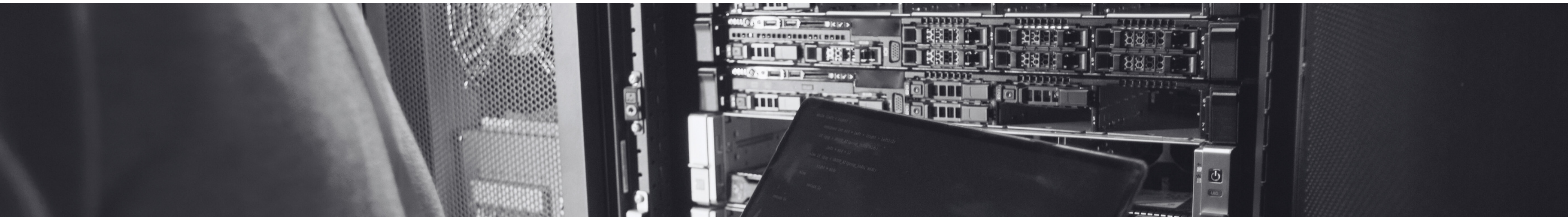
Promoting Gender Inclusive Initiatives

Implement and actively promote gender inclusion initiatives to address bias and stereotyping. This involves creating awareness, fostering an inclusive culture, and establishing programs to support women in navigating the challenges they face as a woman in a heavily male-dominated industry. **19% of women surveyed consider this to be a barrier to entry due to a male-dominated industry.**

Gender bias shows up as a barrier to entry when organizations don't look at their brand presence, talent pipeline development, retention by demographic and promotion philosophy. For example, structural biases need to be removed. Leaders need to actively check job descriptions for biases, increase pay parity, equally evaluate skills to job-level starting points, and ensure there is equitable time to promotion.

To attract more women, organizations need to look at their culture, working norms, and values, and re-align them to support the creation of an inclusive working environment.

Investing in Training and Skill Development:

Overcome the barriers to training and professional development, and invest in programs that provide equal access to learning opportunities.

Most effective are initiatives to actively invite and encourage women to pursue relevant certifications, attend workshops, and engage in continuous skill enhancement, thereby fostering a more skilled and diverse workforce and increasing retention.

Leadership training must be equitably offered. Provide access to training that enhances critical leadership skills such as negotiation, public speaking, and managing people. It's important that training and subsequent skills development are aligned with role expectations and there is transparency around those expectations for promotions. Roles and responsibilities should clearly outline the soft and hard skills necessary for success and women should be given equal access to on-the-job training and professionally developed certifications and courses.

Creating Pathways to Leadership:

According to the results of the survey, **24% of women leave their roles due to a lack of career progression and promotion.** Companies must actively work towards creating pathways for women to advance in their careers. Providing equal growth opportunities means ensuring that women have access to high-profile projects and they gain recognition from the subsequent success of those projects.

Organizations need to invest in mentorship. Being a good mentor to women colleagues means actively contributing to their professional development. Building trust between the mentor and mentee is critical to learning how to encourage mentees to take on challenges, apply for promotions, and support their professional development. Building trust starts from actively listening and engaging in understanding career aspirations. Mentors need to advocate in professional settings your mentee's work and their specific contributions to project or company success. **Women not only need to support one another, but male mentors* play an even more crucial role in fostering a more inclusive workplace.**

A SPECIAL NOTE TO MENTORS:

It is the responsibility of male colleagues to educate themselves on the benefits of inclusion and how to be an effective advocate. These responsibilities include educating themselves on workplace unconscious and conscious biases and how to avoid them.

Men are able to foster safe and respectful working relationships by actively listening for perspectives, experiences, and career aspirations and sharing resources and opportunities to support women in the workforce.

Male mentors can use their network with influential colleagues to further sponsor mentees to recommend her for opportunities that align with her career aspirations.

Conclusion

Addressing the workplace issues faced by women in the data center industry is essential for attracting and retaining key female talent and fostering a more inclusive and innovative sector. By promoting gender diversity initiatives, creating pathways to leadership, and investing in training and professional development, organizations can contribute to building a workplace that values the contributions of all employees, irrespective of gender.

This paper calls for a collective effort from industry stakeholders, policymakers, forward-looking leaders, and individuals to address the lack of talent by creating a more equitable and sustainable future for women in the data center industry.

While researching the staffing demands of data center design, build, and operations teams, Uptime has collected gender data since 2018. **Figure 1** shows that the majority (81%) of data center teams are overwhelmingly male, with women making up one in 10 workers or fewer. On average, a meager 8% of all teams are made up of women. This year, Uptime calculated this weighted average for the first time, and five years of data reveals no significant change.

Figure 1 Data center teams lack gender diversity

What portion of your organization's data center design, build, or operations staff is women? (n=749)

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