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Follow up from our call on Monday

1 message

[REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ideo.com> (Global Head of Talent and Organization) Tue, Jan 19, 2010 at 9:43 PM
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ideo.com>, "Elizabeth Johansen" <[REDACTED]@gmail.com>

Elizabeth:

I'm sorry you feel that we are not listening/concerned about gender and diversity at IDEO. I think we've been working in a determined fashion to approach this issue in a thoughtful and careful way, to avoid any missteps or mistakes in a very important and highly personal issue to so many of our people (both women and men).

After our call yesterday, I was torn about whether to share with you about our recent discussions at the highest leadership levels of the company. I don't want to be boastful or to express promises when we are still in the formative stages of designing solutions. But below is a post from [REDACTED] to the whole company about our recent efforts, so I'm sharing it with you. The bottom line is that we see concerns women have as early indicators of what every emerging leader at IDEO considers an issue. Namely, "How can I have a sustainable, engaging career at IDEO and still be fully me?" This approach helps us respect each individual as a unique person with unique, special needs.

We feel if we adopt this higher bar as a standard for leadership and developing all talent, that women will feel less of their concerns and see IDEO as a great place to work (as will all types/shapes/forms of people). Yes, until now, perhaps we've not been great at developing people in an intentional way. But, no we don't feel there is an illegal bias against women in this suboptimal practice.

We are serious and committed to figuring out positive forward motion to a problem that IDEO shares with nearly every business... How to engage leaders (with women as an important subgroup) in their future in a way that feels fulfilling and fair. So read below and let me know if it helps.

Best of luck in your next venture.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]
Global Head of Talent and Organization

(Gender) Diversity at IDEO update

POSTED JANUARY 19, 2010 12:25 PM

by [REDACTED] IDEO Partner

[see attached graphic]

Some statistics

Overall IDEO is 58% men and 42% women - not horrible.

And, better now than in 2005 (66% men, 34% women).

At level 3 and 4, we're nearly 50/50 (51% women at level 3, 47% at level 4).

Firm-wide, there many more women in support roles (64%) that don't tend toward partner track.

And, at level 5, we only have 24% women.

Do we have a problem?

Isn't it just a matter of time before we're more gender-balanced? Won't we naturally see an increase in the number of strong women leadership candidates in the next 3-5 years? Of course we will. The numbers show it. But, there appears to be something deeper here. Beyond the widely held knowledge that women are generally disadvantaged by the systems, structures, and behaviors of business environments. IDEO's existing ways, leadership tendencies, and talent

development processes may create conditions that disadvantage people who don't map to our existing leadership norms - women being just one of the more obvious. Yes, we believe we have a problem. But, it's one that we can begin to address intentionally.

This is a business issue, not diversity for diversity's sake.

It's about creating the highest potential for IDEO's success and impact. The literature says that a diversity of leadership styles benefits business practices (just look at our most successful project teams). More homogenous leaders and leadership creates bias for what we already know and less diversity of thought. This makes IDEO less fit.

Why women and not diversity more broadly?

We have a large cohort of women who are looking for clear indication that IDEO is a place for them to thrive. As the "canary in the coal mine" of a healthy business community, successful women at IDEO will help us understand how best to support diversity more broadly.

Some things we've come to believe

- We should embrace subcultures and variety of fit within the organization. Values and goals must be shared by everyone - skills, style, and experience should be extremely diverse.
- We need to redirect "back roominess" - conversations that favor the few whom are most normed to existing leadership characteristics. It fosters an over-reliance on crowd wisdom and gives disproportionate strength to the loudest advocates.
- We do not have clear enough definition of people's jobs and accountabilities. This encourages unstructured (back-room) conversations that forefront personal relationships above the contributions everyone is making.
- The pace of our business demands the efficiency of small decision-making groups and incomplete transparency. This norms us toward homogeneity in all ways. It's not about creating all-inclusive transparency, however, it is about demanding new behaviors in talent development and leadership practices.

The work we believe we need to do

Creating a more diverse work environment and population at IDEO is complex. This initiative will need to interconnect with other things being driven by the partnership (e.g. Feedback, Governance, AP and new partner nomination processes)

Next steps

- Broaden our team to include people who will benefit from this effort.
- Map career arcs, and "pinch points" for people progressing through the organization.
- Prototype more networked career development efforts that balance one-to-one mentorship.
- Explore more impactful (more effect, more people) approaches to leadership development and coaching.
- Explore external support/consultants (Anese Cavanaugh, Jane Tight, Mark Nicholson, others).
- Draft a talent manifesto (à la Netflix).
- Define a short list of things we can do quickly to signal IDEO's commitment to more diverse leadership.

Gender_Workmap_2.jpg
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