

October 2024

Pathways to Growth

Gender-smart business actions that work

An illustration on an orange background shows a woman with dark skin, wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt and a green skirt, pointing with a blue line to a presentation slide. The slide is a light yellow rounded rectangle containing two stylized human figures (a woman in a pink top and red skirt, and a man in a purple top and blue pants), a white speech bubble with three horizontal lines, and a bar chart with five bars of varying heights in purple, orange, yellow, brown, and pink.

Pathway 5
Work Culture

Gender Equality

Pathway 6
Workplace Safety



Establish robust systems for addressing sexual harassment

- + Employee satisfaction / retention
- + Attract more diverse talent
- Legal risks

- + Equity in the workplace
- Harmful norms

Pathway 1
Product Delivery




Deliver high-impact products and services to women customers

- + Sales to existing and new customers
- + Customer satisfaction

- + Economic empowerment
- Time poverty

Pathway 2
Agriculture

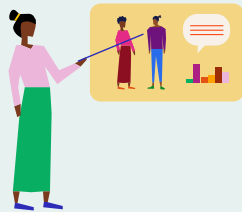


Connect women smallholder farmers to formal supply chains

- + Supply volume and quality
- + Retention of suppliers

- + Income for women farmers
- + Agency for women

Pathway 5
Work Culture



Foster an inclusive work culture in which women can thrive

- + Employee retention and productivity
- Absenteeism

- + Opportunities for working caregivers
- Sexual harassment of women
- Stress and burnout

Pathway 4
Last-mile Sales



Equip women sales agents with the tools to excel

- + Sales through new customers
- Agent turnover

- + Income opportunities for women
- + Access to products in rural areas

Pathway 3
Recruitment



Hire more women by creating quality jobs and inclusive hiring practices

- + Market size and profitability
- Employee turnover

- + Women entering key fields
- + Employee satisfaction
- Gender pay gap

Pathway 5

Work culture

Retain talent by fostering an inclusive work culture in which women can thrive



Inclusion is a key ingredient for employee satisfaction, business performance, and team retention. An inclusive work culture goes beyond diversity in numbers to value and support all employees, including women in all their diversity. Companies can enact policies, practices, and leadership approaches that create and uphold an inclusive work culture that recognizes and celebrates diversity, fosters a safe and productive space for all, and allows employees to feel a sense of belonging.

Which enterprises this pathway works for:

Businesses in all sectors, both those that want to start creating an inclusive culture and those that want to deepen their approaches.

The challenge: An inclusive workplace contributes to employee happiness, well-being, and satisfaction, which in turn leads to better employee performance and business results.⁸⁴ Companies, however, do not always prioritize inclusion. The business case for prioritizing it may not be fully visible or companies may focus exclusively on inclusion externally, such as reaching diverse women customers, and overlook inclusion internally among employees. Or if company management recognizes the business importance of an inclusive work culture, they may not know where to start or how to address inclusivity issues or gaps.⁸⁵

What businesses can do:

1. **Make a commitment.** Vocally prioritize inclusion at the leadership and management levels. For instance, you can develop a gender inclusion commitment statement and share this with your whole team to show your commitment to gender inclusion.
2. **Listen to your team.** Gather data and feedback on employees' experiences in the workplace, disaggregating the data by sex. You may gather this through surveys or through meetings or small group settings.
3. **Establish basic inclusive practices and**

policies. A good starting point is an anti-harassment policy and inclusive recruitment practices.

4. **Consider a broader suite of inclusive policies and practices.** These include but are not limited to: wage equity, paid parental leave, caregiver support, professional development, flexible work options, inclusive promotion criteria, and inclusive performance evaluations.

Business outcomes:

- **Improvements in employee retention.** A study conducted by McKinsey in Latin America found that employees at companies committed to diversity expected to stay at their companies 3.6 years on average, which is ~12% longer than employees at companies not committed to diversity.⁸⁶
- **Increase in women and men employees' productivity and engagement,** thereby minimizing recruitment and onboarding costs.⁸⁷ A study conducted by the ILO identified that over 60% of the participating companies, which had gender diversity and an inclusive organizational culture and policies, reported higher profitability and productivity.⁸⁸
- **Recruitment of diverse talent,** which can

lead to improved productivity, performance, and innovation.⁸⁹ %

- **Decreased absenteeism and attrition** of women and men employees and, therefore, decreased personnel costs.⁹¹

Social outcomes:

- Women experience **less discrimination and sexual harassment** in inclusive workplaces.⁹²
- All employees experience a more positive work environment and women specifically experience **reduced stress and burnout and improved overall well-being.**⁹³
- **Working caregivers are supported.**⁹⁴ Companies can respond to caregivers' realities and support employees who are juggling work and home responsibilities.
- Women experience **more stable employment and increased opportunities** for advancement and leadership roles.⁹⁵

Case study

Simplifica



Company profile

Operating since 2015, Simplifica is a Colombian HR tech company that offers payroll management solutions for domestic workers. Simplifica assists employers in enrolling domestic workers in social security, formalizing the employment relationship and ensuring these workers' access to mandatory benefits. Plus, Simplifica provides additional benefits, such as health and education services, to further improve workers' quality of life.

Background

Simplifica had for many years believed that its internal culture would be inclusive, by virtue of serving predominantly women customers.⁹⁶ In 2021, the company cast an eye inward and ensured it was being intentionally inclusive with both customers and its workforce.

Business priority and entry point for the gender work

With support from Value for Women and one of its investors, ALIVE Ventures, Simplifica undertook a gender diagnostic. This included applying an employee survey for the first time

and segmenting the responses by gender.⁹⁷ The survey showed two main findings:

- A gender gap in the perception of work-life balance. Only 56% of women compared to 76% of men felt they had a work-life balance.^{98 99}
- A large percentage (32%) of men and women felt the company did not take seriously making adjustments to meet the needs of parents (e.g., breastfeeding rooms, parental leave), potentially hindering work performance.¹⁰⁰

Simplifica was surprised to see these gender disparities emerge in the data, and they served as a lightning rod for further investigation and then action.

Simplifica recognized that formalizing policies and practices to foster an inclusive work culture would have powerful synergies with the already-strong gender focus of its products and would drive multiple additional benefits. Formalization would remove subjectivity and potential bias from the company's policies and practices, ensuring they consistently benefit all employees. Formalization would also increase employee awareness of the company's commitments and increase employees' uptake of these policies.

Our company DNA has always had an inclination towards gender inclusion and diversity. But we were lacking formalization; we didn't have a structure to implement the plans so everyone in the organization understood the issue clearly. It was important to formalize this into inclusive policies and communicate them with employees to ensure the well-being of the staff and the development of the company.

— Co-CEO, Symplifica

Actions

Recognizing the imperative for Symplifica to align its values internally and externally, and driven by the gender gaps revealed by the survey data, Symplifica took multiple actions, including:

1. Design and launch of a Gender Commitment and Strategy, which set out Symplifica's vision for gender inclusion, why it is important to the company, and how the company will act on it. This strategy considered the impact on both women domestic workers and Symplifica's women employees and leaders. It included objectives, goals, and metrics to measure the progress on gender inclusion actions.
2. Creation and launch of a family support policy addressing the needs of parent and caregiver employees. Benefits established by this policy include:
 - Support for nursing mothers. For those working online, flexible schedules enable women to not be online while expressing milk. For those in the office, an hour daily is now granted for milk expression.

Beyond these actions on inclusive work culture, Symplifica undertook additional actions inspired by the results of the holistic gender diagnostic. The company formalized its recruitment policy with a gender lens to hire more women into underrepresented areas. The company developed an awareness campaign on gender-based violence to mitigate the elevated risks that domestic workers face and partnered with local government to support domestic workers who identify being in situations of violence. All together, these actions constituted Symplifica's holistic Gender Action Plan.

Results

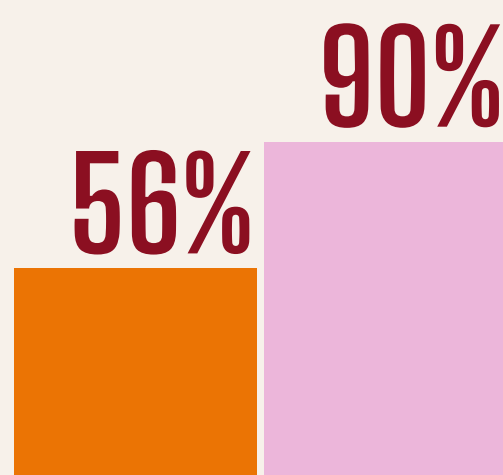
Employees immensely valued these changes. Since their implementation in the second half of 2022 through July 2024, employee satisfaction has improved markedly in associated measures particularly among women (men's satisfaction was already quite high):¹⁰¹

Women's satisfaction with work-life balance increased by 34% from 56% to 90%.¹⁰²

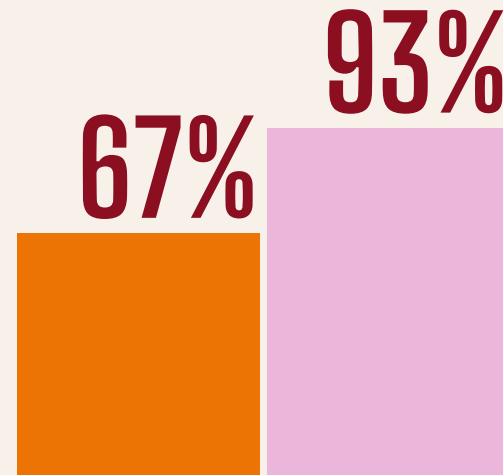
Women's perception that the company takes seriously the specific needs of mothers and fathers increased by 26% from 67% to 93%.¹⁰³

Women's satisfaction with benefits increased by 12% from 78% to 90%.¹⁰⁴

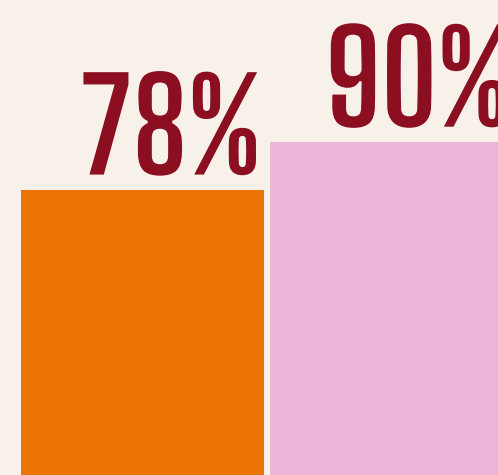
The leadership team reported noticing increased productivity, which they said the new policy and practices contributed to.



Women's satisfaction with work-life



Women's perception that the company takes seriously the needs of mothers and fathers



Women's satisfaction with benefits increased



contributed to by new policy and practices

What contributed to Symplifica's success?

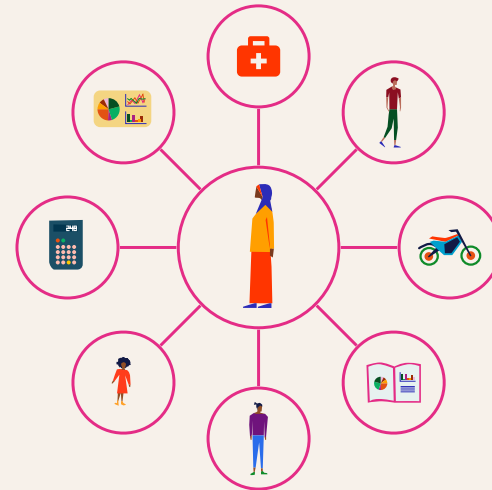
Regular measurement

The company conducted an employee satisfaction survey regularly to ensure that the inclusive policies and practices were achieving the expected results, and made adjustments if necessary.



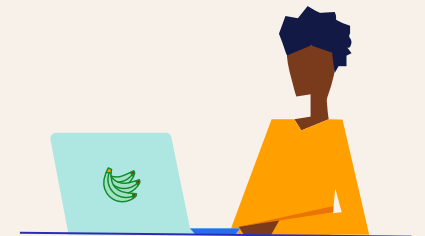
Leadership commitment

Simplifica's leadership, deeply committed to gender equality as a core part of the business model, was motivated to take action after the employee survey revealed employees', and particularly women's, concerns.



Team ownership

Simplifica established a gender committee that led this work with committed representatives from different areas of the company. This fostered ownership so much so that after the technical assistance, the committee subsequently implemented an inclusive recruitment policy and process and took action to increase the representation of women in tech roles. Today, this committee continues work to close gender gaps.



Mini case study

Easy Solar



Case Study: Easy Solar reduced its employee turnover by more than half



Sector: Clean Energy



Country: Sierra Leone & Liberia

Easy Solar provides pay-as-you-go solar energy solutions in West Africa.

Challenge

Easy Solar's women employees were a minority (31%) of its workforce and less likely than men to recommend Easy Solar as a place to work, with an Employee Net Promoter Score of 32 for women compared to 55 for men.^{105 106} This was increasing employee turnover, and associated costs.

Actions

With support from Value for Women and Acumen, Easy Solar held focus groups to understand why women employees were less satisfied in the workplace than men. They found that parents and caregivers, including women returning from maternity leave, were particularly struggling. In response, Easy Solar revised its employee handbook to include additional benefits:

- Flexible work hours for new mothers returning to work.
- Nursing rooms and breaks for nursing mothers.
- Fourteen calendar days paid paternity leave for new fathers, so they could assume care responsibilities in the household.
- Increased scope of bereavement leave to include caring for the critically ill and recovering from domestic violence.

Easy Solar also assembled a group of 15 gender champions, both men and women, to steward its gender practices.

Results

Women employees' Net Promoter Score grew from 32 to 51 and employee turnover decreased from 4.6% to 1.9%.¹⁰⁷

Mini case study

SokoFresh



Case Study: SokoFresh's formalization of policies improved women employees' satisfaction



Sector: Agriculture



Country: Kenya

Sokofresh provides cooling and market linkages to smallholder farmers to solve post-harvest loss issues.

Challenge

In an employee survey, SokoFresh's women employees reported being less satisfied with the company than men employees (54% versus 78%) and having a lower work-life balance (63% versus 72%). Lower satisfaction is risky for any company because it can lead to attrition and loss of talent.

Actions

Sokofresh took this gender gap seriously, and with Value for Women's support, Sokofresh decided to put in place policies that would improve its employees' experience in the workplace. It prioritized a specific set of policies and practices and did the following:


- Revised the Code of Conduct to explicitly promote gender inclusion.
- Enhanced communication about the "flexible office" opportunity to ensure all


- employees could fully benefit from it.
- Standardized remuneration bands and communicated these.
- Formalized an Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy and a Whistleblowing Policy.
- Conducted Training of Trainers for key team members on gender inclusion, covering barriers women face in the workplace, unconscious bias, and the business case for gender diversity.


Results

After implementing these actions, SokoFresh saw significant improvements in women employees' satisfaction. Overall satisfaction increased by 29% from 54% to 83%, while women who felt they had a good work-life balance increased by 26% from 63% to 89%. Additionally, the sense of belonging among women employees improved by 21% from 73% to 94%, reflecting a more inclusive and supportive work environment.



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This pathway contains references from the our report, Pathways to Growth: Gender-smart business actions that work. Please refer to the full report for complete context and to access the referenced footnotes and additional details.