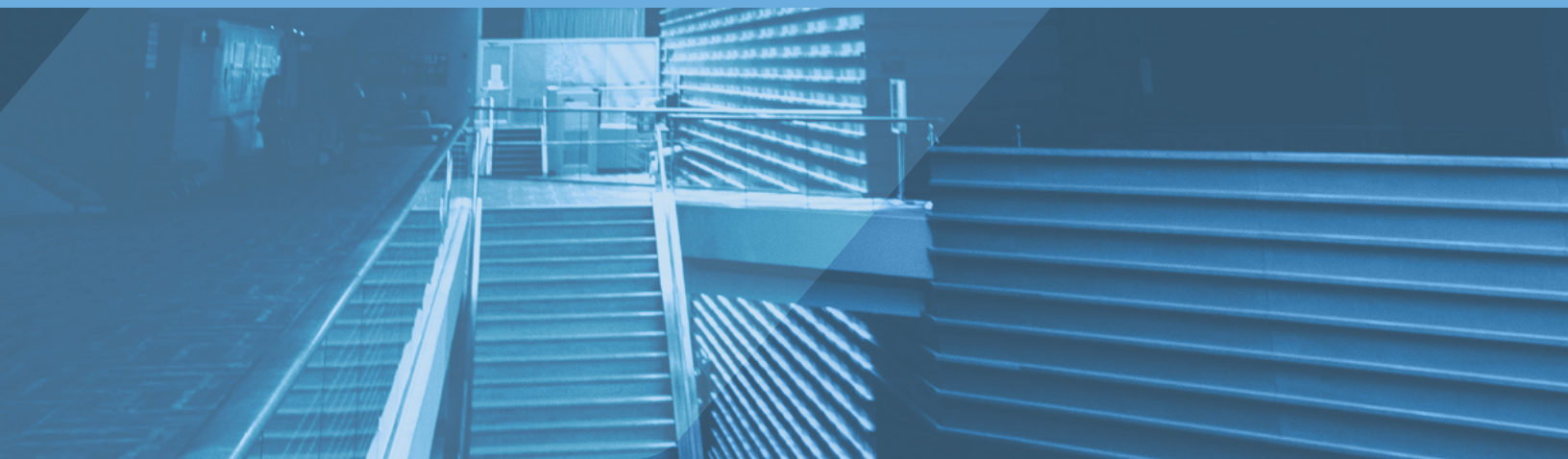




WOMEN
UNLIMITED, INC. | MENTORING
EDUCATION
NETWORKING

IMPACT REPORT

2021 | Looking Back to Move Forward:
Building Inclusive Corporate Cultures
through Competencies and Collaboration



“I am enabling my team to get answers, as opposed to always providing them.”

”

“

I would rather fail forward than not try at all.”

“

I’m now comfortable with being uncomfortable.”

”

“I see risk as an opportunity to grow.”

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Impact Report 2021

Looking Back to Move Forward: Building Inclusive Corporate Cultures through Competencies and Collaboration

The pandemic thrust the business world into unprecedented changes in how, when and where people work. It required a greater flexibility and an increased trust in the ingenuity, creativity and diversity of the work force. While “one size fits all” was never really the answer, the pandemic made it clear that it never could be.

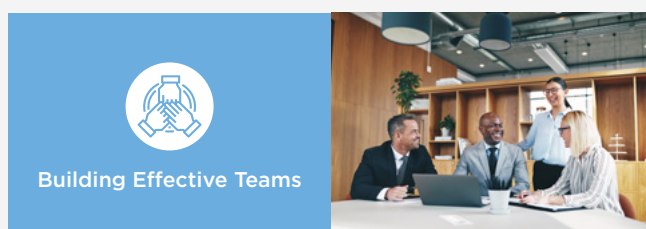
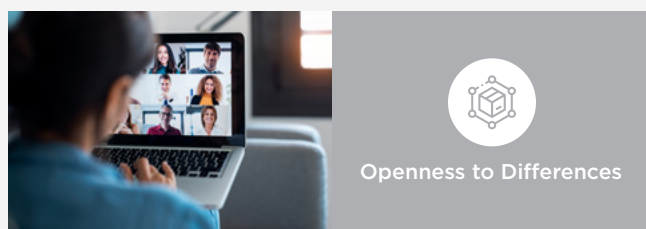
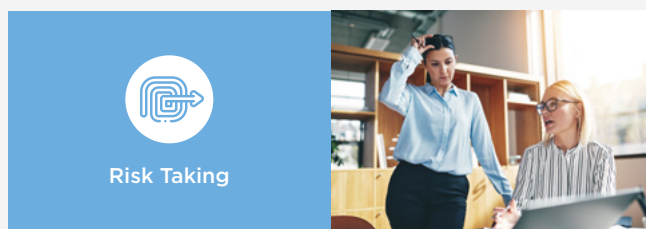
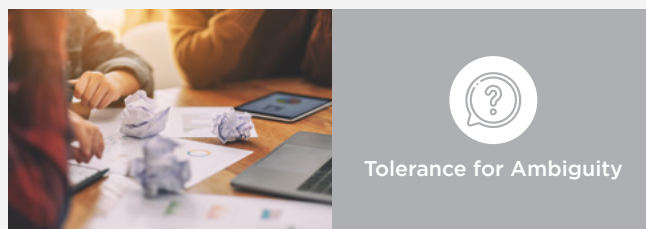
When the pandemic and lock downs abruptly changed the way business was done, WOMEN Unlimited, Inc. pivoted to design a new, and equally impactful, opportunity for female leaders to learn and grow despite the personal and professional stressors brought on by the pandemic. We created a safe environment in which program participants could readily take advantage of the three proven components of WOMEN Unlimited’s learning framework for successful growth and development: Mentoring, Education and Networking.

While evaluating the session topics for the newly designed virtual programs, it became evident that the women attending were experiencing a greater need to accelerate the development of five key competencies for successful leadership:

1. Adaptability
2. Tolerance for Ambiguity
3. Risk Taking
4. Openness to Differences
5. Building Effective Teams

These competencies, a foundation of our in-person programs, combined with the feedback we received from participants, their managers and their mentors, affirmed that our learning approach was equally effective and impactful regardless of the learning environment.

Key Competencies for Successful Leadership



Additionally, we knew from our over 27 years of developing female talent that these competencies, because of their requirement for creativity and collaboration, helped create more inclusive corporate cultures.

We began to ask the question: “How does all of this hard-won knowledge, play out in the pandemic?” Although, anecdotally, we saw increased acceptance and practice of these competencies among our participants, we took advantage of the opportunity to survey the three constituencies impacted by WOMEN Unlimited programs: the women themselves (program participants), their managers and the organizational leaders who served as the participants’ mentors. We also assessed the accompanying shift towards more inclusive corporate cultures.

The research measured the self-rating changes in specific competencies of the talented women who participated in WOMEN Unlimited programs before and during the pandemic. It also assessed the changes in competencies and collaboration as perceived by their managers and their senior level mentors. As a result, WOMEN Unlimited was able to compile an objective and multi-faceted assessment of shifts in leadership competencies and collaboration as well as their impact on corporate culture.

Competencies and Collaboration at Work

- The competencies developed were considered to be of critical importance, whether working remotely, on site or in a hybrid environment.
- In all five competencies, across the three constituent groups, there were marked improvements as reported by the women themselves, their managers and their mentors.
- Managerial empathy for female employees and their complex personal and professional responsibilities increased significantly and led to a greater understanding by managers of the varying needs of a diverse workforce.
- Through conversation and collaboration, women and their managers worked together to define critical priorities. As a result, women were able to let go of time-consuming and stress-inducing tasks so they could better influence what was most critical to the organization.
- By redesigning development programs to leverage the remote platform, WOMEN Unlimited was able to create a learning experience that was every bit as effective as the in-person environment.
- Frustration and burnout decreased significantly among a large majority of the women as they became more adept at managing their time and their responsibilities.
- Feelings of uncertainty about their value to the organization decreased among the majority of women participants, increasing the probability of their long-term loyalty to the organization.
- Managers and mentors looked at inclusiveness through a different lens, with the spotlight on the importance of individual creativity in fostering organizational goals.

Moving Forward: Implications for the Future

- > Corporations now have a clearer roadmap of five competencies that can improve both leadership effectiveness and organizational inclusiveness.
- > Leveraging the flexibility and ingenuity employees gained during the pandemic, organizations can maximize their efforts to retain key contributors, especially female talent.
- > As the job market continues to tighten, compensation alone will not attract new talent. By creating a culture that is defined by adaptability and openness to differences, organizations are more likely to attract much-needed diverse talent.
- > Managers who provide their employees with more independence for when and how they work will see that the job will get done and that the resulting autonomy will often result in even better outcomes.
- > Organizational leaders have tangible evidence that collaboratively implementing key competencies throughout the company, and holding managers accountable for learning and fostering those competencies, can create a more trusting and inclusive corporate culture.

Overview & Goals

WOMEN Unlimited, Inc. (WUI) surveyed three major constituencies: Participants and Alumnae of WUI programs...their Managers...and their Mentors.

The research had four specific goals:

1. Simultaneously survey three major sectors who contribute significantly to corporate growth and profitability
2. Assess the growth and development of program participants and alumnae across five major leadership competencies
3. Gain the insights of managers and mentors on how the women changed and the strategies they utilized to help them change
4. Analyze the impact of the changes in the women and those key constituents who interacted with them to create a more inclusive corporate culture

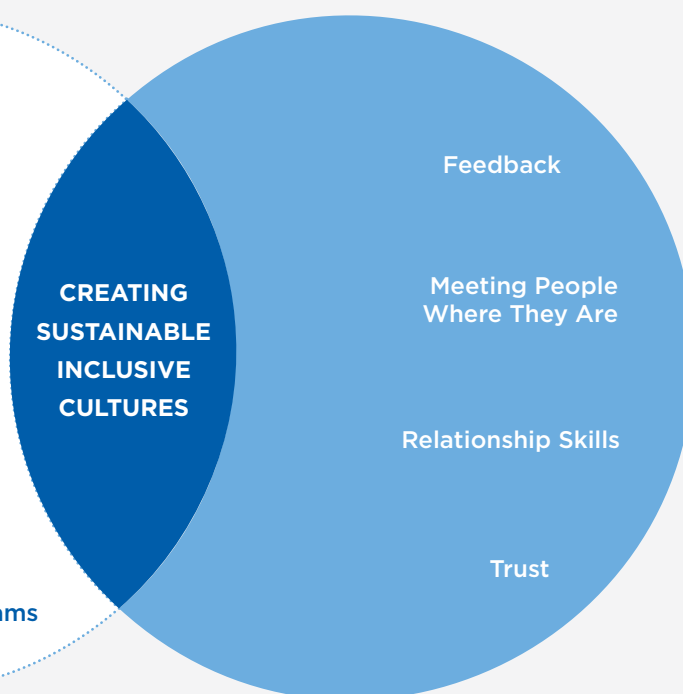
THE FOUNDATION

5 Leadership Competencies



THE FRAMEWORK

Collaboration



Our study highlighted both the foundation and the framework for building inclusive cultures

Demographics—Three Constituencies Surveyed

- 2141 current **participants** and alumnae of WOMEN Unlimited's LEAD AND IMpower programs who participated between 10/5/2017 – 12/2/2020 were surveyed. 1194 attended the LEAD program, which is designed for mid-career women and 947 attended the IMpower program, designed for early-career talent. All had been selected by their organizations for participation in their respective programs.
- 2098 **managers** who were the immediate supervisors of the women surveyed. They were involved in assessing the women's growth and development throughout the respective programs.
- 223 organizational leaders who acted as **mentors** for the surveyed program participants and who interacted with their mentees regularly throughout each program.

Competencies Surveyed

Five competencies were the basis of the survey for each group. Women were asked to rate their improvement in each competency. Managers and mentors were surveyed on the improvements they saw in the program participants.

Competencies were selected based on their proven importance for effective leadership. For all three constituencies, the competencies were named and defined as follows:

- **Adaptability:** *The ability to be flexible in handling change and easily adjust focus and demeanor to match shifting demands of different situations.*
- **Tolerance for Ambiguity:** *The ability to work in conditions of uncertainty, operate effectively and be comfortable with vague information.*
- **Risk Taking:** *The ability to make a decision or begin a task involving a challenge or a desirable goal in which there is a lack of certainty and potential of failure.*
- **Openness to Differences:** *The ability to have an open mindset, embrace new ideas and experiences, and different ways of seeing things.*
- **Building Effective Teams:** *The ability to direct work, drive engagement, collaborate with team members with diverse skills and perspectives, and create strategy that motivates others to action.*

Collaboration Surveyed

- Women were asked about their relationships with managers and mentors.
- Women were surveyed on the impact of the pandemic
- Managers were asked about the impact of the pandemic on their direct reports, and how they helped them create strategies to move past pandemic-related obstacles.
- Mentors were surveyed on the impact of the pandemic on their mentees.
- Mentors were asked what corporations needed to do to further support female talent.

The pages that follow provide detailed information on responses by each of the constituencies to changes in the five competencies during the pandemic and the effect of these changes on creating a more inclusive corporate culture.



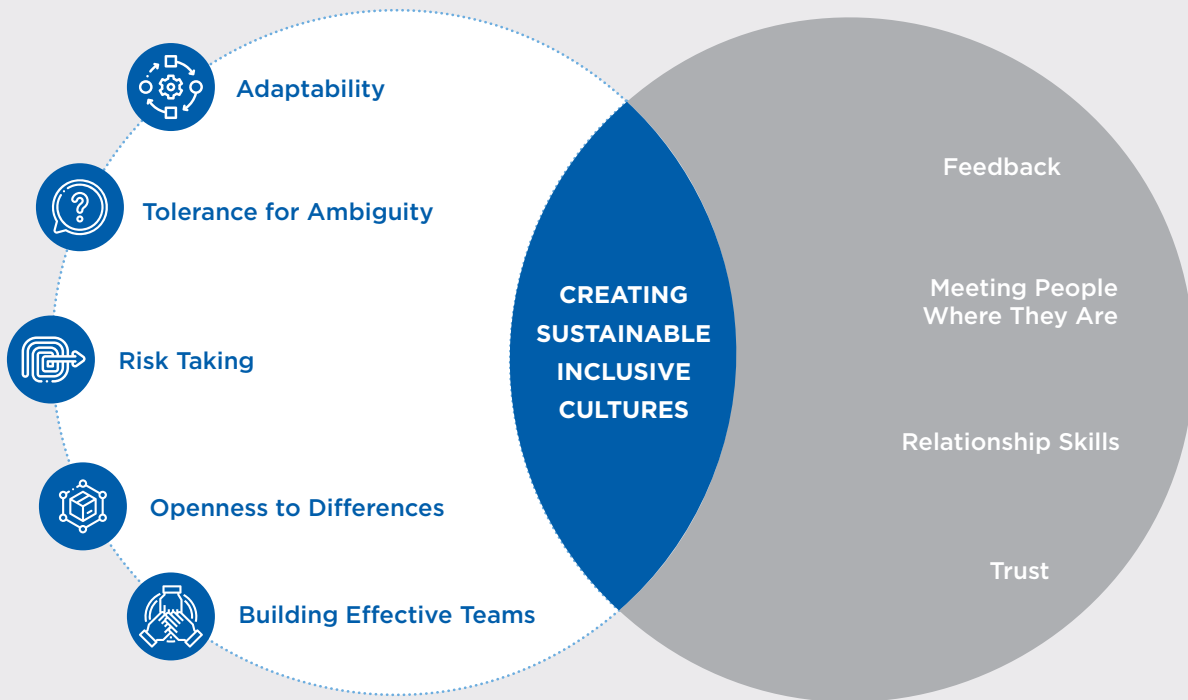
COMPETENCIES: THE FOUNDATION FOR INCLUSIVE CORPORATE CULTURES

THE FOUNDATION

5 Leadership Competencies

THE FRAMEWORK

Collaboration





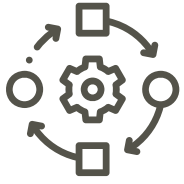
KEY COMPETENCY 1

Changes in Adaptability



DEFINED

To ensure uniformity and a common understanding of Adaptability as a needed leadership quality, it was defined for all three constituencies as: *the ability to be flexible in handling change and easily adjust focus and demeanor to match shifting demands of different situations.*



Changes in Adaptability

How Women Rated Themselves in Changes in Adaptability

KEY FINDING:

PARTICIPANTS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, the women rating themselves as “highly skilled” nearly tripled, going from 15% to 41%.

Women on Improved Adaptability

“I applied for a role knowing I did not have all of the skills requested and I GOT THE JOB!”

“Between COVID and a merger I’ve definitely had to adapt. Acquired the skills to be more assertive and more confident.”

“I learned change was constant, and I didn’t need to be afraid of failure. I could try one approach and adjust if needed.”

How Managers Rated the Changes in Adaptability

KEY FINDING:

MANAGERS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, managers who rated their program participants as “highly skilled” at adaptability more than doubled, going from 14% to 29%.

Managers on Improvements in Adaptability

“She now shifts direction seamlessly and focuses on the business objectives and not on emotional ties to the previous direction.”

“Travel restrictions forced project implementation to be done entirely remotely which called for much Adaptability.”

“She can see where more frequent changes and improvements help the business do better. Can adjust to new situations more rapidly.”

“I’ve noticed she continues to enhance this skillset by being more aware and empathetic to the perspective of other functions.”

How Mentors Rated the Changes in Adaptability

KEY FINDING:

MENTORS SURVEYED

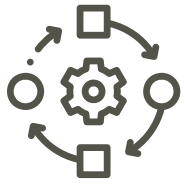
During the pandemic, mentors found that their mentees moved from only 4% being “highly skilled” in adaptability to 35% reaching that level...an improvement of more than eightfold.

Mentors on Changes in Adaptability

“The mentees showed amazing adaptability during the COVID pandemic and its required adaptations.”

“They did especially well moving from about a 3 to 5 in 2020 with its challenges!”

“They quickly set up new ways to work with their team and saw the opportunity to gain more time in their day (no commutes, no drop-ins) and to be more strategic in their thinking.”



Changes in Adaptability



Perspective on Increased Adaptability from Experts “In the Room” as Shared by WUI Program Managers

- *“In essence, as a Program Manager, I am hearing participants are acting fast and learning fast, all while communicating more often and frequently with key stakeholders.”*
- *“Participants are now more adept at being adaptable. One pointed out that she became better at thinking through what wasn’t working and then adapting as she moved forward.”*
- *“There was a significant improvement in adaptability among a number of participants.”*

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- Both the statistics and the comments by women, their managers and their mentors show that the pandemic period was a catalyst for all to become more adaptable.
- By interacting with their team members, their managers and their mentors, the women were able to pinpoint strategies for adaptability that worked for them and their organizations.
- Collaboration was crucial, reinforcing the success strategy: *“You have to do it yourself, but you can’t do it alone.”*
- While working and learning remotely defined this period, the increase in willingness to be adaptable by women, their managers and their organizations is transferable to success in any work environment.



KEY COMPETENCY 2

Changes in Tolerance for Ambiguity



DEFINED

To ensure uniformity and a common understanding of “Tolerance for Ambiguity” as a needed leadership quality, it was defined for all three constituencies as: *The ability to work in conditions of uncertainty, operate effectively and be comfortable with vague information.*



Changes in Tolerance for Ambiguity

How Women Rated Themselves in Tolerance for Ambiguity

KEY FINDING:

PARTICIPANTS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, women who viewed themselves as “highly skilled” at tolerating ambiguity tripled from 9% to 28%.

Women on Tolerance for Ambiguity

“I developed confidence in not being fully prepared.”

“I’ve become comfortable with being uncomfortable.”

“I learned a lot about perfectionism and how it leads to missed opportunities.”

“I’m able to proceed when ambiguity and vague information are part of the equation.”

How Managers Rated the Changes in Tolerance for Ambiguity

KEY FINDING:

MANAGERS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, managers who rated their program participants as “highly skilled” at tolerating ambiguity more than doubled, going from 12% to 26%.

Managers on Improvements in Tolerance for Ambiguity

“She’s very flexible in dealing with partial information and uncertain environments.”

“My direct report takes ambiguous inputs and figures out how to get her team to produce value.”

“She does not stress in the face of ambiguity and is comfortable asking questions.”

“She is always looking for second alternatives when the normal process is not available.”

How Mentors Rated the Changes in Tolerance for Ambiguity Among Their Mentees

KEY FINDING:

MENTORS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, mentors found that their mentees moved from only 2% being “highly skilled” in tolerating ambiguity to 30%.

Mentors on Changes in Tolerance for Ambiguity Among Their Mentees

“The pandemic gave mentees the opportunity to work with significant ambiguity and, to their credit, they each stepped up.”

“Good solid movement to accepting that ambiguity is part of their career world.”

“They learned to understand that leadership involves accepting ambiguity.”

“As the trust among the team grew, tolerance for ambiguity and the ability to successfully navigate it increased.”



Changes in Tolerance for Ambiguity



Perspective on Increased Tolerance for Ambiguity from Experts “in the Room” as Shared by WUI Program Managers

- “One of our participants indicated how she had become more comfortable with ambiguity: *I am floating ideas and sharing drafts without having everything buttoned down, which has empowered me to be more strategic. For example, an idea that I pitched resulted in a thought leadership paper at the brand level that is getting senior level attention.*”
- “Several participants navigated tremendous change and ambiguity: COVID cases and hospitalizations, moving countries, serious accidents and sick children. They supported one another through this ambiguity and really utilized each other.”

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- Women who traditionally tend to want all the answers before they proceed became three times more willing to embrace ambiguity.
- The pandemic made ambiguity a way of life, but women and their managers often chose not to be sidelined by it and thrived as a result.
- Trust, collaboration and a willingness to ask questions are important cornerstones of channeling ambiguity for individual and corporate success.



KEY COMPETENCY 3

Changes in Risk Taking



DEFINED

To ensure uniformity and that those surveyed were responding to “Risk Taking” as the needed leadership quality, it was defined for all three constituencies as follows: *the ability to make a decision or begin a task involving a challenge or a desirable goal in which there is a lack of certainty and potential of failure.*



Changes in Risk Taking

How Women Rated Themselves in Risk Taking

KEY FINDING:

PARTICIPANTS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, the women rating themselves as “highly skilled” at risk taking more than quadrupled, going from 4% to 18%.

Women on Risk Taking

“I was always pretty strong at risk taking. Now I have a better understanding of how to bring others along with me.”

“I used to hold back my ideas because I didn’t feel I was in a position to give my suggestions.”

“I now see risk as an opportunity to grow.”

“I learned that it is NOT just okay to take calculated risks, but expected if you want to stand out.”

How Managers Rated Changes in Risk Taking

KEY FINDING:

MANAGERS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, managers who rated their program participants as “highly skilled” at risk taking increased almost sixfold, going from 4% to 25%.

Managers on Improvements in Risk Taking

“Taking good risks and encouraging her team to do so is probably her biggest improvement.”

“She now delegates much more and understands the risk that entails.”

“Moving from Project Manager to Director was an unknown and she has been able to navigate with confidence.”

How Mentors Rated Changes in Risk Taking among Their Mentees

KEY FINDING:

MENTORS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, mentors who rated their mentees as “highly skilled” at risk taking increased from 0% to 18%.

Mentors on Changes in Risk Taking among Their Mentees

“The women start to realize that there are written and unwritten rules within their companies, making them much smarter about how they approach risk taking.”

“They have all been challenged and taken risks. One took a big risk seeking a big promotion and got it!”

“I’ve selectively advised participants to have the trust and courage to take specific risks. They have largely taken my advice, and it has worked out well for them.”



Changes in Risk Taking



Perspective on Increased Risk Taking from Experts “in the Room” as Shared by WUI Program Managers

- *“A participant from my last program gained confidence by taking risks. She said she started small and then as her confidence grew, her manager tapped her to take a larger role (which would have a steep learning curve). She took the new role, her confidence continued to grow and she has been very successful. Taking a leap and a risk was scary for her, but she told me that if she hadn’t jumped into the new role, she would have been living with regret.”*
- *“A participant from a pharma company gained tremendous confidence from the beginning to the end of the program. As a woman of color, she embraced her authenticity and took the risk to offer different perspectives she had previously hidden. This resulted in promotions, greater executive presence and great feedback from her manager.”*

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- While a number of women perceived themselves as adequate risk takers at the start, they became significantly more proficient at defining the right type of risks.
- Delegation and collaboration were pinpointed as important aspects of successful risk taking, especially in a remote environment.
- A number of women put the practical aspects of risk taking to work and sought out new positions and/or responsibilities and got them.



KEY COMPETENCY 4

Changes in Openness to Differences



DEFINED

To ensure uniformity and a common understanding of “Openness to Differences” as a needed leadership quality, it was defined for all three constituencies as: *The ability to have an open mindset, embrace new ideas and experiences, and different ways of seeing things.*



Changes in Openness to Differences

How Women Rated Themselves in Openness to Differences

KEY FINDING:

PARTICIPANTS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, the women rating themselves as “highly skilled” at being open to differences more than doubled, going from 13% to 34%.

Women on Being Open to Differences

“I became more curious without being judgmental... really asking questions because I am curious of the answer and not to steer in a particular direction.”

“Diversity and inclusion of thought were not a priority before. Today they are VERY much an intentional part of my decision making process.”

“I am leading a very diverse team now - in thought, approach, and background. That has taught me to value differences and leverage them to impact the business.”

How Managers Viewed the Changes in Openness to Differences

KEY FINDING:

MANAGERS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, managers who rated their program participants as “highly skilled” at being open to differences moved from 26% to 42%.

Managers on Improvements in Openness to Differences

“Now she is more prone to take the time to listen to all parties.”

“She has a much better understanding of other parts of our business and their drivers. She has learned to integrate each of those viewpoints to better our outcomes.”

“She is gaining the ability to pull ideas from others and develop plans together.”

“She is very open to new and diverse situations. Sees and evaluates with no preconceived notions.”

How Mentors Viewed the Changes in Openness to Differences in their Mentees

KEY FINDING:

MENTORS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, mentors found that their mentees moved from 10% being “highly skilled” at openness to differences to 50%. A fivefold change.

Mentors on Changes in Openness to Differences among Their Mentees

“In some ways, the pandemic made them more open to differences.”

“They have recognized that people are wired differently; so different approaches are needed to create the desired impact.”

“Many ‘aha’ moments from my mentees as they expressed they would never before have looked at or addressed issues that way.”

“2020 has forced all of them to look at work and their careers differently.”



Changes in Openness to Differences



Perspective on Increased Openness to Differences from Experts “in the Room” as Shared by WUI Program Managers

- *“The participants have shared that they have seen value add in getting broader opinions which are shaping decisions more effectively. They had to resist taking it personally and realize that getting various points of view can drive a better outcome. Overall there was greater innovation and thinking outside the box.”*

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- All three constituencies acknowledged that the pandemic necessitated a need to be more open to differences.
- Accepting differences took many forms: alternate work environments, unconventional work hours, new methods of managing and interacting with peers, subordinates and leaders.
- Managers became more open and understanding of the different challenges women faced, since women were more often the ones balancing home and work requirements.
- Collaboration and creative solutions increased with greater openness to differences.
- The more these changes took hold, the more inclusive the corporate culture became.





KEY COMPETENCY 5

Changes in Building Effective Teams



DEFINED

To ensure uniformity and a common understanding of “Building Effective Teams” as a needed leadership quality, it was defined for all three constituencies as: *the ability to direct work, drive engagement, collaborate with team members with diverse skills and perspectives, and create strategy that motivates others to action.*



Changes in Building Effective Teams

How Women Rated Themselves in Building Effective Teams

KEY FINDING:

PARTICIPANTS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, the women rating themselves as “highly skilled” at building effective teams more than doubled, going from 14% to 39%.

Women on Building Effective Teams

“I have a better understanding of how to bring others along with me.”

“I was very successful this year in my new role to build an effective team by ensuring I provided a safe environment for all to collaborate and brainstorm solutions to challenges.”

“I now focus on delegation and enabling the team to get answers as opposed to always providing them.”

“I have become more decisive in aiming at business goals whilst continuing to care for people and up-skilling my team.”

How Managers Viewed the Changes in Building Effective Teams

KEY FINDING:

MANAGERS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, managers who rated their program participants as “highly skilled” at building effective teams more than doubled, going from 16% to 40%.

Managers on Improvements in Building Effective Teams

“She now understands the value of the softer side of cross-functional project management: team motivation; communication and listening.”

“She now excels at leading matrix teams, and I am confident this will also be the case when opportunity is given as a direct people manager.”

“She is able to delegate more and has increased the overall effectiveness of the team.”

“She changed her approach to empower her team.”

How Mentors Viewed the Changes in Building Effective Teams in their Mentees

KEY FINDING:

MENTORS SURVEYED

During the pandemic, the mentors who found their mentees “highly skilled” at building effective teams quintupled, going from 6% to 30%.

Mentors on Changes in Building Effective Teams among Their Mentees

“I love the fact that there is a willingness to hold people accountable, and to look at challenging people in new ways.”

“Each of the mentees had team leadership roles at work in which they were stretched even further due to the pandemic to influence others and bring others along.”

“Mentees really embraced ensuring goals are set properly with the team.”



Changes in Building Effective Teams



Perspective on Increased Team Building Effectiveness from Experts “in the Room” as Shared by WUI Program Managers

- *“In the virtual world, our participants have truly found the importance of building alliances, not doing it alone, and having a personal board of advisors. I have seen a tremendous increase in utilization of the peer team members within each group as well as their willingness to leverage mentors.”*
- *“Under the supervision of their mentors, two participants took the lead to address a number of team-based challenges, agreeing upon a new set of operating principles and ultimately changing the team dynamics.”*

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- The importance of moving away from “doing it all” to tapping the talents of a diverse team became especially evident during the pandemic.
- Women became more willing to...and more adept at...delegating to their teams.
- Women expanded the definition of ‘team’ from only immediate reports to include peers at all levels. This resulted in expanded ideas and successful collaboration, which fostered individual and corporate success.

The FEW

How High-Level Women View the 5 Competencies

In our efforts to develop a complete picture of the importance of the five competencies at all organizational levels, WOMEN Unlimited also surveyed participants in The FEW, The Forums for Executive Women.

Participants were asked to rate the competencies in order of importance to success in their current high-level roles. They were also invited to provide their comments.

ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

82% Building Effective Teams

73% Adaptability

55% Tolerance for Ambiguity

55% Openness to Differences

10% Risk Taking

KEY FINDING:

THE FEW

Among the high-level women executives surveyed, building effective teams and the need for adaptability were rated the most important in their current role, significantly outpacing the other three competencies.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Senior-Level Women Executives on the 5 Competencies

"I am constantly trying to improve my ability to anticipate changes and get ahead of the need to adapt."

"I have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Markets, the economy and political environment are constantly evolving and are never completely known or sure."

"Openness to differences is a tricky balance when you have grown a business and seen success in a particular way. Yet, you need to be anticipatory of industry changes and evolve with the current market."

"In my role, risk taking is a natural part of what we need to do to deliver performance for our clients."

"Building effective teams is critical to success - one I continue to work on and am sure I will never be done."

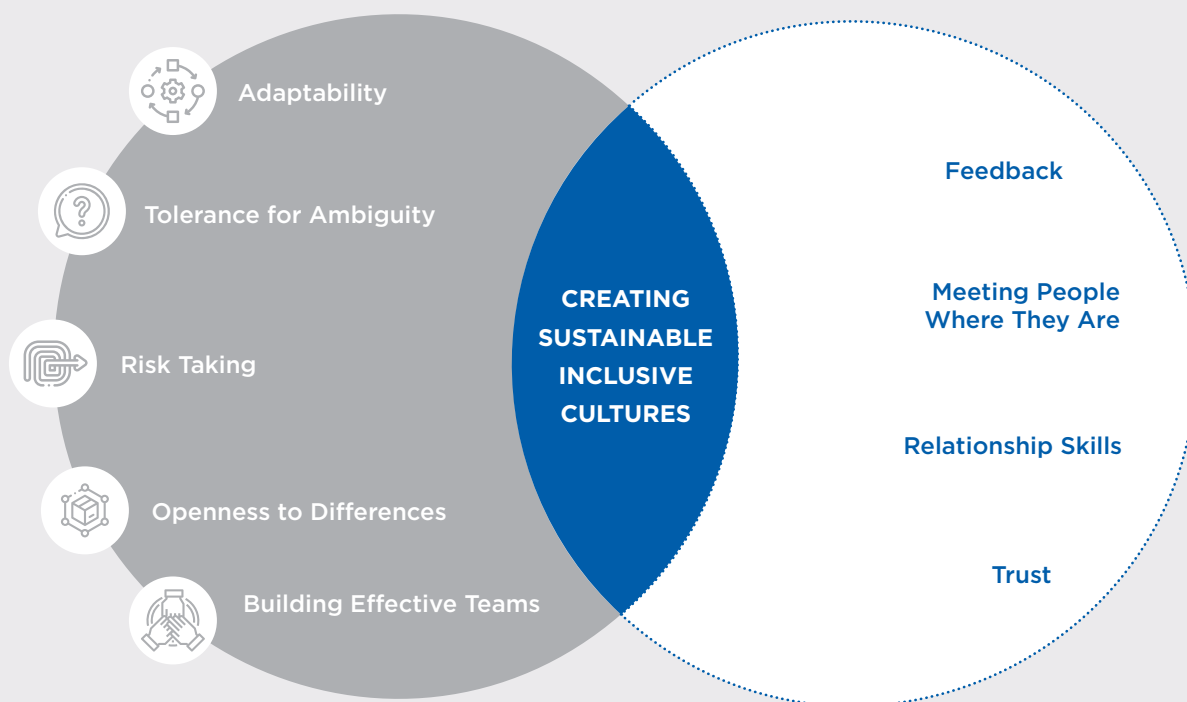
COLLABORATION: THE FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE CORPORATE CULTURES

THE FOUNDATION

5 Leadership Competencies

THE FRAMEWORK

Collaboration



THE FRAMEWORK

Survey Findings on Collaboration



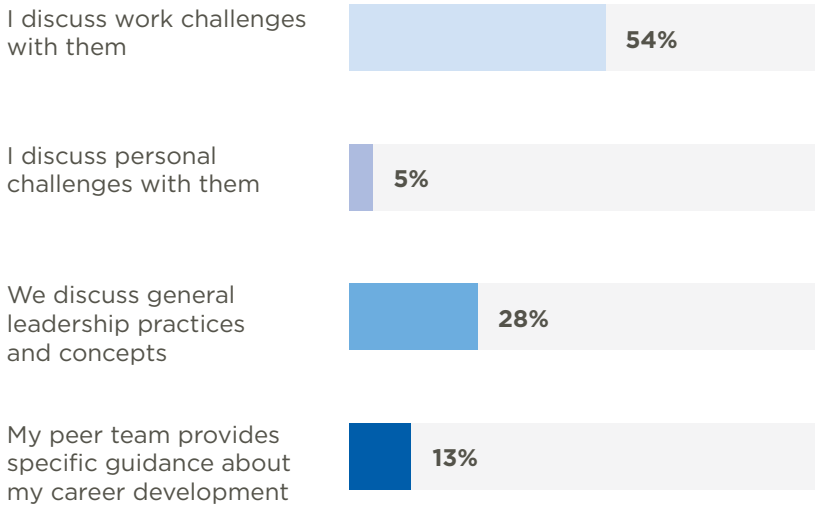
OVERVIEW

All aspects of WOMEN Unlimited programs are aimed at applicability to real world situations in the workplace. As a result, throughout the programs, participants interact and collaborate with their peer groups, mentors and managers to develop the leadership skills required for their own career advancement and for the benefit of the organization.

As part of our survey, we asked the women to assess and comment on their collaborations with their managers and mentors. Additionally, we asked all three constituencies about the impact of the pandemic on their interactions. What follows is a summary of our key findings.

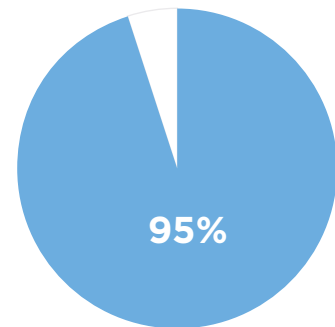
Participants on Collaboration with their Peer Team

How are you leveraging your Peer Team to support your development?



KEY FINDING

95% of the women surveyed leveraged their peer group in some way to support and advance their development.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I still meet with my peer team after 3 years, and we discuss all things work and personal. Love them!"

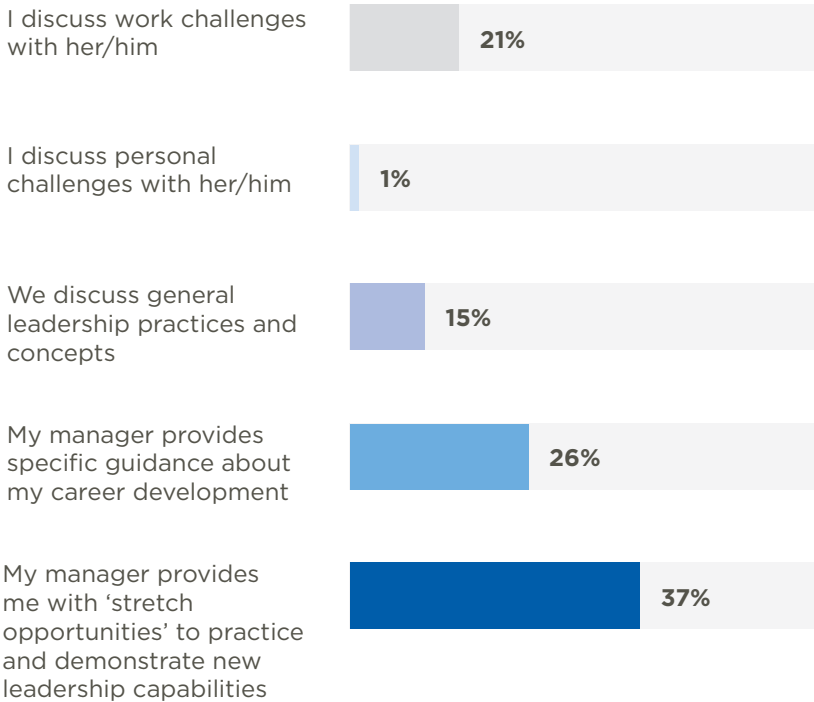
"I have discussed both work challenges as well as career development topics with my peer team. They are a great sounding board."

"Our peer team is continuing to connect monthly and utilize these sessions to discuss personal and professional challenges."



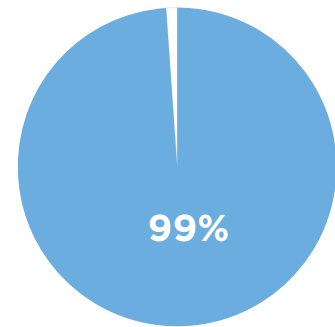
Participants on Collaboration with their Managers

How are you leveraging your manager to support your development?



KEY FINDING

Over 99% of the women surveyed indicated they and their managers are collaborating in some way to enhance and support leadership development.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"My manager and I are very close, so we discuss and coach each other on a variety of topics daily."

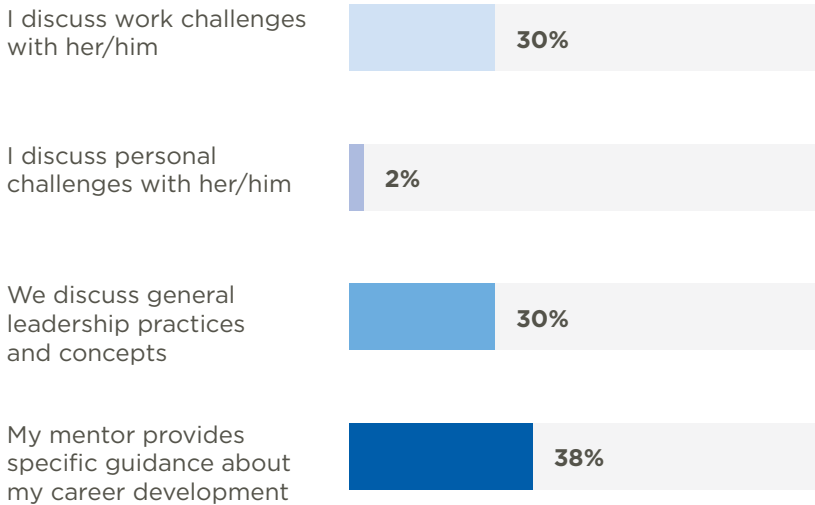
"My manager is all about growth opportunities."

"This year has brought many changes to our business and I had to make many adjustments to lead my team through. My manager challenged me to really open my mind and to take risks."



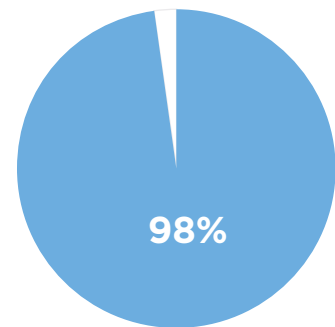
Participants on Collaboration with their Mentors

How did you leverage your mentors to support your development?



KEY FINDING

98% of the women surveyed utilized their mentor in some way to leverage their career development.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"My mentors helped me step back from the day to day of my work challenges and put things in perspective."

"I leveraged my mentor when I was interviewing for roles throughout the organization."

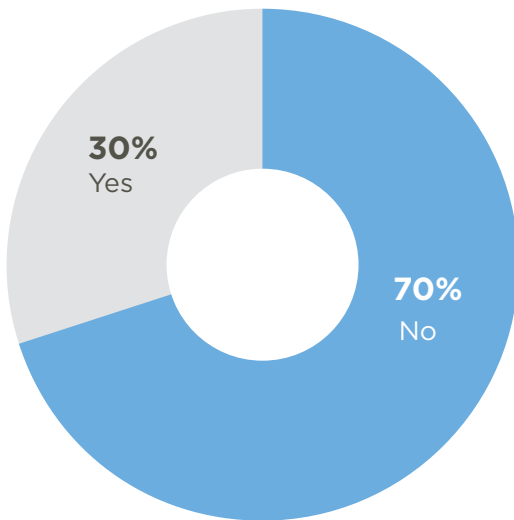
"I used real examples with my mentors to help guide me on approaches and styles."

"My mentor posed questions that have led me to reflect on things in ways I hadn't previously considered."



Collaboration: Impact of the Pandemic—Women

Have you experienced any significant obstacles in your development efforts since the pandemic?



KEY FINDING

An interesting disparity. Although 70% of the women answered “No” to this question, their comments reflected otherwise.

SOME EXAMPLES

“I grew as a people manager (this was my first year as a people manager). However, the developmental goal I set forth for 2020 was not met due to time constraints.”

“Gaining visibility to senior leadership is more difficult when all virtual. However, I still have strong support from my manager who looks for opportunities for me.”

“Given more opportunity for development. A positive that has come from 2020.”

“Actually, have had more interaction with more senior leaders. Virtual meetings have leveled the playing field.”

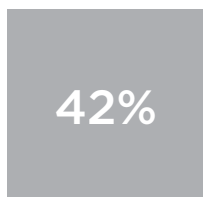
“Pandemic significantly cut opportunity for development within the organization.”

“Virtual presence is a challenge.”

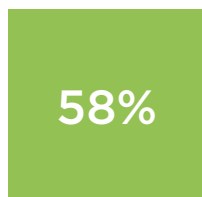
Collaboration: Impact of the Pandemic—Managers

Since the start of the pandemic have you witnessed any new obstacles your direct report faces that she didn't before?

No Obstacles



New Obstacles



KEY FINDING

In contrast to the 70% of women surveyed who responded that the pandemic had **not** impacted them, 58% of their managers indicated it had.

MANAGER COMMENTS

Typical Manager Comments on How They Help Reduce the Obstacles

"Communicate and listen more."

"Making sure she knows that it is OK if her kids need her on call and not to be sorry if she thinks they are interrupting a meeting."

"Openness to shift schedules, empathy to the situation, increased transparency to all other team members sharing similar situations."

"One-on-one coaching."

"Provided greater flexibility in work hours, discussed workload and alternatives."

"Coached her on: the need for proper boundary setting with remote work; and on remembering to take other's differences into account due to the pandemic circumstances."



Typical Manager Comments on the Pandemic's Impact on Direct Reports

"Required changes in work-life balance both in the hours worked and when work was/could be performed."

"Lack of in person means less exposure to senior leaders."

"What is missed is the ability to whiteboard, brainstorm and observe nuances that aren't communicated over zoom."

"One of her strengths is her social skills and ability to engage, so she has had to develop other ways to stay connected to the extended team."

Collaboration: Impact of the Pandemic—Mentors

Since the start of the pandemic, have you witnessed any new obstacles your mentees were facing that did not previously exist?



KEY FINDING:

More than any other constituency, with an overwhelming 73%, mentors felt the women were impacted by the pandemic.

Typical Mentor Comments on how the Pandemic Impacted their Mentees

"Balancing work, home, and self-fulfillment time."

"The obstacles were working from home, staying gainfully employed, keeping their reports effective and efficient."

"Many more competing priorities."

"Rapidly changing environment, management of risk, need to learn new roles."

"Ensuring virtual presence, managing virtual relationships/network."

How has mentoring during this pandemic shaped your perception about what is needed in the workplace to support female talent?



KEY FINDING:

Since mentors are men and women in high-level leadership roles, the survey aimed to gain their perspective on where changes were most needed.

Typical Comments

"Companies need to allow more flexible work hours and work-from-home opportunities for employees (especially women). I am delighted that the pandemic has shown how working virtually from home can be effective and efficient."

"More encouragement to be bold!"

"Women are much more adaptable and agile than their male colleagues and leaders expect. This was a new discovery for male leadership. Women need to capitalize on it."

"More senior management training on empathy and embracing differences."

"Confidence building and access."

"More willingness to let emerging leaders test their skills."



Moving Forward

The extensive survey we conducted during the pandemic provided previously unavailable clarity about pathways to corporate inclusion and diversity. It showed that by allowing talented women to create and improvise, corporations were opening wider the door to acceptance and inclusion. It gave managers and mentors a clearer picture of the importance of leaving women to their own devices, to decide the “how’s” and the “when’s” of fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

Given that flexibility, combined with the need to manage through ambiguity, the women became agile thinkers and powerful leaders who not only survived the uncertainties of the pandemic, but thrived despite them. That transformation was not just individual. It impacted teams and helped to influence cultural changes. As a more individualized approach to management took hold, organizations became more flexible, more inclusive, and more open to diverse perspectives—both of people and of work.

Additionally, remote platforms further leveled the playing field. One of our program participants commented that it’s harder to discriminate when everyone is an equally

sized square on a screen. There’s truth in that observation. In many cases, remote platforms lifted the barrier of hierarchy that exists around a conference table, making many women less reluctant to speak up and allow their light to shine.

Moving Towards a Sustainable Culture of Inclusion

Where we’ll work and how we’ll work in the months and years ahead is still being defined. That uncertainty underscores the importance of the WOMEN Unlimited findings, which provide empirical guidance on how to create a sustainable culture of inclusion. Of course, no one study has all the answers. However, based on our findings, those of a wide cross-section of other organizations and our over 27 years of involvement with the people who shape corporations as they move through a sea of uncertainties, we can offer a number of insights on creating inclusive corporate cultures. For example:

- Diversity has many faces: gender, age, ethnicity, lifestyle, work style and management styles, as well as individual beliefs and perspectives. The more of these differences an organization espouses, the greater the impact on growth and profitability.

- Women generally tend to be more risk averse than their male colleagues. As they overcome that hesitancy and take on the right risks, they become invaluable contributors to corporate success and organizational inclusion.
- Collaboration is a complex framework with many inter-workings. It significantly improves decision making, morale and talent retention. It works best when it permeates an organization at all levels, embraced by peers, managers and their reports, the C-suite and the Board.
- A thriving, inclusive organizational culture is one in which managers of all backgrounds, at all levels, meet people where they are and accept them for who they are. This approach not only positively impacts the individual employee, but also serves as a productive eye-opener for those willing to learn from differences.

Looking Back with Gratitude

I would like to thank, first and foremost, the Corporate Partner organizations who support the development of their female talent through participation in WOMEN Unlimited programs. Thanks are also due the women, managers and mentors who took the time and effort to provide us with the data for this important study. Finally, thanks to each of our WOMEN Unlimited associates who didn't skip a beat in a time of unprecedented challenge and uncertainty.

Together, we are making sustainable headway in helping organizations achieve a more inclusive culture, regardless of what the workplace looks like in the months and years ahead.




Dr. Rosina L. Racioppi
President & CEO
WOMEN Unlimited, Inc.

About WOMEN Unlimited, Inc.

WOMEN Unlimited is on the front line of helping organizations build the diverse talent pipeline needed to achieve profitability and innovation in today's competitive global business environment. Our unique approach of engaging female and male leaders in WUI development experiences creates crucial advocates who are evolving their cultures to be more inclusive, opening pathways for women to advance.

In addition to development programs for female talent at all levels, our extensive knowledge is represented in other helpful resources:

- **Manager & Mentors: Their Vital Role in Advancing Female Talent**
- **Infographic: Manager & Mentors: Their Vital Role in Advancing Female Talent**
- **Infographic: The Vital Role of Managers**
- **Infographic: The Vital Role of Mentors**



[View the 2021 Infographic ▶](#)



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“The pandemic experience made her more open to differences.

”

“Enhanced capacity to manage stress related to change.

”



“

Looks for second alternatives when the normal process is not available.”

“

Sees and evaluates with no preconceived notions.”

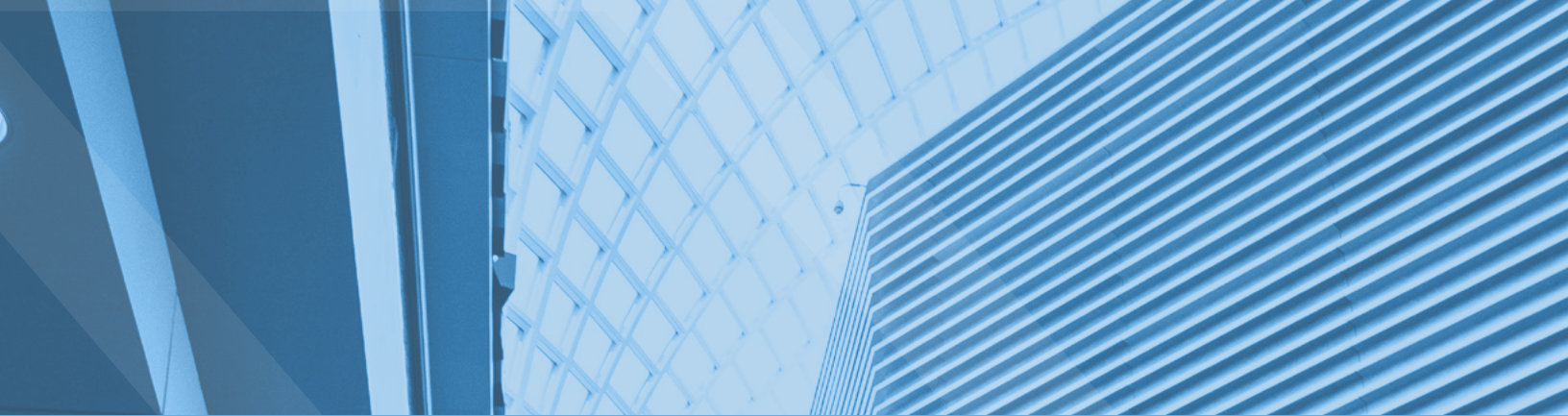
“Adjusts to new situations more rapidly.

”



“Comfortable with looking at things with an unbiased and open perspective.

”



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