

Diversity and Inclusion Challenge 7 – Encourage Alternate Career Choices and Success for Women in Trades, Production and Technical Occupations

The Opportunity

The mining and minerals sectors provide talented women with an opportunity to work in challenging and rewarding occupations. Currently, women are underrepresented in the mining industry workforce. According to the Mining Industry Human Resources Council (MiHR), women represent 48% of the labour force in all industries and only 17% in the mining industry. Women account for 27% of workers in occupations tracked by MiHR in all industries and 12% in the mining industry. For MiHR, this indicates that not only are women less likely to work in the occupations that best define the minerals sector, the women that do work in these occupations are not proportionately choosing mining as a sector of choice (MiHR, 2016). The occupational categories in which women's underrepresentation is most notable are the technical occupations, and trades and production occupations (MiHR, 2015).

The Challenge

Studies completed in Canada (e.g., MiHR, 2015) and Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013) found that many women are deterred from participating in industries which are male-dominated, such as mining, utilities or construction. This can be due to a lack of family role models, stereotypes about the nature of work, structural aspects of employment (e.g., shift work), or discouraging workplace cultures.

The IMII's minerals company members recognize that women represent an underutilized pool of talent, and that not only is this bad for gender equity, it also undermines the economy. A shortage of skilled talent is a drag on the economy, and 34% of Canadian employers reported difficulty in filling jobs in 2016. A 2015 study for Saskatchewan's mining industry forecasted a "gap" in finding skilled people in technical occupations between 2015 and 2024.

According to MiHR many Canadian industries face challenges in attracting and retaining women, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields and professions in science, engineering and technology. Research by MiHR and Women in Mining shows that innovations in workplace cultures in both academic institutions and industry are required in several areas, including looking at both workplace cultures and career trajectories through a gender lens.

New Strategies to Address Male Domination and Stereotypical Perceptions in the Minerals Industry

For 2018, IMII is seeking innovative new approaches to help the minerals sector address male domination and stereotypical perceptions as barriers to be overcome in both attracting women and helping them thrive as employees. The innovations could be related to:

- Developing meaningful signs and symbols of gender inclusion on the minerals workforce;
- Branding the industry as a place for women through gender inclusion;
- Challenging preconceptions as to trades, production and technical careers in mining for women;
- Educating young women as to the occupations that best define the minerals sector;

- Supporting young women through workplace education in choosing mining as the sector of choice for their careers; and
- Equipping managers and employees, through workplace education, in the minerals industry with the skills required to create inclusive workplaces as part of an ongoing commitment to the entire workforce, not just special treatment for women.

Examples of aspects or practices that could be supportive of this Challenge include:

- Developing new ways to overcome stereotypes and bias that may have started in school, and help overturn beliefs that discourage women from pursuing careers in science and engineering;
- Developing new ways to overcome negative perceptions about the minerals industry, or to increase awareness of the opportunities and career paths that are available in mining;
- Changing stereotypes or myths about women in the workplace that may exist in mining organizations about the sort of work women can do, have the skills to do, their potential performance or their commitment to their careers;
- Addressing the perceived masculine mining culture that is non-inclusive and tolerant of poor behaviours that could be viewed as sexual harassment and bullying, and therefore a challenge at all stages of a woman's career;
- Overcoming perceptions of gender bias that may exist in the minerals industry with respect to non-traditional roles (such as trades, technical and production occupations);
- New ways to engage leaders as role models for gender diversity; and
- New strategies, informal or formal, to develop women to non-traditional roles (e.g., by addressing specific skills such as influencing all-male teams).

Conditions

Innovations proposed to enhance workplace cultures for women should, at a minimum, be supported by a team or organization reflective of the underlying goal of the IMII's Diversity & Inclusion Challenge for participation of women in the minerals industry.