

# Gender Inclusion: Is It a Reality in the Workplace?

Are we cultivating gender inclusive cultures at work? The Women in Business (WIB) Committee of the American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce tackled this question carrying out qualitative research, interviewing 28 CEOs of some of the biggest companies in Greece: 27 of them men and one woman. This research shed light on a prevalent success mindset in Greek business culture, which is at the same time an exclusion mindset for women's progress to top positions.

**R**adical success at work is equated with single-minded effort, with total work focus, with making work one's single top priority. Women are confronted with a subtle and unspoken dilemma: Can you give work the single-minded devotion, the long hours, travel, attention required, while raising a family? The either-or choice is real and takes a toll on women.

This exclusion dilemma influences women first, making them vulnerable, and more ready to step aside, at a time in their career when they could be powering up their effort and their aspirations. There is something like an E.Q., an Exclusion Quotient in corporate cultures, that includes themes such as the following:

**The challenge of life stages:** Men around fifty are mature, while women around the same age are considered "tired." Wrinkles in men speak out experience, in women they

speak out expiry. And a woman has to work double hard around that age to prove her professional stamina.

**The challenge of life loads:** Men are proud to walk a single track path of professional success, but women who do so are viewed as missing or failing on life roles, such as that of a mother or life partner.

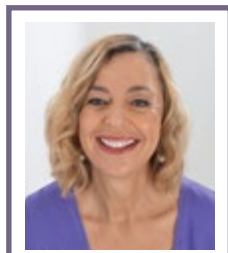
**The challenge of toughness:** Positions at the top demand mental toughness and ultimate charisma in risk taking. Men are viewed as naturally tough for the job, while women have to outprove men in toughness to be perceived as good decisionmakers. And when women are tough, they are seen as "unfeminine shrews."

**The challenge of visibility:** Women lag behind in networking, making alliances, carving their social presence, and claiming the floor. Their social light is weaker or even hidden, as they claim more time to be at home with their family.

**The challenge of subtracted**

**value:** Women are associated with incredible added value at work and they are seen as excellent organizers, multitaskers, responsive, creative, elegant thinkers, and great problem solvers; however, they are also stereotyped as overly emotional, often overreacting, and perhaps less efficient in handling pressure and emotional crises.

The challenge ahead will be one of building an I.Q., an Inclusion Quotient, a work mindset that makes it possible for men and women of talent, skill and dedication to reach the top and make a difference. It will take recognizing the subtle cues of the exclusion mindset. It will take holding ourselves accountable, while building our commitment to business systems that are open, and resilient. This is the only way for growth, both in business and in social capital. 🙌



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