WOMEN EXECUTIVES IN MARKET RESEARCH

by Jonathan D. Deitch, Ph. D.
Chief Revenue Officer, P2Sample

in association with

ABSTRACT

Public awareness surrounding diversity in the workplace continues to rise. Concerns surrounding shortfalls in this arena go beyond a simple moral issue. It has been proven that people of diverse background, specifically women, bring tangible benefits to business. There have been some efforts in the market research industry, by both individuals and organizations, to promote greater representation of women. Yet, the data in this paper will show that we are still falling short.

For this study, we examined the presence of women in executive roles across a broad cross-section of market research companies. We approached the research under the premise that a company's leaders have the greatest impact on culture and performance. We found that women remain significantly underrepresented across nearly every executive function.

The data we uncovered provide incontrovertible evidence that the industry is still broadly failing to achieve adequate representation. The paper concludes with recommendations for targeted and immediate action in the form of explicit recruitment objectives, visible measures of accountability, and internal and external engagement with stakeholders.

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BACKGROUND

Popular awareness of and journalistic reporting on diversity in the workplace is indisputably on the rise. If the moral imperative alone were insufficient, there is compelling evidence that people of diverse backgrounds—and women in particular—bring manifold tangible benefits to business.[1] Corporations promote diversity practices on their websites. News media heap scorn on the bad guys and bad companies who, overtly or covertly, fail to ensure representation and treat people equitably and decently. Popular movements like #MeToo shine a painful yet important light on the subject and have stimulated greater discussion and awareness. In fact, the conversation is so one-sided that the casual observer might conclude the lot of women in the workplace is improving.

In our own industry, attention to women's issues has received a huge boost thanks to individual efforts by people like Kristin Luck, founder of the nonprofit Women In Research (WIRe) association, and Annie Pettit, who has relentlessly campaigned for greater representation of women as conference speakers and panelists. WIRe now counts thousands of members and dozens of chapters. Conference organizers have made great strides in recruiting female speakers and panelists. As is the trend in broader society, there are visible indicators that might lead the casual observer to conclude that things are getting better.

Happily, our industry does not let itself get carried away by appearances or draw conclusions from anecdotes. We articulate hypotheses, we collect data, and we test. We therefore decided to see whether women were achieving greater representation where it counts most.

HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY

While there are several good outcomes one might expect from greater awareness of women's issues and corporate commitments to diversity, the most significant must be greater representation of women in senior leadership roles. For it is a company's senior leaders whose actions have the necessary gravity to change policy and transform organizations and thus create the tangible benefits cited in the research. More bluntly, the mere presence of women or people of color at the top tells us whether a company is "walking the walk" and not just "talking the talk." Thus our null hypothesis is that, all things being equal, gender has no bearing on who occupies the executive suite. Concretely, all else being equal, men and women should therefore be present in proportions equal to those of the population. Should we reject this hypothesis, it would support a conclusion that there is still bias in executive selection.

In deciding to use the presence of women in executive roles as our primary outcome, we face three challenges with data collection. The first challenge is determining the sampling frame. Which companies should we study? There are no fewer than five reports which claim to list the top market research firms, and none of them account for the extremely long tail of small and boutique companies and one-person shops. The second challenge is finding rosters of a company's senior leaders. The third and adjacent challenge is figuring out whom we should include as a member of a company's executive team? Whom should we count, and how do we make sense of the enormous diversity in people's titles?

A second hypothesis relates to the roles in which women have indeed made inroads. We hypothesize that the representation of women in the senior marketing and senior human resources positions will be significantly higher than for other leadership roles. While not to take away from the importance of these roles or the talent of their incumbents, gender stereotypes underlie the conventional wisdom that these are women's roles because they require greater sensitivity and "soft skills." The null hypothesis is that women are similarly represented across the different executive functions. Concretely, all else being equal, we would not see any differences in the proportion of female representation across executive rules. Rejection of this hypothesis is consistent with the presence of gender stereotypes for these roles.

[1] *See for example Stephen Turban, et al., "Research: When Gender Diversity Makes Firms More Productive," Harvard Business Review, Feb. 11, 2019, retrieved from the HBR website at https://hbr.org/2019/02/research-when-gender-diversity-makes-firms-more-productive*

SAMPLING FRAME

We compiled our list of companies using GreenBook's Top 150 Global Companies in Market Research as a starting point. Published almost two years ago, it was created to provide a more expansive definition of the industry to include:

> *"sample companies, technology platforms, and organizations such as Google, Facebook, [and] Equifax" and other companies in "adjacent categories to research that have very different business models to MR, and very different capital structures [such as] Business Intelligence, EFM, CX, Big Data, AI, Analytics, Data Visualization, Biometrics, Web Analytics, [and] Social Media Analytics".*

There is significant overlap between the GreenBook list and antecedent lists, including the pioneering Honomichl Report (now the AMA Gold Top 50 Report), the ESOMAR Global Market Research Report, the MRS ResearchLIVE Report, and RFL Communications' Global Top 50 Research Organizations. While it is not an exhaustive census of the industry's firms, it is certainly inclusive of its largest players, and accounts for a great many small and medium-sized businesses across several subcategories. We started with this list, then supplemented and revised it to reflect mergers and acquisitions and newer prominent entrants in the space. The final list includes 187 companies (including the main divisions of Kantar that have since consolidated, but were treated separately for this study).

WHOM SHOULD WE COUNT?

Who counts as a leader? The answer to this question varies considerably. For sure the company's CEO or President counts, but who else? One way to approach this is to seek appropriate titles, like Chief Marketing Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer and similar. But titles are hardly standard even in our own industry. Moreover, many companies have people with Executive/Senior VP titles who are responsible for individual business units or regional territories whom they consider to be part of their leadership team. Finally, a person can have a senior title but not necessarily be part of a company's Management or Leadership Team.

We ultimately decided on a simple rule: we would count the people which the organization itself felt were important enough to put on its website. This had the benefit of both avoiding the title conundrum while being faithful to the belief that the faces a company shows are the most accurate expression of its view of leadership and diversity. It also allowed for the very frequent situation where the company highlighted business leaders who were not necessarily functional leaders. It also conveniently meant there were pictures by which we could identify gender (which, for this study, is the gender with which a person identifies) and people of color.

There are two downsides that arise from looking at website pages. The most prominent is that not every company shows its leadership on its website. In this case we simply skipped the company, as any deeper investigation would have forced us to burrow deeply into LinkedIn and decide who is part of the leadership team. This brought the number of companies down to 133, or 71% of the total, which we believe is still a respectable size. The other is that some companies (smaller companies, generally) present their entire team on their website. In this case we did make decisions based on the seniority captured in the title. There were 13 companies that did this, about 10% of reduced list (n=133) and 7% of our initial list (n=187). These companies were reviewed by two people to ensure coding accuracy.

EXAMINING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

While we tried to avoid distinguishing leadership team membership by title, we nevertheless wanted to look at representation by title to evaluate the presence of women by function and address the hypothesis that women are being typecast in certain roles. We therefore identified 11 titles corresponding to the most senior functional roles we could envision. Our fieldworkers were given a brief description of each role to guide their coding.

1. **Chief Executive Officer (CEO):** This is typically the most senior leader at a company.
2. **President:** Sometimes companies have both a CEO and President. The CEO is usually more strategic, while the President is concerned with the day to day.
3. **Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or Financial Director:** The person responsible for every aspect of the money in the business: accounting, investments, financial planning, budgeting.
4. **Chief Operating Officer (COO) or Chief Operations Officer or Head of Operations:** This collection of titles can encompass a wide variety of roles. Outside the research world, the responsibilities are more akin to a President, making sure the whole business (what it produces, how the people work) is running well. In market research, it is typically the person who is in charge of all production (sampling, project management, data processing).
5. **Chief Sales Officer (CSO), Head of Sales or Business Development or Chief Customer Officer or Chief Client Officer (CCO):** This collection of titles usually denotes the person who is head of the sales team and responsible for customer acquisition and retention.
6. **Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) or Head of Marketing:** This person is responsible for how the company is perceived in the marketplace and stimulating interest in potential clients.
7. **Chief Revenue Officer (CRO):** This is a fairly new title to appear in the corporate world and typically refers to a person who is responsible across sales and marketing for all revenue generation.
8. **General Counsel or Head of Legal:** The senior lawyer in the company.
9. **Chief Technology Officer (CTO) or Chief Information Officer (CIO):** The senior person responsible for technology, hardware, software, applications.
10. **Chief Research Officer or Chief Analytics Officer or Head of Research:** The senior researcher or methodologist in the company.
11. **Chief Human Resources Officer or Head of People or Human Resources:** The person responsible for staffing and employees.

DATA COLLECTION

Our data collection team (employees of P2Sample) consisted of seven people. We created a field guide with appropriate background information and specific coding instructions which was thoroughly reviewed with the team and divided up the list. Data collection took place from April 15 to May 10, 2019. Members of the team were encouraged to make notes of specific issues, especially the absence of pictures, the presence of the entire team on the website, or questions about roles. Any companies where there were notes or requests for help were reviewed by a second pair of eyes. The team interacted occasionally through Slack to ask questions and get help.

ANALYSIS

Our hypotheses are based on the premise that women's representation in given roles will be significantly lower than their representation in the broader population. Thus we need a measure of female representation in the broader population for our calculations. Given the dominance of US- and UK-based companies in our sample, we collected data from each country's national statistics authority. In the UK, this came from the Office of National Statistics' 2015 population estimate. In the US, we used the Census Bureau's 2017 population estimate. In both cases, we looked for the proportion of women between the ages of 25 and 64 under the assumption that this age group was the primary one in which leadership opportunities would be available. The figures are extremely similar, so we have simply settled on 50.5% as the baseline population proportion for women.

Z-scores are calculated by subtracting the percentage of women in a given role from the population proportion (50.5%), then dividing the quantity by the standard deviation to arrive at a p-value.

$$\sigma = sqrt[P * (1 - P) / n]$$

where n equals the number of companies where the role exists

This naturally means that p-values will be influenced by sample size. Thus the less common a role, the harder it will be to reject the null hypothesis.

RESULTS

Table 1, below, shows the overall breakout of women, men, and people of color across the sampled companies. Across all countries, we found that 36% of executive roles across the 133 companies were occupied by women.

Group	Count	Percent	Avg. per company
Women	514	36%	3.9
Men	923	64%	6.9
People of Color	170	12%	1.3
Total People	**1437**	**100**	**10.8**
Total Companies	133		

Table 2, below, shows the functional break out and p-values associated with the proportions.

Role	Companies where role exists	Women in Role	% Women	p-value
CEO	112	14	13%	0.00
President	43	11	26%	0.00
CFO	84	16	19%	0.00
COO	60	19	32%	0.00
Sales	58	19	33%	0.00
Marketing	48	23	48%	0.36
Revenue	16	4	25%	0.02
Legal	24	9	38%	0.10
CTO/CIO	68	3	4%	0.00
Research	43	16	37%	0.04
Human Resources	53	47	89%	1.00
All Other Roles	121	333	40%	0.01
Total	**133**	**514**	**36%**	**0.00**

Table 2: Representation by Gender, by Role

The data clearly allow us to reject our null hypotheses, thus showing support for our research hypotheses which are consistent with persistent gender bias in the executive suite.

Overall, women are underrepresented in executive roles with only 36% of leadership positions, a figure that is highly significant. Moreover, this bias persists across all functions, with the exception of Marketing and Human Resources, roles which remain gender-stereotyped notwithstanding the talent of the women who occupy them. Legal leadership roles are marginally significant, indicating that women have made some strides toward parity in the top legal jobs. We also see that women remain underrepresented in non-named leadership roles, which tend to be business unit leadership positions. Finally, we see a dismal level of female representation in the CEO role.

POTENTIAL CRITICISMS OF OUR STUDY

Not a random sample, not sufficiently inclusive

We will be the first to admit our study is a convenience sample. There is frankly little we could do to change this without significantly greater time and investment. We aver firmly that this neither diminishes its results nor compromises its implications. The list is inclusive of the industry's large and mid-sized business (and some prominent small ones) and represents a significant amount of the industry's total revenue. These are the most well-known and visible faces of the supply side of market research.

A picture is worth a thousand words

One could hypothesize that there are differences between companies that show pictures of their teams and those which don't. Even allowing for that, those companies without pictures would have to be ***heavily skewed toward women across virtually every functional role*** to make a difference in the data, which at best might only bring Sales, Legal, and Research leadership positions into line. The other top roles would remain incontestably male dominated.

SOLUTIONS

There is no question that our industry, like others, has made little progress in addressing gender bias at a leadership level despite greater awareness of the issue. Given the relatively few leadership posts and apparently low rates of departure, it will be many years before the industry might make a dent without bolder action.

A recent paper by management consultancy Ernst & Young (EY)[2] summarizes several ways in which companies can achieve great diversity. While their paper is focused on diversity in the boardroom, the ideas are easily transferred to corporate management. *See next page.*

[2]Kerry Waring, "How to get more women in the boardroom", Ernst & Young, February 15, 2019, https://www.ey.com/en_us/assurance/how-to-get-more-women-in-the-boardroom (accessed August 1, 2019).

1. **Mandatory disclosure**
   The company should have a concrete and public diversity policy, including measurable targets and a time period over which such targets will be achieved.
2. **Measurable targets over a defined time horizon**
   This concept is a mainstay in our industry: what gets measured gets managed.
3. **Management refreshment**
   As with boards, lengthy tenure in senior management can not only inhibit diversity, but can also lead to tunnel vision that inhibits a company's evolution. In the boardroom, EY suggest that service be contingent on performance and re-election. Management rotation is another enlightened concept that creates more well-rounded executives.
4. **Nomination committees**
   Boards have nominating committees. It is reasonable to apply this idea to executive roles so that there are known criteria which explain how diverse candidates were considered in the hiring process. For example, McKinsey is now hiring for an internal recruiter for senior hires whose role will be to "help identify and attract Direct Elect senior level diverse talent to help sustain growth areas."
5. **Employee engagement**
   EY speaks of investors "engaging with boards on this subject to build mutual understanding and, where necessary, encourage change." This concept is certainly transferable to employees.
6. **Employee voting**
   EY writes of investors voting against company resolutions for poor diversity. Shall we have employees voting for or against the hiring of new executives? Probably not. But this could easily be shaped into a different kind of incentive, say, employees voting on executive bonuses based on management's progress on diversity measures.
7. **Positive recognition and...**
   ...Negative recognition
   Naming and shaming drives change through public perception by shining a light on otherwise opaque practices. In the spirit of this, we have published a list of the best and worst companies on the matter of gender diversity in executive leadership in the Appendix to this report.
8. **Professional development**
   It is disappointing to see how many firms fail to address the very important challenge of developing future leaders from within their ranks. Succession planning creates a bench that ensures a diverse and competent group of people is available for selection. Leadership programs can include everything from training to exposure to other executives to temporary assignments that allow the individual to gain the experience, vision, confidence, and poise needed to be successful. As part of a broader mentorship program, businesses would reap the additional benefits of increased employee engagement and lower turnover.

CONCLUSION

To paraphrase Mark Twain, the famous American author who himself was an early activist for women's rights in the 19th century, the data show that the death of white male-dominant leadership teams (if there was such a perception) has been exaggerated. Gender bias remains pervasive across the executive suite of market research businesses. The notable exceptions to this rule are the Marketing and Human Resources leadership positions, two roles which, notwithstanding the talented women who occupy them, remain stereotypically "women's roles."

There is very little hope that the industry will make meaningful strides in this regard without deliberate and widespread action. These actions must include mechanisms for public accountability such as setting measurable goals, making internal and external public statements about gender diversity, and training and engaging employees on the matter. Failing that, the industry will continue to be long on talk and short on results.

McKinsey & Co. online job posting, "Recruiter – Senior Hires, Diversity, https://www.mckinsey.com/careers/search-jobs/jobs/recruiterseniorhiresdiversity-33227 (accessed August 23, 2019).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JD Deitch is a twenty-year veteran of the market research industry. He began his career client-side in financial services, then went on to hold senior global positions at The NPD Group and Ipsos. Prior to P2Sample, he held executive positions at AYTM and Bakamo. Social. JD is a frequent speaker and a thought leader in the insights industry as it evolves to tackle the challenges of the digital age. He has a Ph.D. in Political Science with Distinction from The American University and a BA from the University of Pennsylvania. He lives in France with his wife and two sons.

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info@p2sample.com | www.p2sample.com | +1-404.446.2720

APPENDIX:
GENDER DIVERSITY BY THE NUMBERS

40% or higher women

2CV
Abt SRBI
Adelphi International Research
Ameritest
AYTM
Business Research group
C Space
C+R
Cello Health
Chadwick Martin Bailey
Cint
comScore
Datamonitor
Decision Analyst
Dunnhumby
EMI
Firefish
Focus Pointe Global
Gongos
Hall & Partners
Hypothesis Group
Idea Couture
Incite Marketing Planning
Isobar Marketing Intelligence
Kantar Media
Kelton
Leger
LRW
Luth
Market Force
MarketCast
Marketing Sciences Unlimited
NatCen
NAXIoN
NuVoodoo
Q Research Solutions
RTi Research
Screen Engline
SSRS
SurveyMonkey
The Planning Shop International
Westat, Inc.

Under 20% women

Acxiom Corp.
Blueocean Market Intelligence
Confirmit
Ebiquity
Equifax
Experian Consumer insight
Gartner
Harte-Hanks Marketing
ICF International
iDC
Information Services Group
IRI
J.D. Power
Lucid
Market Cube
Mediametrie
Paradigm Sample
Periscope by McKinsey
Populus group
QuestionPro
Strategy Analytics
System1
Tableau Software
Toluna
UserZoom
Wood Mackenzie

0% women

Ace Metrix
Branded Research
Defaqto
Frost & Sullivan
Full Circle
Intage Holdings
KS&R
Macromill
Media Predict
Netbase
Rocket Fuel
Simon-Kucher & Partners
Survata
ThinkNow
TurkPrime
Video Research Ltd.
WorldOne Research