



CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

**VALUING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE
REQUIRES SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

WORK MATTERS

COLUMN

MAY 2026

Valuing Women in the Workplace Requires Systemic Change

Ingrid Pilgrim, Assistant Lecturer, Elma Francois Institute, CCLCS

Valuing women in the workplace is no longer just making the best out of having a female employee or a moral issue. It is now a strategic objective as it contributes to superior financial performance, fosters innovation, and enhances organizational resilience. It is a business and societal imperative to bring to the table, women with exceptional communication skills, empathy, inclusiveness, efficient productivity, and a knack for building strong relationships. However, while awareness of the positive impact of valuing women has improved, there remains structural inequalities embedded in emolument systems, leadership and inclusive workplace culture. Systemic reform must replace the symbolic gestures of gender equity for real and effective progress to begin in the workplace.

Ensuring equal pay underpins recognition and respect women deserves for their contribution. It is their human right! There are two schools of thought, being “Equal pay for equal work” refers to persons performing the same or substantially similar work receives the same remuneration regardless of gender and “Equal pay for work of equal value” where men and women receive equal pay for different jobs. This is a fundamental right highlighted in Article 157 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) which requires member states to ensure equal pay for equal work and the United States “Equal Pay Act of 1963 aimed at elimination gender-based wage disparities.

However, the gender pay gap, that is the difference in average earnings between men and women persist. This disparity is because of occupational segregation, biased promotion practices and women being valued with respect to their private sphere roles as caretakers of the family. To reduce these disparities organizations should have transparent salary grades and standardize pay

structure with regular pay audits to reduce or eliminate pay disparities of women earning less than men. Leaders too must commit to taking corrective action when inequalities are uncovered. In addition, equity efforts must take into consideration the marginalized communities who often experience wider pay gaps. Any change must address the existence of different layers of inequalities.

More than half of all women worldwide are participating in the workforce, yet women remain underrepresented at the executive and board-levels. This is not due to lack of education, ability or ambition but mainly due to systemic barriers and biased perception of leadership quality. That is, leadership trait is viewed as masculine and women are viewed as caretakers or are a better fit for supportive roles. It is also important to redefine leadership, to include collaboration, empathy and adaptability all necessary qualities for the modern-day leader. Redefining leadership would assist by creating space for diverse styles and strengths of leaders.

Valuing women goes beyond the compensation package and a name tag on a door; it requires leaders to actively participate in diversity initiatives and be accountable for gender parity goals. Leaders must be the role-models for the change behaviour, as any misalignment could lead to employee distrust and refusal to participate, further it is important to align the organisational structure to the new culture of respect and psychological safety. A major change must include treatment of harassment and discrimination with a zero tolerance policies, safe reporting channels and transparent investigative processes. Workers must trust that their concerns will be handled fairly and without reprisal. Education, change in leadership style and accountability are all necessary to promote equity in the organization.

Ensuring equal access to high-powered activities/ assignments are important to genuinely valuing women. Women are usually pursued for supportive roles rather than strategic projects and related activities that would lead to their advancement. Organization's

investment in training and upskilling programs should be accessible to all for leadership development, certification and professional growth, inclusive of females, and career development must be structured and monitored to ensure equitable participation. Men cannot be left out if the goal is to have gender equity, as men in leadership roles are important in driving systemic and structural changes. Oftentimes, they are the ones better positioned to champion fair promotions, challenge organizational biases and promote flexible, gender-inclusive policies. When they do so, they create space for a wider participation, and equity becomes the responsibility for all members at all levels in the organization, and in this way, equity is no longer perceived as a female-driven initiative.

Valuing women in the workplace is a necessity and is critical for systemic change, and inclusivity. Equitable pay, promotions, leadership opportunities, inclusive cultures and accountability are the foundations for equitable and meaningful progress. Organizations that commit to these changes are not only advancing fair treatment to all, but are committing to improving innovation, resilience, sustainability and greater success in the future. These organizations are not only opening doors to the future but are ensuring all who walk through the doors can thrive given equal opportunity to do so.