CHANGEMAKERS' SUMMIT REPORT

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GIRLS IN CHARGE

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INTRODUCTION

The inaugural **Girls in Charge Changemakers' Summit** brought together women from a variety of industries, from arts and culture to finance to criminology. The aim of this summit was for participants to respond to prompts relating to gender equality in the workplace, and, in doing so, to develop innovative solutions to the problems women face in professional environments.

'I AM A CHANGEMAKER':
THE DILEMMA OF DIFFERENCE

How can women in leadership uplift women in the workplace without reinforcing the stigma of difference?

Under a view that **'equality'** means that everyone is the same, we face a **'dilemma of difference'**; making adjustments for individuals based on their needs means they are stigmatised for appearing to unfairly benefit from unearned advantages, however, failing to make adjustments based on individual need perpetuates disadvantage, and more vulnerable individuals are unable to achieve their potential. This is the **'dilemma of difference'** that participants were prompted to discuss (Minow, 1999). Participants agreed that, in the workplace, the dilemma is evident in several ways.

• One participant highlighted the disconnect between the support policies that a company offers 'on paper' and the negative views that employees and management hold about those policies which leads employees to feel that they shouldn't seek reasonable needs-based adjustments.

• Participants generally agreed that this dilemma resulted in negative stereotypes about women, for instance, that women are **'too needy'** or **'asking too much'**. These stereotypes were often internalised by participants who did not wish to **'take up space'**.

• Participants highlighted the need to distinguish between **'equality'** and **'equity'**, in order to treat employees as **'human beings with different challenges'.** Some solutions raised by participants included identifying physical disadvantages between men and women, and tailoring support systems to match these, following the example of Spain's paid menstrual leave policy. Others suggested that more flexible, bespoke support options (like Shared Parental Leave) which account for individuals' unique support needs would effectively challenge the disconnect between policies and policymakers in the workplace.

By acknowledging the dilemma of difference and the problems it causes, and proposing tailored support systems that foster equity and inclusivity, rather than boilerplate 'equality' policies, companies are more likely to be able to foster a supportive and diverse work environment.

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THE INDUSTRY MINDSET:
INTERSECTING BIASES AND BARRIERS

How can women in leadership collaborate to tackle structural barriers more effectively?

This prompt sought to draw on the **diversity of expertise** we hosted at the Summit in order to identify internalised stereotypes that are perceived to be inherent in or across certain industries. We aimed to challenge the view that **gender stereotypes** are par for the course in some industries, and this was quickly evident in our participants' discussions:

• Participants interpreted this prompt as alluding to the everyday instances of **sexism** experienced by women in the workplace.

• Participants generally agreed that the demographic of leadership teams defines the culture of a workplace, regardless of the industry. In the Arts and Culture Sector, for instance, one participant noted that her workplace, which is largely led by women, was mostly **free of the biases** that other participants cited. Another participant, in response, noted that this was strikingly contrary to her experience in a heavily **male-dominated** sub-sector of the Arts and Culture industry.

• Participants also explained that being oneself can be at odds with both the pressure to **'fit in'** in professional spheres and the view that self-belief, **'calm confidence'**, and **'brutal honesty'** is the appropriate remedy. Participants, on the contrary, suggested that raising awareness of these barriers and taking these concrete steps to remove them would go a long way towards enhancing DEI efforts in the workplace.

This discussion confirmed the importance of empowering, authentic leadership which is populated by positive female role-models. These factors were widely agreed to be critical in uplifting young professionals. Another key factor in breaking down barriers is education in leadership skills and strategic communication – this approach is close to our hearts, as we have spearheaded initiatives like our Leadership Training Programme in service of this goal.

NOT A BOYS' CLUB:
STRATEGISING SOCIAL SUCCESS

How do workplace social and networking events reify gender norms, and what can we do about it?

For many participants, traditional **'networking'** events, which centre around (for example) drinks, golf, etc., posed various problems:
• Some participants, including employees with childcare responsibilities, noted strong feelings of obligation or desire to dedicate time to their families, such that a professional expectation that commitments extend beyond working hours puts them in an **'impossible situation'.**

• Participants who prefer not to drink reported feeling alienated in their social-professional circles.

• Participants emphasised that this does not merely come from a fear of missing out – the nature of social-professional networking events fosters a **'boys' club'** mentality and prevents women from participating fully and progressing their careers.

Our participants inspired us with proposals for **innovative, inclusive** networking-building events:
• Team-building activities such as bowling and paintball were proposed as an alternative to more conventional food-and-beverage events.

• Other participants suggested networking events that are incorporated into the workday, rather than after-hours, such as **'lunch and learns'** with external speakers or work lunches instead of work dinners to improve access.

With the onset of hybrid and remote working, the need to bolster team morale is more important than ever. Reimagining the process of networking would not just impact women positively, but the entire workplace.

A FINAL WORD

The Changemakers' Summit offered a valuable glimpse into the future. Though gender discrimination and inequality persist in many ways, our participants' wisdom and insights offered useful conclusions and frameworks for action. Our central aim underpinning this summit – the empowerment of women – showed through participants' approaches to tackling structural barriers by building confidence, working together, and making professional life accessible for all. Not only did participants highlight the importance of uplifting one's peers to overcome social barriers, their fruitful and positive discussions were themselves gleaming examples of this spirit. As organisations and individuals commit to equitable principles, we would encourage them to champion the role of women as changemakers. By doing so, we can all collectively drive meaningful change.

At Girls in Charge, we are committed not only to realising the potential of women everywhere, but also to creating an environment where women can realise this potential. To that end, informed by the testimonies and conclusions from this summit, we will continue to educate young people about issues of gender equality in the workplace and work with them to build up their confidence and leadership skills. We will also work with corporations to upskill their employees, creating a community for women at all levels of their professional lives.

However, it only takes one person to start something meaningful. If reading this report has made you realise that there is room for improvement in your workplace, why not take some concrete action towards improving it? The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the second best time is now.

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TOGETHER, LET'S PUT MORE GIRLS IN CHARGE.

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Special Thanks to
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