



RaiseYou

A case study in enhancing
gender diversity in
FS Consulting at KPMG

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**The benefits of women
as part of a diverse
leadership team are
well documented**

It has long been an open secret that diverse leadership teams make better decisions, are more creative, more innovative and better at driving company growth.

Much of the existing research in this space shows that firms with high gender diversity on their Board of Directors have been more profitable and larger than firms with less gender diversity.



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To illustrate our intent to realise change, in 2014 KPMG was the first private sector organisation in the UK to publish its diversity targets, including gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability.



We realised that simply putting our best foot forward was not enough

Like most of our peers and clients, KPMG has been grappling with how to achieve greater gender parity. And like most of our peers and clients, we embarked on our diversity journey, initially focusing on some typical interventions. This included flexible working policies, progressive parental leave policies, gender targets for promotion and recruitment, and an array of women's networks focused on skills gaps and formal training and development.

To illustrate our intent to realise change, in 2014 KPMG was the first private sector organisation in the UK to publish its diversity targets, including gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. KPMG was also one of the early adopters of publishing its Gender Pay Gap, well before it was mandated.

Despite all this, we failed to materially turn the dial. By 2018, many women were still leaving the firm with little gender diversity at the top.

- In 2018, achieving Partnership in the firm was an aspiration amongst women that declined the more senior they became. Whilst just over half of the female Senior Manager population across FS Consulting wanted to be a Partner, only about one third of female Directors shared the same ambition.
- The lack of authentic role models that women could relate to was perceived as a contributing factor. In addition, women did not feel they had a clear career path ahead of them. And although those who were able to fast-track their careers, benefited from working with a Partner who was giving them access to the right projects, sponsoring them in the right meetings and supporting them to network through the firm, this support was not consistently available to all. Even with formal mechanisms in place for appointing mentors, coaches and sponsors, women seemed to prioritise more immediate tasks and not take full advantage of the support offered.

- Although flexible working policies were available, people were not making use of it. In 2018, only 2.3% of people in FS Consulting worked part-time. There was a sentiment amongst staff that not working full-time would likely impede their ability to get onto the best client engagements.
- KPMG invested a lot of time and resources to hire women through typical recruitment channels, but often they would drop out of the process or decline offers.



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I have a vision to change the stereotype of what a Big 4 leader looks like. I knew I wanted to do something practical to increase the diversity profile of our firm. I am proud to sponsor our RaiseYou programme which has created the support environment and community for our women to succeed.

Noeleen Cowley, Partner
KPMG



RaiseYou was born: How UNIDA helped KPMG to achieve greater gender diversity in FS Consulting

To help take an honest look in the mirror and really shift the dial on gender diversity, the FS Consulting leadership team brought in UNIDA Consulting (www.unidaconsulting.com), a D&I consulting firm with extensive research and analysis experience and a track record of helping organisations achieve gender parity through practical steps. Noeleen Cowley, a FS Consulting Partner, sponsored the work.

What we were trying to do

Together with UNIDA, we established the RaiseYou programme to prove that if an organisation is deliberate in its support for women, they will thrive. Our aim was to achieve tangible results through practical interventions:

- We wanted to create an empowered and informed female talent pool, with a clear career vision and an understanding of how to transition through every level ahead of them, not just getting to the next step up. Women emerging from RaiseYou would be equipped with the knowledge, tools and a strong appetite for driving their own careers.
- We wanted to enable a proactive group of leaders to drive the D&I agenda in their respective business areas, by helping them appreciate their role in attracting, developing and retaining female talent.
- Ultimately, we were looking to contribute to achieving KPMG’s firmwide gender diversity targets for 2022 of 25% female Partners, 39% female Directors and 49% female Senior Managers.

How we went about it

UNIDA and KPMG started this journey with a diagnostic to better understand the landscape within FS Consulting. Interviews with a cross section of women from FS Consulting to appreciate their lived experience, were followed by in-depth 1:1 conversations with the FS Consulting leadership team. Unsurprisingly, this highlighted a disconnect between perceptions at leadership level and experiences within the teams. Five key themes stood out as potential blockers to career progression for women in FS Consulting:

- perceived work/life imbalance
- lack of appropriate role models
- perceived incompatibility of parenthood with a career in FS Consulting
- insufficient support with regards to career planning and
- culture.

At the heart of our three-fold approach was a year-long bespoke mentoring and career support programme for a pre-selected cohort of high potential women. In addition, we ran external events to attract and retain top female talent, showcasing what KPMG is doing to achieve gender parity and providing a network for like-minded individuals to connect. Finally, underpinning our approach was a programme of work, designed specifically to address the blockers identified during the diagnostic.

Bespoke mentoring and career support

Informed by the results of the diagnostic, it was clear that we had to be more intentional in the career support we were giving our female colleagues in FS Consulting. We identified a cohort of 20 high potential female talent to whom UNIDA provided independent career guidance and support over a 12 months period. This included co-creating individual career plans, matching each woman with mentors and sponsors across the firm and walking shoulder-to-shoulder with participants over the course of the programme to drive tangible outcomes. Quarterly cohort breakfasts offered opportunities for participants to share their progress with their peers and engage with each other around challenges and lessons learned.

External events to attract and retain top female talent

We organised four events, each of which were attended by between 60 and 200 clients and colleagues. Events were headlined by distinguished speakers from across industries and included journalists and authors. Discussion focused around topics such as the ‘fine art of self-awareness and self-promotion’ or ‘personal impact, resilience and brand building’. Moreover, each event presented an opportunity for participants to grow their personal network.

Programme of work to address career blockers

To achieve KPMG’s objective of creating an inclusive environment that supports women to achieve their potential, we stood up a programme of work, covering five workstreams, to address challenges across each of the areas the diagnostic had highlighted as problematic.

- **Work/Life Balance:** We identified ways to improve productivity alongside flexible working and explored and designed a new flexible working framework including policies and processes to embed flexible working into the firm’s culture.
- **Role Models:** To ensure KPMG have a mix of role models and mentors available across all grades for maximum impact, we created profile write-ups and engaging videos about ‘real models’ in our firm.
- **Parenthood in Financial Services:** We designed and implemented interventions to help improve opportunities for those juggling a career in FS with family, incorporating feedback from workshops, highlighting current experiences and needs.
- **Career Planning:** To better understand the challenges minority and female candidates were facing at Director level promotions, we piloted a 6-months mentoring programme available to black heritage colleagues and RaiseYou participants with outstanding feedback and uptake for the coming year.
- **Culture:** We used real stories from workstream leads, sponsors and UNIDA to create internal videos and opened up discussion internally about what the new working models mean for culture and inclusion.



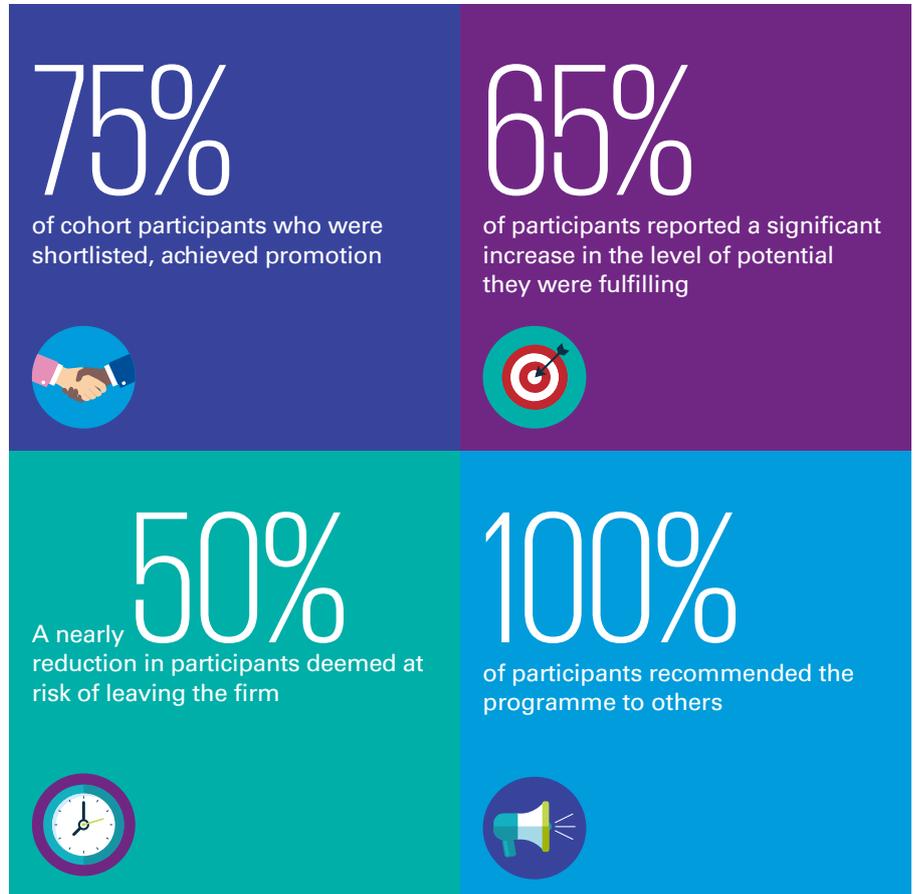
**How is RaiseYou
different from everything
else we tried?**

RaiseYou differs from everything else we tried in three important ways:

- **Firstly**, we were able to create new career habits through continuous hands-on support over the course of the programme. Based on actionable plans, which we co-created at the beginning of the year, participants were pushed north of their comfort zones by having to prioritise strategic career planning alongside immediacy of tasks. They had to demonstrate tangible progress during monthly touchpoints and quarterly breakfasts. Ultimately, this led to a shift in their behaviours and attitudes and instilled an appetite in these women to get in the driver's seat and take charge of their own career journeys.
- **Secondly**, involving UNIDA as external party to work with our cohort fostered a safe environment for the participants to have honest career conversations. UNIDA's independent and external perspective helped to uncover individual 'blind spots'; crucial areas that participants had not focused on thus far.
- **Thirdly**, the programme created a palpable ripple effect. Every woman, who was previously part of the programme, is now mentoring several of her more junior female colleagues in an effort to pay it forward.

At the end of the year, where women felt they had not yet fully achieved their potential and would benefit from further support, they had the opportunity to stay on the programme.

The combination of external perspective, pro-active sponsorship by leadership and participants getting in the driver's seat, has resulted in some great success stories:



This programme has helped me understand where I had got it wrong and what I needed to change to improve my chances of success.

I have so much more potential than I realised before and feel a lot more empowered.

Great at helping me navigate the firm to achieve my promotion to Director.



**Where do we go
from here?**

We have just launched our new RaiseYou Programme for 2021 and are applying key learnings from the 2020 pilot:

1. There is now greater visibility of the programme across the organisation, with women from the first cohort proactively sponsoring the programme and supporting more junior women in their teams.
2. We have created practical ways in which even more senior leaders can get involved in the programme to show their support and sponsorship, such as sponsoring participants or leading a workstream.
3. This year, everyone involved in the programme – cohort, sponsors and those running the programme – are bound by a clearly articulated commitment charter, outlining objectives and setting expectations with regards to time committed to the programme.
4. This year, the programme is supported through robust PMO and transparent governance arrangements. There is now also a clearer link between what women say the need in terms of support and workstream objectives.

We have come a long way and look back proudly on what we have achieved over this programme so far. We also recognise that there is a lot more to do and continue to push the dial.

One of our immediate focus areas will be the ‘pinched middle’ talent, a term coined by UNIDA which refers to a group of women typically at Manager or Senior Manager grade who, just as they are expected to be at full throttle with their career, are also becoming busier at home.¹

We have made a commitment to help create an environment where these women see a career in consulting as attractive and entirely compatible with other commitments in their lives. We have made a commitment to continuing to support all our employees to be their authentic selves and providing the platforms for them to shape their careers according to their circumstances. And we have made a commitment to sharing our experiences and learnings with our clients so that they too can benefit.



UNIDA Testimonial

Sandra Guzman, Co-Founder & Director

Nathalie Mawdsley, Co-Founder & Director

UNIDA has been supporting KPMG on the RaiseYou programme since 2018 and we are very proud to be a part of the firm’s D&I journey. Right from the start it was clear to us that KPMG wanted to do something that would directly and positively impact the lived experience of their female talent and provide them with the platform and the tools to reach their full potential – even if that meant going in a new direction outside of the firm!

The RaiseYou programme has helped highlight what is possible with deliberate intent on both the part of the individual and the firm. The programme has also shed light on the need for unrelenting focus and commitment from the top.

In KPMG, indeed in all the Big 4, getting the balance right between commercial success and creating a culture where diverse talent can thrive is not easy. Together we have learnt a lot from this programme and whilst there is still a way to go, we believe that the building blocks are solid and will help demonstrate to the firm’s talented women that a career in consulting is manageable – and attractive!



¹ [How to hold on to Talent in the Pinched Middle](#)

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