

## WORK SMARTER



A CEO and an academic dean walk into a bar. “Tell me, dean, if you are so smart, why aren’t you rich?” the CEO smirks. Looking at his biggest donor before responding, the dean thinks to himself: “Well, what I wonder is this: If you are so rich, why aren’t you smart?”

On average, women surpass men both at school and in social perceptiveness, key to the creation of organizational “superminds,” according to research by Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Thomas Malone. Yet women fall far behind men in workplace success, not just in the boardroom but from the get-go. American Association of University Women research shows women who graduate with the same major and work the same hours in the same economic sector “experience the consequences of [a] pay gap from their very first paycheck.”

In recent years, many attempts to get women to address their underperformance have failed. In 2013, a *Harvard Business Review* article titled “Women Need to Realize Work Isn’t School” exhorted women to take more risks and be “disruptive.” But full-scale female adaptation to workplace structures is not the solution to tap into half the

population’s intelligence and produce smarter organizations that create success for everyone.

In 2018, *MIT Technology Review* highlighted the results of University of Catania (Italy) researchers who studied the intelligence problem from the multidisciplinary perspective of astronomy/physics, economics/business, and complexity science. While it may be “true that some degree of talent is necessary to be successful in life, almost never [do] the most talented people reach the highest peaks of success, being overtaken by mediocre but ... luckier individuals,” the research showed. Pure luck and the ratio of lucky to unlucky events in one’s lifetime appear to be key to success.

So what then is the solution to creating more intelligent workplaces?

The Catania researchers looked at approaches to funding scientific research, which to varying degrees took into consideration merit, defined as past success. It turned out that the best results came from funding all research equally, irrespective of so-called merit, because using this approach allowed unlucky talent to shine.

To those involved in finance, this is not a remarkable result. For similar

reasons, many people invest in index funds representing the broad stock market, because over time they tend to outperform funds invested in individual stocks handpicked for their merit by professionals.

To create more intelligent and innovative workplaces, organizations need to do the same. Stop wasting time figuring out merit and give everyone a chance to succeed by providing everyone the opportunity to rotate job assignments and do different kinds of work. Eschew artificial intelligence that rewards luck (past success) and address the organization’s luck biases in choosing employees and vendors, assigning tasks, providing educational opportunities, allocating capital, and funding projects. Most radical of all, consider the advantages of equal pay — not for equal work — but equal pay, period.

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