



**AI's future  
success  
will depend  
on women**

#women4AI

## **DaringCircles** Women & AI

by the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society

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# About the Women & AI Daring Circle

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Launched in the second half of 2018, the Women & AI Daring Circle is an initiative of the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society, bringing together an ecosystem of partners to inspire companies and governments to act and to pledge their commitment to inclusive AI. The Circle focuses on two pillars, women empowering AI and driving it forward and on the potential of AI to redress women's status in society and contribute to a better world for all. Led by Microsoft, the Daring Circle's Strategic Members are AXA, BNP Paribas, Google, L'Oréal and Publicis Groupe in collaboration with UNESCO as an Institutional Partner and HEC as an Academic Partner. The circle is also supported by FTI Consulting as Knowledge Partner, and other contributing experts namely Gina Neff, Senior Research Fellow and Associate Professor at the Oxford Internet Institute and the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford.

The Women's Forum for the Economy & Society is a global platform of actions to highlight women's voices and build together a more inclusive economy. With the Daring Circles, the Women's Forum's ambition is to drive innovative solutions at scale and at pace through collaboration between businesses, public entities, NGOs and the media to have impact on issues where women are disproportionately affected and where their leadership is most urgently needed. The Women's Forum for the Economy & Society is a Publicis Groupe company.

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Inspire companies  
and governments  
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to inclusive AI



## DaringCircles

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by the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society

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As an industry and a society, we have a shared opportunity and responsibility to influence how technology, and specifically AI, accelerates our efforts to empower every person and organisation on the planet to achieve more. We must address the need to deploy technology in a responsible and inclusive way.

”

Shelley McKinley  
Head of Technology & Corporate Responsibility at Microsoft

# AI's future success will depend on women

## THE CURRENT STATE

Artificial intelligence (AI) is failing to engage women as equal partners in shaping the future. Today, far too few women are involved in the research, creation and deployment of what promises to be a transformative technology in the 21st century. There is mounting evidence that without the input of women, the technology has been left vulnerable to an alarming number of biases. Equally, there are concerns that programmes are being designed using datasets that either underweight or overlook factors that adequately reflect women as equals in society. These shortcomings and omissions have led to software applications that are flawed or impractical. Over the long term, they may lead to still graver consequences in the years ahead.

The net result is that today, even as we begin to witness AI's vast potential to change our lives, there are already signs that a lack of diversity and inclusion will negatively impact automation's future. Humanity stands at a critical juncture just as AI technology starts to spread across every sector of society and industry. Close the inclusion gap and we improve our chances of harnessing AI as a tool to right existing disparities. If we miss the opportunity before us, however, there is a real risk that for upcoming generations the disparities we see today will worsen.

The timing is critical and the stakes could not be higher. AI and related technologies such as machine learning and robotics are just beginning to usher in what is called the fourth industrial revolution. Across the AI industry, however, the highest-level positions in research, entrepreneurship, and development are dominated by men. By some counts, women currently make up less than one quarter of the developers and leaders working in the field. According to UNESCO figures, female students are only 28% of those enrolled in information and communication technologies worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

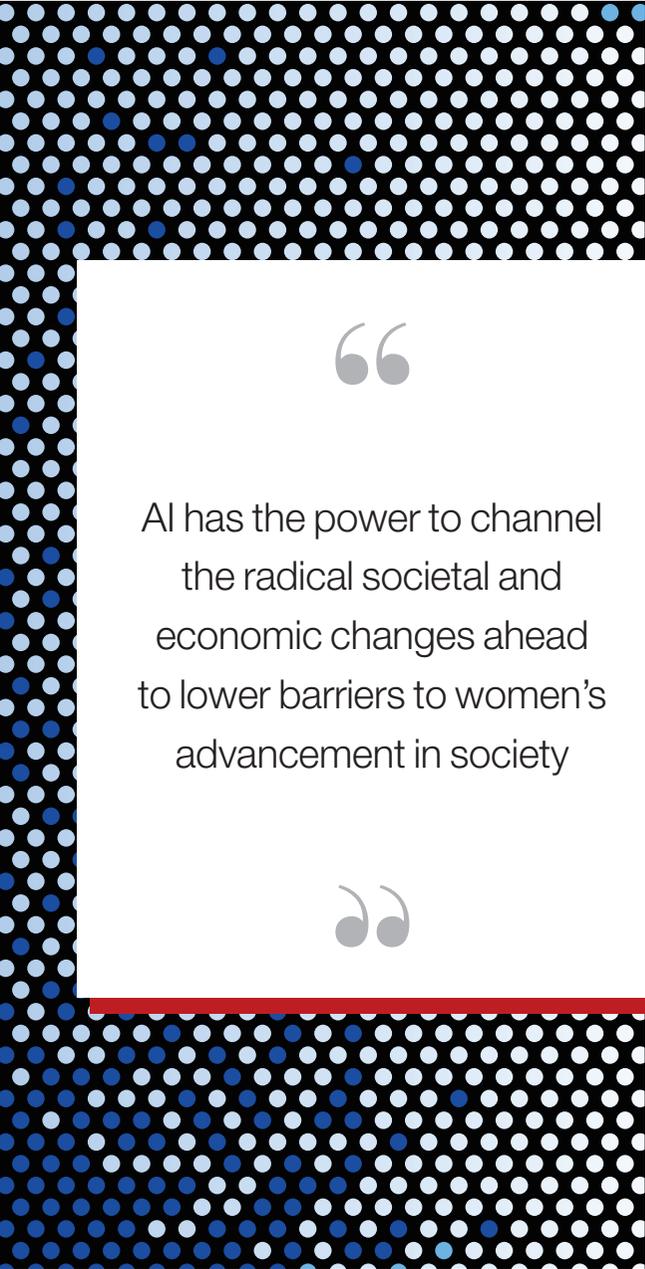
While women have not been completely shut out, their input has been overshadowed or minimised by leadership that is far from representative of our broader global society. AI will only fulfil its potential to improve our world if everyone has an equal share in its development and adoption. Our collective, timely response to this crisis will decide how AI shapes our future.

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The future of one of the most powerful technologies of the 21st century hinges on our ability to make its design and development far more inclusive.  
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UNESCO (2017) 'Cracking the Code: girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)'



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AI has the power to channel  
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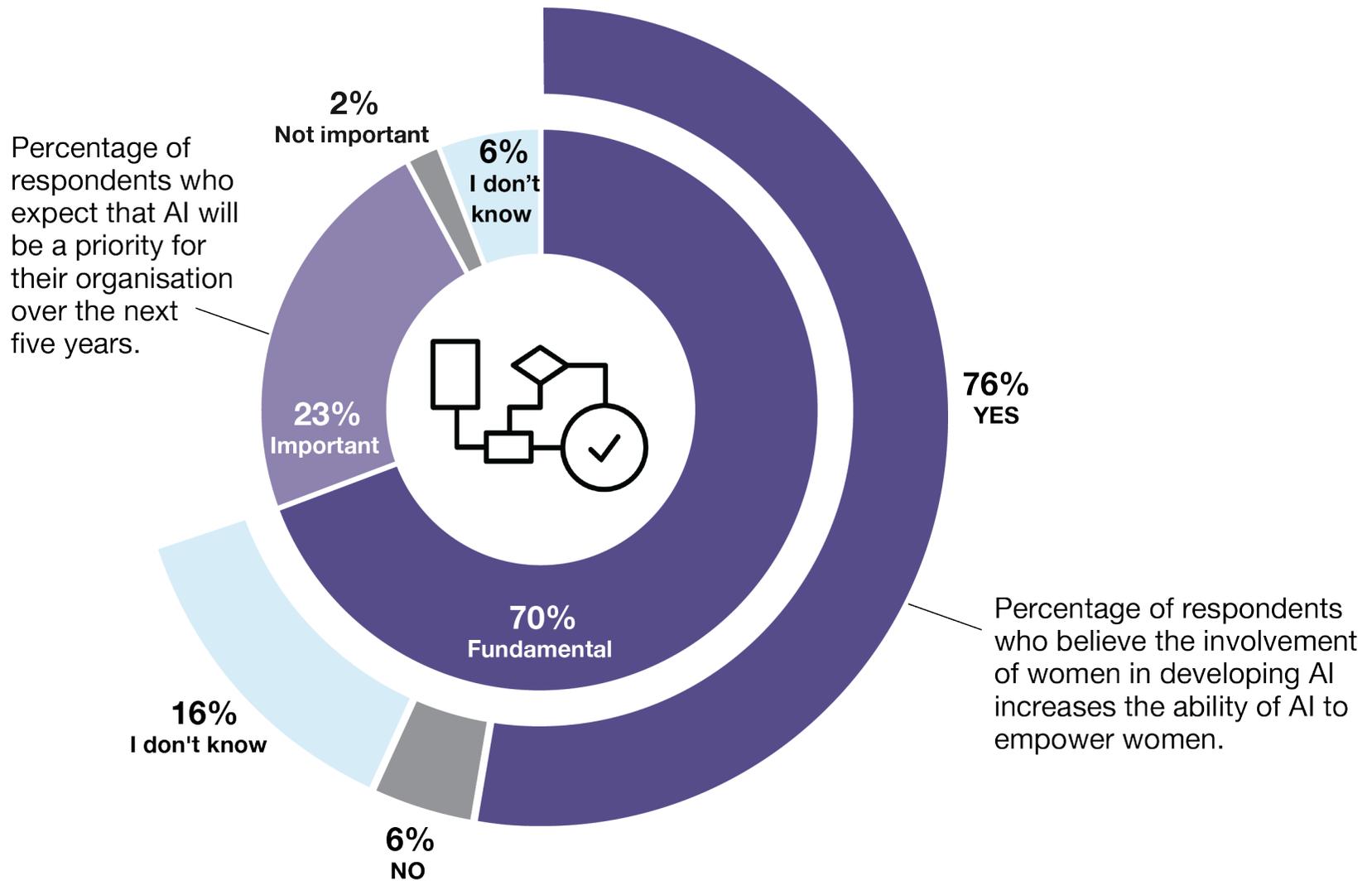
Consider the benefits of a more diverse and inclusive AI industry.

- As arguably the most disruptive technological change taking place in our lifetime, AI will have the power to channel the radical societal and economic changes ahead to lower barriers to women’s advancement in society.
- The effort to expand research, build new applications, and analyse data stands to benefit from a broader pool of knowledge fed by the contributions and insights of women and men both working together. Greater levels of participation by women will benefit AI, drawing from more viewpoints, empathy, and fairness. Diversity will help the technology realise its boundless potential to revolutionise healthcare, education, social services, and the global economy.
- Greater diversity will help to provide everyone with an increased share of the upcoming economic boom generated by sweeping technological innovation. That, in turn, could narrow the gender pay differential around the world.

Conversely, our failure to close the AI gender gap could have dire societal and economic consequences. The myriad sweeping transformations that are predicted could result in far greater gender inequality while simultaneously diminishing AI’s economic potential.

- If current trends continue, we risk excluding women from the AI-driven economy or relegating an outsized proportion of female workers to low ranking roles in the job market. Some studies show that more women than men are potentially vulnerable to the anticipated wave of automation coming within the next decade and that many currently hold jobs that could be swept away by AI.<sup>2</sup>
- AI’s growth, meanwhile, may be slowed or held back by a smaller talent pool at a time when demand for specialised talent is accelerating.
- AI has already endured formidable setbacks due to biased assumptions and insufficiently representative data. Face-recognition and translation software are just two examples of applications that were hampered or ultimately flawed as a result of data problems like these. During critical design stages, more diverse and inclusive development teams can help pinpoint issues. That, in turn, will help AI steer away from a treadmill of costly and time-consuming revisions and corrections.

2. Taylor, K. (2017) 'Automation will affect women twice as much as men. This is why.' *World Economic Forum*; Charlton, E. (2019) 'Women's work faces the greatest risk of automation, says new research' *World Economic Forum*.



Source: FTI Consulting and Women's Forum for the Economy & Society Survey, Women's Forum analysis

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The Women & AI Daring Circle is going well beyond discussions of bias to create an environment where women are empowering AI to its full potential, and AI is empowering women to their full potential.

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# The work of the Women & AI Daring Circle

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The Women's Forum for the Economy & Society understands the urgency of bringing more women into the development of AI, and looks to explore the opportunities that AI presents to address barriers to women's advancement in society. The Daring Circle was launched in 2018 as a caucus where leaders from technology companies can join researchers, enterprises, and organisations to find solutions. The Women & AI Daring Circle has launched a proprietary research programme to draw on thought leadership from the enterprises and research scientists leading the way on AI breakthroughs.<sup>3</sup> The aim is to bring together invaluable information from both the creators of future machines and applications and from key players in the emerging AI marketplace.

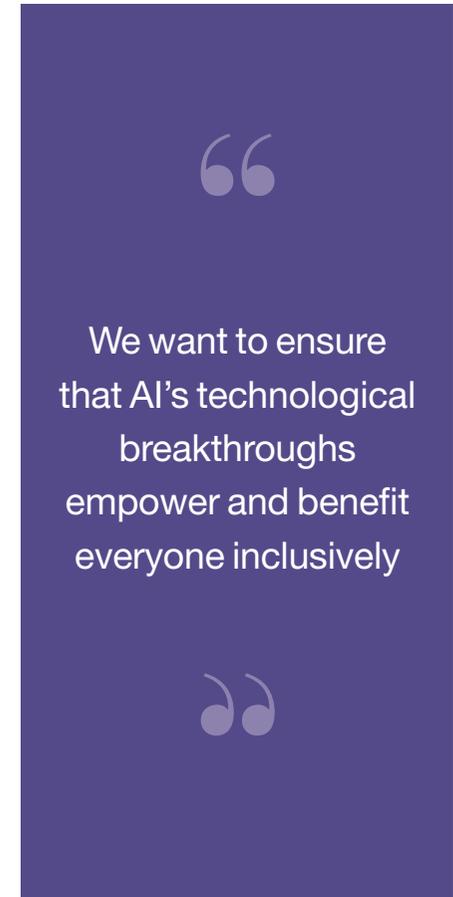
From the onset, the Women & AI Daring Circle has taken an additive approach to the imbalance, going well beyond discussions of bias to encourage tangible action to create an environment where women are empowering AI to its full potential, and AI is empowering women to their full potential — a synergy that will yield bountiful societal benefits for all.

We see that as the best way to ensure that AI's technological breakthroughs empower and benefit everyone inclusively.

In our work to date, three key steps have been identified for the way forward:

- Acknowledgment of the underlying issue and its effects
- Setting goals, identifying efforts and assessing our progress
- Looking forward — the Call to Action

3. About the research- methodology: This research combined an online survey and qualitative interviews of experts within the partner organisations and with academic experts. An invitation to the online survey was sent to employees from a diverse group of organisations, both partners of the Women's Forum, members of the EU AI Alliance, and other organisations and groups working with AI. Four types of roles within each organisation were targeted; Chief Technology Officer or equivalent roles, Chief Operating Officer or equivalent roles, Head of Diversity & Inclusion or equivalent roles, and developers. The survey has received 246 responses to date. The survey was launched on 8th July 2019 and is still in the field. Eleven qualitative interviews were carried out during this same period.



## DaringCircles

by the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society



We're looking to formulate company policy positions on emerging AI ethics issues such as facial recognition and what we stand for.

We can then move from defining principles to actually calling for specific measures and possibly laws.



## I. ACKNOWLEDGMENT: WHERE WE START TODAY

Women are already at a considerable deficit as the world begins its transition to the AI era. In its 2019 Gender Gap Report, the World Economic Forum (WEF) reported that women hold only 22% of key positions within AI such as developers and leaders.<sup>4</sup> The numbers are worse still in subsectors such as machine learning, where according to a report by Wired Magazine, 12% of machine learning researchers are women.<sup>5</sup>

Women's participation will be critical to AI's future. Recruiting more women to join in AI's design will help accelerate advances at this formative stage in the technology's development. Women will provide new thinking, perception, and feeling to the effort to bring more humanity and sensitivity to automation and machine learning.

At the same time, the work of making data-sets more gender-inclusive at the foundation of AI and machine learning is of paramount urgency – a formidable task that must start immediately. “Because AI systems are so data-driven, problems stemming from non-representative data are exacerbated quickly and powerfully,” says Natasha Crampton the head of Microsoft's Responsible AI Office. “The involvement of women in the field is good news for the economy, says Eline Chivot, a senior policy analyst for the Center for Data Innovation. “If a system is fed with biased data, a company might only cater to one population which will eventually lower its growth.”

To provide still further motivation, the Women and AI Daring Circle has launched a survey to chart the progress we have made on these two pressing initiatives while measuring the distance that remains to be covered in our quest to bring women and considerations of gender to the heart of AI development.

Respondents were very candid about where both the industry and their organisations stand in the current state of AI. Take the interim results from the survey conducted by the Women's Forum, for example. About 20% of respondents said they think women are well represented in leadership roles linked to AI services and applications. Nearly 40% of those polled said their organisations were beset by built-in biases that would likely increase existing gender inequalities. A mere 21% say their organisation has an adequate mechanism to track the impact of AI services and applications on women.

“We need to change the conversation to focus on how robotics technology can provide an opportunity to overcome biases,” says Sangseok You, a professor of information systems and operations management at HEC in Paris. “Involving women in the design process is a significant step towards this.”

4. World Economic Forum, (2018) 'Global Gender Gap Report'

5. WIRED, (2018) 'AI is the future, but where are the women?'

## II. SETTING GOALS AND ASSESSING OUR PROGRESS

Building a more inclusive AI ecosystem starts with setting concrete goals to better focus our efforts. We can then make strides forward by sharing knowledge, insights, and best practices. Once we have amassed a critical mass of shared experiences, research, and relationships a third step comes into play – finding ways to measure our collective progress.

**Our research has shown that organisations should be taking on three types of action.**

1. **Building internal foundations** Institutions can take the lead with proactive steps which focus on gender-critical issues in the development of AI. Companies and organisations can start with a closer examination of how AI impacts women and men differently. Internal ethics offices or specially assembled taskforces can examine inclusion in data-sets at the heart of the development of applications. Responsible AI training for all organisational functions can help us unify our vision and resolve. Finally, institutions can promote AI diversity and inclusion through their active support of outside organisations.

“Role models (across the field) are key, if you’re a woman in AI, the best thing you can do is to get out there and talk to other women about it!” says Professor Gina Neff of Oxford University’s Sociology Department.

2. **Proactive recruitment, another strategy, targets the talent pool directly.** A more diverse and inclusive pipeline is a start forward, but one that will take time to strengthen. One way to begin is by establishing high-level panels which focus directly on hiring and possible employment biases.

Organisations, meanwhile, must also expand the support they provide women employees and recruits. Mentorship programmes are one example. Working closely with professional associations and other networks as are another way to learn more about trending issues and concerns that directly affect present and future employees.

Interestingly, AI may play a direct role in these initiatives. “AI has the potential to make recruitment faster, smarter, and easier,” says Kate Glazebrook, CEO and founder of the company Applied. “AI technologies can undertake unbiased evaluation of merit in a way that human beings cannot,” says Dr. Mitali Banjeree, professor at HEC Paris.

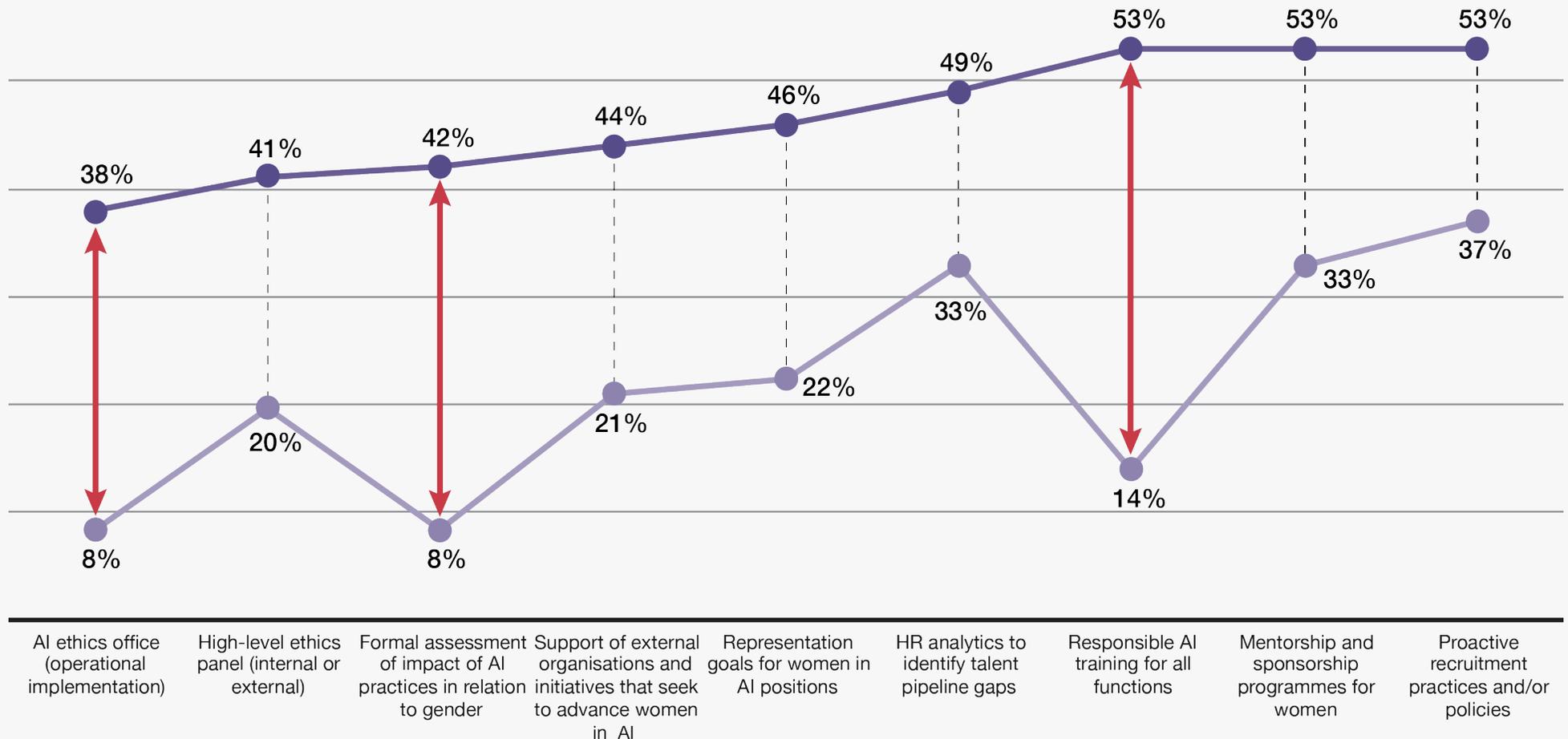
3. **Targets and quantifying progress.** We can use metrics to point the way to progress and quantify successes and shortfalls. We in the AI ecosystem must set about measuring the impact of AI practices on our society, even while drawing up specific HR analytics and representation goals.

The results of our survey were mixed. Respondents said their institutions are pushing ahead on a multitude of issues, while experimenting with a wide variety of solutions.

At the same time, they note that efforts are meeting with different levels of success to date. We asked survey participants how effectively their organisations have implemented the key strategies above. The interim results were surprising. First off, over 60% of respondents do not feel their organisations do a good job in putting these same steps to use. For specific strategies, very wide divergences were apparent. Only 14% of respondents said their organisation provides responsible AI training for all functions. Just 17% said their organisation does well in examining the impact of AI practices in relation to gender. When it comes to the use of analytics to size up talent pipeline gaps, just 22% commended their human resources effort.

# The ideal and the real: The opportunity gap for women in AI

Interim results show that organisations are reaching a consensus on what they can do to draw more women into AI development to build more inclusive AI. A range of companies and institutions tell us that that progress has been uneven. The biggest gaps between the ideal and the reality, highlighted below, show the greatest opportunity for progress and are at the heart of our Call to Action.



- Percentage of respondents who rated the practice as 'very important' to ensuring gender is considered in the development and/or application of AI in their organisations.
- Percentage of respondents whose organisations undertake the practice/initiative to ensure gender is considered in the development and/or application of AI.

### III. LOOKING FORWARD

We all understand the gravity of the AI gender gap. We appreciate the urgency of making substantive changes while the technology is still in its nascent stages, with the goal of making AI a more inclusive technology that benefits all of society. We argue that addressing the barriers that women face in the field of AI is at once beneficial to society and economically sensible as well. We realise that we must share what we have learned and our stories, all while pointing the way for others to follow. And as our conversations and survey numbers show, the time has come to take our convictions further still.

That is the basis of the Women & AI Daring Circle Call to Action. It is meant as a way to solidify our commitment to a leadership role across organisations, geographies, and functions. As a core group, we are willing to assume a place in the vanguard to promote broader change.

In **Phase One** our Call to Action proposes, that Daring Circle partners commit to take action to assess and improve the consideration of gender in AI development and deployment in their organisations. Signatories commit

to share back to the Women's Forum the nature of, and learnings from, the actions they have taken. A summary of these will be shared by the Daring Circle on a quarterly basis as encouragement and inspiration for others.

**Phase Two** will take the Daring Circle's leadership role one step further by launching a further call to elicit the support of a wider group of signatories to collaborate in using AI to address specific challenges that women face in society.

Our goal is simple. We look to awaken organisations of all types and sizes that use AI now or will do so in the future. We want to spark conversation about an issue that has yet to become a centerpiece of the news, but upon which our collective wellbeing depends. We want to gather a repository of ideas and best practices that can help both Daring Circle members and the world at large to move forward.

And most importantly, we want to generate a sense that we all share equally in the responsibility of creating inclusive AI for all.

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# Call to Action

**The case for change is clear:** AI is widely recognised as a transformative technology across sectors, and more organisations need to take steps to implement best practice for its responsible application, in ways that will empower and benefit everyone inclusively.

Under the auspices of the Women's Forum, as a coalition of partners, we call for organisations of all sizes, sectors, and from all countries, to apply a gender lens to their AI development and implementation:

- (1) To include women and diverse viewpoints in AI development and deployment, to mitigate the challenges of gender bias and other societal concerns.
- (2) To explore opportunities for AI to address barriers to women's advancement in society globally.

This Call builds on existing initiatives in this space, including the EU Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI and the OECD Principles on Artificial Intelligence, with a specific focus on women's empowerment.

Through a survey of different organisations, including the Women's Forum ecosystem of partners, we have identified a striking awareness and implementation gap between the perceived importance of initiatives that ensure gender is considered in AI development and deployment, and the existence of those initiatives. The areas which emerged with the most pressing need for action were:

1. Responsible AI training for all functions.
2. Formal assessment of the impact of AI practices in relation to gender, including through analytics.
3. Procedure and governance of responsible AI within the organisation.

We call on organisations to make a one-year commitment to address the implementation gaps above and other issues of choice, ensuring that gender is considered in AI development and deployment within their institutions. Signatories commit to share back to the Women's Forum the nature of, and learnings from, the actions they have taken. A summary of these will be shared by the Daring Circle on a quarterly basis with the aim of catalysing widespread action in the AI ecosystem.

We believe that women's increased participation, visibility and influence in AI systems, will benefit society at large – and we undertake to share evidence and examples of the nature of this impact. We are committed to exploring the ways in which AI could be deployed to address barriers to women's advancement in society, and to working together with organisations across the AI community in 2020 to develop solutions to achieve this goal.

# Background to the Call to Action

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- We want to encourage tangible action to make progress towards an environment where women are empowering AI to its full potential, and AI is empowering women to their full potential, driving greater societal benefits for everyone.
- We envisage a two-phased approach:
  - o Phase 1 – in signing the Call to Action, the partners of the Daring Circle commit to take action to ensure gender is considered in AI development and deployment within their institutions. Signatories commit to share back to the Women’s Forum the nature of, and learnings from, the actions they have taken. A summary of these will be shared by the Daring Circle on a quarterly basis with the aim of catalysing widespread action in the AI ecosystem.
  - o Phase 2 – a follow-up call for organisations to collaborate to address specific challenges that women face in society through the application of AI.
- We want to spark a public conversation around the role of women in driving inclusive AI and mitigating the risk of unfair gender bias in its application. We also want to open the opportunities to empower women and all people through AI.

## The signatories:

- Organisations of all sizes around the world that are using AI services now or will in the future.
- Phase 1 will be soft-launched at the Women’s Forum Global Meeting 2019, 20-22 November in Paris. We aim to have all members of the Daring Circle be founding partners of Phase 1, and commit to take action over the course of the next year.
- Phase 2 will be launched in 2020, in conjunction with the Beijing+25 commitment to gender equality. During Phase 2 we will seek signatories from the Women’s Forum community and the broader business and multi-stakeholder community.

## The process of building this Call:

- The content and form of the Call are informed by interviews conducted with partners and experts, and an ongoing high-level survey of AI professionals and industry leaders.

# How you can get involved

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## 1. Support our call to action using #women4AI

## 2. Contribute to our research:

We are looking to increase the responses to our survey — this survey is directed to understand the existence, nature and extent of implementation of AI policies in organisations in relation to gender. The survey is anonymous and should not take more than 10 minute to complete.

You can start the survey through this link:

<http://survey.fticonsulting.com/t/AHtG0Zej1n>

**Please contribute to the survey if you occupy one of the following roles — or circulate it with relevant colleagues:**

- those involved in technology implementation,
- those involved in operations,
- those involved in D&I,
- and those in developer roles

## 3. Join the Women's Forum community and advocate for inclusive AI throughout the year

# Women taking the lead in AI



## Gina Neff

Professor Gina Neff is a Senior Research Fellow and Associate Professor at the Oxford Internet Institute and the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford. She studies the future of work in data-rich environments. Professor Neff leads a new multinational comparative research project on the effects of the adoption of AI across multiple industries.

**Q: What is the challenge you/your organisation is working on?**

A: I study the impact AI will have on women's authority and on the balance of power in workplaces like hospitals and how collaboration will change in AI-enabled teams.

**Q: How does AI affect women?**

A: The emotional intelligence of some women is a skillset that can't be automated, yet. That's the good news. But it's also true that in many advanced economies, women hold the majority of jobs that face the threat of automation. So there's a gendered aspect to the debate about the consequences of AI on employment that has gone unrecognised.

**Q: Why is women's leadership important on AI?**

A: Beyond the effects I already mentioned, there's the key issue of the quality of the data that AI use to understand the world and make decisions about it. Ultimately, artificial intelligence will make decisions which affect many areas of our lives, and those decisions will only be as good as the data they're based on.

At the moment, very few people are asking what needs to be put in place to build, govern, and manage artificial intelligence in a way that supports women. It's essential that those questions are asked and answered by women, in a way that takes account of the experience of women around the world.

**Q: How can women amplify their impact on this issue, and what's necessary to help them combine their efforts?**

A: Women are leading on the research into the effects of AI, the impact of AI, and founding and leading many of the companies which enable AI to interact more smoothly with human workers.

There's still a long way to go, though. Worldwide, women still only make up 22% of AI professionals, according to one recent survey by LinkedIn and the World Economic Forum.

It's great to see the Women's Forum doing such great work on women and AI through the Daring Circles. It's through interventions like this that we'll be able to begin to change the conversation.

But I think one of the most underrated aspects that would help women lead in this space is role models. A group of economists recently published a great paper quantifying this with economics students: they tested how much women's enrolment in economics courses grew once a group were exposed to charismatic role models from the same university compared to a control group. They found it increased their likelihood to major in economics by 8%. So if you're a woman in AI, the best thing you can do is get out there and talk to other women about it!

**Q: How important is collaboration to having an impact on this issue, and what role does the Daring Circle play in that shared work?**

A: For the most pressing issues on women and AI, the solutions require organisations to collaborate.

Take the issue of gendered data. I would love to be able to tell you that companies which use gendered data to build their systems will be punished by consumers, or in terms of reputation. But in practice, the environments where AI is developed are normally too opaque for consumers, or they are developed in markets which are too concentrated for consumers to be able to exert much power.

So the most effective way to ensure that AI doesn't replicate gender biases is to make sure business decisionmakers understand the risks, work together to set and maintain minimum standards, and keep to them over time.

It's great to see the Daring Circles thinking about this and enabling that kind of collaboration on issues such as women and AI, women and STEM skills, and women as role models for leadership and change more generally.



## Taarini Kaur Dang

Founder and CEO, Brave14 Capital; Author of 'The Young Aspiring Entrepreneur: A 14-year Old Girl from Silicon Valley shares how to Overcome Age and Gender Barriers.'

### Q. Where does your passion for AI stem from?

A: I am always enamoured by groundbreaking technologies that have the potential of changing the face of humanity for the better. I consider AI as that kind of technology. I am passionate about helping to define AI in the right way so that it has a positive impact on the world and can solve large-scale problems like climate change, world hunger and others. I have had several STEM-focused interactions since elementary school. I have done a summer internship at Nutanix after 9th grade and became one of their youngest interns ever. AI was a common topic of internal discussion there. I have been fortunate to be a speaker at top conferences - such as the Google Launchpad Female Founders Summit - where AI was a common topic of discussion at these events.

### Q. What challenge related to AI are you/your organisation currently working on?

A. Looking to invest in AI start-ups via my venture capital fund — Brave14 Capital — where the goal is to help develop AI with diverse viewpoints.

### Q. Which area, in your view, offers the biggest opportunity for women to make a real impact in AI right now?

A. The biggest opportunity for women in AI is in the definition and creation of AI itself. Having diverse viewpoints in the AI industry is important because it will lead to different

ideas, innovations and outcomes for a technology that will have significant impact on our daily lives.

If we must make use of AI technology and enjoy all its possible benefits, there must be a balanced input that comes from women and men. Note that aside from the disadvantages that could come from the expansion of AI that I previously mentioned, a framework that lacks diversity of opinion would be even more disastrous.

### Q. Why is women's leadership in AI important?

A. The insignificant level of female participation in AI development is an issue of big concern. The implication of this for AI is that the essential perspectives of women required for augmenting our everyday activities would be effectively non-existent in the technology. If this trend is not adjusted, the pervasion of AI could be interpreted as a 'takeover' of the world by technology designed exclusively by men. This would be devastating, and we cannot exclude the significance of women's input.

### Q. What do you think would help women lead in the AI space?

A. An early introduction of the rudiments of AI to girls at a young age - would help develop their interest and passion to follow through with understanding the AI concepts and operations. Parents can be more intentional in exposing their girls to

interesting details about technology to provoke curiosity.

The creation of dedicated colleges where AI would be solely taught could be a welcome and impactful idea. This kind of institution is sure to attract people from different parts of the world and would be pivotal to raising the number of women techies in no time, provided that they are made accessible through a low or free-tuition fee structure.

Women currently in workplaces around the world should be educated on the advantages and importance of getting involved in technology creation and development. Organisations and businesses can help the situation by sponsoring women on scheduled courses, where rudimentary and advanced AI can be taught. When provisions like these are made, the numbers are bound to rise by some percentage points.

### Q. How can AI help empower women?

A. AI can help empower women by better understanding women-specific challenges and helping solve them. For example, developments in AI can help to fight bias in hiring and pay. Depending on where you are in the world, such issues are typically not discussed with openness. So, advances in AI in particular can help understand these issues and hopefully generate new solutions, provided that we take steps to ensure that women's perspective are used in developing this technology.

# Acknowledgements

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The Women & AI Daring Circle is an initiative of the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society, bringing together an ecosystem of partners to advocate for making the design and development of AI truly inclusive. Its aim is to encourage organisations of all types and sizes to take tangible action to create an environment where women are empowering AI to its full potential, and AI is empowering women to their full potential. Led by Microsoft, the Daring Circle's Strategic Members are AXA, BNP Paribas, L'Oréal and BNP Paribas in collaboration with UNESCO as an Institutional Partner and HEC as an Academic Partner. It is also supported by FTI Consulting as a Knowledge Partner.

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