



The Business Case for Investing in Women's Employment in Jordan

CASE STUDY

Estarta Solutions

Supporting women in non-traditional roles

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FOREWORD BY THE WORLD BANK GROUP

The International Finance Corporation and the World Bank are partnering with int@j and the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) to remove barriers to women's participation in Jordanian workplaces and build a community of companies that are dedicated to hiring, retaining, and promoting women.

Even before the pandemic, there was an urgent need to level the playing field for working women in Jordan. Despite gains in recent years, only 14 percent of Jordanian women are in the labor market, compared to 64 percent of men. That is one of the widest gaps in the world – and it has deep social and economic implications. We at the World Bank Group recognize that access to economic opportunities is essential for both men and women to live dignified lives and become active social agents.

Attracting, retaining, and promoting women is also good for companies. It allows them to harness talent, making them more productive and competitive. In the bigger picture, raising female employment also contributes to economic growth and supports poverty reduction. Our recently published State of the Mashreq Women Flagship Report found that if Jordan raised its female labor force participation rate to 24 percent, from the current 14 percent, its annual economic growth rate would increase by 2.5 percentage points. Amid the ravages of COVID-19, boosting female employment would act as a catalyst for Jordan's economy, making it stronger and more inclusive.

As difficult as the pandemic has been in Jordan, it has allowed us to re-imagine workplaces and to reflect on what those mean for Jordan's women. We have been inspired to see the agility of some Jordanian companies, many shifting to more flexible, healthy, and thereby inclusive work models that are responsive to the needs of women.

Under a platform created with int@j and the JNCW, we have launched the series of case studies to showcase Jordanian companies that have created more gender responsive workplaces that support women and men. The case studies feature companies that are promoting greater inclusion of women in their workforce in three thematic areas:

- supporting women in non-traditional sectors, as Estarta Solutions is doing;
- promoting anti-harassment policies at the workplace, based on UMNIAH's experience; and
- fostering family-friendly policies in the workplace as exemplified by the Kawar Group.

We hope that these case studies will inspire other businesses in Jordan to develop and test similar solutions to more gender-aware environments, based on insights into the models that work.

Our utmost gratitude goes to int@j and the JNCW for championing this important agenda, to the three companies that participated in this project for generously sharing their data and good practices, and to the governments of Canada and Norway for supporting the Mashreq Gender Facility. This is a five-year initiative under which we are launching these case studies with the governments of Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan to increase female labor force participation.



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FOREWORD BY THE PARTNERS:

The Information and Communications Technology Association of Jordan (int@j), and The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW)

As we write this foreword, we cannot help but think about how exceptionally challenging this year has been for businesses, employees and particularly for women in Jordan. It is with a strong sense of urgency - but also with much optimism and hope - that int@j and the Jordanian National Commission for Women have come together to address challenges to women's participation in the workplace, while aiming to also reverse the recent set-backs that working women in Jordan have experienced as a result of the COVID19 pandemic.

Even before the pandemic, only fourteen percent of Jordan's working-age women were actively participating in the workforce, compared to 64 percent of Jordan's men. What holds women back in the workplace - here in Jordan as elsewhere in the world - is widely known. It is among many factors; the burden of domestic care, elderly and childcare, lack of inappropriate transportation, a lack of workplace security and socially constructed stereotypes about the types of jobs and sector women can work and advance in. The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated some of these challenges for women and is further holding them back or even forcing them out. It is with this understanding that int@j and the Jordanian National Commission for Women have come together to work hand in hand on raising the currently low labor force participation of women in Jordan. This is so very critical to Jordan's economic growth path. If Jordan raised its female labor force participation from currently 14 to 24 percent, as the government has committed itself to in 2019, Jordan's annual economic growth would be increased 2.5 points.

Despite our different mandates, we recognize that our organizations are bound together by a common strategic interest. We both know that harnessing the untapped talent pool of the many well-educated women in Jordan is a critical contributor to boosting the competitiveness and productivity of Jordanian companies and to Jordan's long-term economic growth. Equally, getting and keeping more women in jobs creates career and income opportunities for them and thereby enhances their agency and decision-making.

As such, we at int@j and the Jordanian National Commission for Women have joined forces with the International Finance Corporation to regularly convene, engage and thereby build a community of companies that is committed to hiring, retaining, and promoting women.

It is under that initiative that we have launched a series of case studies, that profile Jordanian companies who are committed to advancing women in their company's workforce. The case studies feature two int@j member companies, and one company from JNCW's network of companies, that are promoting greater inclusion of women in their workforce in three thematic areas: (1) Supporting women in non-traditional roles, as Estarta Solutions is doing; (2) Anti-Harassment Policies at the Workplace as UMNIAH and (3) Family Friendly Policies at the Workplace as Kawar Group is doing.

Our aim is that these case studies will reach many businesses in Jordan and help them better understand the business benefits of employing women, get insights into the approaches that work, and learn from each other's experiences while replicating solutions.

On behalf of JNCW and int@j, we would like to thank the three companies that participated in this project and generously shared their data and good practices. We at int@j and JNCW are committed to continuing our partnership to work with businesses in Jordan towards creating equal employment opportunities, decent working conditions, and lucrative career paths for women, and we will continue to do more.



Dr. Salma El Nims
Secretary General – Jordanian National
Commission for Women (JNCW)¹



Dr. Nidal Bitar
CEO, int@j²

-
- ¹ The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) is a semi-governmental organization which advocates and promotes for gender equality and women's rights. It was established by a cabinet decision in 1992 and has since gained recognition as the authority on women's affairs in Jordan's public sector while it also represents the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan at regional and international levels in matters pertaining to women. JNCW's mission is to support the mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas and to narrow the gap between formal acknowledgement of women's rights as detailed by legislation and the actual societal attitudes towards women.
 - ² The Information and Communications Technology Association in Jordan (Int@j) is a membership-based information and communication technology (ICT) and IT Enabled Services industry advocacy, support and networking association whose purpose is to serve as the collective voice of the industry, advocating on behalf of stakeholders and seeks to maximize the contribution of the ICT sector towards the national economy. We aim to provide our members with the tools required to ensure continued growth and expansion.

The business case for investing in women's employment in Jordan

Estarta Solutions:

Supporting women in non-traditional roles

WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES IN JORDAN

In Jordan, women are primarily employed in a handful of sectors, such as education and healthcare (ILO, 2017), and significantly under-represented in a range of high-skill sectors, for which they are often highly qualified. Women are also under-represented in senior leadership roles, with just 2 percent of Jordanian firms led by a woman (World Bank, 2020). These patterns are due in part to social norms regarding what is deemed appropriate work for women and men but are also shaped by legal restrictions meaning that women are barred from some sectors and roles - which included most night work until 2020, when this provision was repealed³ - which further limits the range of options for women's participation in the labor market. More broadly, women's choices regarding paid employment are also affected by limited childcare facilities, lack of safe and accessible public transport and workplace discrimination and harassment.

This kind of gender-based segregation in the labor market – where women and men are unequally distributed across and within sectors and job types – brings significant costs for the Jordanian economy. The under-representation of women in leadership roles means that many firms are missing out on higher levels of profitability and innovation associated with diversity in leadership (see BCG, 2018; McKinsey, 2020) while many sectors are failing to draw fully on the educational qualifications and talents of half the population (see Das & Kotikula, 2019). According to one study, the improved allocation of talent in the workforce –

³ See: Labor Code; Ordinance Concerning the Jobs and Hours in which the Employment of Women is Prohibited.

Estarta's employee profile - Jordan operations (2020)



Women comprise:

- 44% of employees
- 0% of senior managers
- 52% of managers
- 41% of engineers
- 62% of non-engineer ICT specialists

Summary of key initiatives:

- "Incubator" outreach program
- Leadership training
- Flexible working policy
- Enhanced security measures for night shifts

Summary of business benefits:

- Recruitment from a wider talent pool
- Reduced turnover
- Alignment with values of main client
- Better team performance

largely driven by increased entry of women into highly skilled occupations – accounts for one quarter of GDP growth in the USA over the period 1960-2010 (Hsieh et al, 2019).

Jordanian women enroll in tertiary education at higher rates than men, including in mathematics, statistics, and natural sciences courses, where they represent 51.5 percent of students (UNESCO, 2020). More than half of Jordanian computer science graduates are women (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2020), yet they comprise just one third of the Jordanian ICT sector as a whole, and less than 15 percent of roles in network systems and technical support (int@j, 2019). Unlocking the potential of Jordan’s highly qualified women is therefore key to addressing skills and talent shortages faced by many companies, particularly those in strategic high-growth sectors such as ICT and the digital economy, and supporting economic development more broadly.

In this context, forward-thinking companies have a crucial role to play in supporting women to take up and succeed in non-traditional roles – an umbrella term used in this case study to include all sectors, roles and hours in which women are traditionally under-represented or excluded in Jordan.

COMPANY BACKGROUND

Established in Amman in 1991, Estarta Solutions is now a leading global network engineering and ICT company, specializing in advanced technical support, training and customer service. Since 2004, Estarta has been a key supplier of outsourced technical support services to multinational technology solutions company Cisco Systems.⁴ Supporting Cisco now accounts for the vast majority of Estarta’s operations.

Headquartered in Amman, where 90 percent of the workforce is based, Estarta also operates in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and in 2018, expanded its operations to Europe, where it launched three new shared services centers in Poland, Portugal and Romania. Between 2015 and 2020, Estarta’s Jordanian workforce⁵ grew from 200 employees to 957, of whom 44 percent are women.

This case study explores Estarta’s support for women in non-traditional roles in Jordan, including management and technical roles and nightwork.



THE BUSINESS CONTEXT FOR SUPPORTING WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES

Jordanian ICT companies are operating in the context of a national sector that is rapidly growing – and of increasing importance to the overall economic development of the country. The sector already contributes around 12 percent of GDP and the government has identified it as a potential high-growth sector in its *Jordan 2025* economic plan. In particular, Jordan aims to position itself as a digital outsourcing hub (EPC, 2018) (Estarta’s main area of business). Given the need for increasing numbers of highly-skilled personnel to drive this transition and the untapped potential of Jordan’s women, companies that fail to recruit - and retain - women will struggle to compete in the coming years.

Estarta already employs a significantly higher proportion of women than the sector overall – increasing from 34 percent to 44 percent in just six years. As such, the company is well positioned to meet the challenges - and take advantage of the opportunities - associated with the country’s digital transformation. Estarta believes its longstanding commitment to hiring women as engineers has been critical to its commercial success and rapid growth (from 200 to more than 900 employees over five years). Hiring large numbers of women in the ICT sector remains unusual (despite women’s higher graduation rates from computer science courses) – due to entrenched cultural stereotypes about “suitable” roles for men and women and a lack of awareness

4 Cisco develops, manufactures and sells networking hardware, software, telecommunications equipment and other technology services and products - outsourcing the provision of technical support to its customers to companies like Estarta.

5 References to Estarta’s workforce in this case study refer to the Jordanian workforce only, unless otherwise specified.

among women about roles in the sector, among other factors. Setting itself apart in this way has enabled Estarta to recruit from a wider talent pool and benefit from the increased productivity and innovation that gender-diverse teams can bring (see Staff, 2019; Sodexo, 2016) – positioning itself as an “employer of choice” and helping it to retain employees in the context of a national sectoral staff turnover rate of nearly 25 percent (GIZ, 2018).

“Society is %50 women. Why wouldn’t you want to reflect that in the workforce?”

Mutaz Nabulsi, Chief Executive Officer

Estarta’s early commitment to supporting women in non-traditional roles was influenced by the commitment of Cisco, its main client, to gender diversity. More recently, Estarta’s ambition to increase gender diversity has been driven by the progressive leadership of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Board of Directors (which includes one woman). Underpinning this ambition, according to management, is an understanding that companies with gender-diverse teams perform better. Having made significant progress in increasing the representation of women as engineers across the company, the focus now is on ensuring women are represented in senior management. Estarta’s management recognizes that this is a significant challenge in the context of a national labor market where only 14 percent of working-age women participate (ILO STAT, 2020), and of those 40 percent leave it before the age of 40 (World Bank, 2019) - but is determined to see society reflected at all levels of the organization.



HOW THE COMPANY SUPPORTS WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES

Estarta believes that supporting women in non-traditional roles demands a holistic approach, starting before recruitment and continuing throughout the employment relationship.

The company has adopted several initiatives to foster gender diversity ranging from outreach to schoolgirls and undergraduates, to mentoring and training for high-potential women to support their career advancement. These initiatives are underpinned by a robust policy framework and inclusive workplace culture that supports women (including those with family responsibilities) to stay and excel at Estarta. Recently, Estarta’s focus has been on building the pipeline of female managers, expanding the talent pool and developing a supporting communications strategy which promotes positive female role models. In 2018, Estarta launched its gender diversity plan in partnership with the EconoWin program of German development agency GIZ.

Targeted outreach and recruitment programs

Through its Incubator outreach program, Estarta has established strategic partnerships with universities across Jordan. The purpose of the program is both to directly support Estarta’s recruitment efforts and to contribute to wider changing of mindsets (which may in turn help Estarta to recruit from a wider pool of candidates).

Company representatives aim to raise awareness among students – especially women - and their families about career opportunities in network engineering and inform students about working life at Estarta. This includes addressing the concerns of many families about the safety implications of women moving to Amman, by providing information about safe near Estarta’s office, for example. Through this engagement, Estarta staff also try to challenge stereotypes about “suitable” jobs for men and women.

In addition, students are encouraged through the outreach program to apply to an intensive six-month training course run annually by Estarta – designed to equip promising candidates with the baseline technical skills needed to work with Cisco’s technologies. Estarta hires an average of 24 new recruits from the Incubator training program: in 63 ,2019 percent of these

were women. Importantly, the company aims for 50 percent of trainers to be women, providing female role models for new hires from the outset.

To spark girls' enthusiasm for a career in ICT and encourage them to study the necessary STEM subjects, Estarta runs orientation days, which introduce girls aged 14 to 16 to the daily tasks of an engineer through interactive exercises, live demonstration and Q&A sessions with female role models. This initiative was initially established in 2014 in partnership with Cisco under the name "Greenlight for Girls", and in 2019 was re-launched as "ProGirls".

"As female students, we were not informed about the career opportunities in network engineering, but Estarta has changed that"

Rana Al Shboul, switching team leader

Equipping women with leadership and technical skills

Estarta's commitment to gender diversity is accompanied by an equally firm belief in the need to retain women by nurturing their talent and supporting them to advance in their careers—including to senior leadership positions. With this goal in mind, Estarta created a tailored career advancement program to help the company increase the representation of women in management. Open to men and women, the program consists of three components: identifying promising junior and mid-level staff according to specific criteria; a leadership training program covering topics such as crisis management, public speaking and effective communication; and the implementation of an internal mentorship program for the selected talent pool. As part of its approach to career development, Estarta introduced a rotation scheme which allows participants to join different teams and discover new technologies. In 2019, women comprised 15 of the 17 participants, and six of those went on to take up managerial positions at Estarta.

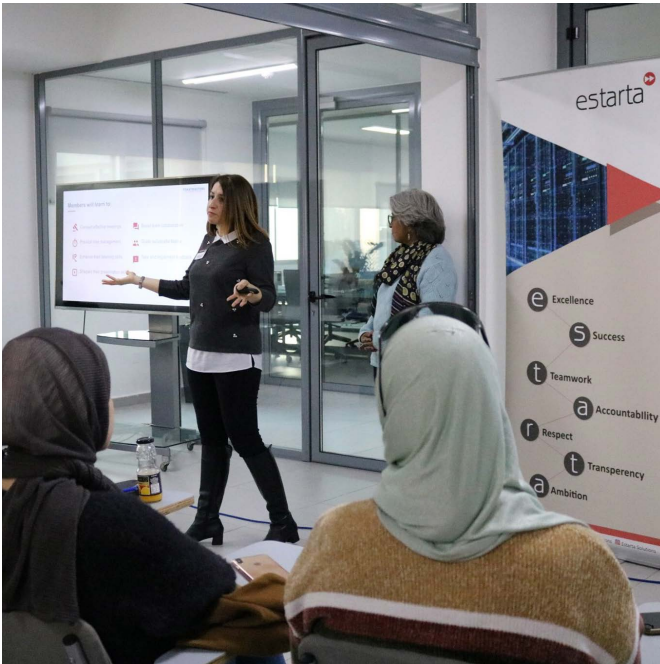
"Every time I've thought about moving on, the company has pre-empted my decision, and given me a new opportunity that has persuaded me to stay."

Yasmin Hushki, VPN team manager

In addition, Estarta supports female employees to take up career development opportunities abroad. Some of these arise through the company's close partnership with Cisco: for instance, to achieve the highest level of Cisco certification, Estarta employees must take an exam at one of Cisco's examination centers overseas. The Cisco Marketplace, a training program available to all of Cisco's technical support providers, provides a range of other options for employees to deepen their knowledge of Cisco technologies. In a national context in which it is often considered socially unacceptable for women to travel abroad for work, Estarta goes the extra mile to support women to take these opportunities, where feasible arranging for women to travel to and from examination centers on the same day, for example, or to be accompanied by a family member. "Families trust Estarta to ensure the safety of their daughters", says Sharif Al Mohammad, Director, Enterprise & Data Center.

Estarta also established a women's empowerment committee in 2019 as an informal platform to inspire female employees and promote gender equality. A key activity of the committee has been the "Toastmasters" program, a series of weekly events to build leadership skills and confidence.





Supporting working parents

Like the ICT sector globally, Estarta’s workforce is young, with 87 percent of employees (and 86 percent of women) under the age of thirty. Employees with children are in a minority – around 10 percent of the female workforce and 21 percent of the male workforce have dependent children. But Estarta is determined to ensure that when they do have children, employees’ working lives are not negatively impacted by their care responsibilities. As such, support for working parents is a crucial part of the company’s strategy to ensure high levels of employee retention. Estarta offers new mothers 90 days’ maternity leave at full pay; that is, twenty days more than the statutory entitlement. Before it became a legal requirement, Estarta offered three days paternity leave to fathers, which men say they feel encouraged to take. The company ensures female employees are aware of their statutory right to take a year’s unpaid leave to look after young children and guarantees their reinstatement. All mothers receive a monthly childcare allowance of 100 JOD (USD 141) per child, up to the age of four.

Estarta takes pride in its non-discriminatory recruitment policy towards pregnant women, with several examples of hiring pregnant women. For many employees, this provides evidence of the company’s non-discrimination policy in practice. Team manager Suzanne Abu Halimeh recalls being

“quite shocked” after receiving a job offer while six months pregnant, noting that “this is not common in Jordan”. The labor law in Jordan protects women in employment only until six months of pregnancy.

The company is set up to support flexibility and the diverse needs and responsibilities of its staff – especially women. With home and flexible working already in place in some teams, the shift to remote working with the onset of COVID-19 did not present a problem for the company. Management believes that this practice will be adopted more widely going forward, and that a more embedded flexible working culture will encourage women with children to stay. Employees appreciate the extra time to spend with their families and the increased flexibility to manage their family responsibilities, and noted that support and understanding from managers has been critical to making this transition successful.

Estarta’s standard working week (Monday to Friday) differs from that of most other Jordanian companies (Sunday to Thursday). This can be difficult for parents – especially women – as Friday is typically considered a family day. The company considers this one of the key reasons why supporting women into senior management remains a challenge, and acknowledges that there is no easy solution. However, management observes that over time, women - and men - are becoming more willing to make this compromise. This is attributed to Estarta’s ongoing efforts to create a supportive, positive and inclusive working environment for women.

“Nowhere else supports its female employees as well as Estarta.”

Walaa, recent female recruit

Providing flexibility and additional security during night shifts

Providing technical support for Cisco clients means that Estarta’s business requires some night shifts. While women are generally legally barred from working late night shifts, the ICT sector is exempt. Until 2020, when the government repealed the relevant provision in the Labour Code, women were

legally barred from working night shifts in most industries, however, the ICT sector was exempt – and Estarta has always supported female employees to work night shifts if they want to. In fact, Estarta has found that when offered the choice, many women prefer to work overnight so that they can take care of their children in the mornings and evenings. To address concerns about personal safety for women working at night, Estarta put several measures in place. Women who work at the office overnight benefit from robust security measures such as surveillance cameras, secure doors, and strict ID requirements for entering the building. The company is also happy for women to be escorted by family members, who can wait for the duration of their shifts in the reception area. Moreover, women working overnight shifts could work from home long before homeworking became widespread due to COVID-19. As a result of these provisions, women represent 58 percent of overnight staff.



BUSINESS IMPACTS OF THE COMPANY'S SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES

Improved recruitment, including attracting high quality candidates

Recruiting significant (and increasing) numbers of women in a sector where this remains uncommon has been critical to Estarta's ability to grow rapidly over recent years, and to meet unforeseen challenges such as COVID-19. Estarta's tried and tested experience of hiring women meant it could quickly find 200 new staff (60 percent of whom were women) to set up a completely new team

in response to increased demand for Cisco products such as WebEx as home-working became the new global norm. As well as helping the company to fill every vacancy, Estarta's commitment to hiring women ensures that it can recruit the highest caliber candidates, by drawing from the broadest talent base.

Since its establishment in 2014, the Incubator program (which comprises both outreach activities to universities across Jordan and a six-month training scheme) has become one of the main recruitment channels for Estarta. Between April and September 2020, Estarta hired 56 candidates in engineering positions. Of those, 27 – including 12 women – were reached through the Incubator Program.

"I encouraged my younger sister to take up a job in the security team. It's not easy to find such a safe, supportive and healthy environment."

Esraa Altamimi, team leader

The program has helped recruit 47 women overall from underprivileged areas. According to training and development manager Heba Odeh, the Incubator program has "enriched the talent pipeline". It has also helped raise Estarta's profile as a credible and well-regarded employer in communities across Jordan, which further supports its recruitment efforts.

Stronger leadership teams

Estarta's leadership team believes that the most effective management teams are those that are representative of their workforce, the company's customer base and society more broadly – and this view is supported by international research. A global study by Boston Consulting Group (2018) found that increasing the diversity of leadership teams leads to more and better innovation and improved financial performance, by introducing a more diverse range of perspectives and strengthening team dynamics. More broadly, stronger decision-making processes as a result of diversity are correlated with higher returns, share prices and profits (Catalyst, 2017; Peterson Institute, 2016; Norland et al, 2016). The performance gains are not a question of women outperforming men; rather, it is the diversity of senior leadership teams that counts.

Women represented 52 percent of middle managers at Estarta in 2020 – making the company stand out in a sector and national labor market that remain heavily male-dominated. In focus group discussions, staff expressed the belief that this gender diversity aids communication in teams and creates a positive environment that helps teams to perform better overall.

However, it remains an ongoing challenge – and a priority – for Estarta to support women into senior management, where they are not represented. Recent initiatives such as the women's leadership program aim to address this, alongside the company's continued support for women to balance family and work responsibilities.

Estarta saves more than USD 300,000 per year by maintaining a staff turnover rate that is 6.5 percentage points lower than the national sectoral average.



Reduced staff turnover rates

Estarta's strategy to increase the proportion of women at the company has led to major cost efficiencies linked to reduced staff turnover. Estarta's current turnover rate of 18.2 percent is well below the sectoral average of 24.8 percent ⁶ (GIZ, 2018), and the company attributes this in large part to the high representation of women at the company compared to others in the sector. Given the additional challenges working women face in Jordan, when they find a company that supports them, they tend to stay: the length of tenure for women at Estarta is on average two years longer than that of men. Moreover, in FGDs, women and men alike suggested that Estarta's inclusive and diverse atmosphere was a factor that encouraged them to stay at the company.

Lower levels of staff turnover help the company control costs related to recruitment and onboarding of new employees. On this basis, Estarta saves an estimated USD 300,790 (JOD 213, 260) per year by maintaining an annual turnover rate 6.5 percentage points lower than the national sectoral average. ⁷ The true cost is likely much higher in the context of Estarta's workforce, as each employee who leaves the company takes with them specialized technical skills, institutional knowledge and social connections whose value is

significant but difficult to quantify. US research suggests that the cost of replacing a mid-level employee can reach up to 30 percent of their annual salary (Boushey and Glynn, 2012).

Alignment with client values

Maintaining a positive relationship with Cisco, its main client, is critical to Estarta's success, and, as the only Cisco technical assistance center in the Middle East, Estarta is also a very important strategic partner for its client. Cisco's own ambition to have a workforce that is at least 35 percent women is driven by the belief that gender diversity improves communication and collaboration in teams. While all of Cisco's service providers try to align with Cisco's gender target, the fact that Estarta goes beyond it sets the company apart and helps to position it as a favored supplier. Aligning itself with Cisco's values helps Estarta to better serve its client's broad customer base across the world – a view that is shared by Cisco and Estarta staff. According to Saddam Ismail, who works in the security group. "We are representing Cisco. Our clients know they are dealing with the Cisco culture".

⁶ Based on 2017 figures (most recent available): GIZ, 2018.

⁷ This figure is based on the direct training costs and lost productivity incurred each time the company replaces an employee (a conservative estimate that does not include the time cost for the trainer, not the additional costs incurred when more senior staff leave the company).

“Estarta’s passion makes it really unique. It is %100 committed to gender equality and it’s leading the way.”

Wasan Al-Talhouni, sales business development manager, Cisco Systems

More cohesive and innovative teams

Greater gender diversity within the organization has led to more cohesive, innovative and adaptable teams. Management believes there is better communication and decision-making, and greater agility and resilience in response to challenges such as COVID-19. “Diverse teams make men perform better too”, says Mutaz Nabulsi, CEO. Gender-diverse teams benefit from the range of experience and different perspectives men and women bring. This view is supported by international research: a 2016 study by Sodexo found that growth was 13 percent higher and gross profit 23 percent higher for gender-balanced teams (i.e. those with a ratio between 40-60 percent) (Sodexo, 2016).



LESSONS LEARNED

Based on its experience, Estarta offers the following lessons learned and advice for other companies trying to support women in non-traditional roles:

- Realize the benefits of early change. By staying ahead of the curve – for example, by introducing flexible working policies and paid paternity leave before these were required by law – Estarta not only positions itself as an “employer of choice” but is better able to adapt to changing legislative requirements and workforce needs.

- Lead from the top. Recruiting women, retaining them and supporting their career advancement needs to be a genuine ambition of management. While setting targets is important as a means of focusing gender ambitions, it is also critical for top management to support an environment in which women know they can thrive.
- Share success stories to inspire others. A coherent communications strategy is key. Via social media, participation in webinars and interactive website content, Estarta raises awareness of opportunities, challenges stereotypes about suitable employment for women, and reinforces its reputation among men, women, families and in the business community.
- Include men too. Estarta ensures that men can benefit from training programs, events and other initiatives and encourages men to take up benefits such as flexible work and paternity leave. Offering inclusive policies and programs helps to avoid resistance or perceptions of unequal treatment.
- Be prepared for a challenge. Supporting women to take up a range of roles in which they are traditionally under-represented – especially management - is time-consuming and not easy, nor cheap. Estarta's management is unanimous in its belief that by investing to address these challenges it will reap significant benefits – generating not just improved business outcomes but improving the lives of individual women and contributing to a positive shift in society.

CONCLUSION

In the Jordanian context, the definition of “non-traditional roles” is broad. For Estarta, the focus is not just on increasing the number of women in a traditionally male-dominated sector but also on creating an inclusive workplace culture that supports women to build longer-term careers at the company, take up leadership positions and work non-traditional hours, including overnight and on Fridays. To realize this vision, Estarta has adopted a multi-faceted approach that ranges from training and outreach programs, to flexibility and support for working parents. Estarta's strategy to attract and retain more women has allowed it to seize a competitive advantage in recruiting the best new graduates in the ICT sector, providing the foundations for ongoing growth and high performance.



SOURCES

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