

Roadblocks, Hurdles, and Glass Ceilings: The Female Executive Perspective

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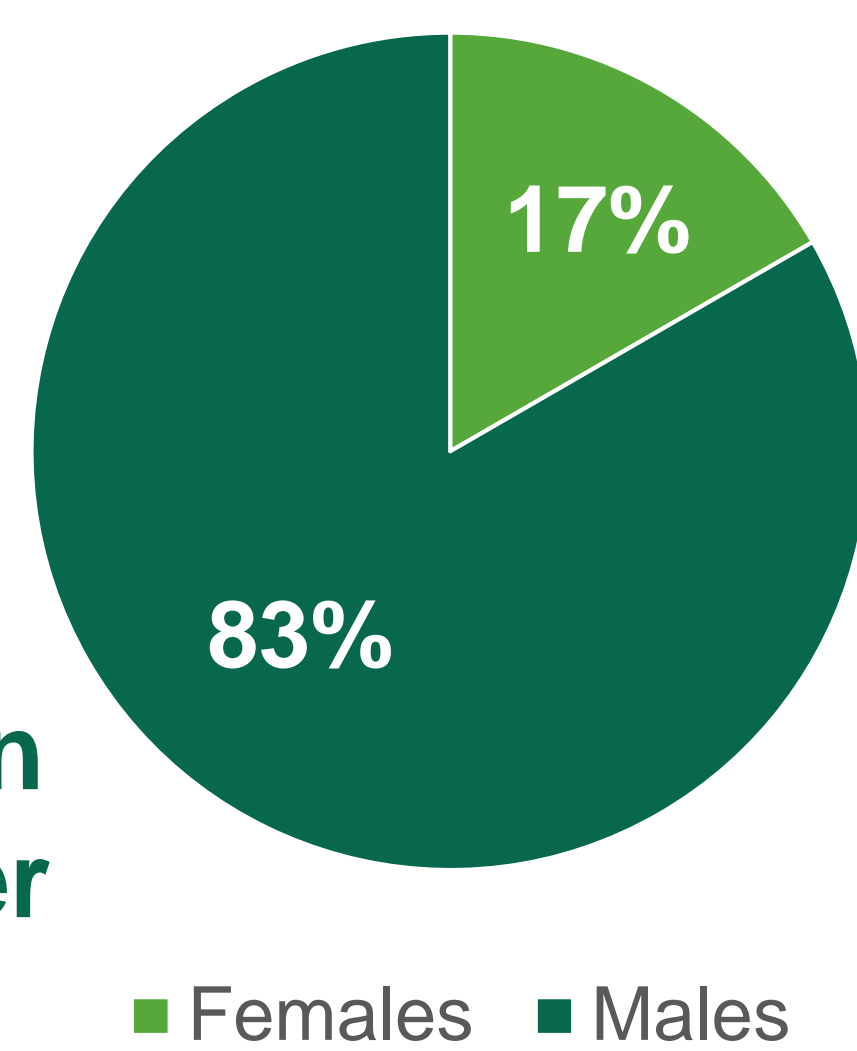
Abstract

The North American forest sector is well-known for its lack of diversity. In most operations, middle-aged white males are the majority of employees. Given this setting, we investigate the experiences of female executives working in North American forest sector firms. We take a qualitative approach with in-person and Skype interviews of female executives in both large and forest sector operations. We attempt to assure representation from various specialties and geographies. Data collection is ongoing. Qualitative data analysis will be used to identify commonalities among respondents. We hope to develop insights that can help improve the sector by eliminating roadblocks and hurdles for female managers as well as provide advice for young females entering the industry.

Introduction

- In our previous research we investigated the relationship between gender diversity and financial performance of large forest sector firms
- We found gender diversity in top management teams has a significant, positive impact on company financial performance¹
- Because the North American forest sector is well-known for its lack of diversity, we investigate the experiences of female executives working in North American forest sector firms
- We hope to develop insights that can help improve diversity in the sector by eliminating roadblocks and hurdles for females as well as provide advice for young females entering the industry

Figure 1. Gender discrepancy of U.S. companies' top management teams on PWC's global list of top 100 pulp paper and packaging companies



Methods

- A careful analysis of US based PricewaterhouseCoopers top 100 pulp, paper, and packaging companies was used to identify all US forest sector female executives.
- A convenience sample was selected, assuring representation from various specialties and geographies
- We anticipate sample size consisting of 15 executives, but will only continue interviewing until we reach data saturation. Interviews will be done in-person, or on-line
- Interview questions will cover the atmosphere of the interviewee's company and sector, the advantages and disadvantages of being a female manager, and what they think might make the forest sector a more attractive place to work for female managers
- Audio recording or extensive field notes will be taken during interviews for use in data analysis. All audio recordings will be verbatim transcribed for use in data analysis
- Qualitative data analysis will then be used to identify commonalities among respondents

Results

We are still in the process of gathering data. Preliminary data suggests there are seven categories to gender diversity in the forest sector: Characteristics of the forest products industry, progress the industry has made, how we can make more progress with gender diversity in the forest sector, the benefits of the progress, advantages and disadvantages of being a female within the industry, and advice to young females who are entering the industry.

"...it just doesn't conjure up in your mind that it [the forest sector] would be an industry that would have a lot of opportunity for women"

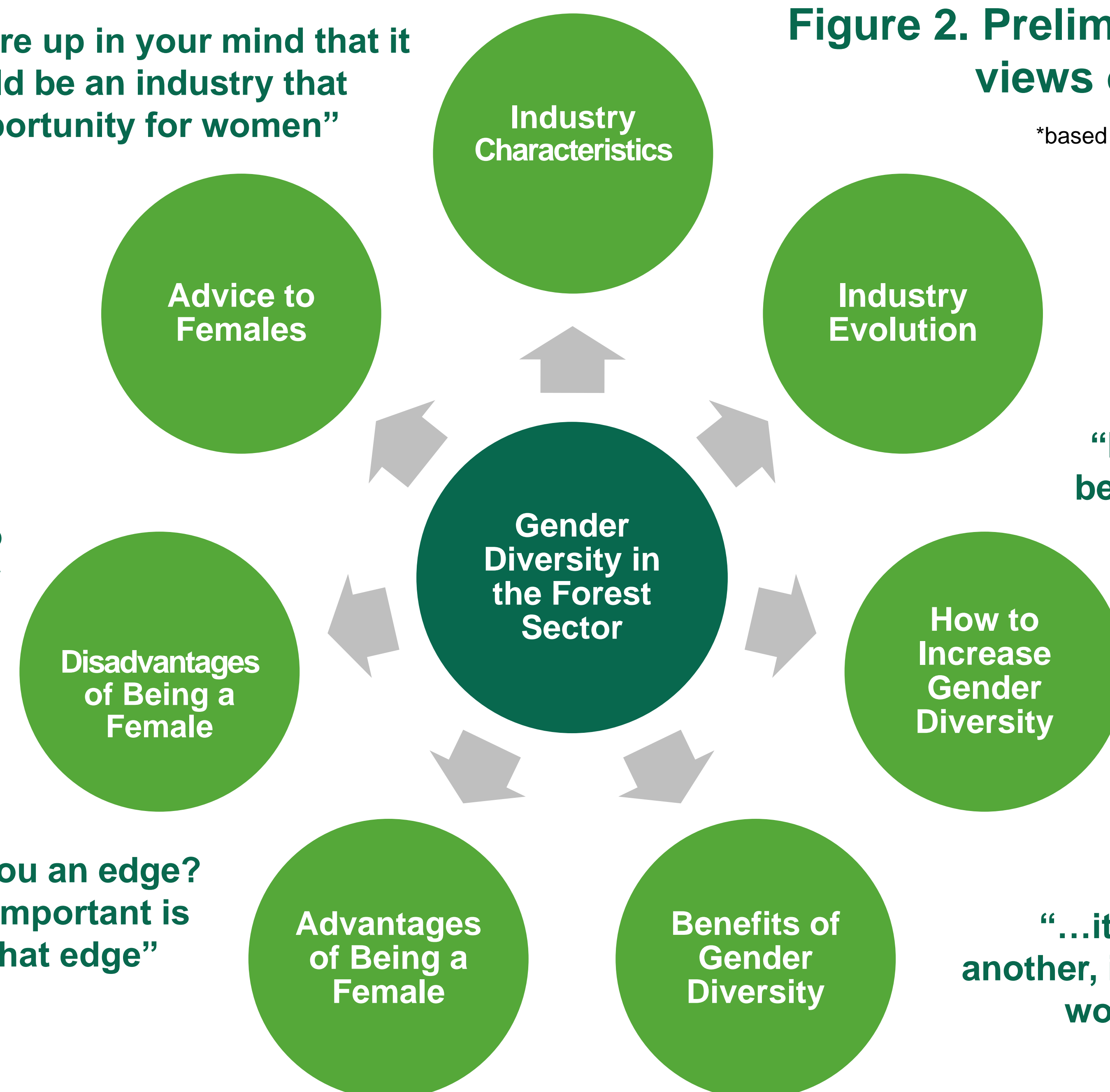
"...women especially, think about what it is I want to do, and how can I reach out more than others and own my own career"

"I think it could be a disadvantage to be a woman if you attempt to um, try and use being a woman as an advantage"

"If companies are looking for females [] is that going to give you an edge? Probably... what I think is really important is that you have to deliver against that edge"

Figure 2. Preliminary findings of the views of female executives

*based on nine interviews with female executives in the forest sector.



"...I've seen a shift of more women in management over time"

"I go talk to classrooms at [] university because it is important for people to see female executives and to learn more about our industry..."

"...to be able to see the world through another set of eyes helps you get better"

"...it's not one is better than another, it is that we're [men and women] better together..."

Conclusion

Although improvements have been made in the last few decades, there are still obvious issues with diversity in the forest sector. From preliminary data we understand diversity makes top management teams more competitive, and to increase diversity we need to make sure we have diverse candidates in our hiring pools. To help obtain this, young females need to see female executives and learn more about the opportunity for them in our industry. And to the young females looking to enter the industry, "Being female might help you get your foot in the door but you still have to be able to deliver and add value to the organization and compete for those next roles, just like anyone else would," –female executive in the forest products sector. We will continue to interview female executives in the forest sector, to further develop insights that can help improve diversity in the sector.

