

SWiFT: Addressing the lack of women representation and diversity in executive roles

September 16, 2022



An Evening With Alastair Campbell



17th Nov 2022



6:00pm - 9:00pm



AECOM, Aldgate
Tower, 2 Leeman
St. London E1 8FA

Alastair Campbell is a writer, communicator and strategist best known for his role as former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's spokesman, press secretary and director of communications and strategy. He now splits his time between writing, speaking, broadcasting, charities and consultancy. This will also be an opportunity to network with other leaders in the transport industry.

SWiFT

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With the majority of senior management roles within rail occupied by men, Shamit Gaiger tells Rail Business Daily how the SWiFT group will bring change to improve inclusion and gender balance at the very top. This is to complement our man allies so we have a more gender balanced industry to deliver better outcomes to our passengers.

As the managing director at the West Coast Partnership Development, Shamit Gaiger is within the minority of women working at a senior level within rail.

It's no secret that the vast majority of executive roles in this industry are positions held by men, with women accounting for just one per cent of those in C-suite roles.

As a result, the sector is missing out on a wealth of senior talent and the business benefits to be gained when companies improve inclusion and gender balance across their entire workforce.

And this is why **SWiFT** – Senior Women in (or Formerly in) UK rail or Transport and their male allies was formed.

The organisation aims to help shift the dial in respect to the number of women in executive roles in the UK rail sector and to further promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the industry, with a particular focus

on executive grades and roles.

The purpose of SWIFT is to provide space and support for its executive members through a peer-to-peer network and to foster the development of high-potential women and help them progress their career and transition to more senior roles. A Women in Rail initiative, SWiFT membership is now open to professionals – both male and female – who hold a senior position, who are looking to progress their career and transition to more senior roles at Board level.

“The number of females in senior positions in the UK rail industry is shockingly low, said Shamit.

“This is why WR set up SWiFT – to address the lack of women and diversity in executive roles.

“Fundamentally, there is a need for more women to form part of the pipeline of talent that feeds into senior roles, for the industry to succeed.

“SWiFT is designed to provide a supporting mechanism for senior women to talk through challenges, this group is all about having women to talk to each other, help each other, support each other, and be part of a network where you can interact with women like you.

“There’s nothing else like SWiFT, which is why we were asked to set it up.”

‘Diversity brings strength’

SWiFT was created after Shamit and a group of other high-profile females working in the industry got together to share experiences and challenges and realised the topics discussed could be beneficial to a wider workforce.

The group was first created in 2019, and has since gone on to become an integral part of Women in Rail. However, due to the pandemic, it is only now in 2022 it can fully launch its events.

As a trustee at Women in Rail, Shamit works on the SWiFT project during her spare time. A dynamic leader with a strategic vision and significant board experience, Shamit is the ideal person to help SWiFT and its members succeed.

Despite holding such a senior position, Shamit is no stranger to the struggles of women climbing the career ladder, so she understands the challenges first hand, but also knows the advantages a diverse senior workforce brings.

“In my personal experience of leading business and teams, diversity brings strength,’ Added Shamit.

“Not only does it bring different perspectives, but diverse leadership teams are more likely to bring innovation and increase productivity.

“Working in innovation for many years I have seen this in action.”

Join today

A SWiFT membership costs £250 per year – the equivalent of under £21 per month. Membership gives you access to:

- Professional networking events
- “Board Ready” development workshops
- Leadership talks from executives
- ‘An evening with.....’ exclusive events
- Live Board job vacancies
- Peer-to-peer networking events
- Support for establishing yourself as a leader within the rail sector

The first event

SWiFT’s first event is An Evening with Alastair Campbell, which will be held on November 17th at AECOM, Aldgate Tower, 2 Leeman Street, London E1 8FA.

Shamit added: “These events are exclusive to SWiFT members and they are so valuable.

“The membership fee pays for these events, so they are free for members to attend. Every pound in membership goes back into creating more opportunities, 100% is reinvested into SWiFT to create more opportunities.”

Senior leaders ‘dissatisfied’ with the gender balance

To find out more about other senior leaders’ challenges, SWiFT launched a survey to more than 1,000 senior leaders in UK rail to gather their views on what they perceive to be the barriers to improving gender balance at senior level in the industry and support the progression of women to leadership roles.

A total of 141 respondents completed or partially completed the questionnaire. The survey revealed that 60 per cent of respondents were either ‘very dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’ with the industry’s current gender balance. Just one participant was ‘very satisfied’ with the status quo.

Asked to select the two greatest challenges in reaching gender balance in senior positions, 64 per cent cited an insufficient talent pipeline as the reason, followed by 46 per cent saying there’s insufficient role models.

The survey results cast a spotlight on the barriers to gender balance at C-suite level and at the same time,

many of the comments and opinions received also helped to map a way forward – with positive suggestions to create a much more gender inclusive culture within UK rail and guide SWiFT’s activities going forward.

For more details about SWiFT, email swift@womeninrail.org or visit swift.womeninrail.org