Advancing Women in Automotive
Knowledge Exchange
NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT
March 2016
Advancing Women in Automotive Knowledge Exchange (AWAKE) Needs Assessment Report

Prepared by the Automotive Industries Association of Canada
March 2016

About the Automotive Industries Association of Canada
The Automotive Industries Association (AIA) of Canada is a national trade association representing manufacturers, re-builders, manufacturer’s agents, warehouse distributors, national distributors, buying groups, wholesalers, machine shops, retailers, and through its councils, the interests of collision repair shops and automotive service and repair outlets.

AIA received funding from Status of Women Canada to create a national sectorial plan to help recruit, retain and advance women in the automotive aftermarket.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada’s $19 billion automotive aftermarket employs more than 400,000 people in hundreds of mostly small and medium enterprises. But as the industry faces wide-spread skills shortages, many employers are re-examining their human resources practices and working to improve their ability to recruit and retain qualified hires.

Women, who currently hold only 6.4% of jobs in the skilled trades, represent a significant pool of untapped talent; they also offer the additional competitive advantages that research demonstrates result from a more diverse workforce.

However, the automotive aftermarket is not currently seen as an industry of choice for women. AIA member CEOs, in recognition of that, supported this study aimed at:

- Gaining a better understanding of women’s perceptions of, and experiences in the industry;
- Examining existing recruitment, retention and advancement practices; and
- Recommending concrete actions to increase the industry’s ability to attract and retain female talent.

The independently-conducted research, involving in-depth focus groups supplemented by a survey of human resource insiders, finds that:

- Women working in the industry are potentially valuable ambassadors capable of helping to improve its reputation among women more broadly.
- However, many female employees have experienced discrimination on the basis of their gender from both customers and colleagues; their quotes offer sobering insights into existing barriers to women’s advancement.
- Despite this, a number of organizations offer best practices that – if more widely adopted – could make an appreciable difference to the industry’s ability to attract, retain and profit from female talent.
In order to capitalize on these insights, it is recommended that:

1. **EMPLOYERS** create more inclusive workplace cultures free of inappropriate “pin-ups” and commentary, where male and female colleagues are accorded equal respect and advancement opportunities.

2. **EMPLOYERS** implement pro-active support measures for women employees, including formal mentoring programs and access to industry networking opportunities.

3. **THE INDUSTRY** invest in measures that enhance public awareness of employment opportunities for women, partnering with educational institutions and featuring them in recruitment campaigns.

4. **GOVERNMENTS** continue to support training and incentive programs and communication campaigns aimed at increasing women’s participation in skilled trades and the industry.
INTRODUCTION

The automotive industry in Canada encompasses a wide range of companies and organizations involved in the design, development, manufacturing, marketing and selling of motor vehicles. However, the industry also includes a secondary “automotive aftermarket”, which constitutes an industry over $19 billion and focuses on the manufacturing, remanufacturing, distribution, retailing and installation of vehicle parts, chemicals, equipment and accessories. The aftermarket employs over 400,000 people, in nearly half the occupations in the automotive sector. These occupations make up the backbone of Canada’s economy and productivity, as aftermarket companies are, for the most part, small and medium enterprises that play a critical role in sustaining the automotive industry.

Aftermarket Supply & Service Chain

The Automotive Industries Association of Canada (AIA) is the only national industry association that brings together the automotive aftermarket supply and service chain in Canada. The chain features a variety of employment opportunities, including jobs in administration, human resources, marketing, and sales on the supply side, and others in parts installation, service technicians and counterpersons, on the service side.

Labour Challenges & Skills Shortages

Labour challenges and skills shortages are a concern in the automotive industries in Canada, as they are elsewhere, and attention to human resources practices and employee recruitment, retention and advancement is critical. Companies understand that their performance and productivity depend on access to qualified employees, retention strategies to reduce employee turnover, and opportunities for employee development and growth.

The Canadian Automotive Repair and Service (CARS), projects that by 2017, the demand for labour in the Motive Power Repair and Service sector (accounting for 246,584 employees), will outpace supply by about 3,000 people. Shortages of service technicians, parts sales counter persons, body and collision damage repair technicians, and technician specialists are expected to be especially acute.

A number of reports on labour market development strategies echoes the importance of tapping into the potential of people from diverse backgrounds, gender, cultures, age etc. Women, who hold a mere 6.4% of jobs in the skilled trades (including automotive), continue to be the most significantly underrepresented group in the aftermarket industry, and constitute the largest potential growth area for the sector.

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1 DesRosiers Automotive Consultants as seen in AIA’s 2014 Outlook Study.
2 DesRosiers Automotive Consultants as seen in AIA’s 2014 Outlook Study.
3 Canadian Automotive Repair and Service, Performance Driven, 2013.
Women, who hold a mere 6.4% of jobs in the skilled trades (including automotive) continue to be the most significantly underrepresented group in the aftermarket industry, and represent the largest potential growth area for the sector.
METHODOLOGY

Little research is available on women in automotive, especially in the aftermarket. In order to ensure the reliability and credibility of the information gathered, data was validated through the combination of three research collection methods: an online survey, focus groups, and a review of secondary material.

All promotional material and research activities (including the survey and focus groups), were coordinated and offered in both English and French.

Industry Survey

An industry survey was created to collect quantitative data on human resources and board policies in order to inform the development of practical tools that could be used by companies to foster recruitment, retention and advancement strategies for women in the aftermarket. The survey was targeted to industry representatives in the following roles:

- Human Resources Representative.
- Senior Manager.
- Hiring Manager.
- Chief Executive Officer.
- Owner.

Selected for its ability to reach industry members broadly across Canada, and vigorously promoted and shared, the survey nevertheless only yielded a 10% response rate, and a 4% completion rate. As a result, the data collected is not reliably representative and was used solely to highlight gaps between organizational policies and procedures identified by respondents, and the actual experience of women working in the industry.

The automotive aftermarket could benefit from the collection of more reliable and accurate labour market and human resources information, as it pertains to some of the themes that surfaced in this project.
Industry Focus Groups

Industry focus groups were conducted with women working in different sectors in the aftermarket, including (and not limited to), manufacturing, wholesale distribution, wholesale, retail, and collision. The goal of the focus groups was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of women in the industry, in order to support the research objectives.

To ensure that women in the industry across Canada were provided with an opportunity to participate in the research, seven focus groups were held in four cities across the country:

1. Moncton, New Brunswick: 1 focus group facilitated in English.
2. Montreal, Quebec: 2 focus groups facilitated in French.
3. Toronto, Ontario: 2 focus groups facilitated in English.
4. Edmonton, Alberta: 2 focus groups facilitated in English.

All participants were recruited to participate in this study via a formal electronic mail. With an average of 5 participants per focus group, sessions attracted women with various years of experience and occupations in the aftermarket, providing for a rich discussion with those in the front line, support staff and leadership roles. A total of 40 women participated in the focus groups, with each session lasting approximately 1.5 hours in length.

The focus groups were conducted in person, and written consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of the anonymity of their responses. With participants’ consent, the sessions were audio recorded, giving researchers the ability to focus on the sessions and probe further into discussions while minimizing any distractions that may have occurred from note-taking. The recordings also made it easier to retrieve data accurately to support the research recommendations. Since the project’s completion, audio-recordings and transcripts have been destroyed.
The focus group questions touched on the areas of industry recruitment, retention and advancement. Care was taken to formulate questions that would extract participants’ contextual knowledge and experiences. They had the flexibility to discuss issues they considered to be relevant to their situations, and the primary researcher was able to probe further to seek clarification or elaboration. The opinions expressed reflected what participants perceived to be the challenges and barriers women face within the industry.

Although the focus groups were well received by the industry, and an overwhelming amount of women showed interest in the research and registered to participate, due to time constraints and funding restrictions, the number and reach of the focus groups were limited.

Secondary Material

The survey and focus groups were further supplemented by an analysis of secondary data obtained through a review of available research on women working in automotive, and in the aftermarket industry. Although this information was also limited, the secondary data provided insight into current best practices in the industry. Resources consulted for this research are listed in the “References” section.
KEY FINDINGS

The industry focus groups proved an invaluable data collection tool for this report. They gave women working in various occupations in the industry the space to share their histories, experiences and insights. An analysis of this information identified five key topics:

1. Women’s perception of their acceptance within the industry.
2. The impact of workplace culture.
3. Public perception of industry opportunities for women.
4. Industry support for women’s advancement.
5. Resources for women in the sector.

To the extent that the survey results support the key findings identified in this report, they have been incorporated. The quotations excerpted from the focus group sessions have been modified only for grammatical understanding and flow.

Women’s Perception of their Acceptance Within the Industry

Perception of gender roles emerged as significant to experiences of the focus group participants. Although some with over 20 years of experience in the industry recognized a cultural shift regarding women’s acceptance in the various sectors, they also felt that a substantial amount of work remained to truly change the common perception of the industry as overwhelmingly “male dominated”.

Because of this, focus group participants acknowledged the significant challenges associated with being “one of few” within a workplace. Regardless of whether they worked in an automotive shop or in a corporate office, participants shared the feeling of being intimidated when they were the “only females in the room”. This was often related to their perception that they had to work twice as hard as their male colleagues in similar roles. General consensus among participants was that they felt pressure to “prove” that they were competent enough to perform the duties associated with their role.
It is unfortunate to say, but in the field, women are not viewed as competent by their male counterparts… the biggest problem is not being seen as having equal intelligence with regards to the trade.

The notion of “equal intelligence” referred to the perception among participants that their colleagues and clients were not confident about women having enough industry knowledge to work in automotive. Regardless of where they worked, a significant proportion of participants indicated that at some point in their career, they were challenged to prove they knew enough to be working in the industry. One shop owner described the following experience with a client:

I’d answer the phone and they would ask to speak to the owner. I’d explain to them that I could provide assistance. I would have to convince them that I was knowledgeable and knew what I was talking about. It took a while, but after the customers would call and realize I knew what I was talking about, then they would be ok with it. At first though, they were like, ‘I’m not talking to a woman’.
Many also recounted workplace experiences of not feeling “valued”. They shared stories of feeling disrespected, instances where they were ignored, or discriminated against due to their gender. For participants working in shops, this often occurred when interacting with men working as parts distributors:

“My husband and I own a shop; we have clients and distributors that come in for business. They’ll come in, and they will direct everything at my husband – everything is directed to the man.”

Such feelings of disrespect were equally common for women working in corporate offices; many spoke about their male counterparts assuming that the women performed what is stereotypically perceived as a female occupation, such as an administrative assistant.

“Even when you’re in a meeting, you’re never treated equally. Even today, you go to a meeting, if you are a woman in the industry, then it’s assumed you are a bookkeeper or secretary.”
Other participants noted they were specifically asked during meetings to prepare and serve coffee or make photocopies. While many said they didn’t tolerate disrespectful behaviour in the workplace, they didn’t see it as a reason to leave the industry, indicating that it fuelled their drive to work harder.

However, for some women, such experiences led them to discourage female family members and friends to pursue a career in the industry. One shop owner stated that she felt there was a significant amount of work to be done to foster respect and acknowledgement in the workplace:

“I have an 18-year-old daughter working in the industry and I encouraged her to become an auto mechanic. She took high school courses and she was looking for an apprenticeship. She went into a store to apply for a job and the store manager blatantly told her that it wouldn’t be a good idea to have her in the back because she would be a distraction.”

While conversations pertaining to acceptance and acknowledgement in the industry were usually linked to male colleagues or customers, some focus group participants working in corporate offices noted that they were more likely to be challenged by other women in the industry. They recounted stories about female colleagues who believed other women had to prove themselves, as part of the process that everyone had to go through. This mentality was explained by one participant:
Women have been my biggest obstacle; rather than mentoring me, supporting me, and showing me the ways of the land, they became my barriers...I think we challenge each other too much because we see each other as competitors, that we almost challenge each other more than we do the men.

Despite these shared experiences, it is important to note that not all focus group participants held these perceptions. Some participants believed that acceptance and acknowledgment in the workplace has little to do with gender, but more to do with inherent personality traits. One suggested that one person’s experiences may be the result of their assertiveness, while another’s may not, and that success is not defined by “gender”, but rather by the collection of one’s personality traits.

The Impact of Workplace Culture

Participants also spoke about the impact of workplace culture on the recruitment, retention and advancement of women in the industry. They described culture in terms of the character and personality of their companies, for example, how colleagues interact with one another, staff behaviour and attitudes, and company values. They saw respect between employees and companies as key, and defined the term using the same overarching concepts: workplace practices, environment, and policies and philosophies.

Workplace Practices

In discussions surrounding recruitment, many of the focus group participants referred to companies’ efforts to hire women to achieve greater gender representation. Some said their male colleagues attributed their success in the recruitment process to the company’s desire to fill a “gender quota”. This perception challenged participants’ feelings of inclusion and, for many, affected their overall morale. Said one:
It is very hard to get respect...A lot of young counterparts were saying I got the position just because I was female and that the company just had a quota to fill. To them, it wasn’t based on my qualifications or my abilities at all. It is detrimental. I really had a hard time, especially for the first year, to show that I can do the job.

A small number of participants mentioned that the unattainability of work/life balance had a significant impact on their experiences, particularly as it related to career advancement. Women from different focus groups spoke of the challenges they experienced in attempting to balance their careers and family life. They attributed the problem not to men, but to the fact that the industry is male-dominated and therefore most companies don’t have workplace practices that respect the unique caregiver roles that many women fulfill, thus placing them at a competitive disadvantage in career advancement. As one participant noted:

It is ‘unachievable balance’, that’s really what’s holding me back, how much do I want myself to grow and what impact will that have on my family. So I wouldn’t say there is a man holding me back, rather I think I’m at a disadvantage not because of my knowledge and abilities, but because I’m competing with other men who do not have the same responsibilities.
Work Environment
Conversations about the work environment addressed what workplaces look like and their impact on the retention of women, especially regarding how uncomfortable they feel being and/or working there. This was raised most often by focus group participants who either worked in automotive repair shops, or had interactions with shops as part of their day-to-day business activities.

Several of the focus group participants shared stories about going into automotive repair shops and being exposed to discomfiting soft porn images. Referred to in the industry as “pin ups”, these typically feature women posing provocatively in minimal to no clothing. One participant described an experience she had attending a meeting at a shop:

“...The walls were covered with ‘pin ups’ of women. It was like one Playboy picture after another. I sat through the meeting with my back to the wall.”

Despite the various stories about discomfort in the workplace, many of the participants balanced conversations with examples of how they successfully changed the conditions of their workplace by raising their employers’ awareness about the issues they were experiencing.

“I was not comfortable with the items (pin-ups) posted in the room, so I went to talk to the manager and 5 minutes later he was in the room taking down the pictures and talking to the guys, telling them it was not appropriate. He could have easily just said “get a tough skin, it’s just a joke”, but he didn’t and he responded very appropriately.”
However, participants also recognized that raising awareness was not solely the employee’s responsibility, and many noted that some industry employers have taken steps to change the workplace culture and encourage more inclusive and accommodating spaces for women. Said one:

“I remember this course called ‘Sensitivity Training’ that we had to take. It was for people in our corporate office, and was mainly designed for the ‘old guard’, because part of their issue was that they were not ‘self-aware’ that some of the things they were saying and doing (that were once tolerated) were now inappropriate. So they were signed up, and told to take this training, and I remember one of the guys I took this course with marched out of the training and said ‘I’m so sorry if I have ever offended you and I had no idea if I was being offensive’.”
Policies and Philosophies
The third category of workplace culture issues is related to policies and philosophies, specifically, workplace codes of conduct. Women in each of the focus group sessions disclosed instances of harassment at work. These situations were often described as inappropriate behaviours between the women and male colleagues, in most cases their immediate supervisor, men working in other companies or their customers (usually shop employees).

For the purpose of maintaining the anonymity of participants, examples of sexual harassment experienced by some of the women will not be disclosed. However, several women shared specific examples of sexual innuendos and “cat calling” they were subjected to, such as:

“I was with a shop employee, who is my customer, and we were having a standard conversation about business and what is going on in the region. Everything was going fine, and then he looked at me and started making inappropriate comments. I responded: ‘Excuse me?’ but he simply repeated himself.”

All focus group participants stressed the importance of addressing workplace culture, and developing policies and procedures to deal with situations involving harassment, and other inappropriate behaviours. In most instances involving harassment from male customers or other employees, the participants noted that they did receive some level of support from their immediate supervisors.
When asked specifically about what might encourage companies to develop more inclusive workplace environments that would support the recruitment and retention of women in the industry, focus group participants shared several positive examples of organizational policies and practices that contributed to their personal decisions to work in the industry. One attributed her positive workplace culture to the fact that she had her initial job interview with a female employee and that her direct manager was also a woman. Her experience of being surrounded by women in various roles at work helped shape her belief that women can work and grow within the industry.

Similarly, policies and procedures reflecting a safe, welcoming and inclusive workplace were stressed by participants as essential components to supporting women working in this industry. Some participants cited the availability of health and safety training which addressed harassment in the workplace. However, they also emphasized the need for management at all levels to be more supportive and involved from the outset. They saw senior management as instrumental in setting the tone for acceptance and respect in the workplace.

Although external research suggests a link between workplace satisfaction and employee retention (HR Council of Canada, 2008), the industry survey revealed that only 4% of respondents believed they have a problem retaining their female employees. This, along with the expression of focus group participants that ultimately they enjoy working in the industry, suggests that experiences where lack of respect, discrimination, or harassment occurs may be internalized by women rather than discussed. This gap may reflect the industry’s capacity or preparedness to address the issues.

Public Perception of Industry Opportunities For Women

Focus group discussions also sought to examine some of the industry challenges in recruiting women. When asked why they had decided to pursue employment within the automotive aftermarket, participants said that they either “fell into it” or were actively recruited by an aftermarket company. It is important to note that only a few of those who participated in the focus groups had technical backgrounds with the majority having human resources and business or marketing degrees.

General consensus among focus group participants was that public perception played a key role in women’s failure to consider the automotive industry as a viable career option. The majority of participants advised that they had never contemplated a career in the industry. “You have this image that it is a guy’s industry”, said one; “I don’t think most women would think about going out and changing tires”, said another. Some participants further noted that, even if the employment opportunity was enticing and attractive, the prevailing image of the industry as being “male-dominated” was a deterring factor for most.
Several of the focus group participants identified how important it is for young women to see female role models working in the industry. For example, featuring images of women when promoting employment opportunities was seen as an effective strategy to encourage women to apply. Some participants also noted the value of mentoring, and their willingness to reach out to young women in high schools and community colleges, to share their industry experiences and raise awareness about career options in the automotive aftermarket.

For the most part, focus group participants agreed that educating young women about opportunities in the industry must start as early as high school, with some emphasizing even an earlier approach. Women stressed the importance of the industry’s role in education, and saw value in partnerships between aftermarket companies and educational institutions that would inform future workers (especially women) of career options. Noted one participant:

“People need more knowledge about the industry. Even in high school I did not know there were opportunities and now I can see there are so many ways women can grow in the industry. It is important that we raise awareness about the opportunities in automotive because it is still a male dominated industry. We should have presentations in high schools and community colleges to help get the word out there.”
Participants also pointed out the need for more targeted approaches to recruitment in the industry, including focused programming or training related to automotive parts. This need stems from what participants believed to be a lack of exposure and access to information about the reach and opportunities of the automotive industry, and particularly, the aftermarket.

Focus group participants further underscored the role of parental guidance and support for young girls pursuing non-traditional occupations. They agreed that encouraging parents to see careers in the industry as viable options for their daughters is crucial:

“Recruitment isn’t just a company issue, it is more than that, we need to get parents to encourage their daughters and tell them that ‘it’s okay’ to be interested in automotive.”

Intriguingly, a significant proportion (43%) of respondents to the industry survey indicated that their companies had trouble recruiting employees, with 25% reporting specific challenges attracting women. It is important to note that the data collected does not allow for correlation between the companies’ perceived challenge of recruiting women and the actual number of women they employ or seek to employ. Caution is required when interpreting this data as companies that do not choose to employ women may have answered ‘no’ to the question of having difficulty doing so. Respondents who did report challenges listed the following reasons:

- New generation work ethics.
- Difficult career move for women.
- Type of business.
- Lack of available/qualified candidates/applicants.
- Lack of awareness of job opportunities.
Although survey respondents cited a lack of qualified candidates as a reason for recruiting challenges, remarkably only one identified having a program that includes “onboarding, talent development and succession planning”. This finding is in line with the emphasis made by focus group participants on the importance of offering training when it comes to recruiting women in the industry.

When survey respondents were asked if they believed that the recruitment process for women is an issue that needs addressing, 46% percent responded “no”, or replied that they already had an equitable process in place which focused on hiring the right candidate for the position – regardless of gender. However, when asked if their company initiated specific programs to improve the hiring and retention of women, 86% indicated they did not. Again, caution is required when interpreting this data as companies who report “no issue”, “no need to address the issue”, and have “no programs” in place to enhance the recruitment of women may, in fact, be choosing not to employ women in the first place.

Industry Support For Women’s Advancement

During discussions of women’s advancement in the industry, more than half of focus group participants stated that they have been promoted in their company. However, the majority claimed that achieving those promotions was challenging. Their general perception was that, compared to their male colleagues, women experienced more barriers to advancement than men. They attributed these barriers to a constant need to conform to their male colleagues’ style, adapt to the workplace culture, and earn respect within the industry in order to be considered for promotion:

“You really need to be able to talk ‘men’s language’. One of the things I did as a Human Resources person, really wanting to gain the respect of the staff from the shop floor, was to take specific training courses to have a better understanding of the roles in different areas of our company.”
Some participants further noted that they often felt they needed to take initiative and continuously advocate for recognition of their accomplishments:

“I went to my director and asked ‘why is this man making more money than I am; what makes his job more valuable to this organization than mine?’ You have to sometimes educate them on what you bring to the table and your value.”

Although, focus group participants felt they needed to proactively approach their supervisors in order to be considered for promotion, responses to the survey provided a different impression of how to access advancement opportunities within the industry. Survey respondents were asked what factors are considered by their management when promoting a male or female applicant and only 46% of respondents identified “an interest showed by the candidate” as important. The vast majority (82%) said the ability to get the job done was a priority, with 79% noting that individual employee performance was a key factor to obtaining promotional opportunities.

When probed about the role of government in ensuring equitable opportunities for women in non-traditional sectors, 71% of survey respondents indicated that their company did not support the Federal Government’s request that companies report on how many of their directors and senior officers are women. Many rejected the notion of ‘quotas’ believing that the jobs should be filled based on applicants’ competency rather than gender. Only 29% of those surveyed report their numbers to government agencies.
Survey respondents who have a Board of Directors as part of their structure reported that 80% of their board members are male; a full 100% of them indicated they did not have measurable targets in place to recruit women or other under-represented groups onto their board, rationalizing that:

1. The pool to choose from is limited due to the underrepresentation of women working in the industry.

2. Candidates are chosen based on merit – skill-sets, talents, ambition, professionalism, communication skills, management experience and referrals.

Resources For Women in the Sector
The value of resources designed to facilitate women’s involvement in the industry resonated throughout all focus groups. Participants unpacked three key concepts: mentorship, training and development, and networking.

Mentorship
Many of the focus group participants identified the importance of having mentors, both female and male, though none had any knowledge of available programs or opportunities. In their view, mentorship opportunities would also encourage future young women interested in entering the industry by aligning them with someone already in the sector.

“I never had a mentor but I could see how a mentor could support your advancement in the industry. It can be intimidating for a woman in this industry. Someone would say ‘aftermarket’, I would have to write that down, I had no idea what an aftermarket was.”
While no formal mentorship programs exist to their knowledge, some participants associated their success within the industry to both male and female mentors they consulted informally.

“I’ve moved up through management because I had a really good mentor and I call her my ‘cheerleader’, but she is my boss and the controller of the company, and she mentored me, and raised me up through the finance part of the industry.”

Training and Development
The majority of focus participants emphasized the importance of employers recognizing transferable skills. A number of participants claimed that, unlike their male counterparts, who were either exposed to or gained an interest in vehicles or automotive parts at an early age, females are not generally socialized to appreciate technical trades. Therefore they could benefit from opportunities that would expose them to, and foster knowledge of, the industry.

When asked about professional development opportunities, participants further cited the benefit of cross training which they believed would help increase their industry knowledge and earn their colleagues’ respect. When asked what specific professional development opportunities employers could provide to help women advance in the industry, participants in all the focus groups requested opportunities within the sector relating to understanding the aftermarket, technical training and professional development training (business, finance, etc).

Respondents to the industry survey also identified training as a key component to women’s advancement. However, both focus group insights and survey data suggest that women may not have the same access to training opportunities as their male colleagues. More research is needed to understand the reasons behind this.
Networking
All focus group participants, regardless of role or tenure, recognized the importance of networking opportunities and attending industry events for professional development and growth:

“Networking, more than anything else, was the reason behind my career development… I never felt that they (the employer) were interviewing me as a woman, but that they were interested in me because I had the right skills and personality for the position.”

However, an overwhelming number of participants stated that for the most part, the opportunities for networking were limited to the golf course. This industry default presents a challenge for some women because either they don’t play or enjoy the sport, or they feel out of place as one of the few women on the course:

“Golf is really prevalent in this industry… I golf sometimes, and I don’t think I’m terrible, but I’m definitely not on the same wavelength as a male. I know that, and I’m okay with that, but it is again, extremely intimidating to golf. I felt like I was sweating, I knew the guys were judging me. There was a lot of pressure behind that.”
In addition, some focus group participants noted that the likelihood of being invited to such industry events was also rare. In most cases, the few women included were already in leadership roles; the more junior employees who would most benefit from opportunities to increase their profile and connections were typically not invited.

Similarly, 54% of survey respondents felt female employees (in varying roles) weren’t sufficiently included in industry-specific networking events, to which access was limited.
The key findings of this report reflected five themes, including:

1. Women’s perception of their acceptance within the industry.
2. The impact of workplace culture.
3. Public perception of industry opportunities for women.
4. Industry support for women’s advancement.
5. Resources for women in the sector.

The following recommendations seek to address these, and are designed to set the industry up for success in its quest to expand its talent pool to address the skills gap and recruit and retain a wider diversity of high-calibre employees. The recommendations call on:

1. Employers to Create Inclusive Workplace Cultures

Industry leaders should agree to address basic organizational policies and strategies to create an inclusive work environment featuring:

- Communicate zero tolerance for gender-role stereotyping (for example, supervisors immediately relay a message to all employees about the importance of respecting all colleagues equally);
- Actively discourage inappropriate comments (e.g. on employees’ physical appearance or sexual activity);
- Provide opportunities for cross-training to enhance employees’ understanding of all aspects of the industry;
- Develop and implement formal performance reviews to ensure all employees have clear expectations and equitable pathways to advancement;
- Ensure a clear and well-communicated process or strategy is in place to address harassment in the workplace.
2. Employers to Implement Pro-active Support Measures For Women Employees

- Introduce formal mentoring programs to make opportunities accessible to all employees;
- Support the Federal Government’s policy requiring companies to report on how many of their directors and senior officers are women. As well, develop and adopt policies to increase women’s representation on boards;
- Support AIA’s Women in Leadership Annual Conference by ensuring women in varying roles can attend at some point;
- Ensure female employees have equitable access to industry networking opportunities and events.

3. Industry to Raise Public Awareness Regarding Opportunities For Women

- Include images of women working in the industry in all industry materials and profile women working in the aftermarket in trade magazines;
- Develop recruitment campaigns targeting women by:
  - Partnering with high schools, community colleges and trade schools to promote careers in the industry and further expose young women to potential employment opportunities;
  - Partnering with school boards and attending job/career fairs, while working closely with guidance counselors to educate students on the range of opportunities available to them in the sector;
  - Accessing internship programs available at community colleges and universities and matching female interns to industry companies that already employ women in various roles;
  - Working with colleges to assess recruitment strategies for programs where female students are significantly under-represented;
- Profile women already working in the industry through marketing efforts with media and in schools to encourage other young women to enter the industry;
- Use social media platforms and job boards to market job opportunities aimed at diversifying the recruitment of applicants;
- Develop an industry speakers’ bureau to showcase women in the industry as speakers for industry and educational events.
4. Governments to Support Training and Incentive Programs

- Continue to fund educational training programs that target under-represented groups such as women;
- Provide additional incentives for companies in the automotive aftermarket sector to hire service technician apprentices;
- Fund programs at the school board and community college levels to address the low representation of female students in technology and trades programs;
- Provide incentives for companies interested in diversifying their workforce (e.g. easing costs associated with diversity training);
- Fund media campaigns to change the perception of women in the automotive industry and break down stereotypes associated with jobs within the skilled trades.
CONCLUSIONS

The Conference Board of Canada predicts that one million skilled workers will be needed by 2020. Although many jobs will go unfilled due to the lack of skilled workers, women remain significantly underrepresented in multiple sectors, including the automotive aftermarket. A considerable body of research has provided an extensive volume of data supporting the business case for companies to diversify their workforce. This needs assessment report, presented by the Automotive Industries Association of Canada, offers a roadmap to improving the industries’ labour outlook by addressing the low representation of women in the automotive aftermarket.

The sector’s economic prosperity depends on increasing the number of female employees. Diversity in the workforce has a demonstrated impact on a company’s bottom line. Numerous studies show that employing women increases productivity and other performance measures and promoting inclusive working environments increases industry profits.

Workplace culture has a significant impact on women’s employment experiences and their willingness to seek opportunities in the industry. Companies must be engaged in the discussion of the roles women can and should play in the automotive aftermarket. Raising awareness and beginning the conversation are the first steps to challenging perceptions, changing the image and addressing the sector’s labour needs.

This needs assessment reflects issues that have been identified and discussed across a number of other sectors, including construction, manufacturing and transportation. The aftermarket sector is well-positioned to take a leadership role in promoting change and in working to eliminate the barriers that women face working in traditionally male-dominated sectors. At the outset of the AWAKE project, industry CEOs committed to participating in the initiative and contributing to positive change. That commitment is further reflected by the 80% of survey respondents who indicated that their leadership team was aware of gender-related barriers faced by women in the sector.

Notwithstanding the industry’s leadership, it’s important that governments also continue to play an important role in supporting Canadian employers to achieve a more gender-balanced work force.

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REFERENCES


