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Study: Women CIOs are rare in California

Lack of female board directors, executives also cited

News Story by [Patrick Thibodeau](#)

FEBRUARY 16, 2006

[\(COMPUTERWORLD\)](#) - A new study of the 200 largest public companies in California finds few women are reaching the highest executive ranks, especially as CIO.

Of these companies, only four have women serving as the CIO, according to a recent [report](#) by the Graduate School of Management at the University of California, Davis. It found six women working as CEOs and 11 serving as chief financial officers.

Women, overall, are underrepresented broadly on the boards and in the executive offices of these companies. Women account for 8.2% of the 1,006 highest-paid executive officers in the top companies, a category that includes CEOs, CFO and CIOs. The percentage of women in top positions at these companies ranged from 50% to zero, according to the study.

"Women executive officers in California's largest public companies are a rare breed," wrote the study authors, Nicole Woolsey Biggart, who is dean of the graduate school of management; Katrina Ellis, an assistant professor of management; and Kimberly Elsbach, a professor of management.

Not many companies are including women in technical roles, Ellis said. Indeed, only 1.1% of the top executives in the semiconductor industry, which includes the CEO and other top executive positions, are women, she said.

The study will be a benchmark for year-to-year updates on the progress of women in the executive ranks, Ellis said.

"We want to bring attention to it. We want to point out that companies are missing out on opportunities if they're only looking at half the population to select their directors and executives from," said Ellis, who added that the study's results are similar to studies done in other states. The goal of the report is to encourage companies to appoint women to boards

The advertisement is a rectangular box with a blue background. On the left side, there is a large, clear diamond ring. The SAS logo is in the top left corner. The main text is centered and reads: "Business intelligence solutions can be dazzling...or disappointing." Below this, it says "Click here to see why SAS® outshines the competition." At the bottom right, there is a white button with the text "FREE WEB SEMINAR AND DEMO".

and executive positions, she said.

There's no single reason for the lack of women in executive positions, but there are steps women can take to improve their prospects for success, said Carolyn Leighton, founder of Women in Technology International, a Sherman Oaks, Calif.-based professional development organization for women.

"We tend to be more focused on getting the job done," said Leighton, but what women need to do is to promote themselves and make people in the company and outside of it aware of their expertise and strengths. "Men have done this for many, many years, and part of being selected ... is making sure that people know about you," she said.

There's a tendency among those who hire to choose people they know, said Leighton, and women need to be visible and to interact. "There's been very little interface between top male leaders and women in the business," she said.

The lack of representation by women in the highest-level positions won't be helped if women reject IT as a field, and the percentage of women in the IT workforce declined from a high of 41% in 1996 to 32.4% in 2004, according to the Arlington, Va.-based Information Technology Association of America in a report released last year.

Increasing the number of women in IT overall would help improve the visibility of women in upper management, said Terrie Jones, the CEO and founder of AGSI, an Atlanta-based technology management and consulting firm. And the decision by women in college not to enter IT "is very frustrating to me -- IT is a great mommy track," she said.

"If you are going to have a child, IT is very forgiving for you to come back into," Jones said. "I think it's a great opportunity for women."

Many women, Jones said, see IT as computer-intensive coding work, but she said it's mostly about business process. And even those women who have left IT can return and get up to speed quickly. "If you code Cobol then you ... can code Java," she said.

Rebecca Shambaugh, president and CEO of The Shambaugh Leadership Group LLC, a leadership and organizational development consulting firm in McLean, Va., said some women choose not to seek executive positions because of other decisions they make to care for their children or the elderly.

"They are achievers, they are multitaskers, they are multileaders, and it just so happened they pulled over to be a leader in their family or their community, but they're going to come back one way or another," Shambaugh said. She also predicted that many of these women "are going to start their own companies."

"The California study is really discouraging," especially when you consider California's technology leadership role, said Ann Franks, CIO at Lanier Worldwide Inc. in Atlanta, a \$17.1 billion global manufacturer of office automation equipment.

Franks called the study a bellwether and said the reason for the low number of women is perplexing. "Why aren't we given the opportunity?"

The Atlanta area has eight women CIOs that she knows of and Franks is involved in advocacy work to help women consider IT as a career and then achieve leadership roles in their field. She recommends that women seek recognition in a range of activities, such as volunteering for nonprofits, but also said companies have to include women in their leadership development pools to help address the inequity.

Networking is also important, Franks said.

“We need to learn how to network like the men do actually,” said Patricia Randall, an executive board member of the Society for Information Management and account director at Tampa, Fla.-based Kforce Inc., a professional staffing firm.

Women face a lot of pressure trying to balance work and family, but can move into CIO positions with the right support, Randall said.

The shortage of women in IT has become a leading issue for the society, which began holding a series of workshops around the U.S. last year.

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