



BRAND. Broad Research in Accounting, Negotiation, and Distribution

e-ISSN: 2067-8177 | p-ISSN: 2068-0473

Covered in: EBSCO; RePEc (Ideas, EconPapers); Google Scholar; Zenodo; Academia.edu; 2025, Volume 16, Issue 1, pages: 64-84

Submitted: February 2nd, 2025 | Accepted for publication: April 15th, 2025

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Networking in High Tech Leadership

Zeala Pinto

AT&T, Raanana, Central District, IL, Israel.

Tsaela@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3759-8068>

Abstract: *Networking is often hailed as essential for career advancement, especially in high-tech leadership. However, for women, networking functions as both a gateway and a gatekeeper—offering opportunities while reinforcing systemic exclusion. This study explores the paradoxes of professional networking through a gendered lens, combining recent literature with qualitative insights from women in senior high-tech roles. The findings are structured using the metaphor of “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.” “The Good” highlights how strategic networking—including mentorship programmes, women-focused forums, and industry events—can accelerate women’s visibility, sponsorship, and promotions. “The Bad” addresses the exclusionary nature of informal male-dominated networks, such as military alumni ties, late-night events, or sports-based meetups, which often determine executive access. “The Ugly” reveals how networking can penalise women who self-promote or seek sponsorship, exposing them to reputational risks, gendered double standards, and exclusion under the guise of caution or compliance. Integrating participant quotes, this article shows how networking—while framed as meritocratic—is embedded with gendered barriers. The article concludes with actionable recommendations to redesign networking spaces, establish structured sponsorship programmes, and redefine leadership pipelines. By exposing the hidden dynamics of high-tech networking, this study offers a pathway toward a more inclusive and equitable leadership culture. Based on 19 semi-structured interviews (17 women, 2 men) in Israeli high-tech, the analysis links qualitative patterns to targeted, system-level fixes.*

Keywords: *gender bias; high-tech leadership; networking; sponsorship; career advancement.*

How to cite: Pinto, Z. (2025). The Good, the bad, and the ugly of networking in high tech leadership. *BRAND. Broad Research in Accounting, Negotiation, and Distribution*, 16(1), 64-84. <https://doi.org/10.70594/brand/16.1/5>



1. Introduction

In high-tech industries, access to leadership opportunities is shaped not only by human capital but also by social capital—who has visibility, who is referred, and who is sponsored. Networking structures the flow of information, referrals, and advocacy that influence promotions, stretch assignments, and executive selection. Yet women often encounter these networks differently from men: access to informal, male-dominated venues (e.g., sports meetups, private gatherings, referral loops) is uneven, and identical behaviours (self-promotion, sponsor-seeking) are evaluated through gendered lenses.

This article examines how networking facilitates or constrains women's advancement in high-tech leadership. Combining contemporary scholarship with qualitative interviews with senior practitioners in Israel's tech ecosystem, we analyse when networking accelerates mobility, when it reproduces exclusion, and which design choices can reconfigure access without sacrificing speed or trust. The findings are organised as “the good” (opportunity creation), “the bad” (barriers in informal networks), and “the ugly” (gendered penalties and reputational risk), and culminate in mechanism-focused recommendations.

1.1. Terminology and Usage

Throughout this article, mentorship denotes advisory support (guidance, feedback), whereas sponsorship denotes active advocacy that creates opportunity (e.g., warm introductions, allocation to stretch work, promotion backing). Informal networks refer to after-hours social venues and alumni/military circles through which influence, referrals, and early information circulate. Networking barriers refer to structural mechanisms that restrict access—homophily, venue design, and sponsorship asymmetries. We use referral(s) (rather than “recommendation(s)”) when describing hiring or role access. We use after-hours decision venues to denote the social settings where decision-relevant discussions occur. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is spelled out at first mention and abbreviated thereafter.

2. Theoretical Framework

Understanding gendered networking dynamics in high-tech leadership requires an integrative lens. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) explains how perceived out-group status undermines belonging and access within elite circles. Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) links penalties for agentic behaviours (e.g., assertive self-promotion) to a perceived mismatch between feminine stereotypes and leader prototypes.

Network formation processes further amplify inequality. Homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001) sustains same-group ties, while preferential attachment (Barabási & Albert, 1999) channels additional opportunities to already well-connected actors. In practice, these mechanisms concentrate referrals and sponsorship among incumbents. Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001) distinguishes between advice-oriented ties and opportunity-creating ties, a distinction that maps onto observed gender differences in the quality—not just the quantity—of network resources (van Helden et al., 2021).

Organisational context matters. Gendered Organisations Theory (Acker, 1990) describes how ostensibly neutral routines are built around male-normed assumptions, while Tokenism (Kanter, 1977) and Impression Management (Goffman, 1959) highlight visibility burdens that raise the stakes of each networking encounter. Digital platforms mirror offline structures: executive-level visibility and endorsements skew male, reinforcing differential recognition (Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025). Offline, access to after-hours decision venues (e.g., late-night gatherings, sports events) further channels information and advocacy towards insiders (Murphy et al., 2022).

Together, these frameworks clarify why networking can simultaneously enable mobility and reproduce exclusion, and they motivate the study's focus on mechanisms—referral design,

venue configuration, and sponsorship architecture—through which inclusion can be evaluated and improved.

3. Literature Review

3.1. *Women in High-Tech Leadership*

The underrepresentation of women in high-tech leadership remains a major concern in both industry and academic research. Despite progress in gender diversity initiatives, women still occupy a small fraction of senior roles, especially in technical and executive positions (Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Women are often concentrated in HR, operations, or DEI-related leadership roles, while core technical and strategic functions remain male-dominated. Studies show that even when women enter the leadership pipeline, they face barriers to upward mobility due to biased evaluation, visibility gaps, and reduced access to influential sponsors (Mickey, 2022; Harris, 2022).

Networking plays a key role in how these leadership roles are distributed. In high-tech, career advancement is closely tied to informal relationships, referrals, and sponsorship. Men typically benefit from long-standing social capital networks, such as military ties, university alumni circles, or after-work social scenes, like soccer games and beer outings, while women are often left out (Mengel, 2020; Murphy et al., 2022). This exclusion impacts not only job referrals, but also strategic promotions, project assignments, and visibility among decision-makers.

To better understand how these dynamics unfold, Table 1 outlines the differences in access, perception, and outcomes between men and women in high-tech leadership networking contexts:

Table 1: Gender Gap in High-Tech Leadership and the Role of Networking

Factor	Men	Women	Implications
Representation in Senior Roles	75–85% of executive positions in tech	15–25%, often in non-technical or support roles	Clear gender imbalance persists across global tech sectors
Access to Informal Networks	High (e.g., alumni ties, army units, social clubs)	Limited or excluded	Exclusion reduces visibility and access to leadership pathways
Sponsorship vs. Mentorship	More likely to receive sponsorship	More likely to receive mentorship	Sponsorship is more directly linked to promotions
Perception of Ambition	Viewed as strategic and driven	Risk of being seen as aggressive or inappropriate	Leadership potential judged differently
Referral-Based Opportunities	Frequently benefit from referrals	Less likely to be referred or recommended	Reinforces systemic hiring bias

Interpretation: Table 1 shows that women's networks skew towards mentoring rather than sponsorship, and access to informal venues is lower—two conditions that depress promotion odds even when performance is strong.

These patterns show that networking isn't just an added benefit—it's a central mechanism through which leadership opportunities are accessed. Without equitable inclusion in these networks, women's leadership potential remains undervalued and under-leveraged.

Retention differentials compound these networking dynamics: in U.S. tech, non-inclusive culture is the single most frequently cited reason women leave (37%), and modelling suggests that building inclusive cultures could reduce annual attrition by up to 70% (Accenture and Girls Who Code, 2020). Complementary evidence from the Tech Leavers Study shows that unfair treatment is the leading driver of turnover in tech, with churn costing firms an estimated \$16 billion annually (Scott, Klein, & Onovakpuri, 2017).

3.2. What Is Networking and Why It Matters

Networking means building professional relationships that help people exchange knowledge, gain visibility, and access career opportunities. In high-tech leadership, these relationships are often key to getting ahead. Research shows that people with strong networks are more likely to be promoted, chosen for key projects, and seen as leadership material (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Watson, 2012).

There are two main types of networks: formal and informal. Formal networks include organised programmes, such as mentorship schemes, leadership development programmes, or professional associations. Informal networks happen through social activities, like after-work drinks, alumni groups, or mutual friends in the industry (Mickey, 2022; Murphy et al., 2022). Informal networks are especially powerful in the tech world because they are where real decisions and trust often form.

However, research shows that women have less access to these informal networks. Many of these spaces, like poker nights, soccer games, and even private WhatsApp groups, are male-dominated. Because of this, women often miss the conversations where promotions and opportunities are quietly discussed (Mengel, 2020; van Helden et al., 2021).

This lack of access matters. According to Social Capital Theory, strong networks give people influence and open doors that skills alone sometimes cannot (Van Emmerik et al., 2006). In male-dominated fields like tech, men are more likely to benefit from these built-in advantages, while women need to actively build networks from scratch.

Networking is not just about being social, it is about being visible to the right people at the right time. Without equal access to networks, women face yet another obstacle in reaching senior leadership roles.

3.3. Barriers in Networking

Despite the well-documented advantages of strong professional networks, women in high-tech leadership continue to face unique structural and cultural barriers that limit their access and effectiveness within these networks. These challenges arise both in physical settings and digital platforms, shaping unequal career outcomes.

A key issue is the difference between online and offline networking. While digital platforms such as LinkedIn offer expanded access, Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno (2025) show that men still dominate executive visibility and endorsements, often benefiting from stronger algorithmic amplification. Offline, barriers intensify due to exclusion from informal social circles where influence circulates, such as after-work drinks, soccer games, or all-male alumni groups (Mickey, 2022; Murphy et al., 2022). These settings frequently serve as informal hiring and promotion pipelines, making them critical yet inaccessible to many women.

Another challenge is homophily, the tendency of individuals to connect with others similar to themselves (Mengel, 2020). Since men still hold most senior roles in tech, this dynamic reinforces male-dominated referral networks, contributing to the cycle of underrepresentation. Even when women gain access to networks, they often face the perception gap: self-advocacy and ambition in women are misread as aggressiveness or opportunism, while similar behaviours in men are praised as leadership potential (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Harris, 2022).

These barriers are summarised in the following table:

Table 2: Common Barriers Women Face in Networking Compared to Men

Barrier	Description	Key Sources
Access to Informal Networks	Excluded from social events (e.g., drinks, sports) where key connections form	Harris (2022), Murphy et al. (2022)
Homophily in Connections	Men tend to refer, hire, and support other men	Mengel (2020), Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno (2025)
Perception Gap	Women seen as “pushy” when self-promoting; men seen as “ambitious”	Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb (2011), Harris (2022)
Digital Network Inequities	Fewer endorsements and visibility on platforms like LinkedIn	Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno (2025)
Risk of Misinterpretation	Women's networking may be misread as opportunistic or inappropriate	Harris (2022), Murphy (2022)

Implication: The barriers in Table 2—access, homophily, perception, and platform effects—map directly onto the invitation, referral, and sponsorship gaps observed in our interview evidence (5.2.–5.3.; 6.1.), indicating that networking, though often framed as meritocratic, reproduces inequality unless organisational structures and norms are redesigned.

3.4. Mentors, Sponsors, and Visibility

Mentorship and sponsorship are often discussed as key drivers of career progression, but they are not the same. Mentors offer advice, emotional support, and feedback. Sponsors, on the other hand, use their influence to create tangible career opportunities for their protégés, such as recommending them for promotions, projects, or high-visibility roles (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011).

Studies consistently show that women in high-tech receive more mentorship than men, but less sponsorship (van Helden et al., 2021; Harris, 2022). This imbalance leads to a paradox where women may feel supported but remain excluded from power structures. As Harris (2022) explains, women often experience “advisory-heavy” relationships that lack the career-advancing push that sponsors provide to male peers. The result is a gap between support and advancement.

Visibility is another crucial dimension. To be promoted, one must not only perform but be recognised. However, women often carry a visibility burden. They must work harder to be seen, prove their value repeatedly, and combat stereotypical assumptions about their leadership style (Murphy et al., 2022). According to Mickey (2022), even in organisations with formal evaluation systems, women are more likely to be evaluated on past performance, while men are promoted based on potential. This creates a “prove-it-again” bias, especially harmful in fast-paced, innovation-driven environments like high-tech.

In addition, women are more likely to engage in invisible labour, such as mentoring others, participating in DEI initiatives, or managing team emotions—work that, although valuable, is often not recognised in performance reviews or promotion criteria (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Harris, 2022). These patterns limit not only advancement but also influence and recognition.

This unequal dynamic between mentorship, sponsorship, and visibility highlights a deeper organisational issue: support without power does not equal progress.

3.5. Elite Networks and Leadership Pipelines

Leadership pipelines in high-tech and business sectors are significantly shaped by elite educational and organisational networks. Across global markets, alumni from top-tier universities dominate executive positions, suggesting that access to formative institutions often serves as a structural gateway to leadership. For instance, a recent LinkedIn analysis revealed that 34.6% of Fortune 500 tech executives in the U.S. are alumni of Harvard, 13% of MIT, and 40.2% of University of Melbourne graduates hold senior leadership roles in Australian tech firms (LinkedIn Economic Graph, 2023; University of Melbourne, 2022).

These statistics reflect what is often referred to as the “old boys’ network”—a deeply ingrained pattern in which elite institutions function as both credentialing bodies and social filters. They not only offer technical training and prestige but also form enduring peer-based ties that facilitate mentorship, referrals, and sponsorships later in one’s career. Research shows that these networks remain disproportionately male-dominated. For example, men comprise over 70% of tech-related executive alumni networks at Stanford, MIT, and Oxford, and female graduates report fewer networking opportunities and lower rates of sponsorship in these settings (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Hewlett, 2013).

This pattern reinforces the gendered access to informal capital—what Bourdieu (1986) would call “social capital”—that is vital for ascending to top leadership roles. Consequently, leadership trajectories often rely less on meritocratic progression and more on embedded affiliations that reward early entry into exclusive institutional spaces. These dynamics are not unique to the U.S. or Europe; similar patterns exist globally, indicating that elite networks act as consistent global gatekeepers across varying cultural contexts.

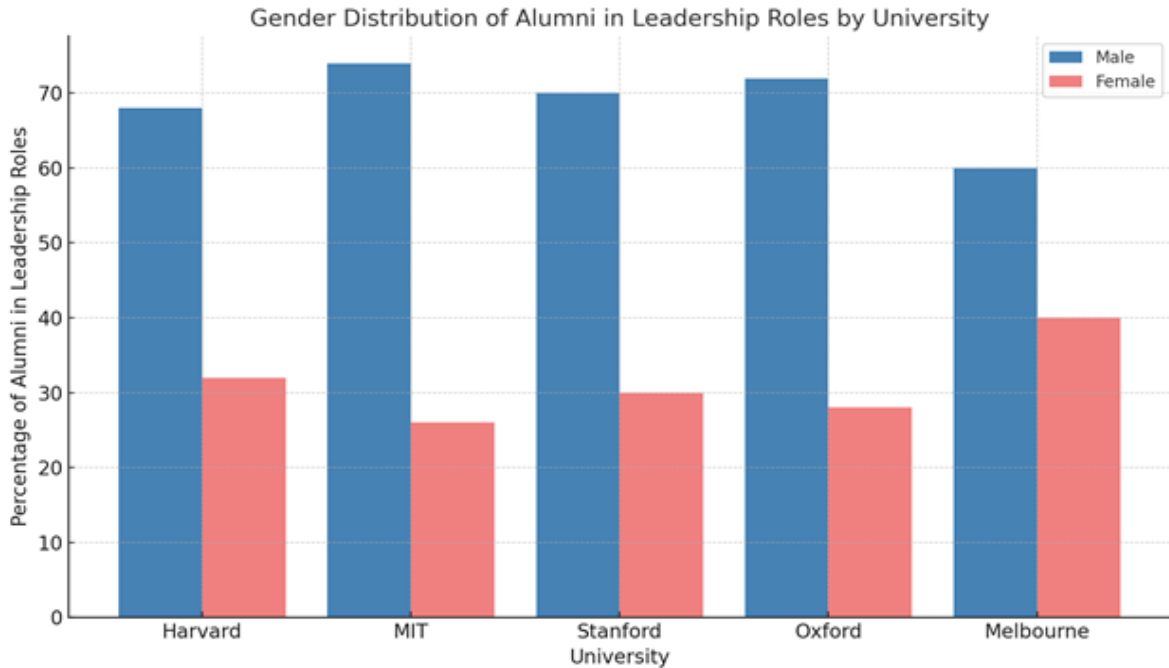


Figure 1. *Gender Distribution of Alumni in Leadership Roles by University*

This visual compares male vs. female representation across leadership alumni from Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Oxford, and the University of Melbourne.

3.6. *What Organisations Can Do*

To address the gendered disparities in high-tech networking, organisations must go beyond symbolic diversity efforts and implement structural strategies that foster inclusive leadership development. Research consistently shows that formalised networking programmes, particularly those designed with sponsorship in mind, can significantly increase women’s visibility and access to high-impact opportunities (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; van Helden et al., 2021). Structured initiatives—like cross-gender mentorship, sponsorship-matching programmes, and women-focused leadership circles—help counterbalance exclusion from informal male-dominated spaces.

At the same time, open networking environments matter just as much. Murphy et al. (2022) stress the importance of moving away from exclusive, informal events like poker nights or late-evening drinks toward formats that are more accessible to a wider range of employees, including parents and caregivers. Events held during working hours, networking breakfasts, and industry-wide mentorship platforms offer more inclusive alternatives.

However, programmes alone are not enough without organisational culture change. Harris (2022) and Mickey (2022) argue that companies must challenge the deeper cultural norms that associate leadership potential with traits typically attributed to men. They also emphasise the need for visibility audits and accountability metrics, ensuring women are not only included in

networks but also recognised and advanced. Importantly, digital platforms like LinkedIn can be leveraged to amplify underrepresented voices—yet Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno (2025) caution that algorithmic bias and homophily online may still reinforce exclusion unless platforms are intentionally designed to counter these effects.

Ultimately, creating equitable networking environments means aligning policy with practice. While setting diversity targets is a first step, sustained impact requires leadership buy-in, regular evaluations, and a shift in workplace values to reward inclusive behaviours.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This qualitative study investigates how women in high-tech leadership experience professional networking. An interpretive, interview-based design was used to elicit accounts of enablers, constraints, and ambiguities in accessing opportunity through networks.

4.2. Participants and Setting

The sample comprised $N = 19$ leaders from Israeli high-tech firms (17 women; 2 men), occupying roles such as VP R&D, director, DEI leader, and team lead. All participants worked in high-tech and had multiple years of leadership experience. The inclusion of two male leaders provided additional contextual perspective on prevalent networking norms.

4.3. Data Collection

Each participant completed a ~60-minute semi-structured interview conducted either in person or online. With explicit consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To preserve confidentiality, all identifying details were removed and quotations are presented in anonymised form.

4.4. Analytic Approach

Analysis followed a thematic content strategy focused on networking. Coding encompassed segments that addressed networking practices, access, perceptions, and consequences; material unrelated to networking was excluded unless it directly illuminated networking dynamics. Themes were developed iteratively from coded data and organised at the level of patterned meanings across interviews.

4.5. Derivation of Themes

Three overarching themes structured the findings:

The Good — positive experiences and opportunity creation via networking;

The Bad — barriers and exclusions from high-value informal networks;

The Ugly — gendered penalties, risks, and double standards surrounding networking behaviours.

This design centers on professional experience while identifying recurrent mechanisms through which networking supports—or fails to support—women's advancement in high-tech leadership.

5. Findings: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

5.1. The Good: Strategic Networking as a Career Accelerator

In the high-pressure world of Israeli high-tech, where startups rise fast and leadership teams are built overnight, networking is not just helpful—it's fundamental. Access to opportunity often comes not through formal job postings, but through people who trust you and want to "run with you." As one VP of R&D bluntly put it:

"In this country, it's all about speed and trust. If I know you from the army, from Unit 8200, from some failed startup—we've already been in the mud together. I'll bring you with me again."

This pattern of trust-based acceleration, while highly efficient, privileges existing informal networks that tend to be overwhelmingly male. Even in its positive expressions, strategic networking in tech is rarely neutral.

One participant described a very different experience of career support:

"My career took off the moment I joined a formal women's leadership programme. Before that, I kept working hard and waiting to be noticed. That programme gave me visibility, language, and connections I didn't even know I needed".

Literature supports this shift from passive to strategic networking. Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, (2011) argue that when women are placed in programmes that combine mentorship with sponsorship, their access to power increases significantly. Mickey (2022) notes that in the startup-driven culture of tech, informal networks are "the real engines of opportunity", which often run on shared masculine norms.

And it's not just programmes. Certain types of events create organic pathways to career mobility—for some.

"I've seen entire teams built during Friday afterwork beers", said one software manager.

"It's where loyalty is tested, jokes are exchanged, and decisions are made. But I'm also a mom. I'm not staying at the office at 9 pm to drink Goldstar and talk shop".

Referral-based hiring, praised as efficient and low-risk, also carries this double edge.

"We trust people who come recommended. But recommendations usually come from the same circles. It's a closed system".

This echoes Murphy et al. (2022), who found that high-value referrals in leadership positions often exclude women simply because they aren't present in those networks.

In our sample (N=19), 12 of 17 women (70%) linked a promotion to a formal programme. By contrast, only 5 of 17 women (29%)—versus 2 of 2 men (100%; descriptive)—advanced via informal personal referrals. Invitations to after-hours networking were also uneven: 6 of 17 women (35%) versus 2 of 2 men (100%) (Percentages rounded; men's figures are descriptive only given n=2).

Because referrals tend to mirror the referrer's circle, and women report lower invitation rates to those circles (see 5.2.), the promotion yield from informal referrals skews male even when women's performance is comparable.

In Israel's innovation-driven economy—often termed the "Startup Nation"—reliance on tight-knit, high-trust groups is not incidental; it is culturally embedded. Yet these practices create structural advantages for those fluent in dominant social codes. Prior work shows that men more often occupy networks that translate into performance signals and advancement, while women are frequently excluded unless they access alternative, structured spaces (Watson, 2012; Mengel, 2020). When designed intentionally, networking can be transformative: programmes that connect women to decision-makers, cross-gender sponsorship architectures, and leadership accelerators reconfigure access without sacrificing speed or trust. As one participant noted, "You can't just tell women to "build your network"—you need to give them a door into the rooms where it happens."

5.2. The Bad: The Hidden Barriers of Informal Networks

Although networking is widely regarded as a lever for career success, the informal and gendered character of many professional networks can work against women in high-tech leadership. In Israel's fast-moving tech ecosystem—often celebrated as the "Startup Nation"—relationships are pivotal. Yet beneath the culture of agility and trust lies a quieter problem: informal networks that systematically exclude women.

Many of these networks take shape in venues where business is conducted informally—after-hours soccer games, poker nights, beer meetups, WhatsApp groups, and early-morning surf sessions. As one participant noted, “Some of the biggest deals are born on the soccer field. If you’re not there, you don’t even know the conversation happened”. These gatherings frequently double as strategy meetings. A woman VP explained: “After work, they go for beers. They talk about product, investment, and recruitment. I have three kids at home—I can’t just drop everything to hang out”. In our interviews, both male participants (2/2) reported invitations to such informal networking, compared with 6 of 17 women (35%)—shaping who hears about opportunities in real time.

This pattern is consistent with research showing that after-hours, male-dominated venues act as *de facto* gatekeeping sites for information and referrals (Mickey, 2022; Murphy et al., 2022).

These are not isolated cases. Across interviews, 12 of the 17 women described consistent exclusion from social activities where alliances form and decisions crystallise: “They had a poker night at someone’s place. The next day, three of them had a new idea and a timeline. I found out two days later in a team meeting”. Another senior leader recalled, “I wasn’t invited to the investor dinner. Apparently it was just “a few friends from previous ventures”. But they were all men.” Such events, while framed as casual, function as strategic touchpoints that allocate visibility and trust.

The dynamic is compounded in cultures that prize shared backgrounds. In Israel, military service frequently operates as a foundational social filter. As one participant put it: “It’s not just about the army—though that’s a big part of it. It’s about who you can call and count on. That trust is built through shared experiences—army, school, or previous startups. Women are often just not part of that loop”.

Two male interviewees helped illuminate the insider perspective. The first one, a senior product executive, emphasised the perceived efficiency of trust-based ties: “It’s not like we try to exclude anyone—it’s just natural to call up someone you’ve been through hell with”, while acknowledging he had never considered who was routinely left out. The second of them, a team lead at a growth-stage startup, said: “We’re just grabbing beers after work—but now I realise those beers turn into hiring conversations”, and reported he had not actively included women nor reflected on the gendered implications of these routines. Together, these accounts show unintentional exclusion via habit—not malice—pinpointing when and where redesign can be most effective (referral sourcing, event timing, sponsorship assignment).

Referral-based hiring further amplifies these patterns. Both male participants (2/2) reported having been referred into leadership roles, compared with 5 of 17 women (29%)—helping explain why referral-driven pipelines reproduce a narrow circle at the top. What appears efficient on the surface concentrates opportunity among insiders.

These findings align with prior research: women are more often evaluated on credentials while men are advanced via trust and familiarity, making informal networks a ubiquitous “trust shortcut” that undermines fairness (Murphy et al., 2022). In practice, this trust shortcut concentrates opportunity among those already inside dominant circles, as reflected in our interview counts. On digital platforms, similar asymmetries appear: active networking by women can be interpreted as opportunistic, whereas identical behaviours by men are read as ambition (Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025).

The consequences are concrete: slower promotion, missed projects, and reduced visibility. As one participant summarised, “There’s this story we tell—about merit, about equality. But the truth is, the real work gets done in the shadows, with the people you drink with or play with. And women just aren’t in those circles”. Because the most consequential interactions occur outside formal structures, the locus of change is practice design rather than policy alone; without deliberate redesign, habitual patterns will continue to keep women outside the rooms where decisions are made.

5.2.1. *The invisible loop: Military and Alumni Networks as Gateways to Power*

The interview data show a consistent pattern: exclusion from informal spaces where influence circulates—after-hours beers, soccer games, poker nights, WhatsApp groups—translates into missed information, referrals, and early access to opportunities. As one participant put it: “after work, they go for beers... I have three kids at home—I can’t just drop everything to hang out”.

In Israel, these informal loops intersect with powerful institutional networks, especially elite intelligence units. Alumni communities associated with such units function as high-trust pipelines into tech leadership: shared service, shared language, and shared references compress due diligence and concentrate referrals—an effect widely documented in accounts of Israel’s tech ecosystem (Senor & Singer, 2009). Several interviewees described how not being part of those circles—by unit, cohort, or previous venture—meant arriving late to conversations that matter. Two male interviewees noted that exclusion is often unintentional but habitual: “we’re just grabbing beers after work”, which they later recognised routinely morphs into hiring and venture discussions.

This dynamic is not unique to Israel. Globally, elite alumni groups—from top universities and “ex-company” circles (corporate alumni networks)—operate similarly: dense ties, rapid trust formation, warm introductions, and sponsorship that accelerates a familiar few. Prior research documents how relationship-based shortcuts and cultural matching favour insiders even absent overt intent (Saxenian, 1994; Rivera, 2012; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Our interview evidence mirrors these mechanisms (see 5.2.): asymmetric invitations to after-work venues, reliance on trust-based referrals, and uneven access to sponsorship concentrated among incumbents. In practice, what is framed as “culture fit” or “efficiency” functions as a structural filter that keeps women at the edge of high-value conversations (Mengel, 2020; Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025).

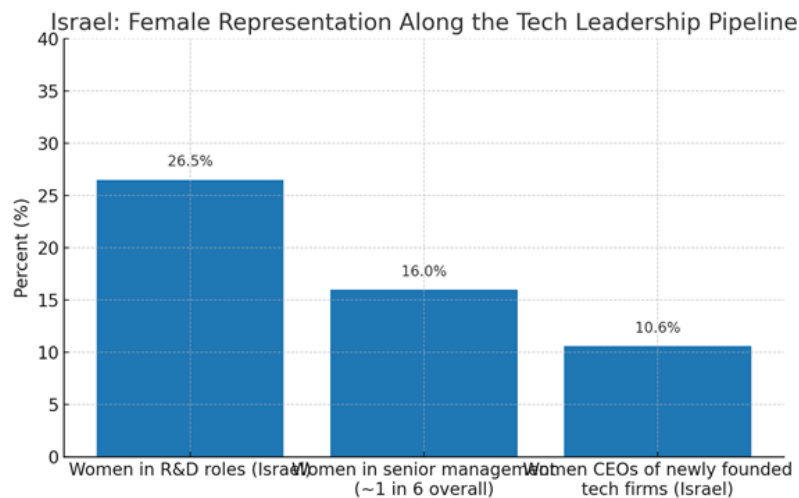


Figure 2. *Israel: female representation along the tech leadership pipeline*

Women comprise 26.5% of R&D roles (2023), roughly one in six senior managers (~16%), and 10.6% of CEOs of newly founded tech firms. The data are provided by Israel Innovation Authority (2025) (press summary for “one in six” senior managers).

As Figure 2 shows, representation drops from 26.5% in R&D to ~16% in senior management and 10.6% among CEOs of newly founded tech firms, quantifying the cumulative effect of informal exclusion on leadership outcomes in Israel’s high-tech sector.

5.2.2. Global Networking Structures: Israel vs. International

Israel’s tech leadership pipelines are strongly shaped by military-alumni networks—particularly alumni of elite intelligence units whose dense, trust-based ties compress due diligence and concentrate referrals. International ecosystems often rely on elite university and corporate alumni networks that function similarly (Senor & Singer, 2009; Saxenian, 1994). In both models, access to insider circles increases the likelihood of warm introductions, sponsorship, and early information about roles and deals. Where women are under-represented in the source networks (elite units or specific alumni cohorts) and in the after-hours venues that sustain those ties, exclusion compounds (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Rivera, 2012).

The salient difference is less whether networks matter than how they are structured and governed. In Israel, high-density, service-based ties privilege speed and familiarity; abroad, university and corporate alumni channels are more often layered with formal mechanisms (ERGs, sponsorship programmes, referral policies, industry associations) that can be leveraged to diversify access—even as homophily and “old boys’ network” effects persist (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025). For women, the critical variable is openness by design: when inclusion is intentional (structured sponsorship, inclusive event formats, transparent referral audits), network benefits diffuse more equitably; when left to legacy habits, they do not. These dynamics echo our field evidence on invitations, referrals, and sponsorship gaps (5.2.–5.3.; 6.1.).

These contrasts motivate the mechanism-targeted design choices in Section 7—neutralised referral screens, venue redesign, sponsorship architecture, and visibility ledgers—which collectively increase network openness by design.

Table 3: Side-by-Side Comparison of Networking Structures

Dimension	Israel (military-alumni centric)	U.S./Europe (university-/corporate-centric)
Primary feeder networks	Elite military alumni communities; prior ventures	Elite university cohorts; corporate alumni (“ex-company” circles)
Gatekeeping mechanism	Shared service/mission; high-trust referrals	Shared alma mater/firm; cultural matching in hiring
Dominant informal venues	After-hours meetups (beers, sports), alumni/unit groups	Alumni clubs, conferences, professional associations, corporate socials
Referral norm	Fast, relationship-first intros within tight circles	Formal referral programmes layered on informal intros
Sponsorship norm	Often ad-hoc via insiders	Increasingly formalised (sponsor–protégé programmes, ERGs)

Inclusion infrastructure	Women-focused alumni initiatives (e.g., mentoring cohorts); limited spillover to mixed circles	ERGs, cross-firm associations, industry mentorship platforms
Typical risks for women	Exclusion from after-hours access; reliance on legacy unit ties	Cultural matching bias; under-sponsorship even in formal programmes
Effective levers	Conscious referral/event audits; structured sponsorship; inclusive scheduling; visibility tracking	Sponsor KPIs; bias-aware referral design; open networking platforms; visibility dashboards

Note: This comparison synthesises interview evidence with established research on network homophily, cultural matching, and sponsorship dynamics (Saxenian, 1994; Rivera, 2012; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025).

5.3. The Ugly: When Networking Reinforces Gender Bias

Networking is often framed as neutral or even empowering, yet for many women in high-tech leadership it carries invisible risks. Behaviours celebrated in men—strategic self-promotion, assertive relationship-building, asking for opportunities—are frequently questioned when performed by women. Participants described how efforts to build connections or increase visibility in leadership circles were misread. As one interviewee reflected: “When a man speaks confidently about his achievements, it’s inspiring. When I do it, people raise an eyebrow”. This asymmetry reflects persistent gendered norms: women are expected to appear modest, collaborative, and grateful, even at senior levels; sponsor-seeking or open ambition is more readily interpreted as self-serving (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Harris, 2022).

A recurring theme was the reputational tightrope surrounding informal relationships at work. Professional boundaries are expected and clear, but their interpretation differs by gender. As one VP noted: “It’s not that things became inappropriate recently—they always were. It’s just that now, more women are finally calling it out”. Heightened visibility does not always yield inclusion; it can justify exclusion from strategic conversations under the banner of “caution” or “optics”. As a senior leader put it: “Some of the most important decisions happen over beers after work. I was never invited—not because of my skills, but because I wasn’t one of the guys”.

Women in this study were proactive and highly capable, yet often worked harder both to access opportunities and to maintain credibility while doing so. The added labor was technical, emotional, and political. “I’m expected to represent every woman, every diversity issue, every mentorship need. I do it, but no one asks the men to carry that weight”, said a DEI manager and VP. This invisible work took multiple forms: mentoring junior staff, managing team emotional dynamics, leading diversity initiatives, and building informal support coalitions. Across interviews, participants reported performing this labour without recognition, compensation, or advancement. In evaluation terms, this is uncredited stabilising labor—work that reduces team risk but rarely converts into promotion points.

Consistent with this pattern, 4 of 17 women (24%) reported receiving sponsorship, compared with 1 of 2 men (descriptive only given the small n).

One participant, a senior R&D leader and mother of four, explained: “People always ask how I manage. I say, ‘I don’t manage it perfectly. I just try to control which balls drop’”. She described mentoring colleagues, leading DEI efforts, and building a now-defunct internal women’s programme—all while directing a large team—yet continued to face scrutiny from peers and interviewers over travel and “balance”, a judgment rarely extended to male leaders.

Another participant, a senior analytics director, reflected on the toll of being the only woman on leadership teams: informal coaching, conflict mediation, and creating “safe” coalitions became routine—none of which was reflected in her KPIs. “None of this goes into your performance review,” she said, “but without it, teams would fall apart.” A third participant, formerly leading global diversity programmes, noted that some of her most consequential applications happened because another woman insisted she apply—forms of advocacy that remain largely invisible to organisational systems.

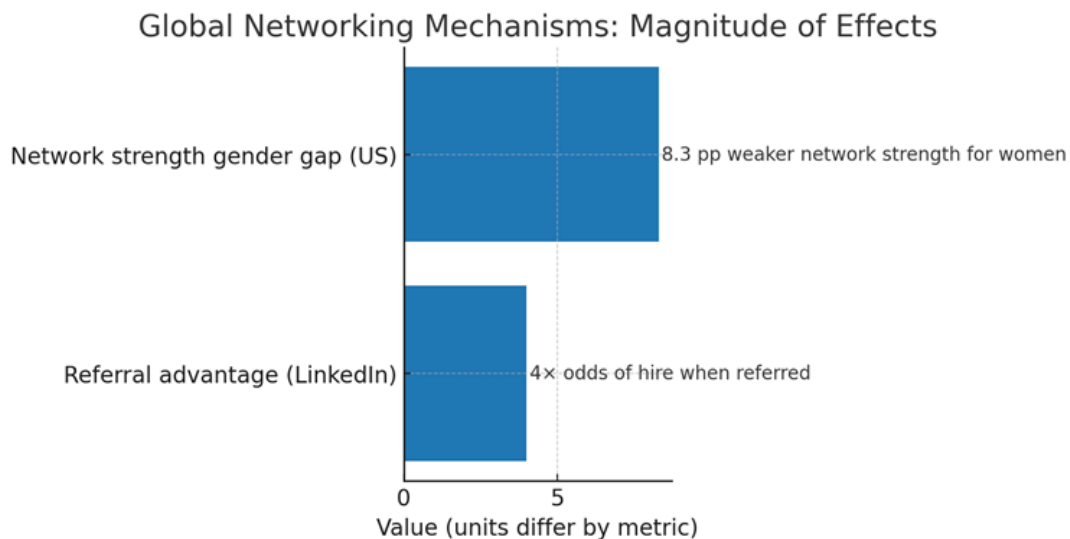


Figure 3. Global networking mechanisms

Candidates with a LinkedIn referral are $\sim 4\times$ more likely to get hired; in the U.S., women’s economic network strength is on average 8.3 percentile points weaker than men’s, and network strength predicts recruiter contact and seniority. The data are provided by LinkedIn (product data page: referrals) and LinkedIn Economic Graph research (2024).

6. Discussion: Sponsorship, Visibility, and Structural Change

This study set out to understand how networking shapes women’s access to high-tech leadership. The interviews reveal a coherent mechanism: exclusion from informal venues (after-hours drinks, sports, private WhatsApp groups) and insider networks (notably alumni and military cohorts) translates into fewer referrals, weaker sponsorship, and narrower visibility at promotion moments. These experiences align with prior research on network homophily, cultural matching, and differentiated access to career-advancing ties (Rivera, 2012; Saxenian, 1994; Mengel, 2020; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025).

6.1. From Networks to Outcomes

Participants consistently linked informal exclusion to concrete outcomes—missed information about roles or projects, delayed access to investor conversations, and fewer senior referrals. These micro-processes are consistent with our interview evidence: both male participants (2/2) reported invitations to after-work venues and referral-based advancement, compared with 6 of 17 and 5 of 17 women, respectively (descriptive counts given the small n). This pattern aligns with international evidence that relationship-based shortcuts advantage insiders even absent explicit bias (Rivera, 2012; Saxenian, 1994). In the Israeli context, high-trust alumni communities—including those associated with elite intelligence units—often function as

pipelines into startup and executive roles, compressing due diligence and concentrating referrals within known circles (Senor & Singer, 2009). Where women are under-represented in the source networks and in the after-hours venues that sustain them, exclusion compounds.

6.2. Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Power

Interviewees frequently differentiated between receiving mentorship (guidance, feedback) and lacking sponsorship (active advocacy, access to high-stakes opportunities). This mirrors the literature: women are more likely to be mentored than sponsored, with sponsorship more strongly associated with promotions, high-visibility assignments, and accelerated mobility (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; van Helden et al., 2021; Van Emmerik et al., 2006). In our data, women reported doing “everything right” yet stalling at decision points where a sponsor’s endorsement would have made the difference. Several men in the sample described their own reliance on warm introductions and informal endorsements, often without recognising how systematically those endorsements circulate within male-dominated networks.

6.3. Visibility and Invisible Work

A recurring theme was the visibility gap: women must “prove it again”, while men are advanced on perceived potential (Mickey, 2022; Murphy et al., 2022). Participants also described substantial invisible work—mentoring juniors, mediating team dynamics, leading or staffing DEI initiatives—that stabilises organisations but seldom counts in promotion criteria. This asymmetry helps explain why strong performance and community contribution do not consistently translate into power or title. Support without positional leverage is insufficient; without mechanisms that convert contribution into recognised, career-relevant signals, women’s effort pools in low-visibility domains.

6.4. Comparative Ecosystems: Israel and International

The underlying mechanism—dense ties→warm referrals→sponsorship→leadership—appears across ecosystems. In Israel, service-based alumni ties are especially salient; internationally, elite university and corporate alumni networks play similar roles (Saxenian, 1994; Rivera, 2012; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Where systems include formal scaffolding—employee resource groups, structured sponsorship, referral policies, and industry associations—there are more levers to disrupt homophily (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025). Yet even in those contexts, informality reasserts itself unless inclusion is designed and measured.

6.5. The Role of Men and Unintended Exclusion

Male interviewees underscored how exclusion is often unintended but habitual: casual beers morph into hiring conversations; alumni chats become venture decisions. This acknowledgement matters because it identifies where intervention can be most effective—not just in policy, but in practice design (what time events are held; how referrals are sourced; how sponsorship is assigned and tracked). When leaders recognise that their default habits allocate visibility unevenly, they can redesign those moments without sacrificing speed or trust.

6.6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study relies on qualitative interviews (N=19) supplemented by literature; while rich in mechanism, the sample size limits generalisability. Some ecosystem statistics (e.g., precise gender shares within specific alumni cohorts over time) are not publicly available or are inconsistently reported. Future work should combine network analytics (membership, overlap, tie

strength) with career outcomes (time-to-promotion, board seats, founder rates), disaggregated by gender and parental status, to quantify how specific networks mediate advancement. Comparative studies across Israel, the U.S., and Europe could isolate which design features (e.g., sponsorship assignment, referral audits, inclusive scheduling) most effectively translate inclusion into mobility.

6.7. Implications for Practice

Three implications follow. First, the unit of change is the system: because advantages accrue in informal channels, solutions must make sponsorship, referrals, and event access visible and auditable (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025). Second, move high-value networking into working hours and diversify formats to reduce after-hours penalties without dismantling trust or speed. Third, convert contribution into mobility by tying sponsorship and visibility metrics to leadership evaluation. These design choices preserve the benefits of networks while broadening who is seen, sponsored, and shortlisted, setting the stage for the recommendations that follow.

7. Recommendations: Fixing the Pipeline

Evidence indicates that access to high-value networks is systematically patterned by homophily, venue design, and sponsorship asymmetries (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Rivera, 2012; Mengel, 2020; Contreras, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2025). In our sample, these mechanisms appear as gaps in invitations, referrals, and active career advocacy (see 5.2.–5.3.; 6.1.). The recommendations below target allocation mechanisms—how visibility and advocacy are generated—rather than individual behaviour. Table 4 summarises the mapping from mechanisms to design principles and intended outcomes; Table 5 places those principles at key leadership-pipeline transitions.

7.1. Decoupling Trust from Homophily in Referrals (cf. Table 4, row 1)

Mechanism. Referral pipelines compress due diligence but import referrers' social similarity, advantaging insiders (Rivera, 2012).

Design principle. Introduce procedural neutrality at the earliest screening stage (e.g., blinded initial review of referred candidates). Operationalisation: mask personal identifiers and referrer names at the first screen (via ATS configuration or standardised templates) so evaluators assess role-relevant evidence only. Incorporate heterophilous referral prompts (cross-unit, cross-demographic, cross-institution), framed as choice architecture rather than quota. The intent is portfolio diversification of inputs, not outcome quotas: broadening who enters the shortlist preserves merit while reducing search myopia.

What to measure. Share of referred candidates by gender/function, pass-through rates (screen→interview→offer), and a referral concentration index by referrer.

Evaluation strategy. Model changes in interview/offer odds for referred candidates (controlling for role, tenure, function) and track concentration and referrer–candidate social distance over time to test whether neutrality reduces pass-through gaps without increasing time-to-hire.

7.2. Reconfiguring Decision Venues (cf. Table 4, row 2)

Mechanism. Decision-relevant interactions migrate to after-hours settings, reallocating information and advocacy toward those able to attend (Mickey, 2022; Murphy et al., 2022).

Design principle. Redistribute decision forums into core working hours via parallel, minuted sessions that replicate informational value while retaining informal events as optional complements; make access observable (invites, attendance, agenda items, outcomes).

What to measure. Invite lists, attendance by demographic/parental status, items discussed/decided, and post-meeting assignment rates to high-visibility work.

Evaluation strategy. Apply difference-in-differences between adopting and non-adopting units; outcomes include assignment to high-visibility projects, promotion hazard rates, and growth in cross-team ties following sessions.

7.3. From Mentoring to Sponsorship Architecture (cf. Table 4, row 3)

Mechanism. Women report ample mentoring but limited sponsorship—active use of social capital to open doors (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; van Helden et al., 2021).

Design principle. Formalise sponsor-of-record relationships with explicit obligations (calibration-meeting advocacy; allocation to stretch work; warm introductions) and surface protégés' contributions in governance routines.

What to measure. A Sponsorship Exposure Index (SEI)—warm intros, stretch allocations, calibration-meeting advocacy—and its association with time-to-promotion.

Evaluation strategy. Estimate SEI effects on time-to-first stretch assignment, promotion probability, and external recognition using survival and logistic models, net of performance.

7.4. External Bridges to Reduce Network Closure (cf. Table 4, row 4; Table 5 “Entry→Early” and “Early→Mid”)

Mechanism. Dense legacy networks (e.g., military or elite alumni) lower search costs but close opportunity sets to outsiders (Saxenian, 1994; Senor & Singer, 2009).

Design principle. Build bridging capital via structured ecosystems (e.g., returnships, women-in-tech communities) that provide curated introductions, technical refresh, and employer matching; use these as countervailing institutions to legacy pipelines.

What to measure. Conversion-to-hire, 12-month retention, and internal mobility for cohort participants vs. matched controls.

Evaluation strategy. Treat cohorts as quasi-experiments; compare outcomes against propensity-matched controls (function, seniority, firm size), reporting effect sizes with confidence intervals.

7.5. Visibility as an Organisational Data Layer (cf. Table 4, row 5; Table 5 “Mid→Senior” and “Senior→Executive”)

Mechanism. Advantage flows through unseen invitations (strategy rooms, investor calls) and uncredited labor (mentoring, DEI, conflict mediation) that stabilises teams yet rarely converts to promotion points.

Design principle. Implement a lightweight visibility ledger recording invitations to decision forums, presenter slots, nominations for high-profile work, and sponsorship actions; review aggregates at team level to protect privacy and embed review in leadership governance. Bias-aware engines can flag concentration (“80% of your recent intros are same-unit, same-gender”) and suggest bridging intros (“second-degree contacts from adjacent functions”) with opt-in dashboards for leaders.

What to measure. Visibility ledgers (invitations, presenter slots, nominations, sponsor actions) summarised as Gini coefficients and tracked against promotion outcomes.

Evaluation strategy. Track convergence in visibility distributions and test whether shifts predict subsequent calibration and promotion outcomes; preregister metrics and analytic plans where feasible.

7.6. Implementation and Governance (integrates Table 4 across Table 5 pipeline moments)

A progressive redesign with governance is preferable to wholesale replacement. Establish a cross-functional committee (R&D, HR/TA, Analytics) to (a) define constructs and measurement plans *ex ante*, (b) monitor referral concentration, venue accessibility, sponsorship exposure, and visibility distribution, and (c) report periodically to the executive team. Incorporating calibrated managerial accountability—for example, sponsorship and venue accessibility as inputs to leadership evaluation—aligns incentives without reducing complex decisions to single metrics.

Link to tables. The interventions correspond to Table 4 (mechanisms → design principles → outcomes) and, when placed at specific transition points, to Table 5 (pipeline moments → observed dynamics → structural supports). Together, they operationalise the gaps described in 5.2.–5.3. and §6.1. by making referrals, venues, sponsorship, and visibility observable and auditable.

Conclusion. These recommendations privilege mechanism-targeted design over exhortation. The aim is to preserve legitimate advantages of speed and trust while decoupling access from homophily. By specifying constructs, analytic designs, and governance routines—and aligning them with the pipeline transitions in Table 5—organisations can evaluate whether redesigned networks measurably expand visibility, sponsorship, and mobility rather than merely relocating the rhetoric of inclusion.

Table 4. Inclusive Networking Strategy Matrix (Mechanisms → Design Principles → Outcomes)

Mechanism observed	Design principle (organisation-level)	Intended outcome
Homophilous referrals and cultural matching	Procedural neutrality at first screen (blind initial review of referred candidates); heterophilous referral prompts (cross-unit/demographic/institution); rotating referrer panels	Broadened shortlists without loss of hiring speed
After-hours decision venues	Venue redesign to core hours; parallel, minuted sessions that replicate decision-relevant discussions; access logs for transparency	Equitable access to decision-relevant information
Mentoring without sponsorship	Sponsor-of-record architecture (advocacy in calibration meetings, allocation to stretch work, warm introductions); visibility surfaced in governance agendas	Accelerated mobility at promotion moments
Digital echo chambers (repetitive suggestions, closed circles)	Bias-aware suggestion engines; referral/event audits; monitoring of concentration indices	Diversified cross-circle ties; reduced network concentration
Invisible work not counted in promotion	Visibility ledger of invitations, presenter slots, nominations, sponsorship actions; periodic team-level review	Measurable visibility aligned with advancement decisions

Table 5. Career Trajectories With vs. Without Formal Support

Career stage	With formal support structures	Without formal support structures
Entry (CS degree/bootcamp/Army unit)	Mentoring cohort (e.g., alumni women's programme); structured onboarding to mixed networks	Entry via ad-hoc contacts; early reliance on same-circle ties
Early career (IC roles)	Assigned sponsor-of-record; scheduled introductions to senior stakeholders; inclusion in work-hours review forums	After-hours exclusion from informal venues; mentoring without advocacy
Mid-career (team lead)	Stretch assignments allocated; referral and event audits increase access to decision rooms; visibility tracked	Referral-only pipelines favour insiders; invisible work (mentoring/DEI) discounted
Senior leadership (VP/CXO)	Visibility KPIs in leadership evaluation; board-ready training; diversified external networks	Advancement tied to legacy proximity; slower promotion hazard despite performance

Note: Tables are clarifying summaries (not statistical proof), aligned with mechanisms and remedies discussed in Sections 5–7 and the cited literature.

8. Conclusion

This article explored how networking, often seen as a career accelerator, is shaped by invisible rules that can benefit some and exclude others—especially in the high-tech leadership space. Through qualitative interviews with women leaders and a review of contemporary academic studies, we examined the good (strategic networking as a tool for growth), the bad (hidden barriers in informal male-dominated networks), and the ugly (gender bias and reputational risks tied to visibility and self-promotion).

The evidence shows that even as women work harder, take on more responsibilities, and build their own support systems, the structure of networking still favours those already inside established circles. In Israel's fast-paced, relationship-driven tech ecosystem—where military ties, after-work beers, and founder friendships often lead to leadership roles—many women find themselves excluded from the very conversations that decide the future.

However, networking does not have to be exclusive. Firms can redesign hiring and sponsorship systems, platforms can reconfigure algorithms, and leadership can be held accountable for inclusion outcomes. This is not only about fairness—it's about building a more effective and innovative industry where leadership reflects the full range of available talent.

Call to Action

Companies must go beyond surface-level DEI programmes and examine how networks operate within their organisations. Platforms like LinkedIn should track visibility gaps and address recommendation bias. Policymakers and investors should hold companies accountable not only for people they hire but also for how opportunities are distributed.

Networking should open doors—not keep them closed. Now is the time to fix the pipeline and ensure that the next generation of high-tech leaders reflects the diverse talent already working hard to be seen.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank Professor Ada Prodan and Dr. Yhudit Od Cohen for their support, helpful advice, and guidance during this research. Their ideas and encouragement helped make this study stronger and more meaningful.

About the Author

Zeala Pinto is a senior software engineering leader and PhD candidate in Business Administration at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași. She holds a BSc in Computer Science and Bioinformatics from Ben-Gurion University, an MBA in Finance from Reichman University, and completed the Global Consulting Practicum (GCP) with the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. With over 15 years of experience in the high-tech industry, she brings both academic knowledge and hands-on technical and leadership expertise. Zeala leads development teams in building secure, data-driven solutions, and is passionate about creating a better and more inclusive future in tech.

References

- Accenture, & Girls Who Code. (2020). Resetting tech culture: Five strategies to keep women in tech. *Girls Who Code / Accenture*.
- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002>
- Barabási, A.-L., & Albert, R. (1999). Emergence of scaling in random networks. *Science*, 286(5439), 509–512. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.286.5439.509>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, 241–258. *New York: Greenwood Press*.
- Contreras, A., Mateos de Cabo, R., & Gimeno, R. (2025). Women who LinkedIn: The gender networking gap among executives. *European Management Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2024.10.003>
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573–598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573>
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 388–408. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2010.0046>
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of self in everyday life*. *New York: Doubleday*.
- Harris, D. A. (2022). Women, work, and opportunities: From neoliberal to feminist mentoring. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 29(1), 143–158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12966>
- Hewlett, S. A. (2013). Forget a mentor, find a sponsor: The new way to fast-track your career. *Harvard Business Review Press*.
- Ibarra, H., Carter, N. M., & Silva, C. (2010). Why men still get more promotions than women. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(9), 80–85.
- Israel Innovation Authority. Women in high-tech. (2025). *Jerusalem: Israel Innovation Authority*.
- Kanter, R. M. (1977) *Men and women of the corporation*. *New York: Basic Books*.
- LinkedIn Economic Graph. (2023). Tech leadership demographics by alumni affiliation. *Sunnyvale, CA: LinkedIn Research*. <https://economicgraph.linkedin.com>
- LinkedIn Economic Graph. (2024). Measuring gender gaps in economic network strength in the U.S. *Sunnyvale, CA: LinkedIn Economic Graph Research*.
- Lin, N. (2001) *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action*. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815447>
- McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 415–444. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415>

- Mengel, F. (2020). Gender differences in networking. *The Economic Journal*, 130(630), 1842–1873. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/ueaa035>
- Mickey, E. L. (2022). The organization of networking and gender inequality in the new economy. *Harvard Business School Research Paper Series*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/07308884221102134>
- Murphy, M., Callander, J. K., Dohan, D., & Grandis, J. R. (2022). Networking practices and gender inequities in academic medicine. *BMJ Leader*, 6(2), 100–106. <https://doi.org/10.1136/leader-2021-000548>
- Rivera, L. A. (2012). Hiring as cultural matching: The case of elite professional service firms. *American Sociological Review*, 77(6), 999–1022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122412463213>
- Saxenian, A. L. (1994). Regional advantage: Culture and competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128. *Harvard University Press*.
- Scott, A., Klein, F. K., & Onovakpuri, U. (2017). Tech leavers study: A first-of-its-kind analysis of why people voluntarily leave jobs in tech. *Kapor Center*.
- Senor, D., & Singer, S. (2009). Start-up nation: The story of Israel's economic miracle. *Twelve*.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations*, 7–24. *Nelson-Hall*.
- University of Melbourne. (2022). Annual report: Graduate outcomes and leadership representation. *University of Melbourne*. https://about.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0027/422397/RFQ07703_AnnualReport_22-WEB-C.pdf
- Van Emmerik, I. J. H., Euwema, M. C., Geschiere, M., & Schouten, M. F. A. G. (2006). Networking your way through the organization: Gender differences in the relationship between network participation and career satisfaction. *Women in Management Review*, 21(1), 54–66. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09649420610643411>
- van Helden, D. L., den Dulk, L., Steijn, B., & Vernooij, M. W. (2021). Gender, networks, and academic leadership: A systematic review. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(6), 837–853. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211005057>
- Watson, J. (2012). Networking: Gender differences and the association with firm performance. *International Small Business Journal*, 30(5), 536–558. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0266242610384888>