

# **ACCENTURE CYBERSECURITY FORUM WOMEN'S COUNCIL**



**Cybersecurity threats and  
policy solutions: A perspective  
from the Department of  
Homeland Security**

**Virtual Roundtable Summary**  
March 6, 2019

## DISCUSSION

On March 6, 2019, the Accenture Cybersecurity Forum (ACF) Women's Council hosted a discussion on "Cybersecurity threats and policy solutions: A perspective from the Department of Homeland Security." Female CISOs and senior security executives from multiple organizations and industries joined the conversation with our guest subject-matter expert, assistant director for cybersecurity at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

The conversation focused on the state of the threat environment from the perspective of DHS, policy approaches to counter threats, and how commercial enterprises can engage with DHS to address threats. Participants also discussed approaches for recruiting, retaining and advancing women in cybersecurity in both commercial and federal government arenas.

The session was conducted under the Chatham House Rule. Below is a high-level summary of the discussion, without attribution, for both attendees and those who were unable to participate. Council members may use the information provided that neither the identity of the speaker nor that of the speaker's organization is revealed.

### **Collaboration and cooperation**

Both the U.S. government and the commercial sector face serious cybersecurity threats, have invested significantly in defense, and need to deepen their collaboration and cooperation on cybersecurity. CISA's top priority is maintaining cybersecurity strength across all federal agencies. DHS is also reaching out to commercial enterprises to understand how enterprise architectures and functions impact the technology ecosystem.

- Over the past three years, the responsibilities of DHS have evolved from policy making to policy implementation and enforcement. This expanded operational

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role requires focusing on mission-critical issues such as securing cybersecurity infrastructure and processes across the federal government.

- Operationalizing cybersecurity compliance across all federal agencies is complicated by the vast number of civilian agencies that are also in charge of protecting their networks.
- CISA helps agencies identify critical assets and establish key cybersecurity performance indicators.
- We need to continue to evolve how commercial-enterprise CISOs can best collaborate with DHS. Presently, the department has engaged with companies in mission-critical functions in financial services, utilities and energy.

### Advancing women in cybersecurity

Participants offered numerous constructive comments about how to attract and retain more women in cybersecurity. The value of gender diversity is well-documented. What is needed now are practical steps women and organizations can take to establish and maintain that diversity.

- It is important to systematically identify high performers among women early in their careers and mentor them along their career paths. Women need to avoid several “don’ts” in managing their careers: Don’t shy away from taking credit for your accomplishments; don’t apologize for not being “technical”; and don’t be intimidated by jargon.
- In taking control of one’s career, don’t self-select yourself out of making career progress. Ask if there are opportunities to forge a different career path that could, for example, accommodate child-rearing or caring for elderly parents.
- CISOs should serve as role models who demonstrate that “it’s OK to have a life.” It starts with us, as senior women. We can’t rely on someone else or the government. We need to be the role models.

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- It is important to get men involved in conversations about privilege and gender equality. Establish a formal program that involves men in mentoring women and actively promoting their progress. It's not just about mentoring young women; it's also about us mentoring the men.
- Many women, for a variety of reasons, leave their careers or have difficulty advancing to the most senior positions. Enterprises need to create an environment in which women can advance from the mid-point in their careers to senior levels.
- One of the enterprise behaviors that is undermining women's efforts to advance in their careers is a lack of pay parity. Many HR departments may actually push back on attempts to establish parity. It then becomes extremely difficult for those women to catch up with their male colleagues.
- Recruit university students for careers in cybersecurity. Try to demystify cybersecurity and share your passion so that students might think of a different career path.
- One resource available to us is the website [www.paradigm4parity.com](http://www.paradigm4parity.com), a coalition of business leaders seeking to accelerate the pace of gender equality in senior roles and on corporate boards.

### Key takeaways

**DHS and corporate enterprises have the potential for greater cybersecurity collaboration.** DHS recognizes the value of having a deeper understanding of enterprise operations, including essential functions, architecture, risk-based cybersecurity programs and barriers to compliance with federal regulations. While progress is being made in understanding critical enterprise infrastructure, such as oil and gas pipelines, deeper knowledge of enterprise processes could go a long way toward increasing cybersecurity collaboration.

**The lines between individual bad actors and nation states are blurring in terms**

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**of cybersecurity threats.** As a result, information sharing among DHS and enterprises can be useful in proactively addressing a broader range of threats.

**Women can take a number of steps to promote upward mobility in cybersecurity careers.** For example, female leaders should identify and nurture high performers early in their careers. On an individual basis, women should be supported in their efforts to juggle career advancement with personal responsibilities outside the workplace.

**Enterprises must be engaged in promoting gender diversity and equality.** Creating an environment that promotes gender diversity is good for the bottom line. But that can happen only if women and men in the workplace are actively involved.

The ACF Women's Council encourages members to contribute their ideas, get involved in council activities, and reach out to other members. For questions or suggestions, please contact [Valerie Abend](#), ACF Women's Council chairperson, or [Lisa Harris](#), program manager.

## CONTACT US

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