Women in Telecoms Roundtable: Who Gets Seen, Who Gets Ahead?
Insights from the Cavell Summit Europe

The Women in Telecoms roundtable at Cavell Summit Europe brought together leaders and professionals across the telecoms industry to explore how visibility, role design, and workplace structures shape career progression. The session was candid, interactive, and focused on identifying practical solutions to support diverse talent and progression.

Panellists
Justine Taylor – Independent
Rebecca Penman – Channel Partner Manager, Infinitel
Lauren Croxson – Senior Sales Director, UK & NW Europe, Sangoma / Co-Chair, Comms Council UK Women in Telecoms Group
Natalie Strange – Managing Director, RPS Telecom / Co-Chair, Comms Council UK Women in Telecoms Group
Bridget Hayes – Channel Director, Dstny
Hosted by:
Catie De Marcillac – Consultant, Cavell

Key Discussion Points

1. Visibility vs Performance
Often, the **loudest or most visible individuals are recognised**, rather than those who deliver the most impact. Progression should be **data-driven**, measuring outcomes and performance, not just presence or perception.

2. Perception Bias
Confidence is perceived differently across genders:
o **Men:** seen as confident and capable
o **Women:** sometimes seen as aggressive

Removing bias should be the focus, ensuring career progression isn't influenced by gendered perceptions.

3. Authenticity Develops Over Time
Many panellists reflected that **authenticity comes with age and experience**. Early in careers, individuals often overcompensate to appear confident, especially when knowledge feels limited. Organisations should create environments where early-career professionals can contribute **without pressure to conform to a certain persona**.

4. Seniority and Age
Seniority and title affect perception:
o Senior professionals are often treated with more credibility and flexibility.
o Junior or younger employees may need to & prove themselves & more visibly, creating barriers to progression.

5. Industry Progress

Telecoms is making **positive strides**:
o Industry bodies and initiatives are encouraging women to step forward.
o More women are applying for leadership roles and speaking engagements.

Generational change will continue as career choices balance out across genders. Technology and access to knowledge have also helped junior employees **accelerate learning and confidence**.

6. Parenthood, Flexibility, and Career Progression

Women often face additional pressures around **parental responsibilities**, travel, and office presence. Questions were raised about whether men experience similar challenges ("dad guilt") and how these pressures are addressed. Flexible working, supportive programs, and leadership initiatives are needed to ensure progression is **possible for all parents and carers**.

7. Structural Barriers

 Many roles still assume:
o Frequent travel
o Full-time office presence
o Availability outside standard hours
These expectations can unintentionally exclude parents and carers or individuals requiring flexibility. **Role design should be inclusive and neutral**, ensuring career paths are accessible for all.

8. Representation & Leadership Visibility

- **Visible female leaders are essential** for aspirational progression.
- Lack of women in C-suite and panel discussions **reinforces the perception that leadership is male-dominated**.
- Organisations should actively **champion women into leadership and visible role**s.

9. Recruitment & Job Design

Job descriptions and recruitment processes can unintentionally favour men, particularly in technical/engineering roles.

Recommendations include:
o Using **inclusive, neutral language**
o Offering **flexible working options**
o Designing roles that accommodate carers and parents **without limiting progression**

Solutions and Actions

The roundtable agreed on actionable ways organisations can address these challenges:

1. Promote Data-Driven Visibility
o Measure performance and impact, not just who is most vocal or visible.

2. Champion Representation
o Ensure women have visible paths into leadership roles and public- facing opportunities.
o Include women in panels and industry events to increase aspiration and skill-building.

3. Inclusive Role Design
o Redesign roles with flexibility in mind.
o Consider parental responsibilities and reduce rigid travel/office requirements.

4. Mentoring & Leadership Programs
o Provide structured programs for women and underrepresented groups to **build confidence and leadership skills**.

5. Neutral Recruitment Practices
o Write inclusive job descriptions.
o Reduce gendered or biased language.
o Highlight flexible working to attract a wider talent pool.

6. Culture & Mindset Change
o Encourage authenticity and diverse styles of working.
o Challenge assumptions about who is "ready" for leadership.
o Address bias in perceptions of confidence across genders.

Key Takeaways

- Progression should be **performance - and data-driven**, not perception-driven.
- **Representation matters**: visible female leaders inspire confidence and aspiration.
- **Flexibility is critical** for retaining talent, particularly parents and carers.
- Industry initiatives and technology are helping, but **structural and cultural changes** are still required.
- Success requires **organisational commitment to inclusion, visibility, and unbiased role design.**

Closing Thought

The roundtable highlighted that career progression should be about **rethinking systems, expectations, and definitions of success** - rather than being about fixing individuals. Telecoms can attract, retain, and develop diverse talent by creating a more equitable and inclusive environment.