Women are consistently underrepresented in engineering workplaces, especially in senior management positions, and face a high attrition rate. To address this, organizations must become aware of the impact human resources policies and practices have on diversity in the workforce. Our study engaged 39 Canadian companies that employ engineers and focused on their human resources policies and practices. We examined the connection between the practices and percentages of women at different levels of the organization, pay, and tenure relative to men.

In our study, women were paid less and had shorter average tenure than men, at all career levels. Only 18.4% of engineers at the non-managerial level were women in the 39 organizations. This percentage dropped considerably at managerial and senior leadership levels. Organizations that sought women for leadership positions, and provided them with training and mentorship, had more women leaders. Women stayed longer at workplaces that offered paid maternity and paternal leaves, and a culture that supported gender diversity.

Measuring the recruitment, advancement and retention of women in an organization demonstrates a commitment to diversity, and provides concrete evidence about an organization’s current situation. This paper presents a selection of policies and practices; implement those that make sense for your context and workforce.

Gender-inclusive policies benefit both men and women. Strengthening diversity requires implementing, communicating, and supporting policies and practices at the senior management level. Many women experience non-linear career paths, and look for organizations that can accommodate their needs. This study demonstrates the benefits of woman-to-woman mentorship, training, maternity/parental leaves, and fair promotion practices.

The HR practices of >60% of organizations in this study were in legal compliance, but they did not use formal metrics to assess outcomes by gender.
In our study, the most common practices were training, career advancement and mentorship.
The most common work-life balance policies were related to flexible work (telecommuting, flexible hours, compressed work week), and maternity/parental leave.

About Engendering Engineering Success (EES)
EES is a joint research project between the University of Alberta, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Guelph. We aim to identify which organizational practices best predict an inclusive and supportive workplace culture that maximizes organizational commitment and productivity for both men and women.

More Resources & References
8. Legal compliance refers to complying with Canadian legislation that protects workers from discrimination. Read more at: http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/policies-human-rights.cfm