



the leadership challenge

# women in management

HANNAH PITERMAN



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## Acknowledgements

This study was made possible by encouragement and financial assistance from 13 private companies, three government agencies, Monash University, the Women in Mining group within the Minerals Council of Australia and the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA). In particular it owes a great deal to the contribution of members from the Reference Group, made up of distinguished corporate, government and university professionals and to the assistance of managers specialising in diversity and related issues in their organisations. This study would not have been possible without the advice and support in gaining access to executives for interview in their own and other organisations.

The project was considerably more involved and intensive than originally anticipated. Accordingly it took longer than planned to complete. I am grateful for the patience of its sponsors.

I would like to thank a number of people who have provided support and encouragement. Special thanks are due to Rosie Beaumont, for her assistance in the literature search, drafting, and provision of comment. Special thanks also go to Melbourne Business School's Professor Amanda Sinclair and Diversity Manager Coles Group, Dr Katie Spearritt, for their edits, valuable insights, and suggestions on the penultimate draft. Thank you to Geoff Allen and Fergus Ryan who were able to make the idea of this study a reality and to Geoff who provided ongoing feedback and encouragement as drafting proceeded.

It has been a great pleasure to work with all those involved and I thank them for their support.

**Hannah Piterman**

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## Reference group and organisation advisors

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- Coles Group – Pamela Catty, Kerrina Watson, Dr Katie Spearritt
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- Minerals Council of Australia – Melanie Stutsel
- Monash University – Professor Stephanie Fahey, Karen Haywood, Kay Gardner, Barbara Dalton
- Newmont Mining Corporation and Convenor, Women in Mining Group – Christine Charles
- Office for Women (Commonwealth) – Kerry Flanagan, Julia Burns, Sue Williamson, Lee Emerson
- St George Bank – Gail Kelly, Jeremy Griffith
- Westpac – Ann Sherry, Ilana Atlas
- The Allen Consulting Group – Geoff Allen

*Note: Some members of the reference group have since left these organisations*

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## Report terminology

To ensure confidentiality, generic position descriptions are used to identify participants. The term 'senior manager' denotes executive and senior positions (CEO, managing director, general manager, partner, divisional/sectional head, senior manager). More junior participants are referred to as 'managers'. Participants' gender is also identified. The term corporate is used generically to include organisations in the private, public and tertiary sectors.

# foreword

The new Australian Federal Parliament has a record number of women in key leadership positions. On the world stage there are also unprecedented numbers of women leading nations and there is a strong possibility that the United States will elect its first women president.

These events provide indisputable evidence not just of women's talent and capability to lead, but that their contribution is now widely recognised and welcomed in political arenas and societies. While such changes are cause for celebration, they bring for me also a sense of loss. This loss derives from the evidence that the corporate world continues to miss out on much of women's potential leadership contribution. Women remain a tiny proportion of senior managers and leaders in Australian organisations and statistics reveal a plateauing in their numbers over the last decade.

This report, *The Leadership Challenge: Women in Management*, provides new depth and insight to understanding the continued absence of women from leadership roles in Australian business. In *Trials at the Top*, research undertaken by a group of corporate leaders and academics in the early 1990s, we found that to understand women's absence from corporate leadership, there needed to be a focus on the existing leadership culture. Yet undertaking such research is often difficult. Senior managers of both genders are often guarded about sharing obstacles on their paths to leadership and talking to women provides only a partial picture of the dynamics at work.

Dr Piterman's report answers these gaps in our understanding. It provides rich new information about what it's like for men and women leading and aspiring to lead Australian organisations. Her interviewees speak with honesty, feeling and insight about their work and its impact on their lives. Their experiences reveal that while organisational cultures contain strong expectations on leaders to work hard, their norms often mask deeply conformist behaviours in which anyone who looks or acts differently comes under intense scrutiny. Says one executive 'people fight the fight

but don't challenge the culture'. The report also documents in absorbing, intricate detail how pressures on men and women to conform, play out in gender stereotypes and sexual tensions. The results are bad for many women, who find fewer, narrower, more hazardous and personally-costly paths to the top. And they also have much wider effects, undermining the very potential and quality of business leadership itself.

Yet the research also shows how much of a difference innovative and committed leadership can make. The report provides practical advice on how leaders can create environments where women with talent flourish in leadership.

As an MBA teacher, I come across some truly amazingly talented and dedicated women and men. Watching these students graduate, my fervent hope is that society and business will find ways of growing their capabilities and desire to contribute. I believe this report will be a source of inspiration to all those taking up the challenge of creating innovative and inclusive leadership cultures in which women and men can thrive in new ways .

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January 2008

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## executive summary

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### 1.1 Background

The presence and status of women in paid employment has improved dramatically over the last half century. However, the progression of professional women into positions of leadership has been slow. Within Australia, women currently represent 12 percent of ASX200 executive managers. Five women have been appointed to chief executive level in ASX200 companies since 2004. The number of women holding chief executive positions (or equivalent) in the public and tertiary sectors is more promising. Nevertheless, women find it more difficult to rise to positions of leadership in environments that are highly male-dominated, irrespective of the sector of employment.

There is a strong business case for enhancing the contribution of executive women to the achievement of organisational objectives. There is a parallel ethical, public good and humanitarian case for the participation of women at executive level. Rising social expectations for equal opportunity can no longer be ignored. Significant

change will require a committed leadership focus to the economic and broader performance dividend that can be achieved by attracting and retaining quality women managers and optimising the contribution of women in management.

Over the last decade, an increasingly tight and globally competitive labour market has seen the business community make genuine efforts to promote and retain women. A number of Australia's leading organisations have adopted globally recognised strategies to facilitate gender diversity within their workforces. While the focus of this study is gender diversity, many of the issues the study raises relate to dynamics in the wider domain, which result in the exclusion of certain groups from benefits afforded to the dominant culture.

This study was undertaken by Dr Hannah Piterman and initiated through a number of conversations with Geoff Allen, Fergus Ryan and a number of senior executive men and women who agreed to support the study financially and who formed the steering committee.

The objective of the study is to explore unconscious and subtle inhibitors to the positive experience and full utilisation of women in executive and management posi-

tions. The analysis considers the powerful organisational elements that shape the experiences of women in corporate Australia. The findings will contribute to a wider appreciation of implicit barriers to women's career development and retention, and help organisations engage with the diversity agenda in Australia.

## 1.2 The study

Management literature refers to unspoken rules and arrangements that govern workplace structure and gender dynamics. These elements of organisational culture are subjective yet powerful. They have the potential to limit women's promotional opportunities and undermine their experience at the workplace. A number of studies internationally and in Australia have identified correlations between a multitude of structural and cultural forces and the under-representation of women at the senior level. Significant Australian research on the culture of leadership and authority in corporate environments has revealed the role of gender, sexuality, and power in shaping the experience for women.

The study pursues this line of investigation to further address the gap in our understanding of the impact of organisational settings on women's work experiences. The analysis is based on 115 in-depth interviews with women and men in middle and senior management. These have been sought from a broad range of industry sectors and disciplines including private, public and tertiary sectors. A number of suggestions are made to more effectively support interventions to enhance diversity in leadership across all sectors.

## 1.3 Findings

The findings show that impediments to female advancement can be attributed to a number of interacting factors. These include short-term business drivers; cultures that undermine the female presence through narrow notions of 'cultural fit' and masculine leadership constructs that exclude women; complex dynamics around managing strategic relationships; and work/life balance issues.

### 1.3.1 Business drivers

The current market focus on short-term financial returns creates incentives that mitigate against longer-term and more sustainable corporate performance. Powerful short-term business drivers influence business operations, corporate culture, and the type of leadership attributes that are sought and rewarded – all which pre-

vent the optimisation of female contributions to business outcomes. The study finds that unspoken rules and arrangements of mainstream corporate Australia set particularly narrow parameters for leadership. The prevailing profile of the good business leader reflects the stereotypical traits of masculinity.

- Preoccupation with immediate financial performance encourages a left brain bias that favours hard skills, such as rationality, expediency, and numeracy (typically associated with masculinity) over less tangible, soft skills such as relationship-building. These cultures tend to have a greater tolerance for bullish 'command and control' communication.
- A culture of competition generates a winner psyche. Individuals strive to align with success and fear marginality. Critique is avoided and difference is often not accommodated. In an attempt to fit in, individual needs, particularly the needs of women, can be suppressed.
- Team-play in competitive, results-focused environments requires skills in forming strategic relationships and navigating organisational politics that often require separation of the personal from the professional. Men and women who are not adept at 'playing the game' are less successful.
- A 24/7 work ethic includes a low tolerance for the intersection of the commercial and domestic worlds, particularly at the senior level. A 'round the clock' culture struggles to accommodate parenthood, which impacts on women who have prime carer responsibility.

When business is viewed through a narrow masculine prism, the skills and traits attributed to the feminine do not align with business essentials. Moreover, gender stereotyping excludes women from leadership roles.

- The alignment of numeric competency with intellect, combined with a gender stereotypical assumption that women are numerically less competent, encourages a view of women as innately lacking business acumen.
- The communication and decision-making styles attributed to women, such as being inclusive and collegial, are seen as incompatible with desired leadership traits of decisiveness and expediency.
- Women's reluctance (and/or inability) to enter into a game of strategic survival and aggressive personal politics is perceived as a weakness and lack of ambition.
- Working mothers are excluded from key roles, projects and opportunities due to a work structure and a culture that does not accommodate their needs.

### 1.3.2 Life in a straight jacket

The study finds that most women face numerous cultural dilemmas when they aspire to success. The business environment is dominated by a limiting female archetype that places women in a cultural 'straight jacket'. Few women are able to seamlessly navigate organisational life. Women are subjected to intense scrutiny that tran-

scends performance. They are judged on appearance and communication style. Highly-talented women can be sidelined and excluded from leadership positions based on a perception of poor cultural fit.

A number of women in the study have attempted to adjust to the dynamics of a narrow cultural environment. They accept the challenge of life in a straight jacket and internalise the responsibility for their poor cultural fit. Women become sensitive to their marginality at a senior level and to the lack of cultural accommodation. Their visibility renders them highly vulnerable. They display the anxieties of the minority in infiltrating and surviving at the top. Some women resort to the contrived stance of an 'honourary bloke'. They adopt hard and aggressive demeanours, talk sport and suppress authentic female characteristics. A number of women display guilt and secrecy around their responsibilities as mothers and carers. They fear association with women's programs and affirmative action initiatives, as these highlight their 'otherness' and denote their need for special treatment. In a culture of winners, women seek to adapt to the norms of the winning group.

A high level of personal adaptation and compromise not only interferes with women's performance potential, but rarely proves a successful strategy. Some of the men interviewed perceived the acquirement of 'blokey' attributes by women as fraudulent and unnatural behaviour. While women face tacit cultural barriers to demonstrating their authentic value, their attempts to accommodate the masculine model of authority encourage suspicion, derision, and cultural isolation.

For some women, the relentless level of scrutiny results in burnout and leads them to exit organisations, resulting in the loss of a valuable talent pool.

### 1.3.3 Managing relationships

Managing relationships is intrinsic to organisational life. Good relationships are fundamental to career sustainability and advancement. As it is often men who hold positions of power, women who wish to succeed must establish good relationships with men. They must become conversant with the unspoken rules and codes of behaviour that shape this strategic relationship dynamic.

Mateship is the glue that binds. Mateship has long been embedded in the Australian psyche. It connotes powerful frontier imagery that upholds masculine fantasies of power and sexuality. Historically, the loyalty of mateship extended only so far as those fitting the standard of Australian manhood. It represented an exclusive and divisive ideology that has its genesis in a notion of racial homogeneity that saw 'real Aussies' as Anglo-Celts. Mateship did not extend to women. It firmly affirmed the dichotomy of the sexes and enshrined traditional sexual stereotypes of man as the warrior and creator, and woman as subservient (Hirst, 1999; Lake, 1992).

Women do not generally fit into a culture of mateship. They are often absent from networking opportunities such as drinks at the pub or games of golf. They do not run with 'the pack'. They do not possess men's innate ability to form strategic alliances within hierarchical environments. Men's early socialisation provides them with the capacity to negotiate hierarchy. The experience of safety and camaraderie in the group provides a powerful antidote to the loss of autonomy that hierarchy demands. 'Mateship' provides the equaliser in competitive and hierarchical cultures.

Women's failure to gain the full strategic benefit from work relationships results in their exclusion from the opportunities that these relationships afford. While they recognise the strategic potential of informal networks and alliances, they are often not privy to the workings of informal career pathways. The 'tap on the shoulder' that can open doors is elusive to most women.

Women's entry into leadership career paths is more difficult in male domains where 'like attracts like' and 'like begets like'. These subtle and often unconscious dynamics influence how talent is recognised and rewarded. They can thwart interventions designed to support recruitment and promotion of women, making it difficult for women to be recognised and rewarded. Meritocracy and transparency remain statements of policy; idealised notions that are difficult to operationalise in the face of corridor politics and informal communication systems.

For women, developing strategic relationships with senior figures is essential to gaining entrée into informal networks and executive environments. A relationship with a key senior player can provide a woman with a level of visibility and recognition that she would struggle to attain on her own. While successful women are often perceived as obvious role models for ambitious women, a paucity of positive female role models exists. Perceptions of women's experiences at the top can be negative and not all successful women are natural mentors. Given the gender balance of the power elite, a strategic relationship with a key senior male is often necessary if an ambitious woman is to realise success.

Primitive dynamics drive relationships between the sexes. These dynamics are complex and unconscious. The father/child and husband/wife interplays are prevalent, particularly in traditional organisational settings where men hold power. Failure to meet unconscious expectations and fulfil one's archetypal role in the interplay can render both men and women targets of aggression. Women, however, are particularly vulnerable given power inequality in most organisations. Being attuned to these dynamics can assist women understand hostile behaviour, and can take some of the pressure off women who often blame themselves when relationships are not working.

Dependence on male advocacy renders women vulnerable. In order to retain the favour of a 'champion', a woman treads a fine line to ensure she is not perceived

as a threat. It is incumbent upon her to demonstrate the good judgement of a male advocate through the highest level of achievement. A woman who steps outside her designated role or does not prove her worth may attract aggression or rejection from the senior male advocate.

Some women have referred to deeper dynamics in the way competition expresses itself among women at all levels of the organisation. While women increasingly embrace ambition, competition and success as part of the competitive world of office politics, many have difficulty managing overt competitive dynamics, particularly when it involves other women.

### 1.3.4 Work/life balance

Increasing numbers of Australians are struggling to accommodate the demands of work and family life. Research reveals links between poor flexibility and the loss of female talent from management. Australian research has found that while highly skilled women in full-time employment are more likely to have access to flexible work opportunities, resistance to flexibility increases at the senior end of the organisational hierarchy. Women in management are less inclined to take up flexibility options than women at general staff level.

The study finds that Australian business is undertaking initiatives that recognise the flexibility needs of professional women. Indeed, large private employers are gaining recognition for their design and delivery of flexible work initiatives. Nevertheless, the incorporation of diversity into business continues to be a major challenge. The full-time worker model underpins the structure of workforce contribution. Choosing flexibility suggests a lesser engagement with the workforce. Flexibility options are not meeting the needs of senior female talent.

Ultimately, it is women who are responsible for managing the work/life balance. Research indicates that women typically bear a disproportionate amount of responsibility for home and family. Where a 24/7 imperative drives an organisation's work ethic, there is little cultural tolerance for the intersection of the commercial and domestic worlds. Time spent in the office continues to be seen as a powerful indicator of work commitment that impacts on family life, health, and productivity of men and women at work.

To the extent that flexibility options are provided, the onus remains on the individual to accommodate the demands of the workplace and manage employer expectations. A piecemeal approach to implementing flexibility strategies places the onus on women to negotiate work/life balance. This renders them particularly vulnerable in cultural settings where diversity policies are fluid, ambiguous and open to interpretation by individual managers.

A number of the most successful women identified in the study do not have children. Others stress the value

of supportive partners, some of whom have made sacrifices in their own careers. Some women engage in a complex juggling act that is not sustainable.

The study finds that stigmatisation of flexibility inhibits the effective uptake of initiatives by women. Women who negotiate a part-time return to work may find that their full-time responsibilities have not diminished. However, they avoid negotiating for a more manageable workload and accept a 'Clayton's' flexibility. Others are sensitive to problems associated with working in unconventional ways, such as working from home, and choose to remain in the mainstream. They see a danger in isolating themselves from office life and daily interaction with colleagues and communication processes. Female talent is ultimately lost as working mothers fail to achieve effective flexible work arrangements and abandon demanding corporate careers.

Flexibility needs to move from the margins of organisational life. It needs to be treated as a strategic intervention designed to enhance organisational capacity and maximise talent contribution. If policy is to move from rhetoric to practice, the introduction of flexible work practices must gain support and co-operation from across the workforce. This requires leadership to challenge cultural attitudes and traditional principles of good business, and to herald in new ways of thinking about the role of men and women in society, sustainable workforce planning, social capital and responsibility to community. There are limits to the adoption of flexibility opportunities when business remains locked in a mindset that privileges work over private life.

### 1.3.5 Navigating a leadership presence

The study finds a level of scepticism among women regarding the effectiveness of diversity strategies to support them through to leadership positions. This is particularly so in predominantly male, monocultural environments where the notion of talent and assessment of merit are influenced by stereotypical beliefs about leadership incumbency, leadership behaviour, and gender relations.

While there are extraordinary women who successfully navigate all domains of corporate culture, they are the exceptions. The study finds that a number of women in mainstream corporate Australia gain seniority through compliance and patronage. A deep level of cultural resistance to female authority excludes an authentic female presence. While the ability to adapt is a skill many successful leaders share, women need greater space to exercise authenticity if they are to be truly effective leaders. Women need more than just a seat at the executive table. They need to command respect and loyalty from their colleagues in order to achieve significant and sustainable outcomes for business. To this end, a greater acknowledgement of the different 'look' of female authority is needed.

A majority of ambitious women struggle to gain recognition and reward in the prevailing business environment. They become trapped between an impenetrable male paradigm and an unpalatable female stereotype. Their position as cultural outsiders from senior management inhibits their authentic participation in daily working life. Organisational recognition and reward for their contributions remains elusive.

Corporations attempting to address the gender imbalance have traditionally perceived that female attributes and behaviours are responsible for the problems that women face. Organisational strategies have commonly adopted a person-centred approach, encouraging women to adapt and reform their behaviours to achieve a better cultural fit within a male-dominated environment. This approach gives women stilts to play on an uneven playing field, but doesn't flatten out the field itself. The 'person-centred' or 'deficit equity' model continues to characterise Australian and international business strategies to facilitate a greater retention of female talent.

The current approach of 'tilting the playing field' to seek equal outcomes has, at best, produced change at the margins. Removing the cultural straight jacket that restricts the participation of women in corporate life requires strategies that address organisational rules and cultural dynamics.

The study supports research that demonstrates a 'tipping point' effect in the form of 'female friendly' cultural change that occurs once women represent significant and powerful minorities at senior levels of management. Researchers have tracked the impact of a critical mass of senior women on organisational culture. Findings consistently indicate that constructs of good leadership and therefore suitability for promotion, are influenced in favour of female candidates when they represent a significant minority of senior appointments. Most importantly, a critical mass enables women to take up authority that is authentic and unencumbered. Women are free to be themselves, rather than conform to a survival script. These organisations embrace a diversity of leadership styles, which reflects the heterogeneity of their incumbents and the situational requirements of their business.

The forces that define and undermine female authority are subtle and complex. They go to the heart of some of the most unpalatable dynamics between men and women. Conversations about the place and treatment of women in the corporate world are not easily conducted in the workplace. The real conversation about women in business is not yet occurring in the open.

## 1.4 The diversity challenge

### 1.4.1 Creating awareness

An honest conversation between men and women needs to begin in order to raise awareness of the subtle inhibitors to women's experience in the workplace. Leaders must create and leverage awareness around the principles and values of diversity in business. A review of the corporate leadership paradigm is required to shift models of authority away from a narrow, technical, short-term orientation that rewards some men and isolates most women. Leadership expectations need to be made explicit throughout management ranks, drilled down through organisations, and underpinned by specific performance indicators and incentives that change behaviours.

The honest conversation needs to create a climate where deeply embedded values and practices can be brought to the fore and examined. Areas for examination include the items listed below.

- **Culture** – What are the forces that lead to a male-dominated culture in this organisation? What does the term 'male-dominated culture' really mean? What does cultural fit connote in this organisation? Does the concept of cultural fit perpetuate homogeneity and with it exclusion of women?
- **Leadership** – The perception of excellence in business leadership needs to be re-examined. This requires challenging the norms that determine leadership eligibility. Are there drivers that perpetuate a leadership incumbency that excludes females? What is the basis for these drivers?
- **Gender relations** – Do stereotypical mindsets around gender relations lead to gender inequality in this workplace? Do work structures disadvantage women? Is there an alignment of managerial attributes with gender stereotypes, such that male attributes of competitive spirit and technical competence are given ascendancy over female attributes of care, consultation and team-play?
- **Work/life balance** – What are the implications of a trend towards increased work hours on work/life balance and on the uptake of flexibility opportunities?

### 1.4.2 Taking action

As part of a concerted effort by senior leadership to raise awareness of inhibitors to women's work experience and to enhance women's promotional opportunity, senior management needs to commit to on the ground initiatives that see diversity incorporated in core business activity. Such initiatives include:

- collect data to assess the contribution of flexible workplace options to the bottom line, and to measure the opportunity cost of under-utilisation and of failure to attract and retain women, and establish risk mitigation strategies;
- pursue diversity initiatives as a core element in business strategy. Incorporate diversity as a key performance indicator through the business, such that managers are accountable for linking diversity with business outcomes;
- facilitate flexible working arrangements that set realistic deliverables. In particular, take action to address deeply seated assumptions that align diversity initiatives with negative business outcomes, as exemplified by part-time work being associated with less commitment;
- seek interventions to enhance the attractiveness of traditional male industries to executives (men and women) with families through the provision of flexible and family friendly working conditions;
- provide women with opportunities to take up mainstream leadership in operational roles and support and mentor them in those roles in the same way as men get mentored. In particular, manage the early stages of this initiative when women are visible and potentially vulnerable to undue scrutiny such that a mistake is construed as a failure rather than a learning opportunity;
- identify development opportunities and facilitate use of mentors for women through successive stages of their career;
- enforce appropriate management behaviours and standards that address professional inclusion, meeting dynamics, and communications and language protocols. These should be role-modelled at the most senior levels and every opportunity should be made to communicate standards and behaviours through the organisation;
- seek the achievement of a 'critical mass' of women in management positions to avoid isolation, maintain confidence, encourage emerging women leaders, and limit minority/majority dynamics; and
- recognise that cultural change initiatives may be resisted by both men and women. Manage the resistance through ongoing communication and awareness raising while moving ahead.

# 2.0

## methodology

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### 2.1 Background

The study involves a year-long partnership between the researchers and 17 large Australian employers. The participant organisations represent a broad range of industry sectors and disciplines, with the majority white collar professional services, including the government and university sectors. The mining and construction industries are also represented. The organisations participating in the study have high proportions of women at middle management levels. The issue of progressing women's career paths remains both a challenge and a priority for them.

Most participant organisations regularly measure and report the numbers of women at senior and executive levels in an ongoing evaluation of their strategies to promote female talent. This activity provides a statistical profile of the status of women in leadership. It establishes a snapshot of the general patterns of participation that form the big picture of Australian women in management (EOWA, 2006a).

The study aims to augment the diversity work of these organisations to explore the complex dynamics of professional environments in which women are seeking to develop successful careers.

The analysis expands on Australian research (Chesterman, et. al., 2005; Beck & Davis, 2005; Palermo, 2004; Sinclair, 2004b, 2000, 1994) to enhance understanding of the nature of powerful organisational dynamics that shape the experiences of women in corporate Australia and their engagement with diversity initiatives. The findings will assist organisations to address more implicit barriers impacting career development and retention, performance, costs of turnover and quality of working life.

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### 2.2 Underlying premise for research

The proportion of women in higher status positions is a key indicator of equity (Appold et. al., 1998). While the number of women in middle management is increasing,

data points to an under-representation of women at senior levels (EOWA, 2006a). Legislative requirements and policies that commit an organisation to diversity have not facilitated women's advancement in leadership.

The literature concerning women in management suggests that gender discrimination is so deeply embedded in organisational life, as to be virtually indiscernible. It points to unspoken 'rules and arrangements' and 'a plethora of work practices and cultural norms' that govern workplace structure and gender dynamics (Liff & Ward, 2001; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). These elements of organisational culture are subjective yet powerful. They have the potential to limit women's promotional opportunities and undermine their experience at the workplace.

A number of studies have identified correlations between a multitude of structural and cultural rules and the under-representation of women at senior levels (Beck & Davis, 2005; Hewlett & Luce 2005; Palermo, 2004; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Spearritt, 1999). Significant research around the rules of leadership and authority in corporate environments has revealed the role of gender, sexuality and power in shaping and limiting opportunities for women (Chesterman et. al., 2005; Sinclair, 2004a, 2004b, 2000, 1994; Kram & McCollom, 1998).

A range of qualitative methodologies have facilitated these investigations and consistently demonstrated the unique capacity of interactive methodologies to capture the richness of human interaction (Spearritt, 1999; Oakley, 1981).

## 2.3 Method

### 2.3.1 In-depth interviews

The study examines the experiences of men and women in Australian organisations to explore deeper dynamics that impact on opportunities and barriers for women in management. Organisational policies and other initiatives that support diversity agendas are presented.

The study has adopted an in-depth interview technique that allows open-ended conversation between researcher and participant. This approach captures the more subtle experiences women face in their day-to-day working environments, affecting their attitude to work and the career choices they make. Moreover, it allows participants to set the parameters of conversation rather than be constrained by a predetermined research agenda. This enhances exploration of organisational values, roles and relationships within the context of personal career development.

### 2.3.2 Research questions

The research questions are based on a number of hypotheses that were explored in the preliminary interviews with members of the steering committee. The key research questions are listed below.

- What can be learned from studying the experience of women and men in the workplace to generate an understanding of cultural and structural factors that enhance and impede the place of women in organisational life?
- What does leadership look like in contemporary corporate Australia?
- How do dominant leadership constructs impact on recruitment and retention of women in the workplace?
- How is excellence recognised and success realised in various organisational settings?
- What impact does critical mass have on women's career advancement opportunities?

(See Appendix A for a full list of interview questions)

## 2.4 Findings

The findings are placed within the context of company initiatives and external business policy environments. This enables a depth and breadth analysis of the data that conveys the multi-layered dynamics pervading organisational life that inform women's attitudes to working life. The recommendations are aimed at enhancing the attraction of women to Australian business and the promotion of their career and professional advancement.

## 2.5 Participants

Participant organisations helped recruit women and men across middle and senior levels of management into the study.

One hundred and fifteen interviews of between one to two hours were conducted. The following table provides a break down of the interviews.

TABLE 1: INTERVIEWS			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Senior (CEO and Executive)	31	24	55
Middle	9	51	60
TOTAL	40	75	115



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## 2.6 Steering committee

A reference group was formed to support the study. Members included a number of senior women, chairs and CEOs of major companies, as well as female heads of major government departments that supported the project. Geoff Allen, founder and director of The Allen Consulting Group, provided overall guidance to the project, assisted by Fergus Ryan, CBA board member and company director, and former head of Arthur Andersen in Australia.

The task of the steering committee was to:

- comment and advise on research design;
- review and comment on drafts as appropriate;
- advise and support post research dissemination of findings and discussion; and
- participate as desired in the proposed workshop.

# 3.0

## context

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### 3.1 A changing social environment

#### 3.1.1 The social and economic participation of women

The norms governing Western women's social and economic participation have changed considerably over the past 50 years. In Australia, the period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s saw equal opportunity for women comprehensively enshrined in law. Equal pay provisions were phased into federal and state awards, employment restrictions were lifted on married women, and paid maternity leave was introduced for public sector employees. This period of legislative reform culminated in the passing of the Federal Sex Discrimination Act in 1984 and the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act in 1986.

At one level, women are reaping the rewards of equal opportunity enactment. Over the past 25 years, Australia's

female workforce participation rate has steadily increased and recently overtaken that of men (ABS 2006a). Workforce projections for the United States point to a 'veritable tsunami' of women entering all sectors of the professional workforce as the twenty-first century progresses (Reciniello 1999; 304). The proportion of women accessing tertiary education has also grown steadily (ABS, 2006a), providing greater numbers of women with leverage into Australia's professional workforce. In 2004, just over one-third of Australia's working women were employed at a professional or associate professional level and their participation in skilled employment continues to increase (ABS 2006a). The legislative enactment of equal opportunity has also contributed to a rhetorical framework for the full social and economic participation of women in Australia. The term 'equal opportunity employer' has gained widespread usage and is now considered an important business citation.

However, Australian researchers have raised concerns about the narrow interpretation and enactment of affirmative action by employers. The principle of equal opportunity has remained a marginal concern and a non-core issue for business. Employers have achieved a superficial

compliance with the principle of equal opportunity (Spearritt, 1999). The gap between the rhetoric of equal opportunity employment and organisational reality remains not only an academic concern but a source of ongoing social and economic disadvantage for women. In 1950, the basic female wage was estimated to be 75 percent of the basic male wage. Over half a century later, women have gained less than 10 percent on that baseline figure. Current estimates place the average female wage at 84 percent of the basic male wage (EOWA, 2007).

### 3.1.2 The intersection between work and family life

Women's lifestyle patterns have also changed considerably since the mid twentieth century. Greater numbers of adult women are remaining single and childless. Women are having fewer children at a later age. The peak years for childbearing increasingly coincide with the peak years for women's career development. A growing number of Australia's professional women are taking temporary leave from their careers to begin families (ABS 2006c).

These trends have led to major changes in gender roles, family structures and work patterns. The distinct divisions of labour established between men and women in pre-war society when men were the principal bread winners have become muddled in contemporary Western democracies. Women's interactions with work and family life are increasingly complex and demanding (Charlesworth et. al., 2002). Australia's working mothers are now the most time-poor of all demographic groups (Bittman & Rice 2002). Women are experiencing significant interruptions in their working lives to respond to domestic and care responsibilities. Their re-entry into working life can present an enormous challenge. It is often gradual, incremental and not without great personal sacrifice (Probert, 2006; Charlesworth et. al., 2002). A small number of men are also breaking from traditional full-time career responsibilities to participate in other avenues of their lives. However, male work and family participation patterns remain far more stable and simple than those for women (ABS 2006a).

## 3.2 The political environment

### 3.2.1 The emergence of family friendly policies

In many Western democracies, the emergence of family friendly policies signals government and employer attempts to respond to the changing social and economic landscape. There is a notable trend in European countries to 'extensively modernise' the standard employment contract through policy and legislative directives that acknowledge the right of employees to balance work and family commitments. (Charlesworth et. al. 2002). A Scandinavian model for work/life balance recognises that work and family participation patterns alter as individuals move through different life cycles. It encourages government policies to accommodate this dynamic (Probert, 1999). In the United Kingdom (UK), where a trend towards increased working hours has been apparent, the government has now legislated for the provision of maternity and parental leave and an employer requirement to consider requests for flexible work hours from parents with young children (DTI, 2007).

### 3.2.2 Policies in Australia

The political and socio-economic response to work/life balance in Australia has not mirrored the European approach. Australian work/life patterns have followed economies such as the UK and the United States (US), where average working hours have increased. Indeed, Australia has more people working more hours than all other OECD member countries except for the US (Dawson, McCulloch & Baker, 2001). Australia and the US have also seen a growing number of casual workers and reduction in the proportion of employees who can access basic work entitlements such as paid leave (Charlesworth et. al., 2002).

The development of family friendly policies in Australia has been notably slow. Government policies have been criticised for failing to respond to the real needs and expectations of Australian workers and families and encouraging a 'family hostile' work culture (Charlesworth et. al., 2002). A recent study of work/life patterns found more than two-thirds of surveyed Australians disapproved of the trend towards longer working hours. Many respondents believed unsociable work patterns interfered with their family and personal lives. The study identifies 'a broadly held public preference for the government to take action' through the implementation of public policy (Relationships Forum Australia, 2007: 14).

A number of Australian and international researchers have been critical of the current policy environment for favouring stay-at-home mothers at the expense of their

working counterparts (Charlesworth et. al., 2002; Williams, 2000; Probert, 1999; Campbell, 1993). Family-related policies reflect an outdated ideal of the full-time, unencumbered worker and fail to respond to the changing needs of women and working families (HREOC 2007; OECD, 2001, 2002). Australia remains one of only two OECD countries without a national paid maternity leave scheme. In 2006, 34 percent of employed mothers-to-be took paid maternity leave. The majority of these women were employed in the public sector (ABS 2006c).

Australia's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has echoed the concerns of research, describing the 'external support for families juggling paid work and care [as] patchy at best and counter-productive at worst'. (HREOC, 2007: xi). The commission called for both government and employers to adopt a more holistic, co-ordinated approach to the delivery of comprehensive, family friendly policies. Recognition of the intersection between work and family life should underpin a strategy that combines legislative, policy and infrastructure remedies to address the systemic discrimination against workers with families.

### 3.2.3 Employer response in Australia

There is a growing recognition among employers of the need to adopt family friendly work practices as part of a more sustainable approach to workforce management. Increasingly, employers are prioritising the need to attract and retain female talent through the provision of family friendly initiatives (EOWA, 2006b). However the business community is not in total accord. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry recently argued provision of flexible work opportunities would place unreasonable cost burdens particularly on small employers (ACCI, 2004). Many employers remain reluctant to implement a full range of family friendly initiatives on these grounds (HREOC, 2007).

In contrast, there is a growing trend among large employers in professional sectors to create family friendly environments. The provision of paid and unpaid leave arrangements and other flexible work opportunities has increased significantly in sectors such as banking and finance (EOWA, 2005). The business community has lobbied the Federal Government extensively for the provision of tax incentives and other supports to enable a greater number of employers to offer family friendly work environments (HREOC, 2007).

While progress is being made, there is still a long way to go. As public expectations for work/life balance increase, the business community is showing leadership in the delivery of family friendly policies and looking to government for vital support.

## 3.3 A changing business environment

### 3.3.1 Diversity: the new imperative

Australia's business community is at the forefront of major change. The demands of a globalised and increasingly competitive marketplace are rapidly reshaping commercial imperatives. While business leaders remain optimistically focused on continuing an unprecedented period of prosperity and growth in the Australian economy, they recognise that the shortage of skilled labour is a key restraining factor (Australian Business Ltd., 2006a, 2006b; EOWA, 2006b).

The tight professional labour market has created a 'war for talent' (Harvie, 2003) among leading organisations. Women represent a significant but underutilised pool of talent that needs to be tapped by business to combat the skills shortage and ensure long-term commercial viability. In 1995, Deloitte & Touche in the US identified the recruitment and retention of women as its 'number one human resource effort' (Rosener, 1995). Its Australian operation has since followed suite, recognising the initiative to retain and grow female talent as 'absolutely crucial to our success' (Giam Sweigers, 2006).

The recruitment and retention of talented staff is emerging as a key goal for leadership. Strategies to broaden the talent pool require effective engagement with the diversity agenda as a core business imperative.

### 3.3.2 The cultural accommodation of women in business

The growing recognition and response to the diversity challenge across corporate Australia is heartening for women in management. However, research continues to point to fundamental incompatibilities between traditional business imperatives and the accommodation of diversity which requires longer-term strategic initiatives. While the business climate recognises the value of a heterogeneous workforce, pressure to respond to short-term key performance indicators (KPIs) to meet shareholder value is a major driver of business activity.

**The focus of the executive culture is on 'the business' and the business is defined by budgets, resources, shareholders and assets, the objectified workforce and strategic 'big pictures'. (Sinclair, 1994: 21)**

The traditional imperatives of the market economy do not easily accommodate the diversity agenda. Research has found that within the traditional business environment, and most notably in organisations with a minority of women at senior level, the preferred management

style is informed by 'masculine stereotypes such as dominance, aggression, rationality and independence' (Palermo, 2004: 22). This style bias mitigates the value of talents widely associated with the feminine such as interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence. Within this cultural setting, women are seen to provide support to men but fail to thrive as leaders in their own right (Chesterman, et. al., 2004; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Burton, 1997; Collinson & Hearn, 1996).

While structural elements such as a lack of family friendly policies undoubtedly inhibit career development for many women, there is strong evidence that mainstream corporate culture still struggles to accommodate the presence of women and the exercise of authentic female authority.

## 3.4 Women in business

### 3.4.1 A poor cultural fit

A growing body of research indicates professional women across modern Western democracies have shared experiences of corporate life.

In 2004, three of America's leading business organisations, Ernst & Young, Goldman Sachs and Lehman Brothers, sponsored a national survey of more than 2000 tertiary qualified women to investigate their movements in and out of the professional workforce. An analysis of the results by Hewlett and Luce (2005) reveals a frustrated group of professional women who were 'reluctantly pushed' and 'pulled' from their careers by a range of social, organisational and economic forces. Their exit from the workforce was characterised as 'taking an off-ramp from their chosen career path'.

**For many women in our study, the decision to off-ramp is a tough one. These women have invested heavily in their education and training. They have spent years accumulating the skills and credentials necessary for successful careers. Most are not eager to toss that painstaking effort aside. (Hewlett & Luce, 2005: 46)**

This research highlights the impact of workplace culture on many women's decision to temporarily or permanently abandon their careers. Indeed, women participating in this survey nominated lack of opportunity, under-stimulation and cultural isolation as greater influences on their decisions to leave work than the 'pull' of caring responsibilities. The 'push' impact of organisational culture was highlighted by the finding that only 5 percent of women re-entering the workforce wanted to return to their old company. This reduced to 0 percent for women who had been employed in the business sector.

Australian research provides a wealth of material on the 'chilly' cultural response that many women face as they rise through management ranks. Male-dominated business organisations have been found to operate unstated promotion criterion that favours Anglo-Australian men. A 1997 Morgan and Banks survey of employers found a worrying 'male bias in key industry sectors' against the employment of women. More than a third of respondents admitted 'they prefer employing men' (Burton, 1997: 13). 'Men recruit 90/10 in favour of men – while women tend to show no gender bias in their recruitment decisions and typically recruit 50/50' (McFarlane, 2004). Amanda Sinclair, focussing on the constructs of leadership in Australian business, has long argued that gender, sexuality, and power have shaped and limited leadership to 'a white male idea'. (Sinclair, 2004a: 17). Along with a growing body of researchers, Sinclair identifies a masculine 'norm' that dominates across organisational settings, supported by stereotypes of both the masculine and the feminine that inhibit the cultural response and recognition of female authority (Chesterman, et. al., 2005; Sinclair, 2004a, 2000, 1994; Spearritt, 1999; Still, 1996; Burton & Ryall, 1995; Karpin, 1995; Rosener, 1995). Women have few options than to be incorporated into these Anglo-Australian norms.

### 3.4.2 Women in leadership

Women's increased participation in the workforce generally and at the professional level specifically, is not translating into increased numbers of women at senior and executive levels. Statistics show the movement of women through business hierarchy into top level positions has been slow. Indeed, the profile of Australian women in business leadership supports research assertions that despite nearly 40 years of investigation, the dearth of women in management remains a 'perennially critical' and 'tricky' issue to deal with (Fox & Broussine, 2001).

- Twelve percent of ASX200 executive managers are female.
- Three women have been appointed to executive level since 2004.
- In 2007, 13.5 percent of companies have two or more women on their boards, up from 10 percent in 2004.
- There has been a drop in the number of companies with at least one female board member since 2004.
- Over the past three years, there has been no increase in the number of companies with a female CEO to 3 percent.
- No Australians featured in the 2006 Forbes 100 Most Powerful Women list.

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## 3.5 The challenges for leadership

The attraction and retention of talent is a key workforce planning issue that demands a strategic orientation from business leadership. Engagement with the diversity agenda is a strategic issue. While contemporary economic forces are pushing for a longer-term focus from business leaders, the current preoccupation with the short-term remains the major driver in a large number of corporate environments. Narrow demands of day-to-day business need to be reconciled with a broader consideration of relevance, resilience and sustainability over the long-term. This presents leadership with a challenging balancing act. Notions such as sustainability and diversity require awareness beyond daily operational issues. Corporate environments need to recognise and reward characteristics that transcend the focus on the short-term, individualism and competition as key leadership attributes. It is the role of leadership to refocus the organisational to accommodate both short and long-term agendas.

- How are talented women faring in business efforts to recruit and retention excellent staff?
- What does success and leadership look like in corporate Australia?
- How is female authority perceived across the range of organisational environments?
- What circumstances are favourable to females exercising authentic leadership and authority?

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## 3.6 Conclusion

The contextual framework for any investigation of women in management is complex. A range of social, political and organisational elements influence the way women engage with the workforce and manage their professional working lives. Recognition of key impediments to female advancement is growing. The business community is acknowledging workforce planning as a major strategic issue that involves engagement with the diversity agenda. The business community is endeavouring to address:

- the poor provision of family friendly work practices by employers and government; and
- the pervasiveness of negative stereotypes around women in business.

There are still large gaps in our understanding about the influence of organisational culture on women's work experiences. This study pursues the issue of culture and tests the contention that unconscious workplace arrangements and unspoken rules create hidden barriers to female promotion and retard their advancement towards leadership. In subsequent chapters we pose a range of questions around this proposition.

# 4.0

## the business response to women

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### 4.1 The implementation debate

The business community's response to the diversity challenge shows a consensus around barriers facing women in management. Diversity strategies are designed to respond to:

- the need to manage and maintain level playing field dynamics around selection and promotion processes;
- the preponderance of caring responsibilities in women's lives; and
- the need for more flexible arrangements for working mothers and fathers.

While consensus exists around the problems facing women in management, debate about implementation of strategy highlights the complexity of this perennial problem. Business leaders, managers, researchers and policy makers differ as to how to progress the diversity agenda. Two schools of thought have emerged:

- a person-centred or deficit equity approach; and
- an environment-centred approach.

Traditionally, the diversity challenge has been understood in terms of person-centred variables but is increasingly challenged by an environment-centred approach (Tharenou, 1995). At present, most organisational responses to diversity contain elements of both approaches.

#### 4.1.1 A person-centred approach: placing the onus for change on women

Early business endeavours to address the gender imbalance have been underpinned by a person-centred approach. According to this paradigm, problems faced by women are related to female attributes, behaviours and even their historical relationship with working life (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). The onus of change is on women. Interventions to support women in professional work environments aim to assist women adapt their behaviours to culturally fit within a male-dominated environment (Simpson, 2005; Burton, 1997). To succeed, women have to assimilate and adopt behaviours in line with the dominant male culture. Leadership training programs encourage behavioural reform through the acquisi-

tion of 'essential' business skills aligned with masculine traits such as assertive decision-making and self-promotion.

**Women weren't coming up through the ranks so we created this program...[for] understanding what your skills are...what trade-offs are you prepared to make to get where you want to go? We did a lot of skills training about voice training, stress management, things like that to give people some understanding of what they can do to actually change how they are. (Female manager)**

#### 4.1.2 Pipeline theory

Pipeline theory is premised on the relatively late participation of women in tertiary education and professional life. It argues that the under-representation of women at senior levels will reverse once a generation of appropriately qualified women move through organisational hierarchies and become better placed for promotion (Rosener, 1995; Buono & Kamm, 1983; Kanter, 1977). Pipeline theory is underpinned by a person-centred understanding of the gender issue. Accordingly, its effectiveness relies on women's capacity to successfully negotiate their way up the organisational hierarchy. This approach gives little recognition to fundamental elements of organisational culture bias against women, and hence places relatively little emphasis on organisational interventions in fostering a climate change process.

#### 4.1.3 Critics of the person-centred approach

Critics of the person-centred approach believe that the pipeline theory argument is effective only in workplaces that are favourable to the female presence. The pipeline theory presupposes the existence of a level playing field where meritocracy and transparency exist and negotiation within an organisational hierarchy will not in itself prove problematic to women.

Since the mid 1990s, researchers have also argued there is little evidence of a pipeline effect in action. A generation of qualified and ambitious women appear to have stalled at middle management levels in both the private and public sectors (Burton, 1997; Reciniello, 1999). The former director of the Federal Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency, Fiona Krauttil, asserted:

**[I] feel very frustrated...about the time it is taking to see significant numbers of women in CEO and leadership positions with a pipeline of female talent coming up behind... The fact is that the majority of Australian organisations do not have a pipeline of high-performing women who have been identified for promotions and advancement. (Krauttil, 2003: 2)**

Research suggests that women attempting to climb the career ladder have been stymied by informal networks that can exclude them. A comparison of the factors influencing the promotion of men and women to executive positions in the mid 1990s found informal identification of potential candidates for senior positions had a far greater influence on the promotional outcome for women than their background or personal characteristics (Tharenou, 1995). A similar US study found that while becoming a manager required the demonstration of appropriate credentials, becoming an executive relied more on intangible characteristics such as 'belonging to the appropriate networks' (Rosener, 1995: 8).

A reluctance to provide women with line management opportunities, considered an essential prerequisite for promotion, provides a more contemporary example of attitudinal barriers to female advancement. A recent US survey of Fortune 1000 CEOs and women executives found 79 percent of women believed a 'lack of general management or line experience' among senior women was a primary reason for their continued under-representation at leadership level (Wellington, et. al., 2003: 18). The survey identified widely held perceptions among men that women were inappropriate for high-end profit and loss roles. This was identified as a major contributing factor to their continued exclusion from important promotional opportunities.

Women in senior management are increasingly challenging person-centred arguments and associated strategies. They argue that their daily working life presents significant cultural and structural barriers to advancement. Participation at middle management is not translating into senior leadership opportunities. As more women enter the professional workforce the paucity of senior leadership is becoming harder to ignore.

**While women, at 44.8 percent, are present in almost equal numbers to men in the workforce as a whole, at senior levels women become increasingly more isolated until, at board director level, there are 10 men to every woman. At CEO level the picture is even more pronounced with 33 male CEOs to every female CEO within the ASX 200. (EOWA 2006a: 17)**

#### 4.1.4 The perception gap

While empirical data continues to challenge the merits of person-centred strategies to facilitate diversity, organisations are proving slow to respond. Research reveals senior management still favour person-centred strategies, appearing less inclined to associate gender inequity with organisational culture or work practices. Attitudinal surveys consistently report a tendency for men in business to 'seem less convinced of [the] significance' of organisational barriers to women. Rather they perceive 'women's ineffective leadership style and their lack of



skills to reach senior levels' as the source of many female managers' problems (Wellington, et. al. 2003: 19). As American researcher Dawn Carlson argues:

**Executive women still say they encounter barriers to success. Men tend not to see those barriers. (Carlson, et. al. 2006: 28)**

#### 4.1.5 Environment-centred approach

As evidence emerges that person-centred responses to the diversity challenge are limited, strategies that adopt an environment-centred approach gain ground. An environment-centred strategy accepts that the source of gender inequity lies within organisational cultures and work practices rather than with the inherent aspects of women's performance and behaviour (Tharenou, 1995). This approach considers the impact of organisational practices and attitudes on the participation of women. It seeks strategies that fundamentally realign organisational values to accommodate the growing presence of women.

US researchers Debra Meyerson and Joyce Fletcher point to systemic gender inequity, evidenced by poor retention rates among female staff, low female representation at the executive level and the failure of equal opportunities initiatives to reverse these trends in a number of leading business organisations. They encourage organisations to 'hold up a mirror' to themselves and investigate their management systems for embedded practices and attitudes that discriminate against women and thwart strategies to improve diversity.

**Once an organisation determines that it has a problem – female employees won't join the company or women are leaving in alarming numbers – it is time to start searching for causes. Such diagnosis involves senior managers probing an organisation's practices and beliefs to uncover its deeply embedded sources of inequity. (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000: 132)**

This approach involves a deeper level of intervention than many organisations are initially comfortable with, but it does not advocate radical or aggressive regulation of the workforce. Rather, management is encouraged to take small steps and achieve 'small wins' in redressing behaviours and attitudes that inhibit the participation of women at senior level.

**Small wins are not silver bullets; anyone familiar with real organisational change knows there is no such thing... Small wins combine changes in behaviour with changes in understanding. When a small win works – when it makes even a minor difference in systemic practices – it helps to verify a larger theory. It says that something bigger is going on. (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000: 135)**

#### 4.1.6 Finding the tipping point

The notion that human behaviour is influenced by the behaviour of others can be traced back to nineteenth century social thinking (Veblen, 1899). This concept has re-emerged in contemporary business literature in the form of 'tipping point' theory, (Livingston, 2003; Graetz, 2002; Gladwell, 2000). Proponents of the theory argue that only when internal support for change reaches a point of critical mass will there be a sustainable shift in organisational culture. Pipeline effect relies on the natural evolution of critical mass. Critics of pipeline theory argue that systemic barriers within organisations mitigate against a critical mass of women at senior levels.

A number of studies have demonstrated a tipping point effect in the form of female friendly cultural change that occurs once women represent significant minorities at senior levels of management (Chesterman, et. al., 2005; Dahlerup, 1988; Kanter, 1977). Researchers have tracked the impact of a critical mass of senior women on organisational culture. Findings consistently indicate that constructs of good leadership and suitability for promotion are influenced in favour of female candidates when they represent a significant minority of senior appointments.

An Australian study compared attitudes towards women in law firms that had a minority of female partners (5 percent) with the attitudes in more gender-integrated firms with a minimum of 15 percent female partners. The results revealed a marked tendency among women in the male-dominated environment to comply with traditional, masculine constructs of leadership and to under-perform in comparison with their male colleagues (Palermo, 2004). A recent survey of Australian organisations revealed that as the proportion of women in management increased, so too did the uptake of female friendly work practices such as flexible work hours and work from home programs (EOWA, 2003). US researchers recently reported that at board level, a minimum of three women was required before their presence is fully accepted by their male colleagues (Konrad & Kramer, 2006).

These studies demonstrate that once a critical mass of women has been achieved at senior levels, other strategies to facilitate women become more effective. Findings suggest that the realisation of critical mass is an essential prerequisite for the facilitation of women into senior positions. However, research also suggests that numbers alone will not guarantee gender equity unless work/life balance issues are addressed (Chesterman, et. al., 2005).

**There is a different effect when you have a lot of women in the workforce, different things are valued. (Female senior manager)**

## 4.2 The leadership challenge

The workplace will remain largely unchanged until the increased presence of women ushers in more significant cultural change. This requires a will at leadership level to take on the diversity challenge. It requires leadership to confront a traditionally narrow interpretation of diversity. It also requires initiatives to test and bring to the fore hidden and often irrational and unconscious assumptions regarding women's ability to operate in senior business environments (Sinclair, 2004a, 2004b; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000).

The US non-profit research and advisory organisation, Catalyst, has made an explicit commitment to advance the position of women in business ([www.catalyst-women.org](http://www.catalyst-women.org)). Catalyst regularly awards companies who report notable achievements in the advancement of women. Commenting on the attributes of its 2003 winners, Catalyst President Shiela Wellington stated:

**The enlightened CEO builds a strategic vision and business case for gender diversity, sets concrete goals to meet those commitments, holds management accountable for achieving diversity goals, reports on progress, participates visibly in diversity events, and takes every opportunity to communicate these commitments down through the ranks. He – and it is still usually he – uses the bully pulpit to its full advantage. The key to women's advancement rests squarely with him. (Wellington, et. al., 2003: 19)**

A robust diversity agenda depends on managing the long-term as well as the short-term. This requires transcending knee jerk pressure for reactive cost-cutting that may undermine the diversity agenda.

**You think you have made substantial ground, you think you have embedded long-term substantial cultural change... But as soon as there is a profit downgrade then anything goes to get there. (Female senior manager)**

## 4.3 Implementation practices

### 4.3.1 Organisational response in Australia

Organisations are introducing initiatives that require changes to work practices. The majority of organisations that have adopted diversity strategies in Australia have chosen to enact them in relatively passive ways (Charlesworth, et. al., 2002). Establishing alternative work patterns like flexi-time or career pathways for women are common examples. These strategies are still driven by the desire to help women conform to a better cultural fit, with the aid of some organisational concessions.

They achieve minor changes to conventional workplace practices but continue to present women as special cases needing accommodation (Sinclair, 2000).

The study confirms research findings that a reluctance to adopt an aggressive interventionist response to organisational settings reflects, in part, the continued influence of person-centred arguments.

**I've chosen not to have a formal affirmative action type policy...because I've seen the very negative impact of those sorts of policies. [They] can be misused and misunderstood. So for us it is really the right person for the right role. (Female senior manager)**

Resistance to active interventions in the organisational environment reflects not only espoused values of individualism and meritocracy but the suspicion of excessive control and regulation inherent in Australia's 'fair go' culture. A US style of affirmative action is commonly portrayed among Australian business leaders as unacceptably aggressive in the mainstream environment (Sawer, 2003).

Interventions involving gender specific career pathways and work practices are perceived to encourage unfair advantage for women and are unpopular.

**The moment you create a separate pathway that...is pretty much gender based, that is a pretty second rate solution. That's not to say there shouldn't be a different pathway that can be chosen. My point is it shouldn't be a gender specific one. (Male senior manager)**

**I actually sponsored one of my reports on a program...'Women in Management'. This person went to the presentation and it was a great course, absolutely magic course...What I objected to was that we differentiate and we shouldn't differentiate. It should be called 'People in Management'... I just think, well why are women doing this course as opposed to a general course with women in the first intake? (Male manager)**

A number of business leaders and senior managers argue that where meritocracy and transparency are emphasised at policy and strategy level, a level playing field environment will support women's career paths to senior positions. They believe a critical mass of women will occur organically without interventions such as quotas and that inculcating values that support diversity is a better way to go.

**It starts with the right people in the right role, very much around culture and making sure that you bring on people that have values that are aligned to the values of the organisation. Because you are selecting not just for the skill to do the job but you are selecting for a fit for the culture. (Female senior manager)**

Critics of this approach argue that environment, rather than values, drives and influences the effective-

ness of diversity strategies. Recruitment does not always ensure that individual values truly align with those of the organisation.

**There's a particular part of the business where we've had quite a lot of turnover and probably 60 to 70 percent of senior management have come in from organisations that do not value any of these issues and in that part of the organisation it is being systematically unpicked. (Female senior manager)**

### 4.3.2 Passive enactment weakens strategies

Diversity strategies can be vulnerable to shifts in the landscape. Changes in leadership, radical shifts in the market, or profit dives are common examples of external forces that can undermine the effectiveness of passively enacted strategies.

A senior manager at the forefront of her organisation's cultural change initiatives bemoaned the lack of resilience shown by these programs when the company's financials 'went south' and bottom line concerns took centre stage.

**[After] four years of really serious investment in fundamentally changing the cultural fabric of the organisation...something comes in and threatens your financial future. It is a license to undo absolutely everything. Things the [executive] was up supporting three weeks ago, we are now unravelling them faster than you can say the word 'because they are costs'... We thought we had embedded long-term substantial cultural change but a new owner unravelled five years of work in five minutes simply by taking all the tools and processes out. (Female senior manager)**

Another senior manager described her concerns that diversity would be sidelined as her organisation struggled with a financial crisis.

**I wondered whether the organisation would be able to continue to focus on it given everything was focused on cost cutting. Maybe I thought the organisation wanted to go back to a leaner, [more] compliant organisation. (Female manager)**

Researchers increasingly argue that diversity needs to be integrated into business planning if positive benefits are to be realised (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Wellington, et. al. 2003; Burton, 1997). This embedding process needs to transcend passive enactment and requires active intervention and staunch direction and support from leadership.

**If a company is not fiercely committed to advancing and retaining its talented female employees, it is easy for that company to justify phasing out programs or reducing their effectiveness. (Burton, 1997: 27)**

### 4.3.3 Moving towards organisational change

Some organisations are undertaking internal investigations of their culture. The law firm Freehills and the Westpac bank have conducted internal research on various aspects of their diversity implementation. Westpac has contributed to research on the impact of flexibility initiatives on business outcomes (EOWA, 2006c), incorporating the findings into their improvement strategies. Freehills has established cross-industry forums to discuss the delivery of flexible work options. The company argues that 'it may be easier to change the industry collectively rather than attempt to promote change in isolation' (Freehills EOWA EOFCW Application, 2006: 16).

A minority of leaders have also broken with tradition and are pursuing change in an atypically proactive manner. Rather than sitting and waiting for critical mass to evolve, they consciously pursue a cultural tipping point. They explicitly promote positive discrimination practices, such as quotas, as the only response to the under-representation of women in leadership. ANZ Bank CEO, John McFarlane recently argued:

**For my own part, I've come to the conclusion that the most important thing to do is simply to appoint more women. We have gone against conventional wisdom and set specific targets. We want to see women in 25 percent of senior executive roles by 2008. (McFarlane, 2006: 6)**

These leaders follow the small wins model (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000), pursuing slow, incremental but deliberate and co-ordinated change.

Under the leadership of CEO Giam Swiegers, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu has established equal opportunity as a key strategy in business planning. It seeks to ensure the gender issue remains high on the management agenda. Implementation of the organisation's equal opportunity programs is a critical KPI, a 'ticket to play' at senior level. In 2006, 16 of Deloitte's senior partners were held accountable to help drive an inclusive culture as part of their business plan.

**We are in an environment that is not an equal environment...specifically we look at women [and] say, 'When I come to you with these hard numbers, you'd better be above this line'... The most powerful change agent for people is to see the talented women. (EOWA 2006b: 8)**

Positive discrimination initiatives such as those undertaken by Deloitte and ANZ are relatively unpopular among a majority of Australian organisations. Swiegers recognises that this approach has been 'very controversial as it focuses on the top talent and that is often considered not to be Australian. The study finds that person-centred responses to the diversity challenge tend to be more prevalent than the more aggressive interventions suggested by an environment-centred approach.

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## 4.4 Conclusion

Organisational culture impacts on the experiences of women in management. It can impede female advancement and exercise of authority.

A person-centred (deficit equity model) continues to drive organisational interventions to support women in professional work environments. It is based on the assumption that women's behaviour and competencies lie at the heart of their failure to thrive in corporate environments. Diversity initiatives are aimed at assisting women adapt to the culture.

Critics of the person-centred approach argue that it does not address the source of problems faced by women in management. Strategies that place the onus on women to effect change and encourage a passive response from organisations only 'give women stilts to play on an uneven playing field' (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000: 130).

An employer-centred approach encourages a fundamental realignment of organisational values to accommodate the growing presence of women. It seeks to change organisational culture by adopting interventions that pursue an 'inclusive organisational culture that is championed by the CEO, driven by senior executives, and holds line managers accountable' (EOWA, 2007).

Leadership at the most senior levels is required to drive the change agenda if women's promotional opportunities are to increase.

# 5.0

## strategies for change

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### 5.1 The business case for diversity

Contemporary business literature provides a compelling case for diversity in the workplace. A considerable body of evidence demonstrates that increased female participation at senior levels can enhance organisational capacity to respond to key shifts in the economy. A report by Catalyst suggests a strong correlation between the number of female executives and the performance of Fortune 500 companies between 1996 and 2000 (The Economist, 2005).

A critical mass of women at senior levels has been shown to impact positively on an organisation's communication and decision-making processes, broadening awareness of stakeholder interests and encouraging thorough investigations of problems (Konrad & Kramer, 2006; Chesterman, et. al., 2005).

The trend towards outsourcing at all levels of commercial enterprise is also encouraging the adoption of management styles that facilitate and support short-

term partnerships. Within this environment, stereotypically female skills such as strong communication and collaboration are valued over traditionally male management styles that are felt to promote individualism and competition (Sands, 1996; Hampden-Turner, 1994). Businesses that tap into the large pool of female talent are increasingly seen to have a distinct competitive advantage in a tight and highly competitive labour market (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

While the business case for diversity has been acknowledged within corporate Australia, its translation into business practice has yet to be taken up across the board. A small number of leading organisations have adopted strategies to promote and retain female talent (EOWA, 2006b; Beck & Davis, 2005; Palermo, 2004). Flexibility, meritocracy, and transparency are the key drivers of this response. A review of Australian 'employers of choice' reveals that companies are improving the delivery of flexible work options and employing contemporary human resources (HR) practices to encourage level playing field dynamics around recruitment and promotion.

## 5.2 Contemporary human resources

Contemporary HR practices reflect a growing appreciation of the difficulties women face gaining visibility and recognition in male-dominated work environments (EOWA, 2006b; Thomas & Graham, 2005). HR initiatives prioritise transparency and encourage level playing field dynamics around selection and promotion practices.

### 5.2.1 Transparency

Values of transparency and accountability underpin selection and promotion criteria. These can include gender proofing assessment processes to avoid emphasis on mathematical and analytical 'male' competencies or a 'left brain bias'. Group selection processes are also encouraged to ensure greater accountability.

#### **Case study: Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)**

In 2001, DEST introduced a workforce planning process to help recruitment better respond to key business needs. The process requires an annual round table discussion between the department's people management branch and key business group leaders to identify current staff issues, supply and demand needs, and workforce gaps. This group discussion and planning process informs recruitment strategies over the short and medium-term. As part of this process, a 'Get It Right Selection & Recruitment Kit' was designed as a support tool for management.

Between 2003 and 2004, DEST achieved an 8 percent increase in women at senior executive level. By 2005, the proportion of women at executive level had risen to 57 percent.

In 2006, 35 percent of federal public service senior executives were women, and proportion was higher at DEST. This relatively high proportion of female executives has been partially attributed to a transparent group selection process instilled, supported, and driven by leadership in the APS and at DEST (Burgess, 2006).

## 5.3 Selection quotas

Selection quotas and dedicated attempts to recruit female talent aim to create a critical mass of women employed in an organisation.

#### **Case study: Insurance Australia Group (IAG)**

According to IAG's recruitment policies, shortlists for vacant positions must include at least one female candidate. The company also encourages recruitment agencies to search beyond their regular networks to identify appropriate female candidates for vacancies.

In 2004/05, 71 percent of promotions at IAG were awarded to women. A female CEO was appointed in 2003 and a third of the current group executive is made up of women (EOWA, 2006b).

### 5.3.1 Talent development and promotion

Talent promotion programs aim to demonstrate the business case for increased female participation at the senior level. They encourage the identification of potential female talent for specific management training and career development opportunities. Many programs are designed to address issues such as the low level of line management experience of female managers.

#### **Case study: IAG**

As part of its women's strategy, designed to 'increase the number of women in senior management positions, and especially in line management roles', IAG has established a Chief Executive Women Talent Development Program. This innovative program incorporates a range of career development opportunities for 'high potential staff' including a 'managed career growth opportunity' for participants. During the pilot program, all participants made a beneficial career move.

## 5.4 Mentoring and networking

Dedicated mentoring and networking schemes encourage and train women in career development strategies within a supportive environment. They can provide mentoring opportunities to high performing women. A growing number of business leaders are publicly mentoring female candidates for executive and boardroom appointments. Women's networks are also a popular element of diversity strategies.

### Case study: Deloitte

Deloitte offers 10 networking forums a year for employees. Forums and workshops give participants the opportunity to seek out official mentorship and develop key networking and career development skills. The CEO mentors five female partners and believes mentorship and networking are vital to successful career development.

Since 2003, female partners at Deloitte have increased from 5 percent to 15 percent. Marked achievements in the retention and promotion of women have saved the organisation more than \$250 million in hiring and training costs.

## 5.5 Raising awareness

Practical initiatives are often complemented by awareness-raising programs that educate managers on the principles and benefits of achieving greater workforce diversity. Initiatives range from mandatory diversity courses for all levels of management to diversity councils that provide executives with an opportunity to oversee the implementation of strategies for cultural change.

### Case study: Coles Group

In 2004, Coles established a diversity team of key executives. As part of this process, 'high potential team members' participated in leadership programs for women and fed data on issues facing women back to the business. In 2006, a diversity council, comprising the CEO and other executives, began working on the organisational challenges to diversity. Facilitated by the diversity manager, the council focused on unspoken rules and stereotypes that exclude women. Coles set targets for increasing the percentage of women leaders and followed up with a mentoring program for women executives. Between 2004 and 2007, the percentage of executive level women rose from 16 percent to 22 percent.

**The council is widely understood to give the organisation's leadership the opportunity to gain a working appreciation of the need for diversity and get it in their hearts that this stuff matters. (Female manager)**

Diversity manager, Dr Katie Spearritt said:

**The most important thing for me is to make sure we've got those key executive champions. That's one reason I wanted to see a diversity council set up pretty quickly. We had compelling business reasons with the majority of retail customers being women.**

## 5.6 Childcare

Work-based and subsidised childcare facilities not only acknowledge the parenting responsibilities of many employees but directly address common problems in accessing childcare that is affordable, accountable and local.

### Case study: Westpac

In 1996, Westpac opened its first childcare centre in Adelaide. By 2007, the number of centres has grown to 11 across the country. Three hundred and forty-seven families use the bank's onsite care facilities and can pay for the service with pre-tax dollars.

The bank's former New Zealand CEO, Anne Sherry, was a driving force behind the establishment of childcare services for staff.

**When we build big facilities we put the childcare centres in. It's a marginal cost when you're spending potentially tens of millions of dollars in capital, and has fantastic outcomes. (Sherry, 2002)**

In 2006, 25 percent of the bank's board directors and 22 percent of executive managers were women. Since 1994 the number of women in management positions at Westpac has increased by 200 percent.

## 5.7 Infrastructure supports for parents

Some organisations have introduced infrastructure support initiatives for working mothers including mothers' groups, breastfeeding rooms and kids' days.

### Case study: Monash University

Monash University has established a family and children's services co-ordinator role. The co-ordinator helps the university provide referral and advisory services concerning family life resources and childcare matters to employees.

## 5.8 Flexible work opportunities

Since the early 1990s, the range of flexibility options and family support offered by both public and private sector organisations has increased. By 2007, 131 organisations had received the Federal Government Employer of Choice for Women Award. This citation is widely considered an important response to women's experience in the workplace and the provision of initiatives and policies designed to encourage and retain female talent.

Common initiatives include part-time and job share arrangements, flexi-time and working from home afforded by technology such as telecommuting. Strategies incorporating a range of flexible work arrangements are designed to allow women and men to maintain and develop their working lives without neglecting key family and personal responsibilities.

### Case study: *The Commonwealth Bank*

The Commonwealth Bank has instituted flexible work options including part-time work, job sharing, purchasing extra leave and working from home.

Between 2004 and 2006 the bank recorded an 85.5 percent increase in the number of senior executives, executives and managers working part-time. Of the estimated 7000 part-time employees, 89.6 percent were women.

### Case study: *Freehills*

Freehills has named 'recruitment of a flexible workforce' an essential part of its strategy to attract and retain women. The firm offers flexible work opportunities such as paid parental leave, job share, variable hours and working from home. All requests for flexible work conditions are considered. Currently 13 percent of the firm's female lawyers are taking up flexible work options. The industry average is 10.9 percent.

### Case study: *St George Bank*

In July 2007, St George received the National Work and Family Gold Award for the private sector in recognition of its industry leading parental leave initiatives, including 13 weeks paid parental leave and 12 months grandparental leave.

### Case study: *AMP*

AMP introduced paid parental leave in 1995. The rate of return to work from maternity leave increased from 50 percent in 1992 to 90 percent in 1997, saving the company between \$50,000 and \$150,000 for each woman who returned.

## 5.9 Leave entitlements

The range of paid and unpaid leave options is also growing. Many organisations offer schemes that provide leave purchasing, additional unpaid annual leave for caring and family purposes, and paid maternity/paternity leave. Within the private sector, there is a notable trend towards the provision of paid parental leave schemes and some evidence of improved post-maternity retention rates as a result.



# 6.0

## the drivers of business

The Australian business community has responded to the diversity agenda by producing initiatives considered best practice policy (EOWA, 2006b). However, the modest advancement of women to executive level positions suggests policies are not working to full effect.

Recognition of talent is most commonly facilitated by the value systems that underpin organisational cultures. Management literature has long emphasised good cultural fit in the selection of senior managers (Simpson, 2005; Burton, 1997). Cultural fit needs to be understood in the context of a range of forces that bring various levels of influence to corporate environments and determine a set of behavioural dynamics.

While corporations seek to facilitate diversity through cultural change and innovation in both policy and practice, a legacy of immovable work practices, attitudes and behaviours continues to undermine female presence and female authority in most workplace environments.

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## 6.1 The dominant corporate culture

An examination of the complexities of incorporating gender equity into corporate culture reveals organisation dynamics and patterns of behaviour that result in men and women negotiating the career ladder to radically different effect. There is a relationship between distinctive organisational cultures and behaviour towards women. In particular, the data reveal a correlation between organisational settings and the capacity to embrace diversity initiatives.

### 6.1.1 The narrow business model

While most organisations in the study are attempting to encourage diversity in their workforce, elements of a narrow business model can thwart the effective operation of diversity initiatives. The narrow business model reflects practices that are exclusively market-driven, and that reward short-term market success. The pressure for

short-term results can divert energy from the longer to the shorter-term. Some corporate leaders have acknowledged that growing pressures for short-term financial performance impact negatively on organisational culture and mitigate against longer-term sustainability and market success.

It shouldn't be a choice between shareholder value and sustainability – maximum, long-term shareholder value comes from sustainability... The way we have managed and led our companies in the past is not the right way, given the lack of sustainability and humanity of our companies. (McFarlane, 2006:1-2)

In any public organisation with quarterly analyst reports...they always do things on a shorter and shorter time frame and you can't change the business. (Male manager)

The success here is hitting the numbers. Success here is dancing to the right tune at the right time. (Female senior manager)

The way corporates need to set up their business, you need that hard commerciality... It's a comfort with that street smartness, that practicality...markets move quickly. When you've got that gut feel you need to make a decision...we are risk-takers. (Female senior manager)

This strong short-term profit orientation demands adeptness at 'hard' skills. Capacity for rationality, numerical competency, and expedient decision-making is highly valued.

You have to communicate in a direct way. The numbers have to be right and we cannot go to the client with the wrong information. It's the cut and thrust of the market. (Female manager)

While left brain adeptness is paramount to business success, research indicates that longer-term viability requires skills that transcend a narrow numerical focus (Schmidt, Hurwitz, Lines &, Montgomery, 2002). The annals of the Harvard Business Review are awash with cases that align business success with longer-term business drivers. The study finds that managerial competence in Australian business is often aligned narrowly with a demonstrated capacity in the 'hard' skills. The 'softer' skills associated with emotional intelligence and relationship building, which build sustainability for the longer term, are not as valued.

The language of relevance is numbers. It is the language of success. If you don't report and speak that language you are invisible or mute. (Female manager)

Very business focused, very good on the numbers, at driving results...they are some key attributes of successful leaders. (Male manager)

It's very much about achievement of results in delivering projects or revenue or whatever, not in staff management and working relationships and team development. (Female manager)

Behavioural skills and motivating and empowering a team would not be the key success factors to getting on here. (Female manager)

It's a very left brain organisation. You need to be mathematically brilliant. Creativity is actually suppressed. (Female senior manager)

Indeed, contemporary corporate Australia applauds a leadership construct with a strong left brain orientation and stereotypical masculinity. A highly competitive culture rewards confidence, decisiveness, and ruthless individualism. The 'tough nut' may be rewarded as a 'good guy' even when he is a bully. A 'command and control' leadership style is valued and may prevail. Indeed, in a culture that requires quick decisions there is a tendency for leadership to be viewed as an individualistic enterprise aligned with the heroic actions of a few individuals at the top. This culture eschews reflection and has little time for questions. Indeed, a display of ambivalence and uncertainty is eschewed as weakness.

I'm never wrong. Or perhaps I'm often wrong but never uncertain. It's a masculine thing not to acknowledge you are wrong. It's not always conscious either. Attack is the most common form of defence. (Male senior manager)

There is zero tolerance for saying, 'I don't know the answer'. (Female senior manager)

There is often a lot of aggressive behaviour, often a lot of personal abuse. People often say they play the man and not the ball or, in my case, play the woman and not the ball. (Female senior manager)

There is a need to make commercial quick decisions... Some people see it as aggression. (Female senior manager)

Everything he knows, he learnt on the footy bench. He looks for loyalty – that matters. He's a command and control guy. (Female senior manager)

The study finds that corporate cultures with a strong orientation towards a narrow business paradigm exhibit a marked ambivalence towards the participation of women, particularly at the senior level. The promulgation of cultural traits aligned with a narrow notion of leadership is reinforced by selection criteria, which align leadership capacity with a confidence and assertiveness that is particular to men. Women who wish to survive or indeed excel in these cultures collude with many of its tenets. For those women, survival often means exit.

There is an element of senior management that is male that really has difficulty dealing with females. Sometimes in a meeting you can see they are uncomfortable because they

like being surrounded with like-minded people...You never will quite be in the inner circle. (Female senior manager)

There's male dominance, I feel there is a level of nervousness around women in the workplace. (Female manager)

Maybe it's me but I think the paradigm is still with the six foot tall executives who have naturally booming voices. (Female manager)

I think corporate Australia sees leadership as a bunch of male characteristics. (Female senior manager)

They don't see me as a competitor. I could never be a CEO because I am a woman. (Female senior manager)

I said to him, 'Why didn't I get the GM role? I'm easily moveable [willing to work any where]'. He said, 'I thought you were only joking and what about [your partner]?' He can't imagine me or another woman going into the executive level. (Female senior manager)

The way we structure recruitment favours males. Males are more assertive. Males tend to present in a confident way; females present in a more circumspect way. They [men] will say, 'I can do it'. Females will say, 'I can do it only if...' (Male senior manager)

Within uncompromisingly masculine and short-term results driven cultures there is little desire to deviate from the behavioural norm. Success in the market provides little incentive for change, resulting in a culture of conservatism that undermines creative and innovative thinking. There is limited capacity to recognise the benefits of diversity and to incorporate it into practice. Indeed difference is viewed as a threat and those deviating from the norm are referred to pejoratively as eccentric or a poor cultural fit and are marginalised or ejected.

There's a very internal focus and through that a very self-fulfilling, reinforcing leadership style...The leadership style is hierarchical, conservative, distant and paternalistic. (Female senior manager)

It is an environment that is hard to acknowledge, you can't change it. It self-perpetuates." (Female senior manager)

If you've grown up in an organisation and you are suddenly surrounded by people who are starting to threaten you because they think in a different way or speak in a different way...that may lead to some of the issues we have around here about embracing diversity. (Male senior manager)

As a company we are not ready for the eccentric style and approach. We are not ready as a company to see through the layers. (Female manager)

A culture of conformity remains deeply intolerant of men and women who aspire to a broader notion of authority.

There's a tendency for people not to disagree with people above them. People fight the fight but don't challenge the culture. (Female senior manager)

[It's] almost to the point where male executives who demonstrate a kinder, more concessional view are almost isolated because of that, or vilified as being pansies or gay or whatever because they are just being more moderate. (Female senior manager)

There is a culture and I'm struggling to describe it, not 'yes men' but people who won't stand outside the pack... (Female manager)

It's been OK to impose the male dynamic on the workplace but you hear about the feminisation of corporate Australia – that is not acceptable. (Female manager)

Positive business outcomes support a 'why fix it when it's not broke' mentality, mitigating the need for major organisational change and reinforcing the cultural status quo.

I think one of the great risks for the big companies is that at our core we are dinosaurs...we've been incredibly successful by doing the same things in quite a monocultural way for a really long period of time. (Female senior manager)

Indeed, the cultural focus of narrow business environments encourages insularity and distance from broader social agendas. This dynamic reduces an organisation's ability to recognise the need for innovation and to accommodate significant internal change, including the growing presence of women. While the diversity agenda is acknowledged, engagement is tentative and limited to meeting compliance standards.

We do the compliance reporting there and there's a sense of, 'We're EOWA compliant so we're fine when it comes to women'. (Female manager)

Around here you hear the words but you choose not to listen to the content. [of diversity] ...People see it as a label, not a philosophy. So their acceptance of it is at face value. (Female senior manager)

People here, in my experience, are unwilling to confront diversity of thought or culture head on. That's why it's harder to get hold of. Of course, they'll embrace it in a public environment, even on a one-on-one basis and more particularly in a group but actually...we say we'll do what's necessary to look all right. (Male senior manager)

These organisations remain locked in established practices and values and there is little opportunity for broader social practices and ideas to develop.

When you are running intensive business, compliance is critical...and that demands a leadership style that is about enforcing that compliance. It is a learned response over time. That's why organisations struggle and take so long to change because they don't have the agility. (Male senior manager)

For years, [organisations] never did recruiting from the outside... When they did, the insiders were in a very poor position to compete because merit meant something different from what it had meant internally for years. (Female senior manager)

I think in a highly operational multi-site organisation...it's a learnt social response to reject diversity of thought or gender or individuality of some description. You've got a real dichotomy between the needs of the marketplace and the style and organisational principles of the company. That becomes very evident when a company needs to change. (Male senior manager)

The study finds some ambivalence for diversity initiatives in the attitudes of participants. Diversity programs are seen to not only distort level playing field dynamics but to inhibit women from competing on an equal footing.

I know that is probably politically incorrect to say it. I always believe that, in one sense, you make your own luck in this world. You can have all the coaches and all the assistance but in the end...nobody else can do it for you. People can help you along the way but in the end you'll get judged by the market, your peers, or whatever for what you are as to where that career ends up. (Male senior manager)

### 6.1.2 A culture of winners

Within a culture that fosters competition, individuals strive for success.

They fear marginality and avoid opportunities to critically analyse the work environment.

A number of participants displayed defensiveness to suggestions that corporate culture does not easily accommodate a female presence. Women and men interpret characteristics such as an aggressively competitive environment or a market-driven, 24/7 work ethic in pragmatic rather than problematic terms. These elements are considered the reality of senior corporate life rather than evidence of cultural hostility towards women.

I think to some extent, executives are a self-selecting group. There is only a certain type of person who wants to be an executive... The requirements of the role include being very committed, having an appetite for working 60 to 70 hours a week. (Male senior manager)

People gang up on you but that's work... Some women and men will see that as aggressive and can't cope with it [but] it's normal everyday business, isn't it? (Female senior manager)

No-one is going to get to senior management unless you can perform... You have to be prepared to put the hours in. In the corporate world, you have to be prepared for the work ethic. (Female senior manager)

There is an expectation that you check your emails seven days a week and are on call seven days a week. Some days I start at 7am and finish at 11pm. (Female senior manager)

A gendered analysis of the issues facing women in management is also widely rejected. A number of participants in the study are reluctant to support arguments of systemic sexual discrimination and prefer gender neutral interpretations of workplace dynamics. On the question of promotional opportunities, many women argue personal choice plays a far greater role in shaping their careers than cultural resistance to female advancement.

We also create our choices around glass ceilings... If certain opportunities present we make choices about which roads we choose. (Female manager)

There is just not a big enough pool of women to fill [senior] positions and even if there are, they don't necessarily want to move up to that level. They're conscious of the work lifestyle ... I guess a lot of women just opt out. (Male manager)

At the end of the day, women have choices to make... I'm not surprised women are under-represented... A lot of women don't want to be senior woman in corporations because they want to have more flexibility and more choice and dedicate more time and focus to other elements of their life. (Female senior manager)

I'm not actually ruthlessly ambitious. I don't care if I go up, down or sideways, although I want to be involved. My driver is not money, it's about being involved. (Female manager)

### 6.1.3 The stigma of feminism

Australian research has found a strong negative association in the 'free market' psyche between aggressive cultural change strategies and feminism. Feminism is considered the voice of an elite that represents no authentic ethical content (Sawer, 2003). It is perceived to be part of a politically correct fashion that bears little relevance to the viability of legitimate commercial enterprise. Feminism is seen to taint level playing field dynamics and the identification of real talent. Cultural change interventions that reflect feminist principles such as positive discrimination are widely rejected by the business community. Historically the business community was opposed to affirmative action legislation that proposed company targets and preferred non-regulatory approaches (Braithwaite & Bush, 1998; Spearritt, 1997).

The study finds a subtle cultural rejection of diversity, articulated through a marked hostility towards feminism. Both women and men are keen to avoid association with a feminist agenda. The data contain derogatory references to 'redneck femos', 'women's libbers', 'socialist feminists' and 'political correctness bullshit'. Feminism, and by

implication women's issues, are portrayed as radical, out of control and extreme.

Feminism means to them, people who are feisty, hard to get along with, ugly...so they don't want to be aligned with that. That's a very practical decision because the people who employ them would feel very threatened by that sort of thing. (Female senior manager)

If there is a women's forum it is seen as proactive, discrimination...bra burning. (Female senior manager)

I come across as easy to get along with, not immediately feisty on this stuff, [an] in your face redneck femo. (Female manager)

Business women's networks don't cut it for me. You can't speak freely. You want Chatham House rule. I would value networking with women who have made it. How do you learn and what are the lessons? (Female senior manager)

A number of respondents articulated misgivings about the specific fostering of female talent, reflecting fear, embarrassment, hostility, or indeed elements of all three. Resistance is expressed subtly. Managers convey a lack of enthusiasm or respect for implementation of programs rather than open hostility.

There was a bit of laughter and all that stuff but we've run a professional women's network. (Male senior manager)

Men have given lip service to the need to support women but nothing happens... There needs to be some willingness to change the way we do things. Otherwise, it's just a bunch of girls having lunch. (Female manager)

When I did the women's program that they have [here] there was a lot of, 'You are going off to do secret women's business and why should you get the extra privileges?' So that caused quite a bit of a stir with our male colleagues, wondering what the hell we were doing and why we had that opportunity. (Female manager)

I've tried to get development programs for women...and the manager I reported to said he wanted results in 12 months. He wanted to see women stepping up the ladder and applying for jobs. It doesn't work like that. You need at least five years or six years and then do a full blown analysis to see if it's working. It would be working but he's no longer supporting it. (Female manager)

In some circumstances, a lukewarm response from management clearly undermines program popularity and encourages cultural hostility. Both men and women feed into this culture. Women, in particular, are keen to disassociate themselves from any initiative that might further diminish their status in the eyes of male colleagues. Some women fail to take up opportunities offered by female friendly programs such as women's networks and talent promotion opportunities out of fear of marginality. Others express active hostility to initiatives.

We used to have a women's network but it fell away. It definitely wasn't given any senior support and it was almost considered the mothers' club. At the time I was asked to join it I almost felt like a little girl going off to join my mother's friends. (Female senior manager)

At the beginning of the women's networking, people would be too afraid to ask their line manager if they could go to it. (Female manager)

### 6.1.4 Scratching beneath the surface

Conversations about the place and treatment of women in the corporate world are not easily conducted in the workplace. The real conversation about women in business is not occurring in the open. Concerns and criticisms remain hidden and unspoken.

A lot of the old sexism has gone or it may have gone underground. There are things people know they cannot say anymore but they may be thinking it... Scratch the surface. (Female senior manager)

With my own manager who was pretty traditional, a generation ahead of me... I sensed there was something that he couldn't put his finger on that made me not quite leadership material. It was never articulated but it was something I felt. (Female senior manager)

A leading Australian banking executive alluded to this dynamic in a recent speech.

We have few really honest conversations about gender issues in the workplace – because all of us, men and women, bring our own biases to the table. (McFarlane, 2006: 9)

## 6.2 The contemporary business model

While most organisations reflect elements of a narrow business model (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Charlesworth et al., 2002; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Sands, 1996) models shaped by the pragmatics of a globalised economy are increasingly making an impact on organisational culture in Australia.

A self-consciously contemporary business model has emerged in the corporate landscape. This model openly challenges the narrow status quo as outdated and inefficient. A radical mindset promotes expansion of the conventional business agenda and, by implication, a broadening of cultural reference points.

Everything has changed to meet the greater efficiencies required. People have to act more business-like because they don't have a great lot of resources to throw around.

We've had to become more professional, there's been a change in values in the workplace...to reflect a balance between the bullish blokey type world and the more sensitive one, attuned to issues which might affect people outside the work environment. (Male manager)

The study finds a number of participant organisations are striving to establish cultures that are more contemporary and arguably more sustainable. Through strategic planning initiatives these organisations argue that realignment of the business mindset is necessary to transcend the short-term and ensure long-term viability. They seek to establish a balanced agenda that mixes business, workforce and the community.

**We need a new and radical way forward, a paradigm shift in our conception of what a company is and how it behaves. (McFarlane, 2006: 2)**

The cultural implications of this paradigm shift are significant for the implementation of diversity. A contemporary business model consciously promotes proactive social rhetoric and promotes sustainability through investment in intellectual capital, diversity, and the pursuit of creative and flexible workforce planning initiatives. Leadership is inclusive and relationship-orientated, allowing those who fit outside a narrow, conformist model to aspire to leadership positions. Performance is judged by standards which transcend a narrow notion of fiscal success. Command and control authority is relinquished for an approach that views leadership as a shared and distributed practice (Fletcher, 2004) through the delegation of accountability and responsibility.

**Caring for our people is a core value in this department and that means modelling work/life balance and showing you don't ask too much of people... We place a high value on social capital here, people trying to enjoy work rather than just being here, so a good leader will try and make that happen... I really believe that in this department those values are really taken seriously. (Male senior manager)**

I think women would have a strong connection with those values. They are not the old blokey values that you work until you drop and go to the pub. I wouldn't go as far as saying they're female. I think they are modern workplace values that recognise the equality of people and the need to be fair in all things, whereas the old blokey culture is more about being comfortable. (Male senior manager)

Organisations that are consciously moving towards a more contemporary environment approach diversity as a tool for cultural change rather than just a compliance issue. Leadership is proactive and acknowledges that a dearth of senior women is problematic. Space is provided for crucial conversations about diversity, enabling old assumptions to be challenged and new initiatives to be undertaken.

If you are going through enormous change processes, let's debate about what we need, let's debate about the broadness of the skill sets that we need. I've said to my leaders, 'Don't come and ask me for objective criteria. You have judgement. You tell me who is talented and who is not and debate with me how you came to your conclusions'. (Male senior manager)

**While we are in this talent war...you don't just suddenly stumble into a world that's all OK. It's actually got to be a positive step to get a positive reaction... The intangibles are the things that we have to work on now, I think. It's a conscious step by people to do certain things. (Male manager)**

These organisations tend to actively intervene in diversity. They recognise that a laissez faire approach will not overcome cultural resistance, at least not in the short term. They explicitly promote quotas or gendered career pathways to address the shortage of senior women.

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## 6.3 Conclusion

While diversity has been established on the business agenda, the mainstream culture of corporate Australia is highly gendered. Business imperatives reward values and behaviours that are aligned with masculinity, such that leadership is a masculine enterprise and female authority is excluded. Creating a culture that complements the masculine and feminine remains a challenge.

# 7.0

## leadership and authority

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### 7.1 Leadership and masculinity

Leadership is a male domain. Traits associated with traditional, heroic leadership including individualism, control, assertiveness, and skills of advocacy and domination, are socially ascribed to men and generally understood as masculine. (Sinclair; 2007, 2004a, 2004b; Fletcher; 2004; Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Calás & Smircich, 1993; Acker; 1990)

**Three reasons which instilled confidence in me years ago – I'm male, I'm six foot two and prematurely grey. I know that works. It doesn't really but it gives me the confidence that it does. (Male senior manager)**

The study finds the unspoken rules and arrangements of mainstream corporate Australia set particularly narrow parameters for leadership. The prevailing profile of the good business leader reflects the stereotypical traits of masculinity.

**I think he has some power there being a male and it builds on itself... He's big and he's got a loud voice, he's only in his late 30s and he's really no better...but somehow there's a commanding thing that he has and it just seems to build on itself. (Female manager)**

Characteristics commonly associated with the feminine, or a broader notion of the masculine, are not key drivers of authority in many business settings. As Sinclair's research suggests, men are also forced to conceal sides of themselves to survive (Sinclair; 1994). A number of women believe that their focus on achieving outcomes through a more personal and encouraging style of management is not seen as cutting it when it comes to moving up the organisational hierarchy.

**[I was] told for many years that I'd never make [senior manager]...they would say to me, 'You are too easy to get on with, you'll never get anywhere here. You're too affable'. Someone said I talked too much... They told me I had to be pretty aggressive... I think a lot of the other [senior managers] think I'm too soft. (Female manager)**

I was expected to play the head kicker and bad guy as head of finance. I refused to play that game. It's not my style of operating. I'm not an aggressive person. I'm not a head-kicking type person. I would try and achieve the same result but I would go about it quite differently. In the end I thought I'm a poor cultural fit here. I don't believe in that style of management. (Female senior manager)

You have to use their [tough] language. He didn't want to hear that we discussed it over a nice conversation and agreed. I was expected to beat her over the head and rip her eyes out. When I reported to him, I had to tell him that I had laid into her. I had to change my language. You had to be a head-kicker. (Female senior manager)

I was once told in a promotional situation by a [senior manager], that really if I had been a man I would do better. (Female senior manager)

Many of the current generation of leaders have earned the right to leadership stature through their experiences in 'the field'. Leadership is aligned with physical prowess, resilience and a willingness to 'get your hands dirty'.

They've earned the right to manage by having experiences in the field. (Female senior manager)

When I first started work, I worked down the mine... We had to earn our stripes. (Female senior manager)

Sporting prowess, while not overtly expressed, may indeed be a proxy for physical acumen.

I played a lot of sport at a fairly elite level in both rugby and cricket. So the concept of working in teams and being challenged for something which was exciting was important to me. (Male senior manager)

It's the same with men being good at sport, they have an advantage as well... There is something about the total package that helps. (Female senior manager)

When business is viewed through a narrow prism, the skills and traits attributed to the feminine do not align with business essentials. Women who aspire to senior positions are challenged to demonstrate the value of their contributions. The way they look, communicate and respond to the organisational environment are all subject to scrutiny.

In some sectors it's male all the way down and rarely do you get to a female. It's very much perceived as a male club, male style. You fit into that formula... the voice, the tone, the body language, everything goes with it. (Female senior manager)

You've got to work out what your strategy is and how you get a bit of leverage with [senior men]. I think it is a visual contribution. (Female senior manager)

The paucity of women at senior level renders them as 'other' and not to be trusted by both sexes.

Most senior executives have extremely limited experience in working with women. Most women have had no experience in working with women. Men don't trust women. (Female senior manager)

I don't want women. I don't have time with recruitment consultants; we need someone that fits. We don't want to have to worry about fit. We have one woman from hell. I get on with her but she's aggressive and causes trouble. (Male senior manager)

In narrow, male-dominated environments talented women can be excluded from lead roles. They can achieve only by moving up the support ladder, or accepting support status when permitted into senior echelons.

Most of the financial departments are blokey. It's a 'go away little girl' culture in the financial space. In some quarters you'd have a hell of a time seeing a woman in the group. It's pack behaviour, a boys club (Female senior manager)

It was all male... We did all sit [in] on the senior manager meeting but there was a separate group working on strategy... I don't think I had a major role at the table there. I wanted to. I knocked on a couple of doors and said I wanted to participate... The [senior manager] at the time, his view was, 'No, you have to focus on holding your team together and just continue to do that'. My opinion was, 'No I think I can do both, I can contribute strategically... I just think he was very closed as to who could add value. (Female senior manager)

Within this organisation you do not get many women... The industry would laugh at us if we got a woman. Some of the crusty old guys had spoken to their mates and said I'm OK (Female senior manager)

In some places it's actually... focused on females being in a support function as opposed to a business facing role. (Female senior manager)

All of the people sitting on that wall, all of them men and all of them in senior positions in the department did not think it was odd that the only senior female was sitting in the personal assistant area. (Female manager)

## 7.2 Intelligence

Within a narrow business setting, mastery of codified knowledge, or 'getting the numbers right' is considered the basis for good business leadership. 'Soft skills' such as stakeholder management and relationship-building are understood to support business transactions rather than drive them to positive outcomes. They are ascribed a lesser value than more tangible, 'hard edged' business tasks. They are also considered to be primarily feminine traits.



Organisations that demonstrate a 'hard' skill bias and downgrade the value of 'soft' management traits, consider women inherently less suitable for senior and leadership positions.

When women say to me, 'Why is it that I'm always being told that I'm good at the soft stuff but I can't get promoted?' I say... 'The message they are really trying to give you is you are not good at the hard stuff. In my experience people get hired for hard skills but they are fired or not promoted for their soft skills. (Female senior manager)

Many women say the [organisation] gives too much emphasis to the financial side... A lot of women who have a lot to contribute in the people space... will certainly feel they are not being looked after and recognised because it's not very important criteria. (Male senior manager)

### 7.2.1 The downgrading of female intelligence

A number of dynamics occur to diminish the perceived value of 'female' attributes. Firstly, the narrow alignment of numerics with intellect, combined with the assumption that men are intrinsically more capable in this area, encourages a view of women as innately lacking business acumen. Secondly, attributing women with relationship skills and then de-legitimising those skills as secondary undermines female intellect and encourages a view of women as innately lacking business sense.

If you are a woman in management... there is a lack of respect for intelligence and experience and knowledge definitely from a male peer. (Female manager)

Because I'm female, sometimes people try and run rings around [me] because they don't think [I] know what's going on. (Female senior manager)

The study finds some evidence that women are perceived as lacking in the intellectual gravitas that business demands.

One of the guys had said, 'When it comes to problem-solving I actually think she'll do the girly thing and bat her eye lids and try and get me to do that'. (Female senior manager)

When you talk to [female managers] it becomes a bit of a Country Women's Association and I want to have more robust conversation. (Male senior manager)

If we were looking at intellect as they do when they talk about talent, [the female manager] would probably not have been a talent. (Male senior manager)

The assumption that women do not have strong business intellect precludes their entry into senior management roles. Research has consistently identified the difficulty women face in gaining recognition as technical and intellectual equals to men (Reciniello, 1999). Women

struggle to gain line management experience at the profit/loss end of business. In 2006, only 7.4 percent of Australian line managers were women, while the majority were still in support positions (EOWA, 2006a: 13). The well-documented reluctance of senior men to place women at the numbers end of management reflects the perception of women as numerically and, by implication, intellectually weak (Griffiths, 2005; Harvie, 2004; Wellington, et. al., 2003; Krautil, 2003).

The study concurs with these findings. Women are passed over for promotional opportunities and underestimated in money management roles because they are not seen to be 'good with the numbers'.

I'm probably the most senior money manager in our business. I've headed up the equity dealing desk and they are all guys who talk to you... You have big blokes ringing up and they think, 'Oh it's a girl. I'll negotiate really hard with her and I'll win'. But because they underestimated you, you do a better deal than they do. (Female senior manager)

There's a feeling here that not many women are numbers savvy and because the [male manager] is that sort of person [we] need him. He adds mystery, it gives him power. So a lot of his personality problems get overlooked because we need his financial input. (Female manager)

### 7.2.2 Women and numbers

The study finds no substantial evidence that women are incapable of operating at the profit/loss end of business. Rather, women who are given 'hard' business roles demonstrate great competency and skill.

From my perception she's very business focused, very good on the numbers, at driving results. (Male manager)

Indeed, some women are perceived to offer a richer form of 'hard' business management. They combine numerical competence with strong qualitative skills, and are able to communicate in a way that demystifies the numbers, enhancing key interactions and analysis.

From some of the women that I've worked with, I probably think that women generally have a greater capability for leadership than men... Again, I don't know if this is personality driven or gender driven but my experience with some of the women I've worked with is they can present a very balanced approach. So they can be very focused on the numbers but also very focused on the behavioural aspects of what they do as well, in terms of how it relates to other people. Whereas probably my experience with some of the men I've worked with, good on the numbers, strong on the numbers, not so much on some of the behaviours. (Male manager)

Many people can't understand numbers and are terrified of them... I was very good at telling people a story in pictures and words they could understand so they didn't feel

stupid because they didn't understand the numbers.  
(Female senior manager)

A number of participants believe a lack of interest in finance and operations rather than a lack of competence is apparent among female managers. Women exclude themselves from this vital end of business.

Women hate operations. (Female senior manager)

At the moment when we are talking to graduates, we have a number of women who have done finance subjects but they'd love to do communications and marketing. (Female senior manager)

### 7.2.3 An holistic view of intellect

The outcome of any endeavour is improved when a compendium of skills and intelligences are drawn upon. Since the early 1980s, psychologists have identified a range of distinct intellectual components, including linguistic intelligence and logical or mathematical intelligence that operate as parts of an intellectual whole (Gardner, 1983).

Within the business community, there is growing awareness that a holistic approach to management, incorporating both 'soft' and 'hard' business skills produces more resilient and positive outcomes (Hampden-Turner, 1994). Processes such as gaining trust and achieving consensus are increasingly seen as essential traits for successful business leadership.

In businesses...process control, operations management, command, control and compliance are necessary to get the job done but that can be taken too far... You have to understand how to have ideas that improve the function of the team and demonstrate you can bring them in. (Female senior manager)

My [senior manager] understands his people skills are the most important thing running this company. He needs to make sure he has people he can trust and he needs to make sure he knows, 'I've got to incent people, I've got to develop people, I've got to put different leaders in'... To the point where he actually sounds more like an HR person than he does a business person. He is across the issues and he knows how the jigsaw works. (Female senior manager)

Mining is not just about digging stuff out of the ground. It's about government and community relations. These days to be an asset you have to be strong in building relationships. (Female senior manager)

A broadening of the business equation to incorporate 'soft' skills presents a challenge to number-centric cultures. It requires a radical shift in mindset to appreciate a broader notion of managerial competency. A narrow business environment does not provide people with the

reference points to make this perceptual leap. Indeed, one female executive nominated the difficulty of quantifying the value of 'soft' skills as a key reason many organisations fail to recognise the leadership potential of women.

'Hard' is easier to measure and calibrate and define. We know how to interview for 'hard' skills. 'Do you have the accountancy degree or don't you? Were you the CEO or weren't you?' We don't know how to interview for 'soft' skills. 'Are you a good listener?' She must be because she didn't say much in the interview. (Female senior manager)

The promotion of 'soft' skills in the management equation allows business to respond to the increasingly complex demands of a global economy. Women improve business outcomes precisely because they drive the communication dynamic (Sands, 1996; Hampden-Turner, 1994). Men can enhance their leadership contribution by expanding their 'soft' skill repertoire.

## 7.3 Emotion

In organisational settings that emphasis the importance of strategic and logical analysis, there is little recognition of the positive business value of human emotion (Palermo, 2004; Mills & Tancred, 1992). Narrow constructs of leadership provide little room for emotion. Rather, an ability to suppress or restrict emotional energy is perceived as an important leadership trait.

Emotionally aware isn't something we'd be valuing...that space for being reflective and really tuned into what is going on. What is valued more is someone who gets in, gets things done, delivers, delivers, delivers. (Female manager)

There is a much greater emphasis placed on strategic thinking, emotional toughness, and a facility for rapid...analysis of complex issues. (Male senior manager)

### 7.3.1 Male and female emotion

Within this environment, a negative construct of emotion is strongly aligned with the feminine. Indeed displays of emotion are mediated by gender stereotypical perceptions.

When a white male like Bill Clinton shares a moment of weakness from his past, it might be read as authentic; when a female leader does the same, it is more likely to be read as inappropriately confessional. (Sinclair, 2007: 137)

A perception of a strong association between women and emotional irrationality is apparent in the data. Female emotionality is considered innate, childlike and unprofessional.

Women tend to be a lot more emotional than men and dealing with their emotional breakdowns when things are occurring which are troublesome or stressful, I think some men probably wouldn't cope very well with that. I've learnt to do that as I became a parent. I've always had those man-sized tissues which have always helped a bit. (Male senior manager)

Emotion is not hugely part of our culture. (Female senior manager)

You need a bit of thick skin as well and sometimes women can be quite thin skinned and take offence at things which men would never take offence at. (Female senior manager)

[My senior manager] got me in a room one day and for an hour he shouted at me. I just sat there. He said, 'Have you got any comment to make? You're not even getting upset by it'. He was trying to make me cry... It was quite alarming really. It's not been unusual to have that kind of behaviour here. (Female manager)

They'll use the time of the month to excuse, tears, 'Oh you wouldn't understand'. They'll quite happily throw that into the mix. (Male manager)

An alignment between female emotion and a lack of control undermines the capacity for women to display authentic leadership. At its extreme, the negative associations between women and emotion distort not only perceptions of female value but the nature of female participation in management. Women are aware that displays of emotion are viewed as irrational and out of control. They become wary of exhibiting emotions even when displaying positive emotional energy. They recognise that to survive they need to keep their emotions under wraps even when the culture tolerates or indeed rewards displays of male emotion.

It can be seen as a bit unprofessional if you are emotional or passionate about something. So you need to be slow and steady. (Female manager)

Sometimes I would have conversations with [my direct manager] and I felt he would look at me and just not understand where I was coming from. That was probably the emotional connectedness not happening... 'Don't talk to me about how you feel, it's all too confronting.' I was leading people and he was leading people and you can't not talk about emotions when you are dealing with people. It's just not possible to divorce the two. (Female senior manager)

There is a view that women are too emotional to operate at a senior level. As a woman I've learnt to deal with my emotions very privately. I wouldn't do myself any favours if I was emotional. You have to be smart with your emotions. Never burst into tears. If a man is emotional it's seen as very different. He gets brownie points for expressing feelings. (Female manager)

American women undertaking MBAs have been found to take on enormous personal compromises in order to fit with a very limited idea of the role emotion plays in business. This self-censoring not only mutes women's potential as professionals but impoverishes the business process by denying the opportunity for more insightful and creative management responses (Sinclair, 1994).

The study finds that in narrow business environments, male emotion commonly manifests through anger, intimidation, and bullying. This behaviour is at best excused or tolerated and at worst rewarded.

I've sat in meeting rooms where people have just been shouting at me and I think, 'Why have I come all this way for this? Why are you being so emotional? Why are you behaving like this?' If I show any emotion then they've got what they wanted. (Female manager)

This manager is the biggest bully...and the executive manager will go, 'This manager has got results and he has done this, this and this.' I say, 'Yes but he's managed to do that by being a thug and a bully'. They don't want to hear that. The reality is this person has achieved great results by putting enormous pressure on everybody and not only that, he's teaching his direct reports...to achieve results by doing exactly what he does...shouting at people or belittling people. (Female manager)

There is a perception that the men can get away with it. It's accepted as natural aggression that's needed to do those jobs. You need to be pushy. If a female does it, it's almost seen as unnatural, whether it comes with the voice, the tone, the body language, everything that goes with it. (Female senior manager)

### 7.3.2 Expanding the understanding of emotion

The place of emotion in business is changing. There is growing recognition that positive business outcomes are achieved by harnessing positive emotional energy to enhance key relationship and communication processes. Management essentials are broadening to include elements such as emotional intelligence, creative thought and interpersonal engagement (Palermo, 2004).

One construct of emotional intelligence is, it's the ability to successfully engage with others so as to engender positive relationships and there are all kinds of semi-conscious tactics that you employ. Being persuasive and charming is surely an example of possessing emotional intelligence. (Male senior manager)

You can be in a room and someone is completely insensitive to another person... That social IQ, to be able to measure people's reactions...that ability is a certain level of intelligence. (Male senior manager)

Indeed, the essence of good leadership is increasingly associated with heightened emotional intelligence.

**I think you can see both male and female leaders who have an innate ability to set a direction for an organisation, who are highly emotionally intelligent, have a seventh, eighth, ninth sense to be able to distil issues... They are the true leaders that people follow...they can actually set the direction as opposed to other leaders I have worked with...who wait for something to occur or don't have that additional sense. (Male manager)**

The broadening of the management mindset to accommodate the positive potential of emotion is increasingly recognised as key to improving diversity and enhancing the essential business process (Hampden-Turner, 1994).

**It takes a high degree of emotional intelligence to manage diversity in the workplace... I think that's probably why here we haven't seen, in terms of gender diversity, we haven't seen that much or enough senior women come through. (Male senior manager)**

## 7.4 Communication

Gender differences in language and communication style exacerbate the cultural tensions between men and women at senior levels. The real and perceived communication tendencies of women, that may involve a complex use of language and a reluctance to engage in aggressive communication, do not hold them in good stead when the dominant communication style of an organisation is bullish and abrupt.

Within outcome-focused environments, certain communication styles are aligned with expediency and results. Clear and uncomplicated communication is considered an essential element of good leadership.

**I think people in power are quite succinct usually, so people who make it have that ability. (Female senior manager)**

**I like to chew the fat. He [the boss] is solution orientated. (Female senior manager)**

In a high stress executive environment, efficiency with words connotes efficient outcome. Messages must be conveyed quickly and simply.

**It's something people say on our executive. You wouldn't survive unless you could get your ten second grab in very easily. You've got to be able to make your point very quickly. (Female senior manager)**

### 7.4.1 Gendered communication patterns

Research on gender brain functions highlights significant differences in male and female communication patterns. Women's daily word usage has been estimated to be nearly three times that of men (Macrae, 2006). The data conveys a view of women as wordy, overly analytical and 'bogged down in the detail'. This verbosity is considered incompatible with leadership imperatives such as decisiveness and expediency.

**I've been sitting [in] on the senior IT management meetings and still found that it was very male-dominated in the way they interact, in what they find funny... It wouldn't be the way I would like to participate in a management meeting. Delivery isn't everything. It's having your management recognise your value and if they are all men, I think they sometimes have slightly different flavours in what's important. So sometimes, 'Oh, [women] are too warm and fuzzy and why do we have to worry about all that people shit?' (Female manager)**

Internally competitive corporate environments are not generally considered good listening environments. The study finds this is particularly apparent in large executive meetings, where the loudest and most aggressive voices are heard, and often rewarded, to the exclusion of others.

**At the managers' conference the other day somebody presented the thought that the only listening that occurred [in our organisation] was a pause in order to reload, rather than listening at all. (Male senior manager)**

**Personally, I'll take the opportunity when there is a quiet space to get in there. I don't like talking over people in those sorts of discussions but you don't always get the opportunity. You try to say something relevant whereas you feel some people are talking so they can be heard, whether it's relevant to the debate. (Female senior manager)**

**You can't sit in a meeting for two hours and not say anything...it is a strange culture where occasionally you've just got to throw a couple of things on the table and be prepared to be scoffed at... It does take a lot of training. (Female senior manager)**

This dynamic can inhibit individuals who do not practice an imposing or bullish communication style, from making contributions and gaining visibility and recognition. Women and young, inexperienced men are most likely to find themselves in this position.

**In meetings, if a woman doesn't say anything she is completely ignored and seen as irrelevant. Whereas, I think it's a bit mixed for men. I think young men who are slight and don't appear to be very powerful are seen as someone's assistant. (Female senior manager)**

In a meeting it's very easy for males to talk over females. We [women] have a tendency to be polite. (Female senior manager)

I tell women...if you don't speak early, the probability of your ever speaking is reduced. (Female senior manager)

I'm actually thinking of a meeting yesterday where I put my point and someone started talking over me. I thought, I'm not going to talk over them back and I'm not going to keep talking, I'll just wait for [them] to finish. (Female senior manager)

Women's failure to be seen to be participating during meetings reinforces perceptions of them as non-performers, non-contributors, and the weak links in the chain.

I think with women, you've got to be heard and you've got to say stuff. You've got to make your presence felt, otherwise it's not just that you're seen as not having anything to contribute on that day but it's a black mark, it is seen as negative, you have nothing to say. (Female senior manager)

If you're sitting around a meeting table and you're getting a lot of contribution from particular people and only contribution when requested from others then you will naturally order people in that way... Perception is reality. (Male senior manager)

We have a few women at the board. They don't say anything. They don't have anything to say. (Male senior manager)

#### 7.4.2 How can women be heard?

Within male-oriented monocultures, the distinct communication patterns of women tend to reduce their effectiveness as communicators rather than simply denote difference. In a highly combative and competitive environment, it is the male voice that is heard, sometimes to the exclusion of other voices. Women using more complex, team-oriented language have less impact on an executive who wants decisive action in a high pressure environment. Many women attempt to accommodate this expectation. Others are rendered mute.

I don't use language that might suggest that I'm not really sure what I'm talking about. I'm very clear on my facts. It's not something I was born with. I've observed. Why was that person so convincing? It's because of the language they used. (Female senior manager)

I've been saying to her, 'Don't use any marketing words, don't use any consulting words. Talk to him like you'd be talking to a front line person'. (Female senior manager)

I find women, when they get to put their point, often put it the wrong way... For many women, learning how to flex their own style but speak the language of others is a huge breakthrough in their effectiveness. (Female senior manager)

While contemporary business models include a higher level of tolerance for alternative communication styles, the expectation of decisive leadership is apparent across all organisational settings.

We reward decisiveness and technical prowess. We pride ourselves on how fast we deliver. What is not rewarded are people endlessly asking questions. (Female senior manager)

Only a small number of women take the risk of challenging these communication norms.

I almost try not to use their language... You do have to continually force yourself to be a little bit courageous... to help shift the culture. (Female manager)

## 7.5 Physicality and sexuality

The study finds physicality is still an issue for women in the workplace. A woman's physical presence and appearance can diminish perceptions of professional competence but, equally, can raise her visibility among key players.

The senior females are there, I'll be blunt, because of how they look not because of the way they behave or the way they work. (Female senior manager)

Most women who are successful in [industry] have down to earth appearances. Occasionally but not for very long you see women who have manicured nails, dress up and giggle. (Female senior manager)

### 7.5.1 The impact of appearance

Physical appearance is important for both women and men in professional life. Cultural rules govern dress codes and presentation styles across organisational settings. Nevertheless, physical attractiveness provides both men and women with distinct advantage.

I, as a boss...like to have a good-looking person reporting to me, they're also really useful to send out to your clients. (Female senior manager)

I don't like women blatantly using their sex appeal to get on. Some do. But guys are human. They can fantasize romantically and sexually and can be more likely to be supportive to those they find attractive. (Male senior manager)

For women, getting their 'look' right is particularly important to career advancement. It is fundamental to gaining acceptance and respect in the workplace.

When I first [joined the organisation] one of the professionals gave us a bit of a lecture about what was appropriate in the workplace in terms of women's attire and she

said, 'Put your jacket on before you leave your office. It's not kind of expected of guys but it is of women and always wear stockings in the workplace'. (Female manager)

You see some junior women not dressing appropriately, big dangly earrings and things like that. They look awesome but you can see people thinking, 'That's not appropriate for the workplace'. People won't take you seriously. (Female manager)

Relations between senior men and upcoming women are also considered to be improved if the woman pays particular attention to her appearance.

In a professional services organisation, one of the ways you get ahead...step one is look decent. It's natural. Blokes don't want to take out somebody they think looks daggy or too out there. (Female senior manager)

### 7.5.2 Attractiveness

The study finds that physical appearance is an issue in organisational life. A number of women believe their physical appearance works against them in particular organisational environments. While physical attractiveness can provide individuals with an edge, a woman's appearance can also encourage negative associations with stereotypes such as the 'dumb blonde'. A physically attractive or sexually alluring woman has to fight for credibility in a male-dominated environment.

My experience with some of the [senior managers]...[as] a young, blonde-headed girl, 'What does she really know about what [we] do?' (Female manager)

I went [to work in] a transport company. That was a smart decision. A tall blonde working in a transport company!" (Female senior manager)

"I've got a baby face and I'm blonde...I don't look like I've got 32 years experience...and I've always found in every new job that I've had to prove myself. (Female senior manager)

Other women are aware of the power of physical appearance. Many perceive that a particular physical type of woman rises up through the management ranks. Women operating at a senior level of management are all considered to be 'cut from the same cloth'.

You'll notice we are all cut from the same cloth... It's the way he likes us to look. (Female senior manager)

There's a level of attractiveness...blonde and tall... I guess that's probably something for me, that probably gets me in, and you don't like to admit that but I'm sure that would be part of it. (Female manager)

While we have a lot of women in executive management, they tend to be, from my point of view, all very similar looking... They brought in some female executives from

outside and it's not a problem but they just look like all those other female executives on that floor... They all have that sort of look. (Female manager)

The thing that will get women noticed, certainly under this management structure, is reasonable appearance. When I realised that's what happened, I was bitterly disappointed. Then I realised it wasn't really my problem if that's what was going to make me visible to people, I'm smart enough to deserve to be there anyway. (Female senior manager)

I really think that is something that needs to be outed or named. There is a certain level of attractiveness or fit, a look fit, appearance fit. (Female manager)

I know one senior manager who just wanted to have attractive young women around him and this helped them in their career. (Male senior manager)

### 7.5.3 Sexuality in the workplace

Women know their appearance has a huge impact on their professional visibility. Society is constantly bombarded with sexist media messages and imagery. Women are criticised for their hairstyles, weight, sexual history or un-sexiness (Baird, 2007). Physicality and associated sexuality can be the most challenging aspect of femininity that women have to manage in the workplace. Women cannot completely disassociate from their physical presence, although attempts have been made such as the phenomena of androgynous power dressing during the 1980s (Cochrane & Hoeppe, 2007).

Acknowledging or embracing physicality brings women into complex dynamics with male colleagues.

I've seen some women get promoted because they quite outrageously play the card with men, flattery and all the rest of it, lessons about managing up. If you are dealing with a manager that has a lot of ego, stroking the ego is not going to hurt. I think men expect that from women but they don't necessarily expect it from other men. Men can be promoted who don't play that kind of game at all but I think it's extremely hard for women. I don't think it is conscious in any way. (Female senior manager)

You can't divide work from the rest of the world. It is natural to warm to some people more than others, and some women, particularly young women, more than others, get our attention – either paternally or through some sublimated romantic or sexual impulse. They are more likely to be embraced and cared for. (Male senior manager)

While feminine traits increase women's visibility among senior men, they must follow through with a non-threatening level of toughness to be taken seriously.

He likes you to look good but he also likes you to have testicles. (Female senior manager)

There are ways of relating that men find easier and less threatening. It probably relates to looks, more feminine rather than less feminine but also the level of respect that women are required to exercise towards men in order to be seen to be behaving in an appropriate way. (Female senior manager)

A number of women accept certain flirtatiousness in their dealings with men, as a means of diluting rather than exacerbating the natural tension between the sexes. There is even some suggestion that embracing sexuality can empower women.

I'm not suggesting at all that people ever tolerate blatant harassment of any sort. I'm talking about the day-to-day type stuff, the odd tease or odd joke that comes along... If someone says, 'You look nice today', well feel terrific about that. Say, 'Thank you', and tease them back... You can use your gender in your favour as well and I do. (Female senior manager)

Do I dress to look in a particular way? Absolutely. Do I dress to get compliments from the men I work with? Yes. When I get the compliments can I tell which [men] really like working with women and treat us as equals and which don't? Absolutely. For me, it's a weapon and also a barometer of what...people think. (Female senior manager)

There will often be a natural frisson between some men and women at work. We are all sexual beings. It doesn't have to be overt or acknowledged, but no doubt these subtle relationships will have a subtle influence on how people treat each other, including support and providing opportunities. (Male senior manager)

However, a number of participants warn that this is a delicate dynamic to manage and the dangers lie mostly for women. Women must hit the right balance in their interactions with senior men. Too little warmth can mark women as overly sensitive or prickly, while too much flirtation can be perceived as a challenge to male authority.

Some women make themselves prickly and no-one wants to work with prickly people... You are being difficult to be with where you kind of feel 'I've got to watch my Ps and Qs with this person. If I put a step out they are going to nail me'. (Female senior manager)

Some women reject the use of their sexuality to achieve status and acceptance. They are unable to accommodate a level of personal compromise, are uncomfortable with sexuality in the workplace and display a firm belief in participating on their own terms.

I know there are other women who do use it [attractiveness]. I am a woman and there are womanly things about me that I don't need to come to work and exploit. They are for home, for my partner exclusively... I feel old enough, mature enough, and confident [enough] in my abilities now to insist on that. (Female senior manager)

## 7.6 Acknowledging gender in the workplace

Commentary from interviewees on physicality and sexuality reveals a tension between those who perceive that a gender neutral workplace aligns with concepts such as meritocracy and transparency, and those who argue that a denial of gender exacerbates the natural tensions between the sexes and creates smokescreens around the true dynamic between men and women.

Organisations that promote gender neutrality have been found to perpetuate a 'myth of disembodiment' and a notion of a masculine 'norm' that rewards male sexual identity through a leadership paradigm that is deeply imbued with themes of seduction and masculine conquest (Sinclair, 2007, 2004a, 2004b).

I think in corporate Australia we've almost tried to deny people's physiology and people's dynamics and to impose this bullshit world of when you come to work you stop being a woman and you start being an automaton. It's 2006. You've got to recognise that people are built a certain way and when they come to work their dynamics and the way they're built is still going to operate. (Female senior manager)

Gender neutrality is code for male in this society. (Female senior manager)

### 7.6.1 The high visibility and high vulnerability of senior women

The study concurs with research that suggests women face unique challenges when they take up leadership roles in male-dominated environments. Their heightened visibility renders them vulnerable to increased scrutiny and pressures of minority/majority dynamics (Kram & McCollom, 1998). While women may not necessarily be working in a radically different way to men, they are nonetheless perceived differently and subject to criticism for misdemeanours that would be forgiven in males (Sinclair, 2004a, 2000, 1994; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Kram & McCollom, 1998; Reciniello, 1999).

When I feel like criticising one of the women senior executives I ask myself would I criticise a male in the same position for the same things and I find that in many cases I probably wouldn't. (Female senior manager)

This 'high visibility, high vulnerability' dynamic (Kram & McCollom, 1998) is particularly apparent in narrow organisational settings that are unconsciously but endemically resistant to female presence. Women's physical and verbal presentation comes under intense scrutiny. A dual pressure is placed on them to demonstrate the value of diversity while assimilating with a male-oriented culture.

I've seen a number of women pushed beyond proving they can do their role. Over the last five to ten years there have been attempts made to push a lot more women up without them having to prove themselves... I can imagine the immense amount of pressure on them... If they are one of two, or one of one in that sort of role, lots of people look at them. (Male senior manager)

Women look different in the roles and they approach roles differently. And I've heard women being criticised for things men wouldn't be criticised for and the penalty women pay will be harsher than the penalty for men in the same situation. (Female senior manager)

It's always a fine line. You've got to be partly accepted by the culture but not too accepted. You've got to keep a radar out for what is that majority culture. How do you unpack it and how do you keep reminding, particularly our senior executive team, that the way we do things often unintentionally excludes predominantly women but also people from different backgrounds who don't fit that culture. (Female manager)

I remember going to a board meeting where I had a big group of men. I was the only female there and they were all 40 plus years old. They made it clear to me that a woman does not enter the boardroom... I proved my capability through my delivery of work to a point where they trusted me and I became part of the team. What you achieve is you actually gain respect and acceptance by delivery of better quality product [than] the guys need to do. (Female senior manager)

The minority status of women at executive level highlights their 'otherness'. The presence of a small number of women appears to intensify scrutiny of their performance and potential rather than mark their natural assimilation into leadership ranks. This cultural dynamic sees women as visible and therefore vulnerable to attack, particularly once they reach senior management level. This presents as a major challenge to women negotiating the career ladder.

For any woman that's got to play this kind of behavioural, cultural game, it's going to be a real straight jacket... Men have a walk up start. All they have to do is act like men and they are OK. (Male senior manager)

Women [in politics] are judged brutally. Any woman who rises to the top or attempts to rise to the top gets kneecapped. (Male senior manager)

## 7.7 Collusion with the dominant culture

The study finds women accept the challenge and burden of life in the corporate 'straight jacket'. They internalise the responsibility for their poor cultural fit (Reciniello, 1999) and through personal adaptation and sacrifice, strive to be 'OK' in the eyes of men. They display the anxieties of the minority to infiltrate and survive in the fray (Vallacher, et. al., 2003).

I don't embrace [the culture], I just know I have to manage it and deal with it. I have to be entirely different. (Female senior manager)

It's a tough industry. You need to be tough. It's big business. It's male dominated, global, 24/7. It's not for the faint hearted. If you are in a senior position you have to watch your back every day. (Female senior manager)

Anxiety around their capacity to gain acceptance can lead women to repudiate aspects of themselves, and of other women, that render them visible. Particularly in strong masculine monocultures, women survive by their adeptness at mapping the external environment and accommodating to its demands. They are flexible. They move with the flow and they submerge behaviour that may be perceived as overtly feminine.

I'm usually the only woman in the room. I'm conscious of trying to blend in rather than stand out. You don't want to draw attention to yourself. You tend to think twice before you say anything. If you are in an all male environment you hold back and express opinion off line. (Female senior manager)

Women have to do it more than men. Women have to be flexible in style. They have to have intuition. (Female senior manager)

Women generally tend to move with the flow. They don't rattle the cage. (Female manager)

I'm very aware of the girl talk and I often say to more junior people, 'That's what a woman would say and that's OK but think about what message that's sending out'. (Female manager)

Women adopt excessively hard and aggressive demeanours, talk sport and hide authentic female characteristics that may encourage perceptions of weakness or ineptitude among their male colleagues.

They've, I think, taken the view this is a man's world and I have to be better than the men. So I will behave as the men do plus some in order to show that I'm not to be messed with. (Female senior manager)



A couple of women in particular...they were very masculine in their style, they were very aggressive in conversation, were much very one of the boys, for want of a better word. (Female manager)

Indeed, women judge their own behaviours through a pejorative prism.

Women in groups can be catty, bitchy, they talk... While this may be the way women process information, men are not comfortable about that. (Female senior manager)

However, fitting in is a delicate enterprise that does not always produce the desired outcomes. While some women can effectively navigate organisational life by adopting an 'honorary bloke' persona, this approach carries risk. Women lose credibility and respect among male and female colleagues for 'camouflaging their gender' (Sinclair, 2004b) and eschewing their 'natural' femininity.

This sounds terrible but it's almost against the natural law because it's not instinctively, innately how women behave or are seen in terms of the way they are respected. So that can be a turn off. (Male senior manager)

It's probably unfair but you can get very assertive men who can get away with it because that looks more like the natural law. (Male senior manager)

I think women trying to move up the career ladder are viewed differently from men trying to do the same thing. I think the perception is [that] for men it's natural, they are trying to earn a livelihood and support their family, whereas the woman is trying to take over the world. (Female manager)

A female came to work for my team...and she was hesitant about joining us because our floor is called the scary floor... I think it's the aggression or the hard commercial reality about the demands that we put on people... She was very soft...it wasn't her nature to be aggressive and she actually became quite aggressive. (Female senior manager)

Women are punished for fraudulent or unnatural behaviour when they attempt to assimilate into the masculine mainstream. A number of senior men view women's attempts to blend into an extremely masculine environment as signalling weakness, poor judgment, and poor suitability for leadership. This is a difficult arena for women to negotiate. Assertiveness applauded in men's behaviour is often seen as aggressive when it comes from women.

If you get a woman acting aggressively and more aggressively than male counterparts, I think people would doubt the wisdom or judgment that person might have to undertake a leadership role. (Male senior manager)

You don't really often hear about guys being described as pushy other than real estate guys but you hear about pushy women all the time. I think in society we are prepared to put that label on women more frequently. You don't hear about bossy guys, your mum is bossy, your primary school teacher was bossy, guys aren't bossy, they're directional. (Female manager)

If you are assertive and make decisions easily then you are called aggressive. It wouldn't happen if I was a man. You can't fight that problem. (Female senior manager)

Rather than appearing safe and familiar, women who attempt to assimilate into male corporate culture attract suspicion and derision from men and women. They become the feared (Reciniello, 1999) and fabled 'power bitches' of senior corporate life, the 'Rottweiler with lip-stick' (Beck & Davis, 2005, p. 282). They remain outsiders.

There is the power bitch and she behaves like a man and that in itself is quite frightening, not only to men but also to other women in the organisation. (Female manager)

One woman manager scares the pants off me, very aggressive, very successful, very capable... I think for some women there's a belief that that's what it does take... There's nothing wrong with that, you've got to be aggressive, you've got to be tough... Now the trouble is...if a man does it, it's like he's a tough one. If a woman does it, she's a hard bitch. (Male manager)

[You] say, 'Don't deal with her because she's a real bitch'...these people are alienated, particularly by their peers, 'I don't like working with you. You are arrogant'. (Male senior manager)

The study finds that a high level of personal compromise not only interferes with women's performance but undermines their sense of self and their ability to assert authentic presence and authority. The findings support Australian research (Sinclair, 2007, 2004a, 2004b; Palermo, 2004) that, for many women, the loss of personal authenticity is too high a price to pay for participation in the professional workforce.

Women looking at a female senior manager [say], 'I don't want to be that person. I don't want to change'. It's a little bit about being authentic. (Female manager)

I thought, if that's what it takes to be a [senior manager] here, I don't want to change my personality to do that, it sounds quite vile. (Female manager)

## 7.8 Regulating invisible barriers

The forces that manipulate and restrict female behaviour in some corporate settings are subtle and complex. They also go to the heart of some of the most unpalatable dynamics between men and women. These dynamics are not easily discussed and therefore cannot easily be addressed. Yet they remain frustratingly present for many ambitious women.

**They say there's a problem here, all our women are leaving... But there is no study done, no understanding of why that is the case...it's just hidden. (Female manager)**

**There are no nude women in lockers, it's a professional organisation but just because it's not coarse, doesn't mean it's not a male influence. (Female manager)**

**You talk about the glass ceiling, it's definitely here. Some of it is so entrenched that people really don't know how to behave anymore. (Female manager)**

A majority of organisational interventions to support women and enhance talent management rely on a gender neutral, level playing field environment.

**This is a meritorious system. You are either as good as the next person or worse than the next person, male, female or whatever. (Male senior manager)**

**It's solely merit that applies. I'm completely comfortable with merit promotion. (Male senior manager)**

**I think within [the department], it's far more transparent achievement. This is the culture where women can achieve better, in [a] meritocracy environment. (Male manager)**

Principles such as meritocracy and transparency can only guide selection and promotion processes if there is recognition of cultural barriers.

**[When I see a woman in the boardroom]...it's the pink elephant in the room. (Male senior manager)**

**A woman getting promoted, that just doesn't happen. They [women] need to push themselves forward. I wouldn't have got my recent promotion if I didn't ask for it. It was comfortable for me to ask my boss. (Female senior manager)**

## 7.9 Conclusion

Women face numerous cultural dilemmas when they aspire to success across a range of business settings. Seeking to accommodate to the limiting female archetype that dominates the narrow business environment fundamentally undermines female contribution and the establishment of female authority. Moreover, attempts to fit in with the masculine model of leadership encourages suspicion and derision from peers. Women face tacit barriers to demonstrating their authentic value.

The pressure on women to demonstrate the value add of diversity while assimilating in a resistant male environment, places them in a cultural 'straight jacket'. This restrictive dynamic has its basis in a male-dominated culture that resists the presence and authority of women. To remove the cultural 'straight jacket' that women face, strategies need to address underpinning cultural barriers. The 'undiscussable' needs to be brought to the fore for the implicit to be made explicit.

**Until we unravel and expose the links between being a leader and enacting a particular form of manliness, then, in gender and racial terms, leadership will remain the domain of an homogenous elite. (Sinclair, 2004a: 175)**

# 8.0

## work/life balance

Increasing numbers of Australians are struggling to accommodate the demands of work and family life. Between one quarter and one third of all Australian employees are now believed to regularly work unconventional hours such as 50 hour weeks and weekends (HREOC, 2007). There is compelling evidence that these work patterns are contributing to worrying social trends such as rises in stress related health problems and increased family breakdown (Relationships Forum Australia, 2007). Indeed, these recent Australian studies express significant concern that the pressures placed on both the individual and the family unit from a 24/7 culture are immense and, ultimately, unsustainable.

Political recognition of the need for a systemic rebalancing of work and family life has been slow. Australia remains conspicuous among comparable economies for its reluctance to deliver a policy program that better supports the intersection between the commercial and domestic spheres (Relationships Forum Australia, 2007; HREOC, 2007; Charlesworth, et. al., 2002).

Research reveals links between the poor accommodation of flexibility and the loss of female talent from management (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Australian research has

found that while highly skilled women in full-time employment are more likely to have access to flexible work opportunities (HREOC, 2002), resistance to flexibility increases at the senior end of the organisational hierarchy, with women in management less inclined to take up flexibility options than women at general staff level (EOWA, 2003; Gray & Tudball, 2002).

Australian and international studies point to a prevailing belief among women and men that breaks in their careers or participation in flexibility initiatives may undermine their potential for promotion and career advancement (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Smyth, et. al., 2005; HREOC, 2002; Gray & Tudball, 2002). Women who aspire to advance in their careers but take up flexibility options are often financially penalised and their career development sidetracked. Professional American women returning to work after breaks such as maternity leave, have a typical drop in earnings of 18 percent. This figure increases to 28 percent in the business sector (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

The study finds that while there is increasing recognition that the requirement for long hours of work can interfere with health and family, there is little evidence of a reduc-

tion in hours of work, particularly at senior level. The demands of the 24/7 culture impact on the way work is organised, and indeed on the executive work ethic. Time spent in the workplace continues to be a powerful indicator of commitment. The impact on family life, health, and productivity affects men and women at work.

*We had two full-time careers and two kids and that put a lot of load on us – too much pressure that killed our marriage. I was spending more intimate time with people at work than with people at home. (Male senior manager)*

*At the moment [we have] this huge policy of work/life balance and there are a lot of people with very good intentions. But how it works in practice is another issue. (Female manager)*

*I think the burn out rate on female roles is very high... It's very, very, very high pressure... I had a huge job... It was ridiculous. The sheer load, it wasn't physically possible to do. It was 24/7... I'm divorced...the hours that I worked and the pressure I was under, I didn't have time for a relationship... Work was interfering. I spent the entire Boxing Day on the telephone... I had two kids. It was impossible for me to hold that job and run my life at another level without me breaking...that is another reason why you don't see women continue on. (Female senior manager)*

*I'm married with two kids, they're 12 and eight... What I had seen was that relationship time was being affected by the job I was doing because I do reasonably different jobs and as well as that I manage stress. Most nights I would go home and I would be stressed and tired and Saturday I would be recovering from that and maybe Sunday afternoon I'd turn into a nice person and when that goes on week after week, month after month, that's not a terribly nice person to be around. Absolutely that affected the quality of my relationships with those people. (Male senior manager)*

## 8.1 Recognising the benefits of flexibility

Australian business is responding to the work/life dilemma. Where the private sector once lagged behind its public counterpart in the provision of family friendly policies, large private employers are now gaining recognition for their design and delivery of flexible work initiatives. The provision of leave options such as maternity and carer's leave in the business and finance sectors has improved considerably over the past decade (EOWA, 2005; CASR, 2002). Widespread recognition of the flexibility needs of professional women now underpins business strategies to encourage diversity at all organisational levels (EOWA, 2006b). Nevertheless incorporation of

diversity into business practices continues to be a major challenge.

*I'm wondering how many companies are good at filling in forms instead of changing the reality. Maybe we should have a moratorium on awards and have an honest conversation. (Elisabeth Proust in Fox, 2007:61)*

The study finds a growing appreciation of the benefits to be gained from the establishment of flexible work options. However, execution needs to move beyond meeting a politically correct agenda, a brand for employer of choice recognition. There are limits to the take up of flexibility opportunities when the structure of business remains locked in a traditional heritage with the roles of men and women highly segregated

*My concern in applying for the job was, at what point do they call meetings for a business manager? Is it at 2 o'clock in the afternoon? No, we find out there is a 5 o'clock meeting? What do I do about my children? How do I finish my day at 3pm? I can't. Am I prepared to not pick up my children two days a week? No I'm not. (Female manager)*

### 8.1.1 Retaining talent

A number of managers acknowledge the negative outcomes of not engaging with flexibility. They recognise that talent is lost through a failure to better accommodate reasonable employee requests for flexible work conditions, particularly those of mothers.

*The reality is we've lost some really good people over the last two or three years, mothers who wanted to return to work but only return to work two or three days. We were too inflexible and said, 'Nuh, can't do it'. (Male senior manager)*

Flexibility enables organisations to retain vital experience and talent at the senior end of their workforce and avoid the substantial costs associated with staff replacement.

*Organisationally, there are big benefits in job sharing. Five days a week I was at work and five days a week I was a full-time mum... There is always somebody in the chair. If I wasn't there, some other competent person was. (Female senior manager)*

### 8.1.2 Improving productivity

A number of senior managers recognise that efficiency benefits flow from the flexi-work experience.

*[I] would much prefer to recruit women part-time than a full-time male because women manage their time better and are more organised. They need to be because they have this other part of their life which is more important and to be able to balance those effectively, they've got to be very productive at work. (Female senior manager)*

A lot of women who work part-time [are] in my view very, very productive. This is not the only place where people work, they have computers at home, they're on the phone, text messages, emails. So people can be in a variety of places and still provide the type of leadership and support that people need to operate effectively. (Male senior manager)

I want the highest calibre strategic brain and if possible a working mother...to do one of the most important jobs we have to do. (Male senior manager)

## 8.2 A more sustainable business model

A number of senior managers believe flexibility is essential to the pursuit of more sustainable business practices and the retention of high-level human capital. They recognise that workforce sustainability requires an integrated strategy that views family and community as complementary and indeed integral to the workplace.

We can't create a society where women, in order to fulfil their potential in a working environment, are not able to fulfil their potential and provide appropriate mothering. (Female senior manager)

I believe I could actually be a [senior manager]. I believe I have the credentials, certainly got the drive. What goes with that is really balance. I need to reconcile that in my head. How much am I prepared to give up? (Female senior manager)

There are a range of benefits to business in realising the need for work/life balance. The positive policy response of corporate employers is translating into flexible work opportunities for women in management.

## 8.3 Women's engagement with flexibility

For women, engagement with the flexibility agenda and their utilisation of options offered by employers is influenced by their personal circumstances, attitudes and the stage of their careers.

### 8.3.1 Flexibility supports working mothers

Flexibility allows working women to take the career breaks necessary to fill the pivotal roles they continue to play in Australia's social and family life. This is especially important for women at middle management levels who

tend to reach peak childbearing age at vital stages of their careers (ABS, 2006b).

The study finds a belief among participants that to increase the pool of women moving into senior leadership positions, flexibility options must target women at middle management level.

Women don't tend to have children when they are a senior executive, they tend to do it earlier in their career and the real issue is to stay on a viable career ladder even though you have the children and have the breaks earlier in your career. It's the question of, let's not discount these women when they go off for a year and not discount them when they come back. (Female senior manager)

It's an indisputable fact, in my opinion, that if women have to leave the workforce because of children, it's a body blow to their career. (Female senior manager)

Two to three years [out of the workforce] can be dangerous, not only in terms of technical knowledge and confidence, you lose an edge. It's the same as if you interview guys that have been unemployed, something has been lost. (Male senior manager)

Women who leave the workforce at a middle management stage in their careers, gain from staying connected with employers through paid leave options and flexible work opportunities. Many see flexibility as a temporary solution and aim to return to more conventional modes of work at senior level.

I've worked full-time. Then I had two children and worked part-time. Then I had job share and then back to full-time again. So to be given that opportunity and still be in an executive manager role is pretty good I think. (Female senior manager)

### 8.3.2 When flexibility doesn't work for mothers

For some working mothers, flexible work arrangements do not provide solutions that they feel comfortable with. They are sensitive to problems associated with working in unconventional ways and choose to remain in the mainstream. They see a danger in isolating themselves from office life and daily interaction with colleagues and communication processes.

Working from home doesn't fit into the current way businesses are run. I think it needs a broader change... It's whether it practically would set the person up for success. I mean, would I want to work three days at home? Let's say I did. I know that I'd struggle with it because I would know I wanted to be at that meeting, and I needed to be there to hear that. So there's a bit of isolation around that as well. (Female senior manager)

Women also express concern over breaking from the conventions of good parenting that dissuade maternal absence in the early childhood years (Sims, et. al., 2007). For a number of women working at a professional level, the decision to re-enter the workforce is not driven by economic imperatives.

**We can't both work 70 or 80 hours a week and raise a child the way we would like to do it. Yeah, we could put him into childcare and have nannies but that's not the way we want to do it. (Female manager)**

For these women, a return to the workforce after the birth of a child becomes possible only through family support, as in a stay-at-home husband. Indeed, the study finds a number of successful senior female managers attribute their professional advancement to the support of their partners.

**I've got a fantastic husband...a lot of women will really battle because they are expected to still do a whole lot of the domestic stuff and the wife/mother stuff, because the husband has the intrinsic view that he's also working and it should be at least 70/30, 60/40 on her job. (Female senior manager)**

**I am actually the breadwinner of the family and my husband, although he does some part-time work, he is the parent, the carer. (Female senior manager)**

**I have a child who is five-years-old. I have a husband who cares for him full-time and a husband who supports me 100 percent...but if my husband had different aspirations then I would have some decisions around my values about how my child would be raised. (Female manager)**

These opportunities are not mainstream. Men's identity is still linked to the workplace.

**The prospect of looking after kids would drive me to suicide. I don't get my jollies going to playgroup... The women I deal with can slip into playgroup talk more easily. I couldn't get into those discussions about little Johnny. (Male senior manager)**

### 8.3.3 When flexibility is unsustainable

Some women who take up flexible work options experience difficulty adjusting to and sustaining their new work patterns. The study finds a number of part-time, middle level managers work considerable hours at home and complain of being overloaded. They express concern about their ability to sustain this working pattern for any duration of time. Some choose to leave their careers temporarily rather than attempt to make flexibility work for them.

**At the end of the day, working part-time, my responsibilities didn't change. So you still got the job done in less time. You just became more efficient. (Female senior manager)**

**I'm a four-day-a-week mother who basically works five days a week, lots of hours at home... I'm starting to get quite intolerant of some things that are and are not happening here. I can see myself over the next 24 months thinking long and hard about whether I'm going to stay or go somewhere else. (Female senior manager)**

### 8.3.4 Flexibility and seniority

At a senior level flexibility is proving to have particularly limited benefits. It does not solve the problem of retaining senior female talent. Seniority bestows high commitment expectations on managers. To the extent that flexibility options are provided, the onus remains on the individual to accommodate the demands of the workplace and manage employer expectations (Charlesworth, et. al., 2002; Probert, 2002, 1999).

The study finds a majority of participants see little opportunity to accommodate flexibility with the demands of a management role at senior levels. Middle and senior managers perceive family friendly work options including part-time, job share, and telecommuting to be at odds with the grinding demands of a competitive, 24/7, client driven environment.

**I don't think we should have executives who work four days a week... I'd never put myself forward for it in the context of four days because I know that just doesn't fit the role. (Male senior manager)**

**If I got made a [senior manager] first [before having children] then I think I would have to come back full-time... I don't think you can do this job and breastfeed and be woken in the night and things like that. (Female manager)**

**I think traditionally as an organisation, we say, 'If you can't be there five days a week, that's it'. (Male senior manager)**

In the finance sector particularly, there is an expectation for senior managers to be available on a full-time basis. The business transaction cannot be confined within the framework of the eight-hour day. Effective players needed to be available around the clock to seize opportunities and respond to client demands.

**When a deal is on, a deal is on and they need people then. (Female manager)**

**If the client wants something you have to be there to do that. Someone coming in thinking you can do it in a nine-to-six environment, I don't think you can. (Female manager)**

Only a small number of executive level players role model unconventional work practices. A majority of senior managers work on a full-time basis and are attuned to the needs of a 24/7 culture. This paucity of senior players operating in flexible circumstances reinforces the message that flexibility is not appropriate at a senior level.

There's very few role models at those senior levels that work differently. People who work outside the mould and challenge the stereotype are not recognised as leaders. (Female manager)

### 8.3.5 The shock of the new

The study finds a perception among participants that business leadership is dominated by a generation of men who have difficulty advocating a business model that reflects the values of a contemporary work environment. Identified as affluent and conservative baby boomers, this generation's work history has not provided the reference points necessary for managing the presence of women in the workforce, and at senior level. The baby boomer generation of leaders is widely perceived to be hostile to flexibility.

Older men, the men who are holding many senior positions, are people who are going to have to make an exceptional effort because nothing they have ever been taught is going to help them to get it right about getting women into the boardroom and into positions of power. (Female senior manager)

We've got a policy in place if you are the primary care giver, you are entitled to maternity leave, male or female is irrelevant. That's how society is changing. It's now an acceptable activity for a guy to actually be the carer. Still for the older generation it's not accepted. We have to get that whole culture up and if you look at your boards today, the majority are still 50 plus. So this is not normal and you are asking them to change at an age that is not normal. (Female senior manager)

We are the first generation of working mothers in the professional ranks at the senior level that the executive is having to deal with. (Female senior manager)

The [senior managers] and particularly the males are 35 to around 50. They generally are private school educated, they generally have a partner at home that takes care of their children or if their children have left home, the general running of the household, their shirts... Maybe part of it is how those male [managers] see the women around them. Maybe there are always people who are helping them do whatever they do rather than a peer of theirs. They generally have wives at home, they have female secretaries. (Female manager)

I don't think with the current management team in place, that they would support that fundamental change to how we operate because they are in their comfort zone. They are managing the way they have for 20 to 30 years, which is totally understandable. But without their support it won't happen. I don't think they really agree with the fundamental need to change. (Female manager)

While this older generation provides a formidable

leadership role model, there is evidence that the next generation of men are questioning the precepts underlying the traditional model of work and seeking alternative options.

You've got to stop the generational link, these ideas are just being passed on. You've just got to stop it. (Male senior manager)

Men 10 or 15 years younger than [the senior manager], they say if this impinges on family time then I don't want to be doing it. (Female manager)

A lot of women and men don't want this life. I was moved by my company at a complete whim. I saw my father do the same. Young people are saying, 'I don't want this. I want to go wind surfing'. We need to radically revisit a list of basic assumptions that we have in engineering. Women want to have kids and people want a work/life balance. (Male senior manager)

I've got kids and I'm in at eight and leave at a reasonable hour to see them. If they don't like it, then I can always go somewhere else. (Male senior manager)

### 8.3.6 When flexibility and seniority are not aligned

When a 24/7 imperative drives an organisation's work ethic, there is little cultural tolerance for the intersection of the commercial and domestic worlds at a senior level. Female talent is lost as working mothers abandon demanding corporate careers. The onus to change remains on women.

At best, women who abandon their management careers are seen to be making informed choices and exercising good judgment in the face of competing domestic demands.

Women choose not to take on the positions at the top of organisations because it's difficult to balance these with other duties in the household. (Female senior manager)

When you are at work you think you should be at home. When you are at home, you think you should be at work. All that guilt, I don't know why anyone would do it. (Female senior manager)

At worst, women are seen to have failed to meet the demands of a contemporary 24-hour work culture. They have not been creative or enterprising in navigating and managing their work and family commitments. They remain influenced by a long abandoned culture of super mums. (Reciniello, 1999).

Something as easy as organising a cleaning lady or picking kids up from school, they're still trying to [do it], they are still trying to be super mum. But you are competing with other men and women who have better support teams and they will do better. (Female senior manager)

Nanny agency, house cleaning, car cleaning...they are exactly the sorts of cottage industries that females, if they want to work hard in an industry like this, need if they're to be parents too. (Male senior manager)

The uptake of flexibility options is seen to demonstrate a lack of commitment. Indeed, it is perceived as shorthand for a lack of interest in promotion. Women with senior career aspirations must hide their desire for family life.

I really want children and I have spent a lot of time analysing how to fit that in and when to fit that in. In fact, one of [my managers] said to me, 'If you want to be a senior manager, wait till after you are a senior manager to have your children'. The message was, you will be perceived differently if you have children before you are a manager. (Female manager)

Ultimately, it is women who are responsible for managing the work/life balance. Research indicates that women typically bear a disproportionate amount of responsibility for home and family. It is therefore incumbent on women to negotiate a satisfactory outcome.

I went to see the new head of [the organisation]... He said to me, 'This job is 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Can you do that?' I said, 'I'll say two things to that. If it really is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, then you have structured the job incorrectly because nobody can do that and quite frankly if that's the position you've got, I'm not the person for that anyway'. What transpired was I walked away and said I don't want to know... What came back was if I worked every second Friday, then that was acceptable. (Female senior manager)

### 8.3.7 The stigmatisation of motherhood

There is evidence that Australian working culture struggles to accommodate motherhood. Pregnant women in the workforce have been found to experience cultural difficulties and discrimination such as 'inappropriate or negative comments' and 'missing out on training and promotional opportunities' (ABS, 2006b).

The study concurs with these findings. While motherhood has been accepted at a policy and rhetorical level, in practice tensions remain in fully accommodating motherhood in the workplace. Women fear the stigma associated with motherhood as this may suggest a lesser commitment to workplace demands.

Successful women are single, no kids. (Male manager)

[The organisation] is user friendly for a working mother but I guess you kind of get a little bit labelled. The men see the women getting all these benefits and feel they're kind of missing out. (Female senior manager)

I've read about hiding the children... When the kids were sick I said I was sick. I wouldn't take a family leave day. Oh my god, that was just unacceptable even though they were offered because I would be seen to be unreliable. (Female senior manager)

Working mothers experience subtle resistance on a number of levels.

Is this a career woman or does she want to have a family? It's always a concern. It's one of the questions you can't ask. (Male senior manager)

Some of the girls who do have family...they all openly admit that they come to work, do their job and go home... They say, 'I'm leaving the floor today, that's what I've agreed'. [They are] not willing to be flexible, not willing to put themselves out at all. (Female manager)

This resistance is most manifest through the exclusion of working mothers from key roles, projects and opportunities.

Before I announced I was pregnant, I was always in demand, given work by the managers. When I was pregnant, it was almost like I'd resigned, I was coming back in a different capacity. I'm not treated like I was beforehand. I was always the first port of call, whereas now I'm not. Now I'm finding the managers, who used to give me a lot of work, don't give me a lot of work and have been giving work to other senior people who are always there. I can't be here 24/7 like I was previously but to be completely ignored by some of the managers is quite difficult. (Female manager)

Working mothers are often unable to break from entrenched feelings of guilt and unworthiness. They do not recognise their flexibility needs as legitimate.

When I used to come in late I used to make excuses but I could never say it was nappies and babies. (Female senior manager)

I guess when I first came back to work from maternity leave, four days, I always felt I wasn't doing enough. (Female senior manager)

We've got one lady on our team who is part-time...but it's interesting to watch her in action. It's like she always has to justify why she's not full-time with us... She'll come in half-an-hour late and go into a total spin about why she is late. (Female manager)

She's just recently come back to work after 12 months parental leave... For the first three months she was very apologetic. If she had to leave work early because her daughter was sick or she was late in because something happened at childcare... It wasn't just, 'Hey, something happened, my car broke down' or something like that. It was coming from the point of view of, 'I'm a mother, I've just come back from maternity leave returning to work, I'm really sorry'. (Male manager)



A number of women go to extreme lengths to hide their parenting responsibilities.

I had to go to the children's hospital once a week for three hours. So I said, 'I don't have a choice. I can share with my husband every so often but this is the reality'. [My boss] said, 'I don't want you to tell anyone that's what you're doing', which I sort of understand was the right thing to do. But it wasn't the right thing to do because it doesn't allow the transparency of the family thing to happen. [My boss] felt the culture didn't allow it to happen. She was protecting me. (Female senior manager)

Widespread cultural resistance to motherhood results in significant 'body blows' to many women's performance and career aspirations.

I've been going with the flow and just see how things pan out. I'm trying to stay positive. I mean, the main thing I want is a challenging career and...to come in and be respected for what I do and know I'm valued. [But] my level of confidence now has gone down in terms of what I'm capable of and what I can achieve in terms of my career progression. (Female manager)

Some women decide to abandon working life.

It definitely did have an impact... I had to make a decision about what I would do careerwise. I guess I've just sort of come to the conclusion that if I want to maintain a healthy involvement in my daughter's life, that I can't do that [maintain career] and I'll just put it on hold for a while. (Female manager)

Underpinning these comments is a discomfort and anxiety with the presence of working mothers, particularly at senior level. Men do not experience the same challenges from the working environment. Male sexuality and the fatherhood role that this portends are aligned with leadership (Sinclair, 2007, 2004a, 2004b; Fletcher, 2004; Calás & Smircich, 1993).

Premier John Brumby's decision to give the Treasury job to John Lenders over Tim Holding, at least partly on the grounds that the former is a father, goes to show how people – and especially politicians – still see fatherhood as the mark of commitment, reliability, competency and hard work in men. (Fotinopoulos, 2007:17)

### 8.3.8 Negotiating flexibility

Where diversity and flexibility policies fail to be formally integrated into the organisation's formal workplace and market place processes and practices, negotiating flexibility is rendered a function of good negotiating skills and market power. A piecemeal approach to implementing flexibility strategies places the onus on women to negotiate work/life balance. This renders them particularly vulnerable in cultural settings where diversity policies are

fluid and ambiguous, opening the way for interpretation by individual managers.

At [the senior] level I know there is a lot of different agendas, but they do walk the talk more than at the level below them. I think that's where we lose it, the level below them and the one below that. That's where things haven't changed. [The senior manager] can talk until he's blue in the face about all the changes we need in the business but it just gets lost as it filters down and someone else puts their spin on it. (Female manager)

I support women working at home. Ten percent of my staff is on part-time employment working from home. Productivity does not suffer. I make expectations clear. (Female manager)

The study finds that flexibility is not seen as a right but a privilege that must be earned. Women employ a high level of strategy in negotiating work/life options ranging from selling the benefits of flexibility to their organisation to adopting a highly proactive stance and seeking out environments that are more culturally aligned with their flexibility needs.

Whenever I take a new role I talk about the way I like to work and whether it's important that I'm there at the crack of dawn. Often that gives me an indication of the type of person I'm working for because often, if they are really rigid around time, they are probably not someone from a style perspective that I'm actually going to work with ... as you get into a more senior role, you want some autonomy. People I work best with are actually outcome focused rather than what hours do you do when you sit behind the desk. (Female manager)

An uncompromising 24/7 work ethic remains a dominant force in many organisations. While this is more pronounced in some industries, it is nevertheless an ongoing part of organisational life. Tension exists between the policy intent of flexible work programs and the prevailing management work ethic. This 'tacit resistance' (Hewlett & Luce, 2005) sends a message to ambitious managers that adopting unconventional work practices may jeopardise their careers. Stigmatisation of flexibility can result.

The study finds stigmatisation of flexibility inhibits the effective uptake of initiatives by women. Women who negotiate a part-time return to work only to find their full-time responsibilities have not diminished, avoid negotiating for a more manageable workload. They accept a 'Clayton's' flexibility in its place.

There's a lot [of senior women] that have families. How have they done it? The hard way. I know that a lot of them are strict around their time in terms of when they physically leave or physically get into the office but I also know a majority of them go home and do the night shift in terms of work. (Female manager)

There is no senior executive role that is four days a week, there is no such thing. And the stress of doing a five-day job in four days is huge. Because what happens is, I used to work very long hours to make sure everything was up-to-date. I had everything sent home to me on Friday night and I would do it over the weekend so I could hit the ground running. So the fact that I worked four days didn't impact on performance even though I got less pay for it... Part-time females in executive roles overcompensate like nothing I've ever seen before. I've got three part-time females working for me and, I tell you what, I get five days a week work out of them...that's actually what's expected. (Female senior manager)

Unfortunately there are a number of senior jobs that can't be divided. That's part of the reality of corporate life. (Male senior manager)

Women feel powerless in the face of real and perceived hostility. They remain sensitive to both their marginality and a lack of cultural accommodation. This impacts on their ability to negotiate satisfactory work/life options. Many conform to the accepted status quo or abandon careers. To take the role of change agent is considered too risky, particularly when the overriding message from management is 'business as usual'.

The signals that people clearly get from their direct line management, This might be organisational policy but not in my patch. (Female senior manager)

A senior male manager in an organisation that was in the early stages of engaging with diversity and designing flexibility options described how onsite childcare was abandoned at concept stage because the female managers were not supportive.

I'm told our crèche thing hasn't been very successful. I thought we tried or we offered it but it didn't get off the ground because not a lot was made of it or there wasn't enough enthusiasm for it. (Male senior manager)

Participants from this organisation acknowledged women did not feel secure enough to reveal their needs as mothers. Rather, they went to great lengths to appear unencumbered by family responsibilities.

There's a female manager who kept her pregnancy quiet for five months. So if that's what senior women feel they have to do, then that sends a pretty clear message to me. (Female manager)

The study concurs with research findings that women comply with the dominant mindset rather than champion alternative work practices (Probert, 1999).

### 8.3.9 Men and flexibility

Flexibility is understood as a female agenda item. Women continue to bear the burden of domestic care responsibilities and have pressing work/life balance needs. Juggling work and family commitments does not impinge on men's workforce participation in the same way that it does on women.

A small number of middle and senior male managers adopt flexible work practices. These men utilise their status as valued members of their organisations to exert personal authority and successfully and confidently negotiate flexibility options.

I work four days a week. Primarily that is around wanting to have a different balance and not being so sucked into my job. I'm generally regarded as being reasonably good at what I do. So I'm considered to be of some value to the organisation and I think that makes a big difference. Organisations on the whole are quite happy to meet you half way, compromise, when they've got something of value. (Male senior manager)

I leave at five o'clock for my family. I know I'm of value to this organisation. They accept it. If they didn't like it there are plenty of other options. (Male senior manager)

Men's experiences with flexibility underlines the importance of negotiation skills and confidence in achieving positive outcomes. This confidence emanates, no doubt, from being part of a cultural majority that takes its rights for granted.

## 8.4 The leadership challenge

The flexibility option has not been a panacea for the management of work and family life. It suits some individual situations and does not suit others. The difference in women's experiences suggests that achieving successful flexibility practices is a complex task that requires a co-ordinated management effort.

At its core, leadership needs to challenge the alignment between long hours devoted to work and individual performance. Pressure to work long hours is relentless and on the increase, a reflection of a masculine construct of career that emphasises self-elevation, a construct that advantages men (Spearrit, 1999; Sinclair, 1994).

It's rubbish that people are working to full effect for 12 and 14 hours a day. Sometimes they are just socialising. So I think in some ways people have built that culture and that culture is quite excluding of certain sorts of women and certain sorts of men too, who want to have some balance in their lives. But it's not necessary and people really need to rethink how they do it. (Female senior manager)

I don't accept the most senior people should have no time. We'll have better people in senior positions if they have work/life balance. (Female senior manager)

You've got to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week but I think we allow ourselves to get away without testing that proposition too often. (Male senior manager)

## 8.5 Conclusion

The 24/7 work culture has come under scrutiny in the broader community (Relationships Forum Australia, 2007; HREOC, 2007). Corporate engagement with flexibility is still in its early stages and Australia has yet to follow many western economies by adopting a more co-ordinated response to work/life balance. Managing diversity successfully in organisations requires a thorough understanding of management infrastructure that is consistent with diversity, especially structures of work, policies, and procedures that institutionalise and build diversity. High profile business leadership support is vital to ensuring the issue remains firmly on the agenda and the narrow demands of day-to-day business are reconciled with a broader consideration of relevance, resilience, and sustainability over the long-term.

# 9.0 dynamics

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## 9.1 Understanding the dynamics of hierarchy

Hierarchy is a reality of organisational life. Success is a function of effectively navigating the career ladder. Subtle and unconscious dynamics around the management of hierarchy shape relationships. Mateship is the glue that binds. It has a long history of being embedded in the Australian psyche. It connotes powerful frontier imagery that upholds masculine fantasies of power and sexuality. Historically, mateship was underpinned by a notion of racial homogeneity. The loyalty of mateship extended only to those fitting the standard of Australian manhood. It represented an exclusive and divisive ideology based on racial homogeneity that saw 'real Aussies' as Anglo-Celts. Mateship did not extend to women. It firmly affirmed the dichotomy of the sexes and enshrined traditional sexual stereotypes of man as the warrior and creator and woman as subservient (Hirst, 1999; Lake, 1992).

Men's early socialisation provides them with the capacity to negotiate hierarchy. The experience of safety and camaraderie in the group provides a powerful antidote to the loss of autonomy that hierarchy demands. Mateship and team membership mitigate the tension between competition and subjugation.

**Men are comfortable with conceding dominance to another male... It's okay to concede dominance because you can compensate the psychic damage...through other mechanisms and activities and the parallel relationships [in] social realms and all those things. (Male senior manager)**

**There are two ways to survive. You fight in the playground and knock out more people than knock you out. That is classic male behaviour. The other way is...to join in...all of them require some loss of dignity. (Male senior manager)**

**The whole hunting and gathering and males hanging out in packs – why? It's a lot safer to hang out in packs when you are chasing the wild buffalo... It's preordained, it's the hunting pack. That is also what I was told at a very young age, blokes stick together. (Male senior manager)**

The study finds a 'hunting pack' mentality presents particular challenges to women in working life. They do not have the social reference points to become part of the pack. Nor do they speak the language of the pack.

Another language thing and this is my personal favourite, when people say, 'We don't just eat what we kill here at [organisation], we share it around'. You know, 'We have to feed those underlings. Share the kill!' (Female manager)

Sporting language dominates corporate small talk and permeates the professional environment. It is the language of connection and bonding.

I can't tell you how many times I've been in meetings and people use sporting analogies. I started using sporting analogies myself one day in a particular meeting, talking about rhythmic gymnastics and netball, just to make the point and say, 'Here we go, another cricket analogy'. (Female manager)

For the first eight weeks... I just sat back and observed the interactions and started to learn about the business and so forth. Then I felt that if I'm going to be accepted as one of the team maybe I need to change. So I found myself, which I cringe at now, I found myself talking about football and all these blokey things... I felt that I had to change to be accepted. (Female manager)

I don't play golf. That's just one element. I can and do talk about [sport]... You need to find points of interest... a bond, a bridge. It's powerful. (Female senior manager)

Women who do not have a background or interest in sport can experience difficulty participating in key social and networking activities within their organisations.

I'm not in the club and I don't have the appetite or patience to go in the club. I don't play golf. Before dinner they have bonding activity. They do go cart racing, rowing, clay target shooting, paint balling. I don't need to do this. It's a physical expression. They can choose bonding things that are more inclusive. Some guys don't like that either. (Female senior manager)

There are golf days and things. So boys' things and they go and do that. They just get organised and I probably don't get included in that. (Female manager)

A senior female executive points to the staff cricket match we have every year... I say, 'That's alright isn't it? It's a family day and women go along to it'. She says, 'Yes, but how often do we take part in the game?... This is for men, not for women'. I must confess I hadn't even thought about that. Multiply it by the beer tasting evenings we have... most women aren't going to find [that] so attractive. (Male senior manager)

Women tend to observe the informal but strategic plays between men from the standpoint of an outsider.

They're not blokey in the traditional sense but they call each other by their nicknames... I just don't feel as connected as I normally would with a group of people. (Female manager)

I couldn't talk the blokey language... There is always a barrier that is going to be there. So [the senior manager] will have his blokey names for his people, the people he takes advice from. For me it's always a bit of a barrier there because I don't fit into that stereotype. (Female senior manager)

Meetings will happen without my knowledge. I'll see all the men walking off to have a meeting. I'll get cc'd on the notes [but] I'm not engaged with stuff. (Female manager)

Women do not easily fit into a culture of mateship. They do not run with 'the pack'. They are often absent from networking opportunities such as drinks at the pub or games of golf. Men can also feel uncomfortable with some of the informal, though expected social networking.

Being able to play golf with the boss on the weekend, being able to go down the pub and have a drink, men are more available for those types of activities... So I guess the boss might feel more comfortable with those types of blokes who will go down and have a drink. Whereas the women... are more likely to go home and look after the kids and make the dinner than the blokes are... Men have and continue to dominate the culture. (Male senior manager)

A senior woman was brought in and she didn't stay to have a beer. She wasn't going to be part of the team. The only way to be successful is to stay out and have a drink. You need to be comfortable in a room with thirty men. (Female senior manager)

I don't do drinks. I don't network. (Female manager)

I can ring a business colleague for lunch. I can go out and have a drink. How does a woman do it? (Male senior manager)

### 9.1.1 Thriving in a competitive environment

Competition is a reality of organisational life. It underpins most facets of organisational life.

Women's isolation in hierarchical environments reflects an innate difficulty with the competitive dynamic (Reciniello, 1999). Women struggle with the power plays of hierarchy and have difficulty gaining strategic benefit from the competitive process. Men harness the strategic component of competition in their workplace relationships. They are more adept at managing the competitive dynamic. Women find it difficult to display raw ambition in the same way men do, and their behaviour is misinterpreted as less driven.

I have the impression that men do approach the workplace with a little more distance than women do. Women want the personal relationships to be right. Whereas I think with men, it's less of a factor. Men are taught to compete with each other and they expect competition. (Female senior manager)

From a male point of view, my only choice is to work. Therefore I absolutely have to want it or fail. I have to develop a behaviour that in a corporate environment means that my wanting it is very evident. If I'm a woman in the same level, however more talented I may be, I...don't feel the need to display that I want it... I suppose somehow we need to help women in the workplace to understand...that at some point that may become an inhibitor to growth. (Male senior manager)

The study finds women do not feel comfortable with the level of aggression and competition that is intrinsic to organisational life. The need to form strategic alliances rather than genuine friendships can be at odds with their professional values and expectations. Women commonly misinterpret the strategic and aggressive manoeuvres of colleagues as personal attacks.

One thing that I guess really got to me in the end, that was a contributing factor to leaving, was really the politics... I found that extremely difficult to deal with. I guess my natural reaction is to take it personally. I found it hurtful and difficult and in the end it just really wore me down. (Female senior manager)

I think when you get into more senior roles, the politics comes out more and more. You've got to be comfortable and you've got to be able to deal with that. It puts a lot of people off. It puts a lot of women off too. They see the negative politics and how hard you have to push sometimes to get things through. I think that could make people think this is just not worth it. (Male senior manager)

A number of women expressed their reluctance to enter a game of strategic survival that involves cut throat dynamics. These women choose to leave organisations rather than engage with hostile managers and aggressive office politics.

You were constantly spoken to as an inferior and basically a fool. At the time I didn't have the maturity and I certainly didn't have the confidence to tell people to rack off. I came from a background where seniority was always respected. For me, the whole environment was personally very difficult. Intellectually it was hard work and I thoroughly enjoyed it but I found personally I had to leave. I just felt my intellectual effort wasn't being recognised and there were other things at play that I didn't want to deal in. (Female senior manager)

It was a competitive environment... I think I've had enough of it. I'd like to run my own show. I'll go to a

smaller organisation where you are not looking over your shoulder all the time. All large organisations...you get thrown into situations with peers where there is an element of fight for survival. It's OK to a point but it's not why I go to work. (Female manager)

I was actually horrified that someone felt they had to resign to get relief from the situation. I sat in a meeting and it was all men and it was like, 'Oh well, you don't understand and it's the right thing to happen – risk management. She was a risk and we couldn't trust her.' Fundamentally they didn't understand her because they didn't want to understand her or try to understand her. (Female manager)

Difficulty with a competitive dynamic can prove a woman's Achilles heel in terms of career development (Reciniello, 1999). The subtle and unconscious dynamics around the management of hierarchy influences how talent is recognised and rewarded. Women's failure to gain the full strategic benefit from work relationships leads to exclusion not only from 'the pack' or 'the boys' club', but from sharing in the rewards of 'the kill'.

If you've got a band of men who are very chummy, how do you break in? You don't. That's why there are fewer and fewer women in the organisation. (Female manager)

A lot of the women...would say it is about being...male, you've worked in [the industry], you've been around a long time, you know the boys' club well. That's probably how you get to senior roles. (Female manager)

You have to be fairly tough as a female in that environment. A lot of people in senior positions [have] been there for a long time and they'd just kind of get those positions...I guess it's the old boys' club to some degree...they are definitely looking out for each other, that's for sure. (Female senior manager)

There's a lot of politics when you go up to fairly senior roles in management. I'm not sure that a lot of females want to be a part of that to be honest. It's a bit of a boys' club and that's because there aren't a lot of females in there. (Female senior manager)

### 9.1.2 The shadow side of career progression

The dynamics around the management of hierarchy are unconscious and powerful and thwart interventions designed to support diversity. Research suggests organisations that take elaborate steps to embed values of meritocracy and transparency in their work practices, find their initiatives thwarted by intangible cultural dynamics. Diversity programs have not made tangible inroads into gender balance. An American study of senior appointments in public and private organisations found the 'gender proofing' selection criteria did not

result in greater gender balance in senior appointments. Beneath the overt selection process lay a highly subjective, informal understanding of good leadership that favoured familiar, male candidates. Senior appointments were found to be made “not on competencies but other subjective standards...The final decision often rests with one or two senior people and this is where the bias creeps in” (Cranfield, in Griffiths 2005: 21).

I hold two parallel images of the culture of organisations. In a traditional model, as people rise through the ranks, they are recognised for their skills and achievements. They are rewarded through promotion and increased status. However, there is also the shadow side in organisations, where promotion is based on corridor politics and informal communication systems. Somewhere between the two polarities lies the reality for many people. (Eden, 2006: 80)

Golembiewski (1995) refers to a tension between the ‘complexity of diversity’ and the ‘simplicity of homogeneity’, a pervasive dynamic played out in organisational life that sees women excluded on the basis of their ‘otherness’. Sharing power with women (or others) constitutes a threat to homogeneity. John McFarlane has indicated the tendency for men to recruit 90/10 in favour of men – while women tend to show no gender bias in their recruitment decisions and typically recruit 50/50 (McFarlane, 2004). A number of the study’s participants referred to the unconscious male subjectivity or ‘like-attracts-like’ dynamic, influencing recruitment and promotion decisions in their organisations.

I call it the mini-me syndrome. You look around and your peers look much more like the middle-aged men that are the executives. Then when they see those people they don’t think, ‘I’m going to choose Bob over Jane’, they think, ‘Bob would be great for this. Why don’t I get him to help me out on that because Bob and I are alike’ ... I don’t think it’s deliberate. (Female manager)

When I employ someone, it’s got to be someone I trust. That’s why I might employ men. Blokes trust blokes. It’s a point of reference, we are consciously connected. We’ve been on the same path, on the same journey. You’re like me. You look like me, our values are aligned. It’s Darwinian, we move in packs and that’s why we survive. (Male senior manager)

Managers and partners will promote people who are like them...it’s a hard cycle to break. The people who are in charge and promoting people to go forward are likely to choose people who are like that. (Male senior manager)

We tend to go to the market and buy talent. Men are better at selling themselves. Men also recruit in their image so if you go to the market you get more men. (Male senior manager)

Male and female managers attribute a ‘mini-me syndrome’ to the poor representation of women in senior positions.

Why don’t women get promoted? Well, because we don’t behave the same ways the guys do and therefore, I think, all of us are inclined to promote in our own likeness or promote the things we like and the way women work is not the way men work. (Female senior manager)

He [senior manager] wasn’t saying, ‘I don’t want you on the management team because you are a woman’, but he was saying, ‘I don’t think your style fits with what I want’. (Male senior manager)

There was a regeneration of the character of the place through generations of staff as they came through. Obviously they were predominantly male, there were hardly any women... People were shoring up their positions consciously and subconsciously...and no-one was going to challenge the norm. So women who have come here have had a bit of a battle. (Female senior manager)

Meritocracy is an idealised notion organisations aspire to but find difficult to operationalise. The study finds a level of scepticism among women regarding the effectiveness of diversity strategies to support them through to leadership positions. This is particularly so in predominantly male, monocultural environments where stereotypical beliefs about leadership incumbency, leadership behaviour, and gender relations imbue the notion of talent and therefore a rational assessment of merit.

It’s a club culture, people looking after their mates. It’s not nepotism in a formal way. They end up like family. They have special ties with one another. It’s about past personal relationships... It’s not a structured process. It’s not transparent. You tap your mates on the shoulder. People who have patchy delivery records still pop up. (Female senior manager)

There are no formal structures for you to go up. Even though we work on a meritocracy, I’ve been here for 13 years and I’ve had many roles, I’ve never had a formal internal interview. You just get tapped on the shoulder. (Female manager)

You could probably get to, I don’t know, middle management, team leader, next level. There are processes. But once you get to the senior 120 grand and above jobs, that’s all a bit sleight of hand. (Female manager)

One of our values is meritocracy. I don’t believe meritocracy is actually valued here. It’s about mateship and who gets jobs. (Female senior manager)

A senior female manager believes women need assistance from outside their organisation to gain visibility among candidates for promotion. Indeed, women need a ‘ticket’ for membership into the ‘boys’ club’ to access promotional opportunities and reward.

People can recognise in a young man how they were when they were young. They can't recognise that easily in a woman. So a woman needs a ticket of external endorsement. (Female senior manager)

You have to have a boss that is supportive of you. As a woman you need that more than ever, more than a man does. If my boss didn't value what I did and advocate for me every day, I wouldn't be where I am now. (Female senior manager).

## 9.2 Managing relationships

Managing relationships is intrinsic to managing organisational life. Good relationships are fundamental to career sustainability and advancement. A number of explicit and implicit dynamics drive professional relationships in the workplace. Given it is men, in the main, who hold positions of power, women who wish to succeed must establish good relationships with men. Women must ensure that men are comfortable in their presence. Exhibiting 'precious' or 'sensitive' behaviours can alienate and target a woman as 'politically correct', a 'spoilsport'.

**Developing good interpersonal skills is fundamental. Now, that's fundamental for men and women but it really is important for women, that they can get along with people and give as good as they get. Talk with people, joke with people, have fun with people. Don't stand on ceremony and carry a chip on your shoulder because then people will be wary of you...that politically incorrect stuff.** (Female senior manager)

**I was offended at a joke and called it when it happened at the meeting. After the meeting I was lambasted by the executive [who made the joke] who accused me of attempting to embarrass him in front of others. It was most distressing for me.** (Female manager)

While a good sense of humour and a capacity to 'roll with the punches' may be helpful, women must also be conversant with the unspoken rules and codes of behaviour that shape the relationship dynamics across the range of corporate settings.

The study finds that while some women are exceptionally savvy at working relationships, most women do not navigate organisational dynamics as naturally and effectively as men. They struggle to read the political plays of organisational life and to converse with 'hidden' elements of workplace hierarchy. Women's failure to manage the dynamics of hierarchy distances them from strategic networking and relationship building at a time when they need to develop skills in this crucial area.

**Women don't always know what to do in order to get some of those top jobs. What are the skills you need, what**

**are the competencies but also what are the networks that you need to have built to actually get some of the opportunities?** (Female manager)

**Although men have to give off all these signals about being strong and capable and independent, the truth of modern life...is that most of the time you are in a subordinate relationship, everybody is except for a very small number of people... I think sometimes maybe men are better at it than women are and that maybe another reason why they don't do as well...that they're not handling those upward relationships as well.** (Male senior manager)

### 9.2.1 The mentor

Mentoring is widely recognised as essential to career development. Developing strategic relationships with senior figures is paramount for gaining entrée into senior and executive environments. It provides opportunities to increase visibility and profile within the organisation. Good mentorship can provide an edge in a competitive work environment (EOWA, 2006b).

Findings by Hewlett & Luce point to 'an urgent need to implement mentoring and networking programs that help women expand and sustain their professional aspirations'. They found companies like American Express, GE, Goldman Sachs, Johnson & Johnson, Lehman Brothers and Time Warner were developing 'old girls networks' that build skills, contacts, and confidence. These organisations 'link women to inside power brokers and to outside business players and effectively inculcate those precious rainmaking skills' (Hewlett & Luce, 2005: 9).

The study finds that women value the opportunity mentoring offers. Successful executive women emphasise the importance of mentoring in opening doors for women. A number take up a variety of mentoring opportunities, participating in organisational and industry-wide mentoring and networking programs and seeking mentors from within and outside their organisations. However, women also believe that they do not have the same access to mentoring as men.

**It is very important to cultivate people who can be sponsors, who have the power to give you opportunities.** (Female senior manager)

**Women do not have access to the same level of sponsorship and mentoring that men have.** (Female senior manager)

While women recognise the strategic advantage of significant mentors, the study finds that women at all managerial levels demonstrate some reluctance to actively seek out mentors. Few women pursue mentorship strategically, actively or aggressively.

**I don't think I ever cultivated a power base to cultivate myself or consciously look after myself.** (Female senior manager)



I've been strategic because others have been sensible enough to tell me to do it. I would never have known to do it on my own. (Female manager)

'Women typically wait until someone else, usually a respected male, confers eligibility for success on them' (Sinclair, 1994: 28). The dynamics of gender relationships has seen acceptance of women contingent on subservience and service. Privilege is the reserve of men. Women who advance themselves are seen as selfish. Women have learnt to hide their needs or find circuitous routes to get needs met. This can be difficult and hence avoided or rationalised to avoid the label of self-interest.

### 9.2.2 The importance of male patronage

While a number of senior women operate as mentors to their junior colleagues, the overwhelming majority of mentors are men. Given the gender balance of the power elite, a strategic relationship with a key senior male is paramount if an ambitious woman is to realise success. Gaining the support of senior men is viewed as paramount to career development by many women. Indeed career advancement is difficult without the support of senior males. The support of a key male player can make the difference between a women failing or thriving at senior level. Unique opportunities can be gained from male guidance through organisational hierarchy. It provides women with a level of visibility and recognition that they would otherwise struggle to attain.

Unless you've got a champion there who can push you through, it's very much waving your own flag and getting known in a culture that's very much about where you are drinking and who you are socialising with. (Female senior manager)

Without the strong support of my [senior male manager] I would have been just another woman and there have been many before who have been allowed to leave the company. (Female senior manager)

I am heard because I'm a monumental pain in the arse and I have the absolute support of my [senior male manager]. (Female senior manager)

Senior women carry the legacy of gratitude from a post-war female workforce allowed into the male world of work (Reciniello, 1999). Indeed, senior and executive level women speak of the privilege and luck involved in gaining senior level sponsorship.

You get a break. A little bit of luck. Part of it is a little bit serendipitous. (Female senior manager)

Now, to some extent [it] has been luck [that] I've been in great organisations and working with some fantastic leaders...who have given me an opportunity to be the best I can be. (Female senior manager)

Women also speak of reward for hard work, bestowed upon them by a senior man.

I have one [mentor] who selects hard workers and identifies people who are prepared to have a go. (Female manager)

I've actually been very fortunate in that I was selected as the only woman in our division that meets with [the organisational head] for half-an-hour as a regular one-on-one. I was astounded. I had no idea that was being proposed. (Female manager)

Women who are strategic use relationships, generally with direct managers, to gain access into support networks and extend opportunities for male patronage.

I will often have conversations with [my direct manager's] peers, one of whom I asked to be my mentor when I started. I could see he was valued for his people skills and his commercial skills. I went to him and said, 'I've probably got the people skills but I know nothing about the business'. [My direct manager] knows I have that relationship with one of his people and he supports that. (Female manager)

In a corporate environment I still think I'm maybe better off getting advice from a man than a woman. They see things differently sometimes... If it comes from a man, not that it's any more credible, but it's almost like, sometimes in organisations you are trying to pitch yourself at how men perceive me so it's better having a man's view. That's more about being pragmatic than anything else. (Female senior manager)

Male patronage can also provide women the space to exploit their 'otherness' and gain some authenticity. Women who are placed on the perimeter of leadership circles can become invaluable agents of 'truth' or change for managers seeking to break from 'the pack' dynamic.

[The senior manager] realises the top executives are not capable of telling him what he needs to hear on his honest days. So he almost needs to create a secondary pool of people who will tell him like it is... There are a bunch of women who I think he does trust and would look to rely on for the truth. (Female senior manager)

### 9.2.3 The boss

The relationship a woman develops with her immediate supervisor can have enormous influence on her career advancement. A good relationship can provide an invaluable opportunity for mentoring and promotion. A negative relationship can interfere with a woman's daily working life and long-term career prospects.

The study finds women in management are often reluctant to take the lead in personal interactions with senior men. A lack of confidence and the skill to engage in the playing field inhibits strategic career planning. Male patronage is seen as essential to career progression. A

number of women report that their relationship with their boss influences their career planning.

In the corporate world, you are not going to progress unless you have a boss who is going to help you. (Female senior manager)

I think I've been fortunate that I've had very good bosses that have given me opportunities. That is a career tactic in a sense... I need to be comfortable in my work environment with the people I work with. I would personally suffer if I didn't work with the right people. (Female senior manager)

I've been fortunate that I've had a couple of people that I've supported [who] have been my champions and promoted me throughout the organisation, and enabled me to get the role I've currently got. Having people that support you and appreciate what you deliver, you don't have to wave the flag. (Female senior manager)

#### 9.2.4 The boss as champion

The role of champion is usually taken by men. They introduce women to senior management environments and advocate for them at executive level. The role of champion is perceived as high risk by men and women alike. Women are still considered unknown quantities in leadership roles. Advocacy on behalf of a potential female leader is a gamble.

What [the senior manager] does particularly well is actually talk people up to the right people and give people opportunities. I think what's kept him going... is the fact that we've actually not disappointed him. If you are the [head] of an organisation and you take bold moves when you know you are gambling a little bit with outcome, and you are not disappointed, it encourages you to do more and more. (Female senior manager)

In these relationships, it is incumbent on women to demonstrate their worth. They must ensure their manager's reputation for good judgment is not damaged which, at times, requires feats that may not be expected of men.

If you look at the really influential women in Australia... they have achieved the respect of the men... because they were excellent in what they do. They have had to be better than the guys. I keep on seeing it... my young ladies that I work with, they need to be that bit better. (Female senior manager)

I worked with eight men and most of them were 25 years plus in the organisation. Most of them were European and I am as well. I remember being introduced to them and two of them wouldn't even get up to shake my hand. Everyone else did. Then one of them said, 'What's a good little [European] girl like you doing here?' I didn't answer that. Then 12 months down the track they were all com-

ing to me for advice. It was just needing to show them I knew what I was doing. (Female manager)

While championing can provide women opportunity for career advancement, it also carries a burden. Women are placed under a level of scrutiny that is relentless and can lead to burn out.

I've seen women pushed into roles too quickly. So they are thrown in the deep end, get no more support than anyone else in terms of coaching and hand holding. They go on lots of training courses and things like that but it's not the same as coaching and mentoring someone through it. I see so many of those women crash because it is too hard. (Male senior manager)

I do think companies play on that a little bit, as a trophy, 'Here's our woman. Isn't it wonderful? Let's wheel her around and show everyone. Let's get her up to talk to groups continuously'. That puts more pressure on in terms of more visibility and we take them out of their day-to-day job more to do these extra curricula activities. But that means they're probably spending less time on the business than the average man. (Male senior manager)

Effective patronage of female talent is a complex dynamic with a number of dimensions. Successful championing requires an understanding of the interplay between the cultural setting and the individual.

You've got to protect them and I run defence for them so they can continue to flourish... So we have a process here about... who gets the next jobs and I'm marking them up. The HR people are saying, 'No I don't think they're ready,' I'm going, 'They are. Get them up there and they'll be fine'. (Male senior manager)

[My manager] could see and relate to some of the early fears that I was having and that made it so much easier. If I had had a manager who didn't have that side, I would have struggled and I would have felt that I had to go to a grand final! I actually don't think I would have survived because it's not who I am. (Female manager)

#### 9.2.5 The boss as competitor

Women's dependence on male advocacy renders them vulnerable. In order to retain the favour of advocacy, they tread a fine line to ensure they are not perceived as a threat to the power of a senior male (Sinclair, 1994; Reciniello, 1999). A woman who oversteps the mark does so at her own peril.

My latter career has been dominated by average bosses who are incredibly insecure about my abilities. (Female senior manager)

The origin of competition is threat. So I'm comfortable in my environment, I understand the rules of engagement. But something new arrives which is thought, gender, whatever,

and my first reaction, depending on my level of self-confidence, is one of threat. This individual, this thought, this opposition, this challenge is somehow threatening my status quo. Therefore my reaction to that is initially to reject it. Then if it persists to somehow compete with it, and then if it still persists, to undermine it. (Male senior manager)

The study finds a number of women experience relationships with direct male managers that are deeply controlling and patronising. They are not exposed to promotional opportunities, treated as incompetent and childlike when in the presence of executives, and constantly bullied.

The hierarchical style of leadership wouldn't allow me to meet other managers without my group manager being with me... I was not able to get around the business and reach the key leaders and stakeholders. They kept diverting me off in other directions. (Female senior manager)

I found I had a business that probably had many millions of dollars that was in danger and [I] said 'Look it's time to make decisions. I want your support to do it', and [he] said, 'No young lady, I take care of all of that. You put your head down and your bum up and chip away and do as you're told for the next two years'. (Female senior manager)

I've been working with my new boss now for four or five years. I had to demand to have one-to-ones with him. I said, 'It's really important so I know where I stand and how I'm doing and you can give me feedback. It's really important for me to drive my career'. He goes, 'What is it with you and your career?'... I just thought, hang on a minute, everything I've done in my career is about betterment and trying to move forward. I need an inspirational leader to help me do that. That comment just completely killed it dead for me. (Female manager)

Women's confidence and ambition can also be undermined in more subtle ways, through duplicitous politicking.

I had been extremely supportive of my new boss...and in turn he had been supportive of me. But towards the end his 100 percent focus was his own ambition and himself and he liked having me supporting him... I realised [he] was playing me off against other staff. So there was some dishonest communication. In the end I felt he shafted me. (Female senior manager)

I actually had been approached internally for another role... I wasn't successful because my manager was so unsupportive and discouraged me. In fact, he almost put a level of doubt in my mind that I wasn't capable to do it. (Female senior manager)

I think that I threatened this man...it did eventually become clear to me that he'd been very negative and damaging. I felt terribly betrayed because I thought we had got on very well. That level of duplicity, people will meet it in the workplace. (Female senior manager)

"[The boss] touched me in a meeting on the hand and on the knee and I know he had no interest in me and I had no interest in him, that's for sure. But it was intended to be unsettling and a put down more than anything... Things like blowing kisses in the car park in front of other people was an intentional put down. 'You are the little woman and I am the man, therefore you should be disregarded, everyone should disregard you in the same way that I am.' He was like a child. Do you give him the attention he is trying to seek or do you just wash it off and say, 'You've got a problem'. (Female senior manager)

A woman's relationship with her direct manager can have significant implications for her career. The ability to manage a range of relationship dynamics with men is paramount for women seeking to advance their careers.

### 9.3 Dynamics between the sexes

The study finds a primitive dynamic drives relationships between the sexes. Survival in the workplace sees both women and men play archetypal roles. The 'father/child' and 'husband/wife' are prevalent interplays. While the more sinister elements of a 'good girl/bad boy' dynamic have been legislated out of the workplace, its legacy remains subtle and covert, and a powerful driver in workplace relations. These dynamics render women vulnerable in their relationships with men. Without effective understanding and management of these primitive interplays women can find themselves targets of male aggression or male idealisation. The study finds that women's survival strategy has been to accept and collude with these dynamics, albeit unconsciously, particularly in organisational settings which are highly competitive and hostile to the female presence.

Ambitious women have been advised to learn to combine the traits of a 'good girl and a fighter' if they want to advance their careers. (Interview with Maxine McKew, Weekend Australian Magazine, March 31–April 1, 2007). A display of too much spark, however, can be read as threatening. Indeed, a woman's failure to understand subtle boundaries around her interactions with a senior man can jeopardise the relationship.

I think there are a lot of men in senior positions who genuinely want to give opportunities to women but I also think they are more comfortable with some sorts of women than others. If they feel seriously challenged by a woman, in terms of demeanour or whatever, they are much less likely to take that woman on. (Female senior manager)

There's a realm of sexualised behaviour which is permissible for men to be engaged in, in the workplace...a sexualised

display where to be charming and slightly roguish is acceptable. Whereas, I can see clearly that for a woman to engage in equivalent behaviour would be seen as improper and inappropriate. A woman of great courage and wit could get away with it but it would be high risk behaviour, especially in a less enlightened environment. (Male senior manager)

Several senior female managers believed older men responded well to a certain playfulness and feisty demeanour in the women that they mentored and supported.

I think [he] just appreciates a bit of banter and sometimes even being put back in his box...rather than someone just cringing and taking...it. (Female senior manager)

I'm open and warm but not a pushover... Older men respond to that. It's not done with disrespect and they kind of respond to that as being masculine but not so masculine from a female. (Female senior manager)

There's not an aggressiveness to these women who get promoted, but there's a feistiness, there's a 'speak-your-mindness' that they have and that gets valued. (Female manager)

Indeed some men encourage risk, viewing playfulness in women as a survival strategy.

We'll be in the company of men and I can see their discomfort. I say [to a woman], 'For God's sake, tell a dirty joke'. She tells it and they all relax. The men don't know where the boundary is. She has the power to set the boundary. So senior women who survive set the boundary or allow the boundary to be further than ordinarily it might be. It's a huge risk. (Female manager)

Managing perceptions of sexually threatening behaviour may also require women to navigate delicate interactions with a male colleague's wife.

I've had a few instances where you can see the wife being incredibly suspicious... The way I've always handled that is when I've had the opportunity to meet guys' wives, I always made the point of going up and talking to them. If they don't introduce [themselves to] me, I'll go and introduce myself and I will spend the time to chat to them, to talk to them and make sure they feel comfortable with me and try and subtly give the message that, 'No, I couldn't possibly be sleeping with your husband'. (Female senior manager)

You have a younger female travelling with an older male. It's one-on-one. That's an issue and quite a few wives didn't like it when I travelled with their husbands. I've become good friends with them to get them to understand that I am not a threat. (Senior female manager)

### 9.3.1 Sexual awkwardness

Research has found that many senior men experience difficulty mentoring younger women because of a sexual awkwardness underlying the relationship. Described as 'sexual static...like snow on the television set or noise on the radio' (Rosener, 1995: 67), sexual tension can interfere in the interactions between older men and younger women, causing distraction and discomfort.

The study finds the professional, platonic relationship is not seen as a natural dynamic for women and men to enter into.

It's probably not the most natural relationship I suppose. Men gravitate towards men on a mateship basis. (Male senior manager)

He was my manager [for] about ten years and when I was leaving I realised in all the time I was reporting to him we never had coffee. At [the organisation] everyone sits and has coffee... So I invited him down and I actually had a five dollar bet as to whether he would turn up or not...he turned up...but he was uncomfortable. (Female manager)

I would more likely do [coffee] with a woman than a man. That was probably more about the culture in the organisation. A woman asking a man for coffee just wasn't done. It would be like, 'Oh, what's the agenda here?' (Female manager)

Mentoring relationships between older men and younger women are widely perceived to have sexual undertones.

I think early on there was a cynical view that, 'Well she's an attractive young thing, of course the [senior manager] wants to see her up in his office every week'. (Female senior manager)

Without doubt, there is a difficulty in women cultivating those sorts of friendships because of the way it can be perceived, the difficulties of men and women being friendly and people feeling that if they're too friendly there's something sinister or sexual about that friendship. (Female senior manager)

### 9.3.2 Paternalism

The mentoring dynamic can take the shape of the father/daughter relationship.

In working for [Company A manager], he took a very paternal view of me and that's been replicated at [Company B]. As I've become noticed and been promoted [Company B manager] has also taken quite a paternalistic interest in me... It's almost like the men of that generation have treated the women of my generation as their default daughters and taken a paternalistic or protective role in their succession. (Female senior manager)

She [referring to a peer senior manager] has a lot of uncle type figures in the business...they like that...they see her vulnerability...it's a more natural thing. (Male senior manager)

While women can undoubtedly gain opportunities from this dynamic, they may not be enduring. Indeed, reliance on 'father/daughter' relationships can carry risks for women.

Young women have a tendency to be too trusting. [If they] have grown up with a father that has been relatively protective they can actually expect men to behave in a certain way. [But] they are not your father, your protector. They are in fact another snout at the trough. (Female senior manager)

A significant percentage of the women who are promoted, leave. The benign explanation is [the organisation] gave them the opportunity and the advancement to showcase their talents to an outside world who could pay more. A less benign explanation is many feel they got ahead on patronage and the price was too high. (Female senior manager)

Our only role models are men and...most women's mothers didn't work. Maybe we think the only way to do it is men's way, but that doesn't quite fit. The women we do see tend to be more like men. (Female manager)

The perception of women's experiences at the top is one of hard work with little reward.

Women in senior positions work very hard and they tend to be used to [doing] very hard things. After they have done it they are not rewarded... Women are sacrificed more easily and that's not a good model for success. If young women look around and see senior women being marginalised or dispensed with after doing the hard stuff, they will not put their foot forward. (Female senior manager)

Some successful women are not considered realistic models for the majority.

She's an example of an absolutely outstanding [senior manager] but she's at one end of the spectrum. She's a remarkably driven, hard working person and she's got a family too, she's got four or five kids. She's an absolutely extraordinary person. But she's seen as someone that you couldn't emulate or wouldn't want to emulate. (Male senior manager)

Not all women are natural mentors. In the same way that not all men expect to act as mentors, not all senior women see themselves as champions for upcoming female talent. The study finds a number of senior women feel undue expectations are placed upon them to act in mentor roles.

[A women's network] wasn't used by me to get myself to the top, but having got myself to the top then there is a fair expectation that I'll put in a bit of time to them. (Female senior manager)

Women who have attained a certain position can often be outright told, 'You are expected to promote women now'. I was very angry being told on more than one occasion, 'You should have appointed a woman because you are a woman'. (Female senior manager)

Women are nurturers when it comes to children. But they are not nurturers when it comes to supporting other women. (Female senior manager)

The study finds that women go to great lengths to ensure that their career achievements are recognised as merit-based and distance themselves from activities that may threaten this perception. This concern can dissuade women from participating in formal female only networking programs. Indeed, attending female only events can brand someone a feminist, a label that women are particularly keen to avoid.

I'm not a 'burn your bra' type by any means and I worry about the perception. People go, 'Oh, she's gone to burn her bra for a week and she'll get it out of her system and it will be fine'. (Female manager)

## 9.4 Dynamics between women

### 9.4.1 Women as mentors

Relationships between women play an important part in female career development. Senior women are often perceived as more obvious role models and mentors for ambitious women. Their experiences in navigating through hostile and challenging environments can be of enormous value to younger women.

The [senior female manager] is such a fantastic role model... She has been able to be extremely successful but also have very strong values that probably women hold in higher priority than men. And she actually talks about her family and so forth and we don't see much of that. (Female manager)

I've had other women that have really helped me in my career... For some of those women in their 50s, they've had to struggle so hard to get there. (Female manager)

A paucity of senior female role models has resulted in a low pool of potential female mentors.

For young women to aspire, they have to see people above them and that's not happening. If you're someone who is middle management...you look up in the organisation [and] there's a sea of men. (Female manager)

The relevance of the skills and what they talk about is essential for most women [but] I don't like the thought that it is exceptional and exclusive. Don't make it a female thing! That just doesn't sit easily with me at all. (Female manager)

A lot of what they do is around networking activities, so bringing people together, generally just women, which creates angst on the other side... I'm not someone who relies on those sorts of forums... I'd like to believe that if I choose to go after something then it's assessed on my merits. (Female manager)

Don't take me as the token female. Don't think I'm here just to show we're diverse. (Female manager)

### 9.4.2 Women as competitors

While women have difficulty managing the competitive dynamic to their advantage, the drive to compete is not exclusive to men. Among women, subtle and undermining as well as upfront competition does occur. Women compete on a number of explicit and implicit levels as part of the 'cut and thrust' of executive life.

I think there are many women, if not most women in business, who feel that the sisterhood can be seductive at first. But you very quickly start to think most people see it here as a zero sum game. They get ahead or I get ahead. There is a sense that few women get ahead, so I've got to look after myself and bad luck if the others don't make it. (Female senior manager)

A recent commentary on professional women's networks lamented the politically correct stance taken in regard to competition among women. Acknowledging the existence of a competitive dynamic does not sit comfortably with a sisterhood view of relationships between women.

The trouble is that the merest mention of women's networks seems to turn intelligent women into politically correct, acquiescent fools... Successful professional women want to compete with other successful women. There is nothing wrong with that. There is something wrong with pretending they don't. (Kellaway, 2007: 8)

The study finds that while men can experience competition as energising and natural, women have difficulty acknowledging and managing competitive dynamics in the workplace. Competition among women goes against an idealised view of how women should behave and is seen to be 'unhealthy' and depleting.

Within the female ranks and I'm talking the executive now, I would say there is no loyalty. Everyone is out for themselves. I think there is a lot of competition. I think it is unhealthy competition. (Female senior manager)

When I joined the team I'm in now, it [was] predominantly blokes but [there were] two women at the time. I had this

vision that they would actually help me out or there'd be some camaraderie... But they actually gave me the hardest time on the team. (Female manager)

I've seen it happen where there are women that do progress very well and they then become very hard for other women to do business with. It's almost the traditional, 'I pulled myself up by my bootstraps and you can do it too'. (Female senior manager)

Some women feel that deeper dynamics are at play in the way competition expresses itself among women at all levels of the organisation. The use of intimidatory dynamics to exclude other women has been referred to as the 'Queen Bee' syndrome (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). Mooney (2005) suggests that while women increasingly embrace ambition, competition and success as part of the competitive world of office politics, many have difficulty reconciling the need to be liked with overt competitive behaviour and resort to subversive tactics to achieve goals.

Women do not support other women. We can be our own worst enemies. Women have a tall poppy syndrome... I've seen women in more junior positions put senior woman in a negative light. It's a competitive tension or jealousy. Women by nature are more underhanded. (Female senior manager)

I actually think the women prevent the women going any further in this company. If there was one reason why I would leave this company it would be because of the women in this organisation... The men want to promote the women but the women don't want the other women promoted. (Female senior manager)

There is one other [senior] woman who works in the company and she is a bigger bully than the men. She is horrendous when it's woman to senior woman. She bullied me. She wanted to be the top dog. She wanted the lime-light. (Female senior manager)

The study finds women are often more comfortable cementing strategic and personal relationships in the safety of informal networks, supporting each other outside the work place.

I wouldn't see her as someone who would be an advocate for me. We support each other informally. (Female senior manager)

We go walking together outside work or we may go shopping occasionally. Do I do that with the men? No I don't... [I always] seek out and maintain friendships with people who do similar work to me and do work for me. (Female senior manager)

Everybody has bonded. We're in this together and we're sharing stories and it just feels great. People do have lunch, just on that one-on-one basis. It breaks down some of those subtle barriers. (Female manager)

I think I should have a coffee club account because I think I do a fair bit of that. It works well informally. (Female senior manager)

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## 9.5 Conclusion

Managing relationships is an essential component of working life. For women, the skill to negotiate a range of challenging dynamics and interactions with both men and women is vital to career advancement. While women at all levels of management appreciate the professional benefits of mentorship and networking, they fail to gain maximum benefit from these initiatives. Women's minority status sets into motion a number of dynamics that undermine their status as authority figures and diminish their capacity to form strategic relationships. Organisational awareness of minority/majority dynamics can improve interventions to support women's career development. Mentoring and strategic networking is critical for women's advancement. It enhances confidence and skill, and most significantly provides women entry into the 'corridors of power'. Indeed, leaders are increasingly viewing mentoring and networking to be the top developmental tools for implementing diversity.

# 10.0

## successful women

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### 10.1 What it takes

There are extraordinary women who are able to successfully navigate all domains of corporate life. They display a heightened awareness of their environment which enhances their capacity for judgment. These women exhibit a robust sense of self. Many attribute their success in masculine settings to the influence of significant family members and social background. Belief in self has often been instilled early in childhood relationships with one or both parental figures, often a father whose encouragement has been a major influence on career decisions and the resilience to pursue ambitions outside traditional boundaries.

I grew up in a boys' world...I fitted into the boys' club...and it was absolutely no problem. So I could then and I can now. (Female senior manager)

I walk in and when they [the men] say things I just let them know, 'You'd have to do better than that'. I grew up with [lots of] brothers. (Female senior manager)

I was brought up by my father to believe that I can do whatever I wanted to do. I never accepted boundaries that society or organisations put on you. I agree that there are challenges but it's your own personal mettle of whether you let them stay as challenges and obstacles to overcome. (Female senior manager)

I was an only child. I had a close relationship with my mother... My father gave me a lot. I was flying with my dad. I was out as a glider with all the guys. I'm used to being one of the boys. (Female manager)

Men can be awestruck by women with talents normally associated with masculine prowess and reserved for men.

Her parents didn't put a fence around her. She wasn't constrained by her social environment...and wow, she's actually got the intellectual horse power and people skills to bang on through. (Male senior manager)

These women demonstrate great stamina, sacrifice, flexibility, and an enormous will to survive in the face of gruelling demands and hostile environments.



I've sacrificed my personal life to get there. You couldn't [as a woman] get a senior role in Brisbane. I moved to Sydney and Perth... I've had a hard time maintaining a long distance relationship. Weekends are not enough. (Female senior manager)

Whatever happens with the bad stuff, I am an optimist in my approach to life. I am smiley and happy. I have an inner anchor. (Female senior manager)

It's like a zoo and a jungle generally... Survival becomes a key part to your day which is not great because you are coming to work and you should be performing and driving the business forward. (Female manager)

It's water off a duck's back... I don't go off and sulk or anything like that. I just get on with what I have to do because you need that toughness... I just think that experience is quite invaluable as much as it [is] horrible. (Female manager)

I don't get copied into emails. He doesn't acknowledge my presence. In his space I don't exist. I have to laugh about it. (Female senior manager)

Some successful women are able to accommodate and accept the extremes of a 'blokey' environment without feeling undermined. They accept the status quo and consider collusion with the culture their only strategic option.

Boys will behave as boys... I don't want to stop them because blokes have to have their fun too... If I walked in and they were telling a joke and I'd say, 'What's the joke?', and they would say, 'Oh no, you don't want to hear', and I would say, 'Fine'... I didn't want them to change the way they work... just have a very upfront, easy relationship in that sense. (Female senior manager)

If you spill the occasional 'f' or 'c', I'd laugh along with you... If I want to add value I have to understand people at the pointy end. (Female senior manager)

Others take on the 'honourary bloke' status.

I think her natural style is to get on well with men, she's kind of a tomboy in a way. So she's surrounded herself with men. (Female manager)

I'm seen as one of the boys. (Female senior manager)

There have been a couple of females that have ended up being blokes and mixing it with the boys. They've been very successful. (Female senior manager)

They don't mind a strong woman because you're more like a man. Being a girly girl, they don't know how to handle you. (Female senior manager)

Others are able to celebrate their femininity and leverage off the advantages that come with it. These women accept that being female is part of who they are and how they engage with others. They may enjoy the attention that the 'only woman' status affords and are able to

accommodate the full range of male environments.

I'm blonde. I have shoulder-length hair and I do my nails. I don't shy away from being a woman and the privileges that it brings. (Female senior manager)

Being the only female is lots of fun too, I've got to say... There are some people who don't want to talk with a female... There are other guys who want to talk to someone else for a bit of relief because they are always talking to blokes. I saw the advantages but never the disadvantages. (Female senior manager)

Many work within the cultural stereotype. They understand the powerful place of archetypal dynamics and can leverage this understanding to their advantage. Senior women continue to play designated roles, such as the scolding or supportive wife, alongside their male patrons.

We're called 'Mr and Mrs'. [The senior male manager] wants you to be here because they see you as the other side of their personality. I'm the conscience. But if I was the logic, I'd be in a different situation. (Female senior manager)

While the most successful women demonstrate an ability to navigate in the prevailing culture, many find the challenge of ongoing compromise daunting, as they struggle and juggle to survive. Many forgo their own authenticity and capacity for leadership in an attempt to serve patrons and to accommodate the dominant style. Indeed, there is little evidence that women ever gain the opportunity to exercise real authenticity as leaders. Women in leadership do not appear to set the cultural agenda or radically change their working environments. Tolerance of male dominated culture does not diminish once they reach executive level. While women may achieve a level of success, it is often at the expense of personal integrity and wellbeing, undermining their full potency as leaders (Hampden-Turner, 1994).

[The senior female manager] says all the right things but it's not changing behaviour a couple of levels down... It's a very hard thing to change. (Female manager)

[The senior female manager] doesn't actually do anything to promote women... She doesn't make it harder for women but I think her natural style is to get on well with men. (Female manager)

It's actually hard to be [feminine] when everyone around you is being [masculine]. From a career perspective you can actually get shafted. (Male senior manager)

Women have the greatest opportunity to exercise real authority as leaders when there is a critical mass of women. While these organisations are faced with demanding business imperatives and pressure for expeditious responses to the customer, the culture can accommodate heterogonous leadership styles. This provides women and men with a capacity to take up authentic authority.

There is more variety with women in power. There is more heterogeneity. There is a kaleidoscope of different women and men. This makes us so attractive to women.

(Female senior manager)

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## 10.2 Conclusion

The study finds that hard work and sacrifice alone will not guarantee women a leadership position in mainstream corporate Australia. Women who gain seniority and authority do so through compliance and patronage. A deep level of cultural resistance to the female presence eludes an authentic female contribution. While the ability to adapt is a skill many successful leaders share (Kram & McCollom, 1998), women need greater space to exercise authenticity if they are to be truly effective leaders. Women need more than just a seat at the executive table. They need to command respect and loyalty from their colleagues to achieve significant and sustainable outcomes for business. To this end, a greater acknowledgement of the different 'look' of female authority is needed (Sinclair, 2004b; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000).

# WIO the diversity challenge

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## 11.1 Strategies for leadership

Achieving greater female presence within the senior echelons of business presents significant challenges to leadership. At its heart lies a realignment of business values and practices. Optimising the performance and the value of half the potential workforce requires a new and fresh approach. Truly embracing diversity requires challenging organisational culture at the deepest level and 'naming the problem with no name' (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000: 135).

**I actually think that 'thought diversity' and 'cultural diversity'...is the hardest to hold, it's the hardest to define and the hardest to create policy to support because it's insidious and like a lot of prejudice or bigoted value...it's hidden. (Male senior manager)**

Leaders must embark on a process of creating and leveraging awareness around the principles and values of diversity in business. A fundamental review of the corporate leadership paradigm is required in order to shift models of authority away from a narrow, technical,

short-termism that rewards some men and isolates most women. Leadership expectations need to be made explicit throughout management ranks, drilled down through organisations, and underpinned by specific performance indicators and organisational incentives that change behaviours. When women, behaving as women, achieve results, an organisation can begin to see the benefits of cultural change and new styles of leadership gain currency.

**I think the macro issues require people to have a 'Road to Damascus' understanding, to bring people into organisations who already understand it or get it or to have an imperative in your business that requires change to be fundamentally part of what you do. But I do think it's quite hard to do it just through the logic. People get the logic but don't change their behaviour. (Female senior manager)**

A number of organisations in Australia are engaging with the diversity challenge. However, most organisations have yet to facilitate cultural change that supports women at senior levels. In the small number of organisations where there is a critical mass of women at senior level, women can strive to leadership positions.

When I was at [department A], that was pretty tough and pretty much a male-dominated environment. For me, it would be a lot harder as a female to get through the senior ranks than at [department B], where half the leadership team is female ... which you don't generally see at that level of the organisation. That gives me comfort that there is an opportunity to excel and advance as a female in that particular part of the organisation. (Female manager)

If you get enough change, then you get re-interpretation. (Female senior manager)

At the broadest level, the diversity challenge requires leadership on a grand scale. Raising awareness, identifying change, and putting policy into practice is a leadership enterprise. While change has commenced, its focus has been on helping women adapt and assimilate into the dominant male culture, or accommodating their needs through flexible work practices. These strategies have produced success at the margin only.

Creating change involves a paradigm shift to align leadership with a female presence. It requires an ongoing conversation between men and women with a vision for the future. While men increasingly register support for inclusion of women, barriers to female progression are not being addressed (Carlson, et. al. 2006).

**Gender remains a defining dimension of modern organisations. But the changes required in our future organisations call for something beyond gender diversity at the top. It calls for future leaders with a perceptive and reflective mindset about 'difference' in the workplace to complement their traditional skills and experiences in maximising stakeholder gain. This is a tough but worthy mission for tomorrow's business executive who can lead change. (Spearritt, 1999: 47)**

## 11.2 The honest conversation

The 'honest conversation' between men and women needs to begin to raise awareness of the subtle inhibitors to women's experience in the workplace. This conversation needs to address both the source of gender inequity and its symptoms. It needs to transcend rhetoric and political correctness. A safe environment for the airing of taboo topics should be established. This should not be limited to corporate hotlines for unethical behaviour. It requires active and sustained programs to service and challenge assumptions, values, and behaviours. The discussion needs to focus on culture, leadership, gender relations, and work/life balance.

**The big thing is you've got to talk about it because it exists...you need to find the men who can start the conversations that get the organisation thinking about it. (Male senior manager)**

Dialogue needs to take place at the most senior levels to identify everyday practices that constitute barriers to the retention of women employees and their capacity to move to leadership positions. Organisations need to make explicit the 'norms that silently support gender inequity' (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000: 132). In order to achieve and maintain significant progress, organisations need to identify, discuss and actively address the inhibitors to a positive workplace experience of female executives. These include not only the well-identified structural barriers such as flexibility in working arrangements but the more subtle constraints that stem from deep seated assumptions that lead to gender stereotyping.

### 11.2.1 Culture

**When cultures lose the complementarity of their values a chill wind blows and a strange malaise descends. (Hampden-Turner, 1994)**

Culture remains a nebulous notion that encompasses shared patterns of behaviours and interactions that are implicit and hence not available for scrutiny. Much of it is unconscious and subliminal in its expression, and it is held onto with a power that defies logic or common sense (Settel, 2006). The honest conversation needs to create a climate where deeply embedded values and practices can be brought to the fore and examined. What does the term 'male-dominated culture' really mean? How can we begin to unpack and understand it? Only by addressing these questions can organisations hope to uncover blind spots, and address untenable behaviours and deep-seated cultural intransigence that have their underpinnings in stereotypical views of gender relations.

**This isn't policy as in, 'Here is a new policy, we'll have more women'. Its policy as in, 'We have to change the dynamic of the way the organisation thinks and feels because that will then enable people to feel more comfortable with diversity of thought, gender, whatever'. It will probably take longer than we all think. (Male senior manager)**

Unless the nature of male dominance and its impact on women is unravelled, it cannot be addressed (Spearritt, 1999). This is particularly so in predominantly male, monocultural environments where leadership values, behaviours and perceptions of merit are so deeply ingrained in organisational culture that they undermine policy and procedural interventions to include women. The study finds that both men and women often perceive poor cultural fit as a reason for women's perceived failure in corporate environments.

Assessing for cultural fit is now firmly entrenched into hiring practices. It reflects sound objective judgement (Watt, Busine & Wienker, 2007) and 'reduces the strength of the organisation's antibody rejection' (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, Axelrod, 2001:76). While shrouded in

the language of objectivity, there is a subjective dimension to the pursuit of cultural fit. Organisations need to be aware of these subjective dimensions so that pursuing cultural fit does not lead to homogeneity and exclusion.

### 11.2.2 The face of leadership

The prevailing profile of excellence in business leadership needs to be re-examined. This requires challenging the norms that determine leadership eligibility.

**Only by challenging the assumptions on which leadership is based will we be equipped to seriously anticipate the transformation so often promised by leadership. (Sinclair, 2007:33)**

What does leadership look like? Who is allowed to lead and why? What traits get selected and why? What traits are seen as incompatible with leadership? Are there drivers that perpetuate a leadership incumbency that excludes females? What is the basis for these drivers? Why do certain models of leadership take hold while others do not? How do organisations cultivate leaders?

While the rhetoric around heroic leadership is increasingly being challenged and team-based cultures are promoted, the study finds that a particular competitive and individualistic masculinity continues to characterise leadership practice. Management is seen as a masculine enterprise dominated by male bodies, male discourse, and male behaviours (Collinson & Hearn, 1996, Chesterman, et. al. 2004; Acker, 1990; Sinclair, 2007). The female presence in leadership is considered complementary. It is valued for the nurturing and caring traits required in team-based structures and dealing with customers. However, it 'fails to challenge effectively either the hierarchical valuing of gender differences or the organisational mechanisms that reproduce them' (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000: 562).

While globalisation has heightened the competitive business dynamic, long-term success in global markets demands leadership that can traverse competitive instincts to shape an organisational culture built on shared interests, mutual obligation, and cooperation. The knowledge economy, in particular, requires a value system that can harness unique talents, skills, and ideas irrespective of how they are packaged. It requires an environment where multiple perspectives can emerge and diversity can thrive, as people feel safe to explore unknown territories, question current assumptions, and propose new approaches to thinking and working together.

**What you stand for externally somehow demands an internal energy to shift it... You just need a few evangelists, and energy can be created through individuals. A new CEO can change this completely. You just need to start**

**talking about it... It takes senior people to tell stories...and hold a mirror up to the organisation. (Male senior manager)**

Competitive and individualistic models of leadership create dynamics that are self-limiting and unsustainable. They breed a hero mentality that, while lionising incumbents, renders them prisoners of a role, culture, and ambition, that disconnects them from parts of themselves, from their families, and from reality, with potentially destructive consequences (Kets de Vries, 1991, Sinclair, 1994, Krantz, 1998). The heroic leader is well-depicted in the metaphor of 'man as a block of wood' (Biddulf, 1994) that depicts the two-dimensional John Wayne entity of a bygone era, where men's self-definition was based on a fierce independence in which women had no significant part.

Leadership models that thrive on competition and individualism are unsustainable in the face of the complex cross-functional challenges facing the modern economy. They spawn organisational cultures that are exclusionary; that measure success narrowly; that reward few individuals; that lead to information being withheld; and that thwart the creative spirit which is the mainstay of knowledge creation. At the extreme they have been responsible for the corporate collapses in which individuals with omnipotent notions of self bypass governance principals of transparency and accountability.

For a new value system to gain currency, prevailing profiles of excellence in business leadership need to be re-examined. Traits socially ascribed to men such as individualism, control, assertiveness, and skills of advocacy and domination are not drivers of knowledge creation. Raising awareness of more relevant and contemporary management styles and identifying the constraints of gender expectations would facilitate a wider pool of talent to include men and women traditionally not welcome in leadership positions, an opportunity to make a leadership contribution.

**Perhaps the courage of creativity is required, perhaps the courage of admission of failure, as opposed to the desire to be right. I think that allows you to be agile in an environment that requires you to be agile. (Male senior manager)**

### 11.2.3 Gender relations

Despite the progress made towards gender equity, entrenched cultural beliefs regarding the roles of men and women in society continue to be played out in organisational life. Organisational systems, work practices, norms, and discourse reflect masculine experiences, masculine values, and men's life situations (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). This not only limits the quality of work experience for men and women, but it undermines their potential contribution.

Something about the atmosphere and the way people conducted themselves at a senior level, I didn't feel I was with people who had shared values... My main gripe was the highly political nature of the organisation where I felt no matter how good you were or how well you worked with people, it didn't really matter, you wouldn't necessarily get on... I felt it was a very male, macho culture at the senior level that I didn't feel comfortable in. (Female senior manager)

You've got the male saying, 'Give me, give me'...and here I've got someone who is apparently ambivalent but clearly talented. So what do I do? My conditioning tells me to select the male and not the female. (Male senior manager)

In order to address gender inequality in the work place organisations need to examine expectations men and women have of themselves and of one another that perpetuate and reproduce gender inequity. To address stereotypical mindsets, organisations need to ask some of the following questions:

- *Do work structures disadvantage women?* Work structures include: time of meetings strategic to decision-making; the nature of work that is valued and rewarded; occupational segregation between men and women that leaves women in low visibility or low paid jobs or in classic 'women's departments; women's pay and pay rises that are not on a par with men's; and notions of competency that value certain aspects of performance over others (for example, valuing technical competency over behavioural competency).
- *Is management a male enterprise?* Are managerial attributes aligned with gender stereotypes so that male attributes of endurance, strength, and competitive spirit are given ascendance over female attributes of care, consultation, and team-play. *What gets heard and who gets heard* is underpinned by a masculine construct of leadership.
  - *What gets heard?* Male discourse determines the agenda items that get attention and those that are undervalued or never make it onto the agenda.
  - *Who gets heard?* A culture dominated by physical masculinity and masculine behaviour impacts the 'look' of success as well as communication styles that are rewarded/punished, and hence who succeeds in terms of promotion and reward. Self-promotion, (an example of behaviour valued in men and derided in women) leads to higher pay.
- *If work is a male enterprise, is family a female enterprise?* There is an assumption that women are responsible for family and that there is a disconnect between family and work.

### 11.2.4 Work/life balance

To establish a climate that accommodates the flexibility needs of the workforce and optimises the contribution

women can make to enterprises, leadership needs to acknowledge the legitimate intersection of work, family, and community interests. Accommodating work/life balance demands a rethink of traditional principles of good business. It requires challenging traditional value systems and introducing new ways of thinking about sustainable workforce planning, social capital, and responsibility to community.

**In this organisation we actually have these two themes that we run...two particular strands that reflect the sort of organisation we are. Those streams are around our business or policy objective and the other theme is caring for people. So we actually believe they're not exclusive, they're actually things that work together to achieve the business outcome. (Male senior manager)**

The 24/7 culture and its repercussions need to be squarely located as a business and social agenda as workplace sustainability issue. The impact on men and women and their families cannot be ignored as health, relationships, and community are affected. There are limits to the take up of flexibility opportunities when the structure of business remains locked in a mindset that privileges work life over private life and structures. Devising strategies to assist women juggle family and work, goes some of the way to assist women, but does not address the wider implications of structure of work that remains locked in a traditional heritage that sees gendered segregation of roles.

With more sophisticated mobile and electronic technologies virtual work places can now exist in cafes and lounge rooms, blurring the boundary between work and non work. This creates difficulty when negotiating private life as the separation between private and public life becomes increasingly opaque, particularly at senior level when work relationships slip into the personal. This highlights and exacerbates the gendered consequences of a 24/7 culture that work against many women, who choose to maintain boundaries between work and home. Indeed the 24/7 culture impinges on choices both men and women make.

**To be honest with you, I don't think it would be possible [to have children] to do what we do... when both of us are at full throttle and that does impact our domestic life. Simple stuff like dry cleaning, shopping. When we are both working 12, 14 hours a day, those things suffer." (Male senior manager)**

Leadership needs to address basic assumptions that underpin the 24/7 culture. It needs to address the rhetoric of work life balance that does not reflect the day to day reality that sees commitment to work being judged by long hours spent at the workplace, by responsiveness to work demands when not at work, and by the interplay of public and private life that sees leisure, family, and work progressively intertwined. Leadership needs to interrogate the notion of flexible work options when

performance is often judged by the capacity to meet unrelenting workplace demands that see women, in particular, working to all hours in the morning to meet deadlines. Flexibility needs to be a tool that assists women (and men) to make choices about work and family. Choosing flexible work options should not see women juggling impossible demands.

Flexibility needs to be incorporated into mainstream organisational life if it is to transcend tokenism. Flexibility needs to be treated as a strategic intervention designed to enhance organisations' capacity and the maximisation of talent contribution. If policy is to move from rhetoric to practice, the introduction of flexibility options must be incorporated into mainstream corporate life and supported by management. This requires leadership to challenge cultural attitudes and practices that are intransigent and indeed discriminatory and to support a clear and unambiguous case for the uptake of flexibility.

### 11.3 Taking action

As part of a concerted effort by senior leadership to raise awareness of inhibitors to women's work experience and to enhance women's promotional opportunity, senior management needs to commit to on the ground initiatives that see diversity incorporated in core business activity. Such initiatives include:

- collect data to assess the contribution of flexible workplace options to the bottom line, and to measure the opportunity cost of under-utilisation and of failure to attract and retain women, and establish risk mitigation strategies;
- pursue diversity initiatives as a core element in business strategy. Incorporate diversity as a key performance indicator through the business, such that managers are accountable for linking diversity with business outcomes;
- facilitate flexible working arrangements that set realistic deliverables. In particular, take action to address deeply seated assumptions that align diversity initiatives with negative business outcomes, as exemplified by part-time work being associated with less commitment;
- seek interventions to enhance the attractiveness of traditional male industries to executives (men and women) with families through the provision of flexible and family friendly working conditions;
- provide women with opportunities to take up mainstream leadership in operational roles and support and mentor them in those roles in the same way as men get mentored. In particular, manage the early

stages of this initiative when women are visible and potentially vulnerable to undue scrutiny such that a mistake is construed as a failure rather than a learning opportunity;

- identify development opportunities and facilitate use of mentors for women through successive stages of their career;
- enforce appropriate management behaviours and standards that address professional inclusion, meeting dynamics, and communications and language protocols. These should be role-modelled at the most senior levels and every opportunity should be made to communicate standards and behaviours through the organisation;
- seek the achievement of a 'critical mass' of women in management positions to avoid isolation, maintain confidence, encourage emerging women leaders, and limit minority/majority dynamics; and
- recognise that cultural change initiatives may be resisted by both men and women. Manage the resistance through ongoing communication and awareness raising while moving ahead.

### 11.4 Conclusion

The demands of the global economy have seen an intersection of the business and ethical case for change. The ethical case for equal opportunity, while afforded the protection of legislation has not been able to make inroads into deeply rooted cultural practices. Leadership can no longer afford to stand by while talented individuals are denied opportunities. Today's networked, interdependent, culturally diverse organisations require a leadership presence that is able to harness the collective intelligence, creativity, and imagination, of employees at all levels. 'We must take the risk, because there is none' (McFarlane 2004:20).

# postscript

This project has resulted from a conversation among friends about the experience of women in executive positions in large organisations and professional firms.

It was noted that despite employer of choice and action to counter discrimination, and to encourage equity, many women of quality are not being used to their full potential or are leaving these organisations for a more supportive environment. In this environment hungry for human talent, the cost to both individual organisations and the nation are significant. The issue also has a significant social dimension as women of quality are often frustrated and denied their fullest chances in life.

Much of the research in this area has focussed on issues of structure and workplace policies such as those relating to work life balance, affirmative action in recruiting and so on. However, it was felt that the largely hidden story was in the more subtle areas of culture and social and interpersonal dynamics which affect the quality of women's experience, and therefore career choices and ability to contribute.

The proposal to undertake this research attracted the ready support of a number of progressive organisations

in various sectors and a number of leaders associated with them who were willing to help guide the study.

Understanding the nature of hidden dimensions in organisational life through in depth qualitative research has addressed a significant gap in our understanding and will assist organisations address more implicit issues that create barriers. As Professor Amanda Sinclair has said in her preface to this report, Dr Piterman's research answers with new depth the gaps in our understanding of the thinness of female ranks in the leadership of our organisations.

The openness of Dr Piterman's many interviewees, male and female, to discussing their feelings and experiences, and her perceptive analysis and use of contemporary research, provides us with a platform to move forward. Her practical recommendations will be of real benefit to organisations that want to seriously engage with this issue.

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# appendices

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## Interview questions

1. What is your age and current position?
2. Can you give me a brief work history?
3. What are your career aspirations?
4. Tell me about your life outside of work – family or other responsibilities?
5. How do you manage work life balance?
6. What is valued in your organisation?
7. What do you believe it takes to be successful in this organisation?
8. What traits and behaviours do successful people demonstrate?
9. Are there particular pathways that lead to success?

10. Do you believe you have had access to those pathways? OR
11. How would you describe your journey to a leadership position?
12. Do you believe you have had difficulties advancing your career? If so, what do you believe are factors which have created difficulties?
13. What are important relationships for you?
14. What do you do to nurture those relationships?
15. Do you regard the number of women at senior level reflects the talent pool of the organisation?
16. How do you believe women in authority are regarded in this organisation?
17. Do you believe women in this organisation have the same career paths as men? Why or why not?
18. How does this organisation assist women into positions of seniority?
19. What, in your opinion, are the reasons for the small number of women in senior management positions?

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## Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry
AICD	Australian Institute of Company Directors
CARS	Centre for Applied Social Research
DEST	Department of Education, Science & Training
DTI	Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (UK)
EOWA	Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
WISET	Women in Science Engineering and Technology Advisory Group





