

Working Paper No. 8

Organisational fairness: senior positions (Part of the Gender Worx Working Paper Series)

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References

For all references please refer to Working Paper References on the Gender Worx website.



Organisational fairness: senior positions

Male and female executives know that gender comes into play when women's leadership is evaluated. When executives evaluate the leadership performance of male and female colleagues, they are 25 times more likely to comment on the woman's gender. Women executives may demonstrate all the behaviours required for their current and more senior roles, but will still be identified for gender: the same does not apply for men (Lyons & McArthur 2007). Women's talents are scrutinised and evaluated more harshly and this cultural bias impacts on women's progress and status.

In addition, women's talent and ambition may be suppressed as they adjust their expectations of what they might personally achieve to the evidence in front of them. Women (and men) don't see evidence of women holding senior positions, which impacts their assessment of whether women are suitable for such roles. As a consequence, women's self-efficacy about their leadership abilities and expectations reduces, as they avoid setting themselves up for failure (Sealy 2010).

These factors are complicit in the lower representation of women at the top. A negative cycle is completed by low numbers of women at the top being taken as evidence that they do not have the ability to succeed (Sealy 2010).

Women who do succeed, tend to have an extraordinary level of capability (Eagly & Carli 2007b). This in turn contributes to further unfairness, as the measuring stick for women to be successful is set unrealistically high.

Men who have a strong sense of fair play are more aware of gender bias. These men are more highly attuned to issues of fairness, and a lack of fairness, and feel a need to redress imbalances. Men demonstrate their commitment to fair play by being willing to stand up and advocate for greater fairness for women. Ernst & Young's *Cultivating men as allies* program focuses men on the negative impact of gender beliefs on men and women, and what they stand to gain which helps increase their sense of fair play and engagement (Prime & Moss-Racusin 2009).

Australian organisations reported that merely offering workplace programs does not change much. The view was that the one action that demonstrably impacted on women's representation was active identification and promotion of high potential females (Nesbit & Seeger 2007).

The University of Western Australia plans an audit to ensure that staff who work part-time, use flexible arrangements or follow a non-traditional career path are equitably accessing all development and career opportunities available to their full-time colleagues (EOWA 2010c). This will help recalibrate fairness of access to senior positions.

If beliefs that limit the engagement of women can be explored and set aside, then organisational culture will maximise all leadership potential.



About Gender Worx

Gender Worx is a specialist gender diversity practice. We are thought leaders, experts and consultants to organisations in gender diversity measurement and change. We assist organisations to unlock the potential of women and help make organisations:

- better places to work; and
- more productive and profitable

Gender Worx is a specialist division of Insync Surveys, stakeholder survey and consulting specialists and a 2009 BRW Fast 100 Company.

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About Insync Surveys

Insync Surveys has one of the largest suites of leading edge integrated benchmarked stakeholder surveys in the world. Its surveys are distributed in over 30 countries and in over 15 languages and include surveys for employees, customers, boards, community groups and many other organisation stakeholders.

Insync Surveys has carried out surveys for some of the largest public, private, government and not-for-profit organisations in Asia Pacific. It is based in Australia and has representatives in New Zealand, Asia, UK and North America. Insync Surveys' technology also powers the surveys of Board Benchmarking and Gender Worx.

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