

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ARC Linkage Project

Top to Bottom Talent Management

The Top to Bottom Talent Management project is a three-year ARC-funded research program involving the University of South Australia, Melbourne Business School, Aegis Pty Ltd, and the Australian Senior Human Resources Roundtable. We call this the Top to Bottom Talent Management project because it's all about how an organisation can utilise the talent of its total workforce from top to bottom.

In the first phase of this program we focused on 'Increasing Gender Diversity' at four leadership levels of the organisations, as well as the gender diversity of the whole workforce. The four levels we considered were Board of Directors (if the organisation has one), Top Executive Team (those reporting directly to the CEO), Senior or Executive Manager (employees above middle management) and Manager.

This report presents findings from 334 organisations that responded to Employer Survey One. These organisations represent all 17 of the Australian Bureau of Statistics standard industry classifications. Respondents provided information about their organisations' gender diversity and gender diversity management policies and practices.

The survey findings show that gender diversity has increased at all levels in Australian organisations since 2008, but more at lower than at higher levels of leadership. Despite these gender diversity increases, women continue to be under-represented at all management levels and on Boards.

The results from Employer Survey One also indicate that Australian organisations are adopting three different approaches or paradigms to manage gender diversity: 'No agenda' (focus is on other key business issues), 'Blind Gender Diversity Management' (a philosophy that 'people are just people' so employment practices can be applied effectively across the board), and 'Conscious Gender Diversity Management' (changing recruiting and selection practices so that the gender composition of the workforce reflects the gender composition of customers or clients).

Over one quarter (or 26%) of the participating organisations adopt the 'No agenda' paradigm and almost two thirds (or 65%) adopt the 'Blind Gender Diversity Management' one. Overall, most Australian companies are not actively seeking to increase or leverage gender diversity in their workforces.

Organisations that adopt the more active 'Conscious Gender Diversity Management' paradigm (about 8% of our sample) use more policies and practices that specifically manage gender diversity. In turn, those policies and practices increase gender diversity. In particular, work flexibility policies and practices are effective in increasing gender diversity throughout the organisation up to, and including, the Top Executive Team level. At this top level, recruitment and selection practices that target women, such as explicitly considering gender as a criterion in selection decisions, are also effective in increasing gender diversity. Similarly, selection practices that target women are successful in increasing female directorships. In addition, a number of other practices, such as establishing and monitoring measurable objectives for achieving gender diversity, are effective in increasing gender diversity on boards of directors.

Although this study shows that gender diversity at all levels of Australian organisations increased since 2008, women are still an under-utilised resource. One way to improve the management of all talent in organisations is by embracing a more proactive approach to managing gender diversity.

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