

'Not doable jobs?'
Exploring senior women's attitudes to leadership roles in universities

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Background

In this paper we analyse selected findings of a recent Australia-wide empirical study that investigated the experience of women in senior managerial positions and the impact of the presence of senior women executives on management cultures. We also explored what it was that supported and sustained women in senior managerial roles. The study involved interviews with 255 senior male and female executives in Australian organisations from the public, private and tertiary sectors. This paper covers data gathered from five universities where 81 interviews took place. 50 of these were with senior women, 31 were with senior men.

The project arose from the knowledge that in some Australian organisations there was a critical mass of women at senior levels of management. More importantly many had remained in positions of seniority for a significant length of time, providing ample justification for a research project that systematically investigated and documented the reasons for and impact of this.

The project had three major objectives:

- (1) To provide an in-depth analysis of the lived experience of women at senior executive levels.
- (2) To identify, document and evaluate extrinsic (work/family policies) and intrinsic (cultural, relational and deep-structural) factors that support and sustain women in senior managerial roles.
- (3) To investigate the extent to which the presence of senior women in substantial numbers has transformed managerial cultures in selected organisations.

The research approach adopted for much of this project was essentially qualitative. The principal method of data collection was ethnographic interviews with senior women managers in the participating organisations. This was supported by interviews with senior males from each of the participating organisations. The interviews were supplemented by quantitative data.

We completed 255 interviews, with 168 women and 87 men. The breakdown across the three sectors was as follows:

Private Sector		Public Sector		Higher Education	
72		102		81	
Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
21	51	35	67	31	50

Ethnographic interviews are seen as a methodology enabling the research participants to speak most freely of their managerial experiences. According to Spradley (1979), the ethnographic interview resembles a friendly conversation but with a specific purpose. As a research methodology it allows for data to be gathered without the need for pre set categories of analysis. Interviews are the main means by which feminist researchers have sought to involve women in the construction of data about their lives (Reinharz 1992). We were of the view that a semi structured ethnographic interviewing technique would enable our participants to express their experiences in their own words and not have a priori categories imposed on them. Our interviews averaged between 45 and 60 minutes although many went longer.

Each of the interviews was tape recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions provided the basis of the analysis, with the original tapes being referred to, when necessary, for clarification of a word or phrase, usually a name or technical term, or sometimes to enable the researcher to recontextualise an interview, or a particular part of an interview, through hearing the words, as well as reading them. Because of their resonance with our research we also drew on the analytic procedures utilised in Marshall's (1995) study of women leaving senior management. The analysis involved an initial reading of the transcripts of each of the interviews by the researchers to get a general sense of their content. This was followed by numerous further readings to tease out common themes and points of difference in the interviews. Having achieved a degree of familiarity with content of the interviews via this process we then entered the transcriptions into the software program N6. Ely's (1995) study of the effect that women's representation at senior levels in organisations has on their gender and gender identity, which used direct quotes from interviews to illustrate participant's perceptions and experiences in this regard, provided us with a useful precedent in developing a strategy for representing the data. Following Ely's approach, direct quotes are similarly used to emphasise, highlight or illustrate a particular finding. We believe the direct quotes shed critical light on the culturally-patterned behaviours of the executive women and men participants and the shifting constructions of gendered power relations and practices within their institutions.

The participants

This paper covers data gathered from the five universities where 81 interviews took place. 50 of these were with senior women, 31 were with senior men. The selection of those to be interviewed was negotiated between the research team and representatives from Human Resources and Equity Units. The final selection often depended on the availability of those approached at a time when members of the research team were in the relevant city. The interviews took place between November 2001 and October 2002. Over the time period when interviews took place, universities restructured or senior staff retired. As a result 6 Vice-Chancellors were interviewed. Some interviews took place with people who then moved to more senior positions either within the University or in a couple of cases to other universities. In a limited number of cases those interviewed had just retired, either from the University or from the senior position that they held. Others retired during the course of the project. Senior positions were defined as Deans or above in the academic stream, Directors and above in the administrative stream. In a couple of cases interviews were held with Heads of School or deputy administrators; this occurred in consultation with the contacts at each University who suggested that there were significant reasons for selecting that person – for example a woman Head of School in a male-dominated discipline.

Of those interviewed in higher education, 46 were academics. 24 of these were men and 22 women. 35 were in administrative support or general staff positions. 28 of these were women and only 7 were men. The high proportion of women administrative staff interviewed reflected the high proportion of women in this category, particularly at one institution, at the time of the interviews.

A distinctive factor was the ‘greying’ of the senior academic workforce demonstrated among those interviewed. 51 were in the age range 50-59 and 9 were over 60. Although the numbers were small it is a significant result that 74% were over 50. They had witnessed major changes in the gender composition of their workplaces. During the year in which interviews took place, 9 of the sample retired. Only 2 of those interviewed (both female administrators) were in the age range 30-39.

Women in Australian higher education

Although women in the last years of the twentieth century entered higher education in greater numbers as students and staff, significant gender differences remained in senior management (CHEMS, 1998). Throughout the world universities “have the dubious privilege of likely remaining the most male-dominated establishments in the world in relation to career advancement” (Kearney, 2000: 13). Feminist analyst Louise Morley (1999: 87) argued that in universities the “dominant culture positions marginalised groups as intruders, outsiders and this is actively, rather than accidentally, constructed” and defined women as such a marginalised group. Thomas and Davies (2002: 379) found that

in British universities women felt “marginalised ...referring to the operation of informal male networks, masculine symbols, and the promotion of masculine identities.” Attention has also been paid to the poor representation of women

Australia’s 38 universities have been similarly criticised for maintaining male-dominated management structures and for ignoring the potential of women as managers (Burton, 1997; Probert, Ewer and Whiting, 1998). For almost twenty years strong equal opportunity legislation to redress gender inequities has covered Australian universities. There has been considerable change over the last 7 years – and it is change that is reflected, albeit unevenly, through all levels of employment in higher education in both academic and administrative positions and particularly in the number and proportion of women in senior positions. In 1996, there were 2 female Vice-Chancellors (5%); in 2003 - 10 (27%). Over a similar time-span, in 1996 there were 19 women in DVC, PVC and Dean positions (19%); in 2003 there were 27 (21%). The number and proportion of women in senior administrative posts (Directors) were 230 women in 1996 (26%) and 423 in 2003 (36%) (DEST 2004). This places Australia well ahead of most other countries. It also indicates that some women believed that senior positions were doable or that they could transform them to make them so. The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (www.avcc.edu.au) approved in 1998 a plan to advance women staff.

The research upon which the findings presented here are based took place in five Australian universities, all formerly institutes of technology. They are members of what is known as the Australian Technology Network (ATN). They all demonstrate a strong and explicit commitment to gender equity. They also fund a Women’s Executive Development Program (ATN WEXDEV) which provides encouragement to promote women into senior positions. It has been suggested that, as relatively recent institutions, they may be less bound by tradition and more likely to promote women into positions of responsibility. “Within countries, such as the UK and Australia, where former Polytechnics and Colleges of Advanced/Higher Education have become universities in recent years, these institutions have a better record in appointing women, at all levels of the academic hierarchy, than the older research-oriented universities” (CHEMS, 1998: 22).

Male and female careers in universities

It is well established that academic careers of men and women follow different and more diverse pathways (Inglis, 1999). Male academics were more likely to seek promotion than female academics at a similar level (Probert et al, 1998). Our research confirmed this. It was particularly apparent in the narratives of men and women who were specialist academics. Almost two-thirds of the academic men we interviewed had applied for their current jobs, over a third of those from outside the institution. The senior academic men were clear about what they saw as typical academic careers.

I have had a fairly conventional career as an engineer, academic, in terms of going from one place to another place about every 5-7 years. I've often changed country between those positions. (Male Dean)

Another outlined a similar trajectory:

I started as a lecturer. Then I spent some time working in England. Then coming back to Australia I went into what was really a Head of School position and then became a Dean. And then a Deputy Vice Chancellor at another University and then a Pro Vice Chancellor at another University and so here. So if you count that first Head of School position, about seventeen years in those kinds of management positions. (Male Pro Vice-Chancellor)

It was more common for male participants spontaneously to mention working overseas or interstate. They had what could be seen as more cosmopolitan careers.

On the other hand just over a third of the senior academic women had applied directly for their jobs, and less than 20% of those from outside the institution. Only 3 of the women mentioned experience in overseas positions; 3 mentioned appointments at universities interstate. It is a truism of analysis of women's employment that in the context of their family relationships and child bearing and rearing women have less mobility. One woman had been in the same institution for 27 years.

The situation for female administrative or general staff was different. As higher education in Australia has become more competitive and market-oriented, universities have sought senior general staff administrators who are highly professional in areas such as information technology, financial management, human resource management and marketing. 28 female general staff were interviewed, as a distinctive feature of Australian universities was that women filled a high proportion of these senior administrative positions. Too few male general administrators (only 7) were interviewed to make a significant comparison. Female general staff had developed expertise in certain areas in other sectors, such as the public sector. Most had confidence in their capacity and had made a decision to try the higher education sector. At one University, out of 9 women administrative staff who were interviewed, 7 had applied to come directly into the positions they still held from outside, 3 from the public sector, 3 from the private sector and one from another University.

Interestingly many of the women administrators, once in the University had stayed in the senior position for which they had applied for lengthy periods of time. It was clear that they were specialists in a particular field. Career structures at universities did not provide clear paths for advancing administrators who were not academics. It is probable that males in the administrative stream faced similar problems.

In discussing their career histories with the men and women involved we uncovered a complex series of interlinked factors that had influenced women's career patterns. First, and understandable given the ages of the participants, many of the women had suffered

from a culture of discrimination. Second, women showed themselves to be lacking in confidence about their credentials, particular as academic researchers. Third, it was apparent that a number of the women were uncertain that they could do the job; we described this as reticence. Fourth, a number of academic women showed ambivalence, in particular because they were involved in and enjoyed their research and teaching and did not want to relinquish these. Fifth, women (and some men) were keen to ensure that they had some 'balance' between the working life and their family responsibilities. Finally some women showed resistance to taking on demanding jobs.

A history of discrimination

Given the fact that the age-range of 50 - 69 years was most common in the sample of senior women, many had experienced overt gender discrimination. A number had come back to tertiary studies and employment through involvement in the feminist movement or similar social movements. These women 'pioneers' reflected a particular generation, one that had struggled to forge a career against expectations that their primary responsibilities were for family and childcare. One senior woman indicated how that expectation played itself out in the ways in which she and others in that generation had operated in the workforce and sought promotion. She pointed out that women had fought for their success and had had to struggle to make themselves visible and heard by others:

In general the first wave of senior women, the ones of my generation and probably those who are 5 years or so younger than me but not much younger than that, this is a pretty common characteristic. They're big personalities. They're people who develop a public persona. ... I learnt in the 70s to speak at the beginning of a meeting. Get over your own fear of speaking. Try and grab their attention so that they can't ignore you. Which is what they basically wanted to do. (Female VC)

Women who entered the workforce in the 1960s needed this firmness and adopted explicitly forceful techniques. The dominance of gendered ideologies at the time when many of the women were beginning their careers was reflected in a belief that work was peripheral to women's lives. Women were essentialised in a patriarchal discourse that presumed heterosexuality, domesticity and motherhood. The following comments show how one of our female participants struggled against such discriminatory beliefs:

I held only temporary appointments, contract appointments, whereas I saw men who I didn't think made the contribution I did being put into a tenure track. I was considered not to need the job. Then my husband died and people saw that I actually needed an income. There was actually a change in attitude once I was perceived as the breadwinner. (Female DVC)

Another feature of women's career patterns was that many were likely to start their academic careers later, sometimes after child-rearing (Probert et al, 1998). One explained:

Often female academics come into it slightly later. They haven't got that traditional leave school, go to university, get honours, go into a PhD, become a tutor and do your research and by the time you're 30, you're ready to take on a management position. A lot of females, like me, come in later, start to do all their higher degrees and always take on administrative (and) management jobs because you're good at it. You're doing it all. But then you've a research profile that is not as vibrant as the male who has been spending 10 years devoted to his research.
(Female Dean)

One senior woman argued that women should see their 'non-traditional' backgrounds as a strength that gave them a broad range of experience for management:

Women mustn't apologise for having an atypical background. A lot of women do. It took me a long time to realise this, quite frankly. But when I wrote my application for a personal chair, it was the first time that I actually sat down and I wrote as the first sentence: 'My life has been enriched by many things.' And that was really important because it meant that I wasn't apologising any more for having been a wife and a mother and having part-time jobs and having carted around the world with a husband and things like that. Women have got to assess their own backgrounds in a more positive way and women are starting to do that.(Female DVC)

Uncertainty about qualifications: the role of research

The inequity at a senior level was particularly severe for women in the academic stream. Rubin (1997) pointed out that formalised selection processes "are viewed as neutral and fair for women and men. Gender, or more specifically women's disadvantage, becomes a problem only when individual selectors ask individual women sex-specific questions or base their assessment of female candidates on their own gender-stereotyped assumptions." This process ensured that women and men were treated the same. Rubin argued that this 'equity principle' ignored the fact that women academics often had a very different starting point and hence faced discrimination unless steps were put in place to ensure that the field was absolutely level.

Critical to academic promotion criteria is the emphasis that may be placed on research strength. Many theorists have argued that women's relative lack of success in academic promotion rested on their poorer research performance. Suggested (Creamer 1998, (Probert et al 1998, Bagilhole 2002, White 2003, Carrington and Pratt 2003) as reasons for this have been the fact that many women enter academia later than men, and that they have interrupted careers, because of their primary responsibilities for family and child-care. Women also enter academia at lower levels than men and this has a snowballing effect as they then have less time to build their academic qualifications. Women are less likely to have post-graduate degrees, begin studying for these after they become academics, take longer to complete postgraduate studies and are less likely to go on to post-Doctoral fellowships. They are concentrated in disciplines (such as education or

nursing) where there have not been long traditions of research and which have less access to large grants (as medicine or science do) or to industry funding. Statistics show that women do not apply for grants in the same proportion as men. Women do not build up a tradition of publications. Morley (2002) described the publications of many women as being in 'grey publications' – informal, arising from conferences, not widely circulated. Women have been found to have less access to networks, particularly international ones, for research and publication (Poole 1998). It has also been suggested that women have higher teaching workloads than men and give greater priority to student and pastoral care.

Some of these have become firmly established as explanatory criteria, although some researchers have found that when the discipline of researcher was controlled, early career women researchers were as active as men (Bazeley 1996; Asmar 1999). But the senior academic women interviewed for this project placed high value on research and considered their lack of research qualifications had been a barrier to them applying for senior positions. One woman had been a Deputy Vice-Chancellor in the organisation, during two amalgamations and restructures, over a period of 10 years, working for 3 different Vice-Chancellors. But she did not apply for the senior position, until approached by a search company:

That in itself is a story. I do not have a PhD. I'm probably the only Vice-Chancellor in Australia without one. I considered at the time that, although I could do the job, it would be a major barrier. The search person had done 70 interviews across Australia in relation to this job, including some of them in here, and my name had come up as the obvious appointment. Nobody saw the lack of PhD as an issue in terms of performance. So I was very fortunate. (Female VC)

For this woman a PhD was seen as a necessary pre-requisite for a senior academic position. It stood for skill in research. Interestingly a male Vice-Chancellor commented that he did not see a PhD as necessary for a senior position; what was needed in his view was "the respect of the academic community." Senior positions are about managing; and in the case of the women cited above, she had already demonstrated skill in this.

A female acting as Head of School did not apply for the permanent position. She argued that the PhD was essential for someone in that position, although it had not been seen as a necessary qualification when she began studying information technology:

I didn't apply for the position and I decided not to because I don't have a research background and I just feel that to be a woman without a PhD trying to run one of the largest schools in the University, the odds are stacked against it, so I decided not to. I am happy with my skills and what I can do. But I do think there is an important role for research and the visibility of research in those positions and I felt it needed someone who had those better research skills to be leading the department. (Female HoS)

Reticence

A female Deputy Vice-Chancellor explained what she saw as the phenomenon of women not applying for senior positions:

The big problem is actually getting the women to the point of application. Maybe I've been a perfect example of it, saying no, I wouldn't apply for the Vice-Chancellor's job because I wouldn't get it. Women think they have to be perfect before they actually apply for jobs. Men with an imperfect record will apply much more readily than women and take the gamble. Women like to get it all stitched up and then run. (Female DVC)

Many women expressed uncertainty, particularly about their credentials. It seemed women academics defined their roles primarily as teachers or researchers. The step into a role that was seen as purely managerial seemed to produce a wariness about applying unless there was very specific encouragement. The researchers described this trait as 'reticence'.

Examples of reticence were that the majority of women interviewed were in their current jobs because they had been invited to apply, were approached by search firms or their own direct superiors or were appointed from acting positions. Some women were aware of their qualities, but wanted others to endorse them. Some indicated that they waited for a signal to apply for the job. In a number of cases it was clear that women thought that they were not ready for the jobs, overvaluing the qualifications of other colleagues.

A female Director of an academic centre had assumed that a male colleague had better qualifications; her direct superior, a DVC, had to ring her to request that she apply:

So they advertised for a Director and funnily enough I actually didn't put in, didn't even think of applying to be the Director and it was only that the DVC rang me up about a day before the applications closed and in hindsight he must have looked to see, but at the time I didn't think. He said 'Have you got your application in?' 'No.' 'Why not?' I said 'Oh well a good friend of mine's applying and he'll get the job for sure so there's no point in me applying.' And he said 'Oh no don't do that because even when you think someone's a shoe-in for a job, their institution makes a counter offer and then we go to the number two person on the list.' And I thought 'Oh that's right.' So I put in an application but funnily enough they offered me the job and not him. So it's quite funny. (Female Director)

Female administrators showed more readiness to apply for jobs than academics, although a small but significant group also expressed concern and doubt about their credentials and wanted to be absolutely certain they would be able to deliver:

I came to be here because I was doing a similar job in the Division. Initially I was approached perhaps a year and a half prior to my coming across to this central role from a Divisional role and at the time I thought it was premature which is very

interesting. I thought that I wasn't yet experienced enough. I'd been doing a (similar) role in the Division and the VC actually approached me and said 'What about coming across to the centre?' It's very interesting because this goes back 7 or 8 years and I said I didn't believe I had fully conquered the job in the Division. Isn't that an interesting thing. Probably I'd been there for 3 years and I hadn't tidied up all this end. So some 18 months later I was approached again. I think there actually was a selection panel on that occasion and I did apply because I felt I was ready and I had really got it. It was an obvious move for me because I thought I'd mastered the Divisional ... activities so I was quite interested to come across to the University's central office because it meant a whole new range of activities to take on and a larger staffing. ... So from my perspective it made a lot of sense. So I was attracted to it because it was a new challenge and therefore career development.

... in having this discussion I also reflect upon whether or not I am confident enough in my own abilities and pushy enough. It's an interesting issue about women in management. I don't even know on reflection – I think it was the correct decision but it may not have been a decision that others would have made. But I think now I'm quite sure it was the right decision because I certainly felt that I was very much in control of what was going on and I really felt that I knew more than anybody else by the time I finished the five years of the Divisional level.
(Female Director)

Another woman also received direct encouragement from a Vice-Chancellor and acknowledged that without this she would not have applied, even though she had been working for some years in the field covered by the position. She commented that she had anticipated that they 'would have wanted a male marketing guru' and was in fact surprised that 'they had not gone with that model':

Basically I have been in this position, and it is a new one in the University, for seven months. I had initially looked at the position when it was advertised and made some initial judgments that I would not be competitive and that I was unlikely to win the position against a nationally competitive field and did not initially apply. But I suppose I was encouraged to put in an application by the Vice Chancellor and I did that, still thinking that perhaps I would not be competitive and not being entirely clear of the kind of profile that the University wanted. Being very clear about my skills and strengths and weaknesses and so probably to my surprise, complete surprise, it seemed to be a match with what the University was looking for and here I am so... (Female Director)

Some women saw the job application and interview as a way of giving themselves practice or some form of professional development. Others talked about themselves 'hoping to get an interview.' Again it seemed as if they had not visualised themselves in a senior role and were 'surprised' when others viewed them in this way, as competent and committed:

I was encouraged to apply. ... I was then in another State. In fact the VC wrote to me and she also suggested that (another executive) ring me up and make sure I applied. I hadn't been thinking of any such thing. I'd been appointed for 5 years and this was just 2 years into that, I'd bought a house and my partner had moved to be with me. I discussed it with my then boss who had been a Vice Chancellor. He thought it was a very good exercise and sent me to apply. It was a public presentation, a two-day process; it was a way of signalling to the other State that I had a life other than there. Also to signal to this State that I was alive and well. So I really undertook it as a professional development exercise, never dreaming, never even considering that I would be offered the job. Hadn't given a moment's thought to that or how I'd react so it was astonishing when I was. (Female PVC)

A female administrator described hesitancy and lack of confidence among women academics. She also argued that more junior women in the administrative stream were even more lacking in confidence even though she attempted to give them encouragement:

My feeling, and this is a feeling because my work with academics was not so close, would be that certainly men academics would feel they have more scope for promotion or to put their hands up for various opportunities. Women academics seem to relate to me when I'd say 'Why aren't you looking at X?' They were more hesitant, less encouraged but that would certainly change faculty by faculty.

In the administrative staff or the support staff, I would say there would not be that same sense with women that they had the opportunities, they are much shyer or less, what's the word I am looking for, less confident and many of the women...

Q: Less confident than academics?

Yes, are less confident to see themselves putting their hand up or, you know taking that risk or the leap even to be told 'no' in the first go but have a few tries. I mean I have encouraged them. I've said, 'Well give it a go, treat it like a trial run', maybe they've had different experiences which have led them to believe they shouldn't. (Female Director)

A female Director of Human Resources argued that when an institution was committed to equity, women had to be actively encouraged to apply for more senior positions or to act in them:

There was still an issue because I think men are actively fostered more and they're pushier. I can think of two absolutely excellent women who were Deans, both of whom could have been excellent VCs had they chosen, or if they'd taken certain decisions. There's more consciousness of men's careers so if you're looking at who will act as DVC over the next while, women have to be more assertive to get themselves on the list than men. Men are more assertive so when those things come up... For example a six-month opportunity as a DVC. It would not be unusual for two male Deans to put their hands up really quickly to be considered.

I talked to (one of the women I mentioned) at the time and said: 'Are you going to put your hand up?' And her view was that she wasn't getting enough explicit encouragement. It was a two-way thing. There was an executive who may not be giving (signals). But also she was waiting for more, waiting to be asked. It made a difference to at least one of them who was dithering about whether she would go back into being a Professor and update her research profile or whether she would tip her hat into academic management. And I think it was a really fine line. I think she would have been an absolutely excellent DVC. I like to think what made the difference was there was a critical acting opportunity coming up and she didn't feel that she got enough encouragement. She wasn't willing to assert it and a male Dean was. (Female Director)

This woman did not see this as 'overt discrimination.' Rather she suggested that senior men could lack 'particular sensitivity around what some of those women might need to play the game.' In other words she had seen that many women needed to be specifically encouraged to apply for senior jobs or even to take up a short-term acting opportunity. Since women did not compete as willingly as their male colleagues, there were assumptions made about 'who is ambitious and who is not ambitious.' She believed it was not that women were not ambitious, rather that they were more modest about their capabilities and their readiness for the position. Organisational leaders assumed people applied when ready. This ignored the stark gender differences in applying for senior appointments.

Ambivalence

For some women their reticence about applying for senior jobs reflected ambivalence. They could be potentially interested in management. They were however particularly interested in research or teaching. So for many this was expressed as an ambivalence about applying for a management job.

It was a contradiction for many that there was such an emphasis placed on research as an essential qualification for senior academic management. Facing many senior managers was the problem that they had found they had no time for research.

A female Dean had been on the interview panel for her current position. When none of the candidates proved suitable she was persuaded by her panel colleagues to apply:

I was on the selection panel when we were trying to replace the previous Dean and we kept interviewing people and we couldn't seem to find a Dean and at the end of that I was then asked actually to become the Dean.

Q: So did you have to go through the formal process?

I didn't go through that interview with the now defunct selection panel. I did an interview with the Vice Chancellor and the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

Q: So what ultimately attracted you to apply for the job of Dean?

It had not been in my career path. I had wanted to stay and do research, but when someone says we'd like to talk to you about the position, you think well I'll give it a go. (Female Dean)

This particular contradiction was also confronted by another female Dean:

A lot of people who become academic managers want to be researchers. And you say I'll go into that management job for a bit just to see, but I can always go back. But of course you're not publishing, you try but you're too busy, you begin to lose the academic part of your job and then it does become very difficult to go back. So you find yourself thinking where do I go after being a Dean. Can you go back and be a Professor and just concentrate on research. You have to keep going forwards because I don't particularly think you'd want to stay Dean forever.

I think this time at this level if I don't go back after this 3 years is up, I've probably lost my chance to really do proper research again. (Female Dean)

At the basis of this ambivalence was the concern that many academics defined their academic work as their major focus in the University and did not equally value the role of management. This belief has grown more powerful in recent years with the expressed suspicion among many academics that managerialism has gone too far and eroded traditional academic values. This was behind the views of a male Dean about the advice he would give to a younger member of the faculty:

There is an academic in the faculty who has a junior-ish managerial position who makes no secret about the fact that she'd like to rise as far as she can in this or another University. She's faced with a choice of pursuing a managerialist path like an MBA somewhere or a PhD which she doesn't have or a research portfolio that would go with that. The direction she wants to go is vaguely the MBA route and I'm critical of her for that. I don't think it's the way to go but she may prevail. That's not the sort of basis I think for building a management team in a University. If I was in a position where I had some sort of influence over whether she got appointed to a more senior position as against someone who had gone the other way, providing other things are roughly even, I would certainly go for the person who incorporated in their development some academic propriety and traditions.

This man emphasised that the traditional academic qualification of the PhD was one that a younger colleague needed to have before going into academic management. He did not recognise that a management qualification could provide her with important skills for University management.

A female Deputy Vice-Chancellor considered the conundrum of women not applying for senior jobs and listed a range of other responsibilities that could have discouraged them.

She realised that those women who were successful had well-developed support systems in their outside roles, which thus liberated them to apply for senior positions:

I just don't think enough women have done it. I have asked myself this question before, what is it that stops some women applying for jobs, is it family, is it home, is it the outside commitment, is it strength of purpose to carry through. I haven't quite come up with an answer, because when I look around at the ones who have successfully managed, usually their support system outside is very good, very strong, whether it is friends or family. They are certainly high achievers in themselves. They are women who will fight for what they want, the position they wish to get to.

It's just at the Executive Dean level we're not so successful and one wonders whether women draw the line at wanting to do those sorts of jobs. This is the other phenomenon to do with women's careers, that some of them just decide that they've got a really good job and a really interesting job doing their profession.

Balance

The age-range of the interviewees meant that most did not have to face the problems of balancing work and family when children were still dependent. But one young woman administrator, in the 30-39 age group, had recently had a child and saw balance as a very important issue:

One of the issues that I have been thinking a lot about is the extent to which the culture is going to be flexible because obviously I am about to return from maternity leave and I have, quite honestly, been worrying about the extent to which... you know, suddenly going... you know, myself being able to work in a much more of the traditional career pattern previously and you know being able to put in the long hours and deliver the goods... and, you know, it hasn't been an issue because my partner and I have both been in senior positions and that's been our life, very professional focus. And to suddenly realise that there's this new person in my life that I need to accommodate. I have been wondering about the extent to which the University will be able to accommodate my new needs, I suppose, and I don't feel particularly positive. I would be happy to be proven pleasantly wrong but from my observation I don't think the University has always been very good at being flexible. I mean it is... I know all the stats because I work in this area and, you know out of 60 people in management positions at this University only one works part-time and I think that's quite a telling statistic.

This woman's confusion was evident in her repetition of key words and her attempts to draw on the interviewer's understanding. She believed that the option of more flexible work arrangements could be attractive to others in senior management, without responsibility for young children but with an interest in working with greater time for

their own pursuits, particularly as they moved towards retirement. This interest was not gender-specific:

I've spoken to other people, both men and women in the administrative Director group, who have indicated to me that they would all feel that they're working very hard and a number of them would be interested in maybe doing four days, maybe working in a different format but just feeling it is just not possible to even ask for it. And I guess that's interesting, the extent to which we self-censor from asking for these things because we feel that that's part of the culture. You know it may be that the University would be perfectly amenable to it but people feel 'Oh, they really can't do without me doing all these hours because I am very important to the culture of the organisation'. I've experienced that trap myself, that you really feel that you're very indispensable until the moment that you walk out the door and you realise the place doesn't fall down when you walk out. It's a very good experience to have.

Although people make culture, it was obviously still not acceptable in many institutions to question what have become basic tenets of workplace organisation. An emphasis on long working hours might not be in the best interests of both individuals and organisations. Crompton and Le Feuvre (1992) suggested that the requirements for a successful career in any bureaucratic organisation included full time continuous work and a high level of commitment to the employing organisation. It has been argued, further, that women need to be seen to work even harder than their male colleagues if they want recognition and career success (Sheppard, 1992). The woman quoted above suggested that senior women managers in these universities whilst favouring family friendly work practices for their staff do not and indeed often cannot avail themselves of the benefits that derive from such practices. What is of concern here is that masculine work habits are still the norm at senior levels in universities. Implicit within this masculine work ethic is the idea that the manager has a 'wife' who holds responsibility for the private domain and, therefore, they (men) can devote themselves to their public (organisational) life (Pateman, 1988). This was borne out when the female Director of an academic centre was asked, 'Do you aspire to a more senior role in the University?'

No I don't. I look at the role and the responsibilities the PVC has or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and I think no, I don't want that. I feel I'm kind of at the edge of what I'm able to manage and remain sane. And I'm also at an age now where, probably because my youngest is finishing high school, I'm just beginning to see that there is another life. There are some other things that we do and my partner and I have just bought some land in another State and we're thinking about our future there and a different kind of life. (Female Director)

Interestingly, within the year following the interview, this woman had accepted a Pro-Vice-Chancellor position at another University elsewhere in the country, indicating that her perspective of the inter-relationship between gender, family relationships and employment was not fixed but responded to changes in circumstances.

Resistance

A number of theorists have discussed the rapid transformation of higher education in Australia over the last twenty years. Coaldrake and Stedman (1998) argued that the need to respond to the rapidly changing context had made it imperative for universities to become more professionally managed. They discussed in particular the influence within Australia of the public sector reform agenda in introducing techniques to improve performance and accountability, with emphasis on quality, benchmarking, strategic planning and performance management. Brooks and Mackinnon (2001) cited the research of Slaughter and Leslie as identifying 4 critical areas of increased concern within universities: financial constraints, the growing importance of techno science and international markets, collaboration with industry in product development and the influence of multinationals on intellectual property. Thomas and Davies (2002: 379) found in their research study on New Public Management and its impact on British universities that there had been an intensification of work through a performance culture, described by some theorists as an 'audit culture' (Power 1997).

Academics in particular looked back regretfully to times of greater flexibility when administrative duties were less demanding. The sustainability of core academic values and frustration at the increased pressure on academic work were particular themes. There were many references in the interviews to the increased stress and insecurity of working in a University, as shown in this quote from a senior male academic:

The university sector ...had gone through a huge amount of change, but my view of it was that it had gone through the slightest incremental adjustments but was resisting all of those pretty venomously. And it didn't surprise me that Government actually started to take a closer interest. And Government still to this day has a strong view that universities aren't performing particularly efficiently, but I don't think Government has any idea either as to what to do, or what particular strategies might therefore be engaged to do what they want to do. They have a view that the university sector needs reform and the business community tells them it needs reform, they continue to wean us off the public dollar but they don't provide us with other means, in terms of the regulatory environment for example, to actually respond.

Some have suggested that substantial and rapid change in higher education exacerbated the poor position of women. Thomas and Davies suggested that New Public Management discourses "promote new forms of masculinities, serving to reinforce the gendered substructure of the organisation. The profile of the committed, single-focused academic is seen to comply with masculine discourses of competitiveness, instrumentality and individuality." Kenway and Langmead (1999: 197) similarly argued that the new conditions of production including marketisation, corporatisation and rationalisation within academic institutions created a 'chilly climate' of "exclusion, exploitation, discrimination, career limitations and cultural entrenchment" for women.

Some women also showed resistance to moving up what many saw as a corporate ladder by applying for senior jobs. This was often combined with expressed concerns about the demands on people in the most senior roles:

(W)e've just recently gone through the process of appointing a new Vice-Chancellor. There wasn't a single woman that we could shortlist. There was only one woman applicant. And that's for a major job. There were a number of women on the panel and we all asked the search company why this was so because we had certainly had hopes of at least short listing some women. The response was that women are choosing not to go into the very senior positions now, but they get into the level of Dean, sometimes to PVC and then opt either to stay at that level or to opt out of academia altogether.

Q Have you seen evidence of that?

Yes.

Q Why would that be so?

Because Vice-Chancellors' positions at the moment aren't doable jobs. Why would you set yourself up for it? I mean if you really look at what our VC does, how much of what he does would **you** want to do. I mean a whole lot of it is trivial drivel and the other bit of it's **so** hard. It's almost not able to be done (Female Dean).

Yet one male Dean commented that an unwillingness to seek promotion might not be a problem, but an assertion of values.

My observation of a number of very able women that I've come across in universities is they don't in fact aspire to the senior management positions. They will look laterally at something else that fulfils them. And I think to construe that as some sort of failure is far too simplistic....

Knights (2002) has argued that in relation to notions of the self, work and organization is an important site of resistance. He draws parallels with Foucault's work on the condition of the struggle 'against the submission of subjectivity' (Foucault, 1982:213) and Foucault's view that whenever there is power there is also resistance. Knights' writes organizational analysis into Foucault when he suggests that resistance can be argued as occurring 'because of a defence or expression of identity' (2002:585). Certainly in the interviews some academic women reacted negatively to the administration of large faculties and to the encroachment of managerialism on academic values. This view was powerfully put by a woman who had been offered a position as a Dean at the time of interview, but who was reflecting on her immediately previous role as Head of School and an earlier role as Head of Department. She had experienced intensification of work related to the increased size of academic units:

What's changed dramatically is that there's a great difference between being Head of Department and Head of School. It's like when I became a Head of Department it was still a Department. You could imagine getting to know everybody really well and, you know, running it in an informal way because everybody knew each other. You could create a culture. Whereas now I'm Head of School, forty-five academic staff, twenty administrative staff, seventy sessional academic staff, three research centres. It's like running a faculty, it's too much, it's completely... just keeping it going and making it go in good directions and keeping everybody happy is very, very full time. Whereas as Head of Department you could have a life. I could still manage to research and do things whereas it's increasingly hard. It's not impossible mainly because there's lots of good people you know, but it is too big.

What is the explanation for the phenomenon of resistance? Katia and Merilainen (2002:338) related women's resistance to the powerful definitions for senior jobs as all-consuming and dominated by male values:

“ Organisations and organising are gendered.... to resist the patriarchal articulations of their professional identity women adopt different strategies. Some women have found fitting into the dominant discourse and culture so difficult they have left the mainstream. Others silence their complaints and surrender their identities, consequently defining themselves and their relations with others in terms of the dominant discourse”.

Conclusion

It was the observation of the research team that men and women still defined a relentless pursuit of career progression through promotion as representative of more common masculine norms. This research project interviewed women who were looking back on their appointment to their current senior positions. It must be pointed out that in general the women interviewed enjoyed the challenges of their jobs and the power they were able to wield. They were confident of their own abilities and their skills were praised by both male and female colleagues.

Yet it appeared that many could have been in senior positions much earlier. Their narratives suggest that women were uncertain about applying for senior positions. It has always been assumed that through equity measures selection and promotion policies have been amended so that they are no longer discriminatory to women, as had been experienced directly by some of our interviewees. Yet clearly more needs to be done. We have identified issues such as lacking confidence, reticence, ambivalence, seeking balance and resistance as playing a part in women's avoidance of senior jobs. Is it possible that these are based on women understanding that the processes of selection and promotion are still deeply unsympathetic to women? When interviews take place, for example, do committees take due account of the awkwardness of many women in 'selling' themselves? Do committees rely on evidence of demonstrated effectiveness in roles rather than on descriptions of success? Are the demands of jobs assessed so that they

are able to be undertaken by men and women with family responsibilities? These are important areas for further investigation.

It is also important that university management introduce specific measures to address these. Initiatives should be put in place to encourage women to apply for senior positions, with the encouragement of their superiors. Central administration should encourage search firms to increase effort and seek out suitable women for senior positions. Women should be actively sought to undertake acting positions. University administration should also ensure that women staff members meet the relevant criteria for senior jobs and that criteria are broadened to include areas where women are likely to have had success. Resistance to senior jobs, whether as a response to managerialism or a deeply felt need for work life balance manifested by the desire to escape work altogether, should also be explored. It may well be possible to develop jobs at senior level that are not so demanding of time and emotional effort. We believe such an understanding may go a long way in assisting a paradigm shift away from traditional masculine models of management, and to create jobs that women and men may find 'doable'.

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