

# **Senior Women Executives and the Cultures of Management**

A brief cross-comparison of public, private and higher  
education organisations

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# 1. Introduction

This research project investigated the experience of women in senior managerial positions and the impact their presence had on management cultures in their organisations. It also explored what it was that supported and sustained women in senior managerial roles. This brief report is a summary of findings and an analysis of differences and similarities between the three sectors included in the research.

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 researchers were Dr Colleen Chesterman (Australian Technology Network Women's Executive Development Program), Associate Professor Anne Ross-Smith (University of Technology, Sydney) and Dr Margaret Peters (University of South Australia) with the assistance of Mr Scott Dovey, NSW Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment and Maxine Murray Director, Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, Western Australia (until May 2002).

The project capitalised on the opportunity that in some Australian organisations there were a significant number and proportion of women at senior levels of management. More importantly, many had remained in positions of seniority for a considerable length of time, enabling a research project to investigate and document the reasons for their continuity in these organisations and the impact of this. Organisations were selected because of their demonstrated commitment to gender equity; all had a high proportion of women (around 30%) in senior executive positions (in the top three tiers). Five universities were involved, two major financial institutions and the five mainland public services, nominating 12 departments.

Interviews with senior executive men and women in the 19 organisations in these three sectors were undertaken in 2001 and 2002. Senior men were involved to compare their experiences and to gain their views of their female colleagues. 255 interviews were completed, with 160 women and 95 men. The breakdown across the three sectors was as follows:

<b>Private Sector</b>		<b>Public Sector</b>		<b>Higher Education</b>	
<b>72</b>		<b>102</b>		<b>81</b>	
<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>47</b>

The following summary of findings is in four major sections: the lived experiences of women and men in senior management positions, the characteristics of workplace cultures that sustain and support women in senior positions, the changes that are reported to occur in managerial cultures when women are present in 'a critical mass' and remaining barriers and challenges to recruiting and retaining senior women.

Women have become senior executives in the top tiers of the public sector and higher education in increasing numbers. In the private sector women have recently become well represented in the third tier. The interviews for this project showed that the experiences of women and men on their way to leadership had been different. Older women interviewed had struggled against discrimination and many in higher education and the public sector had been pioneers. But most now did not see themselves as tokens in leadership, expressed great enthusiasm about their positions and what they had been able to achieve. Younger women in the private sector and the public sector believed they had been appointed on merit, were at ease with their male colleagues and confident of their capacity to influence events and to effect changes. It was apparent that in applying for senior positions many women had been, and some continued to be, reticent about their capabilities. Some expressed resistance about the demands of senior jobs, raising questions about sustainability of work at this level.

Interviews showed that the most important issue in getting more women into management was explicit support from the senior executive. It was also important that women were present in a 'critical mass', particularly in senior positions so that they could make a difference. This was reflected in a strongly held belief that a critical mass of women at senior levels with the ability to exercise power was significant in attracting other women to management positions. Women valued opportunities to network. They favoured organisations with expressed value systems. Flexibility and family friendly policies were also important.

Overall, this research project showed that women in senior positions were seen to have had an impact on managerial cultures. Women and men suggested that women approached management differently to men. Women encouraged greater collaboration, more consultative-decision making processes and more collegial workplaces. They were described as encouraging to staff and colleagues and as showing more 'emotional intelligence'. Women were believed to discourage competitive behaviour; to emphasise values such as honesty and integrity; and to focus on the welfare of the organisation and their co-workers.

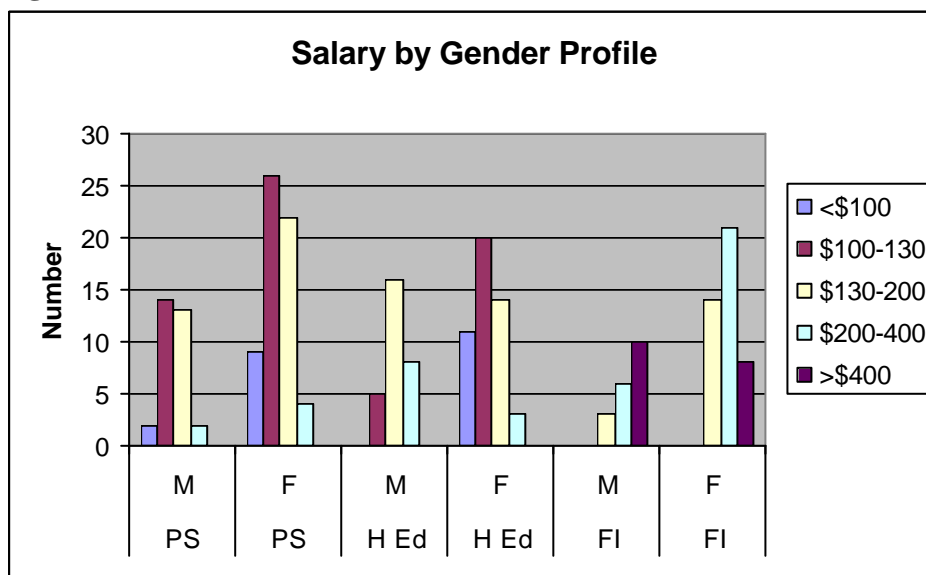
Women's promotion had been slow and uneven across the three sectors, and it was suggested that a slight negative change in the number and proportion of women in senior positions could lead to a rapid decline in their numbers. Continued programs for senior women and mentoring were seen as important for progress, although views differed as to whether these should be just for women. Heavy work pressures were a problem for many executives, male or female as were the problems of balancing family and work demands. The issues of domestic responsibilities were particularly important to younger women in the financial institutions. It was apparent that more needed to be done to reach full equity and that issues of management, gender and cultural change must be discussed by both men and women in all workplaces.

## 2. Scope of the Research

Senior management was defined by the use of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (previously the Affirmative Action Agency) categories of Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 managers<sup>1</sup> (AAA, 1995). Across all organisations involved in this research males still dominated the senior management categories. Statistical analysis of the reports to the Agency by the organisations involved over a ten-year period was prepared for the project by Kerry Brown and colleagues. This showed that overall women in the higher education sector had achieved better outcomes than private or public sector. There had been an increase in women at Tiers 1 and 3 in the public sector, with some women achieving CEO positions within public sector organisations and universities. The outcomes for women in both the education and public sector, however, had reached a plateau over the last four years. Women's participation had begun to increase in Tiers 2 and 3 management in the private sector.

Rather than break down the interviewees by tiers, which were difficult to compare across the three sectors, Figure 1 considers salary by gender. Among interviewees in the higher education and public sector, there were no salary differentials between women and men in the same tier save at the most senior level. Public sector employees also received salaries similar to others at the equivalent tier, though differences appeared with rewards in the most senior tiers. Salary levels were in general distinctly higher in the private sector, but it was not easy to identify any gender bias, as proportionately less men were interviewed and some of these were at more senior levels than the women who were clustered at Tier 3 or 4.

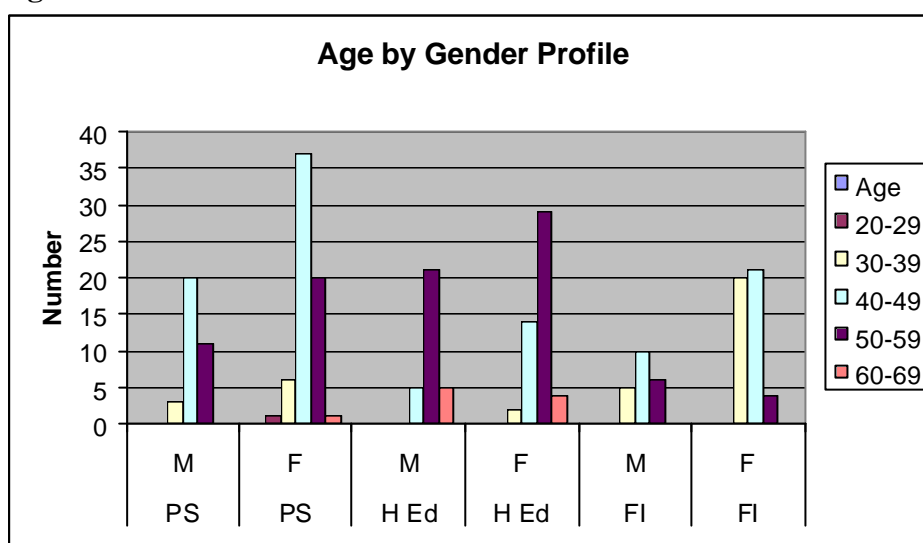
**Figure 1**



<sup>1</sup> Tier 3 Management includes those managers who are responsible for the formulation of programs and policies and assume accountability for financial, employment and human resource aspects of a specific work area. Tier 2 is responsible for, and supervises, Tier 3 Managers. The duties of Tier 2 Managers are of a higher order than Tier 3 Managers in that they are directly responsible for leadership and strategic direction of lower Tier managers. They directly report to Tier 1 Managers and also support Tier 1 Managers in relation to strategic organisational operations and development. Tier 1 Management is defined as having ultimate control of the organisation and usually there would only be one person in that category in each organisation.

There were marked differences between the three sectors in terms of age. The female respondents from the private sector were much younger than those in the other two sectors. Within the higher education sector many management positions were held by staff approaching retirement age; seventy-four percent of those interviewed were over fifty. In senior management positions in the public sector most female managers were 40-49. In the 3 states that had had equity policies for a number of years a high proportion of senior women were fifty years of age or older, whereas those interviewed in Queensland and WA were younger. In contrast, the private sector had many senior management positions held by women aged between 30-49. These women faced different challenges, particularly in relation to child-bearing and rearing.

**Figure 2**

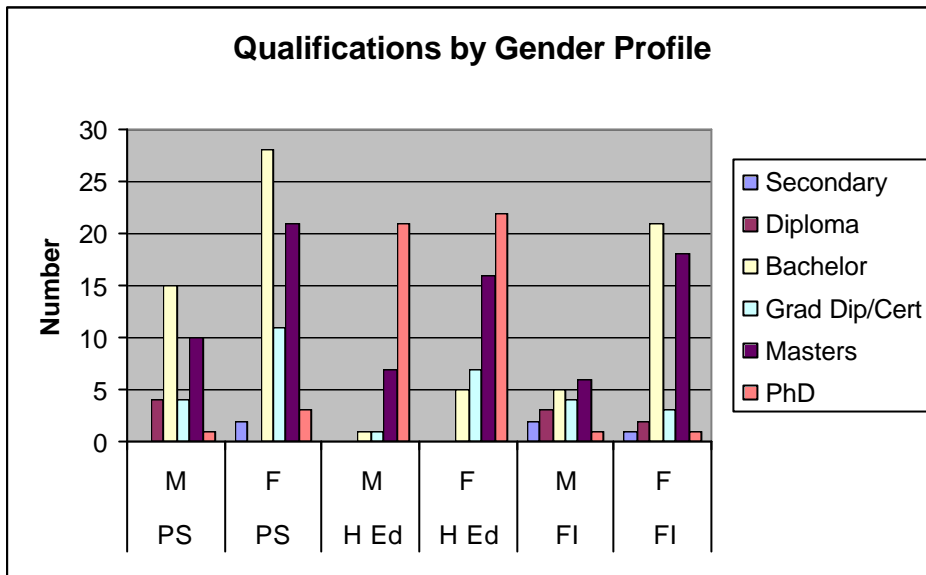


Qualifications are of primary importance in higher education promotion especially for academics and the high number of participants with postgraduate qualifications did not show any gender difference. The higher education sector, as would be expected, had the majority of interviewees with doctorates and masters degrees.

In the private and public sectors, however, significant gender difference appeared in the area of qualifications. A high number of public service or financial institution interviewees were well-qualified; overall only five participants, four women and one man, held just secondary qualifications. These had followed a traditional route to senior positions, joining as junior clerks and working their way up.

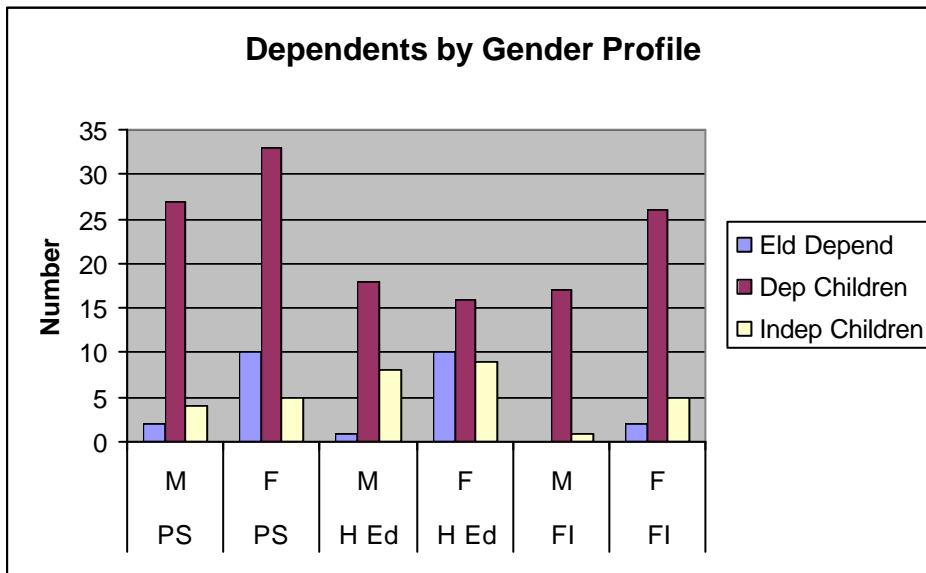
Significant differences in these organisations emerged in tertiary qualifications, in particular post-graduate qualifications. In the public sector women were twice as likely as men to gain postgraduate qualifications such as masters degrees, graduate diplomas and doctorates, suggesting that women were concerned to ensure that they had qualifications for senior work. In the financial institutions, women interviewed were much more likely than their male colleagues to gain a master's degree, with an MBA being particularly popular. These findings should be looked at in relation to the findings of women's reticence outlined in Section 3. They suggest that women placed a high value on qualifications to ensure that they were able to perform well in the position they were in.

**Figure 3**



A number of younger women in the public sector and in the two financial institutions had responsibility for dependant children, and this was a major issue in their work-life as senior women. Interview data suggested that in general these dependant children were younger than those of parents in higher education. It was also noted that older respondents from higher education and the public sector mentioned their responsibilities for elderly dependants.

**Figure 4**



The information gathered for this summary report is not taken directly from the interview transcripts but from the series of reports prepared for the industry partners. To date nine reports have been generated in the study, each entitled *Senior Women Executives and the Cultures of Management*. These reports were provided to the industry partners, in draft form, as follows:

- ATN Universities (5 Universities) August 2003
- Victorian Public Service (3 departments) September 2003
- Financial Organisation 1 October 2003
- Western Australian Public Service (2 departments) October 2003
- Queensland Public Service (2 departments) November 2003
- South Australian Public Service (2 departments) December 2003
- Financial Organisation 2 December 2003
- NSW Public Service (3 departments) February 2004
- Integrated Public Service June 2004

During the course of the research, many changes occurred. Both men and women in senior positions retired. The five universities all experienced some changes in the structural organisation of their senior management teams. In the public sector there were changes in structures of departments, sometimes occasioned by changes of government or by reorganisation of responsibility. One private sector organisation faced severe economic difficulties that led to dramatic staff changes. Hence this research can be said only to describe organisations at a particular period during 2001-2002.

The research approach adopted for much of this project was essentially qualitative. The principal method of data collection was ethnographic interviews with senior female and male managers in the participating organisations. The interviews were supplemented by quantitative data and by relevant reports from the participating organisations. In this summary report direct quotes from interviewees are used to emphasise, highlight or illustrate a particular finding.

### 3. Experience of Management Careers

Across the three sectors there were more similarities than differences revealed in the lived experience of women in management careers. Experiences of women in the public and tertiary education sectors correlated particularly closely, as these women were likely to be older than those in the private sector. These older women interviewed had struggled against discrimination and achieved a great deal. Most younger women in the private sector and the public sector believed that discrimination was a thing of the past. Interviews revealed that many women were reticent about their capabilities. Some expressed resistance about the demands of senior jobs.

#### 3.1 Gender Discrimination

According to the narratives from all 3 sectors, discrimination had been more prevalent in the past. Discrimination was more commonly reported in the public sector and higher education where older women dominated as they were often pioneers in gaining senior positions:

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, Tier 2, Higher Education, 60-69

These women trailblazers had faced rigid expectations about their capacity, the jobs they could do and their mobility:

When I joined the job, the very first day, the first person said to me 'This is no place for women' because I was one of the first female clerks. ... Before that women only did typist jobs and it (being a clerk) was a predominantly male occupation, very few women. I was one of the first women to go to the country and it was very male-dominated, a strong culture and very much geared to ensuring that women stayed down in the lower grades.

Female, Tier 2, Public Sector, 40-49

It was acknowledged that the private sector had been more discriminatory in the past although only a few women interviewed had experienced this directly. But a male CEO brought this to the fore:

Look this was probably still a sexist organisation in the early nineties. ... You know I think it would have been terribly tough to be a woman making her run in this place in the eighties and the start of the nineties. Since then I believe, not overnight and you still get pockets where they are slower to change than others, but over a ten year period I think we have moved from a sexist organisation, no more sexist than any other organisation out there,

don't get me wrong, but to one where gender is now genuinely irrelevant and unacceptable as a criteria in a meritocracy.

Male, Tier 1, Private Sector, 50-59

Many younger women interviewed, particularly well-represented in the financial institutions, reported that overt discrimination was a thing of the past. They believed that merit gained them jobs and that harassment and discrimination were 'just not tolerated'. Younger women expected to have a level playing field.

I haven't seen (being a) female as a barrier at all and I haven't witnessed me missing out on a position because I was female. If there was a position I applied for and I didn't achieve it, then I could see that there were other reasons.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 4, 30-39

Women rejected the notion that they had been placed in senior positions as tokens, and were confident of their abilities to perform to required standards.

### **3.2 Reticence**

It appeared that women often undervalued their own skills and were not as good at self-promotion as men. They often needed to be encouraged to seek more senior positions and would not apply without specific endorsement. Women were more likely to overvalue the qualifications of their colleagues. The researchers described this as 'reticence'. This was particularly reported in the public and tertiary sectors. 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, Higher Education, Tier 2, 60-69

The evidence concerning women's reticence in applying for senior positions was compelling. One senior woman in the public sector described the phenomenon of women not applying for more senior positions in this way: 'I think it's a gender thing, girl disease as we call it here. They don't know how good they are.' Analysis of the striking difference between men and women in their readiness to apply for more senior positions indicated that committed organisations must go beyond simple advertising to pinpoint suitable women applicants. Women would benefit from the opportunity to act in more senior positions and to meet more senior colleagues.

Related to the issue of reticence was the fact that many women interviewed showed a lack of career planning. Women were more likely to take opportunities that become available, thus advancing their careers almost by accident. Women were more likely

to focus on their current position and the pleasure they derived from doing that job well than to focus on the next step of their career:

Oh no, women never have career plans. ... We actually have a Women in Leadership group where quite often senior women come from an organisation and share their stories and they always start out with 'Oh well I left school and I went to train as a teacher and here I am Director General of something....' .  
Female, Public Sector Tier 3, 40-49

Women in the private sector, particularly younger, well-qualified women displayed much greater confidence in their abilities and were eager to advance themselves

### 3.3 Resistance

Resistance to taking up senior level jobs would appear to be part and parcel of a response to the increasing pressure on executives in senior positions in all sectors. The culture of overwork, long hours and intensity have had a more negative impact on women than men because of their additional domestic responsibilities.

The public sector and higher education attracted people committed to their area of work, and often they resisted promotion to a management position that removed them from direct contact with clients or students. Resistance was usually based on people wanting to control the demands on their time and their stress levels, and because they were content and sufficiently stimulated in their current roles.

I'm not inclined to go any further in that I see the stress and the political environment of the more senior positions and they're not at all attractive to me. There's really wonderful remuneration for them and conditions in terms of cars and what have you, so obviously that's really nice. But ... what are the incentives? The main thing is it's interesting work and nice people and a sense of having made a difference.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

In the private sector resistance was most often expressed by women wanting to remain in positions where they could control the demands on their time. The woman quoted below was not lacking in confidence but indicated a range of reasons that she would not apply for promotion. Interestingly she indicated that she would consider a more senior position, if it was offered to her:

I don't see any reason why I couldn't go further. The question is, do I want to? I am almost fifty-five years old, my career plan was always to retire probably no later than sixty. I could do it now from a financial standpoint but I don't want to right now, I enjoy what I am doing. So do I see any reason why I couldn't progress? No I don't see any reason why I couldn't progress. The question would be, do I want to? I am quite comfortable and happy with what I do today, I get a lot of satisfaction out of it, again I think I bring value to it and I'm not under 'Gee I have to tick off the next box on the career

ladder'. If it was offered I would have to decide whether I would want to take it. Am I out there actively seeking it? No.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 3, 50-59

## **4. Characteristics of Cultures that Sustain and Support Women**

Across all three sectors there was unanimity about the factors that encouraged women to apply for senior positions and that sustained and supported them in those positions. These were clear support from organisational leaders, a critical mass of other women in senior positions, opportunities to network, flexible and family friendly policies and strong statements on values.

### **4.1 Strong Formal Support and Encouragement from Organisational Leaders**

In all three sectors women indicated that formal and explicit support of women and equity by senior executives was a critical factor in women's promotion. Chief executives had to go beyond rhetoric, and demonstrate their support through endorsement of women's performance, encouragement of women to apply for promotion, and commitment of resources to development, such as training courses. Women also emphasised the emotional support that a CEO and senior peers provided in assisting them through periods of potential difficulty.

The explicit policies of a CEO could change the shape of senior management and in addition change the culture, the way 'things were done':

He wanted to change the culture and one of his key dimensions was to make sure that women were much more able to take on senior positions. He had that as an overt agenda and everybody knew it and he was very successful in that. So we went from a situation of virtually all males from the top roles to ... fifty-fifty women and men in the executive. ... He let it be known that he wanted women considered. He was very on the side of giving women acting opportunities and women opportunities to do things that would assist them.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 3, 40-49

Similar endorsements were made about senior men in universities: 'He's a man who is not frightened by capable women', said a woman Deputy of her Vice-Chancellor.

In both private sector organisations, two American CEOs were described as instrumental in deliberately bringing about greater equity, as recognised by a senior man:

Gender diversity was driven from the top. The (American CEO) was absolutely personally committed to making it happen. He was horrified at how few women were in senior management and he was horrified at the way the very few senior women anywhere were treated and positioned. So he was generally on a mission from God to address that.

Male, Private Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

Women from these organisations expressed their appreciation of these now legendary figures:

He was exceptional, he was great. We were very depressed when he left, the staff loved him and from a female point of view he was great.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 4, 40-49

These examples of supportive CEOs were of men. As the number and proportion of women in senior positions had increased, other women were more ready to apply.

The recruitment of a female CEO made a big difference in terms of promotion of women to middle and executive levels. ... It's changed the landscape of directors.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 4, 40-49

## 4.2 Critical Mass of Other Women

In all three sectors, having women present in significant numbers in positions of power was seen to encourage and sustain other women. Both men and women suggested that things changed when women were not isolated 'tokens' or scattered throughout an organisation. Many used the term 'critical mass' to define a significant group of women. This was seen as instrumental in balancing and changing the dynamics of the workplace culture. A senior man described his university:

In 1990 there were no women in the senior executive. Beginning of 1991 (a senior woman) arrived and that made a quantum difference. (Then another who) made a demonstrable difference in the way she interacted with the senior management group. By 1996 ... about fifty percent of those senior positions were women and I put a lot of that down to three women ... who when it was really tough and you had to provide mentoring and develop the critical mass and so on, they were the women who made the difference in my view ... That was that magnetic attraction of senior women.

Male, Higher Education, Tier 2, 60-69

Women in senior positions provided role models for other women, which in turn encouraged women to apply for senior positions. They also provided examples of feminist management practice for other women:

And I think it's enormously important (to have women in leadership positions) because it's amazing how many people have come up to me, how many young girls, and they are girls, who have come up to me and said 'It's great having a woman in charge, it gives you so much sense that you could go on and do stuff.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 1, 40-49

## 4.3 Networks

Most women saw the value of networks both within and beyond their own organisations. Unlike traditional networks focusing around power and patronage, women seemed to use networks to provide personal, social and organisational support, to discuss issues and problems and to focus attention on particular issues for women.

Women were prepared to be honest about insecurities with other women, suggesting they felt less scrutinised and judged. Women also felt more comfortable discussing the conflicting pressures of their work and personal lives with other women:

I find I can speak to other women much more frankly about my experience and to many more women. It takes me quite a bit more time to know a male manager well enough and develop a sense of trust where I could say 'Look I feel really distraught about this issue,' where I find with women I can say that fairly readily. You don't have to pretend to have everything together.

Female, Higher Education, Tier 2, 50-59

Networks seemed particularly valued in universities, providing opportunities for joint research and breaking down barriers between academic and administrative staff. Public sector women were also involved in networks, although some criticised 'elitist' ones. Many women indicated that they approved of informal women's networks. Some women, particularly in the private sector, expressed a preference for mixed networks although many enjoyed informal gatherings of women in the workplace.

#### **4.4 Flexibility and Family Friendly Work Practices**

Flexibility and family friendly work practices were highly valued. One woman indicated that she chose to work in the public service rather than elsewhere because it provided flexibility:

But I think the public service really enables women to (be flexible). And it's not all women, because not all women obviously have families, but particularly those who choose to have families, I think it is a sort of nurturing environment within which you can take that break and come back and know that you've got a job when you come back.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 3, 30-39

Flexible work included flexi-time, part-time work and career breaks. Universities and the public service have offered these for a number of years. Yet at one university a female administrator indicated that she was one of only two executives working part-time in a management team of sixty people.

The private sector employees reported that progressive work and family practices, with part-time and flexible work arrangements, were highly valued:

I took on the new role literally just as I was pregnant, so it's been quite a challenge to deal with having a first pregnancy, your body is going through these significant changes at the same time you're taking on a big role, travel to the UK just at the time when I was having quite significant morning sickness. So it's been a very demanding year for me this year. But I also have a great deal of support from management and felt like a role model to other women.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 3, 30-39

In all sectors senior staff were supposedly able to work flexibly. Many interviewees reported having laptops and mobile phones which enabled them to work successfully away from the office. Nonetheless it was acknowledged that even if the focus was on results rather than attendance they were not readily able to take advantage of flexible work opportunities. Women reported that they really needed to work full time and continuously in order to progress. A senior man agreed that from his experience there were problems in combining domestic responsibilities with senior jobs:

There are certain incentives in terms of our flexible working, in term of lots of maternity opportunities. My personal experience of three publicly quoted business – two in the UK and one here – is that if you believe that you can work 9 to 5 in a senior executive position it just doesn't apply. And in an international company like this one where time differences are so important, that belief is just nonsensical. When I finish work here this evening the UK will be just waking up and I will probably get calls this evening.

Male, Private Sector, Tier 2, 50-59

Some women particularly in the private sector reported on their successful, if highly difficult, attempts to balance child-bearing and caring with full time jobs. Yet success relied on having a support base of other carers. Few examples were documented of innovative ways of managing family friendly policies. In one excellent example from a public sector organisation, 2 women with young children had introduced job-sharing, with each working three days, so there was adequate hand-over time. They found this highly successful, as did the Department.

Interviews indicated that, increasingly, having time for family and other interests was becoming important for both men and women. Paternity leave was offered in addition to maternity leave, and was increasingly being taken up:

You know whether it's women's influence or whether it's the diversity influence but I think there's a drive for work-life balance. Increasingly the ability for males to walk out the door at five o'clock and say 'I'm going to go and pick up the kids', you know all of that is accepted and you know 'I'm taking Wednesday off cause I'm going to watch my kids play soccer' or whatever. It's quite an accepted part of the way we do business

Female, Private Sector, Tier 4, 30-39

#### **4.5 Explicit Commitment to Values**

It was apparent from the interviews that a commitment to ethical behaviour and providing the best services for clients were key dimensions of cultures that attracted senior women. They approved of explicit statements of values and of integrity within the practices of the organisation.

Support for values was particularly strong in the public and higher education sectors where the outcomes of the organisations were defined as values in themselves and therefore a reason for working for that organisation. The ethos of 'public service' remained strong, and interviewees valued activities that increased benefits to society.

Women emphasised that it was important to practice these values rather than simply espousing them and spoke of the power of their organisations to change people's (clients/students) lives forever. Men also spoke of the importance of values, but not as frequently as women.

A woman public servant compared the public sector to the private sector:

I think if you have to put so much time and effort into a job, I'd rather be doing it for the better good of a number of people and the State Government is in a position to do that. And with the private sector I would find it very hard to dedicate my life to increasing profits for something like Coca Cola, I just don't think there would be meaning to that for me. I've worked in universities, for small organisations, the public sector. I've never worked in the private sector as such. I don't think that would bring any meaning to my work.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 3, 40-49

Women in higher education made clear distinctions between the importance to society of education and the lesser importance in societal terms of other areas of work:

Education is a wonderful attribute that has the power to change people's lives forever. So it is very exciting to be working in an organisation which has that potential and to see people coming in, you know, whose lives are transformed by the service the University offers. I think that's very exciting. And I guess I loved my own time at University and, you know, it is wonderful to be involved in the education field.

Female, Higher Education, Tier 3, 30-39

The idea of values in the private sector was often focused more sharply on the operation of the organisation itself while still taking in broader community concerns. One of the organisations had had a specific focus on values-based management and both men and women expressed their commitment to this. One senior woman identified the values of an organisation as an important driver for women:

I think the more important thing in terms of keeping women and retaining women is actually more about the kind of values and the way that people work type stuff rather than special leadership programs. ... I think women generally ... require more empathy and respect. They're not as likely just to do (work) to pay the mortgage.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 3, 40-49

Important values for many senior women were transparency and integrity in decision-making. One described how the culture of her Department since the appointment of senior women differed from that previously operated with all-male management:

Previously it was secret men's business – a couple of men locked away - and that was where all the decision-making occurred.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 4, 20-29

## 5. Changes in Managerial Cultures when Women are in Senior Positions

It was widely believed by both women and men across all sectors that managerial cultures were changing and this was at least in part due to the increasing number of women in senior roles for cultures are created by the people working in the organisation. Older women and men generally had clear experience of how workplaces had changed over the years as women entered senior positions, describing collaboration, consultation and concern for colleagues as key initiatives.

### 5.1 Masculine and Feminine Managerial Styles

Both women and men presented quite stereotypical views as to what constituted male and female management styles. It was evident that both men and women held quite stereotypical views of male and female management styles. Senior women in the universities and the public sector reported that when they entered the workforce in the 1960s they had to adopt more aggressive techniques in order to succeed, but believed that they were now able to practice more feminine styles of management. Women were seen to encourage greater collaboration, more consultative decision making processes and more collegial workplaces. They were described as encouraging to staff and colleagues and as showing more 'emotional intelligence'.

People working long hours, people not having close relationships with people they work with, people handing orders down from on high. I guess the whole culture of the leader being removed from the people they work with... and I guess I wouldn't want to essentialise that as the male management style but would possibly feel more comfortable calling it a more traditional style.

Female, Higher Education Tier 3, 50-59

This woman went on to describe her own management style as 'Very much a servant-leader rather than somebody standing out'.

In the following quotation a senior male public servant described how he had seen his Department change as more women entered management positions:

In the past within the Department, going back before the last restructure about ten years ago, it was a very male-dominated organisation, it was real mateship sort of stuff, hierarchical, very male-dominated, so the people side of it tended to fall away. Since we've turned that focus around, to be focused on the clients, it actually comes with a whole lot of different ways of not only operating but also decision-making and the way we go about decision-making. So I would say it's taken a long time but I would say the distinction between male and female way of thinking and decision-making is probably quite close now whereas I think in the past it wasn't. I have a fair number of senior managers who are female and we have a very collaborative way of working and that's been a development in cultures. Broadly speaking we make decisions on a consultative basis, it's not autocratic and I love that way of

working. So for instance in the past when it was hierarchical and a bit male-dominated, people just did what they were told so we had a culture which was more about waiting for the orders to come down whereas now it's consultative.

Male, Public Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

At the most simple level of explanation, the entry of senior women and changes to a client focus occurred contemporaneously. But it might have been that women in management encouraged the change in focus, or that women had been the beneficiaries of a more people-focused policy. Interestingly, this man emphasised that there had been a convergence between the management styles of senior men and women and that both now displayed consultative and people-focused behaviours.

## 5.2 Collaboration

Collaboration was stressed by many interviewees as a particularly effective way to achieve outcomes and women were seen to favour more collaborative ways of working. It was seen by people working in all three sectors as an important way to remove silos. Managers felt that it increased the trust between team members, involved staff in deliberation and made decisions transparent:

I run a very collaborative Department. I very rarely make single-minded decisions, most of the decisions that are made here are done through my corporate executive and frequently are on a collaborative basis. It's difficult for me to judge how this compares with other people. There are certainly some fairly autocratic rulers around. I don't think I'm an autocratic ruler for the most part, occasionally I am. I think I've got a collaborative style and that's probably at the more extreme end of collaborative although some people would probably feel differently. .... I know there are probably better words in management jargon that I never entirely trust. I think if you asked me what the single greatest goal is in terms of my style of management it would be collaboration.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 1, 40-49

Many of the women interviewed claimed that they were not interested in claiming individual achievement; that their interest lay in producing the best outcome. They preferred to share success and praise with their staff, and were more interested in encouraging and motivating staff than exercising their own power. In the private sector interviewees reported that 'mavericks and bullies' who did not like collaborative styles of working were actually leaving the organisations, but some recognised that within financial organisations, there were still rewards for competitive behaviour:

The stated position rewards collaboration but in practice I think its variable. I think we try really hard but there are clear examples where we revert to type and reward competitiveness. That's I think very destructive.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

An intrinsic part of collaboration related to building teams, a management practice which women were seen to perform effectively. Interviewees suggested this related to their willingness to collaborate with others, their interest in developing staff and their comparative lack of ego, which enabled them to share achievements. Teamwork was seen as an opportunity for individuals to understand the rationale behind decisions and processes, to enhance networks and to learn from others while demonstrating their own abilities.

### 5.3 Consultation and Consensus

Women indicated that they were interested in taking many opinions into account and deliberating decisions, rather than reaching them quickly and finding they needed to alter aspects of their decisions because things had been left out of the equation. These views were expressed by interviewees from all sectors:

I think we actually help bring a consensus to the table. I think we actually will go the next step and say 'Well what are we going to do next?' so I think we're bringing that to the table. I think men talk about it longer and they'll meet again and they tend to do that more.

Female, Private Sector, no data

One woman from the university system reported that in her workplace handing out orders from 'on high' was not tolerated

Well I think my management approach is probably what I've seen described in management text as being more typically feminine or female and that is, we do a lot of consultation and I would rather put in a solution to a problem that is 80 to 90% of the desirable solution but has buy in from all the stakeholders than try and drive through something I think is 100% right when I know people aren't buying into it.

Female, Higher Education, Tier 3, 50-59

One senior woman was convinced that women were more committed to reaching a consensus than men and were focused on getting results:

They are just more willing to make decisions and reach consensus. They don't try and bully, they don't try and get aggressive, they try and work it through. I mean some women are aggressive but they don't resort to that. ... Lots of men, their natural behaviour is to be aggressive and then apologise. There are some women like that but they are few and far between. Overwhelmingly they will try to work through an issue and keep working at it until they can resolve it. They won't just grandstand and they won't just dig in and they won't just decide to be incredibly aggressive and hope that can get their way.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 1, 40-49

She gave a powerful example of a Commonwealth State Ministers meeting that had occurred the previous week, where 'suddenly the gender balance (had) just completely tipped.' In this particular area, the Commonwealth Minister, 3 State

Ministers and several senior bureaucrats were now women. She explained that every previous meeting of this group that she had attended had 'ended in disaster' since the Commonwealth and State representatives, mainly men, fought over funding. In this case 'This ended in collaboration, in people agreeing they were going to sort a whole lot of mess out.' The interviewee saw this exemplifying a female tendency to try to reach consensus and to achieve a result, rather than either blaming others for a lack of solutions or making stands on points of principle:

Suddenly it had changed. Suddenly it was just a different group of people sitting around a table. ... Suddenly people were in a 'Let's try and work this out' kind of mode. And yet the policy parameters were actually harsher than where we were four years ago.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 1, 40-49

Women were described as having the appropriate skills to run successful consultations and to explore more areas before making decisions:

I tend to listen. I tend to reflect and then I tend to add my considered opinion. My male colleagues tend not to listen. They tend to outspoke each other and they shoot from the hip. There is no real considered response, it's just what ever comes to them at that point in time.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 3, 30-39

#### **5.4 Discouraging Competitive Behaviours**

The research found that women discouraged competitive behaviours, seeing them as disruptive to work environments. Many women discussed how polite and cooperative work arrangements were made visible and rewarded:

A number of senior staff are fairly instinctively collaborative and I think that rubs off in the processes that they support and generate. There does not seem to be in any way an acceptance of being mean to people. In fact I've seen very little of people being mean to people. And I just think there's an ethos about the place that's not how you behave. Funnily enough we've had a new member of staff who was a bit mean and I actually found myself saying to him 'We don't behave like that here. This is how we behave here.'

Female, Higher Education, Tier 3, 50-59

A senior woman saw that women's less combative style also influenced men:

Because there are more women around there is less testosterone every so often, so you tend to get less ranting and raving, less thumping of the desk, less screaming and shouting. So as an organisation that sort of behaviour is just not tolerated. So that's a behavioural issue and whether that's because women are in the organisation or not is a question mark. ... There is a correlation I would suggest.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 3, 40-49

A common theme of women and management research over the last twenty-five years, particularly in earlier years when there were few women in senior management roles, was that older women, 'Queen Bees', highly successful professional women, survived in the corporate world because of their strict adherence to traditional male norms, did not support other women.

Interestingly little reference was made to this in our interviews, suggesting that there was less competition as more women were appointed and individual women did not have to prove themselves. Some women however referred to having experienced competitive female colleagues in other organisations or in the past. In a few interviews, mostly in the private sector, some women suggested they were not supported by some female colleagues:

I think a lot of it (is) when in really senior roles women act like men you know. They have the same aggression and the same competitiveness. I think quite often you do see women that are incredibly senior knock out other women from getting there, and that's very much alive. Also they tend to kind of say, Well I'm here and I'm protecting my position and they're actually harder to deal with than the men.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 3, 30-39

## **5.5 Friendly and Collegial Working Environments**

In all three sectors women were seen to be particularly 'good' at encouraging collegial environments, such as having a friendly environment, an approachable leader, a culture where people could be honest with each other and a no-blame atmosphere.

In one university, with a high proportion of women at management levels, interviewees ascribed the friendly atmosphere to their influence:

Anyone you speak to in this University who is a relatively recent arrival will almost certainly comment on that positive aspect of the place, that it is a pleasant place to work, that people do observe the basic levels of courtesy and friendliness.

Male, Higher Education, Tier 2, 50-59

In this university a senior administrator described how the other senior women had welcomed her arrival, sending flowers and greeting cards. In another university, a senior woman, recently appointed, described her disappointment when male colleagues did not introduce themselves at meetings. These two narratives demonstrated how women were more likely to place emphasis building an atmosphere of friendliness in the work environment.

There were expectations that women managers would be open and approachable. One woman CEO emphasised that support from her staff was important to her. But she did not want this to be unquestioning support. She appreciated honesty within her relationships with her staff and was prepared to take criticism of her performance:

I would have to say that one of my characteristics in fact is I probably use humour too much (laughs). But the executive that we have is a very good executive and they have a terrific sense of humour and they're self-effacing, they don't mind having jokes on themselves and I don't mind that either so... In fact we had this (in a previous position). I'd been in a policy area and after a year in they did a roast of me which was one of the funniest things I've ever seen in my whole life, I laughed for forty-five minutes solidly. So it's a great climate I think for the organisation because they know I can laugh at myself and they laugh at themselves as well.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 1, 50-59

Many women stressed the need to know their staff as individuals, and to show some interest in the whole person. These managers claimed that an emotional investment in staff was repaid in loyalty, but acknowledged that this could be a 'double edged sword' if the personal problems of staff became an issue.

A senior man in the private sector emphasised how important the promotion of women had been in breaking down traditional male groupings:

It has broken down, the male clubbing. So that's so much less a feature of business in this organisation than it used to be. Interestingly enough it's all about more transparent practices. I'm not sure it's actually happened in the broader industry in Australia, but it is happening here, much more.

Male, Private Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

## **5.6 Developing and Nurturing Staff**

In all three sectors senior women managers were seen by both women and men as being committed to developing staff. They were keen to encourage them to move their careers forward and to reward them for their efforts. They expressed a willingness to take the extra time needed to fit the right people to the right jobs.

In the public sector, staff development was emphasised, including encouraging staff to upgrade qualifications through formal studies. As well as senior women a number of male public servants demonstrated their commitment to staff development. One man described how he saw this as part of the long-term impact of having women in senior positions:

Look having known the organisation for a little while before the restructure when it was very male-dominated, I think that the women have made a difference in the organisation. I think that the management style is different. As I say not exclusively but I do think that the majority of women managers that I've encountered in the Department have taken more of a developmental role and are a bit more of a mentoring partner in their role with staff, more engaging with staff than the kind of strict hierarchical administrative traditional model this Department had.

Male, Public Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

In universities most senior women interviewed emphasised the importance of assisting other staff and students to fulfil their potential. Female academics claimed that men were more likely to focus on their own research than women were.

I personally liked being Dean. About seventy percent of it is drudgery but what is very fulfilling about such a position is your ability to make things happen for other people, to see the potential that exists in activities and people and to be able to structure the kind of administrative systems and the resources so that you actually enable those things and spark them off.

Female, Higher Education, Tier 3, 50-59

One public sector woman demonstrated how for women valuing staff included nurturing and encouraging them. She had gone to work a shift with some of her staff whose job was particularly difficult:

So I went and did a shift to watch one of the peak hours. ... So during the shift, chat, chat, chat, work, learn. And when I first arrived they wanted to know why I was there, what was I investigating and all these questions. I said 'I'm not. I'm here to learn from you. I can represent you better if I understand what your job is because I think often your job is poorly understood.' So during the shift, I walked around, talked to staff. And what I do, because I've now done a number of them, is I use them to give positive feedback to the staff so I reflect back to them what I see of their practice. ... My aim is at the end of the shift they feel valued, they can understand what they do and that each shift I have given them feedback, I've said thank you. ... I think that's what I have to do and if they can see that I can model being strong and clear but also compassionate with the staff then I think that it's more likely I can then reflect back to them those attributes that we know we need for the future. I'm more likely I think to get success than by issuing yet another rule.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 3, 50-59

This concern for others was common to interviews with women in all three sectors.

It was quite clear from this research that many women in senior management roles used the skills of nurturing, caring and being more compassionate. Regardless of whether one views these attributes as being learnt as part of women's 'social script', or as innate, the presence of women in senior management with these concerns had transformed work practices.

Females look at the small items, the small things. If you walk out and the receptionist is crying, I would say a male Dean would just continue walking, but a female Dean is going to notice it and come back later and find out why. Females seem to take more account of the people issues, and it's the people who keep this place going. So that's one small example of where I think there is a difference between a male and a female.

Female, Higher Education, Tier 3, 50-59

Concern for individuals did result in painful emotions for some women managers:

Obviously there's the other whole side which is managing people and retrenching people or managing people out, and I find that emotionally very draining. I hate to see people in pain and personally suffering and I've had to do more of that in the last 18 months than I've had to do for the rest of my career all added up. To see someone struggle, personally struggle and personally suffer. And everyone has a life outside so those people have families and things like that. It is a very difficult thing to and I have found that very hard, very hard. Although it doesn't mean I'd make a different decision or do anything differently, it certainly means that I wake up at 3 in the morning and lie awake for an hour thinking about it. Or spend all Saturday thinking about it in the back of my mind.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

## **6. Meeting Challenges to Recruiting and Retaining Senior Executive Women**

All three sectors reported very positively on women's presence in senior positions. Nonetheless some deep-seated problems remained and were identified in a number of interviews. These included the slow progress to equity at senior levels, ensuring programs for senior women were relevant, introducing mentoring, lessening the pressures of work, building more balance into work and family responsibilities and investigating the deep-seated problems in reaching gender equity.

### **6.1 Increasing Gender Equity at Senior Levels**

Across all three sectors, many interviewees emphasised that equity was yet to be achieved at the highest levels of management. The statistics on the organisations collected for this project showed that progress was slowing and that women had reached a plateau in senior management. Although much had been gained in the achievement of equity at senior levels, there was also an acknowledgement that full equity was still an ideal.

Concerns were many. One was that although women had reached senior positions in greater numbers, those numbers were still small and a few key resignations or appointments could change the balance dramatically. A senior man attributed lack of support from one executive member as a factor in losing some senior female staff:

If you get even a slight change in a positive direction that attracts senior women to the place, if the culture changes, that will cause some of them if they get a better offer to go somewhere else. We lost two senior women last year because their immediate supervisor was changed and didn't give them the support they felt they needed and deserved.

Male, Higher Education, Level 2, 60-69

Women were also seen as concentrated in support areas or in more traditionally female positions such as human resources. Men still dominated core business, particularly in the private sector, where women recognised that they had not entered the key areas:

I look around and I see who are the role models in this organisation that I can aspire to these days and I don't see a lot. ... I think there's more to be done. We've done a lot but there's a lot more to be done yet. Look at some of the teams that I sit on; they're all men. I was in a team meeting the other week and one of the general managers of the area was a female. The whole team was male, except for the HR person. I'm joining that team now and I'm another support person. All the business line are all men. ...I don't know if it's anything that can be addressed. It just means in that case that we've been trying to put the right people into roles and we didn't have any females who happened to fit that, whereas in other teams there are a number of females. I

look at the executive team. I look at people, not necessarily the executive team but the next level down, you wouldn't say we're inundated with a lot of senior women.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 4, 30-39

Some women argued that traditional male hierarchies were still strong. One suggested that men often had a network of other men around them, who would be promoted into a position as another went up the ladder. She suggested that senior women did not want to appoint other women in order to 'replicate themselves':

Men are comfortable with pets you know. Quite often men in high levels of organisations have three or four blokes that have followed them all the way up. So they get promoted, then they promote Fred behind them and then Fred promotes such and such so you have these strings of people. And when they go up the top they know that Fred will be next in line for that job. ...Women just can't break in because they have these lumps of men moving through the organisation together promoting each other as they go, just cementing that support and getting a comfort zone around themselves.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 3, 40-49

Elsewhere in her interview she also identified the problem of men getting promoted when they were seen to have their responsibilities increased, for example by having another child: 'Oh Fred's got another mouth to feed.' This she defined as a self-supporting network, where men looked after other friends.

Many men considered that equity had already been achieved. A few even felt that gender equality had gone too far and that now men were disadvantaged.

## **6.2 Supporting Programs for Women, including Mentoring**

A contributing factor to the promotion of women had been special programs for women. These were still supported in the university sector, particularly women's networks, but were frequently criticised by women in the private and public sectors. Many women stated that they would prefer developmental programs for both men and women, as targeted programs could lead to a perception that people were not being treated according to merit and could create resentment and cynicism

All I could say is I've seen them around and I've never elected or wanted to go to one myself because I don't think that that distinction would warrant it. It undermines women by making them special and unique to say that they need this extra hand and out of principle I've not gone to those. So I would say ditch that distinction, we're perpetuating the difference. Every person has different strengths and weaknesses, it's not just genders stereotypically.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 2, 30-39

Another woman pointed out that special programs were not popular among younger women:

Interestingly enough at least the younger women and particularly graduates don't feel any problem in terms of their opportunities and what they think they can achieve, how they go about achieving it and their confidence level.

Female, Private Sector, no data

In all three sectors a few men expressed suspicion regarding women's networks and saw them as a 'women's mafia' or a 'secret women's network'. For the majority, however, networks were largely seen as being beneficial to organisations and to all individuals regardless of gender.

In all three sectors there was support for mentoring programs for women. These received particular support from interviewees in universities, where mentoring programs were extensive. In the public sector mentoring was appreciated but there was concern that women might not be aware of the availability of such support and that informal schemes did not continue for long periods of time.

In the private sector there was support for mentoring. Most women were not involved in formal schemes and regretted this, particularly when recalling their entry to the organisation. Instead some had found mentors for themselves. It was suggested that when mentoring was provided, women were offered mentors rather than coaches, as mentoring appeared softer and more focused on the individual while coaching was tougher and geared to the interests of the organisation. One senior woman suggested that men received coaches for their professional development, whereas women were referred to coaches by the organisation only when there were problems:

I don't know whether I am just generalising here, but I would say that the women often get the big coaches when there is an issue, some problem, and the males get them when they want to further their career.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 3, 40-49

### **6.3 Lessening Work Pressures**

The work pressures on all sectors have increased in recent years. The culture of long hours and high commitment has dramatically increased for senior executives. However, for women this culture has proved particularly damaging because of their other commitments. Women reported that, despite the rhetoric and policies, the practice was still long hours and an enormous emotional investment in their work.

Concerns seemed to be less pronounced amongst interviewees in the private sector where there was an expectation of intense work and concomitant financial and other rewards. Senior staff often stayed late at the office, took work home with them, received work related phone calls late at night, and attended meetings early in the morning or late in the evening. Some had extensive international responsibilities, involving travel and phone contact at anti-social hours. They reported that work/life balance was very difficult and it was often hard to switch off.

Although work was demanding senior executives found it exciting, which sustained them in keeping up the pace, although it sometimes had a negative impact on their private lives and could lead to burnout. A senior woman enthused:

These are great jobs. They're powerful jobs. Men have kept them secret from us!

Female, Private Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

She went on to reflect that it is not until one actually had the opportunity to experience what it was like to be in a really powerful job that one could appreciate the satisfaction that could be gained from it.

Work demands in senior jobs in the public sector and higher education were also heavy, though there were fewer demands than those imposed by international responsibilities in the private sector. There was also more expressed commitment to flexibility. Some departments in the public sector reported recruitment of senior women from the private sector, specifically from legal firms, who were entering that public sector to gain a more balanced lifestyle and one more compatible with family responsibilities.

Women in the higher education sector reported feeling indispensable, even though they were aware that they were not actually indispensable. They did not feel that asking to work part time was an option.

#### **6.4 Seeking Balance and Assisting Work/Family Responsibilities**

The struggle for women to choose the best pathway in relation to work and family is fundamental to understanding gender inequity, particularly at senior levels in organisations where the stakes are so high. Individual men in these positions may struggle with decisions about work/ family balance and some take steps towards achieving balance, such as attending school sports days, though this could be considered token. These interviews made it clear how important it is becoming for both male and female executives to balance work and family responsibilities, and to limit the hours they devoted to the fulfilment of work expectations.

Women with no families worked long hours and didn't know how women with families managed:

Yeah I tend to work usually between I don't know 10½ and 12 hours a day usually and probably on average once every second Saturday for about five hours or so. It is quite long but to me that's all part of managing stress. I'd rather do that and feel I'm in control and then I will actually rest much better. And because I don't have other commitments I'm conscious that I've got a very lucky situation. I really think it's so much harder for someone who either has a partner which I don't have or a family of course, it's just a totally different environment. I can do it easily but it wouldn't be the same for others.

Female, Public Sector, Tier 3, 40-49

One woman from the university system stated that senior female staff sought 'a point at which they could manage and remain sane – some succeeded!' This comment summed up how many women felt about their high stress jobs. These women were time poor due to heavy work demands, and this was one of the major factors causing resistance to senior executive roles for both women and younger men. Males were similarly affected, but they were less likely to have to manage children and household duties to the same degree as women.

Women's approach to staff members as whole people tended to make them more understanding in terms of staff leave needs. All 3 sectors had built in leave conditions to cover most emergencies and family commitments, and these were more likely to be taken by women than men. In the private sector interviewees claimed that the presence of women in upper tiers of management ensured policies that supported staff existed. Maternity leave was accepted as commonplace in all sectors. Many women in the private sectors reported it did not seriously impede their career paths. Some women had had very positive experiences of being supported during their pregnancies and offered powerful positions on their return: male managers who had encouraged their return or promotion were praised. These perceptions however were vehemently contradicted by a vocal minority.

Parenting presented some of the most acute challenges for women in the workplace particularly among younger women in the private sector. The work/family struggle is fundamental to understanding gender inequality. Women still bore the primary duty of raising children, yet balanced this with high-pressure jobs. Long hours, business trips and other work pressures meant that some women chose to forgo having children. Others had children and then worried that they were not being good mothers. Women were seen as 'opting out' by taking time out from work to have children or support their children. They were expected to attend meetings at unrealistic times, get to work very early, or stay very late, which conflicted with their family commitments. Women reported that challenges were not understood by many senior men who had never had to manage their home lives. Part-time work together with childcare had enormous costs in terms of organisation and demands:

To make the role work at that level on a part-time basis I had to make a huge emotional commitment to it. I mean I was getting up at four-thirty in the morning to get worked up, you know thinking 'Oh there are twenty-four hours in a day, I have to get this done and get the kids ready and do this, this and this' so I would get up at four-thirty or work till two to get something done. I now think I wouldn't go there again because of course then when it all falls apart you feel completely devastated, you kind of think 'What was the point of all that'. So I think even though I was part-time I still made a huge emotional commitment to the job and I'm kind of not planning on doing that again in a hurry because I just don't think it would be worth it.

Female, Private Sector, Tier 3, 40-49

Women in the private sector named these problems more frequently as some were in the midst of child-bearing and rearing. Some had not acknowledged that they had children, or had led their employers to believe that they had full-time nannies. In many narratives senior women struggled with the attempt to enjoy their children and

family life whilst still committing themselves to demanding and exciting work. The interviews indicated how difficult many of the decisions were and how demanding of time and emotion. Some women chose to work part time, and were discriminated against because of it, or simply ended up working full time for half the pay. Others reported that things changed so much when they were on maternity leave that it was difficult to step back into their roles. One woman stated that children were a liability everywhere, and that when you had a family you hit the 'mummy ceiling'.

Flexible working arrangements were also available to men, but few took advantage of them. Some, however, were starting to build family into their commitments in more encompassing ways. It was significant that some men also in formally senior positions talked plaintively about the need for a balance. This was expressed both by younger men with family responsibilities and older men as they began to look beyond the world of full-time employment:

This is all part of the balance I am still trying to work out about. How do you find time between my work, my commitment to this organization, my commitment to my family, and as part of that how do I look after myself?

Male, Public Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

Some senior managers believed their offering of flexible work arrangements gave them an edge in recruiting staff. In the public sector some believed that they could attract women from the private sector, as the jobs were less 'greedy'. Yet a male participant indicated that there were problems with the appointment of women whilst they still had major responsibility for the family:

We have areas where there are a very high percentage of women. I think we're very fortunate because they're very bright, very hardworking, very well organised and all sorts of stuff. But we also have an incredibly high fertility rate, so we have a large number of pregnancies that we have to in-manage. I mean people talk about family friendly policies but I mean it's very easy to talk about, it is much harder for actually managing. The CEO's mentioned this in his report, it's really interesting that no-one's really thought about what that means for the organisation. If you have a large number of young women in critical areas then there's no doubt that you're going to have a significant issue of how you're going to manage all the pregnancies that come with that and so that's a challenge, that's a really difficult thing. Organisations aren't structured to run on that basis.

Male, Public Sector, Tier 2, 40-49

Many women felt that the challenge and excitement of their work kept them going in their professional lives despite the complications of having to juggle family and work. Women in the private and public sectors who had come back to work after having children reported being sidelined, put on what one called 'the project track' and they resented their absence from more powerful jobs. Other women felt an increasing need to 'have a life', and felt that work did not define them as a person, and questioned whether work was as rewarding as having a family. These were some of the issues that led women away from the work force and senior management roles.

## 6.5 Questioning Belief in Gender Neutrality

Despite a belief in gender neutrality, research revealed that workplaces were still deeply gendered in many ways. Career progress was still judged by male standards. It is unrealistic to expect that women follow the same linear career paths as men, and their broader experience may count against them, or not be considered as relevant. Some men did not recognise the issues affecting women's entry to senior positions.

Women executives were less likely to remain in their positions. This was often due to heavy workloads and frustration with the workplace culture. Male career patterns and ways of operating still dominated organisations. Women in management roles felt they were carefully watched to see how they performed and that they had to work harder than men to achieve the same recognition.

Heavily male dominated pockets still existed in all sectors. When women were present in the minority they felt it was much harder for them to be taken seriously. They found expectations and stereotypes limiting, and often felt confined to 'soft' areas. Language, culture and expectations worked in subtle but deep-seated ways. There was still a feeling that they were not seen as committed to work if they had children, and that they had to be more assertive than men to achieve the same goals.

In one public sector organisation a woman claimed that male bullying was still a feature of the workplace, but to name it as such would be 'absolutely suicidal'. Clearly there is still much progress to be made.

Surprisingly, few men interviewed were really aware of gender issues and could not begin to comprehend how their gender may have affected their careers.

It must be acknowledged that organisations are inherently gendered and that everything that is taken for granted as 'normal' at work is, in fact, based on male/masculine standards. Until these gendering processes are revealed and critiqued, until organisational policies and practices are put under a 'gender lens', change cannot take place.

## 7. Recommendations

1. It is recommended that despite the widespread acceptance of gender equity, organisations continue to monitor different forms of and appearance of gender inequity, so that discrimination does not become invisible or covert. For this purpose the continued existence of agencies with the task of monitoring equity is very important.
2. It is recommended that women are encouraged to develop appropriate and clearly stated career goals through staff and professional development programs.
3. It is recommended that organisations develop strategies for succession planning, exploring how they pass on knowledge and develop the leaders of the future in a tradition of equity. In order to combat reticence, organisations should be positive recruiters of women, identifying and targeting high potential women and actively preparing them to apply for senior positions. In particular women should be encouraged to apply for higher-level jobs through direct intervention by senior staff. Organisations should also develop a policy on short-term vacancies in senior positions and offer women the opportunity of acting in senior positions or undertaking higher duties. Developing workforce succession plans that specifically aim to increase the representation of equity groups such as women in senior management is also a specific and visible commitment to encourage women.
4. It is recommended that organisations with responsibility for gender equity monitor the impact of work intensification at senior levels and explore whether people are resisting applying for senior jobs. It is also important to monitor if there is a differential gender impact.
5. It is recommended that men and women in organisational leadership positions, particularly the CEO, demonstrate publicly a commitment to gender equity, to the appointment of women to senior decision-making positions, and to the support of women in these positions.
6. It is recommended that organisations strive to ensure that women are not isolated in leadership positions, but that a significant number of women are appointed to ensure that they can have an impact on cultures and support other women.
7. It is recommended that organisations provide encouragement and opportunities for informal networking for women and that energetic and committed organisers of informal networks receive support to enable them to fulfil this role.
8. It is recommended that organisations ensure that flexible and family friendly working conditions are a critical component of their workforce planning and are available to both men and women.

9. It is recommended that organisations provide and act upon clear statements of ethics and values, in order to attract senior executives with a commitment to social justice.
10. It is recommended that organisations provide opportunities for their senior management to discuss the deeply-held stereotypes of male and female management styles in order to encourage awareness of valued management styles and the constraints imposed by the imposition of gendered expectations.
11. It is recommended that organisations with an expressed commitment to collaboration ensure that successful examples of collaboration be highlighted so that others can model them and that rewards be provided for individuals practising collaboration.
12. It is recommended that successful examples of consultation and consensus be documented and rewarded.
13. It is recommended that competitive behaviours such as bullying be explicitly discouraged by senior management.
14. It is recommended that opportunities for establishing collegial environments through workplaces be encouraged, through activities both in and outside working hours.
15. It is recommended that developing staff to their full potential be supported and that appropriate care and concern for people be recognised among the crucial skills required by leaders, managers and organisations. There should also be opportunities to ensure that women do not undertake disproportionately higher loads of 'emotion work' and people support.
16. It is recommended that support and resources to ensure gender equity strategies continue to be provided.
17. It is recommended that organisations encourage special programs for women and develop mentoring and coaching schemes to assist senior leaders with major jobs and that these be available equally for both men and women.
18. It is recommended that appropriate bodies undertake a study of the costly demands of a long hours and high work commitment culture on senior executives
19. It is recommended that major equity agencies at state and federal levels document alternative work arrangements at the most senior levels, such as flexible and family friendly policies.
20. It is recommended that organisations provide opportunities for both men and women to identify and consider ways of transforming the deep structures in which gender differences are enacted in the workplace