RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Leadership in Local Government: ‘No Girls Allowed’

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This article explores the under-representation of women at the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) levels of Western Australian (WA) local government. It draws on data collected from 21 second tier senior women managers about their perceptions and experiences of leadership within the sector, as well as their aspirations for CEO appointment. By applying critical gender analysis to the data, gender and specifically masculinity emerges as a significant and valued leadership attribute. While this analysis is not unique to local government, what sets the sector apart is its apparent disinterest in examining the reasons for, or the impacts of this continued leadership stereotype when at the same time Australian public and private institutions are challenging these traditional leadership models. This article points to fundamental weaknesses in the formal power structures and processes of local government that support deeply embedded biases about leadership. Perhaps the most significant contributor to these outcomes that emerged from the study is the apparent unencumbered power of Mayors and elected members over all aspects of CEO employment, especially recruitment.

**Key words:** leadership, local government, gender

**Professional and Political Leadership**

In the local government environment the CEO is expected to manage the political-managerial interface, which can appear to challenge the neutrality ethic, whereby public servants are to remain non-partisan in their dealing with elected officials (Jones 2011; Martin and Aulich 2012; Heelo 1975). Senior local government managers rate accountability to elected members as very important and CEOs are increasingly concerned that their fate is bound to the politicians they serve (Fox and Leach 1999; Jones 2011; Nalbandian 2005). As a consequence of this relationship, Holgersson (2012) describes CEO appointments as a type of co-option, which requires the successful CEO candidate to share similar characteristics to the appointing group, resulting in appointments made for reason of comfort rather than competence. A cursory analysis of local government CEO incumbents in WA reveals that this is indeed the current situation and that there is a distinct lack of women, and people from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as a diversity of professional experience.

**Gendered Leadership**

Both scholarly and popular literature present-persistent representations of leadership as a gender neutral activity, but fail to convincingly explain why women are absent from leadership roles throughout public domains. Yet, over the past three decades there has been a significant body of research exploring this topic. The key themes emerging from this research are the gendered nature of leadership (Schein 1976;
Kanter 1977; Sinclair 2013), gendered leadership styles (Eagly and Johnson 1990; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003), women in male dominated work cultures (Maddock and Parkin 1994; Alvesson and Billing 1997), women in leadership (Marshall 1984; Eagly and Carli 2007) and career development and progression (de Vries 2010). While research indicates that each of these is a separate aspect for analysis, in combination, they provide a lens through which it is apparent that, rather than being gender neutral, concepts and practices of leadership are embedded in a variety of social interactions which shape ideas of gender and leadership. Recent research has attributed much of the resilience of these gendered concepts of leadership to what has been termed as either implicit or unconscious bias (Eagly and Karau 2002; Ridgeway and Corell 2004; Genat, Wood and Sojo 2012). The concept of unconscious bias refers to cognitive processes and knowledge that motivate or influence an individual’s actions or responses to different situations or groups without the person being aware of them. These ‘subliminal’ responses can include judgments and decisions about a social group’s competencies or fitness for different types of work or roles based on very limited or relevant knowledge. In their meta-analysis of 117 studies that compared men and women who were equally matched on all criteria, other than gender, Genat et al. (2012) found that women were consistently assessed as being inferior to their male colleagues in areas such as professional competence, leadership ability and agentic qualities.

**Gender and Local Government Leadership**

While there is little research into local government leadership, what literature does exist, is consistent with the broader gender analysis. Fox and Broussine (2001), in their study of women managers in United Kingdom local government, identified four indicators of a gendered leadership framework: the predominance of men at senior levels; masculinised management styles and discourse; unchallenged barriers to women managers’ effectiveness; and apparent bias of elected members in the appointment of CEOs. These four factors reappear in other literature including Australian studies (Ford 2006; Page 2011; Pande and Forde 2011; Paddon 2005; Diamond 2008).

In regard to Fox and Broussine’s (2001) first indicator of a gendered leadership framework, empirical evidence reveals that women have been significantly underrepresented in executive positions within Australian local government. However, local government leadership has generally lacked both academic research and public attention. The last Australia-wide census of local government (Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council 2009; reported that of the 551 local government CEOs, only 41 or 7.44 per cent were women and only 20 per cent of second tier managers were women. The WA local government sector was ranked 5th out of seven State and Territories.

In 2011, at the time of this study, women constituted 11 or 7.8 percent of 140 WA local government CEOs. Only three of these eleven positions were located in the metropolitan area. Each of the 29 metropolitan councils had four second tier positions. Of these 116 direct reports to the CEO, 21 or 18 percent were held by women. In 2013, the numbers remain the same. When considering the position of women and leadership in local government in WA, it is worthwhile drawing attention to the context of women’s employment across the State in general. For example, WA has the lowest numbers of women on boards and women in CEO positions in Australia and the gender pay gap is calculated at around 26%, compared with 17% nationally (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2013).

The second Fox and Broussine (2001) indicator was masculinised management styles and discourse. This is similarly described by Kanter (1977) as the ‘masculine ethic’ which underpins and shapes both leadership behaviours and image. Similarly, Grint (2011: 9) points to 19th century constructions of leadership as ‘irredeemably masculine, heroic, individualist and normative in orientation and nature’. Two centuries on, Amanda Sinclair (2013: 2) suggests that there has been little reshaping of leadership thinking and instead ‘[p]eople think that a performance of leadership is a heroic one: a
performance of tough, out front decisiveness or 'greatness'. And 'greatness' is an adjective that is almost always applied to men'. On the other hand, the attributes and qualities that are associated and expected of women such as cooperation, kindness, warmth, care and gentleness, are not the traditionally ascribed characteristics of a leader, but are more akin to subordinate and support roles (Kite, Deaux, and Haines 2008). Within large bureaucracies women are generally clustered at the lower levels of administration or the 'support' functions of human resources, organisational development and communications. These particular roles and jobs are not often considered as being useful preparation for a leadership career, as both the issues they deal with and their necessary skills and attributes are not those of the traditional leader.

A number of studies have concluded that there are distinct male and female ways of leading. Various meta-analyses point to women leaders as being more consultative and encouraging of others, while their male counterparts are more likely to be direct, assertive and individualistic (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen 2003). However, a number of researchers caution against adopting a stereotyped view of male and female attributes (Martin 1994; Sinclair 2013), as this may further act as barriers to both women and men acting in different ways, as well as reinforcing the idea that women are not suited to particular work and roles such as leadership. As Sinclair (2013) observes:

_The very real risk with this approach is that 'women's ways of leading' get 'essentialised' - that all women will be expected to deliver this, and only this, approach. Further, women's ways of leading then gets simplified and stereotyped as a kind of second-order leadership.' (Sinclair 2013: 11)_

While the gendering of work persists, and leadership remains largely a male construct (e.g., Atwater, Brett, Waldman et al. 2004; Eveline 2005), women leaders and those aspiring to leadership, need to negotiate the feminine and the masculine, an issue that men never face. As leaders they are required to demonstrate those qualities associated with normative masculinised leadership, while simultaneously presenting culturally defined behaviours such as solace and support: '... women are measured by two yardsticks - how as women they carry out their management role, and how as managers they lived up to the images of womanhood' (Kanter 1977: 161). The capacity to be available at all times continues to dominate criteria for leadership development and appointment.

As women still undertake the vast bulk of caring and domestic duties, they may find it difficult to meet this requirement (Collinson and Collinson 1995). Similarly Simpson (1998) found that 'presenteeism (the tendency to stay at work beyond the time needed) was being used as a visible sign of commitment to an organisation and a demonstration of leadership. Simpson (1998: 37) concluded: 'Such presenteeism was found to be gendered: it is associated with a competitive masculine culture... and it imposes heavy costs on women as they attempt to meet the conflicting demands of work and home.' Further, where their availability is not in question, women run the risk of not living up to 'images of womanhood' (Kanter 1977: 161).

Thus, leadership remains a contested space where women's presence is notable because they are not male (Eagly and Karau 2002; Eveline 2005). Therefore, women who occupy leadership positions represent an aberration of sorts. They are:

_... exceptional women in an atypical context ... When a woman occupies a position traditionally filled by a man, the significance of her sex, for both how she operates and how she is treated, is subjected to a scrutiny in a way that the 'normal' hierarchical order is not (Wajcman 1999: 2)._ 

As a consequence, many women managers experience various degrees of hostility from peers and from their employees (Eveline 2005; Marshall 1984; Rudman 2004). This links to Fox and Broussine's (2001) third indicator of the unchallenged barriers to women managers' effectiveness. The incongruity and novelty of a woman as the leader has been shown to contribute to professional isolation and limited
career development, as women are often excluded from the ‘old boys’ networks that frequently include powerful male leaders (de Vries 2010).

Overwhelmingly, in local government, women occupy traditional female roles of support and emotions management (administration, human resources, community services and stakeholder engagement), while men are located in those jobs that are highly technical, visible and influential (engineering, finance and planning) (Gibbs 2013; Pini and McDonald 2008). The career pathways for local government CEOs appear to rarely include feminised roles, even when held at a manager level (Fox and Broussine 2001; Diamond 2008). Further, in a culture that allocates work and authority on the basis of gender stereotypes, the traditional role of women as carers also impacts on concepts of leadership. Such is the nature of local government that much of the interaction between elected members, the community and senior management takes place outside normal working hours, leading to a common view that women will be unable to easily participate and therefore unable to fulfill the time commitments of a CEO.

This time factor helps the culture of local government leadership to retain a strong sense of exclusivity, reminiscent of Maddock and Parkin’s (1994) typology of gendered organisational cultures like ‘the locker room’, and the ‘gentleman’s club’. Diamond (2008) found that local government leadership was described variously as a male only domain or a ‘boys club or men’s shed’ (Hutchinson and Walker 2011: 11). Just as with any club, entry into leadership ranks is dependent on both meeting certain membership criteria and sponsorship from existing members (Fox and Broussine 2001; Hunt 2007). However, what clearly sets local government apart from other Boards of Management within private and public organisations is the almost absolute power of the elected board of governance – the council. Consequently, researchers such as Fox and Broussine (2001) and Diamond (2008) have observed a potential link between the resilience of a masculinised leadership culture and the unchallenged decision making of councils described by Morgan (2003: 52) as a ‘realm of personal prejudice’.

The fourth and final Fox and Broussine (2001) indicator was that of the apparent bias of elected members in the appointment of CEOs. Nalbadian (2005) suggests that there is a notable gap between the practical management and leadership skills and experiences of elected officials’ executive management. Where this gap exists, there is a greater risk that elected members may be more inclined to assess a CEO’s performance much more on subjectivity and the extent to which their personal interests are satisfied (Hutchinson and Walker 2011; Nalbadian 2005). This is clearly problematic for if these executive leadership roles are not independent, then the obvious conclusion is that CEOs may be appointed not on merit and ability, but rather to fill a stereotypical ideal, that may or may not be party politically derived, or simply be because the council has an ‘ideal’ person that they wish to appoint. This leads to the perpetuation of appointing the ‘safe pair of hands’, which are invariably male.

In summary the literature would suggest that the issue of leadership in local government is still highly gendered and there would appear to be barriers, both actual and perceived, that women face if they aspire to apply for the CEO position. What is reported in the next section are the results of the study to see how strong these barriers are, using two of Fox and Broussine’s (2001) indicators.

Research Framework and Methods

The study was undertaken in 2011, at the request of an advisory group to the WA Minister for Local Government, to investigate why women were not being appointed to CEO roles. The researchers designed this small pilot study as a precursor to, a larger project that broadly considers leadership in local government. In this study, the researchers focussed on 21 female second tier directors from the 29 metropolitan Perth councils.1 This group was primarily chosen as they were the internal pool from which CEOs are traditionally appointed. Additionally, given the social,
economic and geographic diversity of WA, the researchers believed that the commonalties between metropolitan councils provided a useful research site for this study. It is acknowledged that this was a convenience sample and only metropolitan councils were included rather than a representative sample from all 140 local government authorities in WA. This was because the study was exploratory in nature and was constrained by a lack of resources.

The researchers have also acknowledged the risk that by focusing only on women, they themselves become the problem. This ‘deficit’ perspective can mask the advantages and privileges that accrue to men, by emphasising women’s disadvantage (Eveline 1994; Sinclair 2000).

Methods

This study employed in parallel both quantitative and qualitative methods, including:

- analysis of various sets of demographic data;
- review of the literature;
- informal discussions with a range of individuals and groups representing professional organisations, government and interest groups;
- a written survey circulated to the 21 participants;
- three focus groups involving the survey participants.

The purpose of the survey was to collect information relating to:

- demographic data;
- personal domestic situation;
- career e.g. qualifications, prior roles, leadership development;
- career aspirations and attitudes towards role of chief executive;
- perceived barriers to women’s advancement to CEO;
- leadership recruitment experiences.

The survey also provided respondents with the opportunity to make additional comments about the survey and other matters they considered relevant.

Three one hour focus groups were organised with the majority of the 21 participants. The facilitated process involved reporting the progress of the project, highlighting key issues emerging from the survey data, seeking clarification and amplification of emerging topics and inviting focus group members to comment on relevant issues.

Analysis

The first part of the study was quantitative and the survey results were analysed using a statistical software package (SPSS v.18) and given the small number of participants, only descriptive statistics were reported.

The second part of the study, the focus groups explored the themes that emerged from the quantitative data and provided a richness that is not available from pure quantitative data (Patton 1989). All three focus group discussions were recorded and later transcribed then thematically analysed individually by the members of research team and finally compared for consistency.

Results and Discussion

The Participants

All of the 21 women directors had tertiary qualifications across a range of disciplines including planning, finance, public sector management and the social sciences and were all able to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to professional development, often at their own expense, in areas such as communication and leadership. The length of service with councils ranged from one year to over 20 years, with the majority having at least ten years’ experience. In addition, several of the women had international local government experience, from countries such as New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom. In the next section comments by each of the 21 women have been differentiated by an alphanumeric code R1 through to R21.
All but three of the participants occupied traditionally female roles, the most common being Director Community Services. This role required close consultation, cooperation and negotiation with constituents, stakeholders and suppliers on a range of matters. The three participants who had different occupations were in either engineering or planning.

The survey revealed that all of the 21 women believed that they had the required skills and ability to undertake the role of a local government CEO. However, while 14 of the group had stated intentions to apply for a CEO role at some stage, (including some who had unsuccessfully applied previously) they, and those who did not intend to apply, believed that the appointment of women to top jobs was less likely than it was for their male colleagues. In submitting reasons for this view, participants wrote about ‘narrow ideas of who can be leader’, ‘attitudes and competence of councillors’, ‘devalued work’ and ‘women being perceived as being people focussed, not facilities focussed’.

These comments provided a framework for the interviews and the focus groups to explore further senior women’s experience of leadership in local government.

‘No girls allowed’

As we applied a gender lens to the data, the analysis revealed that the themes identified by Fox and Broussine (2001) 12 years ago were strongly present. The two most powerful themes, however, were the masculinised leadership culture and the attitudes and behaviours of elected members. Both of these issues were interwoven through the three sets of data as critical determinants of the type of leadership being enacted in the organisation and the appointment of a CEO.

Masculinised leadership culture

A consistent issue that emerged from the study was the very masculine nature of authority and leadership in local government. The women’s comments pointed to very visible indicators such as the low numbers of women at leadership levels, the absence of women from CEO positions, the division of labour, the resources and time provided for male dominated areas: ‘Despite community services being the daily connection to the stakeholders and rate payers, its seen as not needing resources – our tools are often invisible. [it’s] listening, negotiating.’ (R4)

Yet underpinning all of these visible indicators were the subtle and unconscious informal behaviours, language and interactions between men, and often between male directors and the CEO, which seemed impenetrable to some of the women. As one respondent stated, ‘Talk about ‘secret men’s business – it’s like a secret society with its own language’ (R3). All but three of the women recounted experiences of exclusion that demonstrated the unwritten rules that existed among their male colleagues, that were manifested in where people sat at meetings, visual and verbal cues for different decisions and in some instances a very ‘blokey’ sense of humour (Marshall 1984). For example, three women gave examples, where male colleagues pretended that the Mayor was demanding to see a particular colleague, ‘Nothing puts the fear of God into our Executive than to know that he [the Mayor] is on the warpath. One of our guys has been called to the phone as a joke on more than one occasion’ (R13). While on the one hand, a number of the women professed to thinking that the prank humour was ‘silly’ or ‘infantile’, they also recognised that it bound the men together in a form of camaraderie, which often heightened women’s sense of exclusion. Many of the women interviewed were acutely aware that for many of their male peers, this was the first time that they had worked with a woman of equal status. ‘It’s hard to believe that in 2011 there are men in councils who have never worked with a woman as an equal. This leads to a lot of different responses like fear, confusion and sometimes resentment’ (R7).

The extent to which women were promoted and welcomed into leadership roles and teams was considered to be largely determined by the behaviour of the CEO. Unfortunately, there were many examples provided where CEOs were incapable or unwilling to engage with women directors in the same way that they did with the men (Brass 1985). For example,
some CEOs appear to be unaware that the camaraderie enjoyed by male executives is often more about being men than leaders. Thus, women observing this easy informality often feel excluded when for instance a male CEO regularly just ‘dropped in’ on male executives for a chat, while women are only spoken to when there is a problem or by pre-scheduled appointment. One women director described it as:

... the gap is with me and the CEO ... only time I see him is when there’s a crisis or a problem. I have to beg and borrow a gap in his diary ... never have the opportunity to just brief him ... other directors (all male) don’t seem to have a problem. (R6)

This was not necessarily seen as an intentional act to isolate, but rather as a lack of understanding and in some cases possibly a reflection of the age and personality of the current generation of older males CEOs who tended to feel more comfortable working at a managerial level with staff who they perceived were similar to themselves. This problem however is compounded for women by the fact that a large percentage of CEO, director and managerial positions, as well as many elected council positions, are occupied by older long serving males, which means that a masculine culture pervades throughout the organisation (Fox and Broussine 2001; Diamond 2008). It also emphasises the significance of leadership recruitment being made on the basis of a comfortable ‘fit’ ... [CEO] needs to be comfortable with that person from the following perspective ... makes him look good and will challenge him enough but be compliant when he wants his own way. (R10).

Some of the women had also experienced exclusion from both formal and informal team building activities and personal development courses. The ‘golf day’ was seen by many to provide male staff with additional opportunities to informally network and develop relationships that were beneficial for future career progression and on one occasion the female director was neither informed, consulted or invited (Kanter 1977). One interviewee described being informed by her male managers that they wouldn’t be in the next day as they had been invited to the golf day, ‘My CEO had a golf day ... and my two managers were taken away and I didn’t even get told they were going’ (R2). While a number of women made light of their exclusion from the golfing days ‘I hate golf’ (R4) and ‘I can’t think of anything worse’. (R7), they acknowledged few alternative comparable activities that were available in which they could participate with their colleagues. As R1 observed, ‘It’s like little boys building a cubby and putting up a sign – no girls allowed ... If it wasn’t so serious, it would be funny.’

ii Attitudes and behaviours of elected members

From the comments made by the respondents there was an inconsistent approach to the selection and recruitment of CEOs in local governments represented in the sample, exacerbated by the influence of elected members. The system used to appointment CEOs appeared to be individualistic, and whereas there are guidelines set down by the various State Government agencies relating to standard equity practices, as there is no overriding independent commission (such as the Public Sector Commission for State Government and the Australian Public Service Commission) to review local government governance. Therefore issues like CEO appointments are open to individual interpretation, by the appointees, which in this context is the actual Mayor or Shire President and the council. Again there was inconsistencies between councils in that some CEO’s were appointed after interview processes that involved the whole council, or some that were appointed by interview panels that consisted of the Mayor or Shire President and a small executive.

In some cases, participants reported that external recruitment consultants were used to undertake very comprehensive searches, while others described minimalist in-house processes. The use of external consultants was considered by some participants as a much fairer process, in which people who didn’t ‘fit’ might not be discarded immediately, ‘Even though I didn’t get the CEO position I applied for, being recommended for shortlisting by the
'head hunter', gave me a fighting chance'. (R11). Many accounts of CEO recruitment processes indicated a lack of sector wide professionalism, and a lack of transparency and independence, 'There are too many stories of certain candidates being given 'a nod and a wink' or others being told not to apply,' (R10). Unfortunately, the sense that many CEO positions were being determined before advertising emerged as a strong theme across the interviews even when external consultants were used, 'In the end, a consultant can't make a decision for the mayor of the council. They will do what they want'. (R5)

The attitudes of elected members and especially the Mayor or Shire President were also considered to be a significant contributor to the type of leadership present in the organisation and the career opportunities for managers. For example, while most councils have a policy of directors 'acting' in the CEO position when the incumbent is away, some women were never asked, while others were asked to do the job at the quieter times of the year, when there were no council meetings or for shorter periods. The appointment of an acting CEO had to be ratified by the councils, which meant that the Mayor or Shire President and elected members had a significant influence on this appointment. This was perceived by some of the women as a lack of trust in their leadership ability:

If the CEO is going to be away for 3-4 or more [weeks] it's always one of the guys and that comes from council . . . there's this sense of . . . it's not length of service but tends to be because the male directors are in either the technical or finance divisions' (R12).

Once again, the devaluing of women's work and experience results in both the individual being denied a career development opportunity, as well as squandering the chance to have a women be seen in a position of authority. The notion of giving it to a 'safe pair of [male] hands' (R6) was a common theme running through the data. The overwhelming perception of the women was that leadership capacity and managerial ability in local government still emphasises technical expertise and a top down approach (Diamond 2008; Dempsey 2006). Technical (hard) expertise in areas like engineering and/or accounting was highly prized by senior management as well as the elected councillors (Diamond 2008). Thus, as the majority of women directors and managers have a social science/community service (soft) background their knowledge, skills and experience are not considered to meet the 'perceived' essential criteria necessary for CEO appointment.

One woman described being given feedback on her unsuccessful application for promotion to CEO, 'It's the 'numbers boys' and the governance boys that become CEOs' (R8). Beyond professional expertise and functional responsibilities, over half of the women believed that many councillors made decisions about leadership candidates on the basis of strong ideas about the gendered order of things. For example, when one woman director asked a Mayor why he had not approached her to discuss applying for the vacant CEO position he responded 'I didn't think you would be interested in such a demanding job with your family and everything' (R4). Similarly, one woman had been told by her Mayor that she was 'too nice' to be a CEO.

The political nature of local government and the tensions between Council management and the elected members was seen to contribute to CEO appointments with whom councillors, in particular the Mayor, felt 'comfortable', as opposed to someone who might challenge the status quo. This 'comfort zone' attitude was suggested to be responsible for the lack of diversity in senior management, including gender, cultural background and professional experience. As one woman observed:

I am not sure why we are so surprised at some of the CEO appointments. When we look at most of our councillors, they are a group of grey-haired old men who would prefer to talk about roads than needs of a really diverse community. (R7)

Despite, the apparent bureaucratic and accountability mechanisms in place for all aspects of local government operations, CEO recruitment appeared to be managed in a variety of different ways, largely determined by the Mayor. 'We have excellent recruitment processes for
almost everyone in our organisation — gardeners, admin assistants, librarians, everyone, but the CEO role is a mish mash' (R13).

It would seem to be the case that the inconsistency of management practices in local government can have a detrimental effect on women who aspire to the top role in the organization. Even with more enlightened management, there appears to be significant barriers with the elected members and in some instances an unwillingness to acknowledge that women already in the organisation could fulfill the CEO role, due in part to the perpetuation of notions of women not having the leadership capability to do the job. This is despite a substantial body of research to the contrary (Genat et al. 2012).

Conclusion

This article reports on a small study that set out to explain the absence of women from WA local government CEO and second tier leadership positions. The research points to perpetuating gendered notions of leadership and what constitutes a ‘leader’ with interviewees providing a range of examples of how stereotyped views of women and men were often openly used as the basis for leadership decisions within the sector. While these findings echo a vast body of gender and leadership theorisation, as well as research specifically into local government, this study points to an underlying cause. The powers, vested in elected members, over the recruitment and employment of the CEO, are such that there is little requirement to either adhere to best practice in relation to CEO recruitment or to expand ideas of leadership to embody more diverse ideas and candidates. Some CEO currently appear to be appointed more on the ‘gut feel’ of the Mayor or Shire President and council, rather than on a competences based framework, as whereas there are some formal processes that do occur, much of the decision making aligns to informal processes, thus leading to an inconsistent and ad hoc approach. Further, the interdependent relationship between organisational leaders, in particular the CEO, and mayors represents a unique and potentially compromising relationship between the organisational and political arms. This may result in elected members seeking CEO candidates with whom they feel more comfortable, who they assess as being like themselves or more significantly, those who they believe to be more compliant. These scenarios exclude not only women, but also men who fail to fit entrenched masculine norms of leadership.

More fundamentally the lack of diversity within council leadership has the potential to create a dissonance or disconnect between diverse constituencies and this increasingly important tier of government. This article points to a need to extend the scrutiny of local government performance to include the role of elected members in identifying and recruiting CEOs. Further research is required to explore the social capital that elected members consider necessary for appointment to senior leadership ranks. In addition, the processes applied in the recruitment of CEOs require interrogation to determine the extent to which they contribute to the narrow gendered construction of leadership that is a dominant feature of Western Australian councils.

Endnote

1. It should be noted that 21 participants did not represent 21 metropolitan councils, as some councils had two women directors and some had none.

References


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