Women in Local Government in 2011

*Still a boys’ club – still a men’s shed*

A DISCUSSION PAPER

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The researchers would also like to thank the 21 women directors who participated in this study and who all freely gave of their time. It is important that the voice is heard so as to inform any change agenda.
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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years the absence of women from the most senior ranks of Australian business has generated a significant amount of activity from governments and in particular business organisations. So serious is the problem that a range of diverse groups such as the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Stock Exchange, the Australian Human Rights Commissions and State and Commonwealth governments have joined together to address what is seen as both an injustice to women but also as a serious indicator of a much broader problem in Australian management and leadership. This problem is best described as an out-dated and short-sighted approach to leadership that ignores the competitive social and economic environments in which organisations, both public and private, need to respond in various ways to new markets, diverse stakeholders and the competition for skilled people particularly executives and leaders.

This paper reports on a study that considers how the local government sector in Western Australia is tackling this issue. The study was undertaken under the auspices of the West Australian Ministerial Advisory Committee for Women in Local Government during October and November 2011. It is not meant to be a comprehensive review, but rather to provide a snapshot of the perceptions of women directors in metropolitan Western Australian Councils about the challenges faced by women executives specifically and leadership in the sector more broadly.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The absence of women from the senior leadership of Australian local government councils is a significant problem. Nationally only 20% of these positions (CEO and CEO direct reports) are occupied by women with only 5% reaching the ranks of CEO\(^1\). In response to this problem, the ‘Women in Local Government Strategy 2009-12\(^2\)’ and ‘Local Government Management Challenge 2010\(^3\)’ reports have both sought to identify and develop strategies to improve the representation of women in leadership positions. In 2009, the Australian Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council endorsed a target for 2020 of 30% of local government senior managers being women.

Based on this study, academic research and a review of the broader Australian business landscape it appears doubtful that the very modest goal of 30% over 11 years will be achieved. This study has found that progress in Western Australian metropolitan Councils does not suggest much improvement or even that the attainment of the numeric goal is a priority. For this to change, like business and State and Commonwealth public sectors, a much more rigorous approach needs to be applied to the problem. This approach relies on developing a business case based strategic plan for exemplary sector wide leadership that has as one of its explicit goals the increase in women leaders.

The key features of this approach are:

- A contemporary leadership framework for the local government sector that focuses on the transformational leadership capabilities, rather than technical expertise.

- Accountable leadership including linking gender equity targets to Council, CEO and senior executives’ performance and where relevant to remuneration.

- An evidenced-based strategic plan for each Council that contains:
  - A clearly articulated business case
  - Clear, measurable goals with sound metrics that trace progress clearly against the goals of the organisation, inform possible action and which can be benchmarked with comparable projects within and outside the sector.

\(^1\) LGMA 2010
\(^2\) Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council
\(^3\) LGMA 2010
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- A strong management and governance program
- A change management strategy
- A review process for continuous improvement

- Replacement of the current ad hoc and inconsistent approach to executive employment including recruitment, performance, development and remuneration.

- Ongoing research into local government leadership from the perspective of local government responsibilities, women and men, geographic location, competing sectors, diverse communities and the implementation of a more rigorous and transparent approach, as well as monitoring the impact of the current structural reform process on gender issues.

The proposed structural reform of the local government sector provides the ideal context for the implementation of such an approach. However, one of the consequences may well be an overall reduction of director and CEO positions. Further, based on similar exercises in other industries, the Victorian local government sector, and the historical performance of WA councils, the already small number of women in executive roles is in danger of stagnating and not increasing.

Yet, the flip side is that the reform process should be more than reductive. Rather, for structural change to really benefit the West Australian community, the nature and quality of leadership needs to be firmly an agenda priority. Within this context, there is a compelling social and business case for a diverse and responsive leadership approach for local government.
Women in Leadership - The Big Picture

Between 1994 and 2008, a period of unprecedented Australian economic activity, the percentage of women CEOs and direct CEO reports in the ASX 200 companies increased from 8% to just 10.7%. A similar situation existed with Boards of these companies and the percentage of women board directors increased from 3.3% in 1994 to 8.3% in 2008. However, it is important to note that the progress between 2003 and 2008 movement was the slowest in the 14 year period and the percentage of companies with a minimum of one female director in 2008 (49%) was less than it was in 2004 (50.3%).

So what’s the problem? Back in 1994 contributing factors to women’s limited representation at leadership levels could genuinely be traced back to lower levels of workforce participation, narrow career choices and education. However, in contemporary Australia women constitute almost fifty percent of workforce entrants and they are graduating in equal or greater numbers to men in economics, commerce, business and law faculties. Yet, by the time they reach senior executive level, women make up only 10.7% while only 2% get to sit in the CEO’s chair.\(^4\)

International comparisons underscore the glacial rate of change in Australia. For example, the 2008 EOWA Census of Women in Leadership compared the presence of women senior executives in Australia with comparable nations: Canada, South Africa, the UK and the USA. Australia lags behind these countries with a greater proportion of companies in South Africa (59.3%), UK (60.0%), Canada (65.6%) and the United States (85.2%) having at least one female executive manager. In 2006, Australia was 15th on the World Economic Forum Global Gender Equity, however, by 2010, the country had fallen to 26th behind Portugal and Mozambique. New Zealand, on the other hand, went from seventh to fifth in the same period. Australia’s performance has been described by Peter Wilson, National President of the Australian Human Resources’ Institute, as reaching ‘the world’s worst practice by OECD standards’.

The Business Case For More Women Leaders

The dismal performance of Australian business in recognising and utilising the pool of women candidates for leadership positions has caused business and government to concede that time alone will not ensure that organisations achieve the gender balance which will enable them to optimise

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\(^4\) EOWA, EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership, 2008
the largely ignored pool of talented women. Instead, a much more proactive approach to the problem is required.

Despite a strong social and business case for gender equity, few Australian organisations are able to articulate the effects of ignoring women in the leadership talent pool. To demonstrate the economic loss, Mike Cook (former Deloitte USA Chair) developed the concept of the ‘stupid curve’. Below at Fig. 1 is the ‘stupid curve’ applied to loss of talent in Australian companies. It shows that 90% of leaders come from just the 50% male employee pool. Even though men and women enter the workforce in about equal numbers, men have a 9 times better chance of reaching executive levels than women.

![Stupid curve graph]

*Source: The CEO Kit edition 2, EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership 2008*

To bring about any change the first step is understanding and articulating the business case which according to international research has global implications. For example, it has been estimated that an improved gender balance would boost US GDP by as much as 9%, Eurozone GDP by 13% and Japanese GDP by 16%. These calculations are based on three areas: attracting and retaining talent, organisational performance and employee engagement.
Attracting and Retaining Skilled Employees

In 2008, an international survey of 43,000 employers found that 31% of respondents believed that they were facing a ‘talent shortage’. Of this group 53% of Australians surveyed represented the largest concerned national group\(^7\). Similarly McKinsey & Company have found the same concern, along with a distinct lack of leaders’ preparedness to meet the challenge\(^8\).

While Australia looks forward to a strong economic future generated largely through the resources sector, there are longer-term trends which are constraining the Australian labour market. These include an ageing workforce, retirement of the ‘baby boomers’ and low fertility rates. Australia also has some of the lowest workforce participation rates of specific social groups such as women with children. Further, the unrelenting demands of the resource sector will continue to impact on the supply and demand of skilled labour particularly in Western Australia. To meet these challenges, organisations will need to be attracting and retaining the best leaders. Currently, Australian business is only tapping into around fifty percent of the leadership talent pool.

Organisational Performance

Increasingly international research is showing that those companies with a critical mass of women in the top leadership group achieve significantly better business results than those companies with few or no women. For example, research undertaken by McKinsey & Company in the UK reveals companies with a higher proportion of women in their top management have better financial performance – 10% higher return on equity, 36% higher stock price growth and nearly double the EBIT growth compared to the industry average. Their ongoing research reinforces this trend\(^9\). Two Finnish banks which created a new index option invested solely in companies headed by women. Aalandsbanken and Tapiola banks jointly launched ‘Top Women’ an option investing in a group of 15 multi-national companies ‘selected for their strong profitability and large number of women in high level positions’\(^10\). No Australian companies featured in that list.

U.S research has consistently found companies with the most women board directors significantly outperform those with the least, in terms of return on equity (53%), return on sales (42%) and return on invested capital (66%). Fortune 500 companies with the best record for promoting women have been found to be 18%-69% more profitable than the median Fortune 500 companies in the

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\(^7\) Manpower Inc, Confronting the Talent Crunch, 2008  
industry\textsuperscript{11}. Organisations with better gender balance tend to have inclusive cultures that optimise the skills and contribution of all their employees. They are also able to benefit from important leadership attributes which, while common to both men and women, are frequently stronger in women’s approach to work.

\textbf{Employee Engagement}

Those companies which identify and promote female talent into leadership roles have cultures that enable them to recognise and use talent in any form. Research conducted by McKinsey & Company in Europe shows that companies with three or more women on the executive team rate significantly higher than those with no women on measures including work environment and values, vision, coordination and control and leadership. These are crucial indicators of culture, and are central to the engagement of an organisation’s workforce. Employee engagement is a critical factor in business success. Towers Perrin’s Global Workforce study found companies with the highest percentage of ‘engaged’ employees saw a collective increase of 19\% in their operating income, and 28\% in their earnings per share year on year. By contrast, those companies with the lowest engagement scores showed year on year declines of 32\% in operating income and 11\% in earnings per share. The research highlights that, for business benefits to flow from greater diversity, the presence of \textit{one woman is not enough}. It is argued that there needs to be 20\% female employees at each level and in each function for a culture to start to change. At 30\% there is a noticeable difference and at 40\% gender is no longer an issue\textsuperscript{12}. The percentage of women in senior roles needs to reach a tipping point before diversity benefits kick in.

\textbf{Women in Australian Local Government}

The representation of women in the leadership ranks of Australian local government has been traditionally much lower than men. However, there has been very limited research into the reasons for this inequitable situation and very limited demographic data collected on either a State/Territory or national basis. In 2009 the Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council endorsed the ‘Women in Local Government Strategy 2009-12’ and designated 2010 as the ‘Year of Women in Australian Local Government’.\textsuperscript{13}

The Ministers’ Council decision was based on 2009 data that showed that:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Catalyst, The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women’s Representation on Boards, 2007
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Towers Perrin, Global Workforce Study, 2007-2008
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council(2009)
\end{itemize}
There were 5070 elected members in Australia. Of these, 1440 or 28.4 per cent are women. This is slightly less than the percentage of women councillors (29 per cent) reported by ALGWA in 2001. There were 551 mayors nationally, with 119 or 21.6 per cent of these women.

Of the 551 local government CEOs nationally, only 41 or 7.44 per cent were women (See Figure 1).

Local Government Managers Australia (LGMA) data indicated that only 20 per cent of senior managers were women*.

Table: Women CEOs and General Managers in Australian Local Governments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>TOTAL No. GMs/CEOs</th>
<th>TOTAL WOMEN GMs/CEOs</th>
<th>No. WOMEN GMs/CEOs</th>
<th>TOTAL % WOMEN GMs/CEOS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VICTORIA</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All states and territory ministers committed to the achievement of the five key strategies that formed the 'Women in Local Government Strategy 2009-12'. The first of these strategies was to:

Support the goals of achieving a 40 per cent female participation rate of elected representatives, 35 per cent of mayors, and 30 per cent of senior managers in local government by 2020.

* It is important to note that there is very little historical or current consistent or reliable data in relation to management demographics nationally and in most jurisdictions.

** There is no common definition for senior managers. It appears that the term is used to cover managers who are members of a corporate executive and report directly to a CEO.
WOMEN IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In 2009:

- WA local government sector was ranked 5th out of seven Australian State and Territory local government sector in relation to women GMs/CEOs.
- Women represented only 6% of local government CEOs and lagged behind the rest of the State public service that reported 23% of tier 1 management (CEOs) were held by women.\textsuperscript{14}
- Women constituted 29% of local governments’ 2nd tier management positions (corporate executive & direct reports to CEOs) and 33.7% of tier 3 managers.\textsuperscript{15}

In 2011:

- Out of 140 local governments, there are 11 women CEOs (7.8%). However, the majority of all women CEOs have been appointed to small regional and remote councils and there are only 3 women CEOs (10.3) out of 29 metropolitan local governments’.\textsuperscript{16}
- This represents an increase of 3 CEOs but a decline in % terms since 2009.

RESEARCH INTO WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There is a paucity of both Australian and international research into women and organisational leadership in local government. However, what little does exist points to common experiences and common barriers to women’s progression to the senior executive levels. As with the research into the broader women and leadership field, the underlying cause of women’s continued under-representation at leadership levels appears to be caused primarily by ‘unconscious bias’ (see Appendix 1) and second by the failure of organisations and institutions to recognise and effectively respond to this problem. Research indicates that bias against women in leadership is inherent in recruitment processes, attitudes to the career patterns of women and men, lack of job flexibility, performance management systems, role of elected members, formal and informal networks and ineffective interventions. While each of these areas represents a discrete issue, when considered together they can be seen as symptomatic of a narrowly conceptualised idea of leadership that advantages men.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} OEO, 2010
\textsuperscript{15} OEO, 2010
\textsuperscript{16} WALGA
\textsuperscript{17} Fox & Broussine 2001.
THE STUDY

In October 2011 under the auspices of the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Women in Local Government, research was conducted with all of the women directors in metropolitan councils. In total 21 women were identified as being at a Director level and all 21 participated. It should be noted that whereas the response rate was excellent, the 21 participants did not represent every metropolitan council, as some councils have 2 women directors and some have none.

The first stage of the study involved the distribution of a written questionnaire to each participant. The purpose of the survey was to gather the professional profile of each participant and to identify those issues they felt have the potential to impact on the career progression of women in local government. The second stage involved conducting three focus groups to explore these issues in more depth. In addition several one-on-one interviews were conducted with women who could not attend a focus group but were still keen to contribute more information.

The Findings

All of the 21 women directors had tertiary qualifications across a range of disciplines including planning, finance, public sector management and the social sciences. Within the group there were 10 Bachelor’s degrees, Graduate Diplomas and 7 Masters degrees. All of the women were also 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 1 year to over 20 years, with the majority having at least 10 years’ experience of local government. In addition several of the women had international local government experience, from countries such as New Zealand, South African and the UK.

In regard to their career aspirations all women believed that they could undertake the role of Council CEO. However, while 14 of this group wanted to apply for these roles, they and those who did not attend to apply believed that the appointment of women to top jobs was less likely than their male colleagues. Three key intersecting issues emerged as obstacles to women:

- Concepts, culture and practice of leadership in Local Government
- Career development and recruitment
- The elected members

Finally, a significant aspect of this study’s data gathering focussed on strategies to overcome the identified barriers and also to improve the general leadership capacity of local councils.
Concepts, culture and practice of leadership in Local Government

A major issue that arose from the survey, focus group discussions and interviews was the general masculine ‘boys’ club – men’s shed’ culture of local government, and in particular around authority and leadership. A common thread was the informal nature of the working relationships between male colleagues which often excluded women both explicitly and implicitly. The women commented on the feelings of exclusion and of the unwritten rules and mores that existed among male colleagues, including behaviour at senior executive meetings. Many mentioned that they were often the first woman that had held a director’s position in a particular council and so this was something that male colleagues, some of whom had worked together for decades, had never experienced before. This translated into some male CEOs not treating women directors in the same manner as male directors. For example, a CEO would simply drop in for an informal chat with male colleagues while women were only spoken to when there was a problem or by a pre-scheduled appointment. One women director described it as:

*For everything else we have weekly meetings … 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.*

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 age and personality of the older generation of CEO who tended to feel more comfortable communicating with staff who they perceived were similar to themselves, in this instance other older men who shared a single career path in local government. 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 the masculinity pervades throughout the organisation.

Another issue identified was the exclusion that women experience when team building activities and personal development courses were offered. 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 often the women directors were not informed let alone invited. One director 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 2 managers were taken away and I didn’t even get told they were going.*
The ‘leadership as male’ concept is further reinforced in some local councils by women’s access to ‘acting’ opportunities. Whilst most councils have a policy of directors ‘acting’ in the CEO position when the incumbent is away, often women were doing the job at the quieter times of the year, when there were no council meetings or for shorter periods. This was seen 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 disciplinary based*

When challenged, one CEO said that x would do it because he was more experienced and had done it before; thus perpetuating that men are leaders and women are not. The notion of giving it to a ‘safe pair of [male] hands’ was preferable to giving a woman the opportunity.

**Career development and recruitment**

The overwhelming perception of leadership and managerial ability in local government still emphasises technical expertise and a top down approach. Thus, as many women directors have a community services background there knowledge, skills and experience are not considered to meet the ‘perceived’ criteria necessary for CEO appointment. One woman described being told: *It’s the numbers boys and the governance boys that become CEOs.*

However, appointment was often seen to be based more on fit than skill or ability:

*... [he]needs to be comfortable with that person from the following perspective ... makes me look good and will challenge me enough but be compliant when I want my own way.*

So not only is it difficult for women to ‘qualify’ for CEO roles in terms of technical skill and knowledge they must also be a good ‘fit’ for the role.

An entrenched masculine leadership culture which sees men as leaders with certain skills and experience that are essential has the ability to impact on the recruitment process, but work hours and lack of flexibility within the roles are also important barriers. Research suggests that it is at the very first stage of the selection process where women are being restricted. Generally this occurs at the application and short-listing stages. However, once a woman gets to interview her chances of success are proportionately higher than the males. This research was supported by this study’s findings. Interestingly, there was evidence that the bias that precluded women candidates at the
short-listing stage was present in a variety of different approaches to executive recruitment such as those managed by external recruitment agencies or in-house run exercises. Some women were of the opinion that recruitment agencies were not always impartial in their selection. Others felt that the use of external recruitment companies provided an opportunity to be independently judged based on experience and skills and also provided opportunities to gather further information of the role requirements through the short-listing interviews.

_They saw my talent, skills and potential and thought this person would be okay to look at ... I felt I had an opportunity at least to get in there._

The main area identified in the discussions where improvements in the recruitment process could be made was that local government recruitment should be in line with other public and private sector organisations providing consistency across the sector. A focus on leadership capacity rather than technical expertise should be the primary consideration if local governments are to attract a more diverse set of applicants for a CEO role.

While it was difficult in this study to get an accurate picture of the remuneration of women executives, the gender wage gap in Australia which compares unfavourably to international data and is particularly significant at the executive levels. Therefore, it might be assumed that there is likely to also be problem within local government. One interviewee knew the remuneration of her Council team and was satisfied that there was comparability. Another woman’s CEO informed her of the disparity and increased her remuneration in line with her male peers.

**The elected members**

In line with UK research\(^{19}\), this study found that the role of the elected council was problematic in the way in which leadership was enacted and organisational management undertaken. While, not meant as a reflection of individual elected members, the limitations of the current council structure for elected members including appointment, skills, responsibilities and span of control were raised as critical issues. The feeling was that local government councils are more concerned with stability, short-term gains and keeping things under control than about leadership, decision making or the achievement of strategic outcomes. Further, there was a view that there is a lack of external oversight and accountability for the quality of leadership and organisational effectiveness unless the council either cannot reach a decision or if there are allegations of impropriety.

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\(^{19}\) Fox & Broussine 2001
This lack of accountability was reinforced by the general feeling amongst the women that many elected members are not necessarily qualified or experienced or aware of the complex challenges facing local government. One director described the decision making process as:

... the decision making [on the big projects] is seconds. The things that take up all the time on the agenda is the $50 donation to the local sportsperson.

This focus on the immediately tangible quantitative outcomes supports a certain type of leadership that reinforces the view that councils are about ‘rates, roads and rubbish’. This notion was considered to be further reinforced by the election process which seems to attract a narrow section of the community for both council members and the voting process itself. The lack of role statements, selection criteria and accountability measures for Councils and their members was seen to be a major weakness in the current system. These factors were believed to reinforce very traditional and transactional models of leadership, ignoring the values of diversity and new ways of thinking. This translates into practical decisions about the appointment of directors and particularly CEOs that usually appointed men of a certain age, specific skills set and experience. To demonstrate, one director recounted:

The CEO’s job was coming up. I knew the Mayor had spoken to at least one of male colleagues about applying so I went to him [the mayor] and asked him about my applying. His response was ‘but I didn’t think you would be interested’.

This type of unconscious bias (See Appendix 1 is reinforced by what emerged from the study as a very ad hoc and at times cavalier approach to the executive recruitment processes by both councils and some CEOs. There were reports of very professional and transparent systems, but these were outweighed by instances of recruitment exercises that breached the Local Government Act by Council members being directly involved in the appointment of directors and other staff. Also some recruitment involved no external or independent expertise or diversity within the selection committee such as the representation of senior women for all appointments not just when there was a female candidate.

Strategies for Moving Forward

As well as identifying the barriers to women, women directors interviewed for this study provided a range of strategies to overcome the problems identified. These strategies demonstrated both a sophisticated understanding of the issues and a strong degree of optimism for change. The key theme that emerged as a framework for change was the repositioning of the problem from being ‘just a women’s issue’ to one of leadership and governance in local government. It is important to understand, however, that this was not aimed at making invisible the under-representation of
women leaders. Rather the more equitable representation of women in executive leadership needs to be seen as a constant and important indicator of effective leadership and governance.

A framework provides a way of identifying, developing and evaluating meaningful strategies. For example, in terms of the macro level sector wide strategies of women mentoring women and women’s networking groups, while they were considered to be important for overcoming the isolation of many women executives, alone they do little to overcome those barriers outlined above.

For example, a number of women pointed to the need for opportunities to develop professional networks with men in the sector who could provide them with information, guidance and formal sponsorship for career decisions.

I find meeting up with other women extremely important. But I don’t think it’s either or. I need to have forums where I am working with senior guys as well other than my own immediate colleagues and not just on the golf course.

Being part of a wider professional network is so important to be noticed by decision makers like mayors. I knew a guy who found out that a certain CEO was retiring. So he went and talked to that CEO who introduced him to the mayor of that Council over lunch and that was 12 months out from the job being advertised. I’m not saying that this was wrong but I’m sure it helped put him on the radar and yeah he got the job.

A majority of the directors saw the need for a much more contemporary approach to leadership within the sector and in each council. While other sectors place a premium on leadership development and performance investing in systems to identify, develop and evaluate organisational and individual leadership, there was little evidence in general of such a robust approach. Two councils emerged from interviews with their women directors as being very progressive, with the respective CEOs emphasising leadership amongst the executive teams to the extent to which their appeared to be a leadership blueprint and a leadership language developing in those councils. An important indicator that set these two organisations apart from others was that there was an interest in leadership beyond only the context of local government so that examples, models and development was engaging with broader industry leadership thinking.

I have found the experience of ongoing work with the executive team about how we operate individually as leaders and as a group really enlightening. It’s also meant that it’s knocked a lot of the separateness that exists between different departments. I think we are beginning to see how each of sections brings different things to the Council.
Around the governance issue, two areas were identified almost unanimously by the interviewees. First, there was a demand for much greater external accountability over the recruitment, development and employment of Council executives. Strategies that addressed these aspects related to more useful and meaningful guidelines for Councils and CEOs to manage leadership employment including performance management systems, development and remuneration.

* I think each Council and each CEO should have to develop a plan for executives like a workforce plan. They need to have to show how they make decisions and manage their leaders. *

Linked to this strategic planning for leadership was the idea that part of this should address targets for an increase in women executives: If it’s good enough for big companies like Wesfarmers and mining why not local government?

Finally, all 21 women pointed to the current review of the local government sector as an exciting opportunity for the introduction of the type of change that they believe is needed to improve the leadership of local councils and the representation of women in the leadership ranks. However, they also cautioned about the real risk of women ‘missing’ out in the scramble for jobs. As one woman warned:

* ‘If ever there was a time for best possible leadership it will be at the implementation of the review. I’m not afraid that I’m not good enough, but just that I won’t even get to be considered.*
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APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1 UNCONSCIOUS BIAS – KEEPING LEADERSHIP A WOMEN-FREE ZONE

Overwhelmingly, in the contemporary world the most unremitting barrier to women’s equitable representation in leadership positions is unconscious bias. Increasingly, governments and business leaders are recognising that bias is the ‘elephant in the room’[^20] that must be understood and tackled by organisations if women are ever to be able to confidently aspire to leadership and organisations take advantage of this ignored talent pool. Bias towards women and leadership is linked directly to three factors: gender roles, career development and concepts of leadership (See Fig 1). Together these factors interact to shape and influence organisational policies, processes and practices that exclude women from leadership.

![Fig.1](image)

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**Gender roles**: Proponents of this view argue that women and men are socialised differently. Men are encouraged to develop the attitudes, traits and behaviours that are traditionally associated with leadership, while women are socialised to take on the role, attitudes and behaviours of the follower and supporter of leaders. Thus, because women

[^20]: Ernst & Young 2011
are not ‘suited’ to management and leadership positions, it follows that they are under-
represented at these levels.

Stereotypes based on male and female leadership capability underpin an unsupported idea
that men are naturally suited to leadership, while women are not21. Yet, while some
research argues that there are gender differences in leadership style22 most findings
indicate that there are no real differences in leadership effectiveness or achievement of
outcomes based on gender and that there are far more similarities than differences
between male and female leaders23.

**Career Development:** The traditional gender stereotypes that depict women as lacking in
leadership attributes24 underpin the career development of women leaders in a number of
ways. First, some employees, suppliers and other stakeholders may view female leaders
more negatively than males. This is based on role incongruity, in that women are not
expected to show leadership traits and therefore when they do, they are viewed more
negatively than men exhibiting the same behaviours25. Second, occupations and roles are
often segregated by gender so that women have been traditionally segregated into
occupational areas that are best seen as ‘women’s work’ and not a leadership development
area. Thus, women candidates may be overlooked for ‘male jobs’ like senior managers. Jobs
may also become gender-typed based on the previous incumbent, a practice that is further
exacerbated by a lack of female role models26.

Some women may feel unwelcome in dominant masculine leadership cultures and under
pressure to ‘fit in’. There is a considerable body of evidence that women are more likely to
experience greater stress than their male counterparts because of gender stereotyping and
varying levels of hostility amongst their male colleagues. As women move into senior roles,

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21 Heilman, Block, Martell & Simon 1989
22 Gilligan 1982
23 WACMAN J 1996
24 Eagly & Carli 2007
25 Ibid.
26 Singh et al. 2006
many report increased scrutiny and need to perform at the highest levels in order to justify their appointment

Where there are only one or at most a few senior women, the dominant group (men) tend to reinforce their commonality and cultural group, further excluding the isolated and ‘different’ woman/women27. This can also extend the exclusion of women from informal networks such as sporting activities and club memberships perpetuating gender stereotyping of women through the idea of the ‘old boys’ network.28 Similarly, an important career limiting aspect of women’s isolation at senior levels is the lack of sponsors and mentors, who can both provide career advice and support and most importantly put forward their name for appointment.

Concepts of Leadership

Drawing on the traditional gendered roles, the model of a successful leader is overwhelmingly male, linked to qualities of decisiveness, aggression and competitiveness. Managers are expected to be hardnosed, ruthless, adversarial, results-oriented and confident of their own power base29. This type of leadership is often described as ‘heroic’ and emphasises many of the attributes of mythological gods and heroes. This archetypal image of the leader is deeply embedded in collective social beliefs that produce masculine images of leadership30.

Unconscious Bias in Practice – Dispelling the Myths

In the 30 years that women have started to enter the workforce essentially for life, many organisations, leaders and ordinary employees have allowed stereotyped attitudes and out-dated scenarios shape their thinking about women. Hence, the majority of programs and interventions that target women and leadership are built on a ‘deficit model’ that concentrates on ‘fixing’ the women. However, as discussed earlier, this perspective fails to recognise, and thus overlooks, a strong and capable pool of women leadership candidates.

27 Kanter 1977
28 Searby & Tripses 2006
29 Eveline 2005
30 Sinclair 2007
Women in Local Government in 2011

Still a boys’ club – still a men’s shed
## Appendix 2

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