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INTRODUCTION

“The case for greater gender balance is obvious for Australian leaders. The opportunity to leverage untapped talent, and the productivity imperative, means that gender should be on the national agenda for years to come. There is just no justification for not... ‘getting in the game’.”

~ Michael Smith, CEO, ANZ Banking Group *

What does it take to change the representation of women in leadership? While many executives are keen to achieve gender balance, knowing what to do, and when, is not always clear. This book is designed to share evidence-based insights about how to successfully achieve leadership gender balance.

ORGANISATIONS CONTINUE to grapple with low levels of representation of women in leadership positions, despite more than 40 years focusing on equal opportunity and diversity initiatives. Neither legislation nor significant investment have created the change sought.

Rather than improving, women's representation on boards and top teams in the mid-2000s plateaued or decreased, a situation widespread across developed nations. It has been claimed previously that it is simply a matter of time before women have equal representation, but current experience and projections don't bear that out.

The difficulty of making real progress comes down to the challenges of changing gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are categorical judgments we make about the characteristics and potential of individuals based on their gender and lie at the heart of discrimination at work. Stereotypes are deeply, often implicitly held, and difficult but not impossible to change.

If your organization has set gender diversity targets and/or programs, this book will help you:

- ✓ **Better understand** what gender diversity means for managers and organizations,
- ✓ **Provide evidence** on what gender balance contributes to organizational performance,
- ✓ **Identify how** to improve the gender balance of senior roles in your organization,
- ✓ **Understand** what gets in the way of achieving gender diversity results,
- ✓ **Understand more** about conscious and unconscious beliefs and their role in change, and
- ✓ **Focus** your actions to achieve the best results.

The book is divided into five main chapters: Each chapter begins with a short review of your own organization's status, to help keep you focused on what's needed next:

2. Leadership visibility and direction,

3. Building an inclusive culture,
4. Work practices,
5. Fair talent and performance management, and
6. Taking action.

The chapters summarize the relevant evidence about gender balance at work. What are best practice organizations doing, and what results have they achieved? Each chapter is a guide for what to do to make progress towards best practice.

Each section within each chapter turns the evidence and experience into a simple “To do” checklist of workable actions. Each chapter’s checklist is compiled and presented at the end of the chapter.

Having assessed your organization’s progress and reviewed best practice, you can then select three to four key actions to inspire and focus your change efforts. When you’ve achieved these, you can move on to the next area.

Chapter 6 focuses on personal change. The evidence is clear that unconscious bias is an important factor in the perpetuation of gender imbalance. The chapter provides a process for increasing your personal awareness of unconscious bias. Practical tools are provided to help minimize the impact of bias on decision-making.

The final chapter provides a list of selected references.

While you may choose to read the book from beginning to end, it is also designed so that you can choose the appropriate chapter, or section within a chapter, to focus on first. To work out where to start, use the review on the following page.

Current research on gender diversity provides a source of hope for change. While many of the themes that characterized the position of women in organizational life in the 1970s and 1980s are still with us, more recent research shows that where there are more women at the top of organizations a number of positive impacts are evident. For example

- Women are more likely to aspire to the most senior roles in their organization, finding such roles increasingly attractive,
- Senior women's job and career satisfaction increases as does loyalty to the organisation,
- Organisational climate improves,
- The dynamics of boards and top teams improves, as reported by both men and women, and
- A number of studies confirm that organizational performance increases.

Review 1.1: What is the most significant challenge your organization faces in achieving better gender balance?

Lack of leadership visibility and direction from the top – we don't know what it is, how to talk about it or why it matters (*go to Chapter 2. Leadership visibility and direction*)

Changing a male-dominated culture – we have more men than women in most work groups, men are in core/professional roles and women are in support roles (*go to Chapters 3. Building an inclusive culture and 4. Work practices*)

Lack of opportunities for women to advance – women don't get/want senior jobs (*go to Chapter 5. Fair talent and performance management*)

Lack of action – our actions aren't focused, clear or aligned (*go to Chapter 6. Taking action*)

** Male Champions of Change is an initiative of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission. Quotations from their report Our experiences in elevating the representation of women in leadership: a letter from business leaders are provided as section headers throughout this book, to provide guidance and inspiration.*