

WHAT'S WORKING? GENDER EQUITY

**Data-Driven Insights for
Advancing Diversity**



THIS REPORT INCOPORATES LEARNINGS FROM:

- **243 academic papers**
- **26 case studies**
- **17 first-time leader programs**
- **5,000+ conversations with corporate leaders**



GOAL OF THIS REPORT

Help business leaders do more of what actually works in:

- **attracting diverse talent**
- **retaining great people**
- **championing diversity**



MYTHS THE DATA BUSTS:

MYTH
BUSTED

**Asking women to Lean In
(spoiler: it doesn't work)**

MYTH
BUSTED

Men cause all the issues

MYTH
BUSTED

It's expensive to fix

MYTH
BUSTED

It's always complicated and complex

MYTH
BUSTED

Bias training works





MYTHS THE DATA BUSTS:

**MYTH
BUSTED**

Diversity is bad for business

**MYTH
BUSTED**

Google's bias training is the best

**MYTH
BUSTED**

Educating about bias is the most effective way to overcome it

**MYTH
BUSTED**

Women can't do anything about it

**MYTH
BUSTED**

There are no simple solutions



IT'S OK NOT TO KNOW



What actually works best to attract and retain women?

That's the exact question a senior construction leader turned to me and asked in a Board Room 6 months ago.

I provided my perspective, but the question got me thinking.

Outside of my own experience as a female in engineering with over a decade actively working to increase diversity, speaking globally to 25,000+ people and reading countless books and papers on diversity: **did I really know what works?**

What you see before you today is hundreds of hours of effort to try and answer that very question. Backed with data.

What started as a search for answers has turned into a mission to share an actionable summary of the latest insights and actions to take **for business leaders committed to progress in gender equity.**

At WeAspire we specialise in helping first time leaders get promoted and be great. Why? Because the transition from technician to leader is a critical inflexion point in anyone's career - **especially for women.**

For many women this transition from technician to leader happens right around the time they are having children. **A new reality which re-aligns everyone's priorities.**

The unsung hero's of this report are the hundreds of academics who **diligently test, and bring statistically relevant findings to us all.** Without them, this report would only add more emotive speculation which often obstructs real progress.

Admitting that we don't *really* know something can feel daunting. **Yet real progress depends on all of us remaining curious and willing to learning.**

Thank you for your curiosity,

Felicity Furey

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ABOUT WEASPIRE



Our mission is to be the **most effective first time leader training** on the planet.



We specialise in **immersive scenario-based experiences for technical people**, allowing participants to experience the realities of leadership.



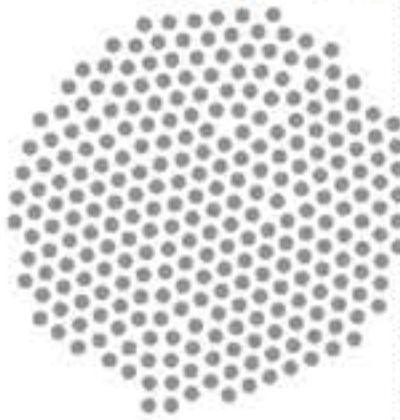
Our team has been trusted to work directly with hundreds of **technical first-time and emerging leaders across industry**. We have inspired 25,000+ people globally to lead.



PAY DISPARITY IN AUSTRALIA

REFERENCE: THE GUARDIAN, 2024

No gap (0)



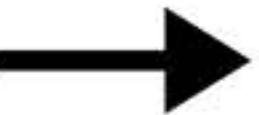
1 (-5% to 5%)

EACH DOT REPRESENTS ONE COMPANIES DISCLOSED GENDER PAY GAP

WOMEN GET PAID MORE



WOMEN GET PAID LESS



8

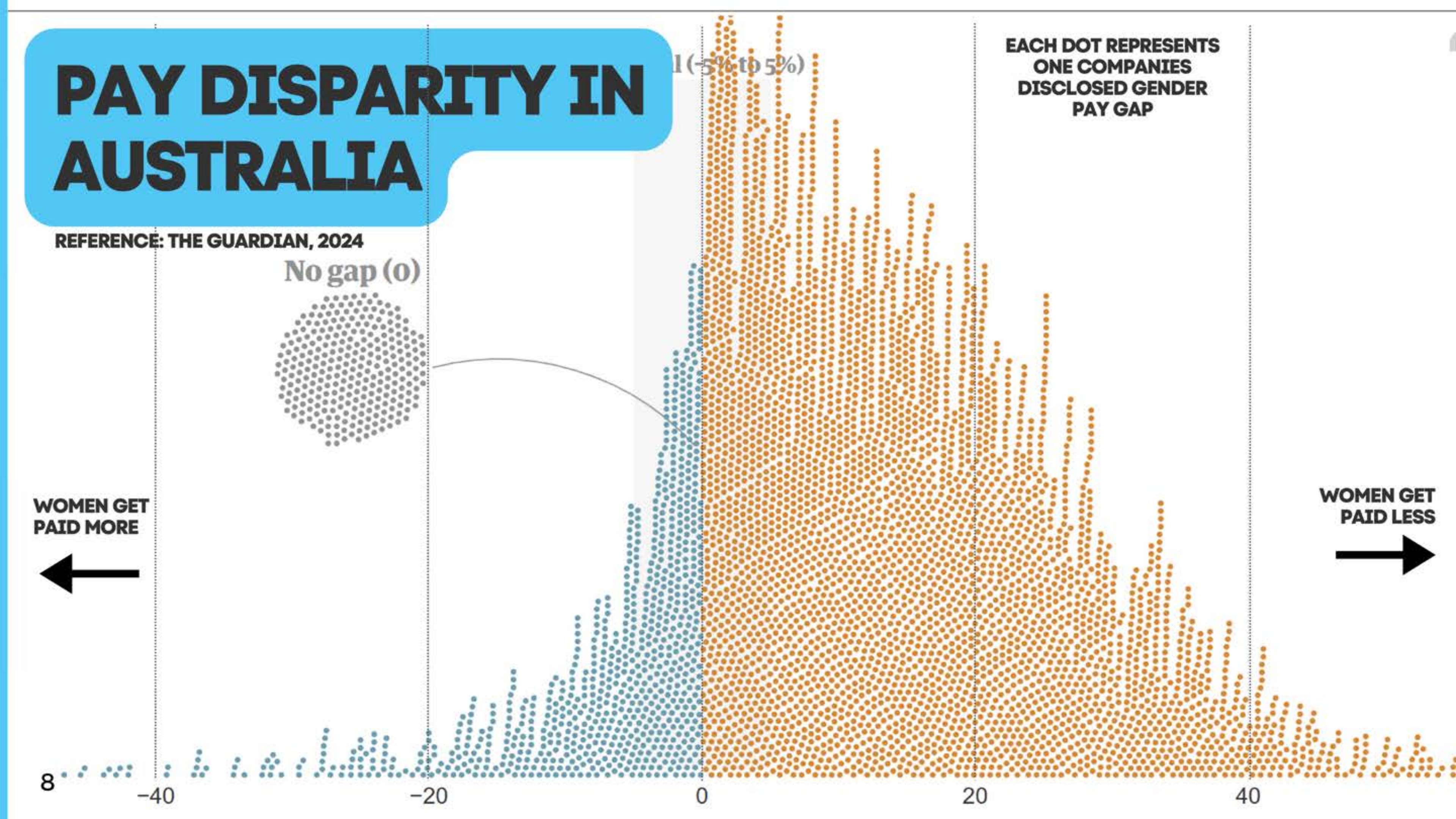
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-20

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20

40



THERE'S CLEARLY WORK TO DO

26%

of boards do not have
any women

62%

of companies have
a pay gap which
favoured men

22%

National Gender
Pay Gap*
(Australia)

* Note "Gender pay gaps are not a comparison of like roles. Instead, they show the difference between the average or median pay of women and men across organisations, industries and the workforce as a whole."

Source: Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2024

**BUT HOW DO WE
MOVE THINGS
FORWARD?**



Too Long;

Didn't Read

TLDR: WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Gender bias training **consistently makes things worse**

Mums who show **kiddy career breaks receive 13% less call backs**

Asking people to opt in to job opportunities, **causes a gender bias**

Women rate their own performance 25% lower than men

Women negotiate **salaries 17% lower** expecting more backlash

Single women hide their ambition to appear more attractive



Too Long;

Didn't Read

TLDR: WHAT DOES WORK

Anonymising gender is most effective way to remove bias

11.7% more women apply to **roles showing number of applicants**

Using performance rating scale **6 / 6 (not 10 / 10) removes bias**

Female CEOs improve perception of female leadership by 50%

Profit increases by 2.4% for every **10% increase in gender diversity**

Female founders deliver 63% better investment returns



WHAT'S WORKING? GENDER EQUITY

HIRING TALENT



MUMS WHO SHOW KIDDY CAREER BREAKS RECEIVE 13% LESS CALL BACKS FOR JOBS

A study found mums who showed a career break on their resume when having children, received 13% less call backs, than mums who show years of work experience only.



2017 - Assistant
2020 - Manager
2021 - Mumming



3 Years - Assistant
2 Years - Manager



Reference: Reducing discrimination against job seekers with and without employment gaps, 2022



**Automatically including
all qualified candidates
in a competitive
processes helps harness
a broader talent pool**

Felicity Furey
WeAspire





11.7% MORE WOMEN APPLY TO JOBS ADVERTISING THE NUMBER OF APPLICANTS

For jobs traditionally dominated by men, revealing applicant numbers significantly increased the number of women applying, with up to an 11.7 percentage point increase in started applications and a 4.7 percentage point increase in completed applications on LinkedIn.



ANONYMISING GENDER IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO REMOVE BIAS

In a review of over 15,000 applications for Scientists to use the Hubble Telescope for research, it was found **removing reference to gender during the assessment made the most significant difference in removing bias.**

The study found when anonymising data **men were more likely than women to bias against women.**

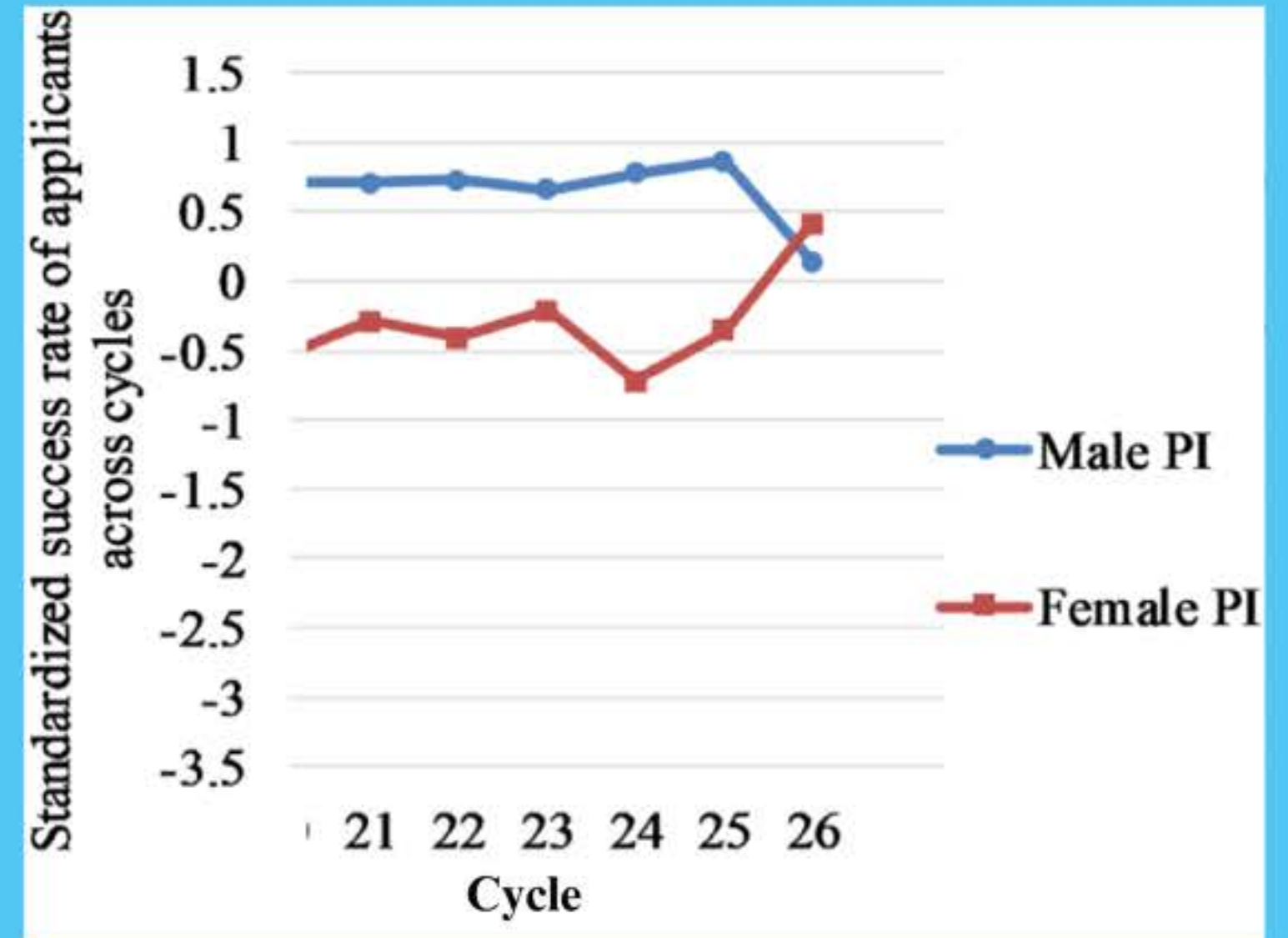


Diagram from the study shows the review cycle. **Only in Cycle 26 was gender anonymised, seeing any gender bias removed.**





WOMEN NEGOTIATE SALARIES 17% LOWER THAN MEN BECAUSE THEY EXPECT MORE BACKLASH

A study found women anticipated more backlash in a negotiation process than men when advocating for a pay rise. Advocating for self is incongruent with communal perceptions of feminine where advocating for others is congruent.

In the study of 57 people, on average women achieved an 8% improvement on starting salary, while men achieved a 27% improvement on the same starting salary.



Having an advocate involved in the salary negotiation process **removed the likelihood of this happening.**

Reference: Negotiating gender roles: Gender differences in assertive negotiating are mediated by women's fear of backlash and attenuated when negotiating on behalf of others. (2010)



WHAT'S WORKING? GENDER EQUITY

PROMOTION & RETENTION





OPT IN PROMOTION CULTURE WORSENS GENDER BIAS

Switching from opt-in to an opt-out hiring processes significantly **narrows gaps between genders especially in leadership roles.**



Please reply to this email **if you would like to be considered** for the Operations Manager role.



You have met the criteria for the Operations Manager role. Please reply to this email **if you do not wish to be considered** for the role.

Women are notably less inclined to participate compared to men in competitive job processes.

Reference: Leadership selection: Can changing the default break the glass ceiling? (2022)



WOMEN SELF EXCLUDE FROM PROMOTION, EVEN WHEN ENCOURAGED TO “LEAN IN”

Training females to “lean in” has varying levels of effectiveness when it comes to job promotion opportunities.

Companies who create a more inclusive structure that automatically includes all qualified candidates - male and female - in competitive processes, businesses can harness a broader talent pool, with women less likely to self-exclude.

A portrait of Sheryl Sandberg, a woman with dark hair, wearing a white jacket, looking directly at the camera.

Sheryl Sandberg

Ex-COO Facebook
Author of “Lean In”

Reference: Gender, Sense of Power, and Desire to Lead: Why Women Don't “Lean In” to Apply to Leadership Groups That Are Majority-Male (2020)



MORE MUMS RETURN TO WORK WITH EMPLOYER-SPONSORED CHILDCARE

Mums with daughters were **7.5% more likely to return to work** if they could access childcare support from their job during the first 5 years of the child's life. Mums with sons were 2% more likely to return to work.

Reference: Work-Family Programs and Nonwork Networks: Within-Group Inequality, Network Activation, and Labor Market Attachment (2020)



SINGLE WOMEN HIDE THEIR AMBITION TO APPEAR MORE ATTRACTIVE TO POTENTIAL PARTNERS

The study found that single female students act less ambitious and avoid leading roles in front of single men. They do this to fit into traditional expectations and improve their chances in the "marriage market."

Researchers looked at single women in an elite MBA program in the U.S., studying how they balance their career goals with the desire to find a long-term partner.



If asking about ambitions - communicating that the information would be kept private or anonymous **removed the likelihood of females reducing ambition levels.**



WHAT'S WORKING? GENDER EQUITY

NAVIGATING BIAS



BIAS TRAINING HAS THE OPPOSITE EFFECT, AND CAN CAUSE BACKLASH

One-off online diversity trainings **fail to significantly change workplace behaviors**, with some employers experiencing backlash among male employees who actively don't hire women.

Newly "trained" individuals can **think they no longer have bias** due to their new level of "awareness".

✘ DON'TS

Use traditional methods without checking their proven effectiveness.

✔ DO'S

Use data or specific examples to show bias



GOOGLES UNCONCIOUS BIAS TRAINING NOT THE MOST EFFECTIVE APPROACH

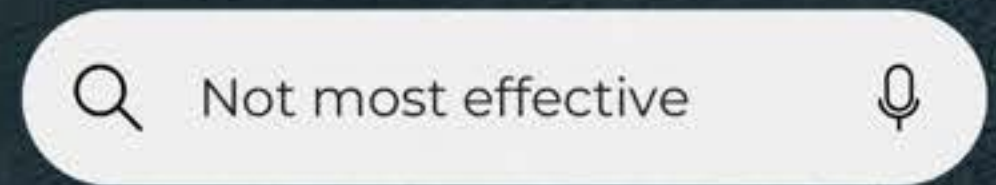
Training which provided data driven examples of bias in daily situations were found to be **superior in helping change the actions of people** rather than traditional approaches like Google Bias @ Work.



Don't do PowerPoint lecture presenting scientific findings on unconscious bias followed by a Q&A session (Google's initial unconscious bias training approach).



Do present scenarios of unconscious bias in a game setting and actively practice. Finish the training with a facilitator-led discussion (the WAGES-Business approach).



PRESENTING DATA OF GENDER BIAS REDUCES DISCRIMINATION

Presenting concrete evidence of past gender discrimination is more effective in reducing bias than simply encouraging people not to discriminate.

Reference: Reducing discrimination in the field: Evidence from an awareness raising intervention targeting gender biases in student evaluations of teaching (2021)





73% OF ORGANISATIONS WITH FEMALE CEOS, LINKED FEMALE TERMS WITH LEADERSHIP AND STRENGTH QUALITIES.

The study looked at how often words describing women (e.g., "she," "her," "woman") were linked with words denoting strong leadership qualities (e.g., "competent," "independent," "assertive").



Promoting senior leaders within an organisation can be one of the simplest ways to **move the dial around gender equity in a company.**

Reference: Hiring women into senior leadership positions is associated with a reduction in gender stereotypes in organizational language (2022)





Without CEO and board sponsorship, even with the best intentions, nothing will happen.

If it becomes a priority for them, it becomes a priority for the organization.



Sandra Casinader
Group Head of Inclusion & Diversity, Westpac



PROCESS TRANSPARENCY TRUMPS ANY OTHER METHOD

Increasing the transparency of a process or selection process is more effective at reducing gender bias than trying to change any individuals' reactions or beliefs.

DON'TS

Keep the process private, and under management of just one individual.

DO'S

Communicate the evaluation process and use multiple resources to collect, anonymise, and review.

Reference: Strategies to Prevent or Reduce Gender Bias in Peer Review of Research Grants: A Rapid Scoping Review (Tricco et al. 2017)



WHAT'S WORKING? GENDER EQUITY

PERFORMANCE



WOMEN RATE THEIR PERFORMANCE 25% LOWER THAN MEN, EVEN WHEN THEY'RE ACTUALLY BETTER

Despite equal or superior performance, research has found **women consistently undervalue their achievements compared to men**, a discrepancy not mitigated by removing incentives for self-promotion or providing comparative performance data.



Overly critical self evaluation **can be particularly detrimental around promotions and review periods.**



Helping employees access & evaluate specific performance metrics can help an employee correctly evaluate their performance.

Reference: The Gender Gap in Self-Promotion (2021)






**In male-dominated fields
(with 11 to 15% women),
a 10/10 rating was the most
common rating given to men
whereas an 8/10 rating was the most common
rating given to women.**



Lauren A. Rivera,
Kellogg School of Management



GENDER BIAS IS REMOVED WHEN THE PERFORMANCE SCALE IS CHANGED FROM...

10 / 10  **6 / 6**

Modifying the evaluation scale from a 10-point to a 6-point system reduces the gender gap in performance evaluations. This study more broadly states how rating systems—rather than being neutral instruments—shape the distribution of rewards in organisations.





PRIORITISE CONNECTION OVER CONTENT FOR DEVELOPING FIRST TIME FEMALE LEADERS

Programs that placed a significant emphasis on connecting with others (with informal interactions such as lunch or dinner) produced the highest quantitative and qualitative program feedback.

Reference: WeAspire After-Program Feedback Review



DOUBLE FEMALE ENGAGEMENT BY ADDING MORE LEVELS OF CHALLENGE

Expanding levels of difficulty in a task to 3 options (up from 2) saw female engagement in challenging tasks increase to 49% (up from 27%).



Please complete the puzzle below.



Please select one of the options below:

Easy: 1 - 2 puzzles

Medium: 3-4 puzzles

Hard: 5+ puzzles

Reference: Challenge-seeking and the gender wage gap: A lab-in-the-field experiment with cleaning personnel (2020)



LONG-TERM



MEDIUM-TERM



SHORT-TERM



TRAINING INITIATIVES GET BETTER OUTCOMES THAN PROGRAMS

Companies who focus on implementing an initiative (think: longer term), rather than running a Program (think: short term) emphasise post-program growth, participant ownership, and sustained impact in leader development.

Reference: WeAspire Program Review 2024



MID-LEVEL FEMALE ROLE MODELS MORE EFFECTIVELY INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE YOUNGER WOMEN

Exposure to high-level female role models can negatively impact younger women's self-perceptions and leadership aspirations due to feelings of inferiority. Conversely, mid-level female role models do not produce this effect. Superstar high level females can sometimes be perceived as unattainable.

✗ DON'TS

Very senior females in organisations **can be off putting to junior staff.**

✓ DO'S

Help employees access peer mentors - one or two years ahead - to **make progress more relatable.**

Reference: Female Leaders: Injurious or Inspiring Role Models for Women? (2011)



REMOTE TRAINING WAS THE LEAST FAVOURED APPROACH BY FEMALE TRAINEES

Trainees reported some of the following issues:

- easily distracted by in office / on site workings
- other staff expressed they were wasting time
- participants felt they couldn't share openly when working from on site – due to colleagues sitting near to them, thin walls, or distracted by on-site tasks
- staff received threats they would lose their job if they took time out to train on company time (their supervisor was from a different company)



Be mindful of who may be in the vicinity of trainees when undertaking remote training sessions

Reference: WeAspire End of Program Survey Feedback



Women volunteer for “non-promotable” tasks more than men

Women are more frequently asked to take such tasks on; and that when asked, they are more likely to say yes.



Ask women to decline more work requests, this has negative impacts for the organisation and for women.



Managers can rotate assignments across the team rather than asking people to volunteer.

Linda Babcock

Why Women Volunteer for Tasks That Don't Lead to Promotions Harvard Business Review (2018)

WHAT'S WORKING? GENDER EQUITY

FINANCIAL OUTCOMES



PROFIT INCREASES BY 2.4% FOR EVERY 10% INCREASE IN GENDER DIVERSITY IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS

McKinsey & Co
Diversity Wins" Report (2020)

McKinsey
& Company

**Diversity
wins**

How inclusion matters
May 2020



FEMALES FOUNDERS PRODUCE 63% BETTER INVESTOR RETURNS

First Round Capital found companies with at least one female founder **performed 63% better than their all-male counterparts** in terms of investment returns.

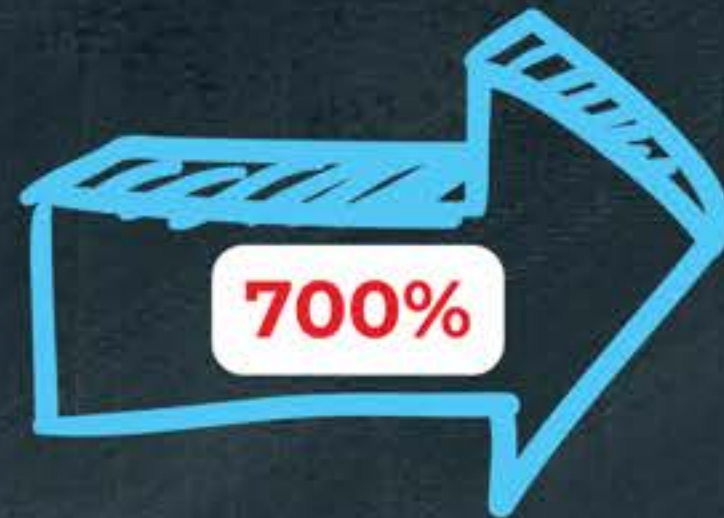


TOP UP SUPER DURING EARLY CHILD YEARS AND DELIVER A 700% BENEFIT

A large energy company in Australia chose to top up super during early childhood years. By paying full time super (5 days per week), when they were on parental leave and when they returned to work part time (typically 3 days per week). The compounding effect of super earlier in a career can create a 700% benefit.

\$30,224

Cost of Super Top up to employer



\$215,593

Benefit to employee at end of career

Assumptions

Have child at 30 assuming 40 year career
Initial Annual Salary: \$100,000
Annual Contribution Rate: 9.5%
End of Career Super Balance: ~\$1,820,826 (with top up)

Salary Growth: 3% per annum
Super Rate of Return : 5% per annum
End of Career Super Balance: ~\$1,605,233 (no top up)





FEMALE FOUNDERS RAISED 1.2 X MORE FUNDING THAN MEN

Female entrepreneurs are often seen as more trustworthy than their male counterparts.

Findings indicate that **female-led campaigns** had a higher likelihood of meeting their funding goals and received, on average, **1.2 times more funding than those led by men in crowdfunding campaigns.**

Reference: A woman's place is in the... startup! Crowdfunder judgments, implicit bias, and the stereotype content model (2018)



FEMALE LED STARTUPS GENERATE 10% MORE REVENUE, WITH LESS CAPITAL

Boston Consulting Group (BCG) reported **startups founded or co-founded by women generate 10% more cumulative revenue over a five-year period** than those founded by men, despite often receiving less venture capital funding.



FEMALE LEADERS ARE TRUSTED MORE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Female leaders who show a lot of care and connection are trusted more than male leaders who act the same way in crises that are seen as predictable and manageable.

The study showed that the advantage is uniquely attributable to female leaders' use of relational behaviors and is manifested only when crisis consequences are known.

Reference: A Female Leadership Trust Advantage in Times of Crisis:
Under What Conditions? (2019)



DIVERSE MANAGEMENT TEAMS HAVE 19% HIGHER REVENUES DUE TO INNOVATION.

In a study of 1,700 companies in eight countries, "**diverse companies found unconventional solutions to problems** and generate more and better ideas, outperforming their peers financially.

"There are few slam dunks in the business world. This is one of them."

Reference: Boston Consulting Group, 2018



WHAT'S WORKING? GENDER EQUITY

REFLECTIONS





BUSINESS CASE FOR GENDER EQUITY IS STRONG

Investments in gender equity have already enabled:

- increased profitability and value creation (McKinsey)
- enhanced job satisfaction and employee retention (Catalyst, 2020)
- boosted economic growth & reduced poverty (World Bank)
- improved organisational performance and innovation (McKinsey & Co)
- better financial decision-making (GFLEC)
- job creation (Boston Consulting Group)
- healthier communities (World Health Organisation)
- better mental health (American Psychological Association)

Globally, businesses that champion female education and skill development are reaping tangible rewards in enhanced performance and competitive edge.



OUR FINAL THOUGHTS

Extensive progress has been made globally.

Quick wins do exist.

Bias is real.

In organisations simple things become complex.

Self-Actualisation is real.

Progress is achieved through imperfect action.

There is much more to be done.



DISCLAIMER

WeAspire makes no representations or warranties, express or implied, as to the accuracy or completeness of the information contained within this report or its suitability for any specific purpose.

This report synthesizes the findings from over 243 academic papers and 25 case studies, along with insights from our leadership programs. It is important to note that none of the research presented is original to us. The complex nature of gender equity means that there are no definitive answers, but research from a range of sources can offer valuable insights for businesses seeking to make progress in this area.

We have leveraged the significant work done internationally in the space of gender equity, particularly drawing upon the resources compiled by the Harvard Kennedy School's Women and Public Policy Program, among other sources. However, our interpretations and conclusions are our own or any other entity referenced or mentioned.



The data and findings in this report are based on the independent synthesis and analysis conducted by WeAspire team members, and do not reflect the views or policies of any institutions or programs cited.

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HAVE A QUESTION?

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