



GENDER EQUITY: WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO BE THE BEST

An initiative of
Richmond Football Club

In partnership with Bluestone Edge,
the Australian Football League and
the Australian Sports Commission

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INTENTION OF THE WORK

In early 2014, the leadership of Richmond Football Club decided it needed to more effectively engage with female stakeholders, internally and externally, to improve business performance. It was agreed that the critical first step to drive this strategy and subsequently drive business outcomes was to address the issue of gender equity within their organisation.

In order to do so, they needed to understand the real and perceived barriers to getting women into leadership positions in the club, and they needed to hear that from people within the industry, from people across other industries with relevant experience, and from experts in the field.

This report presents an abridged version of the overall research findings and is designed to be shared with other elite sporting organisations and the general public that choose to follow suit in creating change within their workplaces, so that gender equity may become a sustainable reality in sport.

Richmond Football Club owns the full version of the research report including de-identified commentary from almost 60 interviewees, with unreserved rights given to the Australian Football League and the Australian Sports Commission as principal partners.

The intention of the work is to inform the development and implementation of practical responses and strategies to address gender equity in the club over the next two years, with final reporting to be completed in 2016.



FOREWORD: ELIZABETH BRODERICK

I congratulate the Richmond Football Club for embarking on a new project to encourage women into leadership positions in the AFL, a sport which has a massive fan base among women.

As Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, a significant proportion of my work has been devoted to the issues of gender equality and women's participation in various different sectors of the Australian workforce. This has included working with a diverse group of male chiefs of industry in the Male Champions of Change initiative, which continues to grow and establish programs and best practice for supporting women into senior executive roles. At perhaps the other extreme, I have led the Australian Human Rights Commission's Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force.

In all of my work, I have been heartened by the support offered by many men in male dominated industries – men who understand that the task of advancing gender equality and women's leadership cannot sit on the shoulders of women alone – that men must step up beside women to build inclusive organisational cultures for the benefit of all. I am pleased to see the discussion moving away from 'fixing women' to changing our workplaces so that both women and men can thrive.

For women, as with anyone, it is a case of 'you can't be what you can't see'. So, the more we begin to see women working equally alongside men in traditionally male dominated industries – of which sport is certainly one – the more women will feel these careers are a valid choice. It will always be a case of achieving a critical mass. And men in male dominated industries, including sport, have a critical role to play in shaping this future. After all, research clearly shows that gender diverse workplaces achieve the best results.

I commend the partners who have come together with Richmond Football Club to undertake this important research into the under-representation of women in elite sport – Bluestone Edge, the Australian Football League and the Australian Sports Commission. The broad issues of respect, gender equity, support, power networks, workplace access and flexibility, recruitment and attraction practices, and ongoing measurement and



reporting are vital elements in understanding and addressing the parts that make up this challenging picture. This research provides a strong foundation on which to build.

Undertaking this work is a huge step towards encouraging all sporting codes to support women into leadership roles. I look forward to the change it will help bring about.

Elizabeth Broderick

Sex Discrimination Commissioner



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INTRODUCTION

Sport, as a reflection of our wider society, is not an industry shared equally between men and women. Gender inequity remains firmly entrenched, particularly at the leadership and governance level of most sports.

This inequity also mirrors the situation in broader business in Australia in some ways, although other industries are further advanced in both the acknowledgment of the imperative to change, and useful action towards achieving such change. Increasingly, leadership diversity is seen as a rational response to business needs, not just 'the right thing to do'.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR CHANGE

Extensive research among leading businesses shows that gender equity in the boardroom and in senior executive positions is not just about talent, diversity and equity – it simply makes bottom line business sense. The evidence from countless surveys, studies and reports clearly shows that increased female representation at the top levels of organisations is linked to better decision making, more effective organisational performance, higher rates of return, more effective risk management and even lower rates of bankruptcy and fraud.

Research by McKinsey and others has shown that the presence of gender diverse leadership teams correlates with stronger financial and organisational performance. McKinsey has found that companies with higher degrees of gender diversity tend to enjoy operating margins twice as high as those of the least diverse organisations. Research has also shown a strong positive correlation between the share of top female managers and return on assets and equity.¹

A recent Gallup study found that hiring a demographically diverse workforce can improve a company's financial performance. The study of more than 800 business units from two companies representing two different industries – retail and hospitality – found that gender diverse business units in the retail company have 14% higher average comparable revenue than less diverse business units, and 19% higher average quarterly net profit in the hospitality company.²

¹ Women Matter 2: Female Leadership, a Competitive Edge for the Future, McKinsey, 2008.

² Sangeeta Bharadwaj Badal, *The business benefits of diversity*, Gallup Business Journal, 20 January 2014.



Another report, *The Business of Empowering Women*, shows that gender-balanced executive committees have a 56% higher operating profit than companies with male only committees. It also found that companies with three or more women in top positions scored higher than their peers in an index of organisational health.³

There is little debate remaining as to whether more balanced leadership teams with the ability to debate from diverse perspectives and challenge the status quo are outperforming the 'old school'.

So why are elite sports organisations lagging?

THE STATE OF PLAY IN AUSTRALIAN SPORT

Since commencing this research there has been a flood of commentary and discussion about women's on and off field involvement in sport across AFL, cricket, NRL and soccer. This year's AFL women's industry lunch on 5th May titled 'Everyone's Game, Everything's Possible' was a pointedly different event than in previous years with an explicit acknowledgement of the need to address gender inequity throughout the game; a turning point that has the potential to mark a contemporary era for women and girls in AFL.

This has not happened overnight. The topic has been live for many years and yet progress has been glacially slow. It is clear that change will not happen organically – things will not just 'work out' on their own without strong, clear, definitive action taken to address gender inequity.

To date, no collective group in AFL has truly been prepared to prioritise this agenda above many others shouting for attention, and no one has been willing to stay the course and 'lean in' to the potential discomfort of change on this issue.

Throughout the research interviews there was an overarching recognition of three things:

1. The situation today is better than ever.
2. There is a burgeoning appetite to have women more involved but still some reluctance to give women a 'leg up' which in effect creates ongoing resistance.
3. The shift needed from here can only be achieved by leader-led, institutional and attitudinal changes to workplaces and that would make a football career attractive and viable for women.

³ The Business of Empowering Women, McKinsey, 2010.



The conversation in football is slowly starting to shift from a ‘what to do about women’ debate nested in problems and women’s rights, to a debate about the cost of not including female talent if the sport wants to remain competitive in a dynamic, fast paced entertainment industry. This singular desire to thrive and compete is the source of consensus among all participants, and the most likely lever for change.

Participants in this research describe a sense of being on the brink of change, and yet there is a fair amount of cynicism, and the cynicism comes from both men and women.



FINDINGS

Women throughout this research described feeling frustrated and impinged and yet many have found it difficult to express exactly why in literal terms, or with evidence based examples of discrimination.

The AFL game has moved beyond overt, blatant sexism on most counts, and what pervades today is something much more subtle, nuanced and culturally ingrained, but deeply felt, widely experienced and prohibitive to women's progress nevertheless.

Women felt that there were stubborn, unthinking attitudes and cultural habits that created resistance to progress, and they found them hard to talk about without sounding like complainants and risking their reputations as 'team players'.

Women want more opportunity, but women with children particularly feel conflicted about asking for more leadership opportunities when they don't always see how they would be able to 'deliver' if they got them, given the current systems of work. Systems that have not evolved from the default model of intensive time-commitments, set seasonal demands and fast tracking of those people who are seen as insiders, committed and loyal to the club above all else.

A lack of innovation in work practices has meant that women who could and would step up are inadvertently 'benched'. The result is a pool of latent talent within the game and a career brand that is potentially underwhelming to high performing senior women.

Men are also frustrated, and cautious on the topic of women in the game. For some, the shift in their own awareness and intention to respect and include women seems futile in the face of ongoing scrutiny and comment – a situation that invites reluctance.

Men seem to be feeling that they are not preventing the progress of women. On the whole, they feel that they are in fact open to change and they see value in equality for men and women – but their attitude alone is not enough to create the required change.

On the whole, men approached the discussion from the perspective of how to assist women to 'fit in' to the existing environment, rather than how to change that environment. They wanted to be fair, open and inclusive, but the vision for how that could be achieved was limited.



Some men felt that there wasn't really a strong understanding of the effort, grit, resilience, sacrifice and at times aggression it has taken for them to succeed in football, traits that were possibly seen as male (particularly aggression) and as 'must haves' for any football leader.

The result is a philosophy that if women can compete in this existing environment, equality is theirs for the taking, rather than a philosophy that the best leadership for modern football might mean something different and more contemporary altogether.

Part of what keeps the status quo seems to be about the difficulty in describing what the inequity problem is in blunt terms. The experiences of frustration that women described were largely about exclusionary power dynamics rather than overt discrimination. Not many people saw football as the old school 'boys club' it may once have been, but almost without exception participants described a 'blokey culture' where positional power, hierarchy, toughness and physicality are commonly favoured over other kinds of power such as intellectual capital and off field experience. There was an extremely strong and consistent narrative about the importance of 'earning your stripes' as a leader in the football world, but participants acknowledged that the 'stripes' that were most revered were often earned in the field of play, leaving the myth of meritocracy exposed.

It seemed comparatively easy for women to talk about a concrete situation of discrimination, an incident, or a structural impediment to progress, but much harder to explicitly expose a problem in 'the way things are around here'. Participants talked about small incremental biases that were no big deal in isolation, equivocal, or hard to quantify. They described feeling that they were 'not patronised overtly' or had not 'experienced negativity directly', but they nevertheless wore an awareness of the deeper stereotypes, expectations and values that left them on the outer. The complexity in raising such frustrations grew further for women who found lots to like in their environment, their roles and their colleagues. For some, it has become easier to collude, assimilate and to demonstrate similar behaviours to the men in order to fit in, than it would have been to try and explain an instinct or a knowing without 'hard evidence'.

Such compliance and collusion seems to have been rewarded in some cases by tacit inclusion, described in statements such as 'she's a good girl, she gets it', and 'she's one of the boys'. While this 'acceptance' was highly valued by some, not least because they felt genuine warmth and affection for their male counterparts, others saw it as a form of subordination that made them feel 'immediately smaller' and less like it was possible to hold their identity as a woman and truly belong in the football environment.



On several occasions throughout the interviews, female participants pre-empted the description of a concern or a complaint with comments such as 'I'm no feminist, but...' and 'I'm not into bra burning, but...' and 'I don't really get the feminist thing, but...', comments that suggest a resistance and distancing from the idea of being publicly pro-women.

WHAT WE NEED TO RESPOND TO

The research unveiled a series of structural and cultural parameters that exist within the football industry that serve to maintain the status quo.

In order to change these parameters, the club needs to consider how to respond in a number of areas, namely:

- The physical and symbolic visibility of women vis-à-vis men in and through the club.
- The way people are recruited into the game and developed in and across roles.
- The way the story of the game and women and men within it is told.
- The lack of flexibility and innovation in organisational structure and practice.
- The way performance is measured and the limited knowledge about how diversity can drive performance.
- The deep unconscious biases about gender roles and capabilities.

The analysis of the commentary, sentiments and observations of participants has been distilled into nine distinct themes for review.



THEME ONE: AN EQUITY MINDSET

Sport has been a heavily masculine culture for over a hundred years in Australia. The roles of women and girls in male dominated sporting organisations are commonly inferior and subordinate, with gender stereotyping and biases maintaining the status quo. The issue is traditional, cultural and systemic, and has been reinforced through symbolism, narratives, recruitment, networks, unconscious and conscious bias, stereotypes, ignorance, nepotism and just plain discrimination.

Many participants spoke about how so much of what is promoted in sport is masculine, or for men, and people within that environment do not see that as an issue. One person said:

"It's still a domain for men to show that they're real men or what they think men should be."

The alternative is a genuine mindset that men and women, boys and girls, share sport.

Such changed norms can begin symbolically – simple things like considerations of the gender representation in the branding imagery associated with sport, or having the same size trophies for men and women; holding women's games on the same schedule as men's in league football, and 'prime time' slots being rotated between boys and girls contests in junior footy; setting expectations that Mums will also run skills and drills and Dads will 'help' or organise things; ensuring women's sport is not played on the inferior fields, and not having men's numbers on guernseys ranging from 1-50 and then starting women's numbers from 51 (women can be number 1 also).

Comments from participants included:

"I really didn't think much about it until it started to irritate me that my daughter would regularly get the dud court for her game and the resource allocation was unfair. She is super-competitive but doesn't get the same opportunities."

"This is actually the first year in 10 years that my shirt has fit, because it is a shirt made for a woman!"

THEME ONE:
**AN EQUITY MINDSET
CONTINUED**



"You know you have made it as a woman in footy when you have learnt to stand up and pee, because there is no alternative offered at the grounds."

Even still in the players' rooms of the MCG, Australia's most iconic sports ground, there is no provision for separate facilities for men and women. Such symbols of exclusion may not ever have been conscious, but they demonstrate an embedded lack of thought and the normality of an attitude or expectation that women would be in the margin.

Such representations have significant flow-on value in regard to respect between the participants, administrators and officials, and respect is the value that underpins the notion of 'everyone's game'.

To develop an equity mindset in an organisation, diversity and inclusion should be adopted and driven as core values of the organisation, and the game. Many interviewees believed that it is not possible to quarantine areas like gender, Indigenous, disability or multicultural issues, and that diversity and inclusion should be an ethos across organisations if change was truly desired.

"When people currently ask how do you engage with women, we point them to the women's round or a women's fan group and that's just rubbish. We need to take a broader and more integrated approach from the business from the top down in everything we do that actually engages women and considers women in a meaningful way. The game needs to get more sophisticated than that in terms of how we engage women."

Women (and diversity more broadly) have to be part of the fabric of the organisation from board level and throughout in order to make equity part of the organisational DNA, rather than what has been seen to date as 'strategic window dressing'.

A deficit approach, where gender equity and women are seen as an 'issue', a problem to fix, is limited; diversity needs to be viewed from a different perspective focused firmly on what the contribution, knowledge, skill and assets women can bring to the equation.

Courageous leadership and sincere commitment is required to shift the culture of football to one where women are truly embraced as equals. Participants stated:

"Everything they do needs to have a gender lens applied to it if they are serious about it working – essentially we need to ask ourselves are we creating a game and a workplace where everyone can participate equally?"

"We need to start from a point where we acknowledge that there are women out there that can do any of these roles in sport from the bottom to the top, but it's a matter of whether there is a will and openness to actually consider them."

THEME ONE:
**AN EQUITY MINDSET
CONTINUED**



“We’ve gone beyond women’s round and women’s programs, we should be judged on everyday life not Valentine’s Day.”

Many sports seem cautious and hesitant to act on ‘women’s issues’. Perhaps this is in part due to the topic being so deep-rooted and complicated culturally that it ends up in the ‘too hard basket’. Perhaps such underwhelming engagement is also a result of the fear of getting it wrong under the zealous watch of the media.

However, acknowledging that a sport has issues around gender equity and inclusion is not a declaration of failure – it is recognition of reality. The AFL is not alone in this; many sporting codes struggle with the same issues predicated around their similar traditions, cultures and systems. Indeed, business and wider society still grapple with these same challenges, something evidenced empirically in many sources.

Gender bias was seen to permeate just about everything in football and that it is complex, intangible and particularly hard to describe. Some participants said that actually acknowledging the bias was the greatest challenge for the AFL, as ‘they don’t like to admit that it exists; there is real fear around this at a personal and organisational level’.

Before change, first comes acknowledgment. Only with an open recognition of the scope and shape of the issue can adequate plans be implemented that tackle the issue head on. The alternative is well-intentioned ‘shortcuts’ that temporarily alleviate tension, before attention and resources are subsumed under another more pressing issue.

“The men of sport have luxuriated in the label of egalitarianism forever. If we are really going to keep using this label, it comes with a consequence.”

In some ways, the AFL has become a model for contemporary, professional sport in Australia, but this has not been matched with contemporary leadership on gender equity.



THEME TWO: THE RIGHT KIND OF SUPPORT FOR WOMEN

SUPPORTIVE DISCOURSE

The problem with traditional notions of supporting women in football is that they have emphasised stereotypes that women 'need help' that may actually work against women. Women have inadvertently been cast as victims, and therefore men as perpetrators, and this in some cases has generated resentment, vigilance and backlash from men, and withdrawal from women.

Both equity and support for women are fairly readily outwardly portrayed and espoused, but a deep understanding and acceptance of what is culturally 'normal' seems to be getting in the way.

Some of the problem is about the high value placed on a work style within football that rewards volume of effort and an absence of critical commentary; grinding through and fitting in without whinging or 'carrying on', not 'putting your head up' or talking about yourself, and doing whatever it takes, whenever you are told to, together – a style that can easily position women as not aligned to the culture if those women are balancing commitments outside of work for example, or if those women attempt to raise concerns about equity. Culture can quickly silence anyone.

Most women interviewed in this research do not like to talk about being a woman in football. They do not want to be distinguished by their gender, largely because they feel with a degree of conviction that they will be taken less seriously for doing so. One person surmised:

"It's kind of like when you were a kid and you were up way past your bedtime watching TV, but somehow your Mum and Dad hadn't noticed you yet. You love it, but you feel like you are kind of getting away with it. As if you are going to say anything!"

Women are reluctant to make it personal, and for men, it isn't personal. The resultant lack of motivation has left a canyon of silence on gender equity.

Leaders throughout this work told us that what should have filled the gap is indeed support, but support for the absolute normalisation of a discourse that is about women and merit, not about women and need.

THEME TWO: THE RIGHT KIND OF SUPPORT FOR WOMEN CONTINUED



Support needs to be transformational not transactional. It needs to reference structural, systemic and cultural practices and it needs to be led by a very different kind of conversation.

It is clear that numerous forums have been created to support and celebrate women, sometimes referring to the amazing achievements of women in the game, 'against the tide' so to speak. The pioneer label often raises caution (and resentment) from the women themselves, perhaps in part because of the fear of being a 'tall poppy', standing out or presenting as different within their workplace, but more so because 'gendering' achievements is seen to diminish the other merits and skills that women have needed to have to succeed in their field. The achievements described are rarely unique per se (albeit still admirable); what is rare is that women made such achievements in a highly male dominated environment.

There is also discourse that positions football as an industry as tremendously unique, and that the slow progress on gender equity is a factor of many immovable forces (demographics, history, traditions and rituals) rather than a result of choices by leaders to act or not act. Others felt that the industry was not unusual in a way that would prohibit progress, it just has very specific cultural nuances, and the 'special' narrative was recruited in service of the lazy status quo.

There was a clear sense that women in football often feel supported, and many 'close in', intimate conversations in support of women do happen in football, both between genders and within genders. These were, however, most often described as private, offline discussions, rather than public, everyday discussions, suggesting sensitivity of the subject matter and the need for care and caution.

As one participant stated:

"I do feel trusted and supported as a woman, but that is what is happening inside my relationship with my boss. I don't hear any conversation at all about women being trusted and supported in the organisation outside of his office."

Women (and men without an AFL level playing background) described a welcoming, open and friendly environment across football when they remained in early career positions, but as one participant stated:

"It starts to change when you press against the established power – that gets resisted strongly; leadership is less acceptable when women start getting the rewards."

The most supportive commentary from the club is not that which reinforces the defeating stereotype that women are unusual in football, but that which normalises and encourages female leadership, not because 'this is the time

THEME TWO: THE RIGHT KIND OF SUPPORT FOR WOMEN CONTINUED



for women', but because if the AFL wants to stay competitive there is an immediate and pressing business case for getting better at leadership, which means getting better at diversity and attracting the best talent for jobs.

SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION

Both men and women throughout this research demonstrated a thirst for more practical education about what to do in support of better gender equity outcomes.

There is a case for more direct educational support for women and men to understand unconscious biases (beliefs and values gained from family, culture and a lifetime of experiences that heavily influence how we view and evaluate both others and ourselves) and how they manifest in our thinking and actions, so that what currently sits uncomfortably as 'a feeling' about stereotypes and inequity can be articulated and therefore addressed.

There was also a call for more education about how to deal with 'awkward stuff'.

Several participants spoke about the relevance of sexuality and the discomfort they felt about the possibility and reality of sexual relationships, particularly between players and female staff that they feared could disrupt team dynamics and get in the way of performance.

There was a concern expressed about it being difficult to manage performance accountability for the woman who 'bridged the roles' of employee and girlfriend; blunt and direct feedback has been the norm in clubs, and the sentiment expressed was that if women are choosing to 'get among it' in a football career, they are giving implicit permission for the sometimes macho, bullish, semi-crude, dressing room-style culture to prevail – but this was separate and different to the kind of styles adopted with other women in their lives, particularly someone else's wife or girlfriend.

Moreover there was tension associated with the idea of sexual relationships between men and women that did not result in relationships, instead resulting in a quick loss of face and disrespect for the woman. It was noted that it was 'close to impossible for the woman to be taken seriously' thereafter.

Men talked about trying to manage 'the risk' historically by having 'the talk', (particularly to attractive women) to ensure that they understood and were prepared for the environment, but they also knew they were walking a very fine line on discrimination by even raising the topic. Men are unsure about what is OK to say when they want to 'do the right thing'.

THEME TWO: THE RIGHT KIND OF SUPPORT FOR WOMEN CONTINUED



It seems there is a substantial opportunity to further educate men and women in football about gendered attitudes, and to offer consistent education on how to have hard conversations. This includes education about how to voice fears and values in confident, productive and ethical ways that lead to equality and change rather than attempt to manage 'risk' or talk about women in association with 'problems'.

It was felt that further education on what it actually means to be a competent football professional would be highly valued; a refocusing on 'what it takes', that moves beyond the romance and high currency of having had an on field career, or latent notions that men will naturally be better.

"We can be our own worst enemy. Women always think men can do the job better...we undervalue or underestimate our own competence all the time, and this ends up with us doing 'extreme apprenticeships' in footy that involve twice the workload and twice the results, earning less money trying to prove ourselves and still feeling like imposters. If a man thinks he has 6 out of 10 'ticks' on a job description, he rates himself enough to have a go. A woman needs 10 out of 10."

Other people referred to 'relevant experience myths' that perpetuated the idea that only those who were 'home grown' and had come 'from within' were truly fit to lead. It was noted:

"Somehow we have got our heads around the idea that a kid from another continent who has grown up kicking a different shaped ball, on a different sized ground and has been coached in completely different skills, or not even coached at all, can make a champion player...but we can't see how a woman could administer or coach the game. Really?"

SUPPORT THROUGH COLLEGIALLY

Central to the culture of football clubs is the value of teamwork. Indeed it is a huge part of the attraction of sport for many people. Many participants in this research noted how much they loved the camaraderie and passion of football, the closeness of the groups they worked with and the sense of being 'in it together'.

It is this teamwork value that can underpin a reconceptualisation of support as more than care and protection for the unfamiliar minority, to 'shepherding'; guiding women to get to know 'the way things operate', including cultural norms, unspoken hierarchies of respect and everyday organisational practices.

THEME TWO: THE RIGHT KIND OF SUPPORT FOR WOMEN CONTINUED



One participant reflected that men needed to help women 'get it'; the explicit and implicit ways that footy clubs work, but sometimes there was a quiet caution that women might be overly vigilant, 'hoity-toity trailblazers' who start upsetting things; things that are much loved like banter, repartee and having a bit of a dig at each other.

For a woman coming into football, having a trusted source who can open doors to opportunity, invite in, include and enable is extraordinarily beneficial. This seems to be the case in boardrooms or change rooms. In football however, it seems that you are 'inside the tent', or you are way, way out.

One participant described a positive experience of collegiality that made all the difference:

"He made it easy for me. He provided a physical guide – where to stand or sit, where people left their gear on game day, where players and coaches position themselves in meetings so I didn't get in the way, he would 'shepherd' me to the right spot within the inner sanctum with some small gesture of warmth and connection which made me feel less self-conscious. I would always look for him for a nod or an instruction at first. He also took the time to explain what was likely to happen next in the early days, so I could predict ahead and be ready..."

...He made the effort to talk about how respect was demonstrated between people, the rituals and the banter, he told me the stories of the club and the people in it, and he gave me a heads up about never being late for the coach! Just the knowledge of systems and practices made a massive difference to me being able to feel normal. He didn't make a fuss or single me out; he just told me what I needed to know and took the time to have a chat. He was a brilliant teammate."

In contrast, another participant shared an example of feeling 'killed by kindness' as she tried to assimilate into a club environment as part of a very small minority of women. The over-saturation of empathy and 'checking' whether she was coping or needed anything alerted her very early to the fact that she was not only considered almost 'odd' as a woman here, her gender was also the first thing people were relating to about her, it was something glaringly visible that was overshadowing what she would have liked to be talking to her colleagues about – the job at hand. Even though she could see the attention was well-intended, as a new incumbent she felt like 'a freak show' – quickly wondering if she was in the wrong place.

THEME TWO: THE RIGHT KIND OF SUPPORT FOR WOMEN CONTINUED



SUPPORT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL MENTORING

Participants consistently referenced the need and desire for strong mentors for the industry; people who could demonstrate leadership excellence first and foremost. People who could see and open curiosity in others, people who could ask 'who would you like to be and why?' and people for whom a person's identity or capability was not foreclosed on gender.

Respondents wanted to work with mentors to emphasise skill, character and potential. The kind of support that women preference was support to deepen competence and confidence as professionals and leaders, rather than support in the form of talking to other professionals about any personal gender equity challenges they may face. Women, like men, want to know what the best of the best are doing; they want to compete and prosper in their careers.

The entrenched narrative that footy is a 'man's game' – tough, combative and competitive, and thus its leaders need to be ruthless and bloody-minded, is starting to be seen as outdated by some men and women. Both want to understand what contemporary leadership needs to look like.

Women spoke about wanting support to work out a strong and influential style of leadership that did not have to rely on aggressive feedback. As one person put it:

"I don't want to 'man up' in order to lead any more than I want to wear a suit so that I can match it with the blokes. Eventually I'm starting to find my own style, verbally and physically. Yes I 'give it back', but I don't need to provoke and aggress to do that, I worked out that I get more respect by just demonstrating confidence, passion and self-assuredness. I don't subordinate myself. I don't curtsy. That's not my brand of leadership."

It was clear that both mentoring and business coaching was seen as one of the most logical long term projects designed to create a pipeline of talented successors for industry leaders. And it is cross-industry leaders who seem to be the most coveted mentors; people who are already at the top of their game. Women want to hear and be inspired by stories of success from within industry, not least so that they might recognise the possibilities within themselves.

THEME TWO: THE RIGHT KIND OF SUPPORT FOR WOMEN CONTINUED



WOMEN TO WOMEN SUPPORT

Many women spoke about the exceptional support, maturity and trust they had found in the women-to-women networks that had been formally and informally established throughout their careers. It was here that they were most apt to explore gender equity issues that were challenging them on a personal and professional level. It was also in the company of other senior women, in relatively small and familiar groups that women were and would be willing to express their emotions:

"I would have loved to talk things through knowing it was safe to do so. Somewhere to raise my self-doubts and hear someone else's story."

"I really needed connection and a sense that I wasn't imagining it, maybe I just wasn't up to it – not good enough."

There was also a call for women to find their voice on equity issues too, in a clear, professional way that does not create a firestorm but creates a climate of listening and taking action:

"It has been such a relief when I have heard other women speak up, especially on the tricky topics."



THEME THREE: RECOGNISING THE STRESS OF THE STATUS QUO

One of the consequences of not having a 'weight of numbers' is that women have often felt isolated in their professional lives – something that even the most resilient women noted does eventually take its toll.

The isolation may not be in a physical sense, but the psychological sense of being alone in your experiences, endeavours or views can become taxing for some people. One participant reflected on just how drained she had felt managing her 'separateness':

"It can become a real focal point of your professional life if you are not, or don't want to be, in with the boys. You don't ever relax. It's not like a vigilance so much, but just a constant awareness that you are different. You look for ways to get out of things sometimes. If you are not careful you drift to the back of the room. Actually if you push to the front and start doing well that can be even more isolating! For anyone to be their best in their job and perform requires energy, but then you rest. You need connection to get through and renew. It's the connection bit."

Many women were at pains to reiterate that they really liked, admired and respected their male colleagues, and that they liked their jobs too, but most did not truly feel 'at ease' or fully confident in predominantly male company in the way they did in the company of mixed gender groups; something they felt did or could 'hold them back a bit'.

"Look they are a great bunch of blokes and I trust them. I just can't explain – I don't want to play the victim card but there is a 'white noise' about being a woman. I just sense it."

Women also valued the efforts men extended to include them, but the bottom line is that football is still very much a male environment, and being an isolated woman in amongst it can wear down resilience. One consequence of feeling psychologically isolated is that people may become unwilling to risk being differentiated any further, thus foreclosing on those elements of professional performance that require taking a risk, exposing a view, or challenging a position. The result can be a self-perpetuating, self-doubting, even self-absorbed containment where people do not put themselves in a position to be criticised. Put simply, this type of isolation is seen as 'added baggage' in an already competitive elite environment with limited opportunities.

THEME THREE: RECOGNISING THE STRESS OF THE STATUS QUO CONTINUED



The politics of elitism in sport are not specific to gender. Elitism in this context is the attitude that the opinions of men who had the distinctive physical and mental attributes that allowed them to play at the elite level of the game, are intrinsically of higher worth. It is not uncommon in sports environments to see that the revered ex-player has greater influence or authority than others or that his views will hold the most weight. Physical prowess and skill may still hold sway and extraordinary on field talent can be appreciated over other kinds of talent, including broad ranging leadership skills. Obviously this risks concentrating power in the hands of a limited number of people, an 'in-group' where unconscious bias and discrimination, albeit unintended, are more likely to occur.

For some, such unconscious bias has resulted in 'gritted teeth determination to succeed'. For others, the vulnerability that they have felt (where vulnerability is not well accepted) has remained as a silent disempowerment.

Some women spoke about their never ending need to prove themselves, going over and above what was required and putting in more time, because they felt they had to be unequivocally better, unquestionably good. As one participant stated:

"I sometimes think we have created a bunch of extreme over achievers. Women who are over responsible in their roles and who don't know how to say no."

Another participant commented:

"I feel somehow that you have to fight to be seen, at least in the way you want to be seen."

"You are every woman in the world when you are the only woman."

There were issues of overt discrimination that were discussed within the interviews that were beyond 'white noise'. Some of these had not been dealt with historically, although the more contemporary examples given had each been managed effectively. One example of the experience of discrimination given was as follows:

"His attitude to me was something I sensed first. I think he viewed me as a groupie. I got the sense of being an intruder in his eyes, not welcome. When he actually said it, I felt an overwhelming revulsion and anxiety inside. And even after all these years I had to think about whether I would say anything."

Male and female participants spoke about the football culture requiring a person to be bold but not too bold, because if you overstep the mark or overstep your 'rank' you are not easily forgiven. Reputations were seen to be 'earned and lost quickly' and to involve lots of generalisations that stick. Some

THEME THREE:
RECOGNISING
THE STRESS OF
THE STATUS QUO
CONTINUED



of the much loved banter centres around 'not getting ahead of yourself' and while the intention is lighthearted, 'putting your head too far up' is not well tolerated at all. One leader commented:

"The way forward is to focus on developing organisational cultures that don't encourage the squashing of other people to get ahead generally. Survival of the fittest is something that needs to stay on field on the whole, because that mentality quickly becomes domination and ridicule."

Men and women who thrive in football are generally resilient; the questions raised here by participants are about how to create an environment where that resilience and energy can be adequately channelled into performance, rather than into the management of inequity.



THEME FOUR: WOMEN'S BRAND IN FOOTBALL

Participation numbers for women and girls are massive in sport. Women hold up half of the national pride and medal tally in international sporting competition, and women are increasingly big consumers of AFL football in many ways. Yet until very recently, there remained an extraordinary under-representation and narrow representation of women in the public story of sport; it is an area of significant opportunity in creating gender balance across the game.

Men tell the story of sport, on the whole. This may not be a barrier to gender equity within a football club per se, but neither is it likely to change the score on engaging women.

With a few notable exceptions, print media, TV and radio broadcasts are very male centric.

"The age-old retort that people don't want to listen to women talk about footy is just an excuse. It is what people have become acculturated to and the broadcasters keep doing what sells, like making sequels to the same movie."

"The position that broadcasters take that they have to wait for demand is lazy. Men control the market and the structural inequity. They can also control the change."

"Nobody really has any impetus to change. It works well now – there are so many talk shows with the same basic formula, rolling out the same basic stuff that appeals mostly to male consumers – a verbal punch-on where people try to get the upper hand at the other's expense."

"The demand for analysis and the technical insight is so strong now that there is an obvious skew to ex-players, and therefore men. That's probably the main reason men dominate footy media."

Interestingly, almost every participant in the research dismissed some of the more deliberate and pointed 'mongrel commentary' seen from time to time in media portrayals of women associated with football.

"The crudely old fashioned comments are not mainstream and not especially appealing to men or women anymore."

THEME FOUR: WOMEN'S BRAND IN FOOTBALL CONTINUED



"It's just an unreal portrayal of a locker room mentality that is decades old and sounds like it. It's an 'acted behaviour' of lewdness designed to provoke and politicise. No one takes it seriously."

"The only risk is that sometimes the commentators hold powerful positions in football alongside their media lives, and that can legitimise comments as football industry comments when they are not. It can go both ways though, and those are the same people who can tell a more modern story."

"Something like (x) is deliberately light and funny – an entertainment brand that has to be balanced with the responsibility that comes with the football brand."

The media position was something that was considered as largely 'out of our hands', although some participants were more dogged in insisting that the AFL and the club needed to lead the way and continually drive the issue or it would continue to lag.

Several people mentioned the way the story of women and football was told in branding collateral including websites, noting the welcome change of late, and suggestions for further improvement included the opportunity for clear, written commitments and positions on gender on websites, such as diversity policies, benchmarks and reporting.

The most obvious portrayals of women that participants saw as serving inequity were threefold:

1. That women who are involved in sport are 'odd' or unusual examples of women.
2. That the most admired thing about a woman is her physical attractiveness.
3. That the most important role for a woman is the role of mother.

The odd or weird portrayal of women in sport was described in several ways:

"I remember being asked if there were any special bras women needed to wear to take a chest mark, like it was so unnatural..."

"Nobody ever makes the comment to (male journalists who have not played AFL) but I've heard people say to (female journalists) several times things like 'I don't know if you've ever played on the half back (x) but...' it's just patronising."

"I hear people say that most women are 'too emotional' as a rule to be involved in the cut and thrust of competition. Seriously, has anyone had a look at the footage of the coaches' boxes across the weekend? WOMEN are too emotional?? It's mind boggling."

THEME FOUR:
WOMEN'S BRAND
IN FOOTBALL
CONTINUED



The way a (young) woman looks is seemingly still very much part of her 'brand'. Physicality is capital in sport, and for men this plays out primarily as admiration of physical strength, skill and talent, but talent was seen as secondary to a focus on physical beauty or sexual attractiveness in women.

Some participants felt this portrayal of female capital still holds strong throughout the industry.

The problem with representations of women's physical attractiveness as centrally important 'capital' is that it perpetuates the idea that women can be taken less seriously in other ways that are more relevant to their professional talent. Both men and women also found this to be complex territory in the workplace.

"I have no problem telling a man he's looking sharp but I think twice and second guess myself if it's a woman. Really not sure what is OK now. Just, well...awkward."

"I feel that the way some girls present themselves physically is really symbolic and they are dressing to the stereotypes that they say they want to avoid. Perhaps they enjoy the sense of power and legitimisation that brings them, but it makes it tricky all round."

"Women, like men, need to simply control the impression they give. It's about business appropriateness. I tell my staff to dress for the job they want, not the job they have."

"I just cringe thinking 'mate, do you realise how short term that is in this joint? Don't do it to yourself'."

"I want to be feminine and actually I want to be attractive let's face it, but I don't want this to be what I am known for."

The other very strong part of 'women's brand' was the mother role. While participants identified significantly more tolerance for this aspect of the way women were portrayed, seeing it as an affectionate portrayal and something highly admired, there was some comment made about the comparative emphasis between women and men in parenting roles.

"How often do you hear a man being introduced and the number of kids he has being referenced? Think about that for women. It's still seen as my primary role."

"Women, and particularly mothers, are probably just better nurturers and supporters, so they gravitate to those sorts of roles."

THEME FOUR:
**WOMEN'S BRAND
IN FOOTBALL**
CONTINUED



"Being a mother is a great conversation starter professionally, but it's actually where the conversation stops too."

The brand that women wanted to have, and indeed the reason so many women choose to get involved in sport in the first place, is one where they are portrayed as strong, confident, willing, talented, passionate and hardworking team players. Sporting careers, in all forms, have always been a platform for women's identity in the same way they are for men.



THEME FIVE: THE ROLE OF MEN AS LEARNERS, PARTNERS AND LEADERS

Many women who participated in this project lamented the fact that much of the impetus for change to date on gender equity in sport has been left to women.

"It is still women sitting around a table talking to other women about how we can change this."

Male and female participants alike reinforced the notion that women cannot be the only ones leading the charge, as not only will it be seen as though they are pushing a 'special interests' barrow, relying on women to change the status quo will be futile because the site of organisational power in Australia sits firmly in the hands of men, and this is particularly the case in elite sport.

Men quite clearly have a crucial role to play in helping to lead change in sport and society by taking on and promoting the message of gender equality. Without exception, the women interviewed intrinsically recognised this, with comments such as:

"We've got to have men on board because at the moment they are the decision makers and without them nothing is going to change."

"Men are in the leadership positions at the AFL at the moment so they have to believe that women have a genuine role to play. Because they are in the positions of power they need to create the opportunities and the structures and the culture that allow women to succeed."

Most women agreed that men should be engaged in a more structured, deliberate and strategic way so they really have the opportunity to understand what is needed. There was a strong impression from interviewees that work to date had not gone far enough to really change men's views on the value of diversity, and the consequence of this was a perception that the game's position on gender equity was not much more than lip-service.

It is important to highlight that women did not think that men sit around the boardroom table plotting how they can prevent women from reaching

THEME FIVE: THE ROLE OF MEN AS LEARNERS, PARTNERS AND LEADERS CONTINUED



leadership positions. To the contrary, many stories were shared of 'terrific men in footy committed to gender equality' and 'men who feel strongly about this and are throwing their full force behind leadership for women'.

The belief that most men are well-meaning when they say 'women will get there eventually, they just need support', was expressed often but the frustration from people was palpable, with one female leader saying she felt like screaming 'NO THEY WON'T, have a look at the evidence!'.

The Diversity Council of Australia reports that if no specific intervention is made to current practices and approaches on gender equity, it would take about 177 years to reach gender equity in our workplaces; a figure that is a stark reality check for people who would prefer things to happen naturally.

"Men need to be shown the cold hard numbers that show nothing has changed in 30 years. Then logic might say to them if this is the case why would anything be different in the next 30 years."

For others, habits and beliefs in male leaders were believed to be very entrenched and hard to shift.

"For many in the football community they have come up through the system and if they get anything new or different it makes them feel quite uncomfortable."

"It's not something that comes easily or is very comfortable, it's not that they won't try, they just don't know how."

This point was reinforced by a gender expert who commented that even though people might intellectually understand the case for change – that is gender diverse organisations perform better – the view clashes with the 'gender schema' that men hold, which means it is difficult to embrace the case for change at an emotional level.

"What we're asking people to do is to move to a model where leadership is shared between men and women. We're asking them to go directly against the gender and power schema they have, which is difficult to do. To do this, they have to unfreeze their beliefs around men and women and try and move onto a different model."

This comment highlights the importance of the need to listen to and consider the male perspective; what men fear about change, what issues concern them and how such concerns might be alleviated.

A part of men's role in addressing gender equity in sport is to be prepared to be learners; curious about the issue from multiple perspectives not just the political or social justice standpoints, and willing to accept the very nature and depth of the partnership required to forge change.

THEME FIVE: THE ROLE OF MEN AS LEARNERS, PARTNERS AND LEADERS CONTINUED



BREAKING INTO THE POWER NETWORKS

Some respondents were not so sure that a lack of understanding or a fear of the unknown were the main barriers to change, suggesting that the male dominant structures and cultures were quite deliberate.

"Decisions are still made by elite, powerful men who like to control things."

"If they really want to change they have to have a good hard look at themselves, and recognise that it has something to do with them."

"Keeping people in their current 'boxes' is a way that men can say they have done everything they can, while they haven't really done anything. They have just kept the status quo."

"This organisation is built on being male and built on a culture of masculinity that means excluding women, that's what they're about. It won't change unless there is serious commitment to it and a recognition that the position isn't 'why can't more women fit into our environment' – but instead – 'we've got to change our environment'."

Several people made the observation that those in the seats of power do not want to give up their influential positions, and this was more evident the further up football hierarchies one looked.

"It's hard for a person in a position of power to want to give up that power for someone else. To start to implement change means that at the end of the day someone in that room will need to step aside for a woman."

Many people echoed the sentiment that change will require deeply committed, powerful and decent men to take the message of change and gender diversity to other men. As one person said:

"Change will occur when men stand with us and say women are no different to us, they are just part of the team. By men saying things in support of women it might be the only way other men will listen."

"We need to get at the long term power brokers of football. Men who have been around for 20-30 years – the proud, old-school heroes need to say that they believe in this out loud and not just give a quiet helping hand to a select few behind the scenes. That is the biggest network women could have."

This is the strategy that sits behind the 'Male Champions of Change' model introduced by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick. The men involved with this project (leaders of Australian corporate industry and business) are making a commitment to action, saying 'the time for rhetoric is over' and 'this issue is not beyond our intellectual capability to solve' and 'excuses are just that'.

THEME FIVE: THE ROLE OF MEN AS LEARNERS, PARTNERS AND LEADERS CONTINUED



Each male champion of change is being bold in setting targets and working within their organisations to meet these targets. However, perhaps an equally high impact role these men have undertaken is as strong national advocates for gender equity, a position which is fundamentally changing the debate on this issue. Many participants thought that a similar male champions approach for sport would be very effective.

"It's up to average men stepping up and playing a role by saying it's not about me being bad or good, or being defensive, it's understanding that sexism and inequality is giving all men a bad name and recognising it's time to change it."

"At the moment men are playing on the fairway and women are in the bushes. To get women back out on the fairway we need strong male leadership in sport."

"Men need to reflect on what it is going to take for their daughters to grow up differently, and once they recognise the stark possibilities ahead, they need to make it happen as colleagues to the women around them today and as leaders for the women of tomorrow."

There was no shortage of excellent suggestions on how men could support and champion gender diversity initiatives. These included a 'panel pledge' concept, where male leaders advise conference organisers that they will not speak at events where there is not a good representation of women also speaking. Or establishing working groups or shadow committees run by a board member which are comprised of women doing an activity that the board would normally do, thus giving these women good experience and exposure to what it is like at the top.

Another person suggested:

"Men introducing aspiring younger women to their networks; men committing to opening up their database and introducing women through it; creating 'hot jobs' in their organisations that will lead to the CEO role by identifying jobs that can lead to this position and making sure there are women in those roles."

Men play the pivotal role in promoting diversity in their organisation, in creating a culture where gender is normalised, and where everyone understands that 'this is the way we do business'. As one woman concluded:

"It's really up to men to engage the hearts and minds of their largely male management cadre."



THEME SIX: THE VISIBILITY AND VOICE OF WOMEN

The visibility of women – a weight of numbers – was a recurrent theme raised among participants in this research. For some, populating the game with more women was a conscious intervention ‘to make it harder to objectify a few’. For others it was about providing visible role models for young, aspiring leaders to look up and see ahead of them in the game, and for others still it was specific to representing the best possible level playing field from which talent could spring.

There are in fact many women employed within the AFL in diverse roles, and at first glance, there is certainly a strong and growing female presence within the game. This was noted as a visible and welcome change in the last decade, but the numbers taper off significantly when it comes to both senior roles and ‘non-traditional’ roles (such as coaches, umpires or operations).

The modeling that those successful women do provide (for other women and for men) is substantial.

“I started at the club and I met (x) working in an operations role. I had no idea it was possible until that point, but from then on it is what I wanted to do.”

“One young person said to me, ‘I am really glad you are here. When you bring your kid into work, I feel like I can make it work too and stay here when I am a mother’. That’s massive for me.”

“(x) allows me to confidently and authentically ‘talk’ to female leadership within our club. The fact that she is here, and doing well, helps me speak about it in real terms not just as a concept. It makes it real.”

“If I hadn’t seen (x) cutting through and finding a pathway, I would have probably just stumbled along. Her example was critically important.”

“To be honest I had never really had a female colleague. Not a peer anyway. I had no idea how similar all us blokes were in our thinking until she pointed that out.”

Some participants spoke about the current orientation in football towards the idea of ‘natural’ jobs for men and women; a division which saw men in visible management roles that required assertiveness and confidence and women in

THEME SIX: THE VISIBILITY AND VOICE OF WOMEN CONTINUED



support-based roles that relied more heavily on nurturing, development and organisation – and often saw women in the background.

However, it was noted that the actual character traits of successful leaders were perhaps not especially well understood or considered, particularly those traits that involved influencing skills, relationships and partnering, and the gendered divisions were somewhat erroneous when such skills were unpacked.

The bulk of participants did feel there was strong symbolic merit in having capable women in the most visible roles in the game.

“Someone needs to be bold and put a woman into the coaching ranks – that would be the nutcracker.”

“The real change will come when we can see a woman actually running a club. It’s not that they could do it any better, but it would just change the perception that they can’t. It will just take a couple to change everything.”

As deep as the respect ran for the existing ‘pioneer’ women in AFL, there was also a belief that things would remain tricky for the few women in leadership positions where they were a small minority.

“It is the visible collective we need to get right, rather than luminaries in isolation. We need unity.”

“We definitely would benefit from more women on boards and as executives in the AFL, but there needs to be a quorum to make progress.”

“If the woman is solo on the board, she really doesn’t want to be ‘banging the pink drum’ very often.”

The representation and visibility of women in associated, non-employed roles within football was also raised, with several people noting the possibilities of ‘contemporising’ the social and business networks within football, such as the Coterie group and ‘Tigers at Law’, so that professional women had ways to associate with the Richmond Football Club that did not necessarily involve a direct service provision. This also allows women to go to the game with someone else, rather than turning up alone if they wish to get more involved.

In addition, social offerings that could appeal more to a mixed audience were considered important, rather than functions where the due consideration given to the presence of women was to ‘add champagne to the drinks menu and tone down the comedian’.

Some respondents spoke about better use of the resources at hand rather than only focusing on bringing in new women, suggesting that the presence of senior women from corporate and community partner organisations as

THEME SIX: THE VISIBILITY AND VOICE OF WOMEN CONTINUED



speakers at game day functions and social events would not only deepen partner integration, but the symbolic presence of women as speakers would quickly change the face of game day as a male domain, moving beyond the 'past glories and heroic individuals' alone to better represent the extraordinary reach and resonance that the AFL has today.

Similarly, 'connected' professional women were seen as potentially good brand ambassadors, mentors for young football players, advocates for memberships and fan engagement and ongoing strategic advisors to the leadership. Multiple roles for women in association with the game were seen to best position women as invested and influential, and this did not have to rely on employees alone.

Mothers' association with AFL as a game and with a football club as an entity continues to be seen as critical, with family engagement a high priority not simply so that mothers allow their sons and daughters to play football, but because international research confirms that 80% of family purchase decisions are now made by women the world over; women are a realistic and valuable group of consumers and contributors to the health of the game.

Some of the thinking expressed through these interviews leant heavily towards defining and developing a better 'female product', including retail merchandise but also growing existing memberships without attendance at games attached, particularly for mothers who were involved because other people in their family were fans rather than being fans of the on field contest themselves. The rationale in such a 'product' is finding relevant ways to have women support and engage with the higher purpose of the club or the game in a community sense rather than fading into the background if they were not especially interested in the physical exhibition.

However, by far the biggest influence on the visibility and voice of women in the game in the future is thought to rest on the genuine opportunity afforded to women to play the game at an elite level. The heart of the matter is that many women and girls are footy lovers too, and while there has been no true means of showcasing their passion, talent, competitive drive, on field leadership, grit, character and skill in the metaphorical field of battle, those traits that are regarded so highly in male football players, they have necessarily remained 'unfamiliar' as peers in the fairly closed and intimate world of AFL.

As one participant said:

"It breaks my heart when I watch my daughter kicking the footy in the backyard and she thinks she is going to play for Richmond – one day soon she is going to have her dream shattered just because she's a girl."

Perhaps the number on the back of a little girl's shirt needs to represent a hero that she could actually be one day.



THEME SEVEN: WORKPLACE ACCESS AND FLEXIBILITY

Once women do get a foot in the door in AFL, what is helping them to thrive or causing them to fall away? Is there a glass ceiling where women in the industry truly don't get an opportunity? Or are there not enough quality women to choose from among the ranks?

Respondents certainly felt there was a complex mix of practical and cultural factors that went far beyond poor or resistant attitudes.

"I do believe that there are still some 'glass ceiling' issues culturally. I think that clubs have been a bit resistant to women talking pure footy or negotiating contracts for example. There is still probably a bias towards male 'deal makers', but it's probably the lesser evil for women. I reckon the bigger deal is career pathways and kids."

"Men are overwhelmingly positive about hearing different views and opinions, especially those of women. They are better diplomats, better at balanced decisions, probably less proud. It makes us better to involve talented women and we have a great interest in getting better at the end of the day; lack of appetite isn't the issue here. But I reckon we could do more to explain that we genuinely value broad opinions to be honest. We don't ask for others' views, we probably wait for them. It's sort of implicit."

ACCESS

For some people, it was a question of women having 'access' to opportunities to showcase what they can do, a demonstration of the kinds of skills that are most admired in the industry rather than skills that are considered secondary or peripheral.

"I can easily pull out the names of very capable women who are senior decision makers within our industry partners, but less so within the clubs. I tend to see more women make it in areas where they can show technical proficiency readily."

THEME SEVEN: WORKPLACE ACCESS AND FLEXIBILITY CONTINUED



"We need to be getting women into pipeline in high value, high pay-off jobs where skills are recognised and applauded...grow them in these roles too, the sacred areas like commercial, recruiting, operations, coaching, CEO and the board."

"Talent and work ethic are judged fiercely in footy, and I guess it is pretty character driven at head office. Performers are embraced and efficiency is paramount. Some people just make it because we can see the fit is right."

For other people, questions of restricted access were seen as more practical in nature, and not just gender specific.

"I don't really believe we blatantly keep women out of football anymore. I get that there is probably some old habits and old dinosaur attitudes, but it has shifted. Maybe it has more to do with the small numbers required for specialist technical jobs, and the fact that the longer they are in, the better they are. It's a low turnover industry at the top end so there is not as much demonstration of women's competence as there could be. Not many spots free up."

"For women, there is no less of a pathway than for men – there is a natural ceiling for everyone in a small environment like this. There is nowhere to go. That said, when you do have to carve your own pathway, it's probably easier for men who know the politics, networks etc."

"I get the inequality thing but what to do about those people already 'in waiting' for the next job – you can't just bring someone over the top just because they are a woman, it would be almost unjust!"

Other comments on the access theme related more specifically to the industry culture, and the 'perpetual cycle of insiders' for high visibility and high performance jobs. Some people considered this 'unavoidable' – an attitude that aligned closely with the idea that the industry is both unique, and forged by tradition rather than opportunity.

"There is not much margin for error – you lose people early in this game. First impressions count unfortunately. The thing is, blokes who have played already 'get it'...they can quickly find the balance between not going too hard too early and being a boof-head, and still managing to speak up and offer something, be a voice and contribute. You get found out quickly in footy, whether you are a leader or follower."

"The fact of the matter is that we need to trust someone quickly, and they are more likely to be people we have interacted with before. I've got a 10 month cycle, no time to waste."

THEME SEVEN: WORKPLACE ACCESS AND FLEXIBILITY CONTINUED



"In the early days you can feel like it only takes one little trip and you are out. You pay a lot of mental rent just to fit in. It's just as simple as the fact that it is easier if you already know some people and are old teammates."

Others saw past the culturally imposed norms that maintained the status quo to a more adaptive position.

"If you stick with what you've got, then you'll be stuck with what you've got! I find it hard to believe that football is so much harder than other industries to change. On some things we change quickest and lead the way. Why so slow on women?"

*"I think the coaching accreditation process is poor. We still see players circumvent the process, and this really challenges women's access. We need decent coaching schools and decent recruiting schools into the future to make it fairer. How many women have done the AFL General Managers' course? Do we promote that enough? Do we strongly encourage women to do that? Insider knowledge will win out if we don't have a look at the pathways and access overall. I personally think the resistance is low, the appetite is OK but the pathways are s**thouse."*

Many participants also spoke about the importance of credible, powerful networks in breaking down access barriers symbolically as well as practically.

"If you look at the women who have done well, they have usually been pretty well networked, well connected. They can pick up the phone to the right people, and they do."

FLEXIBILITY

Perhaps the most significant inhibitor to women succeeding in football once they do have access to the industry is having sufficient flexibility to stay in the workforce and reach their full potential.

Unless the flexibility question is addressed properly, many believe it will be very difficult for women to progress. It is one thing to offer equal access to role, but realistic consideration about how women can actually prevail is also required, particularly when women are still more likely than men to require flexible work arrangements to care for children at some stages of their working lives.

The research did uncover a lack of innovation in approaches to working life and careers, including a common attitude that once women are in the industry it is up to them, rather than their organisations, to make it work.

THEME SEVEN: WORKPLACE ACCESS AND FLEXIBILITY CONTINUED



However several participants felt strongly about shifting that paradigm:

"It's not enough for the organisation just to take equal action towards the currently disadvantaged group and everyone else and think that will solve things. They need to do what will actually work in the circumstances. I use the rope analogy here; you have a man and a woman both standing down a hole and you want to help them both get out, so you throw them equal 3m lengths of rope, but that isn't going to provide an equal outcome if the man is in a 3m hole and the woman is in a 5m hole is it? Women are further back."

"We need an aggregated approach rather than one big thing. Absolutely, get women in but also we need to be smart about what makes it possible for women to truly succeed. External access is important, but it's nothing without internal growth and change."

There were three central themes raised in regard to improved workplace flexibility:

1. Career paths.
2. Time-spent versus performance-outcome measures.
3. Childcare.

There was a strong call for the industry to start thinking differently about career paths, with the current view of a trajectory to the top being regarded as too rigid and too linear in a comparatively small industry. Several cross-industry leaders spoke about a different kind of advancement and fulfilment involving diversity of opportunity and cross-functional success. Participants spoke about wanting a future that they could see as realistic without having to be a spearhead or trailblazer.

"Think about where we input. Does it always have to be the top roles? What actually works for each person in context of his or her broader life? How do we change the value we place on multiple contributions to a great organisation? Does it always have to be the hero role? Maybe we need to start valuing inputs differently."

"It's like the Tour de France. Cadel Evans is not winning anything without his massively influential domestiques. There are lots of unsung heroes in football but people don't know about those jobs. Not everyone needs to be or wants to be Cadel."

The underlying sentiment of the change advocates throughout the research was that it was time to change the model on leadership and performance, rather than getting women to try and fit with the existing model; a shifting focus towards getting the best contribution to an extraordinary organisation that is possible.

THEME SEVEN: WORKPLACE ACCESS AND FLEXIBILITY CONTINUED



Research has been able to demonstrate that high performing women in flexible roles are some of the most productive workers, and yet across industries flexible work arrangements have often been hard to make effective in practice. This is in part because the cultural default position in Australia is a minimum 9am-5pm, 5 days a week for 'serious' professionals, plus regular out of hours access via mobile devices. In football, there is further tacit expectation of weekend availability in many roles, as well as a habit of 'breakfast meetings' that do not impinge on 'regular work hours'.

To date, there has not been a visible tolerance or encouragement of job-share arrangements, perhaps in part because commitment is seen in terms of time spent and loyalty is seen as 'wholesale', leading to an 'in or out' mentality where people need to choose between priorities. This makes it extremely difficult for anyone with primary caregiver commitments outside of work to be taken seriously and leads to an unstated norm that women's careers are 'on hold' while they raise families.

Several participants spoke about feeling that the system discriminates against people who do take advantage of flexibility when it is offered. Women felt significant anxiety that being out of sight would mean being out of mind and in truth flexible work arrangements would be a career-killer which a woman could ill-afford when she was already culturally sidelined.

"What was it about having a kid after five years with the organisation that made me less knowledgeable, less capable or less senior than the bloke who had been doing the job for six months but was there fulltime? It was as if I lost every inch I had gained up until that point. My responsibility was less, I was never kept in the loop and I certainly felt that my commitment was questioned. To be honest, I never recovered from it in the organisation. I felt constantly guilty and when I did raise it, my concern was answered in terms of my legal rights not my status. I just felt like a whinger – black mark against me."

The reality is that very many jobs (including senior roles) can be done flexibly with adequate resources, use of technology and an enabling culture so long as there is a commensurate shift in performance accountability to a focus on results and not physical presence.

The issue is not necessarily specific to women and there is merit in a de-gendered and value-driven conversation about work approaches more broadly in contemporary organisations interested in diversity as a performance lever.

Such a shift requires trust between employee and employer, certainty of role and respect. It also requires the cultural normalisation of flexible work practices, including moving away from the idea that someone is getting

THEME SEVEN: WORKPLACE ACCESS AND FLEXIBILITY CONTINUED



'leeway' or a 'favour' if they have flexible working lives, and that such practices are simply a stop gap measure until someone is able to seriously invest once again as a fulltime worker.

When it came to childcare and maternity (or paternity) leave, most participants felt like they were on particularly shaky ground and had very few answers. It was acknowledged that there was probably a need for a serious revision of this issue if the industry wanted to grow and keep talent over time however.

"It takes compromise for employer and employee. The days of thinking you can be superwoman and do all roles are gone – it's nonsense. The reality is a senior leader cannot do it all, she needs help. It's critical to accept that from the start."

"This definitely needs talking about. At the moment we say 'yes it's no problem there is no reason you cannot continue, you're welcome here etc'... but how? How will it not prejudice her career? How can she progress if she is raising a family too?"

"There is a collision of two factors here; low industry turnover and 'family years' for women. If you rise in here, there is no real reason to move on, and opportunity is limited anyway so it probably keeps women at a disadvantage. The ones who do well at the moment don't have young kids."

"I am pretty unsure about the maternity leave questions frankly. What's my role as a manager to address salary discrepancies? Do I still give someone a pay rise who I know is going on mat leave for a year? What am I empowered to do here? I'm conscious of it but uncomfortable about it. I want to do the right thing but I also have to balance the budget."

"The maternity scenario is really tough on talented women. The 30-year-old female applicant just married – not too appealing because she is likely to have time out. How do I manage that? Nobody is going to be having that conversation honestly! This is the biggest issue."

"I had this idea about a central sports crèche in the precinct, because this issue must surely affect other sports within a 3k radius of us. I think childcare is a tricky space in terms of regulatory requirements though? And a serious cost! Not sure we'd go there."



THEME EIGHT: RECRUITMENT AND ATTRACTION

It became clear from the discussions with people involved in the interview process for this project that getting more women into leadership positions in sport was a two-way street – there must be the courage and will from qualified women to want to work in this environment, the application and dedication to do the hard yards to make it, and for the process and opportunities to be genuinely there to make this possible.

Recruiters mentioned that there are a significant number of women sitting at the senior executive level whom they believe would be contestable candidates for roles within the AFL, and these women are attracted to the strength of the AFL brand as the number one sport in the country, the reach of football organisations into the community, the opportunity for voice on important national issues and the chance to make a difference.

However, some of these women were reticent to put their names forward as interested leaders. Some of the possible reasons highlighted were:

“A club needs to show its genuine intentions to go and seek these people out and give them comfort as to how they would be embraced and how they could add real value.”

“If women are not fans of the game, there is not actually much information about careers.”

“The AFL industry offers very limited, linear opportunities that are well contested. There is not much lateral opportunity, so it can look pretty insular. It is not necessarily seen as a legitimate career path, it’s off the normal trajectory.”

“Women aren’t applying as they don’t have the confidence – they doubt themselves and think the skills required are beyond them so they don’t put their hand up as often. The ones that do apply are highly successful women in other areas of business so they do have the confidence, so we end up using the same small group of excellent skilled women, but it doesn’t extend beyond this or leave opportunities for others.”

THEME EIGHT: RECRUITMENT AND ATTRACTION CONTINUED



“Women are unclear about the opportunities and pathways for advancement, women with kids would need to understand the flexibility of work practices and hours, a woman would likely reflect on whether she felt capable of operating in what she may have an impression of as an aggressive, confrontational, jocular environment – a cultural ‘backwater’, she may be concerned about objectification, and she would maybe also be concerned about the perceptions of other people – what is a women looking for in here? Is it a bit of fan-dom? Is it really a legitimate career path?”

Research shows that more men who are ‘unqualified’ put their hands up for senior positions – men will apply for a job if they have around 40% of the requirements, but women will wait until they reach 70%. Women also tend to be a lot more conservative in what their next career move will be and in applying for roles.

“In the end everyone stands on their merits, but it takes a very, very strong woman to be able to break down the barriers that exist. It requires a lot of upfront confidence to be able to pull it off.”

Several women leaders also described the time and effort required to get onto the radar for board positions and the tough lifestyle and long hours necessary once you make it to the top.

“There is nothing like the AFL industry in terms of robustness and the constant pressure applied in this environment. It’s not an easy road and not one for everyone. This is absolutely the same for men and women.”

RECRUITMENT PROCESS BARRIERS AND BIASES

At the entry level and midcareer level, participants told us that recruitment decisions were much improved in football and women were getting a better shot and roles than ever before. While this pipeline is critical for future gender equity in football leadership, there is still a critical gap at senior level leadership today.

While this is certainly starting to change once women get to interview, the changes need to be institutionalised if they are to stick, and this includes changing who is involved in selection decisions for leaders of the club.

There is a deeper problem however, and that is that women simply are not there in adequate numbers to inform and contribute to this process of attracting, recruiting and selecting other talented women in the first place. Consider the following recruitment process for a position on a board that was described, which highlights some of the issues and barriers for women:

THEME EIGHT: RECRUITMENT AND ATTRACTION CONTINUED



"The recruiter gets a brief from a (usually) male client and they advise that their role is to recruit on merit. The client says "that's fine, we wouldn't want anything other than that". The recruiter goes to market and does their best to build a candidate group through targeting and has an open campaign. People apply and the recruiter screens the candidate group (on merit) and then sends this list to the client. They say "thanks, we have considered the group and we want to bring forward these candidates". At this stage, the recruiter says "we don't know what the gender balance of your board is and we don't care, but it is in your interests and the processes' interest to have a balance of male and female on the selection panel". They say "that's a good idea" and go back and select off their board. The reality is they will be predominantly men making this decision. They might say "we'll get someone from outside", but then say "no, they don't know anything about our sport". So you keep running into these barriers. You want gender diversity on the selection panel and if you don't have it, there is still a natural bias for a very masculine-controlled sport to select people based on gender. Although they would say they never do that."

Research participants commented that in the way the current recruitment processes are run 'more often than not you are going to choose someone who looks like you, sounds like you, talks like you and thinks like you'. One leader emphasised the point:

"We need to address unconscious bias through the recruitment process and have a selection panel that is 50/50 male and female, not a group of people exactly the same, hiring a group of people who reflect themselves. Is that what the board or organisation needs for the best operation?"

"A good leader does not replace like with like, but it's easier said than done when the pool seems so small."

For some sporting organisations, it will require a move away from the assumption that sports should be governed from within, rather than seeking the right blend of professional knowledge and expertise externally. 'It's moving away from the idea that if you haven't played football you can't know anything about it.' As the following comment highlights:

"The corporate sector employs people they went to school with and sport employs people who they used to play with or had as a coach. You may call recruiting people in their own image 'unconscious bias', I call it 'actual bias'."

Another person added:

"The irony is that in order for boards to look and resemble their communities they are finding that they need to look further afield, outside of their own communities for qualified people that can help grow the organisation."



CHANGING THE PROCESS

To be a champion for affirmative action means challenging existing hiring and promotion decisions and asking the hard questions: Where are all of the women at the top? Why do we have only men on the shortlist for top-level jobs? And why are the people making the decisions who get these top-level jobs mostly men?

Several people suggested that 'registers for women' (such as WomenOnBoards or Australian Womensport and Recreation Association) should be promoted and utilised more, so that women who do want to get onto boards know these mechanisms are available and boards that are looking for women know where they are.

Several interviewees described how they had used open, transparent, equitable nomination, selection and recruitment processes to get the best person for the role – and in many of these cases that person was a woman. One person told of a recent successful nomination and selection process for appointing new people to their sporting board. It started with a skills and experience analysis of the board members that was aligned to what the needs and gaps of the organisation were (according to their new strategic plan and goals). They describe the process from there:

"We set up a matrix for what skills we were looking for which reflected the gaps on the board and what skills and experience were needed based on member feedback. We used a transparent and open process where we advertised in as many areas as possible to get as many people interested, including putting out through WomenOnBoards. We got a broad range of applicants and then set up a selection panel with men and women from different areas in sport. This resulted in three new women being appointed to the board. We could see women applied as they could see the fairness and openness of the process. We wanted to make sure we got the best people and we did."

Many people reiterated the point that the sports and clubs that do things right around gender equity and recruitment will be the places where women are drawn to and want to work. This provides a real opportunity to stand out from the crowd and become an employer of choice. As one woman said:

"I want to offer my skills and experience to a sport where I can have an impact or not be jilted out of the recruitment process before I even get there. There are too many other boards where I can go and give my time in the areas of health, education or social issues, where I'll be appreciated and valued."



THEME NINE: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

The message was clear from the experts interviewed for this project that if having women on boards and in senior executive positions is to be a reality in a football organisation, leaders will have to be proactive about it and actually say 'we're going out to look for women' and then tell this to their membership, otherwise nothing will change.

The fact is, some women have made it to significant positions in sporting organisations on their merit and there was the hope that further examples would abound. However, this has not eventuated on any decent scale and has actually gone backwards in some cases. There was a genuine sense of despair amongst some people interviewed. Comments to this effect included:

"...There is no general sense of goodwill on gender; men don't let go unless they have to."

"Men support development and growth but not experience when it comes to women. They seem happy to put their time into someone they can shape to the culture. It might look noble on the surface, but it's just another form of control."

"Face it, women are still dismissed as largely irrelevant in football."

*"Men are described as passionate and boisterous, and if women don't find their voice and get silenced, it is seen as their own fault because 'this is how it is' in footy. Of course, I forgot it's your game...I'll make the f**king lamingtons shall I?"*

Most people agreed that when an organisation or industry is not moving towards progress at a steady rate, there needs to be some form of intervention.

"Simply put if you don't seek to positively act, you will quietly discriminate against. It is critical to act."

THEME NINE:
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION,
MEASUREMENT AND
REPORTING
CONTINUED



Almost exclusively, participants expressed a preference for a situation where women got opportunities for leadership roles on their merits – ‘but the problem is that they never come about spontaneously’. There was general consensus that Australian sport needs a strongly led culture that supports women with affirmative action policies and initiatives. Comments included:

“The best person for the job should get the job. If that’s done properly in terms of recruitment by saying ‘this is the skill set we need, these are the skills we have at present, so now we need to recruit in these areas’ then that is fine. But if it’s not happening we need to help the pendulum swing to get the balance right.”

“Footy just hasn’t built a base to draw from, so ‘natural selection’ isn’t going to work. We will have to wedge women in.”

“To artificially inflate the merit of women for senior roles today seems risky, and I worry it will look inauthentic. But it is a bit of a utopia to think it is going to happen on its own. Sometimes you need a blunt instrument.”

“We’ve spent 20 years talking about it and nothing has changed. If you don’t force them nothing will change.”

“We need some sort of compressed cultural change on this, and probably hard goals.”

“To be honest I cringe when I think of quotas and affirmative action; will it just be a ‘tick the box’ exercise where more women are involved but the culture stays the same and we don’t have any different conversations? But it is just not good enough that we do more on engaging multicultural populations than we do on women. Affirmative action works there I suppose.”

Many respondents also highlighted that the present situation of having one woman on a board or as part of a senior executive team was not ideal:

“You need a critical balance of men and women on a board, not just one token woman as they will feel they don’t have an opportunity to have their say unless it is more balanced.”

“If you can get more of a critical mass of women into these roles the momentum will be self-perpetuating, as you will see more women in these roles and this gives others confidence.”

THEME NINE: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING CONTINUED



THE QUOTAS/TARGETS APPROACH

Despite substantial evidence and widespread recognition that gender inequities persist as a feature of the Australian sporting landscape, there were mixed feelings from participants about the idea of targets and quotas – whether for board membership or more broadly. For example:

“Quotas would be undermining, and if women get a leg up, it might set them up to fail anyway. It would have to be introduced gradually, and introduced with lower level roles first where talent could be identified and developed.”

“Ultimately we need to let people know that you get a job on merit. We don’t just put a ‘gun’ CEO in from outside industries anyway let alone a woman who would have a harder time. It would be a set up.”

“In a true egalitarian world you wouldn’t need quotas. If you have capable women on the board it will change thinking and break down barriers, but without them we will never see cut through. It is the right way to go until it is a level playing field.”

“Quotas are working in the big corporates and helping genuine flexible careers. Where targets are implemented the outcomes are there.”

“I used to think it (quotas) was offensive to my gender, but we are not getting cut through.”

“There is a narrative in place around women not being given an advantage through quotas and it is crap. There are many mediocre men in place who have been given an advantage through some form of nepotism or cronyism. Women cannot carry this as a burden of guilt or legitimacy. We will do well when there are as many crap women in leadership as men!!”

“I hear women saying ‘I don’t want a leg up’ – then you won’t get there. Good luck with that nobility! It is absolutely about getting there, then anything else we can handle.”

“What we need to do is take a few big punts. It may not be the absolute best candidate for the job today, but there is a broader dividend that cannot be ignored in the long term.”

One expert said that affirmative action can work if used in conjunction with several conditions; most significant were board members’ adoption of gender equality as a goal or organisational value and the introduction of active measures, including quotas, to achieve it.

“There are a lot of things you can do before quotas, you can have a target you work towards. A well managed target is not dissimilar to a quota, but doesn’t have the stigma.”

THEME NINE: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING CONTINUED



It is clear from the performance of ASX 200 companies, that the ones who have targets in place do make progress towards them. One person surmised what needed to be done:

"There are three things to do: get a target for boards, get a target for staff and have women involved in the marketing and decision making process."

The 'Rooney Rule' was brought up by several interviewees as an example to follow in regard to affirmative action to achieve results around diversity in sport. The rule comes from American Football and is named after the Rooney family – owners of the Pittsburgh Steelers. Dan Rooney drafted the rule that teams were required to interview at least one minority candidate when filling a head coaching position – or be penalised financially.

Prior to the rule, the NFL had 70% black players but only 28% in any sort of coaching position (and only 6% of the head coaches). The result is now that 12.5% of head coaches are black.

"The results are there. The NFL found the standard of coaching, not just the equity balance, went up as it went through a proper, transparent and open application recruitment process. We need similar rules to help women get to leadership positions in the AFL."

Most participants were very receptive to the Australian Sports Commission's new governance principles for funded NSOs and requiring them to meet a 40% target of female directors on sporting boards by 2015. Many suggested going even further:

"40% doesn't go far enough. Why don't you have a starting point of 50/50, because that is the makeup of the community and if you don't have that, ask 'why not?'"

"Nine white Anglo male men sitting around a table are not representative of your footy club, your members or your community. The target should be to get the membership of the board to 50/50."

One person said that several countries have a quota system in the corporate world and one of the clear downsides is that you have the same women filling these quota positions across multiple boards:

"If you have a tiny pool of the same women sitting on boards you haven't taken diversity further. It is important to have women from a variety of backgrounds. If you have women from the same churches and the same suburbs and the same schools and the same sports as the men sitting on the board how are you going to have diversity of thought and innovative thinking that can face the challenges of the future?"

THEME NINE: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING CONTINUED



Several people made the point that getting more women onto boards was a huge task in itself, let alone trying to get Indigenous women or those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds on boards. Two women explained the difficulties:

“Different organisations will enter (the process of balancing gender) at a different level. If they haven’t looked at diversity issues before it’s hard to also extend this at the start to look at CaLD or Indigenous women. It has to be done in stages.”

“It’s so difficult getting the gender stuff up let alone also having to argue for CaLD and Indigenous women as well. People on the boards would say to us ‘do you have to make this so complicated for us’. But the fact is, Indigenous and CaLD women bring qualifications that would assist any board.”

Participants provided suggestions around proactive interventions, with several highlighting the need for an organisation’s strategic plan or constitution to articulate the number of women it wants in senior leadership positions, either at the board or senior management level.

“You have to make a conscious effort to change your governance arrangements and put a serious plan in place. You need strong policies and frameworks – the ASC targets will help.”

Another person questioned the length of terms for directors:

“While I don’t support mandated quotas, I would support a maximum term for a director on a sporting board or an alternative corporate governance structure such as 1-2 directors rolling off the board every 1-2 years, which would provide stability without staleness. This term could vary from club to club or across sporting bodies, but would eliminate the approach of an individual considering a non executive director role on a sporting board as a ‘life’ position or retirement role. It would encourage a sharp focus on making a strong contribution for your term(s) and would also enable turnover, which promotes new thinking and a fresh perspective.”

NO DATA, NO IDEA

“In order to hit a target, you have to be able to see a target.”

If you do not measure your activities how do you know whether you have made any progress towards outcomes? And if you do not report against gender indicators how can anyone see if you have actually changed anything?

THEME NINE: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING CONTINUED



The ASX states that companies should establish a policy concerning diversity and disclose the policy or summary of that policy. It should include requirements for the board to establish measurable objectives for achieving gender diversity and for the board to annually assess both the objectives and progress made in achieving them. Companies should also disclose in their annual report the proportion of female employees, senior executives and directors. Examining and reporting data is an integral tool for gender equality and business.

"A carrot works better than a stick, but nothing works better than competition, and the top companies in Australia are vying to be seen as diverse and inclusive organisations. Football should do the same."

Treasury secretary Martin Parkinson made it quite clear that gender reporting is critical to holding organisations accountable and is not 'just another form of red tape'. Participants generally supported this view.

"If you talk about wanting to get more women into leadership positions you have to make it a project, which means if you genuinely understand the values women will bring and what it will do to your business and brand, you have to have metrics to determine if you're getting somewhere and you have to have an aspiration."

"Data, measurement and monitoring are the three steps to creating progress. To drive change you need to audit where you're at and make a strategic call on where your organisation wants to be in 5-10 years time, commit to actions and create accountability and transparency around your progress."

It appears that transparency of reporting and measurement is seen as a critical accountability for Richmond Football Club during the process of change, but such transparency can also create excellent modeling for others.

"We need to see case studies of sports and organisations that are pioneering and trying to do more in this space and monitoring and evaluating the results to see if it is making a difference. Then you can actually go to other sports that aren't doing it as well and say 'we gave it a crack and look at all the positive outcomes that have resulted in it'."

"You can promote the fact that it's not just a gimmick, or something we wanted to do just for the sake of getting a quota, it's actually making a difference."

"People start websites, run forums, hold conferences, but they are disparate and unconnected. We need to properly use the networks we have to focus the activities and stop reinventing the wheel. These activities can then be promoted and replicated around the country."



RECOMMENDATIONS

The issues, focus areas and themes arising from the research have been distilled to form an overarching framework, which highlights key areas and suggested interventions that Richmond Football Club and other sporting organisations can make to embed gender equity and diversity in the management and governance of their organisation.

They include a range of practical strategies, processes and activities to consider.

STRUCTURAL – the way the organisation operates

Developing a gender equity mindset, where diversity and inclusion are adopted and driven as core values of an organisation were identified as a key theme throughout this research project. Having workplace structures and programs that were geared to support female employees to be recruited, retained and reach their full potential were seen as integral to achieving this.

Suggested interventions to facilitate this may include:

- Championing flexible work/life processes (such as job-share, part-time work, recognise family responsibilities).
- Supporting diverse career pathways for women to leadership positions (e.g. identify 'hot jobs' or traineeships for women to the top).
- Providing cross functional/non-traditional initiatives for men and women.
- Creating alternative forums for engaging outside industry women.

CULTURAL – the way the organisation behaves

Having women (and diversity more broadly) as part of the fabric of an organisation from the board level and throughout was identified by many people as crucial in order to make equity part of the organisational DNA. Ensuring all staff understood the standards and accountabilities on gender equity, and promoting this 'gender conscious' narrative and brand of the organisation, both internally and externally, were viewed as paramount.



Suggested interventions to facilitate this may include:

- Enshrining gender equity into the organisation's constitution, strategic plan, business plan and ethical framework.
- Reviewing policies and processes to ensure an inclusive, safe working environment is provided in which standards and accountabilities on gender equity are clear and robust.
- Education, training and scholarships for women into leadership positions.
- Educating staff on unconscious bias, blind spots and how to give voice to their values.
- Rewarding and incentivising the meeting of targets/KPIs.
- Promoting the visibility and voice of the organisation's women leaders and role models.

LEADERSHIP – the way change is driven

Leadership is driven from the top through actions, not words. It was made very clear throughout the project interviews that the impetus for change on gender equity cannot be left just to women. Men have a crucial role to play in helping to lead change in sport and society by promoting the message and value of gender diversity in their organisations, and providing opportunities, support and mentoring for women leaders.

Suggested interventions to facilitate this may include:

- Initiating and driving a 'Male Champions of Change' program across the sporting industry (similar to the program developed by the federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner with business leaders).
- Accepting leadership responsibility for change and making public commitments re action.
- Promoting gender in the narrative and brand of the organisation (e.g. via media, website, social media, campaigns, messaging).
- Promoting the business case of gender equity to the executive and board.
- Providing mentoring and network opportunities for women leaders.



BUSINESS – the way results are enabled

The message was very clear from the research and from experts interviewed for this project that gender equity for women on boards and in senior leadership positions in sporting organisations will not occur unless affirmative action policies and initiatives are implemented, and are driven by strong leadership. Also highlighted was the need to measure gender outcomes according to set goals and report these to show the intrinsic and bottom line value of equity and diversity. Suggested interventions to facilitate this may include:

- Ensuring open and gender-neutral recruitment policies, processes and selection panels.
- (Re)defining and articulating leadership capabilities needed for the organisation.
- Identifying and targeting opportunities for women within the organisation (re participation, coaching, senior leadership, non-traditional roles).
- Integrating gender activities into business planning and costings.
- Setting benchmark quotas/targets to achieve gender equity goals.
- Reporting why/why not meeting targets and the value of gender equity to the organisation in regular reports/documents.



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WHO IS BLUESTONE EDGE

Report authored by Pippa Grange and Paul Oliver of Bluestone Edge in May and June 2014.

Bluestone Edge is a consultancy business helping sports people and organisations thrive. We believe great people build sound cultures. Our working models are based on good ethical thinking, optimal organisational performance and active leadership. At Bluestone Edge we believe in building the capacity of organisations and people to be their best and give their best. This means an authentic investment in people and a continued effort to make sport all it can be to society.