

A Cross-Sector Approach to Encourage Women as Leaders in Male-Dominated Sectors



Presented by:



INTRODUCTION

The cross-sector Guide has been developed from an 18 month intervention project¹. The aim of this project was to work beyond sector silos and bring leaders from three male-dominated, cross-sector organisations together to: gain insights into challenges women encounter when moving into or during their time as leaders; learn about effective global organisational practices to attract and retain women as leaders; implement an intervention to enhance practices in the workplace that support women in leadership positions; and discuss and address challenges faced during the intervention.

To support organisations in male-dominated sectors to implement policy-making and workforce system strategies to encourage women in leadership positions, the Guide has three sections:

- 1.** Background: Frames the current state within the Surgery, Sport and Trades sectors
- 2.** The Steps We Took: Outlines the formation of the Advisory Group and identifies key target areas
- 3.** Interventions in Practice and Good Practice Recommendations: Presents a summary of cross-sector initiatives and good practice recommendations.

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BACKGROUND

Research suggests that leadership opportunities in male-dominated sectors such as surgery, sport and trades continue to preference men. Australia needs to strengthen its progress to increase the number of women in leadership positions in these three sectors and more broadly.

Surgery

Despite the rising number of women entering medical school in the past 35 years, the surgical specialties continue to attract relatively few women. In Australia only one third of applicants to the Surgical Education and Training Program of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons are women², and only 13% of practicing surgeons are women^{3,4}. Women are also underrepresented in leadership positions within the profession⁵. Barriers to advance women in leadership positions in surgery include persistent cultural beliefs, inadequate mentorship, lack of respect, and difficulty with work-life balance⁶. Senior Surgeons often make assumptions about a female surgeon's family and motherhood issues, and as such, withhold career advancement opportunities⁷.

Sport

There is a scarcity of women as leaders in sport organisations which has been recognised as a worldwide dilemma. The continued underrepresentation of women in sport leadership is a growing concern. In Australia, data is limited in regards to women in leadership positions, what is known is that women include 23% of CEOs in national sports organisations⁸, and less than 10% of national high performance coaches across 36 funded sports. Barriers associated with women in leadership positions in sport include feeling marginalised, working in a sexist workplace, the existence of 'old boys' networks, and the work-family culture of an organisation¹⁰.

² Royal Australian College of Surgeons. (2020) Survey Report: Breaking barriers; developing drivers for female surgeons. https://www.surgeons.org/-/media/Project/RACS/surgeons-org/files/operating-with-respectcomplaints/Break-barriers-report_2020.pdf?rev=6d32e206ee4b4d12aa916ec5cb8886d0&hash=5113131E0530FBEDBBD6FACE5B970CDO

³ Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. Surgical workforce 2018 census report: <https://www.surgeons.org/-/media/Project/RACS/surgeons-org/files/reports-guidelines-publications/workforce-activities-census-reports/2018-surgical-workforce-census-report.pdf?rev=2eb3d9f503b74bc8b40a5a20fd13e6e1&hash=B5932F83FFD1C562D68FFC7E9F4F6FDE>

⁴ Medical Board of Australia. Medical Board of Australia registrant data (2021): <https://www.medicalboard.gov.au/News/Statistics.aspx>

⁵ Wu, B., Bhulani, N., Jalal, S., Ding, J., & Khosa, F. (2019). Gender disparity in leadership positions of General Surgical Societies in North America, Europe, and Oceania. *Cureus*, 11(12). https://journals.lww.com/plasreconsurg/Abstract/2018/04000/Factors_Affecting_Women_s_Success_in_Academic_and.44.aspx

⁶ Shah, A. R., Haws, M. J., & Kalliainen, L. K. (2018, Apr). Factors Affecting Women's Success in Academic and Private Practice Plastic Surgery. *Plast Reconstr Surg*, 141(4), 1063-1070. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PRS.00000000000004247>

⁷ Silva, A. K., Preminger, A., Slezak, S., Phillips, L. G., & Johnson, D. J. (2016). Melting the plastic ceiling: overcoming obstacles to foster leadership in women plastic surgeons. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, 138(3), 721-729.

⁸ Jeanes, R. (2021). Challenge who rules to change the rules: Women, sport and leadership in Australia. <https://lens.monash.edu/@celebrating-influential-women/2021/03/08/1382926/challenge-who-rules-to-change-the-rules-women-sport-and-leadership-in-australia>

⁹ Australian Institute of Sport (2022, Nov). <https://www.ais.gov.au/media-centre/news/major-milestone-for-women-high-performance-coaches>

¹⁰ Burton, L.J., (2014). Underrepresentation of women in sport leadership: A review of research. *Sport Management Review*, 18(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2014.02.004>

BACKGROUND

Trades

The underrepresentation of women continues to be particularly stark in male-dominated trades. In the skilled trades industries, women represent less than 3% of the overall workforce¹¹, and in construction and infrastructure comprise 12% of the workforce¹². Potential barriers both for women who are already in the industry and those seeking to enter, include a lack of supportive work

practices, structures and cultures¹³. This leads to women in management positions not fulfilling their real potential due to a lack of confidence and mentors¹⁴. Women who work in the construction industry in different countries confront numerous career barriers. The more prevalent related to the difficulty of balancing work and family, and the lack of professionalism in human resource management¹⁵.



Image Sources: GettyImages/iStock

¹¹ <https://tradeswomensaus.com/about-us/why-we-do-it/>

¹² <https://www.tpmbuilders.com.au/women-in-construction-australia/>

¹³ Jenkins, S., Bamberry, L., Bridges, D., Krivokapic-Skoko, B. (2018). Skills for women tradies in regional Australia: A global future. *International Journal of Training Research*, 16(3), 278–285.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14480220.2018.1576329>

¹⁴ Oxenbridge, S., Cooper, R., & Baird, M. (2019). 'One of the boys?': The work and career experiences of Australian women working in automotive trades occupations. University of Sydney

¹⁵ Astor, E. N., Onsalo, M. R., & Infante-Perea. (2017). Women's career development in the construction industry across 15 years: Main Barriers. *Journal of Engineering Design and Technology*, 15(2), 199-221.

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JEDT-07-2016-0046/full/html>

THE STEPS WE TOOK

Strategies that informed the intervention

Recent research has demonstrated the limitations of one-dimensional strategies that focus on the macro/structural level such as gender targets/quotas, or at the micro/individual level such as women's leadership development programs¹⁶. Instead, multi-dimensional strategies are required. Our approach was to create a targeted cross-sector intervention, focused on enhancing organisational practices over a 18-month period.

A cross-sector Consortium was established comprising Association influencers from the surgery, sport, and trades professions, and an organisation from each sector. These Association influencers identified an organisation recognised for their motivation to enhance workplace practices to encourage women in leadership positions. An Advisory Group was formed from the Consortium including:

- **Victoria University:** Project lead
- **Surgery:** Royal Australian College of Surgeons and Monash University Department of Surgery
- **Sport:** Exercise & Sports Science Australia and Queensland Academy of Sport
- **Trades:** Tradeswomen Australia and Programmed

Five intervention steps were conducted:

1. Surveyed women recognised as current or upcoming leaders, and their managers, in each organisation. To dig deeper and if interested, these people were interviewed on barriers women encounter and changes in organisational practices they believe would support women as leaders.
2. Identification of strategies from global sources that have shown evidence of successful implementation through good industry practice.
3. Findings from Steps 1 and 2 were translated into a template to address the barriers commonly identified across the three organisations.
4. Implementation of a 18-month intervention guided by the focus areas and targeted practices identified in the template.
5. Step 1 was repeated to identify enhanced organisational practices and additional recommendations to attract and retain women as leaders.

¹⁶ Piggott, L. V., & Pike, E. C. J. (2019). 'CEO equals man': Gender and informal organisational practices in English sport governance. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690219865980>

INTERVENTIONS IN PRACTICE AND GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Four focus areas targeted for organisational intervention practices included:

- Career Pathways
- Networking
- Mentoring
- Gender Bias

The following section presents: quotes that represent the barriers identified pre-program (Step 1) and the facilitators identified as a result of the intervention (Step 5)¹⁷; examples of practices applied in each focus area (Steps, 2, 3 & 4); and the recommended organisational practices for future implementation as a result of the intervention (Step 5).



CAREER PATHWAYS

Barrier: Lack of Identified Career Pathways

“

There are always groups for women as leaders and they do, I think, try and promote women in leadership positions. But how it is specifically done I really don't know.

(Alanna, Surgery)

”

“

Just having the awareness that there are steps you could take if you wanted to, like even within the performing sciences, there are no clear steps to become a senior scientist let alone to become a manager.

(Lily, Sport)

”

“

I don't have a developed plan, just saying, okay, you do this and this and then it will take you to that level, or you need to apply these skill sets to be at that level. I don't know anything about what's next for me. I have no clear plan at the organisation.

(Ella, Trades)

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Facilitator: Create Visible and Accessible Pathways

“

I think our career pathway has become significantly more visible for women and more women are going into the surgical workforce. But that is at very slow rate. The more women that are visible doing the job, the more obvious it becomes that it's a potential career pathway.

(Rachel, Surgery)

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“

Speaking to my particular experience, [organisation name] really promotes training opportunities for women to enhance their skill set, which then leads to different career pathways within the business, it helps to valuing women's contribution to construction and maintenance.

(Danielle, Trades)

”

“

I think there's been a lot of programs put in place, particularly by [organisation name] which is trying to increase the visibility of and support for women to progress through into leadership positions, which has been really good. These programs have enabled females from across the country to connect and also just increase that visibility of if you see it, you can do it.

(Amelia, Sport)

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CAREER PATHWAYS

Example Intervention Practices	Recommended Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implemented 'Lunch and Learn' sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Career pathways need to be visible and sustained over time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Created a dedicated webpage with links to resources and career opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Highlight stories of successful women through internal and external communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developed a Career Pathways Employee Guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Offer flexibility and support for women returning to work after parental leave
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developed a Career Pathways Manager Guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide superannuation for women whilst on parental leave
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Created People and leadership training series 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Facilitate job sharing roles for women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developed Your Career, Your Opportunity Career Employee Template 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide opportunities for women to build their leadership skills
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow time for women to access leadership training
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create opportunities for women to discuss career goals with their manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify potential women leaders, discuss their goals and provide support
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Showcase successful women's leadership pathways

NETWORKING

Barrier: Limited Networking Opportunities

“

I wouldn't say that our [organisation] does anything to particularly promote networking.

(Elena, Surgery)

”

“

There is nothing that is formally organised I can think of that is driven by the organisation so I guess we are encouraged as professionals in our industry to seek that ourselves.

(Ivy, Sport)

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“

We all need to know what those opportunities are and how it can benefit from networking.

(Noelene, Trades)

”

Facilitator: Create Networking Opportunities

“

COVID has pushed online meetings and networking and that has continued for the most part. I think that allows, particularly someone in my position to participate more, not only in meetings but also in conferences and to be present in those fields. That's probably been the biggest change in the last year or so. I can see that I have more opportunities to be present at things.

(Kelly, Surgery)

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“

I still think there's a need for greater networking and support for females across the board ... there was a conference last week in Melbourne, and they had childcare. Like, that's a huge initiative to actually have childcare available at a conference for people to be able to go.

(Amelia, Sport)

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“

I'd like to see more networking opportunities. It's something that we don't do very well and I think they're really valuable in making connections ... I would like to see some internal networking. We're such a big company and there's lots of opportunities for people within other business units, but we tend to be quite siloed. So I think internal networking opportunities will be great. I'd definitely like to see us potentially host a networking opportunity for women.

(Danielle, Trades)

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NETWORKING

Example Intervention Practices	Recommended Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provided network opportunities for women locally and across other regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide networking opportunities, such as attending conferences, that cater for the gendered needs of women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Initiated virtual Mentoring/Networking Event for women including networking between attendees, panelists and ambassadors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enable ongoing networking to provide women with the opportunity to find potential mentors (face to face or online)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partnered with an external industry Committee to implement a face-to-face Mentoring/Networking Event for men and women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Link with other professional bodies to facilitate networking opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow women the time to network
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equip women with the skills to build networks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow opportunities for organic mentoring relationships to form during networking events



MENTORS

Barrier: Difficulties Finding Mentors

“

I think having some mentoring programmes would certainly be very helpful. At the moment there is no official mentorship programme, they just encourage you to find your own mentor.

(Alanna, Surgery)

”

“

I think mentoring would be good because I can hear it from somebody that has been through it and who can share their experiences and make that advice specific to you. It would be really useful.

(Ivy, Sport)

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“

I think that's a gap. We don't have a proper mentoring system in the business with career opportunities or exposure.

(Ella, Trades)

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Facilitator: Create Mentoring Opportunities

“

When mentors are allocated, they don't work. For them to work, you need to have some sort of 'click and develop', some sort of relationship with that person.

(Diane, Surgery)

”

“

We've had a mentoring program as part of this project that has also connected further with our professional body, ESSA. Those have been some good opportunities.

(Amelia, Sport)

”

“

My ideal mentoring opportunity would be somebody mentoring me that I could learn from, call at any time, and ask any questions. You know, float ideas and be inspired by, that would be my ideal. Someone really, really senior and definitely female.

(Danielle, Trades)

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MENTORS

Example Intervention Practices	Recommended Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed mentoring in partnership with the Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide internal and external organisational and sector opportunities for mentoring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established mentoring measurement framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide mentor training to ensure effective mentee guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked to external webpage to provide template for mentoring and mentees applications and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure mentees understand what they can gain from the mentoring relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlighted mentor and mentee roles and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify whether potential leaders would like formal or informal mentoring opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed resources for mentors and mentees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide informal and formal mentoring opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matched mentors and mentees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster organic mentoring relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained Mentors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer women and men as mentors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ran a pilot to gather data and refined program to show commitment to the mentor program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure mentoring relationships are supported
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasised relationship building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure mentors and mentees are suitably matched
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlighted the benefits of mentoring program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factor maintenance of mentoring relationship into working hours

GENDER BIAS

Barrier: Perception of Women as Leaders

“

When you're a woman in a highly visible leadership position you don't want to be different from the men because you just feel like that's asking for special treatment and that makes you look vulnerable or at least you feel like you'll be judged to be vulnerable.

(Layla, Surgery)

”

“

I've had instances where the people below me or who are reporting to me had an issue with the leadership - Why should I report to her, she's younger, she's a woman.

(Ella, Trades)

”

“

Even though you are really credible and have done all these things before... you have got to earn that right again. I don't know if it's different for a male in the industry, where they can just come in and operate at the level that they should be, but for me I feel like you have got to earn that respect again even though you have that credibility from previous employment and opportunity.

(Ivy Sport)

”

Facilitator: Raise Gender Bias Awareness

“

We need to look at the barriers to getting into the pipeline and improving that... Having a women friendly inclusive environment. Make it more inclusive not just for women, but for ethnic minorities and for the men that currently work in our profession.

(Samantha, Surgery)

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“

We need to change ingrained perceptions of what you can and can't do because you're part time. And the reason that you're part time is because you've got caring responsibilities.

(Amelia, Sport)

”

“

We have done training on unconscious and conscious bias. We've held a couple of toolbox meetings, all of our senior leaders have had training on it. It's definitely something that's become really prominent in the last 12 months, behaviour in the workplace including the sexual harassment piece. And not just with gender, it's across the board such as disability.

(Danielle, Trades)

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GENDER BIAS

Example Intervention Practices	Recommended Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Created a Communication Awareness Guide: Communicating Inclusively in the Workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure gender neutral terms in recruitment and promotion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Published a Women’s Newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure women on selection panels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developed ‘Toolbox’ sessions to address discriminatory practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Engage in continuous and ongoing education about unconscious bias
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Embedded tips on addressing unconscious bias into the Association’s Newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure gender equality targets are genuine and not just rhetoric
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maintain ongoing discussions about unconscious bias in newsletters and internal correspondence
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create working groups to address unconscious bias and include monitoring and evaluation frameworks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Encourage gender neutral leadership qualities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Address perceptions of appropriate working hours, presenteeism, and flexible working arrangements

Project contact: Professor Clare Hanlon,
 Institute of Health and Sport, Victoria University
 ✉ clare.hanlon@vu.edu.au