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Middle Managers' Role in Progressing Gender Equity: A leading practice guide

ANZ
SOG



Public
Service
Commission



Queensland
Government



Government
of South Australia



Tasmanian
Government



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY
Business School



This guide has been developed as a product of a 2017-18 research project between UNSW Canberra, the University of Sydney, CQUniversity and the New South Wales, Queensland, South Australian and Tasmanian governments. The project examined how middle managers can progress gender equity at work and was based on conversations with 300 middle managers, senior public sector leaders and human resource professionals in the four jurisdictions.

CREATE A CULTURE OF AWARENESS AND CHANGE

- Recognise the powerful role that middle managers play in promoting and progressing gender equality.
- Encourage conversations about gender equality, the merit principal, unconscious bias and working flexibly. Use resources provided by your agency to assist you.
- Include gender equity topics on the agenda at team meetings, instigate discussions in the lunch room and be part of developing an inclusive culture. Establish momentum and initiate a program of activities together. This will be more successful than a stand-alone event.
- Include men in conversations about gender equity. Explain the business benefits of gender equity to everyone, and encourage men to attend gender equity events.
- Celebrate early wins publicly and share successful stories about positive gender equity figures and new approaches to working flexibly. This will enable employees to see how gender equity benefits them personally.
- Create a culture where people are recognised for promoting gender equity and feel safe to 'call out' others who may not be behaving according to the organisation's values of respect and equality.

ADAPT HUMAN RESOURCE PROCESSES TO PROGRESS GENDER EQUITY

Job Design

- Use portions of part-time positions to create new positions for acting, higher duties or backfilling opportunities for others.
- Design jobs around a collection of tasks, not necessarily around making up one new full-time position.
- Implement and analyse job-sharing arrangements to identify the productivity of a six day week (as a job-share) over one full-time equivalent position.

Recruitment & Selection

- Have conversations around merit – what it means, what it looks like and how targets and merit are not mutually exclusive. Consider how recruitment can be undertaken by looking at merit in a different way.
- Consider attracting different genders to non-traditional roles. Identify blockages in recruitment pathways and ask questions about why different people are not applying.
- Go outside of the standard avenues when advertising and searching for candidates. Try different recruitment methods such as: blind recruitment, work tests, presentations, role plays and activities that challenge how candidates respond in different situations.

- Review job descriptions whenever there is a vacancy. Assess for gendered language and inclusiveness. State that flexible hours will be considered and women and those with caring responsibilities are encouraged to apply. Articulate the organisational values, behaviours and competencies, not just the technical skills required for the role.
- Aim for shortlists to have an even gender split of applicants. If this is not possible, consider revising the job description, advertising and search mechanisms.

Career development

- Find and encourage mobility opportunities for all staff to increase their experience.
- Cross-train employees to broaden their skills, but to also enable them to move around their agency, other agencies, to backfill or be an additional resource in times of need.
- Plan work so that everyone – including part-time staff – have the opportunity to work on interesting and prestigious projects.

TECHNOLOGY & SUPPORT

- Insist on appropriate technology to support staff who work flexibly. Provide laptops, shared calendar access, shared document editing platforms and remote meeting options.
- Use a shared calendar to track leave and employees working flexibly, even if they're just going to be in later.
- Discuss office communication requirements, standards of work and expectations on output. Provide guidelines on working from home.
- When putting project teams and workplans together, consider those working flexibly and accurately forecast resource needs and deadlines.

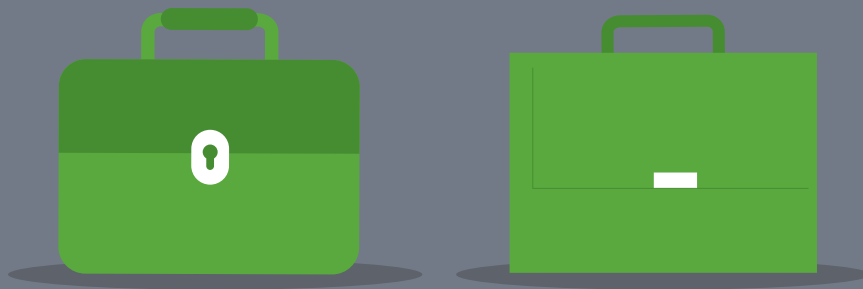
Flexible Working Arrangements

- Make it clear that flexibility is not just a 'women's' issue, it is good business practice - a mutually beneficial arrangement where home and business priorities are met.
- Encourage men and those at higher levels to access flexible arrangements, and promote this as positive case studies.
- Make decisions on workplace flexibility by consulting with the team, so it's a shared response, not just the responsibility of the manager and employee.
- Be flexible across the year and negotiate with part-time staff who might be available to work full-time for the busiest time of the year.
- Cross-train staff and implement shadowing arrangements to broaden employees' skills, to allow them to move around departments and backfill roles.
- Create an environment where those who are acting, backfilling or working in new roles feel ok to try new things. Support them to make decisions in the absence of others.

This research project was funded by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government and the four state governments. The full report is available at

<https://www.unsw.adfa.edu.au/public-service-research-group/research-projects/role-middle-managers-progressing-gender-equity-public-sector>

For further information, please contact Dr Sue Williamson at s.williamson@adfa.edu.au



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