



How do we keep more women in the pipeline to leadership?

It is a stark reality that there are considerably more men in leadership positions across New Zealand than there are women.

Existing Champions for Change and Global Women research confirms that men and women enter the workforce in the same proportions and yet women are under-represented in senior management roles.

We wanted to discover what was happening to women along the way which was impacting whether they remained in the pipeline or not.

Through both quantitative and qualitative research, we investigated what was really happening in New Zealand workplaces and discovered the following themes:

1. Importance of having 'relatable' role models/mentors
2. Importance of flexibility in the workplace
3. Inconsistency of parental leave experience and family friendly workplaces
4. Importance of an inclusive workplace culture particularly transparency around pay and promotion

Our goal is to use our insights to positively impact the numbers of women remaining in the pipeline and progressing to senior roles through the use of our practical and pragmatic tools developed as a result of this research.

What we did

Quantitative research

Through partnering with NZIER to use the Integrated Data Infrastructure we were able to gain access to data covering the whole of New Zealand and relating to real people. We used the salary bracket of \$90-130k as proxy for mid-level seniority and looked for both similarities and differences in the men and women in that bracket.

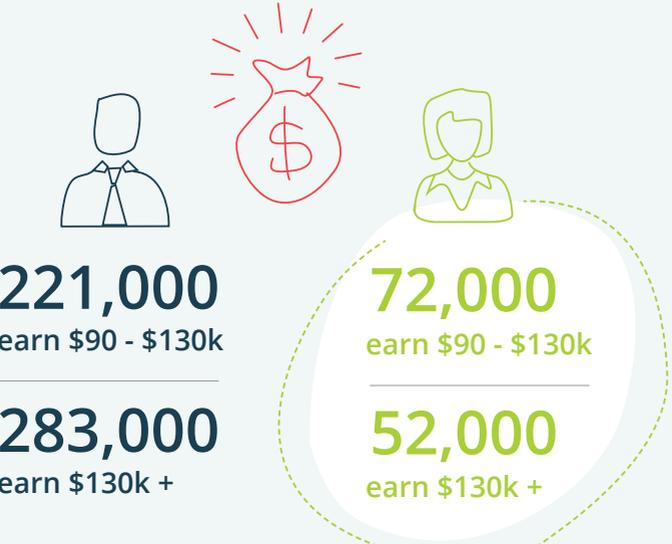
We found that there are a significantly higher number of men in that salary level than women and that women's careers appear to stagnate before even that salary band.

Women who have made it into that salary bracket actually have very similar characteristics to the men in the salary band with the biggest difference around the number of children and taking time out to have them.

Quantitative data

To explore the themes and get rich stories that bring the data to life we worked with HTG to undertake one-on-one interviews, analyse surveys from our Activate Leaders Programme participants and conduct focus groups. We delved into the lived experience of people within this salary bracket to find more about their current reality and their career aspirations.

We found that experiences varied so much even within organisations indicating a reliance on good managers rather than consistently applied policies.



30
IN-DEPTH
INTERVIEWS



20
FOCUS
GROUPS



150+
SURVEY
RESPONSES



What we found

1. Relatable role models

The qualitative research discovered that many women struggle to see themselves in leadership roles. All too often the women showcased as leaders are actually seen as unrealistic or doing things that seem unobtainable to those further down the career ladder.

In order to encourage more women to remain in the pipeline, it is important that they see the realities of combining leadership and family responsibilities.

Both men and women wanted to understand how they could be leaders but remain true to their values which was not what they often saw being role modelled.

Mentoring, both from leaders and peers, was seen as a valuable tool for career advancement. Learning and understanding from the experience of others and building networks contribute to confidence and opportunities for advancement.

Recommendations

- Showcase leaders of differing personality types, backgrounds and skillsets
- Demystify leadership by encouraging leaders to be open and honest about their roles entails
- Check out the resources on the Global Women website



People talked about seeing leaders as:

- Forceful
- Tough
- Single-minded
- Aggressive
- Resilient



But they wanted leaders who are:

- Empathetic
- Emotionally intelligent
- Genuine and authentic
- Values driven
- Vulnerable



“She was amazing. The impact that she made in six months was so much more than any other Director. She was approachable, a leader and strategic. She could read the room then put an action plan together. She’d laugh a lot. She made a really powerful speech when she first came in: ‘I have three young children and I work four days a week and I am unavailable after these times but I will do as much as I can to make sure everyone is supported when I am here.’”



What we found

2. Flexible working

Both men and women valued being able to work flexibly, whether for childcare or any other lifestyle reasons such as a long commute, religious commitments or health considerations.

Despite most organisations having a flexible working policy, the application of this was still very dependent on individual team leaders and the experience varied greatly.

Some people felt that there was a compromise between ambition and balance whereas in other organisations flexible working was seen as an essential part of their culture.

Access to flexible working is well documented as the biggest enabler to keeping women in the pipeline. Understanding that flexibility is broader than simply working from home and equipping people leaders to have confidence in managing flexible workers is critical.

Recommendations

- Have a clear and easy to understand flexible working policy
- Make it clear that flexible working is for everyone, not just working mums
- Understand that flexible working is not just working from home
- Start with a yes and work with individuals to find a workable solution
- Train managers to lead flexible teams
- For more information see our Champions for Change Flexibility toolkit: <https://www.championsforchange.nz/resources/?f=Flexibility>



“My first week back, my son was sick and I applied for unpaid leave. My boss called me in and said ‘you don’t need to take unpaid leave, take it as normal sick leave. You can’t help it if your child is sick.’ It made such a difference to how I felt about the company.”





What we found

3. Parental Leave experience

The quantitative data showed us that having a child had little or no impact on the number of hours men worked. By contrast, the number of hours women worked dropped significantly following the birth of a child and was less likely to return to full-time.

Exploring people's experience of preparing for and taking parental leave, we found that it varied greatly even within the same organisation and was highly dependent on individual people leaders.

Feeling supported and valued results in more women returning from parental leave and being engaged and motivated employees. Being part of a family-friendly workplace benefits both men and women. When men are able to share the caregiving roles and be more equal at home, women can be more equal at home.

"I initially wasn't going to take the 18 weeks leave. I thought there would be a stigma associated with taking that much time off. But it was all in my head. Work has been fantastic. It's made me feel like I'm a really integral part of the company; it's like a family. My boss has been really supportive and encouraging."



Recommendations

Parental leave policies that are equally available to men and women

- Ensuring that language is gender neutral
- Easy to understand with clearly communicated and easily accessible information
- Consider removing the primary and secondary carer labels

Flexible in application

- Empowering parents to take parental leave as it suits their circumstances
- Enabling opportunities to take it in a chunk or use it to work part-time over a set period

Actively encouraged and incentivised

- Having a workplace culture that supports conversations about taking parental leave and returning from parental leave for both men and women
- Identify blocks, stigmas and attitudes that prevent men taking parental leave
- Adequately compensating both men and women who take parental leave

For more information, see the parental leave resources on the Global Women website.



What we found

4. Inclusive workplace culture

The benefits of an inclusive workplace culture are well documented and the importance was illustrated in the Global Women [How inclusive do New Zealand's workplaces feel?](#) report from 2018.

The main concerns that came up during our research were related to clear and transparent HR policies and practices, notably around promotion and pay.

Women returning from parental leave felt that they were missing out on opportunities to advance and that their pay was slipping backwards as they were not included in the annual review cycles.

Others found that despite being at the same level as male colleagues they were being paid less. This indignity was compounded by the length of time taken to remedy this and the implication that the women were being 'difficult'.

Having clear, transparent, easily accessible and consistently applied HR policies, practices and procedures are essential to create a workplace environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging and that they are valued.

Recommendations

- For more information about inclusive workplace cultures, see the resources on the Global Women website
- For more information on reporting, see the resources on the Champions for Change website



"I used to think that I was doing the company a favour when I hired someone on a lower salary than we would have actually paid to get them. Now it's a real problem because you can't then bump up their salary other than the same percentage increase. We've looked at the gender pay gap and it's been a problem for my area partly because I've hired women on lower salaries to begin with."



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