



Middle Managers' Role in Progressing Gender Equity: Findings from cross-jurisdictional research

Presented by:

Dr Sue Williamson, UNSW Canberra



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Understand the role of middle managers to **progress gender equity** in public sector workplaces.
- Build on previous research which shows middle managers are key to progressing gender equality.
- Identify systemic and structural impediments, and countervailing reforms and policy levers.
- Support the development of best practice.



METHODOLOGY

- New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and Tasmania
- High level of engagement from central public sector agencies
- Eight agencies
- November 2017 to February 2018
- Total: 297 Participants, 24 interviewed and 40 focus groups

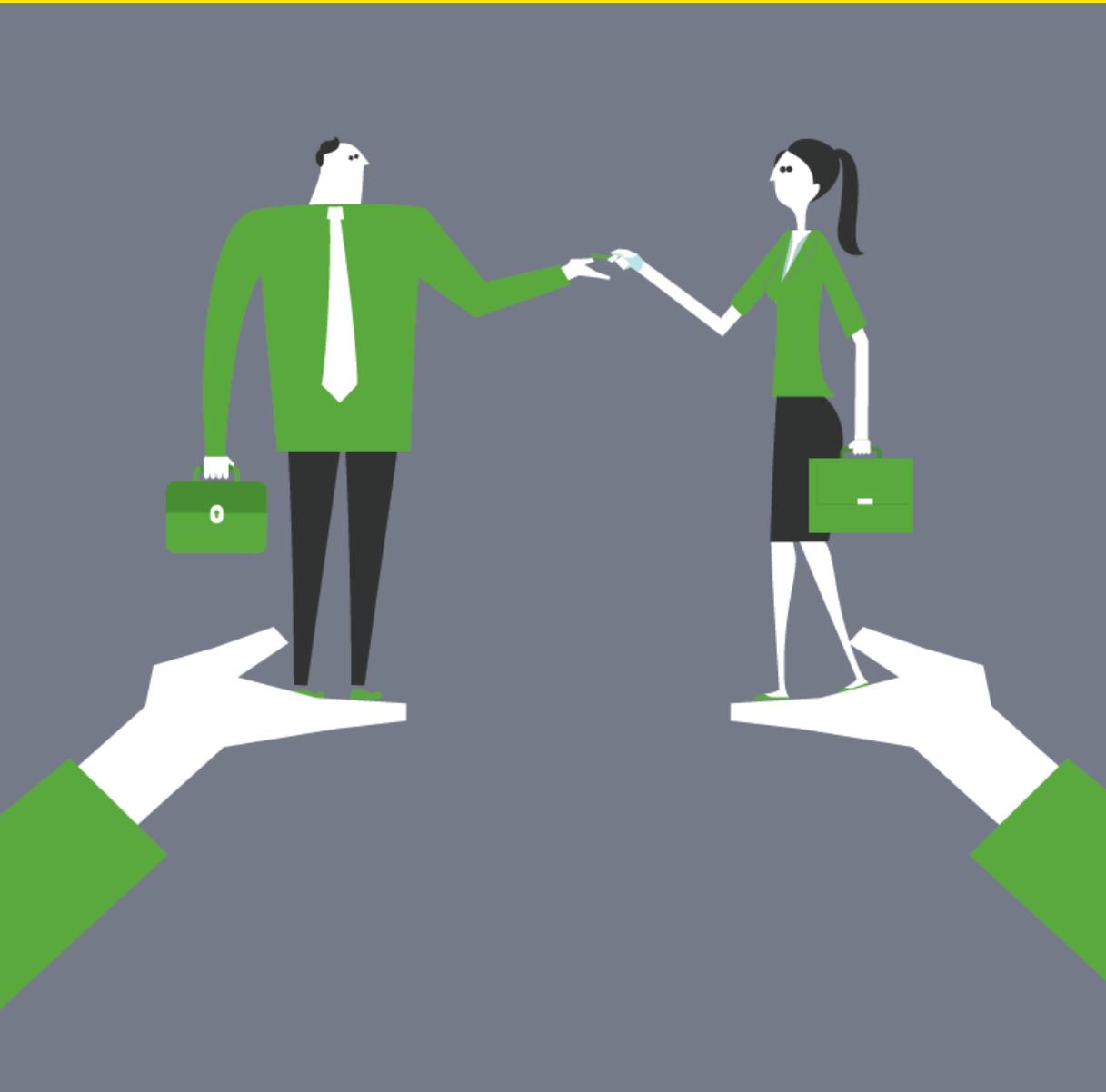
ISSUE: UNDERSTANDING AND RECOGNITION OF GENDER EQUITY

- Understanding of gender equity concepts:
 - Numerical parity = equity
 - Not a pressing issue in many agencies
- Some managers argued, however, that gender inequity does persist:
 - Gendered cultures or behaviours
 - Limited opportunities for caregivers
 - Horizontal or vertical segregation



*“It’s not something I’ve come across here... **gender is not an issue** in this department”.*

*“I think the assumption is that often because we are a female-dominated sector, **we haven’t got a problem**”.*



RECOMMENDATION: CREATE A CULTURE OF AWARENESS AND CHANGE

- Encourage regular conversations about gender equity, the merit principle, unconscious biases, and working flexibly.
- Explain the business benefits of equity to everyone, and encourage men to attend gender equity events.
- Share stories about gender equity ‘wins’ and new approaches to working flexibly.

ISSUES: JOB DESIGN

- Job evaluation and design seen as process-driven and more thought could be given to how jobs could be redesigned.
- Access to good quality part-time jobs difficult for employees.
 - Not given jobs which lead to career advancement.

“I just feel like you get better opportunities by being available five days a week. You might get a high priority project because they know you’re going to be here, they know that you can commit full-time and possibly more to delivering something.”



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RECOMMENDATIONS: JOB DESIGN

- Use portions of part-time positions to create new positions for acting, higher duties, or backfilling opportunities.
- Design jobs around a collection of tasks, not necessarily around one new full-time position.
- Implement and analyse job-sharing arrangements to identify the productivity of a job-sharing over one position.

ISSUE: Understandings of bias and merit

- Many managers had undertaken unconscious bias training – research shows standalone training has limited effect.
- Merit strongly linked to notions of the ‘best person’ for the job.
- Some awareness of how biases can affect construction of ‘merit’.
- Substantial confusion about how the merit principle interacts with equity goals.

*“You’re just taking the best person. It doesn’t matter what their race, their gender, their colour, whatever– it’s the **best person**”.*

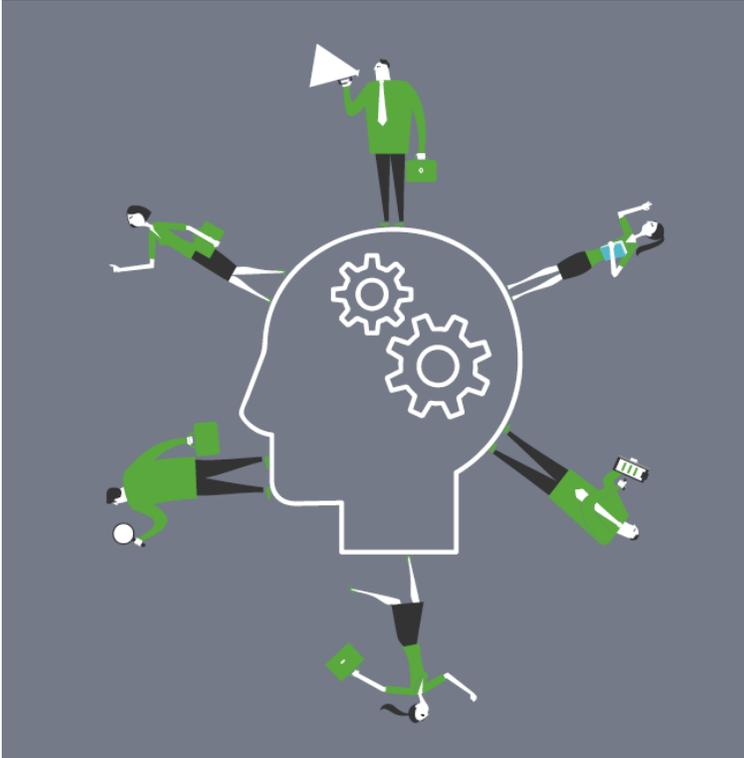


RECOMMENDATIONS: BIAS & MERIT IN RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

- ‘Bias disruptors’ are needed.
- Assess job descriptions for gendered language. State that flexibility will be considered.
- Aim for shortlists that have an even gender split of applicants. If this is not possible, consider revising the job description, advertising and search mechanisms.



ISSUE: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND MOBILITY



- Managers reported that access to mobility experiences were limited (esp. for part-time and regional workers).
- Lack of ‘backfilling’ positions.
- Lack of transparency.
- Contingent on individual line manager support.

*“If you’re **inhibiting people’s ability to move**, when you have [departments] who do enjoy a high employment count of women, why do they maintain that? Is the **movement low**? Are they not finding opportunities to move outside that [department] or team?”*



RECOMMENDATIONS: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND MOBILITY

- Cross-train employees to broaden their skills, and 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.
- Create an environment where staff 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.

ISSUES: FLEXIBLE WORKING

- Managers committed to enabling employees to work flexibly
- Limited uptake of flexible working by men and senior managers
- Some instances of ‘all roles flex’ – managers committed but confused
- Operational concerns:
 - How to manage employee expectations & underperformance
 - How to measure productivity.

*“We are really learning that on the job because **we never really sat down** and thought about how we will manage people who are working from home”.*

*“The resistance of managers to flexible work practices is often based on the **difficulty managing poor performance** under these circumstances... or that people feel they should have an **equal entitlement** to these work practices...”*





RECOMMENDATIONS: FLEXIBLE WORKING

- Be flexible across the year. Negotiate with part-time staff who might be able to work full-time during peak times.
- Make it clear that flexibility is not just a 'women's issue' but that everyone benefits.
- Encourage men and senior executives to use flexible working arrangements.
- Look at job design, resourcing and planning.

ISSUE: PART-TIME WORK

- Managers reported widespread use of part-time work.
- Managers argued that being promoted to senior executive roles while working part-time was theoretically “possible, but not probable”.
- Limited role models working part-time or flexibly (male and female).

*“Since I’ve had children, I’ve always been part-time... every time that you move teams or departments...you have to renegotiate that, and **you have to prove** again that it’s a worthy arrangement and that you’re **getting the work done**”.*



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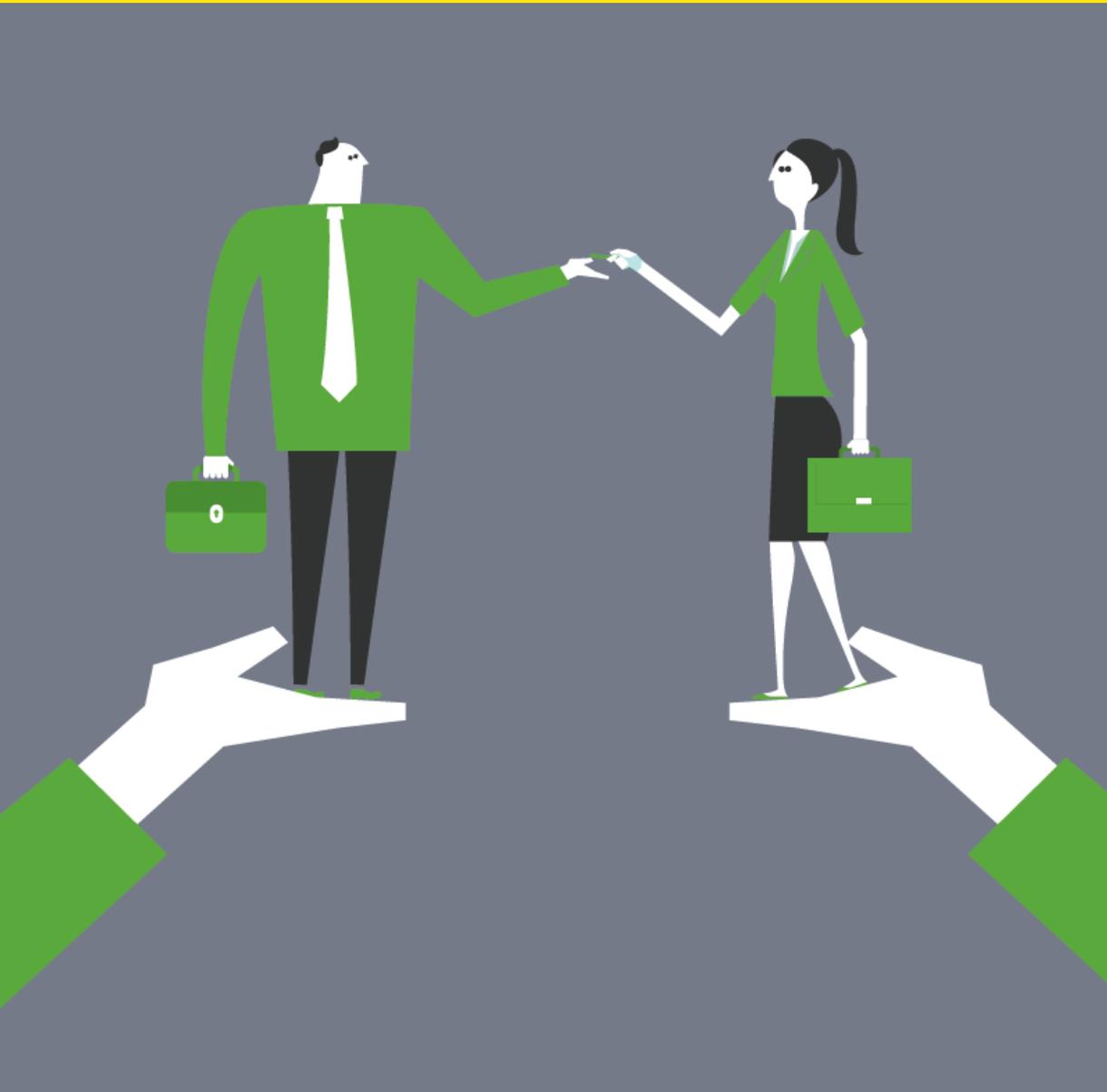


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RECOMMENDATIONS: PART-TIME WORK

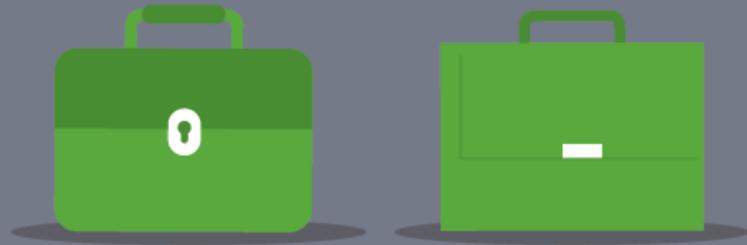
- Focus on creating quality part-time jobs, and monitor work allocations.
- Enable job-sharing of higher duties.
- Encourage men and senior managers to work part-time. Share positive stories.
- Be flexible with part-time work – think in terms of tasks, not FTE.



EMBEDDING GENDER EQUALITY

Factors for success:

- Short and long term agendas for cultural change
- Plans need to be iterative
- Buy-in from whole organisation – don't leave in the hands of HR!
- Be creative to combat gender fatigue
- Consider using bias disruptors and workplace experiments



THANK YOU

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This research was conducted by a consortium of researchers:

Dr. Sue Williamson, UNSW Canberra (project leader)

Dr. Linda Colley, CQUniversity

Dr. Meraiah Foley, UNSW Canberra

Prof. Rae Cooper, University of Sydney

For further information, email
sue.williamson@unsw.edu.au.



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