

# Gender Diversity for Engineering Professional Services

Workshop Summary Report

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Stantec



Beca



engineering  
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# 1 Introduction

On the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017 Stantec hosted a gender diversity for engineering professional services workshop in conjunction with Engineers New Zealand (ENZ), BECA, the Environmental Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ) and the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (NZILA).

Participants in the workshop came from a range of disciplines including engineering, science, landscape architecture, construction and support services. We were also pleased to be able to include men in the discussion as well as women.

Participants heard from two sets of presenters. Belinda de Zwart discussed the Stronger Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team (SCIRT) Women in Construction group. She discussed the opportunities that came out of an organisation which brought so many competitors from the same industry together and gave examples of what the group was able to achieve. Libi Carr and Joanne Duffy talked about the Women in Construction, Champions of Safety events which were held earlier in the year. Libi and Jo talked about the barriers and recommendations identified by women in the construction industry and noted that many of the barriers were applicable to women in other fields as well.

The workshop was mediated by Gay Pavelka, the participants were split into three groups with a workshop format used to promote discussion and record talking points. The participants discussed what was working well in the industry already, identified some of the barriers to women entering and staying in the industry and came up with some recommendations going forward to improve gender diversity within the professional services.

This report is structured in the order that talking points were presented to the workshop participants. The report includes the following sections:

- Section 2 – What is Working Well?
- Section 3 – What are the Barriers to Gender Diversity in Professional Services?
- Section 4 – Solutions / Recommendations,
- Section 5 – Conclusions.

## 2 What is Working Well?

Support and flexibility were key themes for what was already working well. Participants stated that succeeding as a woman in this industry is enabled through having the support of partners at home as well as supportive employers.

Some of the comments around what was working well within the participants' work places included:

- Supportive employers, including both support for flexible working and staff development,
- More flexibility around working hours, which is supported by law,
- Recognition of the benefits of diversity.

One participant commented that they felt that the glass ceiling was cracking.

Outside of work participants felt mentoring was valuable and the current mentoring structure worked well. Many businesses have a mentoring programme and most professional institutes also provide mentoring programmes. Participants also noted that:

- Landscape architecture now has a 50/50 gender split,
- Pioneers in the industry are now recognised (i.e. women who are first in a particular role are recognised and celebrated),
- We now see more images of women in advertising (both within the participants own organisations and externally),
- Events like this workshop help spread the word and keep the conversation going,
- Sponsorship of events that promote diversity demonstrate the value business place on improving diversity within their organisations.

The participants noted that New Zealand is very progressive, that there are always a lot of opportunities and also that as a country we have a lot of high achievers.

## 2.1 What are the Barriers to Gender Diversity in Professional Services?

Participants were asked to discuss barriers in the professional services around three key topics:

1. The barriers to getting young people interested in a career in this industry,
2. The barriers to retaining and/or bringing back women into the industry,
3. The barriers to career progression for women in this industry.

The discussion points for each of these three topics are outlined further in Sections 2.2 to 2.4.

## 2.2 Getting Young People Interested

Participants discussed the barriers to encouraging young women to enter male dominated industries such as engineering.

### 2.2.1 Barriers

The barriers to young women entering male dominated professions fell into four broad topics; the way girls are brought up at home, what they are exposed to at school, how gender is perceived in society and how the industry portrays itself.

Many participants noted that language can be very important, one participant noted that they call their young niece bossy, when they would not do so to a nephew. Parents' attitudes were identified as important to shaping how girls perceive themselves, some suggestions included:

- Be more aware and careful of language use around young children, does the language you use reinforce gender stereotypes?
- Be open minded, show interest and don't shut down interest,
- Encourage girls to participate more in traditionally male activities (hunting, fishing, camping etc...),
- Allow girls to get dirty when they play,
- Career advice can be influential, ensure it is gender neutral.

Participants noted that equal parental leave would send a strong message to children.

Participants also discussed how bias can be introduced at schools and that teachers' attitudes can shape what jobs children consider. How children receive career advice at school and what jobs they are exposed to growing up will also shape which careers children pick as they grow up.

At a societal level participants discussed:

- Gendered toys (i.e. McDonalds toys),
- How masculinity and femininity are portrayed (ads, movies, music, etc...),
- The lack of a long term, national, coherent strategy for training in the industry to support students into work.

Finally participants felt the way our industry is portrayed could be improved, this included:

- How job adverts are written (do they encourage both men and women to apply?),
- Advertising opportunities within the trades,
- Addressing the stigma attached to the trades,
- Improving communication within the industry,
- Increasing exposure to the industry through childhood and teenage hood,

It is important to note that many of the barriers to young women entering the industry come from society as a whole not just the professional services industry. Having said that there are still ways in which the professional services industry can change the way the industry as a whole is perceived and therefore increase the participation of women.

## 2.3 Bringing Back/Retaining Women

Participants discussed the barriers to retaining talented women within this industry and the barriers to these women returning, particularly after maternity leave.

### 2.3.1 Barriers

Participants discussed:

- Why women leave the industry,
- The barriers whilst on maternity leave that may make coming back difficult, and
- The barriers once women return, particular to those who return on reduced hours.

It was noted that we should be careful about making assumptions around why women leave the industry. It shouldn't be assumed this is because of 'mothering' or that women leave because they are more likely to want to stay at home with children. It was suggested that safe exit interviews would play an important role in determining why women leave and in many cases do not return to the industry. It was also noted that women often leave, before they physically leave, where women are considering their next career step so they don't put themselves forward for opportunities in their current employment. This holds an organisation back from the skills that women contribute and holds women back from further developing their own skill set to advance their career and contribute to the industry.

Women also 'leave before they leave' when they are considering starting a family. This links into the challenges women face when returning to the industry after having had children – see below. If we can improve the ways in which industries approach parental leave (for women and for men) we will benefit through women being fully engaged in their career and the organisation – and not feeling that they need to 'leave before they leave' so that they can plan a family.

Suggestions as to why women may not return to the industry after maternity leave included:

- Perceived lack of career progression,
- Lack of flexibility in time, location and type of work,
- Lack of understanding of motivations outside work, including family commitments, recreation, passions outside of work (this applies to those without children as well),
- Difficulty maintaining part-time hours,
  - Some colleagues do not respect reduced hours,
  - Difficulty turning off the phone on days off,
  - Not enough time to take on challenging projects.

Participants suggested that women need to be better at asserting boundaries and that they need more support to do this.

The challenges while on maternity leave were also discussed, this included:

- Lack of opportunities to undertake training while on leave,
- Limitations around professional registration,

- There should be an ability to put these on hold, CPD hours cannot be maintained while on maternity leave,
- Work doesn't pay to continue your registration while you are on leave,
- When you return many CPD events are after 5pm which can be difficult when you have a young family,
- There is a lack of recognition of other learning and experiences when women return,
- The ability to work at home while on leave may address the perception of maternity leave being a 'gap' on your CV,
- Lack of awareness around the process for returning and what support is available.

Once women return to work, often on part-time hours, the following barriers were identified:

- Women side-lined from technical roles to people management,
- Lack of confidence in being able to do the same work as before leave – i.e. technical ability,
- Lack of forward planning and honouring commitments by other staff which can result in missing out on opportunities to be part of projects due to part-time hours,
- More work should be done to explore job sharing.

Participants felt that there was a hesitation to train women because of the perception that they may be a 'wasted resource' due to the potential of women leaving to have children. It was suggested that the education of managers is essential. This could include simple measures such as, encouraging managers to invite those on parental leave to social events, and once they return, inviting staff to take part in challenging projects and ensuring this can still occur on reduced hours. The above can also apply to staff who leave for reasons other than to start a family and may have other motivations for working part-time.

## 2.4 Career Progression

Participants discussed the barriers to women's' career progression within the professional services industries.

### 2.4.1 Barriers

Participants identified a wide range of barriers to career progression. Language was a key theme again with discussion around the use of language in the work place:

- Use of language in workplace, in reference to women: e.g. 'girls', calling women 'emotional',
- The use of appropriate titles (i.e. referring to a women as a 'chairman'),
- Double standards – e.g. strong women are 'bossy' or a 'bitch', while a strong man is 'assertive' or a 'leader'.

The expectation around having children was also identified, with participants stating that they have been asked in interviews whether they were planning to have children or why they had not had children yet. Participants also discussed:

- Fear of starting a family and losing out on opportunities,
- The perceived risk by businesses and/or managers of training a woman who will end up leaving to start a family,
- Lack of motivation and support to return to work after maternity/paternity leave,
- Lack of opportunities for project management, particularly when working part-time.

Participants felt that a key factor in career progression was not the quality of your work but rather the time spent at work. Regardless of whether a staff member has children, other commitments outside of work may limit the amount of over-time a staff member may be willing to take on. In industries/careers where the longer the amount time spent at work the

perceived greater value to the employer, people who work part time, take parental leave, seek flexible hours (terms and conditions women often seek), are seen as not providing the same value to the employer as someone who is at their desk 60 hours a week.

Women felt strongly that the various industries represented needed to look at the quality of work produced as a measure rather than the time spent at work as a measure for progression, promotion and designating responsibility e.g. lead on a project.

Other barriers identified included:

- The assumption that women have the same road to travel as men and should not be given extra support,
- Limitations on male to female mentoring due to concern for how behaviours are perceived,
- Social events dominated by traditionally 'male' activities (e.g. golfing, drinking),
- These social events are often where the 'deals get done' and career progression is facilitated,
- Greater support for more traditional 'male' training courses (e.g. 4WD training).

Some participants noted they had been deliberately excluded from social events because of the assumption they would not want to attend a traditionally 'male' activity. Participants felt that social activities were too often dominated by alcohol and that there should be more alcohol free events.

Finally participants discussed those things women do to get in the way of their own career progression. In particular the imposter syndrome was discussed. This is something predominantly experienced by women which results in a persistent feeling that you are not good enough at your job and that you will be 'found out' at any moment.

Participants noted that:

- Women sometimes try to be more masculine than their male colleagues to enable career progression,
- That some women step on other women as they rise to the top,
- Some senior women only promote the men around her, possibly to avoid the perception that she is giving women around her preferential treatment,
- There is a lack of support for women in senior roles and this leads to a feeling of the need to 'protect their turf' from other women,
- Being the only woman in the room can be intimidating,
- Women tend to have a lack of self-confidence and are less likely to back themselves/more likely to be self-critical than men,
- Women often sell themselves short and may not put themselves forward for a promotion (research shows that women will only apply for a job that they meet 100% of the criteria for, men will apply for a job that they meet 60% of the criteria for),
- Women often do not put themselves forward as mentors.

Participants also discussed the fact that women may try to avoid hard conversations and need to be better at accepting critique. A fear of failure and rejection was discussed as something that may limit women's career progression and it was suggested that women should be given a safe environment in which to 'fail'.

## 3 Solutions / Recommendations

Participants were asked to split the solutions they came up with into two groups:

1. Personal solutions that we can all be working on, and
2. Solutions that should be implemented at a business/organisational/industry level.

### 3.1 Personal Solutions

Participants identified a range of actions that can be undertaken as individuals to change the culture of our organisations and promote gender diversity. Many of the solutions involved what women can be doing themselves, however there were also a number of solutions that can be undertaken by both men and women.

The personal recommendations/solutions identified included:

- Change your language,
  - E.g. use women, instead of girls,
  - Use appropriate job titles,
  - Address a group with gender neutral language (i.e. not thanks 'gents' at the end of a call).
- Actively raise your own awareness around what may be holding you back as an individual,
  - Seek out feedback,
  - Don't wait to be asked,
  - Be braver,
  - Develop strategies for building self-confidence,
  - Be assertive,
  - Find a mentor/role model that works for you,
  - Back yourself.
- Embrace who you are first, you bring new viewpoints which are valuable to the company
- Be better at backing other women,
- Connect with other women in the business and shift the focus from surviving to thriving,
- Do more shoulder tapping of colleagues when you think they may be right for a role,
- Let go of ego and work collaboratively instead of owning a project and/or client,
- Bring men into the conversation,
- Call it when you see it e.g. when a particular person's behaviour undermines you and provide back up when we see this happen to others,
- Know how to challenge negative behaviour,
  - Seek out the skills and the know-how, to know when and how to raise issues.
- Connect to senior managers with daughters – how would they want the situation to be if their daughter worked in that environment?
- Go have a conversation, walk over and talk to those in the same office rather than emailing.

### 3.2 Industry Solutions

Participants also identified recommendations/solutions at a business/industry wide level that would promote gender diversity within individual businesses and within the industry as a whole.

Solutions were grouped around a number of key themes:

#### **Communication**

- Communication within the business, use of terminology and language that may be exclusive,
- Increase promotional images that include women beside or with men and review how women are portrayed in these images (i.e. are they in the background/in a passive role),
- Ensure women within the business are more visible and more vocal (encourage more women to take on speaking roles (e.g. conferences etc...),
- Showcase pioneers and role models,
- Celebrate the wins (e.g. promote what the business is doing to be more inclusive),
- Educate those in the industry on effective communication (participants singled out engineering and construction as requiring this in particular).

### **Pay Gap and Flexible Working**

- Promote openness around discussing salaries,
  - Remove clauses from agreements which do not allow open discussions around salary with colleagues.
- Industry to publish data on pay rates by gender – encourage a discussion on pay equity,
- Create a fair environment, don't gauge employees around pay,
- Embrace flexibility that works for people and ensure this is promoted within the culture of the organisation,
- Companies need to shift thinking around how work is done and plan flexibility into work and projects,
- Incentivise a collaborative, team approach – address how the perception between time at work and ownership of a project translates into career progression,
  - Link career paths to work quality, not quantity,
  - Re-think direct time targets.

### **Career Progression**

- Promote total diversity in leadership roles, this should include diversity of personality not just including women who reflect traditional 'male' personality traits (e.g. dominant, driven etc...),
- Advertise opportunities to existing staff,
- Provide more opportunities for staff to get out and challenge their comfort zone,
- Create a more inclusive environment.

### **Safe Working Environment**

- Develop and promote safe ways to report harassment,
  - Senior managers must demonstrate leadership and be proactive on this,
  - Take the pressure off victims needing to report harassment if it is observed by others.
- Support women on site,
  - Provide engagement/conflict management training to enable staff to deal with difficult clients/contractors.
- Provide clear strategies to address issues on site,
- Ensure graduates are equipped with the skills to do site work and make sure they know they have support,
- Ensure the work space and workplace is welcoming and safe for everyone (prayer, breastfeeding, yoga, wellness room).

### **Social Events**

- Re-think social events,
  - Less alcohol,
  - Greater variety of events,
  - Breakfast focus groups with others in the business,

- Ban drinking at desk, promote inclusive drinking (e.g. require staff who have a drink on a Friday evening to get away from their desks and talk to others).

### 3.3 Priority Recommendations

Participants were asked to identify the recommendations/solutions they felt were most important to prioritise, these have been summarised below.

#### Personal Solutions

- Work on being more assertive, be tough and ask for more. Do more shoulder tapping of other women if you feel they would be good for a particular role,
- Find a mentor/role model that works for you,
- Know how to challenge the status quo, seek out the skills and the know how to raise issues.

#### Industry Solutions

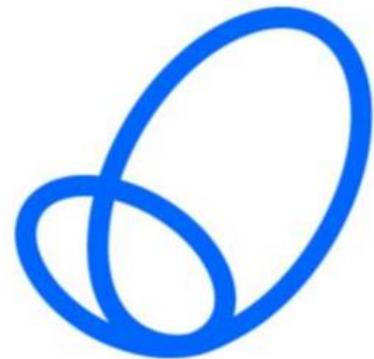
- Make women more visible and more vocal, use women more in promotional material and put women forward as representatives for the industry,
- Showcase pioneers,
- Incentivise collaboration and a team approach, this will address issues with career progression, time at work and perception that ownership of the project equals career progression,
- Link career paths to work quality, not quantity,
- Promote total diversity in leadership roles, challenge what a leader's personality is,
- Openness around salary, take clauses out of agreements which prohibit discussion around salary,
- Promote communication (e.g. social speed networking, variety of social events that suit all personalities),
- Create a safe environment for networking.

## 4 Conclusions

Professionals from a variety of fields and businesses gave up their time to discuss how we can increase gender diversity within the professional services. Many barriers to gender equality within the industry were identified, however just as many solutions were identified. These solutions will provide business with an opportunity to address the gender imbalance within their organisations which will provide diversity of thought and provide benefits for staff of all genders. It is hoped that many of the solutions raised will also begin to help to promote all forms of diversity within our workplaces.

### 4.1 Next Steps

This report will be distributed to a range of organisations to provide some guidance of ways to promote gender diversity. The intention is to build on this further by continuing the conversation with a wider range of professionals across New Zealand.



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