



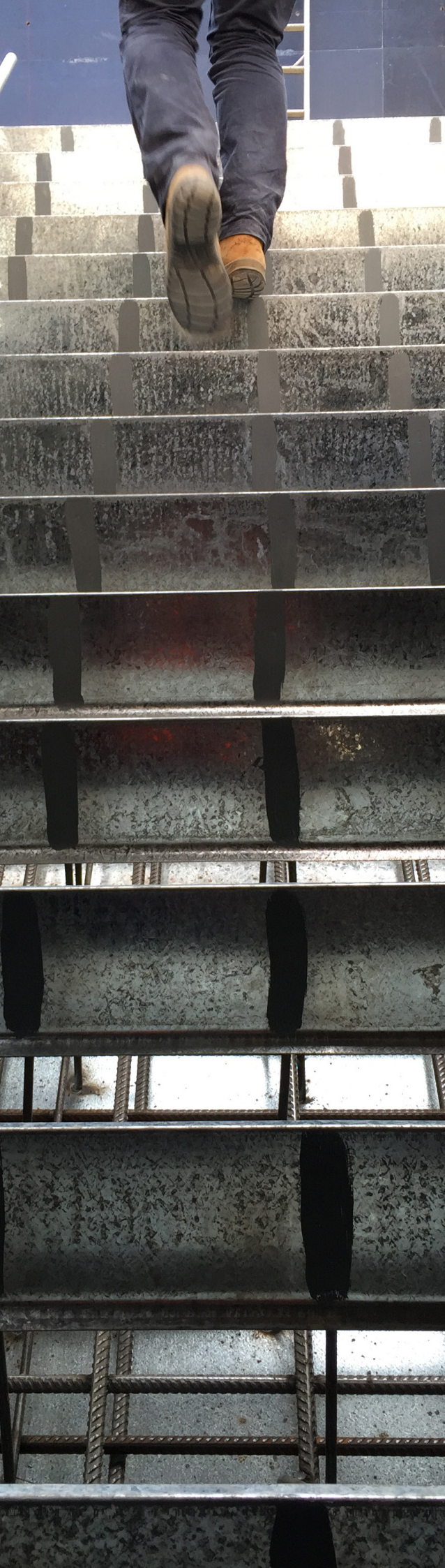
**UNSW**  
AUSTRALIA

## Demolishing gender structures

Never Stand Still

Built Environment, Australian Human Rights Institute and Centre for Social Impact





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## ■ Disclaimers

- Any errors or omissions are those of the authors only.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from recent research investigating why policies and strategies to attract, retain and support the progression of women professionals in large construction companies have, for the most part, failed.

The ethical case for gender equality is grounded in arguments of social justice, equality and fairness. It is based on the premise that discrimination is inexcusable and that all people should be treated fairly and equally and granted fairness of opportunity. The business case for gender equality asserts that workforce equality reduces staff turnover and attrition, widens the talent pool of candidates, enhances the talent attraction of companies, addresses skills shortages and develops an adaptive and innovative workforce. Decreased industry gender segregation also reduces the gender pay gap. As a result, gender equality in the workforce leads to higher national and organisational productivity and economic growth. Improved gender equality in construction could counter the industry's poor public image and broaden the talent pool of candidates considering a construction career.

The research showed that large construction companies are actively piloting a range of initiatives to support gender equality for example flexibility initiatives, wellbeing initiatives and gender targets. Large construction companies have made strides in addressing the gender pay gap and offer a suite of policies to support gender equality including childcare rebate provisions and paid parental leave. The construction sector has come a long way according to participants, but it still has some way to go in providing equality for women professionals working in the industry.

## Leadership and gender equality

Business leaders and managers have a varied degree of understanding, and readiness for, gender equality initiatives. Project leaders and line managers play a central role in the careers of employees yet are often reluctant to take responsibility for gender equality policies, undermining their effectiveness.

At each career stage different practices operate to undermine gender equality. Across a construction

career these different practices have a cumulative effect that maintains men's overrepresentation and power in construction.

Beneath the surface of construction companies there remains a subtle culture of denial and resistance with regards to diversity and equality initiatives, with evidence of sexism as well as homophobia and racism.

## Recruitment and attraction of women

### **Different recruitment channels are in operation:**

Informal networks influence formal recruitment processes. They provide a way for applicants to 'get a foot in the door' and secure an employment position. Women are more likely to be recruited through formal recruitment channels and men through informal networks.

### **Companies focus on the 'pipeline' and cultural fit:**

There is a strong focus of recruiting from the traditional education 'pipeline' – from degrees such as construction management, structural and civil engineering, and for candidates who are perceived as a 'cultural fit' within a company. There is little reflection as to the effects of these recruitment decisions, particularly the limitations on the diversity of candidates.

**Male sponsorship is important:** Recruitment onto projects routinely operates through a practice of male-to-male sponsorship and 'picking your team'. This undermines diversity of talent and limits women's access and opportunities in the industry.

## Recommendations for industry

- Make company and project recruitment processes and criteria more formalized and transparent.
- Review the values that underpin 'cultural fit' to determine their gendered dimensions and contribution to exclusionary practices.
- Initiate recruitment drives specific to women not from the traditional pipeline and provide these recruits with construction training.

## Retention of women

**Rigid work practices remain in force:** Employees' value is demonstrated through their adherence to rigid work practices that include long hours, 'presenteeism' and total availability. There is little accommodation for social or caring roles outside of construction. As a result, women - who continue to carry the greatest caring responsibilities - are often left to choose between a career in construction or a family. Rigid work practices undermine employee wellbeing and work life balance for both women and men.

**Parental leave practices:** Parental leave is primarily seen as an issue for women only and is a major barrier to equality. Despite formal parental leave policies, individual women have to strategize and negotiate their departure, return and career 'survival'. Parental leave is viewed as a resource cost to construction projects, with little recognition of the cost on women's pay equity and career progression.

**Exclusion:** The exclusionary nature of the construction industry operates to remind women – subtly and overtly – of their gender and difference; these reminders frustrate and exhaust women over time. There is a tolerance for sexism in construction - sexist comments, sexist graffiti, presumptions that women will do the administrative work, and other practices that make women feel they are intruding in a male-dominated space.

### Recommendations for industry

- For women, it is important to see other women in senior ranks and be placed with other women professionals on site.
- Stop rewarding and promoting excessive hours and 'shaming' those who don't comply with these work patterns.
- Introduce job sharing. Standardise work hours. Remove Saturday work. Monitor fatigue. Talk about it. Enforce it.
- Demonstrate 'no tolerance' practices towards sexism – including sexist drawings, wording, behaviour – in the workplace (including the site).

- Endorse parental leave practices 'on the ground'. Introduce the option for staged return to work for parents.
- Set up projects with gender equality in mind. Plan for flexibility, wellbeing and parental leave.

## Advancement and Progression of women

**Undermining women's capabilities:** Men's capabilities as construction professionals are assumed; women's capabilities are frequently questioned, singled out or discussed. Women need to demonstrate they are better, not just equal men. Actions to address gender equality are viewed by men as providing women with an unfair advantage.

**Strategic alliances:** A lack of transparency around how progression and promotions occur strengthens the need to form strategic alliances with senior leaders, who are predominantly men. These strategic alliances are frequently closed to women.

**Access to opportunities:** Career progression is highly dependent on proving that you can deliver projects successfully. Men and women are given unequal access to these opportunities, which impacts on career progression. Men are given greater opportunity to 'shine' in front of leaders, while women are often encouraged into feminised career paths – such as human resources, marketing and design – with fewer progression opportunities.

### Recommendations for industry

- Make promotion processes and criteria more transparent.
- Change the narrative. Recognise, recruit and celebrate agile and diverse career pathways and career breaks.
- Establish a formal sponsorship program for women in low to middle management.
- Encourage and support women into project management career paths.

# INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is the most male-dominated sector in Australia: data from the most recent Census shows that in 2016 women represented only 12% of the workforce, a decrease from 17% in 2006<sup>1</sup>. Among professional and managerial roles, women represent 14% of staff<sup>2</sup>. Men dominate senior 'technical', operational careers, while women congregate in junior, support roles and non-fee-earning professions such as human resources and marketing. Early enthusiasm by women about construction professions and their future careers in the sector decreases with increased exposure to the workplace as they experience relative disadvantage and inequality in pay, development and promotional opportunities compared to their male counterparts<sup>3</sup>. These experiences take their toll with women leaving the construction professions almost 39% faster than their male colleagues<sup>4</sup>.

In 2014, UNSW and industry partners commenced a project supported by the Australian Research Council to determine why existing formal policies and strategies to attract, retain and support the progression of women professionals in large construction companies have failed to achieve gender equity and diversity. What role do norms and practices play in the failure of formal policies?

The ethical, business and legal case for gender equality in construction has been repeatedly made by industry leaders. The ethical case for gender equality is grounded in arguments of social justice, equality and fairness. It is based on the premise that discrimination is inexcusable and that all people should be treated fairly and equally and granted fairness of opportunity. The business case for gender equality asserts that workforce equality reduces staff turnover and attrition, widens the talent pool of candidates, enhances the talent attraction of companies, addresses skills shortages and develops an adaptive and innovative workforce. Decreased industry gender segregation also reduces the gender pay gap. As a result, gender equality in the workforce leads to higher national and organisational productivity and economic growth. Improved gender equality in

construction could counter the industry's poor public image and broaden the talent pool of candidates considering a construction career. Gender equity in the workplace is attained when people are able to access and enjoy the same rewards, resources and opportunities, regardless of gender.

This report finds that formal gender equality policies sometimes do not go far enough. It was also found that gendered norms and practices act to undermine and in some cases, replace gender equity initiatives in construction companies leaving women's recruitment, retention and progression disadvantaged. This report presents findings related to women's recruitment, retention and progression in construction. We also highlight key findings around parental leave, wellbeing and work life balance, mental health, flexibility, graduate recruitment and graduate programs, project recruitment, mental health and leadership.

Our research found that women and men have a strong desire for improved work life balance and changes to rigid work practices, although there is limited understanding of how change might occur.

The research was conducted between 2014-15 in a number of major construction companies. The research involved documentary analysis of company policies and initiatives directly and indirectly impacting on gender equality; interviews with 21 senior business leaders; participant observation of 14 company events and ethnographies of six construction project sites. Ethnographies involved researchers shadowing 44 construction professionals for 2-5 days to observe work practices, as well as 61 interviews with professionals on site about career pathways. All data has been anonymised to protect the identity of participants.

We acknowledge that this research is a snapshot in time, and that during the period of this research, the two companies who supported this research have conducted a range of initiatives to improve gender equality that may not be captured in this research.

# LEADERSHIP AND GENDER EQUALITY



The research found that **company leaders had varied understandings of the need for gender equality** initiatives in their organisations, as well as varying levels of willingness to ‘own’ or take responsibility for gender equity. Both issues impacted on their readiness to adopt strategies to address the issue. Company leaders had a narrow understanding of gender equality as the need to increase the number of women working in construction. Key drivers for gender equality in construction were identified by leaders as the need to meet external regulations, individual leaders and business imperatives. Few leaders linked gender equality to their company’s values.

**Senior managers and line managers play a central role in the career of employees;** recruiting employees into companies and onto projects and promoting employees. However, senior management (including general managers and operations managers) are often responsible for large numbers of employees making it difficult for them to manage the careers of all employees equally. Nevertheless, women and men **place importance on ‘being seen’** by senior managers in relation to their career strategy.

Project Directors are also critical to employees career progression and project recruitment. **Project Directors set the tone.** They shape and enforce the rules, practices and narratives employed on the project sites, which may or may not be in line with the company’s stated values and initiatives. They

often seek to **replicate their own career** and work experience rather than implement company policy.

Beneath the surface of construction companies there remains a **subtle culture of denial and resistance** with regards to diversity and equality initiatives, with evidence of sexism as well as homophobia and racism. Employees who differ from the norm in terms of race, gender and sexuality often find it difficult to fit in to workplace culture. This increases employee’s feelings of dissonance and makes forming good relationships with other team members more challenging.

If you know who you know, like you know the construction manager, the operation manager, and, if they see that you’ve got the ability, there’s every chance that you can get promoted.

(Senior Project Engineer, Male)

*The operations managers are the people who make it happen... It’s also about relationships, relationships are key.....” (Senior Project Engineer, Male).*

*When I was working for [name] here and I told him and the operations manager when they were on-site one day that I, that I wanted a promotion. They go, "Yep, all right. You've earned it," and that was it. And then same thing happened the second time. So it's never been offered to me. I've had to push for it.*  
**(Project Engineer, Male).**

*I mean the stuff you hear when people don't think you're listening is unbelievable. And it's probably not as bad as it used to be. Like, when I started on-site in 2007 you could walk around the site and this is as a chick, not as a lesbian, but you'd see people would have their toolboxes open. There'd be naked pictures of chicks everywhere. It's disgusting, very unsafe. Like a very unsafe feeling work environment. I don't know if anything would ever happen but it doesn't make you feel very safe. And then when you hear the casual homophobic slurs and people don't even realise they're homophobic, it does sort of knock you back a little bit and you have to sort of take a breath and say "I'm gonna reconsider my assessment of that person"*  
**(Commercial Manager, Female).**

I reckon now it's the other way... no discredit to any of the women that are in the company, I've not met any that I've been thinking of getting a free ride. But, certainly, at early stages they're getting opportunity and early, kind of exposure. There's a lot of benefit there. And I think if you were a go-getting female, you'd find yourself on a pretty good run.

**(Site Engineer, Male)**

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## ■ Recommendations

Extensive structural barriers remain in relation to women's recruitment, retention and progression. For change to occur we recommend:

- Those in operational roles with power and status (company and project leaders) need to 'own' and **take responsibility for gender equality**.
- Company policies and initiatives need to **address work practices** that act to undermine women's inclusion and women and men's wellbeing.
- Companies address **all three stages of women's careers** (recruitment, retention and progression), recognizing that all three are inextricably linked (e.g. strong strategies to support women's retention, will lead to improvements in women's recruitment).
- A gendered lens is applied to **new and existing policies and practices**, to recognise that sometimes practices and policies have unintended gendered consequences.
- Make **transparent recruitment and promotion** practices.
- Differentiate your company to clients and the talent resource pool by **prioritising gender equality**.



# RECRUITMENT



Company, graduate and project recruitment practices were found to affect the pipeline of women and men entering the sector, being appointed into companies and onto project teams. Below we describe a number of issues found to influence recruitment:

- Different recruitment channels for men and women
- Cultural fit and the talent pipeline
- Industry recruitment practices
- Graduate recruitment and graduate programs.

## Different recruitment channels

**Women are disadvantaged by the current formal recruitment processes** that do not acknowledge the power and extensive presence of informal recruitment practices. **Women are more likely to be recruited through formal recruitment channels** such as online applications, newspaper advertisements, and formal employment interviews. Conversely, **men are much more likely to draw on informal male networks** including their family and family friends, schooling, sporting and industry connections to set up informal and formal employment interviews and communications. These **informal networks heavily influence formal recruitment processes** and provide a way in which for applicants to 'get a foot in the door' and secure an employment position. **Company referral programs** reinforce these informal networks in recruitment, with unintended consequences for gender equality.

Beyond graduate recruitment, recruitment into companies was not conducted uniformly or transparently. Participants reported **different recruitment pathways** including different interview formats and questions.

I have had five jobs in [Company] and none was ever advertised.

(Construction Manager, Male)

*It just so happened that the bloke I used to work for at the fit-out company was then working for [Company] and they needed another engineer. He got me the job up at [city]. I applied. My CV ends up on someone else's desk and he's like, "Hey, the referee's sitting two metres from me. I can just ask."*  
(Project Engineer, Male)

*An opportunity came up through a guy whose wife works for [the company]. They have spread the word [that] they've got this recruitment policy thing: if you know people, recommend them and there's something in it for you. They put my name forward. [I] went through the interview process and here we go.* (Site Engineer, Male)

*Dad was friends with a guy and he said, "I'll sort out an interview"... So there was no conflict of interest, someone else got in contact with me, arranged the interview.* (Project Engineer, Male)

## Cultural Fit and Pipeline

The findings indicate a **strong narrative from company and employees around the notion of 'cultural fit'**. Candidate selection, recruitment and even promotion were routinely assessed according to how well they were perceived to be aligned with established cultural values and behaviours. Whilst this approach appears logical, the findings indicate that **'fit' is often gendered and restrictive and undermines transparency**. Candidate 'fit' was routinely determined informally through a system of verbal referrals. As a practice it can operate to **maintain a monoculture**, rather than a diversity of workers or thinking.

*The recruitment assessors regularly categorised candidates, as 'a good fit', 'a doer', 'a worker', 'a communicator', 'a foot soldier' and even 'a propeller head' (explained as 'He likes his computers and ... he's not the right fit').* **(Researcher observations)**

I've seen a lot of young engineers and they can't get through. Like they're not like your man's man. They're nice people and that but they haven't got that oomph about 'em. And they haven't got the connections.

**(Site Manager, Male)**

There was also a practice to **recruit solely from the traditional 'pipeline'** from specific tertiary construction and engineering degrees. An existing focus on the traditional 'pipeline' ignores the fact that the number of women completing those degrees is lower than that of men but also maintains a monoculture. Limited **practice of widening the 'pipeline'** and recruiting candidates from broader construction/engineering field – architecture, landscape architecture, and interior design - or other business degrees – accounting, business, commerce – and training them in-house to undertake construction roles.

The findings also showed expectations that employees will be **geographically mobile and will be able to move on short notice** (sometimes within one to three weeks). Little consideration of partner, family or care responsibilities appeared to be given. Men were typically able to relocate

with their partners and families as their partner undertook the primary care responsibility. For women, geographic mobility is often isolating as partners are less likely to travel and more reluctant to relocate.

*"Okay. You're going to [City]." "Yes! Great." And three weeks later I was up on this job. [T]hat's actually good notice. Sometimes people get moved within a week.* **(Site Engineer, Female)**

*I shadowed three men on site who had all been geographically mobile for work. In each case, there was little to no consideration for family life. All three had wives – midwife, contracts admin, stay at home wife – but it was the fact that the company didn't take care of the housing situation for these families. One man had to travel home each weekend to see his family after a full work week. Another had been relocated to this site and was still in a two-bedroom hotel room with small children (babies) after 6 weeks.* **(Researcher observations).**

## Industry Recruitment Practices

The research found an absence of formal procedures for **internal project recruitment** including how employees were selected and appointed to different projects. Instead, we found an informal **project recruitment practice** where project leaders – Project Directors, Site Managers - **'picked their team' and took 'their people with them'**. People are **'picked' or sponsored** based on a previous relationship of working together, industry reputation/experience and an informal referral system. **Men have greater access and awareness of this sponsorship practice** and they proactively negotiate their power networks to enquire and obtain employment opportunities. The practice of "picking your team" **enhances the career progression** of those who are sponsored and **promotes and strengthens informal male-to-male sponsorships and networks**.

**Women are routinely denied access to these informal male networks or sponsorship** with male superiors and are therefore much less likely to utilise them. If women had been recruited through a male mentor or previous line manager, they consider themselves 'lucky' and 'fortunate' to have had male sponsors in senior positions.

*In the four years I've been here in senior roles, we've only once hired someone noone knew.* **(General Manager, Female)**

*I chatted to [Name, Male] throughout the day and he told me that the Project Director handpicked the*

*best guys to come with him from his last job onto this job. (Researcher observation)*

The process of selection came down to 'who do you want on your job'.

(Project Engineer, Male)

*In Australia, if you know people, they'll just grab you left, right and centre, if you're good. But, if you've got no connections, very hard to get work. Very hard to get work. The reason for that...there's a lot of money at stake...none of the employers want to risk that [money] by employing new guys. (Senior Project Engineer, Male)*

## Graduate Recruitment and Graduate Programs

The research showed that companies have established **graduate recruitment processes and programs** that often include a comprehensive candidate assessment and detailed development program. Graduate recruitment **was undertaken formally** to minimise bias and there appeared to be real emphasis on gender equity at this stage. However, **informal networks** continued to carry weight in deliberations about appointments.

Despite having a highly structured graduate program, **gendered sponsorship** by line managers was found to be more important in relation to progression. Graduates worked extremely hard and some older employees expressed concern about this. A **range of management styles** were observed in relation to graduates. Some managers expected high technical competency levels from graduates, leaving graduates

to 'sink or swim'. Other managers nurtured graduates and were conscious to provide them with a supportive environment free of blame.

*Some people ended up getting sort of stuck in things that they didn't like particularly and then didn't really put in much of an effort. I don't think they got sort of the opportunity that me and another guy got. Like the girl that was in my group, she ended up leaving before me. She hadn't done anything for three months or something (Graduate, Male).*

*Oh it, it definitely depends on the manager. Like it's a big impact. If you potentially didn't get a good manager, it could be pretty miserable. (Graduate Site Engineer, Male)*

*Grad program's three years but they're very sneaky. So pay reviews in September. The grad program finishes in November. So they tie you over for another 10 months as a, a graduate. (Graduate Site Engineer, Male)*

## Other recruitment findings

Companies were focused on recruiting to internal gender targets. Targets relied on graduate recruitment and did not appear to be backed by comprehensive strategies. Young women are drawn to companies where there is a visible presence of women working and holding positions of power. The findings showed young women are self-selecting by undertaking double degrees in construction and another field. Work life balance – work hours, flexibility of work hours and job demands – is an issue for women and men being recruited.

*I did choose [company] because I could see that women were being employed there and I could see that they were involved, they were actually making it in the organisation. (Project Manager, Female)*

## Recommendations

To address the gender equality in recruitment practices, we recommend that companies:

- **Review the values that underpin 'cultural fit' to determine if they are gendered and exclusionary.**
- **Broaden the recruitment pipeline.** Ensure graduates from other built environment degrees (architecture, landscape architecture for example) have access to the graduate recruitment initiatives.
- **Hold recruitment drives** – specific to women not from the traditional pipeline – and train women on the job and through a fit-for-purpose course.
- Set recruitment **targets and a strategy** to deliver these targets.
- Make **company and project recruitment processes more transparent.**
- **Change the narrative.** Recognise, recruit and celebrate agile and diverse career pathways and career breaks.

# RETENTION



There were a number of significant features of workplace culture and environment that were found to have a direct impact on why people choose to stay with or leave construction careers, particularly for female professionals. These included:

- Parental leave
- Exclusionary nature of the industry
- Rigid workplace practices
- Incompatibility of construction work with family commitments
- Wellbeing and work life balance
- Mental health
- Flexibility.

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## Parental leave

Parental leave operates as a **major impediment to women's retention and progression**. Parental leave is still perceived as **'maternity leave'** and therefore primarily an issue for women, young women (impact on their future) and childbearing women. Parental leave policies are still shaped around a **'primary carer' and 'partner'**. This policy design perpetuates the notion of women as carers and men as breadwinners.

Parental leave policies are in place but in practice, on construction sites, it is **left to individual women to strategize and negotiate** departure, return and career 'survival'. Operations Managers, line managers and HR **avoid ownership** of parental

leave. Women feel **forced to choose between having a fulfilling career and having a family** due to rigid workplace practices - such as relentless high workload, long work hours, total availability and geographic mobility - and the lack of senior women in operational roles.

**Maternity leave carries a stigma**. It is seen as an **actual and resource cost to construction projects**. There is an assumption that women will leave the project and never return and as a result, some women are required to work very hard prior to their departure. Parental leave roles are often not backfilled and the workload spread amongst peers that result in resentment. Women highlighted the importance of having a good relationship with senior management in order to successfully negotiate suitable **return-to-work** options in regard to work load, flexible work hours, and leave options. 'Lucky' women have a **male sponsor** that aids their return to the company.

**The project status influences women's retention post maternity leave**. Women who return to the same project after maternity leave are more likely to return and not get 'lost' in the system. Yet women who return in between projects have to compete with other employees to 'find' a new project and this situation makes returning very difficult.

**Maternity leave breaks have implications on women's pay equity and career progression**. Negotiated suitable hours, flex leave options, workload and role are 'accepted' by women, but they recognise this at the expense of career progression.

*I initially came back after having kids there was a real struggle around what could I do. One of the directors, he kind of was struggling with the idea of having any part-time role for me. (Construction Professional<sup>5</sup>, Female)*

I certainly don't think there is much thought. I don't think they have a plan for women coming back into the workforce after having kids. I haven't seen it and I certainly haven't been told of anything. I don't see much flexibility on a day-to-day basis. I mean I think they'd like to think that they do a lot of things but I haven't seen anything.

(Construction Professional, Female)

*That's why I've changed, well not changed but worked towards a defect manager role which won't be so time-demanding, which will allow me to be flexible. I'm still doing the things that I like but it'll be more flexible so I can start a family if I want to or whatever. (Construction Professional, Female)*

*I was feeling very sick on my last day and I had worked like every night and every morning that week [before and after work]. I finished at two and then I got my mum to pick me up, and I just went downhill. So by three-thirty I was in - I think, physically, I was, and mentally I was just trying to hold it together. I got Mum to pick me up and, by that point, I had like a really bad migraine and was vomiting, and was in quite a fair bit of pain, and she took me straight to the obstetrician, and I was in hospital by three-thirty. So they thought it was pre-eclampsia and then all the tests came back negative. And they more or less said that I was so exhausted that my body was just sort of shutting down. They gave me morphine. I was in that much pain. I don't know and I look back now and I think it's just stupid. I really wish that I had had the sense to pull back but I just couldn't, you know. I didn't get stuff, like it wasn't a clean hand-over, there's so many issues on the go. So I guess I was just really ... And I'm worried that [colleague's name] won't be able to pick it up and run with it. (Construction Professional, Female)*

*I don't know who is replacing me and my boss has decided to bring forward as much work as I can get*

*it done before I go. (Construction professional, Female)*

*I won't be able to do the role that I'm doing because you're on call all the time. I love what I do. I love my role but, at the moment it doesn't account for ... it doesn't allow people to do it part-time. (Construction professional, female)*

## Exclusionary Nature of the Industry

Construction sites are overwhelmingly a masculine space. Men dominate in all positions and masculine norms and practices including the acceptance of aggressive and combative exchanges, swearing and resistance to flexible work hours are ever present. **Practices of aggression and blame towards women and men are abundant.** In addition, women, also endure practices of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual discrimination. There is a **tolerance and acceptance of sexism**, sexist language and sexist practices by project leaders, employees and subcontractors. Women were called 'sweetheart', 'babe' and 'girl'. Women reported cases of sexual harassment and sexual discrimination and sexist practices by leaders and other workers such as being filmed in the shower at work, forced to change phone numbers to avoid harassment, having their breasts commented on and being delegated administrative tasks not in line with their role. There is also tolerance of homophobia and racism. The exclusionary nature of the construction industry operates to **routinely remind women – subtly and overtly - of their gender and their difference.** These reminders accumulate over time and women report that despite their best efforts to fit in, they feel tired and frustrated. There is also **resistance to affirmative action** practices (e.g. targets, quotas) by men (and some women), as these are perceived to advantage women. Women across different levels highlighted a **lack of mentoring, sponsorship and career support** as significant factors that contribute to feelings of isolation and exclusion.

*You've gotta be able to, to stand up for yourself. I made a complaint when I was abused and called a c-bomb. (Document Controller, Female)*

*I get more uncomfortable when they single me out as a female in those comments like, "Oh sorry for the ladies here but I'm gonna drop an f-bomb or something," and then they swear. And it's kind of like, "Well, no. I don't want you to censor yourself on my behalf." (Contracts Administrator, Female)*

Well, when I first started, I was like, “Wow! There’s a lot of guys.” I was 23. I’d just moved out of home. Didn’t know anyone here... so I remember my first month on site and it was quite overwhelming. [L]ike you’d go out there and guys would just be checking you out and I was like, “Okay.” Like you’re not just walking past a building site. You’re on that site and people stare, looking at you. **(Site Engineer, Female)**

The name ‘Brooke’ featured prominently on the site walls, for example ‘Penetration Behind...Brooke’ or ‘Brooke loves it’. I asked the Construction Manager, “Who is Brooke?” He replied, “What do you mean?” I said, “Well her name is written all around the site.” “I’ve never even noticed it,” he responded **(Researchers observations).**

There’s heaps of dick drawings out on site.... I think it just, if you’re not liking the dick drawing, then you’re not really meant to be here.

**(Site Engineer, Female)**

Working on site the foreman came in and, the site office there was a bunch of people sitting around. And he ripped shreds off me for something. I’ve no recollection now of what it was. I may well have been at fault or done the thing, or not organised the whatever. He just stood up in his big foreman way, stood over my desk, and yelled at me. He just ripped shreds off me. And I was just horrified because, as I’d said, I’d come from an all-girls school and I’d gone through a very pleasant university upbringing and I’d worked in offices before and it was all very pleasant. And people may have disagreed on stuff but no-one ever yelled at each other or was really nasty. So this was really confronting for me, and I remember afterwards because the site manager or project manager, construction manager was there and he didn’t even raise his eyes. And afterwards I thought to myself, “You bastard. You and the leader should have been doing something different.” It didn’t matter if I’d stuffed up. That’s not the way to deal with it. That’s not how adults deal with stuff like that. And I really lost ... the more I thought about it, I really lost a bit of respect for him...he shouldn’t have been allowed to get away with it either. **(Project Manager, Female)**

I’ve spoken to an engineer here and she said she’s had to get her phone number changed because she’s been so harassed by people in the past. Another engineer used to get comments about her boobs all the time. So she’s just maybe one of the unlucky ones. She had another incident where somebody filmed her in the shower [at work]. The partition had a gap and saw someone with a phone.

**(Safety Manager, Female)**

## Rigid Workplace Practices

The strict adherence and enforcement of rigid work practices - including **relentless high workload, long work hours and expectations of ‘presenteeism’ and total availability** - have a significant impact on women’s retention and men’s wellbeing. These practices are usually set and enforced by project leaders, sometimes in response to ‘target’ programs, but also because it was business as usual – the way things had always been.

Fulltime work hours of employees range from **55 – 80 hrs per week depending on adherence to Saturday and sometimes Sunday work, role and program status**. These hours can escalate to +80hrs towards the end of the project. **Saturday work and RDO schedules often varied from site to site**. There was resentment from employees towards Saturday work, despite this; those who do not follow projects norm are reprimanded.

The research found a practice of **shaming** - verbal and behavioural sanctioning -towards employees seen to be arriving late, leaving early, or even refusing to work from home - at all levels including graduate, middle management, and senior management. A number of **employees worked extra hours at home**, typically those in more senior positions such as project managers and project engineers, to catch up on work they could

not fit into their existing work day. This added to levels of fatigue and stress. The nature of this work was often administrative including sending emails, answering emails, and conducting phone calls.

Employees indicated that the heavy reliance on people, paper, and physical presence on site were **highly inefficient and promote fatigue and stress**. Despite this, **employees' value and worth** was demonstrated to their peers through the adherence to these work practices.

*I'd get in at five and I'd have two hours and then the day would not be mine anymore, and then at six o'clock at night I might get back to what I was actually doing. There would just be a million issues and questions, and problems, and meetings to have.*  
(Commercial Manager, Female)

I go home, I work a massive day, early mornings. You know, you come home around six o'clock or six-thirty; you have dinner, put your kids to bed and then back on the computer for another couple of hours working. 10 o'clock is probably the norm and then midnight could be something like the other nights. And doing that has just been taking its toll.

(Project Manager, Male)

*To give you an example of what my typical day looks like, I set my alarm at 4.00 am in the morning. I try and do an hour and a half's worth of work before my kids wake up at 6.00 am. I then have to drop them off. I have to do two drop-offs and, and then I double-back around and come to site. I'm probably one of the last people to walk in at a quarter-past eight, eight-thirty. And, whether it's something that I am sensitive about or whether it actually happens but I feel like the fact that I'm walking half an hour, an hour later than everyone else is, is noted by everyone in the office. So I then work 'til about five, five-thirty. I go home. I bath the kids. Put them to bed. I eat dinner. Do the washing and ironing and then I do some more work. No-one has ever pulled me up and directly said, "What hours are you working?" but you get a lot of emails at like nine, 10*

*o'clock at night, on Saturdays and Sundays. And I sort of feel like, if you can't get to those emails within a certain period of time, then that is noted.*  
(Commercial Manager, Female)

Our biggest issue - and this again is an industry thing - is the project lifecycle. Everything's rosy at the beginning of a project. Things are pretty ugly towards the last 20 per cent of a project when you're under cost pressure, you're under time pressure, the client wants this, that and the other.

(Human Resource Manager, Female)

*At the end of a job... I worked three weeks straight, 14, 15, 16-hour days. It's expected and it's known so you can sort of prepare yourself for that in the lead-up to it.* (Site Engineer, Male)

## Incompatibility with Family Commitments

Rigid work practices have **significant implications and differences on the careers of women and men** in regards to the difficult balance between work, career and family. Women professionals acknowledged feeling **forced to choose between: a fulfilling career and having a family**. Both were perceived to be unsustainable and unattainable. Women are left with the **responsibility to negotiate and execute the balance** between rigid work practices and inflexible care arrangements.

**Interviews indicated that men assume they can have both a career and family.** But men have to negotiate spending long hours away from family, dealing with job stress seeing and themselves primarily as a breadwinner. Avoiding divorce is a greater issue for men. For the few men who try to fit greater care responsibilities around rigid work practices - due to a separation, divorce or the illness of their partner - they also face a challenge, often remedied through **informal short-term support from their managers**.

I do what the boys do but then I go home and I do what their wives do as well.

(Estimator, Female)

*Time is everything at the moment so I feel like I'm really tight for time... on every front. I think that's common for someone that's trying to juggle working and a family. I find that like right now I'm looking at trying to sort out my technology to make it easier to be sort of remote ... the phone's good. I've got a laptop at home but I want a laptop that can be in my handbag at any point in time because, realistically, I have to do work when I'm at home with my daughter. (Project Manager, Female)*

*So I had separated and I had the little fella in day care at the time and I was having to get up at three-thirty in the morning and dress him, and put him in the car at four o'clock in the morning to start his day. And I just thought, "Fuck, this is shit." (Site Manager, Male)*

*With small children, I won't be able to do the role that I'm doing because you're on call all the time... I love my role but at the moment, it doesn't allow people to do it part-time. (Site Engineer, Female)*

*The reason that I am delegating and good at delegating is that I want to save my marriage. (Construction Manager, Male)*

## Wellbeing and Work Life Balance

The widespread acceptance of working long hours, and a culture of presenteeism and total availability, make it difficult to balance work with family and social life. Overwhelmingly, men and women reported being **stressed, fatigued, having sleeping issues, stress related health issues, turning to alcohol and having anxiety attacks**. Young people reported that they were considering a move out of contracting for better hours. **Physical safety on site is valued but wellbeing** – stress, fatigue, mental health of employees and subcontractors – appears to be overlooked.

**Work life balance remains a significant issue** for the majority of employees (men and women) – most participants reported having a **very poor work life balance**. The challenge of achieving an effective work-life balance **was most pronounced for full-**

**time employees with children** with long hours away from home putting a strain on relationships with children and partners, **and for young people relocated** to work in regional settings.

On construction sites, work life balance and wellbeing is **led from the front**. In other words, project leaders lead by example, they set and enforce work hours and access to flexible work practices.

Companies piloted different initiatives in response to wellbeing including **rostered wellbeing leave (one day every four months)**. These initiatives were well received by men and women.

*It's hard work mate. It's stressful work. Like I said, it's long hours. (Services Manager, Male)*

We're not making business decisions at the right time, when we're fresh. The last tender, a really important tender we'd worked 12, 15-hour days and longer. And here we were at 11 pm making the most important business decisions...

(General Manager, Male)

*I normally get in between seven and seven-thirty and I rarely leave at five. I sometimes leave at seven or eight. Most of the time I take work home with me and do a bit more in front of the TV, so a bit too much... I may be failing at the moment. If I knew how to juggle it I'd be doing well. I'm trying to keep to-do lists; One for today, one for this week, one for this month. I'm trying to limit my hours where I can. (Commercial Manager, Female)*

*I think the hardest part for some people is that not only are they working a 12, 13-hour day but they've got a 30 minute commute in the morning and an hour and a half commute home in the afternoon. And that's the time that really starts to cook you. (Site Engineer, Male)*

*Well I've lost a notch on my belt buckle for the first time in about seven years. Having a cloud over your head or in the back of your mind that there is always stuff to be doing. Almost feeling guilty if you have a, a down moment because you know that there is so much work that you have outstanding or to, on your to-do list. (Project Manager, Male)*



## Mental health

**Mental health is a significant issue** for many construction professionals. Overwhelmingly, men and women reported being **stressed, fatigued, having sleeping issues, stress related health issues, turning to alcohol and having anxiety attacks**. Young people reported that they were considering a move out of contracting for better hours. Whilst many employees report issues with stress, fatigue, and mental health it is **physical safety rather than psychological wellbeing that remains the number one priority on site**. For men, rigid workplace practices such as long work hours, high work load, and expectations of presenteeism and total availability, can have a significant impact on mental health and lead to **anxiety and depression**. For women, the exclusionary nature of the industry, the masculine nature of construction environments, and constant questions of female capability can contribute to feelings of **isolation, exhaustion and a lack of confidence**.

Positive mental health initiatives operating on site included:

- Mates In Construction: initiative which aims to promote open discussion around mental health among men.
- Group exercise programs and a focus on healthy eating.
- Wellbeing leave and flexibility initiatives
- Mentoring, sponsorship and career support programs

A young foreman said that in the eight years that he'd worked for [Company] in two states, he had not been on a construction site that didn't have at least one suicide on that job.

(Researcher observations)

*It's the Australian way of "She'll be right mate. Won't happen to me," and you end up taking all this pressure on board, you know. And you've got family, relationships, wives and kids, and a mortgage, and it's a big juggling match. And it becomes too much.*  
(Safety Manager, Male)

*I'd say my personal life has taken a dive, definitely, since being here... being the only girl can be a bit shit.* (Site Engineer, Female)

*I wake up three, four times in the night and I think I've got anxiety.* (Site Manager, Male)

I have had men of all different age brackets. A 30-year-old, a 35-year-old and a 50-year-old discussed waking up many times during the night with stress associated to the job. One even described having an anxiety attack as he drove to work. He said, "It's even now affecting how I go about my life." When I asked them how they treated this stress, they self-treat by doing or introducing exercise.

(Researcher observation)

*The exposure to the stresses and the pressures that are daily on a construction site I think, yes, I'd like to do it and prove to myself that I can do it but I don't think I would want to do it for the rest of my career. For example, I think, you know, working six days a week, working 70-hour weeks isn't necessarily (a) the healthiest thing and having a family and wot-not gonna want to spend time with the family.* (Project Engineer, Male)

*I've learned to not take it home with me. I've learned to switch off and not ... yes, I still worry there are periods of the job where you have a bad sleep for a couple of days in a shitty pattern until you get something resolved... You've gotta be able to, at some point, forget about it. And not through drinking two bottles of red or anything else. That's more of a personal coping mechanism or strategy you either develop or you have a heart attack.* (Site Manager, Male)

## Flexibility

Companies were piloting a range of **flexibility policies and initiatives**. These included rostered five-day working weeks and employees negotiating individual flex arrangements with their line managers. The **success and uptake** of the different flexibility policies were difficult to gauge due to them being relatively new initiatives. One criticism of flexibility policies and initiatives is that it is a 'one size fits all' approach is not as flexible as it aspires to be.

**Flexibility - coming and leaving at non-standard times** - is acceptable if it is used **temporarily, short-term and when suitable for the project**.

There is a 'give and take' approach to flexibility that predominantly operates through informal agreement. Flexibility was **much less palatable if it is long term, individual and done publicly** i.e. staged return of women from maternity leave is met with resistance. On site, there is resistance to 'flexibility' as it is considered unfair and lacking in commitment. The 'give and take' approach to flexibility does not address the practice of **'presenteeism', 'total availability' or long work hours. Different informal rules operate across different roles**, particularly in relation to site supervision. These rules impact employees ability to work flexibly. For some roles, shared and part-time work was often not considered an option. Flexibility arrangements are often **dependent on** the employee's relationship with line/project manager.

*There is a bit of resistance from some managers I guess. Some of them are harder to get around than others. I'd say 9 out of 10 are on board. There's a few old stalwarts that are not interested. They'll just keep doing what they do. We'd say, "You don't have to be here. Go!" It's taken sort of three or four months for everyone to get into a pattern where they're planning three days out that, "Hey, I'm not here this Saturday. You've gotta be able to do this for me," or, "This is what's happening," or we've planned. (Project Manager, Male)*

*In two to three-month blocks everyone puts in a proposed date and myself and [Name, Male] view it, and go, "Yeah, that works." People can take it off and it's gotta be a structure around non-critical, regular meetings and that sort of thing. Client visits and that sort of stuff. The whole industry has changed a bit now. You get a lot of the guys take work home all the time and you're doing stuff after work at night, on the weekend anyway. You're not here. (Project Manager, Male)*

*So I think the whole flexibility initiative is great. It shows people that they're keen to work with it. But they need to look at it on a case-by-case basis, not necessarily a one thing fits everyone." (Contracts Administrator, Female)*

*They sent an email out to the whole business at one point ... in the middle of this project so it wasn't during a major push, saying, "Look, from now on, in the interests of work/life balance, there are no more meetings to be scheduled on Sunday." It's a six-day week only.... they then listed a schedule where you could only schedule meetings between 6.00 am and 6.00 pm, Monday to Saturday. And definitely no more on Sunday. Well, unless it was a real emergency.... When you see that and like my career is important to me to keep me interested and sane but there's a point where you think to yourself, "There really is more to life." (Project Manager, Female)*

Whenever anyone important comes [to site], they stand on the steps on the back deck and present to all of us. [Executive Manager] made a point of saying how well the business had been going and how much profit they had declared, and how the shareholders were very happy. That's when he spoke about the wellness day initiatives and really focusing on safety, and not so much program. Afterwards a lot of people were speaking about the fact that the project director was so livid...he had been pushing everyone for the last year to work to a program and push hard and [Executive Manager] came and told us that we could relax and take four days off a year.

(Construction professional, Female)

*There are different degrees of flexibility across the projects. On a regional job where most people travel, it was acceptable to leave early every Friday. The narrative was – as long as you put in the hours during the week then you can leave early on Friday. This was the trade-off. It also came down to your line manager and where the job was in relation to the program. (Researcher Observations)*

Working from home is only for out of hours. Work flexibility is for out of hours.

(Commercial Manager, Female)

## Recommendations

To address issues of gender equality in **recruitment**, we recommend:

- Where possible, women construction professionals work with at least one other woman construction professional on site, in training, at events – to avoid them being **the only woman**.
- **Stop rewarding and promoting excessive hours** and ‘shaming’ those who don’t comply with excessive hours.
- Set consistent work hours, RDO rules across the company and monitor fatigue. Talk about them. **Enforce them**.
- **Demonstrate ‘no tolerance’ sexism** – sexist drawings, wording, behaviour – in the workplace (including the site). Spell it out in site inductions, company events. Enforce it.
- Introduce **fit for purpose technology** including phones, tablets and Wi-Fi to reduce ineffective/inefficient work practices that support presenteeism work practices.
- Set retention **targets and a strategy** to deliver these targets.
- Attention needs to be paid to project establishment, delivery and to expectations of work practices that are unsustainable for employees’ health and wellbeing.
- **Set up projects with gender equality and wellbeing in mind**. Plan for flexibility, wellbeing and parental leave.
- **Resource planning** needs to accommodate the program cycles, employee leave allowances and different ways of working (part-time, share roles etc). Monitor and track resourcing allowances from tender to project to ensure resourcing is not undermined.
- Introduce and champion **different ways of working** on construction sites including, job sharing, part-time and rosters.
- Focus on **parental leave in practice**. Look at how it is managed, costed and resourced.
  - » Review and adjust current procedures to ensure all impending parents and line managers know the procedure – before and after – parental leave.
  - » Appoint one point of contact that is responsible for managing parental leave in each region.
  - » Ensure salary reviews and bonuses are passed onto those on parental/caring leave to avoid pay gap.
  - » Introduce the option for staged return to work for parents over 3, 6 and 12 month periods.
- Remove terms such as ‘primary carer’ and ‘partner’ from parental leave policies and offer all employees full parental leave benefits. Be prepared to **deliver equal pay**, despite potential costs to company. For example, greater pay transparency.
- Review and recognise the **effects of ‘target’ and ‘stretch’ programs** on employee’s wellbeing and productivity.

# PROGRESSION



With regard to **career progression** and the steps needed to advance in a career in construction, we identified a number of issues impacting on disparities between women and men. These were:

- The question of female capability
- Forming strategic alliances
- Access and exposure to progression opportunities.

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## The Question of Female Capability

Women's capabilities were often **singled out, questioned and discussed** in relation to progression (and recruitment). Women routinely have to prove their capability. **Men's capabilities are taken for granted and assumed to fit with construction roles.** Men were often given opportunities to demonstrate capability which inevitably leads to career progression and promotion. **Women needed to be better (not equal with men)** and often expected to perform more than what is required in their current role in order to demonstrate exceptional capabilities to even be considered for promotion and career progression. For women, having many different line managers over a relatively short space of time was a hindrance to women's career progression as they must demonstrate and **prove their capabilities again and again.**

Gender diversity is something that happens in Head Office. Initiatives aimed at promoting women were

understood by men as giving women an **unfair advantage.** This research finds that there is unfair advantage, but it is not women who are advantaged.

The findings showed that the **gendered notion of 'leadership fit' was an influencing factor that undermined women's progression** in construction too.

*Sorry, it gets me upset. [Participant holding back tears]... I felt he was given more opportunities to shine and I was nothing. Whereas on my last job it was more kind of shared-about a bit and also I was the one that was given a lot of opportunities. And then you come to a new team and no-one knows you, and you feel like you have to prove yourself again I guess. (Site Engineer, Female)*

*[Women] feel they've gotta prove themselves in a male-dominated industry but it shouldn't be that way. You don't see like men trying to prove themselves in a female-dominated industry. (Site Engineer, Female)*

*So I was telling [my line manager] one day about how I'd spoken to the project director and informed him that I had actually done construction management, and had years of experience, and was his highest educated, youngest, only female manager. [Name, Male] got all flustered and said he couldn't believe that I spoke with such aggression to the project director. He then also said to me that he believes that I have such a sense of entitlement that I believe that I'm owed something. And I said to him, "No, I don't believe that I'm owed something but, when the project director doesn't think that*

*I've got the basic qualifications, I felt it necessary to point out to him that, yes, I did have a degree in construction management and a master's degree in construction law, and that I had experience."*

**(Commercial Manager, Female)**

*Because I'm a female. Boys don't like getting orders from females. So you sort of learn to be nice to them to get them to do something. You've gotta become their friend and then make it think that like it's their idea. (Estimating Manager, Female)*

The whole gender thing gives me the shits as well sometimes because ... above me, they're like pushing me to, "Oh yeah, more women, more women." And I go, "Well hang on. If I need to employ people then I will advertise for the role. I will interview for the role and I'll pick the best candidate." Just because she's female ... If she's crap, then I'm not gonna put her on because this guy might be better. But, if she's really good and better than him, then I'm gonna give her the job.

**(General Manager, Female)**

## Forming Strategic Alliances

There appeared to be a **lack of transparency around how promotions occur**. Women and men had little understanding of the processes underpinning career progression and promotion. Participants reported that they were promoted because they: 'were in the right place at the right time', they are 'lucky', pulled through' by a manager or 'picked' for a team, trading positions and 'pulling it off' when under pressure. **Strategic alliances** between men in positions of power – line managers, project directors, male leaders – and men, escalates the likelihood of men's career progression. **Women are left frustrated and puzzled as to what is required to get ahead.**

There appears to be a **gap between performance reviews practices and career progression**

**strategies/practices.** For women, communicating career goals and aspirations and having these taken seriously and put in action plan remains an issue.

A minority of women acknowledge that they had been sponsored during their career. Sponsorship had accelerated their career progression and boosted their personal legitimacy amongst their male peers. They also acknowledge how hard career progression is for women without sponsorship.

I think your performance speaks for itself but can very easily be overlooked if, if the right people aren't speaking to the right people about you and what you're doing on a daily basis.

**(Project Engineer, Male)**

*I suppose being a female as well in a male-dominated industry I feel like I have to fight a lot more for what I want. I have to be the aggressive one, and really let the right people know or determine who the right people are that need to know that. (Contract Administrator, Female)*

*I think that they talk a lot about progression but then the actual opportunity to do that is non-existent or was non-existent. Every year I'd do a development plan and, and like there'd be objectives that I'd say, "Okay, I want to learn this, this and this so I can progress my career and my position," and just have a better knowledge of the position that I'm already in. And that would roll over from one year to the next and it was just, nothing would ever happen. And I think a lot of it comes down to that people are just too busy. They don't have the time to show you. (Contracts Administrator, Female)*

*It really is a boys' club. It's so exclusive that they won't allow anybody in. And I just, I didn't know how to get into it. (Commercial Manager, Female)*

*And there was another rogue called [name] who gave me some pointers as well about on the job as in managing company expectations. "These, these are the people to talk to. These are the subbies to talk to." You know what I mean? He just gave me a very brief lesson in who does what...and said, "Right. I'll give you all the phone numbers in my phone. This is actually who you need to talk to. (Site Manager, Male)*

You hear of people that they've recognised and singled out for management purposes but I don't know what they see in that person to put them up for that. They never communicate these things to you....I don't know what more I'd have to do to be considered for something like a management course that certain people.

(Commercial Manager, Female)

## Access to Progression Opportunities and Exposure

Career progression is linked to project management and **proving that you can deliver construction projects** successfully. The research found that men and women had unequal **access to opportunities and resources** for career promotion and progression. Men were given greater opportunities to demonstrate capabilities and **the opportunity to shine** in front of leaders. Women felt they were **undervalued and operating at diminished capacity**. As a result, women reported feeling fatigued or being worn out from constantly having to prove their worth. **Mid-level women described being in the "lost lands"**. They found there were limited opportunities to develop their capabilities or shine in front of senior managers.

Men are more likely to be given **access to training programs and professional development**, sometimes at the expense of women in greater need of this training.

The research found that career pathways in construction remain rigid. Career progression into key senior management roles assumes employees will follow **specific, often site based career pathways**. Women were encouraged into **female dominated career paths** - such as commercial, design or multi-sites/user experience - that reduced progression opportunities and access into senior management roles.

*I wasn't pissed-off in terms of his capabilities but I did say something to [Name, Male] like "How can you prove yourself when you're not given opportunities? I'm running at 70 per cent capacity because no-one cares what I do." (Site Engineer, Female)*

Recently we had an odd situation where I had just been given [Name, Female] as my first ever someone you're responsible for. I had no idea what I was doing and there was a management course that was happening, and [Name, Project Manager] came up to me and said, "So we've got an odd situation. While [Name, Female] will be your person that will report to you, she'll actually be under [Name, Male] because we want to send him on this management course and he needs to have someone under him to be able to go on this management course," and he didn't have anyone under him.

(Project Coordinator, Female)

*It's a difference of people getting jobs or getting their next role or whatever. I pick the guys up on their assumption of whether she can handle it or - or she's at the age of having a child or you know she has got a child. They don't know what her circumstances are. They don't know that she's the breadwinner and she's got a partner at home and they're just making the assumption. And they do make these assumptions to the negative because they're thinking about their own wives or sisters or mothers and it's overt. It's not even unconscious. (General Manger, Female)*

*No-one has ever paid me enough attention during these years when I need it the most to help me through this period. As a young graduate, and you see it even here on-site, our young, female*

*engineers and our young, male engineers are supported to no end. They are promoted like they are the golden-haired children. And they do a good job. They've got a lot of responsibility but, as soon as you hit middle management, you're in the lost land. (Commercial Manager, Female)*

*I'm really lucky in [company]. I've been very fortunate to be placed in some difficult projects which have given me a chance to show what I can do, which means I've had a chance to meet people. (General Manager, Male)*

Project success. Track, proven track record. There is no substitute for it.

(Project Director, Male)

## Recommendations

Based on these findings regarding women's (lack of) progression in the construction industry, we recommend:

- Set **progression targets and a strategy** to deliver these targets.
- **Review career pathways.** Make transparent skills checklist for each role.
- Make promotion processes more **transparent**.
- **Change the narrative.** Recognise, promote and celebrate agile and diverse career pathways and career breaks.
- Introduce a **sponsorship program** for women in low to mid-levels.

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