



Report on Representation and Development of Women for Top Leadership Roles in the New Zealand Public Service

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Zealand has an enviable international reputation as a country where it is relatively common for women to hold top leadership roles in government and in organisations. Of 36 OECD countries, in 2003 New Zealand had the 4th highest representation of women in senior management with 31% of such positions held by women. However, by 2009 New Zealand had slipped to 17th position with 27%¹ representation.

The New Zealand Public Service in particular has traditionally had higher representation levels of women in senior management with 34% in 2001 climbing to a new high 40% in 2010. The proportion of women in public service² chief executive roles averaged 23% per year for the years 2001 to 2006. However, it has declined from a high of 26% (9 out of 35) in 2005 to 14% (5 out of 35) in late 2010.

This paper focuses on appointments to CE positions in the New Zealand Public Service and in particular it examines:

¹ Grant Thornton International Business Report

² The 35 departments and ministries to which the State Services Commissioner is responsible for making chief executive appointments

- the extent to which women are applying for, being shortlisted for and being appointed to Public Service chief executive positions over the last decade
- the extent to which women are represented in the potential pool for CE appointments and the previous roles of CE appointees
- what can be done to increase the number of women who apply for and are appointed to Public Service chief executive positions.

Method

Three main methods of information gathering were employed:

- an analysis of appointment data from 2000-2010, provided by the State Services Commission
- an analysis of media statements from the State Services Commission to determine the previous role held by the successful candidates
- qualitative interviews with parties involved in the chief executive appointment process, and close observers
- examination of the literature on international experience in this area

Information about the appointment process and data from the State Services Commission's Human Resources Capability Surveys was also obtained.

Key Findings

The level of representation of women in Public Service senior management pool, which acts as the main feeder pool for Public Service chief executive roles, does not appear to be a contributing factor to the decline in the numbers of women CEs. The proportion of women in such positions has increased from averaging around 34% in 2000 to 2005 to nearly 40% 2010.

The decline in representation of women at CE level is a result of a much larger decline in the appointments of women to CE roles in the second half of this decade compared to the first half. For the five years 2000 to 2004 inclusive, 35% (11) of the 27 appointees were female. For the years 2005-2010, the percentage of female appointees dropped to 4% (2) across the 26 appointments made. Of the last 22 chief executive appointments made by the State Services Commissioner, only one was female, the chief executive of Women's Affairs. As a result, the number of female chief

executives in the 35 core departments of the New Zealand Public Service dropped to a new low this century of 5.

While the number of women shortlisted for CE positions also declined somewhat in the second half of the decade, the reduction was much less than in the case of appointments (28% in 2005-2010 compared with 36% in 2000-2004).

For the same period 2005-2010, a slight decline (from 28% to 26%) was experienced in the number of women applying for Public Service CE positions compared with the period 2000-2004. However, this decline is more significant (from 25% to 20%) when the Women's Affairs appointments in 2003 and 2009 are removed from the mix. In a country which values both organisational performance and diversity, these statistics are concerning on both counts.

Over the entire period being examined (2000-2010), a breakdown of the organisation from which successful candidates were sourced showed that:

- 45% of CE appointees have previously been chief executives or the equivalent
- 90% of appointees came to the role from New Zealand organisations
- 88% of successful candidates came from within the New Zealand state sector
- 15% of appointees came from within the organisations to which the CE appointments in question were being made

There was considerable variation in the views of the nine people interviewed as to the reasons why women do not apply for or are chosen for CE roles. While a small number saw no differences between men and women in this regard, most interviewees considered there were some differences between male and females in the potential candidate pool. The main themes were:

- CE roles have become increasingly complex and difficult and potentially less attractive as a result
- overall, senior women were seen to perform at least as well as their male counterparts
- no deliberate or overt bias was perceived in the appointment process, with some speculation about possible unconscious or inadvertent bias
- lack of female role models seen as a barrier
- women were considered by some to be less likely than their male counterparts to present convincingly at interview
- women were perceived as inclined to have a lower appetite and/or tolerance for risk and rejection than men

- women were seen as more likely to stay in roles, organisations or job families (eg policy, service delivery, corporate) longer than men and they often lack large scale operational experience (as do men, but even more so)
- women were viewed as less likely to have large scale operational experience (similarly for men, but more so for women)
- women were considered less likely than men to actively manage and promote their careers, and to seek the opportunities that would give them both visibility and a wide range of experiences. As a result they are less likely to come to the attention of recruiters assisting the Commissioner.

There was strong convergence in the views of those interviewed as to what can be done to improve the number of women applying for and being appointed to CE roles. They involve strategies for personal action by women, facilitated by system wide messages and initiatives to assist women in developing their readiness for CE roles. Observations and suggestions included:

- gaining a broad range of diverse experiences, including large scale operational roles
- the importance of role models and modelling of the desired behaviours and practices
- active career management and seeking the opportunities to broaden their experiences
- increasing personal visibility through networking and high profile roles and assignments
- active engagement with coaches and mentors including working with, observing and emulating successful CEs
- improved candidate care at all stages during and following the appointment process

While quotas and hard targets were not supported by interviewees, this report concludes that a powerful message is sent through having aspirational targets established by top management (ie the Commissioner) and monitored, reported and discussed widely.

The pivotal role played by the State Services Commissioner is acknowledged. There are a range of initiatives he could take that, especially if supported by his CE cadre, that would create a more conducive environment for women executives to apply for CE roles, to become 'CE ready' and to compete on an equal playing field for the advertised positions. While individual women still need to be in the driver's seat of their own careers, and taking responsibility for addressing their 'sticky floors' that get in the way of their realising their full leadership potential, a more enabling environment would make it much easier for them to do so. Implementation by the Commissioner of the recommendations contained in the report '*A Chief Priority*' by EMPA students Battison et al (2009) for expanding both the demand and supply of CE candidates would constitute a significant step forward.

This report makes a number of other recommendations to the State Services Commissioner which are designed to ensure that the selection process identifies and values the full range of abilities and leadership styles that contribute to successful performance, casts its net broadly, assesses candidates fairly and treats candidates with care and respect.

The time for talk is over. This is a call for leadership in action by all parties so that the New Zealand Public Service plays its part in restoring New Zealand's reputation as a country at the forefront of fully harnessing its leadership talent.

INTRODUCTION

During the late twentieth and early part of this twenty first century, it became relatively common place for New Zealand public service chief executive roles to be filled by women, instead of being totally a male province as had been the case previously.

However, the situation changed in the latter half of this decade with only one woman appointed out of last 22 chief executive positions filled. As a consequence, at the time of writing this report, the number of chief executive positions held by women has reduced to 5 out of 35 positions.

The purpose of this paper is to gather and analyse data and information relating to public service chief executive appointments in order to shed light on the reasons for this decline in the numbers of females appointed to such positions, and to establish what could be done to increase the chances of women being appointed to CE positions.

METHODOLOGY

A review of the international literature was undertaken, and the following streams of work were identified:

1. An analysis of chief executive appointment data from 2000-2010 by gender was carried out. For each chief executive appointment commenced between 2000 and 2010, the State Services Commission provided data on the number of males and females who applied, were shortlisted and were appointed. The breakdown of long listed applicants was not recorded for about half the appointments and as a result has not been included in the analysis.
2. Using media releases on the State Services Commission website, the role of the successful candidate prior to their appointment was encoded as the 'source' and an analysis was undertaken as to where the successful candidates were 'sourced from'.
3. The appointment process for Public Service chief executive positions was determined using information from the State Services Commission website about the appointment process generally and the information provided relating to particular appointments.
4. Nine structured interviews with various parties involved in CE appointment processes and other key influencers in the Public Service to solicit their perceptions and views on the numbers of women in CE roles and what can be done to improve the situation.

5. Data from the Human Resources Capability Surveys from 2000-2009 was reviewed.

6. A review of the literature was undertaken to examine international trends and practices

PUBLIC SERVICE CHIEF EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENT PROCESS

In New Zealand, the State Services Commissioner is responsible under the State Sector Act 1988 (Sections 35-39) for appointing and employing the chief executives who head the departments of the Public Service (currently 35 Departments). Specifically, *'the Commissioner is responsible for:*

- *Notifying the responsible Minister or Ministers of the vacancy;*
- *Advertising the position;*
- *Assembling an interviewing panel which includes, at minimum, the Commissioner and his or her Deputy; the Commissioner may invite others in consultation with the Minister;*
- *Recommending the preferred candidate to the Minister, who will then refer the recommendation to the Governor-General in Council.*

The Governor-General in Council may override the Commissioner's recommendation by appointing a different person to the vacant executive post.

The State Services Commission website sets out the process which the Commissioner uses to manage the appointment process for chief executives of public service departments. The appointment process takes 4 months on average to complete and may take considerably longer. All vacancies are required to be advertised. A position description is prepared which includes responsibilities and priorities, key result areas and accountabilities, and the competency profile for the role.

An executive search firm is normally engaged to assist the Commissioner in identifying and evaluating candidates. Long listed candidates are generally interviewed by the recruitment agency. A short list is identified and the shortlisted candidates go through an assessment centre process. The Commissioner then convenes a panel consisting of him/herself, the Deputy Commissioner and a small number of invited persons. This panel then interviews each of the shortlisted candidates. Once the Commissioner has identified a preferred candidate, referee checks are undertaken. The Commissioner then reports his conclusions and recommendations to the relevant Minister and the Prime Minister, and Cabinet makes a recommendation to the Governor-General for appointment³.

³ In practice, the Commissioner's recommendation has only ever been declined (at Cabinet stage) once in the case of Gerald Hensley (Norman, 2003)

It appears that the appointment process has remained relatively unchanged over the last ten years, other than the addition of an assessment centre process in 2004 and the subsequent introduction of the Lominger competencies as the basis for selection.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC SERVICE CHIEF EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS 2000-2010

A total of 53 appointments were made to Public Service chief executive positions by the State Services Commissioner between April 2000 and October 2010. This is an average of 5 appointments per year.

Figure 1 below illustrates how the percentage of women applying for, being interviewed for and being appointed to CE roles annually varied over the ten year period. The results are displayed a) for all appointments and b) for all appointments excluding Ministry of Women's Affairs⁴.

For the 53 appointments made over the period surveyed, an average of 16.3 applications was received per appointment, with 4 on average being shortlisted for interview.

The data shows that a substantial change has occurred between the first and second halves of the decade in the numbers of women being appointed to chief executive roles. For the five years 2000 to 2004 inclusive, 35% (11) of the 27 appointees were female. For the years 2005-2010, the percentage of female appointees dropped to 4% (2) across the 26 appointments made.

There has been a slight drop in the proportion of CE applicants who are female. For the period 2000 to 2004, 28% (138) of applicants were female (25% when the 2003 Women's Affairs appointment is excluded). By comparison, for the period 2005- 2010, females constituted 26% (101) of applicants (20%, after excluding the 2009 Women's Affairs appointment).

There has been a greater drop in the proportion of women being shortlisted for interview. Between 2000 and 2004, 36% (43) of shortlisted candidates were female, and whereas this dropped to 26% (104) of shortlisted candidates in the period 2005 to 2010.

Of the last twenty two appointments, only one woman has been appointed (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2009). Other than Women's Affairs, the last female appointed to a public service CE role was in 2006 (Ministry of Education).

⁴ All applicants for the Women's Affairs appointments in 2003 and 2009 were female so that these appointments have a disproportionate impact on the overall data. As a result, the data is also presented excluding the Women's Affairs appointments.

Figure 1a

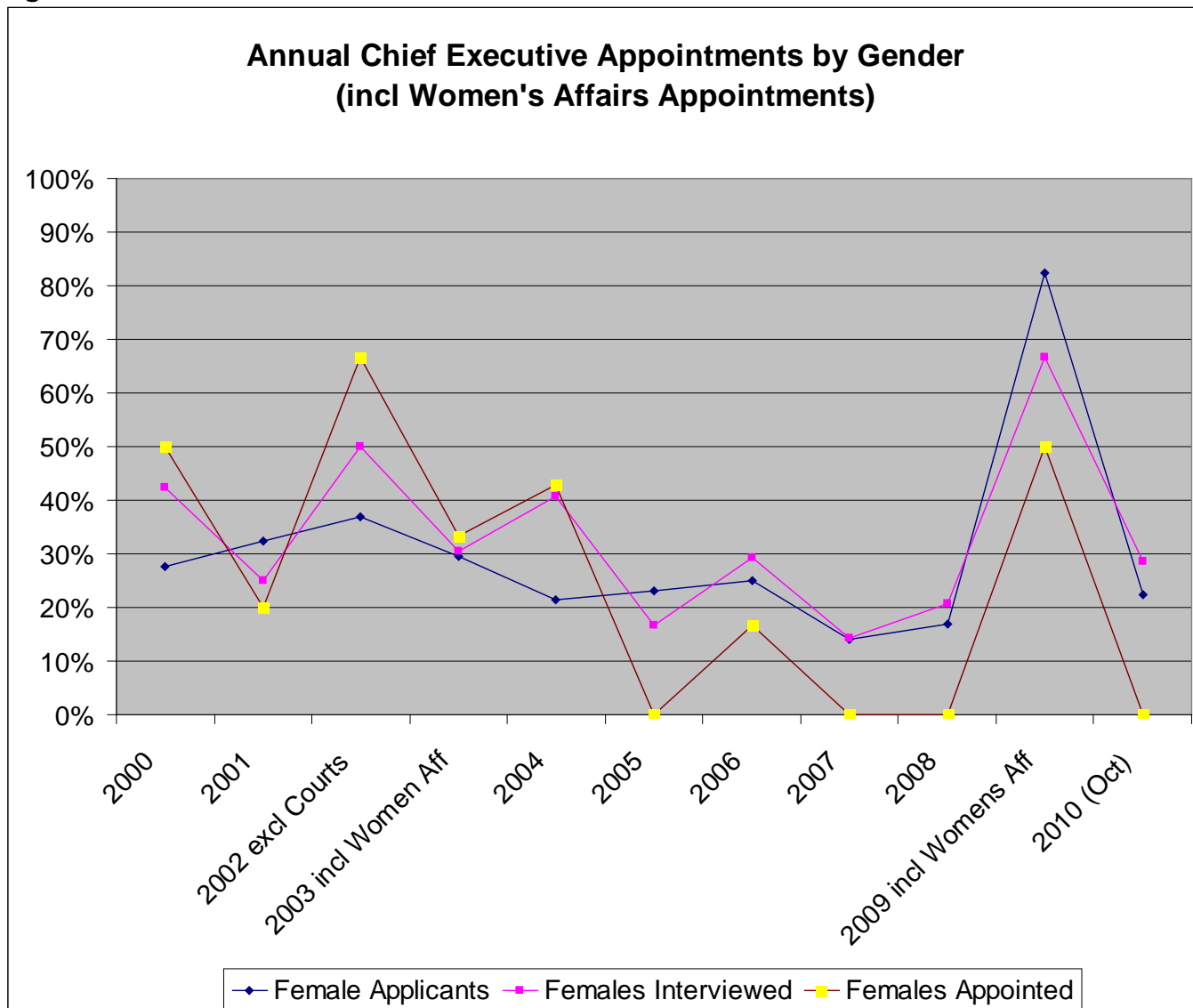
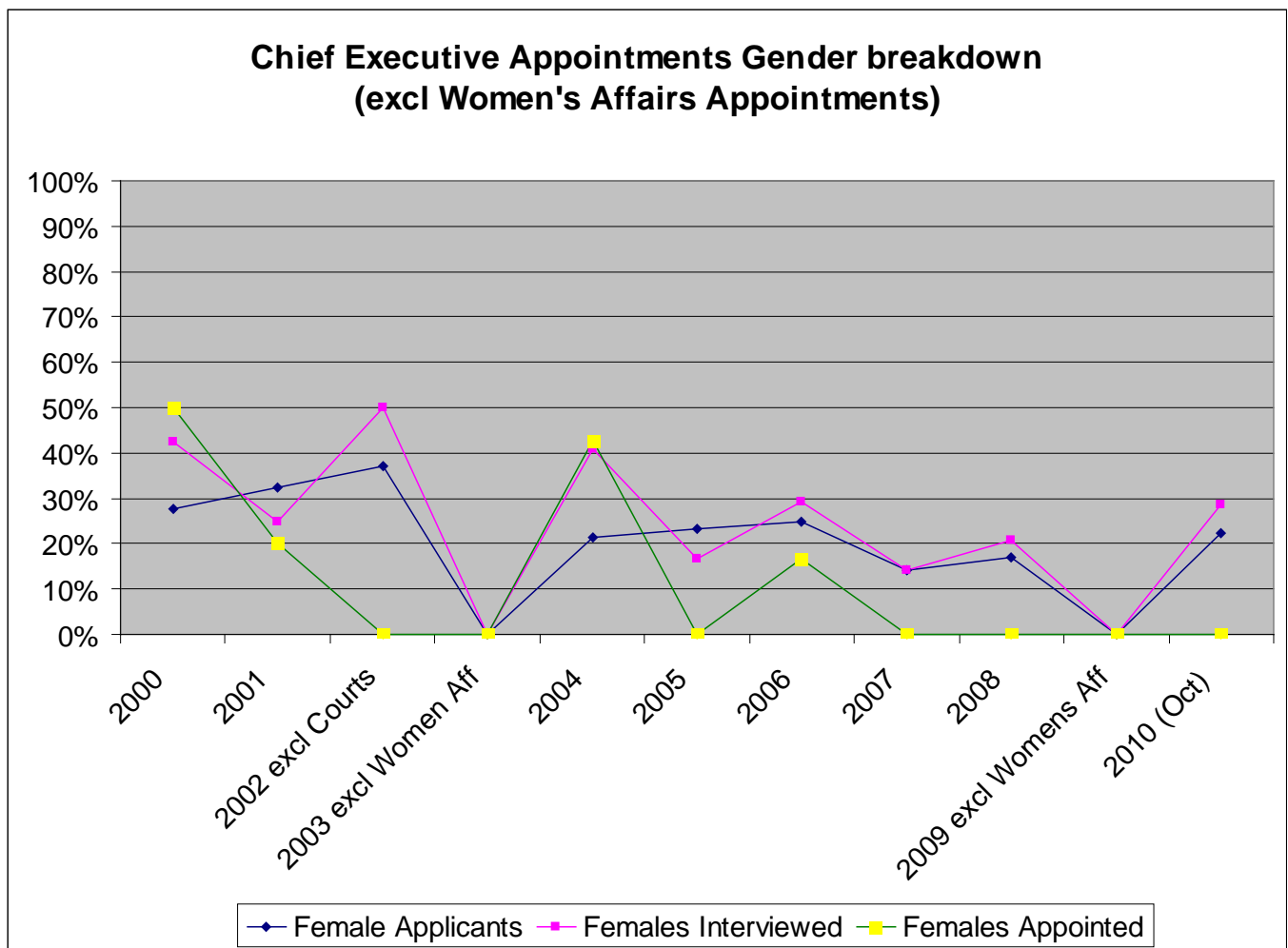


Figure 1b



SOURCES OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

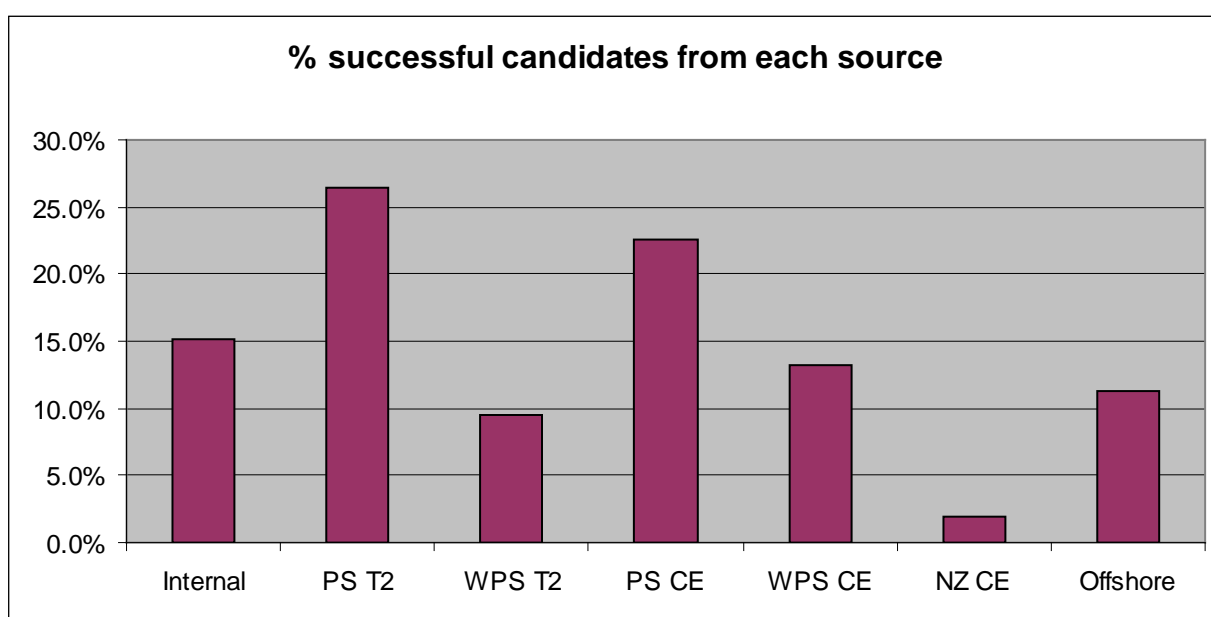
Table 1 below illustrates the nature of the roles and organisations from which successful candidates have been sourced. 65% of successful candidates came from within the core NZ Public Service, of which 15% were internal to the organisation being recruited for, 27% were from other core public service agencies and 23% were current Public Service CEs. Eighty eight per cent of successful candidates were from within the NZ wider public/state sector. Two per cent came from non state/public sector organisations within New Zealand and only 10% were recruited from outside New Zealand, namely from Australia, Canada and UK.

Of those appointed from non CE positions within the core public Service, three came from Ministry of Economic Development, two each from The Treasury, State Services Commission and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and one each from Statistics NZ, , NZ Defence Force, Crown Law, Inland Revenue and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Appointments made from the wider public/state sector came from Office of Auditor General (two), ACC, Reserve Bank, Transit NZ, Auckland Regional Transport Authority, Counties Manakau District Health Board, Auckland University, Christchurch College of Education, Pharmac and NZ Post (a State Owned Enterprise).

Over the decade, 45% of appointees have previously been chief executives or the equivalent. Five of the last 6 appointees have previously been CEs, the exception being the appointee to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs who was a third tier manager in a central agency.

Figure 2: Source of Successful Candidates for CE positions



Legend

- Internal = within organisation
- PST2 = Public Service tier 2
- WPST2 = Wider public sector tier 2
- PSCE = Public Service chief executive
- WPSCE = Wider public sector chief executive
- NZCE = CE from other NZ organisation
- Offshore = Outside NZ

HUMAN RESOURCES CAPABILITY SURVEY

A survey is conducted annually by the State Services Commission of Human Resources Capability in the Public Service. Table 1 illustrates how the proportion of senior management (tiers 1, 2 and 3) positions held by women has varied over the decade.

Table 1 Gender Composition of Public Service Senior Management and CE positions⁵

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Percentage senior mgmt positions held by women	33.6	32.7	35.5	35.1	36.2	35.6	37.7	37.8	38.3	37.8	39.8
Percentage of CEs who are female		23	22	24	26	26	23	22	23	19	17.6

The proportion of women in senior management roles trended slowly upwards from around 33% at the turn of the century, reaching 38% in 2007, then rising to 40% in 2010.

At the time of writing, the number of female CEs has declined to 5 out of 35 or 14.3%. This proportion is expected to continue to track downwards as a result of the lack of female CE appointments in recent years.

INTERVIEW THEMES

Introduction

In all, 9 people were interviewed of whom six were male and three were female. The State Services Commissioner was approached and designated his Deputy State Services Commissioner to respond. Other interviewees were central agency heads (2), another Deputy Commissioner, and principals from executive recruitment and assessment centre firms contracted to assist the Commissioner with specific appointments (5). All but 3 of those interviewed were directly involved in some or all of the appointments and the others were selected because they were close observers of and directly impacted by the selection outcome.

Barriers

Questions 1 to 4 addressed the factors that inhibited women from putting themselves forward for CE roles and being considered as credible candidates for CE roles, and the decreased numbers of female

⁵ Source: State Services Commission Human Resource Capability (HRC) Annual Surveys 2000- 2010, SSC Analysis of HRC data 2001-2009 and Human Rights Commission NZ Census of Women's Participation 2010

appointees. There was a wide range of responses to these questions. A small number of interviewees stated that they saw no differences between men and women. Others thought there were some limited differences and the balance quite material differences.

A strong theme which emerged was that CE roles have become increasingly complex and difficult and potentially less attractive as a result. Reasons cited as to why potential candidates of both genders do not apply are that they do not want the ambiguity inherent at the interface between the public service and its political masters, the frustrations and challenges of both working with 'robust' Ministers and the additional complexities of the MMP environment, the public exposure and with it the inability to defend yourself in the face of Ministerial or public criticism, and the personal cost of excessive hours and its impact on family life.

While several interviewees noted that the job performance of females is just as strong (if not stronger, said one) as their male counterparts, some considered that in general, women are inclined to display less confidence at interview than their abilities warrant. While two of the interviewees were clear that they saw no discernable differences between how male and female candidates present at interview, women were seen by several interviewees as less likely than their male counterparts to present convincingly at interview. Comments included that women are less likely than their male counterparts to 'display sufficient gravitas', 'to read the interview environment accurately', to 'convey their passion and motivation for the role and what they could achieve', and to 'articulate a results orientation'. 'Men are better at hiding their lack of confidence' said one, while another suggested that 'women have to be prepared to put on their suit of armour'. An interesting comment by yet another interviewer was that 'women are less likely to think about how they want to be seen as a leader and more inclined to focus on what they don't want to be seen as'.

Appetite and/or tolerance for risk and rejection emerged as a factor in potential candidates' decisions whether to apply for CE positions. Men were seen by some interviewees as more inclined to be personally proactive and to 'give it a shot'. They thought women were inclined to be more cautious, and to want to be approached. Women, they thought, were more likely to feel sense of personal rejection if unsuccessful and less likely to have another go.

Lack of female role models was advanced by several interviewees as another barrier to women aspiring to and applying for CE roles.

A consistent theme emerged on the subject of candidates bringing a broad range of relevant experience. Several commented that women are more likely to stay in roles, organisations or job families (ie policy, service delivery, corporate) too long, with a lack of large scale operational experience being seen as a barrier particularly affecting women. One interviewee commented that

women find it 'more difficult to get the necessary track record, particularly gaining relevant experience at tier 2 level'. In this regard, another interviewee was concerned that women are more inclined to be focused on the detail and doing the task. Women were seen by another respondent as being 'less likely to articulate their wish to progress and to have access to the opportunities that would allow them to do that.'

Related to the lesser tendency of senior women managers to advocate for opportunities to advance their careers was a perception by some that women have a lower level of visibility with key influencers and decision makers compared with their male counterparts and that this acts as a barrier to their being considered for such opportunities, or being approached about their interest in CE roles.

Finally some interviewees touched on the question of family responsibilities and speculated as to whether these played a greater role in women's career decision making in this context than for men, but this did not emerge as a significant issue in the interviewees' responses. Several did suggest that some of the interview questions in this survey would be better answered by women considering CE roles.

It is important to note that two thirds of those interviewed are directly involved in the selection process working to meet the Commissioner's requirements. While there was no evidence of any deliberate bias, it is not possible to rule out some form of unintentional systemic bias, such as selecting only candidates who fit a particular mould.

How to Make Progress

There was a high degree of consensus among those interviewed in their responses to questions 5 to 8 which centred on what could be done to increase the number of women ready and applying for CE roles.

Most mentioned the need for women to gain a broad range of diverse experiences, including experience in leading through multiple layers and in operational roles, working with a range of Ministers and stakeholders on major and long term pieces of work, gaining exposure across government, working independently in tough situations and 'taking the heat'.

Several stressed the importance of role models, both women in top roles acting as role models for other women, and role modelling by decision makers by appointing women to top roles. The importance of active engagement with coaches, mentors and networking was also emphasised by a

number of respondents. Similarly, the need to initiate contact and increase visibility with recruiters, other CEs and their agencies, Ministers and other key influencers and decision makers was mentioned. Those women aspiring to top leadership roles in the public sector CE candidates were urged to proactively drive their own careers in other ways, such as having in place career management plans and, ideally, being part of a formal career management process, 'being demanding' in seeking leadership development opportunities, asking for feedback if their candidature has been unsuccessful and making it easy and safe for that to be given, working with, observing and emulating successful CEs and 'practising being a CE' by thinking and acting as a CE would.

There was negligible support from those interviewed for quotas or hard targets. Attending formal executive development courses did not feature in the suggestions for developing CE ready women candidates.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The body of evidence continues to grow that supports the business case for having women represented at the highest level of decision making in organisations. International research commissioned by McKinsey (Desvaux et al, 2008) found that companies with several senior level women tend to perform better overall than those without. Those organisations with three or more women on their senior management teams scored higher on all nine dimensions of organisational performance than companies with no senior women. The internationally recognised critical mass of women at the top decision making levels that has been found to have a significant positive impact on organisational performance is a minimum of 30 per cent women⁶.

Maitland (2009) notes that 'international bodies, from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to the World Bank to the European Commission, now recognize the importance of women as engines of economic growth. In fact, Goldman Sachs has calculated that gender equality in the workforce could boost GDP by 9 percent in the United States, 13 percent in Europe, and 16 percent in Japan' (p1).

Despite the evidence to support the value to business performance in having women well represented in leadership roles, the authors of DDI's Global Leadership Forecast 2008/2009 voice their concern at the slow rate at which women are moving ahead and that they failing to attain leadership roles in the numbers expected (Howard & Wellins, 2009). Eagly & Carli (2007) cite a review of longitudinal studies that shows a slowing and flattening of the previously sharp upward trend of the 1970s and 1980s in the percentage of female managers.

"Organizations will succeed in filling half their top management slots with women - and women who are the true performance equals of their male counterparts - only by attacking all the reasons they are absent today" according to Eagly and Carli (2007, p9). While noting that women continue to experience impediments to holding organisational leadership roles, the authors observed that organisations can eliminate or reduce these impediments by introducing initiatives to increase access to and success of women and minorities in leadership roles.

Kilian et al (2005) found that "the most common barriers to minority advancement include stereotypes about roles and abilities, the scarcity of mentors and personal networks, the lack of significant line experience and visible assignments, and, particularly for women, family responsibilities" (p 155).

⁶ Tarr Whelan (2009) citing resolution of Forth United Nations Conference on the Status of Women, Beijing, 1995 and Rosabeth Moss Kantor's work

Likewise, a study carried out by Wellington et al (2003) for international research firm Catalyst, found wide agreement among Fortune 500 executive women and CEOs that lack of line experience bars women from the most senior jobs.

Shambaugh (2008) , who has worked with organisations over two decades to cultivate women leaders, coined the term 'sticky floors' to refer to ' self defeating and unrecognised beliefs, assumptions and behaviours that hold women back from achieving their career goals or advancing to the executive suite' (p39). Included in these behaviours she identified perfectionism, risk avoidance, failure to build relationships that are strategic, staying in one place too long (the loyalty factor), women not making their words count or voices heard and not being able to ask for what they want.

Chesterman, Ross-Smith, & Peters (2005) interviewed over 250 senior women and men in Australian public, private & tertiary education organisations. They found that the women in senior positions had only rarely put themselves forward for their current roles and many of them expressed conflicting views about senior roles. They determined that "some had experienced discrimination; others were reticent about their capacities, ambivalent about the choices or resisted the heavy demands of the jobs" (p1).

International corporates studied by Desvaux et al (2008) found that women were less likely than men to apply for promotion even though their performance overall exceeded that of their male counterparts (Lloyds TSB) and that women only applied for promotions when they met 100% of the criteria whereas men applied when they met 60% (Hewlett Packard). Such findings are of increasing concern to organisations internationally as they grapple with how to optimise their organisational performance by utilising their talent to maximum advantage.

A number of writers distinguish the different career paths of men and women and make the case for targeted development programmes to meet the specific needs of women. (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003; Hewlett, 2007; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Wittenberg-Cox and Maitland, 2008, Budworth & Mann 2010).

Kilian et al (2005) conclude that best practices in development of top talent indicate that a targeted focus on women (and similarly, on people of colour) is not just desirable, it is necessary. The authors explored interventions which have been successful in overcoming barriers to the success of women in corporate environments. They concluded that without active leadership from senior executives, existing cultural norms and managerial attitudes will not change. They found that successful intervention methods include 'holding managers accountable for progress on diversity

metrics, and training about diversity and associated attitudes and behaviors. Formal networks, mentoring programs, high potential talent identification and development, and work-life supports can also help an organization's diversity efforts" (p 155).

The personal support and action of the CEO was considered by Desvaux et al (2008) to be a contributor to the success that some organisations have achieved in the representation of women in their management ranks. Progress is assisted when this support is translated into specific initiatives such as diversity indicators which are established, monitored regularly and reviewed by senior executives who are held to account for achieving progress and developmental initiatives such as coaching, mentoring and networking programmes.

DISCUSSION

International research indicates that the business case is increasingly compelling for women to be well represented in the cadre of public service chief executives. Not to do so runs the risk that the performance of our public service and with it, New Zealand's economic performance, will lag behind other countries that are taking steps to utilise their pool of senior women and other minority group leaders more effectively.

The situation in New Zealand attests to a lack of progress in the representation of women in management roles. New Zealand slipped from having women as 31% of business managers in 2003 to 24% in 2006, then back up to 27% in 2009. New Zealand is now 17th among 36 OECD countries, having been 4th in 2003, meaning that more than half of these countries rate more highly than New Zealand.⁷

It is unclear as to what specifically has led to the marked decline in the number of female CEs in the New Zealand Public Service. There have been changes in a number of key areas in the ten years under study: in particular, changes to the feeder pool, the appointment process, the decision makers and key influencers, to the political and economic environment and to the attractiveness of the positions to potential candidates.

In recent years, women are being shortlisted for interview in roughly the same proportions as they are applying for CE positions, whereas in the years 2000-2004, the proportion of those interviewed who were female was somewhat higher than the proportion that applied (36% compared with 28%). It is interesting to speculate whether the increased proportion of women shortlisted was a contributing factor to the higher number of women appointed over this period.

The reduction in the numbers of female applicants for CE positions other than Women's Affairs may also be a contributing factor to the decline in female CE appointments. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the reasons for this decline in applicants, an examination of what is happening with the feeder pool of female senior managers will help shed light on whether this factor is partly responsible for the decline in female CE appointments.

There are several sources of information on the composition of the feeder pool for top leadership positions in the Public Service. Over the decade 2000-2010, the proportion of women holding senior management⁸ roles increased by 6 percentage points to reach 39.8% this year. The Advanced

⁷ Grant Thornton International Business Report

⁸ ie tiers 1, 2 and 3 of the Public Service

Leadership Programme offered by Leadership Development Centre and sponsored by the State Services Commissioner for developing senior public servants for top leadership roles now has 48% (35) female participants whereas the Programme's alumni comprise only 36% (16) women.⁹

The State Sector Act¹⁰ holds the Commissioner and departmental chief executives jointly responsible for 'the development of senior leadership and management capability in the Public Service, so that there will be sufficient senior employees who are able to fill chief executive and other leadership and senior management positions in the Public Service.' Recent discussions have been held between and the State Services Commission about the development of the most able of our senior public servants of whom slightly more than half are female¹¹.

Overall, these data sources indicate that the proportion of women in the feeder pool is tracking in a positive direction and therefore that the composition of the feeder pool is not a factor in accounting for the very large decline in the numbers of women appointed to CE positions. Rather, one would expect to see a corresponding increase in the proportion of women at CE level as a flow on effect of the increase in representation of women in senior management. Moreover, if 40% of these senior employees are female, then in a well performing system one it would be reasonable to see similar numbers at application, short listing, and appointment stages of the CE appointment process.

What do we know about the motivation of women to apply for CE positions? The State Services Commission's Career Progression and Development Survey (2002) found that 26% of Public Service managers aspired to a chief executive position with men and women equally wanting to progress their careers to more senior levels. It would be very useful to have current data to compare with these 2002 findings.

Patricia Reade's research study, 'Influences on Career Aspirations on Second-tier Managers in NZ Public Service' (2006) found that seven of the twelve deputy chief executives and deputy secretaries interviewed clearly aspired to chief executive roles. Her analysis found that that negative aspects concentrated around perceptions of the lonely and isolated nature of the roles, the exposure to risk and publicity, the increasingly political dimensions of the role, the impact on personal life and lifestyle and the lack of support and thankless nature of the job. The report did not distinguish between male and female responses.

Students on the Executive Masters in Public Administration programme, Battison et al (2009), carried out a research study for the State Services Commission and the Australia and New Zealand

⁹ Source: Leadership Development Centre

¹⁰ State Sector Act Part 4 Section 46

¹¹ Source: State Services Commission

School of Government which examined demand and supply side issues impacting on women's aspirations and choices in regard to chief executive positions. They found that 'women in New Zealand are less interested than their Australian counterparts in applying for a Chief Executive position and are more inclined (than their Australian counterparts) to view the role negatively'. (pv).

This report entitled 'A Chief Priority- Attracting More Women to Chief Executive Positions in the New Zealand Public Service' made sweeping recommendations to the State Services Commissioner that were designed to increase the number of women aspiring to and applying for CE roles. In particular, on the supply side, the report recommended that the Commissioner put in place initiatives to create and engage with the talent pool of high potential female managers, to offer an annual calendar of networking opportunities and to provide a comprehensive career management programme for these managers.

On the demand side, the report recommended implementing 'active' recruitment processes for identifying and encouraging female candidates to apply, piloting an Acting Chief Executive programme, clarifying and disseminating information about the skill set required for chief Executive roles, reviewing Chief Executive employment conditions and creating opportunities for Chief Executives and Senior Managers across government agencies to network and develop a shared understanding about 'whole of government' issues.

It must be of some concern to the State Services Commissioner that there appears to be such negative perceptions of the CE positions and that a decreasing percentage of the talent pool does not choose to apply for the positions. It would be very useful to carry out quantitative research on how attractive CE positions are to public service senior managers and the reasons why they choose to apply or not to apply for these positions. It may be that there are some aspects of the current environment or the selection process which are acting as an unnecessary barrier to people applying and that these can be changed without adversely affecting the integrity of the process.

The Commissioner's role is pivotal in the selection of the successful candidates for CE positions. During the period being analysed there have been three different Commissioners, with the changes in Commissioner taking place in mid 2004 and mid 2008. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine how the different Commissioners have impacted on the numbers of women applying for, being shortlisted for and being appointed to CE positions. Suffice to say that under statute, past and present, Commissioners have had the final decision on recommending appointments and as such their influence on the outcome cannot be overestimated.

Another factor in the mix is the inclusion by 2004 of an assessment centre into the appointment process. Its purpose is intended to add more rigour to the selection process. The question as to

what contribution, if any, the assessment process has played in the declining number of women appointed to CE positions was not addressed by this study. The extent to which the selection process in general and the assessment centre process in particular, predict effectiveness in the job was also beyond the scope of this report. Presumably, the Commissioner has this information and there is ongoing testing of the validity of the CE selection process and its component parts in predicting effective performance in the job.

Another contextual factor is the views and decisions of Ministers, although, in theory, they exercise little direct influence over who is appointed to public service CE positions, unless they overturn the Commissioner's recommendation. Furthermore, the environment in which appointments are being made has become increasingly demanding with high individual stakes, perhaps contributing to an increasingly risk averse approach by the Commissioner to appointments.

In addition to the above areas, a combination of the following factors may be contributing to the paucity of female CE appointments:

- In the absence of any deliberate steps to identify and develop a pool of female CE ready candidates, the system has reverted to its default state ie predominantly male
- Decreasing number of female CEs as role models
- Women may be less likely than their male counterparts to leave current roles to build a range of diverse experiences (the 'loyalty' factor)
- Women may be more likely than their male counterparts to wait to be asked to apply for positions and not to apply again if they have been unsuccessful.
- Women may be more likely than their male counterparts to be occupied with 'doing the job' and less likely to be actively positioning and profiling themselves
- Women may be increasingly inclined to see the CE roles as unattractive as they increase in complexity, work demands, public exposure and personal risk.

The themes that emerged from the interviews are broadly consistent with those identified in the international literature, and in particular, with those contained in the report *A Chief Priority* (Battison et al, 2009).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine what progress has made on these recommendations, there are pockets of initiatives happening both within and beyond the Public Service. Examples include the Global Women's Programme and its Wellington Women CEs Network, NZDF's Women Leaders Annual Development Forum, the Ministry of Social Development's Women Leaders' Development Forum and the proposal for a senior women's network operating under the umbrella of the Leadership Development Centre. In addition, peer learning groups for senior public sector women leaders are being established by the author of this paper. It is not known what other steps are being taken by the State Services Commission to develop and nurture potential women CE candidates in particular.

There was a high level of agreement between respondents on the types of initiatives which might lead to an increase in the pool of willing and able CE candidates. They fall into two main categories: those that women themselves drive and those which are championed and orchestrated by the State Services Commissioner.

There is a need to build programmes and initiatives that will assist women to prepare for CE roles such as career planning, networking, shadowing, coaching and mentoring, preparing and practising for interviews, leadership workshops and building personal profiles.

While the interview respondents did not favour targets or quotas, the evidence from international companies is that targets that are clearly communicated and visibly monitored by top management are effective in changing behaviour and would be likely to provide an effective lever in the New Zealand context.

CONCLUSION

If we keep doing the same thing we are going to get the same result - that is, the New Zealand Public Service will not reap the benefits of having high performing female leaders well represented in its cadre of chief executives. A circuit breaker is needed to begin reversing the current trend of ever diminishing numbers of female chief executives.

The State Services Commissioner plays the pivotal role in determining the composition of the chief executive group. He/she has sole responsibility for managing the appointment process within the statutory requirements, choosing and recommending the preferred candidate for each appointment, being the employer and performance manager of chief executives and having statutory responsibility for senior management development and equal opportunity within the Public Service. The Commissioner also shares joint responsibility with CEs for developing the succession pool. Within the context of the incumbent Government's requirements, what the person in the role of Commissioner

does and doesn't do makes the greatest difference to the make up of the Public Service chief executive cadre over the medium to long term. As the person responsible for chief executive performance, he/she is also in a unique position to hold CEs to account for developing future CEs. To do this credibly calls for both communicating and personal modelling by the Commissioner of the desired behaviours and practices.

This is an opportunity for the State Services Commissioner to provide hands on leadership. The Commissioner must take deliberate, proactive steps to redress the balance if the New Zealand Public Service is going to be able to hold its head up internationally in this area. Several excellent recommendations are contained in *A Chief Priority* report (Battison et al, 2009), which if implemented would begin the process of reversing the declining number of women CEs in the Public Service.

Having said this, the Commissioner cannot alone achieve a turnaround in this situation. Women leaders too must take steps to strengthen their claim to CE roles by addressing their 'sticky floors' and self limiting behaviours, being prepared to think and act as CEs, backing themselves and doing the necessary yards to build their credibility for these roles.

There are a range of initiatives which could be taken to help reverse this situation. The design and delivery of such initiatives is an area for further attention that should be informed by those practices that have been implemented in other New Zealand and international organisations that are having a positive impact.

Another area that would benefit from further research is the attractiveness of CE positions to senior managers and their career aspirations, to determine any differences between males and females. Researching the views of top NZ public sector male and female leaders, past and present, would provide another window into how to take this situation forward.

If he does not already do so, the Commissioner needs to be satisfied that all reasonable steps have been taken both to ensure that the recruitment process has identified and encouraged the candidature of leaders from diverse backgrounds and with a range of effective leadership styles and that any bias is eliminated from the selection process.

The long term objective should be to have women represented at CE level in the public service in similar proportions to their representation in the workplace (currently 59%).

A realistic medium term objective would be to exceed the highest prior level of representation of women at CE level (26% in 2005).

These findings help narrow the options for achieving these objectives and support a conclusion that the following package would constitute a viable path forward for the Commissioner:

1. establishing a well publicised medium term goal of 30% female chief executives by 2015, (with interim milestones) with annual monitoring and reporting on progress, and that these targets be included in the Commission's annual Statement of Intent.
2. agreeing annual expectations of CEs for the level of representation of females in their agency's senior management group.
3. short listing at least one female to be for every CE position and requiring the contracted recruitment agency to provide 30% female long listed candidates and at least one short listable female candidate by 2013 (with interim milestones).
4. requiring contracted recruitment/assessment firms to have at least one senior level female directly involved in recruiting/assessing candidates.
5. having at least 30% female representation on all CE appointment panels.
6. implementing the recommendations of 'A Chief Priority' report.
7. commissioning research into why T2 managers (both male and female) do and do not apply for CE positions
8. commissioning research into what steps other international jurisdictions have taken to strengthen their pool of potential female CE candidates and what impact those steps have had.
9. regularly reviewing the recruitment and selection process and their component parts to ensure that they are 'fit for purpose' in that they embrace a range of effective leadership styles, accurately predict performance in the job and that all reasonable steps have been taken to eliminate bias.

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