Gender in the Workplace: The Journey to Equality

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Arguments focus on benefits at three levels:

1) individual level
   - a matter of fairness and equity

2) national level
   - competitive and economic benefits

3) enterprise level
   - improved organisational performance
   - access to talent
The gender equality scorecard

• 2011 marked the 25th anniversary of the Affirmative Action Act

• Some progress made
  - more women in paid employment
  - paid maternity leave
  - flexible work options

• But ongoing discrimination and disadvantage
  - gender pay gap
  - poor representation of women in leadership positions
  - caring responsibilities
Barriers to gender equality in the workplace

• Failure to position gender equality as a central business issue

• Impediments to achieving gender equality
  - male-dominated society and organisational cultures
  - gendered attitudes
  - worker stereotypes
  - embedded bias in HR systems
  - unconscious bias
How can we achieve gender equality in the workplace?

• Male Champions of Change convened by Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner
  - a phased approach to achieving gender equality but do we have time for this?

• Limited window of opportunity to get results
  - problem of “gender fatigue”
How can we achieve gender equality in the workplace?

Key steps for making a change

**Leadership**
- visibly present as an advocate for gender equality
- be a role model
- set clear expectations
How can we achieve gender equality in the workplace?

Focus
- establish gender equality as a business priority
- identify issues to be addressed
How can we achieve gender equality in the workplace?

Accountability
- establish action plans
- measure and transparently report outcomes
- hold managers accountable
The current role of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency

- Statutory authority under the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act
- Key Australian government agency to improve gender diversity in workplaces
- Regulatory function
- Education and assistance function
The current role of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency

EOWA Employer of Choice for Women (EOCFW) citation
- acknowledgement of organisations recognising and advancing women

- 2001: 55 recipients
  2012: 125 recipients

- rigorous criteria

- driver of significant improvements for women
Proposed EOWA reforms

**June 2009** – review to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the Act and EOWA in promoting equal opportunity for women in the workplace

**March 2011** – government announcement that EOWA is to be retained and improved

**March 2012** – legislation tabled in the House of Representatives and referred to the Senate Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Proposed EOWA reforms

A new name and focus
- Workplace Gender Equality Act
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency
- new focus on gender equality, equal remuneration between women and men, family and caring responsibilities and productivity and competitiveness
Proposed EOWA reforms

Reporting
- new gender equality indicators focussed on outcomes
- reports signed by CEO, completed on-line and made available to employees and shareholders
- employee organisations notified when a report is lodged
- opportunity for employees and employee organisations to comment to the employer or the Agency
Proposed EOWA reforms

Compliance
- non-compliance is a failure to meet a minimum standard and improve over a two-year period
- Agency will provide advice to “poor performers”
- Agency will conduct organisational reviews to check compliance
- penalties: “name and shame” and exclusion from Federal government procurement/grants
Proposed EOWA reforms

Assistance
- Agency will develop benchmarks and strategies to help organisations improve their performance
- Agency will provide advice and support to all private sector organisations including those not required to report
Proposed EOWA reforms

• Staged implementation for reporting
  - 2012/2013 reporting year: workplace profile only
  - 2013/2014 reporting year: new gender equality indicator reporting

• New legislation is a significant advance
Proposed EOWA reforms

• Modus operandi of the Agency will not change
  - “light touch” regulation
  - work cooperatively with employers

• Commitment to
  - building key external relationships
  - raising the profile of gender equality issues
  - assisting in aggregating efforts to improve gender equality
Conclusion

• The journey to gender equality in the workplace has a long way to go

• It’s time for concerted action

• Employers must respond
  - threat of more prescriptive legislation
  - need to accommodate societal changes

• Agency is committed to doing everything possible to accelerate the journey to gender equality in Australian workplaces