

## MEDIA RELEASE

### NEW STUDY FINDS VALUING DIVERSE STYLES IS KEY TO WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT THROUGH SENIOR MANAGEMENT RANKS

- *Majority of professionals surveyed feel that leadership teams do not embrace the different styles that women bring to a team*
- *Senior leaders appoint others with styles more like themselves, continuing the cycle of exclusion*
- *Men and women have different styles - men are viewed as better "promoters," women as better "collaborators"*
- *Whose style is more effective is crucial to the debate*

**A comprehensive study of 842 Australian business professionals debunks a popularly-held belief that competing work-home priorities is the greatest inhibitor of women's advancement to senior management positions.**

The study, conducted by global business consulting firm, Bain & Company, in partnership with Chief Executive Women (CEW) of Australia, found that the biggest threat to the advancement of women is that senior leaders are more likely to promote someone with a similar leadership style as their own, and that they do not value the perspectives women bring to a leadership team.

According to the study, competing work-life priorities still represent a roadblock in women's career advancement. However, approximately 60 per cent of total survey respondents (both male and female) feel that "style" differences (i.e. gender-specific approaches to management situations and issues) are a bigger obstacle to women's career advancement. The majority of women (78 per cent of women respondents) are in this group. However, only 39 per cent of men agree, with the majority (61 per cent of male respondents) believing that competing work-family commitments is the main inhibitor.

The survey shows those who consider that "differences in style" is the biggest constraint to women's progression list the following factors (either Agree or Strongly Agree) as the most important inhibitors of women's advancement to leadership positions:

- Men are more likely to appoint or promote someone with a style similar to their own as the top factor (90 per cent)
- Women under-sell their experience and capabilities (79 per cent)
- Some leadership teams do not value the different perspectives that women bring to the team (78 per cent)

"There aren't enough women in senior ranks in Australia and this research shines a light on differences in style as the biggest roadblock for women's advancement" said Bain partner Melanie Sanders, who is the leader of Bain's Asia Pacific Woman at Bain program. "The challenge is that this issue is not widely acknowledged, and men and women don't always see the issues the same way."

The study finds that women and men are viewed as equally effective at delivering results for their organisation. There was no gender difference identified in attributes such as making commercially-sound decisions, managing high-pressure situations and delivering significant or transformative change—largely the critical attributes that create value and drive results in organisations.

However, the study highlighted that men and women agree that they achieve these outcomes with quite different styles. Both genders generally view men as better “promoters”, i.e. performing better than women at such activities as speaking up in leadership meetings, better at managing emotions at work and working with colleagues of the same gender. Women were viewed by both sexes as better “collaborators”, working effectively in a team and maintaining work and family commitments.

The stark finding highlighted in the research is that women’s collaborating style is not perceived to be as effective as men’s promoting style. Specifically, women are perceived to be less effective at problem solving. Men rated women as half as effective as other men on this dimension – which was rated by both genders to be the most important leadership attribute.

“Women problem solve differently to men, typically collaborating more, engaging others in the process and not needing to take the credit for getting the problem solved” said Jayne Hrdlicka, from CEW and co-author of the study, Group Executive at Qantas, and non executive director at Woolworths. “While this approach is highly effective at creating ownership and buy-in to the answer to the problem and the actions required, it presents a challenge for women if this is not recognised as problem solving and contributes to not getting appropriate recognition for their leadership capability.”

**For a full copy of the study, or to request an interview with Melanie Sanders or Jayne Hrdlicka, please contact:**

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**About Chief Executive Women**

Chief Executive Women (CEW) is one of Australia's leading organisations supporting female leadership in Australia. Its members include over 200 of Australia's senior women leaders. CEW's goal is to facilitate greater representation of women at senior levels of Australian business, government and the not-for-profit sectors. CEW provides scholarship, mentoring and networking to talented women to help them attain important leadership roles in Australia and undertakes research and provides diagnostic tools to assist organisations improve the development and retention of women talent. For more information visit: [www.cew.org.au](http://www.cew.org.au)