Career Advancement for Women in Accounting

Amy Watson
Adrian France*

*Waikato Institute of Technology

Adrian.france@wintec.ac.nz
Wintec, Private Bag 3036, Waikato Mail Centre, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand.
Outline

• Introduction

• Method

• Results
Problem Statement

• The existence of a glass ceiling for women
  – Invisible barriers (Benschop & Brouns, 2005)
  – Discrimination, family responsibilities, lack of access to organisational knowledge, need to adopt male-style roles (Twomney, Linehan, & Walsh, 2002)

• Reality of barriers to career progression not encountered by males (McStravog, 2005)

• Female participation in (accounting) work, not top
  – Female participation now 48% of workforce (Whiting, 2004)
    » Female directorships 8% of NZX top 100 (Swann, 2009)
  – Females ½ university classes (Whiting, 2004)
  – Female NZICA membership now 38% (NZICA, 2008)

• Female senior management positions in accounting profession 19.6% (Parsons, 2008)
Glass Ceiling Review

• Glass ceiling not reference to individuals characteristics, reference to women as a group (Benschop & Brouns, 2005)

• Women in professional services encounter up to 17 barriers, men fewer (Tone, 2008)

• Barriers: psychological, situational, social

• Networking & mentoring conducted out of work “old boys club” (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986; Hopson & Lord, 2009).
Barriers Review

• Conform to masculine stereotypes & perpetuate (Morley, Bellamy, Jackson, & O’Neil, 2001).

• Discrimination & stereotyping (Hopson & Lord, 2009; Owen & Todor, 1993)

• Perception women primary caregiver & lack commitment to job (Abidin, 2009)

• Work/balance pressures alleviated = women reluctant to use

• Part time work
  = lower status & salary (Whiting & Wright, 2001)
  = limit or defer children (Whiting, 2004)
Solutions Review

• “Inhospitable culture” (Abidin, 2009; McKenna, 1997; Cornelius, 1998)

• Male & female differences in career progression attitudes. Maybe? Maybe same?
  – Apply similar or different strategies to promotion

• Glass ceiling dismantling requires
  – Individuals understanding barriers
  – Leaders understanding barriers
  – Using successful strategies of other women (Belle, et al., 1998)

• Strategies for women to gain career progression:
  – Exceed performance expectations
  – Develop styles comfortable for male managers
  – Seek challenging & visible assignments
  – Have mentor support (Ragins, et al., 1998; McStravog, 2005)
Current Study

• Much research on the barriers of women
• Women that have dismantled the glass ceiling in the accounting field
• Aim to identify factors & characteristics of those female accountants successfully overcoming the glass ceiling in NZ.
Method

• Identify factors from female accountants that have successfully overcome the glass ceiling
• Selection of female members of NZICA
• Success = associate, director, or partner
• Sampling technique = chain sampling effective for specialist & knowledgeable populations
• 8 participants described & reflected on career progression, barriers, & strategies
Results

• Career timeline

• Organisational context

• Personal characteristics
Results: Career Timeline

• Rapid career progression
• Few jobs & same employer = Significant commitment
• No one single project attributed to career progression
• Respondents made it known with senior partners of their desire to advance
Results: Career Timeline

• A respondent admitted
  – 10yrs to get promoted, during which
  – began family,
  – lack of not knowing what was required,
  – & lack of discussing progression desires

• “Board known of your desire to become partner?” “Not as early as I should of”
  “So Probably 2 yrs before made partner”
Results: Career Timeline

• Gender specific barriers
  – Time off to have children
  – Older partners favouring male staff
  – Discrimination in pay

• (Older) Clients prefer male staff
Results: Organisational Context

• Participants keen on networking events
• Now networking strategically with time pressure
• All had a mentor = informal & unstructured
• Part time impacted career progression
• Friday night drink invites to “rugby boys”
• Supportive with promotions & maternity leave
• Career breaks to have children slows down career progression. No participant deferred.
• 3-5 mnths maternity leave then full time
Results: Organisational Context

• ½ successful women had husbands stay at home with children
• Provided focus while on full time work
• Attributed successful career progression in part to husbands
Results: Personal Characteristics

• Participants self described management style:
  – Open door policy, ability to delegate, very supportive, giving employees freedom
  – “Not micromanaging”

• All agreed their management style changed
  – More relaxed & less personal
Conclusion

• Barriers to career progression:
  – Gender discrimination, managing family/work balance, part time work,
  – Maternity leave slowing progression
  – Accounting has additional discrimination from clients

• Strategies used:
  – Enjoy work, actively pursue progression, make desire to progress known, display drive & determination

• Successful female accountants have commitment = displayed in ways that are not long work hrs...