

# Career Advancement for Women in Accounting

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# 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...