



# Making it work with women

May 2016

Maybe you're a small business owner. Maybe you're the CEO of a major company or the managing director of a board. Maybe you're in charge of implementing this new thing called 'diversity' that everyone seems to be talking about. Maybe you want to improve the gender balance in your workplace and you don't know where to start.

**The good news is there are plenty of women out there. In the last 30 years, the female labour force has increased by more than 50 percent. New Zealand's female labour force participation is above the OECD average.**

But women aren't always where we need them in the workforce. There are still too few in senior roles across nearly every sector you can name and women continue to be underrepresented in governance. Nearly 50 percent of New Zealand women work in female-dominated industries, and these jobs are often poorly paid.

Women in New Zealand are slowly but surely making inroads into industries that were previously closed to them; it's no longer a novelty to see a female police officer, or doctor. Women are working on building sites and in technology companies. More New Zealand women are graduating from tertiary study than ever before.

We need more women in meaningful and well-paid work for many reasons. If you're concerned about your bottom line, hiring and promoting women is a smart move. A 2015 McKinsey Global Institute report found that advancing women's equality could add US\$12 trillion to global growth.

Numerous studies have found that companies with gender-diverse boards perform more competitively, thanks to better decision-making at the top. Giving women more spending power is better for them, their families and our economy.

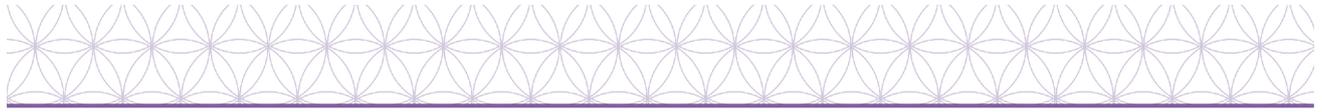
New Zealand can't afford to ignore such a massive proportion of the workforce, but there are many who have yet to realise the opportunity.

**We have worked with a variety of sectors and analysed many others. Here's what we've learned.**

## Change needs champions

**Leaders within an organisation or sector need to see what's wrong with the status quo and call for change. The call needs to be highly visible, consistent and determined; wherever they're from, these champions need to link change to business strategy and keep their foot on the gas.**

In 2011, a UK government-commissioned report by Lord Mervyn Davies criticised gender inequality on boards.



Lord Davies' public call to action was supported by a group of senior, highly respected chairs and spurred a strong response. The report and subsequent annual monitoring is driving significant change. There are now more women on FTSE 350 boards than ever before and a massive reduction in the numbers of all-male boards.

One FTSE chair said no one wanted to be left behind:

*"Once it becomes a direction of travel then people climb on board because they don't want to appear to be the odd ones out. The more people that did it, the more people saw that actually the boardroom dynamics improved, they became advocates because of the improvement not because of the adoption, and then these things start to become embedded."*

Closer to home, Fletcher Building chief executive Mark Adamson has pushed for more diversity among the company's 19,000+ employees. He says Fletcher Building recognises that hiring the best staff, irrespective of gender, ethnicity or sexuality, will help it achieve its goals and deliver results for shareholders. The company has already seen big gains in productivity in parts of the business where it has increased the number of women, which contributes to Fletcher Building's bottom line.

While change must be championed at the highest levels, we need to recognise leadership wherever it occurs. In 2013, Hays senior recruitment consultant Chloe Sabbadin used her expertise to lead change. Chloe wanted to attract more women to the construction industry and change perceptions about the jobs women could do. She designed an event to celebrate women working in the sector on the basis that increased visibility would help boost numbers. In 2015, more than 190 people attended the Hays NAWIC Excellence Awards in Christchurch and Hays has been looking at creating similar events around the globe, thanks to Chloe's influence.

## Change needs evidence

**Look at where the women are in your industry and in your organisation, and where they will be in the future. Look at your business strategy. Will you be left behind if you don't take action?**

Gathering data is crucial to success. Data helps you understand the scope of the issue, the challenges you face, and the partners who can help. Better metrics also help build a business case to convince those who may see employing women purely as a human resources issue.

In 2013, the Ministry for Women's 'Building Back Better' research identified women's potential as an untapped labour force in the Canterbury rebuild, and provided the business case for increasing their numbers. The research pinpointed what it would take to attract more women into trades jobs. It also focused on who could help make the project a success; people who could see a need for, and a benefit from, thinking and acting differently to help the Canterbury recovery.

As a result, Ara (formerly the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology) introduced measures to increase the numbers of women in trades training. In 2013 it launched the first 'Top female trades student award', and in 2014 it introduced fees free trades training for women. By December 2014 it had 414 female enrolments (compared to 120 in 2013).

## Change needs a co-ordinated plan

**Once you've got the data, use it to map out tangible actions. The devil is in the detail, but once you have a plan people can see what they need to do and what they're accountable for.**

In 2013, a survey by the New Zealand's road transport industry showed it faced a widespread shortage of drivers. Attracting more women to the industry was an obvious answer, but they needed to be smart about how they did it.

The Road Transport Forum's resulting action plan was nine months in the making. It focused on four areas: increasing the visibility of women and expanding their work opportunities; addressing unconscious bias; improving workplace practices and policies; and providing networking and support. The plan was detailed, with clear timeframes and buy-in from participants from across the sector.



## Change needs to be measured

**Any action plan is pointless if it doesn't have clear baselines and targets to increase understanding. Accountability plays a big part in driving change.**

BNZ began looking at ways to improve its gender balance back in 2010, with a review led from the top. The bank employed men and women in equal numbers, but women's experiences in regard to progression differed.

BNZ's board and executive identified areas where the bank's processes were failing. They looked at recruitment policies and practices, mandated that all roles would be advertised with the option of flexible working and applied a gender lens to the bank's succession planning and development programmes, among other things. Crucially, they set stretch targets for these measures and embedded them in the executive team's performance scorecards. They developed a comprehensive people and diversity dashboard, including gender disaggregated data, which is used in monitoring and decision making. The targets are now part of the bank's Performance Alignment Framework and the bank has been recognised internationally for empowering women at work.

## Who is doing a good job?

**There are organisations of all sizes in all sectors working hard to improve results for their staff and their businesses as a whole.**

Flexible working is a key part of life for staff at Abley Transportation Consultants. The engineering firm's 40 employees, who are split between Auckland and Christchurch, benefit hugely from a supportive culture. Founder and managing director Steve Abley says creating an environment where "people can do their best work" means the company attracts good workers, has low staff turnover and reaps rewards as a business.

New Zealand Police has worked hard in recent years to ensure that its workforce is more representative of the New Zealand population. Changes to recruitment policies and increased emphasis on valuing diversity and empathy have seen a 44 percent rise in the number of women in

the ranks since 2005. Now, the service is 20 percent female. Most women are in frontline roles but more are moving through the ranks. Women now lead three of 12 police districts and there are several women at executive level.

The work of the Stronger Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team (SCIRT) is notable on many levels. Following the Christchurch earthquakes, the organisation encouraged collaboration between its partners (five large construction companies and three government organisations) to solve the city's labour shortage problems as the 'below ground' rebuild began.

SCIRT's solution was to encourage women into roles more commonly held by men. It achieved a 50 percent increase in the number of female workers in the industry between 2013 and 2014 by challenging biases, altering recruitment practices and providing more support.

**See Getting it done: Utilising women's skills in the workforce for more information**  
<http://bit.ly/1SK0Eja>

## Five things you can do

1. Lead from where you are: model the change you want to see in your organisation
2. Do the homework – identify the core reasons for change
3. Make a detailed plan that holds everyone accountable
4. Keep track and measure the things you care about
5. Celebrate the wins

## Further reading

**See Inspiring Action: Action plans and research to help you attract and retain talented women**  
<http://bit.ly/26pGe3h>

PO Box 10 049  
Wellington 6143, New Zealand

Tel: (04) 915 7112  
Fax: (04) 916 1604

[www.women.govt.nz](http://www.women.govt.nz)  
[info@women.govt.nz](mailto:info@women.govt.nz)

[newzealand.govt.nz](http://newzealand.govt.nz)

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