

**CLIFFORD CRAIG FOUNDATION
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY LUNCHEON 2022
ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
COUNTRY CLUB TASMANIA, LAUNCESTON
WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH 2022**

It is a great pleasure to be here today to mark International Women's Day, a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

May I acknowledge among us:

- The Honourable Jo Palmer
- The Honourable Nick Duigan
- The Honourable Rosemary Armitage
- The Honourable Tania Rattray
- Ms Bridget Archer MP
- Senator Wendy Askew
- Ms Kate Kent, Deputy Secretary, Communities Tasmania
- Mr Peter Milne, CEO, Clifford Craig Foundation
- Directors and staff of the Clifford Craig Foundation

I would like to acknowledge the Clifford Craig Foundation and commend its charitable work and substantial research funding over the last 30 years. May I also acknowledge the late Dr Craig Clifford after whom this Foundation is named.

International Women's Day has been celebrated for well over 100 years. The day gives us an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of women, to reflect on gender equality and to assess how we are progressing. This year's theme is 'Breaking The Bias' with a focus on raising awareness of the significant impact bias, both conscious and unconscious, has on women's equality.

I want to focus on unconscious bias and how to challenge it. I would also like to briefly mention the benefits of gender equity and some personal assessments of how we are going in Australia in challenging unconscious bias.

Why is it important to “break the bias”?

May I first ask the obvious question of why it is important to “break the bias”. Both conscious and unconscious bias can affect the way employers recruit, hire, promote, evaluate performance and make decisions. Bias limits the influence of women and limits diversity and equity in leadership. Unconscious bias can make us more reluctant to give authority to women than to men and it can cause attrition of women from professions, the under-representation of women in senior roles and over-representation at less senior levels.¹

It can affect earnings and impact career advancement. A perception survey of women professionals in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in Australia found that 70% agreed that unconscious bias had negatively impacted their career advancement, and 60% agreed that it had impacted their earnings.²

Australian women executives have reported that they are held back in reaching the top of their organisation by the perception a woman’s leadership style is different and that men are more likely to value and promote those whose perspectives are similar to their own.³ As Sue Morphet, an Australian Board Director noted recently, “men employ men. Not because they don’t like working with women, they just expect the men will be better at what they do, they have had more experience.”⁴

I am sure we all agree that we need to recognise bias, conscious or unconscious, and call it out,⁵ so that there is a balance in leadership. If we do not recognise bias, we cannot overcome it and compel changes in attitudes.

Unconscious bias?

So, let me turn to unconscious gender bias. It is more insidious than overt bias and sexism. We are usually unaware that our behaviour has been influenced by this bias, because it is entwined in the way we perceive the world.

¹ Professionals Australia Gender and Diversity: Unconscious Gender Bias In The STEM Professions (2015) page 4.

² Ibid page 5 citing Professionals Australia: Unconscious gender bias in the STEM professions (Melbourne, 2015).

³ <https://cew.org.au/paying-lip-service-to-equality-doesn't-pay-off> citing Bain and Company and Chief Executive research page 4 accessed 20/12/2021.

⁴ Financial firms fall behind Charlotte Grieve The Age 19/10/2021 page 23.

⁵ www.internationalwomensday.com/speeches

Those who unconsciously undervalue and disrespect women are likely to deny the existence of any bias, because they are not aware they are doing it. This makes it hard to call out unconscious bias. Women who complain about it can be characterised as over-sensitive or told they are being “hysterical” or making it up.⁶ This reminds me of a recent Patricia Karvelas interview on ABC radio. A listener described her as hysterical after hearing her questioning of the Federal Health Minister. She was certainly not hysterical, she was calm and forceful. Would this description have been attributed to her if she were a man? I doubt it.

Unconscious bias, as I have said, is insidious and is hard to detect and to deal with. Mary Ann Sieghart in “The Authority Gap”, my favourite go-to book on systemic sexism, gave a good example of when a woman is told by her male boss that she is not being given a challenging project because “women can’t do that sort of thing”. She could complain to HR about that. If, instead she is told that she is not ready to take on this challenge, she is more likely to blame herself, to lose confidence, and to believe the assessment, even if it is tainted by unconscious bias and is inaccurate.⁷

No matter how intelligent or progressive we are, we are all likely to suffer from unconscious bias. Scientific studies have shown that women as well as men have unconscious biases, even against our own gender.⁸ We may not be able to stop this bias, but we can recognise that the bias is based on an incorrect assumption and then try to correct for it. If we find a competent woman unlikeable, we can ask why? Would we feel the same if she was a man? Is it our problem? Similarly, we should be careful of adjectives that come to mind when appraising a female colleague. Do we think she is bossy, shrill or aggressive? Mary Anne Sieghart argues this may tell us more about our bias than about the woman herself.⁹

A lot of behaviour which undermines women is unconscious. May I offer an example of unconscious gender bias that occurred when the male partners of my law firm assumed that I did not have partnership ambitions because of my gender and because I had children! There had never been a female partner in the 100-year-old firm. They were only used to men. They made the incorrect assumption based on their norms and experience.

⁶ Ibid page 10.

⁷ Ibid page 71.

⁸ The Authority Gap, Mary Ann Sieghart Penguin Random House 2021 page 7 citing Jost et al “The existence of implicit bias is beyond reasonable doubt: a refutation of ideological and methodological objections and executive summary of ten studies that no manager should ignore” Research in Organisational Behavior, 29 (2009), pp 39-69.

⁹ Ibid page 290

Another example was when a male partner did not want to employ a female lawyer with a young child because he assumed she would have more children and not continue with her employment.

You may ask how I dealt with such attitudes. I was polite and patient, or tried to be. I pointed out politely the flaws in thinking of the males, and to propose changes in the law firm. I made it known that I wanted to be a partner. After I became a partner, I am very pleased to report that two more females came into the partnership. Once the males got used to the idea of female partners and realised we were actually good at our jobs and good for business, they somewhat changed their attitudes. I was able later to bring in a sexual harassment policy in the firm, after this not being taken seriously and opposed on the basis that it was not necessary. I pushed on and would like to think that I helped make some changes to the culture of the firm.

A common complaint made by women is that their contributions to meetings are overlooked or they are interrupted by men. Martin Parkinson, a former Treasury Secretary, said recently at a CEW event that real progress in increasing gender diversity at senior levels in Treasury began when there was more genuine listening in meetings. He reported that when everyone's voice was heard, this led to better problem solving.¹⁰

Personally, this reminds me of the time I was asked by a senior lawyer when I was the only female partner in my law firm, "how do you find partners' meetings? I suppose it doesn't matter what you say, as no-one listens to a woman!"— a stark example of being discounted because of gender.

In respect of meetings, we can support other women if a man is interrupting them in a meeting. We can affirm what female colleagues say at meetings. If a woman makes a point at a meeting and is ignored and a man makes the same point later, we can remind the meeting that the woman had the idea first.

The issue of leadership style and gender bias are inter-linked challenges to overcome. Women's leadership style is generally different to men's. The women's traditionally categorised feminine leadership qualities are empathy, compassion and truthfulness.¹¹

One survey revealed that one reason women are held back was that leadership teams do not value the different perspectives that women bring to the team.¹²

¹⁰ <https://cew.org.au/paying-lip-service-to-equality-doesn't-pay-off> page 5 accessed 9/01/2022.

¹¹ <https://cew.org.au/topics/women-in-leadership/> page 2.

¹² What stops women from reaching the top? Confronting the tough issues 2011 Bain & Company Inc.

Yet, whilst the survey found that men and women have different styles, they both deliver on the job and make strong leaders.¹³ Different leadership styles should be celebrated.

Benefits of Gender Equity

May I comment on the benefits of gender equity. There is evidence of measurable benefits from a greater gender balance and equity in key decision-making positions. Reported research demonstrates that more women in key decision-making positions, delivers three results — better company performance, greater productivity and greater profitability.¹⁴

This research demonstrates that increasing representation of women across the key leadership roles in an organisation added market value of between \$52 and \$70 million per year for an average sized organisation.¹⁵ This supports a causal association between women in leadership and business performance. It demonstrates that gender diversity in leadership is not only a matter of fairness, but also a commercial imperative.¹⁶

Research also demonstrates that increases in the representation of women in executive leadership reduces gender pay gaps.¹⁷

It also makes good sense to have greater numbers of women in the workforce and at senior levels, to ensure access to the full talent pool is available.

So, there is an obvious economic and social benefit of having the talents of 50% of the population recognised.

Gender equity is also important for success in retaining and recruiting talented people. The culture of a workplace is becoming more important to our highly educated young professionals, who are increasingly wanting to know about diversity, equity and inclusion in an organisation before taking up employment with it. They are not just looking for a well-paid job, they also want to work in an environment which accords and aligns with their values.¹⁸

¹³Ibid page 12

¹⁴ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency Research 2020

¹⁵ Ibid page 2.

¹⁶ <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/gender-equity-insights-series> accessed 30/9/2021.

¹⁷ <https://www.wgea.gov.au/women-in-leadership> accessed 28/9/2021

¹⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com.business> accessed 18/02/22/millennial-genz-workplace-diversity-equity.

Where are we going on the road to equality?

Simply, we still have a long way to go in my view. Women are still unrepresented in leadership positions at every level across almost all industries in the Australian workforce.¹⁹

In respect of the medical sector, gender parity in medical schools has been evident for decades but has not translated into representation in specialty fields and leadership roles. In 2020, females outnumbered male medical students at Australian Universities (51.3%). However, women represent only 12.8% of surgeons in Australia, only 12.5% of hospital chief executive officers, only 28% of medical school deans and 29% of medical board members.²⁰

Similarly, of engineering graduates (in Australia), only 23% are women. Of Information Communication and Technology (ICTs), 22% are women. Of professionals with AI skills (in Australia), 24% are women.²¹

In respect of research, globally, women are underrepresented in research careers. They make up 33.3% of researchers.²² As women embark upon a scientific career, the gender gap widens. The numbers of women decrease as they reach higher levels of research governance structures, such as academies of science or science councils.

Women's science research is underrepresented in high profile journals. An analysis of nearly three million computer science papers published between 1970 and 2018 concluded that gender parity would not be reached in this field until 2100.²³

Women are typically given smaller research grants than their male colleagues and only 12% of members of national science academies are women, although they represent 33.3% of all researchers.²⁴ The gender bias is also found in peer review processes and at scientific conferences at which men are invited to speak on scientific panels twice as often as women.²⁵

¹⁹ <https://www.wgea.gov.au/women-in-leadership> page 1 accessed 27/09/2021.

²⁰ Gender Equity In Australian Health Leadership Asia-Pacific Journal of Health Management 2021;16(1): 519.

²¹ Ibid pages 2 and 3.

²² UNESCO Institute for Statistics for 107 countries 2015-2018.

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²⁴ <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-research-shows-women-career> page 3 accessed 18/01/2022

²⁵ Ibid page 3.

I am pleased to read that at Clifford Craig, of the 2021 research grants, 50% of the recipients are female.

Nevertheless, we still need to “break the bias” in many of our professions.

I have talked about the problem of bias, now I will talk about some actions organisations can or have taken to recognise and challenge unconscious bias.

How to recognise and challenge unconscious bias

Organisations can assess unconscious gender bias in their workplaces by perception surveys and data gathering on people’s experiences, analysis of gender gaps in pay and career advancement and, even with experiments.²⁶

Organisations can address bias by firstly identifying patterns of bias and monitor management processes. There should be objective assessment criteria, to ensure that unintended bias does not affect appointment and promotion processes.²⁷

As an example, a structured recruitment process can minimise the impact of unconscious gender bias on hiring decisions. I have a personal experience as a member of a selection panel for a high-level public service position and the interview process for the three-member panel was structured, with criteria evaluation and the same questions asked in the same order. A scribe attended the interviews and the panel discussions, which were recorded in detailed notes. The scribe provided a written report detailing our process, which our panel signed off. This process helped us more easily select the candidate on performance.

Secondly, training can help raise awareness of personal biases or tendencies to stereotype or make false assumptions about people. Such training was available to me in my former life as a judge which aimed to ensure that bias did not influence decision-making. I had to reflect and be aware of any personal biases.

Training will not necessarily change behaviour, unless a commitment is made for action, but it helps to raise awareness of unconscious biases.²⁸

Thirdly, setting measurable targets has been shown to have increased the numbers of women in leadership positions in several sectors.

In respect of the corporate sector, research shows that targets specifically in executive teams and for line roles are one of the most effective mechanisms to drive changes needed to increase the representation of women in leadership

²⁶ International Labour Organisation Research Note August 2017 Breaking Barriers: Unconscious gender bias in the workplace page 5.

²⁷ Ibid page 15

²⁸ Ibid page 10.

teams.²⁹ The research data shows correlation between ASX ranking, targets and gender balance.

The Australian Public Service (APS) set targets in 2001, and the proportion of senior executives increased from 26.8% to 50% in 2021.³⁰

Similarly, our Tasmania State Service set targets in 2016.³¹ As at 30 June 2021, 46.39% of senior executives were women. Equally significantly, in June 2020, 46.4% of Government board and committee positions were held by women, up from 33.8 per cent in June 2015.³²

An example of an organisation taking action to increase the number of females is the Australian Academy of Science (AAS). It comprises only 17% women Fellows and is taking action to improve diversity, including improving the nominations process. Importantly, it is developing a Women in STEM Decadel Plan, a 10-year roadmap, which provides a plan for achieving sustained increases in women's STEM participation and retention from school through to careers. The Academy Council has taken the Panel Pledge, agreeing to only participate in events where efforts have been taken to ensure women have meaningful representation.³³

Many workplaces are progressing, but still substantive progress is needed to “break the bias.” “Overcoming biases requires creating a culture that genuinely values and embraces diversity of opinion and leadership styles.”³⁴

Research has identified the most powerful action a CEO can take to create a positive work environment for women, is to be a role model for inclusive behaviours, particularly in management meetings and during promotion.

Inclusive leaders reach out to women who are skilled and ready and encourage them to apply for job promotion, as they are less likely to put themselves forward than men. A good leader inspires women and men to give their best, to take risks and extend themselves.³⁵

²⁹ CEW Senior Executive Census 2021

³⁰ Australian Government (2016): Balancing the Future: The Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2016-19 cited in Chief Executive Women Senior Executive Census 2021 page 12.

³¹ Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2018-2021 page 25.

³² Leadership and Participation for Women Action Plan 2021-23 page 6.

³³ <https://www.science.org.au/supporting-science/diversity-and-inclusion>, page 3 accessed 28/01/2022.

³⁴ <https://cew.org.au/paying-lip-service-to-equality-doesn't-pay-off> page 4 accessed 9/01/2022.

³⁵ CEW and Bain & Company

Conclusion

In concluding this brief overview of the continuing challenges of unconscious bias, it is important for us to keep raising awareness of its impact in the workplace. We also need to call out and firmly challenge bias, whether conscious or unconscious.

Thank you and please enjoy your lunch and consider how we can individually and collectively contribute to “breaking the bias”.