

# Women in Engineering: discussion highlights

**We spoke about a range of challenges facing women growing into senior and/or management positions including:**

- the small pool of women engineers upon which to draw from being a core issue – with greater critical mass comes change
- that women tend to prefer being encouraged by peers and managers to try/apply/seek more senior positions whereas men are happier to put themselves forward
- the perception (maybe unconscious) that mid-career women with young kids are not ambitious - not true!
- some women may be less motivated by wealth/prestige/power than most men

**The role of men (in the workplace and in the wider world) was discussed as a critical element in change – comments around this including:**

- men should be supporting women more, in all aspects of life
- change starts with this meeting, by trying to support women in engineering and encouraging other men to do the same – be heard and call out poor behaviour and language
- we're often preaching to the converted in these type of meetings – it's great to see a good balance of women and men on the call
- men need to work on dissolving the "macho culture" as it does no one any good
- allies for minority groups, that are not in that minority, are very important

- men are sometimes discouraged from taking parental leave because 'it's not something men do' – we likely need to address gender roles/balance in society to address it in the workplace

**Mentoring was discussed by all the panellists and came up multiple times in conversation with comments like:**

- a strong mentoring system/program is critical
- mentors play a great part in decision making/coaching with regards to career path
- the sources of mentorship (for being either a mentor or a mentee) need to be publicised widely
- some organisations have a sponsor program rather than mentoring specifically, which is designed to promote and support women in their career growth
- more and more organisations have women mentoring support groups which is fantastic
- perhaps men support groups within organisations might help change the mentality long-term

**An increased focus on STEM subjects for girls in school is an important early intervention – some thoughts were:**

- STEM is the start for achieving equality in our industry
- better integration of secondary schools and with higher education institutions and employers to provide guidance on the many and varied options that engineering and science can present is critical to the pipeline

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- we need to support schools to promote engineering for women – if we can get to the teachers we can get to more young women
  - we have to make sure we reach young women in regional areas as well as cities, which is aided by the move to greater online communication
  - one of the problems in schools is the perception that you have to be "smart" or "good at maths" to be an engineer - but engineers have so much more to offer than just being good at maths
  - We need to broaden the view of the type of person that should consider engineering as a career choice ... it's not just for the traditionally smart kids/smart girls more specifically

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**Bias, recruiting and selection were all discussed – a few observations were:**

- there can be some unconscious bias in the way recruiting criteria are written
- we need to consider what is actually needed for the role being recruited for - would other backgrounds also be suitable and maybe bring in more diverse skills to benefit the team?
- women tend to look at a job description and focus on the things they can't do and why they won't get the job, while men look at a job description and focus on the things they can do and why they will be the best person for the job
- we have to work very hard to remove bias in selection and offer training to give women confidence to step up for senior roles

**Flexibility was a crucial factor in attracting and retaining women in the sector – and one which has improved in general across the COVID period.**

**Topics raised included:**

- workplaces with long work hours are a challenge as sometimes flexibility is code for "keep working after the kids are in bed"
- we have made some progress in this area – but it's important to keep going
- the combined industry had work to do before a global pandemic on equality and flexibility - proactive corporates are putting in place strategies to retain, motivate and reactivate those at risk of dropping out

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**Quotas were raised with the suggestion:**

- that the low female representation rate in engineering requires a systematic approach like a quota style solution
- zero/discounted HECS fees for women would encourage more to study
- quotas will likely be dictated by government clients/ on government projects