



HORIZONS
UNLIMITED

Clutterbuck
Associates

Mentoring Women in Australia

© Horizons Unlimited 2011

Melissa Richardson
Director

For further information, please call
1300 88 40 49

Email us at
info@horizonsunlimited.com.au

Visit our website
www.horizonsunlimited.com.au

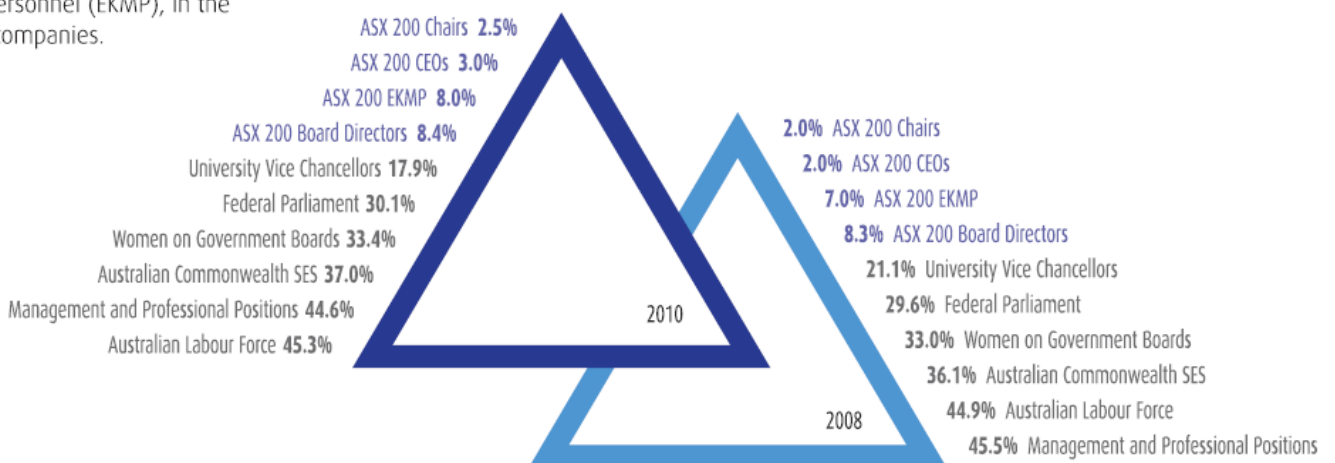
Mentoring women in Australia: Key trends 2011

Women on Boards and in senior executive roles

Australia has a poor track record for women being appointed to the Boards of large publicly listed companies. The diagram below compares data collected in 2008 and 2010, confirming what many people thought, that the argument “it just needs time for women to move up into these roles” just does not hold up any more. In 2010 women represented only 8% of the directors on Boards of the top 200 publicly listed companies – a figure that has not changed in the 9 years since the data has been collected by the government agency EOWA – Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency.

stralian Census of Women in
units the number of women
rd Directors and Executive Key
Personnel (EKMP), in the
l companies.

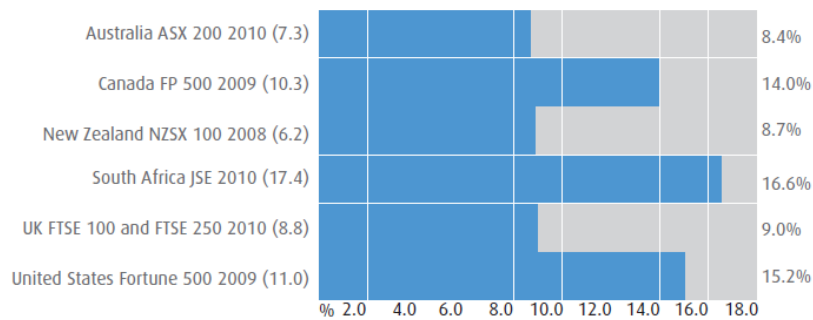
Figure 1 Census Pyramids: The status of women in the workplace 2008 and 2010



Source: EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership 2010 and 2008

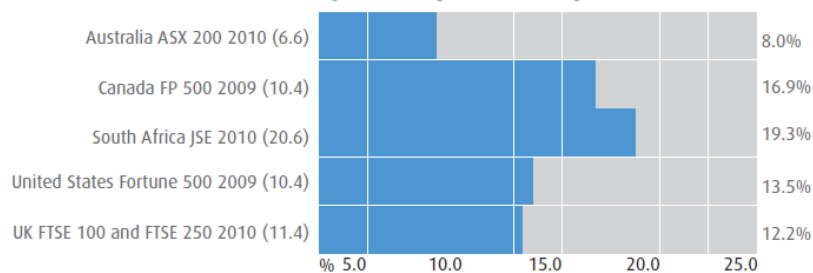
This level of representation puts Australia on par with the UK, but well behind Canada, the US and South Africa, as shown in the next chart.

Figure 5 Percentage of Board Directors who are women



Source: EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership 2010

Figure 6 Percentage of Executive Managers who are women



Source: EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership 2010

Interestingly, where Australia really lags is in the percentage of executive managers that are women.

With the threat of possible regulation forcing Boards to announce quotas for gender diversity, the Australian Institute of Company Directors took action in 2010, with a number of initiatives seeking to get more women onto Boards. One was a mentoring program, in which around 60 Board Chairs mentored women who were considered “Board ready” to help them with immediate appointment. This, together with other initiatives and raised awareness in the media, has resulted in an apparently healthy increase to of female representation on the top 200 Boards to 11% in 2011. 25% of Board appointments in 2011 have been women.

Whilst on the face of it the mentoring has been effective, some have questioned whether the model is just replicating the “old boys’ network” responsible for the exclusion of women on our top Boards – i.e. we have now created a network of women, most of whom were already on other Boards, who are actively being sponsored into new appointments through the mentoring scheme. This model of mentoring fits more with the US mentoring approach in which the mentee is really a protégée whose career is championed by a more ‘powerful’ mentor.

Perhaps the bigger issue for Australia is the under-representation of women in executive management roles, the pool from which Boards wish to draw. Already, some are saying that attracting women onto Boards will drain this pool very quickly, and we will have an even bigger diversity crisis at the senior executive level.

Many organisations have looked to mentoring as an intervention to help women make their way up the corporate ladder. Mentoring programs specifically for women became popular in Australia about a decade ago – offered by organisations for their own women, and by industry associations and networking groups for women without access to these types of support in-house.

More recently it would appear there has been a move away from gender specific in-house programs, perhaps as organisations come to grips with the many complex causes for the lack of women at the top. Increasingly organisations are questioning whether having a mentor is the way to go. The use of mentoring as a solution can be underpinned by the belief that a woman can and wants to make it to the top, and provided that she works hard enough on herself and learns to “play the game”, she will. Organisations that rely on mentoring to solve the dilemma of the lack of women in senior echelons run the risk of missing the broader systemic issues that keep women out of boardrooms and executive suites. These issues are just starting to be recognised, and include the nuances of unconscious bias, cultures that promote long working hours, and in Australia, our fairly unique tendency for women to work part-time whilst children are still young. This is a path that assists work-life balance but can create obstacles to career advancement, as part-time roles are often less challenging and women who work flexibly struggle to retain visibility in the organisation. To solve any of these would require more than just the women to be mentored!

So, right now the trend appears to be tending away from gender-specific mentoring programs inside organisations in Australia. Women still have opportunities to participate in organisation-wide mentoring programs, and many prefer not to be singled out by their gender. However, should the level of female representation at senior executive levels reduce, as mentioned earlier, due to a drain into Board positions, this trend may well reverse itself and we may see increased demand for mentoring programs specifically for women in middle and lower management.