



Coles Group Case Study

Organisational Background

During the last three years, Coles Group has significantly revised and upgraded its Equal Opportunity program and integrated it into its overall Diversity Strategy. This change came about as a result of extensive data collection and consultation throughout the organisation, as well as the active interest of the CEO and Leadership Team.

The Diversity strategy has been linked to the goals, values and behaviours of the business. Its focus was determined by the desire to make Coles a place where people want to work and an awareness that the workforce needs to reflect the diversity of both customers and the wider community.

Diversity is increasingly being melded into the culture of the organisation, thanks to a clearly defined strategy with accountability at executive level and the integration of diversity into a range of cultural programs, as well as recruitment and development.

QUICK FACTS

- **Industry** - Retail
- **Number of Employees** - 165,000
- **Gender Split** – 61% women and 39% men
- **At a senior level** – 20.8% are women (an increase from 17.1% in 2005) 79.2% men. The percentage of women in operational leadership areas is 37.4%.

Staff Consultation

During 2005-06, Coles Myer undertook extensive consultation with its team at all levels of the organisation so as to better understand the issues for women. Following on from initial consultation in 2004, a Diversity team was established and is led by a Diversity Manager who is accountable for the development and implementation of the business' national strategy.

Some of the consultation processes used include:

- **Focus Groups:** Over 200 focus groups were held involving over 2200 team members from all brands and functions, from all States and Territories of Australia and New Zealand.
- **Internal Surveys:** Diversity and Work/Life management questions were built into three major internal surveys.
- **Project-Based Information:** Data was collated via projects undertaken by high-potential team members participating in the 'Stretching the Boundaries' leadership programs for women.

- Meetings and discussions were held with the Shop Distributive & Allied Employees' Association (SDEA) to discuss issues relating to women who are covered by relevant Enterprise Agreements.
- Analysis of HR statistics took place, addressing turnover, parental leave retention, workplace demographics and flexible work patterns.

Training & Development

WHAT WAS THE ISSUE

The analysis conducted by the company showed that there were opportunities to increase the overall awareness of diversity within the company. In particular, it was found that there was a wide range of views on the topic at senior management level. The data also suggested that there were opportunities to increase women's participation in management development programs.

INITIATIVES

The company has instigated and conducted an extensive range of education programs. These include:

- A new Coles Myer Equal Opportunity Program (1 March 2006), which includes a new organisation-wide 'Equal Opportunity Policy' covering harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying in the workplace. It also defines a new support role of Equal Opportunity (EO) Advisor, whose function is to assist the resolution of internal complaints. A core number of EO Advisors have been trained.
- A new online 'Diversity and Equal Opportunity' training program for all managers. The program provides line managers with a strong understanding of diversity and inclusion, as well as the compliance requirements to support equal opportunity.
- Leadership programs for women, including 'Stretching the Boundaries', which 60 women have attended so far. Additionally, over 200 women have attended the 'Career Resilience for Women' workshop. Both programs focus on developing the leadership and networking skills of high-potential women.
- 'Preparing for Parenthood' programs, which focus on successful strategies for balancing work and family. This program is currently offered to women considering motherhood and those who are currently pregnant. It will also be offered to men taking parental leave as the primary carer.
- The Coles Myer Women's Network (July 2005), which attracted over 200 women to a session that included women Board Members as guest speakers, who openly shared the challenges for women in large organisations. Another session on finance strategies for women attracted similar numbers. The Network has around 600 members and is expanding into most states.
- The Executive Women's Network, is an internal group that meets every quarter and includes General Managers with high potential for executive positions.

RESULTS

- A survey of executives demonstrated an outstanding improvement in the company's commitment to diversity and support of work/life balance.
- A team member climate survey conducted in March 2006 also showed significant improvements in the category of diversity and management of work and life responsibilities.
- Women participating in the program have attributed improvements in confidence and competence to their involvement in the Network.