



Connell Wagner Pty Ltd. Case Study

Organisational Background

Connell Wagner is one of Asia Pacific's largest multi-disciplinary consulting practices. They provide planning, surveying, engineering, environmental, scientific, business advisory and project management services across a broad range of markets. Traditionally this type of work has been undertaken predominantly by men. However, the company has been promoting opportunities for women in Australian schools and universities as a way of encouraging more women to consider engineering as a career.

QUICK FACTS

- **Industry** – Consulting Engineering
- **Number of Employees** – 2,239 (Australia only)
- **Gender Split** – Overall 24% women and 76% men
- **At a senior level** – 5% women and 95% men

Recruitment & Selection

ISSUE IDENTIFIED

There is an ongoing perception within the industry that consulting engineering is difficult and demanding, resulting in it being more challenging to recruit and attract engineering graduates (in particular women graduates) into the industry.

INITIATIVES

As part of their overall strategy to recruit and retain women in all levels of the organisation, Connell Wagner has developed and implemented a range of strategies. They also have in place a recruitment process that:

- Focuses on matching the skill requirements of the job with the skills of the prospective employee
- Uses behavioural-based questions and criteria as part of the interview process
- Requires selection to be based on merit

In addition, the company has a number of programs that are run in schools and universities, including:

- Participating in Careers Nights for high schools (one or two engineers are usually sent to deliver a talk on engineering. Wherever possible, at least one female engineer delivers a presentation).
- Providing guest speakers at primary and high schools as requested.
- Hosting work experience students (Years 11 & 12). At least two previous work experience students are now working as engineers at

the Connell Wagner office in Adelaide (one is employed at Associate level).

- The Adelaide office is part of the Adopt a School Partnership Program. Connell Wagner has “adopted” four schools in the Adelaide metropolitan area, with a commitment to accepting two work experience students from each of the four schools starting in 2007; holding engineering workshop sessions and presentations as part of the school curriculum; awarding a Connell Wagner medal for the top Year 11 student in physics and mathematics; attending school career nights; and working with the schools to encourage those students interested in engineering as a future profession.
- Undertaking a review of the existing work experience program and introducing set exercises on engineering tasks so that students get the most out of the experience (both through observation and practical experience). In South Australia, they have also joined up to a new initiative run through Youth Jet, which aims to create partnerships with high schools to promote engineering to students.
- A recently-held Workchoice Day, whereby students from secondary schools had the opportunity of going into the office to discuss engineering, surveying and planning as career choices. A number of students from girls high schools also took part.
- Sponsoring the annual Bridge Building Competition in Victoria. This event is open to Year 8 and 9 students and is supported by Engineers Australia and ScienceWorks. Approximately 150 students participated in 2005 and 180 in 2006. Due to the success of this program, the competition will be going national in 2007.
- The graduate recruitment program, which is also designed to attract more women into the consulting engineering industry. At least one woman is involved in all teams that attend career fairs. Profiles of women engineers working for the company are displayed and promotional materials contain images of both women and men.

RESULTS

- 28.4% of the 2006 graduate intake was women
- A comparison of starters and leavers at the three years level of service indicated that:
 - 52% of female employees remained with the company (48% had left)
 - 60% of male employees remained with the company (40% had left)
- The return to work rate for women on maternity leave is approximately 81%.
 - In 2006, of the 11 employees who returned from maternity leave, 10 returned on a part-time basis (at their request). Of these women, only 3 were in administration support roles.

SUCCESS STORIES

Heather Benbow, civil engineer (graduate)

“I wanted to find a company that would give me the opportunity to develop my skills broadly and grow as a well-rounded engineer. Connell Wagner’s multi-disciplinary environment provided me with this opportunity. As a young engineer I can work in

different aspects of engineering, which is not always possible working in a smaller company.”

Tanya Sideris, civil engineer

Tanya joined Connell Wagner eight years ago. After taking maternity leave with her first child, she came back to work part-time, initially two days a week with an additional half-day's work at home. “Eventually I was comfortable building up to three days a week, and that is as much as I want to work with a young child.”

Promotion, Transfer and Termination

ISSUE IDENTIFIED

The proportion of women in senior roles across the organisation is quite low and Connell Wagner acknowledges the challenges of promoting women into these roles. As one way of addressing the issue, the Board has established the target of promoting at least one woman into an executive role per annum.

INITIATIVES

- In-house targets for the promotion of women have been established.
- Opportunities for both women and men to be seconded or promoted to roles in other offices either in Australia, New Zealand, South East Asia or Europe are provided.
- Exit interviews are conducted to identify ways in which Connell Wagner could better manage their human resources.

RESULTS

- As at 1 July 2006, the number of female executives was 13, with three of these women working on a part-time basis. In 2005, this number was 8, with one working part-time. In 2004, there were 6 female executives, with one working on a part-time basis.
- Promotion targets have been achieved or exceeded every year since their inception. In 2005, the company promoted 5 women into executive roles.

Other Notable Strategies – Work/Life Balance

ISSUE IDENTIFIED

Work/life balance has been identified as an issue for a significant number of both women and men within the company. This is most relevant where staff need to travel away from home for long periods of time to undertake projects either interstate or overseas.

INITIATIVES

EEO/Work/Life Committees have been established in each State or Region. The committees implement a range of programs and activities in their area which are designed to meet the needs of their specific work groups. Initiatives and activities have included:

- Family fun days for all staff members
- Lunch time Pilates and yoga sessions

- Guest speakers on topics such as managing stress and understanding adolescent behaviour
- Dry cleaning drop-off and pick-up service
- Onsite flu vaccinations
- EAP (Employee Assistance Program) service
- Introduction of 8 Weeks paid maternity leave
- Setting up a 'Keeping in Touch' Program for employees on parental leave.

RESULTS

- The business case for paid maternity leave was approved by the Board.
- A female executive has returned to work from maternity leave on a part-time basis. This has been a very successful outcome, with executives being highly supportive of the arrangement.
- The uptake on lunchtime Pilates and yoga has been so high in the Victorian region that they have also introduced after-work sessions.

SUCCESS STORIES

Margaret Alousis, mechanical engineer

Having worked in the industry for six years, Margaret is proud of her contribution to landmark buildings around Melbourne. Through her work at Connell Wagner, Margaret has had the opportunity to travel overseas, which she says has "helped me be more independent, be inspired by new colleagues and contacts, develop new ways to solve problems I had encountered before, and establish new networks".

Benita Husband, Associate and registered communications distribution designer

Benita is employed as a building services consultant specialising in communications services for Connell Wagner and was promoted to Associate in 2006. A winner of the NAWIC (National Association of Women in Construction) Young Achiever's Award in 2004 for her contribution to construction/infrastructure development projects and community activities, Benita said, "My career in engineering is very rewarding and I am not looking to slow down anytime soon!"