



media release
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Survey Shatters Women 'Opt Out' Myth

A report released today by leading US research group, Catalyst, has shattered the myth that women do not aspire to top ranks within the workforce.

The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) has welcomed the report as indicative of Australian female aspirations within the workplace, regardless of their parental status.

EOWA Acting Director, Susan Biggs, said that EOWA would expect to see similar results in Australia based on working closely with Catalyst over the past two years on the Australian Women in Leadership Census.

The US report, "*Women and Men in U.S. Corporate Leadership: Same Workplace, Different Realities?*", questioned the argument that women do not want the top job and 'opt out'. The study found that despite the dearth of women in senior roles, women are just as likely as men to covet the top job, regardless of whether or not they have children.

According to the report, the majority of women (55 percent) and men (57 percent) want to occupy the most senior role (CEO or equivalent) within an organisation. The study also refutes the claim that women with children are less likely to strive for the CEO job. In fact, women who do have children (55 percent) are slightly more likely than women that don't have children (46 percent) to pursue the corner office.

Also more women in staff or support positions (60 per cent) than men in staff or support positions (51 percent) aspire to be CEO. The large majority of men (77 percent) and women (82 percent) in line positions, responsible for profit or clients, aspire to be CEO.

"The argument that women 'opt out' of executive careers has been used to justify the low representation of women in executive positions however the survey found that women were





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just as likely as men to covet the top job, regardless of whether or not they have children,” said EOWA Acting Director, Susan Biggs.

As they advance to senior levels, men and women perceive the same barriers. They include displaying a behavioural style that is different to the organisation’s norm, lack of significant general management or line experience and lack of awareness of organisational politics. However women experience an additional and even more pervasive set of culturally related barriers – such as exclusion from informal networks, stereotyping and a lack of role models.

In other findings, the study found that women and men equally desire a variety of formal and informal flexible work arrangements to assist them balance work and life. Both genders also agree that they can’t use any flexible work arrangement without jeopardizing their career advancement.

“This finding illustrates that balancing work and personal life is not a ‘women’s issue’,” said Ms Biggs. “Balancing work and life is a quality of life issue for all employees. Leading-edge organisations perceive workplace flexibility as critical to employee relations and therefore to business success.”

The study was based on data from surveys and in depth interviews with senior level women and men in Fortune 1000 companies.

EOWA is a Federal Government statutory authority. With more than 2,700 employers reporting to it, the Agency has unrivalled insight into the workings of Australian employers. Last year, EOWA released the second *Australian Census of Women in Leadership*. The Census showed that nearly half (49%) of Australia's Top 200 publicly listed companies still have no women at the highest levels of management. It also showed that women hold just 8.4% of the Board positions in these companies. EOWA will release the 2004 *Australian Women in Leadership Census* on October 5, 2004.

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