
Gender equity in career development and promotion

Pay equity recommendation sheet three

A lack of equity in career development and promotion can be a key contributing factor to any gender pay gap with an organisation.

This pay equity 'recommendation sheet' aims to assist organisations reduce their gender pay gap by providing potential solutions and strategies for equity in career development and promotion.

Is there a problem?

A pay equity audit may identify if there is a problem with career development for women within an organisation. If the pay equity audit shows that women in the organisation are clustered in lower level jobs and are poorly represented in senior or management roles, career development may be a problem.

Contributing factors

There is a range of reasons why poor career development for women may contribute to the organisations gender pay gap. These include:

- women are not undertaking appropriate training for promotional opportunities;
- female occupations have more steps in their pay scales than male dominated occupations;
- the nature of male occupations makes it easier to progress to management roles; and
- women are disadvantaged by taking time out of the workforce for child rearing reasons.

Actions and issues to address

Ensure female employees can participate in training

Career progression for women may be restricted by a lack of training and development opportunities. Organisations should support all employees, including part time employees, to undertake training and development opportunities that are not just relevant to their current position, but also to future career development and promotional roles.

The availability of training and development opportunities should be widely publicised to ensure that all employees are able to express an interest in participating. This helps to overcome possible inequity due to managerial assumptions about employee suitability, interest and availability for training.



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Ensure women's skills are appropriately valued

Traditionally many of the skills and attributes of female dominated occupations have been seen as natural and innate and have not been highly paid. 'Women's work' is often undervalued because of:

- the absence of appropriate classification structures;
- poor recognition of qualifications;
- the absence of previous and detailed assessments of their work; and
- the continuation of historical inequities in the valuation of women's work in female dominated occupations.

Organisations with gender pay gaps should ensure that the job evaluation systems and classification structure used appropriately recognise female skills, and appropriately assess work of equal value. This will increase the ability of women in the organisation to progress to higher levels.

Reward performance, not just years of service

Women are more likely than men to have extended absences from the workforce, mostly due to child rearing responsibilities. In organisations where career progression is based or partly based on years of service, this can significantly disadvantage the promotional opportunities for women.

Organisations should ensure that career progression through existing levels and promotion to higher levels is based on an employee's performance not solely on length or service. Gender-neutral performance management systems allow the work done by women to be recognised and rewarded without penalty for career breaks.

Use merit selection processes for promotion

The use of a formal merit selection process for all promotional appointments may increase the number of women advancing to higher levels. In some organisations, managers have high level of discretion in the promotion and appointment of staff, and may not appropriately assess the skills, experience and suitability of potential candidates.

A merit selection process is one in which the position is formally 'advertised', either internally or externally and employees are encouraged to apply. Job criteria need to be clearly defined and all applicants must be objectively assessed for suitability for the job.

Introduce quality part time work at all levels

Quality part time work should be available for women and men at all levels in the organisation. 'Quality' part time work is work in which employees are part of the regular workforce, and have access to training, development and promotional opportunities. Part time employees should be seen as valuable contributors, and provided with work that is meaningful and satisfying.

Identify high potential staff and establish a succession plan for the organisation

Succession management focuses on assessing the future skills needs of the organisation, and implementing programs to ensure that a wide pool of talent will be available when necessary to fill vacant roles. A formal structured approach to succession also allows the skills of all employees, male and female, to be developed to meet the organisation's needs.

Case Study

To ensure that they highlighted all current and emerging talent within their workforce, one organisation created a succession plan in which every position at management level and above needed to be allocated 3 successors – one who could move into the position immediately, one who could be developed to take over the position in one year and one who could be developed to take over the position within five years. For positions where there was no woman or no culturally/linguistically diverse successor nominated among the first three potential successors, two more successors were required to be added to the list.

In this way women and culturally and linguistically diverse staff with potential were identified and plans made for their development.