

# **New Zealand's experiment: closing the gender gap in higher education leadership through cumulative cultural change**

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## **Origins: knowing, showing and intervening**

The subject of this paper is a long-standing New Zealand (NZ) national university women's leadership programme, NZWiL<sup>1</sup>. Formally established in 2006, with the first program delivered in 2007, NZWiL was designed to address an issue all too familiar across the world – university women's under-representation at senior leadership levels and over-representation at entry level classifications amongst academic and professional staff alike. In New Zealand this pattern has persisted well into the twenty-first century, despite a NZ woman, Kate Edger, in 1877 becoming the first woman to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree in the British Empire (albeit having enrolled without revealing her sex) and despite NZ being the first nation state in the world to enfranchise all women in 1893. Yet this pattern persists notwithstanding the steady increase in women's numbers and achievements as both staff and students in NZ higher education, and after several decades of legislative and public policy frameworks aimed at eliminating sex discrimination and achieving greater equality between women and men in various areas of life, including in education and employment<sup>2</sup>.

NZWiL did not, however, spring magically into being in response to this issue, but rather through carefully timed and highly strategic interventions by three women, each at the crucial time well placed to exercise national leadership across the NZ higher education sector. The story of their successful collaboration demands further analysis<sup>3</sup> without the limitations

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/aboutus/sc/hr/women-in-leadership>

<sup>2</sup> In 1893 NZ was the first nation state in the world to enfranchise women, followed by the right to stand for election in 1919, the Government Service Equal Pay Act in 1960, the Equal Pay Act in 1972, the Human Rights Commission Act in 1977, and in 1984 the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women following which NZ has presented regular reports to the UN on progress towards the objectives of the Convention. Since 1984 the NZ Ministry of Women's Affairs has overseen the implementation of various governments policy frameworks for women and for the delivery of specific services to women (preceded by the 1973 Select Committee on Women's Rights and its successors).

<sup>3</sup> Such an uninhibited account is overdue, including acknowledgement of a fourth woman key to NZ WiL's origins and success, Sarah Schulz, the Program Convenor who has steered its design and delivery from inception.

imposed by two of them being authors of this paper<sup>4</sup> and the third a key informant to its preparation<sup>5</sup>. A brief overview follows.

Although the paucity of women at senior levels in NZ's universities had been apparent for some years to anyone accessing official statistics, in 2004 this situation became a matter of easy public scrutiny with the publication by the NZ Human Rights Commission (NZHRC) of the *New Zealand Census of Women's Participation*<sup>6</sup>, the first in what became a series of bi-annual reports on the position of NZ women. Women's representation at leadership levels of NZ's eight universities was a significant element in this first report<sup>7</sup>, as it was in subsequent ones. These influential reports were the brainchild of the (then) Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Commissioner, Professor Judy McGregor, who as a former academic knew the power of credible and comprehensive evidence to awaken and inform public policy development, and as a former journalist, was expert in ensuring political attention through wide dissemination and publicity.

This was the broader setting within which Professor Dianne McCarthy developed a visionary proposal for a NZ national university women's program. At that time the Pro Vice Chancellor (Equity) at the University of Auckland, in 2006 she presented to the national university women's leadership program in Australia, NZ's near neighbour across the Tasman Sea. Since 1999 Australia's peak body of vice-chancellors<sup>8</sup> had promulgated a regularly updated Action Plan for University Women, whereas NZ had neither a national leadership program nor a national strategic framework for university women's advancement, with only a couple of universities offering programs locally<sup>9</sup>. In parallel, the second NZHRC census report<sup>10</sup> made public this comparison, with EEO Commissioner McGregor visiting universities throughout the country to urge vice-chancellors and other senior university staff to assess and adapt the Australian interventions in NZ. Determined to remedy this vacuum, made all the more apparent by the presence of NZ attendees at the Australian program, Professor McCarthy developed a compelling case for a national NZ university women's leadership program, and rapidly set about finding the means to make this vision a reality. Crucially she obtained seed funding from a charitable trust<sup>11</sup>, recruited an experienced and highly talented program

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<sup>4</sup> Prof. Dianne McCarthy, at the time the Pro Vice Chancellor (Equity) and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Science, and former Associate Dean of the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, at the University of Auckland, an inaugural member of the NZWiL Steering Committee (2006-11) and more recently, the Chief Executive Officer of The New Zealand Royal Society (until mid 2014); and Prof. Judy McGregor, at the time, Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner at the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, and currently Head of the School of Social Sciences and Public Policy and Associate Dean - Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Culture and Society at Auckland University of Technology.

<sup>5</sup> Prof. Sarah Leberman, Professor of Leadership and Head of the School of Management, Massey University, and a member of the NZWiL Steering Group since its inception and its current Chair.

<sup>6</sup> McGregor, J. and Olsson, S. (2004), *New Zealand Census of Women's Participation*,. New Zealand Human Rights Commission, Wellington, New Zealand

<sup>7</sup> EG women were 15.82% of NZ's professors and associate professors, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Then known as the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) and now as Universities Australia

<sup>9</sup> The University of Auckland and Massey University

<sup>10</sup> McGregor, J. and Fountaine, S. (2006), *New Zealand Census of Women's Participation, 2006*, New Zealand Human Rights Commission, Wellington, New Zealand, p.12.

<sup>11</sup> The Kate Edger Educational Charitable Trust, named in honour of NZ's and the British Empire's first woman to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Kate Milligan Edger (1857-1935).

convenor, Sarah Schulz<sup>12</sup>, and through her own Vice-Chancellor's advocacy<sup>13</sup> gained national endorsement of the proposal<sup>14</sup>, including a commitment from every university in the country to fund at least four participants annually over an initial five year period. In the meantime Massey University's research-based New Zealand Centre of Women and Leadership was added to the existing partnership, with its Director, Professor Sarah Leberman, joining Professors Dianne McCarthy and Judy McGregor as the third foundational strategist giving life, shape and direction to NZ's national university women's leadership programme, NZWiL.

### **Program design principles and methodology**

Designed for women by women, highly collaborative in all its elements and imbued with an ethos of self initiative and empowerment, the program was intended to break new ground in terms of its design principles and strategic intentions. Its objectives and intended benefits are set out in full in the report of the 2011 independent evaluation<sup>15</sup>(initiated to inform the decision whether to renew funding for a further five years, 2012-16). Of relevance here is that these include enhancing women's leadership capacities and influence, building individual and national networks, encouragement for participants to fulfil their potential, and to increase their visibility and desire to "come to notice"<sup>16</sup>. NZWiL was specifically designed to address the known inhibitors of women's promotion, such as not having enough time (to reflect on and plan careers, to build networks, to attend national and international academic and professional gatherings), the scarcity of mentors and sponsors (and less likelihood of them being senior, experienced and well placed to advise and support their careers), less confidence (in oneself) and lower career aspirations (for oneself) combined with less trust (in the likelihood of career support and promotional success) and lower expectations (of ones' institutional processes and culture), and hence less influence institutionally, less visibility, and less likelihood of being noticed or wanting to be noticed. In other words, the program was designed and continues to be run not only to familiarise women with the institutional, sector-wide and international context, and with a variety of leadership styles and frameworks, but also to normalise the very notion of participants' (ie of women's) leadership contribution and leadership potential, and more specifically of women *as* leaders.

At the core of NZWiL (but not its only significant elements, as discussed below) are two annual, week-long, sector-wide national residential programs, delivered in a well appointed, executive standard hotel in the national capital, Wellington. Its residential nature and location are both critical elements, the former ensuring participants the rare opportunity to focus and reflect on leadership unimpeded by the demands and interruptions of their professional and personal lives, and the latter conveying the high standard and standing of the program as well as respect for and expectations of its participants. The course content has been documented by

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah Schulz, the Program Convenor of NZWiL who has steered its design and delivery since its inception, described by Professor Dianne McCarthy as "the glue that turned our vision into reality". Personal interview by Eleanor Ramsay, June 26, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Professor Stuart McCutcheon

<sup>14</sup> By the New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC), now known as New Zealand Universities (Te Pōkai Tara in the Māori language).

<sup>15</sup> Lumin (2011), *Programme Evaluation: New Zealand Women in Leadership Programme*, Wellington, New Zealand, published by the author, pp.6-7

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

Associate Professor Candice Harris and Professor Sarah Leberman<sup>17</sup> in a recent article<sup>18</sup> reporting the findings of their longitudinal evaluation of the NZWiL program<sup>19</sup>. In brief, about 20 women participants at upper-middle levels (at least two from each of NZ's eight universities) attend each annual course, one targeting academic and the other professional staff, with Māori<sup>20</sup> and Pasifika<sup>21</sup> women always well represented with scholarships to ensure this outcome introduced in 2011. Reflecting the priorities of their universities and the sector, the academic participants spend a day on developing their research capability and leadership, drawing up research plans, gaining greater understanding of the NZ research funding environment, and learning from and being inspired by successful women researchers. For the professional staff cohort, the replacement day is spent on communication and resilience, but otherwise the content for the two is identical each year, and essentially similar year to year.

The methodology centres on two synergistic design principles, an emphasis on (and time set aside for) self-reflection, combined with a “collective learning approach”<sup>22</sup> in which presenters share their varied experiences and perceptions of leadership and participants share their thoughts, reactions, insights and understandings of leadership and their own leadership trajectory as these emerge and develop throughout the course (and thereafter in follow-up activities mentioned below). This approach sees participants learning from each other in what the NZWiL experience shapes as an enduring sector-wide peer group, as well as through individual reflection, in the context of a rich and stimulating program of presentations, panel discussions, workshops, and more informal occasions, peppered throughout (and prior) with stimulating and relevant readings from the literature. The opening sessions include at least one and generally two presentations by male vice-chancellors, an important signal to participants about the status and legitimacy of the program and of the sector's expectations of it and them. Indeed the ongoing support for and regular presentations to NZWiL from this highest level of the sector gives legitimacy, gravitas and authority to the program itself and its participants, an anti-dote fending off the feelings of guilt and unworthiness women typically experience when taking time away from professional and personal responsibilities.

Throughout the rest of the week the diverse and changing array of speakers and facilitators<sup>23</sup> includes high profile women leaders, from the NZ higher education sector as well as from the wider public and private sectors, the media, the Parliament, and leaders of

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<sup>17</sup> Professor Leberman is currently the Chair of the NZWiL Steering Group, and a member since the program's inception, and Associate Professor Harris is a past participant and currently a member of the NZWiL Steering Group

<sup>18</sup> Harris, Candice and Leberman, Sarah (2012), “Leadership Development for Women in New Zealand Universities: Learning from the New Zealand Women in Leadership Program” in *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 2012 14:28, originally published online December 4, 2011 by SAGE Publications on behalf of the Academy of Human Resource Development, accessed at <http://adh.sagepub.com/content/14/1/28>

<sup>19</sup> Harris' and Leberman's longitudinal evaluation targetted all past participants within three years post-completion of the program, and was conducted through a series of surveys and follow-up telephone interviews over the period 2008-2011

<sup>20</sup> Māori are New Zealand's indigenous people, and as of the last census, November 2013, are 13.3% of the population

<sup>21</sup> New Zealand's Pasifika population derives from the many island of the Pacific region, 6.6% of the country's population as of the last census, November 2013

<sup>22</sup> Harris and Leberman, op.cit., pp.33 and 40

<sup>23</sup> Around 20 per course

significant elements of the country's civil society. Māori and often also Pasifika women are always included as presenters, exceptional leaders in their own communities and nationally, as well as at least one international presenter (including the British High Commissioner to NZ, Samoa and Governor of Pitcairn<sup>24</sup> in June this year and the principal author of this paper<sup>25</sup> in all but one year of the program). Presenters are selected as exceptional role models, and for their diversity as much as for their achievements: senior, experienced, and very influential women, many of them responsible for forging new pathways within their own, usually very high profile<sup>26</sup> and sometimes very surprising fields<sup>27</sup>, and whom the participants would not otherwise have the opportunity to hear, learn from, or meet. Many of them generously share their own experiences and strategies in surviving and thriving at or near the top, including juggling their public and private responsibilities – the infamous “work-life blur” in the words of NZ's only woman VC at this time<sup>28</sup>. Their collective impact is as diverse role models displaying a multitude of leadership styles as well as sources of experience-derived wisdom and strategic advice, both within the formal program and thereafter as part of the on-going engagement activities of the NZWiL alumni (as explained below).

Amongst other findings of the 2011 independent evaluation (especially relevant ones of which are mentioned below), is that significant pre- and post-course methodological elements contribute to NZWiL's success and impact<sup>29</sup>. These elements include the local institutional processes to identify and select participants, pre-course meetings to clarify expectations (including discussion of individual and institutional goals), post-course de-briefs with vice-chancellors, line managers and other senior staff to support participants' leadership objectives, monitoring of career plans, and past participants' ongoing involvement in both local university-based and national alumni activities and networks. The joint national organising and steering group which plans and oversees each annual program is another significant methodological element identified as contributing to the program's impact by the independent evaluation. Its members are from the universities themselves, ensuring direct engagement, responsibility, and ownership as well as ensuring the program reflects institutional and sector priorities. The steering group monitors and revises NZWiL's content and processes, including the selection of presenters, on the basis of the evaluative feedback collected from every participant and every program, and from the more formal evaluations referred to above – a rigorous and continuous feedback loop keeping the universities

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<sup>24</sup> Vicki Treadwell, a career diplomat who has served in Kuala Lumpur, Islamabad and Mumbai

<sup>25</sup> Prof. Eleanor Ramsay (former PVC, Equity, at the University of South Australia 1993-2001) whose workshop on leadership in strategic change is informed by her long experience in women's leadership development, at senior levels of the Australian public service and higher education as well as internationally. EG In 1995 the establishment with Prof. Margaret Gardner (then PVC Equity at Griffith University, currently VC at RMIT and, in Sept. 2014, to become the first woman VC at Monash University) of the national Australian senior universities women's network (now Universities Australia Executive Women, UAEW), and in 1998 the adoption of the First Action Plan for Australian University Women (with Prof. Gardner and Prof. Anne Edwards, then VC at Flinders University of South Australia, the three of them presenting and intervening on behalf of the national network).

<sup>26</sup> Professor Claire Robinson, a regular political commentator in the NZ media including frequent television appearances, as a media star is an example of a very high profile presenter, as well as being a NZWiL alumna, an artist, and an academic, currently Pro Vice-Chancellor for the Creative Arts at Massey University

<sup>27</sup> Karen Fifield, Chief Executive of the Wellington Zoo is an example of a presenter breaking new ground in a surprising field.

<sup>28</sup> Professor Harlene Hayne, Vice-Chancellor of Otago University, a term she often uses including in a presentation to one of the bi-annual NZWiL alumni conferences held in Dunedin, November 29-30, 2012

<sup>29</sup> Lumin op.cit. p.21

accountable in terms of their follow-up activities, and ensuring continuous quality improvement informed by participants' priorities and preferred learning styles.

The membership of this national steering group<sup>30</sup>, including the position of the national chairperson, is shared among institutions with past participants regularly stepping up for this role, a significant career-enhancing leadership opportunity not least due to the interactions between the group and the vice-chancellors' national peak body. In addition to the two residential courses, since 2012 there has been an annual one-day regionally-based program (referred to as the NZWiL Roadshow) which, unlike the residential programs with their limited numbers, provides an open opportunity for engagement with NZWiL to all women staff at the host university and from other institutions in geographic proximity. A bi-annual national conference for and organised by past participants is held in various locations across the country<sup>31</sup>, an opportunity to reflect on earlier learnings and post-participation career trajectories, and to strengthen nation-wide networks amongst past participants and presenters (the latter also being regarded as NZWiL alumni). This ever expanding, vibrant alumni network is a source of information, support, advice and peer-mentoring amongst participants and presenters from which an impressive array of initiatives at the institutional and national level has emerged. Further, in the program's eighth year and given NZ's size (with a population of some 4.5 million), the alumni cohort is already a sizeable group<sup>32</sup> of considerable collective influence and impact, with the potential to affect the culture of the sector nationwide and the capacity to influence priorities and directions at the institutional, sector-wide and national levels.

## **Outcomes and impact**

While the purpose of this paper is to identify the impact of NZWiL on the gendered culture of higher education, some quantitative indicators are included because women's numerical and proportional progress at leadership levels also contributes to cultural change (as discussed below). Significantly, and as the figures below show, the rate of improvement in women's representation at leadership levels in NZ's universities does appear to have accelerated after the commencement of the NZWiL program in 2007. In making this claim we acknowledge the complex relationship between correlation and causation, and the many challenges to proving that the program has caused or even contributed to this acceleration. This view is however held by significant numbers of well-informed university personnel, with the independent evaluation reporting that most (77%) of the institutional stakeholders amongst the evaluation's respondents "considered that the programme had increased the number of women in leadership roles."<sup>33</sup>

## **Some data**

Data is readily available on numbers and percentages of women at associate professor and professor levels (but not at equivalent levels of the professional staff cohort) from 2003 to 2012 due to the introduction in 2004 of the NZHRC's bi-annual publication the *New Zealand*

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<sup>30</sup> The two foundational strategists, Profs Dianne McCarthy and Judy McGregor have remained on the group as advisors, rather than members, to ensure that the membership is entirely from the universities across the sector.

<sup>31</sup> Auckland in 2008, Wellington in 2010, Dunedin in 2012, and Auckland in 2014

<sup>32</sup> At time of writing, NZWiL past participants number about 300

<sup>33</sup> Lumin, op.cit. pp. 9 and 10

*Census of Women's Participation*<sup>34</sup>. Looking at associate professor and professor levels combined, women's representation increased by 8.56% between 2003 and 2012<sup>35</sup>, a change of more than 50% on women's representation in the base year<sup>36</sup>. Significantly the annual rate of this increase accelerated noticeably from 2007 when the NZWiL program commenced. Disaggregating the data for professors and associate professors is interesting, especially at the level of the professoriate with women's representation decreasing by 0.47% 2003-2007 and increasing by 3.55% 2007-2012<sup>37</sup>. There was a marked increase at associate professor level of 14.49% over the whole period between 2003 and 2012, with marginally more than half of this leap upwards after the NZ WiL program was introduced in 2007<sup>38</sup>.

Isolating the impact of NZWiL from other factors in play during the same period is difficult, the latter including an increase in university-based women's leadership programs across the country. Significantly however, the 2011 independent evaluation identified this latter as one of NZWiL's outcomes<sup>39</sup>, attributing this increased attention to women's leadership development within universities to NZWiL's high profile and acknowledged success. If changes in the wider society during this period may contributed also, a comparable rate of improvement in similar or related employment areas should be evident. In the period 2010-2012, women's representation at senior levels in the education sector as a whole increased by 1% and by 1.8% across the entire public service<sup>40</sup>. The rate of advancement for women at leadership levels in academia over the same period compares favourably, at 2.44% for associate professors and 1.93% for professor/associate professors combined<sup>41</sup>. This suggests that the faster progress for women in academia is being fuelled by factors beyond and in addition to developments across the wider society, potentially the introduction and ongoing impact of NZWiL, as further explained below.

### **Evidence of cultural change**

Both the 2011 independent evaluation and the internal longitudinal 2008-11 evaluation found that participants and stakeholders alike consistently identified an increase in self confidence and the development of networks and enhancement of networking skills as the most significant benefits from the program<sup>42</sup>. The independent evaluation found that stakeholder respondents overwhelmingly (85%) considered that one of the results of the program was women's increased confidence<sup>43</sup>. And the longitudinal evaluation found that 80% of past participants reported an increase in self confidence, with their January 2011 survey and follow-up phone-calls highlighting "the importance of networking with other women across the tertiary sector and increased self-confidence."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> McGregor, J. and Olsson, S., op.cit.

<sup>35</sup> From 15.82% to 24.38%

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Commission (November 2012), *New Zealand Census of Women's Participation 2012*, Wellington, New Zealand, p.138

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Commission, Nov 2012, op.cit

<sup>38</sup> 7.22% increase 2003-2007 and 7.27% increase 2007-2012, Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Lumin, op.cit. pp.3 and 4

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.96

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.138

<sup>42</sup> Harris and Leberman op.cit. pp.28, 33-35 and 37-9; Lumin op.cit.3-4, 10 and 20

<sup>43</sup> Lumin, op.cit. p.10

<sup>44</sup> Harris and Leberman, op.cit. p.37

Related to these two outcomes and frequently attributed to them, both evaluations found that past participants are increasingly putting themselves forward and being sought out for leadership roles, successfully applying for promotion as well as stepping up for and being offered leadership responsibilities in a range of contexts. Thus Harris and Leberman report that by 2010 more than half the faculty respondents and more than a third of the professional staff respondents had successfully applied for promotion<sup>45</sup>, and more broadly, beyond positional promotion “more than 75% of alumni have taken on leadership roles since participating in NZWiL”<sup>46</sup>. Thus enhanced confidence translates into increased leadership contribution, visibility and influence, reflecting and reinforcing participants’ heightened expectations of and aspirations for themselves, as well as those of their senior university colleagues. Evidence of the latter can be found in the finding that past participants are increasingly being actively sought out for leadership roles within and beyond their current roles<sup>47</sup>, “actively targeted as leaders for new initiatives, or to undertake leadership roles” and “encouraged to pursue promotion towards professorial status.”<sup>48</sup> Connected to these outcomes is the finding that this willingness to take on “roles and responsibilities previously not considered has increased the pool of (women) leaders and the visibility of women across the university landscape.”<sup>49</sup>

Impressive as they are, in what way are these outcomes evidence of changes to the gendered culture within which they have occurred?

Firstly, increased numbers and proportions of women at senior levels do matter, and not only as evidence of progress towards gender equality or in terms of enhanced career trajectories for the women represented in the data (important as these outcomes are). Evidence is emerging that reaching a particular proportion of women at senior, decision-making levels in organisations lessens the negative effects of the gendered culture which otherwise continues to keep women in our place. Almost two decades ago the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recommended that nations should regard 30% as the minimum threshold for women’s participation in decision-making at the national level<sup>50</sup>. More recently, research has shown that “when at least 15% of a leadership team are women, there is less likely to be a perception that assertive women leaders are acting counter-stereotypically”<sup>51</sup>. This research found that women’s reluctance to put ourselves forward for senior positions, our tendency to negotiate less and for lower rewards, and to underestimate our skills and knowledge may well be due to a rational yet career-damaging desire to avoid a backlash against counter-stereotypical behaviours and attitudes<sup>52</sup> - i.e. not so much a lack of confidence per se but evidence-based strategies to avoid negative reactions. Similarly and perhaps reflecting similar patterns, research has found academic women to be more nervous about applying for

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<sup>45</sup> Harris and Leberman, op.cit. p.38

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.37

<sup>47</sup> Lumin, op.cit. p.2

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.3

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.20

<sup>50</sup> United Nations Development Programme, (1995), *Human Development Report 1995*, Oxford University Press, p.9

<sup>51</sup> Mitchell, Rebecca (June 12, 2014) “Gap or trap? Confidence backlash is the real problem for women”, *The Conversation*, <http://theconversation.com/gap-or-trap-confidence-backlash-is-the-real-problem-for-women-27718>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid



promotion<sup>53</sup> and less likely than our male colleagues to have a sense of entitlement to progression and influence<sup>54</sup>. As the numbers and proportions of women at senior levels grow, the likelihood of backlash reduces and so women's professional behaviour is less likely to be constrained by the need to keep (or appear to keep) within stereotypically gendered expectations of behaviour and attitudes. In other words, the vigilance and potency of the gender border police reduces both internally (in terms of women constraining our own behaviour) and externally (in terms of negative perceptions, judgments and reactions to women who do not behave in gender approved and expected ways).

Further, earlier research has shown that when senior women are a distinct minority, we are less likely to identify with or support each other, or to accept the few women at senior levels as role models and their leadership as legitimate, and are more likely to be competitive with women peers<sup>55</sup>. Hence in organisations with very few senior women, we women actively contribute to the power and impact of the gendered culture which keeps us in our place, at lower levels and outside circles of power and influence. Unsupportive, competitive, undermining the few women with power and influence, isolating ourselves from each other and distancing ourselves from the very women who could provide leadership guidance and influence, we create a hostile climate for ourselves and reduce the impact, effectiveness and visibility of women in the organisation including those few at leadership levels. Given university women's minority status at leadership levels, it is not surprising that other research has shown that women managers in academia are much more likely to face challenges to our authority and credibility than our male colleagues<sup>56</sup>, nor that the power and status of an academic leadership position is reduced, through gender devaluation, if it is held by a woman<sup>57</sup>.

Secondly, in addition to these positive effects on the gendered culture of higher numbers and proportions of senior university women, and in the light of such research, we argue that NZWiL's outcomes - in enhancing participants' leadership contribution, visibility, impact and expectations - are reducing the negative, career-limiting impact of the gendered culture of NZ universities. And since the size of the alumni network is on a steady annual growth trajectory and the national, institutional and sector-wide standing of the NZWiL program increases with its success and longevity<sup>58</sup>, this positive impact on the gendered culture is accumulating over time. The week-long program is packed with diverse women, as presenters, workshop facilitators, panel discussants, speakers over dinners and other informal occasions in the evenings, program leaders, and members of the Steering Committee, all of whom interact with participants, providing them with accessible and supportive role models of women comfortable with our own authority, influence and positions of power – a microclimate and

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<sup>53</sup> Probert, Belinda (2005) " 'I just couldn't fit in': Gender and Unequal Outcomes in Academic Careers" in *Gender, Work and Organisation*, Vol.12, issue 1, p.50

<sup>55</sup> Ely, Robert J. (1994) "The Effects of Organizational Demographics and Social Identity on Relationships among Professional Women" in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No.2, June 1994, p.203

<sup>56</sup> Acker, Sandra (2010) "Gendered games in academic leadership" in *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, Vol.20, no.2, pp.129-152

<sup>57</sup> Monroe, K, Ozyyurt, S., Wrigley, T. and Alexander, A., (2008), "Gender Equality in Academia: bad news from the trenches, and some possible solutions" in *Perspectives on Politics*, 6(2), pp.215-233

<sup>58</sup> In 2014, NZWiL is in its eighth year, with the Lumin evaluation reporting that "there is considerable recognition of the value of the programme and willingness for it to continue and develop." Lumin, op.cit. p.21

an ongoing network giving an insight into what the world (and universities specifically) will be like when powerful women leaders are as prevalent and culturally accepted as powerful men leaders. And the follow-up activities for NZWiL alumni, most especially the bi-annual conferences and regional roadshows, further build the size and longevity of this positive microclimate, an enduring national network of high achieving senior university women, committed to the program, its objectives and participants, a source of information, advice and support spanning a wide range of disciplines and professional specialisations.

Together these factors legitimise and normalise the very notion of women's leadership, of women's career progression, and of women speaking up and leaning in to make a bigger, more impactful and more noticeable contribution to their universities and the sector nationally. NZWiL alters participants' expectations of themselves, enhancing their preparedness to take up leadership positions and roles, whether through promotion or non-positional leadership responsibilities. It also awakens expectations of them within their institutions, amongst peers and senior colleagues, right up to the vice-chancellors who have funded their attendance and increasingly take an interest in its outcomes. For example, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Auckland, Professor Stuart McCutcheon, in June 2014 gave a data-informed presentation to an international gathering on women's progress towards leadership levels at his own university, describing his own interest in this progress as "enlightened self-interest" and asking the question "why deny yourself access to half the talent pool?"<sup>59</sup>. These fundamental changes to the gendered culture, most especially as this defines leadership, power and influence within universities, lie beneath past participants consistently identifying an increase in their confidence as one of the most significant outcomes of the programme. This confidence arises not only from participants' greater awareness of their own leadership capacities, contribution and potential, but crucially, from the realisation that these capacities are more likely to be recognised and acknowledged. This in turn empowers them to seek leadership roles and to make a leadership contribution unencumbered by the deployment of self-effacing and self-defeating strategies to avoid a backlash against such counter-stereotypical behaviour.

The independent evaluation provides evidence of such changes to the gendered culture, identifying the following outcomes: that it unlocked participants' potential and strengthened their commitment to being leaders, that they were more likely to be sought out for leadership roles, both within their current roles and beyond, that they were more confident about their own capacities and contribution to their university, and clearer about their career aspirations, and that they valued the ongoing network of support and encouragement within their own institutions and nationally<sup>60</sup>. In the words of one past participant "NZWiL gives you wings – it's up to you whether you hide behind them or grow them and soar"<sup>61</sup>. As research cited by Harris and Leberman indicates, networks such as that established and maintained by NZWiL "enable women to develop alliances, acquire knowledge, gain visibility, and build a community of support."<sup>62</sup> Further, the independent evaluation found that the program "has

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<sup>59</sup> Professor Stuart McCutcheon "Gender Equity at the University of Auckland", presentation to the 18<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) presidents' meeting, Canberra, June 23-25 2014.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p.2

<sup>61</sup> Unpublished raw data extracted from the transcript of interviews with NZWiL past participants conducted by Prof. Sarah Leberman, undertaken as research for a book by the same author which will be published later this year. Leberman, S.I. (2014) *Women's Tertiary Leadership: New Zealand Women in Leadership*, forthcoming.

<sup>62</sup> Cross, S., & Armstrong, C. (2008) "Understanding the role of networks in collective learning processes: the

emboldened women”, and that its outcomes impact “on participants, their universities and the university system as a whole”<sup>63</sup>. In addition, there is evidence of active and purposeful interventions spawned by the NZWiL programme to challenge and change the gendering of leadership and power in NZ universities. Thus the independent evaluation found that NZWiL alumni in some universities have become “a formalised ‘advisory group’ which the VC has used to monitor issues pertinent to the senior women in their university, and to seek feedback on ideas”<sup>64</sup>, that locally based alumni networks are creating “an ongoing focus on gender equity and leadership (for women) within each university”, and that “senior women leaders are increasingly taking responsibility for the development and mentoring of more junior women” including “ensuring that barriers to (more junior women’s) advancement are clearly identified and strategies for overcoming them shared and supported.”<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

The national sector-wide NZ university women’s program, NZWiL, has for eight years been making positive changes to the gendered culture of the country’s universities, most especially with respect to the gendering of leadership. Increasing numbers of women in NZ’s universities have become more visible, audible and influential within their own universities and across the sector as a result of participating in the NZWiL program. By contributing to an increase in the number and proportions of women at more senior levels and by enhancing the willingness and confidence of women staff to exercise non-positional leadership through wider responsibilities and roles, the outcomes of this program have incrementally been challenging and changing stereotypical notions of leadership arising from the gendered culture of the sector, and indeed the wider society. Most importantly, the program’s impact has normalised and legitimised NZ university women’s leadership, including making their leadership potential and contribution more visible and acknowledged. In the assessment of the NZ vice-chancellors peak body, by producing “more women leaders who are strong, capable and confident “ NZWiL has created “a better environment in universities and tertiary organisations”<sup>66</sup> nationwide. Further research is now required to identify these impacts in finer detail, including differentiating their expression and impact within different disciplines and most especially those which are currently the most gendered.

## Postscript

The last words come from the voices of NZWiL’s past participants, as they reflect on what they have gained from the program, and framed this as advice to younger women<sup>67</sup>:

***Grasp every opportunity and go for it... Don’t be afraid to put yourself forward... do the things that others are afraid to do... be ambitious and audacious... you shouldn’t be risk averse... Don’t be afraid to stand out from the crowd... Don’t be afraid to stretch yourself... Embrace that sense of ambition and that sense of self-fulfillment... Think bigger..... seize opportunities when they come... Get out there, take risks, and don’t feel***

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experiences of women” in *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 10, 600-613, cited in Harris and Leberman, op.cit. p.5

<sup>63</sup>Lumin, op. cit., pp.20-21

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.3

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.20

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/aboutus/sc/hr/women-in-leadership> accessed online July 1, 2014

<sup>67</sup> Leberman, S.I., (2014) op. cit.

**guilty...take opportunities before you are ready ... (don't) hesitate to put your hand up and still be afraid, it is okay...Take any opportunity that comes your way...Look for opportunities, put yourself forward, don't ever sit and wait for somebody to nominate you ...show them you're interested, and get involved...Choose the career that you want and then find ways to make that happen, as opposed to waiting for opportunities that come up... take opportunities when they come, or make them happen... Volunteer, participate, do what you want to do, and build the career path that comes with your dream... When possible you should always say yes...Take as many opportunities as you can to put your hand up to do jobs and roles... ...Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do it...Don't listen to the 'shoulds'...Follow your values ...build all the networks you can... become reflective, be mindful, and the earlier the better... Mindfulness, resilience, letting go of things and not ruminating over things that you did badly or went wrong... be proud of who you are and what you're achieving...Make sure you celebrate your own success!**

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