

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**1 March 2017**

**FOR WOMEN ON THE PATH TO LEADERSHIP:  
USEFUL FEEDBACK IS HARD TO FIND**

*Bain & Company and Chief Executive Women's sixth gender parity study  
**ADVANCING WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA: Eliminating bias in Feedback and Promotions**  
uncovers several root causes of the disparity in promotion rates  
inhibiting equal progress of women in corporate Australia.*

Women in line roles in corporate Australia are progressing more slowly than men towards leadership. The Bain-CEW report, based on a survey of nearly 4,500 respondents from the Australian business, government and not-for-profit communities, found that almost 60 per cent of men were promoted twice or more in the past five years compared with only 41 per cent of women. This gap in promotion rates only increases with seniority.

Narrowing the gap in promotion rates demands that our Australian organisations be meritocratic, yet the survey data from the *Advancing Women in Australia: Eliminating bias in feedback and promotions* report highlights that there is significant room for improvement. Less than half of the female respondents (45%) felt that their organisation is meritocratic, with men slightly more positive at 61%.

“Merit should be assessed on performance and potential. However, defining who has merit and who does not can be open to subjectivity and bias, particularly in evaluating potential. And if we continue to define merit as people ‘like us’ who have done what we did, we will get more of the same” said CEW President and co-author of the report, Kathryn Fagg.

The Bain-CEW report highlights some key differences in performance and career feedback between women and men, pointing to the perceived riskiness of female appointments:

- Women are twice as likely as men to be told that they need to display “more confidence” to be ready for promotion.
- Women are a third more likely than men to be told that they need “more experience” to be ready for promotion.
- Women are less likely than men to receive clear feedback on what they need to do to be ready for promotion – a disadvantage that was found to grow with seniority.

“The fact that women are told to show ‘more confidence’ and to get ‘more experience’ to be ready for promotion may reflect a bias that women are somehow perceived to be more ‘risky’ appointments, compared to their male counterparts,” said Melanie Sanders, a Bain partner and co-author of the research, “It is an undeniable truth that men remain in the majority as

senior executives in most organisations, so appointing a woman often requires putting a woman in the role for the first time.”

The Bain-CEW report recommends actions organisations can take to improve gender diversity and business outcomes:

- Train managers to provide all employees with feedback that is specific, measurable, actionable, timely and thoughtful so that women as well as men can learn about and address any performance issues in a timely fashion.
- Ensure that women and men have effective sponsors to support their career development and advocate on their behalf.
- Ensure that women and men have access to career-development opportunities and specific roles in which they can gain the skills and experiences deemed necessary for promotion.
- Take specific actions aimed at preventing bias in appointment and promotion decisions and processes.

The full report *Advancing Women in Australia: Eliminating bias in feedback and promotions* can be downloaded from [www.cew.org.au](http://www.cew.org.au).

The report is the sixth in a series of landmark gender parity surveys by global management consulting firm Bain & Company and Chief Executive Women, Australia’s preeminent organisation of over 430 senior women leaders.

### **About Bain & Company**

Bain & Company is the management consulting firm that the world's business leaders come to when they want results. Bain advises clients on strategy, operations, technology, organisation, private equity and mergers and acquisition, developing practical insights that clients act on and transferring skills that make change stick. The firm aligns its incentives with clients by linking its fees to their results. Bain clients have outperformed the stock market 4 to 1. Founded in 1973, Bain has 53 offices in 34 countries, and its deep expertise and client roster cross every industry and economic sector. For more information visit: [www.bain.com](http://www.bain.com). Follow us on Twitter @BainAlerts.

### **About Chief Executive Women**

Chief Executive Women (CEW) is the pre-eminent organisation representing Australia’s most senior women leaders from the corporate, public service, academic and not-for-profit sectors. Founded in 1985, CEW has more than 430 members whose shared vision is “women leaders enabling women leaders”. With values of collegiality, respect and vision influencing all that CEW undertakes, it offers innovative and substantive programs aimed at supporting and nurturing women’s participation and future leadership. These include scholarships and the highly regarded “Leaders Program” which are offered to emerging female executives throughout Australia. CEW strives to educate and influence all levels of Australian business and government on the importance of gender balance through a range of initiatives, advocacy and research. For more information visit: [www.cew.org.au](http://www.cew.org.au). Follow CEW on Twitter @CEWAus.

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