# eResearch workforce 2019 – treating gender diversity like a business priority

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**Background**

Achieving gender diversity in the workplace is a challenge.  Globally from Silicon Valley to cottage industry there are very few organisations that consistently maintain both diversity and gender balance at all levels.  Within eResearch, the situation is no better.  Routinely from the Board down the representation is non-inclusive meaning that the rich talent pool of perspectives available is neither influencing or guiding the technology driven organisations across Australasia.

**Australian and international perspectives**

According to a recent Access Economics study only 27.8% of the IT workforce are female[1].  As a result, only a "movement" can instigate the practice effective change-based workforce initiatives needed[2].  "*It is only when we have an inclusive working culture where both women and men can make a full contribution that the benefits start to flow*[3]".  It is important to ensure that there is a correct balance of inclusive approaches, to ensure both male and female views are represented.

It's the smart choice.  Research indicates that whilst there is limited correlation between the "collective intelligence" of a group and the individual intelligence of its members, "*if a group includes more women, its collective intelligence rises*"[4]. Research also suggests that "*teams need a moderate level of cognitive diversity for effectiveness*". Homogeneous (all or mainly exclusively teams aren't as intelligent.

**Challenges**

There are multiple challenges in achieving gender balance.  However, the main challenge to any employer is harnessing the potential a gender balanced workforce can provide.  As a collective there is an urgent need to remove the barriers which prevent greater female participation in the eResearch workforce[2].

**Opportunities**

There are significant opportunities to those institutions that can provide committed leadership as well as investment in resources[2.] It is suggested that removing barriers for women to enter the workforce generally would boost the Australian economy by ~ $25 billion per year[5].  As a frustration, participation of women aged 35 - 44 year age in the Australian workforce has shown almost no change since 1990[4].  Therefore, this group clearly need additional support to re-enter paid employment.  But this is a challenge for everyone. "*No single organisation can by itself orchestrate and deliver the quantum change needed*"[2].

There is limited published information available on gender bias in the eResearch sector including how this might affect productivity and innovation.  In attend to understand the landscape, this presentation will provide the results of a recent assessment of the gender balance in organisations supporting eResearch nationally.

Champions - join the movement and be an agent for change – promoting gender balance and smarter teams!

**The structure**

The BoF session will be 60 minutes in duration.  At this BoF the authors will examine some of the challenges of achieving diversity and the opportunities that diversity in the workforce can present. The format of the session is a mixture of presentations, facilitated discussion as follows:

- eResearch workforce – a national perspective with results of workforce diversity research conducted eResearch providers in Australasia [15 mins]
- Case study 1 – A personal journey in eResearch – Carina Kemp [5 mins]
- Case study 2 – A personal journey in eResearch – Mary Hobson [5 mins]
- Panel discussion - practical steps to achieving eResearch in the Australasia workforce with Interactive discussion with audience – what can be done to improve diversity [30 mins];
- Wrap up [5 mins].

The presentations will be provided/convened by the listed presenters.

The targeted audience for the session includes anyone with an interest in how organisations can increase diversity in the greater eResearch staff of Australasia.

A primary goal for the BoF facilitated discussion is to inform and initiate conversations aimed at how to increase gender diversity in the workforce, therefore this BoF is not discipline specific.

**References**

1 https://www.roberthalf.com.au/blog/employers/women-technology-why-arent-there-more

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4 Harvard business review 89(6):32-3 · June 2011 (Williams Woolley, A. & Malone, T. W.)
 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51453001_What_makes_a_team_smarter_More_women

5 https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Game_Changers_Web.pdf

https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2018

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