

# GLASS FLOOR OR GLASS CEILING?

In this month's Instep, we look at the gender balance (or imbalance) that exists in most HR teams and look at the implications for HR professionals and the profession. The HR profession is charged with the major responsibility of influencing organisations in the areas of diversity, gender and inclusion strategies. The fact is, the HR profession may benefit from a look in its own backyard.

There is a long-held view, satisfactorily backed up by compelling evidence, that HR is a female-dominated profession. However, take a slightly more in-depth glance and you could draw the conclusion that the profession is both female and male dominated, albeit in very different ways. (Diagram 1 which is a sample of Australian HR roles would seem to support this premise).

## Gender and levels of work

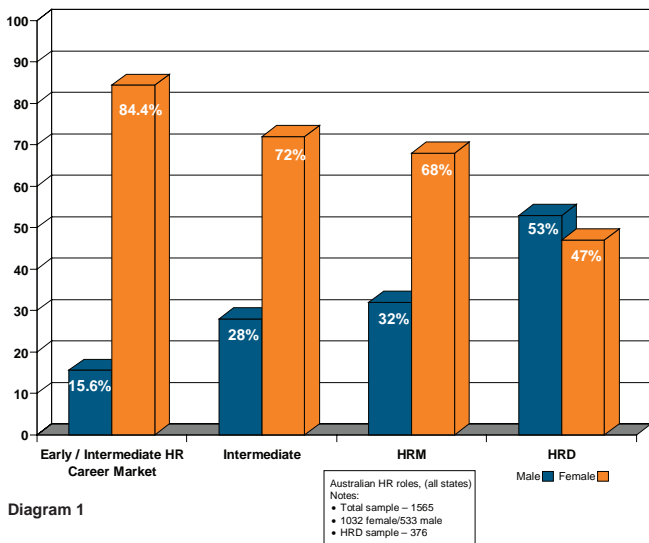


Diagram 1

So then, two questions. Firstly, where are all the men? At the top it would seem. The profession is female dominated at the entry to HRM levels. Males barely feature as being attracted to the profession as a first career option.

Secondly, where have all the females disappeared to between the HRM and HRD end of the profession? As per the challenge with other professionals' fields of endeavour, just at the point where their careers are usually the most rewarding, they are faced with balancing family responsibilities.

Times are, of course, changing and organisations are doing their best to attract women back to, not only the HRM jobs they left but to more senior roles, based on talent and potential. Fortunately, we have some very strong female role models in HRD roles today.

## The glass floor

Due to the gender imbalance in most HR teams, HR leaders often ask, (off the record of course), "have you interviewed any males who might be a good fit for this role?". There is a healthy demand for males at the entry to intermediate levels of the HR profession to provide often needed balance to female-dominated HR teams. As the saying goes, one way of thinking equals one way of doing...

Given the origin of the profession and its evolution from personnel to the more business critical and knowledge based HR function, many would say that the dominance of females is still a hangover of the profession's grounding in the more social science based, 'people' and even welfare field. Others would argue that traits required in HR predispose females to the profession just as males have been predisposed to science and engineering.

As the HR profession has evolved, 'outsider' perceptions of what HR does just hasn't caught up. For many males at the entry level, there is a perception that the HR profession is somewhat soft and fluffy and lacking a well-defined career path.

Top that off with the fact that for many HR graduates, there is a distinct lack of graduate programs. This is combined with the best point of entry being at an administrative or call centre level and you have well and truly lost the boys. Hence, HR still misses out to the more traditional, technical degrees traditionally favoured by men.

## The glass ceiling

According to Diagram 1, the HR profession is making some progress, having truly chipped away at the glass ceiling. For what is a largely female-dominated profession, you would hope that this would be the case.

Having said that, there still needs to be a continued emphasis on developing the HRDs of the future and in ensuring that talented female HR Managers are encouraged.

## Problem halved, problem solved?

Until the profession is much closer to a 50:50 split at all levels, there is definite room for improvement. Its improvement will be linked to the consistency of HR models and how the profession develops emerging professionals at earlier stages of their careers.

HR's own backyard needs some attention if equality is to be improved and it's not your typical equality problem. Who's up for the challenge?

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