2010: WOMEN PREPARED TO LEAD AND MANAGE

A dissertation submitted to the School of Education, being part requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any institution.

Signed: …………………………………………………

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Abstract

In February 1995, the Australian Federal Government Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management, released *Enterprising nation: Renewing Australia’s managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century*, ¹ (known as the Karpin Report). The Karpin Report defined 1995 - 2010 as a developmental period for improving Australian business practices at leader and manager level. It identified five levers for change. Australian businesses were encouraged to focus on globalisation. Life long learning was seen as a key ingredient in up-skilling workers and managers for evolving work environments. Australia was advised to build an enterprise-focused culture. Managers and leaders were encouraged to value diversity in the workforce. Enterprises and education and training institutions were encouraged to implement ‘best practice’ procedures.

This study situated the Karpin recommendations in the literature on gender, leadership, management, and Australian social, economic and political conditions. Employing an interdisciplinary approach and using quantitative and qualitative methods, it sought the views of women in senior, middle and frontline or supervisory positions, in large, medium and small businesses.

The study concluded that, in terms of creating diversity within institutionalised leadership, recruitment practices and social circumstances still encouraged the status quo. It found that refocusing Australian business and its leaders was unlikely to provide expanded opportunities for women in leading and managing. The skills women were acknowledged to have often aligned with skills sought for lower management positions. This has been one contributing factor in confining women to lower decision-making roles except in some education and community service environments. In these areas where women often form the majority of workers and reflect the cultures of their industries very successfully, more women occupy senior positions. The study found that women’s skills were comprehensive and suited to roles carrying greater responsibilities. It also discovered that not all of the existing approaches to preparing women to lead and manage served women well; however, some effective strategies were in place. It concluded that for women to be appointed to positions of high responsibility, they should successfully reflect a
recognisable management approach, congruent with the company’s and industry’s current style and values. This tended to perpetuate existing practices of competitive individualism and self-interest.

Since the 1980s, managers have been disproportionately elevated in status, with accompanying high salaries and bonuses. There is a risk that leaders will be credited with more wisdom and vision than warranted. Australia leaders need to have a mix of vision and business acumen. While many women managers have this mix and are prepared to be leaders, they may not be appropriately connected to the senior recruitment market. As a subtext, complex levels of vested interests, ties of loyalty and forms of reciprocity often operate in the appointment of senior personnel. Women tend to operate outside these practices and may be reluctant to endorse them. This may partially account for the unchanged circumstances of a small number of women in top senior positions.

The study concluded that the current level of refocusing of Australian businesses was resistant to change and limited in responding to expertise in the marketplace. The challenge of globalisation requires decision-makers with specific skills, knowledge and experiences. It requires people who will act with morality and preferred futures in mind rather than quick returns and advanced levels of self-interest. For organisations keen to identify these kinds of leaders then selection processes will need to differ in order to be highly attuned to recruiting individuals who can help build a responsive, innovative and caring society.

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PROLOGUE

The original study was undertaken in 1996-97. ‘Globalisation’ has entered our everyday vocabulary. We use the concept to explain changes in business practices, altered business affiliations and various impacts on sections of our economy and community. Over the period 1999-2002, fortunes have been made and lost by investors in the technology market and the Asian tiger economies have undergone severe devaluing and economic and industrial restructuring. The Pacific region has become politically unstable, organised protests have provided a resistant voice at meetings of the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and of regional trading communities. Islamic fundamentalism challenges Western power, security and materialism, using highly networked flattened operational structures to progress their aspirations.

This project describes the impact of changes on decision-makers, both women and men, and provides some approaches to how they, in turn, might wisely respond.