2018 Women in Leadership SUMMARY REPORT
THE RESEARCH ANSWERED THESE QUESTIONS:

As a Business Chick ...

What does leadership mean to you?

What are the most significant leadership challenges you face?

Which leadership skills matter most to your role and career?

In what way do you want to develop as a leader?
The time is now

The need for this understanding comes at a time when much is being written and spoken about women in leadership and in the workplace in general - representation in senior roles, the gender pay gap, and harassment in the workplace (the recent #timesup movement being one notable example). However, what is still lacking is a deep understanding of the specific opportunities and needs faced by women, which must be addressed in order to support women in achieving their career aspirations. In particular, we believe in the importance of providing women with a platform to give their voices to this topic directly, and to share their experiences and needs first-hand.

You spoke, we listened

The overwhelming response to the online survey and interview-based research we conducted is testament to the passion that women have for this topic, and the demand for greater attention being given to it. We heard from over 2,700 women in a 48 hour period, spread right across Australia and beyond, who collectively shared over 4,500 comments. Business Chicks, BSchool and CLA are privileged to present the findings of this research - and do so with the hope that it provides both meaningful insight to those who have a stake in this topic, as well as opens many doors to many more conversations and development opportunities for women in business.
Shifting landscape brings new leadership challenges... and opportunities

Before sharing the findings from our research, it is worth acknowledging the major shifts in the business landscape that continue to significantly influence the way we produce and collaborate for outcomes, and in the physical environment in which we work. Businesses need to be more agile than ever before, in order to maintain or re-gain competitive advantage. As a result, the work that many of us do is now more cognitively complex, team based, collaborative, dependent on technological competence and less dependent on physical location. Collectively, these shifts have dramatically reshaped the expectations held by organisations of their employees across all levels, especially of those in management.

“So, what does this mean for women in leadership?”

With many organisations facing substantial pressure to ‘do more with less’, it has been a widely observed trend that employees across all levels of an organisation are required to demonstrate leadership. That is, people aren’t defined as a leader simply because they have direct reports or a formal title that typically indicates leadership. In other words, more than ever, businesses need people of all backgrounds, holding all manner of roles in business, to demonstrate effective leadership. For women in particular, this new world order carries with it a huge opportunity to step into leadership in ever-increasing ways, whilst at the same time acknowledging some pretty significant factors that have impacted their ability and opportunity to take on leadership responsibilities in business.

Facing The Challenges

It’s no secret that many women have, and continue to, experience a range of obstacles or barriers when it comes to pursuing their career goals. This can especially be the case for women in business, including those who are seeking to take on leadership roles. Multiple role conflict (the pressure on women to manage competing demands between their personal and professional lives), unconscious bias on the basis of gender (or worse, discrimination and harassment), and even women’s own attitudes or internalised beliefs about their potential as a result of all that they experience or observe in the workplace ...all of these factors and more can create substantial hurdles for women who wish to progress in their careers.
Shining Through

Despite these very real factors, we all know and see many women who are successfully demonstrating leadership in business and other sectors. In the world of startups, the number of female entrepreneurs in Australia is growing faster than for men. NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern recently announced she is expecting her first child (despite needing to ward off multiple questions regarding her ability to do the job at the same time). In agriculture, the National Farmers Federation has voted in its first female President in 37 years (Naomi Simson). Australia has observed two of its most successful women in tech (Cyan Ta’eed and Melanie Perkins) announced on the BRW Young Rich List. And former PM Julia Gillard has been appointed as chair of the new Global Institute for Women’s Leadership (King’s College, UK), the first institute of its kind to apply research and advocacy in tackling women’s underrepresentation in leadership globally.

Despite so many examples of women who are leading successfully in business, what remains as a reality for many women is that they continue to experience challenges when it comes to pursuing careers in business and leadership. We believe passionately in the need to fully understand from women themselves which skills they believe will best set them up for success in business, and in which way they believe they can best develop these skills.
Collectively, this research asked the following questions:

- What are the most significant challenges and opportunities you face as a leader?
- Which leadership skills matter most to your work in your current role?
- Which skills do you believe you most need to further develop, to support your career goals?
- In what way/s do you believe you would best develop these skills?
The Results

The biggest challenges facing women when pursuing their career goals:

1. **HAVING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTION** (the ongoing existence of the glass ceiling, ‘old boys clubs’ and being excluded from consideration for roles on the basis of being female);

   “We can keep knocking on the door, but the handle is on the inside. If men don’t take part and let us in, we can knock all we like but nothing will change.”
   
   **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

2. **DEALING WITH UNCONSCIOUS (OR CONSCIOUS) BIAS** including unfair perceptions that others have of their abilities and potential as leaders;

   “I feel we’re only starting our journey of fighting for our rights, and influencing mindsets to correct certain stereotypes. I personally struggle most in my full time job with the lack of respect and attitudes from my male colleagues in a technology based business.”
   
   **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

3. **MULTIPLE ROLE CONFLICT** encompassing parental and other carer responsibilities and the many associated issues (returning to work after parental leave, limited access and expense of child care, emotional and physical burden);

   “Whilst it’s awesome society is evolving to accept women in leadership, what I think we’re yet to figure out is how to successfully support women in these roles to also play a critical leadership role as a mum.”
   
   **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

4. **WOMEN’S OWN MINDSET** (internalised feelings of self-doubt, lacking confidence to challenge the status quo).

   “The most critical thing we need to challenge is how we feel about our ability to lead, but more importantly whether we feel worthy to be a leader.”
   
   **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

5. **LACK OF SUPPORT BY OTHER WOMEN IN BUSINESS** (either due to having minimal female rolemodels, limited access to networks of women, or even from experiencing negative behaviour by women who have been successful in attaining their own goals, but who for various reasons do not mentor, advocate for or support other women in their careers)

   “I’ve noticed that once women get to the top, they don’t pass it on to help others... instead we keep pushing men to make the change. Women are just as important in supporting one another.”
   
   **SURVEY RESPONDENT**
Skills women see as being most important to success

The above leadership skills form part of the CLA and BSchool Leadership Success Factors framework (2017) which proposes a set of critical leadership skills required for the future of work.

Skills most want to develop to support their career goal
The way in which women believe they can best develop these skills

“The best experiences I’ve had for development have been the opportunities to stretch and grow. Having the opportunities to step out of my comfort zone and into my learning zone, and having the confidence and motivation to do this.”

MELANIE NODEN, THE HUNGER PROJECT

Opportunities Ahead

The 4,600+ written comments submitted by those surveyed speak volumes regarding both the ongoing challenges, but also the immense opportunities that present women in business today. The challenges identified echo those that have been consistently called out over time, including how we overcome gender-based stereotypes in the workplace, support each other as women, and lastly, our own mindset that can significantly impact our preparedness to step up into new roles and opportunities.

However, we believe it is as critical to highlight the many positive opportunities that the women in our study have identified or observed. These include:

• The role of technology enabling greater flexibility (helping tackle the issue of multiple role conflict), as well as offering women multiple platforms and channels for creating their own business opportunities;
• Positive steps taken by employers across Australia to improve gender equality and provide more female-friendly workplace practices, reflecting a greater understanding of the benefits to diversity in the workplace;
• Women often bringing a more balanced, authentic, diverse range of capabilities and leadership style to organisations than what is typically demonstrated;
• Being role models. Leading the way in their own careers, by actively challenging stereotypes and by choosing to support other women who follow in their footsteps.

“Being authentic is critical. It’s ok to show people that you are human, it’s imperative if you are going to be a ‘new wave’ leader. You can’t have a work face and a home face. The more relatable, the more genuine you are, the better a leader you will be”.

MICHELLE COX, BASTION COLLECTIVE
Ultimately, what our research offers is greater understanding of the needs and preferences of women in business when it comes to - what skills they regard as critically important, which skills they want to develop further; and how they prefer to develop the skills they need to succeed. As for how those skills should ideally be developed, our research clearly shows an equal level of interest in professional development options that include learning from peers and mentors, attending speaking events, as well as formal learning or leadership programs that target specific skills development.

We look forward to sharing more with you in the coming months as to a series of Business Chicks Leadership programs and workshops targeting the exact skills and abilities you most want to develop as leaders.

“I think that being female right now is a huge opportunity. We have more opportunities available to us than we ever have had before. I am looking at Board roles and Executive leader roles in the future - why can’t I be the CEO? I am more confident to look for these roles. A few years ago I would have thought ‘no way I can’t do that’. Now I ask myself a question - what would I do right now If I was being brave?”

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This summary document has been prepared drawing on a number of research articles and references. A full list of sources that were consulted is available in the full version of the white paper, which you can download on the Business Chicks website.