



MEDIA RELEASE  
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## High Levels of Frustration with Board Recruitment

Lack of transparency, professionalism and peer support are just some of the frustrations with the board recruitment process, according to new research commissioned by market leading advocacy and director placement group, Women on Boards.

**WOB Executive Director, Claire Braund**, said the research report, 'National Board Recruitment and Appointment Processes' showed that respondents largely had a negative experience when seeking and being recruited into board roles.

"We appear to have a self-sustaining vicious circle where many boards haven't figured out the hard and soft skills they need, so put together a poor-quality PD, which then results in generic applications in a 'pray and spray' approach from candidates who become frustrated at their lack of success," Ms Braund said.

Ms Braund said there is also a **mismatch between the expectations of candidates applying for roles and the reality of achieving a board position.**

"Many candidates appear to have unrealistic expectations as to how much work will be required to get onto boards. They are ill-prepared when it comes to having a high-quality skills and capability focussed two-page board CV, a well-crafted cover letter, a clear idea of the value they would bring to the board and the capacity to articulate this in an interview."

"Recruiters additionally felt many candidates did not do sufficient research as part of their board application process - at the very least calling the Chair and/ or the Chair of the nominations committee."

Ms Braund went to say there is a clear mismatch of expectations on all sides – candidates, recruiters and boards – which then feeds the 'circle of discontent' around serving on boards.

"Added to this is the huge increase in interest in the board sector – which is fuelled by many factors – and we wind up with a whole lot of very frustrated people," Ms Braund said.

The **national survey into Australian board recruitment and appointment processes** was conducted in late 2019 by experienced research and strategy consultant, Norrelle Goldring.

More than 700 people responded to the online survey and in-depth phone interviews were conducted with 22 board candidates and **recruiters**<sup>[ND1]</sup>.

*"In nearly 20 years of research this is the most frustrated group of respondents I have come across. Board candidates, recruiters, and organisations recruiting board members are all experiencing frustration with a suboptimal process. Disruption in the form of more introspection, better planning by all parties and a more transparent process is required in order to align organisational needs with candidate applications and reduce the avalanche of generic applications for generic board positions."* - Norrelle Goldring, report author -

Ms Braund said another issue raised by many respondents was boards and executive search firms who **recruited from a list of 'known and trusted men and women' – effectively a closed shop** which was difficult to break into.

*"In the 6 years during which I have been a professional NED I have been disappointed at the lack of transparency in the director recruitment process and the way that personal networks seem to be crucial in finding positions."* - Survey respondent -

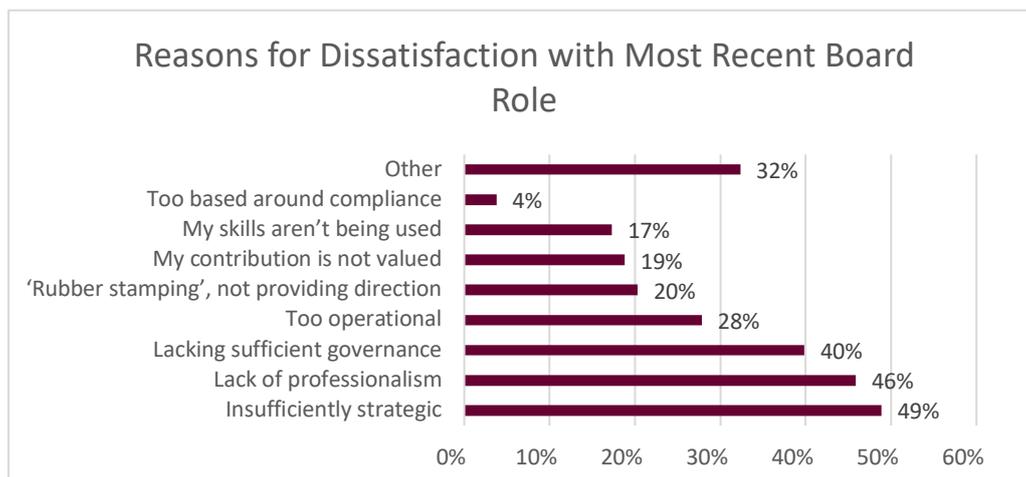
*"It's still very opaque - there needs to be more transparency in board appointment processes. Also, governance skills and education don't seem to count for very much - it's the business acumen and networks that count more. Which is perhaps why we might be seeing some of the governance crises we are seeing in our major institutions."* - Survey respondent -

**Feeders into the 'closed shop' include:**

- risk aversion (we don't know them);
- recruiters who don't cast the net widely because board search is not well remunerated;
- a lack of professionalism in boards vis a vis recruitment; and
- the prevalence of 'old boys and girls clubs.'

The report also canvassed the satisfaction level of the 79% of participants who said they had served or were serving on boards, with one-third saying they were dissatisfied with the experience.

"The major reasons for dissatisfaction are a lack of board strategy with too much focus on the operational and a lack of both governance and professionalism – particularly in the Not-For-Profit sector," Ms Braund said.



## Recommendations

The research did show that there is recognition things are changing and there is a latent desire to diversify the candidate pool, with listed boards (including those run by men) seen as more generous and open to change than other board types.

### What can candidates do to improve recruitment?

There were a number of suggestions from organisations recruiting board members for candidates to make themselves stand out:

- Be researched and prepped on the industry and sector and its challenges.
- Be able to articulate their value add and what they bring
- Be genuine, authentic, honest and who they are, important for assessing cultural fit
- Demonstrate passion, purpose and enthusiasm for the role, organisation and cause
- Behave as a director and peer, not as an executive or subordinate
- Demonstrate understanding of governance.

### What can organisations do to improve recruitment?

- Consistent use of skills matrices to gain clarity on skills gaps
- Board composition reviews to clarify expertise required beyond skills/experience
- Development of cultural fit outlines, including soft skills
- Obtaining upfront consensus from all board members as to what is required from a new board member.
- Openness to interview unknowns and left fielders
- Providing board packs for roles
- Provision of a selection committee with one point of contact
- Faster assessment, response and feedback, aided by only advertising and recruiting for genuine roles, thereby reducing or ceasing the box-ticking.

### The improvements to the board recruitment process that candidates would like to see revolve around increased transparency and opening the 'shop door':

- Lateral and more flexible thinking and new blood.
- Timely and honest feedback provision
- Advertisement of all. Less non-transparent headhunting
- Clear process and timeline, clearly communicated
- Communications and follow-up
- Clear position descriptions and specific selection criteria
- Organisational clarity on what is wanted, sticking with it and not changing criteria
- Faster recruitment process.

## More information / interviews

For a copy of the report please email [wob-aus@womenonboards.net](mailto:wob-aus@womenonboards.net) or call 02 43210100

**For interviews** please call Claire Braund on 0409981781 or Ruth Medd on 0419407 231 or email [wob-aus@womenonboards.net](mailto:wob-aus@womenonboards.net)