

Women in ICT

Perspectives and perceptions
from some of Australia's most
successful female technology
leaders



“As a CIO you need to have vision and the ability to take your team with you. You need to have a good pitch when speaking to stakeholders and service partners of all levels.

And it is important to have some technical knowledge so you know who is bluffing. You need to be innovative and know the difference between brave and stupid, and you should have some risk appetite: know when to push the boundaries and how far.”

Grainne Kearns, Group CIO, Jetstar

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Message from Kaylene O'Brien

With technology evolving rapidly and driving huge shifts in business, the information and communications technology (ICT) industry offers diverse career opportunities. However, women comprise less than 20 per cent of the Australian ICT workforce¹. The lack of female representation at senior levels is even greater, with women occupying a small percentage of ICT leadership roles.

In 2013, Deloitte held in-depth interviews with nine of Australia's leading female chief information officers (CIOs) and IT leaders. Through candid conversations, we gained an understanding of how these women navigated to the top spot, including the relationships and opportunities that helped them get there and the skills they acquired along the way.

The survey also highlighted a need to change the profile of the technology industry. Teachers, career advisors and family members need to open their minds to the prospects, and understand that opportunities are still developing; there will be roles and careers in the future that do not exist today.

We hope our findings provide insight into the challenges and opportunities of a career in ICT, and assist current and prospective CIOs – both women and men – on their journeys to becoming successful leaders.

Kaylene O'Brien
Senior Technology Partner

Message from Suzanne Campbell

It is fabulous that Deloitte has taken the time to survey a select group of talented ICT leaders and write this report. As we know, women in IT are a minority, but rather than seeing this as a negative, I think the overriding message is one of hope. I believe we can turn things around through the influence of strong role models, mentoring of talented women and providing appropriate education in schools, universities, TAFE and the workplace.

I commend this report to you.

Suzanne Campbell
Chief Executive Officer,
Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA)



Meet our interviewees

Julie Bale

CIO, Bank of Queensland

Julie joined BOQ as CIO in 2012 and is responsible for the strategy, development and maintenance of the infrastructure and technology that supports BOQ. Her previous roles include Head of Solutions at ING DIRECT Australia and Head of IT Solutions Delivery at Bendigo and Adelaide Bank.

Janette Bettcher

Acting CIO, SA Power Networks

Janette has held a variety of technology and business change roles in the electricity industry covering the areas of mining, generation, distribution and retail. For more than 10 years, Janette was Chair of her local community childcare centre and Deputy Chair of her local primary school parents' committee. She has been a Trustee Director of the Electricity Industry Superannuation Scheme for nine years.

Suzanne Campbell

CEO, Australian Information Industry Association

Suzanne's IT and telecommunications experience includes leading major change, transformation and growth projects for domestic and international companies. Prior to joining AIIA in 2011, Suzanne was responsible for managing Telstra's Professional Services group.

Grainne Kearns

Group CIO, Jetstar

Before moving into her current role in 2012 leading the separation of Telstra from its New Zealand subsidiaries, Grainne was CIO for Sensis, Telstra's directory business. She has gained experience in Australia and overseas in the ICT, financial services and digital media sectors. In 2008, Grainne became one of only 10 women worldwide to receive the ComputerWorld Top 100 Leaders Award.

Bev McQuade

CIO, SA Water

Bev has led the Information Services and Technology Business Unit at SA Water since 2008. Between 1986 and 2007, she held various roles for ANZ and SGIC Health Insurance, including Global Head of Information Management at ANZ, ANZ Project Director for Basel II, and change and innovation roles at SGIC, the Health Insurance Commission and Mutual Community (now Bupa).



Nina Meyers**CIO, Queensland Urban Utilities**

Nina manages all aspects of Queensland Urban Utilities' ICT environment. She has also provided executive sponsorship to several key projects in the company's Technical Separation Program to transition all ICT services from Brisbane City Council to a managed services provider. Nina has previously held roles with Allconnex Water, Gold Coast City Council, the Queensland Department of Emergency Services, Queensland University of Technology and the Queensland Police Service.

Kaylene O'Brien**Senior Technology Partner, Deloitte**

As the lead Partner for Deloitte Consulting's national technology advisory practice, Kaylene works with a number of public sector clients including Victorian Government departments, universities and the Department of Defence. She is a Board member of VicICT for Women and in 2012 was named the Australian iAwards Victorian ICT Woman of the Year.

Clare Tam**CIO and Executive Manager of Member and Employer Services, VicSuper**

Clare has operational responsibilities across VicSuper covering member, employer and IT services. As the CIO, her strategic business input has transformed business models and processes across the organisation through the use of technology. Clare has a strong background in financial services and is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, a Chartered Tax Adviser and has a Diploma of Financial Planning. Prior to joining VicSuper, she held senior and executive management roles at Coopers & Lybrand and HSBC in Asia-Pacific.

Jane Treadwell**CEO, DesignGov**

Jane heads DesignGov, an experimental initiative to improve the Australian Public Service. She is also a member of the NSW Government ICT Advisory Panel and moderator of the World Bank Leaders for Transformation Network. She gained CIO experience at Centrelink (where she was also Deputy CEO) from 1998 to 2005 and the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet from 2005 to 2006. In 2011, Jane won the Australian iAwards Woman of the Year for initiating the Random Hacks of Kindness events in Melbourne.

Virtues and values

The CIOs and ICT leaders we spoke to revealed a number of personal qualities and beliefs that have been instrumental to their career success. Based on their stories, we distilled five key virtues and values common across all interviewees. Not all of these were innate, and interviewees cited many experiences and opportunities that helped them cultivate these traits.

1. Confidence and self-belief

Rising to the top in any field requires confidence and self-assurance, and these qualities are perhaps especially important for women in a male-dominated industry. Most of our interviewees fought self-doubt at various points in their careers, but through broad experience involving risks, successes and failures, they acquired a strong belief in their own abilities and decisions. Several cited specific moments that gave them the confidence to take the next leap forward.

Grainne Kearns, Group CIO, Jetstar, says her “this is it” moment came when she and her then-boss were entering their 40s and decided if they didn’t make it then, they never would. “A robust conversation followed, with my boss telling me some home truths about my ability – which was far greater than I gave myself credit for.” Four years later, Kearns became CIO for Telstra’s directory business, Sensis.

Julie Bale advises that “as a woman, you are capable of doing anything you set your mind to – the only person that will hold you back is you.”

2. Courage

The fortitude to step outside their comfort zones and stretch themselves beyond their existing skills and knowledge was a common theme with our respondents. While courage is a trait developed over time, most interviewees had shown courage from early in their careers. They were not afraid to move to other organisations to pursue opportunities or to put their hands up for new responsibilities in the face of uncertainty.

After completing an accounting degree in Melbourne, Clare Tam, CIO and Executive Manager of Member and Employer Services at VicSuper, worked for NAB New Zealand. She returned to Melbourne to join Coopers & Lybrand so she could become a Chartered Accountant and gain broader experience in tax and superannuation. Tam spent more than a decade overseas and worked her way up to Regional Chief Operating Officer (COO) in HSBC’s securities services business. In this time, she gained considerable experience in major business transformation programs involving technology.

During discussions for her current role at VicSuper, she told her interviewer, “While my background might not comprise traditional technology-based roles, I’ve been in the business for a long time and I know the A to Z of the value chain.”

“I never let myself believe there was a glass ceiling.”

Clare Tam, CIO and Executive Manager
of Member and Employer Services, VicSuper



3. Flexibility and resilience

Mental fluidity and the ability to work around obstacles are useful qualities to cultivate. When faced with setbacks or diversions, our interviewees were able to think laterally and see the bigger picture. As Julie Bale, CIO for Bank of Queensland, notes, “the route to the top is never direct; with a winding road it is the breadth and depth of experience gained that is important.”

In addition, the fast pace of changing technologies such as mobility and digital disrupters keep the ICT industry on its toes. The need for a flexible approach has never been greater. Bev McQuade of SA Water also cites an aging workforce not willing to accept changing technology and the invisible nature of IT activity as key challenges in her role.

4. Tenacity

Tenacious people are determined and persistent; they are unwilling to yield or give up. Nina Meyers, CIO at Queensland Urban Utilities, set her sights on the job from a young age. As she navigated through various roles in the public and private sectors she kept her eyes fixed firmly on her goal. Meyers sought out diverse jobs and opportunities before becoming CIO of Allconnex Water, where she developed a five-year ICT strategic vision and established the company’s core ICT environment and capability from the ground up.

Janette Bettcher, CIO of SA Power Networks, was always willing to take technology roles that “no one else wanted” in order to build relationships and learn about business. These roles often involved travel and remote work. As her career progressed, Bettcher also took on non-IT related management roles, such as business improvement projects and internal board roles, to widen her experience.

Throughout their careers, our interviewees have also taken personal responsibility for their success and have been willing to do what was needed. When Grainne Kearns emigrated to Australia from Ireland, she felt she had to overcome the challenges of being both a woman and a migrant. “I had to build my network quickly and learn to ask for opportunities,” she says.

5. Relationship building

Without exception, all interviewees emphasised the importance of communication skills and relationship building. The ability to form networks and gain people’s trust can provide a strong return on investment in the form of vital stepping stones.

In her first year as CIO for Centrelink, Jane Treadwell visited some of Australia’s leading CIOs in the public and private sectors to talk to them about what they did, what was important and how they overcame their challenges.

Similarly, Nina Meyers believes building strong relationships and networks across the board is important in getting to know the business. “CIOs are increasingly part of general management who just happen to have oversight of the IT strategy and operations,” she says. “General business knowledge and understanding the various levers of the business is important in enabling CIOs to manage the organisation’s technical requirements but also ensure projects support the business strategy.”



Essential skill sets

In the changing world of ICT, a successful CIO must understand the whole business and the issues facing it, not just the technology. Staying at the forefront of technological progress supports strategic planning, but a broader skillset is essential to propel professionals to leadership.

1. Broad business knowledge

Technology has become a crucial tool for improving business performance and efficiency. Our interviewees acknowledged that with every department relying on IT for something, successful CIOs must have a holistic understanding of the business and a broad spread of skills that aren't limited to technology.

Grainne Kearns and Bev McQuade would both like to see IT off the agenda – that is, that the CEO no longer needs to be worried about IT as the technology and practices meet the needs of the business. They believe the CIO should have a seat at the table and IT should play an integral part in driving the strategy of the organisation.

2. An understanding of technology

In addition to broad business oversight, all interviewees had a strong understanding of and passion for technology. With the world of technology changing so quickly, it's vital to invest time and money in regularly updating your skills to stay ahead of the trends. However, most emphasised that deep technical know-how is not compulsory.

When she was CIO of Centrelink, Jane Treadwell says her IT skills were not always at the same level as many of the staff members she managed. To establish her credibility with the 10 to 12 executives reporting to her, Treadwell enlisted a number of mentors to advise her on various IT disciplines. Nina Meyers, likewise learnt to cultivate and rely on subject matter experts to supplement her technical knowledge.

3. Communication skills

Bev McQuade, CIO at SA Water, believes a key function of the CIO is to enable communication between IT and the business and "take the jargon out of IT." It is also important to foster open communication within the IT team, and effectively convey IT's contributions to the business.

Interestingly, many interviewees believe there's a misapprehension that the CIO is a technical guru. According to Kaylene O'Brien, Senior Technology Partner at Deloitte, "People who do really well in their IT career are often entrepreneurial, they have great communication skills and they are very people focused. They don't necessarily fit the traditional image of an IT person."

4. Empowering leadership style

"Be consultative but firm on what you want and fair on the approach to get there," says Nina Meyers, who believes a personable and respectful leadership style is most effective. This echoed many of our interviewees' responses. Grainne Kearns commented that most of all, she would like to be known as a strong leader and one whose team members (current and past) would want to work with again because she "gets things done, does funky stuff and enables others."

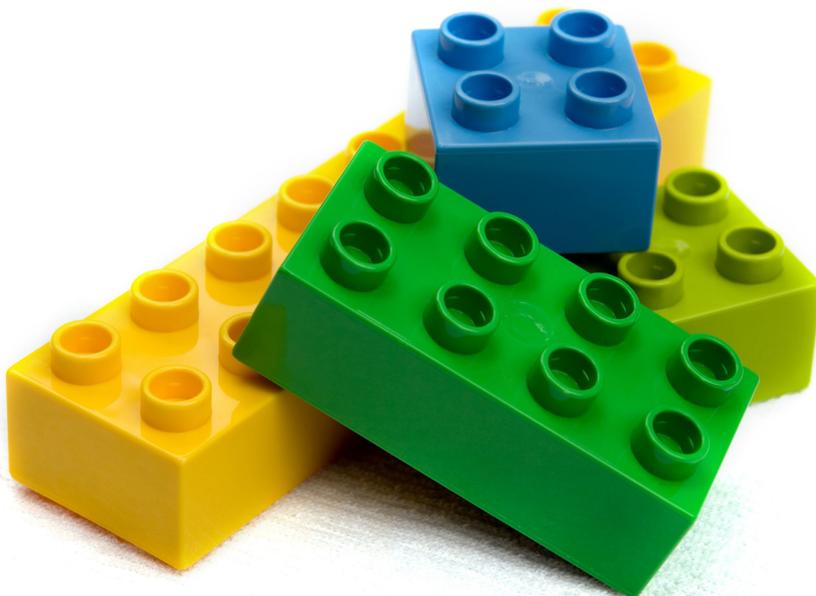
An empowering and fair-minded leadership style can help managers build trust, develop and retain talented people, and ensure their teams are on board with their visions.

5. Strategic planning and long-term vision

Strategic planning and the ability to execute it are at the core of any executive role. However, as custodians of business information and intelligence, CIOs must be strategic thinkers if they are to support the CEO in navigating the constantly shifting business landscape. The CIO needs to have the foresight to ensure the right infrastructure is in place to support organisational growth and help drive strategy. As Clare Tam remarks, “You need to understand your industry and envisage what it will look like in the future to ensure your technology doesn’t lag.”

“The challenges around CIO-dom are not in the technology, but in the seven S’s surrounding it: strategy, style, systems, structures, skills, staff and shared values.”

Jane Treadwell, CEO, DesignGov



Career-defining factors

Many of our interviewees had fallen or drifted into careers in IT. None cited a role model, parent or school teacher directing them to a career choice they are now passionate about. What was clear from all their experiences was that the guidance of mentors; experience of past bosses as role models (good and bad); and their peers shaped how they have developed into the leaders they are today.

The CIOs we spoke to identified people, decisions and opportunities that shaped their leadership style, supported their journeys and helped them better understand their own goals and values. From these stories, five common factors emerged.

1. Working for great bosses

“Capable people can do amazing things if their bosses let them have a go and give them safety lines to come back,” says Jane Treadwell, who cites working for well-known public policy figure Sue Vardon as one of the most significant factors in her career. When Vardon became Centrelink’s first CEO, she appointed Treadwell to the CIO role, recognising her strengths in change management, even though she lacked CIO experience. Grainne Kearns was also offered opportunities for advancement when her then boss tapped her on the shoulder for the top job. In both cases, these leaders had more faith in the ability and skills of the individuals than perhaps they initially felt themselves.

Working under good bosses helped our interviewees foster many of the skills they needed, and in many cases shaped their professional values and leadership styles. Bev McQuade built an important relationship with Gavin Kelly, CEO of the Health Insurance Commission (now Medicare Australia) as his “right-hand person.” This gave McQuade broad experience in organisational change projects and business improvement.

However, not everyone thought a boss had to be ‘great’ to have a positive impact. Julie Bale developed her leadership style by observing behaviours she did not approve of and reversing them. Her most important takeaway? She says, “Everyone on the team should be treated with respect and as equals. Everyone has a positive contribution to make and as a leader it’s your role to bring out the best in your team.”

2. Carefully selecting mentors

More than half of our interviewees have had mentors during their careers, from whom they received valuable support and education. Nina Meyers attributes her success to a strong, long-term mentor who became a close friend and allowed her to share advice and potential approaches to issues and discuss concerns in confidence. However, as Jane Treadwell points out, “It is very important to choose your teachers carefully.”

Julie Bale and Clare Tam both had senior female mentors who shaped their personal development and career direction. Bale used her unofficial mentor as a sounding board: “Nothing was too outlandish. Most importantly, though, she had an amazing way of creating opportunities to help me build or recover my self-confidence.”

“Mentoring is an important role,” says Kaylene O’Brien. “The mentor is a different role model and does not necessarily have to be female. Males are still in the power positions and can open doors and create connections for the female recruits to the industry. However, it is best to find a mentor that supports you and sticks with you.”

3. Building peer networks

Peer networks are crucial at any stage of a successful career, and ideally include peers inside and outside your organisation. These people can be a source of knowledge, feedback and support, and can open doors to unexpected opportunities.

For Jane Treadwell, networking has been a fundamental factor throughout her career. "CIO networks are brilliant for gaining insights and understanding, and also affirming some of my gut instincts," she says.

Suzanne Campbell and Kaylene O'Brien also encourage women to invest in peer networks. Suzanne is excited because "there are so many fabulous people in the community." Her advice to young women is to "be self-confident and courageous, and ask for support and assistance when needed. People are unflinching in their willingness to assist."

4. Following a passion

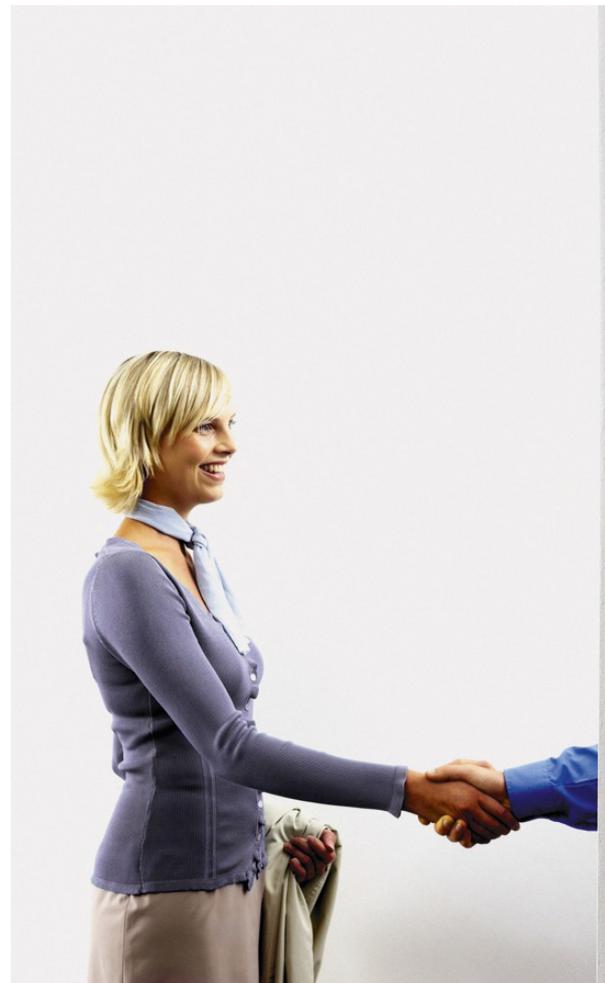
A number of our interviewees began their careers in different fields, such as marketing or medicine, but they were all driven by an interest in technology and how it relates to business strategy. In school in Malaysia, Clare Tam had an early fascination with computers and her dad encouraged her to attend computer courses. But her parents pushed her to undertake an accounting degree because this was seen as a "good office career" for women. Tam followed this career path all the way to COO, but never lost sight of the importance of technology.

"My passion for technology-empowered business strategy extends beyond financial measures and encompasses using technology to develop an inclusive environment that encourages personal and professional growth," says Tam. "Bringing people along on this journey is not only critical to business success, it is my greatest privilege."

Julie Bale found the theoretical aspects of her computer studies course "dull and one-dimensional", but once she began working in IT she knew she had found her niche. "There's a huge variety of roles and opportunities to make a difference," she says. For all our interviewees, working in ICT allowed them to combine their passions with a practical career offering a wealth of prospects.

"Work your network; work hard and work smart and market yourself internally and externally through presentations and activities. Tell people what you do!"

Grainne Kearns, Group CIO, Jetstar



A matter of gender

While some of the CIOs we interviewed did not believe gender inequality had been a career roadblock for them, others felt they had had to work harder to prove themselves in a male-dominated industry. Grainne Kearns spent her formative career years in an “aggressive and testosterone-driven environment” and said she had to “learn to play with the boys and in some cases be tougher than [her] male counterparts.”

The reasons for the underrepresentation of women in ICT are complex, but many of our interviewees believe that a key factor is a lack of awareness of IT career options. Suzanne Campbell, CEO of the Australian Information Industry Association, notes that the IT industry lacks role models for women. “Girls do not understand what the opportunities are for a career in IT, nor do they understand what is required to get there,” she says. “We must identify and promote younger and more relevant role models to profile our industry.” While changing perceptions is critical, Deloitte’s Kaylene O’Brien says this will only achieve so much if the lack of diversity remains.

Balancing family life with work was also a challenge for some of our interviewees; for example, Clare Tam believes parenthood is harder in the Western world than in Asian cultures. “There is less familial support, childcare is expensive and women face more pressure to be present,” she says. But Tam acknowledges that the situation is shifting, with more equal parental responsibility helping to pave the way for women in senior positions.

Despite the gender imbalance, the ICT industry offers numerous advantages for women. As Suzanne Campbell notes, “There is nothing quite like IT for career flexibility. The skills are highly portable and you can get a job at any age. The role changes are so great that you can be learning new things throughout your entire career and work in many different areas and industries.”

“There’s a huge future for women in IT. Good employers have realised that a diverse workforce is to their benefit and that the value of a diverse workforce is realised by cultivating a culture of inclusion.”

Kaylene O’Brien, Senior Technology Partner, Deloitte



Advice for aspiring leaders

Based on the insights that emerged from these interviews, what can aspiring professionals do to advance towards a CIO role? We suggest four things: embrace change and seize opportunities; market yourself to build credibility; ask for support and seek feedback; and be open and flexible.

1. Embrace change and seize opportunities

Demonstrate your interest by seeking new responsibilities and accepting a variety of opportunities – even if they are outside your comfort zone and skill set. Although taking risks sometimes results in failure, these experiences make you a more valuable employee. Nina Meyers advises young ICT professionals to keep their horizons broad and gain experience across the business as well as in four key areas of IT: strategy, architecture, projects and technology.

2. Market yourself to build credibility

“Your credibility is crucial,” says Clare Tam, who believes in the importance of regularly reporting back to management on your successes and measurable results such as return on investment. Selling yourself is especially important if you work in an environment where gender bias exists.

3. Be open and flexible

As Kaylene O’Brien notes, there will be technology careers in the future that don’t even exist today. “We need to open our minds to the opportunities that exist for young people in ICT,” she says. Aspiring professionals who can take unexpected opportunities or obstacles in their stride will develop resilience and self-confidence – two of the five common CIO virtues and values discussed above.

Applying a flexible mind when you encounter inequality can also be useful. “Sometimes you need to accept that bias exists and work with it, or think laterally to work around it,” says Janette Bettcher.

4. Ask for support

Cultivating a mentor relationship can be an invaluable career investment, though it’s not essential. While a number of our interviewees had formal mentors, nearly all actively sought support and input in some way, whether from colleagues, peer networks or informal role models. Jane Treadwell believes networking is crucial, and it’s important to choose people who have something valuable to share, such as interesting work experience or useful connections.

“If you ever start to feel comfortable in your role then it is time to move on.”

Julie Bale, CIO, Bank of Queensland



Conclusion

Our interviews with a selection of Australian female technology leaders have highlighted key areas where aspiring professionals can focus to advance their careers. While gender differences have played a part in many of the CIO journeys we explored, interviewees overcame these obstacles by developing qualities such as self-confidence, courage and resiliency, and building broad skill sets that extended far beyond technical knowledge.

We cannot conclude from our small research sample why there are so few women CIOs in Australia, but our findings point to factors including long-held perceptions about what a typical ICT career involves, and a lack of encouragement for school students and young women to pursue such a career. As more women succeed in reaching ICT's top spot, we hope they will act as role models for younger women and help foster the ambitions of aspiring CIOs, both female and male.



About this research

In late 2012 and early 2013, Deloitte interviewed nine leading women CIOs and IT leaders. The interviews were semi-structured and included open-ended questions to elicit responses. These were:

1. What were the significant moments in your journey to becoming CIO and developing into your current role? Why were they important and why did they occur?
2. What were the significant relationships that helped you on your journey to CIO? Why?
3. What moments, people and activities shaped your values and leadership?
4. What are the skills important to being a CIO, and how did you acquire them?
5. What advice would you give other aspiring women professionals on managing their journey to leadership?
6. What are the critical challenges you currently face in your CIO role?
7. As a CIO and leader, what would you like to accomplish and leave as legacy?

Using these simple questions to anchor the interviews, we explored each unique journey to leadership, including what mattered most to those who became leaders. Our aim was to better understand the factors and issues that affect the career prospects of women in Australia's ICT industry. To the best of our knowledge, no similar piece of research has been conducted, and we hope it will be a valuable contribution to an important issue facing Australian business.

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