



THE STORY

Implementing an active bystander campaign has allowed Aurecon to address workplace sexism and sexual harassment.

Aurecon is a design, engineering and advisory company working with clients across markets and asset types in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and Asia.

A respectful workplace culture is critical to success as a business, with known benefits including increased representation, employee satisfaction and retention. A pre-campaign survey across the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand business asked about experiences and responses to sexism and sexual harassment. It found that one in five Aurecon employees had either experienced or witnessed sexism or sexual harassment at work, a statistic the organisation set out to improve by focusing on prevention.

“It has been said the standard we walk past is the standard we accept, and on matters of social responsibility, there must be no compromise or turning a blind eye,” says CEO William Cox. Aurecon implemented an Active Bystander campaign and framework to equip employees to be able to address workplace sexism and sexual harassment.

For the campaign to be effective, it needed to be relatable to employees. Before starting, Aurecon ran a workforce survey across all employees in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, designed to

understand how sexism and sexual harassment were experienced, witnessed, and perceived in their specific workforce. The insights from this survey were used to inform the Active Bystander email campaign and strategy going forward.

The campaign started with an email campaign over five weeks, providing guidance and resources for employees to actively respond to situations they might experience or witness. The campaign used social norms developed from the survey to drive behavioural change, highlighting actions employees could take to respond to inappropriate behaviours. The five emails were sent by CEO William Cox to reinforce the company and leadership team's expectations and commitment to addressing sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Aurecon followed this up by launching an Active Upstander Framework. The framework includes a mandatory 'From Bystander to Upstander' training module, which provides an overview of workplace sexism and sexual harassment, and the role of active upstanders in addressing disrespectful and harmful workplace behaviours. The training includes actionable tools, strategies and videos from leaders and others from the organisation. Other actions included the launch of an updated bullying, harassment and discrimination policy, a new reporting and resolution pathway and a review of related mandatory training.

"In building an upstander culture, encouraging everyone to hold employees and peers to professional conduct, we continue to enhance our organisational culture," says Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Co-ordinator Zina Abu Ali.

Recognising the importance of buy-in throughout the organisation, the CEO wrote to leaders prior to the implementation of the campaign, asking for their support, and encouraging them to discuss it with their teams. A crucial element of the framework is a guide designed specifically for team leaders, which actively encourages them to facilitate conversations following the Upstander e-learning and throughout the year. The People team was also prepared that there could be an increase in incident reporting as a result of the campaign.

Accountability was a key aspect of the overall strategy of the campaign. The framework incorporates grievance pathways and reporting, enabling employees at all levels of the organisation to act proactively. Leadership actions are recorded in an incident and audit management tool, which plays a critical role in enabling a data-driven approach to understanding the performance of the campaign and supporting ongoing improvements in measures and protocols.

DEI Manager Penny Rush says, "This initiative has captured the imagination of our leaders, workforce and external parties more than any other. The opportunity to apply behavioural science to a common workforce challenge has been exciting and impactful."

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THE CHALLENGE

To equip all employees with knowledge to address workplace sexism and sexual harassment.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Conducting a workforce survey to understand the specific needs of the workforce and to provide a benchmark to evaluate the initiative
- A sub-committee of the Group Executive established to lead a response to recommendations from the sexual harassment in the workplace report
- Email campaign over five weeks sent from the CEO, providing guidance and resources to actively respond to situations where team members might experience or witness sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace
- Active bystander framework created to empower everyone at Aurecon to act proactively
- Initiative visibly championed by leaders at all levels



RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Survey results found the majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that they felt confident knowing what to do if they experienced or witnessed sexism or sexual harassment
- Female representation in the overall workforce increased from 32.2% to 39.2%
- Workforce percentage of returning alumni doubled since 2020, including four non-binary alumni and a higher proportion of women than men returning
- Engagement surveys showed increased satisfaction scores for the statements “I’m confident I won’t be discriminated against or harassed at Aurecon,” and “In my organisation, gender-based harassment and sexual harassment is not tolerated.”

KEY LEARNING

Understanding the specific workplace needs and engaging with champions at all levels of the organisation empowers every individual to act, contributing to meaningful change.

