

# CASE STUDY: VIVA ENERGY

## A path forward for female emerging leaders

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It's not hard to find companies who talk earnestly about their quest for a fair gender balance in upper management. But it's harder to find one that truly commits to that objective.

What's really required is leadership and Viva Energy's CEO Scott Wyatt does more than pay lip service to gender equity. He's a WGEA Pay Equity Ambassador as well as a member of the Industrial Chapter of the Male Champions of Change (MCC). If Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow were correct in defining leadership as *mobilising people to make progress on an issue you care about and thrive*, then Scott's a genuine leader.

In early 2017, Wyatt guided Viva to set ambitious gender equity targets, aiming for 50 per cent female recruitment internally and externally each year, as well as setting a goal of 40 per cent female representation in all levels of management by 2020 and 50 per cent of the senior leadership group should be women by the same year.

Wyatt went on a mission, forming focus groups to gather personal feedback from women at Viva about what it was really like to work there and what they saw as barriers to gender equality. For context, Viva was formed in 2014, having broken away from Shell, and runs an oil refinery in Geelong. It's also active in supply terminals, airports and corporate offices. In all, more than 1400 staff - heavily based in engineering and technical skills - work in the company. If you're thinking mainly men in hard hats and fluoro vests, you'd be right. Only 26 per cent of Viva's workforce was female and both Wyatt's questioning and more formal employee engagement surveys suggested a lot would need to be done to assist any rise of Viva's female leaders.

For a company that defines its purpose as 'helping people reach their destination', the goal was clear, and People Measures was engaged to find a path forward for Viva's female executives.

The Viva Energy Female Emerging Leaders Development Program (FELDP) was established by People Measures with a key objective: to be a leadership program for women that did not try to adapt women so they could be leaders in a male world.

From pre-program discussions through to a Development Centre, four workshops across six months and regular feedback loops and development planning, Viva's women were pushed to explore their strengths, weaknesses, confidence and their individual sense of leadership purpose. The 12 participants were given live experience of challenges facing senior Viva leaders and a chance to explore how they would respond. Importantly, senior

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leaders within the company were trained beforehand in how to observe and how to offer constructive feedback.

It wasn't easy. One participant described People Measures' program as *challenging and confronting, but eye opening; a great opportunity to reflect & improve*. Another admitted it was a really worthwhile program that has stretched each one of us.

A year later, five of the 12 in the FELDP cohort have moved into senior management roles. Line managers and senior managers within the organization are more educated about gender issues. The women involved have been able to engage with Viva's CEO and the General Manager, Human Resources on a regular basis, to discuss their ideas for the company. The 12 participants have formed their own strong peer support network, while also enjoying comprehensive development plans to improve their chances of progressing as leaders.

Some of the initial cohort have been guest speakers in the expanded second wave of FELDP, in 2018, as 22 emerging female leaders took part in the program. Viva's reputation in a male-dominated industry has been enhanced and the company has built genuine respect as a champion of female leadership and the recipient of the unique and diverse qualities those leaders have to bring.