

# Ultimit Benefit – women trainees in the Electricity Supply Industry



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Industry Training Federation Research Forum  
Wellington  
11-12 April 2013



# Today we will .....



- Provide you with a bit of industry context
- Give you a broad idea of what it is that line mechanics and cable jointers do in their jobs
- Tell you about how we went about the research
- Outline the main findings and conclusions



# Research Questions



- Does isolation and lack of a peer group limit women's recruitment and retention in the industry?
- Does the health and safety model used in the industry sufficiently consider issues that might affect women relative to men?
- What are the work-related attributes and qualities that are valued in the industry, and to what extent do male and female trainees exhibit these?



# How we went about it



- Interviews with trainees, their supervisors and team leaders over a two year period.
- A mixture of face-to-face and phone interviews lasting between 20-60 minutes
- Interviews also with other company personnel and industry stakeholders
- A total of 109 interviews
- Supplemented with documentation (such as company policies, notes from tailgate meetings) and observations of trainees on the job and in off-job training



# Industry Context



- The Electricity Supply industry in NZ consists of generation, transmission, distribution retail.
- The project took place in transmission and distribution sectors where the work is:-
  - Physically demanding – working at height, in confined spaces and heavy lifting
  - Hazardous work is a feature of the industry
  - Health and safety is a key issue for most employers.



# Workforce issues



- 70% of employees are male (and most women work in the retail side of the industry)
- A higher proportion of Māori than in other industries
- An ageing workforce
- Some labour shortages are being met through international recruitment
- Employees generally have high levels of secondary school qualifications, and higher mean earnings



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# ESITO qualifications



- A number of industry qualifications but two dominant industry career pathways:
  - Line Mechanic
  - Cable Jointer
- In 2008, out of a total of 1270 electricity supply trainees, only 42 were women (5 in trades)
- By 2013, a total of 1566 trainees included 107 women with 37 in trades



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- **JTJ S7 ESITO SUBSTATION v6 h264  
1200Kbps 480p**
- **beginning to 2 mins 40 secs**

# Findings



- **The project:**
  - Spearheaded by the ESITO Board with the support of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in early 2010
  - Two establishment companies
  - Based on the employment of a cohort of women trainees, and examining the dynamics of change within an organisation
- **Recruitment happened in mid-2010, and apprentices were employed from August 2010.**

# Recruitment and Selection



- Recruitment was targeted at women – and resulted in 25 applications at both companies
- Selection was aimed at identifying trainees with skills associated with predicting job-related performance
- Selection of 6 trainees at one firm and three at the other resulted in excitement and high expectations about how both the trainees would perform and how the companies would respond.



# Initial expectations



*Just appealing to me here is the trade.*

*I've never seen women out on the lines. ... I thought it would be a good buzz to show women can do it too*

*It becomes pretty apparent what the mores and the norms of the crew are. It gets shaped pretty fast about what you do or don't do and what is expected.*



# Training and Learning



- Initial and on-going learning varied – a lot depended on the team leader or supervisor
- A lot also depended on the “attitude” of the trainee – asking questions and taking initiative were seen as indicators of being keen and willing to learn
- Trainee experience varied from those who were embraced within teams to those where it was clear there was a reluctance to invest in hands-on learning

# Experiences - trainees



*If it's something I haven't seen before, I'm usually like "what's that?" or "what are you doing?" .... I ask enough until I've got the understanding in my head.*

*Having been yelled at, I got scared to do anything wrong. Just started doing what I was told and keeping my head down.*

# Health and Safety



- Health and safety systems in the industry are of a high standard
- Women are perceived as having a higher state of awareness of health and safety risks and hazard control
- Having women employees raised some health and safety issues for the industry (eg; size of PPE, reproductive health)
- Strength and fatigue issues can become an area that is contested – what are reasonable expectations that companies can have of all employees?



## Experiences – trainees



*I know for a fact that women are more safe to work around than guys ..... I look at a thing and I suss it out first, guys will rush into it.*

*I didn't tell them and when they found out they were like 'oh my gosh you've been doing this'? Because when I told them they were like 'congratulations how many weeks are you?' and I was 20 weeks. They couldn't believe how long I had stuck it out for but it was just so I could get my ticket.*

# Experiences - supervisors



*If you go up to (location), they baby the girls. .... They keep saying, 'Don't let her do that, it's too hard', the girls also fall into that some slot, which is not what you want, then you'll get guys saying, 'I can't take her if she can't lift a ladder', and 'I can't use her because of this', she's got to be able to get in there and get the business done.*

*The physical thing has always been a barrier. It's not like a little screwdriver. It's hard for some of the guys, but it's harder for them. We can't carry out (the work) in a simpler way, there's only one way to do it. It'll be hard for them because it's hard for us. It's not that they're not too weak, if we struggle, then everyone will struggle. But they have a disadvantage of not having the strength.*



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# Relationships



- Managers, mentors and outside support
- Team relationships
- Performance expectations and management
- We highly value “getting stuck in” – what does this mean in practice?
- The importance of family relationships

## Experiences – trainees



*It took about a month before they let me do things and I don't know whether it is because of the knowledge or (because I'm female), but I had to ask to do it.*

*It's pretty good, I think we have actually become pretty close, we work well together as a team and because I've been with them for a few months; when we go out to a job, I know exactly what they're going to need for a job and I do think they appreciate it because its not like they have to ask all the time.*



# Conclusions



- The cohort effect makes a difference!
- Health and safety issues cannot be considered separately from workforce development issues.
- Workplace culture plays a big part in determining what is valued in specific jobs. The value that is placed on some aspects (such as physical strength) may be to the detriment of other aspects (such as managing relationships with landowners, attention to health and safety).

# Implications for industry training in New Zealand



- Targeting recruitment for trades at women works!
- Vocational education and training in non-traditional trades offers employers access to a wider pool of applicants in the face of labour market shortages
- Vocational education and training in non-traditional trades offers young NZ women a range of career choices that have not previously been available to them
- Organisations recruiting from a not-traditional workforce need to consider what they need to do to prepare their existing workforce for changes.



## Meanwhile...



- Prepare release of report
- A more defined strategy:

# ultimit



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- <http://ultimit.co.nz/news?page=1>