

A Diverse Firm with Diverse Clients

An Interview with Moira Elms, Chair, Gender Advisory Council,
and Senior Relationship Manager, PricewaterhouseCoopers



Moira Elms

EDITORS' NOTE U.K.-based Moira Elms joined PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in 1981 as a tax manager and became a partner in 1993. After running PwC U.K.'s Human Resource Services practice for a number of years, she was asked to join the U.K. board as Human Capital Leader in 2003. She is still a board member today, with responsibility for marketing and communications. Elms is also Senior Relationship Manager and works with a number of PwC's largest clients.

COMPANY BRIEF Formed by the 1998 merger of Coopers & Lybrand and Price Waterhouse, PricewaterhouseCoopers (www.pwcglobal.com) is a global professional services firm, employing more than 146,000 people in 150 countries. The worldwide network of PwC firms offers industry-focused assurance, tax, and advisory services.

PwC created its Gender Advisory Council in 2006. What were the key reasons behind the development of the Council?

At PwC, we pride ourselves on having incredibly bright people, a strong brand, deep industry skills, and a fantastic business. We have very diverse clients in all industries and different types of organizations. Diversity in our own people makes the advice we give our clients and the culture of our organization and network so rich. Because diversity is such a powerful asset for us and so important to our clients as well, we have to focus on ensuring that our teams are diverse across our organization. We believe we're

very good at diversity – in a wider context than gender. Every year, we bring thousands of bright young people into our organization, and half of them are women. However, we don't manage to reflect that ratio in our senior-most positions. So that's why we established the Gender Advisory Council – to help PwC look at ways to improve gender diversity across the whole of the organization and through all our ranks.

How did you name the members of the council?

The sponsor of the Gender Advisory Council is our global CEO, Sam DiPiazza. It was his idea to set it up, and he has since stood strongly behind it. Sam wanted membership from territories where there were good working practices and where there was a real focus on gender diversity, because that's the best way to share role model behavior with other parts of our global network. He also looked for good representation from our growing markets. The U.K. is one of the areas where we've had a number of successes in diversity. I chair the Council, and I'm fairly vocal about making sure this isn't just a talk shop, where we all have nice conversations with the CEO. The Council's members include Roy Weathers, a partner who looks after diversity in our U.S. firms; Rich Baird, who has a global human capital role; Anita Stemmet, who has been driving our work in South Africa; Cassie Wong, who represents China and Asia; Diana Chant from Canada; Laurie Endsley, who is a partner for Central and Eastern Europe; our Australian representative Susan Bannatyne; and Agnès Hussherr and Robert Swaank from Europe.

Is yours an industry that attracts women at the entry level as well as to its top ranks?

Absolutely. We're an employment magnet – not just our organization, but also the profession as a whole. But, because of our reputation, we have a lot to live up to, and we try very hard to live up to our employees' high expectations. We try to engage with our people as individuals and to ensure that we support their work/life balance. We don't make assumptions based on gender – that if you're a man, you'll do something one way, and if you're a woman, you'll do it another way. We have tried to be open and offer flexibility to all of our employees, not just pigeonhole them into groups. Nonetheless, people at certain points in their lives and in similar situations tend to look for similar things, and that's why we share best practices across our organization. We'll say, "This worked for

one group of young married women. Why not try it for yours?" For instance, a new parent may not want to take a two-month overseas assignment. So perhaps we'll find a way to utilize their skills in a slightly different way for the short term; if they can't do one job, we can find a different role to suit their work experience for a while. Maybe they'll work from home, or maybe they'll work on a project basis. We very often find ways to manage these situations extremely well. We take things on a one-by-one basis and see what works. So I think our profession, and our organization, in particular, offers enormous flexibility and limitless choices.

When you joined PwC in 1981, did you imagine you would end up spending more than 25 years with the organization?

I'm known as what we jokingly call a PwC lifer, but I didn't think at first that I would be. I was lucky to work, initially, for a regional office that was small enough to still be quite personal. The partner who ran the office was an enlightened man; he wasn't old-fashioned and embraced everybody – you could be any shape, size, race, or gender. All he wanted was for his employees to do good work for him. Maybe if my start with the firm hadn't been so different, I wouldn't have been here all these years. That was my first lucky break. PwC has an uncanny knack of giving people lots of opportunities, and chances to do things differently. Given a little bit of support, a bright, motivated person can learn something new. We try to give people the confidence to look for new opportunities and to try different things.

As the Chair of the Gender Advisory Council and as a Senior Relationship Manager with PwC, your time must be pulled in many different directions. How do you budget your time?

Of course, I have to be organized. But as a married woman with children, I have to be pretty organized anyway. In that position, you have half a dozen things going on at once. Even though work is always in the back of my mind, when I get home, I don't have the opportunity to give it too much thought; I'm grabbed immediately by questions like, "Mum, what should I draw for my project?" or "Mummy, can you help me with the computer?" or "Mummy, can I play with your hair?" Something happens the second I walk into the house. I'm very lucky in that I don't see work as a burden. I can very quickly switch it off, and rush to the aid of someone who needs my aid and advice at home. ●