

year Kennards bought out its joint venture partner, Valad Property Group, to become the sole owner of the business.

While Kennards and Millers at the time of the takeover four years ago were about the same size, the experience of working in the two companies was very different.

Kennards had been working on its culture for about six years at that stage, using consultants Achievement Concepts and the Human Synergistics' culture inventory tests.

The company had begun the process of transformation after identifying that some of the problems in its business stemmed from attitude. "Staff turnover was really high," Kennard says. "There

"They had to commit to coming on a journey and change. In the end, they either stepped down or left the business," Kennard says.

By the time Kennards started negotiations to buy its competitor, the company was characterised by its intentions to empower staff and by its inclusive and participative style.

Using the Human Synergistics tools, it could map how behaviours had changed over the previous six years from being aggressive/defensive and passive/defensive to becoming more constructive.

At Millers, the workers were loyal to their company, but the style was much more aggressive and command-and-control driven.

Most decisions about the storage properties were handled by head

managers.

"We [on the other hand] had a lot of 'ownership' of the properties. We wanted people to feel that these were their properties, their customers," Kennard says.

He wanted to undertake the takeover as a "self-actualised" business move, rather than an aggressive one.

"None of us knew how to do it. I had never done it before. We made some mistakes, but we tried to walk the talk and show them the new way of how we ran the business.

"When we bought Millers, we tried to couch it as a 'merger', an 'integration' and the nice words like that... but the reality was, we had a collision."

fail, it is often because leaders get bogged down by finance and technology issues and don't spend enough time integrating corporate cultures and technology styles.

Kennard says constructive culture is not all about being "warm and fuzzy", it actually demands a great deal of managers and workers.

"We actually have high accountability," he says. "I can see that in the senior leadership team, they keep each other honest about what is going on and how they are performing. In many respects, I can sit on the side and let them get on with things.

"At the end of the day, our unwritten rule is: fit in or move on."

In the year after the takeover, the

Kennard says while his company spent \$1 million on due diligence on Millers, it would have been useful to get information on the culture of the company he was buying.

"We had stamp duty lawyers, corporate lawyers, mortgage lawyers, we had due diligence on the environmental [impact] and geotech," he says. "We knew the property and we knew the entity intimately.

"I went along to the chairman at the time and asked if I could audit the culture and there was no way he was going to let me do that.

"So I didn't get the opportunity to learn about what I was getting myself into.

"It would have been nice to know what exactly we were biting off."

# The gender thing is actually a risk-averse thing

## Corporate woman

Catherine Fox

There's a wide range of issues over which Laura Liswood, an American workforce diversity expert and senior adviser to Goldman Sachs, could be losing sleep.

But she says there are three main things that worry her these days:

□ Although some smart employers are getting their act together to try to retain women, many are not and they have to get better.

□ Young women are often unprepared for the challenges of blending paid and unpaid work and so don't have the organising skills they need.

□ Women take a huge economic gamble if they believe in the fairytale that they will be cared for in an era when many will remain or become single.

Liswood was in Sydney last week to

speaking to the Goldman Sachs JBWere women's network about closing the gender gap. She has experience in both the public and private sectors as a former managing director at Goldman Sachs, co-founder of The White House Project which is dedicated to electing a woman United States president, and was also instrumental in establishing the Washington-based Council of Women World Leaders.

In her spare time, Liswood is a reserve officer for the Washington Metropolitan Police Department. Given the market turmoil, Liswood says women and other underrepresented groups in workplaces may have structural and personal reasons for feeling their jobs are particularly vulnerable. "There's the last-in, first-out issue," she says.

"Another structural element is whether your performance evaluation systems are truly fair and equitable. The historical fact is that

underrepresented groups and women may be rated lower." If this is the case, she adds, these individuals may well be seen as lesser stars and therefore more likely to be at risk. On a personal level, the members of a dominant group may subtly disadvantage those who do not look like them.

## If you manage people, it's less risky to keep people whom you understand.

Laura Liswood

This can manifest in the "I can't let my buddy go" attitude, and there may also be vestiges of the view that men are primary breadwinners and women are not.

"Again, it comes down to whether systems fairly evaluate people. Women may have a predilection to not be so outgoing about their accomplishments...

"If women aren't doing that as much as men, then when it comes down to subjective reasons to whether women get kept on, there may be an imbalance in a manager's head about what they have heard about people."

The way language and modes of communicating are used by men and women often creates misunderstandings and there are double standards that involve penalties for women who are too outspoken or aggressive, Liswood says. In times of crisis, these can be crucial.

"Because there is heightened fear and anxiety, people look to find where they can reduce the risk," she says. "If you are a manager of people, it's less risky to keep people whom you understand.

"Clearly, women and other underrepresented groups are seen as a riskier choice." Making a business case for more diversity doesn't stand much chance

unless you have a leader who really gets the issue and wants to change, she says. People change for three reasons: fear, self-interest or honour (or pain, gain or vision). There are some signs of progress in the business community but awareness needs to be followed up by getting people up the learning curve faster and using existing successful models instead of trying to reinvent new ones.

It's still more difficult to get women than men to run for public office, Liswood says. And she believes the sexism evident during Hillary Clinton's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination showed it is disturbingly normalised. On another matter, it's terrific that organisers of the Business for Millennium Development Summit (*Corporate Woman*, August 30) have now included several women speakers instead of the virtually all-male line-up previously circulated.

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