

Case study 11: Rio Tinto in the US

Attracting and retaining women in the workforce at Kennecott Utah Copper (Kennecott)

Recent research commissioned by Kennecott found that negative industry perceptions, traditional work scheduling practices and a lack of family friendly work policies were the key reasons why women were not attracted to mining. The research used a combination of research methodologies, including interviews with students and the workforce, and desk research that benchmarked what other companies were doing, including in sectors other than mining. Kennecott subsequently has piloted a “flexible work practices strategy” (for non operational positions) as a tool to improve attraction and retention of women in the workforce as part of an overall approach to diversity.

In Kennecott’s 2006 diversity strategy paper a series of recommendations were put forward, including the implementation of a two tier approach which includes career development and training programmes for women to help them progress to management levels and also policies to support the retention of women.

The strategy suggests a series of initiatives, including that the business:

Build better understanding

Introduce employee satisfaction surveys and forums to assess the needs and wants of employees to develop a work-life balance and evaluate existing initiatives, and understand flexibility of current site work schedules.

Improve the policy framework

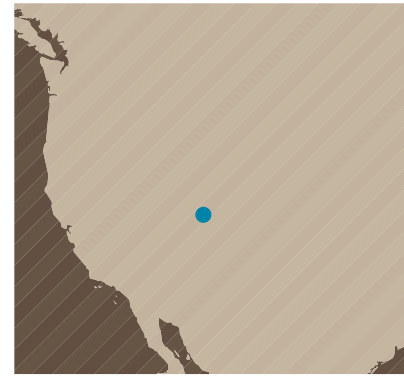
Introduce policies around flexible work arrangements that allow employees to apply to work part time, job share, and to be eligible to work on a part time basis following maternity leave.

Implement strategies

Introduce Human Resources strategies which attract and retain women, including network programme, career development planning, advertising part time positions, scholarship programme that targets women. Improve technology arrangements that enhance communication between managers and employees who work flexible schedules.

Improve data management

Improve data collection and management in key areas, including for exit interviews, percentage of women returning to work from maternity leave,



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percentage of female representation in the company, percentage of women in senior management and percentage of women identified as “high potential”, and percentage of women on flexible work schedules.

The report also analysed the potential barriers for implementing the strategy.





The flexible work practices strategy is one of several workforce diversity initiatives that formed part of the Kennecott strategic plan for 2006. These initiatives align with Rio Tinto's overall diversity goals.

Kennecott also developed annual diversity targets as part of the organisational Human Resources Plan beginning in 2006. Kennecott outperformed against the gender targets in the first year but did not meet its targets in the second year. The ethnic diversity target was not achieved in the first year but was exceeded in the second year.

It became apparent that simply through more focus on improving the specific elements of the diversity profile in the business, improvements could be made. However, challenges remain in sustaining these improvements, which is the justification for the introduction of more flexible work practices such as job sharing, telecommuting and flex-scheduling. The impact of these practices will be measured as part of the pilot project, as well as the feasibility of extending some of these practices to the more challenging operation environments at Kennecott. Additional focus is also being placed on the content and placement of job postings to appeal to and attract diverse candidates. ¹¹