

ADVANCED BOARDROOM
EXCELLENCE



DIVERSITY

RIDING THE WAVES OF THE EXECUTIVE PIPELINE

‘Making it to the Top’



CONTENTS

Foreword	03
The Rt Hon The Lord Mayor Alderman Fiona Woolf CBE	03
Helen Pitcher	04
Executive Summary	05
Introduction	08
About Our Interviewees	09
Main Report Findings	10
A Business Issue, Not a Women's Issue	10
Commitment From The Top	10
Flexible Attitudes	11
Unconscious Bias	12
Male and Female Styles of Management	13
Women Tell Their Stories Differently	14
Self-Promotion, Networking and Finding Mentors	15
The Confidence Gap	16
Women and Money	18
The Question of Quotas?	18
Self-Help and Getting Ahead	21
Thoughts and Conclusions	22
Language and Metaphors	22
Advanced Boardroom Excellence Insights	23
Some Final Thoughts on Equality and Equity	24
Action This Day	25
Agenda For Change	25
Making It To The Top - The Flow To The Board	27
Resilience - a Coaching Perspective	29
Checklist For a Good Sponsor	30
Participants	32
Project Team	34



THE RT HON THE LORD MAYOR ALDERMAN FIONA WOOLF CBE



One of the key focus areas in my mayoral year is Diversity and Inclusion. The future success of the City and indeed businesses in general is dependent upon attracting and retaining the best talent. Time and time again it is proven that talent thrives most in a diverse, and inclusive, workplace.

I am delighted that the spotlight has been placed once more on this important subject, and thanks to further studies on this issue it continues to be at the forefront of the minds of our business leaders.

This research by Advanced Boardroom Excellence reiterates the well-known fact that there are not enough women in senior positions in UK corporates. Although women tend to reach middle management positions, the conversion to senior roles is less than satisfactory and as such companies are missing out on crucial talent.

The research highlights that this is a talent management and business issue, not a “women’s issue” – and that it cannot be solved by “helping women” fit the corporate world better. Instead organisational cultures, structures and practices have to change to create working environments that value different leadership styles and become more open minded in recognising that the talent pipeline does not have to be a carbon copy of existing management. These measures will mean employees feel more empowered to compete for top jobs. The same can be said for other groups not currently represented in senior management positions, since success rests on having fresh voices, new talent and different ideas.

Unsurprisingly this change requires the full support and visible commitment from the leaders in organisations. It is the Board who can effectively respond to this future by setting the challenge, encouraging and supporting the strategy and inspiring the CEO and leadership team to make changes to an organisation’s leadership ethos. Leaders at all levels of organisations should have the responsibility, and be accountable, to creating environments where all talented people regardless of their background can thrive.

It is my belief that now is the time to shift the focus to action rather than reaction and as such I am pleased that a key part of this report includes recommendations that will help achieve better outcomes for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiona Woolf".

**The Rt Hon The Lord Mayor
Alderman Fiona Woolf CBE**

HELEN PITCHER



In the 20 years that the Advanced Boardroom Excellence team has worked together on board effectiveness and leadership, we have gathered many insights on gender and diversity. We have viewed these issues both through an organisational lens and, in the course of our coaching work, through the eyes of the individual executive.

We have seen big changes over the years, with the evolution of much more open and dynamic systems, in which individuals can plot their careers and aspirations in a more deliberate way. This openness has developed as organisations have abandoned rigid responsibility for individuals' careers. But it is really only over the last decade that organisations have found ways of creating flexible and accommodating processes to manage the creative tension between individual and organisational needs.

Diversity is the last piece of this jigsaw, both in terms of gender and minorities. Organisational systems have yet to catch up with the realities of the modern workforce and consumer profile.

It is blatantly ridiculous – and must be recognised as such – that with male and female working populations that are broadly numerically equal, women are still a minority group by the time they reach the most senior levels of organisations. This holds true even for sectors that are heavily dominated by women at entry level, such as healthcare or retail. And if organisational systems are turning female majorities into minorities, what hope is there for those who start as minorities in the first place?

For us at Advanced Boardroom Excellence, diversity generally – and gender balance in particular – are key issues facing boards over the next five years.

Since the Davies Report was published in 2011, we have observed the attitudes of chairmen align dramatically behind the 'women on boards' initiative. The old roadblock of headhunters saying there were no suitable female candidates evaporated overnight, as chairmen challenged them to be more imaginative and dig deeper.

We are, however, now looking at a longer-term supply issue, also identified in the Davies Report. Unless we change the corporate executive pipeline to become more diverse, a sufficient supply of new candidates won't be available for executive committees, or, by extension, for boards.

Our challenge to boards now is that they should take on the same accountability, responsibility and engagement for the diversity of the executive pipeline as they have been forced to adopt for the board itself. Only if they rise to this challenge is real progress possible.

A handwritten signature of Helen Pitcher in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

Helen Pitcher

Chairman
Advanced Boardroom Excellence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“I’m not sure senior management and shareholders really understand the value of a diverse and multi-talented, multi-skilled team at the top. And women who are capable don’t want to do the politicking and games-playing that is involved in reaching senior roles. We need these women in leadership roles.”

Many of our most senior, successful corporate women are not sure that the majority of business leaders have fully grasped the value of diversity – or the reason why women are not making it to the top in the numbers they’d expect.

We interviewed 70 senior women from a range of organisations in sectors including financial services, manufacturing, media, hospitality, retail, the public sector, professional services, telecoms, healthcare and IT.

INSIGHTS

They offered the following insights for organisations, managers and for women themselves.

For Organisations and Leaders

- Gender balance in the workplace should not be seen as a “women’s issue” but a business issue that will drive productivity
- Changes that address gender balance will ultimately help organisations manage everyone better, and create true meritocracies
- Boards should lead by taking an active interest in the executive pipeline, and whether it is being fed from the full range of the organisation’s available talent
- Leaders, starting with the chief executive, need to model the behaviour they seek, to ensure new approaches are embedded.

For Managers of Women and Minority Groups

- Men and women talk differently about themselves and their careers. A better awareness of this can remove hidden barriers to women’s advancement
- The language of challenge and success is different for women and minorities
- Women and minorities may undersell themselves, not because of a lack of confidence or self-esteem, but because their view of communication and self-promotion is different

- Assumptions should not be made about what people want or need. Just because a woman has children, for example, doesn’t mean she won’t want a challenging assignment.

For Women (and Anyone Else Who Wants to Reach the Top)

- Be proactive in managing your career – seek out CV-building roles and assignments
- Find mentors and sponsors who will improve your confidence and your profile
- Cultivate resilience.

Other Research Themes

- **Risk:** Interviewees told us that organisations and women need to be prepared to take risks. Organisations by promoting people who don’t look like the usual, women by putting themselves forward for stretch roles and assignments that take them outside their comfort zone
- **Questioning assumptions:** Organisations need to be creative about how and where work can be done, what success looks like, what qualities or experience are really needed for a job and who can or can’t do something
- **Quotas:** 32% of those surveyed were in favour of quotas as a transitional measure to force change, while 52% were against and 16% were undecided.

There is no plea for women to ‘have it all’, because it seems clear that many of them don’t necessarily want it all. But if organisations don’t accommodate the career preferences of their workforces then those women will continue to question the personal cost that traditional working patterns impose on them and their families.

Smart organisations need to evaluate their leadership portfolio to ensure that they have the right leaders in place for the future and that their succession strategies are targeted to the roles needed for the future, not the past.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our research approach is focused on hearing the voices of the individuals at the cutting edge of diversity, who are dealing with the issues, challenges and opportunities on a daily basis.

The main report consists of a number of headings under which these voices can be heard.

A Business Issue, Not a Women's Issue

The two strongest messages from our research were that this is a talent management and business issue, not a "women's issue" – and that it can't be solved by women alone, or just by "helping women" fit the corporate world better.

Commitment From The Top

To achieve the change required, our interviewees told us that it was vital that there was proper commitment from the top of an organisation – otherwise the project was bound to stall. This is something that is supported by previous research.

Flexible Attitudes

In addition to visible commitment from the top, our interviewees said that line managers on the ground needed to think and act more creatively. A broader range of career structures, wider definitions of success and an open mind about what is needed for a particular role were some of the factors they raised.

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias, some experts believe, is one of the main reasons we have made so little progress in achieving a better gender balance at the top of organisations, despite decades of trying.

Male and Female Styles of Management

While acknowledging that there are always exceptions, the participants believed that men

and women generally have contrasting leadership styles and often place value on different things at work. This issue is also discussed in the sections of this report relating to the language and metaphors within organisations and the different organisational cultures.

Women Tell Their Stories Differently

There is a definite gender difference in how men and women talk about careers and success; they tell their stories differently and our highly successful and focused women frequently attributed their own success to luck and opportunism. Many also professed themselves surprised by where they ended up.

Self-Promotion, Networking and Finding Sponsors and Mentors

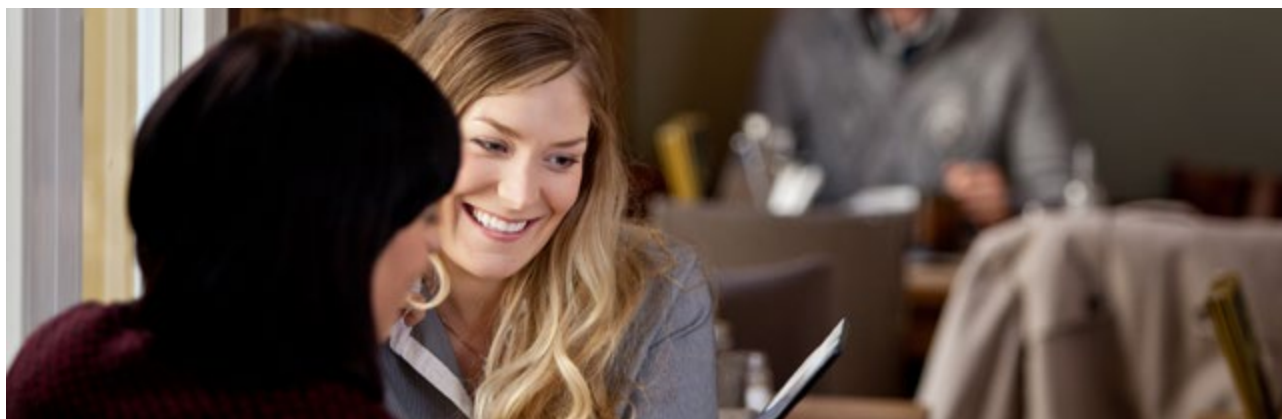
Self-promotion and internal politics seem to be a problem for many women who often feel excluded from informal networks in the office. A number of our respondents raised this issue and expressed their dislike of the political manoeuvring they witnessed at senior levels (admittedly often an issue for men as well). They cited it as a significant barrier for many women.

The Confidence Gap

Women with long and successful careers, with undoubted technical expertise and proven leadership skills all spoke of a confidence gap, in relation to themselves or female managers they knew. A fifth of them mentioned self-confidence as something they wished they had had more of themselves.

Women and Money

A number of respondents commented that women are particularly bad at negotiating salary. Some of our interviewees admitted they had never asked for a pay rise.





The Question of Quotas?

The vexed subject of quotas elicited a wide range of views. Although a small majority of our interviewees (52%) were definitely against, we were surprised to find that 32% were in favour, while the remaining 16% were undecided.

Self-Help and Getting Ahead

Our survey respondents are all highly successful career women, who have learnt to thrive in a male-dominated corporate world. So we asked them what the most important skills were that they used to build their careers and what advice they would give to others. The skills that came up most often were networking and team-building. Tenacity, resilience, strategic thinking and communication skills were also cited.

WHAT ELSE IS IMPORTANT?

In addition to the main findings we have also pulled together some of the Advanced Boardroom Excellence thoughts built up over 20 years. These include:

Language, Metaphors and the New Leadership Model

Throughout this research, interviewees talked about the language of business and how it was biased towards male images and metaphors. This is an important underlying current when considering organisational behaviour and leadership. Research in this area, reflected by our own experience, identifies three main models of gender division within organisations.

Advanced Boardroom Excellence Insights

We see many of the issues raised by this and other research on a daily basis. We look at some of the themes that have often arisen in our own work coaching executives of both genders and working with board teams.

Agenda For Change

We have drawn up a list of recommendations for organisations, for leaders and for women and minorities that will help achieve better outcomes for all. This reflects both this research and Advanced Boardroom Excellence experience in the field of diversity.

AIDS TO ADVANCEMENT

In these three sections we look at some of the solutions that women and minorities can use to bring about career progress for themselves.

Making It To The Top

Our 'Making It to the Top' chart is a tool to help with career planning. It highlights key experiences and career decision points and acts as a map for making sense of a corporate career, be the executive, a woman or man, from a majority or a minority group.

Resilience - A Coaching Perspective

Resilience came out as one of the qualities our interviewees most frequently cited as having helped them succeed in their careers. It's a quality that can be defined as the ability to cope with adversity, to persevere and adapt when things go awry or, to use a common organisational metaphor, the ability to "take the hit and get back in the game".

Checklist For a Good Sponsor

Finally, what makes a sponsor different from a mentor is critical in terms of career management. A sponsor acts as an advocate, not just offering advice but also talking about and backing the individual inside the organisation to get to the next step. From making important introductions to senior leaders to expanding the perception of what the individual can offer the organisation, a sponsor is a personal brand advocate in the workplace and in industry at large. A sponsor inspires, propels, and protects, in order to assist career progress.

INTRODUCTION

“This is not just about women at work, it’s not female-centred, but people-centred. What we need to address is what the workplace of the future will look like, and how people can use their talents to best effect, both for themselves and their organisations. The heart of the argument about diversity is not simply about equality, but also about economics because the changes we must effect will improve productivity.”

Women make up 47% of the UK workforce and 57% of first - degree graduates - that is more than half the potential talent base available to British business. Yet the number of women at the top of organisations is still startlingly small.

We are making progress towards Lord Davies’ 2015 target of 25% women on our top corporate boards. The current tally is just under 21%, according to *Cranfield University’s Female FTSE Board Report 2014*. But success isn’t just about getting more women onto boards. If we address equality at all levels then the real prize is in sight - a fundamental change in the flow of talented people into senior leadership roles and into the boardrooms of Britain, with consequent benefits for organisations and individuals.

As Facebook’s chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg says, “The laws of economics and many studies of diversity tell us that if we tapped the entire pool of human resources and talent, our collective performance would improve. When more people get in the race, more records will be broken. And the achievements will extend beyond those individuals to benefit us all.”

Against this background, Advanced Boardroom Excellence spoke to 70 successful women, occupying senior executive and board-level positions throughout the economy. They came from organisations in industries including financial services, manufacturing, media, hospitality, retail, the public sector, professional services, telecoms, healthcare and IT.

We asked how they had shaped, developed and made key decisions relating to their careers. We wanted to know what enablers and barriers they had faced, what they might have done differently and what advice they would give to women and, more importantly, to organisations, to help them address this talent issue.

What they told us gives reason both for optimism and pessimism. On the one hand there is a growing understanding of what is needed to achieve the desired outcome and a willingness within organisations and among individuals to pursue this. On the other, there is the recognition that the task is huge and that some of our most successful corporate women are not yet sure that the majority of corporate leaders really ‘get’ the nature of the problem or the importance of finding a solution.



ABOUT OUR INTERVIEWEES

We interviewed 70 women for this research, mostly from the private sector and with a bias towards financial services.

The majority of our sample (49) are in executive positions. Of these, 31 are in functional roles, such as HR, law or communications. Fifteen have roles in operations, strategy and finance and three are chief executives. The remaining 19 have non-executive portfolios, including six chair positions.

The great majority of our interviewees (58) have a first degree. Nine did not go to university, although some of them subsequently obtained qualifications such as an MBA. Most of this group had entrepreneurial parents or a strong inclination to pursue an independent course.

A third of our subjects joined management training schemes when they started work, gaining broad-based management training and good commercial experience which they said gave them a long-term advantage in applying for more specialised roles later in their careers.

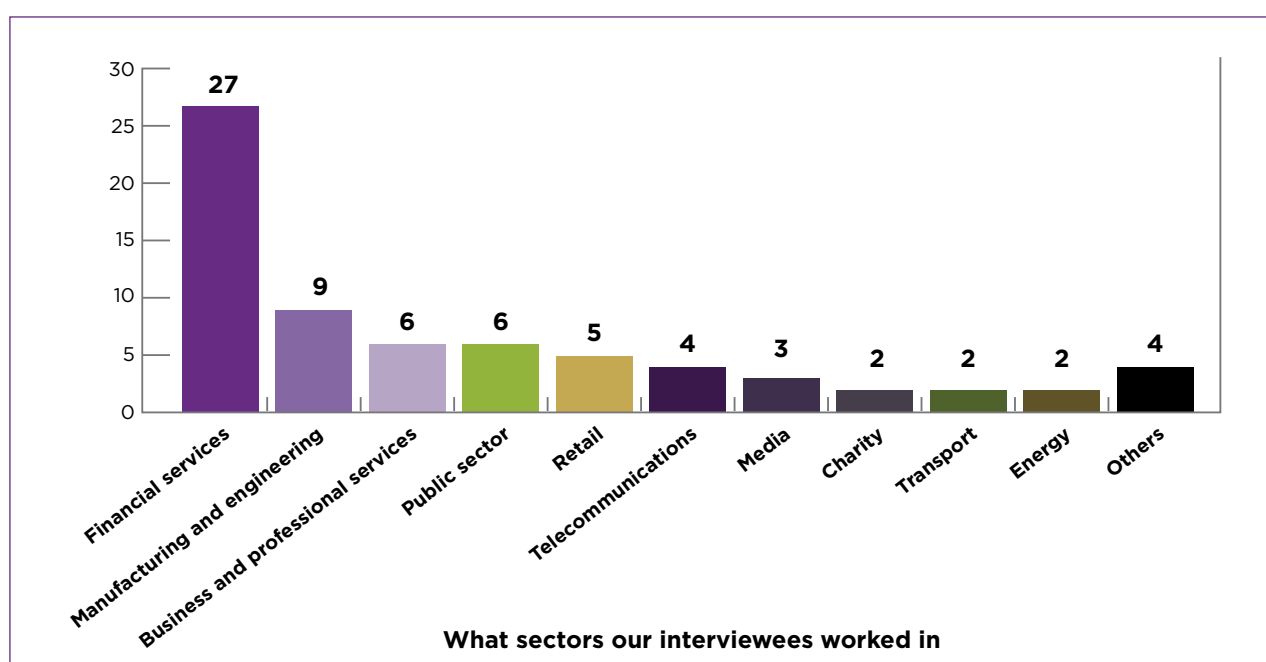
Just 14 of our subjects said that on starting work they had a career plan. A further 14 studied law or trained as accountants so the career path was fairly structured, though not all chose to pursue their profession.

Only 13 of our subjects cited an early role model who inspired their career choice. Most mentioned parents or teachers, one spoke of a godmother who was a professional, one was inspired by feminism and one by a Barbara Taylor Bradford novel. Family circumstances influenced several subjects for whom employability and financial independence were important.

A few mentioned being actively discouraged from pursuing a professional career. One was advised against engineering and another said the careers service suggested she be a dental assistant, an unappealing prospect.

Some found themselves working abroad because they had followed partners. An equal number, however, cited the opposite situation. Many interviewees talked about supportive partners. A proportion mentioned that their partners were self-employed, freelance or retired and that this had enabled flexibility and transformed their ability to focus on work.

We did not ask whether they had children, although it was clear from our conversations that many did.



MAIN REPORT FINDINGS

A BUSINESS ISSUE, NOT A WOMEN'S ISSUE

"There are lots of female development programmes and they don't work because we don't fix the environment; there has to be a strong focus on cultivating and developing women but also on preparing the environment to understand how to manage them."

The two strongest messages from our research were that this is a talent management and business issue, not a "women's issue" – and that it can't be solved by women alone, or just by "helping women" fit the corporate world better.

Our sample of highly successful women had plenty of thoughts and advice for the next generation of women, and believed that initiatives aimed at supporting women could be very useful. But almost all of them were equally clear that organisational cultures, structures and practices had to change too, to create working environments that valued different leadership styles, where women as well as men wanted to stay and compete for top jobs.

Get this right, they added, and wider diversity issues would follow. As one interviewee put it:

"Managers need to be adaptive in accepting different styles that are not moulded in their own image. It's not healthy to have everyone the same and recruited for the same qualities. We need a range of types, a mix of skills and styles – women tend to be more self-aware and are more likely to be accommodating of difference."

COMMITMENT FROM THE TOP

In order to achieve the change required, our interviewees told us that it was vital that there was proper commitment from the top of an organisation – otherwise the project was bound to stall. This is something that is supported by previous research. The McKinsey report, *Moving mind-sets on gender diversity*, found: "When asked about the most important drivers for increasing gender diversity at

ON COACHING AND MENTORING

The answer is not a female answer, it is a people centred answer. What we should be talking about is what the workplace of the future will look like and how people can use their talents for best effect for both themselves and the organisation.

It is about diversity and economics because the change will improve productivity. But organisations don't seem to believe it, they cling to their comfort blanket – we have always worked this way and it has always worked – there's a queue of people who want to work for us why should we change?

Mentoring and coaching are immensely important, women need someone to tell them how things work and need a bit of encouragement, and I still have that at this stage in my career. It is worse for younger women – something to do with the female personality, we are cautious and protective, used to nurturing. It is

natural to us to examine risk more carefully than a man might do and because of that we have to be absolutely sure before making a move.

What makes men move job and what makes women move are different; basically women when they move are not looking just at the money but at the environment and infrastructure and whether they will be okay there.

I do worry about some female orientated initiatives though, it's okay for women to meet to discuss issues, but I don't like to imply that women need special help, so coaching for senior staff has to be for the men too.

We are lurching towards understanding leadership a bit better, and the qualities that make a good leader. There may be a different notion as to what a female leader should be like, but in fact a leader is a leader and it is difficult to make such distinctions: if you do it in your own way then that authenticity is what counts.



the top, executives identify two in particular: first, strong CEO and top management commitment, and second, a corporate culture and mind-set that supports gender-diversity objectives."

As one of our interviewees put it:

"Pay attention to behaviours and working practices at the top, where a male executive team is decision-making. If they would work flexibly it would help. The norm at the top means they don't understand the problems of their employees and juniors don't think they can do it because they don't see it in role models at senior levels."

Other interviewees talked about the importance of CEOs walking the walk, being visible and talking to employees. An MD in financial services told us, *"Small things help, like the CEO having conversations with women so they know they matter."*

"Look at all you have internally and make sure it is gender neutral, many organisations are still very male orientated and behaviour flows from that. So consider the whole culture, looking from the outside, at the tone from the top down."

The importance of real commitment from the top also came up when our interviewees talked about quotas (about which more later). One woman was against quotas because, she suspected, it would not change attitudes. *"Such a move may be well intended with the aim of driving focus round the issue, but it does not change the status quo. They have not taken on board the spirit of the thing, and there is no real change."*

FLEXIBLE ATTITUDES

In addition to visible commitment from the top, our interviewees said that line managers on the ground needed to think and act more creatively. A broader range of career structures, wider definitions of success and an open mind about what is needed for a particular role were some of the factors they raised.

"If you are a manager you can change things. It's no good saying you support something - you have to actually do it. We changed our appraisal form to ask about how we can help employees and that makes it easier for all parties to address change."

"Actively recognise that men and women are different. Personal traits mean they respond, present and communicate differently. 'Always get the best person for the job' is all very well, but too often that is described in terms of characteristics such as impact, presentation, charisma - male characteristics."

"Look at what is required of the role rather than looking at the person, consider the broader picture. Women do not need as much hand holding as is sometimes implied; no soft options, we need to be given opportunities to demonstrate our worth, so open up the roles and don't prejudge what you want."

"Look at all interventions - sponsorship, mentoring, coaching, as organisations need to be quite structured in how they deal with maternity absence and really have some honest conversations with returners about aspirations so they can give those women the opportunities and support to get where they want to be."

A fair proportion of our sample - but by no means all - do or have worked on a flexible basis. Almost everyone recognised that this was a big issue in the workplace. Some had encountered obstacles, while others feared that it was still seen as a bad career move - even though there is evidence that flexible working actually increases commitment and engagement.

"Flexibility is needed, small adjustments could be made that help women. If people are going to be working for longer, what is the problem with allowing a bit of slack mid-career?"

"I wanted to work four days a week and got it eventually. It was rubbish to say the job could only be done over five days. Flexible career structures are good for all employees and having more time for family helps everyone."

"We need flexible career structures so staff can continually develop and grow even though they are not expressing fast-track aspirations. They are still talent and we should want to keep them engaged."

One interviewee suggested that renaming part-time working would help managers think about it differently and remove any stigma.

"Look at the language that is used - don't talk about part-time, coin it as portfolio working. Organisations need to think about agile working, about obtaining maximum outputs for the organisation. The more we move towards this agile mentality the more we can embrace more women."

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

When talking about organisations and attitudes, several of our interviewees raised the issue of unconscious bias. These are the biases we all develop (women as well as men), without necessarily realising it, from our life experiences and what we see around us. They are part of how our brains operate to make sense of the world. Unchallenged, they encourage us to go for default ways of thinking rather than more considered alternatives or interpretations.

Unconscious bias, some experts believe, is one of the main reasons we have made so little progress in achieving better gender balance at the top of organisations, despite decades of trying. One interviewee felt it was the key part of the jigsaw:

“Identify the talent then take a few risks; accept that women have different leadership characteristics to men. The key piece is that men don’t understand

how women work. It is far more about male unconscious bias than anything else.”

Others also raised the need to challenge unconscious bias.

“We should be addressing things like unconscious bias, making people aware of the current situation and how some women feel about moving up to the next level. It’s about educating managers so they are aware of their unconscious bias; they must realise nothing happens accidentally. You do have to focus on women and work out why they are not moving up to the next level.”

“Tackle men and their preconceptions of what they think women want; it’s not about misogyny and lack of understanding – they do want us to succeed, but we look at things through a different lens.”

ON RECRUITMENT

We need to actively recognise that men and women are different; we have personal traits that mean we respond, present and communicate differently. Saying we must always get the best person for the job is all very well but too often that is described in terms of characteristics such as impact, presentation, charisma – male characteristics – rather than potentially female characteristics such as – detail oriented, thoughtful, delivery oriented.

We have to recognise and coach individuals and recruitment managers as to unconscious bias and stereotypes around what good looks like, as this tends to be defined by the majority experience – male experience.

Women tend to be shy about self-promotion but this is because their framework around what good means is different; so self-promotion is a particular point of difference. Women work at least as hard but do different things or do things differently.

When interviewing, men tend to be clear in communicating and presenting the big picture, whereas women often get lost in detail. Even when we know they can deliver and are highly competent and strategic, what we see in

the interview process is that they are not so good at doing the conception and visualisation piece.

It is frustrating during interviews to watch self-deprecating women talk themselves out of the job. If you judge on a metric that only measures one skillset then you inhibit your search, which means there is a disconnect around how senior roles are staffed.

You have to be careful – while you are saying “I don’t know if I can” and being ambivalent about a role and whether it might be right, because while you are doing that some man will go for it. Don’t spend too much time thinking about whether it is right for you but ask yourself if you want to work for him?

The debate needs to shift from lack of confidence to an appreciation of difference, it is okay to be self-deprecating but don’t place a lower value on yourself in displaying that lack of self-confidence. While you are searching ask yourself if you deserve to be paid less than someone else? It does tend to focus the mind.

I find the whole NED debate fascinating and futile, it is reactive and plays on the margins, while the executive pipeline matters more.



Not everyone agreed on the importance of this issue, however.

"I wonder if we overthink the gender difference; if you are clever and the right type of person, the system accommodates you. In a work setting, being an alpha female is what gets you noticed because you are prepared to take risks. Unconscious bias exists but as a woman you have to take risks and then the system will find a place for you and this applies to men too."

MALE AND FEMALE STYLES OF MANAGEMENT

Our sample, while acknowledging that there are always exceptions, did believe that men and women generally have different leadership styles and often place value on different things at work.

When talking about their own approach or experience, several interviewees suggested that women's strength lies in their ability to collaborate, communicate effectively and get the best out of people.

"Women often seem to listen more so you get an improved quality of debate as opposed to opinions being thrown around. But it is the willingness of those around the table to respect each and work together for good outcomes for all that matters."

"Men shoot from the hip, making assumptions. Women tend not to opine until they are sure of what they are saying."

"Men are not as willing to give as much time to [those] difficult conversations as is needed. Men are more likely to want sound bite conversations and get them over and done with. Women are more likely to realise that time spent now is a good investment for the long term."

"I proactively cultivate potential female recruits, sometimes for years, as it can be hard to persuade them to move. Organisations are not creative enough, it is not sensible to expect someone to tick every box so we have to be more proactive and take a chance."

"I'm a doer and don't play politics. I'm collaborative, not authoritarian and give everyone a chance and opportunity to show their best. That improves the way they work with me and gets best results; I see potential in everyone and when they are on my team

I count on them; I'm very honest, tough, demanding, but get the best out of people."

There has been a variety of intriguing studies looking at gender differences in management style – and the implications for organisations. Research by the American Psychological Association, for example, found that women's more transformational, coaching style of leadership worked better in organisations that were female dominated, while men's command and control style suited male dominated workplaces. "Working in a leadership role congruent with one's gender appears to make one more effective – or at least perceived as being more effective," the study concluded.

More recently, a study of the impact of gender balance quotas on listed company boards in Norway found that the only significant difference was that they laid off fewer people. The study looked at a variety of factors such as revenues, costs and the rate of mergers and acquisitions for the Norwegian listed companies, compared with a matched sample of unlisted companies or similar companies from other Nordic countries that were not subject to gender quotas. The researchers then tested the theory by looking at US companies that were majority-owned by women compared to men. The results were replicated – the majority female-owned companies made 25% fewer layoffs during the study period than those dominated by men.

Although the data gave no clue about why this difference exists, the researchers speculated that it could be either that women took a longer term view and kept on workers during times of low demand because it would be expensive to hire them back later when demand picked up; or it could be because women were more motivated by the welfare of the group as a whole, rather than just their own position, and so might be less likely to lay people off even when demand was low.

We asked our interviewees about what motivated them in their work. Many echoed the view expressed by one interviewee that it is "not status or destination but the journey that mattered". This is why many women chose not to go for top jobs, they suggested. The long, office-based hours required were simply unattractive.

Joanna Barsh of McKinsey talks about this in a 2011 study. "Women often elect to remain in jobs if they derive a deep sense of meaning professionally. More than men, women prize the opportunity to pour their energies into making a difference and working closely with colleagues. Women don't want to trade that joy for what they fear will be energy-draining meetings and corporate politics at the next management echelon."

Our interviewees expressed it as follows:

"Many women don't want to be in there, a lot of women don't need it as an ego trip, they have different priorities."

"Things should be different but in practice it is most unhelpful to get into an 'us against them' debate. It's far more effective to turn energy into overcoming the very real barriers that get in the way. Many highly successful women decide to step out of the race because they don't feel they have the right quality of work-life balance; they end up doing consulting or running a freelance business, because it does mean that you have the choice to decide for yourself, particularly when you are leadership level."

"I never thought about career, I just did what seemed interesting. It depended on who asked me, if I trusted them and thought it would be a good sustainable move in the longer term and that I would be able to add value and learn. It was always about who I would be working with."

"As I moved up the ladder it was more important that my values connected, and I have to respect the leader I work for. In working with my team I am quite brave, a tall poppy; in order to make change you have to be brave. Keeping promises is hugely important - leadership is about people and affecting individual lives and career paths and wellbeing."

WOMEN TELL THEIR STORIES DIFFERENTLY

There is a definite gender difference in how men and women talk about careers and success; they tell their stories differently and our highly successful and focused women frequently attributed their own success to luck and opportunism. Many also professed themselves surprised by where they ended up. As one respondent put it, *"Men recreate a series of rational choices, whereas women explain their career as a series of coincidences."*

Interestingly also, not a single respondent claimed that she had been ambitious for high office, a high salary, impressive job title or status at the beginning of her career - although one did confide that she asked for a move to sales because she wanted a company car.

Nonetheless, it became obvious in conversation that many of our respondents were indeed ambitious. They had worked out early on what they wanted to achieve and how to achieve it. They were proactive in seeking out opportunities and in taking on roles and assignments that would add to their experience. But none of them actually described themselves as ambitious.

"I consciously chose to change industry, went to the City and then into IT, put my head above the parapet and asked for an overseas assignment."



ON MALE ORIENTATED ENVIRONMENTS

I was offered this job by happenstance. I wasn't looking but it is a very female friendly business, the first time I have worked where there are more women than men, and more women on the board than men.

Having more women on the board means there is a different atmosphere and culture. In some ways there is less of a recognition that there is a difference, there are fewer issues around the gender thing; we are quite task orientated as a business so there is an attitude of 'get on with it' rather than talking about it.

When I joined the board a female chairman had just been appointed and she has had amazing faith in me and added breadth to my role beyond

what I would ever have imagined. I'm now responsible for corporate communications and media relations and events as well as HR and facilities.

I ran the project to design and construct our new office building. I had no background for this and the project involved working with lots of men, but the Facilities Director is also female so we were 26 men in a meeting and two women, but strong women who knew what we wanted. We were definitely being condescended to on the basis that we were not experts but we worked with them for over two years and at the end were treated as though we were 'one of the boys'.

It is tough when you are put in as boss in a male orientated environment but you can overcome it just by a really practical approach which makes gender irrelevant. Just get on with it!

"I wanted to broaden my commercial experience so took a project management role; then wanted to work for a media organisation and FTSE100 company - I was willing to take calculated risks in order to add value and grow my skillset."

"I wanted to deal with all aspects of telecoms, so I made sure I worked throughout the business, got international experience and spoke to mentors. It gave me really broad experience and exposure."

"I was very deliberate, fearless about moving jobs, happy to take the risk. I had to move around to get broad exposure."

"It was a combination of being keen to see progression and keen to do something which was a bigger challenge, applying myself to a different problem with half an eye on who I would be working for or alongside rather than status - although I was not unconscious of status, in that each role change always meant that I moved up."

"My approach is goal oriented and I always knew where I wanted to go next and what I needed to get there; I took roles that got me where I wanted to go and enabled me to fill the gaps in my experience."

"Early on I thought that no employer is very loyal to their employees. When push comes to shove they will shove. So I always worked on the basis of looking for roles that would enhance my CV. I didn't want to keep doing the same thing all the time, I wanted broad experience. If I don't like something, I can just walk. I sought independence."

"Why limit yourself with career plans? Be open to the possibilities and very opportunistic. Most of the times I have moved jobs or taken on more responsibility it was because it came along and I said I would do it. Keep open to all sorts of opportunities. It's important to love what you do. As long as the job is something you love then go for it."

Interestingly, when we asked our sample what they wished they had done differently, a number of them said they wished they had planned more, been more willing to take risks and sought out more CV-building experience early on in their careers.

"I wish I had moved around more for broad experience and worked outside HR as it would have opened up more options."

"I should have worked harder when younger - good broad business experience is key to career success."

"I wonder if I should have moved around more. But actually I really enjoyed it and had a great career, worked with great people. The only thing I regret is that I have always put work above development and should have taken opportunities that I passed up because of being so busy."

"Whatever I want to do I can do. Though I do wonder, did I broaden my skills sufficiently?"

"I would have liked more P&L experience. It was a timing thing but would have been really useful experience; I came up the functional route but have never run a business."

"Broader experience earlier and work abroad. I was not career conscious enough in the early days."

"It would have been good to work in other sectors. Retail or third sector would have enhanced my CV."

"I wish I had worked abroad earlier before starting a family. It would have stood me in good stead for better roles that I was overlooked for because I did not have international experience."

SELF-PROMOTION, NETWORKING AND FINDING SPONSORS AND MENTORS

Self-promotion and internal politics seem to be a problem for many women who often feel excluded from informal networks in the office. A number of our respondents raised this and expressed their dislike of the political manoeuvring they witnessed at senior levels. They cited it as a significant barrier for many women. This is an area where mentoring and sponsorship are particularly useful in helping women to negotiate, build networks and gain a better understanding of organisational politics.

Dr Ines Wichert of Kenexa suggests that women tend to switch off when it comes to self-promotion and politicking and says that this is a language issue too. If we refer to 'sharing success' and 'building effective relationships' we convey the same meaning but in terms that women can relate to more easily.

Several of our respondents felt they could have done better in this area - and certainly felt that finding the right mentors and sponsors was an important part of the equation. Some expressed regret about not having done more to seek out mentors and ask for what they wanted.

"It's important to be well networked outside your business unit. A lot of women see this as self-promotion but it is not. If you are not well connected you can't help your team."

"Men are far more able to ask for what they want and need; to market themselves and say how good they are and what they add to the business. Whereas women are introverted on that sort of thing, almost subservient."

"At certain points I needed mentoring and guidance and did not get it, so had to figure it out for myself."

"Getting a sponsor/advocate early on is crucial. I wish I had been more assertive about getting what I wanted."

"I wish I had had coaching earlier in my career or someone to explain to me about relationship building, not just networking. I think this would have been enlightening. As you get more senior you run out of people to mentor and support you. You are alone and visible."

THE CONFIDENCE GAP

Almost all our female managers mentioned lack of self-confidence as a peculiarly female trait at some point in our interview. Women with long and successful careers, with undoubted technical expertise and proven leadership skills all spoke of a confidence gap, in relation to themselves or female managers they knew. A fifth of them mentioned self-confidence as something they wished they had had more of themselves.

"It takes a leap of faith to move into new sectors, it needs courage and curiosity to take such risks; a lot of women play it safe and stick to their comfort zone."

"I wish I had had more confidence and self-belief coming into my current role, rather than, "Gosh, aren't I lucky to even be considered." My boss had far more confidence in me than I had, so it took a while to get my feet under the desk; a bit of a waste, but the learning curve has been great."

"I wish I had had more self-esteem earlier. But I did quite a lot without it. Many women lack confidence when they go into workplace structures that are not conducive to women aiming for senior roles."



ON DIVERSITY

Diversity is a big issue for us. Our success rests on being able to offer something for everyone, being inclusive and having people that reflect our customers. We need fresh voices, new talent and new ideas which means that we can't always mine the same seam.

I feel particularly passionate about ensuring that we are attracting enough women into the business because they provide balance and different perspectives. We do loads of mentoring with the women in the business and it's mainly about building their confidence. I blame my generation for setting hares running and creating an obsession about work-life balance. There is no balance. All you can do is be the best you can be at work and the best you can be at home - it doesn't really matter if it is not balanced. However, young women today feel they have to be brilliant

at everything. I find this search for perfection very strange. We should just let people be themselves.

Why limit yourself with career plans? I prefer to be open to the possibilities and to be opportunistic. Most of the time when I have moved jobs or taken on more responsibility it was because something was presented to me and I said I would do it. I'd strongly advise staying open-minded. I also think you need to love what you do. If you get offered something you think you will really enjoy then go for it.

I think women bring very particular skills to business - the ability to listen and a willingness to collaborate and work with the team. Many male leaders expect to leave it to their teams to make things happen and they're not interested in how it happens, but I love being involved - rolling my sleeves up to help it happen and developing the team.

"I could have been more confident to take on things that may have moved me forward. I used to be terrified of presenting and would avoid it. But in consulting they forced me, pushed me out of my comfort zone. You get used to being knocked back and start to think it is you, so because you don't want another battering, you won't push yourself forward. The issue is not that you are in the wrong, but that women do things differently."

"I wish I had stood up for myself more. I had a good track record, but was not particularly good at standing up for what I wanted out of it."

There is plenty of research to support the view that women are less confident than men. In *The Confidence Gap* ABC News anchor Claire Shipman and BBC America anchor Katty Kay say that, "Compared with men, women don't consider themselves as ready for promotions, they predict they'll do worse on tests, and they generally underestimate their abilities. This disparity stems from factors ranging from upbringing to biology."

The Institute of Leadership and Management, in their 2011 report *Ambition and Gender at Work*, also pointed up self-doubt as a significant issue:

- Men are more confident across all age groups, with 70% of men having high or quite high levels of self-confidence, compared to 50% of women
- Half of women managers admit to feelings of self-doubt, but only 31% of men do
- 20% of men will apply for a role despite only partially meeting its job description, compared to 14% of women.

However, there is also evidence that women don't actually lack confidence in their abilities – they are just less inclined to trumpet their achievements. Women should beware of the dangers of this, suggested one of our interviewees.

"The debate needs to shift from lack of confidence to an appreciation of difference. It is okay to be self-deprecating but don't place a lower value on yourself in displaying that lack of self-confidence. While you are soul searching, ask yourself if you deserve to be paid less than somebody else? It does tend to focus the mind."

Finding the most effective approach is not easy, however. Research has shown that women frequently find themselves in a double-bind when it comes to emphasising their expertise (or engaging in other behaviour seen as typically male, such as asking for higher pay). If they don't behave assertively they are dismissed as lacking confidence

or ability (or are paid less than men). If they do, they are marked down, compared to men in the same situation, for being "too bossy" or for not conforming to stereotypical female behaviour.

Interestingly, one of the women who recognised that she didn't lack confidence, described her own attitude as male.

"Probably I have quite a male attitude, I don't look at what I can't do. I think 'that sounds fun, sure I can pull it off,' and if I can't then I'll find someone to help me. You have to take risks; hopefully one is bright enough and collaborative enough to learn quickly and use a good team."

Most of our sample agreed that organisational initiatives to encourage talented women to step forward, become more visible and take on stretch opportunities are a helpful thing.

"We need programmes to encourage women forward and position them, bring in male sponsors so they become aware of what these women are contending with, the language and attitudes – you need to change the men."

"We should make more opportunities for women to move around, make it easy to take new roles, manage them appropriately and encourage them."

"We should be trying to develop staff and looking for talent, those who have a bit extra; helping men and women to grow into leadership roles. We should spend time and money getting to know them and their individual responses and helping them get support through the organisation. Of course, not all of them will stay with you forever."

"Organisations need to look at the next level down. There are a lot of talented women in large organisations who could be given roles and secondments that would let them gain the experience that will get them onto the board in due course."



WOMEN AND MONEY

A number of respondents commented that women are particularly bad at negotiating salary. Some of our interviewees admitted they had never asked for a pay rise. One woman who had done so said her employer offered her the lowest end of the salary range she had suggested and infuriated her with their 'cheese-paring' attitude. The offer was increased though, and she never had to fight that battle again with them.

An HR Director at a multinational distribution company commented:

"I have seen women leave an organisation because they are not happy, but have rarely seen a man do that; when you make a job offer, men will negotiate but women rarely do. Men will argue for higher salary at review but women won't. I was the same - I don't want to work like that, I want to be recognised without having to fight for it. Take me seriously as I won't be under-valued"

Another interviewee observed:

"We definitely do not know how to negotiate. There are still salary differentials even at board level, despite the fact that we have to work four times harder than the men."

THE QUESTION OF QUOTAS

The vexed subject of quotas elicited a wide range of views. Although a small majority of our interviewees (52%) were definitely against, we were surprised to find that 32% were in favour, while the remaining 16% were undecided. One woman felt the whole debate was missing the point.

"I find the whole NED debate fascinating and futile. It is reactive and plays on the margins, while the executive pipeline matters more."

For those in favour of quotas, they were seen as a last resort, a transitional method of achieving progress, given the slowness of achievements to date.

"I have mixed views on this as it generates positive and negative attitudes. But we are going backwards in terms of diversity not forwards. However, on the basis that what gets measured gets done then quotas show where we ought to be."

"Imposing a quota does not drive sustainable results. I think that competence should always be the key driver but targets are not bad for challenging the status quo."



ON LEADERSHIP AND CONFIDENCE

Being the CEO is a lonely role. You can't always share your concerns and issues. When you are in such a role you are assumed to provide certain things, and top jobs require you to behave in certain ways, often these are stereotypical ways but there are also exceptions to any rule.

My attitude is that you should look at me as a successful manager, who happens to be a woman.

As a leader I think people management is critical, and personal leadership style is really important. People enjoy working with me, I have an approach whereby I don't think I have all the answers. I gather good people around me, I'm more

like conductor of the orchestra in that I'm prepared to work hard, put in the hours and take the consequences and trade-offs in my personal life.

This is one of our biggest problems - balancing personal and family life - and one where women often have specific difficulties. I think because we have this higher need to do a job well we are guilt-ridden and have a tendency to believe that as working mother we do neither well; it's quite invidious and anxiety provoking.

Women need to take risks and push themselves; but if they don't want to do that then that is alright too, we should respect that attitude. I think the biggest issue for women is about self-confidence and we need to reinforce that with coaching and mentoring.



"There are some very, very talented women out there so there is no reason for it not to have happened naturally. Therefore, I have some sympathy for putting in targets or quotas."

"Of course, I very much support a meritocracy, but am acutely concerned because I'm a passionate supporter of diversity. We need fundamental change to shift from where we are and there are going to be occasions when merit is not going to make it happen quickly enough."

"We have to start somewhere, and the traditional mind-set says that what gets measured gets done; quotas are not the answer but a trigger. Significant shifts require an initial trigger to spark action, so quotas would be not a long-term need."

"I have changed my mind. Quotas are patronising but things won't move quickly enough; so I would prefer targets and some accountability as to achieving progress."

"They are probably necessary in order to bring about change, which is too slow. The whole issue of NEDs is quite interesting: the longer people have been out of executive roles the less relevant their experience becomes; there are people fulfilling these roles who are well past their sell by date and there must be strong executive women who could do a better job."

For most respondents, however, quotas were an unpalatable option.

"I'm opposed to quotas, everybody will say it is gender not competence that counted and it can backfire very badly; talented women are told they only got a job because of their gender."

"I'd be happier if we were to talk about diversity rather than gender, it is not useful to talk about numbers when what we need is people who think differently. I worry that all the measurements we might make don't bring diversity of thought - if you don't measure you don't do it, but how do you measure inclusiveness?"

"If it is just box ticking, you will always be seen as the token woman and anything you say will be taken as the 'female point of view'. That attitude makes it harder for a woman to perform as an equal on the board when they do come forward."

"We have made progress but it is still all very cosy. We need chairmen who will bite the bullet and educate others; accountability is the key."

"Organisations should target for improvement. You need to be heard as an equal not as a woman. Quotas can be demeaning."

"Focus on women coming through in executive roles. We need to concentrate on that and getting women up to those levels."

"Appointments should go on performance as it potentially devalues the quality of people on a board if they do not have the right background and experience."

"We should always have a board based on merit, which does not mean to say we don't need to intervene in the gender debate. We know there are females of merit being overlooked."



ON QUOTAS VERSUS MERIT

A study commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills says that lack of diversity at the top of organisations can frustrate equality elsewhere in the hierarchy.

The research shows that whereas there was a 20% chance of a company appointing a woman if another woman had left its board, this fell to 10% when a man had held the post (Authors: Professor Brian Main of the University of Edinburgh Business School and Dr Ian Gregory-Smith of the University of Sheffield).

Academics Niederle and Vesterlund (2008) wondered if operating in a highly competitive environment was particularly challenging for women. They used games and puzzles to study gender differences in competitive behaviour and found that "a quota-like affirmative action environment in which women must be equally represented encourages many more women to compete". This response is so marked, they discovered, that there was an increase of all women, including high-performing women, willing to compete and so it was not necessary to lower performance requirements to achieve diversity in the study.

This suggests that if we can get more women into the running via quotas it will increase the likelihood of a female CFO, CEO, NED or chairman in the future.

On the other hand quotas, while addressing the problem of women in non-executive positions on company boards, do not tackle the broader question of how to get more females involved at every level of business, including at executive level i.e. the 'executive pipeline'.

And while we need to change some of the structural barriers, quotas applied to the executive pipeline would be a significantly more difficult step. There does, however, need to be pressure from the board and CEO to change the structural practices.


Brenda Barnes, CEO at Sara Lee in 2005, made the achievement of diversity a metric in computation of bonuses, saying, "There's a lot of tendency to check the boxes on stuff like this. That's not enough. Did the numbers change?"

The British Psychological Society view recognises some of the inherent difficulties of quotas:

"We acknowledge the proactive nature of quotas and in the right circumstances they add some value. However, there is always the danger of a backlash where men and women feel that roles have only been obtained due to quotas. This can be counter-productive if it undermines the perceived capability of the women in those roles and their confidence to achieve their full potential.

Women and minority groups don't apply for very senior appointments. Opaque appointment processes, requirements for sector-specific and previous board experience, poor feedback and a lack of cultural knowledge from executive recruitment consultants and appointing bodies all mean that these roles are filled from a small pool of candidates.

Quotas can be seen as a quick fix but in the long term they can have some negative consequences. It is much more effective to get at the heart of the issues and address the social, economic and cultural issues that prevent true equality."



SELF-HELP AND GETTING AHEAD

Our survey respondents are all highly successful career women, who have learnt to thrive in a male-dominated corporate world. So we asked them what the most important skills were that they used to build their careers and what advice they would give to others. About themselves, the skills that came up most often were networking and team-building. Tenacity, resilience, strategic thinking and communication skills were also cited. Interestingly, emotional intelligence and authenticity were barely mentioned at all in this part of the interview process.

As for advice to aspiring women managers and emerging senior female colleagues, they took the issue of helping them progress and providing role models very seriously.

“Role modelling is really important. It is self-perpetuating and reassuring. It gives women in an organisation more confidence that it is possible to reach those roles and that they can do it too.”

“Aim for a varied CV with a thread of strengths to show you are able to work in different environments, coping with different challenges. So that when a headhunter looks at your CV they see a spread of broad commercial business experience.”

“Pay attention to relationships and influence. Be clear on what you want to do and be disciplined around how you make it work. Don't be frightened about putting yourself forward. There comes a point where you may have to move. Take risks and seize opportunities.”

“A lot of women don't want P&L responsibility for whatever reason, so they stick with their comfort zone. You have to prepare yourself and be able to demonstrate your credentials, you have to take responsibility. Cross-functional experience benefits everyone.”

“Every couple of years, sit down and write down goals – life, personal and career goals – some form of plan that gives you an aiming point. You might get lucky but probably networking is more likely to work. What is really key and critical is that you don't hide your light under a bushel. Women are not pushy enough early in their careers.”

“Don't be afraid to ask. You have to do a good job but people have to know you are doing a good job. You have to talk about what you are doing and be prepared to ask for the next big job, the next logical step for you and go in to bat for it.”

“It's good to have a plan, to be flexible with the plan. Aim to broaden your CV so if you can't go one way, you can go another; continuous learning is important.”



SOME FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

LANGUAGE, METAPHORS AND THE NEW LEADERSHIP

Throughout this research, interviewees talked about the language of business and how it was biased towards male images and metaphors. This is an important underlying current when considering organisational behaviour and leadership.

Research in this area, reflected by our own experience, identifies three main models of gender division within organisations – models which have implications for other minorities too. These are very well described by Professor Judith Baxter in her book *The Language of Female Leaders* (Palgrave MacMillan). Although they exist mostly in a continuum, rather than 'pure' forms, most of us will recognise the prevailing variant that exists in our organisation.

Male-Dominated Organisations

The most familiar type is the male dominated organisation, which is characterised by a clear hierarchical approach. The language and metaphors are war and sport related and promotion is considered a competitive adversarial endeavour. Common metaphors include: "attacking the opposition", "winning market share", "going for gold" and "war for talent".

This dominant male culture has a strong sub-text which links organisational requirements, leadership characteristics and reward to criteria more directly attributable to men: rational, analytical, independent, competitive and able to confront issues. By implication this places women in an inferior space, where they are considered: less rational, dependent, co-operative, passive and conciliatory.

As Professor Baxter points out, "Since war is a quintessentially male activity and an essential test of manhood, its metaphoric usage arguably positions women as an 'out-group' in business."

When women succeed in this type of organisation – and they do – they have tended to 'play men at their own game' and often 'outdo' them. Successful women in these environments are regarded as formidable. On top of their mastery of the "man's world", they often demonstrate a more flexible style and approach which gives them greater 'bandwidth' than the men they are outperforming, thus entering 'Super Woman' territory.

Male-Female Divided Organisation

This type of organisation offers greater accessibility to women and acknowledgement of female characteristics. Differences are recognised and are equally valued, up to a point, and the organisation allows women easier access to senior positions. However, this recognition is usually within specific functions or 'agreed areas' – human resources is a classic, but not exclusive, example. These areas are often fields of operation where female characteristics are perceived as important – the ability to build relationships of equity and trust, where co-operation to get things done is vital and where expressing feelings and emotions is seen as valuable.

This type of organisation is readily recognisable and relatively common. It will often still be characterised by 'male dominant' language and metaphors, especially at the top. There will, however, be a much greater space for the voicing of alternative views and reaching the top of the 'agreed' areas. It often remains, however, that women are excluded from the real, most senior business roles.

Gender-Multiple Organisation

A much rarer beast is the gender-multiple organisation. This represents a future where the agenda is more focused on the talents of people whatever their gender, age, ethnicity or other backgrounds. Roles and boundaries between groups are blurred, without noticeable divisions by 'types'. There are open opportunities for career progression and the organisation is very much focused on 'how we get things done'. There will be a more collaborative and balanced use of language and metaphors.

If this sounds too good to be true, that is because these are still rare environments, despite the ubiquitous diversity proclamations with which most of us are familiar.

The gender-multiple model is, however, starting to gain more traction, driven by the emergence of a

new leadership model. Business leaders are starting to “re-engineer” leadership into a style, which values relationship building, trust and co-operation.

The change is not driven by high-minded altruism. Rather it reflects the global imperatives within organisations to be more collaborative across diverse populations and to build cohesiveness among groups who may meet face to face only rarely. This trend is further driven by the next generation of leaders, who have grown up with a stronger ethos of collaboration, shared goals and mutual development.

ADVANCED BOARDROOM EXCELLENCE INSIGHTS

At Advanced Boardroom Excellence, we see many of the issues raised by this and other research on a daily basis. Below are some of the themes that have often arisen in our own work coaching executives of both genders and working with board teams.

The Model of Leadership: We have seen that white Anglo-Saxon males tend to take a contingent approach to leadership, seeing it as a route to achieving their goals and objectives. By contrast, women tend to take a values-based approach to leadership, which they are less likely to give up to achieve a particular organisational goal. It's a case of, “How does this fit with my values?” versus “What style would you like me to adopt?”

360 Degree Feedback: This is a minefield of language and cultural bear traps. Take the use of ‘integrity’ as a feedback competency; many cultures and professions regard integrity as an absolute, not something you can be quite good at. So when coaching individuals from ethnic minorities, the very notion that their integrity may be in question creates a real challenge for a coach.

Resilience: While resilience is an individual psychological construct built out of specific experiences, we constantly come across resilience in women as a coaching issue that holds them back in organisations. There seems to be a difference between the general swathe of men and the generality of women in the organisational context.

Men are less derailed by work-related failure in the sense that they experience it as part of their normal psychological construct through sport and group interaction. Consequently, they don't take it personally and bounce back more readily. Women, on the other hand, seem to invoke a more personal response and often overthink the issue. We have discussed elsewhere the impact of metaphors and language. The metaphors of resilience favoured in the workplace tend to be very male: “taking the hit,” “driving through the pain”, “going the whole nine yards” even “taking it like a man”. Metaphors that speak more to female experience, or language that is gender neutral, would help women better tap into their own resilience.

Power, Influence and Networking: Generally speaking, men get the notions of power, influence and networking more easily and earlier in their careers than women. For them it is often a contingency play to get what they want. The women we see are consistently (with notable exceptions, of course) less adept at the power, influencing and networking game. They often describe it as ‘unfair, ‘a game’ or ‘ego-centric’. While this is more common in women, we often also see it with technical experts who have been aloof from the power arena of the P&L until much later in their careers, when they hit it as a barrier and are not quite sure what to do.

The Bull Pit: Women are less well prepared for the bull pit of male group interaction, especially amongst peer groups. The insider shorthand, the vulgarity and the general need to find your position in the alpha hierarchy is perversely both subtle and overt. While some men suffer from the same excluding behaviours, they are more inclined to learn, adapt and change to meet the prevailing culture. Women find their own coping mechanisms but often reach a point where they simply vote with their feet in search of an alternative environment. Most organisations today are aware of the more overt manifestations of this type of culture and the need to challenge it, but are less able, or willing, to recognise its subtler workings.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON EQUALITY AND EQUITY

Getting more talented women into the boardroom pipeline is a real challenge for corporate leadership. It requires them to value the different, often socially conditioned qualities which women bring to the workplace and to adapt corporate structures and attitudes to fit women as well as men.

Legal and political rights for women and protection from discrimination are long established. But there remains a disparity of power and influence and we still have a long way to go to overcome the entrenched attitudes at the top of British business – and indeed most parts of public life.

The playing field may be level, but sometimes it looks as though we are playing two different games on the same field. There are differences in the way men and women work, between their values, their leadership styles and their aspirations; there are differences in how they express themselves; and there is the practical reality that women still generally do the bulk of the child-rearing. There are also many similarities between men and women in the workplace. But the fact remains that as long as organisational structures and cultures are not gender neutral, men are much more likely to reach executive committee-level roles than women of equal calibre – who are either excluded or opt out by choice.

Equality is defined as the state or quality of being equal. In the workplace we should be treated equally and have access to equality of opportunity; equal opportunities are protected by legislation. Equity is about fairness; we all deserve to be treated with fairness. When employees perceive that the system is unfairly stacked against them, some respond by trying even harder to succeed, while others opt out, either not going for promotions, or leaving altogether. None of these, ultimately, are to the long-term benefit of organisations.

The problem is that while we have equality of aspiration, we have not yet achieved equity or indeed true equality of opportunity. The disillusionment and frustration that result have fuelled the calls for quotas and affirmative action. These may be useful or necessary in the end. But even supporters recognise that they are a double-edged sword that needs very careful handling.

McKinsey's *Women Matter 2013* report recommends that companies need to create “an ecosystem of measures, sustained over time, that foster the environment conducive to increased women's participation in top management”. This would require strong top-down commitment, programmes to develop women as leaders and ensuring women are systematically included in recruitment and promotion pipelines.

Our interviews would support this view. There is still much to be done to get there. But the rewards that follow will be well worth the effort.

A BROADER PERSPECTIVE – WE'VE TRAVELLED A LONG WAY

- It is less than a century since women over 30 were granted the right to vote in Britain and they only gained equal voting rights with men in 1928. French women did not get the right to vote until 1944.
- In 1918 women over 30 with property gained the vote.
- In 1920 the Sex Discrimination Removal Act allowed women access to the legal profession and accountancy.
- In 1928 all women over 21 gained the vote.
- In 1929 women were deemed 'persons' in their own right by order of the Privy Council.
- Race Relations Act 1965 was the first legislation in the United Kingdom to address racial discrimination.
- In 1976 the Equal Opportunities Commission was established to oversee the Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act.
- Race Relations Act 1976 established the Commission for Racial Equality.
- In 1985 The Equal Pay (Amendment) Act allowed women to be paid the same as men for work of equal value.
- In 1990 the introduction of independent taxation for women meant that for the first time married women were taxed separately from their husbands.
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995, made it unlawful to discriminate against people in respect of their disabilities in employment, the provision of goods and services, education and transport.
- Equality Act 2010, consolidated, strengthened and simplified previous anti-discrimination laws.





ACTION THIS DAY

AGENDA FOR CHANGE

Our respondents identified corporate culture, alternative working practices and more flexible career structures as key factors in tackling the leaky pipeline, along with the provision of coaching and mentoring.

Any serious effort to achieve this and to encourage more women to go for C-suite roles, requires a leadership down commitment that understands the business value of difference rather than just talking about what is politically correct.

This commitment must be embedded throughout the organisation, even if diversity is more complex to manage or involves letting go of long-held beliefs.

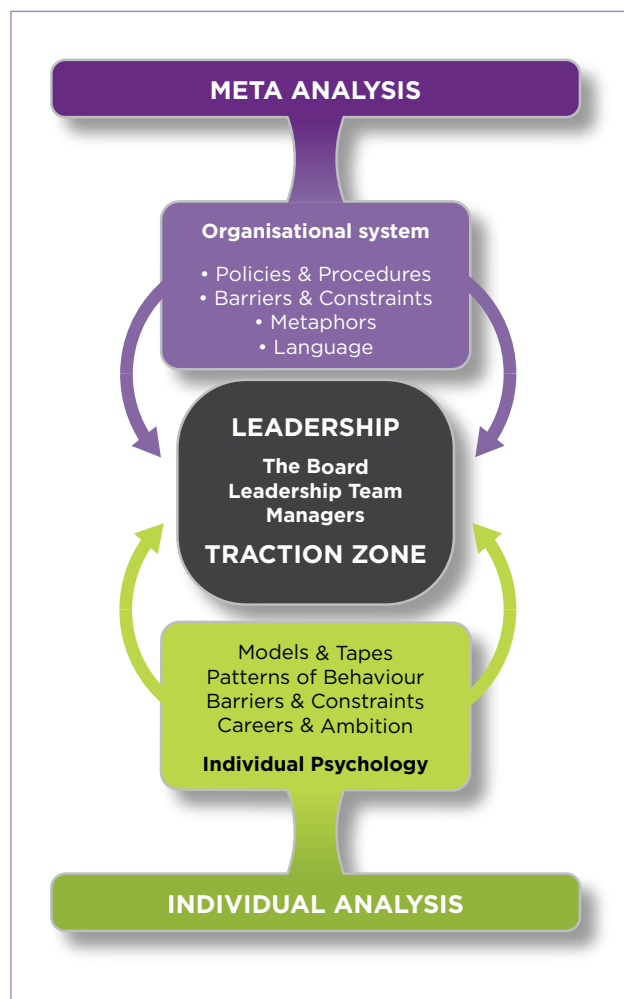
With this in mind, we have drawn up a list of recommendations for organisations, for leaders and for women and minorities that will help achieve better outcomes for all.

Our list reflects both this research and Advanced Boardroom Excellence experience from over 20 years working in the field of diversity.

THE ORGANISATIONAL 'SYSTEM': WHAT ORGANISATIONS CAN DO

Build the Right Environment

- Ensure that diversity is integrated into the business model
- Engage the board with integrating diversity in the executive pipeline
- Examine workplace culture and language from the top down and test it for gender bias
- Define and articulate leadership and management qualities that reflect the culture you want to achieve
- Redefine success, recognising results and outcomes, rather than 'time served'. Offer alternative working patterns and flexible career structures for men and women. Make flexibility normal
- Enable supportive networks and ensure that mentoring programmes target women and minority groups as well as 'traditional' male managers
- Understand what drives the reward and remuneration structures of the organisation



- Undertake 'sensitivity analysis' of proposed changes for their diversity impact
- Take a creative look at the talent management process and programmes to identify and overcome the barriers faced by under-represented populations.

Programmes

- Ensure board leadership of the organisation's strategic diversity agenda
- Integrate diversity into all leadership and management programmes
- Create a board-led mentoring programme to demonstrate the board's commitment

- Understand the 'outflow' criteria for under-represented populations
- Avoid separate programmes which reinforce stereotypes
- Ensure leaders and managers understand how language and metaphors can create barriers
- Make sure employees understand and have equal access to the organisation's sponsorship model
- Create a career management process which opens up the executive pipeline to all, with due regard to the barriers and constraints for different populations
- Creatively re-design the recruitment and promotion systems as diversity friendly and 'collaborative' not 'adversarial'.
- "Take it on the chin" and accept that you may have to do something different to achieve real change
- Do not make assumptions about what people want or don't want. Ask them
- Be open-minded and flexible about what is needed for a particular role or stretch opportunity
- Learn the language and metaphors which encourage different styles of operating and communicating and don't assume that one is necessarily more indicative of 'merit' than another
- Be aware of your personal unconscious biases and how to counteract them.

LEADERSHIP TRACTION ZONE: WHAT LEADERS AND MANAGERS CAN DO

Environmental Factors

- Understand your organisation's business case for diversity and leadership buy-in for it
- Get the active backing of the CEO for integrating diversity into the leadership model
- Provide a clear executive committee commitment to increasing the diversity of the executive pipeline
- Create visible engagement from the board in the make-up of the executive pipeline beyond the usual statements of commitment to diversity
- Role model the behaviour required.

Programmes

- Design the leadership and management programme to both integrate and articulate the challenges of diversity in management action terms
- Provide leaders and managers with a platform to understand the barriers and constraints providing leadership opportunities for diverse populations
- Create greater traction and flow through the executive pipeline for diverse groups
- Look at the numbers at each level within your organisation to inform (or remind) yourself of the scale and nature of the problem

INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY: WHAT WOMEN AND MINORITIES CAN DO

Environment (Personal Psychology)

- Create a networking strategy to increase visibility internally and externally and get noticed
- Take risks and look on setbacks as opportunities to learn
- Be a role model
- Understand the organisational psychology, dominant language and metaphors
- Make conscious decisions about the environment, culture and organisational model you want to work in, and the trade-offs implied; then develop your strategy to maximise your impact.

Programmes (Actions)

- Plan for your career
- Get a sponsor
- Use mentors and sponsors to support you and advocate for you
- Understand your own psychology – strengths, barriers to success, derailers, etc.
- Cultivate resilience
- Ask for a pay rise
- Learn to re-frame
- Learn fluent finance.

MAKING IT TO THE TOP

Our Making It to the Top chart is a tool to help with career planning. It highlights key experiences and career decision points and acts as a map for making sense of a corporate career, whether you are a woman or man, from a majority or a minority group.

We know both from research and from our own experience that formal career planning, or the lack of it, often presents a barrier to diversity because of a number of factors:

- Organisational barriers may exclude women and minorities from the 'flow'
- Lack of creative thinking in organisations to recognise the usefulness of alternative paths of experience
- Pessimism from individuals who look at the need to plan, avoid facing up to the reality of a situation or under-estimate their ability to do a bigger job
- Reluctance to voice ambition, enter an effective dialogue about longer-term career options or ask for a pay rise
- The view that the rules of the organisational system are set in stone, immutable and can't be changed or circumvented
- An aversion/lack of understanding and engagement with the dominant organisational metaphors of war and sports.

As consultants on board effectiveness and through our individual coaching of directors, one of our roles is to support the individual to overcome these barriers and the rigidity of the organisation's career system. This requires creative thinking and an understanding of how the organisational system works so that alternatives can be presented in a way which gets traction in the organisation. We start by recognising the realities and identifying key steps and barriers to achieving outcomes. From this analysis, we begin a creative process of seeking work-arounds and alternatives.

It is particularly important from an individual perspective to present alternatives to the organisation in flexible and business terms that sidestep the setting of precedents which are the nightmare of HR departments the world over.

Using The Chart

Making it to the Top is a flowchart showing three generic routes to the boardroom, with an indication against each type of experience as to how highly it is typically valued. Our experience is that creative

thinking makes it possible to substitute and emulate the types of experience illustrated, even if they aren't fulfilled in their classic form. The chart can help individuals understand what might be happening in their own careers and where there are opportunities to create and meet longer-term goals.

• Three Routes To The Top?

The columns represent three areas of corporate life, a commercial, P&L focused career directed to the CEO role, a finance focused career aimed at becoming Group FD and a functional career as represented by the human resources function, aimed at Group HR Director

• Gaining Experience

While the diagrammatic flow of the chart is upward, the realities of corporate life often involve a sideways move to set up longer term progress. For example, an overseas move is often done as a 'sideways' move to gain valuable experience

• Lateral Moves

The finance function has a tradition of individuals moving across to the P&L CEO stream at various stages

• Positive Steps



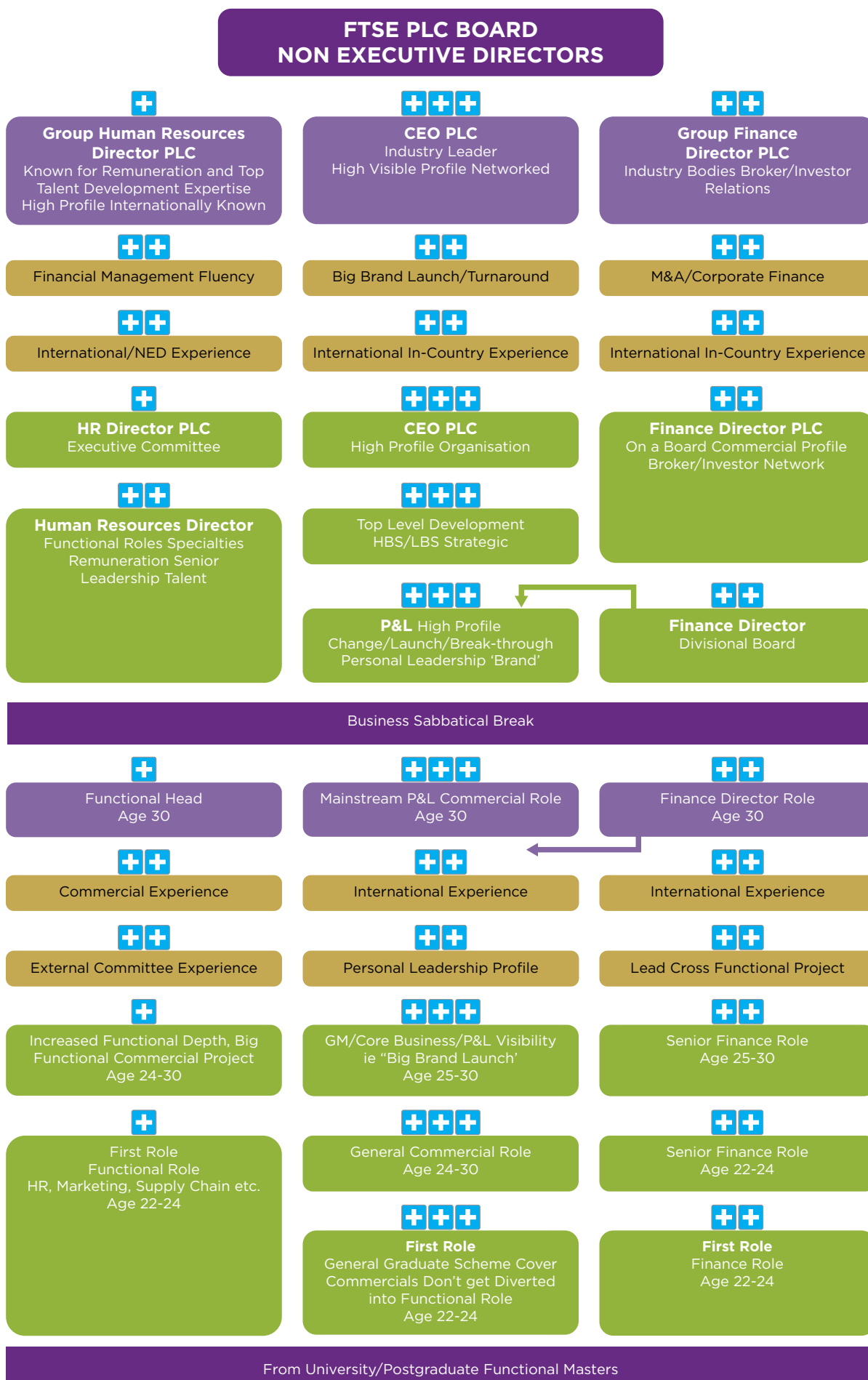
These symbols provide a yardstick of how positive a particular type of experience or role is for achieving a board role

• Every Organisation is Different

The chart describes generic roles and types of experience to use as a template to review a career and plan accordingly. The actual roles and experience will vary from organisation to organisation

• Age Ranges

Age ranges are for guidance only. They will vary considerably, by individual and organisation.



RESILIENCE - A COACHING PERSPECTIVE

Resilience came out as one of the qualities our interviewees most frequently cited as having helped them succeed in their careers. It's a quality that can be defined as the ability to cope with adversity, to persevere and adapt when things go awry, or to use a common organisational metaphor, the ability to "take the hit and get back in the game".

In coaching terms this translates into the ability to:

- Abandon harsh self-criticism and negative self-images
- Navigate effectively through the fallout of any kind of crisis
- Cope with anxiety and negative 'tapes'
- Overcome obstacles in relationships
- Deal with stress and create a balanced sense of health and achievement
- Understand your own derailers and their warning signs
- Re-frame effectively
- Bolster optimism, take chances, and embrace life in light of the challenges faced.

The biggest influence on our resilience is our cognitive style - how we think. How good we are at getting beyond what we perceive to be the realities of a situation so that they don't paralyse our thinking. This relates strongly to the concept of mental toughness, a characteristic found in top sportsmen and women.

Factors that influence our ability to respond positively include:

- The capacity to access trusted, supportive relationships for encouragement and reassurance
- The ability to formulate realistic plans and carry them through
- A positive self-perception and confidence in one's strengths and abilities
- Strong communication and problem-solving skills
- The ability to understand and manage feelings and impulses.

These factors can be developed using a variety of techniques, such as:

- Getting the physical balance right and not dropping stress coping routines such as getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising regularly
- Increasing awareness of the relationship between thoughts and emotions
- Gaining insight into one's beliefs when things go wrong
- Looking for alternative beliefs when experiencing debilitating emotions.

Understanding your drivers, motivations, attitudes, preferences, strengths and weaknesses is a powerful way of conquering some of the negative patterns which drag us down, such as:

- **Blaming:** Either making someone or something else responsible for our problems
- **Shoulds, musts and oughts:** Implying that either you or someone else has failed to live up to an expected standard
- **Polarised Thinking:** Thinking of things as polar opposites, with no room for shades of grey or ambiguity in between. Everything is either success or failure
- **Catastrophising:** Imagining the worst possible outcome and then reacting as if it will come true
- **Emotional Reasoning:** Assuming that what we feel must be true
- **Rumination (or Filtering):** Focusing only on the problem and nothing else, filtering out any positive elements of our experience
- **Entitlement:** Feeling entitled to a life without problems.

The most difficult aspect of changing negative thinking is noticing the thinking pattern in the first place. Thoughts that occur in response to triggering events usually happen so fast that we aren't even aware of them.

Starting to recognise, understand and influence these reactions is the first step to creating a well-formed resilient nature.

CHECKLIST FOR A GOOD SPONSOR

What makes a sponsor different from a mentor is critical in terms of career management. A sponsor acts as an advocate, not just offering advice but also talking about and backing you inside the organisation to get to the next step. From making important introductions to senior leaders to expanding the perception of what you can offer the organisation, a sponsor is a personal brand advocate in the workplace and in your industry at large. A sponsor inspires, propels and protects in order to assist your career progress.

Sponsorship is a deeply ingrained part of human nature. Human beings are deeply social, not individualistic, at heart; they co-operate through a sponsorship process of reciprocal altruism: I co-operate with you because you have co-operated with me in the past, and may do so again in the future (*Origins of Political Order*: 2012, F. Fukuyama).

Sponsorship benefits both parties as you work to ensure each other's success. Though it may seem that the junior member (protégé) benefits from attention and leverage provided by the senior member (sponsor), this senior member also benefits in a range of oblique ways.

However, as with mentoring, it is critical that the protégé should drive the relationship, demonstrating that they have earned and deserve it.

Where sponsorship works well a range of benefits accrue to the relationship.

Sponsors: What they can do for you

- Advocate for your next promotion
- Call in favours for you
- Expand your perception of what you can do
- Make connections to senior leaders
- Advise you on executive presence

Proteges: What you can do for your sponsor

- Be trustworthy and confidential
- Contribute 110%
- Cover your sponsor's back
- Promote your sponsor's profile and legacy
- Allow them to help shape the next generation of leaders

(*Harvard Business Review*, Oct 2011. *A Sponsor-Protégé Checklist* by Sylvia Ann Hewlett; Melinda Marshall and Laura Sherbin).

THE PARTICIPANTS

Note: 45 out of 70 interviewees were happy to be named.

Elaine Aarons

Partner, Withers LLP

Lynne Connolly

Head of Talent, Standard Life plc

Alison Crosland

Operations Director, LGBT Finance Ltd

Bronwyn Curtis

NED JPM Asian Investment Trust Plc, Vice Chairman
Society of Business Economist & Board Member of
National Institute of Economic and Social

Claire Davies

Group Secretary, The Co-operative Group

Catherine Doran

Chief Information Officer, Royal Mail Group

Lynette Eastman

Director, Lynette Eastman Associates Ltd

Julie Elder

HR Director, Home Retail Group

Leonie Fleming

General Counsel, Commercial and Private Banking,
Royal Bank of Scotland

Maggie Griffiths

Global Head of Talent Acquisition, Managing
Director, Investment Bank UBS

Professor Jackie Hunter *PhD CBE FBPharmacoS*

Chief Executive, BBSRC and CEO OI
Pharmapartners Ltd

Claire Ighodaro *CBE*

NED, Lloyd's of London

Jennie Jacob

Head of HR, BSkyB

Gail Lumsden

Director: Group Strategy, SABMiller

Dee Mair

Former HR Director of IPC Media

Alison McLeod

Director, Applecross Consulting Ltd and NED/
Trustee CfBT Education Trust

Anne Minto *OBE*

NED Shire plc, Tate & Lyle plc & Exlservice Holdings

Sue O'Brien *OBE*

CEO, NormanBroadbent

Rachel Rowson

Company Secretary, Man Group Plc

Hilary Sears

Chairman of MS Society, and of KIDS

Liz Sebag-Montefiore

Director and Co-Founder, 10Eighty

Emer Timmons

President, BTGS UK, BT Global Services

Sophie Turner Laing

Managing Director, Content, BSkyB

Joan Wales

Head of Safety and Operational Risk for Corporate
Businesses, BP International Ltd

Jackie Wellesley

HRD Innovation & Digital Disruption,
Telefónica Digital

Ella Bennett

HRD, Fujitsu

Jo Ferris

Head of HR, Personal, Corporate and Business
Banking, AIB

Celia Baxter

Director of Group HR, Bunzl Plc

Marcia Campbell

Independent Director, Sainsbury's Bank, Murray
International Trust, CNP Assurances and Chairman
of the Scottish Green Investment Advisory Board.

Jean Gomm

NED

Dorothy Griffiths

Professor of Human Resources Management and
Provost's Envoy for Gender Equality, Imperial
College & Chair of Central & North West London
NHS Foundation Trust

Nicki Hickson

Director of Coaching, UK & Ireland,
Ernst & Young LLP

Janet Hogben

Chief People Officer, EDF Energy

Kathryn Jackson-Day

HRD Global Marketing, Diversity and Talent
Acquisition, Bicardi Global Brands

Ann Pickering

HR Director, Telefónica UK

Robin Pring

Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Americas
Region, Heineken

Jenifer Richmond

HR Director, UK Coach, National Express

Nikki Rolfe

HRD, Rexam Plc

Imelda Walsh

NED and Rem Chair, William Hill, Mitchells and
Butlers, Mothercare and First Group

Nikki Zamblera

HRD, Debenhams

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico

Dame Janet Gaymer DBE QC (Hons)

Marian Glen

NED, Friends Life Group

Evelyn Gardiner

GHRD, Kingfisher

Jan Cargill

Deputy Company Secretary
and Director, Secretariat, Royal Bank of Scotland

MEMBERS OF THE ADVANCED BOARDROOM EXCELLENCE RESEARCH TEAM

We are passionate about the development and improvement of boardroom standards, behaviour and ethics. Our experience as a leading board effectiveness consultancy is focused on supporting chairmen, CEO's and directors and is underpinned by continuous research. In addition to this report we have published 'The Effective Board' and the 'Code of Practice for External Independent Board Evaluations'. The Code of Practice was issued as a Draft document and is currently with Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) for consultation with the sector practitioners.

Mark Winkle

Research Director
CEO and Executive Coach



Jackie White

Project Co-Ordinator
Brand and Client Services Director



Susan Dudley

Interview Co-ordinator
Regional Director



Helen Menhenett

Research Interviewer
Consultant Associate





ADVANCED BOARDROOM EXCELLENCE

23 Berkeley Square London W1J 6HE

www.abexcellence.com

