Chapter objectives
Think manager think male
Think crisis think female
What's the problem?
An outdated stereotype?
If you don’t play, you can’t win
Follow through

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Chapter objectives

1. To consider the personal, organizational, and institutional factors which explain why women are under-represented in positions of power.
2. To explore the nature and degree of gender differences in perceptions, use, and impact of organization politics.
3. To consider the practical implications for women in change agency roles.

Think manager think male

Why do women lack power, and why are they under-represented in senior leadership positions? Do women view politics and use political behaviour differently from men? Segregating women for special treatment implies that observed differences in attitudes and behaviours are attributable to sex, and some readers will criticize this approach. However, the evidence suggests that women and men do experience organization politics in different ways, and these differences are due to organizational and institutional factors as well as personal characteristics. Commentary on the nature and use of power and political behaviour has been largely male-dominated, and gender-blind (Michelle King et al., 2018). Until recently, much of the research was conducted by men (with notable exceptions). The saying ‘think manager think male’ expresses a traditional bias, which is changing, but slowly.

Carly Fiorina was the first female chief executive of a Fortune magazine Top 20 American organization, Hewlett-Packard. In her autobiography, reporting instances of humiliating sexual discrimination, harassment, and abuse from senior male colleagues, Fiorina (2006, p. 70) concludes that, ‘Life isn’t always fair, and it is different for women than for men’. Anyone who believes that sex-role stereotyping, the systematic underestimation of women, and the resultant hostility are not part of the routine experience of senior female managers will find Fiorina’s account unsettling.

Have things changed? Has Fiorina’s experience been overtaken by changes in male behaviour? Sadly, the evidence suggests that it has not. With regard to sexual harassment and assault, the #MeToo movement, which began in 2017 and spread rapidly through social media, exposed the exploitative behaviour of several powerful male executives towards women with whom they were working. From an employee experience survey by the management consulting firm McKinsey, involving 64,000 employees from 81 companies across North America, Rachel Thomas et al. (2018) found that women face ‘an uneven playing field’:

- women get less support from their managers
- women have less access to senior leaders
- women face everyday discrimination
- sexual harassment is widespread
- women are often the ‘only’ one, especially at senior levels
- women find it more difficult to advance and see an unfair workplace
- women ask for raises and promotions as often as men, but don’t get the same outcomes.
It is different for women

As well as being under-represented in senior roles, women are hired and promoted at lower rates than men at every level of the organization. This reduces the pipeline of female candidates who are then available for promotion at more senior levels. A study of over 1 million people working in financial services in America also uncovered a 'gender punishment gap': women were punished more severely than men in cases of misconduct such as contravening codes of conduct, customer disputes, and illegal acts (Mark Egan et al., 2018). Women were more likely to be fired for misconduct than men, and a higher proportion of men than women found new jobs following misconduct.

Inequality is also reflected in pay. In 2017, the highest paid executive in an FTSE 100 company was Sir Martin Sorrell, chief executive of the communications services company WPP, with an annual pay package of £48 million. The highest paid woman was Emma Walmsley, chief executive of the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline, with a package of £8.8 million. Only seven of the FTSE 100 companies had a female chief executive in 2017 (Aimee Donnellan, 2017).

Interviewer: Would you describe yourself as someone who plays politics, or do you stay out of it?

Change agent: I don’t think you can work in this organization and stay out of it. You have to be political if you want to work at a senior level. But you shouldn’t let the game consume you, and it’s not about the game – it’s about the organization and staff as well. I think you have to know that there’s a ‘Game of Thrones’ going on. There are people who are ‘in it’ because they love the game. It’s all about the game for them, all about the politics. Of course they’d never say that. But it’s all about them and their egos and their careers. And there are people like me who understand that if you want to make things happen and get stuff done, then you have to at least know what the game is, you have to know who is where on the chessboard, you have to know who is connected to whom. There are occasions when I can’t get this done myself, so I have to know somebody who can, and I have to be OK about that. If you try not to play, you will be marginalized.

WOMEN MAY BE YOUR MOST CAPABLE STRATEGIC CHANGE LEADERS

Research by the consultancy Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) has found that only 8 per cent of senior managers have the strategic leadership capabilities required to drive organizational change (Grace Lewis, 2015). From a survey of 6,000 managers in Europe, the highest proportion of strategic leaders were women over the age of 55 – a group which has traditionally been overlooked in the search for change leadership skills. PwC defines a strategic leader as someone who has ‘wide experience of settings, people, and also of failure, which engenders humility or

(Continued)
Despite evidence that board diversity improves organizational performance, Vivian Hunt et al. (2018) report that progress is slow. By 2018, the 346 UK and US companies involved in a 2015 study by McKinsey had increased average gender representation on their executive teams by only 2 per cent (to 14 per cent), and ethnic and cultural diversity by 1 per cent (to 13 per cent). Their more recent study, involving over 1,000 companies in 12 countries, reached the following conclusions:

- there is a statistically significant correlation between diverse leadership and corporate financial performance
- companies in the top 25 per cent for gender diversity on top teams were more likely to have above average profitability and value creation
- the highest performing companies on profitability and diversity had more women in line (revenue-generating) roles than in staff roles on their executive teams
- companies in the top 25 per cent for gender, ethnic and cultural diversity on their executive teams were one third more likely to have industry-leading profitability
- companies in the bottom 25 per cent for gender, ethnic, and cultural diversity were 29 per cent less likely to achieve above average profitability than all of the other companies in this study
- black women executives are under-represented in line management roles, and find it difficult to move to chief executive positions; women in general hold a disproportionately small share of line roles on executive teams, and black, Latina, and Asian women hold an even smaller share.

Gender equality is a goal worth pursuing in its own right. It is disappointing, therefore, that debate has focused mainly on the ‘business case’ for appointing more women to board positions.

**Think crisis think female**

Discussion concerning the problems facing women who aspire to leadership roles has also focused on the ‘glass ceiling’ – the invisible barrier erected by male-dominated company
boards. The careers of men, in contrast, are helped by a ‘glass escalator’ which carries them to the top. But is the concept of a glass ceiling still helpful?

Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2007) argue that the ‘glass ceiling’ argument is misleading. They suggest that the image of the ‘labyrinth’ is more useful, as women face many obstacles and challenges to their careers at different stages. The difficulties do not just lie with senior roles. Male prejudice and family responsibilities are not the only problems. Women tend to have less time for socializing, and have weaker professional networks. Women need persistence and self-awareness to negotiate this labyrinth. Research by the management consultancy company Ernst & Young (2012) also concludes that the concept of a ‘single glass ceiling’ is outdated, as women face many obstacles to their career progression. Their survey of 1,000 working women aged 18 to 60 identified four main barriers. First, women felt that they were always perceived as being either too young or too old. Second, lack of experience or qualifications was also seen to stand in their way. Third, many felt that becoming a mother had damaged their future career prospects. Fourth, 75 per cent said that they had few or no female role models in their organizations.

Michelle Ryan and Alexander Haslam (2005, 2007) argue that women promoted to senior roles face another set of problems – concerning what they call the ‘glass cliff’. Their research found that companies are more likely to change the composition of their boards of directors when performance drops, than when it is improving. Ryan and Haslam suggest that poor company performance can trigger the appointment of women to the board, because diversity leads to higher performance. They also observe that this means promoting women into positions that carry a high risk of failure. As women are a minority among senior managers, they are more visible, and their performance tends to be scrutinized more closely.

Ryan and Haslam (2005) looked at the share price performance of the top 100 companies listed on the London Stock Exchange, before and after new board appointments, male and female. As predicted, the appointment of women to boards was more likely to follow a period of poor company performance. In other words, women were more likely than men to be appointed to roles that were already associated with poor performance. Because of the probability of continuing poor performance, those women were more likely than their male colleagues to find themselves on a glass cliff, with an increased risk of being associated with failure, and with the attendant criticism and blame if that happened. This can be interpreted, they argue, as a form of ‘benevolent sexism’, offering women attractive challenges, and appearing supportive, while exposing candidates to higher career risks (Ryan and Haslam, 2007, p. 558).

The researchers conclude that women were being ‘set up to fail’, in difficult conditions, which made their positions precarious. Women may find that they are held responsible for poor performance caused by factors that were in place before they were promoted. The traditional acronym TMTM – think management think male – may have been replaced by TCTF – think crisis think female.

Evidence for the glass cliff phenomenon is mixed. One study, based on Fortune 500 companies, found that women are more likely to be promoted to high risk leadership positions than men, but lack the support to achieve their goals, and thus have shorter tenures compared to male colleagues (Christy Glass and Alison Cook, 2016). A study of 1,453 female directors, and 23,134 male directors of UK FTSE All Share Index companies from 1996 to 2010 also found that women have shorter tenures than male colleagues (Brian Main and Ian Gregory-Smith, 2018). But this did not mean that female directors faced a glass cliff after their appointment. Women faced a higher risk of dismissal as they approached nine years of
service on the board. The researchers argue that the appointment of a woman as an independent outside director is often symbolic, to satisfy public expectations. However, after nine years, following the UK corporate governance code, those appointments are no longer seen as independent, and have outlived their symbolic value.

Research into the appointment and tenure of 193 North American female chief executive officers between 1992 and 2014 confirmed the glass cliff hypothesis. This study found that women were indeed appointed as CEOs in situations where an organization was in financial difficulty. However, women in this study were less likely to lose their senior positions than male colleagues, who faced a higher risk of a shorter career (Eahab Elsaid and Nancy Ursel, 2018). These researchers conclude that labour market conditions have changed since the glass cliff phenomenon was first discovered. Companies now want to avoid the negative publicity that would follow the loss of a female chief executive. Perhaps the glass cliff is more secure than it once was.

We are left with two awkward possibilities. First, failure to promote women to senior management positions may be seen as a political tactic to protect male privilege. Second, the appointment of a woman to a senior role in a crisis may be symbolic, to meet public expectations, and may also be seen as a political tactic to increase her chances of failure and shorten her career.

**What’s the problem?**

Terms such as glass ceiling and glass cliff are useful labels, but they are not adequate explanations for the problem. After discrimination by men, the next easy answer is to blame women themselves: they don’t have leadership capabilities, they lack drive and ambition, they have different priorities, are too empathetic and caring, and don’t like playing politics. The easy answers are often wrong, but several commentators have nevertheless focused on women’s skills and attitudes – ‘blaming’ women for their under-representation in senior positions. For example, from a survey that included 2,500 men and women, and interviews with 30 ‘chief diversity officers’, Joanna Barsh and Lareina Yee (2011, p. 4) found that women often turn down promotion in order to stay in a role that they find motivating, from which they derive a sense of meaning, and to avoid the ‘energy-draining meetings and corporate politics at the next echelon’. From the large-scale survey by McKinsey, mentioned earlier, Rachel Thomas et al. (2018, p. 36) conclude that:

> Compared to men of the same race and ethnicity, women are less likely to aspire to be a top executive. Women and men who want to be senior leaders see the benefits differently. Women are more interested in being role models than men are, while men are more motivated by the opportunity to impact the success of their company.

In other words, if you are female and you don’t have a powerful senior role, it’s your own fault.

Observing that, ‘the millennium of equal access to leadership roles has not yet arrived’, Alice Eagly (2005, p. 470) argues that women continue to struggle with the ‘take charge, dominant male’ stereotype of leadership. Women adopting that stance, she claims, prompt others to ask, ‘should a woman behave like that?’, where ‘that’ is aggressive, assertive, competitive, clear, intense. Those values and behaviours are reserved for men; ‘Tough
female managers are often labelled with epithets such as battle axe, dragon lady, bitch, and bully broad:

If a leadership role requires highly authoritative or competitive behaviour that is perceived as masculine, the mere fact that a woman occupies the role can yield disapproval. The more confidently a woman conveys these values, the less effective she may become because of her challenge to traditional gender norms and her overturning of the expected gender hierarchy. (Eagly, 2005, p. 464)

Women who moderate their display of femininity, and who model confident, authoritative, masculine behaviours, are thus more likely to feel that they are inauthentic, unnatural, and play-acting. They are also more likely to meet with disapproval from others for failing to conform to their expectations concerning appropriate female behaviour.

Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2007) suggest that women need to develop their ‘social capital’ – by building a network of professional colleagues. Women tend not to invest time in networking due to family responsibilities, and because they may not see this as important. Networking, however, is an important political skill. We each have our own network of relationships based on a variety of social, leisure, and work settings. Used effectively, these relationships can help us to find better jobs, and get promoted. Other people can also be a source of new ideas, and they can in turn pick up ideas from us.

However, Herminia Ibarra et al. (2013; Ibarra, 2015c) argue that women and men build and use their networks in different ways. More importantly, women’s approach to networking puts them at a disadvantage in terms of influence and promotion. Ibarra found that men tend to develop networks in which the people that they approach for work-related conversation and advice are those with whom they socialize outside work. Women, in contrast, have what Ibarra calls ‘functionally differentiated’ networks, with separate work-related and social groups. Men, whose work and social networks overlap, have more opportunities to share information and develop influence. Ibarra (2015c, p. 14) puts it this way: ‘They have more clout’. With their differentiated networks, women have less access to information, and are thus less influential. Women are thus advised to be more calculating with regard to the friendships and relationships that they nurture. This means developing work-related networks that deliberately include people who can help them to achieve their goals, and who they may be able to help in return. Learning how to play golf is not essential, but may be useful in some circumstances.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

Only 32 of the senior leaders of Fortune 500 companies are women. Three of those 500 leaders are African-American, and not one is an African-American woman. Laura Morgan Roberts and colleagues (2018) decided to find out why. They studied the careers of Harvard Business School alumni focusing on 532 African-American women who graduated between 1977 and
2015. They followed the careers of 67 who had been appointed as chair, chief executive, or to another C-suite (board level) executive post, and interviewed 30 of them in depth. How had these women beaten the odds? Qualifications from prestige institutions and personal abilities are part of the answer. However, others had been willing to recognize, support, and develop those capabilities. So, what lessons can aspiring leaders take from the experiences of these successful African-American women?

One of the main challenges faced by this group is what the researchers call the visibility-invisibility conundrum – working under a microscope or feeling ignored. African-American women stood out in their organizations; they would often be the only black person in the room. This made many of them feel that they were ‘on display’, which was inhibiting but, as one said, ‘It makes you work hard to make sure you’re never misstepping’. Being hypervisible, however, often meant that others listened and paid attention. On the other hand, black women were often made to feel invisible, being mistaken for secretaries or members of the waiting staff when starting new jobs. However, some situations may be easier to access when one is not seen as a threat. One executive said, ‘Senior executives would say, “Sure, you can come in”, because they doubted me. If they had known that I was going to come in and get the jobs they wanted, they probably would have said no’.

The main lesson from this study, according to the researchers, concerns resilience. That is a well-known capability, but this group of extraordinary women relied on it heavily. They had faced obstacles and setbacks, often due to race and gender. But they bounced back, refused to be distracted, and continued to make progress. In particular, they displayed three skills key to their resilience:

- **emotional intelligence**: they became expert at reading and managing the interpersonal and political dynamics of their organizations, regulating their feelings, and avoiding over-reacting to prejudice in ways that could damage their reputations and careers.

- **authenticity**: they had deep self-awareness and were able to craft their own racial identities, which they revealed in ways that felt genuine, reinforced by candid self-disclosure and transparency about their motives and values.

- **agility**: faced with the low expectations of colleagues, they confronted obstacles and turned them into opportunities to learn and develop, and to exploit their combination of race, gender, and professional identity to make an impact.

These abilities are useful for anyone’s career, but are especially critical for members of historically disadvantaged groups. But personal attributes are not enough. The researchers conclude that:

The success of the women we studied, like that of most people, depended on their having developed relationships with people who recognized their talent, gave them a safe space in which to make and learn from mistakes, provided candid and actionable feedback about their performance, and generally made it their business to support them and create opportunities for them to succeed. Many of the women pointed to managers, mentors, and sponsors who had helped them discover and actualize their best selves. (Roberts et al., 2018, p. 131)
Exploring the experiences of 2,000 working women, research by the UK Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (2015) identified three common obstacles affecting women’s careers:

*self-confidence:* women often lack the confidence to seek promotion, argue for a pay rise, or ask for development opportunities

*working the room:* many women say that they lack networking skills, which limits their ability to get help from appropriate advisers and mentors

*embracing individuality:* pressure to ‘act like men’ and to conform to the ‘alpha female’ stereotype holds many women back.

The Institute argues that, ‘Organizations need to foster an environment in which women don’t feel the pressure to act like men – or in any other contrived way – in order to succeed. In fact, our contributors emphasized that women have unique and natural advantages in leadership that need to be celebrated’ (Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, 2015, p. 6).

Looking beyond the attitudes and capabilities of individuals, the way in which professional women are portrayed by the media in general, and films in particular, doesn’t help. These are ‘cultural scripts’ that are consumed by viewers, and which at the same time reflect, reinforce, and sustain popular stereotypes. Souha Ezzedeen (2013) studied over 100 films featuring women in senior management and professional positions. What did she find?

It is common knowledge that the media does not generally represent women in either positive or empowering ways, this being true of all forms of media. For example, most women on television are Caucasian, young, thin, and portrayed in traditional roles that suggest female inferiority. In commercials, for example, studies find that compared with men, women are less prevalent, less likely to be seen holding jobs, and even less likely be seen employed as professionals. They are also less likely to be seen as exercising authority, displaying agentic behavior, and are more likely to be pictured either in families or as sex objects. (Ezzedeen, 2013, p. 248)

Professional women, she argues, are often seen as lacking competence and ethics, accompanied with inappropriate sexual relationships at work and unstable family backgrounds. Senior females are often portrayed as the ‘bitchy boss’ who has to be taught a lesson. (Men are not necessarily portrayed in positive ways either, often being seen as sexist, lacking in character and morals, behaving as bad bosses, and making poor life choices.)

Founder of the Institute on Gender in Media, Geena Davis (2014) argues that the media fuel unconscious bias by the ways in which women are portrayed on screen. Watching children’s television, Davis was struck by the lack of female characters, prompting her to examine how gender is shown in family movies. Examining 120 films, she found that the ratio of male to female characters is 3:1, and this has not changed since the 1940s. Only 23 per cent of the films studied featured a female leading character, and only 10 per cent had a gender-balanced cast. She also observes that:

Of the characters with jobs, 81 percent are male. Female characters in G-rated animated movies wear the same amount of sexually revealing clothing as female characters in R-rated films. And even more baffling, women make up only 17 percent of characters in crowd scenes. (Davis, 2014, p. 2)
Davis concludes that ‘If women are continually depicted as one-dimensional, sidelined, stereotyped, hypersexualized, not given leadership roles or simply absent, it sends a very clear message: women and girls are not as important as men and boys. And that has an enormous impact on business and society’ (pp. 2–3). In other words, the ways in which television and movie characters are portrayed have a profound impact on how we see the world around us, our own role, and the role of others. The #MeToo movement has also drawn attention to the relatively small number of female film directors, and it will be interesting to see how this situation will change in future.

Exploring further issues beyond the control of individual women, Eddy Ng and Greg Sears (2017) found four factors that affect women’s careers, from their cross-sectoral study of 278 Canadian firms:

- **gender of the chief executive**: organizations with female CEOs had higher percentages of women in management roles
- **active recruitment of women**: the use of recruitment practices targeting women was also associated with a higher percentage of female managers
- **degree of internationalization**: there were fewer women in management roles in organizations with a significant level of internationalization
- **foreign ownership**: foreign owned firms had lower percentages of women in management roles.

With regard to the latter two factors, women are less likely to be offered international assignments, and there was a smaller proportion of women in expatriate roles than in the workforce as a whole. This may be due to a combination of domestic responsibilities, and perceptions of the acceptability of women to (probably male) managers in other countries and cultures. However, these researchers cite studies suggesting that women have capabilities that make them well-suited to international assignments, particularly with regard to building relationships.

Hazel McLaughlin et al. (2017) argue that ‘fixing women’, by encouraging them to build wider networks, increase their social capital, and enhance their motivation and ambition are inadequate solutions. They examine the micro and macro level factors that influence women’s likelihood of gaining positions of power, concluding that, ‘it is not sufficient to address the individual challenges of being a woman in business or politics’ (p. 189). Women’s progression is undermined by social and institutional biases. The micro issues acting as barriers to women include:

- the lack of role models, particularly in male-dominated occupations
- the perception of difference from those (men) in senior roles
- women are less likely to exhibit the ‘leadership motive pattern’, scoring lower in ‘power motivation’ and higher in ‘achievement motivation’
- the inconsistency that many women perceive between being a leader and being a woman
- the conscious and unconscious biases of male managers
- media accounts that suggest that women leaders should not be taken seriously – reporting on clothing and hairstyles rather than on substantive issues
It is different for women

- the double-bind where women are seen as either too cold and aggressive, or as too feminine and caring
- risk taking is viewed favourably in men, but is evaluated negatively for women as this is not consistent with stereotypical female behaviour
- bias in the executive selection process; a controlled study found that, with identically qualified male and female applicants for a management position, women were nevertheless seen as less qualified and less competent than the men in the sample, were less likely to be hired, and if they were, they were given lower salaries and fewer mentoring opportunities
- where women are not commonly found in leadership roles, those who do hold senior positions are seen as a token minority, and are judged on their gender rather than their ability.

The macro issues, in the form of biased systems and institutional barriers, include:

- the lack of support at work, meaning that many women leave before they are promoted
- women are not given as many stretch assignments as men are, to develop leadership skills, which leads to lower promotability ratings
- with fewer development opportunities, women are less visible and lack social ties
- pay disparities – lower pay signals lower ability
- men are more likely to be offered leadership roles
- women are less likely to ‘fit’ the traditional leadership stereotype, being seen instead as relationships-oriented and caring.

Confirming the bias in organizational systems, Ena Inesi and Daniel Cable (2015), in a series of studies, found that women who were perceived to be more competent (education, promotion history, past achievements) were given less favourable job evaluations by male appraisers. The researchers argue that women’s competence triggers a ‘backlash effect’: women are seen as a threat to ‘the traditional gender hierarchy’, and to the status of traditionally dominant men. For example, commanding officers in the US military gave lower ratings to female subordinates whose pay grades approached their own, even when their objective job performance was high. The same was not true for male subordinates. Consequently, even a successful track record of achievements can inhibit women’s careers as men see this as threatening their status.

To understand the lack of women in senior management positions, therefore, we have to consider a range of individual, organizational, social, and institutional factors. Listing the obstacles that women face, as we have done in this chapter, perhaps makes the challenge seem insurmountable. But many women have overcome these obstacles. Progress continues to be slow, but the proportion of women in positions of power is gradually increasing in many countries. Does the ability and willingness of women to play organization politics contribute to their success, or not?

An outdated stereotype?

With regard to organization politics, two questions dominate the discussion. The first concerns whether or not women are willing to become engaged in politics; some research and
commentary suggests that women dislike politics and, as we have seen, may reject promotion to senior positions for that reason. The second concerns whether women, when they do play politics, play a different game from men. Research suggests that they do, but that the differences may be subtle.

In examining these issues, a note of caution is necessary. Much of the available research evidence is dated. We have to question the degree to which findings from, say, 10 or 20 years ago are valid today. In an age of rapid communication through social media, attitudes, beliefs, and positions on key issues can change quickly. We therefore have to consider the evidence with a critical eye, comparing this with our own experience and judgement.

As well as considering male–female differences in the experience and use of politics, it appears that women and men disagree on the nature of the problem. Boris Groysberg and Deborah Bell (2013) report the results of a survey of 294 women and 104 men, most of whom were US company directors. The aim was to develop understanding of the differences between men’s and women’s experiences as directors. Although gender diversity is generally welcomed, the researchers found that many boards did not know how to take advantage of this. The survey asked if women brought special attributes to their role: 90 per cent of female directors said that they did, but only 56 per cent of the males agreed. The survey also asked if female directors faced gender-related problems: 87 per cent of female directors agreed, but 56 per cent of the males said no. The problems that women said they faced were different from the problems that men said that women faced (Table 5.1).

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<th>Problems that women say they face</th>
<th>Problems that men say women face</th>
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<td>not being heard and listened to</td>
<td>limited access to and acceptance on boards due to weaker networks and the old boys’ club</td>
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<tr>
<td>not accepted as an equal or part of the ‘in’ group</td>
<td>lack of experience and industry knowledge</td>
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<td>establishing credibility</td>
<td>bias and prejudice</td>
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<td>stereotyped expectations of women’s behaviour</td>
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The main concerns for female directors were not being heard and not being treated as equals; men, however, did not recognize that their female colleagues faced these problems. These sharply different perceptions and experiences interfere with relationships, and with board functioning. To improve their effectiveness, boards thus need to become more inclusive, as well as more diverse. Interestingly, compared with other commentary in this area, Groysberg and Bell (2013, p. 90) note that:

We were curious to learn about the aspirations of corporate directors, who by most standards have reached the pinnacle of career success. We found that a somewhat higher proportion of women than men (92% and 86%, respectively) described themselves as ambitious. In addition, contrary to gender stereotypes, 91% of the women versus 70% of the men reported that they enjoyed having power and influence.

Do men and women use political tactics in different ways? Deborah Tannen (1990; 1995) argued that girls and boys learn different linguistic styles – speaking patterns – which create communication barriers, and affect career prospects. Her research found that, while girls learn
to develop rapport, boys learn that status is more important. Girls focus on a group of friends, emphasizing similarities, and playing down ways in which someone could be better than others. Girls tend to be modest, less self-assured, and ostracize those who claim superiority. Boys play in large groups, emphasize status and leadership, display their knowledge and abilities, challenge others, take ‘centre stage’ by telling jokes and stories, and try to acquire status in their group by giving orders. Men thus tend to think more in hierarchical terms, and of being ‘one up’, and are more likely to jockey for position by putting others down, and by appearing confident and knowledgeable. Women are more likely to avoid putting others down, or to use behaviours that are face-saving. Women can also appear to lack self-confidence, by playing down their certainty and expressing doubt more openly. Women adopting a ‘masculine’ linguistic style can be regarded as aggressive, and attract criticism accordingly. In negotiations, women are more likely to focus on what is fair, while men concentrate on winning.

Tannen’s arguments are good today. Kathryn Heath et al. (2014) studied successful and ambitious women who said that they were not being taken seriously in critical high-level meetings. They were ignored, and found it hard to break into the conversation, so their ideas were overlooked. Some men were aware of this problem. After a meeting, one male manager said to a female colleague, ‘Stop acting like a facilitator. Start saying what you stand for’.

The researchers analysed feedback that had been collected on 1,100 female executives, surveyed 250 female managers in Fortune 500 organizations, and interviewed 65 top male and female executives from large multinational companies. This study found that, although men and women agreed on the problems, they disagreed on the causes. For example, men said that they were concerned that women would respond negatively to criticism. Women, on the other hand, complained that they did not get feedback, even when they asked for it. Men said that women should be more concise when making a point. Women said that they did not want to repackaging old ideas or to state the obvious. Men observed that women were more emotional than men, but women said that, ‘it’s not emotion – it’s passion’. Heath et al. (2014, pp. 120–121) suggest three steps to help women become more comfortable and effective in what are still male-dominated settings:

- **Groundwork**: ideas are tested, and decisions are taken in informal meetings that happen before the main meeting. That is why men often arrive for meetings early and leave late, to sound people out, and build alliances. Women also need to ‘master the pre-meeting’.

- **Preparation**: women prefer formal presentations, which men avoid. However, key points, relevant comments, and interesting questions can be written down in advance, and ‘off-the-cuff’ remarks can be rehearsed. Women should ‘prepare to speak spontaneously’.

- **Emotion control**: passion can be persuasive, but when women felt passionate about an idea, men saw ‘too much emotion’. Women must appear to be in command, speak with an even tone, accept that confrontation is not personal, and avoid signalling frustration.

The differences between women and men are not always as clear as this discussion suggests. Research findings are often expressed in terms of averages, tendencies, and predispositions. Many women do not fit the Tannen profile. And Heath et al. (2014, p. 119) suggest that ‘men with more reserved personalities’ will find their advice useful, as will members of racial and ethnic minorities.

The study reported in Chapter 2 (Buchanan, 2008) found few differences between women and men in their experiences of and attitudes towards organization politics. However, one
interesting contrast was the higher proportion of men reporting that they were both prepared to, and had indeed hurt others in order to achieve personal and organizational goals. The proportion of men answering ‘yes’ to those questions was around 30 per cent, compared with around 10 per cent of women, reinforcing ‘tough and tender’ stereotypes. However, a slightly higher proportion of women than men (55 per cent versus 45 per cent) said that their willingness to play organization politics had contributed to their career success. A tickbox questionnaire is not a sensitive measure of complex attitudes, and those results need to be interpreted with care. But taking those findings at face value, it seems that the differences between the sexes in this domain are real but subtle, and that women are just as likely to experience and to use organization politics as are their male colleagues, if in different ways.

Reviewing evidence on the use of influence tactics, Gerald Ferris et al. (2002b, p. 101) argue that men are more likely than women to use aggressive tactics, including threats, assertiveness, and drawing on their expertise. Women are more likely to use coalition-forming tactics, presumably through a greater perceived need for social support and a higher level of comfort with working in groups. One study found that men rated female speakers as more trustworthy and influential when they behaved in a tentative manner. However, many other studies have found no differences between the sexes in propensity to use influence tactics. Summarizing the broad findings of the available evidence, Ferris et al. (2002b, p. 103) make the following observations:

1. women tend to use fewer influence behaviours than do men
2. those tactics that women use most often tend to be consistent with female stereotypes
3. organizational norms reward those who use traditional ‘masculine’ influence tactics
4. women who use ‘male’ tactics may attract organizational rewards (promotion, pay rises), but may get less social support from colleagues.

Some (female) commentators argue that women should put aside their distaste for politics. Getting involved in the politics game may be tough, but not getting involved means staying put. If there is a political skills deficit, and a higher degree of distaste for political behaviour among women, then these kinds of explanations rely on individual differences. As discussed earlier, women’s access to power and organization politics is constrained by structural factors. In the second half of the last century, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1979) argued that women are rendered ‘structurally powerless’ in being restricted to routine, low-profile jobs, as well as facing discrimination in promotion decisions. Tanya Arroba and Kim Turnbull James (1988) also claimed that women lack confidence and (perceived) competence in organization politics, as well as finding political activity distasteful. However, they also argued that women have innate attributes that can be exploited to political advantage, including intuition, sensitivity, observation, and a willingness to engage with feelings. Have we progressed beyond these ‘historical’ views? Or are the arguments of Kanter, and Arroba and James still valid?

Sandi Mann (1995) argues that women are less successful in acquiring organizational power, and that this is easier for men. Organizations that encourage long working hours disadvantage women who have family responsibilities. Failure to participate socially (the late evening drinks) can also lead to exclusion. Inadequate child care facilities reduces flexibility for women. Meetings can be scheduled at times that are inaccessible for women (the early working breakfast), who can also be excluded from informal male meetings in inaccessible locations (golf course, locker room at the gym). Male conversations are often dominated
It is different for women by topics (cars, sport, particular types of jokes) in which women may not share an interest. Women are thus less likely to become involved in organization politics:

The under-representation of women in top management is due in large part to the fact that they are less likely to acquire power than their male counterparts. This may be the result of the male-dominated cultures of organizations that bias power in favour of men. Because they have access to less power, women are less likely to engage in, or make use of, organizational politics, preferring to rely on formal means to advance up the executive ladder. This political incompetence can lead to stunted career progression. The implications of this for change lie not only in relying on men to recognize the economic reasons for eliminating sources of power prejudice against women, but in women themselves who, by recognizing the important role of politics within organizations can help to redress the balance. (Mann, 1995, p. 14)

Mann (1995, p. 9) also argues that many women are deterred by the ‘politicking and power-mongering’ that tends to be an inevitable feature of management life. In this way, Mann argues, women lose out not only through failing to acquire power, but also by denying or ignoring the importance of organization politics. The power imbalance accompanied by this attitude encourages women to adopt what Mann (1995, p. 12) calls ‘innocent’ behaviours:

The innocent politician is blind to power and organizational issues, placing emphasis on rationality and the formal organization. She sees politics as unpleasant. She assumes that she can mobilize resources through formal channels and believes that promotion is gained by working hard without the need to influence others. The innocent politician believes that politics simply interfere with the processes of getting the job done.

Are women really more ‘politically innocent’ than men? Mann cites several studies suggesting that women exhibit ‘political naïveté’. For example, women appear to be less aware of the importance of organization politics, and prefer formal systems to informal networks and sources of information. Women are also less likely than men to use informal relationships, ties of loyalty, favours granted and owed, and mutual benefit and protection. Men in contrast have been found to be more proactive and successful than women in getting early information about decisions and policy shifts, and men tend to report using a wider informal network of contacts than women.

Borgen: Political Craftsmanship in Action

Borgen (2010–2013) is a Danish political thriller made for television, and is available on DVD with English subtitles. The title Borgen – ‘The Castle’ – is the nickname of Christiansborg Palace, home of the government of Denmark. This discussion is based on a short clip from series 1, episode 3.

(Continued)
Power, politics, and organizational change

Val Singh et al. (2002) report two studies of how women use impression management tactics. One involved a survey of around 260 managers, male and female, and the second was based on interviews with 19 female and 15 male management consultants. Networking, ingratiating tactics, and self-promotion were reportedly used more by men than by women. Women
It is different for women were more likely to present a ‘work-focused image’ (avoiding family topics in conversations at work), a difference particularly significant among women in senior positions. Younger and junior female managers made much less use of impression management tactics, and Singh et al. (2002) predict that young women adopting this approach were more likely to fall behind their male peers in promotion. They observe that female managers who said they used impression management tactics also said that, ‘they only started to do so after they noticed men with equivalent experience and qualifications getting more promotions’ (p. 82). This effect was more pronounced among women over 30 years of age.

FEMINISTS FOR MACHIAVELLI

I conclude, therefore, that as fortune is changeable whereas men are obstinate in their ways; men prosper so long as fortune and policy are in accord, and when there is a clash they fail. I hold strongly to this: that it is better to be impetuous than circumspect; because fortune is a woman and if she is to be submissive it is necessary to beat and coerce her. Experience shows that she is more often subdued by men who do this than by those who act coldly Always, being a woman, she favours young men, because they are less circumspect and more ardent, and because they command her with greater audacity. (Machiavelli, [1514] 1961, p. 133)

That famous quote from Chapter XXV of The Prince explains why Machiavelli has traditionally been seen as an arch misogynist. Machiavellian politics is often depicted as a masculine world of combat and domination, contrasted with a feminine world that is more cooperative, nurturing, and constructive (Hanna Pitkin, 1984). In both of his books, The Prince and The Discourses, Machiavelli uses the term ‘effeminate’ as an insult, and on several occasions discusses the problems that women cause in politics. He contrasts Princes as, ‘one man effeminate and cowardly, another fierce and courageous’ (Machiavelli, [1514] 1961, p. 91). He then argues that a Prince, ‘will be despised if he has a reputation for being fickle, frivolous, effeminate, cowardly, irresolute; a Prince should avoid this like the plague and strive to demonstrate in his actions grandeur, courage, sobriety, strength’ (Machiavelli, [1514] 1961, p. 102). The titles of two of his chapters in The Discourses have failed to endear him to feminist writers: ‘How a state is ruined because of women’, and ‘The reason why the French have been, and still are, considered braver than men at the outset of a battle, and less than women afterward’ (Chapters 26 and 36, in Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa, 1979, pp. 402 and 408).

More recently, however, a more nuanced account of Machiavelli’s views on women has emerged. Drawing on Machiavelli’s plays La Mandragola and La Clizia, Maria Falco (2004) notes that he presents powerful female role models, who operate effectively ‘behind the scenes’. Machiavelli also praises the ‘feminine’ values of prudence, and service to the greater good. He was not a sixteenth-century proto-feminist, but his more subtle and complex views on women and politics have been overlooked.

A similar argument may apply to realist views of politics which claim that, in order to attain what one might regard as a noble cause, there is a need for ruthlessness, manipulation, and
Although career planning systems are presented as rational approaches based on skills, knowledge, and experience, Singh et al. (2002, p. 78) note that, ‘Employees accepting this view may however become confused when, having done all that seemed to be required, they do not achieve the anticipated career rewards’. Women seem more likely to believe that ‘doing a good job’ is enough, and that political tactics should not be required in order to achieve. Despite those apparent gender differences, it was clear from their interview study that women understood as well as men the need to ‘read’ the organization and to ‘play the game’ in order to be recognized and to increase their promotion chances. However, while most (not all) men took this for granted, many (not all) women said that they were uncomfortable with having to behave in a self-promoting manner. Men saw networking as a key and necessary activity for building visibility and reputation. While women expressed the same views, some felt that networking was not a natural female behaviour, recognizing that a failure to network could limit their career progression. In other words, the women in this study understood ‘the rules of the game’, but some deliberately chose not to play.

The evidence for gender differences in approaches to organization politics is summarized in Table 5.2. These contrasts must be seen as broad patterns, as predispositions, or as general tendencies, which appear to confirm the cliché that ‘men are bad but bold and women are wonderful but weak’. Although based on the evidence, we have to take into account the social desirability bias in measures of political attitudes and behaviour. As some political tactics may be regarded as reprehensible, according to gendered norms, women might be less prepared to admit to using such behaviours, even though they do. We know many women who are skilled organization politicians, and we often meet men for whom political behaviour is abhorrent. Gender differences should not be confused with individual differences, and we should recognize the danger that summarizing these differences may simply reinforce inaccurate or over-generalized stereotypes.

With the focus on establishing the proportion of senior management and executive board positions occupied by women, there have been relatively few in-depth studies of the experience of women in senior management roles. One exception is the work of Lisa Mainiero (1994a, 1994b), who interviewed 55 ‘high profile’ female executives about their career histories, and in particular about the ‘key incidents’ that helped them to break through the glass ceiling and which contributed to the development of their management style. The majority of women in this study claimed that, ‘a knowledge of corporate politics had nothing to do with
their success’ (p. 7). Mainiero argues, however, that while many senior managers, men and women, variously attribute their success to hard work, dedication, luck, opportunity, and the avoidance of organization politics, the reality is often more subtle. Most of the women in this study described themselves as ‘apolitical’ and regarded politics as ‘a dirty word’. However, Mainiero reports that a careful analysis of their career histories suggested an extremely high degree of sensitivity to, and skill in playing, corporate politics. We explore Mainiero’s findings concerning how women acquire political skill in Chapter 9.

Mainiero concludes, not surprisingly, that political skill is a prerequisite to career advancement for women, as it is for men. She also notes that the women in her study were not as apolitical as they initially claimed to be:

Direct, yes. Blunt and truthful, certainly. But not necessarily apolitical. The lessons learned from seasoning incidents over the course of these executive women’s careers reveal a heightened sensitivity to, and practice of, political skill at a very high and subtle level. In the end, these women had learned enough about doing business in corporations to be considered very politically savvy indeed. (Mainiero, 1994a, pp. 19–20)

Mainiero concludes that these successful and powerful executive women displayed highly sophisticated degrees of political ability, which had enabled them effectively to ‘break the glass ceiling’, and serve as role models for other women seeking similar career profiles.

### Table 5.2 Gender stereotypes in approach to organization politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wonderful but weak female stereotype</th>
<th>Bad but bold male stereotype</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>socialized to be passive and accommodating</td>
<td>socialized to be proactive and competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politically innocent, naive</td>
<td>politically aware, skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasize rapport: ‘we’</td>
<td>emphasize status: ‘me’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strive for equity</td>
<td>seek to win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want to be liked</td>
<td>want to be one up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are less prepared to hurt others</td>
<td>are more prepared to hurt others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational power is difficult to acquire</td>
<td>organizational power is readily acquired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freely express doubt and uncertainty</td>
<td>freely express confidence and certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use passive or ‘soft’ influence tactics such as coalition forming</td>
<td>use aggressive or ‘hard’ influence tactics such as threats and assertiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use fewer influence tactics</td>
<td>use a wide range of influence tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use fewer impression management tactics</td>
<td>use many impression management tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use formal systems to get information</td>
<td>use informal systems to get information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrow network of friends and colleagues</td>
<td>wide network of friends and colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political behaviour is unnecessary</td>
<td>political behaviour is necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political behaviour is distasteful</td>
<td>political behaviour is routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>career depends on doing a good job</td>
<td>career depends on self-promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncomfortable with self-promoting behaviour</td>
<td>self-promotion taken for granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politics interferes with the job</td>
<td>politics necessary to get the job done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mainiero also argues that ‘promotability’ is a political process. As noted earlier (Singh et al., 2002), the belief that competence alone either is or should be adequate to ensure career progression is an unrealistic one. Mainiero thus observes that it is necessary to pay attention to the subtle processes through which some individuals are favoured, and she argues that it is necessary for women in particular to overcome five hurdles (Mainiero, 1994b):

1. getting assigned to a high visibility project; the ‘career maker’ assignment
2. demonstrating critical skills; delivering results, proving your worth
3. attracting top-level support; finding senior mentors – and more than one
4. displaying entrepreneurial initiative; being willing to take risks
5. accurately identifying the company culture and values; what to do, who to talk to.

The ‘high visibility project’, Mainiero notes, can ‘jump-start a fast-track career’. More than 30 per cent of the women in her study were involved in initiatives concerned with corporate innovations: new products, financial reporting systems, business acquisitions. However, she emphasizes that risk-taking on its own does not contribute to personal credibility and career progression unless the innovative new venture is perceived to be successful.

We will explore in Chapter 9 a more recent model of the development of political skill and political will, which reinforces and extends Mainiero’s findings (Elena Doldor et al., 2013; Doldor, 2017).

Before we leave this section, can we remind you of the caution at the beginning, concerning the age of some of the evidence reported here. And can we ask you to return to Table 5.2, to the stereotypes of ‘wonderful but weak’ women and ‘bad but bold’ men, and consider the question: to what extent are those stereotypes consistent with your experience? Our view is that, although we can always find some individuals – women and men – who ‘fit the profile’, those stereotypes have been overtaken by changes in social attitudes, and by changes in behaviour, and are now outdated. What is your view?

**BAD BANKS**

*Bad Banks* (2018, director Christian Schwochow) is a television series made in Germany and Luxembourg. Based in the world of finance, the programme focuses on the career of an ambitious young investment banker – a ‘structurer’ – Jana Liekam (played by Paula Beer). The structurer’s role is to design financial products tailored to specific client needs with regard to risk management. In the opening episode, Jana is fired from her job at Crédit International (CI); her ‘mistake’ was to appear to be smarter than her boss, Luc Jacoby (Marc Limpach) in a meeting with clients. Luc was furious. (We discover that it is not hard to be smarter than Luc.) We see Luc helping in a soup kitchen for the homeless before going to work. Nice guy? He is doing community service for cocaine possession.

One of the financial products on which Jana has been working is a ‘catastrophe bond’. Cat bonds are risk-linked securities that transfer a specified set of risks from a sponsor to investors. Believing that it was Luc who cost her the job at CI, she gets revenge before leaving by making him look foolish when trying to sell the cat bond to a major investor. She does this by inventing a fictitious feature of the cat bond – the ‘cash sweep enhancement’. She makes sure that the
It is different for women

If you don’t play, you can’t win

What are the implications for women seeking to develop and to use political skill to pursue a combination of personal career and organizational objectives?

To address the political skills deficit, Pamela Perrewé and Debra Nelson (2004) advocate mentoring and executive coaching for aspiring female senior managers. Mentors, they suggest, can offer advice, open up access to new networks, influence promotion decisions, and

• Is this an unacceptable ‘dirty trick’? Or was Jana justified in taking revenge on Luc?

Having been fired, to Jana’s surprise, she is then offered her ‘dream job’ in Frankfurt, working for the charismatic finance wizard Gabriel Fenger (Barry Atsma), head of investment banking at Deutsche Global Invest. She discovers that it was not Luc who had her removed from her job at CI, but Christelle Leblanc (Désirée Nosbusch), her former boss. But Christelle arranged for Jana to get the position at DGI. Christelle also gives Jana advance inside information about a major new urban development project that needs refinancing. In return for promoting Jana’s career in these ways, Christelle expects her to reveal commercially sensitive information about DGI. Christelle explains to Jana: ‘Your career depends on your network, not your bank. I’m part of your network’.

• Is it reasonable for Christelle to expect inside information in return for saving Jana’s career?
• How effectively does Jana develop her network in the finance sector?

Jana discovers that DGI has been selling badly performing products to one of its own subsidiaries, a shell company in Bahrain, in order to hide the losses. This is illegal. Christelle wants Jana to give her the evidence — to discredit Gabriel so that she can take his job.

• Should Jana remain loyal to her employer and keep those product sales secret? Should she pass the evidence to Christelle? Should she make this information public? What are the consequences for Jana of each of these actions? What does she decide to do?
• Who is controlling the political game? Jana, Gabriel, or Christelle?
• What ‘power tells’ does Gabriel use to manipulate those around him?

Jana does not fit the traditional female stereotype of ‘wonderful but weak’ when it comes to organization politics. She is a ruthless political player, and she puts her job and her career before her family. What other tactics does she use in this series to protect and promote her career?

• But Jana Liekam is a fictional character. Would you expect to find people like Jana in real life — or is her character exaggerated for entertainment purposes?
• Fiction or not, is Jana a role model to copy, or should we regard her political behaviour as unacceptable, in any sector?

If you don’t play, you can’t win

What are the implications for women seeking to develop and to use political skill to pursue a combination of personal career and organizational objectives?

To address the political skills deficit, Pamela Perrewé and Debra Nelson (2004) advocate mentoring and executive coaching for aspiring female senior managers. Mentors, they suggest, can offer advice, open up access to new networks, influence promotion decisions, and
'run interference' to help apprentices overcome obstacles. These relationships can be mutually beneficial, as both parties increase their visibility and reputations. They note, however, that the literature on corporate mentoring rarely mentions the development of political skill. At senior levels, as political skills become more important, executive coaching by external and internal consultants and advisers may be particularly valuable. In these settings, political skill is often a key focus, and individually tailored executive coaching can be a valuable approach. The main point is that, while the acquisition and use of political skill may be related to personality, and perhaps also gender, we are dealing with approaches, behaviours, tactics, and methods that are relatively well-understood and which can be learned and developed with appropriate training and experience.

Supporting the use of mentoring, in an ‘executive commentary’ on Mainiero’s article (1994b, p. 65), Addie Perkins Williamson comments that, ‘One challenge many women face is spending sufficient time with their mentor yet making sure the mentor relationship is not misinterpreted as something more intimate’. She continues: ‘It is also critical for women [in senior executive positions] to ask for and receive “no quarter”. In other words don’t expect any breaks. The competition is fierce at this level and no excuses are acceptable. Most men sincerely feel that they are making tremendous sacrifices to get to the top and bitterly resent anyone, particularly a woman, who seems to move ahead as quickly without having to do so’.

Several commentators predict that women will assume more leadership positions because they score higher on transformational leadership attributes involving motivation and support. Men tend to score higher on transactional leadership characteristics with an emphasis on traditional command-and-control. Shere Hite (2000) advocates a new ‘emotional-psychological landscape’, based on the familiar argument that it is sexual politics that prevents women reaching senior management positions. Her research shows that male executives often admire female managers for:

- relative indifference to status symbols
- not playing office politics
- innovative ways of thinking
- understanding of service industries
- higher intellectual achievements
- greater productivity
- soft skills such as communication and networking.

However, Hite also claims that women attract male criticism for taking time off work to have children, for not fighting hard enough for power, for not making themselves visible, and for disliking the cut and thrust of the competition that drives organization politics. Val Singh et al. (2002) suggest that, if women were to copy their male colleagues, they would perhaps consider making more use of political tactics such as:

- ingratiating, building their relationships with superiors
- window dressing, displaying their competence
- taking credit for achievements beyond their contribution
- keen, ready, and attentive body language
- adopting the style and mannerisms of the next management level up
- the instrumental use of networking, including women’s networks
It is different for women

- good organization citizenship behaviour such as conscientiousness and courtesy
- actively repairing damage to their image
- volunteering for extra responsibility.

### NICE GIRLS DON’T GET THE CORNER OFFICE

Lois Frankel (2004) argues that girls are taught that success depends on acting in stereotypical ways: being polite, soft-spoken, compliant, and relationship-oriented. While ‘girlish charm’ can be influential, less direct and less confrontational ways of wielding power prevent women from increasing their organizational visibility and influence. In addition, many women view the whole idea of ‘the game of business’ as unpleasant, dirty, and to be avoided at all costs. They tend to play safe rather than play smart, obey the rules, and expect others to do the same: ‘If the policy says don’t do it, then it can’t be done. If it might upset someone, she doesn’t do it. You never want to act unethically, but it is a game—and one you want to win. To do so you have to use the entire field available to you’. Frankel argues that women sabotage their careers through unconscious mistakes which inhibit their promotion chances. Here are fifteen of the 101 mistakes that Frankel identifies:

1. Pretending it isn’t a game.
2. Avoiding office politics.
3. Needing to be liked.
4. Acting like a man.
5. Letting people waste their time.
6. Ignoring the importance of network relationships.
7. Making up negative stories.
8. Minimizing their work or position.
9. Giving away their ideas.
10. Couching statements as questions.
11. Smiling inappropriately.
13. Wearing their reading glasses round their neck.
14. Using only their nickname or first name.
15. Taking notes, getting coffee, and making copies.

Which of these mistakes (with the possible exception of number 4), and the advice that they should be avoided, do not apply to men? Nice boys don’t get the corner office either.

Love or hate organization politics, the evidence suggests that political skill is as important to career progression for women as it is for men. In a study of 140 female law graduates working in American law firms, Marla Watkins and Alexis Smith (2011) found that women working in these male-dominated organizations were more likely to be in positions of power and authority if they had high levels of political skill (see Chapter 9 for a discussion of how political skill can be measured). They conclude that,
‘women with political skill who have an understanding of the gender-based, interpersonal related challenges that may emerge in male-dominated organizations likely gives them an advantage over women who do not have political skill in terms of advancing to positions with authority’ (p. 208).

In summary, there are two over-riding considerations concerning the use of organization politics, one obvious, and one more subtle, for women pursuing management careers. The obvious conclusion is that women in management roles need to be, or need to become, politically skilled. If you don’t play, you can’t win. The ambitious woman who finds politics distasteful, or who is uncomfortable with political behaviour – as indeed many men are – has to overcome that dislike. There is no escaping the need to address the political skills deficiency (should that deficit exist in the first place). This is necessary in order to be able to deal with the political tactics deployed by male managers, and perhaps increasingly to deal with the tactics used by other women in management roles. There is no credible or effective ‘politics-free’ strategy for women to adopt. Female and male managers have to recognize the significant shaping role that organization politics plays in relation to personal visibility, career, and reputation, and with respect to the implementation of change and innovation.

The second and more intriguing consideration concerns the suggestion that women ‘finesse the game’. While women are presumably pursuing the same personal and organizational management goals as men, using the same political tactics, there are dimensions of political skill and behaviour where women may have considerable comparative advantage. Clearly there are many settings in which the use of so-called ‘soft’ feminine attributes – compassion, collaboration, accommodation, nurturing, caring – can be just as effective when used as political tactics to influence the behaviour of others (perhaps especially men) as can ‘harder’ male tactics. Can women develop an effective approach to organization politics that uses, where appropriate, approaches and tactics similar to those that men use, but which also deploys distinct perspectives and methods? If that were the case, many male managers could struggle to work out how to respond.

**Follow through**

**Not till the lady leaves**

This incident is based on the autobiography of Carly Fiorina (2006), the first female chief executive of a Fortune 20 company, Hewlett-Packard.

You’ve just graduated from the company management development programme for ‘high flying’ university graduates, and you’ve been assigned to your first role, as a sales team member, in a successful division which provides government communications services. Your boss, David, is not welcoming, and gives you a stack of paperwork, which you are still reading at the end of the week. Talking to your new colleagues, you discover that your boss is having an affair with a colleague in another department, so he doesn’t have much time for you. Marie, the only other woman on the team, is prepared to offer advice. David manages one of the team’s largest clients, servicing a large national communications network. You are assigned to ‘co-manage’ this client with him. David thinks this is a bad idea. Two of the client’s regional (male) managers, who decide on major purchases, are planning a visit. You ask if you can join them, and David agrees. However, the day before the meeting, David explains
that you will not be able to join them after all, because the clients have specifically requested that they meet at their ‘favourite restaurant’. You are confused, until Marie explains that this is a strip club, with table dancing during dinner. You know when and where they are meeting, and you are embarrassed and anxious.

What would you do? Your choices are:

1. This is just one meeting. It doesn’t matter. Don’t go.
2. Express outrage and insist that they hold the meeting somewhere else.
3. Tell David that you’re coming anyway and that you’ll meet them there.

Fiorina chooses option 3. She wears a conservative business suit, and carries her briefcase. At the ‘restaurant’, she has to walk in front of the stage, where about a dozen women are performing, in order to reach the client group. She tries to sound relaxed and knowledgeable, ignoring the show, while David continues drinking and asking the women to come and dance on their table. All of the women who approach their table say, ‘Sorry gentlemen. Not till the lady leaves’. The meeting lasts several hours. The client’s business is secured.

Fiorina (2006, p. 31) concludes:

After a few hours, having made my point, I left them all there. They heaved a sigh of relief, I’m sure, but the next day in the office, the balance of power had shifted perceptibly. I had shown David that I would not be intimidated, even if I was terrified. [...] I truly cared about doing my job even when it meant working in difficult circumstances. Having tried to diminish me, David was himself diminished. He was embarrassed. And Bill [one of the other team members] decided that he would take me under his wing and help me succeed. We cannot always choose the hurdles we must overcome, but we can choose how we overcome them.

Organization politics at the movies: Elizabeth

Excuse me, Madam, but you’re only a woman. (Sir William Cecil)

The movie Elizabeth (1998, director Shekhar Kapur) tells the story of the early years of Queen Elizabeth I of England, as she learns to be a monarch, as she learns to become a leader. She is an intelligent and well-educated lady, but she is a woman in a man’s world, where women are regarded as inferior. The country which she inherits in 1558, at the age of 25, is poor, internationally weak, threatened by France and Spain, and driven to the point of civil war by religious division between Protestant and Catholic. Elizabeth, a Protestant, inherits the throne from her Catholic half-sister Queen Mary (both daughters of Henry VIII by different wives). Bloody Mary, who burnt at the stake many Protestants, was advised to execute Elizabeth for heresy, but she resisted the temptation. However, this meant that Queen Elizabeth was confronted with threats to her position from powerful Catholic opponents.

By the end of her reign, England has a strong currency, is politically and religiously stable, and has regained its standing in the international community, having defeated the huge invading Armada force of Philip of Spain in 1588. England now also has a thriving culture of literature, theatre, and music. Not only does she transform the country’s social, economic, and cultural fortunes, she created an age – the Elizabethan Age. How did she do it?
Power, politics, and organizational change

- **Political skill**: what argument (thesis) or arguments about appropriate and effective political behaviour and tactics does this movie support?
- **Becoming a leader**: in what ways does the movie illustrate the process of developing leadership and political skills, competencies, behaviours, style?
- **Context specific**: in what ways are these arguments unique to the social, cultural, economic, political, and gender-specific context facing Elizabeth?

Note how Elizabeth demonstrates the use of impression management techniques, particularly, and most powerfully, in her appearance at the end of the movie. The movie raises other issues concerning the manipulative treatment of friends and enemies, and the use of advisers.

A Prince should never flinch from acts of ruthlessness which are necessary for safeguarding the state, and their own person. You must take these things so much to heart that you do not fear to strike, even the very nearest that you have, if they be implicated.

(Sir Francis Walsingham)

There is no shortage of literature for those with an interest in the Elizabethan Age and its characters. For those interested in Elizabeth as a female change agent with impression management and other political skills, the following are useful:

