

# **Keys to Success**

How organisations can open the door for women



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## Greek-Dutch co-operation in Ariadne

Within the European EQUAL programme, the Greek organisation KETHI co-operates with the Dutch organisation Mixed. De Greek/Dutch co-operation is called 'Ariadne' and aims to exchange information, and to develop instruments and brings networks of relevant people and organisations together. Keys to success is one of the products of the Greek/Dutch co-operation.

## Greece: Andromeda

The Andromeda Network Project is an initiative of the Research Center for Gender Equality (KETHI). The network was established in 2000 and brings together women's support structures from different parts of the country, with the purpose of promoting gender equality in the labour market.

The Andromeda Network Project attempts to overcome gender segregation in the labour market. It focuses on the implementation of strategies for change at the level of companies through well-designed and complementary actions, by:

- development of innovative and effective approaches to labour market segregation;
- further adoption and integration of suggested policy improvements at a regional and/or national level.

More specifically the project:

- supports enterprises in the process of mainstreaming equal opportunities within their organisations and detecting and fighting possible inequalities between men and women;
- provides supporting information and consultation services focused on employment and/ or self-employment in new economic sectors and sectors in which women are under-represented;
- supports networking of organisations that provide educational and vocational training;
- evaluates existing educational tools and helps create new ones.



## The Netherlands: Mixed

Mixed is a Dutch programme that supports the promotion of women into higher positions in the workforce. Mixed is a co-operation between the Directorate General Emancipation policy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and seven expert organisations. As part of the programme, individual projects are carried out in various companies and non-profit organisations in the Netherlands.

The main objectives of Mixed are to:

- develop, disseminate and monitor instruments that promote the advancement of women into higher-level positions in the workforce;
- place and maintain this subject on the corporate agenda.

Mixed is aimed at companies and public labour organisations, and it offers them several possibilities to actively work on the promotion of women into higher positions. The project part named Talent focuses on individual female employees who wish to further their careers. *Culture and Organisation* focuses on the companies and organisations. Institutionalisation seeks to establish good practices for the advancement of female employees in businesses and organisations. Thirty diverse companies and organisations are currently participating in the Mixed programme. They are experimenting with management development courses, coaching in the art sector, e-mail coaching, mentoring, culture diagnosis, work/life courses, part-time work diagnosis and institutionalisation of equal opportunities in companies.



Gatekeeping mechanisms:

## Women don't get to the top just like that

Women senior executives are still a rarity in Greece as well as in the Netherlands. Less than ten percent of senior civil servants are women, and the number of women managers is smaller still. Much has been written about why this is so, in particular about the practical obstacles that keep women from getting to the top (limited access to childcare, few part-time executive positions, etc.). Researchers have also identified organisational culture as an obstacle to women's careers. Especially in Greece, where the management style has not yet widely modernised, the organisation of work is still operating in a traditional mode leaving small room for diversity management. The latter offers more opportunities for women to strategically plan their professional careers.

These aren't the only explanations, however. Women intent on a career also come up against prevailing notions about men and women's roles, gender stereotypes, and their own tendency to avoid the spotlight. What we are talking about here are "gatekeeping" mechanisms, the more subtle, less visible barriers that organisations – and women themselves – place in their way. Gatekeeping mechanisms occur in Greece as well as they occur in the Netherlands.

In *Keys to Success*, we describe several mechanisms that make it hard for women to move up the organisational ladder or even prevent them from doing so entirely. We also show how organisations can dismantle such mechanisms and throw open the door to career women: in Greece and in the Netherlands. This publication is intended for companies and other organisations that would like to increase the number of female executives but do not see what is preventing their being promoted to the upper ranks. Managers who are open to new ideas about recruiting and selecting women will find useful and practical advice in *Keys to Success*.

Organisations that only recruit men for top positions are cheating themselves out of many talented managers and executives. Moreover, mixed-gender management teams can be highly effective, not because women are better than men but because they sometimes see things from a different perspective. Men and women can learn a lot from one another. An organisation that promotes women's careers also projects a positive image of itself as a modern company with an innovative personnel policy aimed at shattering the glass ceiling.

It's become clear in the past few years that women don't get to the top just like that. Organisations that want to shatter the glass ceiling will have to work at it. We hope that *Keys to Success* will give them some of the tools they need to do so.

One of my basic beliefs is that it is important to incorporate a high degree of diversity in one's team. It encourages creativity and thereby improves the chances for growth. Various studies have confirmed this link.

Male and female characteristics provide opposite strengths that can compliment each other. Combining the two can therefore significantly increase the organisation's possibilities. This added value is being recognised by an increasing number of our own people.

Information Technology  
Company, The Netherlands,  
Lead Resource Management  
Manager

# Stick to the facts

Women have joined the workforce in increasing numbers in the past ten years, and they are now likely to represent a sizeable share of many organisations' employees. What's also likely, though, is that their employers believe that merely having women on staff is enough.

More and more women go out to work, but there are very few of them in upper management or executive positions. In the Netherlands for example, only five percent of the corporate officers in the hundred largest companies are women.

Organisations that generalise by saying "we employ lots of women" may be distorting the reality. If we look at the breakdown of men and women in the various positions, salary scales, and departments, we see that women are not represented proportionally at all levels and in all positions, or that they account for only a tiny minority of employees in some departments.

Organisations that want more women in senior positions but do not have the figures to measure their progress will have difficulty putting together a suitable policy to promote women's careers, mainly because they are not aware of the size of the problem to begin with.

## Example

The percentage of women in company X has risen nicely from 15 percent in 2001 to 18 percent in 2002 and to 20 percent in 2003. That certainly looks like a positive trend, but when the personnel officer analyses the percentage of women in each job scale, the picture looks somewhat different:

Percentage of women per job scale

Schaal	2002	2003
20	34%	35%
30	39%	41%
40	36%	38%
50	27%	18%
60	11%	14%
70	6%	7%
80	2%	1%
90	0%	0%

The glass ceiling is in fact between scales 40 and 50, and the percentage of women drops dramatically in the three highest scales. The problem lies in the transition from project manager to team manager and from team manager to department head. Few women make the transition.

We really do recognise the pitfall of thinking women are being well represented within the organisation. We have to take care that the interest and motivation for M/F diversity doesn't fade away. People might easily say: "Isn't this what we have been doing all along"? We think a persistent attention and effort for diversity management is very important. We haven't reached our goals yet and we would like to broaden our diversity policy. That's why we think our diversity should be embedded in the organisation. Embedding means that while we are developing and implementing policies, there is a continuous incentive to check how different groups of employees are affected by these policies. A yearly 'diversity report' including facts and figures plays a crucial role in our diversity management. It can either be a reason for actualisation of our policies or a means to benchmark departments' diversity performance.

Insurance Company the Netherlands, Head of HRM Group

## Keys to success

For a realistic picture of the position occupied by women in an organisation, we need to analyse the staffing figures, so that we know the salary scale, position and gender of all employees. This will clarify where women are in the organisation – and where they are not. Once we have identified at which salary scale the percentage of female employees drops off sharply, we know precisely where the glass ceiling is located. It is also important to know how many women join or leave the organisation compared to the number of men.

### Glass Ceiling Index

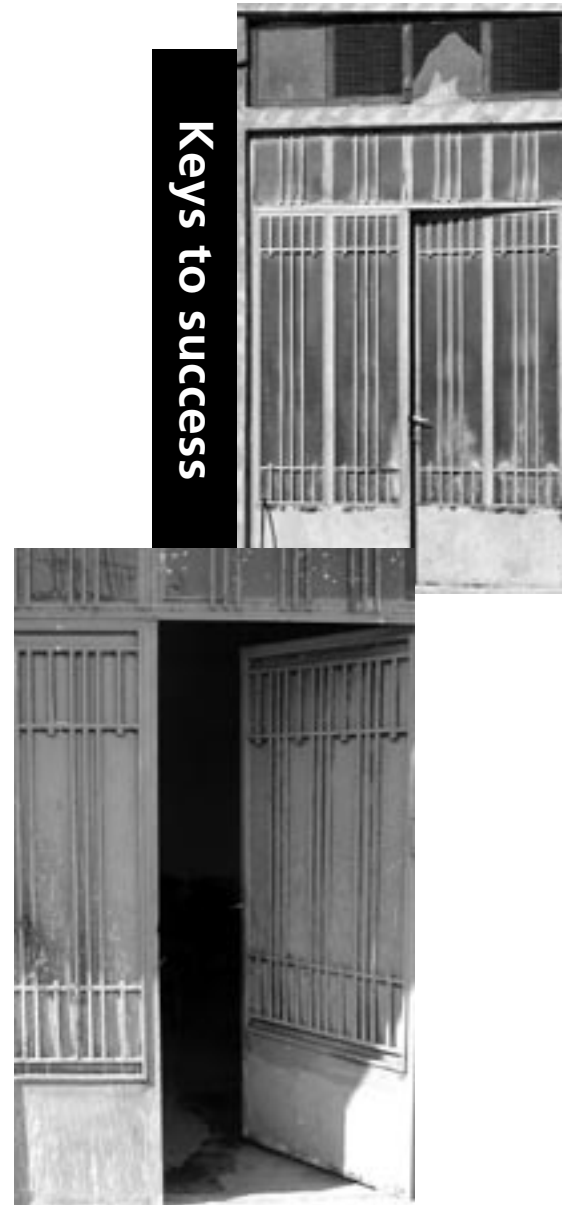
The density of the glass ceiling can be measured. It indicates the discrepancy between the percentage of women in two successive job levels compared with the percentage of women in the lower of the two levels (in other words: the pool of candidates for the more senior position). The formula is: Glass Ceiling Index =  $100 \times (b-a)/b$ , where b stands for a job level and a for the job level just above it.

In the example on the left page, the Glass Ceiling Index between scale 40 and 50 is  $100 \times 38-18/38 = 52.6$ . The index always produces a figure between 0 and 100. The higher the figure, the denser the glass ceiling. In the Netherlands, a Glass Ceiling benchmark had been developed, to enable companies to compare the thickness of their glass ceiling with that of other companies. For each sector or branch average glass ceiling indices can be used as benchmarks.

The company's participation in European and International Benchmarking Mechanisms, like the European Social Responsibility Network – among others – has resulted in its strong commitment to its customers to act responsibly (both internally and externally)! This simply means that facts and numbers regarding the position of working men and women throughout the company have become a cornerstone of our human resources and especially equal opportunity policies!

Bank, Greece, Head of Equal Opportunity Policies

Keys to success



# Invisible talent

Women do not showcase their talents and achievements enough, and as a result their contribution often remains invisible. But there isn't much status in working behind the scenes, no matter how important the job is.

Women's talents are often less conspicuous than men's. The problem is that women are the victims of their own traditional modesty. They are not much inclined to blow their own trumpet. They tend to gravitate towards work that they find interesting, even if that means playing a supporting role. As a result, their work often goes unnoticed.

When a woman brings a project to a successful close, she is not likely to take the credit for it. She will be more inclined to attribute her success to the team's efforts and to point out the contributions made by her colleagues. She would rather avoid the spotlight – it's safer, and you're less likely to be criticised if you don't stick your head above the parapet.

Men tackle things very differently. They take credit for their share of the work and use it to raise their profile. They are not as inclined to think about the people working behind the scenes, the ones who remain invisible. They are also more likely to take on status-enhancing projects. They are not afraid to stick their necks out and show what they are capable of.

Another reason why women's achievements often remain invisible to others is that their contribution is viewed not as the product of their talent but of their feminine qualities. For example, a male employee who visits a sick colleague is praised for his generosity of spirit, but a female employee who has spent many hours listening to that same sick employee's troubles is only doing what women do naturally.

Female executives are often, quite literally, invisible in communication tools such as staff newsletters, promotional magazines, and advertisements. They are simply not pictured, or only as supporting players.

In our organisation which is a technical one, women have struggled to gain a position in technical oriented work, like for instance train drivers. It is quite hard for them to prove – especially male colleagues – that they are capable of doing such a job.

Being in these posts for just a few years now, they don't even think of trying to get a higher, managerial position. They have no energy left to "fight" for promotion. Still they have done it so well so far, that I am convinced that if we undertake further initiatives to support them, they will take on more challenging responsibilities in future.

Transport company, Greece, Personnel Manager

## Keys to success

- Urge women to communicate what their contribution has been.
- Make clear who has achieved what in each project.
- Challenge women to be ambitious. Encourage them to choose high-profile projects that will enhance their status.
- Have employees rotate duties, roles, and areas of work, so that everyone has a chance to take on new challenges and get themselves noticed. Try to get beyond the employees' own preferences when dividing up the work.
- Don't let the same people dominate every meeting. Plan each meeting carefully and ask low-profile employees to prepare points on the agenda.
- Women are unlikely to showcase their talents themselves. Ask male managers to specify the talents of their female colleagues.
- Watch your language when it comes to talking about women's achievements. Don't describe their leadership qualities in gender-stereotypical terms such as "supportive" and "caring".
- Devote training and coaching sessions to such topics as self-promotion and performing in public.
- Pay attention to the impression you make in your internal and external communication. Make sure that women feature in images and text.

Keys to success

In our organisation, too, women mainly perform supportive tasks. There are two reasons for this. In the first place, many women in our organisation work part-time, managers are implicitly expected to be available 24 hours a day. This unspoken rule encourages women to avoid managerial tasks. In the second place the organisation thinks supportive tasks suit women best: women are thought to be more precise and have a better feeling for it. Because of this narrow-minded view on the contribution of women, other qualities often remain invisible. I try to make people aware of this: Have a better look at how women perform in your department. What strikes you? In what situations do women perform at their best and how we can make use of this potential? At the same time I am aware that women should change their attitude, in order to make their competencies more visible. Women should be more independent and showcase their talents themselves.

Cleaning Service, the Netherlands, Quality Manager



# Risk-avoidance behaviour

If you want to get to the top, you have to be prepared to take risks. That's not something most women like to do, however. They may have a positive view of their own abilities, but as soon as there's talk of promotion, they become hesitant.

Women tend to be less confident than men. They show it by avoiding risk; they are less likely to take on challenging and status-enhancing jobs. That then means that they have fewer opportunities to build up their self-confidence – so the vicious circle starts all over again.

As far as self-confidence goes, the difference between males and females starts early on in life. Boys are more likely to stick their necks out, and in doing so they learn what it's like to fail. Girls are more cautious. They would rather not risk failure and are less adventurous as a result. If a boy and a girl play a computer game together, the boy will immediately claim the mouse and try everything out. The girl will watch him. Boys' and girls' behaviour is reaffirmed by their parents and their school. Boys are encouraged to be self-assured and ambitious, whereas girls are taught to wait their turn; they also tend to seek the approval of their teachers and parents more than boys, making them even more afraid of failing.

Because women have low expectations of themselves, they are less likely than men to step into the limelight or to put themselves forward as a candidate for an interesting job. Moreover, senior management positions tend to be held by men. As a result, women may feel that they need to display different – more masculine – behaviour in such positions, something that further undermines their self-confidence.

The latest trends in career counselling place the initiative for career advances squarely with the employees themselves. In other words: if you want to get ahead, you have to stick your neck out. And that is precisely what may well keep women from moving up.

...Female employees – especially those in lower management positions – experience a subconscious and latent fear not to provoke or even threaten, the existing power gender system in the company... Many of them feel that they must not make further demands, nor express their ambitions, as they will be isolated and even challenged from both sides, that is, by both their male and female colleagues! This is the risk they wish to avoid, not the risk of obtaining the greater responsibilities associated with a higher position!

Women's Career Development Course, KETHI, Greece

## Keys to success

- To encourage women to be more self-confident, it's important that someone sees and specifically identifies their positive characteristics. Realising that women are more inclined than men to question their own abilities is already a major step forward.
- Ensure that women assess the work they could do with an eye to self-development and self-promotion.
- It's helpful to give women a relatively safe environment within the company where they can experiment with managing others and working on larger projects.
- Women are not likely to put themselves forward for executive positions. You must specifically invite them to do so and tell them why they are suitable. Do take their doubts and uncertainties seriously, however.
- A proactive system of career support will have a positive effect on women's careers.
- A coach can help women build up their self-confidence.
- Female role models in senior executive positions make it easier for other women to claim the spotlight.

### MD programme

It is possible to achieve gender diversity at the top of an organisation in a reasonably short period of time. A number of companies have found that Management Development programmes for female “high potentials” produce positive results. The women selected for such programmes are first assessed to see whether they have the management competencies their organisation requires. They then work on any areas in which they fall short through a combination of training, coaching, and intervision. They are also given an assignment to carry out; this allows them to gain the necessary experience and qualify as a manager. Another option is to assign them a mentor, who introduces them to new networks, gives them career tips and imparts any lessons he or she has learned. The highly specific, systematic approach taken in MD programmes throws the spotlight on women and ensures that both they and the organisations they work for see them as management material.

We thought one of our female colleagues would perfectly fit a co-ordinating position, but she didn't seem to have the ambition to apply for it. That's why we decided to ask her to take the job, but on a temporary basis. In this way she had the opportunity to experiment with her new tasks. After the experimental period she decided to stay on the job.

Consultancy, The Netherlands, director

# A preference for part-time jobs

Many women prefer to work part-time, but organisations often regard executive positions as unsuitable for part-time work. They also consider part-time employees to be less committed.

Research shows that women are more likely than men to be concerned about the work/life balance. That's not to say that they are less ambitious than men, but – despite all the publicity campaigns – much of the housework and care tasks still fall to them. The need to work fewer hours or part-time depends to a great extent on the women's life cycle. It involves a professional choice during a certain period in their lives when their children are in the dependency age. Especially in the Netherlands, many highly educated women choose to work part-time (about 30 hours a week), but this type of work/life strategy can be a disadvantage when it comes to being promoted to management positions. The prevailing notion is that managers have to be available full time. It would be inconvenient if the boss was not at work every day. Besides, is someone who wants to work part-time really committed enough? Qualities that employees cultivate outside working hours are usually overlooked or undervalued.

## Example

A large ICT company employed a number of highly skilled and ambitious female consultants. After about five years with the company, they were qualified to move up to a supervisory position. By that time, however, they were starting to want to have children. They wanted the promotion, but only if they could work four days instead of five. The company's management rejected the idea because it wanted its supervisors to be on call for clients full time. The management turned down the request to work part-time and so the women left the company. That meant a career break for them, and the loss of know-how and experience for the company.

“Unlike most other countries in the EU, Greece lacks a complete and conscious policy for the reconciliation of work with family life. These two factors remain strongly separated, which creates a limited (if not suffocating) environment characterised by an inflexible social security system, inflexible working forms, and the continued prevalence of traditional ideas regarding the social roles of both men and women, within and outside the family”

A. Mouriki, National Thematic Network “Reconciliation of work and family life”, Greece

*“A manager must be available full time”*

## Keys to success

How can a company prevent competent women who want to work part-time from passing up a promotion or even from leaving the organisation?

The first step is to find out why the employee wants to work part-time. The question is whether part-time work is always the best solution or whether some other form of leave or support might be more suitable. What does the employee mean by part-time? How many hours would she like to work? Can she be flexible about it? And what category of part-time work does she mean, precisely?

The next step is to look at the employee's direct working environment. What impact will working part-time have on her position? What about availability and accessibility? Are there any other employees in similar positions who work part-time, and if so, how has that turned out in practical terms? How does the employee herself think she should deal with the objections?

It's usually possible to find a satisfactory answer if both sides work together. If the manager really has to come in every day to check on progress, why not create a part-time job of thirty or thirty-two hours a week spread over five days? It's as well to note that the better trained the manager's subordinates are, the less she will need to check up on them every day. Another option is to work four full days, or even four days of less than eight hours. It's up to the organisation to set a minimum working week for managers. Finally, there's "duo-management", still fairly uncommon, whereby two people share responsibility for a specific unit or product. This is only an option if the two managers make firm agreements with each other about who does what and when.

### Planning and delegating

Managers have to plan carefully to cover periods when they are away from their desks. They have to be accommodating and make clear when and where they can be reached. No one benefits from an inflexible attitude. Some duties can and should be delegated to subordinates, and in fact doing so can make their jobs more interesting. It even may be necessary to appoint an official deputy.

Keys to success



# Cultural aspects of the organisation

Many women who want a career believe their progress is impeded by the “male-dominated culture” in the upper echelons of the organisation, typified by one-upmanship, reluctance to express uncertainty, and long working hours.

We have learned that implementation of a diversity policy has a positive impact on the culture and climate of an organisation. Working on the climate of an organisation is difficult to qualify with targets: there is no clear-cut way to proceed. Diversity targets are much more concrete: our goal, for example, is to ensure that 25% of management level positions are filled by women. It is generally acknowledged that diversity is good for the organisational climate, so diversity targets are also used for improving the climate.

Information Technology Company,  
The Netherlands, Lead Resource  
Management Manager

What values are important in your organisation? Is it “every man for himself”, or is teamwork the key? Are employees rewarded for toeing the line, or for marching to the beat of their own drum? Do they work under pressure and put in long hours, or are they encouraged to have a life outside the company? All these things go into making an organisational culture – the standards, values and customs that define an organisation.

When an organisation has numerous male executives, a male-dominated culture will generally prevail in the upper echelons, squeezing out the more feminine values such as solidarity, giving positive feedback, finding the right work/life balance, showing uncertainty, and sharing emotions. Women feel less at home in a male-dominated culture and may question whether they really want to climb up the organisational ladder.

An organisation’s culture also determines its image of the ideal manager. If that image reflects typically masculine values, such as competitiveness, one-upmanship, a visible presence, and long working hours, women will have fewer opportunities to move into management positions, because men will be thought to fit the profile better than they do, or because other desirable characteristics, such as a coaching management style, are ignored.

The process is a cumulative one. Because women do not feel at ease in certain organisational cultures, they are more likely to interpret situations or men’s opinions as negative. The distrust increases on both sides.

“Our female colleagues are capable of doing almost all kind of jobs and at all levels of the hierarchy within this company. Still, we must keep in mind that women are born to become mothers and this is what families as well as society as a whole needs! We cannot reverse our roles as we would then risk losing our identities...”

Representative of the Company’s Employees Union, Greece

## Keys to success

Employees tend to be subconsciously rather than consciously aware of their organisation's culture, and the values and norms are tacit rather than explicit. It is therefore important for organisations to recognise that their culture may be a barrier, and perhaps a bigger barrier for women than for men. The next task is to make the existing culture visible: how do employees describe the culture of the organisation, how do they feel about it? There are various tools that can help organisations do this. Once the existing culture has been analysed, it is possible to determine whether certain aspects of that culture prevent women from moving up the ladder.

Comparing the organisation's existing culture with an ideal culture makes improvement possible. There are many different ways of inducing a process of cultural change, for example organising training sessions in gender-awareness, establishing rules for banishing prejudices, and paying particular attention to cultural aspects in job profiles. Because cultural change does not happen overnight, though, it's important to support women who work in a male-dominated culture by coaching or mentoring them.

Keys to success



### Example

The Organisational Culture Inventory (OCI) is used to describe an organisation's culture. It maps out the behavioural patterns within an organisation and breaks them down into three different cultural styles:

- A constructive cultural style, which is very person-oriented. This style is characterised by open communication and respect for one another, but it is also goal-oriented. Personal growth and development are core values. Collaboration, creativity, and innovation are encouraged. It's important that employees enjoy their work.
- A passive-defensive cultural style, where the aim is to gain certainty and security by means of bureaucratic and formal relationships. Employees seek approval and will not be eager to take on responsibility.
- An aggressive-defensive cultural style, which combines certainty, security and status with a strong emphasis on duty. People derive power from their position. Winning and perfectionism are more important than teamwork and involvement.

Every OCI style influences women's careers in its own way. The constructive cultural style offers women the best opportunities for advancement.

# Stereotyping

Gender and ethnic stereotyping play an important role in selection procedures. Sometimes categories can be useful, but they can also exclude women, who have to fight against unfavourable stereotypes.

It is very important for people to be aware of the negative consequences of stereotyping. There is always a danger that what we hear, see or feel is taken into account when we select someone for a job. It is possible that recent experiences play an important role, like having two pregnant employees at one time in one department. When this troubles the department, it is possible that future female job candidates will be at a disadvantage. Speaking freely about what you think is an important step forward.

Consultancy, the Netherlands, director

During selection procedures, candidates are generally divided into broad categories by age, gender, and ethnic origin. Such categories can be useful because they give selection committees a context in which to consider individual situations or persons. The problem, however, is that categories may start to resemble stereotypes. For example, older people are pegged as being loyal and wise but also set in their ways. There are similar assumptions about women, for example that they are less ambitious than men, or that their family always comes before their career. Assumptions of this kind are the product of generalisations about women. Some may have a kernel of truth to them – after all, women are indeed more likely than men to work part-time once they have children because they feel responsible for their care. That is certainly borne out by statistics. The difficulty is when generalisations of this type are made about specific individuals. If the woman in question happens to be highly ambitious and capable of combining work and home life effectively, she must prove that she's not like a "typical" woman.

## Example

A company has a vacancy for an executive position. There are two equally qualified candidates, one a man and the other a woman. The woman is very ambitious and has made her career her top priority until now. The selection committee fears, however, that her career takes second place – as it does for so many women – and so they select the male candidate, whom they automatically assume will be more committed to his job. Because the stereotypes are subconscious and never used as overt arguments during the selection procedure, the woman never gets the opportunity to show that she is in fact entirely dedicated to her career. The statistics are all in the man's favour.

## Keys to success

Awareness and openness are the key words here. The best way to neutralise stereotypes is to speak frankly about commitment, ambition, part-time work and similar factors during selection and appraisal interviews. The selection committee members naturally need to be aware that they may themselves have a tendency to stereotype. It is not always easy to bring this topic up; most people claim that they are not prejudiced, and that qualifications and ability are the only things that matter.

### Example

The chairwoman of a selection committee appointed to choose a candidate for an executive position asked the committee members if they had a certain Example Example

A company has a vacancy for an executive position. There are two equally qualified candidates, one a man and the other a woman. The woman is very ambitious and has made her career her top priority until now. The selection committee fears, however, that her career takes second place – as it does for so many women – and so they select the male candidate, whom they automatically assume will be more committed to his job. Because the stereotypes are subconscious and never used as overt arguments during the selection procedure, the woman never gets the opportunity to show that she is in fact entirely dedicated to her career. The statistics are all in the man's favour.

“There are many ways – explicit but mostly implicit – in which people responsible for personnel recruitment in companies, activate gender stereotypes in order to make a decision for or against a candidate. Strong stereotypical assumptions about a person's abilities, competencies, talents, ambitions, attitudes, etc., are subconsciously present, and it is only through systematic reflection (or rethinking?) and awareness training, that these stereotypes can be overlooked.”

Personnel choice private office, Greece, Consultant

Keys to success



# Close together or a world apart?

## Greece and the Netherlands

In Europe numerous data are available about the position of men and women in economic life. This makes it able to reveal how much or how little Greece and the Netherlands have in common.

### **Gap between male and female labour market participation has lessened**

Women participate in the labour market to a lesser degree than men, but the gap between male and female labour market participation rates has decreased in almost all European countries in the past two decades. Not only are more women active in the labour market, they also spend more of their productive years in the labour market than before.

In most European countries the activity rates for women follow a rising trend, while the activity rates for men have remained rather stable. In 2003 the average activity rate for women in the EU was 61 percent, compared with 78 percent for men (Eurostat). In the Netherlands, the participation rate for women was 68 percent compared with 85 percent for men. The gap in activity rates between men and women is substantial in Greece. In Greece the activity rate for women was 50% - among the lowest in Europe, compared with 77 percent for men.

Several trends are pointed out as contributing to the ever-increasing participation of women in paid employment:

- higher educational levels attained by women;
- falling fertility rates;
- a lesser drop out of the labour force to care for children.

### **The glass ceiling is a worldwide phenomenon**

Available data show a worldwide pattern of a lower ratio of women than men in management positions. Indeed, the glass ceiling is a worldwide phenomenon. Nevertheless, data tend to confirm a growing trend of women in management roles over time.

The United States has the highest rate for women in managerial positions. In European countries the average share of women in managerial positions (defined as directors, chief executives and managers) is 30 percent. Women in (former) Eastern European countries are doing much better. In Greece and The Netherlands, the share of women in managerial jobs is the same: 26 percent (Eurostat).

At senior management jobs though, just below board level, women in Europe now claim not more than 2 percent of senior management positions, ranging from 6 percent in Britain to 1 percent in Germany and 0.5 percent in Italy (EPWN).

Studies in Greece have shown that the density of the glass ceiling increases with the size of the company: the bigger the company the thicker the glass ceiling.

### **Men and women perform different jobs**

Men and women perform different kinds of jobs. In all regions of the world, higher proportions of men than women are employed in the industrial sector. In the service sector women's share of employment is higher than men's. There is not much difference between Greece and the Netherlands in this respect.

The high proportion of women in the service sector is mostly explained by the similarity between the type of work in the service sector and the work that women have traditionally done at home. Other explanations are the barriers and restrictions women face in the access to education and training required for industrial jobs, or cultural barriers experienced at the workplace. The greater flexibility in the service sector, allowing workers to combine work and family responsibilities, might be an explanation, although it also might be an effect of the higher share of women in the sector.

Occupational segregation by sex negatively affects the efficiency of the labour market because it restrains mobility between male and female occupations. It also has a negative impact on women's career opportunities and pay.

### **Women make up the majority of part-time workers**

For the past ten years there has been a growing trend towards part-time work by both women and men, in most countries. In 2002 18 percent of the total EU working population defined themselves as part-time workers, compared with 14 percent in 1992 (Eurostat). However, there are marked differences in part-time employment rates between countries. Part-time work is more widespread in the countries of northern Europe than those of southern Europe. The Netherlands shows the highest presence of part-time workers (44 percent of total employment), Greece the lowest (5 percent).

Women make up the majority of part-time workers and a large proportion of women who work, do so on a part-time basis. Of EU women, 34 percent work on a part-time basis, compared with a minority of EU men (7 percent). In Greece, 8 percent of employed women work part-time, compared with 2 percent of employed men. In the Netherlands 73 percent of employed women and 22 percent of employed men work part-time.

In Greece, part-time working is only regulated by law since 1990 and the General Confederation of Workers in Greece, still has strong objections against part-time working.

### **Women still earn only around 75% as much as men**

The average EU woman earns one-quarter less than a man, according to available European data on hourly wages (Eurostat). In terms of gross hourly wages, the least inequality is found in former East Germany: female wage here is 90% of men's. At the other end of the scale are Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal with around 70%.

The imbalance in the representation of women or men in the different economic sectors as well as in higher/lower positions is one of the most determining elements of the gender pay gap. Fewer women than men occupy management positions, which are better paid and sectors where more women tend to work, are poorly paid. Women generally work fewer hours than men and are less likely to receive shift premiums as they do less shift-work than men.

### **Women perform on average more than 50 per cent of the total amount of paid and unpaid work**

Time-use studies show that women work longer hours than men in nearly every country. Whether looking at developing countries or industrialised countries, women perform on average more than 50 percent of the total amount of paid and unpaid work. Two-thirds of women's total work burden is spent on unpaid labour and one-third on paid labour. The converse is true for men. Looking specifically at domestic duties, data show big differences between men and women. An international comparison of the share of housework by sex in selected OECD countries shows that in European countries 65 to 70 per cent of the total hours spend on housework are performed by women and therefore 30 to 35 by men (Wirth, 2001).

# Perceived risk and reversed burden of proof

It is still a rarity for women to be promoted to key positions. The appointment of a woman is still regarded as a risk, and it is therefore up to her to prove herself before she gains everybody's confidence.

When men are appointed to a key executive position, they generally have the management's utter confidence. They continue to enjoy that confidence until they fail. Many managers feel that it is a greater risk to appoint a woman to an important position. There are, after all, plenty of successful male executives, but very few female ones to point to as examples. The risk they perceive in appointing a woman means that the woman in question – unlike her male counterpart – bears the burden of proof. She first has to show that she can handle a senior position before she can gain the support of her superiors and peers. The burden of proof has been reversed.

All other things being equal, then, men always have the advantage when competing against women for a management position. Research has shown that a woman's chance of being appointed increases only when she is clearly the superior candidate. Her abilities in that case seemingly outweigh the uncertainties about female behaviour – about whether she is really committed, whether she can handle stress, and whether she will make a good team player.

This reversed burden of proof has a significant psychological impact on women. If a female executive feels that her company has not given her its unconditional support, she will lose self-confidence, become more forced in her responses, and perform poorly. The management will see its prejudices confirmed and decide that it was a bad idea to appoint a woman to such an important position. They will be doubly cautious the next time round before they take on a female candidate.

Senior women face greater problems with their male colleagues, including subordinates, as they “demystify “ her authority easier, despite the fact that she usually is higher educated, as is the case with a mechanical engineer in our company. This creates additional problems for all of us, and I cannot see any way of resolving this type of difficulty other than finding convincing ways for an anti-authoritarian type to command a technical unit.

Transportation company, Greece, Head of Technical Departement

## Keys to success

We can start to tackle the problem of the reversed burden of proof by analysing the perceived risk. Managers and selection committees should ask themselves why they consider a female candidate a risky proposition. Is there a specific reason for their feeling that way? Would they perceive the same risk if the candidate were male? Acknowledging these mechanisms requires the management team to engage in a certain amount of reflection. That's not something that many managers do well, but it's a skill that ought to be taught as part of management training programmes.

Female candidates have as much right to unconditional support as their male counterparts. If there are reasons to question someone's suitability, it is better not to speculate but to be explicit about them during the selection interview, so that the candidate has the chance to respond.

It is vital that women themselves recognise the reversed burden of proof mechanism. If they do, there is less chance that their behaviour will be seriously influenced by it. All they can do in difficult starting situations is to be themselves. Rigidly adhering to a masculine standard of self-assuredness – or pretending to do so – is counterproductive.

Keys to success

### How perception works

Perception may well be the most thoroughly researched phenomenon in the field of psychology. Psychologists have taught us that we do not observe reality objectively but always immediately assign a meaning to it. We are influenced by prior experience and our notions of good and bad. Advertisers make a lot of use of the way consumers are influenced by their perception. Perception also plays a significant role when we are assessing a candidate's suitability for a position. We present arguments and counterarguments that confirm what we want to see. If we wish to remain objective, we have to be aware of these mechanisms.

Masculine and feminine values are a matter of perception and as such very difficult to address and change. In political and diplomatic circles, consciously or unconsciously, the ambassador at an important post is assumed to be a man. Just like people tend to ask: "*and what did he say?*" when you have visited a doctor. However, the more women make it to the top, the more this perception will change.

Ministry, the Netherlands, senior adviser



# Recruiting from the “old boys network”

Organisations often recruit new employees from their own networks, which consist of people with the same attitudes and ideas. In most cases, these are networks of men, or “old boys networks”. Because women are less likely to gain access to such networks, they are often overlooked for interesting positions.

Employers use their networks of contacts to recruit new employees or to find out more about job candidates. By doing so, they take away some of the uncertainty about how a future employee will perform. People who are part of a well-oiled, relevant network will have an advantage during a selection procedure. They will be regarded as more credible, powerful, and influential by the selection committee that is considering their application.

Networks are all about informal contacts. Networking means taking people into your confidence, dropping in for a chat, calling or e-mailing them, dropping names when vacancies arise, and doing the rounds at social functions. The networks that count are usually made up of men – the proverbial “old boys network”. Until women gain access to such networks, they will not be tipped off about interesting vacancies. What’s worse is that their names will not come up as possible candidates, a fact demonstrated by research conducted in the 1990s at a Dutch university. When the university was seeking appointees for professorships and contacted other universities about possible candidates, most of the names mentioned were those of men. Even if women possess high social capital, in terms of educational credentials, for example, they are less likely to be able to utilise it in their professional environment in comparison to men. The double burden model they are facing and the dilemma they experience between balancing family and career prospects deprives them of the psychological energy and the time to devote to cultivating their professional social relationships.

This mechanism is a vicious circle: people who are invisible are not admitted to important networks, and people who are not part of an important network never become visible.

Even younger female employees with no family obligations do not invest in their professional future. They just do their work properly and straight after they want to go”. They will not attend for instance English lessons as their personal life seems to be more rewarding. I can understand, to a certain extent, such an attitude, but they must become aware that this is a choice which sooner or later will create barriers to their promotion within not only this one but every company!

Transportation company, Greece, Head of Personnel Department

*“There aren’t any women candidates available”*

## Keys to success

- Look outside your own – largely male – networks when recruiting new employees and try to find out which networks include women. That may take a bit of effort at first, but it does work, as the example below shows.
- Approach suitable women candidates personally and invite them to apply.
- Place an advertisement in journals read by women.
- Screen the advertisement to see whether it reflects women's needs and expectations. Both the job description and the use of language can often be adapted to attract women more effectively.
- Contract out the job of recruitment to an organisation that specialises in seeking female candidates.

Keys to success

### Example

The administrators of an urban arts fund decide to recruit a number of new consultants. Initially, they approach people from their own network, mainly older male art connoisseurs who move in a particular circle. They then decide to call a number of people who belong to a larger, more eclectic network. Their decision proves to be successful: the consultants in these networks move in arts circles hitherto unfamiliar to the fund. Since then, the fund has become acquainted with an entirely different group of artists, including many women.



# Subjective selection procedures

Selection procedures can be subjective and influenced by stereotypes. Selection committees seeking candidates for a management position are likely to have a man in mind. Picture a manager and you automatically picture a man.

Selecting new employees is people work, so there's a good chance a selection procedure will be influenced by subjective ideas. When the members of a selection committee are assessing a candidate's suitability for a position, they unconsciously make certain assumptions about the candidate's personality. Personality, however, is a vague term that opens the door to a whole range of stereotypes and prejudices.

The committee members' frame of reference also plays a role. When assessing and choosing candidates for management positions, they are likely to have a man in mind – no surprise, since most managers are men. On top of that, the committee members themselves are likely to be men. There is a good chance that they will be looking for someone who matches their ideal image.

Finally, the selection instruments used may also give rise to subjectivity. Interviews or tests may distinguish between male and female candidates or between candidates from different cultural backgrounds. An unstructured interview, for example, gives free rein to the selection committee's personal opinions and preferences.

In Greece, even big and modern, public or semi-public, organisations do not have a formal written internal regulation which provides for specific processes, criteria, rules, etc., and which should be accessible by, and well known to, all employees. Hence, it is unavoidable that subjective criteria are used when it comes to recruitment and/or promotion of employees. Limited access and participation of women in decision-making processes, committees, boards, etc., makes the whole playing field unfair!

Equal opportunities expert, Greece

## Keys to success

Professional procedures encourage objectivity. Having clearly defined selection and promotion procedures makes it harder for prejudices to play a role. Organisations can investigate which of their existing procedures are most likely to encourage subjectivity.

Objectivity starts by setting the job requirements and the candidate profile down on paper. The people assigned this task should be acutely aware of gender prejudices when specifying the relevant job requirements (see also: Job Profiles). A set of rules for selection procedures can also improve the quality of the recruitment and selection process. The rules should cover:

- the selection criteria
- the selection instruments
- the composition of the selection committee, and
- the committee's working methods

Research has shown that some selection instruments are more favourable to men than to women. An open interview is not favourable to women because nothing guarantees that all the candidates will be asked the same questions in the same manner. An assessment or criterion-based interview is less gender-sensitive. Assessments allow selection committees to analyse the candidate's individual ability in practical situations without gender playing a role. In criterion-based interviews, all the candidates are presented with the same questions in the same manner, and the focus is on concrete behaviour and action. This approach produces more information than asking candidates about their plans and intentions. By concentrating on concrete behaviour, the members of the selection committee are less likely to judge on the basis of their own impressions.

### Example

The City of Amsterdam makes a point of letting job applicants know where they stand during selection procedures and it is careful to follow the same procedure for each candidate. It has drawn up a special code of conduct and put together a manual of instructions for selection committees, one of the tools it uses to break through the "dominance of white males at the top of the organisation". The manual makes clear that it is not as easy as it seems to select the right man or woman for a position, because we tend to choose "clones" of ourselves. It describes how to dismantle this mechanism.

Keys to success



# The job profile

A job profile describes the assessment and selection criteria for a vacancy and determines how attractive the position is. Job profiles are usually – and unconsciously – written in a way that distinguishes between men and women.

Before you can select a candidate for a position, you have to know just what you're looking for. If you are seeking suitable candidates for a management position and your assumption is that men and women have an equal crack at being promoted, you are not likely to see many female candidates. The problems described earlier, such as visibility within an organisation and making one's ambitions clear, play a role, but women can also be sidelined by the way in which a job profile is written. For example, while an organisation may well value team spirit, ability to communicate effectively and a coaching management style, it may neglect to specify these qualities in the job profile and therefore never use them as search criteria. No one will be selected on the basis of qualities not listed in the job profile, and because it is overwhelmingly women who possess these qualities, they are at a disadvantage.

The description set out in the job profile also determines how attractive the relevant job is to women. They tend to look more at the job content and less at the status of the position. Women can also be put off if the requirements are specified in terms of years of experience.

Some job profiles are so demanding that only a superhero could possibly fit the bill. They are discouraging to female candidates, because women like to be absolutely certain that they meet the requirements before they risk applying.

Modern organisations need more people-oriented managers. In my opinion it is not only up to women to fill this gap. Men should also develop the required skills. If not, either one of the sexes becomes redundant as soon as the requirements change again.

Ministry, The Netherlands, senior adviser

## Keys to success

The first thing a department must do is decide what qualities are actually needed for the job. Once it does so, it can produce a job profile that simultaneously serves as a candidate profile. If an organisation believes that team spirit, ability to empathise, a coaching management style, and interpersonal skills are the keys to success, it must make certain that they are specified explicitly in the job profile. These are qualities that women often possess, and that means that they are more likely to qualify as candidates. Because women tend to want interesting work rather than status, the job content must be described in the most explicit terms possible. Consider what women will find attractive about the job and describe that.

Describing “experience” in terms of “ability to learn” and “development potential” will give women a better chance of qualifying. It also helps to define characteristics and skills in terms of competencies, or the behaviour that is important in a particular position. After all, gender does not play a role when qualities are defined in terms of behavioural criteria. All the same, the text itself should ideally be screened for gender neutrality.

Once the crucial qualities have been listed, they should be used to select and assess candidates. In this way, the organisation has provided a firm basis for an objective assessment.

By focusing on competencies, you no longer pay attention to the distinctions between men and women. You look at what matters, given the tasks and role of a function. If co-operation is considered to be important, this must be included in the job profile. In many managerial functions being sensitive is just as important as being result-oriented.

Success is determined by making optimal use of one's qualities. This is important not only from an ethical standpoint, but also from the business perspective. You value the various qualities that people can have. Respect for each other's abilities is important. You are on the wrong track if you are achieving conformity.

Training company, The Netherlands, HR manager



Keys to success

We must not forget that for a long time it was solely men who occupied managerial positions. This is apparent in the ways companies describe job profiles. It is unavoidable that previous male managers added their personal characteristics to the job description itself! We will all gain if we start to keep female candidates in mind when building up the job descriptions. This would be a more pluralistic approach that would benefit all parties.

Equal Andromeda, Greece, Equal Opportunities consultant

# Inadequate social support

Networks are more than a source of job candidates, they can also offer senior managers a basis of support. Women are less likely to have access to networks of peers and they therefore often lack the social support they need.

There are so few women in senior management positions that they scarcely ever come into contact with one another. That is unfortunate, because networks – which often consist of informal contacts between peers – are important not only as a source of job candidates but also as a form of social support. Women executives may find it “lonely at the top” without the support of others in the same position.

It's difficult for women to gain access to existing networks. Men are more likely to relax around their male colleagues than their female ones, even if they claim that it makes no difference. It may be that they find it easier to do business with other men and feel uncomfortable around women, at least in a business context. Men have developed certain codes and conventions in their dealings with one another that do not yet exist between men and women operating in a business environment on the basis of equality (and not in the customary pattern of boss and secretary). For example, men may have trouble predicting how their female colleagues will respond to something. That makes them feel uncertain, a feeling that they would rather avoid.

The difficulty women have in gaining access to significant networks is also related to the perceived risk mechanism described earlier. Because women do not get an automatic vote of confidence when they are appointed as executives, they are less attractive as network partners. They are also thought to be less influential and powerful, and indeed they often are.

Women in low and medium-level management positions usually have to cope with a common paternalistic attitude. That is, they have to prove themselves again and again and gain the trust of their superiors.. Their seniority does not come automatically from their position within the company... promotion in many cases has proven to be a trap since it becomes a prove-yourself-project!

Research organisation, Greece, director

## Keys to success

- Women are more likely to be accepted into the club if they are introduced by someone who has a good reputation in the network.
- If a woman does not get the support she needs in existing networks, she might consider mentoring as an alternative. A mentor should be an experienced manager who works in the same organisation and knows it inside out, and who acts as the woman's advisor and sponsor. A mentor sets an example, gives the woman tips, and imparts lessons learned during his or her own career. A mentor can also introduce the woman to his or her own networks.
- Peer-sharing and intervision groups are opportunities to learn from others. By talking through practical situations, the participants can help one another find alternative solutions.

Keys to success

### Example

Mentors play an important role in the Dutch Mixed Management Development Programme. Experienced colleagues in senior management positions are asked to spend some of their time and energy coaching MD programme candidates. The idea is that the mentor gives the candidate a bit of support, making it easier for her to function in the organisation. The mentor is familiar with the candidate's job and is therefore a useful source of information as well as an advisor. The mentor can also introduce the candidate to interesting networks, and advise her on her next career move.



# Limited scope

Women who behave like men quickly find themselves labelled as “bitchy”. But they mustn’t be too feminine either, because they’ll then be thought too “soft” for a management job. When it comes to their behaviour, women have only very limited scope in organisations.

If a woman takes on attributes generally thought to be masculine – competitive, visible, high-profile – she will very likely be labelled unfeminine. Behaviour that is regarded as “resolute” and “firm” in men is labelled “bitchy” in women. The same goes for office politicking and strategic manoeuvring: men are praised for being shrewd, whereas women are accused of “playing games”. Women are taught as children to seek the approval of others. They will therefore do everything possible to avoid being called “unfeminine” or “harsh”. They may do so consciously, but it’s more likely that an unconscious mechanism comes into play. They may, for example, conceal the fact that they have authority over others. They may choose to work in a way that leaves others a lot of freedom. Or they may not engage in the kind of strategic manoeuvring that will get them promoted. Cautious behaviour of this kind will earn them the reputation of femininity, but it will not qualify them for promotion. After all, managers are expected to be firm and decisive. As far as appearances go, women may find themselves the victims of a double standard. Being attractive is certainly an advantage, but a woman manager can’t be too pretty, because “brains and beauty don’t mix”. The limited scope allowed to women can cause them to exhibit forced behaviour, especially if they have few examples of women executives who represent a range of different management styles.

## Keys to success

The first step is to recognise that there are certain assumptions about how women should and shouldn't behave. Some of those assumptions (for example that women should be "nice") may be completely contrary to what is expected of a manager. Only after these assumptions have been made clear will it become easier to talk about images of masculinity and femininity and to assess the implications.

- Make sure that there are equal numbers of men and women on selection committees – it makes it more likely that candidates will be assessed from a variety of different perspectives.
- Avoid terms such as unfeminine and unmasculine, but do distinguish between male and female approaches and investigate the extent to which a particular approach may be suitable for the position concerned. Is competitive behaviour really appropriate in that particular management position, for example?
- Offer women enough scope to be themselves. Diversity also means diversity in styles. The quality of the work may improve as a result.
- Invest in women's self-confidence. Women who believe in themselves are less influenced by others' assumptions.
- Give women who are unskilled at strategy a chance to learn. If a particular position calls for strategic skill, offer the female candidate a course in effective strategic behaviour and make her aware of the political manoeuvring of her male colleagues.
- Raise the subject of a candidate's appearance and non-verbal behaviour: who says that beauty and brains don't mix?
- Discuss differences in management styles during all management training and coaching programmes.

Keys to success



# Keys to success

## **Another look at recruitment and selection**

In *Keys to Success*, we have described various mechanisms that prevent women from moving up the organisational ladder. We have noticed that these mechanisms exist in Greece as well as in the Netherlands. These “gate-keeping mechanisms” are subtle, unintentional barriers to promotion thrown up by organisations and, in fact, by women themselves. Such barriers remain invisible to the ill-informed or unaware, but they soon become apparent to anyone who is conscious of them or keeps an open mind.

We have also shown in *Keys to Success* how organisations can remove barriers and open the door to senior management positions for women. Although we have suggested a number of practical solutions, what it really comes down to is a different approach to recruitment and selection, one that acknowledges that there are differences between men and women. Organisations that want to benefit from gender diversity must allow diversity to be expressed in their recruitment and selection procedures. Otherwise they will continue to look for more of the same, with predictable results.

A recruitment and selection procedure is really just a string of related activities and there are pitfalls at every step along the way. At the same time, every pitfall represents a challenge. Now that we know at which points and in which situations prejudices and subjectivity are likely to rear their heads, we can analyse the entire procedure. At each stage, we have to ask ourselves the following questions: Does it matter here whether the candidate is male or female? Is the gender of the candidate unintentionally influencing the result of the procedure, and if so, what can we do to prevent that happening? And if we want more women in senior positions, what barriers and opportunities do they face?

### Negative mechanisms and how organisations can open the door

The gate-keeping mechanisms described in *Keys to Success* play a role in various different areas of personnel management. The following table indicates which areas to bear in mind.

Mechanism	Area of personnel management
<i>Sticking to the facts</i> Where precisely are women employed in the organisation?	personnel information and planning
<i>Invisible talent</i> Women do not showcase their talents and achievements enough.	training, career development, communication, and image-making
<i>Risk-avoidance behaviour</i> Women are less confident about themselves than men are.	career development, management development
<i>Preference for part-time jobs</i> Women tend to prefer part-time jobs so that they can combine work and family.	job structuring, employment terms and conditions
<i>Cultural aspects of the organisation</i> Women feel uncomfortable with the culture in the upper echelons.	organisational development
<i>Stereotyping</i> Individual women are judged by the behaviour of women in general, even if they are “atypical”.	Selection
<i>Perceived risk and reversed burden of proof</i> Women have to prove themselves, whereas men immediately win people’s confidence by default.	Selection
<i>The “old boys network”</i> Women are not members of the organisation’s own networks.	recruitment, recruitment channels
<i>Subjective selection procedures</i> Selection procedures can be subjective and influenced by prejudices and stereotypes.	selection, selection procedures
<i>The job profile</i> Job profiles are generally not gender-neutral.	determining job profiles, selection, staff appraisal
<i>Inadequate social support</i> Women are less likely to have access to networks of peers and therefore lack social support.	career guidance
<i>Limited scope</i> Women mustn’t behave like men, but they mustn’t be too feminine either.	selection, career guidance, training

# Colofon

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