



**WOMEN AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO POWER:  
*TABOO OR NEW CORPORATE GOVERNANCE MODEL?***  
With a FOCUS on CG and BOARDS

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## I/ The reasons for the Study (1)

- Gender diversity on Boards should be a vehicle for change and provide greater Business efficiency...
- Women should be able to bring their 'added value' to places of power, including in the "Workplace" and BOARDS !

**And ...Boards are clearly places of power !**

- The rise of women in places of power creates an interest in looking at women's relationship to power in a still "masculine" model

## I/ The reasons for the Study (2)

- The women already in positions of power are indeed “minorities” within the dominantly male group.
- Studies have shown that minorities (S. Moscovici, 1996) could be subjected to rejection or avoidance
  - These women generally become more masculine in the way they exert power
  - Thus there is a risk they lose their possible “feminine qualities” and become “clones”?
- The relevant questions are:
  - *Do women have a different relationship with power than men?*
  - *Do women have the opportunity to position themselves differently and to promote different values, other managerial practices?*
  - *What is the relevance of a theory of existence of a gender dimension – that is: does a female style of leadership exist?*

## 2/ HOW? A FEW Elements on the Methodology (1)

A 6-month **review of the academic literature**

A **qualitative study** was conducted

**50 interviews (half in France, half abroad) with the help of Boyden and some others partners**

**Board Members and Company Directors**  
- A few Politician and Public Servants  
- Experts within their field.

2 Collective Workshops were held:  
1. Alumni of the Programme *Women Be European Board Ready-ESSEC*  
2. *Women's Network European Women in Leadership (WIL)*.

## 2/ HOW? A FEW Elements on the Methodology (2)

The large majority of questions were open-ended.

From the interviews, several Yes/No questions were DEDUCTED

Are quotas of utmost importance?

Did you deliberately build your career towards a powerful position?

Does power creates a feeling of isolation?

Are you at ease when confronted with conflict?

Do you think that women have particular/specific qualities or attributes and it could play a role on boards ?

Does power create a specific responsibility, with respect to leading change?

Do you feel particularly attached to rules and ethical conduct?

Do you think there is a room of improvement for Efficiency of Boards ?

## 3/ MAIN POINTS AND OBSERVATIONS-OUTLINE

### WOMEN AND POWER ?

- ① An ambiguous relationship to power
- ② A power that can be tamed
- ③ Nuances coming from the differences in Governance Systems

### WOMEN AND CG

- ① A desire of absolute respect of ethics and rules
- ② A idealistic vision of Boards
- ③ A clear vision of the role of Non-Executive

## WOMEN AND POWER ?

### 1. An ambiguous relationship to power

-Still **connotations** about **women's ambitions** : They do not 'build' a career

-The fact that there are few women in positions of power creates the risk that they will '**give-in to**' and '**assimilate**' to the **male power model**. Saying that, **some** women have learned how to resist this assimilation.

**-There is a price to pay for power**

Sometimes : loss of serenity , strong feeling of isolation. The battle for power is a reality that women confront with **difficulty**: there is a **fear** or **simple a lack of interest** in power games.

## WOMEN AND POWER ?

### 1. An ambiguous relationship to power (2)

- “**Power, control, authority, influence**” are often intertwined concepts. In most cases, these concepts are seen rather **negatively**:

- **Power** is associated with **abuse of power**
- **Authority** is equated with **authoritarianism**
- Finally, certain interviewees considered that these words cannot be dissociated and **combined are represented by the concept of ‘leadership’**

## WOMEN AND POWER ?

### 2. A power that can be tamed to do well

Seizing power through **competence** in order to exercise it differently

- The reliance on skills provides women with **legitimacy**
- Women's careers are **not** often motivated by the attraction of power, but the **desire to have a positive impact**.

#### **Power is closely linked with the sense of responsibility**

- All the women interviewed shared an **acute sense of responsibility**, notably with respect to these aspects:
  - ① The duty to participate in the **change of a system of Governance**  
(company or political)
  - ② The absolute respect of the **rules and ethical principles**
  - ③ A **specific responsibility towards other women**, namely those of the younger generation

## WOMEN AND POWER ?

### 3. Possible Differences related to the Governance Culture

#### The “ Anglo-saxon” Model

- simplified in regards to Gender issues due to policies of assumed diversity
- well-established rules of governance that restrict the exercise of a vertical power and power conflicts : being in a position of power is not perceived as causing an isolation & conflicts are better managed.

#### In Republics that are, or were previously socialist

- There is not many challenges on the basis of gender, since women have had access to power positions in the context of an egalitarian policy.
- However, interviewees have **strongly expressed their desire for change** in the **way power is exercised**.

#### In countries that are still non-egalitarian

- Women **appear as “heroes”** concerned with **fighting for the common good**. They are not only engaged in the plight of gender equality within companies, but within the whole society, as well as in policy-making.

## SYNTHESIS : THE 4 PARADIGMS SHIFTS LEAD BY WOMEN

- ① A power “to act” rather than power for power’s sake
- ② The search for the collective exercise of power: an non-executive Board set-up and run as a “Team”
- ③ A disinterest for power games and struggles, but the wish to serve the “general interest”
- ④ The reliance on skills (for reassurance)

# 1. A power “to act” rather than power for power’s sake

*"I have just joined the Board of Lagardère, my goal behind this commitment is to be useful, to make my contribution to the organisation in order to be able to contribute to change.*

*Women have the appetite for societal issues (CSR, sustainable development, NGOs, civil society, gender equality...)"*

*H.Molinari*

In other words, it appears that **women will seek positions of power, mandates on boards with a desire to improve governance; to have an impact; to make themselves useful.**

## 2. The search for the collective exercise of power: A **Board is or should be a “Team”**

*“Power can only create a feeling of isolation  
according to...the way you exercise it.*

*The exercise of power can, in fact, be a  
powerful source of collective energy ”*

*N.Mesny*

### 3. A disinterest for power games and struggles, but the wish to serve the “general interest”

The majority of the interviewees mentioned some discomfort when faced with conflict. **Women seek mediation rather than confrontation, but do not hesitate to assert their position when it comes to defending their values. They are particularly courageous and committed.**

*“Concerning power conflicts, I try to understand the position of others, I express my own, I try to bring both of them to the forefront in the best interest of the company”*

*B. DALLIBARD*

*“Women are prepared to take a strong stance in the event of a disagreement”*

*S. OUZIEL*

## 4. The reliance on skills (for reassurance)

**All interviewees cited the importance of having the right ‘skills’ in order to justify their position as an “eternal imposter”:**

*“Past professional experience and expertise play a very important role in acquiring legitimacy that does not depend solely on quotas. Women are often judged on their experience and ‘accomplishments’, whereas men sometimes have the privilege of being judged on their potential. Women have no room for error, if we want to keep our position we ought to arrive well prepared!”*  
B. DALLIBARD

*“Education is not enough: a women must be legitimate, functional, sectoral, international, etc.. The professional background is important though women are often disadvantaged compared to men (with respect to time)”*  
C.LEWINER

*“When you're a female quota, it means we must prove your legitimacy twice as much as anyone else”*  
A.AUCONIE

## WOMEN AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ?

An absolute respect  
of ethics and rules

• Do you feel particularly attached to rules and ethical conduct?

“YES”

- FRANCE 92%
- ABROAD 65%
- WBEBR Alumni 100%

A idealistic vision of  
Boards in terms of  
responsibility

• Does power create a specific responsibility?

“YES”

- FRANCE 85%
- ABROAD 87%
- WBEBR Alumni 100%

A clear vision on the  
role of Non-  
Executive Boards

• A desire for **diversity on Boards**



## The role of a Non executive : *an idealised vision of the role*

- Know the field/sector
- Participate in **specialised committees** including the Audit Committee
- Provide specific **expertise/skills**
- Have the ability to **understand complex issues** by making them easily understandable and executable
- Monitor and assess the **implementation of strategy**

### But also:

- Manage the **business strategy** and the **coaching** of the management team
- Integrate the dimensions of "**long term**"
- Participate in the creation of what makes the company "preferred" by clients:  
**Sustainable Development**
- Challenge the **current Business Model** to **strive for improvement**

## A desire to Modernise Boards:

*A demanding concept of "GOOD GOVERNANCE" within Boards*

- We need to change the **Governance Model**: at the moment → too financial, not operational enough. There is a systematic lack in the **Agenda** of Boards: **HR Policies** and aspects (including succession planning); technical and technological skills.
- **The role of the board is to ensure the sustainability of the company** and not only the income of Board Members!
- The issue of **compensation** is important
  - They must be linked to more demanding and specific performance criteria
  - They must be justified: this is important for social cohesion.
- Boards should be **evaluated more frequently** based upon stricter criteria, in order to improve the functioning. The magnitude of the crisis led to a **return to core values**: quality of management, composition and functioning of the Board, leading.

## Regarding DIVERSITY...

- It's better when **administrators** are **very different**.

→ It's the range of combined skills and profiles that create the 'wealth' of a Board.  
→ It's the product of the juxtaposition of opinions and personalities that make 'good advice'

- The challenge is help the Boards **evolve**, so that they become **more diverse**, where the profiles of the Board members become:

→ **complementary (different profiles and backgrounds)**  
→ **more feminine**  
→ **more international**  
→ **younger**

### French companies must be able to internationalise & diversify their Boards by integrating more women...

- Women on Boards often look at the issues with "**fresh eyes**" due to the fact that they are new to Boards
- more **independent** from past decisions/actions
- more **sincere & genuine**



## CONCLUSION:

**Towards a mixed power model versus a  
change in mode of leadership and  
governance ?**

- The HR literature suggests that the **ideal manager must be able to blend the male skills (leadership, decision making, capability...) with the female one (rationality, empathy, organization...)**

- The study reveals that women possess certain **strong objectives:**

*To be a team player*

*To be a driver of change.*

- These values and attitudes **fit well** with a new model where:

→ **Power gives way to responsibility:**

*That people in places of power will lead by example, rather than by commands*

→ **The acceptance of a more emotional way of thinking:**

*A humanist leadership which integrates rationality but also intuition...*

→ **A change of perspective of the business horizon which integrates perennial governance in step with stakeholders, and rewards the risks taken with respect to change**

**Question: “Do you think that women have particular/specific qualities or attributes?”**

**FRANCE: YES 69% - NO 23% - Unsure 8%**  
**ABROAD: YES 78% - NO 4% - Unsure 18%**

N.Balla: *“Greater ability to listen, capability to more completely analyze subjects, and a middle of the road perspective.”*

B.Dalibard: *“A perception of the concrete, motivated by a common interest, daring to ask questions (of HR specifically), keeping their ego out of the way.”*

D.Elyaacoubi: *“More intuitive.”*

D.Ernotte-Cunci: *“More collective, using less unverifiable assertions, more courageous, more able to think freely.”*

S.Ouziel: *“Women do things for the good of the company and not for appearances. They have a real concern about making things move forward, they are less into politics and their personal positioning. They bring more objectivity and sense of the practical. Women are idealists and impassioned.”*

A.Arcier: *“Capable of cooperation and compromise, better ability to anticipate through listening and intuition, better sense of the concrete.”*

A.Bricard: *“Women have by necessity a better ability to listen since in their feminine culture they have learned to “listen” to the man (the father, the husband, the son), they have a greater capability to challenge their perceptions as they have a less developed ego. And finally, since they place the general interest above their own, they are less career-oriented, less calculating, they don’t hesitate to tell the truth even if it may be upsetting.”*

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