



# Business leadership for women

Learning guide

# Business leadership for women

---

## Introduction

This learning guide is designed for women managers. It covers areas such as leadership, gender, career management, work life balance, managing the organisation and self-development. It looks at these topics from the perspective of issues that generally face women in today's business environment.

I say "generally," as different women will have different life experiences that shape their experience of, and approach to, business life. Indeed the boundaries on some issues are moving. Work life balance is not just an issue facing female managers. Men are grappling with how to combine the "long hours culture" with their overall lifestyle/family balance. Organisations too, are trying to work with the issue of implementing policies to support work life balance into cultures that are not always supportive of the needs of the new generation of employees.

But before you start to explore this learning guide let's have a look at some of the facts about women in the business environment:

- Of the 552 executives of FTSE 100 companies only 10 are women
- In the same companies 55 are non executive directors out of 695
- 22% of women are managers (Institute of Management 2000)
- In Britain's 350 biggest companies women executives earn a third less than their male counterparts (Institute of Management 2000)
- 1 in 3 businesses are launched by women<sup>1</sup>

Companies are recognising that there are clear business needs to change. The war for talent, the need to recognise diversity, to reflect the consumer profile, and to generate greater creativity mean that gender equality in the board room is a matter of necessity rather tokenism.

Whatever your level in the organisation or your aspirations I hope this guide helps you to think through some of the issues you may be facing.

## Where to start

1. If you have less than an hour, read the overview on p12 and try some of the development activities on p26.

If you have more than an hour, look at some of the articles, books and videos and visit some of the websites. There may be a specific area you want to explore so narrow your development activities down to that area and look at some of the related learning guides. *(A list of these is available in the LRC).*

## Resources

---

### Videos

*Breaking the Glass Ceiling* (1994) BBC for Business, Part 1: 24 mins, Part 2: 10 mins.

In the UK, 43% of the working population is made up of women, yet they constitute only 4% of middle and senior managers. This BBC video is designed to help women overcome the barriers to career progression by breaking through the 'invisible' barrier that prevents them moving up through the organisation. 'Breaking the Glass Ceiling' is not meant to be a management skills video. It is designed for women in middle management who are considering moving into senior management or into a completely new area of management in which they would be pioneers, and aims to give encouragement and a practical process to stimulate further thinking.

### Journal articles

Rosener, Judy B (1990) *Ways women lead*, Harvard Business Review, November-December, Vol 68 (6), p119-125.

Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs; Bass, Bernard; et al; (1991) *Debate: Ways Men and Women Lead*, Harvard Business Review, January/February, Vol. 69 (1), p150.

Tannen, Deborah (1995) *The power of talk: who gets heard and why*, Harvard Business Review, September, Vol. 73, p138-148.

*Women and men in Britain - The work life balance*, Equal Opportunities Commission, view the following website:  
[http://www.eoc.ac.psiweb.com/PDFS/work\\_life\\_balance.pdf](http://www.eoc.ac.psiweb.com/PDFS/work_life_balance.pdf)

Fisher, Liz (2000) *Sex and the city*, Accountancy, August, Vol. 126, p34-36.

Sullivan, Ruth (1999) *The Boardroom - Skirting the issue?*, Director, June, p42-46.

Johnson, Rebecca (2000) *Ascent of women*, People Management, 6 January, p26-32.

Simpson, Ruth and Altman, Yochanan (2000) *The time bounded glass ceiling and young women managers: career progress and career success - evidence from the UK*, Journal of European Industrial Training, Vol. 24 (2/3/4), p190-198.

Meyerson, Debra; Fletcher, Joyce (2000) *A modest manifesto for shattering the glass ceiling*, Harvard Business Review, January/February, Vol. 78, p126-136.

## Information files

There are information files containing a collection of newspaper and journal articles on the following areas:

- Leadership
- Managerial work
- Women and management
- Women in management
- Work / life balance

## Books

\*\* Books marked with asterisks are available for sale from the LRC bookshop. Mail order service available. Tel: +44 (0)1442 841159. Fax: +44 (0)1442 841211. Email: [celia.tucker@ashridge.org.uk](mailto:celia.tucker@ashridge.org.uk).

Agonito, R (1993) *No More "Nice Girl": Power, Sexuality and Success in the Workplace*, Bob Adams Inc  
Ashridge shelf reference: **JPBP (AGO)**

This book contains a compelling series of personal accounts that illuminates the barriers women face today. Agonito claims that shedding the "Nice Girl" persona will help women build self-esteem and confidence and assert themselves effectively.

Bryce, L (1995) *The Influential Woman*, Piatkus

Ashridge shelf reference: JPBP (BRY)

The female model of power and success is described, and the reader is shown how to: behave in a more powerful and authoritative way, influence people, project a professional image, make an impact at meetings and interviews.

Craig, S. (1997) *Make Your Mark! Influencing Across Your Organization*, McGraw Hill

Ashridge shelf reference: CG (CRA)

This book aims to help managers and consultants get support for their ideas from the key stakeholders inside their organisation. It offers step-by-step advice for tackling the tricky aspects of influencing your organisation such as choosing a strategy, building coalitions when your power base is limited, and dealing with the resistance when leading a change initiative.

Davies, P. (1992) *Personal Power: How to Become More Assertive and Successful at Work*, Piatkus

Ashridge shelf reference: AKAB (DAV)

This book deals with the following topics: giving yourself power, power of influence, the tactics of talk, personal power at work, increasing your visibility, powerful people, personal power skills - behaviour, voice and appearance, power and status - who needs it?, the systems we use, reading list, voiceworks courses.

Dickson, A (1982) *A Woman in Your Own Right: Assertiveness and You*, Quartet Books

Ashridge shelf reference: AJB (DIC)\*\*

Anne Dickson defines assertiveness as the art of clear, honest and direct communication. An assertive approach builds self-esteem and strengthens our ability to make our own choices in life, by helping us to manage the anxiety and stress of communicating in difficult situations. Instead of being governed by the

need to either please or blame others, assertiveness teaches us to take responsibility of our own feelings and behaviour.

Duff, Carolyn S (1999) *Learning from other women: How to benefit from the knowledge, wisdom and experience of female mentors*, Amacom

Ashridge shelf reference: **JMB (DUF)**

"Learning from other women" provides a sound and practical guide that will help make the right connections and learn from other women what it takes to reach the top. Packed with advice, encouragement, self-assessment exercises, and the real life stories of 200 career women at all levels and in all types of business.

Jeffers, S (1991) *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, Arrow Books

Ashridge shelf reference: **APK (JEF)\*\***

A book of advice on how to cope with fear of various kinds of experience, such as public speaking, self-assertion, decision-making, intimacy, being alone, ageing, losing a loved one, and ending a relationship.

Kline, N (1993) *Women and Power*, BBC Books

Ashridge shelf reference: **JMHA (KLI)\*\***

This book breaks the ground in the struggle to get women into leadership positions and will change the way that people lead. It shows a new understanding of what holds women back and what they can do about it.

Kline, N. (1999) *Time to Think*, Ward Lock

Ashridge shelf reference: **APH (KLI)\*\***

In this book the author asserts that as change proliferates in our lives and our organisations, we must prize each other's minds above all else. We must learn how to help people think for themselves. The author describes how we can achieve this and presents a step-by-step guide that can be used in any situation. Whether your aim is to be more productive in meetings, solve business problems, create bold strategies or build stronger relationships, the book offers a

new world of possibilities. In four parts the text covers: A thinking environment, Creating a thinking environment, The thinking society, and a Thinking future.

Liswood, L.A., (1996) *Women World Leaders*, Rivers Oram Press  
Ashridge shelf reference: **JMHA (LIS)**

The author talks to 15 women throughout the world who are, or have been, leaders of their country. Each has a story of her own, revealing cultural diversities, successes and failures, dramas and tragedies. In a journey which took her into the corridors of power around the world, Laura Liswood conducted one-to-one interviews with all 15 women world leaders. Using this material, Liswood analyses the obstacles these politicians have faced in attaining high office, examines whether, once in power, they have been able to further the cause of women in their countries, and assesses the differences between male and female leaders.

Lynda, F. (1998) *Creating Self-Esteem: A Practical Guide To Realizing Your True Worth*, Element Books  
Ashridge shelf reference: **APA (FIE)**

"Creating Self-esteem" offers a practical and easy-to-follow approach to developing our selves and our all-important self-awareness. The author shows how to balance the self at every level - the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical. By helping each of us to discover our true worth, this unique book shows us how to take control of our lives and realise our full potential. In four parts the text covers: Connecting, Understanding, Feeling and Acting.

Markham, U. (1997) *The Ultimate Stress Handbook for Women*, Element Books  
Ashridge shelf reference: **APK (MAR)**

A guide to coping with stress aimed specifically at women. It covers such topics as recognising stress and its causes, thinking positively, relieving stress through self-help techniques, and dealing with painful periods, PMS and the menopause.

Schaeff, A.W. (1997) *Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much*, Harper San Francisco

Ashridge shelf reference: **APA (SCH)**

This collection of meditations is aimed at women whose lives are too busy. Paired with quotations from women of many ages, cultures and perspectives, it aims to help women recognise and change their patterns, slow down and take the time to listen to their own needs.

Sheehy, G (1997) *New Passages*, Harper Collins

Ashridge shelf reference: **APA (SHE)**

This book addresses the new dilemmas and demands people of each generation face as they pass beyond middle age. It dramatises the radical changes in all phases of adult life through personal histories and group interviews, attitudinal surveys of professional and working-class people, and findings extracted from 50 years of US Census reports. This edition draws on in-depth British research from MORI and Demos, interviews with British men and women, and analysis from commentators, including Anthony Sampson and Hamish McRae. This book forms the sequel to Sheehy's previous book "Passages".

Simpson, L. (2000) *Working from the Heart*, Vermilion

Ashridge shelf reference: **AKG (SIM)**

In this book, the author shows how it is possible to make work a genuinely fulfilling and enjoyable experience rather than simply a way of earning money. Through questionnaires, common-sense strategies and inspirational mantras the author points the way to a new, enlightened approach to work which involves focusing on how our work represents our life goals and our true purpose. Drawing on real-life experiences the book shows how work can bring us true fulfilment, whether it helps us to decide to make a fresh choice and move to a more satisfying career or to stay where we are and find new purpose.

Smith, Dayle M (2000) *Women at work*, Prentice Hall

Ashridge shelf reference: **AKC (SMI)**

Offering valuable insight and expertise from a wide range of contributing authors, this progressive and informative study offers a candid examination of women and the barriers they face as they enter the 21st Century workforce environment, and provides students with a foundation for exploring the glass ceiling, analysing women's experiences in the workplace, and identifying strategies for managing a successful career. Sharing the personal struggles and achievements of some of today's most inspiring and powerful professional women business leaders, it addresses numerous issues, including the inequity that characterises many work environments, and the challenges confronting women.

Stubbs, D.R., (1997) *Assertiveness at Work : a Necessary Guide to an Essential Skill*, Pan

Ashridge shelf reference: **APA (STU)\*\***

Takes into account the changes in society since this book was first published. Two new chapters have been added: one specifically dealing with difficult people; and one on establishing good working relationships on the basis of mutual respect.

Tannen, D. (1992) *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Virago Press

Ashridge shelf reference: **AJB (TAN)\*\***

Deborah Tannen illustrates how the best intentions can easily go painfully astray between spouses, family members, co-workers and friends. She reveals that no one is to blame for the familiar feeling among most men and women that members of the opposite sex just don't understand them. This best seller has revolutionised the way men and women talk and listen to each other at home and at work.

Vinnecombe, S., Colwill, N. L., (1995) *The Essence of Women in Management*, Prentice Hall

Ashridge shelf reference: **JPBP (COL)**

This text examines the rationale for expanding opportunities for women to achieve a more equal representation in management positions. Using real-life examples of successful women managers, it explores research on the status of women managers in Europe, analyses female roles in organisations, looks at the balancing act between work and family and illuminates the underlying issues of power and powerlessness.

Zandra, D. (1995) *Brilliance: Uncommon Voices From Uncommon Women*, Compendium Ltd.

Ashridge shelf reference: **AKG (ZAN)**

From Margaret Mead to Mother Teresa this book reveals the wit, wisdom, warmth, and uncommon thoughts that allowed nearly 200 fascinating women to survive and prevail. Beginning with young women's dreams and aspirations and moving forward through the entire life cycle of career decisions, setbacks, romance, fame, and late-life introspections, quotes are drawn from the lives of hundreds of outstanding women. An ideal gift for the uncommon woman in anyone's life.

## Websites

**Flametree** [www.flametree.co.uk](http://www.flametree.co.uk)

Flametree is an interactive forum and source of information for working women.

**HighTech Women** [www.hightech-women.com](http://www.hightech-women.com)

Gives you information about upcoming events and projects.

**Women's national commission** [www.thewnc.org.uk](http://www.thewnc.org.uk)

The Women's National Commission represents more than 8 million women and women's organisations. It works alongside the Women's Unit and supports the Minister for Women.

**Opportunity Now** [www.opportunitynow.org.uk](http://www.opportunitynow.org.uk)

Opportunity Now is a Business in the Community campaign, aimed at helping organisations to work on issues concerning women in the work place.

## **Professional women's networks**

### **Women in Management**

64 Marryat Road  
London  
SW19 5BN  
Tel: 0207 944 6332  
(they have regional branches around the country.)

### **Executive Women International**

31 Bedford Square  
London  
WC1B 3SQ

### **European Women's Management Development Network (EWMD)**

Rue Washington 40  
B-1050 Brussels  
Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 6480385  
Fax: +32 2 6460768

### **City Women's Network**

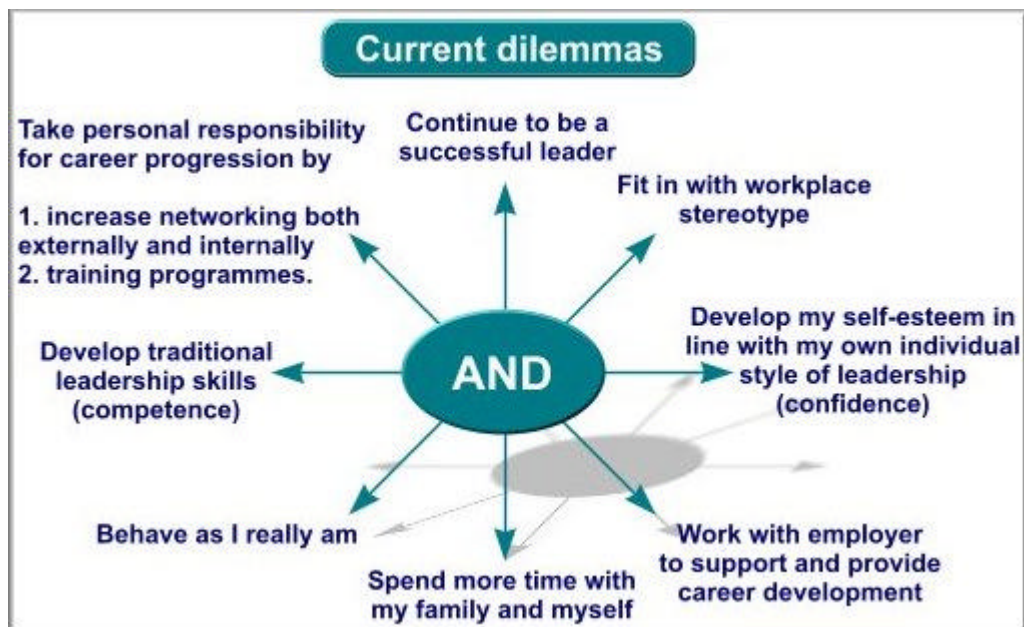
Administrative office  
PO Box 353  
Uxbridge  
UB10 0UN  
Tel & fax: 01895 272178

## Overview

---

This learning guide is based on research conducted by Martha Knight for the Ashridge Business Leadership for Women Programme.<sup>2</sup>

The research took the form of focus groups with in depth discussions. From the research we developed a model we called "The search for And." The model outlines the current dilemmas facing women managers, and certainly strikes a chord with women managers I work with.



The different issues highlighted in this research were the ones of:

- **Crafting a leadership style.** It is not always easy to do this when there are few role models around. The issue of being "yourself" but fitting in with the organisation was not always seen as an easy one to handle.
- **Career management** was linked in with the **self esteem** issues as it was not just a matter of competence (ie gaining the right skills and experience) but also confidence which was an issue for many of the women as they considered whether to progress to the next level. Also understanding the culture and politics of the organisation and developing appropriate support mechanisms are all issues which influence the topic of career management.

- **Work life balance.** (How to be a successful leader and spend more time with my family and myself.) Many individuals identify with the issue of work life balance: working parents with young families and individuals with responsibility for older members of the family, as well as young single staff who are keen to combine a demanding career with outside commitments.

This guide is organised around the model under the following headings:

- Crafting a leadership style which brings out the best in you
- Career development
- Work life balance
- Managing the organisational context

## **Crafting a leadership style which brings out the best in you**

### *The theory*

Researchers have always been intrigued with the differences in leadership styles between men and women and there are different schools of thought.

In the 80's and 90's the concept of transformational and transactional leadership developed by MacGregor Burns came to the fore.

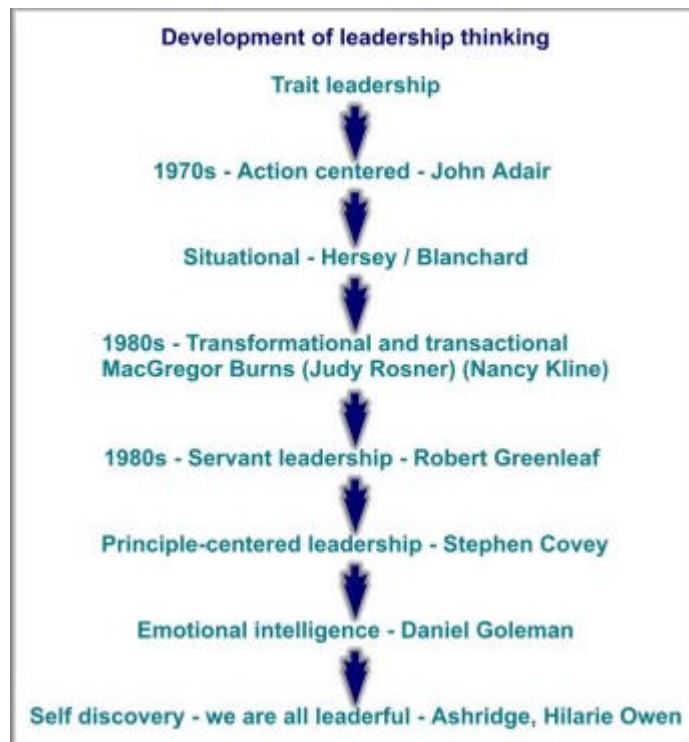
The diagram below illustrates the model. Transactional leadership is very much about motivating people through rewards and goals, whilst transformational leadership involves motivating by empowering and encouraging people.

### Transactional and transformational leadership

| Transactional leadership                                    | Transformational leadership                                     |
|---|---|
| Clarify goals and objectives to obtain immediate results    | Establish long-term vision                                      |
| Create structures and processes for control                 | Create a climate of trust                                       |
| Solve problems  | Empower people to control themselves and manage problem solving |
| Maintain and improve the current situation                  | Change the current situation                                    |
| Plan, organise and control                                  | Coach and develop people  |
| Guard and defend the culture                                | Challenge and change the culture                                |
| Power comes from position and authority in the organisation | Power comes from influencing a network of relationships         |

One of the studies of transactional and transformational leadership caused a huge ripple in the development of leadership theory because it included gender. This work was carried out by Judy Rosner.<sup>3</sup> She found that men and women in the study used both leadership styles, however, the women were more transformational than their male peers. As Hilarie Owen in "In Search of Leaders"<sup>4</sup> points out. "This is consistent with the belief that women feel more comfortable empowering others and encouraging team decision making than with directing subordinates via formal reward in exchange for performance. This is also consistent with the belief that men are socialised to compete as individuals, to see the direct connection between effort and reward, and are comfortable using direct control."

The diagram below charts the history of leadership development, moving from a tools and techniques approach to one which focuses more on the values and intent of leaders and the fact that everyone can be leaderful through their everyday activities.



It is from here that we will move into the practicalities of how to craft a style of leadership that brings out the best in you and capitalises on what is unique about you.

### *The practice*

Our research showed that often women don't know what they bring in terms of qualities and skills. As one member of our research sample pointed out "I want to sell myself, but I want to know what I am selling."

### *Understanding yourself*

"The leaders of the millennium will not be the leader who has learned of "how to do it" with the ledgers of "how's" balanced with "it's" that dissolve in the crashing changes ahead. The leader of today and the future will be focused on how to be - how to develop quality character, mindset, values, principles and courage". Frances Hesselbein.<sup>5</sup>

"Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself." Warren Bennis.<sup>6</sup>

What is it that you bring to your role as a leader? Complete exercises 1 and 2 and 3 in the development activities section to help you reflect on these topics.

- Exercise 1 is a personal SWOT analysis and will help you to look at you at your strengths and weaknesses.
- Exercise 2 will help you to identify times when you were "leaderful" and help to develop a clearer picture of what it is that is special about your approach to leadership
- Exercise 3 will help you to think about what type of leader you would like to be in the future.

These activities will require time but give yourself the space to work them through, as the clearer you are about who and what you are, the more likely you are to achieve your potential as an individual and a leader.

### *Creating impact*

"When you see someone for the first time, the initial sound/visual 'bite' - a combination of their looks, their dress, their bearing and the tenor of their opening remarks – becomes deeply etched in our minds and affects our attitude to them."<sup>7</sup>

To add to this quote, women, like any minority group, also have to face the issue of stereotyping. (According to research in social psychology, if a group's representation falls below 20% in a given society, eg the workplace, then it's going to be subjected to stereotyping whether it likes it or not.)<sup>8</sup>

Rosabeth Moss Kanter<sup>9</sup> in her research identified a number of stereotypes:

- Pet
- Mother
- Wife / Seductress
- Iron maiden

All this highlights just how important it is to create the right impact and give the right message. Think for a moment about what you want other people to think

about you? What sort of impression do you want to make? What is the appropriate image for a successful woman in your business environment? Think about dress, behaviour, attitude, and body language to create an image of what this should be like.

These questions should give you a starting point and below I have given some tips which could help in one to one situations, meetings and presentations:

### *One to one situations*

- Plan and prepare both yourself and the information
- Think about how to present yourself. Is it formal/informal, etc?
- Make sure you have done your research on the topic
- Think about what outcome you would like to achieve
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes - What will they expect from the meeting?
- Concentrate on creating a confident image: good eye contact, posture and a clear voice
- You will need to create "rapport" with the person you dealing with. Rapport is achieved on different levels through the content of what you say, how you say it (the tone and pace) and your body language. Rapport between people happens when they are "matching" each other. Even if people are disagreeing on the content, if they are matching in terms of body language and pace they are likely to have a discussion rather than an argument. Look at exercise 4 in the development activities section for more help on how to achieve rapport.

### *In meetings*

- Make sure you sit in a central position where you have the eye of the chair and can be seen by the group
- Use body language to create space for yourself and remember to lean forward and signal when you want to speak
- Watch out for the "3 second squeak". Women's voices are generally softer and higher pitched than men's so if you're not careful it can be difficult to get a word in and when you do it may not come out quite as you had

planned. To avoid this try to speak early. It will give you confidence and ensure that people know you are there

- Build on others' ideas and summarise. Speak clearly and to the point.

### *In presentations*

- Think about how you can make impact. What is it that's special about your approach? What do you bring to the situation?
- Visualise the presentation going well and you presenting confidently. If you go in feeling positive you will perform better
- Pre presentation nerves can often help to improve your performance but watch nervous habits and movements
- Memorise your opening. When you have got through the first part you will begin to feel more confident
- Remember "People are persuaded more by the depth of your conviction, than the height of your logic, more by your enthusiasm than any proof you can offer".<sup>10</sup> A good presentation is as much about the person who is delivering it as it is about the content, so tailor the presentation to *you*, add *your* spice, tailor it to *your* audience.

Remember - managing your image and your impact is not about trying to be something that you are not. It's about becoming aware of your strengths and putting them forward in a credible way.

## **Career development**

Career development and promotion opportunities rarely happen by accident and take considerable thought and planning.

Looking at statistics comparing performance, image and exposure gives some stark messages about career advancement. It is not just about doing a good job, but getting exposure and creating the right image.

| <b>Getting promoted</b> |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Performance             | 10% |
| Image                   | 30% |
| Exposure                | 60% |

Exposure is certainly an important factor; taking opportunities to present, to work on key project or assignments can help in this process. For tips on how to survive and thrive in organisations, and ensure that your contribution is recognised, look at activity 5 in the development activities section.

Career development is a creative process and today it is important to think outside the box and be aware of all the options available. Flexible working options and portfolio careers create a range of possibilities that can meet both your needs and that of the organisation.

### *What do you want?*

To start thinking about your career development it is important to be aware of what's important to you in terms of your values and life goals.

Exercise 6 in the development activities section will help you to explore some of the issues in terms of your career and life planning.

Once you have a specific goal, short and long term, it is far easier to plan out how to achieve it.

It is also important to get support from others and the importance of networking and mentoring has been highlighted as being particularly valuable to women managers. This is because women are often more isolated and may not fit into the traditional networks in the organisation.

### *Networking*

One of the features of recent years has been the growth in networks. What are they? What do they do? Are they worth joining? How do you choose the appropriate one? These are all important questions to ask.

Networks are fluid and flexible organisations. They help people to make contacts, solve problems, find out what's going on and most importantly they can provide support and encouragement to members.

If you want to join a network of some kind it is important to find the right network to satisfy your current and future interest. Many people will feel more comfortable with others who share similar industrial and professional experience.

If you want to meet local contacts find a regional network which can meet your needs. If you want to explore new areas - be they different types of work, different locations, different countries, different specialisations - then one of the larger, or at least one of the more diverse networks will be preferable.

Look at the resources section for a list of women's networks with useful internet sites. You could also try your local chamber of commerce, and professional associations.

### *Mentoring*

A mentor is someone who takes a personal interest in an individual, guiding them to their success. Mentors are particularly helpful to women managers and can help combat some of the issues around exposure, networking and understanding some of the political and cultural aspects about how the organisation works.

A mentor can help in several ways:

- Helping to sift through complex organisational issues
- Listening
- Giving constructive feedback
- Guiding communications - who to see, how to present the message
- Giving practical tuition when required
- Offering career guidance and objective perspectives on direction and advancement
- Offering a broader vision of situations and opportunities.

Mentors can fulfil different roles at different times, or there may be several people who fit these mentor roles. It is not necessary to think of only one

person. However, where there are several advisers, it is as well to take care that conflicting advice does not cause problems. Remember that at the end of the day the decision is for you to take.

People have mentors throughout their careers and some organisations have set up mentoring schemes where senior members of staff mentor more junior members. It is also possible to have mentors outside the organisation. This is particularly useful for senior managers who can benefit from a different perspective on their role.

### *Choosing a mentor*

There is not one obvious source for finding an effective mentor but there are some aspects to think about. Would you feel best advised by:

- Someone senior to you or someone with relevant experience at that level
- Your own manager or someone outside the "line"
- Someone outside the organisation
- Someone in your own discipline or a different one
- Someone of your own age or gender, or different?

Whatever your preference, the ideal mentor should:

- Have a record of developing other people
- Like to see people progress
- Have a wide range of current skills
- Really understand the organisation and its needs
- Have patience and good interpersonal skills
- Have time
- Have your respect and is confident and challenging
- Have a wide network.

Be bold; approach a mentor who will meet your needs.

## Work life balance

Work life balance is becoming more and more important to both men and women. Over half the managers surveyed in the 1999 Ashridge Management Index looked for family friendly policies, and 70% wanted to see flexible working hours as an accepted part of their work life. Over 93% reported a maintained and increased commitment to their partner or family.

Organisations are also recognising that a focus on work life balance has clear bottom line benefits:

- Increased staff loyalty and commitment
- Reduced staff turnover, which saves on recruitment costs
- Increased productivity
- Reduced absenteeism
- Enhanced corporate image
- Reduced retraining costs.

Increasingly flexible working is becoming more acceptable in senior positions. The major consultancy practices, banks and retailers are all using flexible options as a way of retaining employees.

If you are thinking about moving toward a flexible contract:

- Think creatively about how your job can be adapted to be more flexible. The chances are that it will bring benefits to the organisation as well as your lifestyle
- Look at examples of other women who have flexible arrangements. Find out what works for them
- Build career planning into your goals. Think about what you would like to achieve and ways to make it happen - flexible working does not mean that your career will stagnate
- Prioritise your work so that you are focussing on the important tasks
- Retain visibility in the organisation by taking on tasks and projects that will provide you with exposure

- Use technology to help stay in contact and work from home with greater ease
- Select and work with a mentor who can help and advise you how best to develop your career
- Maintain and develop your networks so that you can build relationships and be in touch with what is happening.

## Managing the organisational content

When managing in an organisation it is important to understand how it operates in terms of the culture and politics. Traditionally women have not been keen to enter this arena, seeing politics as a negative topic.

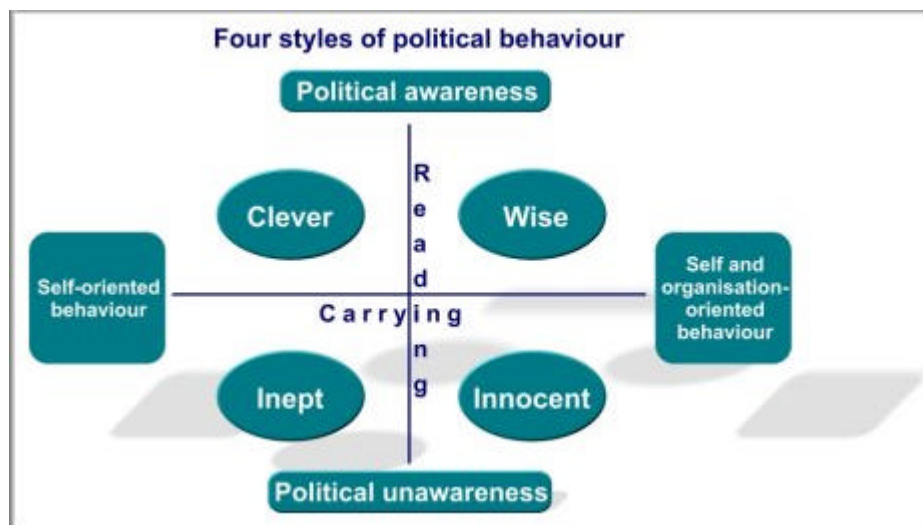
Managers' political skills stem from a willingness to embrace diversity and not to view it as dysfunctional. They also need to be willing to create win/win situations rather than setting people up to lose. Skilled political behaviour involves understanding how the organisation works and mobilising resources to achieve the organisation's purposes. This needs to be done without subordinating personal needs or exploiting others.

There are two dimensions which affect behaviour in a political situation. The first refers to the manager's awareness or understanding of the organisation: the ability to 'read' the organisational world. The second relates to the manager's predisposition to behave in certain ways, requiring an understanding of what you 'carry' into a particular situation.

To understand a management problem you need knowledge of how the organisation works, its processes, procedures and systems. You also need a feel for the power bases, overt and covert agendas, and informal networks: these are facts of organisational life, which lie behind the scenes. Political awareness depends on the ability to read between the lines as well as familiarity with the formal organisation chart. What needs to be read is often unwritten. An inability or unwillingness to become 'literate' leads to political unawareness and is an immediate disadvantage when it comes to mobilising resources. Reading an organisation takes skill, time and sensitivity to other people.

The second dimension is more personal. At one end of its spectrum, personal needs are the prime influence on behaviour. They shape action with little or no concern for the organisation or the other people; the organisation's purpose and other people's needs are taken into account only insofar as they can be exploited and, in this instance, behaviour is self-oriented. People of this sort appear defensive, aggressive or only superficially concerned with the wishes or needs of others. In contrast, at the other end of this dimension, people carry an awareness of the organisation's purpose as well as their own personal needs. This can sometimes be an uncomfortable position. The issue for them is how to resolve potential conflicts with integrity and without compromising themselves. At this end of the dimension a person carries a notion of ethical behaviour.

The integration of these two dimensions give rise to four different styles of behaviour for dealing with political situations, illustrated below:



Adapted from S Baddeley and K James, Management Education and Development, Vol 18 (1), Spring 1987.

## Types of political behaviour

We refer to the four styles of behaviours as 'innocent', 'inept', 'clever', and 'wise'. They are descriptions of how people behave, not of personality traits: anyone can behave in any of these ways depending on their situation. Understanding the differences between them helps women choose how to act. For us, political skill means wise behaviour. This is a stark contrast with clever behaviour, which is

what is often associated with political activity. It is also contrasted with innocent or inept behaviour, which is associated with lack of sophistication and naivety.

**Innocent behaviour** is typified by blindness to power and other organisational issues. It emphasises managerial and professional rationality above all else. Acting innocently, people often do not distinguish between clever and wise behaviour and thus they assume that all political awareness leads to unpleasantness. They expect organisational requirements to be spelt out clearly and assume that they can mobilise resources through formal channels.

**Inept behaviour** is characterised by a lack of awareness of what is going on and the concern of people behaving like this is that they get what they want. Because this is self-oriented and lacks an underpinning of organisational awareness, it frequently lands the person acting in this way in a mess, with a negative spin-off for the organisation.

**Clever behaviour** is typified by opportunism. A shrewd understanding of how the organisation works is used to personal advantage. Acting cleverly gets things done. This type of behaviour uses information both within and outside the formal organisational systems but not necessarily to the advantage of the organisation.

**Wise behaviour** takes account of what is happening at the time in any situation. Wise behaviour therefore requires a considerable amount of intuition. This stems from sensitivity to others, awareness of personal feelings and values and an intimate knowledge of the context. In wise behaviour, the person treads a balanced line between their own and the organisation's needs.

When managing the organisation it is essential to take into account all the aspects of political life and manage in a way which is true to your values and intent.

## Development activities

---

### Personal SWOT analysis

#### *Exercise 1*

This activity is designed to help you think about yourself and your approach to leadership. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses (or areas for development)? What are the opportunities facing you and what are the threats, or potential issues you need to deal with?

| Strengths     | Weaknesses (areas to develop)          |
|---------------|--|
|               |  |
| Opportunities | Threats (issues you need to deal with) |
|               |  |

Make sure that you have a balanced number of strengths and development needs. Ask other people for their views and feedback so that you build up a clear picture of yourself and your potential.

When you have done this set yourself some goals. Thinking about your role as a leader:

1. What can you do to build on your strengths?
2. What development issues should you tackle and how?

3. What opportunities are available to you, to develop your leadership potential?
4. What issues do you need to tackle to achieve your potential?

## Being leaderful

### *Exercise 2*

This exercise will help you to understand some of the values and behaviours you have developed over the years and how they inform your approach to leadership:

- Think about times when you were "leaderful." Take a number of situations throughout your life when you behaved in way that showed leadership. (This may not necessarily be in an official leadership role, but a time when you made a decision, did something differently, took a stand, took responsibility.)
- Jot down some notes for yourself about what you did. What behaviours, values and actions influenced how you reacted to the situation? What impact did you have?
- Identify some themes that re occur in the different situations. What does this tell you about your approach to leadership, and the elements that you value about yourself as a leader?
- How can you continue to develop these themes and build on the core values and behaviours in yourself?

Another approach to this topic is to think about leaders you admire. Pick a few people. These may be leaders who appear in the media, historical figures or, closer to home, people you respect at work or within your family and social network.

What are the values and qualities that you respect in them?

The chances are that these are values you hold strongly about what a good leader should be like, and they probably reflect some of the skills and behaviours you demonstrate or aspire to for yourself.

## **What type of a leader would you like to be?**

### *Exercise 3*

Get creative here, day dream a while, and think about the sort of leader you would like to be. Draw a picture to illustrate this, or make a collage of different images, or just brainstorm a list of qualities and attributes you would like to have.

Getting a clear image and outcome for your leadership approach is a good start because it gives you something tangible to work with an aim for.

For many of you there will be a need to give something away in order to achieve your goal. This may be a behaviour, which has served you well in the past but is no longer needed as you move into the future. For example you may need to give away your need to be liked, to be always right, to be there for everyone, to have the solution, to be in control, etc. Whatever it is it will be personal to you.

You have done two important things in this exercise. You have set yourself a vision of the type of leader you would like to be and you have identified some behaviours you will need to change in order to get there. Exercise 7, the goal setting exercise, will help you to put these into concrete goals and objectives for yourself.

## **Creating rapport**

### *Exercise 4*

Rapport is fundamental to effective communication - it is the natural "dance" that happens when people meet.

There are specific skills you can learn that enhance rapport and increase your effectiveness as a communicator.

This requires sensory activity to see, hear, and sense the other person so that you can match their:

- Posture
- Breathing
- Energy level
- Language and speech patterns
- Gestures
- Rhythm
- Tone

Do some people watching. When people have achieved rapport you will notice that they are matching each other and it looks natural. Your aim is to try and achieve this in meetings and conversations with others.

Try to notice your own behaviour, and ensure that you do match people you are with. Even if you disagree with them, try to match your posture, pace and tone of voice. The likelihood is that you will have a more positive meeting and avoid unnecessary conflict.

## **Tips for surviving and thriving**

### *Exercise 5*

Listed below are tips for surviving and thriving in the business environment and making the most of the opportunities that come your way:

- Be politically aware and open contacts wherever you go.
- Build reciprocal relationships with people (that is, you help them and they help you).
- Let your boss (and others in a position to make decisions) know that you are interested in success and expect to be promoted. And keep telling them.

- Involve your boss in your career development by asking for advice and help.
- Get to know people from other departments in your organisation.
- Volunteer for key projects and tasks.
- Actively pursue visible, important assignments that allow you to be tested.
- Understand the priority tasks and projects in your department and your company, and be productive in those areas.
- Be a problem-solver who helps to overcome crises in the workplace and who builds a reputation as the one to call in difficulty.
- Contribute new ideas and put them in writing.
- Serve on important committees and task forces.
- Take part in company-sponsored events.
- Develop a specific area of expertise in your field so that others come to you for information and help.
- Be creative in your work so that you stand out. Working by the same formula as everybody else will ensure your invisibility.
- Share relevant ideas and articles with people in and out of your department. For example, if you spot an interesting article that relates to what Jane or John is doing, send a copy with a note saying, 'Thought you might like to see this, if you haven't already.'
- Send relevant memos about your work to people who might be interested, being careful not to breach confidentiality.
- At meetings, don't be a mere spectator, take an active part. Be prepared so your comments stand out as informed. Write a brief outline to pass out based on what you will say. Sit in a visible place in meetings, never at the back.
- Take or make any opportunity to chair meetings.
- Don't be afraid to be tested publicly. Welcome opportunities that come along, but do your homework and be ready. It's better to risk failure trying than to remain secure and untested in a crowd.
- Actively promote yourself. It's a crucial part of the process. Just as we're pleased to hear and share the accomplishments of others, we should be pleased to share our own triumphs, however small or great.
- Quantify your accomplishments whenever possible (for example, I instituted cost-saving procedure X, which reduced secretarial time by 20%).

- Let your accomplishments be known in and out of the organisation through newsletters, self-evaluations, newspapers, memos to your boss, or simply comments such as, 'I'm very excited about what happened yesterday.'
- Always acknowledge the role of others in your success.
- Be sure to praise the accomplishments of others.
- When people praise your work in a substantial way, ask them to put it in writing.
- Tell people what you want. If they know, you might get it; if they don't, you won't get it.
- Ask your boss for regular feedback on your performance, making the point that you want to improve and grow professionally.
- Ask someone you respect in your organisation to give you specific feedback about your performance, your interaction with others, and your presentation skills. Make it clear that you want both positive and negative feedback. Seeing ourselves as other see us can help us grow.
- Foster positive working relationships. If tension exists between you and a colleague or superior, meet with the person. Say that you feel a tension and want to resolve it. Ask what you both can do to improve the working relationship.
- Do periodic self-evaluations for your own benefit, including an assessment of your strengths and weaknesses, your concrete accomplishments, your failures, and strategies for addressing your weaknesses to minimise their impact.
- Keep a file on yourself. In this file, place all the items relating to your work, your specific accomplishments (on and off the job), your awards and honours, letters praising your work, and the like. It will constitute a complete record over the years and ensure that nothing is forgotten. Such a file, for your personal use, will put you in a strong position to summarise the specific high points of your career when asking for promotion or raise. When you apply for a new job, you'll be in a great position to tailor your resume to that job.
- Whenever you try to sell yourself (to direct an important project, attend a conference, or get a promotion or new job), remember the basic principle of marketing; people buy based on what you can do for them, based on their

needs. The issue is not how wonderful you are as such, but what you have to offer X.

- Carry yourself in a confident, self-assured manner. If you don't believe in yourself, why should others?
- As much as possible within your financial constraints, dress the part you want to play, not the stereotype others expect of you. Impressions and image are important, whether we like it or not. How we present ourselves is the visible manifestation of who we are at any given moment. Dressing the part also helps provide access.
- Be visible at professional and trade conferences by taking an active part.
- Join together with other women to urge the human resources department to establish a data bank on women who are potential candidates for management and executive positions. This undercuts the frequent assertions of executives that there are no qualified women candidates and helps make women visible. Also, it may help build your networking base.
- Support other women in their career development efforts.
- Be invisible when it comes to participating in office gossip, but listen for clues about behaviour that might be relevant to you.
- Don't broadcast mistakes and failures (as women often feel compelled to do). If you must talk about a mistake, use it as an opportunity to affirm yourself (for example, it's not like me to miss such an important point). Learn from your mistakes, and move on.
- If you reach a point where it's clear you're not going to progress any further (and you want to do so), face it and act. This means looking at the hard possibility of changing jobs or careers.
- Review this list often, making sure that you're taking advantage of every opportunity.

## **Managing your career**

### *Exercise 6*

A good start for thinking about your career and life planning is to take a holistic approach and look at the type of individual you are, your values, aspirations,

strengths and goals. Working within these guidelines will enable you to achieve your potential.

| Step          | Examples  | Time frame                      |
|---------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. Diagnosis  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are you?</li> <li>• What is important to you?</li> <li>• What are your attributes</li> <li>• What are your aspirations?</li> </ul>                 | Past and present                |
| 2. Values     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is more/less important to you?</li> <li>• What can/not you live without?</li> </ul>   |                                 |
| 3. Personal   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission/purpose</li> <li>• What do you have to offer?</li> <li>• What do you believe in?</li> </ul>  |                                 |
| 4. Life goal  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you want to do?</li> <li>• What do you want to create?</li> <li>• What do you want to experience?</li> <li>• Who do you want to be?</li> </ul> | Long term - may not be dateable |
| 5. Resources  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths</li> <li>• Talents</li> <li>• Skills</li> <li>• Experience</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Finances*</li> </ul>     | Medium term – 6 months +        |
| 6. Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career</li> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Financial</li> <li>• Education/training</li> <li>• Health/fitness etc.</li> </ul>                                  |                                 |
| 7. Next steps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak to...</li> <li>• Write to...</li> <li>• Talk to...</li> <li>• Decide on...</li> <li>• Ask...</li> </ul>  | Short term - now to 6 months    |
| 8. Review     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What worked/did not work?</li> <li>• What did you learn?</li> <li>• How have you changed?</li> </ul>   | Annual                          |

\* Note that having is an objective, whereas the life goal is about being and doing. The acquisition of financial resources is a means to an end and hence an objective, but unlikely to be a satisfying end in itself<sup>1</sup>.

## Action planning

### Exercise 7

I hope you have enjoyed this learning guide and that it has prompted you to take some action. Look back at the sections you have read and the development activities you have completed and set some SMART objectives:

**S**pecific

**M**easurable

**A**chievable

**R**ealistic

**T**imebound

|                    |
|--------------------|
| <b>Goal 1</b>      |
|                    |
| <b>Objective 1</b> |
|                    |
| <b>Goal 2</b>      |
|                    |

|                    |
|--------------------|
| <b>Objective 2</b> |
|                    |
| <b>Goal 3</b>      |
|                    |
| <b>Objective 3</b> |
|                    |

*This learning guide was written by Pam Jones, a client and programme director at Ashridge*

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Mail on Sunday 12/11/00, "**Name all the women executives of major UK companies**".
- <sup>2</sup> Knight, M (1998) Research report: Business Leadership for Women
- <sup>3</sup> Rosner, J (1990) Harvard Business Review, November-December
- <sup>4</sup> Owen, H. (2000) *In search of leaders*, Wiley
- <sup>5</sup> Hesselbein, F; Goldsmith, M and Beckhard, R (1997) *The leader of the future*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco
- <sup>6</sup> Bennis, W (1989) *On becoming a leader*, Hutchinson
- <sup>7</sup> Shea, M (1994) *Personal Impact*, Mandarin
- <sup>8</sup> Goffee, R and Jones, G (2000) *Why should anyone be led by you?*, Harvard Business Review, September-October, Vol 78 (5), p. 62-70
- <sup>9</sup> Kanter, R (1993) *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Basic Books, New York
- <sup>10</sup> Peoples, David (1992) *Presentation Plus*, John Wiley
- <sup>11</sup> Tame, J. *Planning for Executives, Long Range Planning*, Pergamon Press Ltd. Vol. 26, no 5, October 1993.