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# INCLUSIVE NETWORKING AND SPONSORSHIP

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We invite you to read our latest report

which addresses:

- How to involve men as gender allies
- How to deliver Everyday Gender Inclusion
- Actions for individuals
- Case studies on organisational initiatives

Both are available for download at

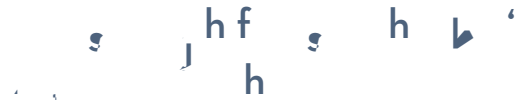
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# THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT



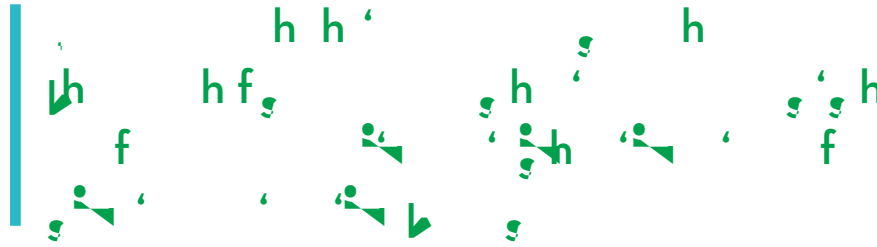
The importance of strong and effectual professional networks cannot be underestimated. They help you feel you 'fit in', help you stay up-to-date with what's going on and they allow you to discuss work-related issues and relationships. Networks can also provide you with mentors who encourage you and sponsors who actively advocate for your career progress. Access to networks can be summed up as social capital<sup>1</sup>. This social capital is accessed in the workplace in two interconnected ways which are known to help career success and increase job satisfaction:



Using our research and quoting from other studies, we will show that despite widespread mentoring initiatives, women perceive they have less access than their male colleagues to both forms of social capital.

This report goes on to present individual and organisational actions to tackle women's more restricted access to informal networking and sponsorship.

***“An under-reported impact of unintentional gender bias is women have poorer access than their male colleagues to workplace social networks and career sponsorship.”***



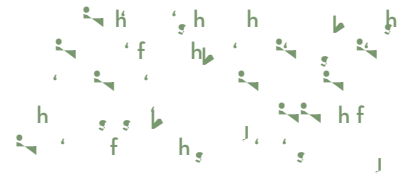
These networks are important to who gets spotted for promotion. Knowing the people senior to you who you don't work with directly means you are more likely to get access to more opportunities to join a project or be invited to apply for a promotion. Discussions about work often happen in these more informal settings that inform the decisions that are later made in meetings. Knowing a broader group of people in your field also means that someone comes to mind when lateral appointments are made. Getting to know a bigger group of people can be delivered either through informal conversations or by joining networking events.

Networking is primarily an issue for individuals. Organisations can also contribute by facilitating communities around common interests and goals.

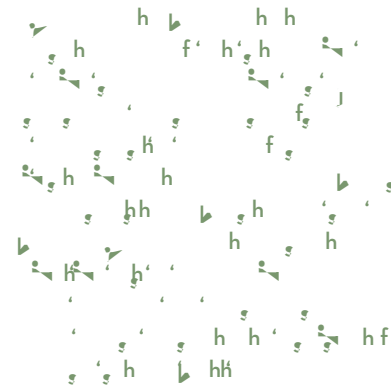
A sponsor is different from a mentor. A mentor is an impartial sounding board to whom you can talk about your goals and challenges. A mentor gives you advice and can introduce you to people that may be useful to your career. A mentor often has no vested interest in your promotion within your current organisation.<sup>2</sup>



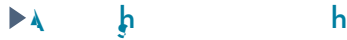
## INFORMAL NETWORKS DEFINED



## SPONSORSHIP DEFINED



## THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT



The benefits of sponsorship are well-evidenced in meeting an organisation's objectives to build a deeper, more sustainable talent pipeline across the workforce. It is a powerful tool in improving the proportional representation of women and other groups who face particular challenges to career advancement. This offers the organisation the benefits of a more diverse leadership team.<sup>3</sup>

- Sponsorship helps retain diverse talent. Men and women and minority employees with a sponsor feel more satisfied with their career advancement than those without.<sup>4</sup>

- Sponsorship can result in as much as a 30% increase in promotions, pay rises, and stretch assignments for a protégé – according to research from the US.<sup>5</sup>

Conversely, lack of access to the sponsorship of senior leaders puts up barriers to career advancement.

- Women are more likely to be offered mentoring with a relatively junior mentor, while men are more likely to be actively sponsored by a senior executive.<sup>6</sup>

- Even with mentoring, women often aren't as well-represented as men in the leadership pipeline.<sup>7,8</sup>

- Minority groups are also not well represented.<sup>9</sup>

A primary reason for this is that sponsorship is often something that happens informally and is therefore subject to unintentional bias. Especially affinity bias, which is the tendency of people to warm to and promote people like themselves.

Sponsorship is a powerful tool. In comparison to mentoring, sponsorship is more important to the performance of the organisation, more demanding of the engagement and commitment of senior people, and carries more inherent risk to reputation. Running a successful sponsorship programme is not easy, straightforward or cheap. There is also a risk of backlash from those who are not selected to be sponsored.

The provision of sponsorship opportunities is primarily an issue for leaders, to be delivered through formal programmes. Individual employees also have a role to play in lobbying for good sponsorship programmes and for getting what they want from a sponsor.

Formal programmes are now often offered by private practitioners and consultancy companies. Emma Avignon, CEO of Mentore, offers her expert advice on page 19. Dr Jen de Vries offers her expertise in the academic sector on page 22. The 'Our Time' programme is being run across the Greater London Authority functional bodies by the Mayor of London. The toolkit to run the programme has been published and is available for download. Charmaine DeSouza expands on this on page 24.<sup>10</sup> ●



# INFORMAL (SOCIAL) NETWORKING

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The Collaborating with Men survey on gender bias in workplace culture researched a gender balanced sample of almost 7,000 from 25 organisations.<sup>11</sup> The findings suggest that most women and many men surveyed think that the informal networks formed around social relationships between colleagues are male dominated. The problem with male dominated networks is that it is more difficult for women to access

them. Therefore, the person spotted for promotion, invited to join a project team or lobbied about their opinion of a work issue is more likely to be a man. When you don't play in the 5-a-side football teams or poker nights or even hang out in the bar after work then an obvious consequence is that you don't get to know as many colleagues outside your immediate team or collaborators and they don't get to know you. ▶

## KEY POINTS



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Very few men are deliberately keeping women out of

*“Male managers can’t provide informal mentorship to women as easily as they can to men. For example, as a man, if in an informal situation a male manager says let’s go and have a coffee or a meal, or a drink, to discuss something, it would be fine. The same approach to a woman in the same situation could be (wrongly) interpreted as inappropriate so it is easier to avoid the situation.”*

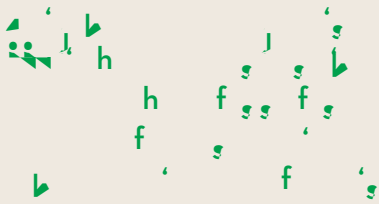
- ▶ The publicity around #MeToo has rightly brought workplace gender issues back to centre stage. However, what the professional men and women in our research have also pointed out is that #MeToo is making it harder for men and women to feel comfortable networking with or mentoring each other.



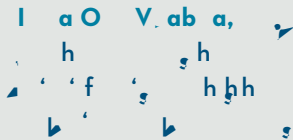
Purposeful acts of allyship<sup>15</sup> to network with women or minority groups can make a big difference to the careers of your colleagues.

Tying suggested actions to inclusive leadership objectives and overtly discussing the what and the why is more likely to make men feel more comfortable in deliberately extending their workplace social contacts with women. ●

## 1. H



## Networking in a male-dominated environment



***Do you (or other women in your sector) face any barriers to networking because your industry is so male-dominated?***

Each network has 'outer' and 'inner' circles. Even if you are 'in', it can be a superficial 'in'. You may not be excluded from general conversations but neither are you 'thought of' when significant events are discussed or unofficial outings are organised. One of the ways to spot this is to see how often you are invited to 'unofficial hangouts'.

I don't specifically prioritise networking with women over men as the 'financial industry demographic' is what it is. However, I have become more active in making more women aware of the Guild I am a member of. I think being a member of the Guild will start other women on the right path for networking outside of the places where they work and help the Guild become more gender balanced. Women need to help each other much

more than they do now, rather than see each other as rivals.

***What is your strategy for networking?***

You do need a loose plan that works with your career stage. At present, for me, intra-sector networking makes the most sense but it's also important to make connections within your own organisation.

I say 'loose' plan because networking is something that 'just happens' with every interaction, at every event we go to, whether we are conscious of it or not.

I treat each person like a book I have not read yet. I may see the book's title (what they do), read the reviews on the cover (what I have heard about them) but just as no one truly knows the book is for them until they start reading it, the same applies to people. None of those whom I see as 'human gems' in my network were met through 'targeted networking' but

***“For women, the challenge is not networking per se, it is being invited / accepted / breaking into these inner circles and becoming the natural part of them.”***

were rather 'discovered' through many years and across many encounters. This does not mean that networking is aimless but you can't build a genuine network by setting out to 'collect useful people'.

For breaking into the 'inner layers' it's good to focus on people who are different from you, but with enough mutual interest for the connection to be synergetic and long-lasting. It's also important not to over-connect as there's a natural limit to how big a network you can maintain.

Even if you have a natural post-school or university 'ecosystem', networking is a must. I suggest thinking of it in terms of 'compound interest', the sooner you start saving (networking) the better your financial position (the reach of your network) becomes over time.

### ***How do you go about networking?***

This is what I see as the

# SPONSORSHIP

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- Sponsorship happens informally all the time when those in leadership talk about who may fit an opportunity. This informal system of patronage is a small step from socialising with and supporting those who share your interests.<sup>17</sup>

- Unconscious (often unintentional) bias is at work here. Unconscious bias flourishes in informal, unstructured situations where there are no checks and balances.<sup>18</sup> Biased decisions favour some groups at the expense of others, with women and minority groups at risk of missing out on career enhancing sponsorship opportunities.<sup>19</sup>







# WHAT INDIVIDUALS CAN DO

1. Trust

## 1. Trust

Remember that both you and your sponsor(s) within your organisation have something to lose as well as something to gain. Be clear about your goals because they risk their reputation by advocating for you. Ask yourself what it is about your potential sponsor that makes you think you can trust them with the frank conversations you will need to have.

## 2. Team

Approach a potential sponsor, especially if you know each other. Otherwise ask a senior member of your team to help you by finding a sponsor or introducing you to someone you have identified as a potential sponsor.

## 3. What?

Trust  
Team  
What?  
What?  
What?

## 5. You

Can you  
be effective

5. You

Can you  
be effective

## 4. Multiple

Expect to have multiple sponsors. Expect some to stay with you for years and others to be helpful tactically at different stages in your career. Having more than one sponsor means you are not dependent on one relationship, you can access a greater breadth of experience and opportunities and insure yourself against your sponsor leaving the organisation.

## 6. No need to prove

You don't need to prove your ability to your sponsor - others will have vouched for your potential and prior performance. In any case, the chances are you won't be able to prove yourself, in the way you may expect to, as you won't necessarily work directly for your sponsor.



## WHAT LEADERS CAN DO

1. **Set the agenda**

### 2. **Drive leadership**

Question whether current sponsorship practices are delivering against your objectives on diversity of representation of women, BAME and on sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic background and diversity of thought.

# Making sponsorship work for inclusion

## Equality, not just access

A good sponsorship programme needs, above all, a clear sense of purpose from both the organisation's leaders and the person being sponsored.

## Common career trajectory

*"We don't have enough senior roles"*

What can be overlooked is how well sponsorship can serve lateral moves across the organisation. This provides the breadth of experience and profile necessary to ultimately rise into the few roles at the top.

*"I'm not sure I have enough time to be a sponsor"*

Leaders often over-estimate the time needed for effective sponsorship. Planning for a year ahead is enough to start a relationship with a sponsee. On average, meeting 8-12 times a year is enough.

## *"Why are we paired together?"*

Both sponsors and sponsees tend to assume that it's best if they share characteristics or common experiences. This is useful in a mentoring relationship but not necessary for a sponsor. What is necessary here is the ability of the sponsor to be able to influence discussions and identify opportunities for the sponsee. What you share is a common goal to see your sponsee's career progress.

*"I believe in diversity and equality of opportunity, but what does this mean for me?"*

The bigger conversation that is happening in the workplace and media around the representation of women means that programmes designed to enable men and women to have greater equality in accessing opportunities can be vulnerable to criticism. This invites a conversation, directly addressing

***"Sponsorship isn't the easy route. It isn't just another diversity initiative. Sponsorship is challenging to do well. Sponsors need to be fully engaged and committed."***



## Professional approach

A professional, public approach gives this important sponsorship relationship the status it deserves. Putting sponsorship on the same footing as other business meetings is vital, particularly when a man sponsors a woman. This avoids the potential for gossipy comments and addresses the discomfort both men and women can feel about mixed gender sponsorship relationships. Advice includes:

- Openly diarise sponsorship meetings.
- Arranging offsite meetings over coffee or breakfast - in a business setting.
- Arranging onsite meetings in a conference room.

*“Sky’s Sponsorship & Development programme was set up to progress our target of a 50/50 gender balanced leadership team. This has since evolved into our Women into Leadership programme, addressing our mid-management level to build a pipeline of female leaders. All of us - especially men - in senior positions should be sponsoring women in our organisations. For example, I’m currently sponsoring someone who previously boxed herself in in terms of her career - now, she is applying for a more senior role that’s out of her comfort zone. Success won’t be measured by whether or not this person gets the job; the very fact that she is realising her potential and reimagining her fit z g. stom,*

## EXPERT ADVICE

# Making sponsorship work in higher education



Dr. Jen DeVoe

*Sponsorship - Creating  
Career Opportunities  
for Women in Higher  
Education.*



Jen is an internationally known expert in mentoring and sponsorship.

**S**ponsorship within academia is required at all career stages and is especially critical at two career stages. Firstly, the establishment of the research aspect of academic careers, which must happen early and relies on colleagues closely aligned within the discipline. Without research success, it is difficult to begin building an academic career particularly within research focused institutions. Secondly, the transition from within the discipline into the broader arena of institutional leadership, where sponsorship opportunities often come from further afield.

**S**ponsorship as an everyday informal practice, where they exercise complete discretion and have little accountability. Taps on the shoulder and selective sponsorship based on individual judgements of talent and merit are commonplace. This leaves sponsorship extremely vulnerable to bias.

Those who are well sponsored see their success as self-earned and sponsorship opportunities provided by others are taken for granted and disappear from career narratives. There is a tendency towards creating a 'mini me' or 'sponsoring people like me with a career like mine'. Sponsorship comes more easily to those who follow a normative career path, and less easily to those who may need it most in order to navigate, for example, career breaks, part-time work, late entry, and reduced geographic mobility.

*“Sponsorship programmes, at least early in careers, may be less effective in academia due to this heavy reliance on close colleagues within your discipline to create the opportunities required.”*

This may partially explain the large discrepancy in the Collaborating with Men survey responses between men and women in academia's perceptions of access to sponsorship. This gender data provides a compelling case to address individual gender bias and to strengthen sponsorship practices to make them less vulnerable to gender bias.

## Sponsorship and collaborative practice

Jen's research identified pockets of collaborative practice, where decision making regarding sponsorship was undertaken by a small team. Sponsorship practices were seen as a strategy to develop all, to ensure the competitiveness of

## CASE STUDY

# 'Our Time' – Supporting Future Leaders programme

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, launched the 'Our Time' – Supporting Future Leaders programme in 2018. Charmaine's vision was for the GLA Group to come together to design and deliver the programme, acknowledging the benefits that would cross each organisation.

These include the development of the necessary pipeline of well-prepared, confident and ambitious women that is essential to achieving gender parity in the workplace within the GLA Group. It supports the creation of this 'pipeline of talent' through formal, structured, HR-approved activities within the Group, in place of relying on informal networks or informal processes which are open to bias.

Talent champions were

deliberately chosen from across all the organisations. Deloitte, as external talent expertise, were brought in to run the programme.

## A f e 'O\_ T e' a e

- The aim of the Mayor of London's office in launching 'Our Time' as an open access (free) comprehensive toolkit is to help organisations be part of a genuine step-change in boosting the number of women in senior leadership positions.
- For those who have never run similar programmes the toolkit sets out how to establish the programme step by step. For those who have more experience, it offers fresh inspiration and content.
- 'Our Time' can be the first step an organisation takes to

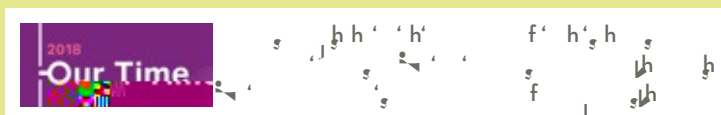
proactively tackle its barriers to female progression or be used to complement a comprehensive suite of talent development and/or diversity and inclusion initiatives.

## H i d e e 'O\_ T e' a t e r ?

'Our Time' is a sponsorship programme that pairs highly talented women with champions at a senior management level, either female or male, who will help to open up the professional networks, opportunities and contacts often needed to progress to leadership positions within workplaces.

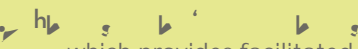
The programme contains two key features:

1. **h 'h h** which offers the key to unlocking opportunities, contacts and





networks, providing participants with a tangible launch pad towards the next stage in their careers. This starts with:

**2.**  which provides facilitated conversations to kick-start the sponsorship relationship, develop a strong network in the cohort and learn how to manage other barriers that may exist.

- The toolkit is being shaped by

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