

WOMEN IN FORMAL CORPORATE NETWORKS: AN ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP PERSPECTIVE

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

The Purpose of this Paper. To investigate women's corporate networks, and the reported benefits for the women and their employers. To gain insight into the motivation for these voluntary activities, by drawing on organisational citizenship theory.

Design/methodology/approach. We explored the issue using in-depth interviews with chairs and organisers of 12 women's networks, and triangulated the data with an email survey resulting in 164 responses from network members in five companies.

Findings. We identify how networks were set up and managed, as well as the benefits that accrue to the organisation, the leaders and the members. Key findings were the wealth of voluntarily contributed extra-role behaviours, and totally business-oriented view of the activities presented by network leaders. More senior women were more likely to report prosocial behaviours such as driving change and supporting others. Organisational citizenship theory provided a lens through which to draw insight into actors' motivations for supporting corporate networking.

Research limitations/implications

This is a study of only 12 corporate networks within large UK companies, but findings should be useful for any employers or senior women thinking about starting or refreshing a corporate women's network.

Practical Implications are that women and their employers appear to benefit strongly from being involved in corporate networking. Evidence suggests that employers should support internal women's networks, given the organisational citizenship behaviours voluntarily contributed for their benefit.

What is original/value of paper? This paper is the first to investigate how women's corporate networks are organised, and how their activities benefit not just the women but also the employer. Organisational citizenship theory provides insight into motivation for such initiatives. The findings should be of interest not just for those involved in women-in-management studies, but also to organisational citizenship and networking researchers.

Key words: Corporate networks; Organisational citizenship behaviour; Volunteering; Women.

INTRODUCTION

As lack of access to organisational networks is increasingly seen as a barrier for women to reach the top (Ragins, Townsend and Mattis, 1999; Catalyst and Opportunity Now, 2000), many companies are starting to support corporate networks for women. Vinnicombe and Colwill (1995) define networking as the banding together of like-minded people for the purposes of contact, friendship and support. They describe such

activities as women's attempts to create for themselves the support generated for men by their informal same-sex grouping. However, there is little research about the nature of corporate women's networks, or the motivation of the women involved in organising or using them. A key feature of women's corporate networks is that they are usually managed by and for women volunteers. Hence, women's involvement may be informed by theories related to organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Our research question is

therefore how are women's corporate networks organised, and what motivates the actors to get involved.

The aim of this paper is to report on how 12 corporate networks were started in the UK, and explore the motivations of those involved, before considering whether OCB theory contributes a deeper understanding of those behaviours. We describe our methodology, before revealing how the networks started, how they are managed, the activities undertaken, and the benefits derived. We discuss the findings in relation to OCB theory, and conclude with consideration of the contribution to knowledge, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The importance of networking

Networking refers to activities by individuals attempting to develop and maintain relationships with those with, or perceived to have, the potential to assist them in their work or career. Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve and Tsai (2004) define networking as "a set of nodes and the set of ties representing some relationship, or lack of relationship, between the nodes" (p. 795), and suggest that internal network ties, especially those between leaders, have a positive and significant impact on unit and organisational performance outcomes. Successful networking can positively influence career outcomes such as increased job opportunities, job performance, income, promotions and career satisfaction, providing access to information, gaining visibility, career advice, social support, business leads, resources, collaboration, strategy making, and professional support (Green, 1982). Luthans, Hodgetts and Rosenkrantz (1988) found that a manager's ability to network was the strongest predictor of managerial success, ahead of their ability to undertake traditional management activities, routine communication and human resource management. Michael and Yukl (1993) examined the networking behaviour of 247 managers, finding that both internal and external networking were related to managers' rate of advancement in their organisation, confirming the findings of the Luthans *et al.* study.

Hence, networking is an important part of managerial behaviour and career success. Different types of networks have evolved (Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1995). Some are professional and occupational, such as those for women in engineering or finance. More recently, internal corporate networks have emerged, sometimes started as informal gatherings of women, but developing into more formal networks

supported by the employer. A historical perspective on women's networking in the UK public sector was recently published (McCarthy, 2004). However, apart from the study by Catalyst (1999) described below, there is little published research on formal corporate networks for women.

Gender and networking behaviour

The research literature on individual networking and personal network configurations emphasises the gendered nature of networking and networks in the corporate world. In the USA, Ibarra (1992) found gender differences in the networks of managers and the ways in which they were used. Men's networks were characterized by more high status individuals, and by more male members than those of women with similar levels of education and experience. Women tended to use their networks for social support, whilst men were more instrumentally active to promote their careers. Burke, Rothstein and Bristor (1995) reported similar findings in Canada. However, recently, women may have become more aware of the importance of networking to their careers, and single/unattached women (in the USA) appear now to engage in these behaviours to a similar extent as males (Forret and Dougherty, 2001). The implication is that women with family responsibilities may remain at a serious disadvantage, should out-of-hours socialising result in important work-related outcomes (e.g. receiving critical information or important job assignments).

Pemberton, Stevens and Travers (1996) surveyed 328 European Women's Management Development network members who reported joining networks to help develop their personal skills, meet others who could help their careers, and make social contacts, rating psychosocial benefits above career support. The paradox is that although research suggests that women may place greater importance on the socialising aspects of networking, they are often excluded from social events and workplace interactions in which men engage (McCarthy, 2004). Travers, Stevens and Pemberton (1997) found that UK women sought and reportedly gained more career support from colleagues and senior managers within their networks than did their counterparts in Europe and the USA. UK women also seemed more interested in the self-development activities, and were noticeably different in the greater emphasis placed on the use of networks as an arena for developing self-confidence and networking skills. They preferred to engage in networks outside their organization. At that time, there were few corporate women's networks for UK women and it appears that their networks were seen by members as a place to learn rather than as a place

to do business. More recently, research by Linehan (2001) into European women and their networks reported that male managers spent more time networking after work hours, difficult for women with family responsibilities. Although keen to take part in networks with women, Linehan's interviewees believed that there were higher benefits from networking in the established male-dominated networks, with closer access to power and resources.

Formal corporate networks for women

Catalyst (1999), a US-based research and campaigning organisation conducted a study of women's corporate networks in the USA, finding that women's networks were formed to address three main problem areas. (1) Organisational environments were often more challenging for women than men. (2) Company social structures were often designed in such a way that they excluded and isolated women. (3) Established career paths sometimes excluded women, who did not have the benefit of female role models. By networking with each other, women could share career development experiences and strategies, and learn from one another. This is the only previous study identified which investigated corporate networks for women. Further research is needed to investigate the phenomenon now that corporate networks are emerging as a popular tool for change adopted by large companies across the world. McCarthy (2004) examined the history of women's networks and undertook a practitioner study in UK public sector organisations, but we found no academic research that investigated women's corporate networking behaviour.

Motivation for women's participation in formal networks

As women and their employers set up corporate networks, the question arises as to their motivation. The Catalyst study above identified the rationales for the introduction of networks, but did not consider theoretical motives for such an investment. Following our report on best practice for companies and for women interested in starting or running women's corporate networks (Vinnicombe, Singh and Kumra, 2004), we undertook further analysis of our data for evidence of the women's individual motivations for such behaviour. From the literature on volunteering and altruism, we identified that the construct of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) might provide useful theoretical insights into this phenomenon.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE – ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is defined by Organ as "contributions to the

maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance" (Organ, 1997, p.91). OCB components fall into seven types according to a review of OCB-related studies (Podsakoff, P.M., Mackenzie, S.B., Paine, J.B. and Bachrach, D.G. (2000). Helping behaviour involves voluntarily helping others, with altruism as an antecedent. Sportsmanship means maintaining positive attitudes and being willing to sacrifice own interests for the organisation. Organisational loyalty means promoting a positive image to outsiders and maintaining loyalty. Organisational compliance implies obeying company rules and procedures, being a good employee and steward. Individual initiative relates to acting and encouraging others to improve work outcomes. Civic virtue means taking part in the political membership of the organisation, engaging in policy issues and monitoring on behalf of the community. Self-development means the voluntary activities undertaken to improve oneself in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities to expand the contribution to the organisation.

The acts of helping, sharing, giving, cooperating and volunteering are also part of the overlapping construct of prosocial organizational behaviour (Brief and Motowidlo, 1986), directed by an organisational member towards the welfare of an individual, group or organisation, in addition to carrying out the normal role duties. Volunteering is any activity in which time is given freely for the benefit of others or for a cause, and "is part of a cluster of helping behaviours entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends", according to Wilson (2000, p. 215). Exchange theory sees volunteering as a rational social exchange, as people weigh up the costs and benefits, especially when they have a stake in the activity, and also if they expect to need help or have been helped in the past and want to reciprocate. But the relationships between helpers and helped would be unequal and therefore a rational view would not be strong in explaining why higher status women contribute their time and energy to the network. Human and social capital theories may provide a stronger explanation. The most consistent predictor of volunteering is education, as it heightens awareness, increases empathy and builds self-confidence. As occupational status increases, volunteering is also likely to increase. As people grow older, they are also more likely to volunteer as they have more social contacts, increasing the opportunities that arise (Wilson, 2000). Social networks promote a sense of community and solidarity too. Gender also impacts the likelihood of volunteering, as young men prefer to engage in individual voluntary efforts whilst young women prefer communal

voluntary activities (Gallagher, 1994). We will draw on these theories for insight into the women's motivations for their corporate networking behaviours.

METHODOLOGY

As this was an exploratory study, a qualitative approach was considered appropriate for the main part of the study. First we identified a sample of private sector companies with good reputations for their women's networks, in collaboration with Opportunity Now, a UK organisation promoting gender equality. Six companies sponsored the research whilst six others offered access for the study. A key project aim was to write a guide for organisations seeking to set up women's networks (now published by Opportunity Now, see Vinnicombe, Singh and Kumra, 2004).

We used semi-structured interviews, meeting the women who chaired and managed the women's networks. The interviews lasted about one and a half hours each, and were tape-recorded and transcribed. Data were analysed using QSR NVivo to manage the process, and to develop an analytical coding framework. Using an interpretive approach, we identified concepts, grouped similar concepts, and constructed a hierarchy of themes such as network activities, with sub-nodes grouped into business, career development and social (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). We also undertook a short email survey of members. Our questionnaires were circulated by five network organisers to 100 members with a letter from their network chairs, to be returned by email directly to the researchers at their academic institution to preserve anonymity. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS and Excel software, frequencies and correlations were obtained, and content analysis undertaken of open-ended questions. We received 164 usable responses, a response rate of 33% across the five networks (ranging from 16% to 71%), reasonable given that the survey was undertaken during August. For this paper, we then re-analysed our data seeking out evidence of women's motivation for engagement in the women's networks as organisers and as members. We identified a number of motivations and helping behaviours, and then examined the literature on organisational citizenship behaviour to construct an appropriate coding framework for our interview material and the members' responses to open-ended questions in the email survey.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS: THE 12 CORPORATE NETWORKS

Starting the Corporate Networks

The networks all started as a result of growing awareness that women were not achieving their

full potential, and that lack of access to male-dominated senior networks might be a barrier which could be tackled by direct action. Seven were started by women, the earliest in 1986 by a group of women in BT after attending a women's development course. Lloyds-TSB's network came as the result of one woman's efforts in 1999. She made a business case to the board, and set up a national steering committee, and the deputy chief executive of the company became the sponsor of the network. Two networks (Citigroup and IBM) started in 2000 and 2001 after women who attended European women's conferences went back to their companies to set up UK networks, and have since expanded internationally. Also in 2000, a group of women at UBS decided they wanted to make a difference for women's careers in their company, and set up their network that has since been rolled out internationally. In 2001, several senior Shell women got together informally, met regularly to discuss issues concerning women's careers, and gradually formalised themselves into a corporate network now stretching around the world. Senior women started Barclays' network as a result of a work/life balance initiative in 2002. Two networks were started by senior males, chief executive Jack Welch being responsible for the initiation at GE in 1997. In 2001, the UK chairman of Deutsche Bank suggested emulating the popular "Women on Wall Street" network of their US branch. The remaining three networks were set up jointly by companies and senior women. Ford's network was set up in 1999, after the business needs for such action were identified. This was followed by Goldman Sachs in 2001 as part of their global leadership and diversity initiative, and in 2002, by PwC as the company recognised that few women were advancing to senior levels and set up a focus group to identify an action plan and become the steering committee of the new network.

Managing the Networks

Membership Issues

At the outset, there were a number of issues to consider regarding membership. Who were the intended members, how could they be supported, and how could they be accessed? Should the network be just for women, and if so, should it be universal membership or segmented in some way. Should it be elitist and just for senior women, or graduate women? Should it be national or regional, should it be international and global? Should all women employees automatically be members, or should they have to register to become members? These were important decisions to be made. Most networks welcomed male members but only after the networks were up and running. But there was a strong argument for involving men, as the Ford diversity director commented, "You need to make

the networks inclusive because you need to raise awareness amongst men about issues that affect women". Naming the network was an important step, usually the company name and "women's network" as the title at first. Whilst IBM chose "Women in Blue", several networks changed names after a while to become more inclusive, for example, UBS called its network "All Bar None", playing on the name of a city pub chain, All Bar One.

Strategic Planning and Leadership

Most networks in the first couple of years drew up constitutions, defined roles and responsibilities, set up voting systems, designed vision and mission statements and produced broader strategy documents. For example, at BT, the mission was "to become a dynamic professional organization committed to the continued progression of women in BT", and their strategy was "to grow the influence and reach of the network, extend the development opportunities open to members, raise our profile within BT, and take the role of ambassador on women's issues throughout BT". At Goldman Sachs, the mission was "to recruit, retain and develop women professionals, and to increase their representation at senior levels". That mission was supported by a statement of purpose, which was then expanded in alignment with their European network, to facilitate network activities across the various country networks to achieve their goals. Planning was seen as a critical activity. Network leaders suggested that the steering group should have an away-day for team building and to get away from the day job, to focus how to best manage the agenda within their resources. All the networks set their own agendas, usually organized through the committee. Most of them canvassed members for areas of interest so that future events could meet their members' real needs. Most network committees met monthly, and a few met quarterly. Since the network leader often attended satellite meetings as well as committee meetings, there appeared to be an excessive number of meetings for some leaders. As networks became established, initial structures needed to be reviewed. Communication systems also needed to be designed, increasingly undertaken through the intranets.

Network leaders agreed that structure and hierarchy were essential and they set up a number of structures to organise their activities. Typical of steering groups, the Shell UK women's network committee consisted of a president, vice-president, treasurer, and then members with roles related to learning and development, mentoring, recognition, communication and social activities. At Barclays, the committee members fell into natural roles after a few meetings, for example, the good coordinator, the women with training backgrounds – and they

decided to work on events or activities in pairs, which made things much easier when someone was unable for some reason to put the time in, or when someone left. Organisers emphasised the need to get the right women involved as leaders, who were willing and able to put in a sustained effort. It was seen as a huge task for volunteers, who might burn out after a long period of dedication and commitment. One chair commented: "We went through a dip, where people were dropping out or couldn't commit." Feelings of unfairness also emerged: "Different people at different times have felt like they're taking an unfair share of the load." The next comment reveals that real passion is needed to sustain the network once the initial enthusiasm and elation of a successful start-up has gone by. "As we've come up to our first year's anniversary, we've had to think how shall we do the rolling on, rolling off? So we as a steering group agreed that a third of us would roll off each year, and sign up a third of new people." Indeed, the term "passion" for the network's goals was mentioned in seven of the 12 interviews.

At GE and Citigroup, there was a rotating leadership. Recognising the need for renewal of leadership, a formal process was instigated at BT for electing a chair, with tenure set for two years. Their network advertised all committee positions internally and interviewed potential candidates. This attracted high quality candidates, and gave the position more status. Some networks called the leader 'president', especially those with headquarters based in the US, whilst others preferred 'chair'. Naming the executive team appropriately was important too. In one company, the US network committee was called the "Cabinet" but the UK branch decided to choose "Executive Board" instead, thereby avoiding likely 'kitchen cabinet' comments.

Some network chairs said that it was important to identify what the networks were NOT about. The GE network chair commented: "What it's not is a substitute for superb HR practices, but it is a group that is determined to do its own bit, to research reasons why the pipeline doesn't work as well as it should, and the reasons why we don't actually have women at senior level." Similarly, the Barclays network organisers decided that they were not going to be trainers, even though they had or could have developed such skills. Training was seen as an activity for HR and the corporate university, but the network would facilitate requests from network members. They also decided that it would be more effective for networking if they tackled issues not in divisional silos but as themes across the various divisions, bringing women and men together from different parts of the organization.

Resources

Five networks obtained funding from central diversity budgets, four from HR, and three from the business areas. Most networks had to bid for their funds, making a business case for whatever they wanted to do. Initial budgets were often very small, with no certainty of continuity, so prudent budget management was essential. Network leaders were proactive in seeking sponsorship from business areas for their events, for speaker costs, and for travel for women members. Generally women members had to persuade managers to support their attendance at conferences and other events. Annual budgets varied by size of companies, their profitability and the kinds of activities that budgets were intended to support, from £5,000 to £120,000 per year, with separate funding for very large conferences. Sometimes secretarial and office support had to come out of these funds, whilst elsewhere, these were funded separately or just done by volunteers, including secretaries of network leaders.

Senior sponsors were seen as key to the success of women's networks, as they played a symbolic role in emphasising the added value to the business contributed by the women leaders and members. But it was often a two way process – one director of business banking strongly supported the women's network – at the same time engaging the women in a drive to recruit more female business banking managers and create new opportunities, products and services to attract and secure female clients. Senior women in particular took on a lot of work for the network, in addition to their usual demanding jobs. As speakers, they were often inspiring, "just speaking from the heart", as described by Citigroup's chair. The GE chair spoke of "a core group of senior women who do feel passionately that this is something that's important to the company, and they have in their own time kept up the drive." But not all senior women want to support women's networks, although sometimes their bosses take a different view. The IBM (UK) CEO, Larry Hirst, reportedly insists that senior women executives have a responsibility to develop and support other female talent. Accessing resources is not a straightforward task, but requires continual attention and effort from the network leaders.

Voluntary Nature of Network

The voluntary nature of the women's network led to a variety of challenges. There were indications of tension about lack of recognition from line management about the contribution made by the network leaders, much of which was undertaken in their own (unpaid) time. Some network leaders sought to formalise their efforts by aligning their objectives directly with those of the company, gaining recognition at appraisals for reaching those

objectives. In contrast, others felt that assessment of their network leadership activities was not appropriate. One chair said: "I don't think it's correct to give people recognition through setting objectives when it's a voluntary organisation." One network leader had to take annual leave in order to be able to run a network event. Another reported that she had 114 emails still to be answered in her women's network email box after working through them all weekend. Another challenge was that potential volunteers needed to be informed about the amount of work involved, before being asked to commit themselves. "We had to work out what new people were signing up to, so everybody in the steering group signed up to certain things", said one network leader. Another said: "It is exhausting. To be honest, if I had a family or anything else, or even a boyfriend for that matter, I couldn't do it."

Business Focus

"It's not just a talk shop." Network leaders felt they had to get rid of the myth that it was about "knitting and childcare arrangements." This was a key issue for network leaders, as they strove to be seen as running a worthwhile business activity. There was almost over-compensation for the criticism encountered from some males, that this is a women's group activity where "they gossip or do trivial things". Network managers and chairs did everything possible to put the activity on a sound business footing. Some networks "bought in" quite formally to the company objectives. Citigroup's women's network set up 100-day task teams to take up issues and produce results. "What we're trying to do is to be seen as part of the infrastructure of the company as opposed to a lobbying group. We're trying to be included in the decision-making process and the business management process." The Ford networks had a balanced scorecard that fitted with the aims of the business. There was also a strong sense of the need for added value – the network leaders were constantly evaluating what they had achieved, and what better ways there might be to reach out to more women and achieve more business benefits from the investment made by the company.

The Activities of the Networks

Activities for the company

Involvement in HR and diversity activities

Networks were all involved with HR activities. Citigroup women leaders had worked to bring the network even closer to HR, as they worked on HR objectives concerning talent management. Recruitment was another area where most of the women's network leaders worked actively with HR, at schools and university job fairs, in particular for technically qualified women in IBM and Ford. Ford's women's network worked with HR on the business benefits of a longer paid maternity leave.

Goldman Sachs women's network ran sessions for undergraduate women to demystify the company and industry. Barclays ran an internal careers fair with HR. BT's network ran a job-share register to help women members find job partners. There was also involvement in diversity initiatives, such as Ford's work/life balance week. Some network leaders fed back to HR the needs identified by members, challenging whether such needs were already being addressed, e.g. by general mentoring programmes, and backing up their feedback with statistics on where women were meeting blockages, such as in promotions.

Involvement in marketing, new product development and PR

Some companies used their women's networks as sources of female opinion on new products and services. Ford's women's marketing panel suggested colour coding car dipsticks to make them easier to see. The women also advised on the design of cars for pregnant women and for better access to baby seats. Some of these activities were undertaken in work time. The women's involvement brought recognition by the male engineers: "Across the organisation, men are feeling that the women's networks are having beneficial effects for the organisation as a whole." In Goldman Sachs, the women's network organised Ascend, a special event for 180 key women clients, with a theme of 'leading in a world of change', focused on business issues. Feedback from attendees indicated that it made them feel they wanted to do business with a company that was so forward-looking in the way it dealt with its female clients. In IBM, networks were often mentioned when the company was bidding for business, and similarly, PwC reported its support for the women's network when bidding for public sector work. So the women's networks helped these companies improve their products, image, reputation and business as socially responsible employers and producers.

Enhancing women's business understanding

Women were keen to understand the core business of the company, and several women's networks invited senior executives to speak and answer the women's questions. In particular, women's networks in the technology companies such as BT and IBM invited senior managers to provide sessions to keep the women up-to-date about the new technological developments likely to impact the company and their jobs.

Leveraging best practice from the networks

The women's networks were run on a very business-like basis, and a key part of this was to leverage best practice from other women's networks within the company, often based in the USA, and share best practice with other diversity networks (e.g. gay and lesbian networks), and

externally with networks in other companies, as for example, IBM and Ford often held joint events. Some network programme initiatives were developed into tailored courses for all senior executives, following successful roll-out by the women's network.

Career development activities

Conferences

Much energy went into organising network conferences, at regional, national, European and global levels. Often, a conference was the very first formal activity of a new women's network, to bring people together to understand what was needed. GE's network ran an annual European meeting for women. Shell's network organisers asked their sponsors to attend their conferences, not just as speakers but as listeners, to network with the women and listen to their stories. Deutsche Bank's annual conference was different in that it was a large, free annual event attracting nearly one thousand women including 50% external attendees. They followed the 'by invitation only' model set by their Frankfurt and New York (Women on Wall Street) conferences, to contribute towards building a business community that supported and valued women, at the same time enhancing the company's reputation.

Career development events

All the networks ran career development events. In Barclays, women were most interested in issues such as career barriers, networking, communication, understanding body language, assertiveness, applying for jobs, preparing for interviews and work/life balance. The most popular event was *A Day in the Life of a Director*, which attracted a lot of males, who were very visible in asking questions from the floor. BT had its own network training programme, *Careering Ahead*, which it developed into a set of modules, which could be run for different geographical groups. A popular new session on voice, using a Globe Theatre coach, ran at a weekend so that more people could attend. Citigroup set up a career development taskforce, which resulted in a one-year development programme for 50 women. At the end, the women were asked to reflect back on their careers, their aspirations, and the feedback received from their informal mentors, which helped them to draw up a better-informed route map for their future careers. Shell's network had sessions on understanding about how to get on in Shell and how talent was developed. One innovatively-titled session on *Moving from Can I? to I Can!* focusing on confidence-building and assertiveness was seen as particularly useful for "the women waiting for the green light" to seek career advancement.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner events for senior women were held by some networks, as part of

efforts to increase exposure of the senior women to those in leadership positions. GE was an excellent example. In BT, the chairman hosted a business breakfast for 60 senior women, to talk about boardroom skills. UBS had networking lunches for women associate directors and above, each taking up a theme such as tackling conflict effectively, career advancement, making performance measurement work for the individual, and work/life balance.

Several networks organised mentoring, either through formal programmes or less formally. Citigroup preferred the term “sponsor”, rather than mentor, when they launched a one-year programme for 50 women identified as emerging talent, but sponsors were also asked to be coaches. In PwC, the mentoring scheme started with partners and directors mentoring women managers in London, with plans for expansion of the scheme across more remote locations, using email and web, as well as mentoring of both women and men, improving career support across the company.

Personal and Social Activities

Several networks organised sessions on well-being, work/life balance and women’s health. IBM women’s network ran a ‘Bring your child to work day’ which was very positively received, a new slant on the more usual daughters’ day model. Several networks supported charities directly, one targeting their diversity award prize-money to a women’s refuge, another supporting a women’s refuge both financially and by equipping and redecorating houses and persuading other companies to supply them with painting materials, linen and toys etc, whilst a third network collected second hand good quality business suits to help disadvantaged women going for interviews. Only a few women’s network activities were purely social. One network persuaded a famous London store to stay open for a Christmas shopping evening for network members. Two networks ran popular wine-tasting events, whilst others ran fun and sports days for members’ families, and one organised a drinks reception and private viewing at the Tate Modern art gallery, inviting women members in recognition of their contribution to the networks’ activities.

Network Leaders’ Views of Impact of Women’s Networks

Whilst it was clear that the original objectives were to focus on facilitating women’s careers, the pressure from the business (implemented in terms of control of budget and support) meant that most networks leaders focused on the business objectives. Hence when questioned about the value of the network, they tended to respond with the business case, rather than the specific benefits

for women. Most network leaders mentioned the positive impact on retention. Some specified recruitment and better talent management, as well as better communication flows across divisions, and integration of women, leading to increased commitment, which again should impact retention. With women keen to improve themselves, the companies gained a better-equipped workforce. There would be more organisational learning, as senior executives acquired experience of coaching and mentoring women as well as men. The companies benefited from enhanced reputation, with more female role models - a good place for women to work, a culture where flexibility is supported for women and men. Other important benefits for the companies included use of the networks by new product development groups to design products and services that met the needs of women consumers, and by involvement of the network in diversity and HR initiatives.

Having senior women role models was seen as a key benefit for women by network leaders, “so that role models were a bit closer to reality”, and “more doable, that’s a goal I can see”. In PwC, the emphasis was on profiling some very senior women, including part-timers, to dispel the myth – “most people don’t realise we have partners who have been promoted who are part-time, because most people think you can’t do it.” In addition, women benefited from personal development, greater visibility and voice, and chance to develop their careers. “They like the chance to network with people they wouldn’t have otherwise met. Some of the women who attend those probably aren’t invited to any event because of the job they do.” Their expanded personal networks enabled them to do their job better, as well as glean more information about job and career opportunities, as one leader commented: “I know of a couple of situations where women have moved jobs directly as a result of the network.” The increased social contacts reportedly led to more satisfaction with their careers and jobs, and a sense of being in a more inclusive and supportive work culture, which should lead to increased retention of qualified and motivated women.

Network leaders also reported getting a lot out of running the networks. “Being involved with the network gives you an enormous lift and your ability to affect the environment, if you believe strongly in something as obviously the volunteers do, makes you feel you can influence the development of the organisation.” Another commented: “You also get to expand your network not just with other women, but with the most senior management of the organisation, and they get a different perspective on you and your abilities and talents than they would just knowing you through your specific job.”

Measures of Success

It was important to network organizers that they regularly considered what they were achieving, and how they were communicating that success, sometimes reviewing this annually, sometimes more frequently. "I think we're still not getting everyone to understand how we deliver on the mission". It was not only promoting their success to the company, but also considering where they had not succeeded. "We try to understand why women aren't supporting it", and used feedback to design new offerings, for example "bite-sized chunks of larger events" so that other women could tap in. The PwC network leaders were very pleased that their network was mentioned in the company's annual report. For the Barclays network, getting the diversity award from the chairman was confirmation of positive regard for the network, and it had a big impact on general awareness of its existence, as such public and senior endorsement helped make line managers more willing to support it.

So what were the measures of success? There were many ways in which network performance was evaluated, some very obvious and easy to measure such as the number of members and events held and some less tangible impacts, such

as cultural change in the organisation. Some companies had gone so far as to integrate the network's activities into a balanced scorecard, so that there was harmonization with measures of HR effectiveness. Some difficulties with measurement were reported, especially relating to the organizational level impact. Where there was lack of integration of HR data systems across various divisions, progress of women into management levels could not be systematically charted for the whole company, and it was difficult to attribute those women's successes to the women's network activity. There were also pressures for short-term measures: "People do have very short time scales and I think sometimes they're not as prepared or able to see the long term benefits". Nonetheless, measures were seen as important, especially in the early stages. "You have got to have something that in the early days makes people feel that they are achieving." Network organisers emphasised the need for measures to be meaningful to the stakeholders, whether they were the women's network organizers, members, senior sponsors or company funders such as HR and Diversity. The measures reported by our sample are given in Table 1.

Table I: Measures of Network Success

Membership	Membership numbers, meeting targets for membership, advocacy for membership, number of satellite networks launched
Events	Number of events including training days; attendance, feedback, interest in repeat and new events
Women Members	Impact on women's behaviour; impact on women's achievements; impact on confidence
Other Activities	Surveys of members, success stories of women achieving; number of mentoring relationships established; number of website hits, books/training materials taken out. Awards received by network, and/or company; features in corporate publications. Regular, well-attended and effective committee meetings. Invitations to network leaders as external speakers
Women's Position	Gender statistics at various levels including the Board; any improvements in the retention of women, especially at mid-career
Business	Have the Women's Network objectives been achieved? Balanced scorecard measures. Has the Women's Network had an HR Audit? What is the business effectiveness of the Network? Sponsorship achieved. Senior managers wanting more involvement with Network. Line management participation in/support for the Network. Cultural change.

Challenges and advice

The network chairs and organizers had strong views about the challenges facing them. These could be grouped as issues around sustainability, network activities and the corporate culture. They saw the biggest challenge as the workload for the volunteer women chairs and organizers, as they grapple with senior jobs and often have family responsibilities too, so women leaders frequently suffer from burnout. As the network gets up and

running, the entrepreneurial skills of the founders are not so relevant for the next phase of settling down, so different skills are needed. Accessing resources is still a problem after start-up, there is a need to deal with change as senior champions leave, and new champions have to be approached. Succession planning of network leadership has to be tackled but engaging senior women is sometimes an additional challenge. There was a strong view that ownership of the network needs to be maintained by the women.

Managing the network activities and starting new initiatives were seen as challenging, as being successful led to more work and higher expectations. The network organisers felt pressure to keep the activities business-focused, to ensure business benefits. The fit of the network activities with other structures, such as HR and diversity departments, was also challenging. The other big issue was the persistence of the male-dominated corporate culture, which still made it difficult for women to succeed. Men often trivialised the women's network (witches' coven, knitting circles, bra-burning, girl power, sisterhood), with some complaining that the network was a form of positive discrimination. The challenge was to engage the senior men and the male line managers in delivering change, so that more female role models could emerge.

At the end of the interviews, we asked network organisers what advice they would personally want to give women setting up networks. The key message was the need to identify and gain support from key individuals. Next highest priorities were to define the aims and objectives and to plan the agenda, as well as sort out a budget. Other important advice included getting a good communication system, recognising what a challenge it is for the leaders of the network, given the voluntary nature of the endeavour, and understanding the fit with corporate strategy. Finally we asked network organisers for assistance in surveying network members to get their views on their favourite events, the benefits of membership and their motivations for membership of the network. The survey results are reported in the next section.

Survey of network members

Demographics

We had a response rate of 33%. The average age of the 164 respondents was 36, ranging from 21 to 58, but most were in their 30s and 40s. On ethnic background, 19 (11.5%) reported themselves as non-white, with the largest sub-group (3%) coming from India or Pakistan, 2% from the Far East, 1% were Afro-Caribbean and 5% came from other or mixed ethnic backgrounds. Only two reported being disabled. The average job tenure was 8 years, and the average network membership was just under two years. An overwhelming majority (90%) worked full-time. Membership was spread across different self-reported levels, with 38% junior or professional staff, 46% in middle management and 16% in senior positions. On average, members had attended three events in the last year, but a fifth had attended none, whilst 10% had attended ten or more events, particularly those in a city-based network that organised most of its events at lunchtimes.

Benefits reported by Women Members

The most frequently mentioned benefit in the survey was an expanded network, providing evidence that networks were indeed meeting their objectives. Members seemed to really appreciate networking with other women, perhaps because of the limited opportunities to meet female colleagues on a regular basis in some male-dominated parts of the businesses.

"Getting to know other women in the company and the chance for them to get to know of my existence (especially the senior ones)."

"Extended my network of people I know here in X. I am now a member of the steering committee."

"Contacts and a better understanding of the issues."

"A large network of mainly female colleagues from all areas of technology."

Career development and advice opportunities were also seen as key personal benefits. It was not just the content of network events that was considered beneficial, but also the opportunity for visibility with senior executives, and for some, the opportunity to commence valuable mentoring relationships.

"Have met a variety of people across the firm, attended some informative presentations on how to make the best of my career."

"It has been a great networking experience and I have had exposure to people throughout the division that I would not normally have had, as well as exposure to meeting very senior people. The chance to organise some high profile events personally, which I probably wouldn't have done if I had not been a member."

"Great mentors that have been really supportive, and I have met a lot more senior people than I would have otherwise."

"I have built a network. I recently changed roles into a high profile position and two of the people on the interviewing list were women I had met through the women's network. This was a massive advantage as I felt much more at ease and confident, and I think I performed to my best at interview."

Another advantage to emerge from membership of the network involved the opportunity to promote diversity and issues relating to women employees. This was felt to be of great benefit, both personally and for junior colleagues.

"The opportunity to meet a broad spectrum of people across the firm. Get involved in understanding the recruitment policies and actively work to promote diversity in the work force."

“A wider network of contacts, awareness of the challenges other women face and those we have in common.”

“Helpful to understand that other women face similar issues at work, and discuss how they cope with specific situations, e.g. part-time working, childcare. Good to have examples of successful women who are in senior positions whilst managing a reasonable work/life balance. Interesting to see data on women’s job levels/salaries compared to men, and therefore understand that proactive work is required sometimes. If you don’t ask, you don’t get.”

“Useful network of contacts. New ideas. Ability to help some other women in the company.”

When we asked members what they valued most, they reported that the network’s greatest benefit was the opportunity it afforded for gaining friendship and support in the organisation, and contributing to changing the culture too.

“I feel much more supported when issues come up which appear to be discriminatory.”

“Feeling like there is a support network out there and that there are other people with the same issues I have.”

“The knowledge that I am not on my own.”

“Nice to recognise people around the building, it makes work a more friendly environment. Personal satisfaction when people report benefits from my coaching/mentoring support. Recognition regarding my involvement in organising network.”

However, network membership had not been so positive for everyone. Some had been unable to attend events due to long working hours, outside commitments or distant locations, and they expressed a sense of frustration that they were unable to avail themselves of what could be a valuable career resource. A few felt a lack of identification with the network’s aims and objectives. “I would be the first person to object to men having their own network, so I would feel hypocritical attending one of these events. A lot of my friends attend and get a lot out of them, so I am not objecting to them per se. I personally don’t want to attend.” Others revealed cynicism that the network was used politically to advance individual career agendas, and that the network “lacked clout” to really make a difference.

Motivation to Join the Networks

Following a content analysis of open-ended responses on motivation to engage with the network, four constructs were identified. Wanting to drive change, support others and share experiences were coded as prosocial motivation. Gaining support, information, mentors, role models, meeting senior women, networking, improving career prospects, learning and development were coded as career motivation. Better understanding of the business and getting business contacts across the company were coded as business-oriented motivation. Wanting to meet other women (without specifying why) was coded as social motivation.

Table II: Inter-Correlations of Motivation Constructs, Age and Job Level

Motivation Construct	N = 164	Career	Business	Prosocial	Social	Job Level	Age
Career motivation	Pearson correlation Sig (2-tailed)	1					
Business orientation	Pearson correlation Sig (2-tailed)	.105 .180	1				
Prosocial motivation	Pearson correlation Sig (2-tailed)	.057 .470	-0.004 .955	1			
Social motivation	Pearson correlation Sig (2-tailed)	.342*** .000	-.109 .163	.203** .009	1		
Job Level	Pearson correlation Sig (2-tailed)	.075 .344	.004 .958	.153 .052*	.017 .826	1	
Age	Pearson correlation Sig (2-tailed)	-.078 .324	-.067 .394	.038 .627	-.127 .108	.525*** .000	1

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.1 level (2-tailed)

Table II shows that younger members were somewhat more likely to report career, business and social motivations for membership, whilst middle and senior members were significantly (but only marginally) more likely to have a prosocial motivation than juniors and professionals. Social and prosocial constructs were significantly correlated. There were no differences between full-time and part-time women, nor on ethnicity.

A number of the responses indicated good organizational citizenship behaviours. Several senior women made the specific point that they wished to help more junior colleagues, as well as helping to engage women in the organisation, thereby assisting in recruitment and retention of women in male-dominated functions, e.g. technology.

“I am in the team that provides women’s networking facilities and felt it would encourage the junior technical women to remain in technical careers rather than moving into management in order to advance in their careers.”

“To help through my experience and position to address some of the challenges facing women in the company, and to get to know more women in the company.”

“I helped set it up, initially to have a support network for women as there were so few in IT, but also to help recruit and retain women.”

“I wished to support junior colleagues to develop their careers.”

Women at all levels mentioned wanting to support others and to share experiences, so that these could be understood without internalising problems and unduly blaming themselves when they came up against hurdles or didn’t succeed. To discuss these with others, and gain some support and understanding on what they were experiencing was felt to be a valuable function of the network.

“To promote my own experiences and share with others the benefits [my company] offers which I have been involved with, e.g. part-time work, as a mother of three.”

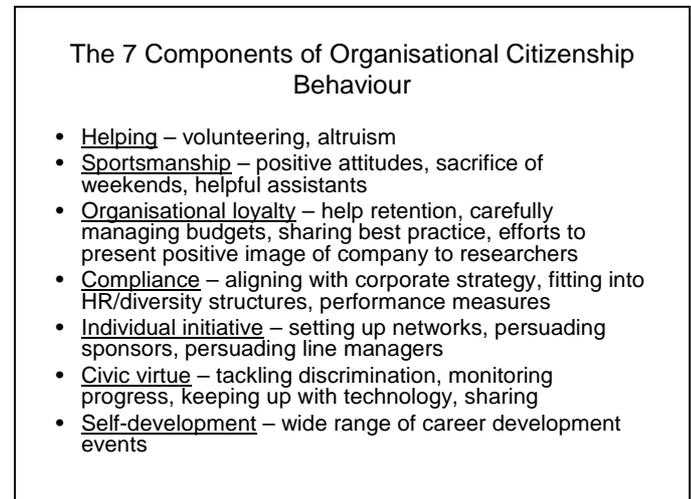
“I view it as a community in this company, and I expected to share experiences between us.”

“To make contacts with other members in the network and to support the issues faced by women in the workplace, as otherwise, we would have no voice.”

“To extend my network across the organisation. To help drive positive changes that will increase the representation of women in management. To share and learn with colleagues through discussions on career/gender related issues.”

These responses indicate that the sharing and learning was seen as a two way process that could help to change the culture and create a more supportive environment for women’s careers to develop.

Figure 1: Women’s Corporate Networking and OCBs



DISCUSSION

Our findings support the evidence from previous studies of gender and networking that women appreciate the benefits that networking can provide, such as access to a wide variety of career resources and psycho-social support (Vinnicombe & Colwill, 1995; Pemberton and colleagues, 1996, 1997; Linehan, 2001). The leaders focused on the business and career development benefits of the networks, whilst members stressed the social support received.

Clearly much energy and goodwill is being contributed by network leaders and members towards a common goal. Their voluntary activities are aimed at improving women’s careers and to create a space in these organisations to provide a supportive and developmental environment for women. We now discuss their motivations for involvement in the networks, drawing on theories associated with organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). The members reported many aspects of good citizenship behaviour as conceptualised by Organ (1997) and Podsakoff et al (2000), namely helping, sportsmanship, organisational loyalty, organisational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, and self-development. These activities were extra-role, unpaid but provided a number of benefits for those engaged in these behaviours, as we reported earlier. See Figure 1.

Certainly considerable effort was put into *helping* by women network leaders and the senior women. They reported their desire and even passion to help other women and their company. Some did so because of enhanced understanding of their own careers as they grew more senior or older, realising the need for career management, impression management, greater visibility and networking, and feeling a sense of frustration as younger women did not appear to recognise the persistence of the glass ceiling.

“One comment, quite recently from a group of younger women said our activities were for old women who are trying to protect their careers. It was a difficult comment to react to, as where they are in lower levels, they are not a minority and I don’t think they experience any discrimination. (I certainly hope not, or all the work we have been doing over the last 8 years will not have achieved its objectives.) I think it must always be the case that if we are doing the right things, those that follow us will take their environment for granted and not see what we have gone through to change things for them. But we must find a way to ensure that the younger women coming through the ranks are aware of the issues they will face as they get more senior and are equipped with the skills to resolve them. We have a long way to go before the women at the top of our large corporation are no longer minorities and we will need the younger women to pick up the baton in their own way (which should be different from ours) in the future.”

The OCB component, *sportsmanship*, (tolerating without complaining) was evidenced by the fact that the women contributing so much were maintaining a positive attitude and were willing to put the needs of the women’s network sometimes ahead of their own personal time, as the network leader had done in spending her weekend answering network emails. The secretaries of the network leaders also showed sportsmanship in bearing much of the administrative load associated with their bosses’ voluntary commitments. “Many of them are really keen to get involved anyway.” Some were even working in their own time for the good of the women in the company, despite their junior and low paid positions. But there was clearly a limit to the voluntary additional workload that could be tolerated, and most network leaders did talk about burnout and the need to share the burden, often by co-chairing or committee role rotation, and by better process management.

There certainly was evidence of *organizational loyalty* (spreading goodwill and remaining committed), as the network organizers worked to

improve the retention of other women, carefully managed their budgets, worked with other networks to spread best practice, and made efforts to present a positive image of their company during the interviews.

The *compliance* element emerged at several points, for example the network leaders’ concerns with alignment with corporate strategy, the fit into career development structures, the relationship with HR and diversity departments, and the measures for success, including incorporating network outputs into a balanced scorecard that fitted into the HR scorecard in one of the networks.

The women network leaders had individually shown initiative in setting up and managing the networks and in particular, getting resources from a variety of sponsors. The women members also had to show *individual initiative* to persuade their line managers to fund attendance at some events such as European conferences for members across the various country subsidiaries.

Clear evidence of *civic virtue* also emerged, as women leaders showed their willingness to participate in the policy-making arenas of their companies, engaging at the highest levels with chief executives and directors, seeking to tackle discrimination and dismantle career barriers not just for women but for all citizens of the company. The women members also sought to keep up with technology advances that would change the nature of their companies’ business, again indicating that their citizenship had wider concerns.

There was much evidence of the last component of OCB, *self-development*, the voluntary behaviours that employees undertake to improve themselves that expand the range of contributions to the company. So much career development and personal growth was being organized and delivered to so many women, which could improve organizational effectiveness.

So OCB theory offers a good explanation for the women’s behaviours in the networks, but does not address the motivation for such behaviours. Human and social capital theories explain why senior and older women are more likely to volunteer than junior and younger peers, as they have more education, more experience and better understanding of women’s careers in their particular organisations, as well as more contacts gathered over many years (Wilson, 2000). Social exchange theory also predicts OCBs as an exchange of benefits in return for contributions. Certainly a number of rewards are suggested from our data.

Younger women members reported wanting to share, to support and be supported, to give and to learn, all relevant to a social exchange perspective

on OCBs. However, for the older, more senior women, perhaps the desire to help was motivated by a sense of generativity (Erikson, 1963) as these women moved into the mid-life stage of their careers. That contribution to younger versions of themselves could provide a sense of immortality, being part of a movement advancing, driving change for a better future. Many of the women leaders were still pioneers accessing senior levels of management. There is also the satisfaction in mid-career of passing on their acquired knowledge, getting pleasure from helping the next generation towards career success (Levinson, 1996), and perhaps personal pride in being identified as role models. In particular, the mentoring and role-modelling (Ragins and Scandura, 1999) aspects of the networks can be explained in this way, but also the motivation may be to engage with youthful and creative people to gain a sense of rejuvenation of themselves as women leaders.

Women network activists may be motivated by the opportunities for their own enhanced visibility, which provides improved career, influence or centrality prospects. As they organise events or take on new committee roles, they would develop their own managerial potential. The act of seeking sponsorship provides another developmental challenge, requiring the exercise of upwards influence skills to inspire, persuade or cajole gatekeepers for resources. The additional information gleaned about what is going on across the company may also improve their own job performance or careers. So their involvement could be a form of impression management, the 'good soldier' syndrome (Kidder and Maclean-Parks, 2001), and certainly some survey respondents indicated that they saw this as the motivation of the women network leaders. Another part of the exchange might be the recognition obtained, both from senior management and from women in the company, for their efforts in organising activities, but also in reflected collective recognition and legitimacy of the network as the junior women move upwards, the business case is strengthened, and network objectives and performance measures are achieved.

There could be yet further explanations. Women are said to be more communal in orientation, and to strive to encompass the needs of others and self, to be caring and authentic in relationships with others, resulting in feeling good about themselves as good organisational citizens and as good persons, but providing invisible and often unrecognised support (Fletcher, 1999). From a psychological perspective, this could be as a result of the essential nature of women, as caring, communal and wanting to be connected, not going through the separation process that men

experienced in their psychological development but preferring attachment and community (Gilligan, 1982). A more social-psychological view would hold that the communitarian behaviour could also be as a result of gendered identification and socialisation processes by gender role prescriptions, gender orientation or stereotypical role expectations that expect women to behave in a caring and supportive manner (Kidder, 2002).

Our findings suggest that the companies' motivation for investing in women's networks was the expectation of rewards from responding to women's needs. The endorsement by women leaders of the need for business performance measures and learning from best practice in network management indicates that they were acting as good organizational citizens in stewarding rather than exploiting corporate assets, but there was a comment that "ultimately we are sort of controlled through our budget ... I'm pretty sure that if we went too far off the acceptable path, our funds would be stopped pretty quickly." The companies would benefit from the creation of new social capital (Bolino, Turnley and Bloodgood, 2002) as women built linkages across these large companies, making it easier to work across boundaries. They would also gain enhanced human capital in terms of more career-developed women, more female role models, more mentoring, more organizational learning, more talent identification, and better retention of women, almost all done voluntarily with only small financial support. The networks also provide unique communication channels that went across as well as up and down the hierarchy. Whether or not there was genuine willingness in senior management to change the culture, or simply to pay lip service to the aims of the women's network, there was evidence of the need to be seen to be doing something for women, building reputation and hence legitimacy as a good employer.

Hence social exchange theory provides a good explanation for the motivations of those engaged in these organisational citizenship behaviours. From the company perspective, the support of women's corporate networks makes business sense, as indicated by Brass *et al.* (2004) that internal networking led to better organisational performance. From the women's perspective, there are likely to be many motivations, some of which we have suggested in this section, drawing on evidence from both interviews and the survey material.

We acknowledge some limitations of our study. This is a small-scale study of only twelve women's networks within large companies based in the UK, and therefore generalisability of the findings may be limited by region and size of company. There may have been social desirability biases as

network leaders sought to present a business-like view of their activity, and of their company to the female researchers from the Centre for Developing Women Business Leaders in a large business school. The findings are based on self-reported data, although we felt that our interviewees were genuinely honest and open with us. We used triangulation of sample and method, surveying network members asking them to respond directly to us so that more honest answers could be given, but network leaders provided the initial sample of 100 members which could have been biased in selection. The exploratory nature of the study means that constructs were not defined at the outset. There are inevitable biases from our involvement as researchers as we interpreted the data, created coding frameworks and reported findings.

The findings of this study would be helpful for practitioners, particularly organisations seeking to set up networks for women or other groups of employees. These findings would also be of interest to women network leaders who are planning to commit their time and energy to enhance career opportunities for other women, and as our study indicates, probably provide a range of benefits for themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper contributes a new organisational citizenship perspective (Organ, 1988, 1997; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000; Bolino *et al.*, 2002) on women's corporate networking, extending previous work on women and networking (Burke *et al.*, 1995; Linehan, 2001; Rothstein *et al.*, 2001), and the limited field of studies of women's corporate networks, where only two previous studies were found (Catalyst, 1999; McCarthy, 2004). We have presented qualitative and quantitative evidence from both network leaders and network members to show how women's corporate networks are set up and managed, and the benefits that women's corporate networks provide to the women members, leaders and the employer. Key findings were the extent of voluntarily-contributed extra-role behaviours undertaken, and interestingly, the totally business-oriented view of their activities presented by network leaders. We noted the passion with which the network leaders reported their engagement. We found that the more senior women were significantly more likely than their junior peers to report prosocial behaviours such as driving change, helping and supporting. We explored the motivation of the women network leaders, network members and employers through an organisational citizenship lens. Social exchange theory, human and social capital theories, and gendered psychological development and

socialisation theories informed our understanding of their motivations for networking.

Future research is needed to examine the impact of corporate network membership on individual women's careers and on specific organisational outcomes. This project has identified the measures of success used by these networks, providing a starting point for more quantitative work. Further research is suggested on the impact of other types of corporate networks, for example, those set up for ethnic minorities or gay and lesbian groups. International comparative studies would also be useful.

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