



## Women Collaborating with Men

# INCLUSIVE NETWORKING AND SPONSORSHIP

Jill Armstrong

*Women Collaborating with Men:  
Inclusive Networking and Sponsorship*  
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University of Cambridge.

We invite you to read our latest report  
*Women Collaborating with Men: Everyday  
Workplace Inclusion* 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  
[www.murrayedwards.cam.ac.uk/collaborating-with-men](http://www.murrayedwards.cam.ac.uk/collaborating-with-men)

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# THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

## It's not what you know, it's who you know

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:

1. Networking (often informally)
2. Sponsorship

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.”***

JILL ARMSTRONG, LEAD RESEARCHER, COLLABORATING WITH MEN

**Sponsorship is a powerful tool in improving the proportional representation of groups who face particular challenges to career advancement.**

### Benefits of access to informal networks

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

The social relationships we form with our colleagues in many face-to-face ways such as: over lunch, over coffee, in sports teams, weekend cycling challenges or in the bar after work.

### SPONSORSHIP DEFINED

A sponsor is someone inside or outside your organisation who can advocate for you. They can talk to others about your strengths and potential and help get you actively considered for development opportunities, promotion or lateral moves. A sponsor will use their social capital and resources on your behalf. They are also there to help you adjust and thrive in a stretching role that is unfamiliar.



### ► Benefits of sponsorship

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> ●

**The provision of sponsorship opportunities is primarily an issue for leaders, to be delivered through formal programmes.**

# INFORMAL (SOCIAL) NETWORKING

## Evidencing the issues

MARTIN BOND PHOTOGRAPHY

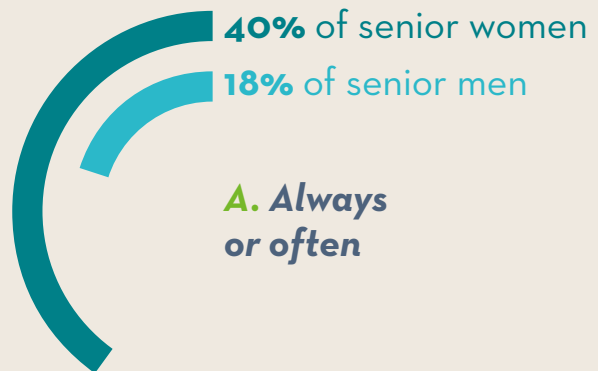
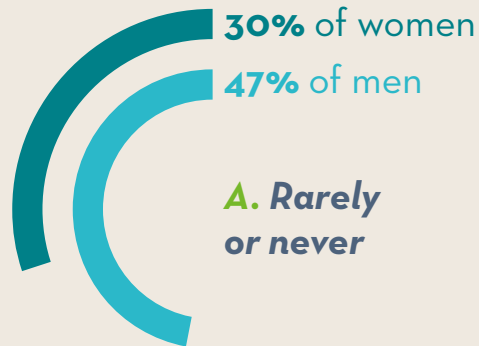


The Collaborating with Men survey on gender bias in workplace culture researched a gender balanced sample of almost 7,000 from 25 organisations.<sup>11</sup> The findings suggest that most women and many men surveyed think that the informal networks formed around social relationships between colleagues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

**Q. Do you believe informal networks tend to be male dominated in your workplace?**

n. 6562. 50% men, 50% women.



**KEY POINTS**

● Men and women see these issues differently.

● Men and women's views are more polarised. Men are more likely to say this is rarely or never an issue.

● Senior women are more concerned than senior men and women in other roles.



***“All the managers at my place are male. And they often go offsite together. Even the next potential supervisors are male and friends with the managers. Even though inexperienced and not long in job they still get chosen over females who have more experience.”***

FEMALE, ACADEMIC SECTOR

## ► Why this happens

Very few men are deliberately keeping women out of the ‘boys’ club’. Many men told us, there is no boys’ club. It happens because some men overlook women. It happens because some men think women will not want to be invited to client entertaining around sports events. It happens because women weren’t included last year or the year before that. It happens because women are less likely to have the time to invest in the social glue that makes work more enjoyable and satisfying. This is partly explained by the tendency of women to have bigger circles of friends, from disparate social groups, whereas men’s friendships tend to be built around activities (including after work socialising) and their friendship groups get smaller after the age of 30.<sup>12</sup> In addition, more women than men work part time.<sup>13</sup> Professional and managerial working mothers are more likely to have primary responsibility for caring for their families. Those who work from home or remotely from an office-based team and work reduced or compressed hours experience limited opportunities for socialising and meeting people in person.<sup>14</sup> It also

happens because when people don’t know much about each other, it can feel easier to build rapport with someone of your own gender.

Look around at the next party or large work event you go to and you’ll notice this happening. So, given that male dominated networks happen unconsciously, action taken to broaden networks is going to feel somewhat forced for a while. ►

**The problem is two-fold: how do we bring more women into these networks and how do we help men feel comfortable with engaging?**

***“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.”***

MALE STEM (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, MATHS) MANAGER

- ▶ 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.

### **What can individuals and teams do within their workplaces?**

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. ●

**An ally is someone in a position of relative power and privilege who acts in solidarity with and alongside a more marginalised group or individual.<sup>16</sup>**

# HOW TO BUILD GENDER INCLUSIVE NETWORKS

7 suggestions made by the research participants

## 1. Hosts

Make more of work related occasions where the team or new joiners get together. In every group there are some who are very good at acting as hosts and getting the conversation going. Nominate a few hosts and ask them to welcome people and introduce them to others.

## 5. Eat in social spaces

Ban lunching at your desk and eat in social spaces where you are more likely to chat and get to know people.

## 2. Coffee conversations

Team leaders to charge their teams to take a tea/coffee break to meet someone new to them, ideally someone of a different gender.

## 3. 10 in 10

When people are new to the team, task them with having coffee/tea with 10 people they don't already know over the first 10 weeks.

## 4. Inclusive social events

When team events or celebrations are being organised, think more creatively about what form the event will take so the range of events over the year is as inclusive as possible. We are not suggesting stopping the things people want to do. Instead, we suggest extending the range of activities and checking in with people to see what else they think would be fun.

## 6. Who you take to client events

If attending client events, take someone with you who isn't one of the usual suspects.

## 7. Strategic networking

Be clear and strategic about your personal networking goals. Ask yourself what is your specific objective and who would be useful to get to know better to help you achieve this goal.

## Networking in a male-dominated environment



**Irina Ons Vilaboa, CFA,**  
Senior Convertible Index  
Manager at Refinitiv  
(formerly Thomson Reuters)

### ***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.”***

***“Most important is your intention to contribute positively to the people you are networking with. To paraphrase JFK, ‘Think not what your network will give you, but what you will give to the network.’”***

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 cornerstones for building a genuine and long-standing network.

- You need to be genuinely interested in the person you are with.
- Opportunities to build connections in person are best. LinkedIn and emails are fine when you have a network to maintain.
- Most important is your intention to contribute positively to the

people you are networking with. To paraphrase JFK, “Think not what your network will give you, but what you will give to the network”.

- Consider how you can evolve your network by introducing people who may not come across each other otherwise.
- When introducing people, respect their their time by asking them in advance how they would like to be introduced and what’s the purpose of the introduction for them. Think of this as an ‘executive summary for the person being introduced’ so that ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ are covered succinctly. This ensures the person to whom the introduction is made understands who is being introduced and why. This is very useful if you do not have a chance to forewarn a person that you will be introducing them to somebody.

### ***What about when networking doesn’t go to plan?***

Sometimes, despite my best efforts, some connections do not work from the start or stop working eventually. Whilst discouraging, I have learned to let it go. My

advice is to acknowledge the good, reflect on why it may have stopped working and move on.

Over the years, I have experienced a very small number of ‘peculiar’ encounters that I attribute mostly to culture rather than gender. With time I learned not to take these problems personally as I know I did not ‘provoke’ them. Also, I now understand that as well as cultural and gender differences, there are various biases and levels of emotional intelligence at play. In my experience, these problematic encounters cover a spectrum from perceived to explicit. For the former, I always give the benefit of the doubt. For the latter, I generally joke it off at the time and avoid any one-to-one meetings after that. I have a phrase up my sleeve which I am yet to use: “This conversation is making me uncomfortable, please stop”. It is important to remember though, that if you feel you have done all you can to stop the unwanted behaviour but it hasn’t stopped, find somebody you can talk to and plan your next step. Do not deal with this alone. This applies equally to men and women.

# SPONSORSHIP

## How sponsorship works (and doesn't work)

- 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>
- This is linked to affinity bias. The majority of senior leaders are men and unless something disrupts this pattern, men (just like women in senior leadership) tend to sponsor and promote people in their own image.<sup>20, 21, 22</sup>
- Informal sponsorship of women by men can attract negative comments or gossip.<sup>23</sup>
- Women, more often than men, conform to gender stereotypical expectations in believing they will be promoted for doing a good job and being quieter about their ambition. Women are also assumed by others to be less ambitious than men. This can mean women get overlooked for sponsorship.<sup>24, 25, 26</sup> ►

***“We should always have three friends in our lives - one who walks ahead who we look up to and follow; one who walks beside us...and then, one who we reach back for and bring along after we have cleared the way.”***

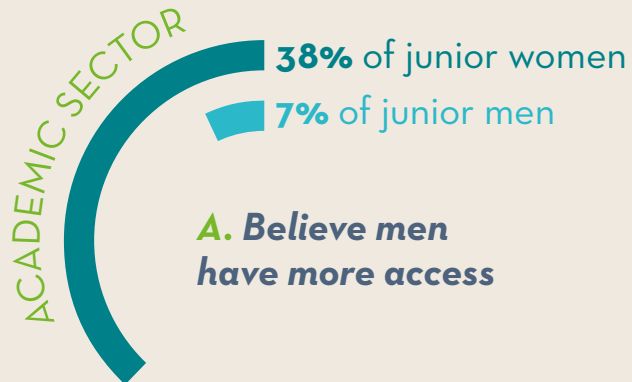
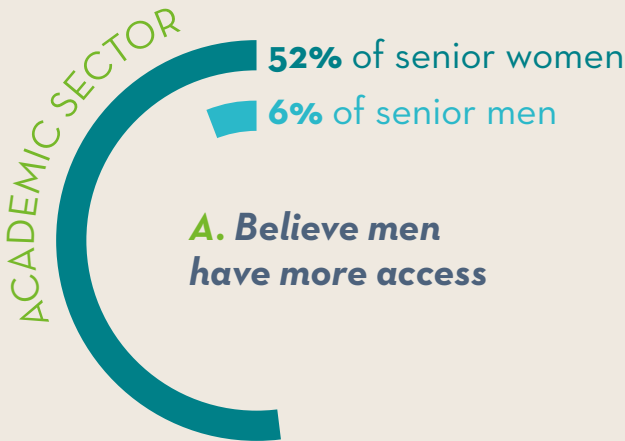
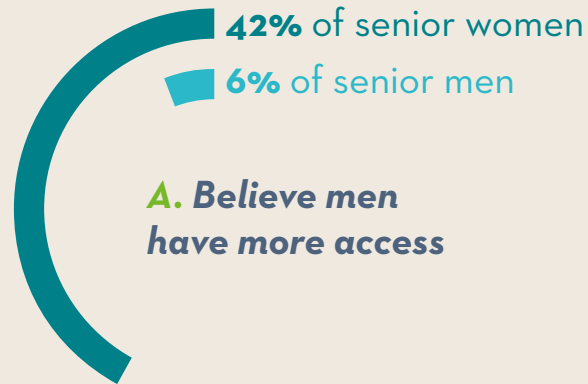
MICHELLE OBAMA<sup>27</sup>

**Q. Do you believe that males in your workplace have had more access than females to sponsorship from senior leaders?**

n. 5737 (all sectors), 53% men, 47% women.

n. 798 (academic sector).

10% senior women, 44% junior women, 14% senior men and 32% junior men.



**KEY POINTS**

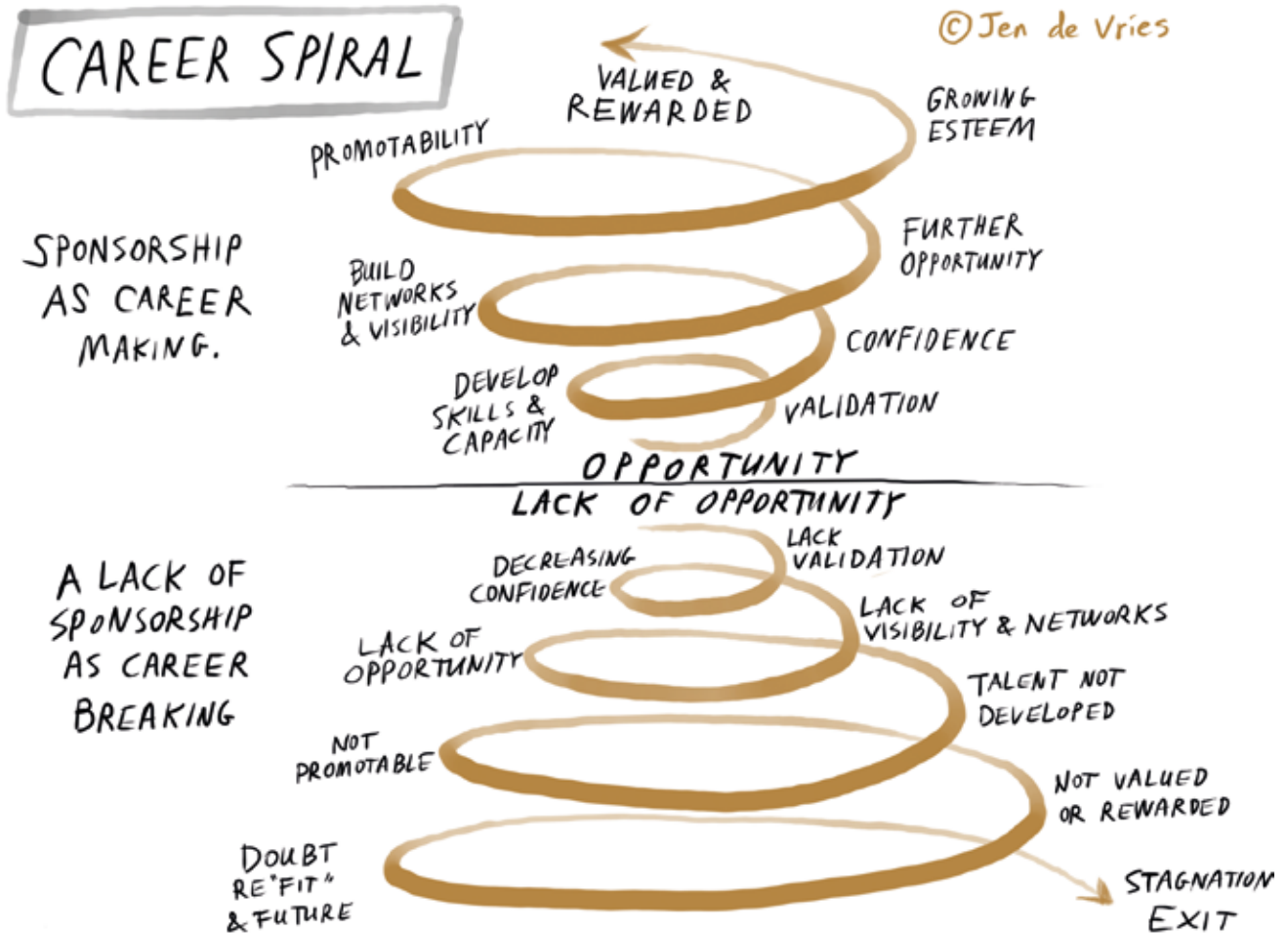
- Men and women see these issues differently.

- The gender gap in perceptions gets wider with seniority.

- Senior women in academia feel this is the case more strongly than other sectors.

## ► One opportunity leads to another

A virtuous cycle, where one opportunity leads to another and in fact makes the next opportunity more likely to occur, is represented here by de Vries's spiral. Equally, the lack of opportunity creates the opposite; a negative spiral making access to opportunities less likely over time.





# WHAT INDIVIDUALS CAN DO

## 6 tips on finding your own sponsor

### 1. Think it through

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.

### 5. You too

**Cascade the benefits of sponsorship by sponsoring women who are less senior than you.**

### 2. The ask

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.

### 4. Multiple sponsors

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 yourself again

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.

### 3. Who?

**Think about what you need from a sponsor and who is in a position to help you.**

# WHAT LEADERS CAN DO

## 4 key questions to ask

### 1. What happens now?

Examine how (informal) sponsorship in your organisation really works - who is advocating for the career development of each of their team members?<sup>28</sup>

### 2. Diversity and inclusion link?

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.

### 3. Who benefits?

Consider who can benefit from sponsorship at different levels of the organisation's hierarchy. This may well include people at early career stage. For example, in academic research, early research output is vital to future success.<sup>29</sup>

### 4. Transparent and accountable?

Treat sponsorship as a business process and ensure that sponsorship is made transparent, formalised and monitored. Make sure leaders are held internally accountable for sponsoring representational numbers of women and minority groups (e.g. through including this as a key performance indicator on performance appraisals).<sup>30, 31</sup>

Consider initiating a formal sponsorship programme. Alternatively, code sponsorship as a core competency for leaders and support them with training.

# Making sponsorship work for inclusion



Emma Avignon  
CEO of Mentore

Mentore provides expert advice into the challenges and success factors that drive culture change. Pragmatic, commercial solutions achieve embedded, sustainable change, enabling clients to emerge as more inclusive and diverse organisations.



## Equality, opportunity and clarity

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

## Common challenges to watch out for “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 this rather than leaving it as the elephant in the room. ▶

**“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.”**

► **“Having the hard conversations”**

● If someone is not selected for a formal sponsorship programme, having a different solution available can be helpful, for example, you could offer them advice and support from an industry mentoring programme or an informal mentor. In addition, take time to help them understand the underlying outcomes that the programme is seeking to address. They may not be aware of all the issues and it's a great mechanism to build an ally group.

● Encourage people to discuss their path to career progress with their line manager and others.

● It is important to put sponsorship initiatives in the context of the organisation's strategic objectives on diversity and inclusion. Sponsorship should be presented as one of the range of initiatives designed to ensure equality of opportunity to progress. Contextualising this in a bigger conversation, about how merit is

***“Senior male allies have a powerful role to play, especially when talking to other men and defending the aims of sponsorship initiatives regularly and loudly.”***

defined in the organisation for men and women and the overall benefits of having an inclusive culture and diverse workforce, is also useful. These messages will need to be conveyed repeatedly and to a broad audience.

**What should a good sponsor do?**

An important part of the conversation is how leaders can act as good sponsors. Here are some key guidelines:

- Talent spotting is a skill and you may well need help to identify people with potential who aren't among your direct reports.
- You may need to encourage the person you think has high potential to recognise this.
- Be an advocate. Raise awareness

of your sponsee amongst other senior leaders.

- Plan a roadmap of what good, stretching opportunities could look like for this person - and expect the roadmap to need updating.
- Don't stop after your sponsee has landed the assignment or role you have suggested her for. By definition, this role will be challenging and stretching and your guidance will be needed to support her in that role. This may include offering reassurance to those who hired her.
- Make sure your sponsee gets actionable feedback to learn from.
- Challenge your sponsee whilst investing in them and creating a safe space for them to learn with you.

***“A good sponsor provides air cover after your sponsee has landed the role. This will mean supporting her and providing advice and guidance as she faces new challenges, early on.”***

## Professionalise the relationship

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.



**Chris Stylianou**  
COO of Sky UK and ROI

*“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 future career as a result of this process is enough.”*

## Making sponsorship work in higher education



**Dr Jen De Vries**  
Co-author of  
*Sponsorship - Creating  
Career Opportunities  
for Women in Higher  
Education.*

Co-authored with Dr Jennifer Binns and developed in partnership with Universities Australia Executive Women, *Sponsorship - Creating Career Opportunities for Women in Higher Education* is available for download at [www.jendevries.com/publications](http://www.jendevries.com/publications)

Jen is an internationally known expert in mentoring and sponsorship.

### **Sponsorship at all career stages - determining who succeeds and who leads**

Sponsorship 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.

### **Sponsorship and bias**

Academic leaders describe

sponsorship 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.”*

*“The informal nature of sponsorship in academia is coupled with a strong, meritocratic discourse that emphasises self-made success. This serves to disappear the importance of mentoring and sponsorship to career success.”*

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 as a collaborative and inclusive 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 individuals in the granting process and enable greater contribution to the overall productivity and success of the team. The question ‘what opportunity does this person need next?’ guided discussions. Sponsorship was not seen as a zero-sum game, where one opportunity has to be given to the best or the most favoured.

Opportunities could be created and crafted to suit individual development needs.

### **Advice for leaders in academia**

Addressing sponsorship gaps and biases requires strengthening the sponsorship practices of a large slice of academic staff. As sponsorship is required at all stages of an academic career, leadership in this context includes everybody who supervises a PhD student or postdoc, through to Heads of Department and the Vice-Chancellor.

### **Conduct an environmental scan and build reflexivity**

- Ask who do I sponsor and why? Who don’t I sponsor and why not? Will my answers stand up to scrutiny if I explain them to someone who is unlike me – for example someone of a different gender?
- Ask people with career trajectories unlike yours what opportunities they need.
- Ask your subordinates and peers what their ambitions are and how you might be able to assist them.

### **Make sponsorship visible**

- Name sponsorship, when it occurs.
- Acknowledge the role of sponsorship in your own career.
- Query sponsorship practices that seem unfair and/or only benefit the few.

### **Improve organisational unit practices**

- Replace taps on the shoulder with more transparent processes that include criteria for making the decision.
- Spread resources such as conference travel funds more fairly, rather than each PhD or postdoc being reliant on the generosity of their supervisor/ current grant funding.
- Agree what opportunities are essential to early career success and make sure no-one falls through the gaps.
- Rotate leadership roles and committee memberships.
- Seek ways to make women more visible outside their discipline/unit/ department/university so they have access to opportunities.

## CASE STUDY

Charmaine DeSouza, Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development at the Greater London Authority, on how to make a difference using this open access toolkit.

# '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.

### Aims of the 'Our Time' programme

- 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.

### How does the 'Our Time' initiative work?

'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. A 12-month one-to-one sponsorship relationship**, which offers the key to unlocking opportunities, contacts and



The toolkit is available for organisations to download so they can also set up 'Our Time' - it can be found at [www.london.gov.uk/ourtime](http://www.london.gov.uk/ourtime)



***“‘Our Time’ is about raising awareness of sponsorship as an activity and as a life skill – the programme creates pairings but also aims to ensure that people think about who they sponsor and who they are sponsored by throughout their life and career.”***

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

**2. A six-month formal development journey**, 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 the first 12-month programme involving 30 participants and career ‘champions’ from six organisations.
- Some sponsoring relationships will be longer than others and will depend on circumstances and what is needed at different points in time.

### **Advice for leaders**

- The term ‘sponsorship’ in a career development context isn’t well-understood. It needs clear explanation. This lay behind the ‘Our Time’ decision to talk about ‘champions’ and ‘participants’ rather than sponsors and sponsees.
- Think about the under-representation that you are trying to address and target that group to apply for the programme.
- Think in terms of the sponsoring relationship. This is about creating new experiences and opportunities for the participant – to meet new people and encounter new environments. And it is also a positive opportunity for leaders to learn and develop, impacting positively on the development of organisations.

**GLA Group members are: Greater London Authority, London Fire Brigade, London Legacy Development Corporation, Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime, the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, Transport for London, Metropolitan Police Service, and London & Partners and the London Ambulance.**

## **IMPACT**

The first cohort are almost a year through their programme. Already, ‘Our Time’ programme leaders know of four promotions to new roles and one change of career direction. The following feedback has been taken from an event at the six month milestone.

‘Our Time’ champions say:

***“I’ve taken the learnings from ‘Our Time’ to inform thinking about the TFL leadership academy.”***

***“I’ve been able to make connections with other colleagues on a similar journey.”***

‘Our Time’ participants say:

***“I’m aware of the things that I say and do that detract from my reputation as a confident leader.”***

***“I’ve received incredible support for interview prep.”***

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