Introduction

Managers are involved in ‘the creation of knowledges, both in the local sense of organisational and managerial knowledge, and in the broader, more pervasive, sense of knowledge in and of society – indeed, of what counts as knowledge’1 in a context where ‘most managers in most organisations are men’2. This pattern might be expected to persist within universities, given their particular role in the creation, evaluation and dissemination of knowledge. Indeed ‘women’s under-representation in positions of power and prestige in academia appears to be a universal phenomenon’3. One of the most common metaphors used for describing this situation has been the ‘glass ceiling’ although this has been critiqued as underplaying both the obstacles experienced by women at all levels as well as women’s agency, with a labyrinth being put forward more recently as a metaphor.4

It has been increasingly recognised that organisations in general, and managerial power and authority in particular, reflect and reinforce gendered realities.5 Indeed it has been shown that ‘correcting for identifiable human capital and individual differences between male and female academics’ in Ireland, women were paid significantly less than men.6 Thus organisations must be seen as ‘social constructions that arise from a masculine view of the world and that call on masculinity for their legitimation and affirmation’.7 Work on women in organisations has increasingly moved to studies ‘representing gender as a constitutive feature of organisational life’ and explaining how ‘patriarchal power is exercised, rather than simply
Explanations for the under-representation of women have frequently referred to aspects of organisational culture including the ‘creation of gendered symbols, images and forms of consciousness’; male centred networks and ‘the internal mental work of individuals’. It has been suggested that organisational cultures ultimately reflect the wishes and needs of powerful men. There are also structural and procedural issues since access to university academic senior management positions is frequently perceived as being only available to those who are already at professorial status. Since only roughly one in ten of those at this level within the Irish university system are women, within these parameters, there is a very small pool to draw from.

Where women constitute a minority they can be simply used by the dominant group as ‘tokens’ to legitimise the system. As such, they are both invisible and extra-visible. In such a world, ‘women’s place’ is defined by men, and it is a subordinate one. While ‘ignoring difference, acting as equal is often an important strategy for women … it leaves patriarchal cultures intact’ and is inherently fragile since at any moment women’s status as honorary males may be withdrawn. However it is at least theoretically possible that discourses may exist which promote or even legitimate women’s participation at management level in such structures, such discourses being framed as in the interests of organisational effectiveness or in terms of wider ideological principles such as those related to representation, role models or diversity.

In Ireland gendered divisions of labour in universities are underpinned by the higher valuation and funding of those areas where the majority of faculty are men – such patterns being depicted as in the national interest, despite challenges to such assertions in what is a predominantly service dominated economy. Furthermore, the use of nominations rather than open competition (for example as regards Stokes appointments) in these areas is likely to further increase men’s advantages. It has been widely suggested that this gendered culture may be reflected in subtle discriminatory processes and practices. In this chapter we are concerned with organisational culture and processes in Irish universities as well as with the existence of alternative discourses which legitimate women’s participation in senior management.
Context

In Ireland, as elsewhere, the proportion of women faculty and students in the universities has increased dramatically over the past twenty-five years, with women making up almost 40 per cent of faculty and more than half of the students. However, they remain under-represented at senior management level. A documentary and web-based six-country international study found that women held 15 per cent of the positions at senior management level in Irish universities—compared with 37 per cent of positions in Sweden. In Ireland, all of those at Presidential level were men, as were roughly three-quarters of those at Deputy President/Vice Presidential Level and 88 per cent of those at Dean level. When these trends were compared with those emerging in Australia, New Zealand, UK, Portugal, and Turkey, the proportion of men was highest in Ireland at the Presidential level and (joint highest with Turkey) at Dean level. The proportion of women at Deputy/Vice Presidential level reflected the presence of non-academic women. Interestingly, of those six countries, Ireland had the lowest proportion of women at professorial level.

The National Development Plan 2007–2013 and the National Women’s Strategy 2007–2016 both recognise the usefulness of equality-proofing measures to identify unintended policy impacts, but neither identify mechanisms to monitor or reverse the ongoing masculinisation of Universities at senior management level. Furthermore, the inevitability of change in an Irish context is challenged by the fact that thirty years ago, before the Marriage Bar was lifted, women constituted five per cent of those at professorial level, at a time when women made up only 11 per cent of faculty. The Higher Education Authority (having closed the Access and Equality unit in University College Cork in 2002) and having failed to create an equality structure since then, has recommended that universities develop equality action plans ‘which sets out explicit and challenging targets and timetables as well as the names of those responsible for delivery.’ No action has been taken to monitor the implementation of this recommendation. Indeed, the State’s interest in gender equality in Higher Education seems
limited to encouraging women to do science and technology – both male dominated faculty areas. There are a number of common sense explanations for the low proportion of women in management in Irish universities. Firstly there are those explanations that focus on men’s and women’s differential responsibilities for caring for children and other dependents. However this explanation sits uneasily with the fact that the proportion of women at senior level in Irish institutes of technology is higher than in the universities. Furthermore, the unions and Department of Education and Science successfully encouraged applications from women for educational management positions at first level in the 1990s, thus implicitly recognising that such patterns reflect systemic educational issues rather than women’s childcare responsibilities. Secondly, explanations have been put forward which have effectively blamed women for their position (by referring implicitly or explicitly to choice, low levels of confidence etc). Such explanations have an element of validity, reflecting as they do ‘the psychological effects of living in a sexist society’. However in Ireland, boys’ academic underperformance and the absence of men as teachers from the primary school system are seen as systemic problems. The question then arises as to why women’s absence from senior management in the university system is not seen in the same light. Thirdly, it is suggested that women’s absence from senior positions in the universities reflects their lower publications output and/or the greater priority they attach to teaching. This argument of course pre-supposes that research excellence as reflected in a professorial position is a necessary precondition for academic senior management. The latter argument is undermined by the fact that there are high profile academic men in senior management who are not professors.

In summary then Irish universities remain overwhelmingly male dominated at management level. The Higher Educational Authority seems powerless and/or unwilling to lead on this matter. Common sense explanations for the effective masculinisation of senior management in Irish Universities seem questionable.
Methodology

The HEA, the Department of Education and the Central Statistics Office do not publish data on the gender of those in senior management in Irish universities. This does not seem to be peculiar to Ireland, although in Sweden these figures are publicly available. Senior Management was defined in this study as those at Dean level or above, who were currently or who had been in senior management in the Irish university system in the past five years. A total of forty people were identified in a purposive sample, involving those at Presidential, Vice Presidential and Dean level; including academics and non-academics; men and women; and including a range of disciplines across all seven universities funded by the State. The questionnaire was devised by the nine-country Women in Higher Education Management Network (WHEMN). It included three sections: getting into and on in senior management; doing senior management (with a small number of additional questions in this area for Presidents) and the structure and broader management culture in the Universities. In this chapter the focus is particularly on organisational culture and processes, largely elicited by questions about what ‘women see as the barriers to promotion’; ‘Is there anything someone in your position could do about the predominantly male management structure?’; and ‘Does having women in senior management make a difference or not really? In terms of management decisions? What about to faculty? To students?’ Such data is also used to look at the existence of alternative discourses and at the limits and possibilities for change.

Of the forty people (fifteen women and twenty-five men) contacted, interviews were completed with thirty-four (thirteen women and twenty-one men) an 85 per cent response rate. These interviews varied in length from forty minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes – with the majority of them being over an hour. All of the interviews were tape recorded, with detailed verbatim notes being made during the interview. Following the interviews the tapes were replayed and any additional material was inserted in these verbatim recordings. Cross country qualitative analysis in the context of themes relating to organisational culture, power and career paths is ongoing.
The interviewees were initially contacted by email, with follow up contact being made at the secretarial level. Because of the level of the interviewees all the interviews were done by the author, with the introductory letter signed formally as Dean. It was clear from several of the interviews that this enhanced the credibility of the exercise. The majority of the interviewees were not known prior to the interview. Some might have been aware of the author’s interest in gender issues, and this and/or the fact that I am a woman may have influenced their responses. It is impossible to explore the extent of this influence and/or the extent to which their responses were rhetorical.

The majority of those interviewed were currently members of the most senior executive in their university or had been within the past five years. Senior executive teams varied in composition although they all included a mix of academics and non-academics. They also varied in size: from seven to fifteen members. The total proportion of women on such senior executive teams varied from zero to 42 per cent (average 18 per cent: excluding non-academic women: 13 per cent). The purposive sample interviewed in this study included just under half of those on such senior executive teams.

In the interests of confidentiality pseudonyms are used and features that would identify those involved are obscured. Thus for example, all the academics on the senior executive are referred to as Professor – although not all of the men are at professorial level. Equally those who are not currently on the senior executive, but who had been on it in the past five years are described as senior executives.

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The Perceived Existence of Gendered Organisational Cultures and Processes

Universities present themselves as gender-neutral meritocracies, concerned with the transmission and creation of scientific, objective knowledge. However it is now widely accepted that they are in fact gendered organisations. Thus Weber’s view of organisations as staffed by depersonalised automatons...
has been challenged: once we accept ‘that staff bring their personal interests into organisations and that these shape the way they discharge their functions, we must also accept that gendered perceptions, practices and attitudes will be present too’.

The organisational culture and processes in the academy have been depicted as competitive, aggressive, individualistic, not very open with male dominated patterns of networking and influence working against women. Professor Cathy O’Riordan described the university she worked in as ‘strong, decisive authoritative ... extremely male dominated ... strongly authoritative, almost authoritarian’ ‘used to a strong hierarchical structure’. Any attempt to bring in a flat management structure, was seen as ‘a weakness’, especially by ‘older men’. Morley suggests that it seems improbable that the academy is ‘a violent place’ although in her study there were ‘many accounts of spite and bullying’. In one case in the present study so real was the possibility of physical violence that the University took out a court injunction against specific individuals since they saw this as:

essential for my safety ... I was personally threatened. Anonymous letters were sent round the University ... I was experiencing bullying by people who had been on senior management ... I was shouted at, screamed at, threatened ... There had been a physical assault. Even if it was accidental, would I be the next victim? (Professor Cathy O’Riordan, academic senior executive)

This level of violence appeared to be exceptional. However, a male dominated culture was also identified at a procedural level in another University in the context of a taken for granted acceptance of all male promotion panels:

That would not happen in the US or the UK. What appalled me was that I had to point it out to senior people, people who had been in senior management positions ... and who saw nothing wrong with all male boards. (Professor Denis Tobin, academic senior executive)

Based on meetings with senior and junior female staff he concluded that such procedures and the related organisational culture was inimical to ensuring gender balanced outcomes in promotion competitions. The effect on women of seeing that ‘all the senior positions in administration or the faculty are all men’ was also referred to by women in other universities:
It was seen ... that these were male dominated environments so therefore some people were reluctant to put themselves forward. This was particularly true of senior female academics who felt that they had no chance going before such a male body. (Professor Denis Tobin, academic senior executive)

They [women] don’t tend to go for them [these jobs] because they don’t feel that they are going to get it if there is a man going for it ... that job is sewn up. (Pauline Hanratty, non-academic senior executive)

Some of the women identified other strategies as characteristic of a male organisational culture including siding with the male power holder at meetings; setting up the outcomes of meetings in advance; not disagreeing with male power holders in public; not being emotional – the latter being reminiscent of the observation that: ‘The academy, by privileging propositional knowledge, de-emphasises the emotional world ... Women’s “emotionality” [being] placed in binary opposition to men’s “rationality”’.31 They described the senior executive as:

a male club at the top level ... very hard as a woman ... you are supposed to think the same way, not to be outspoken on things you feel very strongly. (Professor Ann Joyce, academic senior executive)

Professor Geraldine Maguire, also saw conformity as the dominant value. She reflected that she was ‘too questioning; too challenging, asking uncomfortable questions’. As she saw it her male executive colleagues: ‘were quite frightened of me, scared of me in some senses’. Interestingly the word ‘frightening’ was also used by Husu’s Finnish respondents to refer to their male colleagues’ perception of them.32 The word is evocative of both women’s perceived power and yet their unacceptability within the academy. It was striking that the women who identified such characteristics tended not to be current members of senior executive teams. There were very occasional references to the absence of a critical mass of women in senior management and the burdens on women when they are few in number – including:

... bringing to the table those kinds of issues that might relate directly to gender like how come all chairs are men or just being the voice for concerns for equality. (Professor Eileen Greene, academic senior executive)
It has long been recognised that men’s relationships with other men are a key factor in perpetuating male dominance. This phenomenon has been referred to in various terms including homosocial behaviour; homosexual reproduction and male homosocialibity. A Swedish study of elite men and women found that both the academic elite women as well as the overall female elite group were substantially more likely than their male counterparts to see ‘many men as having problems co-operating with female leaders’; to think that ‘recruitment of female leaders is not a priority’; and that ‘women applicants are passed over in employment’. In the present study pro-male attitudes of varying degrees of intensity were perceived by both the academic and non-academic women:

Most of the men that I work with – the bottom line is that they would be much more comfortable to be working with men. They vaguely put up with you, accept that you have a right to be there – but if it was up to themselves, they are more comfortable around men. This is not a generational thing. Those most uncomfortable are seriously younger. (Professor Tina McCleland, academic senior executive)

the biggest thing really is that men are generally more comfortable working with men, communicating with men, being with men, understanding men. (Claire Hartigan, non-academic senior executive)

one thing you can never be in this job is one of the boys [there is] a certain place that other male colleagues can go with regard to one another that you won’t go. (Professor Joan Geraghty, academic senior executive)

Women are conscious that men are unconsciously misogynistic but men aren’t conscious of this. (Pauline Hanratry, non-academic senior executive)

In summary there was a suggestion that conformity was valued in senior executives and the strategies used to maintain that kind of organisational culture were identified. There was also a strong suggestion by the women of a kind of homosociality and even misogyny in that culture.
Does having women in senior management make a difference or not really?

It was striking that even in Ireland, with its male dominated university management structures, and its gendered organisational culture and processes, many men and women at senior executive level put forward rationales for the inclusion of women in senior management. Some, particularly those who saw students as key stakeholders and those who spontaneously referred to having daughters, stressed the importance of role models. Amongst those who referred to the importance of collegial structures, having women in senior management positions was also seen as important in terms of representation and/or diversity and was seen as facilitating better decision making; while for others it was important because of their perception of the university as a modern or ethical structure.

Some saw the absence of same-sex role models impacting on female junior faculty and students. Thus as they saw it, the presence of role models increased young women’s career orientation, aspirations, confidence and success:

There is no doubt that there are [glass] ceilings all over the place. They have to be corrected – [and to do this we] need role models. (Professor Garry Burke, academic senior executive)

if you don’t have within the university a very obvious and visible presence of women at senior level … [it] is bound to have an influence on younger academics. They have to see people in these positions for them to think ‘I might do that’ … If you are in institutions where they don’t see that, their own commitment will be less or they will move out and that would … impoverish the institution. (Professor Eileen Greene, academic senior executive)

For others, the rationale for having women in senior management was ultimately rooted in an appreciation of the value of diversity in contributing to the making of ‘proper decisions in a balanced way’ referring to Donald Rumsfield’s observation:
You know what you know and you know what you don’t know but it is the things that you don’t know that you don’t know that cause a problem … If we didn’t have any then we would only have the male perspectives … By having women in senior management we must get more balanced views and hence more balanced decision making. (Professor Niall Phelan, academic senior executive)

the combination [of men and women] is much more likely to lead to successful management practise than either by themselves … with the tendency for women to be more team oriented and men more pushy, the combination is the perfect way. (Professor Sean Lenihan, academic senior executive)

Underlying some of these concerns with diversity was a very definite view of the university as involving collegial representational structures:

We talk a lot about access for disabled, disadvantaged but it is for everybody. It is a bit strange when people don’t think about 50 per cent of the population sometimes … 50 per cent of the people are men and 50 per cent are women and people tend to ignore that. (Professor Niall Phelan, academic senior executive)

On a faculty front I would say female staff would feel disenfranchised in some ways … if it was entirely male, I would say women academics would see it as hostile to them in some way-unsympathetic to them-that there was no one there to represent our [their] point of view. (Professor Anthony Donoghue, academic senior executive)

There was evidence that men who had formative experiences outside the Irish academic system saw the continued existence of a male dominated organisational culture as legally and morally unacceptable and/or as an embarrassing anachronism. For Professor Larry Mc Donald the appointment of women at senior management level was a moral issue: “it is right because it is right”. [We] “should want to see appropriate distributions in terms of gender and race”; [not to have this] is inappropriate and unacceptable. Professor Denis Tobin (academic senior executive) spontaneously referred to ‘the very old fashioned approach to gender issues’ in Ireland. For others the presence of women in senior positions was simply what one would expect in any kind of a modern institution:
In most other fields we see the changing face of management in terms of women taking responsibility and being the voice of the institution. Universities have lagged behind. The voices and the language is mostly male still. (Professor Eileen Greene, academic senior executive)

Although men’s relationships with other men have been seen as a key factor in perpetuating male dominance, there was a suggestion of a shift in such attitudes. Thus there were some academic senior executives who preferred working with women because ‘they had less ego’ – such attitudes arguably reflecting the perception of patriarchal privileging as problematic.37 Thus for Professor Sean Lenihan the appointment of women was not only related to the fact that it produces better decision making but also reflected the fact that he:

finds women easier to work with than men ... there is a sort of competitive instinct in men, if they come up with an idea, they have the ownership of it, they have to defend it at all cost. If it is changed or rejected, it is a personal slight on them. Women are more open to criticism of their ideas and amendments to them in order to turn it into an idea that can work ... men are interested in looking good. They are concerned with how they are perceived in the University ... they are much more allergic to authority ... they hate being told what to do, that their idea is off the wall. (Professor Sean Lenihan, academic senior executive)

There were a minority who saw no reason to encourage the presence of women on senior management. Thus for John Keane (non-academic, senior executive) the question was ‘have we seen any verifiable consequences of women’s access to management positions’. In the absence of such proof he felt comfortable dismissing the need for any action on it, implicitly suggesting that moves in this direction were not in women’s interest anyway: ‘Who can be the hardest task master? It can be other women’. There are costs for women involved in identifying such gendered processes – not least of which is the fact that women do not want to depict themselves as ‘victims of misfortune or injustice’ or open themselves up to the possibility of being professionally discredited or simply being perceived as ungrateful.38 A minority of women saw gender as irrelevant in the context of senior management:
My experience has been that gender has never been an issue. Gender can be a correlate or a cause-sometimes people mistake that, confuse that inadvertently, sometimes for other reasons. In my case I don’t think that gender has been either an advantage or a disadvantage. (Professor Marie Walsh, academic senior executive)

Overall then despite some dissonant voices there was a striking level of endorsement of various discourses suggesting that having women in senior management was important. For some this was related to their conception of the University as a representational structure; for others it created a diversity that they saw as related to better decision making while for yet others it was their personal preference or was simply morally right or appropriately modern. In most cases even where it was seen as making little difference to the nature or content of the decisions it was seen as important in the provision of role models for female faculty and students.

Perceived possibilities and limits as regards change

Lukes highlighted the fact that power could be exercised so that some possibilities were literally unthinkable, while others were seen as ‘natural’ or ‘obvious’. Such cultural ‘blinkers’ were very apparent in this study.\(^\text{39}\) Thus structural realities were very much less likely to be referred to as explanations for the absence of women in senior management than ones that focussed on women’s choices, self esteem or life style. Broadly similar patterns have emerged in US and Australian studies as well as in Sweden.\(^\text{40}\)

Professorial status was overwhelmingly implicitly or explicitly seen as a necessary condition for accessing academic senior management. Very few respondents appeared to notice that it had gendered consequences. That effect is particularly acute in Ireland where women’s chances of a professorship are one of the worst in Europe, with Irish men ‘being at least five times more likely than women to obtain a full professorship.’\(^\text{41}\) Interestingly the appointment of non-academic women from middle management to senior non-academic executive positions was referred to. Furthermore,
reference was made to restructuring an academic executive outside the Irish University sector by allowing three academic members to be elected annually from middle management, and requiring that two of the three be female. Although this was seen ‘as certainly challenging what had been a very patriarchal institution’ the aspect of it that was seen as evoking most hostility was related to hierarchy. However the transferability of this kind of strategy to Irish Universities seemed literally unthinkable.

The differential value that is attached to activities undertaken predominantly by men/ women can be seen as key elements in a male dominated organisational culture. In such a context the crucial questions are:

What is the work load; how is it measured; what do we value; what do we assign and how do we assign it … Women are given welfare and minding the student type roles, advisees and counselling. The dynamic, high profile, getting funding, creating buildings is seen as male and is given to the male so [they] build up their own profile … Women are left with the nice ones. They are critically important but are not valued … not THAT important really, not sexy, not going to get you ahead. (Jane Morrisson, non-academic senior executive)

Academic appointments to senior executive positions typically involved assignments of responsibility to existing faculty for three to ten years and in Irish Universities: there was ‘a lack of any tradition of mobility between institutions … that by becoming a Dean here you might be a Vice President there [in another Irish University] … there is no tradition of that whatsoever’ (Professor Kieran Naughton, academic senior executive). Hence one might suggest that ‘ontological security and a culture of sameness’ seemed to be prioritised in these appointments. Overwhelmingly the respondents stressed that the President’s influence was critical – a pattern they noted that was legitimated by the Irish Universities Act, 1997. In the case of those senior executive members who were reporting to the President these positions were explicitly or implicitly filled ‘not by application, promotion, selection or election, but by the blessing of the President’ (Jane Morrison, non-academic senior executive). Even where there was a process involving an internal competition (including application, appointment of selection board, interview) it was stressed that: ‘The President is key’ (Thomas Hennessy, non-academic senior executive). Presidents, through
their actions were seen as showing the extent of their real commitment to gender balance:

There is no point in trying to say that we want gender balance throughout all layers of the University if it is not reflected in senior management ... Action in these types of things is much more important than words. (Professor Garry Burke, academic senior executive)

Overwhelmingly the senior executives referred to women’s own attitudes as limiting possibilities as regards change. To some extent this can be seen as effectively ‘blaming the victim’. However in so far as such attitudes reflect deeper constructions of femininity they can be seen as constituting cultural limits to the possibilities for change. Thus for example they highlighted women’s tendency to be more involved in teaching and women’s own role in sometimes excluding themselves directly or indirectly:

An awful lot of women decide that it would not be good for the university if they got the job ... There are only two questions to ask: do you want it? And can you cope with not getting it? But women have a third. Are they suitable or not? (Professor Sean Lenihan, academic senior executive)

Women, as suggested in other studies had a kind of organisational naivete. Thus for example, they failed to recognise that ‘Promotion is a game’. Others stressed women’s greater passivity in terms of career planning and their ‘lack of awareness of what is needed to get promoted’:

Men will be very aware of the number of points for teaching, for research and for service. Women won’t be able to tell you what the breakdown is and how they feel they are doing on each of these ... Males had planned how long at junior lecturer level; how long at lecturer level. What they would need to do – how much funding, PhDs, publications ... where females seemed to just keep doing these things, [and thought that] I will at some point put it together and I will be promoted – much more passive. (Professor Garry Burke, academic senior executive)

There was a suggestion that such patterns reflected lower and gendered ambitions:
Perhaps some women regard having achieved a teaching position in a university as having achieved their goal, whereas maybe some male colleagues will feel that maybe they want to move further up and that giving too much attention to undergraduate teaching is not the way for upward mobility. (Professor Anthony Donoghue, academic senior executive)

Both men and women in this study explicitly put forward the idea that such patterns reflected women’s feeling of not ‘being valued’ – a gendered pattern that has been identified as early as the Leaving Certificate. Women don’t think they are good enough. Maybe we need more validation of our work. (Pauline Hanratty, non-academic senior executive)

It has been widely recognised that women are poor at marketing themselves and taking credit for their achievements – such patterns being seen as reflecting cultural norms surrounding modesty concerning individual achievements. This response was contrasted with men’s: where success occurred ‘every man and his dog was involved, when they really weren’t’. Women’s response was seen as rather different:

When you kick a goal, what do you do? you dance around and hug everyone. You make sure that everyone recognises that you scored a goal. You make sure you sit at the bar and that everyone recognises that you scored a goal. Those that weren’t at the match you say I will buy you a drink. They [women] weren’t comfortable playing those games ... They did not market it. (Professor Geraldine Maguire, academic senior executive)

A minority of both men and women suggested that the key element was individual choice – in some cases in a context where exercising that choice implicitly excluded marriage and/or a family – at least for single people who happened to be women:

Anything that I have chosen to do, anything that I was qualified for and worked for I have always achieved. A lot of that has been driven by the fact that I am a single person. (Katherine Mc Elligott, non-academic senior executive)

Combining management with childcare can be seen as an important barrier for women in senior management, especially in societal contexts which
are not helpful. In the EU, Ireland was ranked joint lowest with the UK in terms of childcare supports and maternity leave with parents spending roughly 20 per cent of their incomes on childcare. However, childcare was hardly mentioned at all as a problem in a Finnish study of academics (a subsidised universal childcare system for all pre-school children exists there). Some men and women in the present study thought that women saw ‘combining work with family and domestic commitments’ as a crucial barrier. However it was striking how often it was the men who thought that it must be a barrier for women:

I have no idea what they [women] see ... I can’t see into the mind of woman. This is what is the barrier for women ... career choice, lifestyle, family is a huge issue. If you are going to have a family in your late 20s and early 30s it is hard to be as [research] productive as a man. (Professor Kieran Naughton, academic senior executive)

Thus the difficulties for women were typically seen as related to acquiring a professorship (which was implicitly seen as necessary for accessing a senior management position-a problematic assumption since some men in academic senior management were not professors). Furthermore, since senior management positions were typically not accessed until early to mid 50s, the whole question of the difficulty of combining such positions with childcare was arguably less acute than it might otherwise have been, despite an unhelpful Irish social context in this regard.

Frequent references were made to the fact that ‘in the last six to seven years’ non-academic posts had been filled in the university sector from the outside. Typically these people were relatively young, and had worked in mixed gender teams in the private sector. However, many of them appeared to be completely unreflective about gender. Thus for example, they thought that someone in their position could be:

encouraging females to come forward for the opportunities that arise, putting supports in place to help if that is what is required. I don’t know what these supports are – maybe I should know. (Mark Noonan, non-academic senior executive)

However in some cases this lack of gender awareness implicitly challenged the male prioritisation implicit in the organisational culture. Thus, some
non-academics who had come from the private sector and who retained a
cconcern with profit raised the question of why Universities do not present
themselves as Women’s Universities as a marketing strategy:

If there is a profit motive you will make sure that if there is a constituency to be
appealed to that will gain you more profit, you will address it. You don’t have the
same rigour around your consumer [in Universities]. Where have you ever heard one
of the Universities come out and say the Women’s University as an angle on Student
recruitment. (Timmy Collins, non-academic senior executive)

This also implicitly raises the question of the extent to which students
are seen as key stakeholders even in what appears to be a market driven,
‘mercantile’ system.49

Some of the academics who identified proactive ways dealing with
a predominantly male management culture referred to ‘targets’, ‘quotas’
and career development measures (including mentors) to help women to
position themselves in ‘a long term career trajectory’.

The future is quotas. I am much more vehement now. I don’t think that there will
be a rebalancing naturally. We believed that 25 years ago when the Marriage Bar was
removed. (Professor Cathy O’Riordan, academic senior executive)

Special, extra coaching for women, because … they don’t see what they do day-to-day
as being as important as it is and actually talking about that … seeing it from someone
else’s perspective. (Pauline Hanratty, non-academic senior executive)

For others however, gender is quite simply now off the agenda:

Younger people think it is all sorted. A number of other people – women – are just
tired. (Professor Tina Mc Clleland, academic senior executive)

Overall then it is striking that recruitment to academic senior management
positions in Irish Universities is seen as overwhelmingly internal, with a
professorial position being implicitly seen as necessary for appointment at
this level (although in fact not all men in these positions were professors).
Yet there was very little appreciation of the gendered implications of this.
On the other hand much was made of women’s lack of career planning, low
self esteem, high valuation of caring, lack of career ambition, poor ability to market themselves and life style choices.

Summary and conclusions

This study draws on a purposive sample of 40 of those in senior management in Irish Universities, with a response rate of 85 per cent, and involving roughly one in two of those in senior executive positions. The picture that emerges is of a gendered organisational culture reflected in gendered procedures and processes. As seen by the women, it was an organisational culture where men were, for the most part, most comfortable working with other men. Nevertheless these senior executives for the most part strongly endorsed the appointment of women to senior management: referring to the importance of role models, as well as evoking issues around representation and diversity; personal preferences, moral or modern standards. Nevertheless in thinking about change in such structures, they focussed on women’s lack of career planning; low self esteem; high valuation of caring, poor ability to market themselves. The majority took for granted that women’s professorial status was a necessary condition for being in senior academic executive positions, and ignored the fact that not all men in these positions were at that level—and that since women only constitute 10 per cent of those at professorial level, such a pre-requisite has gendered implications. Presidents were seen as having a great deal of power as regards changing the gender profile of senior management. Nevertheless, only 18 per cent of those at senior executive level were women, and this fell to 13 per cent when attention was focussed on women in academic senior management positions.

This chapter raises questions about the nature of power; the culture and processes that maintain it and obscure its reality even from those who are at the most senior level. In a context where women make up almost 40 per cent of faculty and more than half of the students, the gender
disparities at senior management level are striking. Furthermore, in a context where there was relatively little gender differentiation in responses, it was interesting that both academic and non-academic women saw elements of homosociality if not outright misogyny in the organisational culture. The degree to which academic leaders, the HEA or the state are willing to tackle such phenomena in Ireland is problematic. The very different patterns in Swedish universities clearly suggest that change is possible. It remains to be seen whether the academic leaders in the Universities are up to this challenge.

Endnotes

7 Celia Davies, Gender and the Professional Predicament in Nursing (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p. 44.
7 Gender and Organisational Culture at Senior Management Level


18 Maria Machado-Taylor, Ozmen Ozlanli, Kate White and Barbara Bagilhole, ‘Managing Paradoxes: Breaking the Barriers to Women Achieving Seniority in


30 Morley, *Organising Feminism*, pp. 4 and 88.


38 for example, Husu, *Sexism, Support and Survival in Academia*


Husu, Sexism, Support and Survival in Academia, op cit. p. 290.

Denis O’Sullivan, Cultural Politics and Irish Education since the 1950s: Policy Paradigms and Power (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2005).