Gender, Work & Organization
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Transforming Contexts, Transforming Selves: Gender in New Times
University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

Stream No. 29

Gender in Political Spaces

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The aim of this stream is to advance thinking about gender in political spaces. The nature of ‘political work’ is broad and wide-reaching, encompassing not only the political nature of roles within traditional organisational structures, but also the work done by those within legislatures and by elected representatives.

In organisations, politics is an inherent part of the workplace, where individuals compete for resources and power (Mintzberg, 1985). Although organisational politics is often considered underhanded, Machiavellian and undesirable, scholars are increasingly recognising that becoming politically effective is essential for employees to thrive in the workplace and progress in their careers (Ferris, Ellen, McAllister & Maher, 2019). The ability to influence, network, build alliances and understand political landscapes is vital, particularly at senior levels (Ammeter et al., 2002; Doldor, 2018). While politics is part of the workplace dynamics for most employees, and particularly for leaders in business, politics is work for politicians who need to engage in political behaviour to effectively serve democracy (Silvester & Wyatt, 2018). Thus, the metaphor of organisations as political arenas (Minzberg, 1985) remains compelling whether we examine corporations, governments, professional services firms or third sector organisations.

Attending to the political aspects of working life is particularly relevant to understanding women’s uneven access to power in the workplace and the persistent gender gap in leadership. Navigating political spaces in the workplace may be more challenging for women, who have less access to the patronage, sponsorship and informal relationships that help employees develop the political savvy, knowledge and skills required to become politically effective (Perrewé and Nelson, 2004). Women
may also be less willing to engage in the gendered nature of organisational politics, questioning the use and ethics of political cultures like ‘old boys clubs’ and potentially finding it emotionally draining to attempt to embody masculine norms (Doldor, 2013; McKinsey Davey, 2008). From an intersectional perspective, ethnicity compounds this challenge as black and minority ethnic employees experience and make sense differently of the formal and informal/political organisational processes conducive to career progression (Wyatt and Silvester, 2015). Yet, some have suggested that women’s career progression could be facilitated by political skill (Perrewé and Nelson, 2004; Mainiero, 1994). More scholarly work is needed to unpack women’s experiences with organisational politics, and the repercussions these have in terms of preserving or transforming gendered organisations.

Mirroring corporate workplaces, women are also underrepresented at senior levels in politics: just 24% of national parliamentarian roles and 18% of ministerial positions across the world are held by women (UNWomen, 2018). While all-women short lists have been adopted to redress these imbalances (c.f. Nordic countries), women still experience challenges navigating these political spaces (Charles, 2014). Stereotypes about the suitability of women for political leadership are rife in the portrayal of female politicians (Schneider & Bos, 2016) – Hillary Clinton, Theresa May, Julia Gillard and Angela Merkel have been criticised for their lack of warmth and femininity. Yet, the example of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who recently gave birth while in office, suggests that things may be changing. What can we learn from how a new generation of women leaders is engaging and navigating political spaces? To date the nature of leadership work in political (governmental) spaces remains under-examined, as do women’s experiences in this sector.

In this stream we encourage papers that consider how gender issues play out in political spaces and how women navigate these environments. We wish to explore the ways in which organisations in business, the public sector and government can improve the representation and experience of women leading or seeking to lead in these spaces. Papers might consider, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Developing women’s political skill, savvy and understanding at work
- How do we increase women’s presence and success in political spaces?
- Political awareness and gender
- Do women ‘do’ politics differently?
- How/when does women’s engagement in politics disrupt or perpetuate gendered hierarchies in the workplace?
- Leadership journeys of male and female political leaders
- Learning how to navigate political spaces, gendered experiences and political seasoning/political maturation
- The role of politics in career progression and how this shapes women’s career experiences and journeys to leadership roles
- How does power intersect with gender and politics?
- Women’s access to and representation in political leadership
- The glass cliff in political spaces
- How women navigate the politics of very senior corporate roles such as board directorships

Abstracts of approximately 500 words (submitted direct to stream leaders, ONE page, WORD NOT PDF, single spaced, excluding any references, no headers, footers or track changes) are invited by Friday 1st November 2019. Decisions on acceptance of abstracts will be made by stream leaders within one month and communicated to authors by Monday 2nd December 2019. All contributions will be independently refereed. Abstracts should include FULL contact details, including name, institutional affiliation, mailing address, and e-mail address. Abstracts should be emailed to Joel Montgomery at jjwm2@kent.ac.uk
Dr Elena Doldor

Dr Elena Doldor is a Senior lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at Queen Mary University of London, School of Business and Management. Elena’s research interests are in the field of diversity and leadership, with an emphasis on power and politics in organisations, and the role of organizational politics in the experiences of male and female managers. She also examined diversity on UK boards of directors, and the role of executive search consultants in increasing board diversity through the board appointment process. She has written book chapters and co-authored several reports on these topics, and has published in the British Journal of Management, Human Resource Management Journal and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal. More recent research projects investigate the experiences and identities of highly skilled Romanian professionals in the UK, and the gendered nature of developmental feedback provided for political leaders.

Professor Jo Silvester

Professor Jo Silvester’s research focuses on how individuals make sense of each other and their environment by drawing on attribution theory to explore how people explain experiences at work and the impact of these attributions have on performance and leadership journeys. Over the past decade she has become increasingly interested in political work and political effectiveness, which lie at the intersection of psychology, management and politics. Her work identifying and developing political talent has made a significant impact British political parties, and she has developed a unique data set of self-report personality ratings from several hundred politicians, together with performance ratings from officers and political colleagues. These quantitative and qualitative data continue to form the basis for publications in leading psychology, management and political science journals. More recently she has begun to work with the Civil Service, and House of Commons, on projects investigating political work in government settings.

Dr Madeleine Wyatt

Dr Madeleine Wyatt is a Senior lecturer and director of the MSc Human Resource Management at Kent Business School, University of Kent and is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist. Her research uses mixed methods to examine the role of informal and political behaviour in the workplace and its impact on the leadership journeys of women and minority groups. Recently, her research has examined the psychological predictors of leadership emergence and effectiveness of politicians as political workers and the social cognitive factors that influence success in elections. Her work has been published in The Leadership Quarterly, Human Relations and Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology.

Joel Montgomery

Joel is a doctoral candidate at the University of Kent and has been awarded the Vice Chancellor’s scholarship. His research draws on his background in political science and human resource management to investigate leaders’ motivations to act politically in political work spaces.