

# Introduction

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It is over half a century since the first sex discrimination laws were enacted. No doubt the women who fought during the 1960s and 1970s, for equality of pay and opportunity, would have imagined a fairer world than the one we find ourselves in today.

There are certainly some areas where improvements have been made. More women make it to middle management levels, and many formal barriers preventing women from reaching the top levels in organizations have been removed. Yet as Chapter 10 (Burkinshaw and White) demonstrates, for those women who do make it to the highest levels within their occupations, fitting in with male-dominated cultures can be challenging. According to Chapter 12 (Antoniou and Aggelou) social and gender stereotypes still dictate the way female managers ought to behave and the ones who defy them often face multiple consequences. And as Gatrell and Peyton (Chapter 18) observe some mechanisms barring women from career advancement have remained firmly in place until the present decade.

This book comprises a collection of chapters exploring the situation of women in business and leadership positions in organizations today. It is presented in three parts. The chapters in the first section centre specifically on *women and leadership*. These chapters examine a range of situations, from family business (Discua Cruz, Hamilton and Jack) through to educational and other settings (Antoniou and Apergi). Research in these chapters suggests that women in leadership roles, within all arenas, come up against challenges specific to their gender. For example, women who take over the leadership of their family businesses often have to learn on the job – as family members they may have been less visible than male heirs, and thus less likely to have been ‘prepared’ for the responsibilities of heading up the family enterprise.

The second section of the book explores how gender impacts on women’s experience of undertaking leadership and management roles in organizations, and of balancing relationships between work and family. Bevan’s chapter (15) shows how women in heterosexual relationships may feel obliged to conceal from male partners the extent of their ambition, in order to reduce conflict at home. And Perrewé, Daniels, Hackney and Maher (Chapter 16) explore the challenges of managing pregnancy and paid work.

The final section focuses on *constraints*: the structural and cultural impediments affecting women’s career advancement, and the manner in which these are dealt with in relation both to practice and policy. We see, for example, in the chapter by Bisom-Rapp and Sargeant (25), how women may be disadvantaged at every life stage, such constraints operating cumulatively to reduce career opportunities.

As a whole, this collection suggests that we have a way to go before gender ceases to impact on women’s careers in business and management. The chapters in this book highlight specifically disadvantages relating to gender. We remain aware that gender represents only part of the story, with issues of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and health impacting on career advancement. What the chapters show is the extent of

change – in relation to culture, policy and attitude – that is needed if women in management and business are to achieve parity with their male counterparts.

The views within each chapter are not necessarily those of the Editors – but the general approach of the book – that change needs to happen – is one we all share.

We cannot and should not wait for another fifty years.

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