

International Women Day Event Series

“Celebrating Women in Business”

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Essex University Business School

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Chair in Management and Associate Dean of School (Research and Impact)

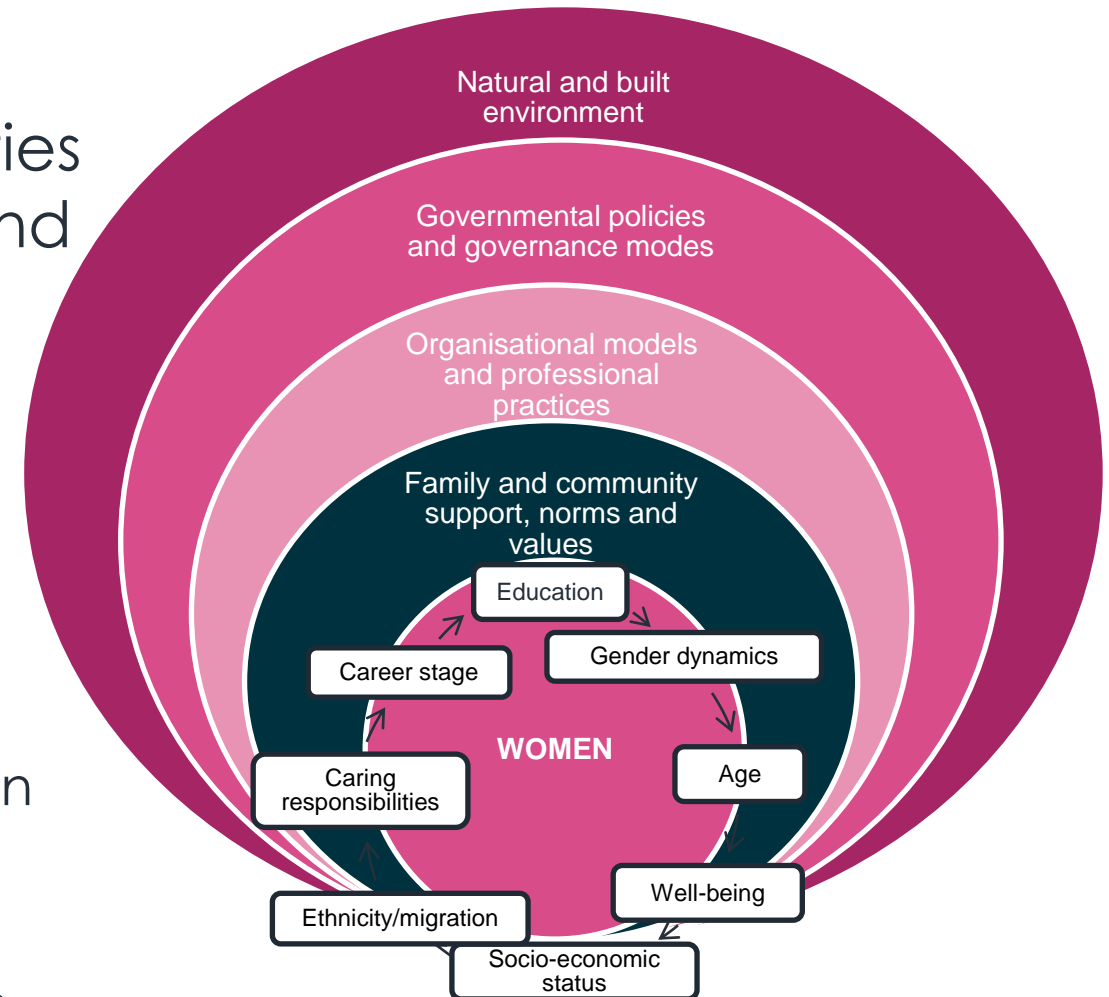
School for Business & Society, University of York

Women in Business?

What are opportunities and challenges for women in current and future business and academia landscapes?

- **Highly heterogeneous group:** opportunities and challenges co-evolve with personal and environmental factors
- **Intersectional, socio-ecological** view: personal factors interwoven to define uniquely specific circumstances
- Very complex environment → inclusive access, happy permanence and growth for women in academia, is still a **wicked problem**

→ Highly situated, context-specific solutions



Who am I?



A weird, interdisciplinary, serendipitous journey:

- BSc & MSc in **Industrial Engineering**, AKA Management Engineering, University of Bologna (2004)
 - Collegio Superiore fellowship (1999-2004)
- PhD in **Business Administration**, University of Bologna, Department of Management (2009)
 - Cutting-edge department with great scholars and role models
- Visiting Scholarship at **Indian Institute of Management Bangalore**, NSCREL (IIMB) (2007-2008)
 - Primary data collection in India, whilst most were studying in the US
- Post-Doc at **Maastricht University India Institute** – Interdisciplinary centre connecting researchers with a focus on India (2009-2010)
 - Innovative yet ill-designed centre with short life
 - Base-of-the-Pyramid studies in resource-constrained settings

Who am I?



A weird, interdisciplinary, serendipitous journey:

- Assistant Professor at Maastricht University, CAPHRI – **Care and Public Health Research Institute, Department of Health Services Research** (2010-2017)
 - Co-direct of MSc Health Policy, Innovation and Management
 - Healthcare management expertise
- Philip Eijlander Associate Professor at Tilburg University – **Tilburg School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Department of Organization Studies** (2017-2019)
 - Program Leader of “Adaptive Societies, Organizations and Workers”, Director of MSc Global Management of Social Issues
- Full Professor – Chair in Management – at **the University of York** (2019-present), **the York Management School**
 - Director of Research (Chair of DRC) UYMS (2021)
 - Associate Dean of School (Research and Impact) School for Business and Society (2022)

Who am I?

- Mother of two, born in 1980, Dario (10) and Fabio (7)
- Italian/French, from a small village on the Adriatic coastline and from a tiny island in the Indian Ocean

- Direct family not academically oriented.

What is it that you are researching??

- Daughter, partner, sister, friend, woman, learner, teacher, leader, follower, mentor, mentee, parent, child..

It's all together! I do not draw my identity on my profession



My opportunities



Professional:

- **Collegio Superiore Fellowship** → interdisciplinary pathway
- **PhD work in India**, drew attention and created a post-doc opportunity in Maastricht → peculiar choice turned into an opportunity
- **Healthcare, social issues, interdisciplinary profile**, at the right time, at the right place → importance of one's institutional work to profile, make sense of your career journey to highlight a contribution (e.g. Tilburg)
- **Work with PhD students early on**, which resulted in several publications and extended projects, and experience in guiding junior staff

Personal:

- **Safety net of friends** → opportunities and capabilities to connect with people and nurture a really important network of (female) friends
- **Coping mechanisms** (running, crocheting, listening to music, watching TV series...)

My challenges

- **Professional** (e.g. post-doc supervisor in Maastricht left after two months, not a mainstream, traditional management scholar and publication record)
- **Personal** (hands-on parent, difficult negotiation of childcare and house tasks and gender dynamics at home, far away family, frequent moves, separation).
'You should have a live-in nanny!'
'Don't you need to ask your husband?'
- **Contextual** (short maternity leave in the Netherlands, family working in two cities, difficult-to-navigate environment and culture for a full-time working mother of young children) *'Everything is fine, my baby sleeps so well, my husband is so wonderful'. 'I decided to have children, so I want to be with them' 'I think your child should be less at the out-of-school club, so he can socialize more!'*

My ongoing tensions

- Tensions/triggers:

- What I am and what I do (*the person vs the role*) → trigger to develop my own interpretation of roles and ways of working
- What I do and what I want to do (restlessness, lack of focus) → trigger to improve, seek, search, experiment
- What I commit to do and what I can do (unrealistic targets, **impostor syndrome**, need to prove myself, excessive work hours) → trigger to develop a more sound work ethic

Who is the (female) academic?



As a PhD student: Power imbalance, uncertainty that can be difficult and paralyzing

As a post-doc or young lecturer: uncertainty or precarity, the pressure to publish and to develop steadily and quickly a balanced portfolio. Need to be good at everything!

- Difficulties to draw boundaries between private and professional
- Difficulty to draw boundaries within your professional sphere; how do you develop your profile in a way that is fulfilling for you, but also valuable for the market and valuable for society later on?

Who is the (female) academic?



More senior academics – Professors maybe

- Prove their worth: to overload their schedule with yet another project, yet another citizenship role, yet another commitment
- Defeat that impostor syndrome *'there must be a mistake'*
- *Paradox of being competent:*

'One of my biggest issues with academia is that the reward for being incompetent at service is less service, and the reward for being good at service is more service, which can lead to unequal (+ very often gendered) service distributions'

Who is the (female) academic?



Women as senior leaders in academic environments

- Navigate the clash with established traditional forms of leadership that are more aggressive, self-serving
- **Paradox:** more collegial leadership style tends to under-react and negotiate → but this risks normalising harassing bullyish behaviours, even in mostly healthy environments
- Produce institutional change and make sure that the position is not tokenistic

.. And the glass ceiling?

How to produce institutional change? A lot women can do!

- Change processes, structures and especially the culture
- Flexible working arrangements, job sharing for large citizenship roles, transparent processes for hiring and promotion, for example through unconscious bias training, apt mentorship schemes, appropriate evaluation system for career advancement
- Acknowledge **gendered challenges!**

More importantly, **step away from a mindset of equality to embrace equity** and support according to needs and situated, context-specific circumstances

Lessons learnt (and learning..)



- **Define the work/life balance and career targets** and shape your work commitments accordingly;
- **Be mindful of the household agreements and balance.** It all starts there – even with role modelling children
- **Be selective with your projects/commitment and say no** or postpone with honesty and without fears (and tears);
- **Manage your energy and not your time.**
- **Use and hone emotional intelligence** – understand others before wanting to be understood
- **Help yourself first**, take care of your own well-being, away from toxic thankfulness;
- **Enjoy life beyond academia**, have fun, nurture a safety of (female) friends that will take you to great length
- **Cut down toxic relations and don't wait for them to heal** – instead, make time to nurture your safety net of people and practices;

Lessons learnt (and learning..)



- **Take on that citizenship role** or apply for that promotion, even if it sounds intimidating.
- **Be true to yourself** and to others, away from role stereotyping. True, personal, nurturing relationships in a work environment are possible. 'There are good people everywhere'
- **Do what you like, what works for you, what you are passionate about** → in a very uncertain environment, self-drive and self-realization are crucial
- **Be strategic, hard-working, kind, respectful, reliable...** be the colleague you'd want to have and be open and honest to others
- **Stand your ground** and set your foot down to clearly and explicitly condemn certain behaviours,
- **Say sorry and thank you**, and always take time to acknowledge the good work of others
- **Develop and leverage the female network**, produce the critical mass, mentor younger colleagues.
- **Talk, share and produce institutional change.** Recognize & embrace the gendered nature of academia!