

“Making Ourselves and Others  
Possible”:  
Gender and Leadership in Irish Not  
For Profit Organisations

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**Submitted to the National College of Ireland**

**September 2019**

## **Abstract**

# **“Making Ourselves and Others Possible”: Gender and Leadership in Irish Not For Profit Organisations**

## **Purpose**

Ireland has a gender leadership gap in that women are under-represented in senior decision-making roles across sectors (European Commission, 2019): public, private and not for profit. This paper concentrates on the latter, specifically on women leaders in the not for profit sector and their journeys to senior decision making roles.

The goal of this paper is to research the experience of female senior decision-makers in the not-for-profit sector in Ireland in order to understand their leadership journeys with particular reference to drivers and barriers to their current position. Specifically, it will focus on those women leaders in the social services sub sector using organisational income as an indicator of scale of an organisation

## **Design/ Methodology/ Approach**

The research employed in this study was a mix of both primary and secondary sources. The methodology for primary research employed in this study was a qualitative one, involving the implementation of in-depth interviews with female not for profit CEOs.

In relation to the latter, in order to understand the scale and scope of the issue of gender and leadership in Ireland, and specifically the not for profit sector, secondary research focused on not only on current academic research but those sources used in social policy formulation in order to provide a statistically-informed evidence-base in which to anchor the area under consideration.

## **Findings**

Women are under-represented in senior decision-making roles in the not for profit sector. The picture is not uniform in that the larger the organisation and wealthier the more likely it is to be headed by male chief executives.

Women leaders in the not for profit sector come from a variety of professional backgrounds, few starting off in the not for profit sector but appear to share a similar leadership style that could be described as “transformational leadership”.

- Idealised Influence: leader is a role model
- Inspirational Motivation: assigning meaning and challenge to tasks
- Intellectual Stimulation: Seeking innovation and agility with the capacity to reframe issues/ challenges
- Individualised Consideration: leaders act as mentors and coaches

Each of the female not for profit leaders demonstrated significant aspects of this leadership style.

## **Originality/ Value**

In comparison with the private sector, very little research has been done on the leadership journeys of not for profit leaders. The intersection of gender and leadership in an Irish not for profit context provides additional value.

## **Key Words**

Gender leadership not for profit sector

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National College of Ireland  
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## **Acknowledgements**

Fittingly for a thesis on gender and leadership, the person I need to acknowledge in making this whole MBA journey possible is my husband Merlin. Whatever about my time and commitment to this, without his equal commitment and support none of this would have been possible.

To Norah Gibbons, a leader in all senses of the word, inspiration and example, the original “just do it” girl before anyone even knew what they were supposed to be doing.

To the amazing women who gave me their time, honesty and insight – your journeys are inspiring to me and I hope for a new generation of female not for profit leaders.

To the board of Sonas your capacity as leaders in your own right in your various fields means I continue to learn and I am privileged to have the opportunity. Similarly, for my colleagues who put gender equality and equity into action every day. The learning never stops.

To the women who are in life and who did school runs, emergency minding, proof read, put up with rants believing in this work; this is yours too.

To Dr Colette Darcy for her patience and wisdom during a difficult time.

To Dolly Parton whose song 9 to 5 endures as one of the most searing and succinct criticisms of gender and leadership.

All the mistakes are mine, of course...

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## **“Making Ourselves and Others Possible”: Gender and Leadership in Irish Not For Profit organisations**

*An exploration of the leadership journeys and perspectives on leadership and gender of female CEOs in the Irish not for profit sector*

### **Introduction**

Ireland has a gender leadership gap in that women are under-represented in senior decision-making roles across sectors (European Commission, 2019): public, private and not for profit. This paper concentrates on the latter, specifically on women leaders in the not for profit sector and their journeys to senior decision making roles. An emphasis on governance in the not for profit sector has been a major driver in improved board practice, including gender equity, with the Charities Regulator as well as the not for profit sector’s own Voluntary Governance Code providing frameworks.

From a gender and governance perspective, there appears to be a generally higher level of female representation on not for profit boards that in either the public or private sectors. (Benefacts 2018). While female board membership is a significant indicator of gender equality at governance level, it does not provide an insight into gender representation at senior executive level within not for profit organisations or the terms and conditions of these women are employed under including pay:

*“The presence or absence of women on boards does not appear to have a strong relationship overall with the amount of the gender pay gap, except the survey found that there are slightly less females on boards in the largest organisations and in the high income organisations where the gender pay gap is higher.”*

(Coughlan 2018)

The same report found that men were overly represented in CEO and senior management roles in the largest not for profits. Correlating Coughlan's findings for the Community Foundation of Ireland then, it could be stated that men are overly represented in the more senior roles in the largest income organisations where there also happens to be the largest gender pay gap and lower female board membership.

Since the majority of boards in the sector are volunteer boards consisting of non-executive directors, this means that a not for profit board while having all the legislative and governance responsibilities of any other board, also has to deal with the fact that board members are donating their time on an unpaid basis and this time can be vulnerable to other commitments (there are, of course, strictures around quorums and attendance).

Finding suitable voluntary board members is something not for profit organisations struggle with which has implications for gender equality on boards. Considering women in Ireland's relatively high level of unpaid work largely around care responsibilities (see Table 1: Time Spent in Unpaid Work by Gender/ Life of Women and Men in Europe – A Statistical Portrait 2018), potential lack of relevant professional experience among older women due to life/ career choices and the challenges for many younger women with relevant professional experience who juggling work and family responsibilities, then board membership might not be an option for many women.

To be fair, private sector boards are also struggling with governance matters such as diversity, succession planning etc (Irish Times 2019).

While there are gender breakdowns for boards and senior decision-making roles, there appears to be an absence of a more comprehensive gender analysis of the overall sector including other roles held by women within not for profit organisations. The latter is particularly important in identifying emerging leaders. In both the UK and US, women form the majority of not for profit employees (The Guardian 2015). In Ireland, the figure is similar to that of the UK, with women making up 72% of the workforce and men 28% (The Wheel 2012).



To deduce that a majority of women in the not for profit sector automatically results in a majority of women in senior decision-making roles in not for profit organisations in the UK, Ireland or the US would be erroneous. The latter will be explored further in the literature review to follow but suffice to say the larger and wealthier the organisation, the more likely it is to be headed by a man. Is Schein's (1973) "think manager, think male" paradigm alive and well in the not for profit sector? Are potential not for profit women leaders getting lost in Eagly and Carli's (2007) labyrinth? Can women leaders overcome the challenges particular to their gender being perceived as incongruous with the roles they hold? (Eagly and Karau 2002).

Such lack of demographic analysis of not for profit sector employees will not facilitate a more structured systemic approach to understanding gender within the context of the Irish not for profit sector; nor will it serve to promote gender equity as a social goal in itself. From an academic research perspective, it makes it more difficult to identify emerging leaders ie the management layer directly below that of CEO and senior management and is one of the identified limitations of this research. Lack of gender analysis on a sectoral and organisational level, could also mitigate against creating operational efficiencies around human resources and capital as well as sectoral and organisational development.

The latter is particularly problematic as the state is relying more on not for profit organisations to deliver vital health and personal social services against a background of "value for money".

"The sector has grown from that historical basis to provide approximately one quarter of acute hospital services and approximately two thirds of services to people with disabilities. Thus, the delivery of many of our health and social care services today is dependent on voluntary organisations, which form an essential and integral part of the overall system."

(Day et al 2018)

The focus in this research is on gender and leadership, hence examining the experiences of women holding senior decision-making roles in not for profit

organisations. The leadership journeys and experiences of Irish not for profit leaders, male and female, appears to be a relatively under researched one in comparison to the private sector, for example, and so from a research perspective there was not an automatic point of comparison to compare or benchmark research findings or indeed a jumping-off point from which to build on further research.

Intersectional feminist theorists would argue, the structural discrimination faced by women attempting to reach senior decision-making roles multiplies when gender intersects with race, disability, social class etc. The “labyrinth” can be filled with even more disorienting twists and turns for non-prototypical leaders depending on their starting point:

“The data clearly show that women and minorities face obstacles to leadership attainment that White men do not face. However, the data also demonstrate that the particular challenges that women and minorities face are distinct in nature. White women suffer agency penalties because agentic behavior violates descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes. Black men suffer agency penalties because agentic behavior is seen as a (realistic) threat to White male patriarchy, due to the perceived strength and power that Black men possess.

“Black women do not suffer an agency penalty because they are not subject to the same descriptive or prescriptive communal stereotypes as White women, nor do they represent the same realistic threat that Black men do. Although Black women are not punished for being direct and assertive in their interpersonal manner, they are punished for being power-seeking and self-promoting in their ambition. Furthermore, they are also disproportionately punished for making mistakes in a leadership role.”

(Livingston 2013)

The goal of this paper is to research the experience of female senior executives in the not-for-profit sector in Ireland in order to understand their leadership journeys with particular reference to drivers and barriers to their current position.

Specifically, it will focus on those women leaders in the social services sub sector using organisational income as an indicator of scale of an organisation.

By undertaking this research, which will consist of both primary qualitative research and secondary research both quantitative and qualitative, it is intended to examine the leadership journeys and experiences of senior female not for profit leaders in Ireland as described by themselves. As already stated this is an under-researched area and should be considered a research objective in its own right.

Allied with this overarching objective are the following research aims in order to gain insights into their journeys and, if possible, learnings that might be capable of being reproduced for the benefit of emerging leaders:

- Ask female not for profit leaders to assess what they perceive as the barriers and drivers to women in the not for profit sector's professional successes and challenges with the understanding that each individual's experiences are subjective but together may allow a more general view to emerge
- Assess if core findings from other research around networking and expertise and women's preference for one over the other is also borne out in the not for profit sector (Ibarra and Petriglieri 2016)
- Assess if senior not for profit leaders were aware of gender impacting on their own career trajectories and experiences including second generation gender bias ie where apparently gender neutral norms and practices, effectively discriminated against women
- Assess if approaches such as coaching/mentoring and family friendly policies, frequently cited as a means of promoting gender equity in the

public and private sectors, are used to any extent or effect in the not for profit sector

- Compare the research into female not for profit leadership style with those of female leaders in other sectors in order to establish if there are commonalities and differences

The research will need to engage with theories on leadership, gender and organisations. It will be informed by gender and leadership prevalence research in the private, public and not for profit sectors in order to provide a wider societal context and in which to locate research findings. The rationale for the latter is that the not for profit sector contains elements of both private and public sectors while being a distinct sector in its own right. Many not for profit organisations are set up as private companies with the accompanying organisational and governance structures. At the same time their core function, is providing commissioned services to the public sector primarily in the area of health and personal social services and often accompanied by a social change aspect to their work.

What this gives rise to is a complex system of private providers hired by the state to provide social and personal health services, in effect contracted to deliver a public good, with many of the organisations involved SMEs. The latter has presented a dilemma for government departments and associated agencies as they seek to balance value for money, scale and rationalisation with the need to deliver services locally.

“We examined the ownership structures of the largest voluntary organisations and looked at the governance and control of their Boards. We found a diversity and complexity of structures... we are also mindful of the need to provide assurances that public funding is appropriately accounted for and that all publicly funded organisations are compliant with sound financial practice, good corporate governance and meet the needs and

expectations of the public in respect of the type and quality of services provided.”

(Day 2017)

### *Summary*

The cross-sectoral comparisons of the prevalence of women and leadership in each of the sectors in Ireland then provides a useful map in which to locate the specific experiences of the women not for profit leaders in the social services sector. While a closer examination of the not for profit sector provides a more nuanced view of the sector, the organisations involved and gendered leadership in the not for profit sector.

Like all research, there are limitations and some of these limitations have already been mentioned. The following will be addressed under methodology and findings but suffice to say, the women leaders interviewed for this research are white, Irish (or parents were Irish) and third level educated which can be taken as an indicator for current their social class.

The key variation among them is their socio-economic origin. The capacity for education to be a facilitator of career success and a commitment to life-long education emerge as strong themes in the findings. The former seems particularly important for those from a poorer socio-economic background since it has allowed them to be eligible for emerging leadership to start with.

In the midst of these macro considerations are the lived realities shaping women’s employment experiences, opportunities and outcomes within Irish society. The leadership journeys of the women leaders in this study and their stories provide a powerful narrative of apparent conflicting binary contrasts: steadfast commitment and adaptability, savviness and idealism, anger/ rage and pragmatic acceptance.

## **Literature Review**

An examination of gender and leadership in Ireland has three initial theoretical areas to consider: conceptualisations of leadership and how they are constructed; the relationship between gender and leadership and the specific barriers to women becoming leaders in Ireland. Rather than dealing with each of these themes in isolation, due to their interconnected nature and overlapping nature they will be woven into this review.

While the focus of this study is primarily the women senior decision-makers in the not for profit sector and specifically the Social Services Sector, it is arguable that the relative position of these leaders is better understood when benchmarked against the prevalence of women leaders in both the public and private sectors since the not for profit sector contains elements of both while uniquely being itself. Where possible international comparisons will also be introduced in order to provide international benchmarks and contextualise the Irish experience.

### ***International Comparison – European Union: Ireland in Context***

The European Commission in recognition of the deficit of women senior decision-makers across the European Union states:

“The causes for the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes and positions are multiple and complex. The main reasons are traditional gender roles and stereotypes, the lack of support for women and men to balance care responsibilities with work, and the prevalent political and corporate cultures.”

(European Commission 2019)

A full investigation of the wider consequences of these factors and how they combine to impact women’s lives and by extension women as a group in society, the construction of organisations and society itself are outside the scope of inquiry

of this study but they are nonetheless relevant in framing the debate around gender and leadership.

In Ireland, these lived realities for women include: lack of affordable childcare, significant extent of women's unpaid work, lack of family friendly work practices and policies, over representation in part-time work - all embedded into political and organisational systems, processes and structures (National Women's Council of Ireland, 2019).

The European Commission gives Ireland a mixed report card to Ireland in terms of tackling gender inequality:

“There's no doubt that Irish women have more rights than their mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers, but gender equality in Ireland has yet to be achieved in many areas.

“Men still dominate the workplace and are the main decision-makers in business and politics while women often find themselves lagging behind when it comes to equal opportunities and income.”

(European Commission in Ireland website, The EU and Irish Women, 2019).

The European Commission in order to tackle gender inequality has named the following among its priorities (Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019, 2016):

1. Equal economic independence for women and men;
2. Equal pay for work of equal value;
3. Equality in decision-making;
4. Dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence;
5. Promoting gender equality beyond the EU.

Priorities 1 through 2 directly relate to gender and leadership in that economic independence, equality of employment and opportunities affect women's capacity to reach senior decision-making positions, a key facet of priority 3 – equality in

decision-making. For example, time spent in unpaid work is a key contributor to the gender pay gap which in Ireland stands at 14%, against an EU average of 16%; with much of that unpaid work time spent on childcare, caring for relatives and household duties. Unpaid work such as this tends to be un-boundaried work ie no set hours, responsive etc. Many women would argue they make this choice willingly out of love, care and concern. Whether women voluntarily make the choice or feel obliged, there is a resulting time cost to women which can potentially impact on leisure, education and paid work. Women in Ireland are third from the top in a comparison with European countries surveyed by the OECD and referenced by the European Commission (ec.europa.eu 2019). (See Table 1: The Life of Women and Men in Europe – A Statistical Portrait, 2018 edition).

It could be argued that ironically in the context of the community and voluntary sector that the much praised tradition of volunteerism in Ireland can be partially attributed to women's unpaid labour and/ or men's increased leisure time as a result of women's labour both paid and unpaid.

In Ireland, female representation in senior decision-making roles on boards and in the Oireachtas and local authorities is well below European averages. For example, women in Ireland in 2016 made up just 13.2% of board members of the largest publicly listed companies in Ireland, significantly below the EU 28 average of 23.3%. (European Commission, 2019). Overall in the European Union in 2016, women accounted for 29% of parliament members in EU countries (European Commission, 2019). In Ireland, 22% of the current parliament (Dail) are female. The figure marks an upward improvement from the previous parliament where women accounted for only 15% (Women for Election Ireland 2019).



*The Irish Not For Profit Sector: Women in Senior Decision-making Roles*

The Irish not for profit sector consists of 29,300 organisations (9,500 of which are incorporated as companies), 163,000 employees with a €13.8 billion turnover and €5.9 billion in state funding (Benefacts Analysis 2018). In terms of governance, the social services not for profit sub sector has the highest rate of female board membership at 57% (Benefacts 2018).

It would be expected then that the sector with its emphasis on social change and social services provision would have a more equitable gender balance around pay or as Coughlan 2018 puts it:

“Employees working in the non-profit sector are expected to accept less pay, in part because of the intrinsic or altruistic rewards of their jobs. Employees self-select to work in this sector, motivated more by the organisation’s mission than by financial rewards. Because funding for many organisations is uncertain and short-term based, many non-profits rely on such things as having an equitable work environment, the provision of work-life balance options and team work, to motivate high-quality work and high commitment (Faulk et al, 2012).

“It would be reasonable therefore, to expect to find lower pay rates overall in this sector compared to the private sector, but at the same time, for non-profit organisations to pay men and women more equitably than in the for-profit sector, and that the gender pay gap would be miniscule, if it existed at all.”

(Coughlan 2018)

According to the data found in the report carried out by Coughlan on behalf of the Community Foundation of Ireland *Survey on Pay and Conditions of Employment in Voluntary, Community and Charitable organisations, 2017* overall gender pay gap was 16.7% i.e. women on average are being paid 83% of the male rate. A fact

acknowledged by Coughlan. An Exploration of the Gender Pay Gap for Managers in Voluntary, Community and Charitable Organisations (Coughlan 2018) found that:

- The gender pay gap was found to be highest overall in large organisations (21.2%) and in organisations with the highest income level (19.3%)
- Males would appear to be disproportionately over represented at the higher levels of management and under represented at the lower levels.
- For level 1 jobs (head of organisation) and for chief executive roles, males were also more likely to work in large organisations and in organisations with the highest income. For example, male chief executives are more than twice as likely to be found in large-sized organisations with 100 or more employees (26%) than female chief executives (11%). Only 8.6% of female chief executives work in the highest income organisations (i.e. with an income of more than €5 million) compared to 34.6% of males.
- In sector terms, the highest overall gender pay gap was found in the social services (20.3%) and housing and homelessness (19.5%).

Coughlan offers the view that there may be historical legacy reasons attached to women's relative low pay across the sector. Much of the social services sector had relied on unpaid female voluntary labour. With the professionalising of services in the 1990s came paid jobs; while salaries were provided, both pay and status for the work carried out remained low and the organisations effectively acting as contractors for the state were primarily small and locally based.

Allowing for historical legacy and the acknowledged low status of care work, traditionally a feminised sector, it still begs the question, is that sufficient explanation for the under representation of women in senior decision-making roles in the larger, higher income not for profit organisations: twice as many men than women in the former and four times as many men in the latter.

The situation is not unique to Ireland. Under representation of women in senior decision-making roles is also found in the UK. Even with 66% of voluntary sector

employees being female (NCVO cited by The Guardian 2015), only 30% of CEOs are women and 36% of charity trustees. (Third Sector cited by The Guardian 2015). In the US, women make up 43% of chief executive officers and 43% of board members. As in Ireland, however, the same gendered trend of men disproportionately occupying senior positions in the larger, wealthier organisations also exists; the wealthiest organisations of \$50 million and over had just 18% female CEOs. And like Ireland, there was a significant gender pay gap at all strata of the not for profit sector (Stiffman 2015).

Summarising the findings then, it could be stated that men are overly represented in the more senior roles in the largest income organisations and that the largest gender pay gap in Irish not for profits is to be found in the largest organisations. Female board membership appears to have little impact on the gender pay gap. What does emerge on reviewing board membership in the not for profit sector is a gendered board profile depending on which sub sector is being viewed (Benefacts, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, social services with its care gender legacy is the only sub-sector with a higher female than male representation on boards. While sports, professional and vocational, religious, philanthropic and local development/ housing had the lowest rates of female board membership.

#### *Private Sector in Ireland: Women in Senior Decision-making Roles*

The private sector has similar if more pronounced gender disparity than the not for profit sector in Ireland as demonstrated by the relatively low prevalence of women in senior decision-making roles in the Irish business context both in terms of governance and executive leadership (CSO 2019):

- Women make up 7.4% of chairpersons in Ireland
- Women make up 19.6% of directors on boards
- Women make up 11.5% of CEOs
- Women make up 28.3% of senior executives

The figures co-relate with gender leadership rates in the Standard and Poor (S&P) 500 (women constitute 26.5% of senior executives, 21.2 board members but only 5.4% CEOs (Catalyst, 2019). To put the American example into context, there are few companies headquartered in Ireland (CRH and Accenture are two Fortune 500 exceptions), that can compare to their US counterparts in scale, revenue or profits.

One possible question, although not in the context of this research, could be: are there more opportunities for senior decision-making roles in US companies due to scale and other factors, such as culture ie longer tradition of women in corporations? Other questions include: Do US companies Irish subsidiaries offer same opportunities to emerging female leaders? Are there advantages to smaller scale companies for women's leadership development?

What the US figures do show is that very few women reach the corporate heights, reflecting Stiffman's findings in the US not for profit sector that while women fare better their numbers fall off in terms of the wealthier and larger not for profits.

Prevalence statistics reveal another common trait with between the private and not for profit sector in the Irish context: There is even further reduced gender proportionality when particular sub-sectors are taken into account. The lowest rate of female senior executives in the private sector was found in construction at 9% with Information and Communication at 24% and Transportation and Storage at 25%. In contrast the Accommodation and Food Sector had 46% with Administration and Support Services Sector at 37%. All of which suggests a gendered workforce stratified according to sub-sector and organisational position raising particular questions not least of all where sector and position intersect. (Table 6: CSO Gender Balance in Business Survey 2019, CSO).

In terms of private sector governance, a more recent 2019 figure from Better Balance for Business, an independent business-led review group which reports to the Irish Government, puts the figure of women on boards at 16.4% which is still below the European average and well below the European Commission target of 40%. The review group which has set itself the task of examining the gender mix

within the governance and senior management of companies in Ireland has set a target of 33% female representation on boards of ISEQ 20 companies by 2023 and 25% for other listed companies. It has an accompanying target of no all-male boards by the end of 2019. At present 29.4% of boards are all male. (Better Balance for Business, 2019).

Setting out the case for better gender balance in corporate leadership, the review group states:

“It makes good business sense to achieve better gender balance in corporate leadership. These include wider access to the entire pool of talent, greater diversity of thinking and increased responsiveness to consumer requirements. The importance of gender balanced leadership is also widely recognised by leading investor groups who are increasingly questioning the composition of boards and calling for change in this respect.” (Better Balance for Business, 2019)

### *Public Sector*

Board governance in the public sector appears more equitable than in the private sector. Women now represent 36 per cent of all appointments to state boards. They are, however, less well represented on economically focused state boards and feature more prominently on the so-called female dominated sectors, such as in education, health and social services focused state boards reference (Irish Independent, 2017. Ironically, reflecting some of the private sector sub-sector stratification.

It could be argued that due to gender-weighted occupation choices that more relevant female expertise is to be found in education, health, social service etc than in those of the more economically focused boards. In the interests of gender equity, the public service, individual government departments and public appointment system will have to work hard to avoid gendered silos.

The public sector in Ireland has traditionally been a key employer of women. Like many of its European counterparts it has made efforts towards addressing gender imbalance. Equally like many of its European counterparts “The structure is largely pyramidal with relatively few women compared to men rising to senior positions.” (genderequality.ie, Department of Justice and Equality, 2019).

In 2014, women accounted for 43 per cent of Assistant Principal Officers and for 35 per cent of Principal Officers; the latter viewed as a launch grade for senior management. However, at the most senior grades; women represent only 25 per cent and 24 per cent at Deputy/Assistant Secretary General level and at Secretary General level respectively. genderequality.ie, Department of Justice and Equality, 2019. The gender equity situation is more pronounced in certain departments, for example Department of Finance there were no women in 2017 working at secretary general or assistant secretary roles. While at principal officer level there were six women out of 25 people in that position. (Irish Independent, 2017).

The figures are borne out by A Study of Gender in Senior Civil Service Positions in Ireland (Russell et al 2017) which looked not just at gender and senior roles but some of the dynamics involved:

“Moreover, there is marked variation in the representation of women at senior grades across government departments. Men are twice as likely to occupy the position of Principal Officer and above as women of the same age, length of service and educational level. Women have made up an increasing proportion of external appointees to the Principal Officer grade over time but remain underrepresented in their appointment via promotion. At Executive Officer level and above, men’s advancement to senior grades is found to be 1.5 to three years faster than that of women in the same starting grades who achieve senior positions.”

(Helen Russell et al, A Study of Gender in Senior Civil Service Positions in Ireland, 2017)

*Missing women: missing leaders...*

It is difficult to discuss gender and leadership in the context of the Irish public sector without speculating on the missing generations of women, those women who up until 1973 had to give up their jobs on getting married. The denial of opportunity to so many women and the influence this has had on government departments, the culture of the Irish public sector and the impact on policy making affecting women's lives has yet to be fully estimated.

“Greater gender balance in senior positions in the Civil Service is not only important in terms of equity for those employed in the sector but also for public confidence in the decisions made by policymakers”.

Mosca and Wright in a relatively recent paper from April this year, utilising the The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), investigated the effects of the marriage bar across a number of dimensions specifically relating to the women who had to give up their jobs and found:

“The first is that the Marriage Bar was widespread and was not confined to specific sectors or occupations. The second is that there are some differences in long-term outcomes between women affected and not affected by the Marriage Bar. Most notably, women affected by the Marriage Bar have shorter working lives, lower individual income but higher wealth at the time of interview, more children and more educated children. However, there appear to be no differences in the physical, mental and cognitive health at time of interview between women affected and not affected by the Marriage Bar. The third finding is that there is no evidence that the Marriage Bar altered women's behaviour, with respect to marriage, education, employment and occupation, in a major way.”

(Mosca and Wright, 2019, p3)

It is difficult to understand how the marriage would not have impacted “employment and occupation” in a major way especially in light of their first

finding. It may point to the overall culturally constructed expectations of women of that period.

What Mosca and Wright do cite is the current pension predicament of women affected by the marriage bar:

“A total of 19.5% of all women aged 65 and above interviewed in the third wave of TILDA reported they had to leave a job because of the Marriage Bar. This implies that in 2011 potentially up to 57,000 women were not qualifying for a (full) state pension because of the Marriage Bar.”

(Mosca and Wright, 2019, p23)

The lack of pension is one aspect of financial lack of agency. Over-representation of women in both part-time work and unpaid work, are all cited by the European Commission as challenges in relation to the strategic priorities of equal economic independence of women and men and equality in decision-making (European Commission, 2019). How are women to reach leadership positions without these pre-requisites for success being met.

The European Commission has stated that Ireland has a gender leadership gap in that women are under-represented in leadership roles in: public, private, political (European Commission, 2019). The preceding comparative analysis of the three sectors looking at female prevalence in the senior decision making roles both management and governance demonstrates that gap is real, present and prevalent.

### *Leadership and Gender*

“Ask any group of businesspeople the question “What do effective leaders do?” and you’ll hear a sweep of answers. Leaders set strategy; they motivate; they create a mission; they build a culture. Then ask “What should



leaders do?" If the group is seasoned, you'll likely hear one response: the leader's singular job is to get results..."

(Goleman 2000)

What Goleman doesn't say here is that leadership, as a socially constructed concept has traditionally been masculine. "Cultural prescriptions for a leader's identity were associated with a traditionally masculine demeanour." (Ibarra, 2015) or neatly summarised as "think manager-think male" (Schein, 1973). Effectively a phenomenon where sex typing mitigated against women emerging as leaders and which ascribed the agentic properties associated with masculinity to leadership so they became indivisible. Haslam et al identify reflect "the great man" theory of leadership as exemplifying an older psychological approach to leadership but whose hero mythology still exercises a powerful grasp on the imagination: "It makes for wonderful reading, but as a window into the causes of great leaders' success it is deeply flawed. Not least, this is because by defining its subject matter in a manner that precludes interest in "great women", the approach displays partiality from the outset". (Haslam et al, 2011)

Even with increasingly global operations requiring more complex organisational structures and diverse human resource and capital innovation and response, the one constant in the midst of continuous change appears to be the rejection of female leadership; a fact borne out particularly starkly by statistics from Fortune 500 or S&P companies where women constitute only 5.4% of CEOs . (Catalyst, 2019). The Irish prevalence rates from public, private and not for profit sectors, particularly the private, demonstrate a similar rejection.

Current leadership thinking focuses on influence and processes apparently reflecting more project based work and flatter hierarchies. "Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives." (Yukl, 2013).

Consciously aligning with leadership theorists such as Peter Drucker and his emphasis on the "we" rather than the "I", Haslam et al define leadership as: "not

simply about getting people to do things. It is about getting people to *want* to do things. Leadership, then, is about shaping beliefs, desires and priorities. It is about achieving influence, not securing compliance. Leadership therefore needs to be distinguished from such things as management, decision-making and authority.” (Haslam et al, 2011).

One challenge in examining the intersection of leadership and gender is describing where and how they intersect. Unless this examination is grounded and shaped by lived experience and rooted in the real context of where the intersection takes place, then the construct nature of both leadership and gender could hide the dynamics of their intersection and impact of both. Haslam et al engage with this tension. Rejecting what they term “a reductionist psychological position”, stating “operation of psychological processes always depends on social context”, they provide the following as factors impacting a leader’s capacity to influence others namely:

- Culture
- Nature of institutions within which leadership takes place
- Gender of the leaders

The institutions within which leadership takes place can be – a charity, an SME, a global corporation, a government department, a church, a political party. While they vary in scale, focus operations, reach etc what they each have in common is that they are organisations. Traditionally, organisations have been led by men, with other men in senior decision-making roles and with the admission of women into the organisation to act in a support role. Again Schein’s 1973 maxim, ten years after the US Equal Pay Act and the same year Roe v Wade passed, “think manager – think male”.

### **Gender and Organisations**

Leadership then is both the product and the producer of culture and institutions which are set up reflecting traditional gender norms. Organizational hierarchies in

which men predominate not only provide few role models for women but also tend to perpetuate implicit beliefs that equate leadership with behaviours believed to be more common or appropriate in men (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). It has made organisational models of success “impossible selves for women”.

Ibarra introduces the term “impossible selves” to describe these cultural prescriptions for leadership identity and behaviour newly promoted women found unattainable. It also further describes role incongruence women experience when preconceived gender expectations, behaviours and role clash. A woman takes on the classic male leadership qualities she is hard and unfeminine. If she ascribes to a more emotional, consensual stereotypical feminine leadership role, she is deemed as too soft to make the hard decisions.

“Yet women who practice femininity according to femininity stereotypes that define women as subordinate may gain approval from men, but they do not gain equal status (Jackman 1994). Women who fail to practice femininity according to femininity stereotypes that define women as subordinate lose approval and end up with even lower status than they would otherwise (Collinson and Collinson 1996; Schur 1983; West and Zimmerman 1987).”

(Martin, 2003)

Ibarra and Petriglieri look at these promotion transition points; junctures where previously successful professional identities were challenged by the new professional identities demanded by promotion that required formation. Effectively in their study promotion to senior roles required not such project or technical expertise but selling oneself. They argue that “second generation gender bias— cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction inadvertently favouring men—inhibited women from engaging in image and identity work that would align them with these cultural prescriptions”.

As a further example of the double bind facing women, role transition even when ostensibly positive such as promotion could be identity threatening. Ibarra and Petriglieri note that women and men experience anxieties as they transition to senior roles but for women these anxieties are allied with gender and the “gender-based stereotype threat”. In this particular study, men and women adopted different strategies in their new senior roles. The women waited longer to make an input, increased their expertise and were more will to “stick to the script”. The men in contrast were more willing to engage with clients earlier, more willing to talk about non-business subjects with clients confident there would be a shared knowledge/ frame of reference to the conversation.

It is as if women, even on promotion, continue to the “outsiders” whereas men are admitted to male only club with its own privileges, the price of admission having the right gender at the right level of the organisation:

“Men need not invent schemes for excluding women from daily work processes in order for women to experience exclusion. As men engage in gendering practices consistent with institutionalized norms and stereotypes of masculinity, they nonetheless create social closure and oppression. If women simply go along with institutionalized norms and stereotypes of femininity, they remain outside of men’s informal networks and usually formal ones too (see McGuire 2000).”

(Martin 2003)

Intersectional feminists might question if the same rule applies to all men: for example, would an openly gay man be accepted into the club as easily or a transman or a non-white man. There will always be individuals who succeed overcoming barriers to excel but to extrapolate from that “everyone can do it”, is to adopt an apparently supportive position while actually endorsing a regressive one that requires individuals to be outstanding or exceptional to succeed. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic’s 2013 Harvard Business Review article titled: *Why do so many incompetent men become leaders?* refers to normative quantitative data showing

that women have demonstrably more *desirable* leadership qualities such as humbleness, sensitivity etc:

“In sum, there is no denying that women’s path to leadership positions is paved with many barriers including a very thick glass ceiling. But a much bigger problem is the lack of career obstacles for incompetent men, and the fact that we tend to equate leadership with the very psychological features that make the average man a more inept leader than the average woman. The result is a pathological system that rewards men for their incompetence while punishing women for their competence, to everybody’s detriment.”

(HBR 2013)

With few exceptions, the theorists and commentators referenced so far in this review while criticising aspects of liberal capitalism and its structures in relation to gender and leadership, have accepted its parameters. It has been intersectional feminists, however, who have most challenged the uncritical view of capitalism as set out in mainstream liberal feminism highlighting the intersection of class, gender and race to discriminate against groups and individuals.

Facebook Chief Operating Officer and Harvard graduate Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* is an example of liberal capitalist feminism. The Facebook COO and others stand accused of ignoring the systemic barriers to women’s empowerment in the workplace by effectively arguing that women become successful within existing discriminatory structures that will only ever privilege a few women at the expense of the many; with those women already being in position to do that by virtue of their race and class origin.

Martha E. Gimenez retrospectively reviewing liberal feminism states:

“Liberal feminists focused their analysis on the barriers to women’s right to equal access in every sphere of social activity to attain parity with men and to pursue educational and political objectives. In line with their uncritical acceptance of the existing capitalist system, liberal feminists saw nothing wrong with male patterns of occupational achievement and insisted that

women had a right to have families and careers, even though the organization of work, education and family conspire against a woman's ability to do so with ease."

(Berbergoglu et al 2017)

Sandberg has been criticised by other liberal feminists who point out the gendered corporate reality. On a very real level, organisations can be hostile environments for women. A culture of long hours founded on the notion of no other role responsibilities outside of work and/ or with the assumption these responsibilities are being handled by someone else; a subtle system of sponsorship and patronage and being positioned as an outsider even when in a team have all been documented. These factors do not just exclude women from positions of leadership, they may cause women to reject the opportunity facilitating the emergence of leadership and in an exercise in hegemony stop women from even considering it as a potential.

While the concerns of liberal feminists might be dismissed by some other feminist theorists, the socio-economic concerns they voice albeit for a particular group of women have very real impact on these women's lives. No amount of "leaning in" will address pay gaps, sexual harassment, sexist hiring/ promotion practices, unrealistic expectations – glass cliffs, glass ceilings and glass escalators. For women, at least, whole corporate organisational structures are fabricated out of glass with women employees being asked to believe the fairytales of talent, merit, achievement and equality equalling ultimate success. These criticisms find resonance in the work of Ibarra etc. More recently, however, darker stories have emerged as encapsulated by the #MeToo movement highlighting sexual harassment, discrimination and assault.

## Gender and Leadership: Sexual Violence, Threat and Harassment within organisations

In reviewing literature on gender and leadership, sexual harassment, threat and violence occurring in the workplace or even enabled by some work practices rarely gets referenced. There appears to be a dearth, and it is as if academic business thinking is struggling to incorporate the visceral reality of sexual harassment, threat and violence into constructs of gender in the workplace and gender and leadership. Victims stories have emerged so that they are not isolated cases but actual trends. Maslow's pyramid of needs specifies physiological needs on the bottom ie food and shelter with safety the next layer above. Esteem and self-actualisation, both it could be argued needed for leadership to emerge and grow in individuals, come later but only once the fundamental needs have been met.

Women working in tech for example, have had to see men accused of at the very least sexual harassment and in some cases actual sexual assault effectively be rehabilitated within a matter of months. Silicon Valley willing to forgive its "flawed geniuses" including bankrolling new ventures to guarantee profits (Buzzfeed, 2019). The victims, almost exclusively women, appear to have been forgotten by the corporations which failed to provide a safe working environment. It could be argued that these practices are the ultimate rejection of female agency in the workplace:

"Men who practice masculinity/masculinities according to masculinity stereotypes that define men as dominant do gain approval and status from men. While such men may not gain approval from women, their hold over powerful positions gives women no alternative but to respect them, especially in work situations where women's opportunities are at stake."

(Martin, 2003)

The immediate impact is on the individual women victimised through the actions of individual men. There are serious questions to be asked about a corporate culture, its systems and processes that hides, denies, minimises or excuses this behaviour. Diversity initiatives or leadership programmes cannot work if employees do not feel

safe for reasons of gender. Google offers a case study in what not to do, when it agreed to pay out €90 million to a former executive alleged to have sexually assaulted a colleague (The Guardian, 2018). The report went on to reference alleged Google on a predominantly white or Asian “bro culture” which it claimed facilitated the systemic underpayment of female employees, kept female employees in lower level positions and facilitated the repeated sexual harassment of a female software engineer. The company has been called out on its overall leadership diversity: 25.5% of senior managers are women, 2% are black and 1.8% are Latino.

Ironically, in the context of gender and leadership, Google employees provided an almost text book example of distributed leadership when protests and walk outs against the company’s discriminatory practices were organised and led by female managers. It provides an interesting if ironic leadership perspective: potential women leaders emerging under the right circumstances, using influence without associated organisational authority, to motivate Google employees to take global action in pursuit of a common goal ie ending gender discriminatory practices within Google.

### ***Conclusion to Literature Review***

The purpose of this literature review was to examine current thinking on gender and leadership. In the course of the review, the evidence base was established to support the position that Ireland has a systemic gender leadership gap in the public, private and not for profit sectors including politics. The latter combined with the lack of senior women decision-makers in the public sector, particularly the well documented lack of women in the Department of Finance, could point to a structural inertia in relation to gender:

“While Ireland’s Constitution envisages a restricted role for women, the statutory framework for equality in employment and service provision is strong, protecting against gender discrimination, but also other grounds such as age, sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity. The policy-making



system lacks a commitment to gender equality in practice, and resources towards equality have been heavily cutback during the recession.”

(Barry, 2015)

Gender and leadership are indivisible from the overall position of women in Irish society where inequality remains a factor in women’s lives. The gap is the result of a number of factors social, economic and cultural. Fundamentally, the gap has to be understood in the context of women in Ireland’s general financial agency and ascription of gender stereotyped roles and responsibilities around family care to women as demonstrated by women in Ireland’s relatively high unpaid labour and part-time employment:

“Inequality continues to be a persistent feature of women’s position in Irish society. Women are disadvantaged on the labour market, carry the main responsibility for unpaid care work, are severely underrepresented in the political, economic and administrative systems, have extremely restricted access to reproductive health services and are vulnerable to violence, with little evidence of redress under the legal system.”

(Barry, 2015)

Women in Ireland’s experience of systemic inequality and their under-representation in senior decision-making roles is echoed internationally as demonstrated in this review by both European and US examples including S&P 500 companies where female CEOs were just 5.4% (Catalyst, 2019).

While Barry references “vulnerable to violence” in relation to women in Ireland’s experience of domestic and sexual violence; the latter took on additional meaning in a gender leadership context with the revelations of gender discrimination, sexual harassment and violence in a work context. As has already been stated in the review if basic needs are not being met (Maslow 1943), first physiological and then

safety, the higher order needs where motivation for leadership is located cannot truly be met.

The not for profit sector while ostensibly further on with gender equity than either the private or public sectors on closer examination provided evidence of gender pay gap, gender leadership gap and gender leadership stratification across sectors and organisations. Ironically, like the private sector, the larger and wealthier the organisation the more likely it was to be headed by a male CEO, and majority male board.

Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) found 27 gender-based leadership barriers operating at a micro, meso and macro level in society in their cross sectoral study of religious and higher education environments. Their central thesis being that gender leadership initiatives fail because they tackle only some of the barriers while not taking the wider areas into account. The authors offer a remedial framework organisations can apply. The latter will be looked at in more depth along with gender reform efforts within the public sector and initiatives within the private sector in the findings section of this research.

Overall, the literature showed that there is acknowledgement of women's capacity to lead and not just acknowledgement but an actual desire for more female leadership. Echoing the Irish private sector gender equality initiative, Balance for Better Business, Goleman, argues organisations are missing out on opportunities and talent by failing to capitalise on female leadership potential. He uses quantitative aggregated data to state that in key areas women have equalled or superseded men: coaching and mentoring; influence and inspiring other; conflict management and teamwork; empathy and organizational awareness; adaptability; focus on achieving goals.

“These abilities have been identified repeatedly by companies themselves when they look at their own leaders to generate a model of the abilities that set the star performers apart from the rest. These competencies of the stars are what leading companies look for in the people they hire, promote, and groom for leadership.

“This sounds like a wake-up call to any organization: you are ignoring a critical factor in your own success if you lag in recruiting women to leadership positions – and most companies are in that boat.”

(Goleman, 2016)

He is describing key aspects of transformational leadership, a style of leadership that has been found to increase organisational effectiveness and one that women leaders in general demonstrate a preference and aptitude for. (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt 2001).

Judging by the prevalence figures of female leadership in the Irish context across the not for profit, private and public sectors there would appear it would appear that the volume has yet to be turned up on Goleman’s wake-up call.

### **Chapter 3: Research Objectives and Questions**

The literature review into gender and leadership demonstrated a systemic comprehensive gender leadership gap in Ireland across the public, private and not for profit sectors. Academic research, the majority from the US, has primarily focussed on the private sector. While the public sector, potentially due to the influence of the EU, has initiated its own gender reviews. The biggest gap in terms of gender and leadership appears, certainly in terms of academic review has, to be the not for profit sector. What research there has been has come from primarily the sector itself. To be fair, the leadership journeys of male not for profit leaders appears under researched as well.

In Ireland, the Community Foundation of Ireland and Benefacts have looked at governance and to a lesser extent employment in the not for profit sector from a gendered perspective. The findings have already been presented in the literature review. They showed gendered governance trends within the not for profit sector; the only sector where women in a board member majority was in social services at 57% (Table 3: Benefacts Analysis 2019: Third Sector Gender Board Balance). Similarly, the research found that in terms of senior leadership, the larger and

wealthier the organisation the more likely it was to be headed by a man. These findings align with US not for profit findings (Stiffman 2015). There is also evidence of a gender pay gap in the not for profit sector.

The objective of research then is to examine the leadership journeys and experiences of senior female not for profit leaders in Ireland as described by themselves. As already stated this is an under-researched area and should be considered a research objective in its own right. Allied with this objective are the following research aims in order to gain insights into their journeys and, if possible, learnings that might be capable of being reproduced for the benefit of emerging leaders:

- Ask female not for profit leaders to assess what they perceive as the barriers and drivers to women in the not for profit sector's professional successes and challenges with the understanding that each individual's experiences are subjective but together may allow a more general view to emerge
- Assess if core findings from other research around networking and expertise and women's preference for one over the other is also borne out in the not for profit sector (Ibarra and Petriglieri 2016)
- Assess if senior not for profit leaders were aware of gender impacting on their own career trajectories and experiences including second generation gender bias ie where apparently gender neutral norms and practices, effectively discriminated against women
- Assess if approaches such as coaching/mentoring and family friendly policies, frequently cited as a means of promoting gender equity in the public and private sectors, are used to any extent or effect in the not for profit sector

- Compare the research into female not for profit leadership style with those of female leaders in other sectors in order to establish if there are commonalities and differences

The research questions which followed from these aims were informed by the literature review and what it revealed of gender and leadership:

1. Can you give brief overview of career?
2. You are/ were CEO of high profile national charity, If you had to sum up – what have been the drivers and barriers to your success?
3. Looking back what role has professional expertise and/ or networking to achieve your position? Have you relied on one more than the other?
4. In your experience of being a not for profit leader, have you been aware of gender as a factor? Have your friends told you of their experiences where they perceived being treated differently due to gender?
5. How important are family friendly policies and flexibility for women in the workplace?
6. What are your views on mentorship? Have you been mentored or acted as a mentor?
7. What do you think leadership is? Do you think you have a particular leadership style and if so what is it?

Based on the questions above, the ultimate question which is also an overarching objective of the research is: what changes could be made to improve gender equity in the not for profit sector? It is intended to focus on the latter in the concluding chapter of this study.

## Chapter 4 Methodology

### *The Participants: Organisational Roles and Responsibilities*

In his description of leadership, Yukl states: “Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.” (Yukl, 2013).

While this may be a useful definition for capturing the complexity of leadership in modern organisations, it may not be the most helpful in examining barriers to leadership as it pertains to women. From a research perspective, identifying women leaders required focussing on their *roles* in an organisation.

The research participants in this study therefore had to have three qualifying criteria. They had to be female, have a leadership role in a not for profit organisation or related organisation in Ireland and hold the title of CEO or equivalent.

A further issue emerged in the course of the literature review namely that that senior leadership posts in the larger wealthier not for profit organisations were disproportionately held by men. So while figures for NGO leadership appear to be more equitable in terms of gender representation, the reality is far more nuanced with scale and income correlating with male leadership (Coughlan 2018). Only 8.6% of female chief executives work in the highest income organisations (i.e. with an income of more than €5 million) compared to 34.6% of males. The larger organisations were also found to have the largest pay gaps. The highest gender pay gap in the not for profit sector was found in the social services sub-sector (20.3%); the homeless sub-sector came second (Coughlan 2018).

Another trend albeit in relation to governance, was the gender imbalance in not for profit boards in favour of men within particular sub-sectors of the not for profit sector (Benefacts 2019: Table 3). In fact, in every sub-sector there was a majority of

male board members; the only exception being Social Services with a female board membership of 57% (Benefacts 2019: Table 3). Individual boards, will differ in their individual compositions, the aforementioned figures are aggregates; they do, however, point to another interesting fact which ties in with general statistics around women's financial agency in Ireland; women in Ireland have the third highest time spent in unpaid work by gender in the EU. While this has implications for financial agency, it also has implications for human capital around time. Unpaid work time is often un-boundaried primarily spent on caring duties. For women, it can mean less leisure time, time for education or time to pursue other interests such as board membership.

Within all of these in mind, it became a desirable feature within the research to capture the experiences of women leaders in both large and small organisations using the earlier referenced €5 million income cut-off point. Of the 8 participants, four were working/ or had worked for an organisation of €5 million and over.

### *Demographics of Participants*

Intersectional feminists would argue in order to understand the dynamics of discrimination and representation then class, race and gender and how they interplay to amplify or change the extent and experience of discrimination.

The following demographic details should be taken into account to contextualise the leadership experiences of the participants in addition to the qualifying criteria outlined above ie CEO/ director:

- All of the participants were white and aged approximately between 40 and 70
- All were based in Dublin although one subsequently moved during the interview process to take up a new role outside of the state
- Each of the participants had held a previous senior management role at director or CEO level; the lowest number of years in at senior level was

approximately 5 with at least two of the participants having at least 20 years of senior management experience

- Each of the participants would now be viewed as middle class; but the origins of two were working class by birth
- Of the 7 participants, 3 did not have children, two had grown up children and two had children under the age of 18

<b>Identifier</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Family status</b>	<b>Years in senior role(s)</b>	<b>Social Services Sector</b>
P1	CEO	Children u 18	5>	Gender based violence victim support
P2	Director	Children u 18	5>	Family Support
P3	CEO	No children	5>	Gender based violence victim support
P4	CEO	No children	10>	Family Support
P5	CEO	No children	10>	Homelessness
P6	CEO	Children/ o 18	20>	Homelessness
P7	Agency head	Children/ o 18	20>	Family Support



### ***Research Approach***

The research employed in this study was a mix of both primary and secondary sources. In relation to the latter, in order to understand the scale and scope of the issue of gender and leadership in Ireland, and specifically the not for profit sector, secondary research focused on not only on current academic research but those used in social policy formulation in order to provide a statistically-informed evidence-base in which to anchor the area under consideration.

The methodology for primary research employed in this study was a qualitative one, involving the implementation of in-depth interviews with female not for profit CEOs. Rossman and Rallis (2003) remark in their work *Qualitative Research as Learning*: “A qualitative research project takes place in the field, relies on multiple methods for gathering data, and calls on the researcher to be pragmatic, flexible, politically aware, and self-reflective. By definition, knowledge is iterative: it builds on... itself. Therefore the research process is heuristic – a discovering experience.”

This discovering experience extends to the researcher themselves as Saunders et al (2009) point out there is a realisation that the researcher is part of the research process. If that acceptance is a reality then the researcher needs to engage in self-reflection.

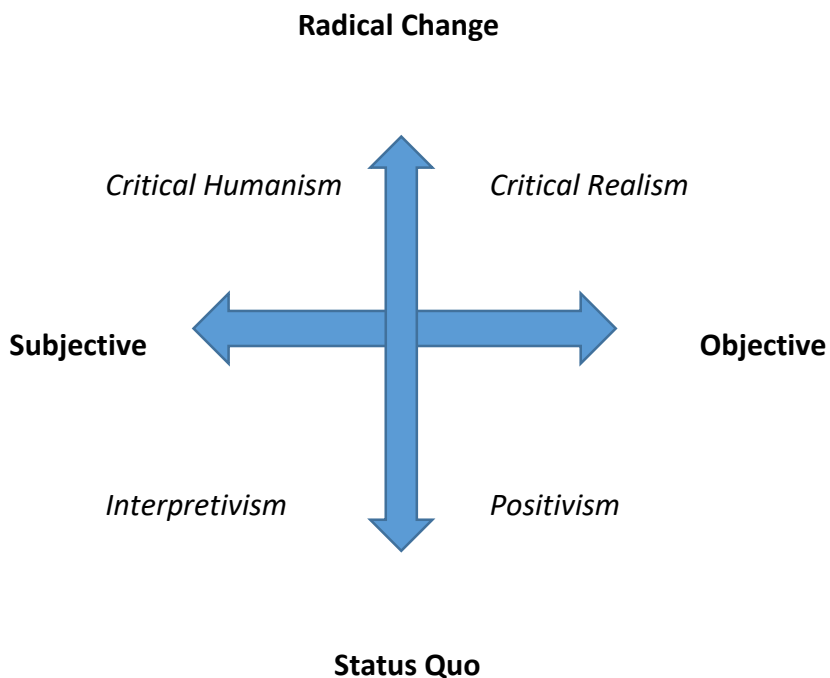
Rossman and Rallis (2003) encourage the researcher to examine her/his own approach by asking of the researcher: does the researcher view society as essentially orderly or as characterised by oppression and domination.

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003): “The two extremes represent alternative conceptualisations of society and social processes. A focus on the status quo, the predominant model of social science, presumes that society is basically well ordered and functionally co-ordinated. Researchers espousing this perspective explain why society holds together in predictable ways and, indeed, assume that prediction is possible. They believe that inquiry into social processes holds the

potential for improving social and organisational life; research will help fine-tune social functioning to better meet the needs of the system.”

The authors contrast this approach with a radical change approach to research which is built on the idea that “social processes deprive individuals and organisations of important satisfactions” with the allied view that society is riddled with contradictions “structures of domination and oppression – that imprison individuals and organisations in both subtle and explicit ways”.

The authors warn against taking a dichotomous perspective in relation to the both. Instead, they suggest four paradigms in which to frame qualitative research:



Of the Rossman and Rallis (2003) paradigms, the Interpretivist Paradigm seems the most applicable to this study with its emphasis on individual experience and qualitative approach. It shares a Critical Humanist approach in that the intention of the researcher is “explicitly participatory”, sharing each stage of the project with participants.

The research approach adopted then was interpretivist in nature, in that the data generated was collected from semi-structured interviews with female not for profit leaders. The ontological approach a subjectivist one.

What this means is that the participants involved in the study were interviewed on their subjective experiences of gender and leadership with the researcher interpreting and analysing the data. The research was inductive and focused on using on non-probabilistic sampling techniques.

### ***Research Process***

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) outline a process flow for the data generated which was pursued in the course of this research:

- Organise the data
- Familiarisation with data
- Generate categories and themes within the data
- Code the data
- Interpret the data
- Identify other plausible interpretations
- Write the report

As stated previously, the primary research outlined above was located within a framework of secondary research.

### ***Limitations***

In terms of qualitative research genre, the proposed research had elements of the phenomenological approach with its emphasis on the lived experience of the participants. Unlike a phenomenological approach, however, the proposed research did not have the capacity to carry out the extensive and prolonged engagement with participants which in why it is focused on individual subjective experiences, as in case studies.

As the female CEO of a not for profit organisation with feminist ethos, there were both methodological advantages and challenges in engaging with the subject matter. The key advantage was familiarity with the particular not for profit area: social services. The other advantage was the area under consideration is a social policy area that would tangentially link with core policy work inherent in my role through the wider context of women and gender based issues in Ireland.

The fact that the research participants are primarily drawn from a personal network means there was relative ease of access to arrange interviews and a level of forthrightness expressed in interviews based on shared professional trust.

The corollary of this, however, is that even with structure outlined by Rossman and Rallis (2003) in the data collection process including thematic analysis there may be assumed meaning or an understood context not automatically offered by the actual data collected. I mitigated against this by focusing in the findings on the views expressed and grouping them thematically.

On a practical level, the intention to interview participants in their own work space did not prove feasible for three of the interviews: in the case of the participant who was moving jobs out of the State; the participant who physically did not have a physical space to be interviewed in and the third participant who was attempting to deal having to cover more than one post and so the interview was done in another location after a joint meeting.

Due to time constraints, two potential rich areas of research are not feasible at this point in time.

- It would have provided an interesting line of sight into attitudes and behaviours male CEOs and male and female board members not only in social services sector but also in those not for profit areas where women are under-represented and in the larger scale organisations where women are under-represented in the senior leadership positions.
- The second area for potential study would be the category of female emerging not for profit leaders since they can provide a real time experience

of the challenges being engaged with. (To an extent, female CEOs have already made it and so their views are retrospective; although to be fair as the findings below show some are still dealing with ongoing gender-based challenges.)

An additional challenge specific to the not for profit sector, is actually identifying emerging leadership candidates this can be attributed to a number of factors: most not for profits tend to be SMEs and so formal roles can sometimes be less defined unlike in bigger organisations, for example. The HR function may be under-developed or non-existent and carried out by someone as part of a wider range of general responsibilities and so even management training can be missing. Ambitious staff also tend to move from organisation to another in order to increase their professional experience or advance their careers as due to scale, formal advancement routes or internal promotions might be rare.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

The following findings are based around the questions asked of the participants and a sample of the responses set out accordingly. As stated previously, it is the belief of this paper that capturing that the responses of female not for profits leaders set out below have value in themselves due to the relative lack of research in the area.

The added value they provide is insight into key areas of gender and leadership in the not for profit sector and by extension those areas which may overlap with the private and public sector.

Questions	Themes from Literature Review
1. Can you give brief overview of career?	Career Trajectory  Disproportionate representation of men in larger and wealthier organisations
2. You are/ were CEO of high profile national charity, If you	Barriers have been identified to women's accession to senior leadership

had to sum up – what have been the drivers and barriers to your success?	roles including family responsibilities; conflicting roles based on sex and gender; role congruence theory
3. Looking back what role has professional expertise and/ or networking to achieve your position? Have you relied on one more than the other?	Men seeking senior roles and in senior roles have traditionally have been able to rely on both formal and informal networks
4. In your experience of being a not for profit leader, have you been aware of gender as a factor? Have your friends told you of their experiences where they perceived being treated differently due to gender?	<p>Experience of gender bias on route to current role or in current role.</p> <p>Pervasiveness of second generation gender bias ie norms are gender “neutral” but designed for men by men.</p> <p>Women can internalise norms to extent may not notice them in selves but may in friends.</p>
5. How important are family friendly policies and flexibility for women in the workplace?	Home/ work role responsibility conflicts can result in women feeling they “cannot have it all”; disproportionate responsibility for childcare often leads women to: opt out of workforce; go part-time or take a reduced status job (the neo traditional family where husband/ partner maintains status job).
6. What are your views on mentorship? Have you been mentored or acted as a mentor?	<p>Men have traditionally benefited from a formal and informal system of patronage and sponsorship within organisations.</p> <p>Women have frequently not been able to avail for a number of reasons.</p>
7. What do you think leadership is? Do you think you have a particular leadership style and if so what is it?	<p>Women are known to have a preference for and effective with transformational a leadership style.</p> <p>Women’s self-definition as leaders</p>

## **Career Trajectories**

None of the participants stated they had a career ambition to work in the not for profit sector at the start of their careers but each of them expressed one of the following: a deep interest in politics/ social change or a more generic “wanting to help people” while others wanted to go into a “caring profession” such as teaching or social work,

For all the women leaders interviewed, they transitioned into the not for profit sector from careers as diverse as administration, hospitality, technology, law and social work. This may reflect the age range of the individuals involved approximately 40 to 70, as the Irish not for profit sector really began professionalising and creating paid posts in the 1990s.

## **Barriers and Drivers**

Each of the participants referenced internal motivations as key drivers for their wanting to become leaders in their area; the motivations in themselves differed. Only one of the participants mentioned gender as a barrier to her acceding to certain senior leadership roles.

“Looking back now, it is hard not to see how gender acted as a barrier to certain opportunities.”

### **Participant 7**

Another referenced the financial situation of the not for profit sector and the constant scrabbling of resources as a barrier. At least three participants highlighted getting an additionally relevant post graduate qualification as an important enabler to facilitating career success. Participant 6: “The MBA made a huge difference, that changed everything.” In the case of Participant 2 it facilitated her transitioning from an administrative role to a professional clinical one which she was able to build on.

Each participant voiced a commitment to life-long learning and a desire to keep on learning suggesting that this may be a behaviour found in successful leaders.

## **Expertise and Networking**

A commitment to life long learning was underlined by each participant and with the exception of Participants 1 and 6, the others either mentioned their expertise deliberately or obliquely in the context of using it to establish the right to be in a senior position. When asked about which they had relied more on in their careers

each participant stressed that they had very good interpersonal skills built on proven relationships in a professional context and had created their own network.

“Networking counts for nothing without expertise. I recognise if you are seeking to engage with someone you have to find the thing you can for them. I use very different language if someone comes from a legal background, faith-based background, private sector... so this is coming from a position of expertise. Starting off as an expert and building your relationships from there.”

Participant 1

When asked about connecting with existing networks only Participants 4 and 6, the former with a professional background in law and the latter in the private sector felt comfortable in availing of existing networks. Even in the case of Participant 4, it was still primarily legal networks she drew on whereas Participant 6 was more willing to venture into a wider network arena.

The responses suggest that women leaders in the not for profit sector rely on both expertise and interpersonal relationships to create own personal networks. Formal networks in the not for profit sector appear to have a way to go which may well be the same for men and women. Men, however, have recourse to more informal networks than women. Certainly the not for profit sector appears quite siloed in its networking with the other sectors.

### **Gender and Experiencing Leadership**

As senior female leaders working in the not for profit sector where gender equality is at least recognised as something good to have in itself albeit the practice does not always follow, the NGO sector could be viewed as one of the more positive sectors for women. The participants interviewed had different experiences. Some compared their own experiences positively in comparison to other sectors:

“Working in this area which is so gender aware, I realised how cushioned I had been when I engaged with other women through an educational opportunity. There was one woman who was from an engineering background and some of the stuff she told me of some of the crap she had to deal with was just shocking. I haven’t been exposed to that situation where I was completely outnumbered, I was just shocked at how much she had had to take in order to survive in this area and reach a senior position in it.”

Participant 1



Participant 7 highlighted her experience of interview panels effectively consciously discriminating against younger female candidates:

“One of the things I would have observed sitting on mixed gender panels is that although it is not spoken of but you can see it among some of the male members of the panel, and facilitated unfortunately by some of the older female colleagues, will be the nod the and the wink, when a woman candidate of child bearing age comes before them.”

She is acutely aware of her age and that of her peers and how that is impacting on their job prospects suggesting for both younger and older women, conscious and unconscious biases on the part of employers around age and gender are intersecting to prevent them availing of job opportunities.

### **Family Friendly and Flexibility**

One of the areas where gender based roles and responsibilities can prove an almost untenable tension point of women in their careers, is around children. As Participant 1 highlights, this can happen even with the decision to have children to begin with. The wider not for profit sector response poses real issues for a sector.

“In the NGO sector, we may not get funded to cover maternity leave but again what are we saying about our values? What are we saying about who we are? If you choose to be a parent as a woman then we are saying we are going to impoverish you.”

“The non profit sector is not just about providing services, it is about social change, leading by example. If we are the poorest sector and we manage to do this, then what does it say to the private sector? As a sector we should be able to say our sector is based more on values than profit and to that extent we have to live those values.”

### **Participant 1**

Participant 7 stressed that without these policies women’s accession to senior decision-making roles particularly in politics were going to be in doubt:

“It is hugely important to have these type of policies. They are everything. I think if you listen to women in politics and their reasons for not going forward, they will cite the lack of family friendly policies. The structure does not support it. If at the end of the day, and I have to choose between my family or the Dail, and I recognise this in myself, I will choose my family.

“I genuinely think men in positions of power in politics or business never have to make those choices because they have a wife at home. I’m not suggesting they are heartless, if a serious issue emerged in their family. With

children, however, the issues are not serious but they are frequent, every day, wellbeing issues, so there has to be a parent there. It's not an emergency but neither is it nothing."

Participant 7

Variations on a common theme were offered by Participants 4 and 6. The former talking about the expectations when a woman did not have children – effectively the flip side to the more gender-approved albeit unsupported motherhood option.

"I don't have children so those policies don't personally affect me but I recognise the importance to have them within an organisation. The other side of that is, because I don't have children, there is less credit given to me for my own time... What do we really mean by family friendly policies... I think paid paternity leave could be a real game changer."

Participant 4

"My husband stayed at home to look after our kids. Most women I know in top positions, they either don't have children or their husbands are at home. It can be a very lonely place for a man to take on that role. Perhaps not so much now but 20 years ago more certainly... Most men I know in top jobs, their wives are at home."

Participant 6

The above responses highlight the realities of choices facing women leaders in the not for profit sector. The same is true for women leaders in other sectors as well. For women leaders in the NGO sector particularly those working in a family support or gender related field the dissonance or parallels between their own experiences and that of the area they are working in can be profound.

### **Mentorship**

Each of the participants expressed the value of both mentorship and coaching with Participant 1 at pains to point out the difference between both; she is a trained coach. Each spoke of the value of being mentored/ coached and in turn being in the position to provide that mentoring to younger colleagues albeit informally ie without being asked or instructed largely because the mechanism for such a process did not exist. The latter highlighting again the impact of scale in the not for profit sector which consists overwhelmingly of SMES.

“I do think it’s good for women to have mentors. I had a male mentor when I worked in banking. It was tremendous having that dual perspective. In the charity I was CEO of, the chairman and the board were fantastic. I could always go to them for advice. In the business sector, you are always trying to prove yourself, that you can manage this, that you know what you are doing. Trying to go to a board of a business and do that and you would have been classed as weak.”

#### Participant 6

Participant 6 had gone from banking to technology before deciding to move to the not for profit sector and head up one of the charities over €5 million in turnover. She highlights the difference in her perception of the private and not for profit sectors ie a willingness to admit vulnerability and “not having all the answers”. She also highlights an unexpected trend which at least two other participants echoed – that of having a male mentor.

“I really loved the different perspective of having a male mentor. I felt it was a different way of looking at things. I am really grateful to him (her ex line manager). He taught me a lot.”

#### Participant 2

Ironically, what we do know from leadership studies in relation to transformational leadership is that male and female leaders exhibit similar traits in the context of transformational leadership with the key difference of women focusing on the mentoring and individual attention aspect. This small sample shows that the women involved in this survey experiencing male mentorship and valued its contribution. It could be argued that the male mentors involved has the power and were exercising their privilege by bestowing knowledge on an “outgroup” ie women.

### **Leadership – Self-definition and Style**

Each of the participants were asked would you consider yourself a leader. Each of them said yes but a number caveated with saying that it was a process that had taken time. It was only when they had done enough and achieved enough did they think they merited the term leader. Others expressly underlined that they were not the only leaders in the organisation and that leadership could be demonstrated without having the necessary title. In effect they were naming the influencing without authority characteristic of modern leadership thinking.

“Yes, actually I would describe myself as a leader. Think what I try to do is to encourage people to think themselves as leaders. Executive leadership is not just the senior management team. It is about emerging leaders. Leaders at all levels of the organisation.”

#### Participant 5

“Leadership is about setting the vision. It’s about giving people hope. It’s about giving people a sense of direction and then corralling them around that to keep them on track. It’s about giving them that energy and channelling that energy into achieving. Leadership is about the feelings, the hope, the passion, a bit of charisma, courage. Giving people a sense of faith. They may not be able to see where they are going but saying ‘let’s see how we are going to get there’.”

#### Participant 6

The description above could almost be a textbook definition of Bass’s Transformational Leadership, a style of leadership which has been shown to be favoured by female leaders and effective for organisations. Transformational leadership has the following characteristics:

- Idealised Influence: leader is a role model
- Inspirational Motivation: assigning meaning and challenge to tasks
- Intellectual Stimulation: Seeking innovation and agility with the capacity to reframe issues/ challenges
- Individualised Consideration: leaders act as mentors and coaches

Each of the female not for profit leaders demonstrated significant aspects of this leadership style.

## **Conclusion**

Women are under-represented in leadership roles in Ireland in the public, private and not for profit sectors. The latter appears to have gone further in governance gender equality with not for profit boards typically having proportionately more female members than their public or private sector counterparts.

The situation is more complex than first suggested. A Community Foundation of Ireland report found that the presence or absence of women on boards does not appear to have a strong relationship overall with the amount of the gender pay gap, except the survey found that there are slightly less females on boards in the largest organisations and in the high income organisations where the gender pay gap is higher.

The same organisations also tend to have male CEOs and a disproportionately male senior leadership team: men are over represented as heads of the largest and highest income not for profit organisations. Women disproportionately so.

The goal of this paper was to research the experience of female senior decision-makers in the not-for-profit sector Social Services sector including their leadership journeys with particular reference to drivers and barriers to their current position. This research does not take place in isolation.

To fully examine the journeys of the participants requires mapping their experiences on to a wider landscape shaped by gender, leadership, organisation development theory as well as current sectoral analysis. It is hoped that by doing so, a path might be navigated from Ibarra's "impossible selves" to possible selves and possible others.

The latter has particular resonance for female not for profit leaders. They may have faced overt or oblique gendered experiences/ challenges on their journeys to their current positions.

Not for profit female leaders, particularly in the social services sector, potentially face the double dichotomy of advocating on behalf of beneficiaries around socio-economic rights and denying rights to female employees or being denied those rights themselves. For example, issues around paid maternity leave, family friendly policies, pensions all of which disproportionately impact on women tend to have low traction within not for profit social services settings with the justification that resources are scarce and/ or could prove disruptive.

From a leadership perspective, where does that leave not for profit leaders in terms of authentic leadership? Similarly, if Haslam et al's perspective on the leadership process is around inspiring/ influencing people to do things, then are not for profit leaders, male and female, potentially compromised in that process with female employees in the sector who may perceive themselves as working for the rights and wellbeing of beneficiaries while being denied those socio-economic rights themselves and hence demotivated.

#### *Opportunities for Further Research*

There are significant opportunities for further research in this sphere.

The first would involve parallel interviews with male CEOs of not for profit organisations on their leadership experiences and their perceptions of gender and leadership.

The second potential research area is to examine the experiences of female CEOs in the private sector or their equivalents in the public sector, assistant secretary general/ secretary generals of departments.

A third, and more methodologically challenging research area, would be to engage with female not for profit employees and seek their views on gender, leadership and their engagement with both within the context of being a "follower".

Finally, there is the opportunity to take on board the seismic shifts that have happened in relation to gender in the workplace. The distributed leadership which has emerged in the context of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace. Fundamentally to ask the question: how can there be gender leadership equity when fundamental safety cannot be guaranteed and what does it mean for the blithe assumptions that women leaders are on a trajectory of success albeit a slow one.

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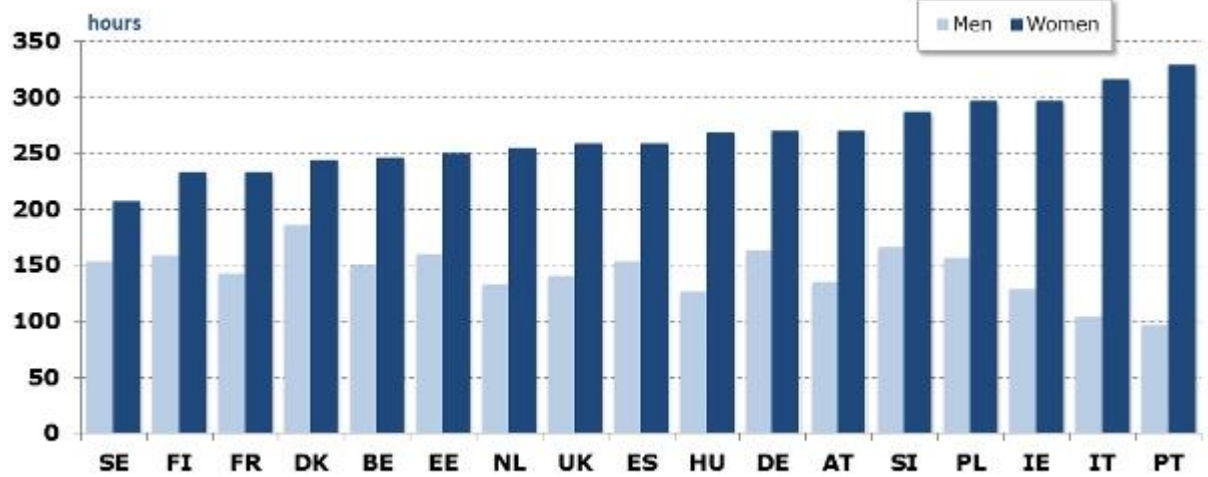
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## Tables

Table 1: (Time Spent in Unpaid Work by Gender/ The Life of Women and Men in Europe – A Statistical Portrait, 2018 edition)

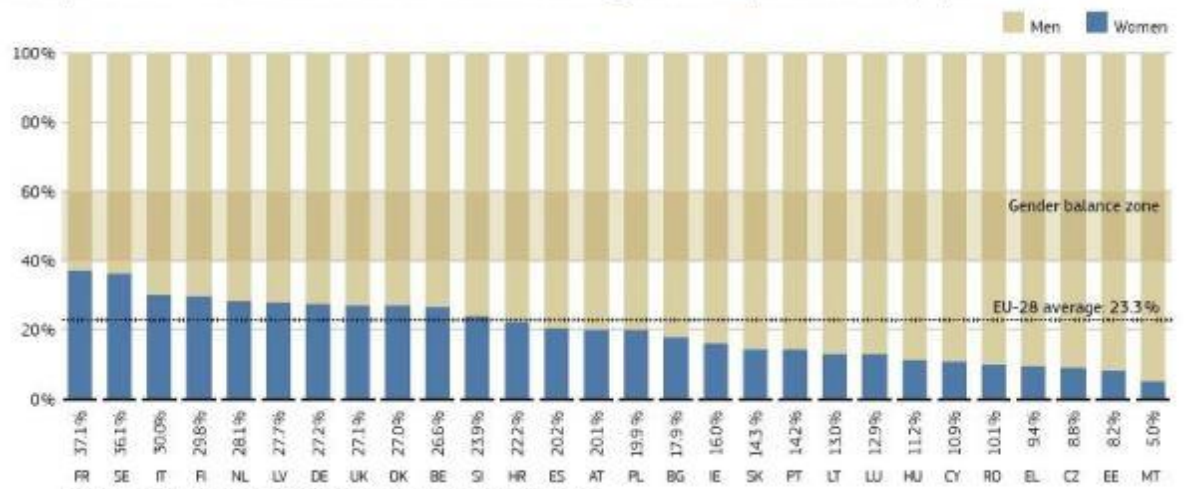
### Time spent in unpaid work by gender



Source: OECD Gender data portal

Table 2: Women and Men in Decision Making: Representation of Women and Men on Boards of Large Listed Companies 2016

■ Representation of women and men on the boards of large listed companies in the EU, April 2016

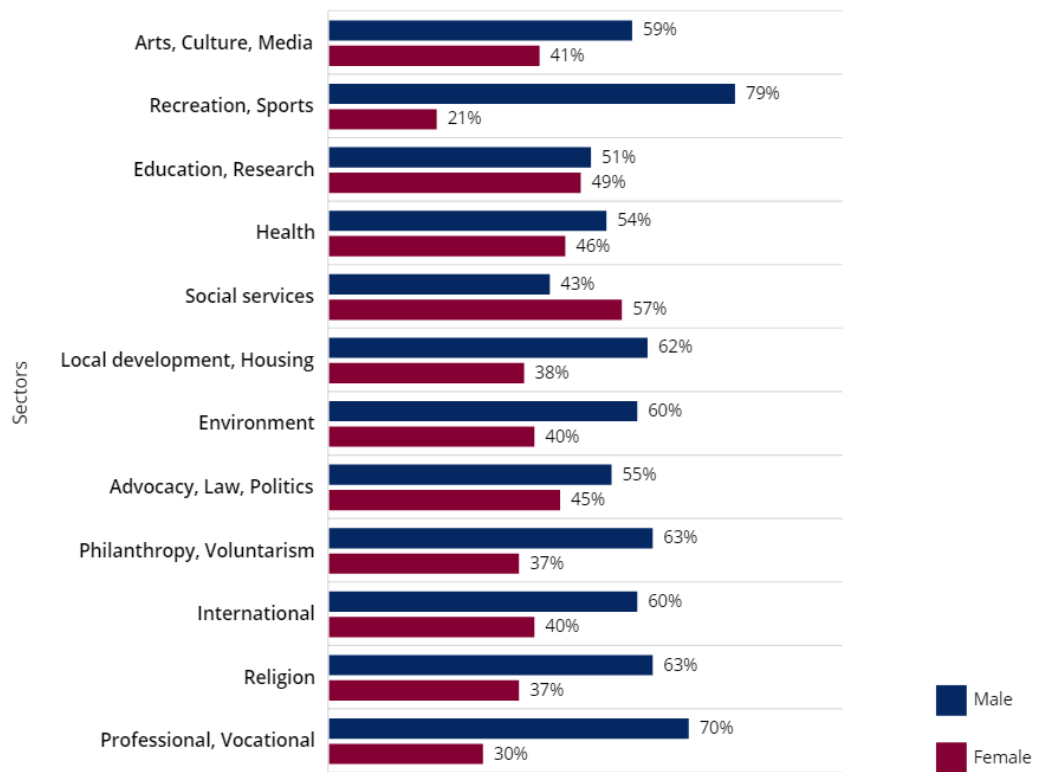


Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision making



Table 3: Benefacts Analysis 2019: Third Sector Gender Board Balance

Figure 10: Third Sector Board Gender Balance



**Table 4: GuideStar Nonprofit Compensation Report 2015 (USA)**

**Chief Executive Salaries**

Median salaries from the 2015 GuideStar Nonprofit Compensation Report, which is based on data reported by about 105,000 organizations to the Internal Revenue Service.

<b>Organization's budget</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
\$250,000 or less	\$42,105	\$44,592
\$250,000 to \$500,000	\$55,727	\$61,765
\$500,000 to \$1 million	\$70,376	\$79,567
\$1 million to \$2.5 million	\$89,549	\$104,918
\$2.5 million to \$5 million	\$111,183	\$136,882
\$5 million to \$10 million	\$140,100	\$168,936
\$10 million to \$25 million	\$177,973	\$212,762

<b>Organization's budget</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
\$25 million to \$50 million	\$235,268	\$284,884
\$50 million or more	\$405,682	\$479,902

**Table 5: Change in Share of Women Chief Executives 2003-2013 (USA)**

The 2015 GuideStar Nonprofit Compensation Report is based on data reported by about 105,000 organizations to the Internal Revenue Service on 2013 informational Form 990 tax returns for some 154,000 positions.

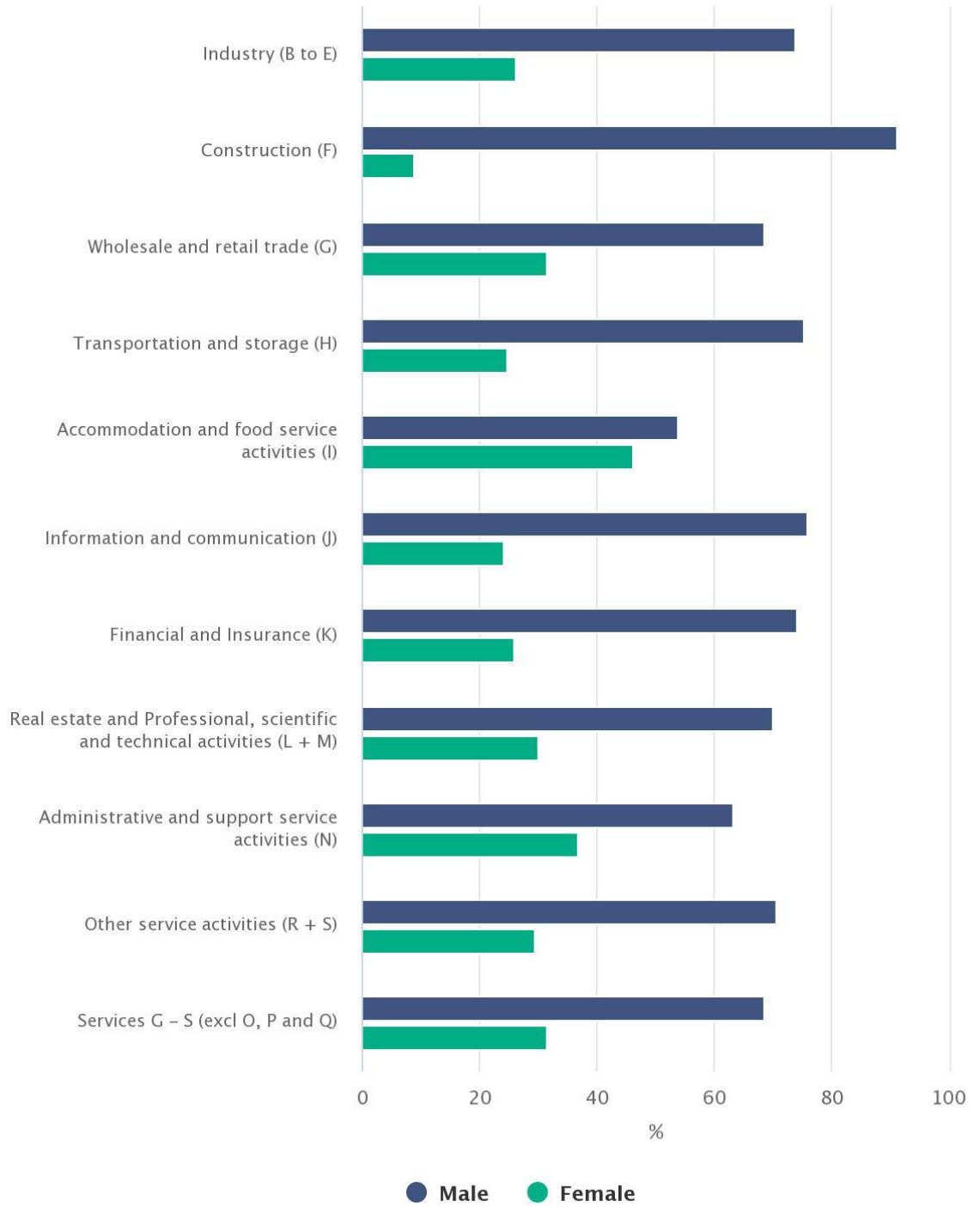
<b>Organization's budget</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2013</b>
\$250,000 or less	55%	55%
\$250,000 to \$500,000	57%	52%
\$500,000 to \$1 million	52%	49%
\$1 million to \$2.5 million	45%	44%
\$2.5 million to \$5 million	40%	37%
\$5 million to \$10 million	32%	32%
\$10 million to \$25 million	26%	29%
\$25 million to \$50 million	20%	25%

<b>Organization's budget</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2013</b>
\$50 million or more	14%	18%

Source: [GuideStar](#) [Get the data](#)

Table 6: CSO Gender Balance in Business Survey 2019, CSO

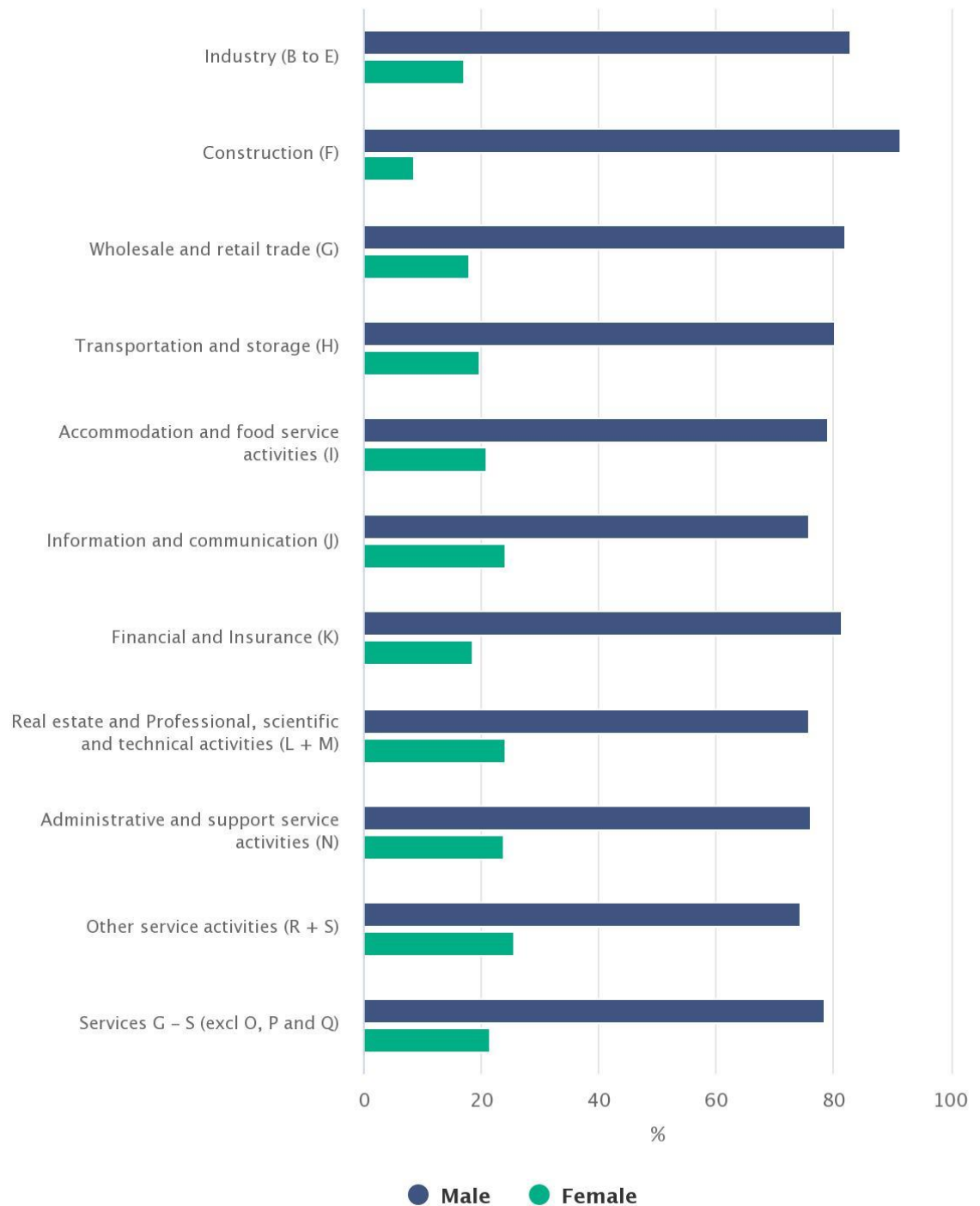
Figure 6: Gender breakdown of Senior Executives by sector, 2019



Source: CSO Ireland

Table 7: Gender Breakdown of Directors by Sector, CSO 2019

Figure 9: Gender breakdown of Directors by sector, 2019



Source: CSO Ireland

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Signature of participant

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Date

*Signature of researcher*

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

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Signature of researcher

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Date