



# Gender, Work & Organization Conference

28-30 June 2023 | Stellenbosch | South Africa

GENDER, WORK & ORGANIZATION



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## Gender, Work and Organization

13th International Interdisciplinary Conference

28-30 June 2023, Stellenbosch, South Africa

### Conference theme

*Marginalized gender identities - how can intellectual activism transform work and organization?*

(Read more about the conference theme on the conference website).

## CALL FOR ABSTRACTS/PAPER SUBMISSIONS

### STREAM TITLE:

Activist shareholders as change agents:  
Enhancing corporate sustainability and board inclusivity

### STREAM LEADERS:

Nadia Mans-Kemp (Stellenbosch University, South Africa)  
Dana Muir (University of Michigan, United States of America)  
Rafael Robina-Ramírez (University of Extremadura, Spain)  
Cornis van der Lugt (University of Stellenbosch Business School, South Africa)

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Corporate sustainability is receiving substantial attention from scholars across disciplines. The term broadly refers to attempts by corporate leaders to mitigate environmental, social and economic risks while simultaneously aiming to maximise value over the long term (Klettner, Clarke & Boersma, 2014; Lee & Saen, 2012). Corporate sustainability thus encompasses environmental, social and governance (ESG) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) considerations (Crifo, Escrig-Olmedo & Mottis, 2019). Business leaders should accordingly account for sustainable value creation related to multiple bottom lines that are relevant to divergent stakeholders instead of merely prioritising shareholder wealth (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). Sustainable corporate practices are arguably the outcomes of decisions made by directors (Rao & Tilt, 2016). Numerous scholars have investigated the linkages between board composition, in particular board gender diversity, and financial performance and have reported mixed results (Post & Byron, 2015). Although gender-diverse boards tend to be more effective monitors and stronger enforcers of ethical conduct than gender-homogenous boards (Galbreath, 2011), gender diversity remains a highly debated organisational consideration, inter alia, given concerns raised about mandatory quotas and potential token appointments (Rao & Tilt, 2016). The composition of boards received renewed scholarly attention post 2020 as the Coronavirus pandemic underlined the impact of severe social and environmental challenges for several stakeholders (Jebran & Chen, 2021).

Women directors' attunement to stakeholders' interests enhances pro-societal actions, which in turn improves CSR. The potential moderating and mediating effects of sustainable corporate practices should hence be considered when reflecting on the relationship between board gender diversity and financial performance (Wu, Furuoka & Lau, 2022; Galbreath, 2011). More research is required on the association between other board composition variables and sustainable corporate practices (Naciti, 2019). In addition to gender, ethnicity and age, the backgrounds of directors should be considered when reflecting on outcomes related to directors' advisory, resource provision and monitoring roles (Naumovska, Wernicke & Zajac, 2020; Chams & García-Blandón, 2019).

Based on the seminal agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), directors should primarily monitor the actions of managers to ensure that the best interests of shareholders are served. Yet, shareholders should not be apathetic owners who merely trust directors to obtain resources and offer advice to managers. Instead, the renowned South African King IV Report on corporate governance states that shareholders can serve as proxies for broader stakeholder interests (Institute of Directors South Africa [IoDSA], 2016). Institutional investors in particular have the voting and negotiation power to ensure that prominent corporate issues receive adequate attention at board level (IoDSA, 2016).

Researchers have focused on quotas (Seierstad, Healy, Goldeng & Fjellvær, 2021) and targets (Jizi & Nehme, 2017) as mechanisms to transform the highest decision-making echelons. Less attention has been dedicated to private and public shareholder activism mechanisms, including voting and reactive and proactive discussions to change board composition and influence selected corporate policies and practices (Perrault, 2015). Such activists played a key role in ending apartheid in South Africa (Proffitt & Spicer, 2006). Shareholder activism has also been shown to be effective in transforming corporate actions, including say-on-pay (Stathopoulos & Voulgaris, 2016), climate risk management (Flammer, Toffel & Viswanathan, 2021) and diversifying boards (Perrault, 2015).

Our stream thus responds to the conference theme by inviting scholars to share conceptual and empirical research on the use and effectiveness of various shareholder activism mechanisms to bring about more inclusive boards and enhance corporate sustainability. We welcome quantitative and qualitative studies, including interviews, case studies and longitudinal analysis. Key themes and questions that might be addressed by the papers in this stream could include the following:

The role of shareholder activism in the broader anti-discrimination and responsible governance movement can be investigated. Which shareholders are leading the way and what are their motives? How diverse are shareholder activists? What can be done to promote more widespread shareholder

activism on board inequality? How can engagements on board composition concerns be enhanced between institutional investors and those with marginalised gender identities?

The usage of shareholder activism mechanisms to create more inclusive boards and to enhance corporate sustainability can be considered in emerging and/or developed markets. To what extent can shareholder activism encourage increased alignment among corporate values, board inclusivity and sustainable activities? Which mechanisms are predominantly used by institutional and individual investors? How effective are these mechanisms? How are the interests of employees and other stakeholders incorporated during engagements?

The linkages between various board composition considerations and stakeholder management to promote corporate sustainability can be explored by utilising intersectional lenses. Gendered perspectives of top leadership can be considered. Which norms, attitudes and behaviours hinder related endeavours? How did the development paths of diverse directors impact their views of responsibilities related to the use of multiple capitals, including hard versus soft accounting and accountability approaches, and tangible versus intangible assets?

What are the main lessons learned by directors and shareholder activists to enhance board composition and corporate sustainability pre and post 2020? Which best practices became evident, and where is there substantial scope for improvement? To which extent have prominent issues such as public health, corruption and climate change strengthened the case for more transformative governance policies and practices?

What are the main contributions of diverse directors to various bottom lines, including their education and skills in dealing with sustainability metrics and management control systems? Researchers are encouraged to account for multiple diversity considerations. What are the mediating and moderating roles of social responsibility aspects when exploring the linkages between diversity considerations and financial performance in developed and/or emerging markets?

Send enquiries for this stream to Nadia Mans-Kemp: [nadimans@sun.ac.za](mailto:nadimans@sun.ac.za).

Abstracts of approximately 500 words should be submitted directly to the GWO2023 conference website in a ONE-page (A4-size, single-spaced, excluding references, with no headers, footers or track changes) Word document, NOT PDF. Abstracts are invited by the end of day 7 November 2022 (Central Africa Time - CAT), with decisions on acceptance to be made by stream leaders by December 2022. Prospective contributions will be independently refereed. Abstracts should include full contact details, including your name, institutional affiliation, mailing address and e-mail address. We are hoping to circulate abstracts prior to the 2023 GWO conference to those attending the conference.

Subject to full peer review, this stream may select suitable full papers for a special issue of the *Gender, Work and Organization* journal post the conference. If your abstract is accepted for this stream, you are encouraged to submit a full paper (5 000 to 7 000 words excluding references) by 28 February 2023, which may be considered for such a GWO journal special edition.

**More information about the conference can be found at:**

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**More information about the *Gender, Work and Organization* journal can be found here:**

*Gender, Work and Organization* is a scholarly journal published by Wiley and edited by Alison Pullen and Banu Ozkazanc-Pan. The journal has an Impact Factor of 5.428 (2021) ISI Journal Citation Reports and a ranking of 2/44 (Women's Studies); 95/226 (Management).

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