

Master Thesis Strategic Management

Board gender diversity and ethical behaviour



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Preface

Before you lies the master thesis “Board gender diversity and ethical behaviour”, with its aim to determine whether the difference in ethical behaviour between men and women in the general population could also be generalized towards a specific organizational leadership role as a board member. This thesis was written to fulfil the graduation requirements for the master’s degree in business administration, with a specialization in Strategic Management, at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Over a period of five months, from February to June 2023, I enjoyed working on this thesis, in which I was able to apply the knowledge I gained from my master’s and bachelor’s degree. It was an instructive process in which I learned several new skills and gained new knowledge, which I hope to be able to put in practice during my professional career.

Completing this thesis would not have been possible without the support of my supervisors, fellow students, and family. First, I would like to express my great thanks to my supervisor Koen van den Oever for providing comprehensive, purposeful, and critical feedback during the entire research process. His knowledge, ideas and motivation helped me tremendously. I would also like to thank my second examiner Stefan Breet for his feedback on my research proposal, which helped me improve and optimize my thesis even further. Also, I would like to thank my fellow students for their ongoing help throughout the process. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their tireless support over the past few years during my master’s and bachelor’s degrees.

I hope you enjoy reading my master thesis!

Sanne ter Braak

Nijmegen, 23rd of June 2023

Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine whether the results from the general population regarding the differences between men and women in terms of ethical behaviour could be generalized to a specific organizational leadership role as a board member. It is known from the social literature and theories that men and women differ in their ethical behaviour, with women exhibiting higher extents of ethical behaviour than men. However, questions have repeatedly been raised concerning the generalizability of these results from the general population towards specific organizational leadership roles. Contextual factors could have a substantial influence on board members' behaviour and are not considered in social theories. By showing that male and female board members are not significantly different in terms of ethical behaviour, it is suggested that increasing gender diversity within organizations will not necessarily exert a direct positive effect on the overall ethical behaviour of the organization. The study comprised a total of 173 board- and non-board members who were questioned about their ethical behaviour using an experimental research method through vignettes. To determine the effect of the interaction between gender and board membership on ethical behaviour, a linear regression analysis was performed. This study found that male and female board members were indeed not significantly different from each other in ethical behaviour, despite the considerations from social theories regarding the general population. Also, male, and female board members show higher levels of ethical behaviour than male and female non-board members. It is therefore highly relevant for organizations to not only consider gender differences as the main factor for board member behaviour. Contextual and individual factors could potentially also be of influence.

Key words: board gender diversity, ethical behaviour

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1. Introduction

The effects of gender diversity, and specifically of female representation in boards of directors and other organizational practices have previously been researched repeatedly. It is often suggested that these effects of women stem from the differences in knowledge, abilities, opinions, skills and perspectives compared to men (Post & Byron, 2015; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Specifically, within the boardroom could these differences lead to a substantial influence on the shaping and process of board decision making, ultimately affecting a firm's organisational practices (Post & Byron, 2015). The core causes of these differences are often suggested to be due to the more fundamental differences between men and women (Croson & Gneezy, 2009), caused by socialization processes individuals face from an early age (Eagly, 1987; House, 1981). One of these evident fundamental differences between men and women can be found in their ethicality, referred to as someone's ethical sensitivity (Wittmer, 1992). Previous research within several fields concluded that women are in general more ethically sensitive than men (Cohen et al., 1998; Cumming et al., 2015; Owhoso, 2002; Sunden & Surette, 1998). Females are for instance more likely to show ethical behaviour (Bernardi & Arnold Sr., 1997; Lund, 2008), speak out when unethical behaviour is displayed (Vermeir & Van Kenhove, 2008) and often maintain a specific ethical perspective (Weeks et al., 1999).

In the boardroom, organizational ethical behaviour is increasingly seen as an important topic due to the many stories concerning fraudulent and unethical practices of organizations, and the negative effects these practices result in (Ameen et al., 1996; Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014). Scholars have been able to establish that this general unethical behaviour of organizations arises from the unethical influences on firm decision-making by individuals holding leadership positions within these firms (Schwartz, 2016). According to Wittmer (1992), ethical sensitivity could improve and enhance ethical decision making. Since women, in general, are seen as more ethically sensitive than men, by joining a board of directors, and positioning themselves within an organisational leadership role, they could potentially exert a positive impact on decision-making, thereby indirectly improving companies' ethical behaviour (Wittmer, 1992).

However, despite the evident differences between men and women in the general population, the question is often asked whether these outcomes can be generalised to specific organisational leadership roles. So did Adams & Funk (2012) suggest that additional contextual factors could potentially be of influence when finding oneself in a specific organizational leadership role, like a board member. They for instance concluded that the previously found differences between men and women in terms of their values do not solely apply to the general population, focusing merely on students and workers. These differences in values between men and women are also present when they find themselves within a board of directors (Adams & Funk, 2012). The suggestions by Adams & Funk (2012) had previously also been considered. So did Eagly & Johnson (1990) conclude that due to the socialization processes into specific organizational leadership roles, the differences between the ones holding those positions

potentially becomes less. And did Kanter (1977) conclude that the differences in behaviour between men and women within professional environments are due to the differences in structural positions genders hold within firms. Because women in general hold positions which have a lack of power, they will also reflect this in their behaviour. It is therefore assumed that if men and women have the same, or a similar, organizational leadership role, their behaviour would become similar as well, even though differences between men and women do exist, as described by for example the social role theory (Kanter, 1977).

This line of argument could also apply to ethical sensitivity. Repeatedly, it has been confirmed that for both the general environment, as within the boardroom, men and women both show a higher degree of ethical sensitivity when it concerns potential wrongs to themselves than to others (Jones, 1991; Rettinger & Hastie, 2001). Also, no differences between male and female board members were found in terms of their ethical sensitivity specifically towards shareholders (Simga-Mugan et al., 2005). Due to socialization processes male and female board members face within their position, and because of the similarity in their function, training and professional setting, male and female board members are therefore assumed to respond similarly in decision making (Betz et al., 1989). So, even though women are more ethically sensitive, and could therefore have a positive effect on the ethical behaviour of organizations, they would not necessarily have a greater impact as board members compared to men, because of the similarity in their organizational leadership role. The central research question for this research is therefore:

“How do men and women differ in ethical behaviour when controlled by their organizational leadership role as a board member?”

To provide for an answer on the above stated research question, an experimental research method examined the potential relationship between board member gender diversity and ethical behaviour. As often within research on ethical dimensions, the probability of socially desirable answers, because of the social desirability bias (Robertson & Anderson, 1993), was considered as potentially high (Cohen et al., 1993). Therefore, specifically a vignette study was used as the method of research to increase the honesty of the results (Cavanaugh & Fritzsche, 1985). Each of the respondents was provided with a total of four contextually different vignettes, including related questions regarding their potential behaviour in the specified situations. For the results of this experiment to be analysed, a regression analysis was conducted to consider the relationship between the independent variable(s) and dependent variable. Additionally, the average group responses were also considered individually for each of the vignettes as a supplementary analysis by means of t-tests.

2. Theoretical framework

Diversity is most often conceptualized as the differences which exist between individuals on any kind of attribute which might potentially lead to the perception that someone else is different compared to oneself (Jackson et al., 2003; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Within a group, diversity could be seen as a characteristic, which reflects the extent to which subjective and/or objective differences exist between members, presuming that they are not aware of the existent differences (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). These differences could be considered in a wide range of different dimensions, which go from nationality to age, functional- to religious background, task- to relational skills, and from sexual- to political preferences (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). The main question within diversity research is how the differences between the group members affect the overall group performance, group processes, subjective well-being, and individual group member attitudes (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Scholars have therefore made a distinction between different perspectives of diversity, which are social category- and informational diversity (Jehn et al., 1999; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). The perspective of social category diversity is referring to the explicit differences between members of a group, like gender, ethnicity, and race. These explicit differences provide for a basis by which members of a group can categorize others and themselves (Jehn et al., 1999). The informational diversity perspective starts at the consideration that group diversity will more likely bring a broad range of knowledge, abilities, opinions, skills, and perspectives. The wide range of resources available due to the diversity could lead to more careful considerations, as the diversity allows for the integration of different perspectives and knowledge (van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

One of the explicit differences which is often discussed, as considered by the social category diversity perspective, is that of gender, in which a distinction is made between the genders male and female. Between these groups of men and women, diversity also exists within their knowledge, abilities, opinions, skills, and perspectives (informational diversity perspective). Scholars assume that this informational diversity arises from the fundamental differences between men and women. Several theories have been developed to provide for a better understanding on the fundamental differences which exist between these groups. So did House (1981) develop the so-called cultural explanation, which assumes that through socialization processes, which individuals deal with in their childhood, permanent gender identities are established. Boys and girls go through different patterns of developments corresponding to their sex, in which masculine emphasis is on justice and feminine emphasis is on relationships (Gilligan, 1982). In addition, House (1981) suggests the structural explanation, which assumes that gender differences relate to social group differences, which arise from more common positions within societal structures, like families and organizations. For example, men are, stereotypically, considered as executives and women as secretaries (House, 1981). The cultural and structural explanations by House are, however, considered incompatible, as they do not acknowledge

the multiple modes of interaction that might be existent between structural- and socialization forces (Franke et al., 1997).

Nonetheless, the social role theory by Eagly (1987) does acknowledge the potential interactions between structural- and socialization forces and is therefore often considered in relation to gender diversity (Franke et al., 1997). This theory suggests that individuals, being men and women, show behaviour which is in accordance with stereotypes that are associated with the social roles they hold. Therefore, women are perceived as more communal, and men are perceived as more agentic (Eagly & Wood, 1991). As women are guided by communal goals, their aim is at putting emphasis on developing interpersonal relationships (Carlson, 1972). They are considered as more friendly, concerned with others, emotionally expressive and unselfish (Eagly & Wood, 1991). Moreover, as men are guided by agentic goals, they focus specifically on pursuing personal goals and achievements (Carlson, 1972). They are therefore considered to be more masterful, instrumentally competent, independent, and assertive than women (Eagly & Wood, 1991). Within a professional environment, this therefore means that due to the different experiences men and women have during their childhood, a different set of skills and traits is developed, and therefore men and women are likely to behave differently (Franke et al., 1997). For example, according to Maccoby (1988) these differences are established as children experience different types of gender-segregated playgroups, in which boys and girls have different playing styles and learn and use different types of methods to influence each other. In addition, when found in the same or a similar organizational position, men and women might be faced with different pressures, also resulting in a difference in behaviour (Maccoby, 1988). According to Gutek & Morasch (1982), the difference in behaviour is the result of gender-based social expectations towards behaviour which are applied within the workplace, the so-called gender-role spillover. Likewise, one of the reasons for the existence of this sex-role spillover comes from the gender roles that individuals are thought early in their lives, and will also, within a professional environment, remain a powerful influence (Gutek & Cohen, 1987).

A significant difference in behaviour between men and women is often found in ethicality, in which this difference is mainly referred to in terms of a difference in ethical sensitivity between men and women. The concept ethical sensitivity can be understood properly in relation to ethical perception, which is the relative capacity of a person to recognize an ethical or moral dimension within an ethical situation. The ethical sensitivity of a person is then their ability to assign a relative importance to that specific ethical or moral dimension within a particular situation (Wittmer, 1992). Several previous studies from different research directions, like ethics, finance and psychology, have concluded that women are more ethically sensitive than men (Cohen et al., 1998; Owhoso, 2002; Sunden & Surette, 1998). Also recently, Cumming, Leung & Rui (2015) managed to reaffirm this conclusion. So are females, for instance, more likely to show ethical behaviour within a professional environment (Bernardi & Arnold Sr., 1997; Lund, 2008), speak out when unethical behaviour is displayed (Vermeir

& Van Kenhove, 2008), often maintain a specific ethical perspective (Weeks et al., 1999) and are women more likely to respond appropriately to questionable business activities (Chonko & Hunt, 1985).

An explanation for this difference can be found in the socialization theory by Dawson (1997), which assumes that men and women are thought different sex roles, concerns and related values, which are the core cause of the formation of either masculine or feminine personalities within their childhood. Therefore, cognitive, and psychological differences in the moral principles of men and women are also displayed within later stadia of life (Dawson, 1997), like in ethical sensitivity. The social role theory as described above is also considered in the explanation for this difference in ethical sensitivity between men and women, as women are more focused on showing concerns for others, and to look out for their welfares ('communion'), whereas men are more likely to reinforce hierarchy and competition ('agency'). Women tend to focus on the so-called "ethics of care", which aims mainly at social virtues and character traits like caring for others and nurturing. The opposite are men, who tend to focus more on the so-called "ethics of justice", which aims at results, equality, and principles (French & Weis, 2000). As women are assumed to put more emphasis on the communal values, they are more likely to also react more ethically when found in a dilemma situation (Mason & Mudrack, 1996). Therefore, as women are more ethically sensitive than men, it could be assumed that they are also more likely to behave more ethically than men. Accordingly, the following can be hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: Women behave more ethically compared to men.

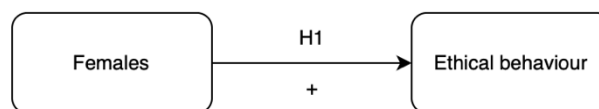


Figure 1 - Conceptual Model Hypothesis 1

With increasing numbers of legislation, like within the European Union (European Commission, 2022), gender diversity in organizations is also becoming increasingly important. Especially within the top echelons of organizations, primarily boards, are these legislations seen as a driver for increasing gender diversity. The board of directors is most often described as the formal link which exists between the firm's shareholders and the managers which are part of the day-to-day functioning of an organization (Mintzberg, 1983; Monks & Minow, 2003). They are perceived as a large and elite group occupied with periodical decision-making activities concerning complex strategic issues an organization faces (Forbes & Milliken, 1999). Like those of top management, a board of directors is occupied with multifaceted and complex tasks that involve the processing of these strategic issues (Jackson, 1992). The biggest difference between top management and the board of directors is however that boards are those responsible for influencing and monitoring the strategy agreed upon, whereas the top management teams will be occupied with the actual implementation of the strategic decisions made, and day-to-day

administrative tasks (Fama & Jensen, 1983). The strategic tasks of a board evolve around the active participation in the formulation of the firm's strategy, in which the directors are assumed to provide for guidance, counsel and advice to the top management and CEO of the organization (Forbes & Milliken, 1999). The monitoring or control tasks refer to the duty of boards to monitor the management of a firm on behalf of its shareholders, and to carry out this specific duty with care and loyalty (Monks & Minow, 2003). Therefore, a board is also often described as the company's top control system (Fama & Jensen, 1983).

Through gender diversity within the board, the effectiveness of its monitoring responsibilities, and the protection of interests of shareholders, were proven to be enhanced. This is due to a significant increase in the experiences, perspectives, expertise, creativity, and interests of the board caused by the gender diversity (Adams & Ferreira, 2009; Carter et al., 2003; Erhardt et al., 2003; Hoever et al., 2012). The variation in the composition of the board could, as it increases the extents of knowledge, perspectives, and information, also enhance the processing of the information in general. Because of the substantial increase in information available, the board's decision making could improve (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Triana et al., 2014), and therefore also its quality (Hambrick et al., 1996). As a result, gender diverse boards are more likely to provide for innovative solutions and ideas (Torchia et al., 2011). A greater gender diversity within the boardroom also increases a board's independence, as women are more likely to ask questions which are not often asked by men (Carter et al., 2003).

For boards, ethicality has been considered a hot topic for many years due to the ongoing discussion regarding stories of fraudulent behaviour by organizations (Ameen et al., 1996), and the question has often been raised of how this could be improved or prevented (Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014). Scholars argue that this general, unethical behaviour by organizations, arises from unethical influences on decision-making by individuals who hold leadership positions within these firms, like board members. Improving decision making, by making it more ethical, is therefore considered as an important possible solution considering unethical behaviour by organizations (Schwartz, 2016). Many scholars have therefore tried to shed a light on what leads these individuals towards deciding upon unethical choices, by considering the ethical decision making (EDM) process. As a result, several theoretical models have been developed presenting the sequential steps individuals go through regarding ethical decision making. A total of three steps have been identified, in which the first one is considered crucial, as this step is, besides from being the beginning of the process, the one which considers the initial recognition and awareness of an ethical situation which requires a moral recital or action (Rest, 1984, 1986). According to Wittmer (1992), the better an individual is at assigning a relative importance to an ethical or moral dimension within a particular situation, the more ethically sensitive they are. A higher ethical sensitivity, in turn, will improve and enhance the ethical decision making of an individual (Wittmer, 1992). Since, as also argued above, women are seen as more ethically sensitive than men, it could be assumed that enhancing gender diversity in boards could positively influence organisations' ethical decision making, and thereby the ethical behaviour of the organization in general.

However, questions sometimes arise concerning the generalizability of the many results from the general population to specific organizational leadership roles, like board members. Many scholars study phenomena by using the general population, like students and workers, as their sample. When positioned in a specific organizational leadership role, like a board member, the outcomes might potentially be completely different due to the consideration of certain contextual factors. Several reasons why we could expect these results to be ungeneralisable are for example that women are often denied promotion because of them acting too “feminine” (Branson, 2007), suggesting that women who think like men are the only ones potentially being promoted by male colleagues. Additionally, women that participate in male dominated environments might adapt their own behaviour to potentially make gender differences disappear (Adams & Funk, 2012). Many scholars have considered this, and a wide range of different outcomes concerning different research topics are visible. So did Adams & Funk (2012) for example question whether the previously found differences between men and women in terms of their values within the general population, also applied within the boardroom. They found that the outcomes from the general population were generalisable (Adams & Funk, 2012). Studies considering the previously found differences in leadership styles between men and women within the general population compared to the boardroom, however found the opposite. Scholars found that this difference does not hold within the professional environment, concluding that the results from the general population are not generalisable (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Wajcman, 1996).

The causes of such differences, which might thus exist between the general population and specific organizational leadership roles such as board members, have been widely discussed. So does stereotypical behaviour become less when men and women are found in the same or similar organizational leadership role, as these roles are often paid jobs, and are generally provided with very clear guidelines on the expected behaviour by an individual positioned within this specific role. Within early stages of the experience within an organization, the leaders are therefore socialized within their specific role (Feldman, 1976; Terborg, 1977; Wanous, 1977). Additionally, it is assumed that men and women are selected for certain organizational leadership roles based on the same or a similar set of organizational criteria, therefore further decreasing the chances of the men and women occupying those roles being substantially different from one another. It is therefore reasonable to assume that due to the socialization into specific organizational leadership roles, the ones that occupy these positions, could potentially differ very little from one another (Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

The argument that gender roles as we see them in general society may not exist when men and women are in equal organizational leadership roles is also supported by the consideration of Kanter (1977), focusing specifically on a structural interpretation of behaviour. According to Kanter (1977), obvious gender differences in the behaviour of those within organizational leadership roles are the product of the differences in structural positions of genders within an organization. As women are more often found in positions that hold a lack of power or opportunities to improve, they will also reflect this lack of power within their behaviour. For men the same would apply, however from an alternative

perspective. The reasoning therefore suggests that if men and women would find themselves in the same or a similar position in terms of power and status, they would behave similarly, even though differences in behaviour exist between men and women like suggested by social role theory when not controlled by their organizational leadership role (Kanter, 1977).

The same, or similar, reasoning is also given by scholars who investigated this generalisability of ethical sensitivity from the general population. For example, it has been repeatedly confirmed that both men and women, within the general population, show a higher degree of ethical sensitivity when it comes to potential wrongs to themselves compared to potential wrongs to others. This was concluded specifically for people in the general population, but also applied for those within the boardroom (Jones, 1991; Rettinger & Hastie, 2001). Additionally, no difference was found between male and female board members in terms of ethical sensitivity specifically towards shareholders (Simga-Mugan et al., 2005). The cause of this is also attributed to the socialization processes that male and female board members face equally. This means that due to their similarity in function, training, and professional setting, they are assumed to respond similarly in decision making procedures (Betz et al., 1989). Based on these considerations, it could therefore be assumed that female board members do not behave more ethically than male board members because of their organisational leadership role, despite the existing differences between the two genders in the general population. The following can therefore be hypothesized:

Hypothesis 2: As a board member, women will not behave more ethically than men.

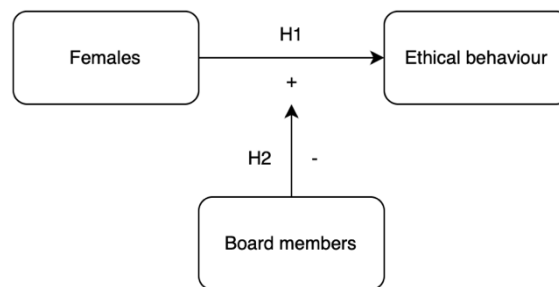


Figure 2 - Conceptual Model Hypothesis 2

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The research focused on identifying how men and women differ in their ethical behaviour (H1) and specifically when controlled for their organizational leadership role as a board member (H2). To research the hypothesised relationships, males and females from the general Dutch population, and Dutch male and female board members, were included in the research sample. For the sample from the general population, males, and females from the Master programme in Business administration at Radboud University Nijmegen were randomly approached through WhatsApp, LinkedIn and e-mail. In addition, this sample was expanded by approaching the general Dutch population at random through social media platforms LinkedIn and Facebook. Through a shared message on these platforms, potential respondents were invited to participate in the study. In doing so, participation was completely anonymous and voluntary. For the sample from the board members, male and female board members from small-to medium sized Dutch companies were approached, as these individuals were most likely more approachable than those from the larger Dutch public limited companies, potentially increasing the response rate. For this response rate to be improved further, a regional perimeter was considered specifically focussing on the Eastern part of the Netherlands in the Province of Gelderland. Potential respondents and companies with boards of directors were approached via LinkedIn, telephone, and e-mail with information about the study and the request for participation. Upon agreement from the contact person, further information was shared regarding the participation.

3.2. Research method

To determine the effect of gender on ethical behaviour, an experimental research method by means of a vignette study, was used as the method of research. Within studies focusing on ethical behaviour, overcoming the desire of a respondent to give socially desirable answers rather than honest ones can be very difficult. These studies, considering the ethical behaviour of individuals based on attitude measures were previously criticized, as these socially desirable answers are more apparent to be given and might therefore lead to inaccurate results compared to true reality (Burstin et al., 1980). Vignettes are therefore a very useful technique when aiming for honest results, as they are concrete but short stories to which the subjects can respond in a variety of different formats. They are often used when researching complex subjects, which are more difficult to observe within the field (Cavanaugh & Fritzsche, 1985). An explicit advantage of a vignette is their aim at the representation of a certain situation. Within ethics research this is considered very important, as the asking of general questions results most likely in responses which are very predictable (Robertson & Anderson, 1993). Often respondents also perceive a vignette as more interesting and feel involved comparing it to more abstract questions. This will also again improve the honesty of the responses and therefore the representativeness (Robertson & Anderson, 1993). Just as with other research methods, vignettes are also subject to

interpretation and errors. Therefore, when using vignettes for researching attitudes and behaviours, multiple are often considered to be able to improve the reliability and validity of the research method and its results (Robertson & Anderson, 1993). A total of four vignettes were therefore constructed for this study, which are shown below in Table 1 - Vignettes Ethical Behaviour. Each of the vignettes was constructed based on previous research as considered in the theoretical framework of this paper. The Dutch translations to these vignettes can be found in Appendix I – Vignettes in Dutch.

Vignettes Ethical Behaviour	
<i>Vignette 1</i>	<i>Vignette 2</i>
<p>Imagine that your company, ABC Inc., is in the process of bringing in a major customer. As a board you are presented with the proposal to close this large and important deal, and you are asked for your approval. The proposal looks good and fits your company completely. The manager who presents the proposal comments that he found out some interesting facts through an intermediary about the proposal which the competitor, XYZ Inc., will be offering to the potential customer. Adjustments based on this information would make the proposal even more competitive and increases its chances of success.</p> <p>As a board member, what would you do?</p> <p>A. I would reject the proposal as presented. <i>(unethical)</i></p> <p>B. I would approve the proposal as presented. <i>(ethical)</i></p>	<p>Imagine you are a board member at a company. An acquaintance, Peter, is the owner of a small consultancy firm and he has expressed an interest in doing business with the company for which you are a board member. You meet Peter at an event, and he suggests taking you and your partner out to dinner to a well-known Michelin star restaurant. In exchange he asks you to put in a good word about his consultancy firm at the next board meeting.</p> <p>As a board member, what would you do?</p> <p>A. I would accept the invitation. <i>(unethical)</i></p> <p>B. I would reject the invitation. <i>(ethical)</i></p>
Based on: <i>Wittmer (1992)</i>	Based on: <i>Chonko & Hunt (1985)</i>
<i>Vignette 3</i>	<i>Vignette 4</i>
<p>Imagine you are a board member of a company, and you are asked for your advice on a possible deal with a potential major client. This customer, ABC Inc., has approached your company, expressing interest in your most comprehensive product. They are about to purchase this product. However, your company's sales department thinks that ABC Inc. might not have a use for all the extra features of the product, and doubts whether they should offer another, less extensive, version.</p> <p>As a board member, what would you do?</p> <p>A. I would advise to sell the product. <i>(unethical)</i></p>	<p>Imagine being a board member of a company on a business trip abroad and it turns out that your good friend, and business associate, Maria, is also on a business trip and staying in the same hotel. Together, over some drinks and snacks, you shortly discuss some business, but mostly catch up on your private lives. The total bill amounts to just under 50 euros. Upon returning home, you must decide whether to add this bill to the expense claim for your business trip.</p> <p>As a board member, what would you do?</p> <p>A. I would claim the costs. <i>(unethical)</i></p> <p>B. I would not claim the costs. <i>(ethical)</i></p>

B. I would advise to offer the other, less extensive,
version. (*ethical*)

Based on: *Chonko & Hunt (1985)*

Based on: *Cumming et al. (2015)*

Table 1 - Vignettes Ethical Behaviour

Vignettes are often used to directly assess the behaviour of a subject, specifically in sensitive situations (Haire, 1950), like ethical ones. This could potentially activate, as previously mentioned, the desire of a subject to present him- or herself in a more favourable way by providing for a socially desirable answer rather than an honest one (Robertson & Anderson, 1993). This so-called social desirability bias can be reduced mainly by phrasing the behavioural intentional questions in the third-, rather than the first person (Randall & Fernandes, 1991). However, for this study the direct ethical behaviour of men and women is specifically considered, rather than their perceptions on the behaviours of others. Accordingly, a conscious decision was made to present the vignettes in the first person, asking respondents what they would do in a certain situation. This did however increase the likelihood of socially desirable answers being given and therefore, to reduce this possibility, (potential) respondents to the study were told that the study considered “the potential differences in behaviour between male and female board members”. All naming of the actual specific subject in terms of behaviour, namely ethical behaviour, was thereby omitted in the communication prior to data collection. This approach could again reduce the possibility of socially desirable answers (Cohen et al., 1993). After the data collection, the respondents were given additional information regarding the actual specific topic of the research. Additionally, to reduce the potential of socially desirable answers even further, respondents considered the vignettes in total anonymity.

In addition to the distribution of the vignettes among the respondents, a total of six interviews were conducted with both male and female board members. These interviews were chosen as a complementary research method to generate additional in-depth information (Jick, 1979) from the respondents to the vignettes. The focus of these interviews was on obtaining more in-depth information regarding the motivations of the choices made on the questions belonging to the vignettes. However, based on the analysis of the interview transcripts made, it was decided not to include the interviews in the analysis, due to incomplete results. Despite asking focused questions, the answers remained superficial, and no patterns could be obtained from the information. Also, despite not mentioning the concept of ethical behaviour, it appeared to become clear to respondents, which gave the impression that they were cautious in answering the questions. The interview questions can be found in Appendix IV – Interview Questions and the interview transcripts in Appendix V – Interview transcripts (Dutch).

3.3. Variables

A total of three variables were identified based on the hypotheses, and were included in the

study. The independent variables gender and board member consisted of men and women, and male and female board members. To validate these aspects, prior to the research, respondents of the study were asked to confirm. Additionally, the dependent variable ethical behaviour was included in the study. The respondents of the study were asked to consider the different vignettes provided for, and they were questioned regarding the ethicality of the situation outlined. Based on the question: “As a board member, what would you do?” the respondents were asked to consider two answer options, one option being unethical (A) and the other option being more ethical (B). In order not to overburden the respondents in the information and response options given, but also not to give too much room to make individual assumptions, the vignettes and response options were drawn up in sufficient detail to provide for this, as also previously suggested by several scholars (Cavanaugh & Fritzsche, 1985; Hox et al., 1991; Hyman & Steiner, 1996).

To be able to correctly include these previously defined variables in the analysis of the data, they were valued in the following way. First, the independent variable gender was valued at 0 for men and 1 for women. In the analysis, this variable was labelled *Female* to simplify its interpretation. In addition, the independent variable board member was valued at 0 for non-board members and 1 for board members. Lastly, the dependent variable ethical behaviour was valued at 0 for unethical behaviour and 1 for ethical behaviour. To aggregate the results of the different vignettes and establish the dependent variable ethical behaviour, averages were drawn from the answers given. Each ethical answer to a vignette represents .25 of the average answer to all vignettes. For example, a mean of .75 is consistent with three ethical answers and one unethical answer.

3.4. Method of analysis

The aim of this study was to determine whether gender substantially influences the ethical behaviour of a person, and whether this potential relationship would also uphold when being within a specific organizational leadership role as a board member. To test these different relationships, the individual effect of gender on ethical behaviour (H1), and the interaction effect of gender and board membership on ethical behaviour (H2) were considered by means of a linear regression analysis. The regression analysis assumes a linear relationship between the dependent variable and the explanatory, independent, variable(s) and considers the effect sizes of these (potential) relationships. Based on the regression analysis, several values were considered to analyse the results. The *R*-value provided for an indication on the correlation between the dependent and explanatory variable(s), the *R*²-value showed the extent to which the variance of the dependent variable could be explained by the explanatory variable(s), and the ANOVA *p*-value provided for more information regarding the usefulness of the model as tested. In addition, the *B*-values were considered for an indication on the effect sizes, showing the average effect on the dependent variable when the independent variable increases with one standard deviation and when all other variables are kept constant. To determine the significance of these *B*-

values, also their corresponding p -values were considered. The significances of the p -values were considered by means of an alpha set at .05 based on a 95% confidence interval (CI) and a significance was assumed with $p < .05$ (Field, 2018; Hair et al., 2019).

In addition to the regression analysis to determine the main effects, a supplementary analysis by means of a t-test to compare the means (M) was conducted for each of the vignettes separately. By comparing the means of the different groups, an attempt was made to determine whether there was a significant difference between the outcomes of one group, men, compared to the other, women. Determining this significant difference was done using two test hypotheses, (1) the null hypothesis assuming that no difference exists between the groups and (2) the alternative hypothesis assuming that a difference exists between the groups. The null hypothesis was accepted when the (two-tailed) p -value was greater than the established alpha. This alpha was set at .05 based on a 95% confidence interval (CI). The alternative hypothesis was accepted when the (two-tailed) p -value was smaller than the established alpha of .05 (Field, 2018).

4. Results

4.1. Regression analysis

A sample of 173 respondents was drawn from the general Dutch population including both board members as non-board members, and men and women. In total, the sample contained 75 males and 98 females, respectively representing 43.4% males and 56.6% females, which provides for some degree of representation of the general Dutch population as defined by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). According to CBS, the ratio in the Dutch population is about 49.4% men and 50.6% women (CBS, 2023). Out of the total sample of 173 respondents, 149 were non-board members and 24 were board members. Due to the mandatory fill our requirements for each of the questions related to the different vignettes, no missing data was present, which therefore required no further actions on this part (Hair et al., 2019). On average, men and women collectively answered the different vignettes quite ethically, with an average mean (M) of .6749 for the dependent variable *Ethical_Behaviour*. Two possible response options were given for each of the vignettes, which were coded as 0 for unethical and 1 for ethical in the data analysis. Hence, the minimum and maximum are therefore equal to these values. The standard deviation for the variable *Ethical_Behaviour* was 0.24735.

Descriptive statistics			
<i>Sample Size N</i>	173	100%	<i>Ethical_Behaviour</i>
Men (N)	75	43.4%	Mean
Women (N)	98	56.6%	
			Std. Deviation
<i>Sample Size N</i>	173	100%	Min.
Non-Board Member	149	86.1%	Max.
Board Member	24	13.9%	

Table 2 - Descriptive Statistics

In addition to the descriptive statistics, the correlations between the different variables were considered, presented in Table 3 - Correlations. These correlations show that ethical behaviour correlates positively with females (.266), suggesting that females have a more positive effect on ethical behaviour than men. Additionally ethical behaviour also positively correlates with board member (.190), assuming that board members in general have a more positive effect on ethical behaviour than non-board members. Finally, ethical behaviour and female board membership also correlate positively with each other (.175), suggesting that female board members, compared to male board members, have a more positive effect on ethical behaviour. This would be consistent with the theory from the general population, but against the expectations of the second hypothesis.

Correlations				
	<i>Ethical_Behaviour</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Board_Member</i>	<i>Female*Board_Member</i>
<i>Ethical_Behaviour</i>	1			
<i>Female</i>	.266*	1		

<i>Board_Member</i>	.190*	-.054	1	
<i>Female*Board_Member</i>	.175*	.239*	.680*	1

* Sig. $p < .05$

Table 3 - Correlations

Hypothesis one specifically states that: “Women behave more ethically compared to men”. The regression analysis was conducted in order to analyse the relationship between the independent variable, *Female*, and the dependent variable, *Ethical_Behaviour*. Table 4 - Regression Analysis Results shows the results of the regression analysis, in which *Model 1* tests for the relationship as just described, and from which the following could be derived. Based on the *R*-value of .266, the degree of correlation between these variables is somewhat low. R^2 indicates that the variance of the dependent variable (*Ethical_Behaviour*) being explained by the explanatory variable (*Female*) is only 7.0% (.070), and therefore very little explanatory power is added by the independent variable. In addition, a deviation from the zero category men is indeed found to be existent and significant, as the *B*-value of .132 shows a significant *p*-value of $< .001$. This reveals that there is a rather small positive effect of *Female* on *Ethical_Behaviour*, displaying that women indeed seem to behave more ethically compared to men, as also expected based on the stated hypothesis. The model as tested here, according to the ANOVA analysis, also has sufficient explanatory power with its *p*-value of $< .001$.

Regression Analysis Results				
	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	B-value	Sig.	B-value	Sig.
<i>Female</i>	.132	$< .001$.147	$< .001$
<i>Board_Member</i>			.179	.017
<i>Female*Board_Member</i>			-.063	.542
<i>R</i>	.266		.338	
<i>R Square (R²)</i>	.070		.114	
<i>ANOVA</i>	$< .001$		$< .001$	

Table 4 - Regression Analysis Results

Hypothesis two specifically states that: “As a board member, women will not behave more ethically than men”. The relationship as described in this hypothesis considers an interaction effect of the variables *Female* and *Board_Member*, in relation to the dependent variable, *Ethical_Behaviour*. Table 4 - Regression Analysis Results shows the results of the regression analysis, in which *Model 2* tests for the relationship as just described, and from which the following could be derived. Based on the *R*-value of .338, the degree of correlation between the different variables is considered somewhat medium. The R^2 implies that 11.4% (.114) of the variance of the dependent variable *Ethical_Behaviour* is explained by the explanatory variables. The interaction effect (*Female*Board_Member*) which is tested provides for a *B*-value of -.063, indicating that there is a small negative effect of the interaction

*Female*Board_Member* towards *Ethical_Behaviour*, suggesting that female board members seem to behave less ethically than male board members. However, the *p*-value of .542 indicates an insignificant interaction effect, revealing that there is no significant difference between male and female board members in terms of their ethical behaviour. This indicates that the expectations as set through the established hypothesis are found to be supported. The absence of the interaction effect is also shown in Figure 3 - Interaction Effect Plot below. The figure does however show that both female board members as female non-board members behave more ethically compared to male board- and non-board members. As shown above from the results, this difference in ethical behaviour is thus significant only for non-board members.

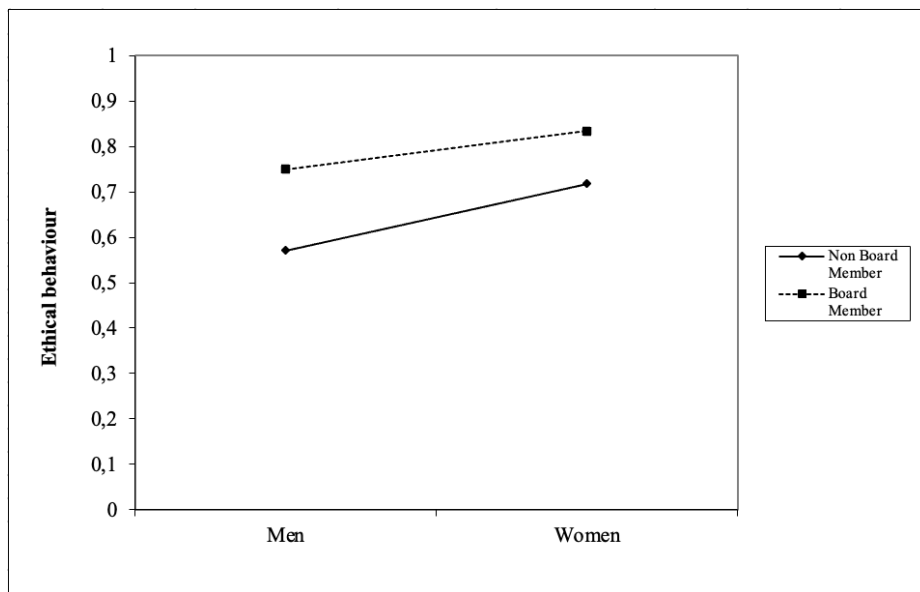


Figure 3 - Interaction Effect Plot

Additionally, considering the two main effects of *Female* on *Ethical_Behaviour* and *Board_Member* on *Ethical_Behaviour*, both show small effects with *B*-values of .147 and .179. Both are also significant, as the *p*-value for *Female* is < .001 and for *Board_Member* is .017. This reveals that women in general behave more ethically than men, as also stated and confirmed based on hypothesis one. Additionally, being a board member also seems to result in a higher extent of ethical behaviour than when not being a board member, as can also be seen based on Figure 3 - Interaction Effect Plot. The model as tested here, based on the ANOVA analysis, also has sufficient explanatory power with a *p*-value of < .001.

4.2. Supplementary analyses

In addition to the regression analysis, several t-tests were also conducted. These t-tests were performed on the different vignettes individually, and in addition were also separated by target population. First, the responses to the vignettes were considered from the general population, and then specifically for the board members. The average responses given by men and women, and male and

female board members, were compared. Since each of the vignettes is based on different contextual factors, and it appeared from theory that these could be of great importance to the possible ethical behaviour of board members (Adams & Funk, 2012), these additional tests were chosen.

Looking first at the different responses to the vignettes by the general population (a total of 149 respondents), which can be found in Table 5 - T-test Analysis Results I, it can be said, based on the averages, that both men and women tend more towards the ethical responses than the unethical ones. Men on average behaved least ethically in the situation as proposed in *Vignette4*, with a *M* of .5079, and women in the situation as proposed in *Vignette1* with a *M* of .5814. In all cases, women generally respond more ethically than men, although sometimes this difference between men and women is very small, like in *Vignette1* and *Vignette2*. The corresponding *p*-values for these vignettes indicate that these differences are so small that they are considered insignificant. This shows that women, specifically for these two vignettes, do not behave more ethically compared to men. For *Vignette3* and *Vignette4*, these differences in behaviour are larger on average, which is also reflected in the corresponding significance values. In both cases, the *p*-values of .020 for *Vignette3* and .003 for *Vignette4* show that the differences between men and women are significant. This means that women do behave more ethically compared to men in these respects.

T-test Analysis Results I			
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Vignette1	Men	0.5397	0.615
	Women	0.5814	
Vignette2	Men	0.6349	0.079
	Women	0.7674	
Vignette 3	Men	0.6032	0.020
	Women	0.7791	
Vignette4	Men	0.5079	0.003
	Women	0.7442	

Table 5 - T-test Analysis Results I

Looking second at the responses to the vignettes by the board members (a total of 24 respondents), as can be found in Table 6 - T-test Analysis Results II, the average behaviour, for both male as female board members, tends more towards ethical- than unethical behaviour. On average, relative to the other vignettes, men behaved least ethically in the situation as proposed in *Vignette3_BM* and *Vignette4_BM*, and women in *Vignette1_BM*, all with *Ms* of .6667. Interestingly, male board members behave more ethically in relation to the situation as proposed in *Vignette1_BM* than female board members. However, with a *p*-value of .670, this difference was assumed insignificant. In addition, it is also noteworthy that for *Vignette2_BM*, the averages are exactly equal, showing an insignificant difference. Also, for *Vignette4_BM*, with a *p*-value of .670, an insignificant difference was found. The only significant difference was found for *Vignette3_BM*, potentially caused by the overall average of

exactly 1.000 for the ethical behaviour of female board members. Clearly, female board members behave more ethically than male board members in this specific situation as proposed in *Vignette3_BM*.

T-test Analysis Results II			
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Vignette1_BM	Men	0.7500	0.670
	Women	0.6667	
Vignette2_BM	Men	0.9167	1.000
	Women	0.9167	
Vignette 3_BM	Men	0.6667	0.028
	Women	1.0000	
Vignette4_BM	Men	0.6667	0.670
	Women	0.7500	

Table 6 - T-test Analysis Results II

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore whether the differences in ethical behaviour between men and women, as observed in the general population, can also be generalised with respect to a specific organisational leadership role as a board member. From the general population it is known that women generally behave more ethically compared to men. These gender differences are thought to stem from socialization processes individuals face from childhood, shaping their behaviour, as theorized in social theories. Through these processes, women form a higher degree of ethical sensitivity, resulting in more ethical decision-making and therefore behaviour. Based on this, it could therefore be assumed that women in board member positions could potentially have a positive effect on the overall ethical behaviour of organisations, through their ethical sensitivity. Often questions have however been raised concerning the possibility of generalizing the results from the general population towards specific organizational leadership roles. Contextual factors related to these organisational leadership roles are presumed to be of such influence that they have the potential of softening the gender differences as experienced within the general population. The expectation which arose was therefore that women, when in a board member position, would not behave more ethically than men. Based on the study, these expectations were indeed found to be correct, in which female board members thus do not behave more ethically than male board members. Increasing the gender diversity within the board of directors will therefore not necessarily lead to improved organisational ethical behaviour.

A first explanation for the non-generalizability of the results based on social theories could be that these do not consider the potential influence of contextual factors on the behaviour of individuals, whereas the behaviour of the ones in specific organizational leadership roles are expected to be influenced by those. Potentially, board members could be influenced by the specific organizational environment, in which we are currently seeing a trend regarding the ethical behaviour of organizations. Predominantly fraudulent and unethical practices are strongly condemned by society, often resulting in negative consequences for organizations when they do engage in this (Ameen et al., 1996; Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014). Because of these environmental pressures, board members are very much focused on preventing these negative consequences by encouraging ethical organizational practices and activities through, for example, their decision-making, which is seen as an important factor in improving ethical organizational behaviour (Schwartz, 2016). These pressures could therefore potentially cause organisational socialisation perils, equally incentivising male, and female board members to improve their ethical behaviour for the benefit of the organisation. By behaving ethically as board members, this can offer as an example to other employees of the organisation who are more directly involved with the execution of the organisational activities. For instance also because board member behaviour seems to set the tone for manager-level decision-making (Wowak et al., 2021). Contextual factors may therefore cause board members' priorities to change, in this case making their behaviour more ethical, and provoking ethical beliefs which are separate from their gender. As a result, higher extents of ethical

behaviour by board members compared to non-board members could become reality, and also a smaller difference in ethical behaviour between male and female board members compared to male and female non-board members might become visible.

Besides the contextual factors that may influence the non-generalizability, there could also be internal organizational factors that could influence the behaviour of employees and therefore board members. Social theories also do not take such factors into account in their reasoning. An important element herein could be the organizational culture of the organization, which provides for the principles on what's right and wrong, governing the stimulation of the behaviour of employees when engaged in organizational activities (Ewin, 1991; Sinclair, 1993). The organizational culture could also influence the behaviour of board members regardless of their gender, with the principles as established by the organization at the forefront. It is possible that because of the contextual, environmental, factors the organization also adapts its culture to the pressures they feel from society to behave ethically. This may further increase and improve the ethical behaviour of board members, in which gender differences do not matter so much, because of an overarching higher interest from the organization.

Furthermore, another possible explanation could be because social theories do also not consider possible individual factors that could be of influence on the ethical behaviour of men and women. Men and women can both develop personal values and beliefs that are independent of their gender and stem, for example, from their character or their responsibilities. These personal values and beliefs can create values of importance, allowing individuals to assign certain degrees of importance to a specific situation (Senger, 1970; Sikula, 1973). Because of the equal responsibility male and female board members have, they could create equal values and beliefs, and could therefore assign equal values of importance to certain ethical situations. In addition, they could also create these beliefs based on organisational and personal reputation, further increasing the value of importance, and allowing male and female board members to behave similarly in ethical situations to avoid organisational and personal reputational harm. These responsibilities and factors regarding organisational and personal reputation could possibly also explain the higher level of ethical behaviour by board members compared to non-board members. These individual factors could also explain why female board members react more ethically than male board members towards the concept of customer relations, as defined in *Vignette3*. For example, Wowak (2021) suggests that female board members place a higher value on not harming stakeholders because they have a certain feeling of responsibility towards these groups. For this study, it could be possible that female respondents placed a higher value of importance on this concept, despite men having the same responsibilities.

5.1. Limitations and further research

This paper is subject to several limitations that should be considered during the interpretation of the different results. First, the research was conducted within a limited timeframe, which could

possibly affect the results and outcomes of this research. Due to this limited time frame, there may be a possibility that an incomplete picture of the phenomenon as studied was obtained. Complex topics, such as ethical behaviour of board members, could be variable over a period of time and subject to changes and developments. Currently, there is a very strong trend concerning ethical behaviour, with developments occurring in rapid succession. The behaviour of board members could therefore fluctuate in the short term, making it more difficult to draw a reliable picture of broader patterns. Future research could therefore focus on more long-term research, which would help to improve the understanding of consistencies and trends in board members' ethical behaviour. Possibly, a longer time frame could also allow a larger number of respondents to be approached in order to increase the sample size. The relatively smaller sample size, especially for the population of board members, could have the limitation that the answers given are potentially based on coincidence. By assuming a larger sample size, this could potentially be prevented, and the reliability of the study could be further improved.

Another limitation which relates specifically to the sample from the general population is the method chosen to approach respondents via social platforms. Approaching respondents through these platforms may lead to an unclear picture about the participants in the study. Not everyone actively uses or has access to these platforms, which may limit the sampling frame. This may lead to biases in the results and may limit the generalisability of the findings. In addition, privacy and trust issues around social platforms could pose problems. However, the expectations are that the effects of the chosen approaching method are limited for this study, as the study focuses on the general population. In addition, the anonymity and voluntary participation basis could avoid privacy and trust issues. For future studies, various more insightful sampling channels could be considered, which could lead to a more precise and accurate understanding of the sample. By doing so, the representativeness and reliability of the study could potentially be improved.

An additional possible limitation could be related to the specifically preferred regional perimeter of the study. Because a regional perimeter was chosen, the possibility could exist that the board members' ethical behaviour was influenced by regional cultural influences. Ethical behaviour is an important part of cultural norms and values within a society and could therefore potentially lead to different interpretations and considerations, resulting in a difference in behaviour. These cultural differences exist between countries, but could also be present between different regions, making that the behaviour of board members in certain regions could possibly be influenced in a different way compared to, for instance, other regions or the national average. This possible influence might make the results of this study specifically less generalisable towards the Netherlands in general. Future research could therefore focus not only on the regional level, but also on the national level to improve the generalisability, because regional cultural influences would most likely ensure less influence here. To further expand the research scope, differences between countries could also be investigated, thereby enabling cross-country comparison. In this way, a better insight could be gained into the possible effects of culture on the ethical behaviour of board members and the potential differences between countries.

This could help determine whether culture has any effect at all on the ethical behaviour of board members, and in which aspects of the cultures the differences appear to be affecting.

A final possible limitation for this study would be related to the potential for socially desirable responses to ethical topics. For example, due to social pressures and the complexity of the concept of ethical behaviour, respondents might be more likely to give socially desirable answers. Despite the several measures taken, the possibility of this remains and would mainly cause problems if one group, in this case men, were more prone to this than the other group, women. Since women are seen as more ethical from the general population, men's socially desirable answers could provide a problem when they are suddenly much more ethical than expected. This would create a distorted picture of reality, which could make the study less reliable and valid. For this study, however, the chances of this are expected to be relatively low, because of the several measures taken, and mainly also because of the chosen research method, the experimental approach by means of vignettes. Nevertheless, there may of course still be the possibility of respondents unconsciously exhibiting socially desirable behaviour.

For future research, it would therefore be important to further improve tools for researching ethical behaviour. Perhaps this would also make conducting interviews to obtain more background information on the choices made more meaningful and insightful. One possibility could be that during the research of ethical behaviour, topics that are different from ethical ones could also be questioned, perhaps "covering" the actual ethical topics. This might make these sensitive topics less conspicuous, making respondents less likely to realise that they are considering ethical topics, possibly reducing the likelihood of socially desirable answers. The fact that, despite the measures taken, respondents still noticed that ethical topics were involved, was also one of the reasons why the interviews conducted for this study became unusable. The proposed consideration could potentially have avoided this.

5.2. Practical relevance

This study on the difference in ethical behaviour between male and female board members has practical relevance for both board members and organisations in general. First, the study offers important insights into gender-related aspects regarding ethical behaviour of board members. By demonstrating a generally insignificant difference in ethical behaviour between male and female board members, the ideas from social theories based on gender stereotypes and prejudices are challenged specifically in the context of ethical behaviour. This has an important implication for the selection and evaluation of board members, as its focus could shift even more to qualities and competences important for ethical behaviour in organisational leadership roles other than someone's gender. In addition, a practical relevance for companies would be not to assume gender differences as defined in social theories when hoping to create certain influences, such as on ethical organisational behaviour. Several factors, such as contextual and individual ones, could potentially have a substantial influence on board members' behaviour, making social theories unsure.

Specifically for board members, this research offers an opportunity to critically reflect on one's own perceptions and behaviour towards ethical issues. This research emphasises that ethical behaviour does not depend purely on a person's gender but could potentially also be influenced by for example individual norms and values, and a person's professional responsibilities. Board members can thus be enabled to become aware of the prejudices and stereotypes they might have individually. In this way, they can critically assess their own ethical behaviour, and adjust it where necessary to the various influencing factors. In addition, it is also important for board members to become aware of the role model function they hold in relation to other employees, so that they can indirectly have a positive and supportive effect on the organisation's ethical behaviour by setting the right ethical example themselves.

6. Conclusions

The central research question as established for this study was:

“How do men and women differ in ethical behaviour when controlled by their organizational leadership role as a board member?”

This question was asked because of the existent doubts concerning the possible generalisability of the results from the general population as based on social theories, about the difference in ethical behaviour between men and women in relation to the specific organizational leadership role as board member. For the question to be researched, an experimental vignette study was used to consider the differences in ethical behaviour between men and women from the general population, and specifically of men and women within directors' positions. Because of the support found for the expectations arising from the different hypotheses, this study was able to confirm that men and women do not differ in ethical behaviour when controlled by their organisational leadership roles as board members. The main contribution therefore is that increasing gender diversity within boards of directors will not necessarily lead to improved organisational ethical behaviour, as female board members do not significantly differ in their ethical behaviour compared to male board members. It is therefore important for organisations, and thereby board members, to become aware that gender does not need to be the determining factor in the behaviour, and in this case ethical behaviour, of board members. Therefore, one should not blindly rely on social theories, but mainly on the possible other effects that might influence the behaviour of board members in specific situations.

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Appendix I – Vignettes in Dutch

Vignettes Ethical Behaviour (Dutch)	
<i>Vignette 1</i>	<i>Vignette 2</i>
<p>Stel u voor dat jullie bedrijf, ABC Inc., bezig is met het binnenhalen van een belangrijke klant. Als bestuur krijgt u het voorstel om deze grote en belangrijke deal te sluiten voorgelegd en wordt er gevraagd om uw goedkeuring. Het voorstel ziet er goed uit en past perfect bij jullie bedrijf. De manager die het voorstel presenteert, geeft aan dat hij via een tussenpersoon interessante feiten heeft ontdekt over het voorstel dat de concurrent, XYZ Inc., aan de potentiële klant zal aanbieden. Aanpassingen op basis van deze informatie zouden het voorstel nog concurrerende maken en de kans op succes vergroten.</p> <p>Als bestuurslid, wat zou u doen?</p> <p>A. Ik zou het voorstel goedkeuren zoals gepresenteerd.</p> <p>B. Ik zou het voorstel afkeuren zoals gepresenteerd.</p>	<p>Stel u voor dat u bestuurslid bent van een bedrijf. Een kennis, Peter, is de eigenaar van een klein adviesbureau en hij heeft interesse getoond in zaken doen met het bedrijf waarvan u bestuurslid bent. U ontmoet Peter op een evenement en hij stelt voor om u en uw partner mee uit eten te nemen naar een bekend Michelin-sterrenrestaurant. In ruil daarvoor vraagt hij u om een goed woordje te doen over zijn adviesbureau tijdens de volgende bestuursvergadering.</p> <p>Als bestuurslid, wat zou u doen?</p> <p>A. Ik zou de uitnodiging accepteren.</p> <p>B. Ik zou de uitnodiging afwijzen.</p>
Based on: <i>Wittmer (1992)</i>	Based on: <i>Chonko & Hunt (1985)</i>
<i>Vignette 3</i>	<i>Vignette 4</i>
<p>Stel u voor dat u een bestuurslid bent van een bedrijf en er wordt om uw advies gevraagd over een mogelijke deal met een potentiële grote klant. Deze klant, ABC Inc., heeft uw bedrijf benaderd en interesse getoond in jullie meest uitgebreide product. Ze staan op het punt om dit product aan te schaffen. Echter, de verkoopafdeling van uw bedrijf denkt dat ABC Inc. mogelijk geen gebruik zal maken van alle extra functies van het product, en twijfelt of ze een andere, minder uitgebreide, versie moeten aanbieden.</p> <p>Als bestuurslid, wat zou u doen?</p> <p>A. Ik zou adviseren om het product te verkopen.</p> <p>B. Ik zou adviseren om de andere, minder uitgebreide, versie aan te bieden.</p>	<p>Stel u voor dat u een bestuurslid bent van een bedrijf tijdens een zakenreis in het buitenland en het blijkt dat uw goede vriendin en zakenpartner, Maria, ook op zakenreis is en verblijft in hetzelfde hotel. Samen bespreken jullie onder het genot van wat drankjes en hapjes kort wat zaken, maar voornamelijk praten jullie bij over jullie privélevens. De totale rekening bedraagt net iets minder dan 50 euro. Bij terugkomst moet u beslissen of u deze rekening moet toevoegen aan de onkostennota voor uw zakenreis.</p> <p>Als bestuurslid, wat zou u doen?</p> <p>A. Ik zou de kosten declareren.</p> <p>B. Ik zou de kosten niet declareren.</p>
Based on: <i>Chonko & Hunt (1985)</i>	Based on: <i>Cumming et al. (2015)</i>

Table 7 - Vignettes Ethical Behaviour (Dutch)

Appendix II – SPSS output regression analysis

		Statistics			
		Female	Ethical_Behaviour	Board_Member	Female*Board_Member
N	Valid	173	173	173	173
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		.5665	.6749	.1387	.0694
Median		1.0000	.7500	.0000	.0000
Mode		1.00	.75	.00	.00
Std. Deviation		.49700	.24735	.34667	.25481
Variance		.247	.061	.120	.065
Minimum		.00	.00	.00	.00
Maximum		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Figure 4 – Descriptive Statistics

		Female			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Men	75	43.4	43.4	43.4
	Women	98	56.6	56.6	100.0
Total		173	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5 - Statistics Gender_

		Board_Member			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non-Board Member	149	86.1	86.1	86.1
	Board Member	24	13.9	13.9	100.0
Total		173	100.0	100.0	

Figure 6 - Statistics Board_Member

		Ethical_Behaviour			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unethical	2	1.2	1.2	1.2
	.25	22	12.7	12.7	13.9
	.50	40	23.1	23.1	37.0
	.75	71	41.0	41.0	78.0
	Ethical	38	22.0	22.0	100.0
	Total	173	100.0	100.0	

Figure 7 - Statistics Ethical_Behaviour

Correlations

		Ethical_Behaviour	Female	Board_Member	Female*Board_Member
Pearson Correlation	Ethical_Behaviour	1.000	.266	.190	.175
	Female	.266	1.000	-.054	.239
	Board_Member	.190	-.054	1.000	.680
	Female*Board_Member	.175	.239	.680	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Ethical_Behaviour	.	<.001	.006	.010
	Female	.000	.	.241	.001
	Board_Member	.006	.241	.	.000
	Female*Board_Member	.010	.001	.000	.
N	Ethical_Behaviour	173	173	173	173
	Female	173	173	173	173
	Board_Member	173	173	173	173
	Female*Board_Member	173	173	173	173

Figure 8 - Correlations

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.266 ^a	.070	.065	.23917	.070	12.970	1	171	<.001
2	.338 ^b	.114	.099	.23483	.044	4.184	2	169	.017

a. Predictors: (Constant), Female

b. Predictors: (Constant), Female, Board_Member, Female*Board_Member

Figure 9 - Model Summary

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.742	1	.742	12.970	<.001 ^b
	Residual	9.781	171	.057		
	Total	10.523	172			
2	Regression	1.203	3	.401	7.273	<.001 ^c
	Residual	9.320	169	.055		
	Total	10.523	172			

a. Dependent Variable: Ethical_Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Female

c. Predictors: (Constant), Female, Board_Member, Female*Board_Member

Figure 10 - ANOVA

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.600	.028		57.936	<.001
	Female	.132	.037	.266	3.601	<.001
2	(Constant)	1.571	.030		53.114	<.001
	Female	.147	.039	.295	3.764	<.001
	Board_Member	.179	.074	.250	2.414	.017
	Female*Board_Member	-.063	.103	-.065	-.611	.542

a. Dependent Variable: Ethical_Behaviour

Figure 11 - Coefficients I

Appendix III – SPSS output t-test analysis

Statistics						
		Gender	Vignette1	Vignette2	Vignette3	Vignette4
N	Valid	149	149	149	149	149
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.58	.5638	.7114	.7047	.6443
Median		2.00	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000
Mode		2	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Std. Deviation		.496	.49759	.45464	.45772	.48034
Variance		.246	.248	.207	.210	.231
Minimum		1	.00	.00	.00	.00
Maximum		2	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Figure 12 - Statistics t-test I

Group Statistics						
		Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Vignette1	Men		63	.5397	.50243	.06330
	Women		86	.5814	.49622	.05351
Vignette2	Men		63	.6349	.48532	.06114
	Women		86	.7674	.42494	.04582
Vignette3	Men		63	.6032	.49317	.06213
	Women		86	.7791	.41731	.04500
Vignette4	Men		63	.5079	.50395	.06349
	Women		86	.7442	.43888	.04733

Figure 13 - Group Statistics t-test I

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Vignette1	Equal variances assumed	.835	.362	-.504	147	.615	-.04171	.08273	-.20520	.12177
	Equal variances not assumed			-.503	132.803	.616	-.04171	.08289	-.20566	.12223
Vignette2	Equal variances assumed	11.145	.001	-1.770	147	.079	-.13252	.07486	-.28045	.01541
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.734	122.917	.085	-.13252	.07641	-.28377	.01873
Vignette3	Equal variances assumed	18.399	<.001	-2.353	147	.020	-.17590	.07477	-.32365	-.02814
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.293	120.014	.024	-.17590	.07672	-.32779	-.02400
Vignette4	Equal variances assumed	19.407	<.001	-3.048	147	.003	-.23625	.07752	-.38944	-.08306
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.983	122.458	.003	-.23625	.07919	-.39301	-.07949

Figure 14 - Independent Samples test I

		Statistics				
		Gender BM	Vignette1_B M	Vignette2_B M	Vignette3_B M	Vignette4_B M
N	Valid	24	24	24	24	24
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.50	.7083	.9167	.8333	.7083
Median		1.50	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000
Mode		1 ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Std. Deviation		.511	.46431	.28233	.38069	.46431
Variance		.261	.216	.080	.145	.216
Minimum		1	.00	.00	.00	.00
Maximum		2	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Figure 15 - Statistics t-test II

Group Statistics						
		Gender BM	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Vignette1_BM	Men		12	.7500	.45227	.13056
	Women		12	.6667	.49237	.14213
Vignette2_BM	Men		12	.9167	.28868	.08333
	Women		12	.9167	.28868	.08333
Vignette3_BM	Men		12	.6667	.49237	.14213
	Women		12	1.0000	.00000	.00000
Vignette4_BM	Men		12	.6667	.49237	.14213
	Women		12	.7500	.45227	.13056

Figure 16 - Group Statistics t-test II

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Vignette1_BM	Equal variances assumed	.741	.399	.432	22	.670	.08333	.19300	-.31692	.48358
	Equal variances not assumed			.432	21.843	.670	.08333	.19300	-.31708	.48375
Vignette2_BM	Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	.000	22	1.000	.00000	.11785	-.24441	.24441
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	22.000	1.000	.00000	.11785	-.24441	.24441
Vignette3_BM	Equal variances assumed	88.000	<.001	-2.345	22	.028	-.33333	.14213	-.62810	-.03857
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.345	11.000	.039	-.33333	.14213	-.64617	-.02050
Vignette4_BM	Equal variances assumed	.741	.399	-.432	22	.670	-.08333	.19300	-.48358	.31692
	Equal variances not assumed			-.432	21.843	.670	-.08333	.19300	-.48375	.31708

Figure 17 – Independent Samples test II

Appendix IV – Interview Questions

As described by Wittmer (1992), the ethical sensitivity of a person considers their ability to assign a relative importance to an ethical dimension within a specific situation. Based on the research conducted by different scholars, women are considered more ethically sensitive, and it could therefore be assumed that women assign a higher relative importance to ethical dimensions within certain situations. Women are expected to more often choose the more ethical option compared to men.

As the underlying cause of the choice made by a male or female board member could be of substantial value, additional questions were asked regarding the answers given during a small interview. The questions asked were based on and related to the definition of ethical sensitivity by Wittmer (1992).

1. What aspect(s) of the vignette defined your answer?
 - a. The aim of this question was to be able to find out some more about what the respondents specifically consider when they read the vignette, and what aspect(s) they use to make their final decision. This might potentially help to understand whether the respondent “picks up” the aspects which deal with ethicality.
2. What else did you consider when you decided upon the answer?
 - a. The aim of this question is to be able to find out some more about what the underlying reasons for the respondents were to decide upon their chosen answer. Potentially they for example considered their job experience, or personal feelings.