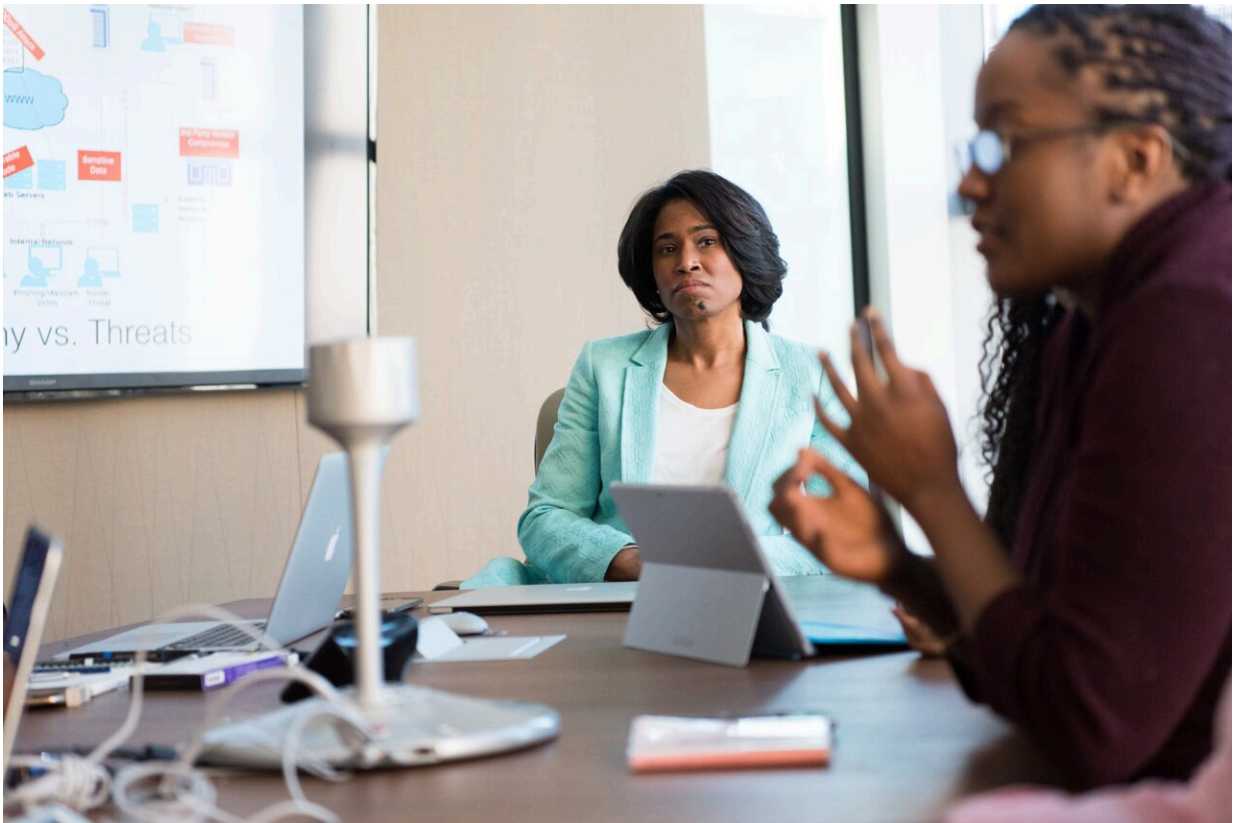


Women use various tactics to accomplish boardroom goals, according to study

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Women directors on Fortune 500 boards skillfully use tactics that enable them to display warmth, competence or both, allowing them to avoid backlash and meet specific aims, according to new Cornell University

ILR School research.

These tactics can help women directors achieve aims including diversifying conversations, clarifying perspectives and amplifying their expertise, and help them manage the "double-bind"— expectations for women to express both warmth and competence—to get things done in the boardroom, said Courtney L. McCluney, assistant professor of organizational behavior in the ILR School and second author of the research.

"Our study suggests that women directors expend an incredible amount of energy managing how and when they discuss matters, which can reduce the overall effectiveness of the board," McCluney said. "It further undermines the reason for diversifying the board. Do companies truly want a different perspective, or do they want visibly different directors who agree with the status quo?"

McCluney co-wrote the study, "Managing the Double Bind: Women Directors' Participation Tactics in the Gendered Boardroom," with Tiffany Trzebiatowski of Colorado State University and Morela Hernandez of the University of Michigan. The paper was published in *Organization Science*.

"In unpacking types of tactics, we develop a more complete understanding of women's experiences participating in male-dominated roles, and emphasize the need for scholars to incorporate a broader and more precise range of behaviors to account for within-gender descriptions of participation behaviors," the authors wrote.

The researchers discovered three groups of participation tactics by interviewing 43 women directors of publicly traded companies. Warmth-based tactics included asking questions and connecting with others on the board. Competence-based tactics required that women directors

assert their opinions and qualify their skills. Waiting to share their insight and checking with others outside of board meetings were labeled as hybrid tactics as they combined warmth and competence.

By examining how and when these directors managed the double bind with a group with which they had only several interactions in a year, the researchers found that the directors customized their tactics, depending on their goals. Warmth tactics worked best when trying to diversify conversations, for instance, and competence tactics worked best when amplifying their experience. When clarifying perspectives, both warmth and competence based tactics were most effective, participants said.

"Identifying what makes women effective participants on boards expands their influence on company decisions, which can be critical for [financial performance](#) and safety recalls," McCluney said.

Their work is timely given the current focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in organizations. Companies are increasingly focused on adding more [women](#) and members of other marginalized groups to their boards without considering whether these individuals will be free to participate and bring their expertise, McCluney said.

"Assessing the culture of boards and any governing body such as the U.S. Supreme Court is just as important as adding traditionally excluded members to its ranks," McCluney said. "Creating change from within will need to start with foundational changes in what it means to participate as a [director](#)."

More information: Tiffany Trzebiatowski et al, Managing the Double Bind: Women Directors' Participation Tactics in the Gendered Boardroom, *Organization Science* (2022). [DOI: 10.1287/orsc.2022.1599](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2022.1599)

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