

Karin Raes & Lieke Thijssen

# Making It to the Board



Building on Character

More information about this and other publications can be obtained from:

Karin Raes and Lieke Thijssen  
[info@makingittotheboard.com](mailto:info@makingittotheboard.com)  
[www.makingittotheboard.com](http://www.makingittotheboard.com)

© 2015 Karin Raes and Lieke Thijssen

Cover art: Studio Polkadot, Oudewater  
Internal design and typeset by: Solid-ontwerp.nl  
Printed and bound by: Wilco, Amersfoort  
The copyrights to the Photographs in this book are vested in the photographers, M. Paalvast-Overkamp and R. Paalvast

ISBN 978-90-823982-0-5  
NUR 801

Translated by: Rianne van Elswijk

Originally published in The Netherlands by Academic Service in 2013.

All rights reserved. All intellectual property rights – such as copyrights and database rights – in respect of this publication are expressly reserved. These rights are vested in the authors.

Without prejudice to the exceptions under or pursuant to the Dutch Copyright Act (Auteurswet), no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, through photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the publisher's prior consent.

For use of specific sections of this publication for anthologies, readers or other compilations (Article 16 of the Dutch Copyright Act), please contact the authors. For use of a specific section of this publication for commercial purposes, please contact the publisher/authors.

Though this publication has been compiled with the utmost care, the absence of any (printing) errors or inaccuracies and omissions cannot be guaranteed, and therefore, the author(s)/publisher and the editor(s) accept no liability for the consequences of any such inaccuracies and/or omissions.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the publisher's prior consent.

# Contents

Forewords	7
<i>A female top executive and a male top executive speak</i>	
Introduction Women on the board: a lack of ambition, or a lack of skill...?	13
<b>1 About the board</b>	21
What the board has to say about it: How do men and women perceive each other?	35
<b>2 Character profiles make the difference</b>	39
Successful talents and qualities on the board and at the sub-top level	70
<b>3 The power of the system</b>	75
Loyalty and authenticity	100
<b>4 The influence of transfer-based relationships</b>	103
Power eroticises and charm works	129
<b>5 Successful diversity development</b>	135
Masculinity and femininity (for success) on the board	155
<b>Epilogue: Predictions</b>	159
Afterword	164
Acknowledgements	166
About the authors	168
Literature consulted	170
List of interviewees	173
List of organizations	175

# Forewords

## **A female top executive speaks**

‘Would you like to participate in an interview on diversity and the success of talent at the top level?’

‘I didn’t need to think about the answer for long.’

At Arcadis, diversity is an important subject. Traditionally, the engineering sector was a real ‘men’s world’, but that changed a long time ago, and the influx of men and women is now pretty balanced. This is not due to conscious efforts to that end; apparently, men and women are basically ‘the same’. However, this does not apply to women making it to the board. In that respect, the percentage of women is still (too) low. I am one of those few women at the top level.

Looking around, I find it hard to explain why I have managed to make it to the board, and so many others have not. What I do know, is that I think that is a great shame, as well as a missed opportunity, both for Arcadis and for the women. For me, there are two important reasons for wanting to change this. First of all, our company is at the heart of society. Therefore, it would be only logical for it to be a reflection of society as well. This goes beyond gender diversity. But even more importantly: I am convinced that a diverse team is a more successful team. This has been studied and confirmed in the past, though not in the way Karin and Lieke have done.

We looked into the differences between men and women, and what makes a successful diversity policy within Arcadis as well. I was surprised to learn that, even in our own workplace, the phenomenon of ‘Men are from Mars and women are from Venus’ is more prevalent than I thought. For example: of those asked, ‘the average man’ felt that being 70% qualified for a certain vacancy made him the perfect candidate, whereas being a 95% match caused the average woman to think: ‘so that means I am not the perfect candidate’. I had never realized this. This study has made me more aware of the differences. And that is a good thing, because as Johan Cruijff put it: ‘You don’t understand it until you see it’.

Then came the interview for this book, which, to be honest, didn’t go as I expected at all. Rather than getting to philosophize about my vision on diversity, I was asked about my passions and convictions, my earliest childhood, my relationship with my parents, and how that had affected my business relationships. While these were far from standard business questions, they were extremely relevant – I just didn’t realize that at the time.

What I remember most about the interview, is the realization that my drive to ‘make a difference’ is very deeply rooted, and that this drive is not only rational, but emotional as well. These days, I actually talk about that. This does not change my drive in any way, but it does help me to achieve more of a balance. And while that is predominantly better for me, I also think it makes me much more fun to be around.

Most of the management books I know are about the manipulability of success, but also about the mystery of leadership. While it’s a comforting thought that success is manipulable, the notion that leadership is ‘intangible’ is rather frustrating. But what if, as Karin and Lieke argue, subconscious patterns and dynamics play an important part, and those two elements are ‘the secret ingredients’ to the perfect recipe for diversity and leadership? Doesn’t that make it

extremely important to be aware of those secret ingredients, and to reveal those secrets and put them to use? At Arcadis, advancement is on the increase, but that only goes up to a certain level. Above this level, advancement stagnates, and we have no idea why. It's certainly not the intention of the company. It's very well possible that the problem lies in subconscious dynamics and motives.

This book provides advice and assistance in looking at our own leadership. In addition, it helps us determine how, with this knowledge, we can improve our diversity policy. It helps us look at our leaders and aspiring talents with a different, more complete perspective: in addition to their professional competence, we will now look at their character profiles and their personal history beyond their CV. They're almost like people, after all....

Lidewij de Haas  
Director Environment & Space  
Arcadis Nederland BV

### **One of the male top executives speaks**

‘Diversity and leadership’. This subject has been at the top of the agenda of the corporate world and politics for ages. Like in soccer, the best coaches are in the stands when it comes to diversity. We all have our own opinions on both the cause and the solution, but despite this collective expertise, the goals we set for ourselves are barely achieved.

10

Over the course of my career, I have been a part of and at the head of many ‘mixed teams’, both in terms of culture and in terms of gender. This depended on – among others – the country I was living and working in at the time, and the nature of my portfolio. In the Philippines, for example, there were a remarkably high number of women in (sub-)top level positions. And in the Netherlands and Poland, I found myself surrounded by relatively many women and different nationalities as well. Apparently, the customer side of a company that focuses on distribution, marketing and communication draws in a lot of female talent. Over the years, I have experienced the power of these teams. Therefore, I firmly believe that organizations that don’t have a proper balance in the composition of the management teams at every level are missing out.

### **Where this belief is rooted?**

The composition of the population is very diverse. How all these different people perceive commercials, corporate promises, communication and products is at least as diverse. Successful companies are those who incorporate the behaviour and opinions of various target groups in all their business processes. After all, these operations always start and end with the customer.

The importance of gender diversity is that there are different relevant – masculine and feminine – values out there. It’s important to look at the world from more than one point of view. The chances of this happening are greater if you combine different perspectives

in mixed teams. I have experienced the power of mixed teams and a good balance between masculine and feminine values in leadership and the management of an organization as well. For example, I consider being action-oriented, an emphasis on achievement, hierarchic actions and claiming a certain domain to be typically masculine values. Feminine values include long-term vision, equality, a good atmosphere, collegiality and sustainability. At a time when many sectors need to regain customer confidence and servant leadership is the preferred management model, these feminine values are indispensable.

Still, it's hard for me to answer the questions of 'what it takes to make it to the board' and 'why the board is predominantly dominated by men'. That was not really the main objective of the interview for this book either; they wanted to get to know me as a person. How did I get to my current position? Which talents did I use to get there? What is my underlying motivation? What life experiences do I have? Which successes have I known, and which setbacks? What was my childhood like, and could I tell them something about my parents and grandparents? What influence has my childhood had on my achieving my current position at the top level? In short, the conversation was about which experiences and choices have shaped me. Over the course of the interview, I started to realize that Karin and Lieke were onto something: subconscious patterns and character profiles do make the difference in the road to the board.

This insight provides new and stronger points of reference to tackle the theme of diversity with greater success. With this insight, 'Making It to the Board' provides companies an essential resource for fundamental improvement of the activities in the field of recruitment, selection and development of various talents.

Robert Otto  
General Manager Commercial Division  
Delta Lloyd



# Women on the board: a lack of ambition, or a lack of skill...?

*‘One of the most important talents that brought me here was the ability to just go for it and believe in the impossible.’*

13

Gender diversity is extremely important to the vitality of organizations. This is widely recognized by now: a diverse composition at the top level provides more perspectives and possible solutions to complex issues. In addition, gender diversity means that you are more in tune with various customer groups. For example, female marketers at breweries are behind supermarkets stocking more six-packs these days, rather than cases of beer. This is because it's usually women who do the shopping, and buy beer for their husbands. They prefer not to have to lug around heavy crates.

Despite numerous diversity programs and interventions, the number of women on the board is barely growing. The large increase in women in advanced education and on the employment market should offer great possibilities to tackle this issue. However, this growing potential is still not sufficiently taken advantage of for the board. A missed opportunity, both for the women in question, and for organizations.

Various publications (such as the *Monitor 'Charter 'Talent naar de Top'*) describe the measures organizations can take to increase the diversity on the board. At this time, little is known about the effectiveness of these measures. We realize that this is obviously exactly what you would like to know: which investment will provide my

company with the desired result – more women on the board and improved advancement to the board?

This is an important question for us as well. As a consultant and an executive coach, we have been working with men and women on the board and at the sub-top level of organizations for years. We have noticed that advancement of women to the board has stagnated significantly, despite past interventions and ambitions. We wonder: Is this a lack of ambition, or a lack of skill? And: What do women and men require to make it to the board and stay there? Many publications do not provide sufficient answer to these questions and so far, the question of why advancement of women to the board has stagnated has not been answered either. In order for organizations to achieve more gender diversity at the top level, they require direct answers to these questions. This is why we decided to look into this matter.

Our experience has taught us that personal leadership is at the basis of leading other people. This is why we asked ourselves: which personal factors were decisive in getting those who are currently at the top level of organizations and companies where they are? In addition, we wanted to know how they managed to keep their position. Are personal factors at play there as well? And if so, which of these factors can be developed, and which can't?

Finally, we asked ourselves which personal factors were the predominant reason behind the stagnation of women and men at the sub-top level. And again, we wanted to know: Can these factors be influenced?

In order to get an answer to these questions, over the course of 2010 and 2011, we conducted one hundred and thirty in-depth interviews with men and women at the top level and the sub-top level. We interviewed people from various types of organizations, which included profit, non-profit and public organizations, and both large multinationals and medium-sized Dutch companies and institutions. In addition, we interviewed a number of Olympic champions: due to necessary choices, we have not included them in this book as a separate group. Interviewees were asked about, among others, their

motivations for wanting to make it to the top level, and the talents and qualities they used to achieve that. The desire to have an influence was one of the most common motivations. Most felt stamina was the most essential quality.

The information we gathered during the interviews provides an extensive and in-depth answer to the question of why advancement of people at the sub-top level to the board has stagnated. We discovered that it's predominantly subconscious patterns and certain character profiles that make the difference. This was at the basis of the creation of this book: we have discovered the ingredients that *do* make the difference, that *do* make advancement to the board successful and sustainable – particularly if women and men contribute to that themselves.

All the examples and quotes in this book are in anonymous form. We have chosen to do so for two reasons: first of all, they are based on comparable experiences of various women and men. Secondly: being at the top level makes you visible and vulnerable. Therefore, we want to safeguard confidentiality.

### **Making It to the Board – Building on Character**

We chose the Dutch title of the book, which means 'making it based on character', for two reasons. First of all, it implies that men and women who make it to the board have a specific and distinctive character profile. We wanted to show that it matters what kind of character profile someone on the board has. These profiles go a long way toward determining whether someone will be successful or not, whether someone aspires to make it to the board in the first place, and whether he manages to stay there.

Secondly, this title refers to the strategies women and men use to make it to the board.

We explain how character profiles are connected to two other lines of approach, and how these are decisive in the success of diversity and leadership in organizations. We have discovered how predomi-

nantly subconscious processes are crucial to the success or failure of a diversity policy. We will describe these subconscious processes from three different perspectives that provide more of an insight into how they work: a person's character profile, phenomena of transfer patterns and the system of origin.

#### CHARACTER PROFILE

A person's character shows how he has responded to events and experiences in his surroundings at certain stages of his life. Over time, a significant portion of these reactions become automatic; you react the way you do without thinking about it. For the interviews, we based ourselves on the character profiles of Jung and Reich, and Lowen's bioenergetics. The work of these psychoanalysts has made an important contribution to what is known about personality development today. A person's character profile determines whether he is or will be successful on the board.

#### PHENOMENA OF TRANSFER

In addition to a person's character, his or her personal history and the development of fixed behaviour patterns play a role in successful advancement to a top position as well. These patterns predominantly arise from the parent/child relationship. We have found that, every day, people subconsciously repeat relationships from the past, including in professional relationships. These phenomena is referred to as transfer patterns.

#### SYSTEM OF ORIGIN

Character and transfer-based relationships are partly determined by dynamics that arise as a result of significant events in a person's family history, such as the loss of a parent at a young age. Hellinger, the creator of this paradigm, refers to the family as 'the system of origin'. Our human actions are partly determined and 'restricted' by dynamics in our system of origin. These dynamics are passed down from generation to generation. During the interviews, we discovered that leaders of organizations are bound by the dynamics in their

system of origin as well. They subconsciously perpetuate these dynamics in the organization. We refer to this as the leader's bond with his family system and the dynamics that have been passed down.

### **Advice for the board**

Why might this book be of interest to you? This may be the case if you have questions about this subject, and are in a position of influence. This book provides insights and advice that can help you change your current situation. You will get an answer to the questions we asked earlier: to what extent is a person's character decisive in making it to and staying on the board, and which factors determine the success of diversity?

What makes this book different from other books about gender diversity and diverse leadership? It's different in that it looks at the issue from three points of view. We explain what you need to make it to the board, and provide the missing building blocks for diversity and leadership development. In doing so, we assume that sustainable, i.e. permanent results of diversity development require personal leadership.

This book will tell you what factors hinder the advancement of men and women at the sub-top level and what – in essence – you need to achieve permanent results when it comes to diversity within organizations. We will point out the differences that can improve the recruitment and selection of talent and executive development further, which significantly increases the chances of advancement from the sub-top level to the board.

### **Reader's guide**

The book starts out with a description of the playing field of the board within organizations, and what may be attractive about working there. We will look at the current situation with regard to diversity policy in the Netherlands and conclusions from noted studies. In addition, we will reflect on the interviews and experiences that we have compiled in this book.

Chapter two describes the most successful character profiles of Dutch women and men at the top level of medium-sized and large organizations. What are the real differences between women and men on the board, and those who do not succeed in achieving these top positions or do not want to?

In the next chapter, we will predominantly look at the matter from a system dynamics point of view. We look at the influence the family system has on the functioning of people on the board and the sub-top level, and on the organizational structure in which you function. We show the effects these family systems have on being successful on the board.

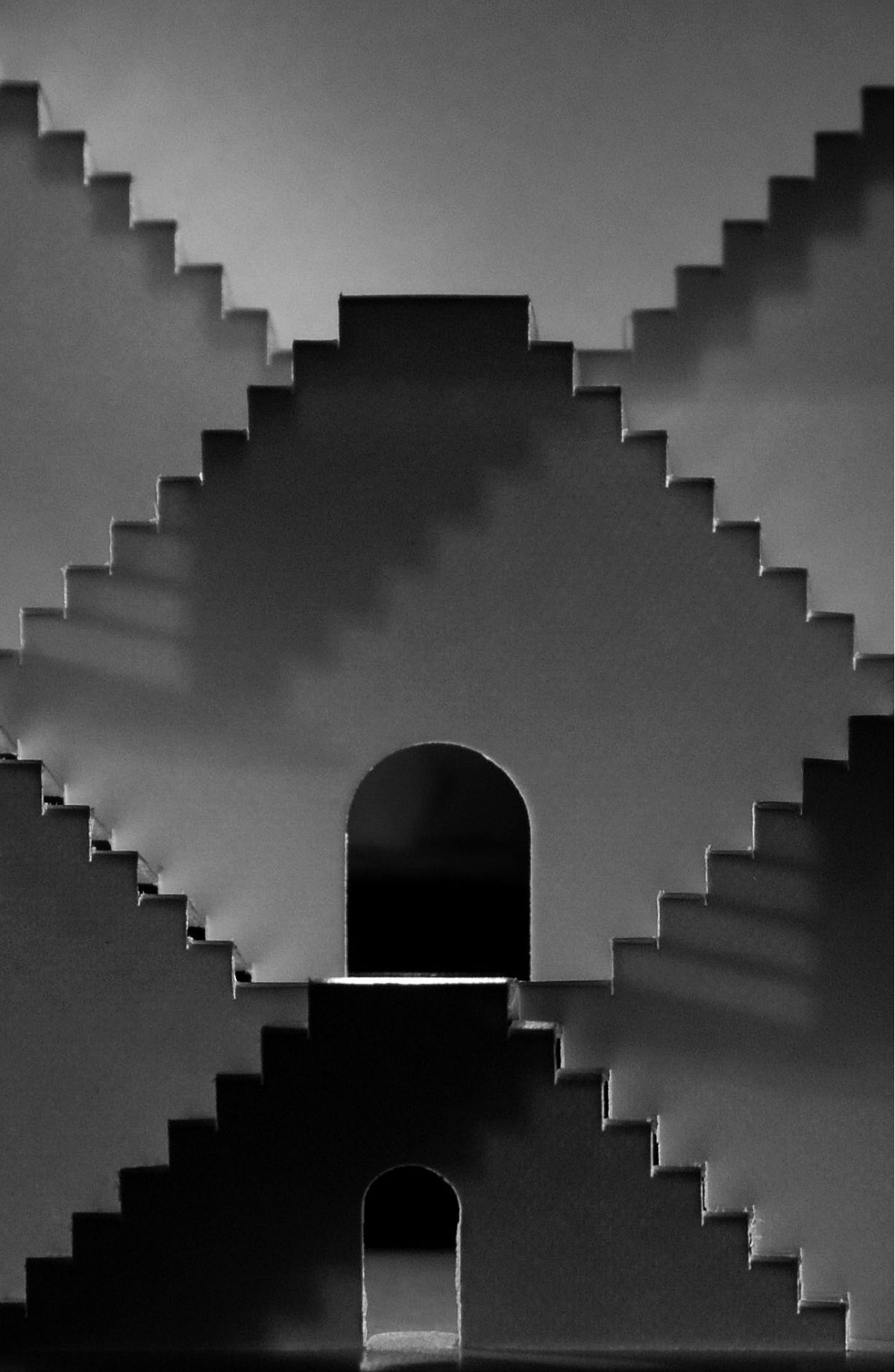
Chapter four covers the influence of transfer-based relationships on the way to the board. This third perspective shows how hierarchy in a person's personal history influences professional relationships.

Chapter five describes our vision on diversity development, and contains practical assistance and advice. Subconscious patterns and dynamics seem to be the missing link in making a diversity policy successful.

Finally, we will look ahead: how can we expect diversity to develop in the slightly longer term?

This book was written for men and women at the top level and at the sub-top level of organizations. For the sake of readability, this book is written in the third-person narrative, using only he/his/him. However, a reference to the male gender obviously includes a reference to the female gender.

Karin Raes and Lieke Thijssen  
June 2015



## 2 Character profiles make the difference

*'Failure is not an option.'*

This motto says a lot about the character of people on the board. A person's character turns out to be one of the things that are decisive in making it to the board. The character profiles of men and women on the board differ from those of the people who haven't managed to make it there, or – having come to realize the price they would have to pay for it – no longer aspire to be on the board. Still, there is no recruitment and selection based on character. That is remarkable. Have you ever realized this before, and do you keep this in mind in the recruitment of talent for the board? Chances are that you don't, or at least don't consciously do so.

This chapter contains the first secret to the success of women and men on the board. For example, we describe the successful character profiles they require for their advancement to the board. In addition, we show how those character profiles differ significantly from the character profiles of men and women who haven't made it to the top.

The chapter starts out with a description of what character is, and which psychological tradition we have based ourselves on to bring those character profiles to the surface. After that, we will provide an explanation of the various profiles and describe the implications of these conclusions for you as an (aspiring) top executive. The implications for diversity development within your organization as a whole are discussed in chapter five.



### **The origin of the character profiles**

There are different theories about the character and its origins. The below descriptions make that clear.

Like Kets de Vries (2007), we consider ‘character’ to be: *‘the whole of the deeply-rooted behaviour patterns by which a person can be described. It distinguishes us from others. It’s the stamp we have been given by nature and our upbringing, which determines who we actually are. Character forms the core of how people perceive themselves and how they present themselves to the outside world.’*

40

According to Rank and Rank (1997), who go by the tradition of bioenergetics *‘the character reflects how certain experiences, struggles and compromises have affected someone who was unable to handle the pressure of these circumstances at a young age. These circumstances forced him to develop life concepts that were only temporary solutions, in the sense that they were not solely created in the interest of a person’s vital urges.’*

In other words: a person’s character reflects how he has reacted to (major) events and experiences in his surroundings at various stages in his life. If someone is not aware of these automatisms or ingrained behaviour patterns, character becomes destiny. You can probably think of such a situation; an event or experience that has had significant influence on your choices later in life. For many people, such an event – consciously or subconsciously – plays a role in their career choices later on.

Reich (1930) and Lowen (1992) distinguish the following five character structures within the character of each person:

- the schizoid,
- the oral,
- the psychopathic,
- the masochist and
- the rigid structure.

## 2. Character profiles make the difference

Johnson (1994) later added a sixth structure: the symbiotic structure.

For the sake of recognizability of these structures to the reader, we will replace the original terms after the initial introduction. You may associate the original terms with unhealthy or pathological structures, which is not likely to invite you to look into this further or identify with them. From that point onwards, we will refer to the schizoid structure as the 'survivor', to the oral structure as the 'needy one', to the psychopath structure as the 'challenger', to the symbiotic structure as the 'merger', to the masochist structure as the 'sufferer' and to the rigid structure as the 'achiever'. You have to realize that this is not about people, but about a character structure, a part of a person's character profile.

A person's character is a mix of these character structures. In most cases, one of the bioenergetic character structures is easier to identify in someone's attitude towards life, body language and attitude than the other structures. This makes this structure the dominant character structure.

All the character structures of an individual put together, and the extent to which they are dominant or hidden make up his character. We refer to this composition of character structures as the character profile or character mix. In doing so, we have based ourselves on the ideas of Reich, Lowen, Johnson, Veenbaas (2006) and others.

### **Development of the character**

The basis for a person's character (profile) is laid in the first five to six years of his life. The development of the character profile is a staged process. Every stage centres around a specific developmental need. A child experiences whether this need is met or not. In response to that, he develops a way of coping with his surroundings. For example, every child goes through a stage in life where what he needs most from his parents is protection and nutrition. If, during

that stage, there is a lack of protection – for example due to a parent being absent or due to neglect – the child develops an extra sense and can become fearful, alert or distrustful.

Experiences and events form a person's perception of reality; his self-image, his impression of other people and his impression of the world around him. As a result of his experiences, he develops all kinds of (subconscious) convictions. A child is unaware of most of these assumptions and convictions, but put together, they form his perception of reality. For example, a child may develop the conviction that the world is a dangerous place. He carries that experience with him into his adult life, at least for as long as he is unaware of it. Someone with such a childhood experience tends to be guarded, tends to avoid taking risks and stays with an organization for longer than others do. He will also wait to see which way the wind blows for longer than others do, and usually isn't too fond of change.

At the age of five or six, someone laid the foundation for his character profile. At that stage in life, one or two of the character structures are dominant. These are most decisive for the character profile. In other words, the basis for a person's character is laid this early on in life, which means that – at least in part – the basis for a position on the board is laid at that stage as well.

Over the course of a person's life, the structures are continuously adjusted or confirmed. This is due to new experiences and events. Adjustment of the structure means that it's smoothed down a bit. Confirmation means that new experiences reaffirm the structure, making it even more ingrained. This means that a person's character profile is not (completely) fixed, but can develop further later on in life. This is what makes investments in education and personal development worthwhile. As someone gets older, his options of reacting to events in more varied ways increase. Therefore, personal development and leadership development benefit from a good amount of life and work experience.

Each character structure has specific qualities. Over the course of their adult life, people don't just learn to take advantage of these qualities, but are also confronted with the limitations that come with their most dominant character structures. Depending on their willingness and ability to reflect on their own actions, people learn to be flexible when it comes to their options and limitations. The greater the flexibility someone develops in this respect, the more effective his thinking, sensitivities and behaviour will be. This greater flexibility will make him perform better. Depending on his talents, this also makes him capable of better performance. You will undoubtedly recognize this, for example in employees who have shot up on the career ladder, or those who have stalled at an early stage.

In the (development of) the character, there are differences between boys and girls, or men and women. In this process, the relationship children develop with their parents is of great influence. For girls, their mothers play a major role in their identification as a girl or woman, and for boys, their fathers play that role in how they develop into men. The presence or absence of the same-sex parent has an influence on the healthy development of masculine and feminine characteristics in both boys and girls. These masculine and feminine characteristics are discussed in the frame about 'Successful talents and qualities on the board and at the sub-top level' at the end of the chapter.

### **Successful character profiles**

The character profiles of men and women on the board clearly differ from those of people at the sub-top level – but in what respect? In order to establish the differences between those on the board and those at the sub-top level, we compared the character profiles of those on the board and those at the sub-top level. In addition, we looked into which structures are predominantly behind the success of the men and women on the board, and which structures are behind someone getting stuck on the way to the board.

While on the board, the character profiles are largely homogeneous, those at the sub-top level are much more heterogeneous. Two different dominant character profiles were found among top executives, while at the sub-top level there are five.

One of the successful character mixes for female and male top executives is a combination of the character structures of the 'challenger' and the 'achiever', with one of the structures being a little more prominent than the other. The most common combination in successful leaders is the combination of 'the challenger/the achiever'. This means that the character structure of the 'challenger' is the most prominent and, after that, the structure of the 'achiever' has the most influence on the behaviour of these top executives. To give you an overall idea: these are the top executives that are most likely to take the lead in new situations.

The second most prevalent combination is the opposite combination: 'the achiever/the challenger'. These colleagues can be recognized by the high demands they make on themselves – and you may even recognize yourself in this.

The third and fourth variety are top executives in whom only one of these two character structures is dominant. In most cases, this is the structure of the 'challenger' and – slightly less often – that of the 'achiever'.

Regardless of their age, the same character structures are dominant in all top executives. However, there are differences in terms of emphasis. Among those over fifty, the 'challenger' is the slightly more common dominant structure. Among those on the board who are in their forties and thirties, the number of people whose dominant character structure is that of the 'achiever' is equal to the number of men and women whose dominant structure is that of the 'challenger'. This suggests that, over time, the combination of character profiles that is required to make it to the board. Amongst those at the sub-top level, there are more men and women whose dominant structure is that of the 'achiever' than there are on the board.

## 2. Character profiles make the difference

This means that, in these younger generations, the influence of this 'achiever' structure in making it to the board has increased. Do you recognize this development in the top of your own organization as well?

What do the two most dominant structures look like? We will start with an overall description of each character structure. After that, we will describe how these structures present themselves in people on the board.