
CHAPTER 3

HOW WE STRUCTURE THINGS

In this first area of the workplace, consider how Max and Fran each tend to structure both physical and nonphysical things: organizations, teams, their office space, and the setup for meetings or conferences. Recall the foundation, *How We Identify Ourselves in the World*: Max's masculine view of self in the world is of competing for position in a hierarchy, while Fran's feminine view is of building and preserving relationships in a network of equal power.

The starting point for understanding how Max prefers to structure things at work (and for each work area that we'll explore in the next several chapters) is to consider rank and competition as driving influences. The corporate world as we know it today was structured by men, for men. The masculine worldview is still the predominant influence because women arrived on the scene, in smaller numbers, long after the norms were established. The corporate structure is hierarchical, the masculine side of the masculine-feminine continuum in this area. Hierarchy invites competition. The male brain is wired to jockey for status. Males of many species, fueled by testosterone, work to win and maintain status.

The centers of the bell curves on each side of this continuum are shown below. (Note that I do not show the preferences of Bullies or Bimbos in the illustration.)

How We Structure Things
 What kind of structure do you naturally create?

Hierarchy

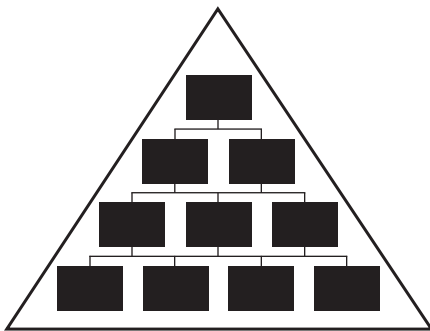
Network

M5 M4 M3 M2 M1 | F1 F2 F3 F4 F5

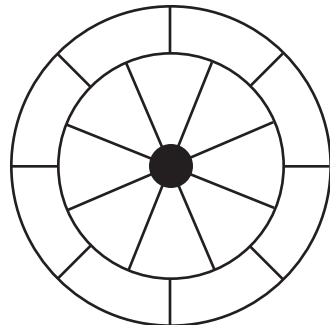
We’ve established that we work similarly to how we play. Look at the description of how Max and Fran play in chapter 2. Max’s boyhood games involved a hierarchy (for example, the coach, the quarterback, the A-team, the B-team, and benchwarmers). Since men were the early builders of U.S. businesses, the corporate world reflects hierarchy. Companies have a board, a CEO, C-level executives, vice presidents, directors, managers, and so forth. There are clear levels, and the norm is that orders flow from top to bottom. One takes orders from ranks above and gives them to ranks below. And rules are critical to achieving the goal of the “game”—profits.

If women had been the architects of the corporate world, it might look very different. It might reflect more aspects of the way little girls play games. There would be a more organic structure. Power would be more diffused, roles would be more fluid, and the structure would be “flatter.” Relationships would be as important as the goal of winning or the rules.

As women-owned businesses proliferate, many continue to be modeled on what came before—the hierarchical model. Yet in the last decade, businesses have found value in the less hierarchical (more feminine) form, flattening their structures and assigning tasks to fluid and overlapping teams. The following diagrams show the distinction.

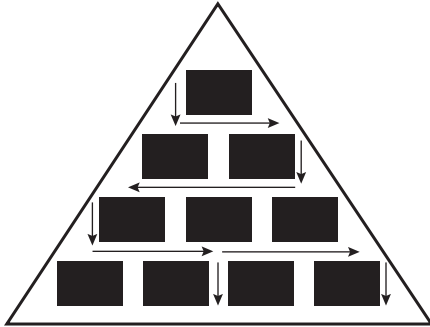


Hierarchy

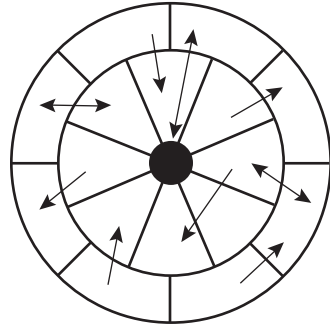


Network

Communications within a hierarchy and a network are different. To Max, the communication structure below on the right often seems disorganized, even chaotic. To Fran, it is effective in keeping everyone informed and involved.



Communication in a hierarchy



Communication in a network

Heim Group CEO Pat Heim discovered in her work that men and women generally have very different conceptions of the word “team.” In her video *The Power Dead-Even Rule and Other Gender Differences in the Workplace*, she reports that when she asked men what being a “team player” meant, they said something like “knowing one’s position and playing it well.” When I ask women in my workshops what “team” means to them, I almost always get answer like “we are all in this together.” The feminine view is of shared power, responsibility, credit, and blame. We may be using the term “team player” very differently—and judging people for not measuring up to *our* definition. If we agree on what we mean by team and team player up front, we can avoid discord and misunderstanding.

Even office space sometimes reflects the difference in how Max and Fran prefer to structure things. In a hierarchy, the corner office with the most space and best view demonstrates where one is in the hierarchy: At or near the top. In her 1990 book, *The Female Advantage*, Sally Helgesen followed five women CEOs. She noted that these leaders preferred to have their offices set up as hubs surrounded by spokes. Each articulated that, this way, she could stay close to her people. I saw this same phenomenon when a Denver-based telecommunications company run by a woman moved offices. The CEO’s first inclination was to choose an office in the “middle of everything” rather than the grander corner

suite. To be in the grandest office may feel uncomfortable to Fran if she is an executive. Without knowing it, she is swimming with the feminine current that prefers a flat power structure. Being close to one's team seems more important than having a showy office. Recall that relationships surpass status and the rules for Fran, whereas Max thinks it is important (and comfortable) to use symbols consistent with his position.

Also consider meeting space. The typical boardroom table is elongated, with a place at the "head" of the table for the top dog or person running the meeting. In spaces designed for larger groups, the theater setup with a dais reflects hierarchy; the more important people sit, literally, above the rest. Watch how women set up a meeting when not restricted by heavy boardroom furniture. Often they will place chairs in a circle! A circle enables everyone to hear and see everyone else. And there is no head, no hierarchy. Everyone feels involved and equal.

My daughter worked for a few years at a nonprofit organization staffed exclusively with women. She told me that if I dropped by at the weekly staff meeting, I would not be able to identify the executive director. Leadership of the meeting was rotated. Furthermore, she told me, I might not be able to tell who was running the meeting that day. Everyone (no one?) was!

The chart below sums up characteristics of the two sides of the continuum in this area.

How We Structure Things	
Max—HIERARCHY	Fran—NETWORK
Roles are clear, as are levels of importance	Roles overlap and power is shared
Ranks are exclusive	Multiple ranks are inclusive
Space is used to show rank, position	Space is used to create connection
Team = play position	Team = we're in it together

Do these generalizations ring true for you?

Have you observed these differences in your workplace?