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Building Relationships and Social Capital Development

**Building Relationships and Social Capital for
Women's Enterprise Development.**

**Research and practice from an award winning support initiative Women Into
the Network (WIN)**

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1. Introduction

A wide range of support initiatives have evolved in the UK, aimed at assisting women to start and develop their businesses. These include training programmes on a range of personal and business specific topics, mentoring programmes, dedicated business premises and financial services. This paper looks at the development of networks as a means of supporting women in business. Networking has been demonstrated to be a powerful tool for new venture creation and business development yet it has been shown that women are often excluded from many traditional business networks and/or lack access to information about such networks. This paper, based on action research primarily in the north east of England examines:

The concept of relationship building through networking and networking as a vehicle for building social capital for women's enterprise as a critical component in helping to build self-confidence and self esteem. This paper is not an academic critique of models supporting women's entrepreneurship. It is however, based both upon practise of an award winning business support initiative Women Into the Network (WIN) based in the UK and action research (a study of bankers and their clients and a survey 1000 women running businesses) together with regular evaluations of WIN members that have been undertaken over the four years as part of an activities of the broader WIN Project. The research aimed to develop a better understanding of how networking helps to develop women's social capital. It identifies a number of themes related to networking support and raises a range of issues relating to the effective promotion of relationship building and social capital for women's enterprise and highlights implications for future interventions. The development of social capital is a relatively under-researched, understood and as such an under supported aspect of women's entrepreneurship.

This paper highlights how;

- Social asset building is critical for successful women's entrepreneurship
- Networking related support encourages and helps women to build contacts and confidence in doing this.
- Relationship and social capital building is a dynamic process, which involves life long learning for both women and the support sector – highlighted by a case study of an awards process.
 - Work on this aspect of 'doing business' - social capital and asset building for women- needs to be given more explicit attention by support providers and policy makers

In recent years there has been much commentary upon the ever-growing importance of women in the global market and that the growth of women's economic activities and their general level of activity in the paid economy can significantly influence the success or failure of each country's long-term economic health (OECD, 2003). Indeed, it is often claimed that women are the producers, suppliers and customers of the future.

Levels of entrepreneurship within a society has long been recognised as a prerequisite and a useful indicator of an economy's health. Although the relationship between entrepreneurial and economic growth is complex, recent international economic reports such as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Reports (GEM) (www.gemconsortium.org) has clearly highlighted the positive correlation between economic growth and entrepreneurship and recently has highlighted the role of women's entrepreneurship. In the 2001 and 2002 GEM reports for the UK, noting that 'Expanding the involvement of women in entrepreneurship is critical for long term economic growth *in the UK*' (GEM, 2001,2002). In turn this was endorsed by the UK's Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2003), which recognised women's entrepreneurship, as a key way of enhancing the competitiveness of the economy

2. The State of Women's Entrepreneurship in the UK

Women have always played a key part in enterprise ownership in the UK, but typically, this has been hidden by the invisible support roles they have played – rarely being 'seen' as the owners or entrepreneurs as such. Good quality data on women's entrepreneurship is problematic as with statistics on small businesses per se (Carter et al, 2002) in particular there is little cumulative information about the experience of women business owners in the UK, which would help to understand the factors that underpin women's attitudes and experiences around the whole area of business ownership. Although there are difficulties in obtaining consistent data across different countries on the actual economic impact of women's entrepreneurship in most OECD countries; there is sufficient research to illustrate the challenge that the UK faces as regards the growth of this sector (DTI, 2003, FSB, 2002, Lloyds TSB, 1998 & 2000, Carter, 2000, and Cabinet Office, 2001, Carter et al 2002, Marlow, et al, 2003, Harding et al 2004)

Despite considerable social and cultural change within the UK, the proportionate increase in the number of women starting their own business in the last two decades has been half that of other countries such as the USA. In simple terms the GEM 2001 UK Executive Report noted that men were currently around two and a half times more likely to be entrepreneurs than women. The 2002 GEM report, shows a slightly smaller gap between male and female entrepreneurship in the UK, but highlights a continuing low level of female entrepreneurial activity in comparison with many other countries taking part in GEM, including Canada, the USA, Australia, Norway and most countries in the Far East and South America.

In Spring 2000, 3.2 million people were self-employed in their occupation (Table 1). The self-employed constituted approximately 11% of the workforce, however women were underrepresented with only 845,000 (27%) in self-employment, which was nearly two-thirds less than that of men. The majority of men who were self-employed worked full-time (91%), while the full- and part-time split was more even for women (53% and 47% respectively). However, this was a steady growth in female self-employment as in 1979, women accounted for only 18% of all self-employed (Cabinet Office, 2001). Labour Force Survey figures (LFS, 2003) show that the number of full-time and part-time self-employed workers is 3.45 million (12.9% of all employed), with women still representing some 27% of all those running their own business, this represents some 7-8% of the total female workforce compared to 16-17% of the total male workforce running their own business. Research by Barclays Bank reinforces this showing in their samples that men are twice as likely to become entrepreneurs than women. "Over the five years the study has been running, the percentage of those surveyed (aged 16-64) who said they were setting up a business was 5.3% for males and fell to 2.3% for females" (Barclays 1999 and 2003 p5).

These numbers of female entrepreneurs puts the UK near the bottom of global rankings – UK women's business ownership is on a par with other Northern European countries but is far lower than USA levels. GEM (2003p24) found that female attitudes towards opportunities for business start-ups are far more negative compared to men, with only 22.1% of the sample seeing good opportunities compared with 31.8% of the male sample. Women were also more likely than men

to let fear of failure prevent them from setting up a business and although women have the skills to start their own businesses, they themselves do not see this.

3. An Overview of Supporting Women's entrepreneurship

Whilst there has been significant growth in the number of women owned businesses in the UK over recent decades has been achieved over the years, it has been noted repeatedly that women owner-managers still face a number of problems, for example, (Allen and Truman, 1993, Richardson and Hartshorn, 1995, FSB, 2002, Lloyds TSB, 1998 & 2000, Carter, 2000, and Cabinet Office, 2001, Carter et al 2002, Marlow, et al, 2003, Harding et al 2004). Interest in assisting women as business owners in their own right began to emerge in the 1980's with a range of local, regional and more recently initiatives providing specific support to women being launched throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Most of these initiatives have focused on helping women to start up their own businesses and have looked at the very overt barriers they face to doing this i.e. concerning their abilities and skills, their experience both generic and business specific, their ideas and their access to resources – see Figure 1 overleaf.

These issues have been dealt with by the design and delivery of a whole range of training programmes both women-specific programmes and generic business development programmes and those targeted at different groups of women (*Cabinet Office, 2001, Small Business Service SBS, 2003*).) These support activities include training programmes on a wide range of personal and business specific topics, mentoring programmes. In addition specific interventions have been developed addressing the type of ideas and markets that women's business are located with a view to helping them to build on their ideas and to move out of locally saturated markets into broader opportunities. Targeted schemes have tackled the problems that women face in accessing physical resources both financial and non-financial such as business premises in the form of incubators. Particular attention has been given to the barriers that women face in getting start up money be this using their own capital, and the role of banks other institutions and the place of micro-finance initiatives as financiers (Koper, 1989; Read, 1998; Lloyds TSB 2000 Marlow, et al, 2003, Harding et al 2004).

Ingredients for a Successful Business

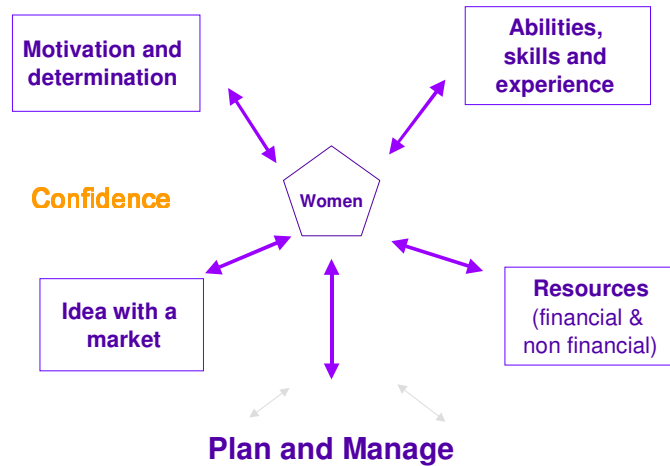


Figure 1

Based on the work of Gibb and Ritchie (1986) (Understanding the Process of Starting Small Businesses, Journal of European Industrial Training 14.1)

In the past five years there has also been a focus on the development of women's business networks and helping women to effectively network for their businesses. Networking as a business activity has been demonstrated to be a powerful tool for new venture creation and business development See for example (Hall and Bennett, 1999 and 2002) and yet it has been shown that women are often excluded from traditional business networks and /or lack access to information about such networks (Shaw, 1998). This note looks at networking as a means of supporting women in business.

4 Confidence Networking and Social Capital for Business

Most of the above support measures whilst focusing on tackling the resource problems faced by women have also aimed to increase women's confidence about business ownership. In this way issues concerning confidence were tackled implicitly, with issues of motivation, determination and confidence being grouped together under the broad label of 'confidence' or more particularly 'lack of confidence'. Confidence or lack of confidence is a factor that is quoted by much of the research that has looked at the differences between men and women starting and running businesses. While confidence is no doubt an issue for men, they do not raise it as an issue or researchers do not address it explicitly when talking to men in business. Gould and Parzen (1992) are just one example of researchers who posit that women entrepreneurs often face barriers not usually encountered by men. These barriers are usually associated with the following:

- Their dual role and domestic responsibilities;
- Low self esteem and lack of confidence (Halpern and Szuruk, 1989);
- Lack of socialisation to entrepreneurship in their homes, school, and society.
- Exclusion from traditional business networks and lack access to information (Shaw, 1998).
- Discriminatory attitudes of lenders, gender stereotypes and expectations that label women entrepreneurs as are 'dabblers' 'hobbyists' or merely lifestyle business owners.

Godfrey (1992) supports this and adds that women have a socialised ambivalence about competition and profit together with a lack of self-confidence! The GEM reports also add to these views stating that 'Women are more likely to let fear of failure prevent them from setting up an entrepreneurial business than men' (GEM 2003). Comments such as the above present very broad generalisations about all the attitudes of women considering or practising business. Confidence is a complex, very personal and relative issue concerning a whole range of psychological, sociological, cultural and economic issues impacting upon individuals and their choices in life. It is not the place of this paper to explore the whole concept of confidence rather it looks at a dimension of confidence that comes from people's – in this case potential and practising business women - relationships with others in their networks.

Much research has shown that contact networks and developing relationships with a range of different people both formally and informally are critical for business success (Hall and Bennett 1999, 2002). Successful entrepreneurs note that having a strong network of people behind them helps to build confidence in doing business. Such contacts and networks are often termed 'social capital' and the remainder of this paper looks at the nature and role of networking in helping to build social capital for women entrepreneurs and with it the confidence of women as business owners.

In addressing the issues of different forms of capital when initiating or growing a venture, it is clear that capital can take a number of different forms: *Physical capital* which can include plant, machinery and other assets; *Natural capital*, including clean air, water and other natural resources; *Human capital*, consisting of knowledge, skills and competences; *Social capital* which consists of the networks, norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the quantity and co-operative quality of a society's social interactions and *Financial capital*, used to fund, acquire or invest in the other forms of capital. Some writers also subscribe to the concept of *Cultural capital*, this includes familiarity with society's culture and the ability to understand and use educated language (Bourdieu, 1986 quoted in Aldridge et al, 2002).

These different forms of capital are not wholly independent of each other but mutually interdependent and re-enforcing. As noted above previous support has tended to focus on helping women to access human assets in terms of training and mentoring to recognise and use natural assets in helping women to use their local resources to build business ideas; to access financial assets in terms of women's savings, their own capital and interactions with financial institutions and the provision of physical assets in terms of premises, safe spaces, access to physical markets in

terms of doing business. Until recently less assistance has been given to explicitly helping women to build their social assets for business. See Figure 2 overleaf.

Social capital has been described as "...features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives... social capital, in short, refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust" (Putnam, 1995, quoted in Aldridge et al 2002). Others highlight three main types of social capital: *bonding* social capital (e.g. among family members or ethnic groups); *bridging* social capital (e.g. across ethnic groups); and *linking* social capital (e.g. between different social classes). From this it can be seen that networking, developing contacts and relationship building are all integral to building social capital.

Individual Capital/Assets

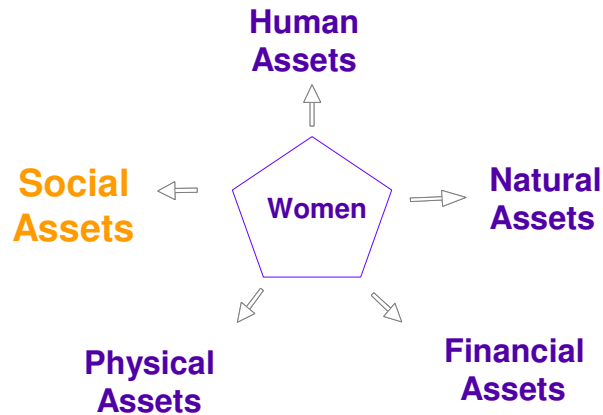


Figure 2
Based on Richardson and Howarth (2002)

5. WIN in the North East

The North East of England, has one of the lowest self-employment rates in the country, (ONE, 2002). It also boasts one of the poorest records of business formation and survival rates. For example, during 1999 and 2000, 8,500 new VAT registered businesses were created, but a similar number deregistered and the formation rate per 10,000 head of adult population was 21 at a time when the national average stood at 38. In addition, women's self-employment rates in the region had been and were still seen as being particularly poor as Table 2 below indicates, with three times more men in self-employment in the region than women.

Table 2: Percentage of People in Self-employment by Gender

	North East	UK
Men	13.7	16.8
Women	4.1	8.1
All	8.4	12.9

Source: Labour Force Survey, August 2003

It was this profile, which provided the backcloth that led to the establishment of Women Into the Network (WIN). WIN was launched in 1999. It began in 1998 when a piece of market research conducted in the North East of England had found that there were over 700 networks and organisations in the region that said they were providing assistance to existing and potential business women, but the majority of potential and practising women business owners interviewed were unaware of the existence of most of these networks and of what they offered (The Journal, 1999). There was a major mismatch between supply and 'customers' with the result that many women were potentially, missing out on a range of opportunities. Faced with such evidence Women Into the Network (WIN) was established to support the creation and management of effective businesses by women, through addressing their lack of integration into mainstream Business Networks.

WIN set out with the twin aims of '**integrating women into existing and new business networks and to bridge the gap between providers of business and professional support and women themselves**'. It does this by delivering a wide range of network related activities along with a wide range of partners throughout the northeast region and beyond. In its first three years, it has assisted in the creation of over 800 new jobs in women owned businesses.

WIN is an initiative composed of multi level – activities and key services which it designs delivers and disseminates with a wide range of partners.

- **Hosting Events** – around 30 per annum from training workshops to lunches. Regular networking lunches, dinners and workshops are offered which are aimed at facilitating new contacts these events offer an excellent informal opportunity to extend networks and offer encouragement and inspiration.
- **Establishment of Annual Women's Business Awards in the North East** – Since 1999 WIN has held an annual competition, which has rewarded the efforts of a range of successful women entrepreneurs in the North East. This has not only raised the profile of women through this competition but has encouraged more women to apply for other mainstream regional and national business awards. It is discussed in more detail in section 6 below.
- **Communications and Publications** –The primary objective of WIN is to facilitate good communication within the network. A survey of 1000 members demonstrated that many women were not on mailing lists or databases of any type and therefore missed out vital information. To overcome this a number of communications media are used: The online service gives an overview of the entire network (www.networkingwomen.co.uk) and its activities and offers the opportunity to register on a free business directory. A newsletter coupled with regular email bulletins circulates network news, diary dates and reports recent successes and opportunities. A series of

simple 'how to' start up and business development guides are available through the network.

- **Role models** – The importance of having positive role models to encourage women in business has been well documented (Richardson, and Hartshorn, 1995; Carter et al 2001). Another objective of WIN is to promote appropriate and accessible role models. It does this by promoting women business owners from a diverse range of backgrounds and sectors through various media outlet, at WIN events and through a specialist publication called Northern Lights.
- **Sectoral initiatives.** The development of new and existing businesses is integral to the objectives of WIN. A variety of workshops and programmes provide access to business training and personal development opportunities at affordable prices. Working in collaboration with local organisations, training programmes in pre-start up, start-up and business development will be delivered as bespoke packages or one-off events.
- **Research.** Research not only facilitates innovation and progress, but also confirms the appropriateness of existing ventures. WIN is currently undertaking research to:
 - Benchmark existing provision of business support for women in the North East region and to conduct and up-to-date needs analysis
 - Progress understanding of the factors contributing to the low number of women entrepreneurs within the technology and construction sector.
 - Understanding the relationship women entrepreneurs have with their bankers. It is this research that has helped to inform WIN's work on relationship building as a dimension of developing social capital. The research examined the relationships that entrepreneurs have with their banker. The nature of these relationships was explored through a qualitative study using a comparative sample of men and women to assess whether gender has any impact on this relationship¹. It investigated the perceptions of both the bankers and owner managers in order to develop a more informed understanding of these issues (Bennett, 2000). This research was primarily based in the North East and geared towards practical learning and application.
- **Signposting** – WIN works with a range of partner organisations and signposting of women to appropriate support services is an important element of its work. These organisations include private sector (banks,

¹ Ten female business owners and ten male business owners together with sixteen bankers took part in this qualitative study. The bankers were representative of the five main business banks in the North East: All the bankers held the position of Business banker or senior business banker and had portfolios of small business customers ranging from 150 to 400.

other business professionals, associations etc), public sector (local authorities regional development agencies etc), voluntary sector as well as peer group providers.

- **Dissemination of best practice** – WIN acts as a key gateway of sharing good practice in women’s business support. The experience of WIN and its activities has already been ‘exported’ to a number of different regions throughout the UK as well as further field. WIN also endeavours to bring into the Region good practice from elsewhere.

The delivery of these services over the past 5 years has brought WIN into contact with thousands of women - both potential and existing women business owners as well as hundreds of business support organisations and consultants. Currently WIN has a membership base of some 1500. It is the experiences of these members and their feedback to WIN that underpins the following reflections on the role and value of networking for building the social capital and confidence of women entrepreneurs.

6 Lessons Learned from Practice and Research to Date

Making Networking Explicit

Networking is a much-used term – business owners are encouraged to network and to build their networks but what does this actually mean? WIN ‘unpacks’ the concept of networking by researching perceptions surrounding networking and the practice of it. In this way it has developed a deeper understanding of networks and networking for women in business – especially how networks operate within different business cultures. Skills and competencies required for effective networking by women are identified from this work and passed on to women. The key lesson from this work to date is that women invariably have strong local ties and strong ‘core’ social capital from family and friends but benefit from help to develop ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ social capital – especially if there has been no experience of business ownership in their immediate family or peer group. To assist with the development of such capital WIN has recognised the following in its work.

- *It is important to offer ‘easy entry points’* to enable women to access existing networks, services or activities. Segmentation of the women’s market is an integral part of this as it highlights the needs of different women and hence for a range of interventions and activities in a variety of venues.
- *Providing Rehearsal space.* WIN offers women the opportunity to practice their networking and relationship building skills before moving on and being integrated into more mainstream business networks. This space affords the opportunity to build their confidence alongside their peer group as well as developing their skills for networking.
- *Both women only and mixed provision is provided.* The question is often asked whether WIN supports women only provision – it supports both. Targeted women-only business support is not an alternative to ensuring that mainstream business support is women-friendly. Although the option of women-only provision is available for many WIN events and services, it is acknowledged that many women will prefer to develop their business in a mixed-gender setting. The key message is that all business support providers should take into account the particular needs of women and base their services on these needs.
- *WIN provides a conduit for the support sector* - Many business support agencies fail to reach their target group particularly women from more disadvantaged communities. WIN helps in this respect through signposting and offering ‘getting to know spaces’ where business owners and support providers are able to meet new clients at events and vice versa.
- *Lobbying for change to existing business networks.* Many of the mainstream networks still field sexist racist speakers at events, which reinforce negative perception of women in the community and deter women from attending. WIN challenges such practices and promotes

the use of speakers who are more aware of the profile and diversity of their audiences.

Segmentation is Critical

Recognising individual needs is critical when helping people to develop social capital – relationships and trust are integral and how people build these with others is a very personal thing. Consequently segmenting ‘women’ as a client group is critical in attempting to really address and meet their needs.

- ***Women are not a homogeneous group!*** Whilst everyone states this fact it is surprising the number of researchers, policy makers and business support providers who still talk and deliver services for ‘WOMEN’. WIN is conscientious about segmenting its market/client base in a variety of different ways for both accessing women and supporting their development. Clearly WIN cannot serve the needs of all women all of the time – and in this respect signposting women onto other support providers can be critical and is an important aspect of how WIN works.
- ***‘Place, Space and Pace’*** are important issues for the delivery of any form of support. Taking these factors into account recognises that women at different ‘levels’ of business awareness, development and confidence require quite different forms of support at different times and venues. Offering networking opportunities at different times of the day, week, month and year is important. Likewise location is crucial with events being held in a variety of places and venues from slick inner city hotels to village halls.
- ***Self-selection is the key ethos.*** WIN makes efforts not to presume that it knows what women want. Instead the ethos is to clearly articulate what is on offer, what events are aiming to achieve and then it is up to the women themselves to decide whether the offering is appropriate for their needs.
- ***Churn is seen as positive.*** WIN doesn’t intend to hold onto their women members and welcomes women joining other networks relevant to their needs. WIN only ever intended having a membership of 100 women at any time but it now boasts 1400 members as women have felt the benefit of its activities and although they participate in other organisations and activities they opt to remain with WIN. Also WIN recognises that you cannot please everyone all the time – as noted above women are not a homogeneous group and WIN is not right for all!

Mixed Perceptions and Expectations

Having a good relationship with your professional advisers, such as bankers can be critical for business success. As noted earlier it has been well documented, that women face particular problems accessing appropriate

funding and financial advice when setting up and running their own businesses. These problems include of issues of credibility when dealing with bankers i.e. this is often a weak area of social capital for many women entrepreneurs – especially those with no history of business ownership in their peer groups. The bankers research by WIN referred to earlier raised a number of points for helping women to communicate more effectively with banking professionals. The two key lessons from this were:

- **Varied Expectations need to be acknowledged**
 - Women wanted their banker to be more proactive and interested in their business. They viewed the bank as an important stakeholder.
 - Men merely saw the bank as a service provider and no more
 - Women viewed access to the bankers networks as the added value aspect of their relationship

- **Different Modes of Meeting needed.** Modes of meeting and venues used by banks were often not appropriate for women. For example women are invited to golf days and football matches and many tended to decline these invitations. Consequently they were potentially missing opportunities for developing their networks, especially 'linking' contacts as well as doing business. One positive outcome from the research is that subsequently interventions have been developed to highlight these issues and address them – for example WIN training seminars for women how to better manage their bank managers, seeing them as a help to develop 'bridging and linking social capital' contacts as well as effective financial support. Seminars are also held for bankers – in helping them to segment their market and provide more effective services for their women clients.

Role Models

Again the powerful impact of introducing women to appropriate role models has long been recognised. The critical issue is the term 'appropriate'. Women role models have to be accessible to the women concerned otherwise the example is not someone who the women can model themselves upon. The UK has some very powerful women entrepreneurs such as Anita Roddick, founder of The Bodyshop. However she is too 'different and distant' – the bridge in social capital terms is too far! This is especially the case for many women in the northeast where as was noted earlier there are low levels and small numbers of women in business. Consequently WIN has focussed on developing and disseminating local role models from a variety of backgrounds taking up business ownership at different stages in their lives.

- WIN has been very active in developing publications with a diverse range of inspirational, aspirational and achievable role models from the north east and further field.

- WIN sees it is critical to disseminate local role models in order to highlight that it is not unusual for women to be in business and to be successful in business.

- Also once again the issue of heterogeneity of women - be this by business type, size or sector - is highlighted.
- Role model publications offer powerful visual imagery –that is overt and explicit. These publications are also used educational tools and promotional vehicles for the women who are featured in them and WIN itself.
- WIN has also brought leading national and international women entrepreneurs to the north east – so that local women can easily access opportunities to interact with very successful women who outside of their normal networks.

Stereotyped Assumptions & Impressions of business support providers

Biased/naïve assumptions about women in business and their support needs by frontline staff in business support services often present challenges for effective and trust based relationship building and can close off areas of support to women.

Examples from WIN research include:

- A woman in a rural area, having made a decision to visit her bank manager, spent time and resource arranging domestic and care responsibilities prior to the meeting and most certainly had garnered confidence for the meeting. Her overwhelming impression was that of 'not being taken seriously' as a 'part time business owner' with her 'country lifestyle'. She never approached any other business support agency until many years later when her business was ready for substantive growth- first impressions are critical especially when the transaction costs of getting to the meeting for the women are high.
- All too often home based portfolio or part time businesses are viewed as diminutive by the support and professional service sector and hence not worth time or attention. Such stereotyping is not uncommon by support agencies and is a critical issue determining women's access to effective support.
- It is not uncommon to hear of women searching websites for support, to find that the search using the word 'women' generates references to activities for the 'socially excluded' or 'disadvantaged'. This 'label of disadvantage or social exclusion' is one that is used by many business support agencies whose funding comes with these 'eligibility tags' attached to it. However to be quizzed whether one falls into these categories as one of the first questions in response to an initial enquiry instantly gives a negative message and deters women from further pursuing support.

8. The Awards – a case study of how to practice networking and provide a vehicle for building confidence through social capital.

Taking WIN's annual awards event as a case study we can look at the development of social capital and its role in building confidence.

The Awards and development of the Award Process

WIN has developed and hosts 'The Annual Women Entrepreneur of the Year Awards'. This event is a powerful mechanism for developing and promoting women's business role models to both men and women throughout the region and has become a very popular occasion with seats selling out very quickly – see Table 3 overleaf profiling the awards

Table 3 Facts and Figures about the Award Process

	No of Awards	Total Applicants	No. Attending	Press coverage	Nomination Events	Launch
WIN 1 2000	5	51	200	9		
WIN 2 2001	6	52	210	7	15 October	
WIN 3 2002	8	103	240	11	19 September	26 July
WIN 4 2003	9	130	319	54	3 July 2 September	29 May
WIN 5 2004	9	144	450	27	10th June 19th August 3rd September	7th May

However the event also provides another important opportunity – it is a live case study on networking. Through the practicalities of organising the award event each year, WIN engages in a series activities that practically demonstrate a multi-levelled process of relationship building. This ranges from winning support for awards (sponsorship) through to effective engagement with the media and the business support sector (communication) and most importantly of all encouraging buy in from those the awards are directed (women entrepreneurs themselves).

WIN are very clear as to why they set up ‘The North East women Entrepreneur of the Year Awards’ The current awards in the region were called the Business Man of the year Awards which was an appropriate title as only men were entering and winning them. However in 1997 a women won the awards for the first time in and she too was called the Businessman of the Year. WIN challenges language and visual imagery in terms of the message they are imparting to women and felt this was inappropriate. Win lobbied to have the names of the awards changed to Businesses Executive of the Year

and also found that very few nominations were coming from women hence the need for awards to celebrate successful women running businesses. WIN is clear that these awards would have a clear focus of women in enterprise and not women in management or women of achievement of which there are a plethora. WIN is also clear that the award categories would be very much business focussed and certainly not award prizes in the names of Greek goddesses for example. In 2000 when the WIN awards started there were five different categories in 2004 there are nine – including rural, ICT, International business, newcomer, innovative and social.

In 2001 The Susan Dobson Memorial Fund, set up to honour a remarkable women entrepreneur who hailed from the North East and who was passionate about both her native region and women in business, approached WIN to explore ways of working together. It was decided that the Memorial Fund would sponsor the main award itself each year as a fitting tribute to Susan who died of breast cancer in 1999.

Beginning with the Launch Event where key stakeholders in women's enterprise, award sponsors, past winners, existing and aspirant women business owners gather to hear about the effect of winning both on women's confidence and the development of their business. These are followed up by Nomination Events in smaller settings where women are encouraged to enter for the next year's award. At these events previous award winners and runners up tell of their own experiences of entering the awards and the benefits to them and their businesses. The regional business paper runs a series of weekly media coverage examining each business category in the awards and profiling previous years winners. The Awards Event, where the awards are presented each year and which grows year on year this year attracting 550 people, is now a truly mainstreamed event attracting a variety of men and women from the regional and national business communities. After the event itself a series of post Award activities take place and media coverage continues through until the next cycle of nominations.

Individual benefits that arise from the awards

For women who are short listed, runners up and winners the benefits include:

- Increased confidence
- Greater visibility
- a voice which is now heard (women have said that they say the same things as winners as they said before but now newspapers want to quote them and they are invited as guest speakers at a variety of events)
- Increased contacts and networks
- More business

Collective benefits that arise

For women entrepreneurs in the North East

- Increased profile and credibility
- Greater interest, the Small business editor insists on profiling at least women in the business pages each day.
- Voice – the media both regional and national regularly want to quote these women in articles on a variety of topics
- Acceptance into mainstream business networks. People see that women do do business and should therefore be invited to and accepted on mainstream business committees and events

Benefits for others

- Support agencies are given credit for support and have their profiles raised. They are also given access to women role models that they can use to generate business.
- Media – newspaper and journals have ready-made copy for articles on women in business.
- Funders, are aware of the profile they are given for their sponsorship monies that goes far beyond the awards themselves
- Access to women entrepreneurs

The lessons learned from this process are about proactively increasing opportunities for social contacts in terms of volume, quality, diversity and in a variety of different contexts and enabling women to develop social capital out of the

9 In Summary

Women's business ownership is on the increase in the UK albeit at differing rates within the country and at a much slower rate than the US. Much research looking at the experiences and trends of women's enterprise have identified a number of barriers facing women in their pursuit of business ownership. Business support in the UK, to date, has tended to focus on the explicit/ 'visible' and practical barriers for women primarily relating to lack of skills, appropriate finance, childcare support and access to non local markets. One barrier, which is seen as gender specific to women is that of low, or lack of self-confidence. Lack of confidence is seen as a somewhat 'umbrella' term being the reason behind women's s/lower start up rates, especially in non-traditional sectors; their allegedly risk averse attitudes to business; their unwillingness to borrow and their reluctance to grow more substantive businesses. One more recent form of support - networking and relationship building has sought to address the area of self-confidence by helping women to understand the place and importance of relationships for business, to review their own range of contacts and build additional contacts and relationships where there are gaps. This paper gives a brief insight into how

WIN, a networking based business support initiative for aspiring and practising women entrepreneurs, has sought to use more effective networking to help build women's self confidence about business through helping to build their social capital.

In essence WIN has been helping women to build their social capital especially 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital through accessing them to new contacts and new contexts. WIN has achieved this – largely 'implicitly' through its broad portfolio of networking and networking related activities. In reviewing these activities with members WIN has found that these activities seem to have really encouraged women and helped them to build contacts and confidence in themselves. The WIN project has also seen the emergence of and encouraged other local women's' business networks within the Northeast region. WIN has shown that hundreds of jobs have been created in and by women owned businesses within region and WIN has been selected as best practice model by a EU commissioned survey on women business support and the WIN model and approach is being disseminated to four other regions in the UK as well as three different countries.

The key conclusion from WIN's research and experience so far is to work more explicitly with social capital and asset building. Social asset building is critical for successful women's entrepreneurship and work on this aspect of 'doing business' needs to be given more attention – making the tacit explicit. WIN has supported networking as a development tool for business and a means of helping women to build their confidence. To date WIN's experience shows that relationship and social capital building is a dynamic process, which involves life long learning for all concerned. A more in-depth understanding, mapping and tracking of the concept, 'relationship building' and its role in social capital accumulation and building self confidence is now an integral part of WIN's work.

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