

Navigating Power Structures



An initiative of:



FALLING
WALLS
FOUNDATION

With funding from the:



This programme is supported by:

DIE ZEIT
VERLAGSGRUPPE

academics

Boehringer
Ingelheim

Young Entrepreneurs in Science



- opens up new career perspectives for young researchers
- part of the Falling Walls Foundation
- enabled by Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space



CHECK-IN



Emoji Check-In



Everybody, show us your emoji mood!

NAVIGATING POWER STRUCTURES



Agenda

Part I

- Check-In
- Input: Power and Status
- Socialisation & Communication Patterns
- Exercise 1: Status- vs. Relationship-Orientation

Part II

- Input: Techniques
- Exercise 2: Navigating Power Structures
- Transfer
- Summary & Check-Out

Learning Goals



Understand how power, status and communication patterns shape whose ideas are heard



Make sense of your own experiences in academic and entrepreneurial power dynamics



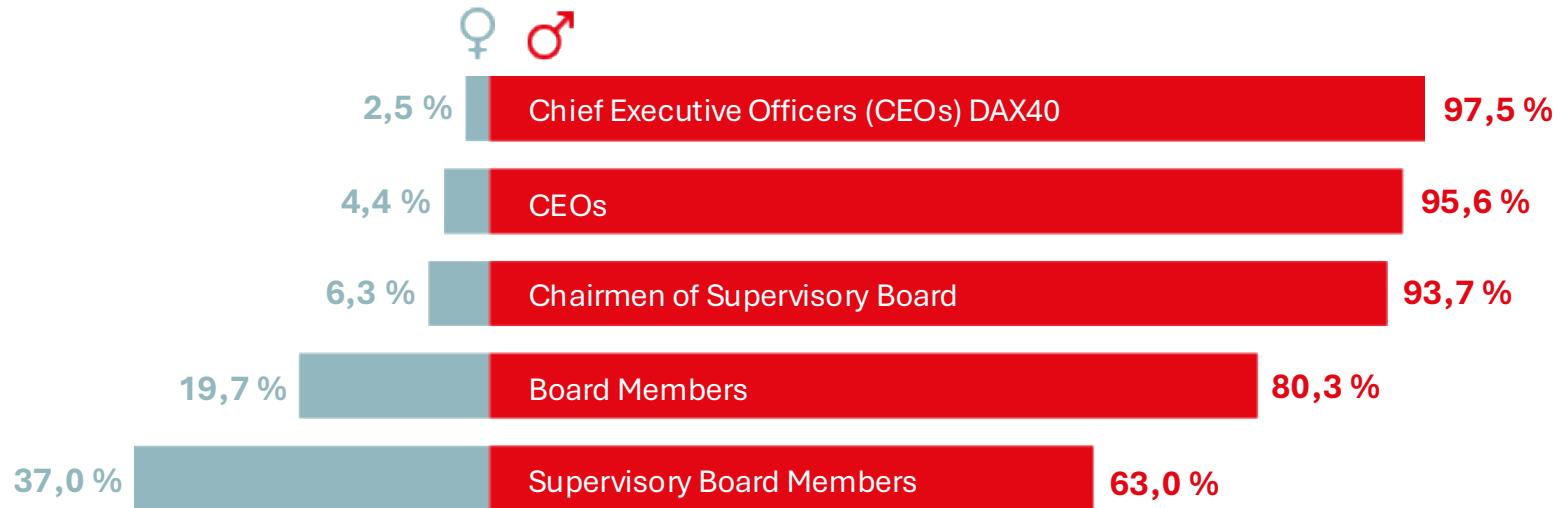
Take away concrete strategies and develop one next step to move your idea/topic forward

How is that Possible?

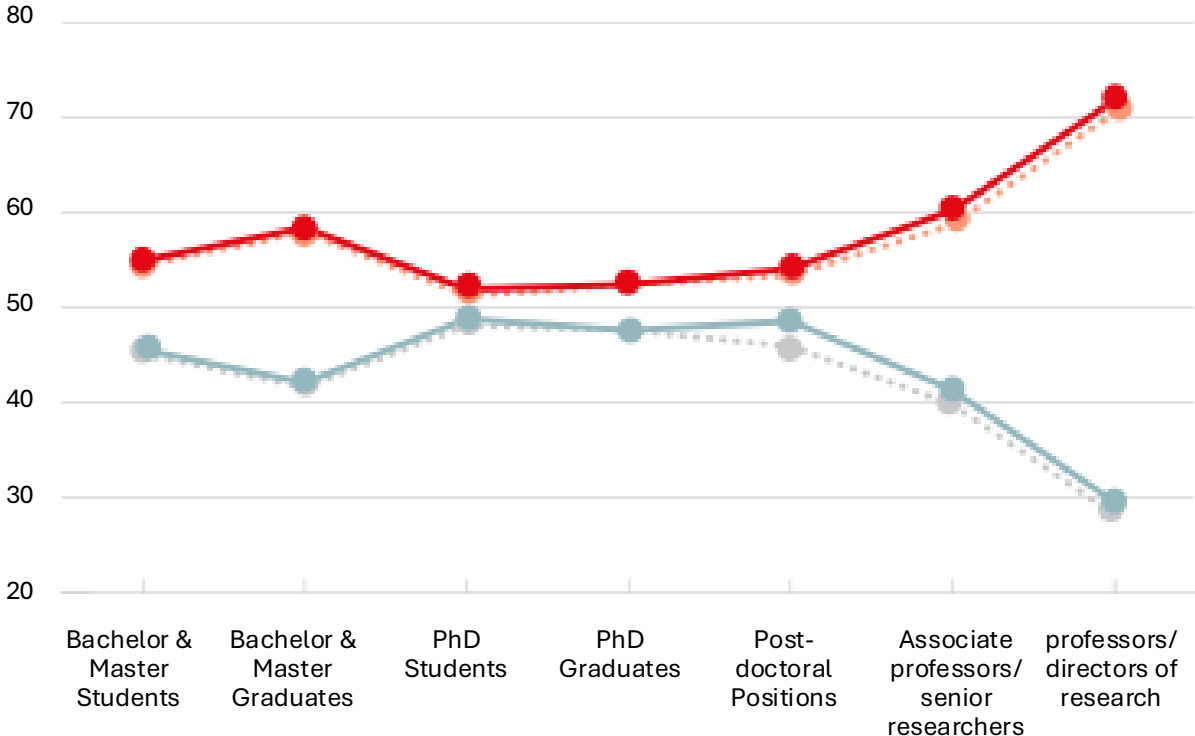


Power & Gender

Power Distribution in Companies



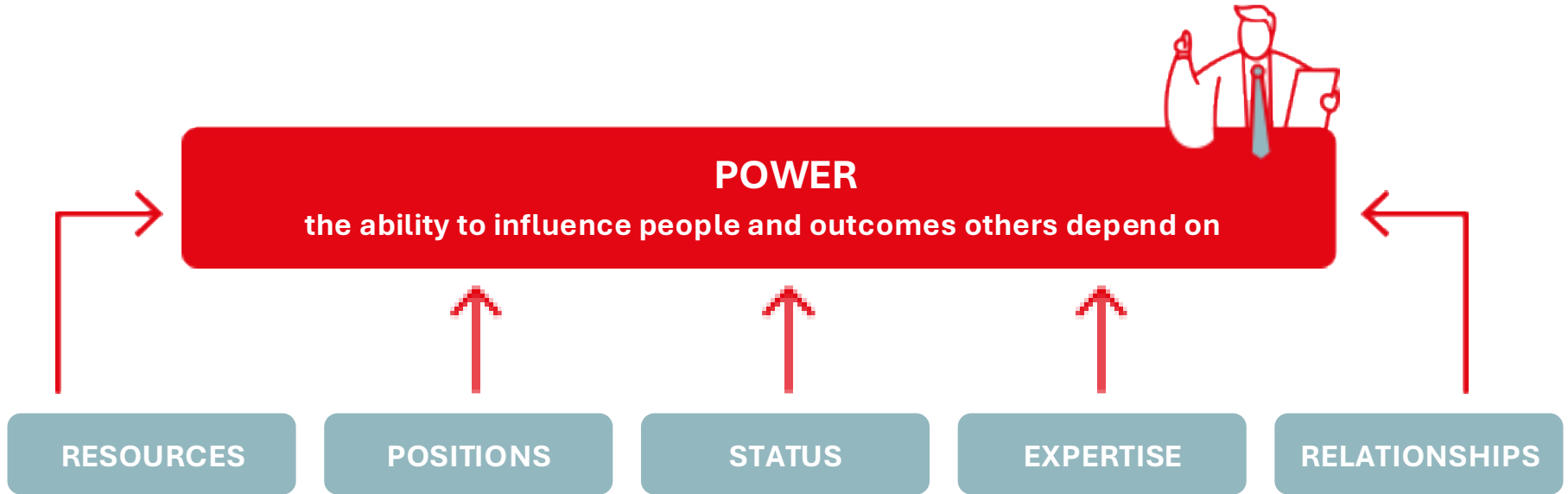
Power Distribution in Academia



Source: European Commission 2024.

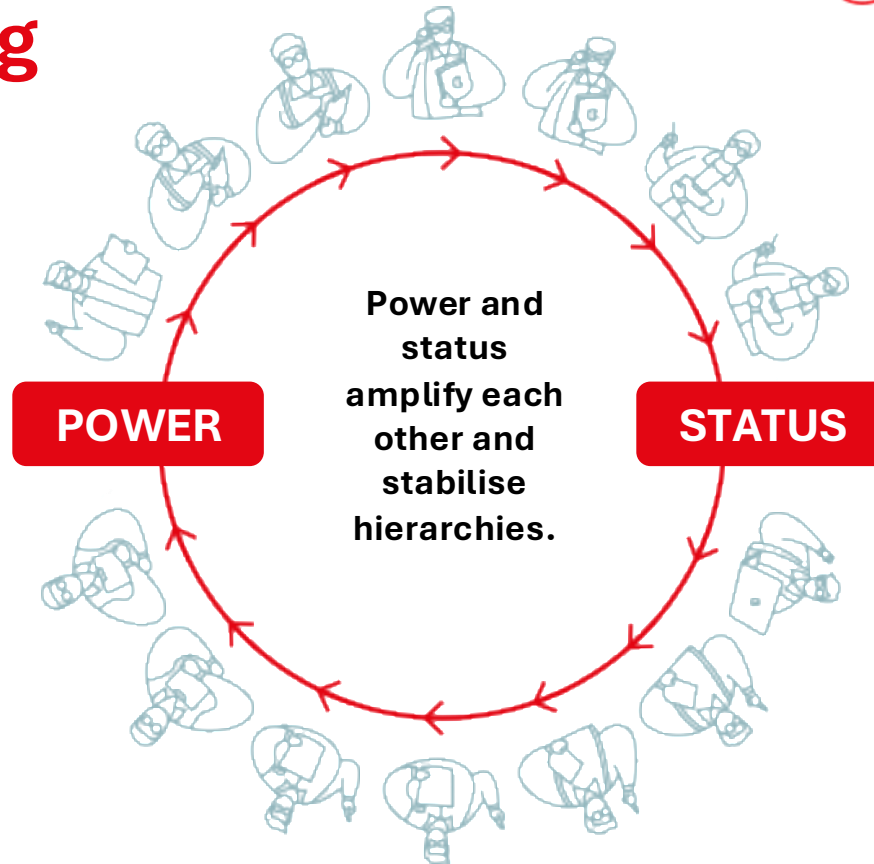
Power, Status & Gender – a Systemic Pattern

What is Power?



→ Access to these power sources is not equally distributed.

Power & Status: A Self-Reinforcing Loop



Power Shapes Systems



Power shapes systems.

Those with more power are more likely to design the rules – and benefit from them.

Similarity Bias



How did we get there?

Different rewards and penalties



Boys tend to learn to use language to negotiate status through

- Focusing on competition
- Displaying their knowledge and abilities
- Challenging/teasing each other
- **Rewarded (status-wise) for being dominant and loud**



Girls tend to learn to use language to negotiate relationship through

- Focusing on connection/harmony
- Downplaying ways in which one is better than the other
- Balancing own needs with those of others
- **Punished for sounding too sure of themselves or being too dominant**

Different communication styles



These are stereotypes, not rules – but these different communication styles shape how many of us later show up in meetings, negotiations and other power structures.



Status-Oriented vs. Relationship-Oriented Communication

STATUS-ORIENTED	RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTED
Position/Status before relationship, thinks in hierarchies and rank	Status emerges from relationship
Direct, assertive	Indirect, relational, harmony-oriented
Makes statements, claims and sets boundaries	Asks questions
Report talk (facts, results)	Rapport talk (connection)
Interrupts	Waits for turn
Challenges openly	Buffers disagreement, values harmony, smiles
Takes space, entitlement to speak	Gives space, asks for permission
“I”, claims credit and authorship, self-promotion, signalling competence visibly	“We”, shares credit, team-oriented, downplaying own competence
→ Rewarded in hierarchies: often perceived as confident and leadership-like	→ Undervalued in hierarchies, but often perceived as cooperativ

Let's put it to practice...



Meet Dr. Nora Yildiz



Age: 33

Position: Postdoctoral researcher at a large German public university

Field: Environmental engineering / materials science

Role in her research group:

- Leads a technical subproject within a large collaborative research project with 2 PhDs
- Writes grant proposals and Publishes regularly

However:

- Her professor must approve funding applications, publications and conference visibility

Nora's Idea



In the course of her research, Nora developed the idea to **use composite material for decentralized water filtration systems.**

The technology has strong **commercial potential for sustainable water treatment.**

Together with two colleagues, she is exploring a startup based on this idea.

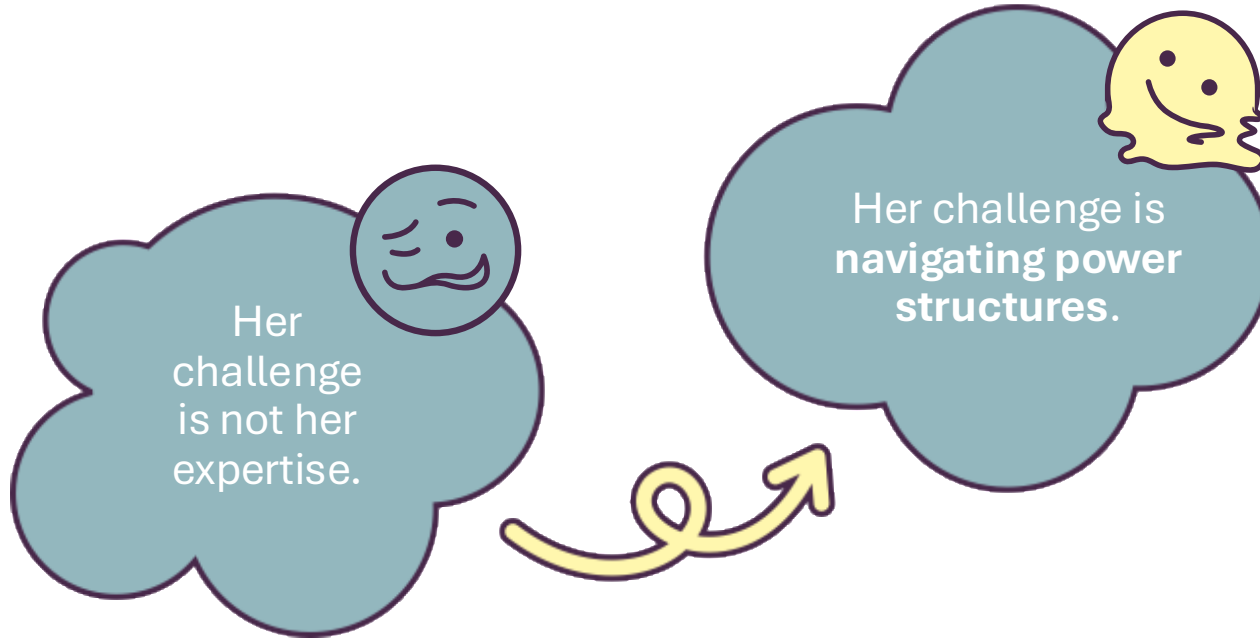
Co-founder:

- **Lukas Schmidt (34)**
 - Mechanical engineer, PhD candidate in Nora's lab
 - Strong in prototyping and technical development

The team is preparing a **spin-off while Nora continues her academic work.**

Nora's Goal

Bringing her research based business idea forward.



Challenge: Moving Her Idea Forward



Discuss in small groups

Identify
concrete
communication
elements on
Miro.

The screenshot shows a Miro board titled "Navigating Power Structures". The board is organized into three columns, each representing a group's workspace:

- Group 1 - Read the scenario** (teal background):
 - 1 Read the scenario: A comic strip showing a group of people in a meeting.
 - 1.2 Identify communication patterns: A table with columns for "STATUS" and "RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTATION".
 - Rewrite the scenario: A section with a "STATUS-VS. RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTATION" table and icons for a lightbulb, a hand, and a red square.
- Group 2 - Read the scenario** (orange background):
 - 1 Read the scenario: A comic strip showing a group of people in a meeting.
 - 1.2 Identify communication patterns: A table with columns for "STATUS" and "RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTATION".
 - Rewrite the scenario: A section with a "STATUS-VS. RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTATION" table and icons for a lightbulb, a hand, and a red square.
- Group 3 - Read the scenario** (purple background):
 - 1 Read the scenario: A comic strip showing a group of people in a meeting.
 - 1.2 Identify communication patterns: A table with columns for "STATUS" and "RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTATION".
 - Rewrite the scenario: A section with a "STATUS-VS. RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTATION" table and icons for a lightbulb, a hand, and a red square.

The Miro interface includes a top bar with the "miro" logo and the board title, and a left sidebar with various tool icons.

Why not getting heard is a systemic problem...



Communication is never neutral – it is shaped by power relations and status hierarchies.

- Statements from **high-status groups** are given more weight.
- **Status-oriented communication** is often associated with competence and leadership.
- **Relationship-oriented communication** is often associated lower authority and uncertainty

Not being heard is therefore often **systemic**, not an individual failure.
→ Awareness gives you more strategic choice in **how you position your ideas**.

Navigation Tools / Communication Techniques



1. Stopping Interruptions



→ **Assertively, but respectfully, reclaim the floor:**

- “One moment, [Name of Interrupter], I’d like to finish my thought. Then, I’m happy to hear your perspective.”
- “[Name of Interrupter], let me just complete this point, and then I’ll hand over.”

2. Reclaiming Your Ideas



→ Calmly Reclaim the Idea:

- “I’m glad this resonates – that’s exactly what I suggested earlier. Let me add one detail...”
- “Thanks for picking up on my earlier point. Building on that, I’d propose we...”

3. Taking Space



- Take space with your upper body
- Avoid constant smiling.
- Speak clearly and loud enough.

4. Making Your Competence Visible



→ Use “I” + concrete facts

- “In my last project I led a team of X and delivered Y.”
- “In my research I conducted N experiments; based on that I recommend...”

5. De-soften Your Language



- Stop apologizing!
- Reduce
 - erasing language like: „I might be wrong, but...” or „Maybe this is a stupid idea...”
 - questions like: „Should we maybe consider...?” or „Do you think it might make sense...?”
- Increase clear statements like
 - „From my experience I recommend...”
 - „Based on the data, I suggest...”

Balance is Key!



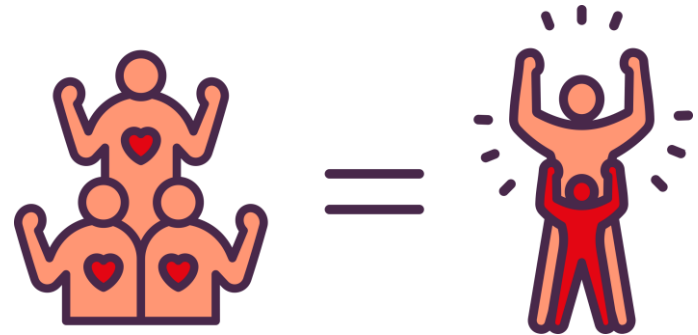
Balance is Key!

Women are often expected to show **warmth and cooperation**, while leadership and authority are associated with **competence and assertiveness**.

If communication is perceived as:

- **too relationship-oriented** → risk of being overlooked
- **too status-oriented** → risk of social backlash

→ Try to combine both!



How it works ...



Step 2: Team Work

Go back into your groups.



Status- vs. Relationship-Orientation

How could Nora communicate differently in order to reach her goals?

Rewrite the scenario. Use the techniques presented as a guideline.



15 minutes

Sharing...



**How was the exercise for you?
Any insights or questions you would like to share?**

**Awareness is the
first step.**



Wrapping up!



I like, I wish, I take away...

Stay connected with the YES community



- Join our **LinkedIn group**
- Take part in other (Online-) **Workshops**
- Tell your peers and spread the word via **social media**
- Stay active in our **Alumni-Community**
- Keep learning from each other on your entrepreneurial journey



Boost your career with your YES experience



- Connect with YES and fellow participants on LinkedIn
- Share your YES certificate on Social Media
- Add YES to your trainings on LinkedIn and your CV
- ... and carry the entrepreneurial spirit further.



Top-Talents-Track

You've got a bold idea from your research – now what?

We are expanding our programme with the **Top-Talents-Track**, a three-month support programme for 20 highly qualified talents from our network. It combines workshops, individual coaching, peer-to-peer learning formats, and networking events.



Thank you!



Connect with us and each other via Social Media ...



LinkedIn
Page



LinkedIn
Group



Instagram
@sciencepreneurs



Newsletter

THE END



Sources

- **Henningsmeyer, Anja (2019).**
Denn sie wissen, was sie tun. Wie Frauen erfolgreich verhandeln.
Campus Verlag.
- **Knaths, Marion (2021).**
FRAUENMACHT! Die besten Wege, zu überzeugen und erfolgreich zu sein.
Berlin Verlag.
- **Bachmann, Jana & Burel, Simone (2025).**
Durch die Glasdecke. Wie Frauen die Gender Negotiation Gap schließen und am Verhandlungstisch überzeugen.
Springer Gabler.
- **Tannen, Deborah (1995).**
The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why.
Harvard Business Review.
- **Kompetenzzentrum Technik-Diversity-Chancengleichheit e. V. (Hrsg.) (2025).**
Innovativ – Exzellent – Sichtbar: Frauen in Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Impulse, Best-Practice-Beispiele und Handlungsempfehlungen.
Tagungsband zur Fachtagung am 20./21. März 2025 in Berlin.
- **European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2024).**
She figures 2024 – Gender in research and innovation – Statistics and indicators.
Publications Office of the European Union.
- **Hirschfeld Alexander, Jannis Gilde, Vanusch Walk, Franziska Teubert and Clara Stellbrink (2025).**
Female Founders Monitor 2025.
Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- **AllBright Stiftung gGmbH (2017).**
Ein ewiger Thomas-Kreislauf? Wie deutsche Börsenunternehmen ihre Vorstände rekrutieren.
PögeDruck.
- **Rock, David (2018).**
Managing with the Brain in Mind. Neuroscience research is revealing the social nature of high-performance workplace.
Strategy+business by PwC.
- **Lunenberg, Fred (2012).**
Power and Leadership: An Influence Process.
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT, BUSINESS, AND ADMINISTRATION, VOLUME 15, NUMBER 1, 2012.