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What invisible, gendered labour is happening in the UK space sector?

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WISPER TEAM

Women in Space: Experiences and Roles



Report available

Our work:

Where are we now? Today

"What hidden work are women doing and how is it valued in the UK space sector?"

Historical context

Knowledge exchange: how effective is policy to improve gendered experiences in space sector.

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What is invisible labour?

Gendered labour

- Doing certain types of work because of your gender.

Invisible labour

- Unseen, unvalued or undervalued work.
- This work is often vital to the workplace, but systematically undervalued and undersupported.
- Large overlaps with race, class etc.

We should address this.

Value work for what it contributes. Rewards and compensation require visibility.

Equal engagement and diverse decision making.

It can be emotionally draining and make people feel isolated.

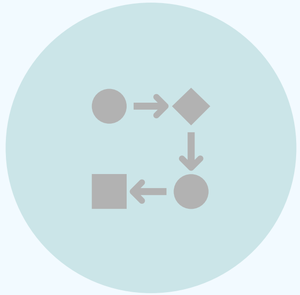
Principles of our approach



Use existing knowledge rather than re-doing it; translate from other disciplines.



Quantitative approaches are not always best for understanding people's experiences.



Highlight the complex, systematic nature of this phenomenon that requires sustained approach.



Validate people - increase belonging, make people feel seen.

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Invisible labour scoping review

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Remuneration and recognition
Similar pay for similar work

Resources
Is access to necessary resources for the role gendered?

Identity based labour
Doing certain types of work because of your gender

Internal identity based labour
Doing difficult-to-quantify internal work that is still necessary for a role

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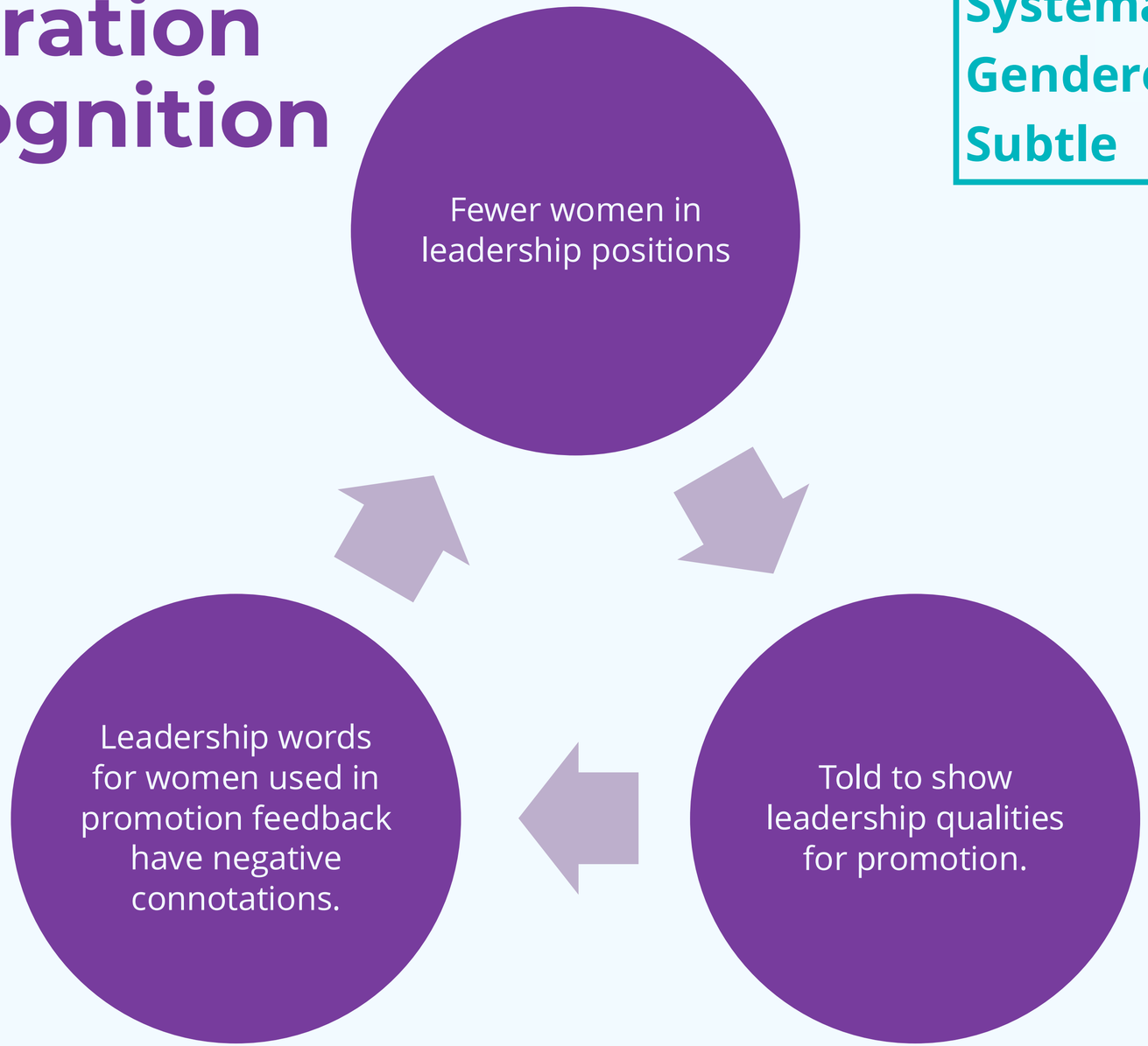
Remuneration and recognition

This example:

Systematic *(women cannot fix this)*

Gendered

Subtle



Agentic leadership traits get women labelled “abrasive” or “opinionated,” and their promotion feedback is more likely to be unusable. (Textio, 2024)

“I was told to act more ‘masculine’ to be promoted” 🚀

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Resources

This example:

Systematic *(women cannot fix this)*

Gendered

Subtle

- Work required to access the same resources as majority peers.

"We submitted the same ticket, his was paid attention to but I was just told to "turn it off and on again"." 

- Resources not there; historical space suit design choices prevent smaller frames (e.g. women) from doing the same tasks.

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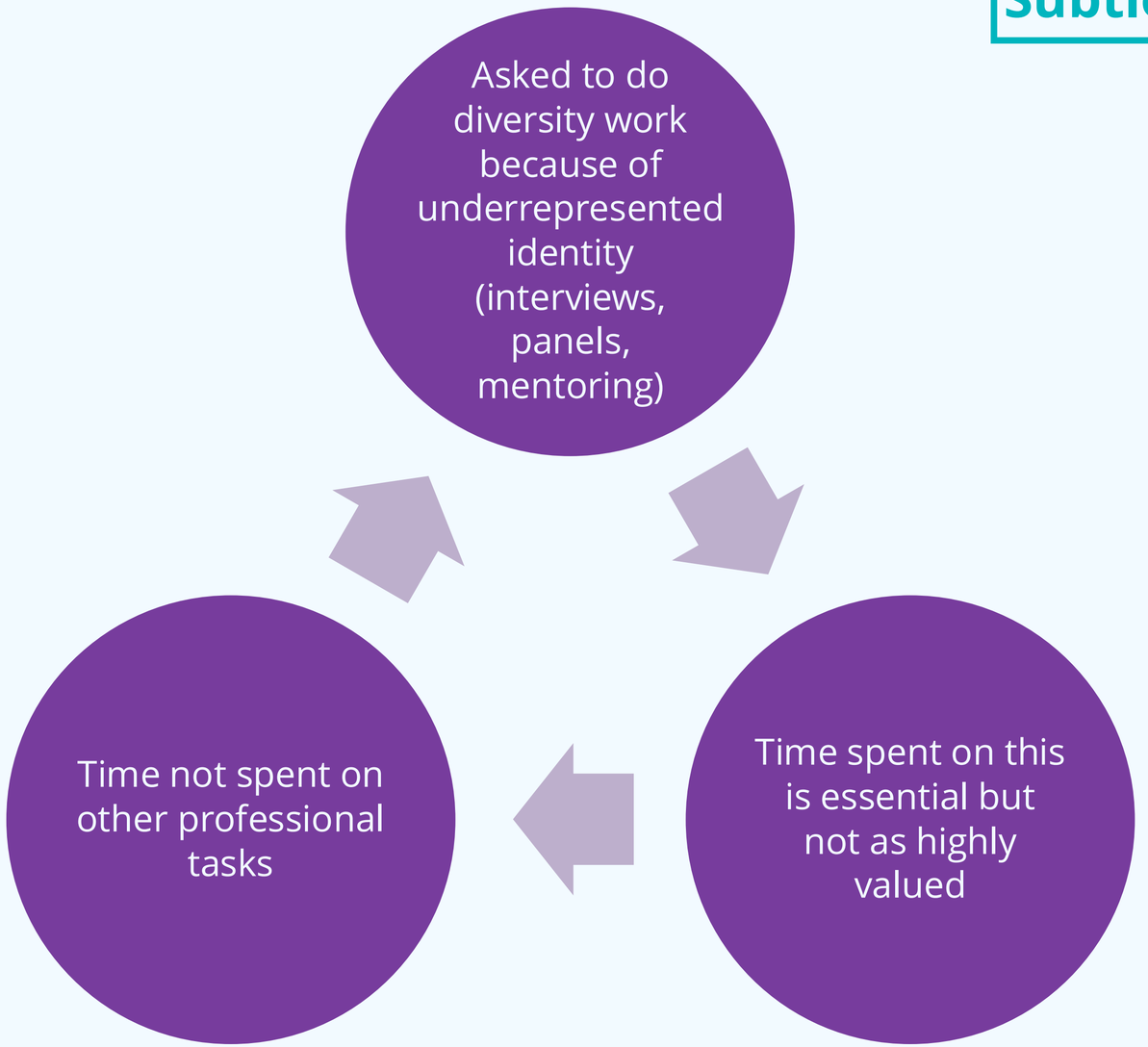
Identity based labour

This example:

Systematic

~~Gendered~~ **Identity based**

Subtle



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Internal identity based labour

This example:

Systematic

~~Gendered~~ **Identity based**

Subtle

- An aspect of our identity is our **professional identity** – qualities and values that are essential to our work and to being part of our community at work.
- This is much harder to develop in the first place if the stereotypical professional identity contradicts with unchangeable aspects of who you are
  - Longer to choose and reach career goals without being able to envision career paths *(Papafilippou & Bentley 2017)*
  - Conversations highlighting this contrast (e.g. microaggressions) require emotional work to manage and are associated with increased burnout *(Hall et al., 2019)*

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Complex and systematic

- If these examples keep happening to the same people then the labour to manage these is significant.
- The work being done to fix these is usually being done by the people affected.

A quote that brings all these areas together:

An engineer describing subtle, hard-to-prove bias: *"work opportunities that just 'happen' to land with my male colleagues, promotions that just 'happen' to always land with my male colleagues instead of me... 'mistakes' being made where I am assumed to be in HR and not an engineer."* 🚀

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Summary

This is a complex and systematic problem.

We translate four categories to investigate:

- Recognition and remuneration
- Resources
- Identity-based labour
- Internal, identity work

from a gender studies literature review.

Which of these are significant in the UK space sector?

Sign up to receive our questionnaire when completed!

Or drop your business card / sign up on the way out of the room.

Get the slides (long or short)

More examples and useful resources (including an equity Toolkit, our report, Landmark global space gender studies)

Or visit my website.

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