Preface

The knowledge economy is both global and highly competitive in nature and it is no longer possible to achieve economic resilience and growth by taking a conventional approach. Policy makers talk about inclusive development where governments and civil society are committed to achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, but struggle to develop models to turn their rhetoric into action. Too many people are still excluded from employment or the opportunity to influence policy and development decisions because they are denied a voice based on their gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability or poverty. When gender intersects with any of these, individuals can be further disadvantaged and find that they are unable to, or excluded from opportunities that would provide them a better quality of life and agency over their own future.

This book on Gender Economics provides a discourse on how to advance current development and business practices through holistic and multidisciplinary views on gender, introducing frameworks, models and metrics for inclusive and equitable economic and organisational development practices. It asks the reader to go further, to challenge traditional thinking on economic issues and women’s empowerment by overlaying a sociological and gender lens to reframe issues and approach them from a different perspective.

It has drawn chapters from an international audience, as well as from academic papers presented at the first Global Gender Economics Conference (GGEC14), hosted by The Centre for Gender Economics and Innovation at the University of NSW, Sydney June 10 and June 11, 2014. They offer a broad view of Gender Economics across the areas of Diversity, Women’s Empowerment, Economics and Law. This book includes chapters from practitioners in the field that provides a firsthand account of the issues, solutions and opportunities in terms of the development process at a global level and diversity at an organisational level.

Gender Economics combines the disciplines of economics, gender studies and sociology to explore the process of research and its resultant recommendations. It applies sociological perspectives, and challenges existing norms and paradigms in our business environments, our civil society, the private sphere and government. By challenging existing norms and ways of thinking in our business environments, we will realize greater benefits in terms of innovation and performance as well as the economic empowerment of women and a clear and measurable increase to economic productivity.

The case for gender diversity is not yet proven beyond a doubt, and although there is a large volume of empirical evidence constantly quoted by research organisations, consulting companies and women’s interest groups, there is a lack of clear and substantiated evidence. Consequently without a baseline from which to start our measurement of any improvement to the bottom line profit of organisations, or indeed, the per capita increase to economic productivity, many do not make gender balance a priority.
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This book on Gender Economics aims to present a case to make gender diversity a priority, to apply the same rigor to understanding the benefits of gender diversity and women’s economic empowerment as we do to the science of space travel, or at least to the practice of organisational change and economic rationalism. The chapters in this book look at a range of issues in an effort to reframe entrenched practices, values and structures; but this is only the starting point. To redefine this field of study and to make it attractive, we must also make its research outcomes applicable to business by developing practical tools, frameworks and methodologies that allow us to question existing structures, laws, policies and even academic pursuits by looking at them through a gender lens. Looking at gender from the perspective of profitability and economics, overlaid by a sociological perspective, provides the necessary background information about how we have arrived at the structure of contemporary society, and lets the reader make his or her own decisions about possible solutions. Gender Economics requires that we look deeper at society and how we think about gender and economics.

THE CHALLENGES

Literature on Gender Economics is difficult to find. Gender Economics as defined by this author aims to challenge the existing ideas of fundamental economics and contemporary business practice and this author believes this book is the first step in defining and growing this important field of study.

The process of developing this book has been interesting and I must thank the diligent and informed efforts of the participating authors who come from a range of countries, backgrounds and experiences. For some, the editing process was brutal, challenging them to expand their typical academic experiences and push past barriers in their own thinking, often built up over decades of economic mantra. For the economists, it meant looking more holistically at their findings and overlaying them with a sociological and then a gender lens. For others, it meant challenging their own views on gender and business. The reader will find a number of views on women’s empowerment and how we measure it. This will lead to further research aimed at developing new discourses around gender and it provides a starting point for further discussions and research on the newly defined field of Gender Economics. A number of chapters in this book highlight ‘innovativeness’, and point to potential areas of economic growth by highlighting the outcomes of studies that reveal the gender mix of new entrepreneurs entering the marketplace. This is an important area of study, that brings with it enormous possibility to encourage creativity and innovation, and highlights the need to ensure that there are no gendered barriers to adequately support those entering new business ventures.

The understanding of the role of gender in economics is relatively new and was led, in part, by feminists questioning the role of women in the labour supply chain and its impact on economic outcomes. (Figart & Warnecke 2013). However the field has broadened over recent times with a more detailed evaluation of the role that economics has on the lives of women and men in society. Other forces including biology, culture and the environment and society in which they live often disadvantage women. A major complexity in Gender Economics is the different levels of women’s empowerment, and how the issues confronting women differ considerably between the developed and the developing worlds (Eswaran 2014, pp.2). The types of issues generally associated with Gender Economics, or more precisely female economics, include micro finance, women’s education, the gender gap, affirmative action and women’s empowerment. Gender Economics as defined in this book aims to introduce the reader to a broader view that can be defined as the “fusion of sociology, economics and gender studies, and looks at shifting cur-
rent perceptions of gender and how we use these perceptions in framing economic policy. Very often, it is an intersection of gender, values and beliefs that create policy decisions, many of which are based on outdated models. It is important that we start to understand how economic research is conducted, how statistical analysis is created and how this flows into policy decisions and ultimately the business bottom line.” (Moore 2013). Gender Economics is inclusive of all gendered identities and considers the interplay of gender in society at all levels and does limit the conversation to women. Using this inclusive approach allows us to examine how issues have developed by analysing the drivers (social, sexual, behavioural and cultural), the institutions and economic structures and how they have been influenced by gendered economics.

“Gender Economics is about “dissecting and creating a new discourse around economic theory that fuses Economics, Gender and Sociology” (Moore 2013)

Chapters in this book draw from economic theory, gender studies and sociology and include policy assessment as well as empirical research and are arranged within the categories of Policy, Investment, Environment and Innovation and Health. These categories form the basis of the proposed field of Gender Economics and are defined by this author in Chapter 1 of this book, “Gender Economics, an introduction to Contemporary Gender Economics”. The chapters then expand on traditional concepts to introduce the reader to Diversity Economics. At an organisational level, think of a persistent organisational challenge and start to unpick it by looking at the assumptions and environments that created the challenge in the first place. Most likely, the core of the challenge has been created by imposing outdated business models, values and measurements that no longer work. Next, reframe the challenge by applying new thought paradigms, to perhaps uncover innovations that lead to increases in performance. In our contemporary society, many traditional gender stereotypes have shifted and organisations can no longer assume that they are catering to the working heterosexual white male with a wife at home, because this model is no longer valid with the increasing participation of women in the workforce (Linacre Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). Although many business leaders know this on a rational level, behaviours and practices are still entrenched as much of our business culture is centuries old from the structures to the drivers, and our organisations need to change to keep pace with a global economy where diversity and cross-cultural management require new skills around managing complexity.

PROGRESS?

In 2009, the Harvard Business Review (Silverstein & Sayre 2009) made the bold statement that “Women now drive the world economy”, and estimated that globally women would control about $20 trillion in annual consumer spending over the next five years. Look at any social networking site or news stream and you will see articles that recognise that the financial empowerment of women is a game changer. Businesses must now attract talent from as wide a pool as possible. Many are recognising that developing a “Women’s Employer of Choice” reputation will ultimately help them increase their competitiveness in the market. However, it is not as simple as painting women’s issues with a ‘pink’ brush; organisations must understand the shifts that have taken place in gendered stereotypes and how this sociological change is now affecting business structures and changes in economic policy formation.
The discourse regarding women’s issues has risen exponentially over the last forty or so years since the 1960’s when the 2nd wave of feminism took advantage of the free-love-peace movement to raise its voice once again in the 1960’s through to 1990’s. At least in white Anglo-Saxon feminist movements, women like Germaine Greer (1939) and Gloria Steinem (1934) became household names. “Second-wave feminism is closely linked to the radical voices of women’s empowerment and differential rights and, during the 1980s to 1990s, also to a crucial differentiation of second-wave feminism itself, initiated by women of color and third-world women” (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005, p. 1)

Similarly, the gay and lesbian movement of the 1970’s has progressed the acceptance of other gendered identities, expanding our view of roles of men and women, and forcing society to rethink the ideas of relationship, marriage and family. In our workplaces, diversity programs are becoming commonplace. Pressure from the LGBTI community ensures dialogues of acceptance and tolerance, at least in terms of same sex relationships. Increasingly, other gendered identities challenge our traditional view of heterosexuality and the idea of the ideal family of father as breadwinner and mother as homemaker. But we are still in a transition, and some continue to struggle with this change even as new economies are building around them based on the recognition of additional gendered identities. Curiously, while homosexuality is increasingly accepted in many parts of the world and openly ‘gay’ leaders, sportspeople and celebrities ‘come out’ to proclaim their status, women’s rights seem to continue to lag. A number of the chapters in this book look at the health and well being of women and question how far we have come in increasing the status of women and women’s economic empowerment.

THE GENDER GAP MATTERS

Gender is big business. New economies, businesses and consulting companies are developing that specifically cater for the gay community. Women’s estimated consumer input into the economy alone is substantial and increasingly the cost of gender-based violence (usually men perpetuating violent acts against women) is recognized as an issue for business performance and company employee value.

The terms gender, diversity and flexibility have come to be associated with women. Diversity Programs and corporate leaders constantly use these words when referring to women in an attempt to improve women’s participation in the leadership pipeline. This has had the effect of devaluing the meanings of these words, and reinforcing the assumption that women are associated with care giving and domestic work. Instead of broadening the conversation to evaluate the opportunities for all genders, diversity and flexibility, childcare and the wage gap are aligned with ‘women’s issues’. Diversity and flexibility are necessary components of contemporary business environments in a global and complex world and one must force a change in gendered language that continues to align parenting with women.

Looking at some of the advantages of diverse thinking in decision making and taking that further to include gender diversity, Friedman (1993) talks about friendship and moral growth: “The greater the diversity of perspectives one can adopt for assessing rules, values, principals and character, the greater the degree of one’s autonomy in making moral choices” (Friedman, 1993, p. 202).

This can be easily applied to represent the benefits that greater gender balance and cultural diversity can make to organizational decisions.
LACK OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON GENDER ECONOMICS

A further challenge to Gender Economics has been its loose referencing by academics and journalists, an almost accidental pairing of the words gender and economics instead of a definition framework from which to start. Feminist Economists may reference the economics of gender, or the economies of gender like this reference by Davies and Saltmarsh (2007) to ‘Gender economies’ in their book on ‘literacy and the gendered production of neo liberal subjectivities’. There are occasionally references in non-English speaking countries where two words seem combined by accident. Without any current academic reference to a framework, the field has been left largely unnoticed until now. Some references to definitions will be found throughout this book, as authors searched for a greater understanding of the field. However, it could so easily fall into a feminist economist camp, and be subverted from the intended direction.

There are other great gaps in the thinking around the gender base of our economy. For example, Marilyn Waring (1988), a feminist economist, said that the opportunity cost of women’s unpaid work is missing from our economic calculations of value, because it fails to take into account the domestic input of women. The opportunity that is lost and not counted is the cost to women who choose to undertake domestic unpaid work whilst foregoing alternatives like paid work or leisure time. However the calculation assumes that the decision to forego paid work for domestic work is a rational choice, but it is not that simple because there are many variables that affect this choice. Many of these complexities are discussed in a number of chapters in this book.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is organized into fifteen chapters across five sections and a brief description of each of the chapters follows:

Chapter 1

Introduces a revised definition of Gender Economics in order to create a development pathway for the future study of Gender Economics and its application in business at a micro level, as well as in policy and economic theory at a macro level.

Chapter 2

Discusses the differences and similarities between Gender Economics, Feminist Economics, Austrian Economics and Heterodox Economics.

Chapter 3

Presents a meta-analysis of the impact of microfinance on five measures of female empowerment used in the empirical literature, namely: mobility, decision-making power, control over finance, awareness and women’s assets. This chapter questions the current development process and the effectiveness of the outcomes of microfinance on women’s empowerment.
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Chapter 4

Provides empirical evidence of the Politics of Women’s Empowerment with case studies of three women in India and Bangladesh who have benefited from micro finance and development programs. It asks whether micro finance empowers women or if the opposite is true. It further considers cultural barriers that exist for women and gives examples of how these have been overcome.

Chapter 5

Explores ‘Co-preneurs’, defined as women in business partnerships (either formal or informal) with a spouse or life partner in the building and construction industry. These women working as administrators and managers in smaller firms in the building industry frequently experience isolation, poor access to career development and low levels of self-esteem. This chapter draws from a research project that investigated why the ‘glass ceiling’ has been resistant to attempts to remove it in this context.

Chapter 6

Investigates how the M-PESA mobile banking technology is narrowing the gap between men and women in Kenya by providing them with greater access to assets and cash resources. It discusses the ongoing gender gap for women in rural areas of the developing world and gives examples of barriers as well as positive outcomes on Gender Economics in Kenya. It concludes that M-PESA is a potential tool for financial inclusion and women empowerment.

Chapter 7

Provides an account of the status of women in Pakistan. It studies the various steps taken by the Government of Pakistan to empower the women. It focuses on the problems of women participating in economic affairs, the hindrances in achieving economic uplift/empowerment, and the equality of women in Pakistan.

Chapter 8

Explores the composition of gender diversity within top management teams (TMTs) and boards, and argues that gender balance is necessary to ensure the proper functioning of group decision-making processes, and also to increase innovation across the firm.

Chapter 9

Explores the multiple challenges which lie in wait for any economist seeking to extrapolate either populations of victim/survivors or the numeric of the black/grey economy in which Trafficking in Human Beings operates. Challenges some of the wider voids of ‘valuation’ into which the neo – liberal market economy has driven the surge of post war globalization and driven third millennium cultures of exchange, and places some of the pressing questions facing legislators, policy makers, development advocates and political economists in the face of the diversity and cross cutting understandings of exploitation which are manifested in the Trafficking of Persons today.
Chapter 10

Investigates if social connectedness presents a possible explanation for the observed decline in self-reported female life satisfaction in Australia over the first decade of the 21st Century.

Chapter 11

Describes institutional and gender relations in the society and economy of Poland, the influence of institutions and the state that may lead to institutional change, which is understood as an adaptation of habits of thought to changing circumstances.

Chapter 12

Deals with the problem of seeking possibilities to utilize patent databases in research on dynamics and development directions in science, technology, and innovation activity as well as on structural changes in the economy of Poland, taking into account gender aspect. The paper, for the first time, presents a statistical picture of industrial creativity of men and women in Poland in the period of economic transformation, based on patent statistics.

Chapter 13

Presents the search for the sources of broadly understood creativity in solving various problems: social, political, practical (related to everyday life), family, economic, culture, religious, etc., wherever traditional approaches proved ineffective. The concept of Innovative Gender is introduced where men and women are granted equality of measures, opportunities, and situations encompassed by the innovation genome model.

Chapter 14

Explores the diversification of the creative activity of men and women in Ireland, Poland, Hungary and Norway by analysing the dynamics of change for the patent activity of men and women and to identify the diversification of the accumulation of the patent activity of men and women for the entire period of 1999-2013.

Chapter 15

Analyses the allocation of women’s and men’s time between paid and unpaid work in the context of lifecycle, using an analysis based on time use data from research conducted by Central Statistical Office, Poland in years 2003-2004.

I hope you enjoy this book, and are refreshed and stimulated by some of the ideas presented. As a businesswoman and serial entrepreneur, I am passionate about improving opportunities for women by highlighting the gender-based barriers that underpin our capital based society, and then mobilizing leaders in all fields to address them.
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REFERENCES


