

Arguing for change (towards more socially responsible business): The experience of women leaders who want to be seen and heard.

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### **Abstract**

The launch of Mattel's Barbie Doll, "Chief Sustainability Officer" suggests women's leadership and socially responsible business are now mainstream, but what about women who want to argue for change? This study applies institutional theory to the study of arguing for more sustainable business, viewing it as rhetorical institutional work. While there is recognition that institutional work is more successful when undertaken by an elite actor, the experience of senior women leaders who seek to argue for more sustainable practices remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap through 25 interviews with senior women leaders at global brands. The findings highlight the constraints women experience around rhetorical leadership and the identity work they undertake to overcome them. In addition, the role of place and space in lending credibility to women's arguments and legitimising their rhetorical institutionalism is identified.

**Subject Areas:** *Organization Behavior, Organization Relationships, Promotion*

**Track:** Social Responsibility & Ethics