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TOWARDS THE TOP

– This is how women work in corporate management teams



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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Women are still in the minority in companies' management teams, but their share is growing. Currently, three out of ten decision-makers in companies' management teams are women, says a recent survey by the Finnish Business and Policy Forum (EVA).
- About 40% of the companies report that the number of female managers has increased in the past five years. Some 57% reported the number had remained unchanged, and only about 5% reported a decrease in the number. Large companies spend more time deliberating on equality issues than small ones, but the results regarding actual practices are the opposite: small businesses are more progressive.
- In EVA's survey, Finnish business leaders believe that a more balanced presence of both genders is beneficial to the company. However, the respondents cringe at strict, standardized mechanisms, based e.g. on percentage shares, or deadlines to increase equality. Quotas for women are dismissed outright.
- Women who responded to the survey are very self-critical and believe that women's own attitudes and lack of ambition are major obstacles to their progress.
- The survey data are representative of Finnish companies with 10 or more employees. The analysis was published October 15, 2013 and it can be read (in Finnish) in its entirety on EVA's website www.eva.fi.

There are 5 917 members in the management teams of the companies which responded to the EVA survey. Some 1 860 of them (31.43 per cent) are women.

The share of women in management teams is on the rise. Some 38% of the companies reported that the amount of women increased during five years and only 5%

reported a decrease. More than half (57%) of the respondents reported the amount remained unchanged.

Increasing the number of women is seen as a worthwhile idea in principle. Half of the respondents believe that a greater percentage of women in operative management would benefit their company

“greatly”. Despite this, respondents seem to believe more in natural evolution than in accelerating the development through numbers and dates.

In small companies improving the status of women by means of quotas, percentage targets or timetables is rejected outright. Large companies are also reasonably reluctant to commit to precise quantitative targets. If a public statement is sufficient, the companies usually opt for that.

The highest proportion of women can be found in the management teams of service sector companies and the so-called knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS). Their share is lowest in the construction industry and high-tech companies.

The participation of women has advanced the slowest in construction, and fastest in the biggest companies. In companies with more than a thousand employees, 56% reported that the number of women has

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increased in the past five years; in the construction industry only a third of the companies responded the same way. On the other hand, large companies still have some catching up to do. The share of women management team members is higher in small companies (32%) than for large companies (30%), and the lead for small companies is even greater when compared to corporations with more than 1 000 employees (27%).

Only 16% of companies have written the promotion of a more balanced gender distribution in some form in the company’s strategy. A few more companies (22%) have set the objective in their personnel strategy.

The development of the share of female leaders is regularly followed by 15% of corporate boards of directors. Half of the companies discuss ideas and initiatives concerning diversity in their management team or top management.

Only 16% of respondents believed there is outright discrimination in recruitment and employment.

More than half of the respondents felt that the business world is conservative and that women’s progress is slowed down by slow change in ways of thinking. The view on the conservatism of business is quite consistent across industries, and the answer seems to have little or nothing to do with the size or the age of the company.

There is a fairly large consensus that the flexibility of business life, or the lack of it is not an obstacle to

the advancement of women. Some 23% saw a lack of flexibility as a reason, and only two out of a hundred were firmly of this opinion.

The respondents were also asked about their personal views on the barriers to women’s advancement – despite the way things actually are in their own environments. Women’s own career choices and career breaks, which are typically more prevalent for women than in men, were seen as the most important obstacles. Three out of four are of the opinion that women make career choices that might become obstacles for them later.

The issue of a fundamental difference in the set of values of women and men was rejected by relatively clear figures. Some 58% of the respondents personally disagreed with the statement and 40% backed it.

A slight majority of respondents saw that women still do not believe enough in their own abilities and opportunities. Some 57% agreed with this notion about self-esteem while 40% were of the opinion that women’s self-confidence is not an obstacle to progress. Women’s self-criticism on this point is strong: 74% of them are of this opinion (52 % of men).

When the same theme is turned around slightly so that the topic of the question is ambition (“the limited number of female managers is very much a question of the fact that women should be more ambitious”), the set-up remains much the same. Some 69 % of all respondents see shortcomings in women’s ambition. As many as 79% of the women complain that women have a lack of ambition, whereas men are a bit more merciful – 65 % of men see that women could increase their degree of ambition.

Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA asked about the share of women in the management of companies through a survey, which was sent in August 2013 using the Fonecta B2B targeting engine. Some 9 659 queries were sent via e-mail and 1 175 answers were received via the web questionnaire.

The respondents represented companies with at least ten employees (in mainland Finland), with a turnover of no less than one million euros.

The characteristics of the companies represented by the respondents do not substantially differ from the corresponding enterprise population in any key dimension.

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