

Working Paper

How to engage senior men to promote women to senior decision-making positions in their organizations

**European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in
Decision-making in Politics and the Economy**

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1. Introduction

The **European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy** (hereinafter called ‘the European Network’) was established in 2008¹. It serves as a platform to facilitate European-level cooperation, exchange information and share good practices with its stakeholders, its members, partners and society as a whole.

On 22 June 2011 the European Network discussed the topic: ***how to engage senior men to promote women to senior decision-making positions in their organizations.***

Despite the fact that many international corporations have adopted and implemented diversity policies, women are still seriously underrepresented in decision-making roles. Less than 14 % of board positions at Europe’s largest listed companies are taken by women (January 2012)² The reasons for this are multiple and include gender stereotyping and bias against women in positions of power, absence of successful female role models, women’s exclusion from formal and informal networks, gender bias in recruitment, selection and promotion processes, lack of sponsors and mentors, career choices, work-life balance issues and personal ambition.

One of the key success factors in improving the underrepresentation of women in positions of power is the commitment of senior (often male) leadership to drive the necessary changes. After all, senior men are the most important and powerful stakeholders and are instrumental in creating an inclusive atmosphere or one of exclusion through their behaviors and actions. The lack of progress may well indicate that diversity programs so far have focused too much on changing women’s behaviors and relying on women only to change corporate culture. Increasingly organizations are realizing that the underrepresentation of women in positions of power is not a women’s issue but a general issue, and that both women and men need to work together as allies in tackling the gender gaps in organizations.

The following questions were formulated as guidelines for the thematic discussion on June 22:

1. It is being said that men, in general, are an **untapped resource** in gender initiatives in organizations. Does this also hold true for positions in senior management?
2. What **barriers** may prevent men from appointing women to senior management roles and top positions in **politics**, and how do you successfully overcome them? What are the most important issues needed to engage men in the change process?

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/index_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/index_en.htm

3. What are **good practices** in organizations in which a significant change in representation of women in senior positions has been primarily driven by men, or in which the key success factor has been the active involvement of senior men?

4. What can be the role of **civil society** in this process? What are the important factors civil society needs to address in order to play a vital role in the process of engaging senior men for change?

5. What is or should be the role of the supervisory board or non-executive directors, or of other **stakeholders** (like investors, shareholders, government) in stimulating senior management to engage in this change process?

This Working Paper contains the highlights of the discussions and presentations at the 22 June meeting by the European Network members, the European Commission’s Gender Equality Unit staff, guest speakers from Danone and further relevant materials collected before and after the meeting, see *Annex 2*.

2. Senior men as gatekeepers

In male-dominated organizations men are the ‘gatekeepers’ to the positions of power; men ‘control the locks’ to the boardrooms. Engagement of male senior leaders therefore is one of the driving forces for change. Engaging men has been part of diversity policies for a long time and nowadays male leaders of high profile companies do not want to be seen as not promoting women. The numbers, however, tell a different story. Some experts in this field have commented that senior men’s engagement to drive change is not always genuine but driven by pressures from the outside world (stakeholders, press, stock exchange, government) and could be seen as ‘political correctness’.

Barriers for men

Research by Catalyst³ among companies in the USA showed that there are **three barriers for men** to engage in diversity initiatives in general:

- Apathy or lack of concern about the topic;
- Fear for loss of their own status and opportunities;
- Ignorance, either perceived or real.

The first step in men becoming advocates and active supporters of promoting women to senior positions is that they have become **aware of gender bias** in their organizations. According to Catalyst’s research active promoters of diversity share three characteristics:

- They defy typical masculine norms about ‘winning’ and ‘being a man’;

³ “Engaging Men In Gender Initiatives: What Change Agents Need To Know”, by Catalyst 2009 and “Engaging Men In Gender Initiatives: Stacking the Deck for Success”, by Catalyst 2009

- They have had a female mentor;
- They possess a strong sense of fair play (in general regarding society).

Lessons from the USA

Research from Corporate Women Directors International⁴ in the USA showed that several factors are important to make progress in improving the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions. First of all, it is the **CEO’s commitment**, in words and actions, to gender diversity that creates momentum towards utilization of programs and metrics and raises the bar for all male employees to participate. The CEO needs to convey and repeat a clear message on the business rationale of diversity as key to the company’s profitability. In addition, a good **infrastructure** is needed to make progress. This entails appointing a gender diversity officer at the Senior Vice President level (reporting to the CEO), monetary incentives for managers for compliance with diversity goals, establishment of an executive diversity council and making life/work benefits as available to men as to women.

Men leading change

There are many ways for senior male leaders to support women’s ascension to decision-making roles:

- Leading the **culture change** needed to remove barriers for women in the corporate culture; this includes taking the lead in addressing infringements, inappropriate behaviors and implicit bias among the senior leadership team by penalties such as publicly addressing issues and ensuring transparency in official complaints cases.
- Leading a **change in procedures**: i.e. transformation of recruitment, selection and promotion processes (HR) to prevent gender bias; setting up metrics and ensuring monitoring and reviewing of policies and results.
- Leading the **strategic narrative** needed to convince other (male) business leaders that appointing women to positions of power is beneficial to the organization.
- Leading **by example** by ensuring gender balance in appointments and teams in their own hierarchy. Preventing to recruit in one’s own image and discouraging others to do so.
- Leading the communication and **Public Relations** processes on the topic by actively promoting the organization’s policy in the press.
- Leading the **development and support system** (such as training, networking, women’s initiatives) to encourage women to grow and excel. Displaying willingness to learn from women’s networks meetings and conferences about issues women value. Actively mentoring women to better prepare them for senior roles. Introducing women to informal networks to become connected and visible.

⁴ As presented by Mrs Irene Natividad, president of the Global Summit of Women and of Corporate Women Directors International

3. Good practices in organizations

Two companies were identified as having put in place effective promotion policies for women to reach senior management positions, i.e. Danone and Deutsche Telekom. Companies were invited to present at respectively the 22 June meeting (Danone) and at the EC Conference ‘Equality between Women and Men’ on 19-20 September 2011 (Deutsche Telekom).

3.1 Danone

In 2010 Danone Belgium won the AXA Wo_Men@Work Award 2010⁵ for its commitment to the company’s diversity policy of **equal opportunities for men and women within the management** of the company. Danone Belgium, with 800 employees, had reached equality at managerial level, with 50% female managers. In top management women accounted for 30%.

CEO of Danone Group Franck Riboud led the change process by communicating the business benefits diversity brings: “*Innovation comes from the diversity of talented people*”. The first step in engaging men in the process was **creating awareness**; women and men were interviewed about barriers to career progress and the differences in answers were analyzed and used to shape policies. Danone Group developed and implemented a Women’s Action plan with capacity building for women, like training, mentoring, but also tools for HR processes and implementing career modularity and work flexibility. Women’s conferences have a 20-30% target for male participants, giving men the opportunity to experience being a minority and to create extra space for them outside of the traditional breadwinner model. Progress is tracked through metrics. Global tools for monitoring progress are made available to local units.

Key learning points from Danone’s experiences⁶ were:

- Not (only) the words of the CEO will start the change process in the organization, it is the **CEO’s personal involvement** that will. By personally backing up and enabling the organization to embark upon specific activities for women and personally engaging into conversations with women, the process really takes shape.
- Consider organizing **individual meetings** with senior men instead of group meetings; often men in a group behave differently and may display less sensitivity towards the issue than when you have one-on-one conversations.
- Create opportunities for **men and women to work together** on related topics instead of having women only work on them. For instance, the topic of work flexibility regards both groups and by involving men actively in the process they become advocates for change.

⁵ http://www.womenatworkaward.be/?page_id=716

⁶ Based on presentations by Mrs Catherine Thibaux, Diversity Director Danone Group, and Mr Albert Ragon, CEO Danone Belgium at the 22 June 2011 meeting

- Stay away from activities or ways of communication that are 'blaming men'. Creating a **positive atmosphere** and demonstrating the positives for men too, and having fun in doing it, are far more productive.
- Ensure the **business rationale** is at the heart of communication. Through emphasizing the benefits, such as mirroring the markets and creating better products for half of the company's clients, i.e. women, the issue of gender diversity becomes embedded in the strategy of the firm.
- **Practical measures** involve setting clear targets to ensure that executive searchers come up with sufficient number of women candidates for senior positions.
- **Filling the pipeline** for promotion to senior positions is very important. Next to reviewing HR procedures a special plan was developed to hire back women who left the company at a certain point.
- **However, commitment of the CEO and top management is not enough. Structural measures are needed in order to ensure continued engagement from men to appoint women to senior positions.**

Diversity is not 'a problem'

The CEO of Danone Belgium Albert Ragon explained his successful approach with the following philosophy: *"A company is a group of people and a good company is a group of talented people. Often people see diversity as a problem, and start addressing it as a deficiency. In this case solutions do not solve the root causes of the problem but are only quick fixes. Sourcing talent in a small group of people (men) means that you lose talent (women). By including women you have a better chance of having the best people in your company. Instead of developing a specific women's action plan, a plan was developed on managing people; talent management and diversity management are the same. Danone is successful in managing diversity because of the process to individualize employees' career paths"*.

Diversity is part of business

Central to Danone's policy is how the company can enable employees to make a better career plan so they can develop. *"If the company's career path is 'up or out' you will lose the women if you forget to adapt the career path for women"*. It is imperative to know your employees personally and to strictly manage the process of the individual development plan. Mr Ragon decided to promote leadership skills over technical skills when he appointed a woman as the new leader of the factory of 300 employees. He shared his insights: *"There is no equality of chances between women and men; women suffer more obstacles. But only if you address them one by one you will achieve results. Diversity is not part of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) but part of the business side, as core of the activity"*.

3.2 Deutsche Telekom⁷

In 2010 Deutsche Telekom’s all-male board decided to introduce a **30% quota requirement for women in senior management positions**, to be reached at the end of 2015⁸. CEO René Oberman explained the board’s decision: *“Having a greater number of women at the top will quite simply enable us to operate better”*.

Engage men

Top management used a host of arguments to engage (male) business leaders of the business case for implementing the quota requirements:

- **Economic:** in shrinking markets and increasing competitiveness new business models and innovation are needed; gender diversity is key to this process;
- **Demographic:** changes in population drive the need to utilize all talents, including female;
- **Shareholders:** 10% of DT’s shares are being held by sustainability investors that value equal opportunities;
- **Values:** respect and integrity are core values in operating the company; performance on the job is more important than gender;
- **Social responsibility:** enable employees to have a balanced (work/family) life;
- **Culture:** create an open corporate culture in which all differences are valued.

Investigate the barriers

The board’s decision followed a decade of less successful policies, relying on mentoring and training as tools, but without clear target setting, timelines and monitoring. Internal research showed that the key barrier for women to reach top positions was the company’s ‘face-time’ culture, in which attendance is valued higher than output and performance. Also, the phenomenon that men were recruiting and promoting men and the prevailing traditional beliefs about women’s tasks at home presented barriers. As a result, women reflected more critically to take the next step upwards in their career.

Implement penalties

Quotas for women are set at every level, from graduates, talent management, leadership development programs, lists for promotions, recruitment, for head hunters search assignments etc. Penalties apply too: if a training course does not have 30% women participants the training will be cancelled. Setting quotas for women in senior management was not the only measure taken. Quotas are considered not a goal in itself but an instrument; it is about motivating and engaging leaders, and showing public commitment to change. Full and active commitment of the management board is needed to succeed. However, it is also important to realize that changing the corporate culture takes time.

⁷ Based on the presentation by Mrs Mechthilde Maier, Group Diversity Director Deutsche Telekom, at the Conference ‘Equality between Women and Men’, EC, 19-20 September 2011

⁸ <http://www.telekom.com/dtag/cms/content/dt/en/829530>

Monitor the results

Although the program is just underway, results so far are positive. The percentage of women in management positions went up from 19% (February 2010) to 23% (September 2011) and women business leaders grew from 3% to 8%.

3.3 Good practices in politics

The number of women leading countries, governments and political parties across Europe is low. In May 2012, only one EU Member State is led by a female president (Lithuania) and two governments⁹ are led by female prime-ministers (Germany and Denmark).

From the presentation¹⁰ and discussions by members the following good practices to improve the representation of women in leadership positions in politics were shared:

- Include gender diversity as a value in the mission of the political party;
- Strong support from bottom-up is needed in order to persuade senior leaders to promote women to leadership positions;
- Senior men will support appointing women to leadership positions if they see it as a way of gaining extra power or of preventing losing power.
- As for timing, raising the issue is most successful in times when political parties are in a neck-to-neck race.

Women’s ability to appeal to voters is an important asset that should be used better. In addition, external allies, like civil society, interested in having more women leaders in political parties can further strengthen the arguments put forward within political parties to appoint women to leadership positions. Although it is not easy to prove the impact of women voters, it is important to always ask something back for the votes delivered by women. Further research and exchange of good practices is needed.

4. Conclusions

Women and men need to **work together** as allies in tackling this important gender gap in organizations.

Commitment of the leadership, in words and actions, to the change process is not enough. **Structural measures** are needed in order to ensure continued engagement from all men to appoint women to senior positions.

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/index_en.htm

¹⁰ Ms Sonja Lokar, Coordinator for the South East Europe Office, CEE Network for Gender Issues

ANNEX 1 – Members of the European Network at meeting of 22 June 2011

Name and function	Organization	Website
Jocelyne Bougeard , <i>President</i>	Committee of Women Elected Representatives of Local and Regional Authorities (Council of European Municipalities and Regions)	www.ccre.org
Helena De Felipe Lehtonen , <i>President</i>	Association of Organizations of Mediterranean Businesswomen	www.afaemme.org
Sophia Economacos , <i>President</i>	Eurochambres Women's Network	www.eurochambres.eu
Cécile Gréboval , <i>Secretary-General</i>	European Women's Lobby	www.womenlobby.org
Julia Harrison , Representative	Women's Forum for the Economy and the Society	www.womens-forum.com
Marianne Karlberg , Coordinator	European Network to Promote Women's Entrepreneurship	http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/women/wes-network/
Armelle Loghmanian , <i>President</i>	European Professional Women’s Network, Brussels chapter	www.epwn.net
Sonja Lokar , <i>Coordinator South East Europe Office</i>	CEE Network for Gender Issues	www.europeanforum.net/gender_network/cee_network_for_gender_issues
Irene Natividad , <i>President</i>	Global Summit of Women	www.globewomen.org
Bola Olabisi , <i>Director</i>	European Women Inventors and Innovators Network	www.euwiin.eu
Tytti Peltonen , <i>Board member</i>	European Women's Lawyers Association	www.ewla.org
Myriam Schevernels , <i>Project Coordinator</i>	Femanet - Eurocadres	www.eurocadres.org
Mirella Visser , <i>Independent expert</i>	Centre for Inclusive Leadership	www.centreforinclusiveleadership.com

ANNEX 2 – List of reference materials

- European Network of Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy:
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/index_en.htm
- More women in senior positions – Key to economic stability and growth, by the European Commission, January 2010: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm
- Database on women and men in decision-making, European Commission, DG Justice: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/index_en.htm
- Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2010-2015), September 2010: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm
- “Engaging Men In Gender Initiatives: What Change Agents Need To Know”, by Catalyst 2009: <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/323/engaging-men-in-gender-initiatives-what-change-agents-need-to-know>
- “Engaging Men In Gender Initiatives: Stacking the Deck for Success”, by Catalyst 2009: <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/349/engaging-men-in-gender-initiatives-stacking-the-deck-for-success>
- “Engaging Men in Gender Diversity Initiatives”, Catalyst Member Benchmarking Virtual Roundtable 2010: http://catalyst.org/etc/Virtual_Roundtable_PDFs/Nov_30_Bench_Virtual_Roundtable_Summary_Final_120910.pdf
- “Actions Men Can Take to Create an Inclusive Workplace”, Catalyst 2010: http://catalyst.org/etc/Virtual_Roundtable_PDFs/Actions_Men_Can_Take_Final_120910.pdf