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# Women on Boards

A Study of the Experiences and Perspectives of Female Swedish  
Corporate Board Members

## ABSTRACT

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In this report we examine how Rosabeth Moss Kanter's theory on the mechanisms and consequences of relative distribution of gender in management, from 1977, corresponds with the perspective of female corporate board members of, particularly, large companies in Sweden in the year of 2010. We test the applicability of the theory by conducting semi structured interviews with ten female board professionals. We also make interviews with three experts in the field of female executives and board members. We find that some of the elements in Kanter's theory holds true, and that others do not. We make two overall conclusions. The first is that Kanter's hypothesis that female performance and achievements are diminished in male dominated groups does not hold true for Swedish corporate boards of directors. The second is that Kanter's hypothesis of majorities and minorities being a self-perpetuating system because of homosocialization does hold true for Swedish company boards of directors, but that the foundations of homosocialization may be weakening as a consequence of a broader societal development towards increased gender equality.

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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Background**

There is a strong limelight in public debate on female representation in management ranks. A particular attention has in this debate been paid to the maybe most discussed category of positions in the Swedish gender distribution debate, the members of listed corporate boards. Having stood almost still during the last few years, the percentage year 2009 of women in listed company boards was 19,5 (Nordiska ministerrådet 2009), which means that women regularly constitute a small minority in these boards.

There is, however, a common view among practitioners and researchers based on organizational research that a small minority of women in a male dominated work group will suffer in different ways. A result of their suffering is that women in such groups may underperform. As a consequence, also the board will perform below its potential.

This made us decide to try to test if theory correctly predicts the reality for female board directors in Sweden. We decided to do so by seeking to understand the board women's own experience and perspective on their role and jobs.

A core organizational theory on gender- and minority issues in management ranks was presented more than 30 years ago by Rosabeth Moss Kanter in the legendary report "Men and Women of the Corporation" (Kanter 1977). This theory is still standing strong among researchers and practitioners, and this is the theory we have chosen to examine.

## **1.2 Purpose**

Our study aims at examining how Rosabeth Moss Kanter's theory on the mechanisms and consequences of relative distribution of gender in management, from 1977, corresponds with the perspective of female corporate board members of, particularly, large companies in Sweden in the year of 2010.

We see the research as interesting because Kanter's theories have had a strong influence on organizational research and consultancy- and corporate practices for decades. We have not found a test of the applicability of her theory in Sweden on the corporate board level, and neither on other management categories in this country. And we have not found her theory's validity tested regarding the corporate board category internationally.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Corporate boards**

#### **2.1.1 Gender distribution in Swedish listed corporate boards**

The female representation in the corporate boards of listed Swedish corporations has grown from 3,5% in 1996 to 18,5% in 2008. The increase has however slowed down since 2004, and was between 2006 and 2008 only about 0,3% per year. Year 2009 the increase was 0,9% (Nordiska ministerrådet 2009, p. 294).

#### **2.1.2 The board institution**

The corporate board has a particular role compared to the executive level of the organization. A main role for the board is to represent the owners towards executive management. The board has by law foremost a supervisory and developmental role, while the executive management has a foremost operative role. The character of the board work, such as making strategic decisions based on limited information combined with limited board working time for the members, makes mutual trust a core concept for the relationship between the board and executive management, the owners and the individual board members, and between the individual board members (Sjöstrand & Petrelius 2002). The board work is also more formalized by law than executive management work.

### **2.2 A framework for gender and leadership**

In the area of academic research, studies have been conducted on gender and leadership, where many have claimed that female executives can contribute in the following important areas: communication and cooperation, loyalty and affection, power, intimacy and care (Grant 1988). In contrast, e.g. Yvonne Due Billing states that despite many researchers' claims about female attributes in leadership, there are only small differences or even no real difference between female and male leaders (Due Billing 1997).

The root question then is what kind of difference researchers are talking about. Naturally, there are biological differences between genders but a great area of debate has been whether the greatest difference lies within the biological aspects of gender or whether it lies within the social structures that shape individuals according to their gender (Bratton, Grint & Nelson 2005). A way of summarizing the different views on gender and leadership in academia is dividing the research areas according to their view on gender similarities or differences and their different concerns:

The equal opportunities field focuses on that there are more similarities than differences between the genders but that women through social structures have been suppressed through history. This field thus claims that by providing equal opportunities for both genders, the inequalities between them will disappear (Bratton, Grint & Nelson 2005). Also the field of Meritocracy focuses on the similarities between genders but claims that “it would benefit society to fully utilize the range of available resources of [women]” (Bratton, Grint & Nelson 2005, p. 194).

On the other hand, the special contribution view on gender and leadership claims that there are differences between the genders and that “women’s strengths complement those of men and therefore can be conducive to more effective leadership” (Bratton, Grint & Nelson, 2005 p. 195). The fourth point of view is the one of alternative values. This approach asserts that “women’s and men’s interests, priorities, and basic attitudes toward life are fundamentally different and, in fact, are sometimes diametrically opposed” (Bratton, Grint & Nelson 2005, p. 196).

### **2.3 Swedish research on female leadership**

The research on Swedish female leadership has been summarized by Lena Pettersson (2002). She concludes that the result of the research is that leadership styles probably do not differ between men and women; that it mainly is organizational structures that explain differences in leadership.

### **2.4 Introduction of Kanter’s theory**

Independent on whether one chooses to believe that there is a difference in leadership between the genders or not, it is still possible to accept research into how men and women interact in the workplace and thus what effects this might have on the gender distribution. One very distinguished researcher in this field is Rosabeth Moss Kanter who, among other publications has developed a tool which is “among the world's most widely-used diversity tools” (Harvard Business School 2010). Kanter’s work emphasizes structural patterns as explanation rather than differences in genders as such, corresponding particularly well with the views emphasizing equal opportunities and meritocracy.

In 1977 Kanter wrote the book *Men & Women of the Corporation* in which she describes the interaction between minorities and majorities in a large manufacturing firm, by the author denominated Industrial Supply Corporation (Kanter 1977). Based on the case study she developed a theory of how majorities and minorities will interact with each other in general in work-life (Kanter 1977). The theory is extensive and main implications are that women in work places where men strongly outnumber women will suffer broadly from being in minority, and



that the majority-minority situation constitutes a self-perpetuating system needing system-level intervention such as altered corporate policy or insertion of affirmative action quotation in order to change. The system of social processes that maintain a majority's domination over time e.g. among management ranks in a company, is by Kanter called “homo-social reproduction” (Kanter 1977).

These implications grow in strength by corporate level, being especially valid at higher high management levels (Kanter 1977). The underlying explanation is structural, rather than found in gender as such, why other minority categories in organizations will face corresponding difficulties. We will further elaborate on Kanter's theory in the theory chapter.

The theory is still standing strong; still receiving much attention, recognition, and practical use in both organizational research<sup>1</sup>, not least in research on female leadership, and in the larger society. An illustrating example of the latter is a recent research based report from SACO on the career outlook for academically trained women and men in Sweden: “Despite that Moss Kanter’s theories largely rest upon studies carried out closely to half a century ago and in another world, we have chosen to base ourselves on her classic work, as we have found that her theories holds well also in the post-industrial society” (Krafft, Saco 2009, p. 13). Kanter’s theory on the structure of work organization, and how structural patterns influence the work conditions of men and women, constitutes the backbone permeating the Saco-report (Krafft, Saco 2009).

## **2.5 Earlier testing of Kanter’s theory**

### **2.5.1 Empirical testing**

Several studies on specific minority groups have found Kanter’s theory applicable, while others have not (King et al. 2010). Reviews of research of the effects of token status on individuals; i.e. according to Kanter when a minority constitutes 15 percentage or less of a group, suggest that effects may vary across demographic groups (Zimmer 1988; Yoder 1991; Tolbert et al. 1995), rather than being consistent. Because of the mixed results some researchers reject Kanter’s theoretical approach (Blum & Smith 1988; Zimmer 1988; Yoder 1991). Zimmer writes that her concept “is of limited value in explaining the experiences of either men or women” (Zimmer 1988, p. 64).

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<sup>1</sup> An example of the widespread attention is the fact that she had been cited in 6557 academic articles and papers according to Google Scholar.

In another research review, Chambliss & Uggens (2000) conclude, however, that the rejections of Kanter's theory are premature, claiming inconsistencies in the research.

We have not found research revealing the applicability of Kanter's theory on corporate boards in Sweden. Nor have we found such research internationally. Studies have however been carried out in management ranks. A majority of executive women reported e.g. in a national USA survey negative that gender stereotypes and exclusion from informal networks hindered them from advancement (Ragins, Townsend & Mattis 1998).

The theory of homosocial reproduction as a general tendency in society, and in particular among male managers, is less questioned. The male majorities tendency to reproduce themselves in numbers in Swedish corporations is documented in e.g. "Kön och makt i Norden" (Nordiska ministerrådet 2009).

## **2.6 Other Criticism of Kanter's theory**

### **2.6.1 Alvesson & Due Billing**

Alvesson & Due Billing's (1999) reservations towards Kanter's theory are partly inspired by a different epistemological point of view. People are seen as appendices to structures by Kanter, and thus seen as having limited opportunities to do act; the fact that structures are produced and reproduced by people and really only "exist" through their actions is not considered, they mean. Furthermore, they write that they do not think that the numbers element in Kanter's theory is convincing, saying that Kanter's theory is based on physics and that people do not behave like atoms. They do e.g. not see convincing empirical evidence of drastic change in a group when a minority exceeds 30% of a group's members, although such a change is predicted by Kanter's theory (Alvesson & Due Billing 1999, pp. 78-81).

### **2.6.2 Kanter 1993**

Sixteen years after the publication of *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), Kanter publicized reflections on the same theme (Kanter 1993). She emphasizes that an increased focus in corporations on team development, and on other organizational change and development efforts, were step by step improving minorities' situation. She also writes that "in the past ten years, women have shown undeniable talent ....and because they are number two they try even harder" (Kanter 1993).

### **3 Research questions**

We have specified the following research question in order to reach our research aim, and we will walk through how we arrived at these questions in the method- and theory chapters of the report.

- What are the overall experiences as minority female board member?
- What are the overall differences and similarities between (majority) men's and (minority) women's roles and behavior in boards?
- What characterizes the interaction between (majority) men and (minority) women in boards?
- What patterns are there of rivalry between (minority) women and (majority) men in boards respectively?
- Are female achievements diminished by the underrepresentation in male dominated boards in Sweden 2010?
- Do majority men in boards prefer to surround themselves, work and socialize with other men, thus being the driving force behind tokenism as a self-perpetuating system?

#### **3.1 Delimitations**

A first delimitation is that we chose to seek to understand the perspective of female corporate board members as we find it particularly interesting regarding the applicability of Kanter's theory. A second delimitation is that our main focus is boards of larger Swedish listed corporations, although we also utilize information from the informants experience of other categories of organizations, such as smaller companies, organizations and foundations. The boards of large listed corporations has got much attention in the national debate on gender distribution in work life.

#### **3.2 On the structure of the report**

In the next chapter we comment on the method used. It is followed by a results chapter in which we walk through the empirical findings structured by the research questions specified in this chapter. In appendices we enclose complementary presentation of research data, structured by interviewee, in order to contribute to the understanding of their experiences and perspective.

After the results chapter we present the analysis; a comparison of results and theory, followed by hypotheses generated and a final discussion of the result of the study. In appendices the reader will also find an interview guide.

## **4 Method**

### **4.1 Qualitative method**

We are interested in how Kanter's classic and still highly regarded theory from 1977 on minorities and majorities corresponds with the experiences and views of female large company board members in Swedish companies in 2010, and have chosen a qualitative research approach.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods have their respective advantages and disadvantages, and a common perception among today's researchers is that selection of approach should be related to the research problem and –object at hand (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2008; Hughes & Månsson, 1988). Qualitative research methods are according to Bryman (1989) particularly appropriate for research aiming at understanding the perspective of research subjects, while quantitative methods, typically, to a higher extent study reality from the researchers point of view regarding dimensions and categories to use. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that qualitative researchers try to understand, or interpret, phenomenon by the meaning people give them, which supports our purpose.

There is not a given clear and obvious definition of how to define qualitative method. Central criteria are, however, to consider and focus on open, and ambiguous, data; to take on the perspective of the research subjects; and to emphasize the presence and interpretation effort of the researcher (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2008).

#### **4.1.1 Perspective**

Perspective is a central concept in our approach. We want to understand the perspectives of individuals, which is central in qualitative research (see Alvesson & Skoldberg 2008 pp. 63-65). Our understanding of "perspective" in this study has been inspired by the concept of "psychological climate", defined as "individual's perceptions of their work environment including structures, processes and events", and as a "descriptive, multidimensional construct that involves an individual's perception of the work situation he or she encounters." (King, et.al. 2010)

### **4.2 Abductive approach**

We are relating a theory to empirical data in order to assess its applicability, and to, hopefully, create further organizational understanding and theory.

Based on literature research we identified the classic theory by Kanter (1977) and decided to use it to test its relevance for Swedish company boards. In a next phase we collected data through,

mainly, semi-structured qualitative interviews, and analyzed, interpreted data, and generated hypothesis trying not to be tied by Kanter's or others' theories and concepts. Finally we compared Kanter's theory to empirical data, and to the hypothesis we had generated, in order to identify matches and mismatches, and to extend and deepen organizational understanding.

As a deductive approach means to start from a general rule and test its relevance on a particular case, the theory application part of our study represents deductive reasoning. On the other hand, a part of our data collection and analysis represent an element of inductive reasoning, as induction means to study a number individual cases and make general conclusions from them (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2008). These characteristics, combined with our emphasizing of qualitative understanding, mean that we have applied an abductive approach, i.e. a complex mix of deductive and inductive approaches combined with inclusion of the concept "understanding" (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2008).

#### **4.3 The research process**

After considering alternative research concepts on the theme of affirmative action we decided to look closer at the applicability of Rosabeth Moss Kanter's theory on majorities and minorities in the boards of, primarily, larger Swedish corporations. We had found the theory fascinating. Furthermore, this milestone in international organizational research is still highly actual among many theorists and practitioners.

Would the theory really still be valid in Sweden, formulated 33 years ago, in 1977, and based on data from the USA?

We designed a study containing two series of qualitative, semi-structured interviews; one series with ten female large company board members, and one series with three researchers in the area. We also collected background information of e.g. board membership gender distribution in Swedish listed companies.

The first seven interviews with female board members were carried out in person and jointly by us, just as all of the interviews with researchers. The interviews were semi-structured in order to stimulate the interviewee to express herself freely, and to give the room needed for us to ask follow-up questions. In order to stimulate our interviewees to reflect freely on their experiences and state their views as freely as possible they were promised anonymity.

We documented the interviews by taking notes and recording them. After each interview we, the interviewers, jointly followed up by completing our notes, filling in the blanks, reflecting on the

interview content and evaluating our own performance in order to learn for the next interview. Because of time restrictions and limited accessibility of interviewees we had to perform the last three board member interviews through telephone. By this stage in the process each of us mastered the interviewing process quite well and uniformly. The telephone interviewing was thus effective and we concluded that we did not lose very much valuable information compared to earlier conducted interviews.

We compiled the data into two different perspectives, by individual and by research question, in order to get a richer basis for analysis.

The syntheses by individual aims at reflecting the impression of the individuals and their perspective without being tied by Kanter's or other's theoretical concepts.

The data compilation by research question is structured by our research questions and in the categories "common theme", "exceptions", and "interesting comments". Both data compilations were done by repeated reviews of interviews as a whole and in details in order for primary data to give an as valid representation as possible.

The analysis work was carried out in two phases. In the first we reflected on data, aiming at discover patterns and themes and developing own hypothesis. In the second phase we related Kanter's theory and research questions to data and to patterns, themes and the hypothesis generated in the first phase.

Finally we made our conclusions and decided final outcomes of our research.

#### **4.4 Selection**

We started out trying to get interviews with Cap 30 female company board members. In order to get rich and valid information we wanted to interview well regarded women with extensive board experience. After the first few interviews, and the learning we developed from them, we selected the next interviewees during the process. One important criterion was still the board experience, and we also wanted to cover a variety of industries.

As we have earlier stated, we focus primarily on the perspective of female board members in larger listed companies in Sweden, the group of corporations that primarily is considered for female board representation affirmative action. Our interviewees have, however, occasionally related to their experiences also from numerous executive positions and a considerable number of other boards, e.g. in public companies, family companies, politics, and various associations.

#### **4.5 On testing of the theory**

Kanter's research is documented in detail in her book (Kanter 1977). Her research result is based on a large amount of practical observations and other empirical data, in which she identified connections, trends, and patterns, and from which she has developed her theory.

In order to test her theory empirically we started by, through repeatedly reading her report, identifying empirical observations and other data that she bases her theory on. We used these data to formulate open questions and follow-up probes for our interviews that would generate such data. We also focused on keeping Kanter's empirical observations in mind in order to probe effectively and precisely during the interviews.

Finally we grouped these items in themes from which we in turn formulated the overall research questions of our study. Through the procedure we related our data to her data and her theories. This way we wanted to get close to Kanter's empirical observations, and be able to empirically test her theory by using qualitative interview data from interviewees that reflected rich personal experiences and also practical observations of other people in boards and organizations they had worked with.

#### **4.6 Generalizability of the study**

The extent to which qualitative research results can be generalized to a larger group is a quality marker according to Stenbacka (2001). Taken together, our ten female board member interviewees are relating experience from 18 present board assignments in listed enterprises and from about 50 board assignments in other commercial companies. Furthermore, during the last decades they have had experience from an additional number of board assignment that are included in the interviews. Considering this substantial amount of collective experience and the informants level of observational and judgmental capability we judge the generalizability of the study for the category large Swedish company boards to be quite good, even high.



## **5 Theory**

### **5.1 Kanter's theory on majorities and minorities**

In her classic study, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), Rosabeth Moss Kanter argues that the relative numeric distribution of men and women within the workplace, in traditionally male jobs, strongly influences the success of the females. The underlying explanation is not primarily found in the gender, but in the numbers; i.e. in the structure of the organization. Other categories of minorities, e.g. cultural minorities, will face corresponding problems, but as earlier stated, we will focus on women in this study.

For our research purpose, we have chosen to express Kanter's findings from 1977 in two interlinked core hypothesis. They are extensively described in particularly chapter 3 and chapter 8 in her book (Kanter 1977):

The first main hypothesis is that “token”, i.e. single or sporadic, women in a predominantly male working group suffer interactional disadvantages such as isolation and increased performance pressure, as a result of their minority status.

This means that a token woman generally have a substantial performance disadvantage compared to the men in the group, and compared to if she was working in a gender balanced group, and particularly so at executive levels.

The second main hypothesis is that the tokenism, a token ‘situation’ or rather ‘system’, is self-perpetuating, meaning that without system-level intervention, such as changes in corporate policy or affirmative action quotation, the token system won't change. The main underlying explanation is that majority men have a need to choose individuals reminding of themselves to relate to at work, because they have more trust in people being similar to themselves, and thereby they reproduce themselves in kind. This process is called ‘homosocial reproduction’ by Kanter.

A consequence is that women will face barriers to advancement, particularly at high-level jobs where social similarity is an especially important advancement criterion.

One of the foundations of Kanter's theory is that women, where in minority, are treated as symbols or tokens in Kanter's own formulation (Kanter 1977). This relationship of tokenism holds true for numbers up to about 15%, after which the tokens become simple minorities

instead. A balanced group, i.e. a group with ideal prerequisites regarding gender distribution, is reached when women make up about 40%-60% of the group.

## **5.2 Themes in Kanter's theory**

We arrived at the following six themes in Kanter's report (Kanter 1977), which we also used as a basis for formulation of the overall research questions of our study:

### ***Experiences by token women***

Kanter claims that tokens face special situations because of their minority status. The reasons for this are that tokens "have a higher visibility than dominants looked at alone" (Kanter 1977, p. 210). Because of the increased visibility of tokens, they are also very much under pressure because failure to perform according to standards is immediately noticed. Moreover, the "women were supposed to be grateful for getting as far as they had (when other women clearly had *not*) and thus expected to bury dissatisfaction or aspirations" (Kanter 1977, p. 229).

### ***Differences and similarities in token and dominant behavior***

The differences between tokens and dominants are subject to exaggeration, especially from the dominants, who become more aware of the similarities between the dominants and the differences between the dominants and the tokens. Also, the tokens tend to assimilate by conforming to the stereotype that is held about the token group. This is further strengthened by the fact that it is "easier for tokens to find an instant identity by conforming to the pre-existing stereotypes" (Kanter 1977, p. 211). A problem that Kanter sees in the interaction between tokens and dominants is that by attempting to learn how to interact with a person from a different group, one can unknowingly reinforce the differences between the groups.

### ***Characteristics of the interaction between dominants and tokens***

In the interaction between dominants and tokens, the dominants tend to focus much less on professional matters and more on dress and behavior. As Kanter describes it: "[t]he focus on appearance and other non-ability traits was an almost direct consequence of the presence of very few women" (Kanter 1977, pp. 216-217).

### ***Rivalry patterns between tokens and between dominants as well as between tokens and dominants***

In terms of rivalry, Kanter states that token women who had reached ranks did not want to share their attention with other women and that they subtly worked to undercut a possible woman peer to be able to keep the unique status to themselves. This fact thus serves to "reinforce the

dynamics of tokenism by ensuring that, in the absence of external pressures like affirmative action, the group remains skewed” (Kanter 1977, pp. 216-217). Kanter concludes that: for “token women, the price of being ‘one of the boys’ was a willingness to occasionally turn against ‘the girls’” (Kanter 1977, p. 228).

### ***Diminution of token achievements***

Kanter claims that the “token does not have to work hard to have her presence noticed, but she does have to work hard to have her achievements noticed [...and that while] the token women felt they had to do better than anyone else in order to be seen as competent and allowed to continue, they also felt, in some cases that their successes would not be rewarded and should be kept to themselves” (Kanter 1977, p. 216).

### ***Changes as numbers increase***

As numbers increase from tokens to simple minorities all these special situations for tokens become diluted and less obvious. Yet, they do still persist until the group becomes balanced, which means a relationship of 40-60 percent of one group and a matching ratio of the other group.

### ***Majority men’s preferences of other men***

Majority men choose others that can be trusted. They e.g. prefer to socialize, network and work with other majority men, and prefer to recruit other men similar to themselves. And thus they keep women outside and reproduce themselves in kind.

## **6 Result**

### **6.1 Presentation of the results**

In this chapter we present the results of our interviews structured according to our main research questions. In the appendices section of the report we present the interviews one by one with the themes and details we found most interesting in our first review of them; in abbreviated form however. This way we want facilitate reader's understanding of the communicated perspectives and experiences of the interviewees.

We also interviewed three experts in the field in order to broaden our frame of reference during the research. They have all conducted research in the corporate board area. The result of the expert interviews is not included in this chapter as our purpose is to understand board women interviewees experiences and perspectives. The expert interviews are instead presented in the appendices section.

### **6.2 Coverage of company sizes, industries, and sectors**

The group of board women is presently active in 68 boards of commercial companies. They have all during the last one to three decades been board members or chairmen of an additional number of companies, which we ask them to also reflect on in the interviews. Outside of the commercial sector they are and have been board members of various non-profit organizations, institutions and foundations in the private and public sector. All of them, except one, are presently members of at least one large private company board.

Out of the 68 companies they are presently board members of, 18 are listed, and 21 of the companies had a yearly turnover of between 1 and 30 billion SEK in 2008. Some of the companies own other corporations that are not included in these turnover figures. The companies having more than 1 billion SEK in yearly turnover are representing a variety of commercial sectors; bank services, healthcare, investment, it, manufacturing, professional services, property management, transport, and wholesale.

Among these 21 largest companies the number of female board members varies between 1 and 4. The average percentage of women in these boards is presently around 38%.

The variation in gender distribution between boards is high and each of the participating board professionals has experience from boards with different gender compositions. This means that they can compare own experience and their perception of board climate and board performance

between e.g. boards having a strong male majority and more gender balanced boards. This is highly valuable for our study.

For anonymity reasons we do not reveal the names of the companies.

### **6.3 Comment on the board member interviewees**

The board member interviewees have extensive experience from operative positions including executive management; generally considered as a prerequisite for being considered as a board member in a large commercial corporation.

Our impression from the interviews is that the interviewed board women are all characterized by being self-confident, matured, and self-distanced individuals. They reflected and nuanced their views during the interviews, and did not seem to hesitate to walk us through the backside of being in a gender minority position. They all seem to us very capable to objectively look at their own role as female board members, as well as on other women and men as board members, and on relationships and climates within the boards.

### **6.4 Interview data structured by research question**

In this section we will present our interpretations of the interview data structured according to our initially presented research questions. The synthesis is systematically structured by common theme (printed in *italic* format), followed by exceptions and interesting comments. Citations and examples have been chosen to illustrate e.g. common meanings or interesting details or exceptions.

#### **6.4.1 Overall experiences as a minority female board member**

##### **6.4.1.1 Efficiency and effectiveness of the boards**

***Overall theme: The board members generally assess the board work as professional, efficient and effective, particularly in large corporation boards, with some exceptions however.***

Most interviewees say that overall, their different boards are functioning well and that there is a high degree of competence in the boards. What differs between boards is often the quality of the board material received from the operative part of the company. In larger companies materials are often more well-prepared than in the smaller ones. As for the board's way of working, this differs somewhat between different companies as well. A general view is that the chairman of the board implements his/her way of working into the board and that the culture within the board often is strongly influenced by him/her and the CEO of the corporation.

One says e.g. that some boards were more consensus driven while others were more effective and quick on decisions. Yet, she does not consider one way more effective than the other.

Large corporation boards work more strategically than smaller company boards which have a more operative focus, says one interviewee. Another one suggests that boards having an operative focus need to get more strategic in order to improve.

A specific view from yet another interviewee is that not only the culture and the way of working of the chairman affected the board, but that also the company culture affected it. Boards in large corporations are, with one exception, perceived as well run and well functioning by the interviewees. The rest of the examples of weaker board functioning are from smaller companies.

#### **6.4.1.2 Weaknesses of the boards' way of working**

***Overall theme: As in the previous paragraph; the board members generally assess the board work as professional, efficient and effective, particularly in large corporation boards, with some exceptions however.***

Most of the boards of the larger companies use self evaluation tools for assessing the functioning of the board and its members according to the interviewees. These evaluations differ between boards and also over time. One of the interviewees thinks that external evaluations made by consultants are more nuanced and deeper than the internally performed, on the other hand more expensive, but that these two varieties of evaluations can complement each other, for example by alternating between them in different years. The effect of evaluating the boards is that "they highlight the things that do not work".

A few of the women say that in some of their boards, they do not use evaluations. All these women say that it would be beneficial for these boards to start using evaluations.

One view held by many of the interviewees is that boards in different kinds of transitions tend not to function as smoothly as desirable but that when the transition is done, they see an improvement. Examples of such transitions could be the formation of a company from a public institution, a merger or acquisition or a separation of two merged companies.

A positive view from one board member on what has improved this far is that "there has been an increased focus on the nominations committees and their work and therefore the boards have improved".

#### **6.4.1.3 Ideas on how to improve board functions**

***Overall theme:*** *Generally, the interpersonal relations are seen as being highly important for how the board works. As one interviewee says: “It is good to know the people you are about to disagree with”. Also diversity and the competence of individuals is repeatedly mentioned.*

There can exist what is referred to as a “cartel” within a board, meaning that some of the board members have already decided in a matter before the actual board meeting. In cases where such cartels exist, removing them and making the members go into the board meeting with an open mind and an own opinion is hence said to improve common trust and function within the board.

For the boards without any evaluation, this is also pointed out as an area for improvement as the interviewees all say that evaluations are effective for improving the climate and working of a board.

Moreover, boards with many members that have been in place for a long time are seen by one of the interviewees to become more prone to groupthink and, coming in as a new member in such a board is seen as difficult and sometimes even unpleasant, especially if the newcomer fills both the criteria of being a woman and being younger. The reason is that the board already has its culture and when trying to get one’s own views across, one is met by a lack of respect.

“I think that I am in good boards, but everything can be improved, of course. I especially think that some boards need to have a more strategic focus, a growth agenda, and that they are too operative and shortsighted,” one says.

One suggestion is that board members could be better at listening to each other and not interrupt; she commented that women get more interrupted than men.

New board members can get a better introduction by the chairman and CEO; that they get help to rapidly understand and get into the work, was proposed. The same interviewee also says that more board members with international experience are needed as companies get increasingly globalized.

#### **6.4.1.4 Being thwarted as board member**

***Overall theme:*** *The interviewees answer to questions on whether they had been thwarted as board member is always no, particularly if it means being thwarted because of gender.*

From just one of the interviewees there is one experience of a strongly negative gender minority situation in a board. She had a female colleague in the board in question but she was quite weak, she says. "It was lonely." Having a tough experience she says that she will never again enter a board as the only woman. She also reflects that despite her competence being in another area, she found herself taking up questions concerning human resources, work environment issues and equality as these areas were classically regarded as feminine. She also ponders over whether she was unknowingly directing herself into that field or if she chose it because it was expected of her.

Some of the interviewees give examples of times when they had felt that they were alone against the rest of the board. Such examples include times when one female board member questioned operations and decisions about operations within the company. Such times, even though the interviewee argued for what would probably objectively be seen as the correct position, the chairman could claim that "we have received clear indications from the owner about this matter" and that was the end of the discussion. Generally they doubt that these situations had to do with their gender, suspecting that the explanation rather would be found in different general personalities, experiences, knowledge, or competences.

Some of the women also claim that with age and seniority follows a greater status and respect and that it is more difficult to belittle an older person than a younger one.

One says that there in fact are a few men that have a negative attitude towards women, "it's a bit of a cockroach-level then", but that there are sufficiently many good men.

Another says that "being alone in a board which is otherwise homogenous is something that I do not cope with" and that there has to be at least two outsiders to support each other in order for her to support a board nomination. This person can however be a man "leading a bit like a woman."

Two of the interviewees say that they have always had a very strong ambition to contribute with something to the board and at times they have felt that they have not contributed. In such instances, they claim they thought they should perhaps step down and let someone else take over.

Another example of resistance from the rest of the board is the use of internal jargon. This is stated to be a very effective way of shutting out a person that does not fully comprehend a particular professional or company-specific jargon. Furthermore, jargon is also believed to hide incompetence or ignorance about a matter while giving the impression of being well-informed.



#### 6.4.1.5 Meeting the attitude “You should be grateful, not difficult!”

***Overall theme:*** *The response is “no” from all interviewees on the question whether they have met an attitude of that they should be grateful to be where they are and not be difficult.*

There are, however, some elaborations, although the interviewees generally do not think it has to with their gender. One of the women says that in one of the boards, she had difficulties getting her questions answered but that she did not give up and eventually got the answers she wanted. Persistence and toughness of women on boards is a common theme in the interviews.

A corresponding theme among the interviewees is ‘selective perception’; to sometimes chose not to hear things that are negative in order to keep a positive outlook on things. Furthermore, it is stated by many of the women that one of the tasks of a board member is to ask difficult questions and if people find them annoying, then so be it. One give the example of a CEO of one of the companies that found her very difficult because she asked about things no one had asked about before and he had difficulties answering her questions. Here however, the board was behind her and the CEO thus had to supply the material needed to answer the question. Eventually even the CEO found the situation positive as he could now discuss issues he had not been able to discuss with anyone before. The interviewee also says that other times, when something she was pushing for was opposed by both the chairman and the CEO together, she had to be extra tough and smart to cope with it.

#### 6.4.1.6 General difference between men and women in boards

***Overall theme:*** *A common pattern among the interviewees is that they do not see much difference between men and women as board members but rather a difference between individuals in terms of competence and perspective. Differences between individual board members are greater than differences between genders, they conclude. One says e.g. that “I decided a long time ago to see myself as a human, not as a woman”, a statement that corresponds with the tendency in the data.*

Women is said to have lower prestige than men, they have the courage to ask questions and thereby show ignorance, and they are often very well prepared.

Another says that she saw a tendency for the minority to stick together and that it was easier to connect with other women for the sole reason of them being women.

“Gender does not tell about competence, but there is a general tendency not to be as good at identifying competence in women as in men”, one says.

Women are more risk averse and detail focusing, men has a bit more courage and take more chances. “This is good as it creates better dynamics that promote the board”, another says.

#### **6.4.1.7 Positive aspects of being a woman on corporate boards**

***Overall theme: Generally the interviewees expressed a highly positive and joyful attitude towards being a woman in a corporate board, also in strongly male dominated boards. They do not give the picture of being oppressed in any sense, rather to be (at least) equal to male board members.***

Some reflections from interviewees: One say that “as a woman, the others in the board dare not talk back at me”. Many state that they feel that “women are less prestigious” than men and that therefore she dare to ask questions maybe the men did not dare to ask. Many also say that they sometimes had a different perspective than the men but that this could also be because she was from a different generation than some of the men in her board and that she therefore saw things they did not see.

One thing that several of the women observe is that they get much more attention from media than their male colleagues, and that media often tend to pamper them with very positive articles.

#### **6.4.1.8 Negative aspects of being a woman on corporate boards**

***Overall theme: None of the interviewed female board members can see a major negative aspect by being a female corporate board member.***

The “good girls syndrome”, making women more self-critical and men more self confident is a common observation, mentioned repeatedly. This has something to do with women being more self-critical and men more self-confident. This means that women might have a stronger drive to always be very familiar with the board material. The good girl syndrome is however not imposed by the board institution or the men majority, but is seen as inherent in the female role.

One interviewee state the view that as one of a very few representatives for women she could not afford to make mistakes, which is an undertone in some interviews.

Two of the interviewees claim that one of the negative aspects of being a woman in a board of directors coincides with one positive aspect, namely the attention from media. This is because the

positive attention abruptly can turn into negative attention in the case of a mistake in one's board appointment.

#### **6.4.2 Differences and similarities between gender's roles and behaviour**

***Overall theme: Most of the women claim that the biggest differences between board members have to do with personality or other general characteristics rather than gender.***

One exception is a woman saying that "talking to a man can be a bit like a Swede talking to a Dane; you understand each other quite well and then suddenly you see something glassy in their eyes and realise they do not understand what you are talking about".

Also, one woman says that there was another type of concern for each other between board women for example if someone fell ill or something of the sort, "although female board members might not be more caring when it actually counts. " Another woman says that she believes it to be disadvantageous for a woman to say that men and women are different or that women have different abilities.

A view from one interviewee is that she perhaps represents quite an atypical woman and that this is something that might be needed in order to advance in such circles. In other interviews there are similar remarks; thicker skin, toughness, high standards, were some attributes.

##### **6.4.2.1 Greatest similarities**

***Overall theme: Some common qualities among board members that are often mentioned are experience, a sense of decision-making, a feeling of responsibility and a want to contribute. Moreover, board members were said not to be afraid of working or speaking their mind as well as being analytical and business-like. All the board women agree that there are greater similarities than differences between board members irrespective of gender.***

##### **6.4.2.2 Difference between board members in how work needs to be done**

***Overall theme: The only real differences between board members observed by the board women are caused by different experiences and different knowledge-bases that make people tackle a problem from different angles, not gender.***

One woman deviates as she means that men generally have a greater self-confidence and are thus able to perhaps work less hard with certain aspects. Tying into this is an experience from another

interviewee that other board members often remark on how well she knows the material. She however does not feel she can claim this is something specific for a woman.

#### **6.4.2.3 Amount of work needed**

***Overall theme: Generally, the female board members do not see any difference in the work-load required by men and women e.g. formally or in order to get recognition in the group. The chairman, however, man or woman, need to work more than others.***

Views brought up from this question are that the workload varies over time and from board to board. Acute situations arise from time to time and demand more from the board members. With a large number of board assignments, there is always some assignment that takes up much time, according to one interviewee.

One claims that women are more withdrawn about their good sides and thus need to work harder to have the same confidence as men have. “It’s more uphill for a woman”.

Another one answers that no, women in many boards have a lot of experience and thus have the comfort of knowing that they are experienced and can also draw from this experience in different matters.

A third statement is that the interviewee has at times felt that she has raised an issue that no one takes any notice of. Then ten minutes later a man raises the same issue and suddenly everyone understands and finds it interesting. She also says that this might go back to what she said earlier about men and women being like Swedes and Danes: not quite speaking the same language. However, not just women but all categories of board members can suffer from similar behaviour, also e.g. younger men. “The whole list of power games can be played out in boards, just as anywhere in society as a whole.”

#### **6.4.2.4 Need to claim place compared to men**

***Overall theme: There is according to the interviewees no gender-specific difference in the level of claim a board member need to make in order be accepted in a corporate board.***

One of the interviewed says: “No –but perhaps right in the beginning you need to earn the respect from your peers. Yet, that goes for men as well so that is not gender-specific.” Most of the women agree with this statement and claim that they have not experienced a scenario where they need to claim their place more than men. There are no differing views.

#### 6.4.2.5 Need to adapt as a woman to fit in

***Overall theme: The general view is that one always needs to adapt to all new situations and groups, and that boards are no exception. There are no particular requirements on a woman in order for her to adapt.***

A comment is that if many of the men in a board have other common denominators it may be more difficult to adapt. Examples of such common denominators are golf, hunting, membership in other boards. Such activities are creating common understanding between the participating individuals, exemplified by the statement “they can look at each other and know what the other thinks about a matter while I do not even see a change in their face”.

Another statement is that it is difficult because “one enters a climate that is fixed and that is very manly” and “in such a climate, one does not waste time questioning things”.

A third view is that there is no adaption apart from the adaption all humans make for each other. Nevertheless, the same woman brings up the issue of men often having common interests such as hunting which “are not interesting for a woman. Then you have to find other things to talk about which are more interesting”.

One said that she did adapt early in her career, not anymore. Examples of adaptations for her were style of dress (wearing suits with pants instead of skirts) and speech (using more curse-words than she normally did). She also said that she realized that the reason for her cursing was that she had a need to claim her place. Tying into this, is the statement of another woman saying that she has “a more cocky attitude than otherwise”.

#### 6.4.3 Characteristics of interaction between majority men and minority women

##### 6.4.3.1 Socializing within the board

***Overall theme: All the interviewed board women claim that there is a personal rapport between the board members in most boards and that this is something very positive and also important for maintaining an open culture within the board. Additionally, there is an agreement that common trust is a prerequisite for an efficient board, and that an important way to build trust is socializing in breaks and outside of board meetings.***

One of the women relates an experience from a board without any personal rapport and this experience was quite negative. In relation to this, she says that a board has to be a safe environment where the members are comfortable with each other.

#### 6.4.3.2 Differences in socializing pattern between gender

***Overall theme:*** *Most of the interviewees are slightly undecided on questions about differences in gender patterns in socializing, but after having reasoned a while they regularly conclude that there probably is a difference.*

Views that come up here are that “men are less private and they talk about other things, such as ‘how’s your Porsche.’” On the other hand some men can be very private with women when they have got a good contact.

Another woman says that “men have their fixed ways with their hunting, golfing and tennis and that is something women cannot always participate in” but added that she did not see this as a problem.

A third says that “to me, there is no big difference, but men probably talk differently with each other than with me”.

A last comment is that women are, or at least act as if they are, more concerned about the well-being of the other female board members, asking questions about how one feels. Connected to this, one woman says that she believes women to be quicker than men to become private but that this is not specific for boards but a more general rule.

One woman thinks that society is becoming more androgynous and that she has seen a change in the rapport over time in positive direction. Another view on this is that men calm down in the presence of women and that between men, there is a “rooster-like behavior”.

#### 6.4.3.3 Comments referring to gender

***Overall theme:*** *Some of the interviewees say that the comments between men are sometimes harsher than those women receive. Examples of typical comments to women brought up by the interviewees revolve around age, appearance, and mode of dress, while men are receiving other types of comments.*

One woman says that men often comment on her nice legs when she wear a skirt. Another woman reflect that maybe some men would like a flattering comment on a new suite some time, insinuating that such a comment may be little to be irritated over. “It is good to have a somewhat thick skin.”

Men need sometimes to endure joking comments from other men, e.g. “I would not eat that sandwich with your belly”, was another reflection.

One woman comments: “Yes, it is easier to belittle a woman, that is something many men in their sixties do”.

#### **6.4.4 Rivalry within and between (minority) women and (majority) men in boards**

##### **6.4.4.1 Rivalry between female board members**

***Overall theme:*** *The interviewees answer unanimous “no” to the question whether they have experienced or observed rivalry between female board members.*

Some had experienced that at the operative level but not at board level.

##### **6.4.4.2 Rivalry between male board members**

***Overall theme:*** *There are no observations found of real rivalry between men in boards in the interviews.*

Some of the women says however that men are more prone to “cock-fights and marking territory” such as who is the best at “gabbling numbers.”

##### **6.4.4.3 Women thwarting other women**

***Overall theme:*** *The interviewees say they have not seen thwarting of a woman by another female in a board context.*

One states that she had heard a woman claiming she had been thwarted by another woman at the operative level, but not in a board. She continues by saying that it is very difficult to judge on other people’s experiences so she concluded that she could not say she had seen it.

##### **6.4.4.4 Female nepotism**

***Overall theme:*** *Most of the interviewed women believe that favouring of friends and relatives exist, but that women are somewhat lagging in their networks, resulting in weaker female nepotism than the male equivalent.*

Yet, the female networks are increasing their power according to the interviewees.

##### **6.4.4.5 Negative consequences of quotation for female board members**

***Overall theme:*** *Most board women do not think there will be negative consequences for women on boards because of being quoted in by law.*

One interviewee says, e.g., that given that the person is competent and can contribute, she will be treated as anyone else. Another brings up the example from Norway and that it does not seem

that the women in Norway are more thwarted than in Sweden. She also means that once you are a member of a board, people tend to forget how you got there. Tying in to this is a comment stating that people would not know if you were a subject of quotas or not.

One interviewee with a differing view thinks that affirmative action women might be more thwarted as it would be like “a B-team coming in”.

Most women state to already be subjects of gender quotas because their boards have felt they need a woman for their diversity, and that this has not meant problems for them. Yet, they also say that they have not earned their positions only because they are women but because they are women with a certain competence.

Another view being brought up by some interviewees is that if one want gender equality, the boards is the wrong end to start in. The operative positions are then of much higher importance, according to them.

#### **6.4.4.6 Opinion on gender affirmative action quotation**

***Overall theme: A weak majority of our board member interviewees are more or less against gender affirmative action lawmaking. Three of the board women are outspokenly for, and two are unsure.***

An interviewee being for gender quotas, says that she had switched sides in the matter only in the last year or two. The reason for this change of mind is that she thinks that the development is too slow and that a gender quota would speed up the introduction of more women in higher positions in Sweden. Another agrees; “I actually do not like quotation, but without it there will be no change.”

Some interviewees say that gender quotas is a highly important ownership question; and that by introducing gender quotas one would limit the owners in their right to choose board members. One woman, although she is against gender quotas says: “Most people can agree that judging a person’s competence is highly subjective. Most people can also agree that many men are not the best suited for their jobs. Then, if men have always gotten their jobs for the wrong reasons, would it be so bad if women got their jobs for the wrong reason?” “Men have already been quoted in for a thousand or hundred years.”



#### **6.4.5 Diminishment of female achievements by underrepresentation**

***Overall theme: The interviewed female board members do not see themselves as hindered in their performance or achievements in male dominated boards compared to men in male dominated corporate boards.***

It is a common theme throughout the interviews that the female board members do not feel hindered in their work or career. The summary is that all of these individuals express a strongly positive and joyful view of their working life.

There are disadvantages linked to their gender, such as stronger male than female bonding and networks, and the media attention that can be a consequence of a failure, but the positive side is reported by them to weigh over, and with substantial margin. The data thus reveal some potentially negative issues for the women, but their response is in principle that they simply do not bother much about them.

The conclusion that the female board members do not see themselves as hindered is supported by the common trend in section 6.4.1.4 that none of them sees themselves as having been thwarted as board member and that they had not seen this happen to another woman. Neither does anyone agree when they are asked if they had met an attitude that they should be grateful and not difficult because of their advancement as women in section 6.4.1.5.

The result in section 6.4.1.6 is that the female board women do not see much difference between men and women as board members; that differences in competence and perspective are more important than gender. In section 6.4.1.7 we concluded that the interview subjects express a highly positive and joyful attitude towards being a woman in a corporate board, also in strongly male dominated board, and that they do not paint a picture of being oppressed in any sense, rather to be (at least) equal to male board members.

That none of the female board members sees any major negative consequence of her gender on her board working is reported in section 6.4.1.8. In section 6.4.2.2 we conclude that the only real differences between the board members in how the work needs to be done, as seen by the board women, are caused by different experiences and different knowledge-bases that make people tackle a problem from different angles, not gender.

That the female board members do not see any difference in work-load required by man and women is told in section 6.4.2.3. In 6.4.2.4 we conclude that according to the interviewees, there is no gender specific difference in the level of claim a board member need to make in order to be

accepted in a corporate board. And finally, in chapter 6.4.2.5 we relate the female board member's experience that there are no particular requirements on a woman in order for her to adapt to a male dominated board.

#### **6.4.6 Bonding patterns of majority men**

***Overall theme: The data from the interviews women board members indicate that majority men prefer to bond with other males, but that this pattern may be weakening.***

There are throughout the data indications of traditional bonding activities within the male majorities on corporate boards. One says for example that "men have their fixed ways with their hunting, golfing and tennis and that is something women cannot participate in". Another relates that "there is no big difference, but men probably talk different with each other than with me."

On the other hand, there are signs in the materials that board men and women bond and socialize with each other across gender-boarders to a considerable extent. The gender barrier seems to be weakened and not so difficult to pass anymore, illustrated by one interviewee who expressed the view that men have become more androgynous. If this is a trend, it might mean that there could be less reason than before for men to trust just men. During the last decade, also strong female networks, and mixed male and female networks have been developed.

Furthermore, despite that many women find the development far too slow, the percentage of females seem to steadily increase in both higher education and operative management ranks. Thus, the chances for male majority board men to find women reminding of themselves regarding education, social background, experience, and competence, look like being on a long term rise.

Regarding corporate board recruitment, there is a strong and growing demand for women seen as having the right background, according to the interviews. Women having established themselves as competent large corporation board members are in high demand on the market for board professionals. They come frequently up on board recruitment shortlists and are in the position to get many offers on board positions, also compared to male board professionals. This can be illustrated by a humorous comment by one interviewee: "It is not easy to be a white, middle aged male these days."

In Sweden there is, however, compared to Norway, that because of their law on gender quota in listed companies is an interesting benchmark, a limited number of female board members that each has many assignments. In Norway the board assignments are spread out to a much larger

number of women, each with a small number of assignments, in addition to the larger number of female board positions generated by the affirmative action quota of at least 40 percent of each gender among a core group of listed companies.

## **7 Analysis and conclusion**

In this chapter we will examine Kanter's theory (Kanter 1977), presented in chapter 5 Theory, by comparing her theory to the data we present in chapter 6 Result.

### **7.1 What are the overall experiences as minority female board member?**

We seek to answer the research question by relating Kanter's theory to our findings in the results chapter, particularly section 6.4.1..

Kanter claims that gender minorities and particularly tokens face special situations because of their minority status. The reasons for this are that minorities and tokens "have a higher visibility than dominants looked at alone" (Kanter 1977, p. 210). This claim by Kanter corresponds to an extent with the board women's stories; a token woman is generally more visible than an individual among the male majority. Being among a few female on corporate boards can also make them feel a certain responsibility and a particular determinedness not to fail.

Because of the increased visibility of minorities, Kanter also writes, they are also very much under pressure because a failure to perform according to standards is immediately noticed. This may correspond with our interviews; a "Dutiful-girl" syndrome is repeatedly mentioned as a characteristic of female board members but with the alternative explanation that this is a female trait.

The "women were accordingly supposed to be grateful for getting as far as they had (when other women clearly had *not*) and thus expected to bury dissatisfaction or aspirations", according to Kanter (1977, p. 229). Our interviewees gave a contradicting picture; all of the board women said they had not met this attitude. All of them also say 'no' when asked if they have ever been thwarted as a board member, or seen another woman being thwarted in a board or during a board recruitment process.

A repeated view from our interviewees is that they do not see much difference between men and women in boards that has to do with gender. Other attributes such as experience and perspective are better explanations of differences between board members, they say.

As said, minority women experience, according to Kanter, high pressure as a consequence of a high visibility. This is however not the picture related by our interviewees; they do not see themselves as being exposed to a higher pressure than male board members. However, at the

same time they generally describe themselves as highly determined to do a very good job and not making mistakes.

Our interviewees express a highly positive and joyful attitude towards their board jobs, also in token situations. They do not give the image of suffering or being oppressed, rather the contrary. None of the interviewees does relate a major negative aspect on being a female corporate board member when asked. And many of them repeat the statement that it differs more within the genders than between them.

## **7.2 What are the overall differences and similarities between (majority) men's and (minority) women's roles and behavior in boards?**

Here we seek to answer the research question by relating Kanter's theory to our findings in particularly result section 6.4.2..

The differences between minority and dominants are according to Kanter subject to exaggeration, especially from the dominants, who become more aware of the similarities between the dominants and the differences between the dominants and the minority. Our board women say however that they do not see much difference between genders on a board, and that other differences are more important between board members, such as personality, competence, experience, and perspective.

Kanter writes also, that the minority tend to assimilate by conforming to the stereotype that is held about the minority group. Our interviewees say that they do not see a need for them to adapt particularly because of their gender; that they do not take on another job role than other board members have.

According to Kanter the tendency to conform is further strengthened by the fact that it is "easier for tokens to find an instant identity by conforming to the pre-existing stereotypes" (Kanter 1977, p. 211). A problem that Kanter sees in the interaction between tokens and dominants is that by attempting to learn how to interact with a person from a different group, one can unknowingly reinforce the differences between the groups. Most of our interviewees say they do not experience large differences between the ways they interact with individuals of different gender. Although there are some interviewees that stress difficulties to interact with and understand particularly some male board colleagues of a previous generation, they do not give the impression of adapting in a way that make them feel suffering. Rather, they generally communicate an image of being strong, proud, self-aware and not bothering very much personally in such cases.

The real difference between the working styles of board members has to do with differences in e.g. experiences and knowledge-bases, not gender, according to our interviewees. They also say that the work-load demanded by men and women in order to get recognized is the same for both genders. They say that there is not a gender specific difference in how much they need to claim their place in order to be accepted, and that there are, according to their experiences, no particular requirements on a woman compared with a man in order to adapt to a board.

### **7.3 What characterizes the interaction between (majority) men and (minority) women in boards?**

Here we relate Kanter's theory to our findings in particularly result section 6.4.3..

In the interaction between dominants and tokens, the dominants tend according to Kanter to focus much less on professional matters and more on dress and behavior. As Kanter describes it: "[t]he focus on appearance and other non-ability traits was an almost direct consequence of the presence of very few women" (Kanter 1977, p. 216-217).

Our interviewees all express that personal rapport with the other board members is a very positive experience and also important for the open climate and trust in a board that is needed for best performance. Most of them are in agreement that there are differences in the way men and women socialize in boards just like elsewhere in society. Regarding gender-specific comments; there exist e.g. complements to women, but we did not hear someone saying she was suffering from them. There also came up the view that men make tougher comments to other men than to women.

### **7.4 What patterns are there of rivalry between (minority) women and (majority) men in boards respectively?**

Here we relate Kanter's theory to our findings in particularly result section 6.4.4..

Kanter reports that token women who had reached ranks did not want to share their attention with other women and that they subtly worked to undercut a possible woman peer to be able to keep the unique status to themselves. This serves to "reinforce the dynamics of tokenism by ensuring that, in the absence of external pressures like affirmative action, the group remains skewed" (Kanter 1977, pp 216-217). Kanter concludes that: for "token women, the price of being 'one of the boys' was a willingness to occasionally turn against 'the girls'" (Kanter 1977, p. 228). Thus, as men possess the most important power positions in male dominated boards with token women, the main rivalry will take place between men; while rivalry between women will take place in the periphery.

Our interviewees say that they have not seen real rivalry in corporate boards. Particularly the existence of internal female rivalry is denied. They relate cases of “cock-fighting” between men but describe these to be harmless; among examples are “who is the best at gabbling numbers”. Thus, if there is real rivalry between corporate board members the board women have not observed them, according to the interviews. Our reflection is that risks of real rivalry may be taken care of on the outside, in e.g. the candidate nomination processes, and/or if rivalry is present, it may not be allowed by a “general corporate board norm” to play out openly between board members.

They also say they have not experienced a woman thwarting another woman in a corporate board context. Instead they see female nepotism as being on the increase; women networking with each other, “scratching each other’s backs”, however not yet being as good at it as men are. A majority of the interviewees say they do not think there will be negative consequences for women being quoted into corporate boards because of gender. A weak majority of them oppose a gender quotation law, others are for.

The tendency is that board women increasingly lean towards supporting law making, thinking that the development towards gender balanced boards is by far too slow. If there would be an effort among board women to protect their turf against other women, despite the result of the interviews, the signs of a gradual change in attitude towards gender quota lawmaking may indicate that this sort of competitive behavior is weakening among them.

### **7.5 Are female achievements diminished by underrepresentation in male dominated boards in Sweden 2010?**

Here we relate Kanter’s theory to the results chapter (6) as a whole and particularly to our findings in the results section 6.4.5..

The first of the two major hypothesis by Kanter that we focus on is that women’s performance achievements are diminished by under-representation in male dominated boards.

As we specified in section 6.4.5 none of the interviewed female board members see themselves as hindered in their performance or achievements in male dominated boards because of their gender. Furthermore, they see themselves as performing just as well, or even a bit better than men as board members.

## **7.6 Do majority men in boards prefer to surround themselves, work and socialize with other men, thus being the driving force behind tokenism as a self-perpetuating system?**

Here we relate Kanter's theory to the results chapter (6) as a whole and particularly to our findings in result section 6.4.6..

The second of Kanter's main hypothesis we aim at looking closer on is that the tokenism is self-perpetuating, characterized by "homosocial reproduction". Here we look for signs of Kanter's core explanation of homosocial reproduction; that all humans, including men, have an inner need to choose individuals reminding of themselves to relate to at work, because they trust them more, and thereby they reproduce themselves in kind.

As specified in 6.4.6, the interviews with the board women indicate that majority men tend to prefer to bond with other men, but also that this pattern may be weakening, and thus weakening the self-perpetuating pattern of gender tokenism. There are indications of increasing bonding across genders e.g. through gender mixed networks. Forces in the larger society drive towards a change in the majority men's behavior in this respect; not least an intense public debate and political threats of gender quota lawmaking. Furthermore, through a growing percentage of women in critical higher education and operative management ranks, the motive that women lack experience and competence weakens continuously in strength, and thus, more women will by time look like the majority men in background and education. The development is however, according to a strong majority of the board women, advancing far too slowly.

## **7.7 Conclusion of the analysis**

Our conclusion of the analysis is that the first main hypothesis by Kanter that we test; that token women in male workgroups suffer in performance and/or achievement because of their gender, does not correspond with female Swedish corporate board member's own stated perspective.

The conclusion regarding the second hypothesis by Kanter that we test, that tokenism is a self-perpetuating system, we find supported by the own stated perspective of female Swedish corporate board members. But we are finding signs of that the core driving explanation behind the system according to Kanter, that men in male majorities prefer to bond with men and thus reproduce themselves (i.e. homosocial reproduction), may be weakening as a consequence of progress among women regarding education and experience, and from a strong pressure from the larger society to establish a balanced gender distribution in boards.



## **8 Hypotheses and discussion**

### **8.1 Hypotheses**

We suggest two hypotheses. The first, which we consider as being well supported by our findings, is that gender minority status does not make women suffer in performance and/or achievement in Swedish corporate boards.

The second, for which we have found reasonable support, is that the pattern of homosocial reproduction is weakening in male dominated Swedish corporate boards as a consequence of a weakening tendency among men to prefer bonding with other men compared to bonding with women.

### **8.2 Discussion of research results**

In this section we will discuss some ideas that may explain the result of our study, particularly the first hypothesis.

The first idea corresponds with the study of psychological climate, i.e. the individual's perception of the work environment, and tokenism, that we refer to in the literature review. A result of that research is a suggestion that a psychological climate of gender inequity is negatively related to factors such as job satisfaction and job commitment (King et al. 2010). Correspondingly, in our effort to understand the perspective of token board women we see a consistent pattern that a climate of trust within a corporate board is seen as vital for both the individuals themselves and for the board as a whole. This may mean that a climate of trust in the board, implying a positive psychological climate for token women, would be of vital interest for all stakeholders and thus is systematically supported by them.

A supporting reasoning may be found in the nature of a corporate board and its work. Kanter (1977) said that the difficulties for token women are as worst at the highest management levels. But a corporate board differs from a company in several respects (Sjöstrand & Petrelius 2002) which may mean a more favorable environment for token women in a corporate board than in e.g. an executive management group. Again, the requirement on trust is seen as the core prerequisite and trust takes a long time to establish. The board members e.g. need to really know each other's experience, values, ideals, and competencies. The building of trust within the board is a core challenge for the individual board member and may take years to establish. In such a context, negative behavior towards a female board member from a male seems for us to be quite

dysfunctional. The same goes for general gender inequality because of its negative outcome for token female board members and thus for the performance of the board as a whole. This seems to be in the disinterest of everybody.

The previous reasoning may be linked to Kanter's (Kanter 1993) reflection that corporations since 1987 tried hard to improve their organizations through teambuilding and organizational change. Such activities will in turn mean a general improvement of social competence among male and female managers meaning positive effects on minorities' situation. We would like to add that we believe the research by Kanter and others has contributed with increased awareness of gender-inequity and its negative consequences, and to establish practices and policies in companies to solve the problems. Kanter's work has thus resulted in better work environments for women in male dominated groups.

The more procedural and formal character of board work, compared to the work in a management group, may result in a more systematic focus on work tasks and provide less room for gender inequity between the group members.

Another explanation may be found in cultural differences, that gender equality in Sweden 2010 among members of corporate boards may be more developed than in USA in the 1970's, resulting in a better work environment for minority women.

Alvesson & Due Billing (1999) criticize Kanter's theory for underestimating peoples opportunities to act and thus change reality, and they mean that the concept of relative numbers within the theory is not valid. Thus, the different result that we have found, compared to Kanter's theory, may be explained by a weak ability of the theory to predict outcomes.

Another angle is that minority corporate board women may not be in minority in a broader sense. Except for their gender, they have generally the same high-level operative background as the men, similar education, and similar social background (see e.g. Sjöstrand & Petrelius 2002). Our study area may thus be identified as a variety of homosocial reproduction.

All of the interviewed board women come forward as being strong-willed, disciplined individuals with high self-confidence and social competence. This could make the case that this group is more difficult to dominate than other women.

### **8.3 Problematisation**

A quantitative study would have been an alternative approach. We believe, however, that we have got a deeper, richer and still representative picture of the board women's perspective with the qualitative approach we have chosen.

Another alternative would have been to include male board members in the study, in order to see female minorities from more angles. This would have been interesting but not possible within our time frame.

Still another issue is subjectivity. We have however tried to take the steps we could take in order to increase our awareness of and reduce subjectivity, and we do, furthermore, not believe that objectivity is possible, particularly not in social research (see e.g. Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2008).

### **8.4 Scientific relevance**

We see our contribution as scientifically interesting as the result contradicts Kanter's theory in vital respects, and as female minority and tokenism in Swedish corporate boards seem not to have been studied earlier according to our information. Neither have we managed to identify tests of Kanter's theory of Tokenism in corporate boards in other countries.

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## **Interview references**

*(Individual's names are changed of anonymity reasons)*

Alpha, interviewed on 2010-04-12 in Stockholm

Beta, interviewed on 2010-04-20 in Stockholm

Gamma, interviewed on 2010-04-22 in Stockholm

Delta, interviewed on 2010-04-26 in Stockholm

Epsilon, interviewed on 2010-04-20 in Stockholm

Zeta, interviewed on 2010-04-29 in Stockholm

Eta, interviewed per telephone on 2010-05-03 in Stockholm

Theta, interviewed per telephone on 2010-05-05 in Stockholm

Iota, interviewed per telephone on 2010-05-07 in Stockholm

Kappa, interviewed per telephone on 2010-04-06 in Stockholm

Lambda, interviewed on 2010-04-21 in Stockholm

Sigma, interviewed on 2010-04-22 in Stockholm

Omega, interviewed on 2010-04-26 in Stockholm

## **Appendices 1 Female board member interviews**

The synthesis of each interview is presented in an abbreviated and distorted way in order to protect the individual's anonymity, without, if possible, altering content being relevant for our research aim. The interviewees' names have been replaced by Greek letters.

### **Alpha**

Alpha is a full time board professional having extensive and long time experience of a large number of boards in a variety of industries in both private sector, public sector, and in other areas of society. She has extensive experience of being both the only woman on a board and working with other female board members in boards where the majority is men.

Alpha does not at all see herself at all as hindered in her board role by being a woman. "I decided a long time ago to look at myself as a human, not a woman in this work." There are no different requirements on female board members' performance compared to males, and women and men need to work equally hard in boards. She has not felt others being envious of her or trying to keep her back or push her down.

She says when men and women in boards socialize they talk about somewhat different subjects with men and women respectively. There are rivalries between men just as between women, but men that are allies are better at watching each other's back. Men in boards never discuss power with women, despite there being incredible power struggles going on in all boards in all sectors of society.

Alpha says that rivalry between women on boards are growing less common, women have now learned to scratch each other's back, just like men. There is also a long term development towards the androgynous among both male and female board members, as in the larger society. An in a way opposite development seems to take place in the dress code; before, female executives needed to dress neutrally, today it is perfectly correct to have a quite feminine look and wear feminine outfits. Earlier Alpha did adopt to a neutral style, but not anymore.

Women having advanced far in their carriers are today highly professional according to Alpha. An important challenge for female board members that has increased in recent years is the stronger limelight on them caused by public debate about female representation and affirmative action.

Alpha is in favour of affirmative action on female representation in Swedish private sector boards. She believes that women have less of a chance of being recruited by competence, and therefore

affirmative action is needed. She also would like boards to look in new directions in order to broaden their diversity and competence, “why not for example a female communication executive in her early forties.” Alpha has worked in many boards with affirmative action on female representation and has highly positive experiences. It works perfectly well in the public sector in Sweden and in private sector in Norway, so why should it not be introduced in the private sector in Sweden? The resistance towards affirmative action comes from the men that obviously would lose in board representation, power and influence.

Alpha thinks that the executive and board member women that oppose affirmative action do so in order to comply with the male board and executive majority. The common argument among resisting women that “I do not want a board position by affirmative action because then I am not seen as competent” is rejected by Alpha. She was once nominated because of her gender and it worked perfectly for her without any problems. “A woman getting a board position because of gender only has to show she is up to the job; otherwise she is out in a year. It is as simple as that”, she says. These objections from some women on affirmative action are overly sensitive, a “Princess and the Pea”-syndrome.”



## **Beta**

Beta is a member of the board of directors of a listed company where she is the only woman and has long experience in human resources. Earlier she has worked in the financial sector and has broad international experience. She says that her personal network played a big part in getting on the board.

Beta says the board is functioning extremely well and that she is a part of a very competent and engaged group of people. She feels safe in her role as a board member and has great trust in her co-workers. The atmosphere is very open and everyone dares to speak out, including herself. She is not in any sense afraid of asking questions or asking for help if there is something she does not understand. Beta says the chairman of the board is to a great extent responsible for setting the right tone to create this good working environment. She also points out that she often feels more energised after a board meeting than before going in. “We do yearly evaluations of board performance and they are usually very positive and we have a good climate for conversation”. She says they have good material to work with.

She has never felt thwarted in a board and has not been opposed to any decision. “You reach a decision through debate and arguing and you reach consensus before you decide on a matter”.

Beta has never felt that she should be grateful for reaching as far as she has and not be difficult. She says all the board members have great integrity. However, she can see that power is very present in the board and that she can see positions of dependence present. She is not at all afraid of speaking up and she says there is a great value in people’s different experiences and that they talk openly about them.

”There are certain differences between men and women, but I think the biggest difference probably can be found on an individual level”. She says that other people in the organization often turn to her for advice. Maybe it is because one can have greater personal trust in her when it comes to certain matters. Especially men turn to her.

Beta does not see any particular other benefits or negative aspects of being a woman compared to the men on the board. But she does say that media treats her differently, she gets more attention and they “cuddle with me” in a way media does not do with the men, particularly the older ones.

Beta believes that it should be at least 30 percent women on a board, otherwise you are alone. If there are only a few women they can be considered to “gang up”. Sometimes she can notice that men and women express themselves differently and that sometimes they do not fully

understand each other. She gives an example that it is like talking to a Dane, you think that you can adjust the language to understand and make yourself understood, but after a while you realize that the other person has no idea what you are talking about. Beta also says that men and women can notice and bring up different aspects in discussions and have different views on the same topic sometimes. "If a child falls on a bike, a woman will comfort the child while the man would get angry at the bike and kick it a few times".

What board members in general have in common she says depends on the different persons and not gender. Experiences are more important. In a board member you look for certain competencies and often these are found in men. Women's competencies are not recognized to the same extent.

She does not believe that she needs to work in any way different than men in a board. Neither does she think she needs to work hard for others to see her accomplishments. Although there can be times when she has said something that passes unnoticed in a meeting, and then after while a man brings up the same thing and everybody takes notice and likes the idea. This can be because of differences between persons (not gender), just as it can be because men and women sometimes express themselves in different ways. Although she does not rule it out, she does not think that women need to work harder than men. But men are usually more skilled at getting their points across and getting attention. However, she says there has been a change over time. She thinks that the individual differences are more important now than gender.

Beta says one always has to adjust to new settings and groups. If many of the men on the board have things in common, like other work assignments or hobbies, it can be harder to adjust to that group. The men who know each other well can understand one another without saying anything, while Beta does not pick up on these signs; "I did not even see a change in their facial expression".

She says that men have a tendency to be quite cocky towards each other, but most of them calm down when there is a woman present. Men also jokingly tease "pull down the pants" on one another time to time, in a way they would never do with Beta. They can make comments like "I wouldn't eat that sandwich with that belly". However, she says that may have to do with how she is as a person. Women do not tease each other in that sense either and Beta has never experienced rivalry between women on boards.

Beta says that if women on boards would meet resistance due to affirmative action it would be because of a bad selection process. "The women would be recruited for their competence

anyway. If a board selects a member only because of their gender and not competence, it would be a stupid board”.

She is undecided when it comes affirmative action, but she says she is not afraid of it and that it would work out fine if it happened because she knows that there so many competent women in Sweden. She says that if you assume that intelligence is equally distributed between the genders and if intelligence is a selection criterion when recruiting, there should be 50% women on the boards today. She thinks things are moving too slowly and that there is no shortage in competent women. “When it comes to an even gender distribution, it takes too long time”.

## **Gamma**

Gamma has extensive and long time experience from corporate boards in the private and the public sector, and from boards of different gender distribution. She also has experience as chairman.

She has positive experiences from being a female board member in male dominated boards, also as token member. In the board work Gamma does not think very much about that she is a woman. “I try to be myself, not a woman.” Some men in boards might have more similar views, but she is not sure it’s because she is a woman or from younger generation.

She has never met the attitude that she should be pleased with her achievements and not ask difficult questions, and “..if someone had tried this they would have failed.” People can find it hard receiving difficult questions, but as board member she cannot allow herself to be influenced by that. “You have to speak up and ask critical questions as a board member. Sometimes you have to start by asking questions, sometimes you touch a sensitive spot, something not thought through, or important. If you do not have the whole picture, you can contribute by asking questions.”

Gamma has had some experience with arrogant men, but, again, is not sure whether this has been because of gender or age differences. She has not been much in media, but when interviewed once she was only asked nice questions, many of them about women in the company rather than business issues.

When she has met resistance in views, she has not felt it has been rooted in gender but in different experiences. As Gamma sees it there are gender differences in boards just as everywhere else in society. Boys step forward and girls do their homework before raising their voice. Boys take chances, and it has been easier for boys than girls to make a career. “But I cannot say that men and women are different when it comes to working in boards.”

Gamma is seen as an articulated individual, asking questions and speaking her mind. She sees herself as being the type who is not very cautious. In order to succeed in these jobs you have to take some chances, have trust in yourself, in your intuition and judgment rather than knowing all the facts. Sometimes you get far with common sense, she says.

Board members are people enjoying decision-making, and people who like to take on work outside their regular jobs, to take on responsibility as the values at stake are large, and that are not afraid of work.

The social side of board membership is personal and pleasant. They have seminars, travel abroad making study visits, etcetera. She also meets board colleagues on other events. Gamma finds it important to get to know each other to an extent outside of the board room. Meetings are structured but still make room for jokes for example, and the members socialize when pausing and when having dinner and similar activities.

Gamma does not feel she is competing with women in boards and has no experiences of women competing with each other. She does not have any problems talking with men, and feels there is no big difference compared to talking to women. "I do not know if men talk differently with each other than with me, it does not matter." In her experience women in boards do not socialize with each other because they are women, socializing is all-inclusive and pleasant. When small talking she has sometimes got more in common with her male colleagues than with the female union representatives.

Affirmative action is a bad idea as the other board members would see these women as a second squad. This would make it difficult for some women. One cannot start with the boards but have to recruit more women to management positions even if this means waiting for thirty years. "Is the important thing to have women in a few public boards, or broadly on important management positions in the whole society?" Gamma asks and then goes on saying that very few people in our society are public corporation board members. Ownership and running of companies is much more interesting. Still, few women are starting companies. There are even larger differences when it comes to ownership, how shall we influence the accumulation of wealth in companies?

According to Gamma, recruitment is done from networks; if older men dominate the recruitment will be made from their networks. There need to be a gender balance, but it should not be achieved through gender quotas. It needs however to be debated and analyzed. "The same for immigrants starting companies, you just cannot regulate at micro level, telling a business owner not to have only Turks in his company."

Gamma concludes by saying "more women in boards is good, but this is nothing society should regulate by law."

## **Delta**

Delta has extensive board experience from corporations of different sizes, from mid-sized to very large, in Sweden and abroad, and from different distribution patterns of women and men in a board.

“It is quite okay to be a woman in all the boards I am in. Being a woman is positive, and I believe a lot in groups that are diverse in gender, nationality, knowledge, age, etc.; in too homogenous groups there will be a tendency of group think.”

Delta sees no negative aspects of being a woman on corporation boards, and she has not seen any other women suffer in a board because of gender. She does not need to work more or harder because she is a woman. When someone is selected to a board the individual is there because someone believes this person can make a contribution. She does not feel that she gets any particular type of comments in coffee breaks etcetera compared to men. She has seen diminution of individuals in operative management groups but not in boards.

According to Delta, when you enter an established group you need to get a position and get accepted. This applies to both women and men. But when you are accepted as a group member it rolls on. It is not necessary to change your female characteristics.

The role of a board member is to ask difficult questions, sometimes someone may get upset, but generally questioning is appreciated. There are differences between individuals rather than between men and women. All have different competence, everyone approaches the work task in their own way. “People being board members do not represent a standard distribution in any way, I am not softer or less inclined to take risks than others. I have my traits and so do everybody else as well.”

Common characteristics for board members are analytic ability, speed, a willingness to tell their view, ask, and question. Except from some union representatives all are business minded. All have been occupied with business in some way and are used to making decisions. “Sometimes you need to take a risk and quickly make an 80-20 decision.”

Board work differs between corporations and national cultures; it can vary from being extremely professional to more loosely fact based, from having high speed to being more slow and operative, from a higher degree of penetration of issues to mostly saying just “yes” or “no”. Conditions vary between corporations and therefore you need to adapt your requirements as a board member on documentation and so on.

Delta has not observed rivalry between women at boards, and she has not seen women be counteracted in a board, or during a board membership recruitment process. There are women protecting each other's backs, but this is not as frequent as among men. There is not rivalry between men, but she has seen examples of what she refers to as "cock fighting".

Outside of the board work there is a socializing side including private conversations with other board members. Sometimes men have their particular bonding events, for example hunting, tennis or golf, where women cannot participate. Delta does not find this being a big issue. The motive behind the bonding is generally not to influence the board and its work outside of the board room.

Delta does not believe that affirmative action women would meet more resistance if they are competent and can contribute in the right way. "I am subject to quotas in every board I am in, just as I have a particular business competence. I am a subject of quotas not just as a woman but also for my particular business competence."

She says the problem is not the boards but the management groups. Women need to grow through the ranks in the organizations. This is a much larger issue, if it is solved it will automatically mean more women in the boards.

She does not think that more women on corporate boards will mean more women in management groups. "It's a good thing that I can be there and question a skewed selection of high potentials, but I think this comes from something completely different. The longest half meter is between the brain and the heart. It is not very difficult to understand intellectually, and there are masses of people intellectually stating this, but when it really matters they do not take a close look at themselves asking what the problem really is."

Delta is an optimist; she believes change will come as time goes by. The gender distribution has developed positively during the last decades in both Stockholm School of economics and the Royal institute of Technology and there are a positive development going on in many companies. More women will want to have operative responsibility as demonstration of results is immensely important for a career.

"Most men I have worked with in boards have operative backgrounds. You need to have a holistic competence in a board. You have to be able to understand and contribute on all issues."

## **Epsilon**

Delta has extensive board experience from corporations of different sizes, from mid-sized to very large, in Sweden and abroad, and from different distribution patterns of women and men in a board.

“It is quite okay to be a woman in all the boards I am in. Being a woman is positive, and I believe a lot in groups that are diverse in gender, nationality, knowledge, age, etc.; in too homogenous groups there will be a tendency of group think.”

Delta sees no negative aspects of being a woman on corporation boards, and she has not seen any other women suffer in a board because of gender. She does not need to work more or harder because she is a woman. When someone is selected to a board the individual is there because someone believes this person can make a contribution. She does not feel that she gets any particular type of comments in coffee breaks etcetera compared to men. She has seen diminution of individuals in operative management groups but not in boards.

According to Delta, when you enter an established group you need to get a position and get accepted. This applies to both women and men. But when you are accepted as a group member it rolls on. It is not necessary to change your female characteristics.

The role of a board member is to ask difficult questions, sometimes someone may get upset, but generally questioning is appreciated. There are differences between individuals rather than between men and women. All have different competence, everyone approaches the work task in their own way. “People being board members do not represent a standard distribution in any way, I am not softer or less inclined to take risks than others. I have my traits and so do everybody else as well.”

Common characteristics for board members are analytic ability, speed, a willingness to tell their view, ask, and question. Except from some union representatives all are business minded. All have been occupied with business in some way and are used to making decisions. “Sometimes you need to take a risk and quickly make an 80-20 decision.”

Board work differs between corporations and national cultures; it can vary from being extremely professional to more loosely fact based, from having high speed to being more slow and operative, from a higher degree of penetration of issues to mostly saying just “yes” or “no”. Conditions vary between corporations and therefore you need to adapt your requirements as a board member on documentation and so on.



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"Most men I have worked with in boards have operative backgrounds. You need to have a holistic competence in a board. You have to be able to understand and contribute on all issues."

## **Zeta**

Zeta has an international background, she has had various global roles and CEO roles. She has experience as a board member from listed international and global Swedish corporations, publicly owned corporations, associations, and foundations.

“I have been lucky to work in very good boards.” She has never met the attitude that she ought to be grateful for her achievements and not ask difficult questions. When she asked a chairman why she was selected the reply was that he did not have all the answers, urging her to honestly state her opinions. “I have never felt any resistance there.”

She sees no differences between her own way of working on boards and other board members’ ways of working. She often receives praise because she is highly prepared but she does not know if it is a personality trait or if it has to do with her gender. She suspects that it is because she is one of the very few women at this level; “one cannot afford to do a bad job”. Also, she thinks other female board members are very well prepared; she says it’s a “dutiful girl”-syndrome, “otherwise we would probably not have been found on this level.” She has, however, not found that she needs to be more assertive because of her gender, “but I do not want someone to beat me on the homework”

“You have your personality, you don’t show all sides of it in all contexts, but I do not need to change myself in order to fit a culture.” She easily talks about private matters and in turn others are doing the same. Zeta says women open up more quickly, but men too can be very private when they have opened up to someone. As a board member, you do not need to have a close friendship with the CEO. But it is important that one can trust each other within a board. She also finds that it is the social side that builds trust within a board.

When asked about gender specific comments she says that she does not think she listens to those, “it’s good to have a somewhat thick skin. If you don’t hear them, such comments cease to come. Men do also get comments as well, and maybe some of them too would appreciate a positive comment on a handsome suit? Newspapers never write about how a male CEO is dressed. But this is common for women.”

An advantage of now being a woman in corporate boards is that she comes up on the short lists over potential new board members. “It is not easy to be a white, middle-aged male these days.” The high attention on women is however not only positive; if there are setbacks it can turn negative. There are no other negative aspects of being a female board member that Zeta can think of.

A characteristic of Zeta's style is to investigate and develop her own and the groups common knowledge by inquiry. Sometimes CEO:s have thought this to be tough, but Zeta has generally been supported by the other board members, as they have found it valuable and instructive for themselves as well. Gradually the CEO:s have adapted and started to appreciate her style.

"However, if both the CEO and the chairman are against you, it is not easy to confront them. In this case you have to be a bit tougher and smarter."

Zeta states that she can feel a tendency among women to stick together because they are female. This is not only advantageous. The negative consequence can be a "girl view"- rather than a "wise view"-impression when women speak their mind. The positive side is that it makes it easier to get to know each other.

She has not experienced rivalry between women on boards. "There can sometimes be fighting between men, but not much, for example on who is the best at gabbling numbers."

She has not seen any examples of women being counteracted on boards or on the way to a board, and does not think that even affirmative action women would be. It has not turned out that way in Norway, she reflects, and when board members have entered the board, how they entered is forgotten.

There are both male and female networks, and many networks containing both men and women. "For me it's like harvesting time right now. People I studied with on high positions everywhere."

A general view is that a board is far more influenced by the common corporate culture, the chairman, and the CEO, than by how many female members it has. Some corporations have distinct traditions; "this is our way to run the board". For example, the definitions of what constitutes a sufficient briefing material for a board decision can vary substantially.

Half of the boards perform their own evaluations of the board work, the other half bring in assistance from the outside. The work by external consultants is generally a bit more revealing, sharper and valuable. "Most boards are highly pleased with themselves, but despite this they can differ a lot."

Zeta states that all the classic techniques of oppression are still present today, for example that your proposal is not heard while someone else later coming up with the same proposal gets everybody's attention. Zeta has not experienced this herself and she says that rather few men are like this, most are neutral and some have no problems with women at all.

"I am against affirmative action quotas, but not as much anymore." The pace of change is too slow. But Zeta still means that competence should decide rather than gender. It is an important

owner issue to select board members. It is very natural if owners select people they trust, they might for example have a large part of their fortune in the company. On the other hand, competence does not always decide in normal recruitment.

“And men have been quoted in for a hundred or a thousand years. So would it be so awful if women got the job of the wrong reasons?” There is a lot of focus on board assignments but executive jobs are far more important, she reflects. The boards are not at all as powerful as the CEO, no matter what the law says. Women on these jobs are a lot more important, particularly as boards are recruited among CEO:s to a great extent. Zeta does not believe that more women on boards will trickle down to more women in the company. “That takes a very long time, how often does one change CEO?”

## **Eta**

Eta has a broad experience of board work covering a wide range of industries. She has been in the IT industry for thirty years, has worked in international companies and has CEO experience. Today she is a full time board member and is the only woman on many of her current board assignments.

Overall, Eta thinks her boards are functioning very well. However she says that things can always improve. As an example of how to get better she says that the boards should have a more strategic focus and not be too operative and have short-term. She says it is important to have clear goals and vision for growth. Many of the boards are a little too operative today, she says. It is important that the top management and the boards have clear roles. She also mentions that the boards would benefit from more members with executive experience. All of her boards conduct evaluations except one.

Being a minority woman on boards is something Eta feels comfortable with. She cannot see any particular positive or negative aspects of being a woman on boards. She is confident in her work and says she does not care who is a woman or a man; “the gender does not matter; only what you can bring to the table”. She has never met any significant resistance from others in her board work, nor has she felt that she should be grateful for reaching as far as she as and not be difficult.

In general, Eta thinks that the characteristics of men and women depend on the different personalities and what they can contribute, rather than their gender. The people who are members of a board need to be able to think strategically, understand the boards’ responsibility and mission. They need to understand the corporate governance, the owners and their role, and be clear on that the CEO runs the company. Eta does not have to work in any way different or harder than the men in her boards. However, she does say that women usually have less prestige than men in the board room. Women are not afraid of asking difficult questions and expose their own ignorance in a matter. They are not afraid of asking for explanations or help if they do not understand. Eta says that it is very important to do this if you want to be an asset for the board and contribute. Women also tend to be very well prepared and ambitious. They know every detail in the material, and to the extent that it becomes a “dutiful girl syndrome”.

Eta says she does not have to adapt in boards to fit in because she is a woman. “But you do always have to adapt to a new group no matter what your gender is. There are different group dynamics in each board”.

In Eta's boards they try to have dinners every once in a while to talk about other things than work. "It's like any other workplace, you talk about other things in coffee breaks, dinners and so on". She believes it is very important to socialize and get to know each other a little better to have a well functioning and collaborative group. The social part is the key to laying a foundation for respect and understanding. "If you know each other a bit more, I think the board work will be more efficient and effective". Eta says she has never thought about whether men and women talk about different things with one another aside from work, and has not noticed that she gets different comments than men in her work as a board member.

She has never experienced rivalry between women in a board, neither has she seen that women thwart other women on boards. Like men, she says that women have each other's backs too and there are several networks consisting of women. There are networks are actively working to get more women in top positions through mentorship and coaching. There are CV databases over competent women, and special networks for women on boards. Nowadays there are networks for younger professionals that are not only for one gender, but include both men and women.

Eta is against affirmative action, but says; "there must be change, law or not and you need to have clear goals to reach a better gender distribution". She adds; "we already have affirmative action today, where the men are searched for and selected because of their gender". There are a lot of very competent women in Sweden, and things need to change". She thinks that more women need to speed up their careers within the companies to gain operative and executive experience. One of the main reasons for there not being many women on the boards in Sweden today is because many businesses need to be better at measuring actual result, and not working hours. Women often have to choose between having a career or a family. It can be tough for women have both things at once.

## **Theta**

Theta has an extensive board experience from several sectors, industries and corporate forms. Among her assignments today is serving as a board member of five listed companies and also as a chairman of a board of directors. She has an engineering background and has held top management positions, both in Sweden and internationally.

In general she thinks that the boards are functioning well. But she says they could be better at introducing new members in the boards. The chairman and the CEO have a responsibility to inform the newcomer in a board. It is important for new members to quickly gain understanding about the company and its future.

Overall she has good experiences from being a female board member. She has met resistance in some boards, but not because of her gender. She says that she never reflects over the fact that she is a woman. “gender is not competence” she says.

She has felt resistance coming from other board members. In these occasions Theta has chosen to step down from her assignments. But she has not been thwarted because she is a woman, only because of differing opinions.

In boards she has not experienced that people think she should be grateful for her career and not be difficult. But she gives an example of a time she did experience this when she was younger. It was right before she was to have her second child when she started questioning why she did not have as high a salary as her male co-workers. She did the same job and even had better grades than the men in the same positions. When she brought this up she got the response; “why would you? You are not the provider of the family”. But things have changed, she says.

Today she never thinks about the fact that she is a woman. Women get more attention, especially from the media who describes a woman differently than a man. This can be both positive and negative. When there are more women it makes it easier if you make mistakes. You stand out much more if you are few of the same kind. Theta says media often paint misleading pictures of women and they are sometimes victimised in a way men are not. She gives one example of where the media has acted subjective and treated women as “truth-tellers”. Theta says the media would definitely have done a sharper analysis if a man was in the same situation.

She does not believe that men and women on boards are different. She says it is important for women and men alike to have a respect for each other, great integrity and to have a strong business focus when working on boards. They need to have a holistic view and be able to be critical and ask constructive questions.

She says men and women on boards do not need to work differently. What separates people is different competences, knowledge bases and fields of specializations, not gender.

She says it is very important to socialize within the group to build trust and understanding. “If you do not know each other a little better you will not have a holistic view and not be able to see the whole picture”. She also says that work starts at the minute you say “hello”. It is vital to be able to read between the lines and trust is vital in the board’s work. She says it is important to not be so formal and “efficient” all the time, trust is not created from that. In her boards the informal conversations around different topics like Barcelona, Zlatan and volcanoes help the board members to socialize and lighten up. She says topics vary between men and women. “You talk about what interests you have in common”. Men usually talk about sports and business and often rely on social background as a base for trust.

She says comments she receives can differ from those that men get. As a woman you do to get comments on appearance. But Theta says it is not negative at all. She sees comments on appearance as a way for men to seek contact and start a conversation. “A very clumsy invitation to start a conversation, but still an invitation”. Earlier in her career she could occasionally be very upset by these comments. If someone whistled after her, she would say “I’m not a dog!”. Today Theta takes those gestures as compliments.

She says she has never experienced rivalry between women in boards. However, she has seen rivalry in other management ranks in companies, “especially before you have established yourself”. Theta says it is the same thing for men, rivalry is strong there too. “Women are expected to stick together, but that is not always the case and rivalry does exist”.

Theta thinks it is very important to get more women on the boards, but does not think gender quotas is the way to go. “The board’s role is to represent the owners, not a gender”. Theta thinks chances are that women would meet resistance if they were on boards because of affirmative action. “It is about trust” she says. The women who get on the boards will not be there on the same conditions as the men and they are treated as a separate group. “They risk playing in the B-team”.



## **Iota**

Iota is relatively young female, yet with an extensive experience. She is an independent board member of one listed company and on the board of several other companies covering many industries. She has previously held high management positions in large companies. Apart from her board positions she has other operative assignments and she holds a law degree.

Overall Iota says she is a member of well functioning boards consisting of very professional people. The way they work varies between the boards depending on to what extent they have operational responsibilities. In the smaller companies the boards are more focused on operative matters, while in the listed company it is a more strategic focus.

Iota says that a way to improve the boards' work is to work on the communication and be more attentive to each other and listen better. There is a tendency that the members do not hear each other out before they interrupt one another. Especially women are used to being interrupted by men in the board room. In this situation women must speak up at let them know that they are not finished yet. In general men and women have different voices. The men have stronger voices and it can therefore be easier for a woman to be unnoticed. The boards would function better if everyone were given the time to both think and say everything they want before they were interrupted. It is a way of showing respect in the board room and in a discussion.

Iota has never felt that she has been counteracted in her board work. However, she has sometimes felt that some people want her to not be heard. "But I don't think that is simply because I'm a woman, I think it has to do with the person", she says. Women also have another way of saying things and sometimes they have problems being heard because they are less vocal. Men are to greater extent more expected to take a step back and make a quick and clear decision and have strong opinions. Personally Iota knows how to deal with this, because "I'm used to working with men and in that environment and I have learnt to speak my mind".

When asked about if there are any benefits with being a woman in boards Iota says women often bring other perspectives than men and emphasize different values. They are also very well prepared and to a greater extent more careful. This does not mean that men are not, but they generally cut right to the core more immediately.

In some situations Iota says that there can be dominant "alpha males" in discussions. Especially in leader positions. These alpha males can be dominant towards anybody, not only towards women. "It is a challenge also for younger men". It is important to stand your ground in these circumstances.

She does not believe that there are any differences between men and women in boards. However, "diversity is always good and I think that the board of directors should represent the company's target audience and owners". She says it lacks logic that many companies have women as their target group, but have only men in the boards and the strategic positions. This is not good for the understanding of the market and is negative for the company.

A common trait for both men and women on boards is that they need to have a holistic and strategic take on problems. They need to be able to "think outside the box" and have a clear vision. Iota does not see any differences between in how men and women to work in the board room. However, she says that women have to work differently and find other ways, in order to break through the male networks to get there. She thinks it is important for women to know how to work smart, not hard. This is different for women and men. "It is important for a woman to create her own network and do the right kinds of jobs and deliver results", she says and adds; "I have done this and I realized early on how very important it is". As a woman you also need to take more initiatives and not just wait for offers. Women simply do not get offers as often and to the same extent as men do. She says the women who do get the offers are usually the same persons and they are already in the system.

When being a part of a male dominated board Iota believes that you need to be "one of the guys". She also says that she sometimes needs to adjust statements when it comes to topics that touches on diversity and gender equality; "you need to clean up answers a little before you speak". She says that there is often a general view that Sweden is perfectly equal and saying it is not can sometimes be sensitive. However, Iota states that it is not only women who need to adjust. "Men also need to look beyond the gender when they are working. If they are not able to do so they will be handicapped and the performance of the board can suffer as a result."

Iota states that it is important for the board members to be professional and usually are so. They are not very personal in her boards, they have dinners once a year or so. But she thinks it is important to have a more social connection. Especially to understand each other better in the board room, since it allows you to see beyond a personal layer; "a person who is frightening in a meeting does not have to be so in private."

Iota says she is often considered to be tough. "Successful women are often described as tough and hard-nosed, while the men do not get these labels to the same extent". She says a woman who stands up for herself and speaks her mind is often described in this way. It is not necessarily negative. When a woman says something there will be more reaction and people will notice more than if they were quiet. She thinks the reason for this is because of attitudes in society that are

reflected in businesses. These attitudes are changing very slowly, and she says “even if you are working for a more equal society, people’s attitudes will take more time to change. Attitudes change when generations do”.

Iota has not experienced rivalry or thwarting between women on boards specifically, but in other situations and different parts of companies. Despite her not having seen rivalry she says some women have a tendency to be or be perceived as aggressive. She does not believe it has to do with rivalry, instead these women are aggressive because sometimes it is the only way they can make themselves heard.

Iota is for gender quotas in Swedish boards of directors. She says change is needed, but things are moving way too slow. As it is now the boards are not representative of the target markets and many very competent women are never even considered to get offers, while a few gets many. She does not believe that women would be treated negatively if they were on boards due to affirmative action, she says ”Not at all! You would never even be considered if you were not a good candidate and competent. It would be criminal if that were to happen”.

## **Kappa**

Kappa currently serves as a board member on several boards. She holds degrees in both finance and engineering and has a broad experience from financial and industrial sectors. She has also held top management positions in several companies.

It is important for the boards to be strategic and to support the CEO. Kappa thinks that she is a member of well functioning boards that do this in a good way. Overall, there are not many problems with being a woman on boards. However, she says there are women who do meet resistance from certain men on different boards, they are the ones who cannot see beyond gender. Many of them can launch personal attacks and be very shortsighted. Kappa says she does not care much for these men and says what they do is at a low level, or “level cockroach”, as she puts it. They are narrow minded because of their attitudes and mind-sets. Kappa says “luckily, we have enough good men too”. She also says the chairman of the board has a completely central role and it is difficult to be a member if the personal chemistry does not match with you and the chairman.

She has not felt she should be grateful for reaching as far as she has and not be difficult. She says things are quite the opposite; women are not compliant in any way and are not afraid to speak up for themselves. Kappa says “why would you be? That is why you are on the board in the first place, because you have opinions and competence”.

Being a minority woman does not bother Kappa, but she says she is more visible. Visibility can be both positive and negative. “If you make mistakes it will have larger effects since you have all the eyes on you”, she says. Kappa does not see any particular negative aspects with being a woman on corporate boards.

When discussing differences between men and women on boards she says women on boards are often more well prepared than men. They also focus more on details and are more risk averted. The men are more courageous, daring and they occasionally “shoot from the hip”. She says that men in general often are very good marketers. Kappa says these differences are complementary and together they create a very good dynamic that is needed for the board’s work. You do need to work a little differently depending of your area of specialty and competence, not gender. Men and women on boards alike are very engaged, competent and professional.

In Kappa’s boards they talk about other things than work. She says it is good to talk about other things than board work and get to know each other better. Social activities are important to perform better as a group. If you know what the other ones are thinking about and what

perspectives they have, it is easier to understand each other and build trust between the members.

Kappa says that as a female board member you can get different comments than the men do. For example; as a new female in a group you can get some comments that focus on the fact that you are a woman, like “it is so good to have you here, so we get a little femininity”, rather than “it is good to have you here as you know so much about risks”. Men also have a tendency to use empty rhetoric and jargons in discussions. She says “sometimes you do not know if they are talking about buying apples at a fruit market or what they are doing”.

Kappa has never experienced rivalry between female board members, but she has seen it in operative ranks in companies. However, she says there are several female networks and most of the women active in large company boards know each other and have similar backgrounds and educations.

Kappa is for affirmative action given that it is competent women who receive offers. “If we want change it is needed because nothing is happening”. In reality, Kappa does not like the concept of gender quotas, but says; There is no other way for women to get through the “old-men-belt”.

## **Appendices 2 Expert interviews**

### **Lambda**

Lambda is a management researcher. She has written multiple publications about women in the business world, both concerning female executives and female board members. She took part in a large study about female board members and the appointment of these to company boards. This study consisted of 30 interviews with board members and members of the nominations committees.

As a researcher, she naturally tries to be as neutral as possible. She recognizes the problem with being a minority woman in a male-dominated group and states that she has seen this problem with many of the women she has interviewed and met through her research.

One of the issues Lambda lifts regarding female board members is what she refers to as the “friendship problem”, where the board members have become such good friends that it is impossible to ask a person to step down from his position. This has the result that members of boards often keep their positions for a very long period of time and it is thus difficult to exchange a senior male board member for a female board member. The effect of this is that the equality evolution is very slow.

Furthermore, Lambda states that the strive for diversity in company boards is deceiving as the members of the Swedish company boards are often quite satisfied with having their equals around them. Thus, they do not want to invite members of different experiences into the board because this might cause disagreements and problems with the group dynamics.

The problem that this sense of homogenization can lead to what is referred to as “group think” where none questions the commonly held views. This might then lead to ill-advised decisions and in the long run to less profitable companies, according to Lambda.

On the other hand, Lambda also states that there are positive aspects of homogenisation as well. For example, it is easier to trust someone you know and with social control you also have a greater insight into what kind of job can be expected of a person within your network than you have with a complete stranger. She here raises the issue of the trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness: a completely homogenous board might be very efficient but not very effective and a more heterogeneous board might be less efficient but more effective. The question then, according to Lambda is what is most profitable for the company in the long run.

Concerning affirmative action, she sees a problem with this as women in boards want to be appointed because of their competence and not because of their gender. As such, these women do not want any “help” getting to the positions they want to reach. This is thus, in Lambda’s view, the biggest issue with affirmative action. What she sees as an alternative would be a greater number of female CEOs as CEOs for the basis for board member recruitment. Hence, more female CEOs would increase the number of female board members as well. She does however recognise the problem with this as the turnover of CEOs is very slow and it would thus take an even longer time to achieve an equal gender distribution in the boards.

In the eyes of Lambda, the most effective way of dealing with gender inequality in boards is to make the recruitment process more transparent and more professional. This would then lead to companies having to explain and motivate their choice of board members and, in such instances, the lack of women in the board. By forcing the companies to do so they are also pressured into levelling out the gender distribution in the boards. Lambda also states that the Swedish Code of Conduct for company governance is a very important tool that has already forced some companies to increase their female representation in the boards. This tool could, according to Lambda become even more useful if the formulations in the code were to be sharpened even more.

## **Omega**

Omega is a journalist working for one of the biggest business magazines in Sweden. For ten years she has been a part of putting together an annual list of the 125 most powerful women in Swedish business life and has thus interviewed several hundred female executives over these years. Although these women have been interviewed in the respect of being female executives and not board members, many of the women are also board members and some have even made the transition from being executives to being both executives and board members to being board professionals. She also states to have built up a professional relationship with several of these women as they often reoccur on the list in several years.

Omega is also familiar with leadership studies and was well acquainted with Kanter's theories about minorities and majorities in the work-place and has written articles referencing this particular theory.

The overall view of Omega is that there are problems being a female board member and a woman and that the biggest reason for the gender inequality is that the recruits to boards are selected from very narrow networks and that these networks mainly consist of men. She here also states that even the women in boards are recruited from the same networks and have often gone to the same schools so that "they do not contribute with something unique just because they are women". Omega also extends this theory about networks to include even the characteristics of board members. As she sees it, the common denominator between the board members is the similar networks. In relation to this, she states that in order to achieve a real dynamic in boards, a greater diversity among the members is needed.

Omega has seen examples of women being thwarted in boards and she states that this is more frequent with women who actually have a competence, especially a competence that exceeds some of the other members of the board, as these members then feel threatened by her and begin to mark territory. Conversely, a woman who does not speak and always agrees with everyone else is not seen as a threat and is thus met with greater sympathy.

In contrast to the above, Omega states that asking difficult questions is something women in boards are able to do as they have reached such a level and seniority that they are not quieted or considered difficult for asking such questions.

The positive aspects Omega has heard about being a woman in a board is that these women are more visible than their male board colleagues. Nevertheless, she also states that there is a downside to this as well as the positive attention from media can abruptly turn into something



negative. She also recognizes her own role in this respect as a member of the media and states that “media has a tendency to attack women more fiercely than men if they have made a mistake”.

Relating to the interaction between men and women, Omega states that comments that women receive are often much more personal and even oriented around her physique while men do not comment on each other’s physique and are much more focused on professional and material matters when speaking to other men. She does not know whether this behavior is intentionally diminishing towards the women or if the comments are made in well-meaning but reflects that either way women do feel diminished by such comments.

Concerning gender quotas and affirmative action she states that “I do not believe it is the best or the only solution but it can be one solution”. She also states that with the women she has interviewed, the answer to the question about affirmative action often depends on whether the interviewee is promised anonymity or not. In Omega’s view, several of the women have one official standpoint against affirmative action and one personal standpoint for affirmative action. She claims that the reason for this is that the women feel the company or companies they work for are against affirmative action and when they are official they are somewhat representing the company and not only themselves. She also refers to the political difficulties of affirmative action as it was traditionally the political leftists who were for affirmative action and as the political left in Sweden is very underrepresented in business life, affirmative action was frowned upon and seen as a socialist idea. Now however, that the political rightists have introduced the threat of affirmative action, more people in the Swedish business life have begun stating that they are for affirmative action as it is now more politically accepted.

## **Sigma**

Sigma is a strongly opinionated person who has spent a great part of her professional life researching women's situation in the Swedish business life. The main area of her research has been to measure the percentage of women in executive positions in Sweden and she has used a method for measuring this using a database called the PAR-database (Postens adressregister) that has, according to herself revolutionized the measurement of female executives.

As we meet her, she starts talking right away and she is not afraid of giving us her personal view of the situation for women in Swedish corporations. Her strongest belief is that company boards are simply *decoration* as she puts it. With this, she means that the board of directors in practice do not control the companies but that it is the management groups that control the companies. Hence, she does not believe gender quotas in company boards will affect gender equality in Swedish corporations and thus she is against gender quotas in boards. When asked about how gender equality should be reached, she is slightly more uncertain. In her eyes, what is needed is a great deal of lobbying to get the companies to understand that gender equality is important and desirable and that the companies are missing out on business opportunities by not involving more women.

Another view on boards held by Sigma is that the compensation level for being a member of a company board is so low that one cannot expect boards to be more involved in the operations of the company than they are. Being more involved would mean much more work and effort for the board members and this would also require a much higher compensation. With such a system it would be impossible for a person to hold up to over twelve board appointments simultaneously as each appointment would require much more from the person. This is therefore also a reason why boards are not representative for the company and thus a reason for to board not to be subject to affirmative action according to Sigma.

Yet another argument against affirmative action in boards that Sigma gives is that it seems ridiculous to recruit personnel to a company from the top down and she argues that recruitment ought to be made from the bottom and upwards instead.

Lobbying was thus, as stated above, the best way Sigma could come up with to change the situation for women. When asked what to do if the companies still did not see the advantages of gender equalities, Sigma stated that she did not know and that those companies could then suit themselves, that if they were so stupid not to understand the advantages of gender equality, they could go on and eventually lose market shares and vanish. As an example of this she claims that if there had been more women in higher positions at Ericsson AB, they would have discovered

much more quickly that there was a market for mobile telephones to private customers and would thus have earned a greater market share for mobile telephones from the beginning.

Sigma also states that one of the biggest obstacles for women in their careers is that they are too afraid of making mistakes. She believes that women need to become less dependent on hard facts and more comfortable with using their gut feeling because that is what men do.

Another claim made by Sigma is that many of the men in higher positions in Swedish companies do not believe that women are as competent as men, as they believe that “had women been as competent as men, they would of course have reached as high as the men as well and since they have not, they must be less competent”. Indirectly, Sigma thus states that many of the men in Swedish business life fail to recognize the structural problems that cause women not to reach as high as men.

Notwithstanding her aversion against affirmative action, Sigma still stated by the end that she found that the situation for female board members in Norway had improved after the introduction of affirmative action there. Hence, she recognized the advantages of affirmative action for individual women but was still principally against it. She also believes that “every type of attention that the issue of gender inequality can get is good and serves to decrease gender inequality” and therefore, this is what she sees as positive with affirmative action, that it sheds light on the issue.

### **Appendice 3 Interview questions**

The interviews were semi-structured in order to facilitate the interviewees to express themselves freely, and to give the room needed for us to ask follow-up questions. In order to stimulate our interviewees to relate their experiences and state their views as freely as possible they were promised anonymity. We documented the interviews both by taking notes and recording. After each interview we, the interviewers, jointly followed up by completing our notes, filling in the blanks, reflecting on the interview content and evaluated our own performance in order to learn for the next interview. The list shows the board member questions. We used the same bullet point list of questions in the expert interviews but, however, adjusted the questions during the interview to fit into the situation.

#### **Questions**

Would you like to tell us a bit about yourself?

What is your academic background?

What is your professional background?

Which boards are you a member of at the moment?

From which other boards do you have experience?

Do you have experience of a large company board where women were a small minority?

Is the work in the boards you are a member of working satisfactory?

Do you feel the work in the board is efficient and effective?

What could be improved in terms of how the board works?

How could the board improve its functions?

Have you ever felt thwarted in your appointment?

Have you ever felt that you are supposed to be grateful for having reached the position you have and therefore ought not to ask difficult questions etcetera?

What is your experience of being a woman in different boards?

Are there any positive aspects of being a woman in your position?

Are there any negative aspects of being a woman in your position?

Do you believe there is a difference between men and women in boards?

What are the greatest similarities between men and women in boards?

Is there any difference in how you need to work from how the men in the boards need to work?

Do you believe you need to work hard in order for others to see your achievements?

Harder than others?

Do you think women need to work harder than men?

Do you believe you need to claim your place more than what men in the same position need to?

Do you as a woman need to adapt to "fit in" in the boards you are a member of?

Are the relationships with the other board members strictly professional or do you sometimes talk more personally with one another?

Is there a difference in this aspect between men and women?

Have you ever felt that the comments you receive before/during/after a board meeting differs from the comments that the men receive?

Have you ever experienced a rivalry between female board members?

Have you ever experienced a rivalry between male board members?

Have you seen an example of a woman thwarting another women in boards?

Have you seen examples of male or female nepotism?

Do you believe women who were placed in boards because of affirmative action or gender quotas would be more exposed and thwarted than today?

Are you for or against affirmative action with gender quotas in boards?