

# **GENDER QUOTAS, NEPOTISM AND WHISKEY CLUBS**

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**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE SWEDISH SPECIAL SPORTS  
FEDERATIONS' SHIFT TOWARD GENDER EQUAL BOARDS**

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# **Gender Quotas, Nepotism and Whiskey Clubs: A Qualitative Study of the Swedish Special Sports Federations' Shift Toward Gender Equal Boards**

Abstract:

Despite having had explicit targets for over 25 years, only 37 of 71 Swedish Special Sports Federations had achieved gender equal representation within their boards in 2016. It was thus decided during the general assembly meeting of the Swedish Sports Confederation in 2017 to implement a gender quota which all Special Sports Federations must adhere to by 2021, or otherwise risk losing their entire financial support. At the same time, while much research has been devoted to the benefits of gender equal boards, less focus has been given to organizational change processes towards the desired end-state. This study thus aims to examine how Swedish Special Sports Federations have worked to move from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality within their boards by addressing organizational practices and structures that influence the outlook for achieving gender equality. For this, a qualitative case study was carried out in which interviews were held with board members of 24 Special Sports Federations. The findings revealed that although almost all interviewed federations had implemented necessary actions to fulfill the gender quota, there was a discrepancy among the federations for which some mainly focused on representation while others showcased a holistic approach which involved deep immersion in identifying and addressing root causes of the problem. The change process was further found to be influenced by pressures from external as well as internal sources and the way the federations worked to manage perceptions of threat, discussions of the utility of gender equality, top management support and educational efforts.

Keywords: Gender equality, Sports governance, Gender quota, Gender equal boards

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- Hannah & Matilda

## Definitions

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<b>Change action</b>	An action aimed to create positive change. This includes, but is not limited to, group reflections, discussions, problem identification, planning, implementation and follow-up efforts to make something better.
<b>Gender binarism</b>	[ <i>Dualistisk könsförståelse</i> in Swedish]. <i>Gender binarism</i> , or <i>gender binary</i> , describes the classification of gender into two exclusive groups: men and women. Gender binarism has, for many years, been the prevalent way of understanding gender within the sports context (Svender & Nordensky, 2020).
<b>Gender equality</b>	<i>Gender equality</i> refers to that women and men have the same rights, responsibility and opportunities in all areas of life (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2018). The gender equality concept has a normative nature, meaning that what gender equality is and how it will be accomplished is determined in relation to a specific situation (Svender & Nordensky, 2020).
<b>Gender equal boards</b>	<i>Gender equal boards</i> has traditionally been discussed in terms of equal board representation. However, equal boards could also reflect the extent to which members perceive that they are an integral part of the organization's communication systems, networks and decision-making processes (Mor Barak, 2015). This study acknowledges the latter, broader definition of gender equal boards, where both formal and informal aspects of gender equality are taken into consideration.
<b>Gender equal representation</b>	<i>Gender equal representation</i> is used in this study to describe the Swedish Special Sports Federations which comply with the 40-60 gender quota in their national boards. For further elaboration, see definition of <i>gender quota</i> .
<b>Gender identity</b>	[ <i>Könsidentitet</i> in Swedish]. <i>Gender identity</i> refers to the personal conception of one's own gender (Marow & Messinger, 2006) and focuses on the inner experience of being a male or female, boy or girl, or to belong to neither, or another gender (Socialstyrelsen, 2015).
<b>Gender imbalance /gender inequality</b>	<i>Gender imbalance</i> , or <i>gender inequality</i> , refers to the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender (Wood, 2005).
<b>Gender quota</b>	[ <i>Könskvotering</i> in Swedish]. There is no clear definition of the term <i>gender quota</i> , since this method can vary in for instance formulation, aim and usage (Dahlerup, 2008). In this thesis, however, gender quota is used to describe a predefined reservation of board seats to a group of a specific gender (Svender & Nordensky, 2017). More specifically, the term gender quota is used to describe the requirement, regulated by the Swedish Sports Confederation, that no gender should constitute less than 40 percent of the members of Swedish Special Sports Federations national boards (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2018a). This is sometimes also referred to as "the 40-60 rule".

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<b>Impetuses</b>	<i>Impetuses</i> describe the incentives, or driving forces, that encourage a particular activity or makes that activity more energetic or effective (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).
<b>Legally recognized gender</b>	[ <i>Juridiskt kön</i> or <i>könstillhörighet</i> in Swedish]. <i>Legally recognized gender</i> is the gender recognized by a country's laws. This gender is often recorded in the country's civil status register, and noted in identification documents, such as passports.
<b>Non-binary</b>	[ <i>Icke-binär</i> in Swedish]. The term <i>non-binary</i> is a hyponym, used to describe people that temporarily, or permanently, identify themselves as both male and female, neither of those, or to identities that fall outside the binary gender division (Regeringskansliet, 2018).
<b>The Swedish Sports Confederation</b>	[ <i>Riksidrottsförbundet</i> in Swedish]. <i>The Swedish Sports Confederation</i> is the overarching umbrella organization which leads, support and represent the Swedish sports movement.
<b>The Swedish Special Sports Federations</b>	[ <i>Specialidrottsförbund</i> in Swedish]. <i>The Swedish Special Sports Federations</i> is the individual sports organizations – such as the Swedish Tennis Association or the Swedish Powerlifting Federation. These are sometimes solely referred to as “federations” in the study.

# 1. Introduction

“Not acceptable!”. That was the verdict from the chairman of the Swedish Sports Confederation, Björn Eriksson, summarizing yet another unmet gender target in 2016 (Andersson & Edwinsson, 2016). The most recent gender goal at the time, set in 2011, stated that *no gender should be represented with less than 40 percent in decision making and advisory bodies of Special Sports Federations* in 2017. In addition, *nomination committees should be equally represented by men and women*. (Svender & Nordensky, 2017). However, as the deadline approached, it became clear that only 37 out of 71 Special Sports Federations would reach the gender equality target within their national boards (Svender & Nordensky, 2018). What was supposed to be a success story rather turned out to show signs of stagnation in the progress towards gender equality. During the general assembly meeting of the Swedish Sports Confederation in 2017, a more vigorous plan to reach gender balance was therefore jointly agreed upon by the Special Sports Federations and subsequently put in action. By June 1<sup>st</sup> in 2021, all Special Sports Federations are *required* to comply with the regulation regarding gender composition in boards and nomination committees, *or* otherwise risk losing their entire financial support. (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2018a).

Gender equality is a widely debated topic worldwide and apart from the moral argument of social justice, scholars have argued for the positive impact on organizational effectiveness and performance that gender diversity may bring (e.g., Barrientos-Báez, Baéz-García, Flores-Muñoz, & Gutiérrez-Barroso, 2018; Daily & Dalton, 2003; Terjesen, Sealy, & Singh, 2009). Although representation alone is not enough to achieve substantive gender equality, it is deemed a crucial first step in the process of achieving an inclusive environment in which both genders are valued and heard (Mor Barak & Travis, 2010).

It is well documented within the organizational literature that the board of directors play a critical role in setting the overall governance tone within an organization (e.g., Arjoon, 2019; Horton, 2002; Cohan, 2002; Law, 2011) and various quota systems are frequently implemented to increase women’s representation in governance roles (Valls Martínez, Cruz Rambaud, & Parra Oller, 2019). Boards sit at the very top of the organizational hierarchy, and the tone set by their behaviors and actions will often trickle-down on other organizational levels (Gunz & Thorne, 2014). Additionally, board members hold the ultimate responsibility for crucial strategic decisions (Hillman, Shropshire, & Canella, 2007), budget allocations (Ferkins, Shildbury, & McDonald, 2005) and decisions on major organizational changes (Schwartz, Dunfee, & Kline, 2005). Board directors hence hold an exceptional amount of power and influence – making the question of gender equality within boards particularly interesting.

The difficulty in achieving gender equal board representation within Swedish Special Sports Federations, despite explicit and jointly agreed targets, is not unique to Sweden and may be put into a wider context of gender inequality within sport (Adriaanse, 2016).



Sport was originally designed for heterosexual able-bodied men (Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001), whose needs and interest has continued to be monopolized and institutionalized, especially at the management level (e.g., Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Fink, et.al., 2001; Osborne & Skillen, 2015; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). During the last decades, participation rates of females in sports has drastically increased (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012 as cited in Burton, 2015) and women now constitute 44 percent of the active members in Swedish Special Sports Federations (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2020). Despite this progression, women continue to be under-represented in sports governance (e.g., Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2008; Osborne & Skillen, 2015; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). This holds true even for sports organizations where women's teams have a longer history of winning than men's teams (Hoerber & Frisby, 2001; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). The sports context thus presents an interesting case for examining gender equality as it has a long history of gender inequality.

Considering the historical and current circumstances of sport as an institutionalized arena of male dominance<sup>1</sup>, the situation Special Sports Federations face in Sweden is interesting for several reasons. First of all, already in 2016, Sweden placed 4<sup>th</sup> in the world with regards to percentage of female national board directors in Special Sports Federations (Adriaanse, 2016). However, considering the failure in achieving the 2017 gender equality goals, there are significant challenges Swedish Special Sports Federations still deal with. There are thus much to be learned, both in terms of successful strategies as well as problematic practices that nonetheless prevail. Furthermore, the decision to implement a gender quota indicates that there are still considerable underlying pressures for deinstitutionalization, or in other words, pressures for the dissolution of the male dominance. These pressures are important to consider as the reasons for gender equality related change actions can impact subsequent organizational attitudes and behaviors regarding such initiatives (Cunningham, 2009). Finally, the adoption of a gender quota is sometimes referred to as the "fast track" to equal representation (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005) and have indeed brought visible change. As of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, 60 federations compared to 37 in 2016, fulfilled the required gender quota within their national boards (Appendix III & IV).

## 1.1. Research Gap

Within the context of corporate boards, much research has been devoted to establishing the business case for gender diversity by outlining different ways in which it can enhance business performance and by examining the link to corporate financial performance (Terjesen et.al., 2009). Many scholars have also focused on researching the historical progress of women's representation in board rooms and board committees, the influence of networks ties and individual-level factors' impact on advancement opportunities to

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that female dominance also prevails in a few sports. However, such dominance is negligible compared to the male dominance. Using the 60 % representation limit to conclude dominance, female-dominated boards only represented 1.4 % of the boards in 2016. In terms of active athletes, only 8 % of the federations had female dominance in 2020.

board positions. Less research has been devoted to investigating how characteristics of organizational structures and practices impact the prospects of achieving gender diversity. (Hillman et.al., 2007). A common theme among diversity management research is also the emphasis on frameworks that outline the desired end state – an organizational culture that values diversity and the associated benefits. However, research that provide guidance on the methods for creating and sustaining such an end state is much scarcer (Benschop & van den Brink, 2014; Cunningham, 2008). This is reflected in research by Acker (2000) who conclude that there is a disjuncture between the intended and actual outcome of gender equality policies and programs, with the consequence of little real change in gender relations.

Although limited, some attention has been paid to gender equality issues within boards of sports organizations and Special Sports Federations. Such research has focused on gender dynamics and relations within the boards, and how gendered discursive practices impact recruitment processes and the maintenance of stereotypes (e.g., Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Hovden, 2000; Hovden, 2010; Shaw & Penny, 2003). Research within this domain is however still in its infancy and research regarding gender quotas in governing bodies is rare (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014). Much of the research within gender diversity in sports leadership has rather been confined to coaches and athletic directors within U.S. intercollegiate athletics (e.g., Aicher & Sagas, 2009; Regan & Cunningham, 2012; Whisenant, 2008). Several researchers have therefore expressed a need to broaden the understanding of gender issues within sports leadership, both in terms of location and types of sports organizations being studied, while some explicitly calls for more qualitative studies within sports governance (e.g., Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Ferkins et.al., 2005).

Putting the insights from previous research together, there is a gap in the literature with regards to research on organizational practices, structures and change processes that influence the outlook for achieving gender equality, especially within boards of Special Sports Federations.

## 1.2. Purpose & Research Question

The purpose of the study is twofold. First of all, it aims to address the aforementioned theoretical research gap. Considering the empirically interesting situation faced by Swedish Special Sports Federations, the sports sector will be the focus area for investigation. To address the research gap, the study will examine how Swedish Special Sports Federations have worked to move from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality within their national boards. To examine this, the study first aims to create a contextual understanding for the central factors that have initiated and currently drives the process of deinstitutionalizing the historically evident gender inequality within sports governance. More specifically, the study aims to outline the impetuses for change as these can potentially influence how the actual change process proceed. Once this has been established, the actual change process will be explored. The study aspires to provide

knowledge about what internal processes, structures and practices that have had to change in order to achieve gender equality within the national boards of Swedish Special Sports Federations and what actions they have initiated to make further improvements in the future. This involves change actions that concern both structural aspects specifically directed towards equal representation as well as change actions which concern informal aspects, since these two aspects are interwoven.

Secondly, the study has an empirical purpose. It aims to generate practical knowledge in terms of what strategies and ways of working that Special Sports Federations may apply in order to most effectively reach gender equality within their boards. Federations may learn from each other's successes and mistakes and how they may work in a way that is beneficial for the organization and simultaneously achieve gender equality.

To fulfill the purpose of the study, there will thus be two supporting research questions used to answer the primary research question outlined below.

**Primary research question:** “How have Swedish Special Sports Federations worked to move from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality within their national boards?”

*Supporting questions:*

- i.* What has been the impetuses for such change?
- ii.* What change actions has Swedish Special Sports Federations taken to achieve gender equality within their national boards?

### 1.3. Delimitations

This thesis focus on how to achieve gender equality within the board level. Examination of change actions whose primary purpose is to achieve gender equality among active athletes, nominating committees, or coaches and other leadership positions such as the general secretary will thus be excluded. However, as interrelationships can exist between those levels and the board level, such connections may be featured in the thesis but only when the ultimate intent is to showcase how gender equality within boards can be accomplished.

## 2. Literature Review

To understand the context in which Special Sports Federations act and establish a baseline for what change actions may be needed, it is first necessary to review the historical background and literature of gender issues within sports.

### 2.1. Institutionalization of Male Dominance in Sports

Sport has been called a male preserve in which the male norm is favored and reproduced (Dunning, 1999). Osborne and Skillen (2015) argue that sporting practices are socially constructed and has throughout history been reproduced to serve the interests and needs of powerful societal male actors. Women are situated as “the other” in sports, which the media’s framing of athleticism contribute to uphold (Kane & Lenskyj, 1988). The institution of sport as masculine appear to hold true despite increased women athlete participation (Meân & Kassing, 2008).

Anderson (2009) further describes sport as an essentially closed-loop system, wherein masculinity and men’s dominance in active athlete participation, as well as management positions, is constantly being reproduced with few openings for voices of dissent. From early age, men are encouraged to participate in team sports in which masculine values are promoted and tightly knit to their identities as athletes. When men do not make the cut to professional sports, retire or are forced to leave because of injuries, many experience a loss of identity and the masculine prestige they previously enjoyed as an athlete. Leadership positions then offer them a way back to sports and they will thus self-segregate into leadership roles. On the contrary, athletes that have been marginalized in their athletic experiences will not seek such positions, which means that their opinions will go lost. (Anderson, 2009). Building upon this notion, one study found indicators of that the masculine dominance in sports contribute to women becoming less attracted to, and less likely to stay, in coaching (Norman, 2010).

The male dominance within sports is reflected in international numbers on women presence within sports leadership positions. On an international level, men hold a majority of leadership positions in governing bodies. Among the 202 active National Olympic Committees, 77.2 % had no female representatives in 2018 (Houghton, Pieper, & Smith, 2018). Furthermore, a global review, based on responses from 45 countries, of women’s representation in sports governance in 2015, revealed that women were significantly underrepresented. The global mean for women presence was found to be 19.7 % for board directors and 10.8 % for board chairs (Adriaanse, 2016).

### 2.2. Homologous Reproduction and Masculine Discourses

A central factor that has contributed to the institutionalization of the male dominance is the prevalence of homologous reproduction. The concept of homologous reproduction was first developed by Kanter in 1977. Homologous reproduction is present within an

organization when the dominant leaders preserve their power by only granting promotions, influence and power to those in the organization that possess similar characteristics as themselves (Kanter, 1977). Within the sports context, several researchers have examined the presence of homologous reproduction. However, most research have focused on women's access to leadership positions as athletic director or coach in US intercollegiate athletics (e.g., Aicher & Sagas, 2009; Knoppers, 1987; Regan & Cunningham, 2012; Whisenant, 2008). Knoppers (1987) examined three structural barriers that acted together to limit women's career progress within sports. First, women received limited *opportunity* to coach for reasons such as that men were often hired to coach teams of either gender whereas women seldom coached men's teams. Secondly, a lack of meaningful mentorship relations constrained women's ability to build alliances and gain *power*. Thirdly, the absence of opportunity and power contributed to a low *proportion* of women in sports, creating a conducive environment for stereotyping and differential treatment. Similar results have also been found in more recent years (Walker & Bopp, 2011).

Furthermore, Anderson (2009) notes that male gatekeepers to management positions often possess a masculine capital from their former sports careers that is hard for women to achieve as the masculine language, cognitive patterns and leadership styles is not learned when competing and practicing sports separate from men. This reinforces the male dominance in sports leadership as gatekeepers value applicants who are similar to themselves. Such masculine discursive practices among sports directors and the negative impact it has on women's potential to access senior management positions within sports organizations has also been explored by Knoppers and Anthonissen (2007), who notes that multiple discourses of instrumentality, relationality, emotionality and homogeneity work together in a complex pattern to sustain homologous reproduction. For instance, "passion for sport" as exhibited by men is highlighted as an impactful gendered discourse of emotionality. When men aggressively argue during board meetings as a way of expressing their "passion for sport", it is positively rewarded while such behavior would not be seen as suitable for women. Discourses of instrumentality involves the expectation of exhibiting toughness and perseverance, 24/7 availability, and adhering to certain dress codes.

### 2.3. Recruitment Processes and Networks

Another influential factor to consider, which to some degree coincide with homologous reproduction, is how recruitment processes are carried out. Shaw and Frisby (2006) indicate that ex-sportsmen are often seen as heroic individuals with symbolic organizational value and are thus sometimes promoted over women with more management experience. Furthermore, a study by Hovden (2010) of how the recruitment process for board members, in three Special Sports Federations in Norway, was shaped by organizational discourses, found that the most desirable candidates possessed qualities that reflected a corporate masculine image. Selecting "heavyweight" candidates was

prioritized above equal gender representation and in assessing women, they were valued for their masculine qualities.

Claringbould and Knoppers (2007) found similar results when examining national boards of Special Sports Federations in the Netherlands. When negotiating their entry into boards, women attempted to prove their “fit” by distancing themselves from their gender. The women that were successful in obtaining a board position had high educational background, former high-level jobs, no young children, demonstrated “appropriate” behavior as determined by the male board members, were flexible in scheduling and not publicly feminist. They were also experienced in, and committed to, their sport. When the researchers asked those women about the selection procedures, they tended to not question the criteria used in the recruitment process but rather demonstrated acceptance of it.

Moreover, the use of informal male networks has been identified to influence the recruitment process of board members for Special Sports Federations (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007). The impact of male networks has also been studied in the U.S. where findings suggest that social capital, such as network size, gender similarity and intraorganizational ties, were more influential for men than women in gaining promotions for U.S. athletic administrators (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004).

## 2.4. Organizational Work Environment

In addition to homologous reproduction and recruitment processes, previous research has also recognized a set of factors related to the organizational work environment, that can either constrain or promote gender equality within top management of sports organizations. Attention has for instance been paid to how organizational practices concerning work-family balance impact women that seek leadership positions within sports. Such research has primarily focused on women coaches rather than women board members, but show signs of organizational level constraints that create work-family conflict such as scheduled work hours, job pressures and lack of support for managing work-family balance. (e.g., Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Dixon & Sagas, 2007).

## 2.5. Gender Equality Within National Boards of Special Sports Federations

Although previous research directed specifically towards gender equality within boards of Special Sports Federations is scarce, some main findings from such research will be presented as a closing section of the literature review. First of all, it should be noted that research within this domain have primarily focused on relations and discourses within the boards themselves. While some scholars have examined how discursive practices contribute to maintain gendered stereotypes (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Hovden, 2010), others have put greater emphasis on researching how various board constellations,

power relations and attitudes creates varying degrees of opportunity for change towards achieving gender equality (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013). Adriaanse and Schofield (2013) have identified four significant characteristics for promotion of gender equality within boards of Special Sports Federations. Firstly, woman board presence is deemed crucial and gender quotas is suggested as an option to propel progression towards such circumstances. Secondly, it is proposed to be essential that women occupy influential board roles. Furthermore, the ability to recognize, understand and explain the dynamics which produce gender inequality within sports governance is highlighted as an important factor. Finally, the fourth characteristic the authors point to is cooperative and collaborative relationships among male and female board members, creating an environment in which men support rather than show hostility toward womens' participation.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

In this section, insights from the preceding literature review and theories concerning the deinstitutionalization of organizations, and full-integration theory, are synthesized into a theoretical framework for organizational gender-equality related change processes. The theoretical model has been developed as an adaptation of Cunningham's (2009) model, putting greater focus on the organizational level and less emphasis on the individual level in order to fit the purpose of the study.

#### 3.1. Impetuses for Change

The first building block in understanding gender-equality related change processes relate to institutional theory. Institutions can be defined as “*enduring systems of beliefs and socially organized practices*” (p.499) and according to institutional theory, organizational activities become institutionalized when habits and history come to form taken for granted assumptions of “the way things are done” (Scott, 1987). As the literature review reveal, the male norm and dominance has become institutionalized within sports, especially within leadership positions and top management. To instill change, Oliver (1992) presents three antecedents of deinstitutionalization: *political pressures*, *functional pressures* and *social pressures*. Such stimulus and forces for deinstitutionalization are important to consider as the reasons and rationale for initiating gender-equality related change efforts will often influence attitudes and behaviors among those involved and impacted by the change process (Cunningham, 2009; Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006).

Firstly, political pressures imply shifts in interests among powerful actors that have formerly accepted the current institutionalized practices. Such pressures may arise from increasing deficiencies in performance or calls for innovation. Furthermore, conflicting interests among various stakeholders or changing dependence on external agents may contribute to political pressures. Secondly, functional pressures arise when information appear that the firm's performance may be improved by changing current practices or simply when the utility of institutionalized practices is questioned as they no longer are perceived to be rewarding. (Oliver, 1992). It is suggested that functional pressures may be closely linked to broad environmental circumstances, such as heightened competition for resources (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002). Finally, social pressures can arise from new or revised laws as well as social movements that may upset the maintenance of an institutionalized practice. Social pressures can also appear when the historical continuity of an organization is disrupted, for instance as a result of a merger. Furthermore, social pressures are associated with differentiation among organizational groups and may thus emerge if organizational diversity is increased, as for instance when new members enter the workforce. (Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2001). In some cases, only one or two of the three antecedents of deinstitutionalization may be present while in some instances, all three occurs and create pressures for change simultaneously. No inference has been made that all three is necessary to initiate change (Cunningham, 2009).



As the pressures above may contribute to a commitment to gender equality initiatives, it is noteworthy to consider that previous literature has outlined three different types of commitment. Commitment is defined as “*a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets.*” (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301) One form of commitment is *affective commitment*, which imply a desire to support an action because of a belief in its benefits. *Continuance commitment* entail a cost-avoidance mindset in which you are committed because you understand there might be negative implications if you do not support the initiative. *Normative commitment* signifies a perceived obligation to support a certain initiative. Moreover, it can be noted that a commitment to gender diversity initiatives is theorized to lead to people exhibiting either *focal* or *discretionary* behavioral support of such initiatives. Focal behavioral support are behaviors to which organizational members are bound to by their commitment, such as obeying to formal gender equity policies. Discretionary behavioral support entail behaviors that are not explicitly required or stated within the terms of the commitment, but are voluntarily displayed by the committed actor as they would nevertheless be helpful in achieving the intended outcome of the commitment. (Cunningham, 2008; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

### 3.2. The Three-Phase Process for Organizational Gender Equality Change Initiatives

With the antecedents for deinstitutionalization creating pressure for change, the next building block of gender equality related change within organizations concern the process of creating such change and builds on full-integration theory. According to Agars and Kottke (2004), organizations which effectively manage diversity related change efforts progress through three stages: *the issue identification phase*, *the implementation phase* and *the maintenance phase*. Although all organizational change efforts are proposed to follow the outlined three-phase process, the sense of urgency and consequent pace for addressing gender equality issues will likely differ among organizations as the impetus for change vary.

In the issue identification phase, awareness is raised about the need for gender equality management. This phase is thus about identifying and becoming aware of formal structures as well as informal practices that impede gender equality. (Agars & Kottke, 2004). Informal practices may concern practices as at what times during the day important meetings are held, socializing events such as playing sports together after work and other networking opportunities that offer access to influential organizational cliques. Informal practices also concern the assumptions people hold about who is best suited for certain management roles. (Shaw & Frisby, 2006). In addition to becoming aware of the prevailing gender-equality issues, the first phase also involves revision of strategy, goals, values and mission. Making necessary amendments to such steering organizational foundations, based on the identified gender equality issues, helps establish guidelines and garnering support for future action. (Agars & Kottke, 2004).

The second phase is the implementation phase. This phase is characterized by *“the implementation of structural and social practices, policies and procedures intended to support the integration of diversity.”* (Agars & Kottke, 2004, p.69) This may for instance entail formal adjustments to the structure of the organization such as revision of the gender composition in leadership positions. Moreover, it includes system wide changes such as making adjustments to recruitment and selection practices in order for such processes to become more inclusive and target a broader population. (Agars & Kottke, 2004; Cunningham, 2009).

In the third phase, the maintenance phase, the target is to continuously reinforce a culture of gender equality. This is primarily suggested to be accomplished by modeling behaviors that is in line with the desired values and goals as well as through careful personnel decisions, which entail the selection and retention of organizational members who value gender equality. (Agars & Kottke, 2004). Following implementation of gender-equality initiatives, Ely and Meyerson (2000) emphasize that although new practices may turn into permanent changes, it can in some instances be beneficial to initially view them as temporary trials. Such an experimental approach open learning opportunities, dialogue and debate. At the same time, the importance of establishing and monitoring concrete expected outcomes, both in terms of gender relations and organizational effectiveness, is highlighted.

### 3.3. Success Factors for Gender Equality Related Organizational Change

The third and final building block of gender equality related change within organizations concern factors that affect the success of the change initiatives. This encompasses aspects such as the degree of critical reflection as well as the ability to get people onboard and creating commitment within the organization towards the change efforts.

First of all, it can be noted that in the three-phase process, ensuring top management support, such as from the board president, is presented as a key element of the issue identification phase. It is important in this phase that top managers become convinced about the value of gender equality to the organization and that they come to perceive, and present it, as a company matter rather than a “women’s issue”. (Agars & Kottke, 2004). However, it can be noted that other authors have demonstrated top management support as a crucial success factor in realizing diversity related change without assigning it specifically to the initial phase of the change process (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004). The importance of top management support partially builds on social information processing theory which suggests that people’s attitudes and understandings of organizational phenomena are shaped by what others in their social environment think (Cunningham, 2008; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Cunningham (2008) has thus argued that top management support for diversity play a vital role to build commitment among organizational members toward such change initiatives.

Secondly, *perceptions of utility* has been identified as a perceptual process that may either represent an obstacle or a facilitator for gender equality change initiatives depending on how it is managed. Managing perceptions of utility means being able to clearly demonstrate the positive impact on organizational performance and effectiveness that the change efforts will bring. Although demonstrating the utility of gender equality initiatives can involve several different performance aspects, financial performance has been highlighted as a key factor. (Agars & Kottke, 2004).

Another crucial perceptual process is the *perception of threat*. Perceived threat has for instance been shown to be related to rigidity of action. This imply that perceived threat may lead to a narrower view of alternative actions for change, higher reliance on formalized policies and possible exclusion of women in formal as well as informal contexts. (Agars & Kottke, 2005; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). Perceptions of threat can arise both at an organizational as well as at an individual level. At an organizational level, the antecedents for gender equality can have great impact on perceptions of threat. For instance, in the issue identification stage it is suggested that “*if the threat of a lawsuit has raised the diversity management agenda, it is likely to initially create rigid responses, less innovative solutions, which will be less functional for diversity management.*” (Agars & Kottke, 2004, p. 46) At an individual level, any changes to reward systems or recruitment processes often coincide with perceptions of threat, and may consequently introduce resistance from those who have previously held powerful positions. Furthermore, it is proposed that a greater share of women in management roles can present a threat to the masculine identity and self-esteem of men. (Agars & Kottke, 2005).

To overcome fears of uncertainty, prejudices and old habits, education about why the change is taking place, and what the change will mean for current employees is suggested as one way of mitigating the risk of such opposition. Demonstrating the utility of gender equality and answering questions about how the gender diversity initiative will affect current practices can be done in various forms such as written announcements, through leader speeches or by holding seminars. (Cunningham, 2008).

A fourth success factor is systemic integration. Systemic integration means that the diversity initiative should not be an isolated project but must rather be incorporated into all aspects of the organization, starting with its mission, values and goals. Furthermore, it means that the sports organization should critically reflect about all organizational practices and activities to see how these might be altered to achieve gender equality. (Cunningham, 2008). Such organizational reflexivity which goes beyond the most visible aspects of gender equality has been highlighted by several authors as a critical success factor for achieving gender equality in the long term (Cunningham, 2008; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Shaw & Frisby, 2006).

The theory from the well-established field of institutionalism and from full-integration theory can be summarized in the theoretical model presented below, and will be applied

in a contemporary context to analyze the relatively nascent research field of gender equality change within sports governance. It can be noted that although top management support is presented as an overarching influencing factor, it is presented under the issue identification phase as in the original three phase model by Agars and Kottke (2004).

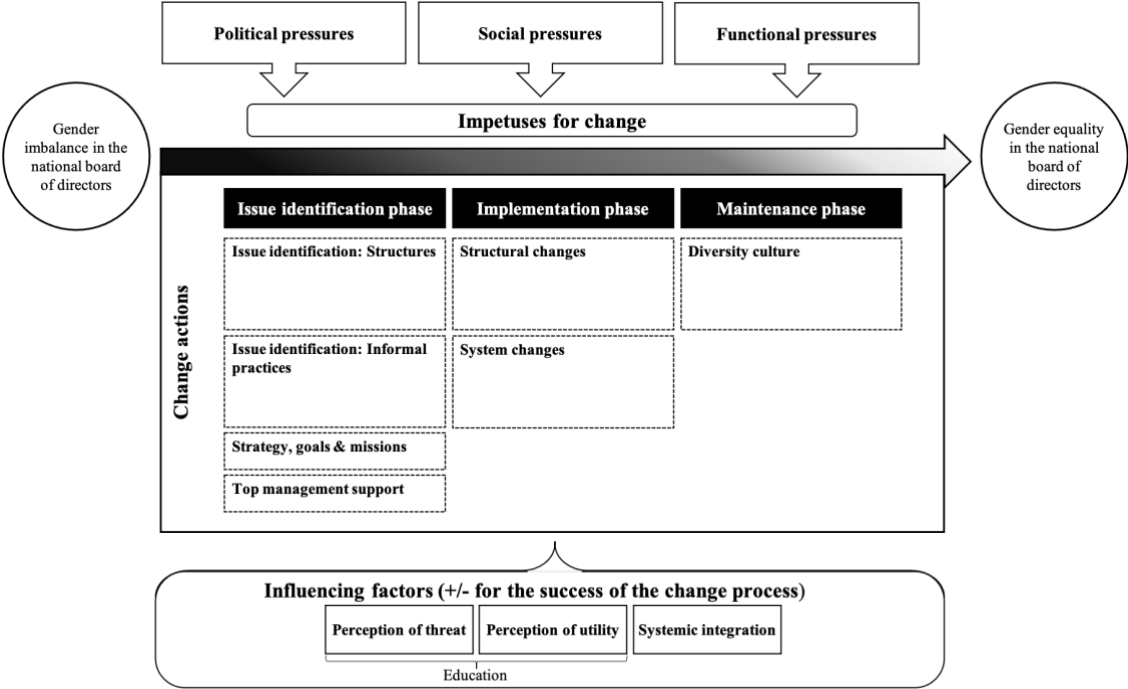


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Research Strategy and Design

This study applies a qualitative research design and has an exploratory purpose. Such an approach was appropriate considering that a qualitative method allows for flexibility and an emphasis on processes and contextual factors. This is in line with the research gap the study aims to address. To fit the exploratory purpose of the study, a case study strategy has been used. First of all, case studies are suitable when attention is directed toward contemporary phenomenon in real-life settings. This coincides well with the background and purpose of this study as it aims to address and gain in-depth knowledge in relation to the ongoing change process towards gender equality within boards of Swedish Special Sports Federations. (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, case studies are appropriate to address questions of “how” and “why” (Myers, 2009) which matches the primary research question of the study. A distinguishing aspect of a case study is “*the focus on a bounded situation or system.*” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 68) In the context of this study, the case to be examined is bounded by that all 24 Special Sports Federations which were interviewed are members of the Swedish Sports Confederation and are impacted by the gender quota that was jointly agreed upon in 2017. Moreover, the study will not outline the background and context specific to each federation and the study can thus be seen as a single case study, rather than a multiple case study, even though each federation constitutes an organization.

The study adheres to the interpretative paradigm which means that the reality and our perception of it cannot be separated from each other. Having interpretivism as the epistemological stance is suitable considering the view of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon (Kwantes, Bergeron, & Kaushal, 2005). Furthermore, the generated insights will partly be shaped by the experiences and subjective understandings of the individuals interviewed within the federations, which is in line with an interpretivist understanding (Dean, 2018).

### 4.2. Research Approach

The study follows an abductive approach which imply a continuous movement between developing the theoretical framework and the empirical findings as they influence each other in an iterative process. Exploration of theory and construction of the theoretical framework were thus initiated before data collection, but has been adjusted as new insights have surfaced from the empirics. Such an approach was seen as appropriate considering that case studies have been proposed to benefit from abductive reasoning in several ways, as it provides valuable cross-fertilization, allowing new combinations to emerge between reality and existing theory. Furthermore, when using an abductive approach, emphasis is put on theory development rather than theory generation, which signify this study as it aims to build upon existing theory rather than creating entirely new theory. (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

## 4.3. Data Collection

### 4.3.1. Pre-Study

In order to gain an improved knowledge about the context and field of study, three background interviews were held. Two interviews were conducted with gender equality experts working for the Swedish Sports Confederations and that had been involved in the implementation of the 40-60 gender quota. Additionally, one interview was held with a person within the advisory board of Center for Sports and Business at Stockholm School of Economics, who also had experience as board President within two large sports organizations. All the pre-study interviews were held online through video calls and lasted for approximately 30 minutes. By providing valuable expert in-depth knowledge about the research topic, the background interviews for instance helped generate relevant, insightful questions for the interview guide.

### 4.3.2. Secondary Data

Based on data gathered by the Swedish Sports Confederation and information presented on current websites of the Special Sports Federations, two summarizing tables were made in the beginning<sup>2</sup> of the study to outline the gender composition in national boards of the Special Sports Federations in 2016 (appendix III) versus 2020 (appendix IV). Aggregated data showing the progression since 2016 of the numbers of federations that fulfill the required gender quota (appendix V), as well as data regarding the gender distribution among board presidents in 2016 (appendix VI) and in 2020 (appendix VII) was further collected. The purpose of assembling such data was to highlight how the gender composition in boards has evolved since the gender quota requirement was implemented in 2017 and to create a greater understanding for the case when designing and planning the research. The data was, for example, used to make suitable, minor adaptations of the interview questions according to the circumstances facing each Special Sport Federation.

### 4.3.3. Interview Sample

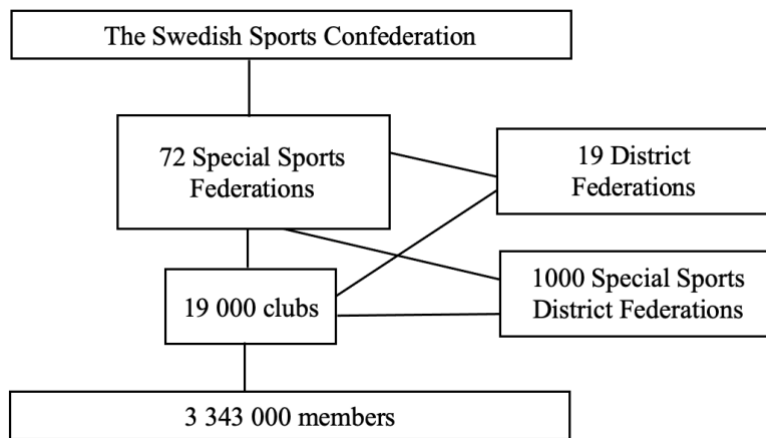
Figure 1 illustrates how sports is organized and governed in Sweden. It is organized as an independent voluntary movement and the overarching umbrella organization is the Swedish Sports Confederation which lead, support and represent the Swedish sports movement, nationally and internationally. They also act as the link to administrative authorities, politicians and administer financial support from the Swedish government.

The Swedish Sports Confederation consist of 72 Special Sports Federations and 19 District Federations. The District Federations hold the same role as the national Swedish Sports Confederation, but on a regional level. The Special Sports Federations may be specific to a particular sporting activity such as tennis, or multisport federations as for instance the University Sports Federation. Each Special Sport Federation has their own

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<sup>2</sup> These numbers have then been controlled and updated as late as 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2020.

District Federations throughout the country and are founded upon their associated member owned, non-profit clubs.



**Figure 2:** How sports is organized and governed in Sweden

It is important to note is that the Swedish Sports Confederation do not rule over its member associations. It is the member associations that jointly agree upon policies at the General Assembly, such as when the 40-60 gender quota for national boards was agreed upon. (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2012; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2020).

The interview sample was selected using a generic purposive sampling method. The interview subjects were thus strategically chosen in accordance with the research question and purpose of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The interview subjects were sampled in a fixed manner, using a set of predetermined criteria. Firstly, only the 35 biggest Special Sports Federations in terms of active members, were considered as interview subjects. A possible drawback of only considering the 35 biggest federations is that there may be different dynamics and considerations among smaller federations, which could potentially have provided valuable insights. However, the limitation was made based on insights from one of the pilot interviews in which it was highlighted that the bigger Special Sports Federations have greater resources to implement more extensive change actions and are more similar to companies in their ways of working than the smaller federations. By only considering the 35 biggest federations, it will thus be more likely that the insights generated in the study can be transferred to the corporate context or to large sports organizations that fall outside the Swedish Sports Confederation’s umbrella.

Secondly, as the primary focus of the study is gender equality at the board level, at least one board member of the Special Sports Federation had to be able to participate in an interview. Accordingly, solely interviewing an employee within the federation did not fit the criteria but in cases where it was proposed that relevant personnel would participate in addition to board members, it was considered acceptable.

Once the interview subject criteria had been set, the board presidents of those Special Sports Federations were emailed. 24 federations were willing to participate in the study,

of which 20 board presidents were interviewed. In the remaining four federations, the vice president was interviewed. Additionally, two ordinary board members and three fully employed persons in the federations participated in the interviews. Among the 24 interviewed Special Sports Federations, 17 had achieved the 40-60 gender composition in their boards in 2016, whereas at time being interviewed, 22 of the federations fulfilled the gender quota requirements. For a complete list of the interviewed Special Sports Federations, see Appendix I.

#### 4.3.4. Interview Design

A semi-structured interview approach was applied as the use of an interview guide can help in making sure you cover essential topics and as the method simultaneously allows for flexibility in terms of for instance making follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, a semi-structured approach was appropriate considering that the interviewed Special Sports Federations in some respects differ significantly. For instance, some federations already had gender equal representation in their boards in 2016 while others were far from the target.

The interview guide was structured according to themes that fit the research questions, and insights from the literature review, theoretical framework and pre-study were used to generate a broad range of relevant questions. For a complete version of the interview guide, see Appendix IX. Each interview began by asking for permission to record it and to disclose that their federation had participated in the study. A potential drawback of recording the interviews is that the interviewees may feel less comfortable to disclose certain information. However, this was likely mitigated by that the interviewees were informed at the beginning of the interview that everything they said would remain anonymous and that the recordings would be deleted upon completion of the study. The weakness of recording is also further outweighed by its benefits such as greater capture of details in information and the ability to be more responsive during the interviews. (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Due to the ongoing pandemic COVID-19 and the consequent recommendations of working remotely (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020), the interviews were conducted through video-calls rather than face-to-face. Conducting the interviews by video enabled us to observe body language and build rapport as in a face-to-face interview, which is otherwise seen as a potential limitation of telephone interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, two interviews had to be held over the phone as those respondents expressed a wish to talk over the phone rather than doing a video call. Both researchers were present in all interviews, except for the two phone interviews, and were conducted in the mother tongue of both the researchers and the interviewees, Swedish, to enable both parties to talk as freely as possible and limit misunderstandings. The interviews lasted for approximately 40-60 minutes and were transcribed within a week from the date they took place.



## 4.4. Data Analysis

### 4.4.1. Data Analysis Method

Following transcription of the interviews, thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data. This entail coding of the data which then proceeds into discovery and translation of the data into themes which derive from patterns and clustered subject matters. Some argue that thematic analysis is not a distinctive method in its own and rather contend it to be a general method for qualitative studies. However, it is nonetheless acknowledged as one of the main traditions for qualitative analysis and was considered to be the most suitable data analysis method for this study since it presents opportunities for identification and comparative analysis of patterns as well as substantive interpretation. Both of these aspects are valuable in order to analyze the empirics in relation to existing theory, which is in line with the abductive approach. (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014).

### 4.4.2. Data Analysis Process

Although some overlap existed, the analytic process consisted of two main phases: “data management” and “abstraction and interpretation” as proposed by Ritchie et.al. (2014). The data management phase entailed coding of the data as well as arrangement of the data into themes and sub-themes. The themes were partially formed in relation to theory, but some themes were also constructed based on the empirical data alone. The coding and translation of data into themes was first performed individually by the researchers before being compared, discussed and finalized together. In the abstraction and interpretation phase, similarities and differences between what had been said by the interviewed Special Sports Federations was analyzed and linkages between various themes were explored.

## 4.5. Research Quality

Historically, reliability and validity has predominantly been used as quality considerations of a study. However, it has been suggested that to be able to use reliability and validity as quality measures of a study, it “*presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible.*” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 400) In qualitative studies, which may not assume such absolute truths, it is therefore rather recommended to use four alternative quality measures which are *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1994 as cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015).

### 4.5.1. Credibility

Credibility corresponds to internal validity and addresses whether the researcher’s representations of reality matches the reality perceived and expressed by the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To fulfill this, having an understanding of the studied phenomenon and field is important, which the three pilot interviews that were held

contributed to enhance (Gudmundsdottir & Brock-Utne, 2010). Another way to ensure credibility is by using several observers (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Both researchers were present during all but the two phone interviews. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, coding and translation of the data into themes were performed individually before being jointly compared and synchronized coherently. A third way of ensuring credibility is the use of iterative questioning and member checks during interviews (Shenton, 2004). This was attained by having a semi-structured interview approach as it allowed us to return to, and rephrase previously asked questions, and thereby identify possible discrepancies in the answers or receive necessary clarifications regarding issues for which there were any uncertainties. Finally, translating the quotes in the empirics from the original language, Swedish, to English might implicate a potential deficiency in conveying the exact statement since translations involves interpretations by the researchers (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). To mitigate the risk of such a deficiency, a bilingual person was consulted when translating the quotes, and some important terms has been retained in the original language, as recommended by Van Nes et.al. (2010).

#### 4.5.2. Transferability

Transferability can be compared to external validity and concerns whether the research findings can be transferred to another contextual setting or time period than the one being investigated (Merriam, 1998). To enable readers to assess whether or not transferable inferences can be made, thick descriptions of contextual factors such as the history of gender equality in sports, how sports is organized within Sweden and detailed information about the interviewed Special Sports Federations, is presented in the paper. Such information is crucial in order to facilitate for the reader to make judgements about whether the results may be transferred to for instance the corporate sector or Special Sport Federations in other countries.

#### 4.5.3. Dependability

Dependability parallels reliability, implying that if the study was to be replicated with the same participants and methods and within the same context, similar results would be achieved. Such outcomes are rarely the case in qualitative research, but it is nonetheless crucial to establish dependability by thoroughly outlining and describing the research process and method (Shenton, 2004). Efforts have thus been taken to keep complete records throughout the study to be able to extensively explain the data collection process and analysis.

#### 4.5.4. Confirmability

Confirmability corresponds to objectivity and although it is recognized that some degree of the researchers' subjective influence is inevitable in business research, the researchers should have acted in good faith (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To achieve confirmability, mere awareness of the importance of objectivity has been a crucial element in the research process, especially since gender equality can be an emotionally charged subject. For

instance, it was crucial to try to avoid asking leading, subjective interview questions. Furthermore, after each interview, a debriefing discussion was held among the authors to make sure the content was interpreted in an objective manner (Bazeley, 2013).

#### 4.6. Ethical Considerations

One of the main ethical considerations is potential harm to participants. One consideration in relation to this aspect is to ensure anonymity of the participating organizations unless permission has been given to identify them. This is especially important when sample sizes are small. (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Based on that it is disclosed that the study targets Special Sports Federations and that only the 35 biggest federations were considered as interview subjects, the sample size is relatively small and specific. Combined with the value of illustrating the breadth and kinds of federations involved in the study, the decision was thus made to ask for explicit permission to name the participating federations of the study, which all of them agreed to.

Informed consent is an additional ethical consideration which means that the participants should have agreed to take part in the study and been informed of the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A crucial measure that was taken in this regard was to ask about permission to record the interviews.

Another ethical consideration is deception, which occurs when the study is presented to participants in a way that distorts its actual intent or the way it is carried out (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To avoid deception, a comprehensive explanation of the research purpose and the kind of questions that would be asked during interviews were included in the e-mails that were sent to ask the federations for participation in the study.

## 5. Empirical Findings

### 5.1. The Impetuses for Change

The following section presents empirical findings regarding the impetuses for change towards gender equality, as experienced by national board members of Swedish Special Sports Federations.

#### 5.1.1. Political Pressures

Government, or “the state”, is acknowledged among a large share of the respondents as the most pressing external actor in the process toward achieving gender equality within national boards of Special Sports Federations. Because the yearly ordinary allocation of almost 2 billion SEK is derived from tax money, the respondents apprehend that the yearly distribution comes with certain restrictions: *“It is the government who define the agenda, because they sit on the money. If you distribute 1.9 billion, as they do a normal year, one can apply certain reservations for it.”* [F10]<sup>3</sup>

Some respondents also addressed the fact that politicians, such as the Swedish Minister for Sports, has expressed criticism for how the Swedish Sports Confederation previously have handled the gender issue – making too slow advancement and not putting enough pressure on the Special Sports Federations. According to several respondents, this has led to a situation in which the government now firmly reinforce pressure on the Swedish Sports Confederation: *“If the government start to feel like the state of affairs is wobbling a bit, then they need to take a step forward.”* [F2]

Other powerful actors mentioned by a few interviewees are sponsors and partners. Over the past years, the sponsors’ and partners’ interest for the Special Sports Federations’ work with gender equality has intensified, and respondents described how this have come to influence the money received: *“If they shall enter and engage in a partnership, they do not want to do it if it is too lopsided<sup>4</sup> within the federation.”* [F12]

A common discussion topic among the interviewees was the long history of inadequate gender targets and strategies within boards of Special Sports Federations, and as a result, a growing call for more fundamental changes.

We have said in the past 40 years that we should achieve gender equality. Decisions have been made on multiple national confederation meetings, there has been tons of strategies [...] we cannot do the same thing all over again! We cannot just produce yet another document or a new policy. [F8]

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<sup>3</sup> The codes representing the interviewed federations, e.g., [F10], have been randomly assigned to ensure anonymization among the respondents. See appendix II for further elaboration.

<sup>4</sup> *Skevt* in Swedish

### 5.1.2. Social Pressures

Being viewed as modern, relevant and “up to date” was considered an essential factor for many of the interviewees. For instance, one respondent stated: *“It is very important that the federation is perceived to keep up with the societal progress.”* [F11] While gender equality has been in the process of progressively becoming an established practice in society, several respondents described how their federation had been in immediate risk of falling out of step with modern times. One respondent explained: *“Gender equality is the future. We cannot continue to treat people differently based on gender.”* [F21]

Lastly, some respondents mentioned that increased women presence within their board had created greater internal pressures as the women took active efforts to put questions of gender equality on the agenda, *“We have noticed that when younger women enter, they are interested in their rights and push for questions of gender equality.”* [F19] Furthermore, one respondent pointed to that women were wary of paying attention to problematic situations which promoted discussions, *“We have had several occasions when women have asked ‘how come that there is none of us women in this steering committee?’ and then you have to take that discussion within the board.”* [F22] Some respondents simultaneously stressed that the questioning of prevailing gender norms does not solely come from the women, instead, *“it is just as likely to be expressed by the men within the board”* [F21], emphasizing that increased female presence in the board had boosted participation in gender questions by both genders.

### 5.1.3. Functional Pressures

Another common theme discussed by the interviewees was how boards are becoming more strategically oriented, making nepotism less rewarding. One respondent described this shift as a result of increased competition for active members, as the options for fitness and leisure activities has expanded during the last couple of years. The respondent thus concluded that from a strategic standpoint *“it is crucial that the ones taking decisions for how the sport will operate reflects current active members as well as potential members.”* [F12] Several respondents also emphasized the scarcity of voluntary forces, creating a situation in which the federations need to step up their game in order to attract qualified board members. One interviewee highlighted that it interests few women to be a part of a board if it is run like a *“gentlemen’s club”*. Other interviewees also underscored the link to social pressures as more people will be prone to dedicate themselves if the federation is perceived to keep up with current societal values, such as gender equality.

Furthermore, some respondents accentuated that an equal gender composition is strongly correlated with better board performance as it allows for more perspectives to come through, *“If the group is very homogenous, you will quickly come to decisions but if it is heterogeneous, it often takes a bit longer to decide but the decisions often become more sustainable.”* [F15] In addition, some respondents emphasized that gender equality in boards is likely to lead to a better organizational culture that is more open and thus allows for deeper reflections.

Finally, it should be noted that although many of the respondents mentioned examples of political, functional as well as social pressures, there were varying degrees of emphasis on the different pressures. For instance, some primarily emphasized external pressures such as the government while others rather focused on elaborating on the utility of gender equality as the impetus for change.

## 5.2. Change Actions

The following section will present findings related to what change actions Swedish Special Sports Federations have taken to achieve gender equality within their national boards.

### 5.2.1. Representation in Boards

#### **Changes to the Byelaws**

Although being an obligatory formality, a change that is worth mentioning is that all but one of the Special Sports Federations had changed their byelaws in order to include the 40-60 quota requirement for the national board. The one exception was a federation which had had it in their byelaws since a long time ago. In addition to changing the byelaws concerning the national board, five Special Sports Federations had also implemented requirements for their district boards. Three had implemented a requirement of a 40-60 composition while two only required that the boards should consist of both men and women. Such actions were taken both because they saw it as their responsibility from a gender equality perspective in general, but also because it may influence the pool of candidates for the national board as it sometimes consists of persons who come from the district boards.

Moreover, one federation recounted how the formulation of the gender quota contained a problem for including non-binary or transsexual persons in the statistics. As the quota only discussed legally recognized gender<sup>5</sup>, rather than gender identity, all board members that fell outside such binary gender division became problematic to include in the formulation: *“We had non-binary gendered persons within the federation that could not be captured in such statistics and that could not be categorized with such a formulation. We were thus forced to talk about legally recognized gender to not disrespect those people.”* [F15] The respondent further explained that a lawyer had helped them formulate the byelaws in the following suitable way: *“No gender should possess more than 60 percent of the seats”* [F15] as it did not put any label for the remaining 40 percent. However, the respondent also mentioned that two weeks before the interview, the Swedish Sports Confederation made a public statement in which it communicated that a revision had been made to allow federations to interpret the 40-60 quota either based on legally recognized gender or gender identity.

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<sup>5</sup> *Juridiskt kön* in Swedish

## **Allocations of Seats**

The governance system within the Special Sports Federations' national boards was a challenge identified by several interviewees. Some boards contain both fixed and free mandates, where the fixed mandates are dedicated to geographical district representatives or in cases of multisport federations, sections for each of their associated sports branches. One respondent elaborated: *"The four fixed mandates often end up being people within the federation, people that are known, while the other four - the free mandates - open up for new competences and perspectives."* [F11] A problem with this system is the lack of control regarding gender composition when assembling the national board as the districts presents their candidates themselves. In addition, one respondent specified that the fixed mandates are often decided based on "trust", and since men has a longer history of being in leading positions within sports, and often has a greater network, they are more frequently chosen to represent the districts.

To address these matters, three respondents mentioned that the dialogue with their districts had become more extensive. One respondent stated: *"Before, a bit sloppy expressed, it was almost like they asked the north district, 'who do you want?' and then it became that person"* [F11] and explained that today, if a male person is suggested by the district, they often ask if the districts have a female with the equivalent competence. Furthermore, to gain control of the gender composition, one federation described that they had decided to double their fixed mandates so that every section selects two representatives – one man *and* one woman. However, the respondent pointed to that this solution carries problems as the board size increases significantly, which can make decision making more difficult and increase expenses when arranging board meetings. The federation had therefore discussed an alternative rotational system, with sections taking turn in appointing *either* a man or a woman.

## **Male Dominance Among Board Presidents**

Despite the increase of female representation in boards, some respondents highlighted the problem with men being heavily overrepresented in the role as board presidents. For example, one respondent stressed that their federation had not had a female president in over 100 years. To achieve greater balance in top leadership positions, two Special Sports Federations raised that they had decided that if they have a male board president, the vice president should be female and vice versa. A president of another federation further elaborated on this topic and mentioned that they had started to experiment with a setup in which two persons, one male and one female, shared the role as president within half of their national committees. The board had made this decision as they deemed it crucial to *"open up old structures, those where it have always been in a certain way, and think in new ways."* [F17] The interviewee expressed it as a potential model for future boards and commented that when he previously had been part of such a solution himself, he experienced that *"suddenly, we were treated very differently by our surroundings when both of us were president rather than when one was president and the other 'only' vice president."* [F17] Other positive facets of a shared presidency that was mentioned were a

shared workload along with getting both the male and female perspective when preparing important questions together with leading officials within the federation.

### 5.2.2. Nomination Committees and the Recruitment Process

One of the most recurrent themes regarding challenges to achieve gender equality within the boards of Special Sports Federations was the work and structure of the nomination committees. One respondent explained: *“A well-functioning nomination committee is the foundation for everything”* [F9] while another emphasized that the nomination committees takes on the role as “the super-strategist” by being in control of putting together a powerful team that will have the mandate and authority to address strategic challenges. Nonetheless, it became clear during the interviews that the Special Sports Federations had identified several problem areas where the nomination committees’ structure and ways of working directly, or indirectly, influenced the gender composition in the Special Sports Federations’ national boards; and that some change actions had thus been initiated.

#### **Composition of the Nominating Committee**

One area of concern, that was frequently brought to light by respondents, was the indirect effect of unequal gender representation in nomination committees. One interviewee stated: *“If the nomination committees aren’t equal, then it’s extremely difficult to achieve gender diversity in boards”* [F17], as the nomination committees influence the outcomes of nominees. The crucial role of nomination committees is also reflected in the fact that the gender quota implemented in 2017 not only address the national boards of Special Sports Federations, it also demands their nomination committees to fulfill a 50-50 gender quota. Although several respondents stressed the importance of such inclusive nominating committees, one pointed to issues with the formulation of the quota. The respondent stated that their most recent nomination committee had consisted of two men and one woman, but since the woman was appointed president – which is excluded from the current regulation – the committee did not fulfill the gender quota. If one of the men would have been chosen as president instead, the committee would have fulfilled the 50-50 requirement.

This becomes a bit of a paradox, as you can imagine. Technically we would have to say, ‘you are a woman and thus you cannot be president - you need to be a member, or otherwise we will not fulfill the gender quota’. [F7]

#### **Recruitment Within One’s Network**

Several respondents had recognized that nomination committees often looked for potential nominees within their own networks, and how this became a problem when the nomination committees were heavily dominated by males. For instance, one respondent said: *“There is a danger of having a nomination committee that only consist of a group homogeneous men, because then they choose their friends since they are the ones they*



*have in their phones.*” [F12] One respondent further mentioned that an action that had been initiated to reduce such influence, but had not yet been approved, was to enroll persons with HR-competency in the nominating committee.

There is a motion which propose that the nominating committee should bring in HR-competency and do a thorough investigation of what qualifications are actually needed along with performing analysis of those that might enter the board – that they have the right background and that they have something important to contribute with. [F23]

The respondent highlighted that such a solution could potentially increase the transparency of the recruitment process and thus decrease the occurrences of “friend recruitment”. However, the respondent simultaneously pointed to a feeling of that some dissent and resistance towards the motion existed within the federation.

The absence of requirement profiles and clear terms of reference was another factor that several interviewees identified as a barrier for achieving a broad and objective recruitment process. To address this, some Special Sports Federations had implemented more explicit specifications of requirements for what kind of candidates they were looking for when recruiting board members. In this process, the board often communicated with the nominating committee to convey their perspective on what kind of competencies that were needed in the future board.

### **Recruitment Process**

Several respondents also pointed to cases where the nomination committee had taken too much of a passive approach, and not actively looked for potential candidates. One respondent for example said: *“I believe the nomination committee need to be more outreaching. My experience is that too often, it is a matter of just stating ‘everyone that would be interested – sign up here’.*” [F14] The respondents further elaborated on how this approach often resulted in a very narrow selection of nominees. One respondent stated that a concrete action that their federation had taken to address such issues was to implement an educational program for nominating committees, both on the national and district level. The educational program included elements of gender equality but also involved more general aspects such as *“how does a nominating committee work in a good way? How do you organize and plan an election year?”* [F9] as this was considered essential to make them feel secure in their processes, and thus be able to work in an objective, inclusive manner. Another respondent mentioned that their recruitment process had changed in terms of that they now start the process earlier and is more thorough. Rather than starting a few months before the election, they now start approximately a year ahead. This was related to that the recruitment process have become less straight forward and more like a puzzle in which different competencies and genders should be matched into a well-functioning team.

Another respondent stated that getting a direct question from the nomination committee is crucial but added that *how* and *by whom* the question is asked also affects the outcome.

This interviewee proposed to emphasize that the board was going to be gender equal when recruiting potential female nominees.

The chances of getting a 'yes' is probably way larger if we ask: 'We are planning to have the same number of males as females in the board - do you want to be one of the elected females?'. It is a huge difference compared to just stating 'do you want to be one of the 11 elected? the rest is men'. [F20]

### **Differences in the Pool of Recruitment**

One controversial issue, discussed by most of the respondents, was how the gender distribution of the active participants of a specific sport had an indirect effect on the pool of recruitment to the federations' national boards. While a large majority of the respondents indicated that the scarcity of women as active participants had a negative effect on the pool of recruitment, other respondents argued that there were often thousands of potential women that could and would want to be recruited, especially to such a high-status body as the national board. One respondent who shared this second view stated: "*I always get upset when I hear that 'there are no women that wants to get involved' – that is a myth!*" [F8] To solve this problem, a large share of the respondents stressed the value of investing in grass root projects to enhance female presence in both local leadership positions and as active participants in the sport. A few interviewees also recounted that their nominating committees had started to expand the network of possible candidates by looking for persons outside the federation when recruiting board members with certain competencies, such as legal or financial knowledge. Although it was still considered beneficial if they had some relationship to the specific sport, it was no longer seen as necessary.

### **Prolonging Existing Board Members' Terms**

A few respondents described that it had been taken for granted that former board members, who want to prolong their term, should remain in their seats and were therefore rarely exchanged. One respondent said that the general impression of how the nomination committee work was that they ask former board members if they want to continue, and if they accept, they do not see the need to explore alternative options. Another respondent stressed how this results in a situation where men continue to hold powerful positions.

The nomination committee should be able to say: 'Unfortunately, you do not fulfill the competences we need in the board at the moment.' [...] because with the current approach, when it is taken for granted to be able to stay, that is a way for men to prevail in their positions. [F20]

#### **5.2.3. Informal Practices**

Recognized by several respondents were also informal practices, that directly or indirectly hindered the achievement of gender equal boards, and thus needed to be addressed. For

instance, one interviewee stated: *“Just because it is 50-50, it does not necessarily mean that the discussion climate, how you bring up questions and treat different voices, is equal.”* [F11]

## **Organizational Culture**

A few respondents sometimes experienced a feeling of that the federation had a culture in which friendship relations had great influence, but that it was hard to demonstrate evidence for such feelings. One interviewee highlighted that this may limit women’s opportunities as there were tendencies that men continually helped and looked after each other in for instance recruitment processes and when decisions were made.

Another related issue that was emphasized during interviews was the impact of a culture of masculinity, *“It could be that an old culture of masculinity scares women away.”* [F16] At the same time, one interviewee raised that a pattern among women who had attained a board position, was that they could be considered “special” in some respects. This observation had emerged as the respondent was part of a collaborative project with two other Special Sports Federations in which they had interviewed approximately 40 women who held a board position within a federation. The recurring theme was that these women were driven, had high performing jobs and were used to making demands, *“The boards is not open to everyone, the ones who make it have something that make them care less about their surroundings, they do not ‘take any crap’.”* [F12] A president from another federation further said that as a response to the argument that women do not want to be board members, she had stated during a meeting:

You have to think about whether you want the women to become like the men to be accepted? Or do you want to open up so that the women can come here and be themselves? Do they have to fit into your norm and culture, or do you men want to expand your behavior and view upon how to work within the board? [F8]

## **Social Events**

Another issue that was mentioned by several respondents was networking opportunities and social events. One interviewee stated: *“It is one thing what you say during the day and another how you act when there is not a strict agenda.”* [F4] Another interviewee emphasized that when there are conferences on weekends, there is a lot of the women who take part during the day but leave before the evening dinner and that a critical mass of women is probably needed in order for them to find such events appealing. Another interviewee expressed that she had experienced the presence of a male “whiskey club” from which she had initially been excluded. As she started to take part in the whiskey club meetings, one member had admitted: *“We are solving all the problems and creating new ones”* [F5], referring to the informal meetings of the whiskey club.

## **Dynamics in the Board Rooms**

Several respondents further elaborated on issues concerning how board meetings are carried out. An interviewee stated that one of their board members had once taken the initiative to record a board meeting in order to examine who, and for how long, spoke during the meeting. The result showed that despite having equal board representation, men had spoken for 1,5 out of 2 hours. A discussion had followed of why this was the case, resulting in that board members had started to reflect upon how prone they were to interrupt or say unnecessary things. In a similar vein, another respondent mentioned that their federation had paid for an external agent to sit in on meetings and evaluate how they were carried out from a gender equality perspective.

## **Clarifying Board Roles and Expectations**

Another issue which two Special Sports Federations had noticed was that women often had other needs than men in terms of putting higher value on feeling a sense of purpose and knowing what their role within the board would implicate, both regarding time commitment and what they were expected to deliver. To address the identified issue, an action a president of a Special Sport Federation recently took was to specify individual board roles to clarify responsibility areas and expectations of each member. The interviewee emphasized that by clearly specifying the board roles, it is more likely that the members experience a greater sense of ownership and purpose as they have something distinct they are expected to contribute with. Furthermore, the respondent had experienced that it raised the effectiveness of board meetings which was important from the perspective that *“for those women who in parallel have to juggle with a professional career and family life, they do not want to spend an evening full of chitchatting without making progress for the board work.”* [F24]

## **5.3. The Change Process**

The following section will present empirical findings related to the change process that the Swedish Special Sports Federations have been subject to in order to achieve gender equality within their national boards.

### **5.3.1. Issue Identification**

A division could be made between two ways of looking upon the need for issue identification among the Special Sports Federations. While some federations made statements indicating deep immersion into problem identification, others showed signs of the opposite. Several federations expressed that the question of gender equality within boards was not a problem to them and that they therefore had paid limited attention to it. For instance, one federation explicitly stated that: *“No, I cannot say that we work with the question of gender equality on the board level, because we do not have that kind of problems”* [F10], referring to that they had equal representation within their board. However, it can be noted that the same federation had a male dominated board in 2016.

Another federation, which had a heavily male dominated board in 2016, repeatedly recalled that ever since their federation was constituted, it had been in their byelaws that they should strive towards gender equality. The respondent pointed to that it had therefore “*never been any problems to embrace such a mindset*” [F7], and that over time, the problem would thus have resolved itself even without the quota requirement.

On the other hand, there were several other Special Sports Federations which articulated that in order to achieve gender equality within boards, issues within the culture and ways of working are essential to identify, both within the federation as a whole as well as in the board room. However, these respondents simultaneously emphasized a difficulty in that problems are not always explicitly pronounced, especially when it concerns informal practices. An impactful way of working with issue identification was therefore to actively measure and map over time for instance who have spoken the most during meetings and how working groups have been appointed and composed. One federation also highlighted that they had discussed issues such as that it is not easy for a woman to enter a board in which some male members have held their seats for over 20 years and may have a tight relationship, “*I have observed some that have lost their interest. It is a big part to get women elected, but it is also a big part to keep those who are interested.*” [F24]

There were several discussions regarding the role of education when identifying gender issues in relation to boards of Special Sports Federations. Although a large majority of the respondents underlined a frequent use of knowledge enhancement initiatives, such as lectures, workshops and discussion forums, the motives behind these varied. One respondent commented: “*A key success factor is education. ‘What exactly are we talking about and why is it important?’ So that we agree on that and use the same concepts*” [F9], hence arguing for the importance of creating a common understanding of the topic when discussing and identifying gender issues. Another interview stated: “*We needed support regarding norms, structures and how we can create a positive attitude going forward*” [F15], hence stressing the value of norm-critique and turning the gender equality transformation into something positive. One aspect that most of the respondents agreed upon was the crucial role of the Swedish Sports Confederation in such educational activities as it had in most cases either been the lecturer or financed them. In addition, the Swedish Sports Confederation had administered several support documents and follow-up reports, that provided the Special Sports Federations with indications of what problem areas to look out for. Some respondents considered it to have been so beneficial for the gender equality process that they would have preferred it to be mandatory for all federations.

They put numbers and facts behind your gut feeling, maybe they should even make education compulsory. Not just leave it in the hands of the Special Sports Federations because we have not, in fact, been able to handle it that good. Otherwise, we would not have had to implement the gender quota in the first place. [F5]

Several respondents also highlighted the importance of incorporating aspects of gender equality into strategy and policy documents. However, rather than continual revision on a regular basis, refinements of strategy and goals were often timebound with several years in between and were made once they had devoted specific efforts to thoroughly analyze the current state, and where they wished to be in a few years as well as in the long term. A recurring theme among the interviewees was also that change did seldom happen unless specific and ambitious goals were set, *“If you should be successful, you have to set clear and measurable goals. If you do not do that, you will not challenge yourself enough.”* [F17]

### 5.3.2. Implementation

A difficulty that was mentioned among a few respondents was the presence of a disconnect between talking about gender equality and taking action. One respondent stated: *“The thing is that you have to work with it, and I believe that a degree of saturation has been reached for the various informative lectures that are held”* [F9], referring to that many people are now often well aware of that gender equality is an important aspect to consider but that few take substantial actions. The respondent pointed to that it is imperative to put greater focus on promoting tools, which they had done through education, for how to actually start working with it and asking the right questions. Elaborating further on the topic, another respondent highlighted the importance of pragmatic solutions. The respondent stated that the lack of substantive initiatives that have been implemented can be linked to the perception of that it exists theory about how to advance gender equality, but that sometimes, it is not aligned with their current conditions and context, and that a key challenge ahead is to reduce such gaps.

### 5.3.3. Maintenance

Although the overall change process towards gender equality was still a work in progress for most of the Special Sports Federations, there were a few federations which expressed that the gender perspective had started to become deeply rooted in their ways of working, highlighting that it was now always in the back of their heads. A recurring theme among these federations was that they had initiated their work with gender equality further back and had already achieved gender equal representation in their boards when the 40-60 quota requirement was set in 2017. One respondent stated: *“Within our federation it has become a norm, we do not talk about that we must adhere to a gender quota, equal representation is just the way it should be, it is completely natural to us.”* [F2]

However, these Special Sports Federations simultaneously emphasized that there were a lot of work left to do and that gender equality is a topic that you never can claim to be “finished” with but rather needs continuous reinforcement and follow-up efforts. At the same time, an interviewee from a federation which had implemented an educational program for the board and nominating committee raised that there can sometimes be difficulties in terms of measuring, and thus evaluating, outcomes of such initiatives.

...it is hard to measure gender equality in terms of knowledge, it is much easier to count heads than to measure the quality. We have to find a way to measure if we can notice any difference from the things we have implemented. [F9]

Moreover, the same federation emphasized that it is important to continuously evaluate and promote a dialogue about which change efforts yields the best results in relation to the effort and money involved. For instance, they had implemented a female network program a few years back in which female leaders at various levels within their federation, including board members, had participated with the intent of giving them an opportunity to support each other and exchange experiences. However, in retrospect, they were a bit doubtful whether it was the right choice to implement it considering that although such networking opportunities may be beneficial in terms of that women can help and support each other, women will not attain higher positions just by exchanging experiences. Furthermore, it had initiated a debate over whether it is best to endorse initiatives which are aimed towards women who already see the need for gender equality or if it is better to put the money on trying to reach those who impede such change.

## 5.4. Influential Factors

### 5.4.1. The Role of Top Management

As an indication of top management's influence, a respondent which had been part of the federation's board for many years, described how the federation had incrementally improved toward becoming more gender equal under the leadership of a president which strongly valued gender equality. However, when he left the federation and was replaced by a person with little interest for such matters, the process toward achieving gender equality abated markedly.

When asked about what their role were in the process toward achieving gender equality, several presidents stated that a crucial part of their job is to consciously facilitate board meetings in a way that ensures that everyone gets the opportunity to get their voices heard. Furthermore, a few presidents mentioned that they felt great responsibility to be a role model and perceived it as crucial that they were a driving force in the implementation of gender equality related change.

I am totally convinced that within certain areas, top management has to make a clear statement and show that it is a pressing issue! If you delegate it too far down within the organization, there is a risk that the top management signals 'this is not that important' or that you do not take it seriously. Therefore, I myself have been president within the working group that has worked with questions of gender equality and diversity. [F17]

However, there were also a few presidents that had taken a more laid-back approach and did not perceive it as that they possessed a particular role within the process. One president laughed while saying: *"I think that my role would actually be to resign in order for a women to be appointed instead. I think that is the best I can do"* [F10], while adding

that the main thing he had done in relation to gender equality had been to remind the nominating committee that they needed to find a board composition that fulfilled the 40-60 quota. A common theme among the presidents that had taken a more laid-back role were statements indicating that major gender equality related change actions was not necessary as the changing values in society would solve the problems over time. One respondent stated: *“I think it is a transient question. The way society looks, that is how the sports movement will look.”* [F18]

#### 5.4.2. Responsibility for Gender Equality

When asked about whether the Special Sports Federations had someone that was responsible for gender equality related concerns, some respondents straightforwardly answered that they did not. A few others responded that they had a particular person who was passionate about such questions and therefore had been delegated the main responsibility. However, one respondent simultaneously mentioned: *“Most of the time, it has been one or two persons that have had more knowledge about gender equality than others and thus have become a driving force. It does not necessarily have to be wrong to have it that way, but we have noticed that the knowledge gap becomes bigger then.”* [F9] Furthermore, one respondent made the following reflection: *“We had a special sector, or group, which worked with gender equality and that group was not equal, it was only women in it.”* [F3]

On the other hand, there were several interviewees that responded by saying that no one in particular had been responsible for the gender equality question as they considered it imperative that it was not treated as an isolated subject, but rather integrated within all of their operations. One interview suggested that sometimes you may need someone to monitor certain questions, but that when it concerns value-based questions like these *“you should be very careful not to shift it away from being the boards joint responsibility.”* [F11] Two federations had also implemented education for the board members about gender equality from a leadership perspective to for instance make sure that the gender equality perspective is truly integrated when decisions are made. One respondent stated *“Those educations have resulted in completely different viewpoints and that we set very clear definitions about how to treat and work with each other”* [F17]. As a counterforce, one respondent perceived a risk of integrating the gender equality question into all subject matters. The interview highlighted that the interest of developing the sport have to come first and that although the gender equality question should be addressed *“it cannot be at the expense of that you always ask: ‘how can this question be seen from a gender equality perspective?’ It can become too much!”* [F1] The same respondent perceived that their board had reached such a state a few years back and, as a result, there had been a tendency of annoyance whenever discussions of gender equality were present.

#### 5.4.3. Managing Perceptions Within the Organization

To create engagement in the transformation toward gender equality and thus increase the likelihood of a successful change process, some respondents stressed the significance of



educational efforts that involve and catalyze discussions of why gender equality is important and the benefits of it. For instance, one respondent stated: *“This is very much a matter of removing fear and making people feel secure, but also to increase the knowledge about the many benefits that actually comes with having an equal structure.”* [F17]

### **Perceptions of Threats**

The interviewees pointed at several areas for concern that elected board member had voiced. A common distress, especially among older men, was fear of that gender equality could implicate a loss of one’s mandate. For instance, one respondent specified that: *“There can sometimes be a concern among elderly men when you start discussing these questions: ‘how will this affect me?’”* [F17] Furthermore, the respondent described how this specific group quickly turned mindset after some targeted educational efforts: *“Suddenly, it was many of the older men that said, ‘this is actually important!’ So, we were given really good feedback that we were on the right track.”* [F17] Another respondent stressed that it is important to not shame the men that have spent thousands of voluntary working hours to develop the sport, as this often leads to an adverse attitude towards the gender equality question. Instead, he emphasized that: *“We will not replace the voluntary and elderly because they are men, but because they will retire. They will end their mandates and then it is free to recruit anyone!”* [F13]

Another common concern was what consequences the gender equality process would have for the competence of the board. Some of the respondents stressed their preference for competence-oriented over gender-oriented board, while some respondents challenged this view by arguing that these two are non-contradictory. For instance, one male respondent commented that: *“Men always state that ‘we should not use gender quotas, we should only recruit based on qualities.’ However, by some reasons, there is only older men that seems to hold these qualities.”* [F17] In contrast, one interviewee stated that there had been qualitative deficiencies when a larger share of women had been appointed. The interviewee admitted that some of the nominations of female candidates had *“been made on too vague grounds”* [F1] and argued that this could inhibit the recruitment of women in the long term. Lastly, while some perceived the threat of losing financial support from the Swedish Sports Confederation as absolutely necessary for advancement of gender equality within boards, some of the respondent expressed their disagreement with such regulation.

### **Perceptions of Utility**

To outweigh any resistance or fear, and to gain momentum for the gender equality process, several respondents stressed the importance of communicating the many benefits of gender equal boards. For instance, one interviewee said: *“It is absolutely essential that we are able to convey and get through with the strengths and value of gender equal boards.”* [F23] Almost half of the respondents further described how they used targeted initiatives, in which they gathered the board members to discuss *why* gender equality is

important in the first place. Arguments that were brought up in such discussions were, for example, access to multiple perspectives, more sustainable decision processes and a better organizational culture. One respondent added that such discussions helped the board “*to move from ‘must’ to ‘want’*” [F12], and that the shift in mindset had great impact on the change process. Another respondent described how the targeted initiative had resulted in a more united board that was convinced of that more changes were needed.

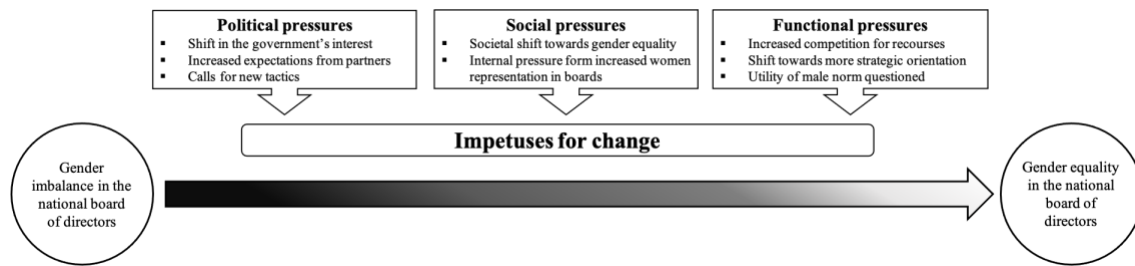
## 6. Analysis

### 6.1. The Impetuses for Change

With a few exceptions, the respondents gave a consistent view of sports governance as a male dominated arena, where women traditionally have been a minority. This is in line with previous research, suggesting that women have been situated as “the other” in sports (Kane & Lenskyj, 1988). The preceding male norm in the federations’ boards can thus be understood as an institutionalized practice, wherein masculinity and men’s dominance in positions of power have constantly been reproduced (Anderson, 2009). However, the respondents further described how this norm increasingly have been called into question during the last couple of years, both by internal and external actors, which indicate that the boards are currently undergoing a deinstitutionalization process (Cunningham, 2009).

Empirical findings regarding the governments’ and sponsors’ growing interest and pressure for gender equality, and the calls for more drastic actions as previous methods were deemed inadequate, are in line with Oliver’s (1992) description of political pressures. Moreover, several of the respondents depicted how increased competition for resources, such as voluntary forces, have pushed the federations to become more strategically oriented, and as a result, the utility of the male norm have become questioned. Such motivation of improving organizational performance supports the idea that functional pressures also contribute to the deinstitutionalization process (Oliver, 1992). Many respondents also provided a coherent view of an ongoing societal shift that puts greater emphasis on gender equality and necessitates changes in order for the federations to be perceived as “up-to-date”. Such impetuses relate to theory of social pressures (Oliver, 1992). Furthermore, some Special Sports Federations emphasized that as their boards became more gender diverse, questions about gender equality gained momentum. Not only did the increasing number of women in the boards challenge the prevailing gender norm, the men in the boards simultaneously became more active in such questions. The presence of women in boards can thus be seen as another social pressure, as it disrupts the historical continuity of male dominated boards (Oliver, 1992). In other words, there were signs of that the deinstitutionalization process can in some cases become an accelerating process where greater gender balance, which is the objective, in turn leads to greater pressure for deinstitutionalizing the male norm.

*Conclusion:* Multiple political, social as well as functional pressures have constituted impetuses for Swedish Special Sports Federations to move from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality within their national boards. As progress were made, the pressure from internal sources increased, which accelerated the ongoing change process.



**Figure 3:** Takeaways regarding impetuses for change

## 6.2. Change Actions

### 6.2.1. Issue Identification Phase

As the empirics indicated, a division could be made between some federations which had barely engaged in identifying gender equality issues while others showcased deep immersion into such activities. For those federations which showed signs of barely engaging in issue identification, theory suggest that perceptions of threat may be an influential factor as the threat of a lawsuit can cause rigid responses and a narrower view of change actions (Agars & Kottke, 2005). Although the federations are not under the threat of a lawsuit, the gender quota enforced by the Swedish Sports Confederation has comparable implications as a failure to fulfill the quota entail financial repercussions and possible exclusion from the Swedish Sports Confederation.

On the other hand, the empirics showed that there were some federations which recognized that in order to achieve gender equality, issues regarding ways of working and cultural aspects had to be scrutinized, in addition to the representational problem. This is in line with previous literature as it suggests that extensive organizational reflexivity, that goes beyond the most visible aspects of gender equality, and addresses the dynamics which produce gender inequality, is necessary to be successful in achieving gender equal boards (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). For instance, the empirics indicated that discussions had not only been held about how to attract, but also how to keep women in board positions, which has been highlighted by previous literature as a problematic issue in instances of masculine dominance (Norman, 2010).

Empirical findings showcased the existence and awareness of several structural issues, such as uneven representation in the pool of recruitment, the male dominance among board presidents, the composition of nominating committees, and the complications from having free and fixed mandates. This supports the theory that systemic integration is a vital factor for gender equality (Cunningham, 2008) as all of these structural issues goes beyond the structures of the board and rather touches upon existing structures within the entire federations. In terms of structural issues, there was also critique against the formulation of the gender quota regarding that it excluded non-binary persons. Furthermore, one respondent pointed to a potential problem when not including the president in the count of a gender quota. Findings thus also supports the notion of organizational reflexivity (Shaw & Frisby, 2006) as the empirics indicate that it is critical

to not take for granted that structures that have been put into place to promote gender equality are “bulletproof”.

The empirics also revealed an awareness about issues concerning informal practices. The presence of a “friendship culture” was highlighted as an issue which can be linked to previous research which propose that social capital, such as intraorganizational ties, is highly influential in for instance recruitment situations (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Furthermore, it is not surprising considering the concept of homologous reproduction, suggesting that people tend to provide influence and power to those who are similar to themselves (Kanter, 1977). The empirics further demonstrated the presence and problematic impact of informal networking opportunities such as “whiskey clubs” intended for men, and conference dinners during evenings in which women were often absent. Such practices can potentially preclude women from access to influential organizational cliques, an issue recognized by (Shaw & Frisby, 2006).

Empirical findings also point to that several of the women who have reached board positions possess certain distinct characteristics such as having high performing jobs and are described as ‘special’ as they come from environments in which they are used to making demands. This is in line with existing literature which demonstrate the prevalence of masculine discourses of instrumentality, such as expectations of exhibiting toughness and perseverance (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2007). At the same time, one respondent mentioned that there had been a need to question whether females were allowed to be themselves or if they had to fit the male norm to be accepted, which is not unexpected as previous research has revealed that women distanced themselves from their gender when trying to gain a board position (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007).

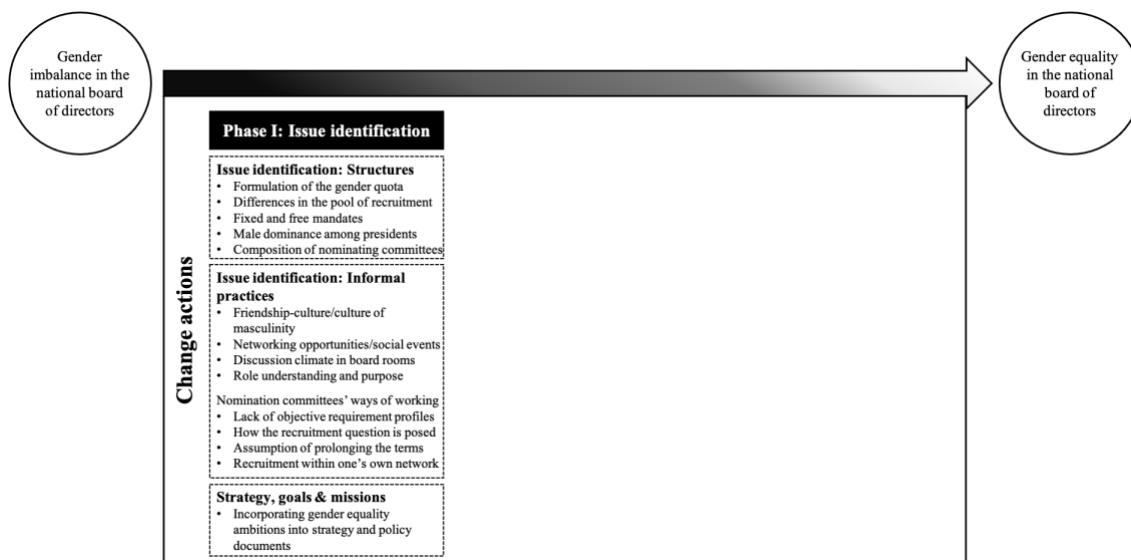
Another issue related to boards’ work practices that had been discussed was that many women seek a clear sense of purpose for their engagements and thorough information about what a board position would entail for them. Furthermore, empirical findings showcased actions to examine the board room discussion climate within two federations, by either recording board meetings themselves or by hiring an external party to observe during meetings. This points to an aspect that has been described by previous literature as imperative in order to achieve gender equality, namely the importance of cooperative relationships among men and women in which men support rather than show hostility towards women participation (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013).

The empirics also directed attention towards identified issues in terms of problematic practices within the nomination committees’ ways of working. For instance, a lack of requirement profiles, how the question is formulated when approaching potential candidates, and taking for granted that former board members are appropriate candidates for upcoming elections. Such practices tie into indications of that some nomination committees had quite a passive approach where primarily persons within their closest network were approached, leading up to a rather narrow selection of candidates. These practices are in line with previous findings of that a barrier for women advancement to

sports leadership positions is limited opportunity (Knoppers, 1987; Walker & Bopp, 2011) as current recruitment practices to some extent lack objectivity and overlook women who do not have the right connections.

As advocated by theory (Agars & Kottke, 2004), the empirics pointed to that many gender equality initiatives had been incorporated into strategy and policy documents and that establishing specific and ambitious goals was an essential element in the change process. Finally, it can be noted that one respondent indicated that engaging in discussions about the utility of gender equality had propelled a shift in mindset from ‘must’ to ‘want’, making the transition from issue identification to implementation smoother. This supports the impactful role of perceptions of utility (Agars & Kottke, 2005).

*Conclusion:* On an aggregated level, the Swedish Special Sports Federations had identified both structural issues as well as informal practices that contribute to maintain a state of gender imbalance in the national boards. However, there were clear differences in the individual federations’ engagement in such problem analysis. Most of the federations had incorporated the goal of gender equality into strategy and policy documents, signaling that this is a “key question” to address in the near future.



**Figure 4:** Summary of takeaways from issue identification phase

### 6.2.2. Implementation Phase

Empirics showed that although many of the federations had identified a multitude of problem areas, the implementation of practical solutions is less comprehensive. However, several gender initiatives had been put into action, which indicates that the federations – although in various degrees – had implemented change actions which can be linked to Agars and Kottke’s (2004) description of the implementation phase.

Empirical findings regarding changes to the byelaws, the allocation of board seats and constructions of shared leadership are in line with theory regarding formal adjustments to the structure of the organization (Agars & Kottke, 2004). Even if changes to the byelaws can be seen as a formal adoption of obligatory guidelines, the implementation of such structural adjustments has led to greater female board presence – a factor that has been deemed as crucial for achieving gender equality within boards of Special Sports Federations (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013). In addition, the empirics pointed to investments in grass-root projects and showcased that some federations had gone beyond what was mandatory by implementing gender requirements for the district boards, since these has an indirect effect on the composition of the national boards. Such a change action stress the importance of systemic integration, where diversity initiatives becomes incorporated into a broad range of organizational functions (Cunningham, 2008).

The empirical findings regarding allocation of board seats demonstrated how one organization decided to double the fixed mandates, so that every section now selects two representatives – one man and one woman. Although such a change action will guarantee an equal gender representation, the respondent pointed toward problems with managing such a large board size. The empirical data simultaneously outlined that a common distress, especially among older men, was fear of losing one's mandate or reduced competency as a cost of achieving gender equality. One could thus question whether the solution of doubling the board mandates were influenced by elected board members' perceptions of threats, since it was a rather straight forward solution that was chosen despite awareness of negative consequences. This is in line with literature suggesting that perceptions of threat can lead to a narrower view of alternative actions for change (Agars & Kottke, 2005; Staw et.al., 1981).

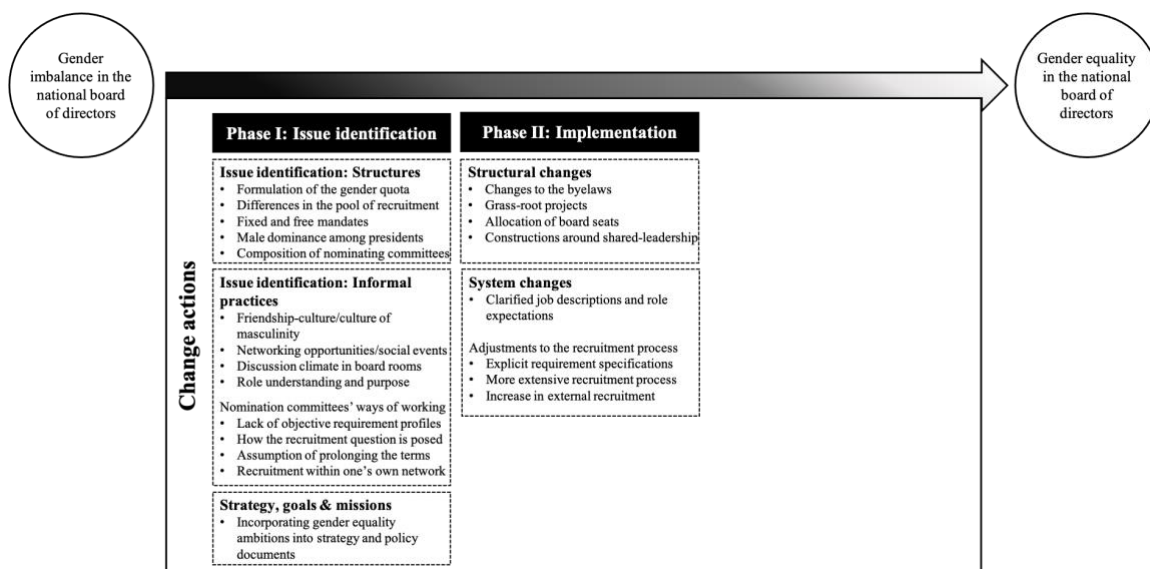
As outlined, other change actions that had been taken was experimentation with shared presidency and policies regarding the gender of the president and vice president. This may lead to greater female representation in influential boards roles – a factor that has been argued to be essential for achieving gender equality within boards of Special Sports Federations (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013). Such change actions also demonstrate organizational reflexivity as it challenges old structures (Cunningham, 2008; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Moreover, that the president could testify to his own experience of sharing presidency with a female director as a case in point for the initiation of such a solution can be interpreted as a clear management statement, which according to theory of top management support can be vital as people's attitudes and behaviors are influenced by the social cues in their environment (Cunningham, 2008; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

Empirical findings also showcased specifications of the roles of board members and adjustments to the recruitment process, which are in line with Agars and Kottke's (2004) description of system wide changes. Empirical findings related to the expectations of board members, such as clarifying the job descriptions, the emphasis on ownership and purpose and the raised effectiveness of board meetings indicated awareness of balancing

board work with other responsibilities in life. This supports previous literature regarding the importance of recognizing work-family balance (e.g., Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Dixon & Sagas, 2007).

To mitigate the problem of “friend recruitment”, some federations had implemented more explicit specifications of requirements for board positions. The argument behind such an action was that clearer instruction leads to a more objective and broader recruitment process, which could lessen the role of recruitment biases – such as the preference for masculine qualities (Hovden, 2000) and homologous reproduction (Kanter, 1977). Moreover, searching for candidates externally outside the federation, initiating the recruitment process earlier and making it more extensive by for instance increasing the expectations on the district’s nomination procedures, are other changes to the recruitment process that had been implemented by some federations. Such change actions emphasize the vital role of systemic integration (Cunningham, 2008), as organizational functions outside the board showed to play a crucial part in the success of the change process. Lastly, one respondent mentioned that they had put forward a motion to enroll persons with HR-competency in the nominating committees but that the initiative was partially met with resistance, for which a suggested possible explanation was that the increase in transparency could hinder “friend recruitment”. Such empirical findings support theory regarding perceptions of threats, which suggests that changes to the recruitment process often create resistance from those who have previously held powerful positions (Agars & Kottke, 2005).

*Conclusion:* While all of the Swedish Special Sports Federations had implemented structural changes to address the problem with equal board representation, some federations had gone one step further and implemented additional structural changes as well as system wide changes to address the more indirect barriers to gender equal boards.



**Figure 5:** Summary of takeaways up until implementation phase

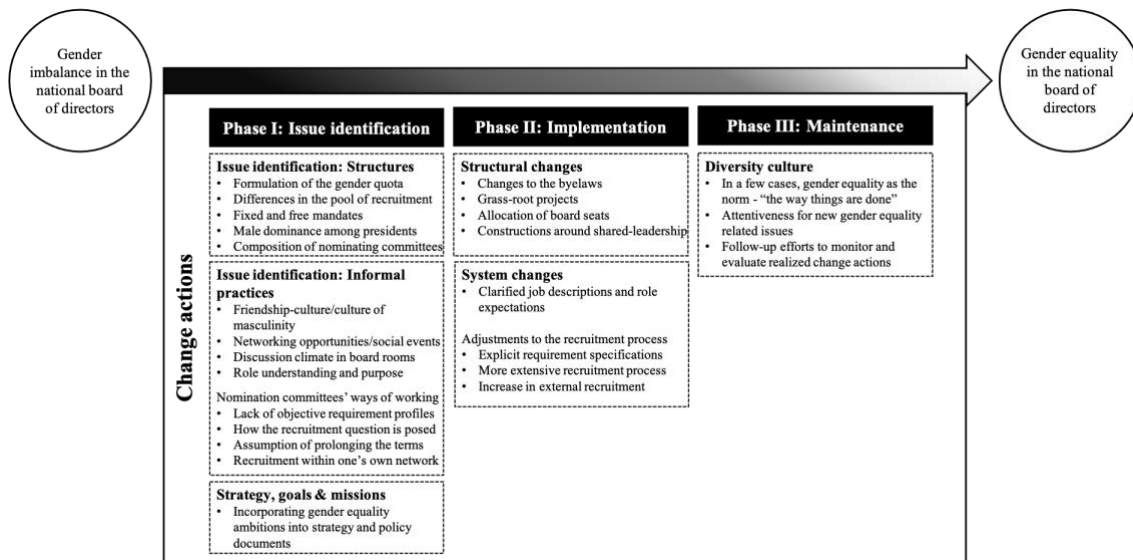


### 6.2.3. Maintenance Phase

Even though almost all federations formally had equal representation, most of the federations could not be considered to have reached what Agars and Kottke (2004) describe as the maintenance phase. However, there were a few exceptions in which federations showed signs of that gender equality had become established as a norm. Nonetheless, these respondents simultaneously emphasized that one can never be finished with a topic like gender equality and that even in the maintenance phase, change actions can thus be prevalent. The empirics pointed to change actions in terms of follow-up efforts, such as monitoring and evaluating the initiatives they had implemented in order to revise future allocation of resources, both in terms of time and money. This is in line with theory suggesting that an experimental approach to gender equality change initiatives is beneficial, which also relates to the impact of organizational reflexivity (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

The empirics also pointed to that a crucial aspect is to make sure that the organization always stay attentive for new problematic practices that may arise. As describes by the empirics, two different approaches could be observed for how to ensure that questions of gender equality continuously appear on the agenda. On the one hand, some federations had designated the responsibility to a specific person or work group. On the other hand, some referred to it as the joint responsibility of everyone which is in line with theory of systemic integration (Cunningham, 2008). Although these two approaches are not confined to affect the maintenance of gender equality, but also impact issue identification and implementation, it is a critical aspect to consider as designating the responsibility to a specific person could entail a risk for the maintenance of gender equality if that person leave the federation.

*Conclusion:* There were only a few, exceptional cases, in which the empirics indicated that gender equality had been established as a norm in the federations' ways of working concerning their boards. Topics discussed by interviewees were follow-up efforts regarding implemented change actions, continuous attentiveness and how to make sure gender equality stay on the agenda, for which various approaches could be observed.



**Figure 6:** Summary of takeaways regarding change actions

## 6.3. Additional Significant Influencing Factors

### 6.3.1 Top Management Support

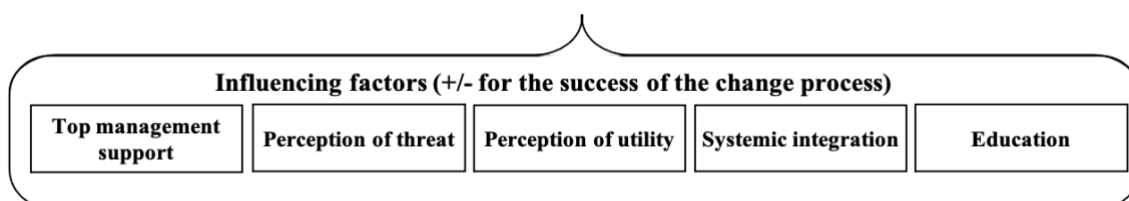
According to Agars and Kottke's (2004) three-phase model, top management support has mainly been argued as an influential factor in the issue identification phase. However, the empirical findings showcased how top management support has continued to play a vital role, in both the implementation and maintenance phase. For instance, the importance of an active leadership style where the president takes great responsibility for the gender equality progress and acts as a role model, rather than delegating it down in the organization, was argued by several respondents as key success factors. Furthermore, board meetings continuously take place through all phases and several presidents pointed to that an important part of their role was to facilitate meetings in a way that allow all voices to come through. In order to not get stuck in simply talking about issues, the need for presidents to "walk the talk" and be a driving force in the implementation of change actions was another key element mentioned in the empirics, which can thus be derived to the later phases in the change process. The vital role of top managers can also be noticed from the fact that the change process was brought to a sudden halt within one federation when a previous president, with strong moral standards concerning gender equality, was exchanged for a president that did not seem to care as much for these questions. Altogether, the findings thus demonstrate that top management support is a crucial success factor throughout the whole change process, which support previous research that have demonstrated the overarching role and importance of top management support (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004).

### 6.3.2 Education

First of all, it should be noted that education was fluent across phases of the change process and specific efforts could thus not be solely designated to a certain phase. The

empirics illustrated how some Special Sports Federations had implemented educational efforts as a method for demonstrating and discussing the utility of gender equality and to counter perceptions of threat, which has likewise been highlighted as a crucial action in previous literature (Cunningham, 2008). However, the empirical findings also revealed that education was used in an interactive manner to build a common ground knowledge base about what concepts and terminology should be used when discussing gender equality initiatives, to propel identification of current structures and norms as well as to provide tools for transitioning from issue identification to actual implementation. Furthermore, education had been used to strengthen knowledge about how to integrate gender equality perspectives when making decisions which is in line with the notion of building systemic integration (Cunningham, 2008). The empirical findings thus contribute to existing theory by adding a dimension of the importance of continuous interactive education, sometimes in a workshop-like manner. The empirics further highlighted that the Swedish Sports Confederation had played a crucial role in educational efforts which points to a need for involvement of an external actor, which depicts another aspect that goes beyond existing theory. Moreover, empirical findings regarding education for nominating committees also pointed to that educational efforts do not have to be confined to specifically talk about gender equality in order to aid in the progression toward gender equal boards. This finding thus adds to theory by suggesting that education about how to carry out work processes in a professional way can, in itself, be used as an indirect method for how to achieve greater gender equality. All things considered, education thus play a much more extensive and interactive role in the change process towards gender equality than what existing theory initially gave light to in the theoretical framework.

*Conclusion:* The vital role of top management support in the federations' change process cannot be derived solely to the issue identification phase. Instead, this study emphasizes how top managers' encouragement and commitment to the gender cause played an essential role throughout the whole change process. Furthermore, education, which has previously been argued as an influential factor to address perceptions of threat or to discuss the utility of gender equal boards, has been demonstrated to play a significantly more influential and interactive role in all phases of the change process. These two elements, together with systemic integration and perceptual processes, which has previously been highlighted by theory as well as in the empirics, can therefore be seen as influencing factors for the success of the Swedish Special Sports Federations' shift from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality within their national boards.



**Figure 7:** Summary influencing factors

## 7. Discussion

To fully answer the primary research question, “*How have Swedish Special Sports Federations worked to move from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality within their national boards?*”, some further reflections and concluding remarks will be presented in the section below in addition to the empirics and conclusions made in the analysis.

When reviewing the empirics from an aggregated perspective, it is noticeable that a large share of the work regarding gender equality Special Sports Federations had performed was centered on issue identification. Less actions had been taken in the implementation phase and the empirics became even scarcer in the maintenance phase. Even though there were several examples of change actions in the implementation phase, some of these had only been implemented within a single or a few federations. Altogether, this points to that there is great awareness of the need for change, which may be a result of that the federations perceive a wide range of pressures for change, but that some federations do not prioritize it high enough, or lack knowledge of how to take action to change. It is also indicative of that there is still a lot of work to carry through before gender equality become thoroughly integrated and entrenched.

A noteworthy finding was also that despite gender equality being put high on the agenda by the Swedish Sports Confederation, a discrepancy could be discerned among federations in several areas of investigation as some were deeply involved in gender equality while others showcased little investment and interest in deeper engagement. For instance, the empirics and analysis pointed to a discrepancy in the level of engagement in issue identification, top management support and in who was considered responsible for making sure gender equality related questions appeared on the agenda. A potential explanation for the discrepancy among federations in the extent of actions taken to achieve gender equality may be differences in perceived pressures for change. While many of the federations pointed to aspects within political, functional as well as social pressures, some primarily emphasized external political pressures. Furthermore, even though many pointed to functional pressures in terms of that gender equal boards perform better, far from everyone had engaged in internal discussions of the utility of gender equality and why it is important. There may thus be several federations with relatively shallow knowledge and limited genuine belief in the benefits of gender equality. For federations which primarily perceive external political pressures, and do not understand and genuinely believe in the importance of gender equality, this may lead to a continuance commitment rather than affective or normative commitment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) to gender equality initiatives. Considering that a federation with a continuance commitment would mainly be committed in order to avoid possible negative repercussions, it would likely almost only do the bare minimum such as making sure it complies with the gender quota required by the Swedish Sports Confederation, which is in line with the concept of focal behavioral support (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). This

could thus explain why some federations did not show further commitment to for instance improving informal aspects.

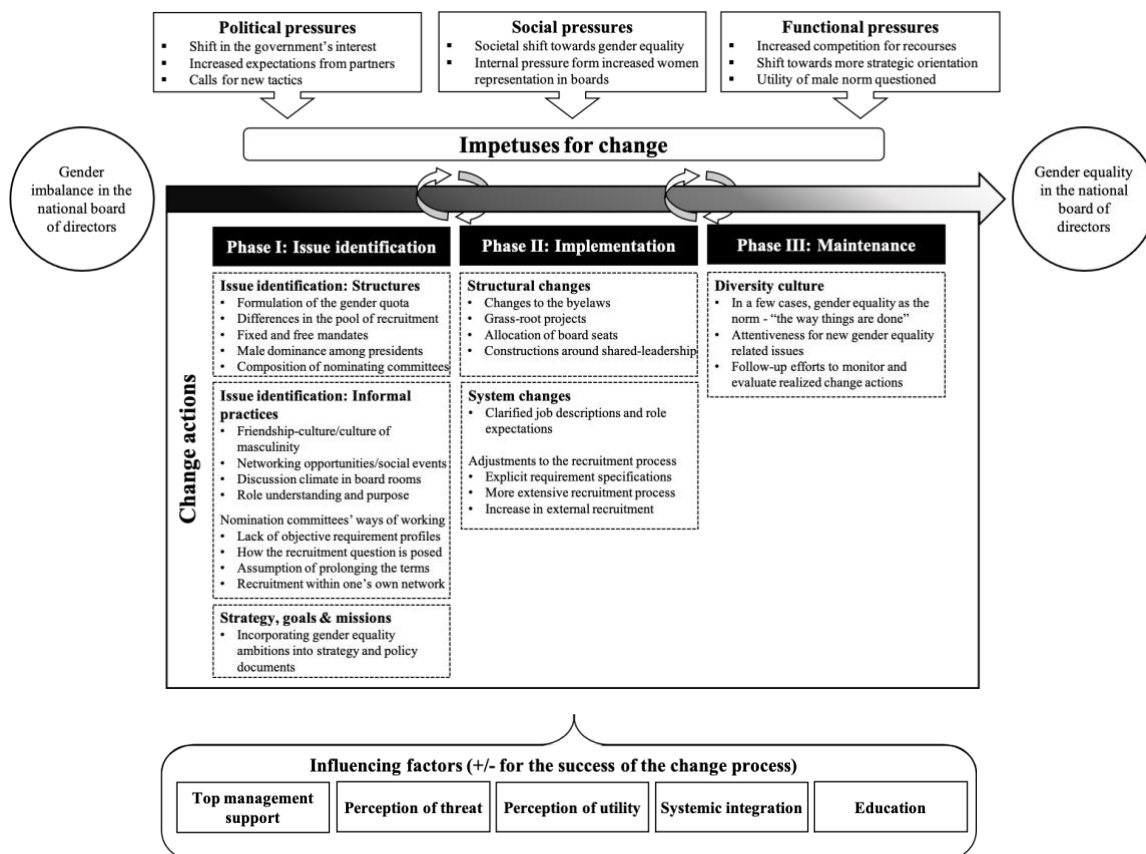
The signs of that there were some federations which had taken few gender equality initiatives is problematic considering that the empirics simultaneously illustrated that there are multiple complex system wide issues in several of the federations and informal aspects of gender equality that needs to be addressed. For instance, the existence of a “friendship-culture”, imbalance regarding which gender speaks the most during board meetings, women adapting to the male norm to become accepted, informal networking opportunities and ways of working within nominating committees. To achieve gender equality, a holistic approach characterized by organizational reflexivity, continuous monitoring and experimentation has therefore been demonstrated as vital. Such a holistic approach for example involves educational efforts, experimentation with old structures, actions to address internal resistance and fear, as well as standards for how to carry out the recruitment process in an objective, thorough and transparent way.

The complexity and scale of such change initiative implicitly question the effectiveness of solely employing a gender quota, since such change action directly focuses on the implementation phase and puts very little, if any, pressure to engage in deeper reflections on why the problems have emerged in the first place. Moreover, such emphasis on changes to the byelaws – a structural adjustment – ignores many of the crucial informal change actions needed in order to deinstitutionalize the prevailing male norm (Agars & Kottke, 2004). While many of the federations at this point have reached gender equal representation in their national boards, the process only included limited change actions for some of the federations. A possibility, and immediate risk, then becomes that they may perceive that a state of gender equality has been achieved, which the empirical findings strongly contradicted. Furthermore, the fact that equal representation has been achieved might also ease the pressure and attention from external actors, such as the Swedish Sports Confederation, which could benefit those who want to maintain status quo. Without addressing the root cause of the problem, one could thus question whether the equal representation would be maintained if the required gender quota was removed.

On the other hand, empirical findings simultaneously showcased that increased female representation in boards, a direct consequence of the implemented gender quota, significantly influenced the gender equality process. As the gender composition became more equal, both men and women became more active in challenging the prevailing gender norm and current ways of working. The outcome of the gender quota, a change action targeting the *second* phase, hence indirectly resulted in greater reflection and issue identification which relates to the *first* phase. This contradicts the view of the change process as linear. Furthermore, it points in favor of applying a gender quota, since such an initiative is likely to have an indirect positive, accelerating effect on the change process. However, due to the multitude of structural and system wide hurdles that has slowed down the gender progress in boards for decades, such change action should not be implemented in isolation. Instead, the study stresses the need of using a multilevel,

holistic approach when moving from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality in the federations' national boards. Furthermore, findings regarding education, revision of the formulation of the gender quota as well as follow-up efforts and evaluation of other change actions exemplifies the iterative nature of the change process.

Bringing it all together, by considering the concluding remarks presented above and recapping the conclusions made in the analysis, an overview of how the Swedish Special Sports Federations have worked to move from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality within their national boards is presented below.



**Figure 8:** Summary of findings regarding change process toward gender equal boards

## 8. Concluding Remarks

### 8.1. Theoretical Contribution

By researching *how* the Swedish Special Sports Federations have worked to move from a state of gender imbalance to one of gender equality, several influential operational factors and change actions have been identified which addresses the research gap on organizational practices, structures and change processes that impact the prospects of achieving gender equality within boards (e.g., Benschop & van den Brink, 2014; Cunningham, 2008; Ferkins et.al., 2005). Besides building on full-integration theory, by identifying and discussing critical change actions, the study has added insights to the research field by discussing how external and internal pressures can impact the change process, as well as how education and top management support played a much more essential and comprehensive role throughout the whole change process than previously outlined. Moreover, the discussion of the consequences of implementing a gender quota provides a much-needed empirical examination of such a change initiative, which contributes to the scarce research body of gender quotas in sports governance (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014).

### 8.2. Practical Contribution

The empirical relevance of this thesis can be considered high given that the ratio of women on boards continue to be a pervasive problem in many corporate and voluntary sectors, such as sports (Adriaanse, 2016; Hillman et.al., 2007). The study identifies several internal processes, structures and practices that will need to change in order to achieve gender equality within the national boards of Swedish Special Sports Federations. Such results can assist other organizations that stands in front of a similar change process to design impactful change initiatives, especially in the sports sector. Additionally, since several differences regarding the federation's approaches to the transformation was identified, the study provides an opportunity for individual federations to learn from each other. Finally, the examination and discussion regarding the effects of implementing a gender quota, a change action that are becoming more frequently enacted (Valls Martínez et.al., 2019), also assist decision makers in understanding the limitations with such a governance policy, as the thesis emphasize the need for a more holistic approach.

### 8.3. Limitations

A limitation of the study is that in most cases, only one board member was interviewed for each federation and more nuanced information about prevailing issues and the change process could thus have been attained if additional board member were interviewed. Additionally, the scope of the study does not address aspects of intersectionality, meaning that equality considerations other than gender, such as the impact of ethnicity or a

disability, have not been examined. Furthermore, considering that the research has been carried out in Sweden, the geographical scope is limited.

#### 8.4. Future Research

One potential area of investigation for future research would be to examine how sports clubs work to achieve gender equality within their boards. Furthermore, as the study have demonstrated the influential role of education for achieving gender equality within boards, one area of interest would be to study how educational efforts and interactive workshops should be designed to attain the best possible effect.



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## 10. Appendices

### Appendix I: Interviewed members of the Swedish Sports Confederation

<b>Interviewed members of the Swedish Sports Confederation</b>	<b>Founded</b>	<b>Entrance in the SSC</b>	<b>Active members (2019)</b>	<b>% male members (2019)</b>
<b>Swedish Athletic Association</b> <i>Svenska Friidrottsförbundet</i>	1895	1903	520 841	41%
<b>Swedish Badminton Association</b> <i>Svenska Badmintonförbundet</i>	1936	1942	41 795	64%
<b>Swedish Bandy Federation</b> <i>Svenska Bandyförbundet</i>	1925	1925	47 534	75%
<b>Swedish Budo and Martial Arts Federation</b> <i>Svenska Budo- och Kampsporfsförbundet</i>	1960	1961	82 396	68%
<b>Swedish Cycling Federation</b> <i>Svenska Cykelförbundet</i>	1900	1903	63 296	74%
<b>Swedish Dancesport Federation</b> <i>Svenska Danssportförbundet</i>	1968	1977	41 210	37%
<b>Swedish Figure Skating Association</b> <i>Svenska Konståkningsförbundet</i>	1945	1945	35 938	18%
<b>Swedish Floorball Federation</b> <i>Svenska Innebandyförbundet</i>	1981	1985	308 968	70%
<b>Swedish Football Association</b> <i>Svenska Fotbollförbundet</i>	1904	1904	1 054 240	69%
<b>Swedish Gymnastic Federation</b> <i>Svenska Gymnastikförbundet</i>	1904	1904	376 024	27%
<b>Swedish Handball Federation</b> <i>Svenska Handbollförbundet</i>	1930	1931	141 439	50%
<b>Swedish Ice Hockey Association</b> <i>Svenska Ishockeyförbundet</i>	1922	1923	215 569	85%
<b>Swedish Motorcycle and Snowmobile Federation</b> <i>Svenska Motorcykel- och Snöskoterförbundet</i>	1935	1961	165 400	84%
<b>Swedish Orienteering Federation</b> <i>Svenska Orienteringsförbundet</i>	1938	1938	85 223	56%
<b>Swedish Powerlifting Federation</b> <i>Svenska Styrkelyftförbundet</i>	1996	1997	29 211	68%
<b>Swedish Sailing Association</b> <i>Svenska Seglarförbundet</i>	1905	1960	64 692	64%
<b>Swedish School Sports Association</b> <i>Svenska Skolidrottsförbundet</i>	1916	1916	103 161	57%
<b>Swedish Shooting Sport Federation</b> <i>Svenska Skyttesportförbundet</i>	1943	1956	106 322	82%
<b>Swedish Ski Association</b> <i>Svenska Skidförbundet</i>	1908	1904	143 408	58%
<b>Swedish Sports for All Association</b> <i>Svenska Motionsidrottsförbundet (Korpen)</i>	1945	1975	144 904	69%
<b>Swedish Table Tennis Association</b> <i>Svenska Bordtennisförbundet</i>	1926	1943	56 066	81%
<b>Swedish Tennis Association</b> <i>Svenska Tennisförbundet</i>	1906	1906	106 834	63%
<b>Swedish Volleyball Association</b> <i>Svenska Volleybollförbundet</i>	1961	1961	39 402	47%
<b>Swedish Wrestling Federation</b> <i>Svenska Brottarförbundet</i>	1920	1920	23 730	74%

Sources: Riksidrottsförbundet, 2012; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2020

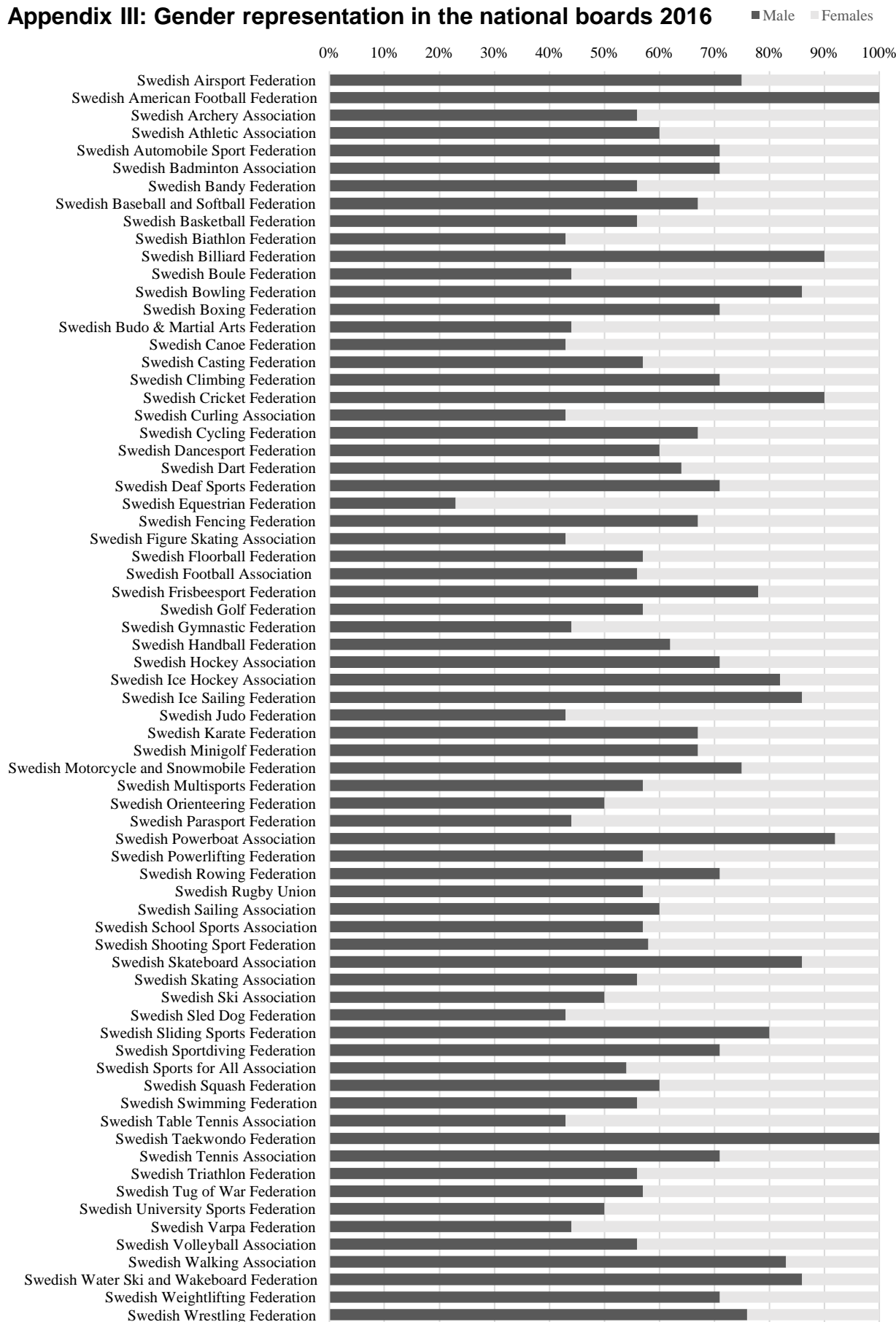


## Appendix II: Randomly assigned federation codes

Note that this table *is not* related to the order of which the federations is presented in Appendix I. The codes have been randomly assigned among the federations.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>F1</b>	President	Male
<b>F2</b>	Vice president	Female
<b>F3</b>	President	Male
<b>F4</b>	President	Female
<b>F5</b>	President	Female
<b>F6</b>	President	Male
<b>F7</b>	President	Male
<b>F8</b>	President	Female
<b>F9</b>	President, two federation employees	Female, Female, Female
<b>F10</b>	President	Male
<b>F11</b>	President	Male
<b>F12</b>	President, federation employee	Female, Female
<b>F13</b>	President	Male
<b>F14</b>	President	Male
<b>F15</b>	Vice President, board member	Male, Female
<b>F16</b>	President	Male
<b>F17</b>	President	Male
<b>F18</b>	President	Male
<b>F19</b>	Vice president	Female
<b>F20</b>	President	Female
<b>F21</b>	President	Male
<b>F22</b>	President	Male
<b>F23</b>	Vice President, board member	Female, Female
<b>F24</b>	President	Female

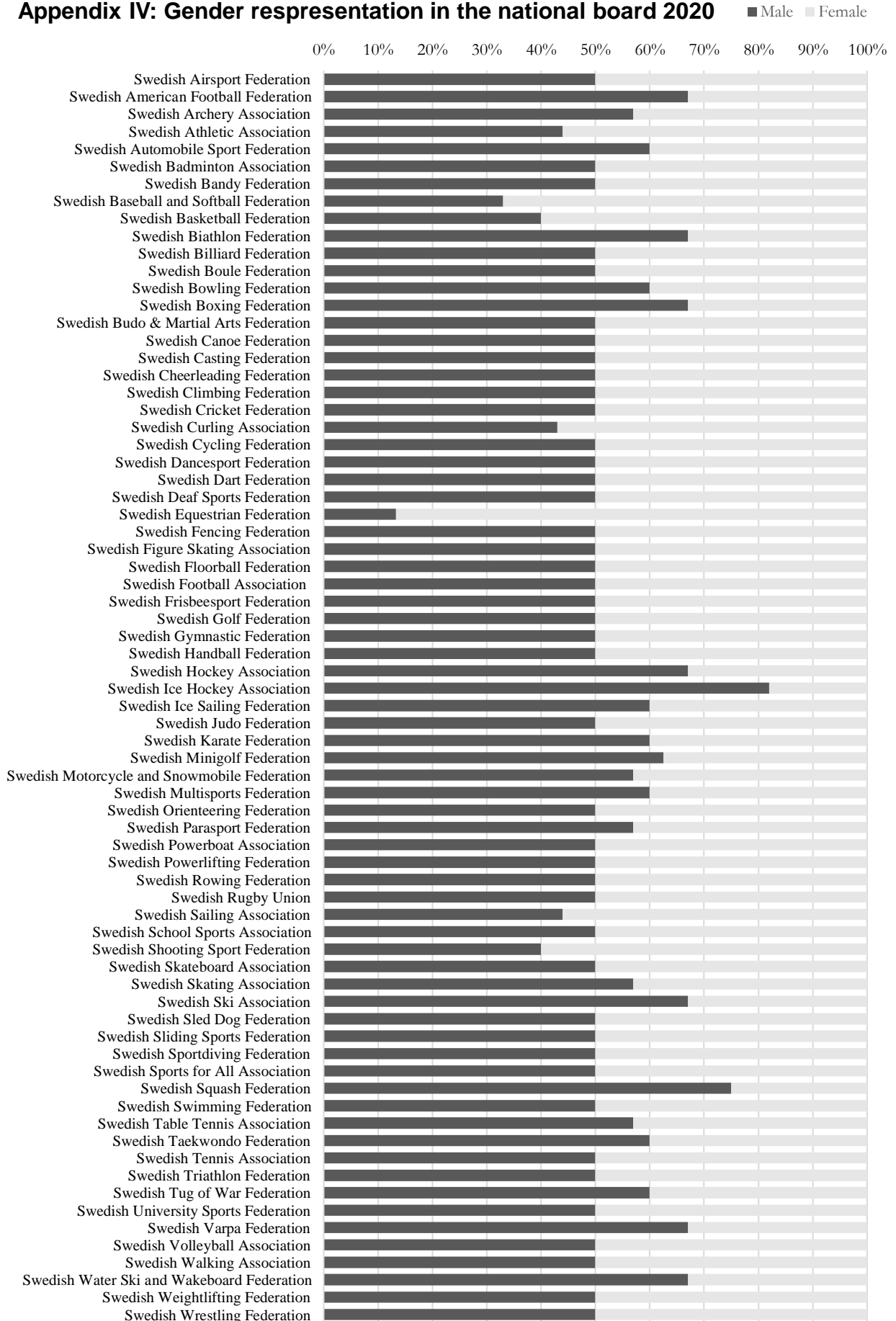
### Appendix III: Gender representation in the national boards 2016



Source: Svender & Nordensky, 2018

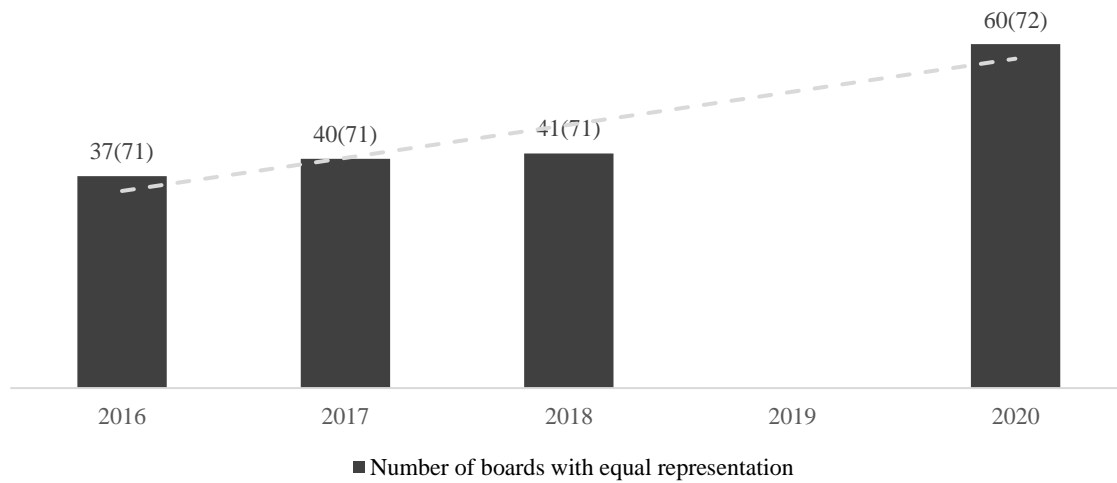
Note: These are self-reported data and can in some cases include the president in the count

## Appendix IV: Gender representation in the national board 2020



Source: Our own collection of data from the Swedish Special Sports Federation's websites, which has in some uncertain cases been verified through email/phone.

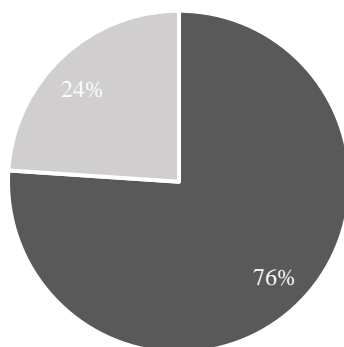
## Appendix V: Progress of boards with equal gender representation



*Sources:* Svender & Nordensky, 2018; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2018b; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2019; Official websites of the Swedish Special Sports Federations, 2020.

*Note:* The data from 2016, 2017 and 2018 are self-reported data and can in some cases include the president in the count. Data from 2019 have not been published. The Swedish Cheerleading Federation entered the Swedish Sports Confederation in 2019, which explain the difference in number of federations from 2018 to 2020.

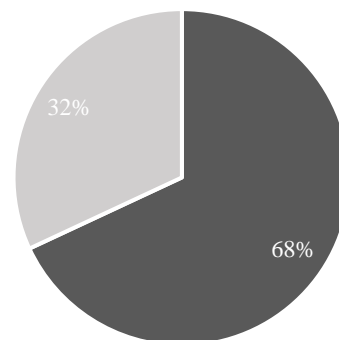
## Appendix VI: Gender distribution among presidents 2016



■ Male presidents ■ Female presidents

*Source:* Svender & Nordensky, 2018

## Appendix VII: Gender distribution among presidents 2020



■ Male presidents ■ Female presidents

*Source:* Official websites of the Swedish Special Sports Federations, 2020

## Appendix VIII: Interview guide in Swedish

### Formaliteter

- Berätta att allt som sägs kommer att anonymiseras
- Fråga om det är okej att spela in
- Fråga om det är okej att det nämns att förbundet deltagit i studien

### Introduktion & bakgrund

- Berätta kort om vem du är, din roll och hur länge du har varit med i förbundet?
- Om vi går tillbaka till 2017, hur gick era tankar när diskussion om könskvotering i förbundsstyrelsen och valberedningen togs upp på RF-stämman?
- Vad tror du ledde fram till att beslutet om könskvotering fattades?
- Varför arbetar ni med att uppnå en jämställd förbundsstyrelse?

### Processen

- Vad tror du det beror på att könsfördelningen såg ut som den gjorde (X) i ert förbund 2017?
- Har ni förändrat något för att uppnå en jämställd förbundsstyrelse? Om ja, vad?
  - Har ni förändrat något i era policys/stadgar?
  - Finns det någon åtgärd som utmärkt sig som extra viktig?
  - Finns det några åtgärder som ni testat som inte gett några resultat / varit mindre betydelsefulla?
- Hur kom ni fram till just dessa insatser? Hur gick ni tillväga?
- Har ni mött några svårigheter/utmaningar?
  - Finns det några andra målsättningar inom ert förbund som står i konflikt med/har hindrat ert arbete med att nå jämställdhetskraven?
  - Är det något i arbetsmiljön/arbetssättet inom förbundsstyrelsen som du upplever varit/är problematiskt för att uppnå jämställdhetsmålen?
- Vilka har varit involverade i förändringsarbetet?
  - Har någon varit speciellt ansvarig?
  - Vad har din roll varit i detta?
  - Har ni tagit in extern hjälp?

### Styrelserekrytering och kompetens

- Har ni utökat eller minskat antalet platser i förbundsstyrelsen eller har det varit samma under de senaste åren?
  - Om det ökat/minskat, varför?
- Vilka kvalitéer eftersöks generellt till er förbundsstyrelse?
  - Vem beslutar om dessa? Varför är de viktiga?
- Har rekryteringsprocessen förändrats under de senaste åren? Om ja, hur?
- Har valberedningens arbete förändrats under de senaste åren? Om ja, hur?

## **Uppföljning**

- Har ni kunnat se några positiva/negativa effekter av arbetet med att uppnå en jämställd förbundsstyrelse?
- Hur följer ni upp ert arbete? Mäter ni utvecklingen?

## **Avslutande frågor**

- Vad är ert nästa steg i arbetet med jämställdhets inom förbundsstyrelsen?
- Finns det något annat du tycker jag borde ha frågat dig?

## **Appendix IX: Interview guide in English**

### **Formalities**

- Inform the interviewees that everything they say will be anonymous
- Ask if it is ok to record the interview
- Ask if it is ok to mention in the research paper that their federation has taken part in the study

### **Introduction & background**

- Tell us briefly about your background, your role within the federation and how long you have been part of the federation
- If we go back to 2017, how did your line of thoughts go when the discussion about a gender quota for the national boards took place at the general assembly meeting of the Swedish Sports Confederation?
- What do you think led up to the decision to implement a gender quota for the national boards?
- Why do you [the federation] work to achieve gender equality within the board?

### **The process**

- Why do you think the gender distribution looked the way it did... [refer to numbers for the specific federation being interviewed] within your federation in 2017?
- Have you changed anything to achieve gender equality within the board? If yes, what and why?
  - Have you changed anything in your byelaws?
  - Has there been any change action that you have noticed to be especially important?
  - Has there been any change action that you have noticed to not yield any significant results/has been less impactful?
- How did you come down to these change actions? How was the process?
- Have you faced any difficulties/challenges?
  - Are there any other goals within your federation that have hindered your work to achieve gender equality?
  - Is there anything in the work environment or the ways of working within the federation that you perceive to have been/are problematic in order to reach gender equality within the board?
- Who have been involved in the change process?
  - Have there been any specific person who has been responsible?
  - What has your role been?
  - Have you taken any help from external actors?

### **Board recruitment and competences within the board**

- Have you increased or decreased the number of board seats during the last couple of years or have they stayed the same?
  - If they have increased or decreased, why?
- What qualities and competences do you generally look for to your board?
  - Why are they important? Who decide about these?
- Has the recruitment process in some way changed during the last couple of years? If yes, how and why?
  - Has the work of the nominating committee in some way changed during the last couple of years? If yes, how and why?

### **Follow-up**

- Have you been able to see any effects of the work towards achieving gender equality within the board?
- Do you follow up on the work you do? If yes, how?

### **Closing questions**

- What is your next step in the work towards achieving gender equality within the board?
- Is there anything you think that we should have asked, but has been left out?