

GENDER EQUALITY, PROFITABILITY AND HEALTH



Quality Work in Gender Equality

A HANDBOOK FOR THE WORKPLACE

Syvonne Nordström · Camilla Simonsson · Dan Humble

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foreword

Freedom, harmony, happiness and the joy of living – these are four concepts that I want to characterise the lives of the people of the county of Jämtland. They are also the four cornerstones of a good life.

Another dimension to the good life is the privilege of working at a workplace that is both invigorating and without discrimination. There is still an unequal power structure in society that expresses itself in the fact that women have lower salaries than men and that professions dominated by women have a lower status than those dominated by men. In practice, this means that women are discriminated against because of their gender.

In Jämtland we are working hard to eliminate this type of discrimination. This is carried out in different ways, including the County Administrative Board's project *Know-How – Gender Equality, Profitability and Health* and the Q-leader project, which aims to increase the number of women in leading positions in Jämtland. One measure which shows that we are on our way towards more equality in the workplace is the increase in women in new leading positions in the county.

An active gender equality program is necessary, both for recruiting competent staff and maintaining a competitive advantage. Another important aspect of gender equality that I would like to stress is that it is imperative to balance work and family life. Besides which, surveys show that gender equality is profitable.

I hope that this book can provide the inspiration for starting gender equality programs in a greater number of workplaces.

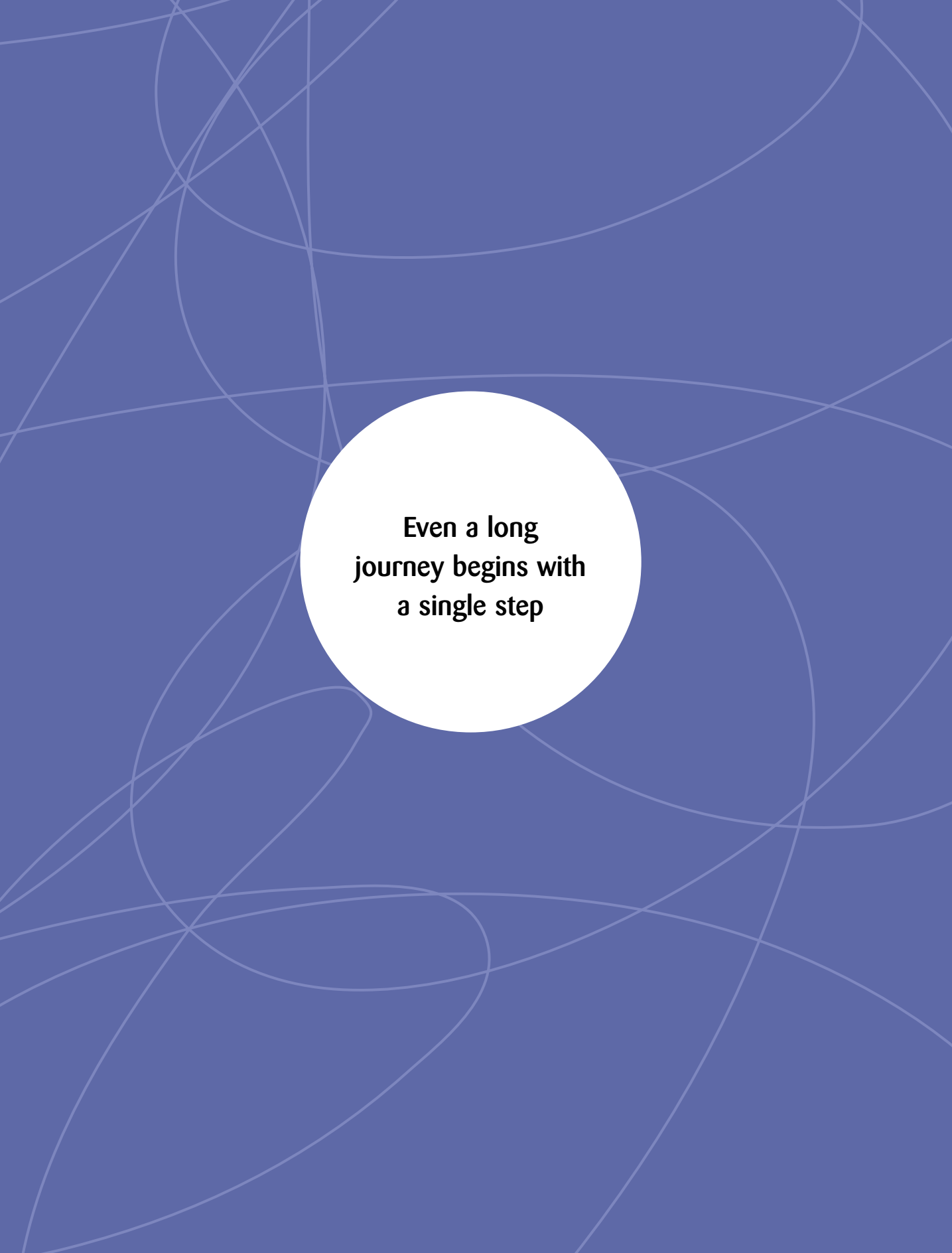
Kind regards,

Maggi Mikaelsson

County Governor of Jämtland



Maggi Mikaelsson



**Even a long
journey begins with
a single step**

Introduction

Swedish society has changed. In the old, industrial society, machines were generally considered to be the most important company asset. These days, it is the people; a company's capital is made up of men and women with their own individual experience, knowledge and competence. Employees are the most important asset for a workplace's future development.

KnowHow – Gender equality, profitability and health is a project that has been run by Jämtland's County Administrative Board from 2000 to 2005. The aim of the project has been to encourage employers to improve their gender equality programs. One way to achieve this is to improve knowledge about gender-related personnel issues and about the connection between gender equality, profitability and health. The project has been aimed at employers in the county, both in the public sector and in the business world. The participants in the project have been good examples



and have inspired others to integrate gender equality programs into their operations. During the course of this project we have obtained valuable insights, both into gender equality programmes and the circumstances surrounding them and into how the employer's choices can have an impact on success. We wish to share our knowledge in this publication.

One of the fundamental ideas behind the project is that it is vital that employers in the county of Jämtland see gender equality as an issue about quality and competitiveness, but also as an issue of growth and resources. By quality and competitiveness we mean that an active gender equality program affects the activities of the company in ways that provide a competitive advantage. This is especially true within recruitment. Many industries are suffering from a lack of available personnel. As a company, if you are working for equal conditions in the workplace, you are more attractive as an employer.

A gender equality plan is often required during tendering procedures. So far, this is more common within the public sector, but is also seen more and more in the business world.



Regarding growth and resources, the message is that gender equality is profitable. A major study was carried out by Nutek¹ in which 14,000 Swedish companies in different industries were studied (Jämställhet och lönsamhet²). This study showed a connection between safeguarding the knowledge and skills of all employees and increased profitability. This was most apparent in teams made up of both men and women. The result is supported by other studies, for example a study conducted by Martha Blomqvist³, which showed that an even distribution of the sexes in the workplace provides, amongst other things, a better social climate, more efficient teamwork, better communication with clients and a positive image for the company. This in turn leads to increased employee satisfaction, and better productivity and profitability.

A Swedish survey

We have also had a hypothesis about consumers and their desire to influence society. For example, Swedish consumers prefer products that are environmentally friendly. In order to find out whether this was true within gender equality, in 2004 a survey was carried out by *Know How* in co-operation with JämO's⁴ project Women to the Top, via Sifo Research and Consulting. The survey's target group was the general public. Throughout Sweden, one thousand people over the age of 15 were interviewed. The results showed:

¹ The Swedish Business Development Agency

² Gender equality and profitability (1999)

³ Blomqvist, *Könshierarkier i gungning: kvinnor i kunskapsföretag* (Gender Hierarchies Challenged: Women in knowledge intensive companies), 1994

⁴ JämO = Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, see page 17

- 80 percent believe that it is very or fairly important that employers are gender equality certified, i.e. have equal terms regarding salaries, personal development and the opportunity to combine work and family.

- 63 percent believe that it is important that the companies they purchase products from have products and services that are suitable for both men and women.

- 61 percent consider it to be very or fairly important that the employer has an even distribution of men and women in leading positions. Furthermore, a majority of 54 percent answered that it was very or fairly important that the company that they purchased products from was non-discriminatory from a gender perspective, i.e. has the same conditions and opportunities for male and female employees.

- There were few people interviewed who felt that gender equality programs in companies or employers are not important. A relatively large proportion of men, one fifth, do not think it is important to have an even distribution of the sexes in leading positions. There were also more men who stated that it does not matter at all if the company they purchase from works with gender equality.

- Women valued gender equality in companies and employers more than men. There are also differences between the private and the public sector regarding the attitude towards gender equality. Those interviewed within the public sector considered gender equality to be more important than those in the private sector. This can be explained by the fact that there is a greater proportion of women working within the public sector.

- Older people think that gender equality is more important than younger people, at least regarding an even gender distribution in leading positions. They also consider it impor-

tant that the companies produce products and services that are suitable for both men and women.

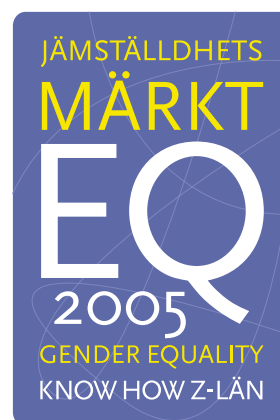
- Interestingly enough, 18 percent of those working within the private sector think that it is not at all important if one's current or future employer has an even distribution of men and women in leading positions. One explanation could be that there is a greater proportion of men than women working in the private sector.

Provision of labour is an important issue in Jämtland. More and more employers see the importance of offering an attractive workplace which can compete for qualified personnel. Furthermore, many employers consider that working with gender equality is an advantage in the development of the company and that it increases customer competitiveness.

An employer who starts to work with gender equality makes a strategic long-term decision, creating a positive basis for the future. Gender equality is something that the workplace will benefit from, but it requires determined work before the benefits are evident. It is important to allow the process to materialise. It is the processes and activities themselves that are important, not merely the words of different plans and policies.

When you begin working on a gender equality program you start to see things from a different perspective. Once the program is in progress you cannot simply take a step back. The process will continue to “roll on”.

Gender equality is an issue that should be included in a quality program because an equal work climate results in improved activity in the workplace. Gender equality is not just about quantity – the even distribution of the sexes – but includes the quality, where the knowledge, experience and values of both men and women are put to use.



Swedish gender equality politics

Gender equality is part of Swedish legislation and is considered a key issue in Swedish politics. However, we are still unable to consider Sweden a completely equal country from a gender perspective.

Sweden has a comprehensive national principle which states that gender equality means equal opportunities, rights and obligations in all areas of life. This means that there

should be an even distribution of power and influence and the same opportunities for achieving financial independence. There should be equal opportunities for entrepreneurship, employment, working conditions and opportunities for development in the workplace. Men and women should have equal access to education and the opportunity to develop their own personal ambitions, interests and talents. The responsibilities of home life and any children should be divided equally and society should be free from gender-related violence.

The aim of the government's political policies on gender equality is that a balanced perspective should pervade all areas of poli-

tics. In the government's action plan for the gender equality program for 2002–2006, it is stated that a gender equality analysis shall be conducted in all areas of politics and that goals and indicators of gender equality should be set wherever possible.

One area which clearly shows inequality between the sexes is work life; however parenthood is also very unequal.



Studies show that mothers spend twice as much time with their children than fathers do, even when the children are older. Many reports testify that being the parent of a small child and having a fulfilling professional life is at times hard to combine.

Men and women are on different terms, both in the workplace and when it comes to health. In Sweden women's ill health is greater than men's. One of the reasons is that women tend to work twice as much because they still take greater responsibility for family life. Life with work, family and time for oneself is often hard to achieve, especially for women. One common opinion is that men's will to share the responsibility for home and family has a very important role in gender equality in working life.

Gender equality is an area of knowledge that involves learning to see the world from a gender perspective. It is important to highlight the conditions for men and women in different areas. In Sweden we say that it is important to view the world through "gender spectacles".

Gender equality increases profitability and good health!

Employees are an important resource and it is of the utmost importance to consider how their competence is safeguarded and developed within the organisation.

Adapting the company so that both men and women can carry out all the tasks is useful as it can effectively double the size of the available workforce. Additionally, employees look for concrete evidence that shows that a company is innovative.

Another factor is what it is that keeps people healthy. Traditionally, we understand that things that are beneficial for health are good food, exercise, and healthcare – but why are there some employers that have such healthy staff despite the fact that ill health is on the rise throughout society?

One important factor is the management's view of the staff. Do the management view the employees in a holistic manner? Participation, the ability to have influence and to feel safe in the workplace is important, as are ethics and morals. Equal opportunities is an ethical issue since it promotes equality. It is important to be able to develop in your job and to be given the opportunity to further stretch yourself, regardless of your gender, your position or your use of parental leave. Combining family life and work life often takes a lot of piecing together. Many people feel inadequate to the challenge of everyday life and experience constant stress. Women shoulder a particularly heavy responsibility, both at home and at work. How child and family friendly are our workplaces?

To a great extent, these issues are influenced by organisational culture. It is important for the well-being of personnel that this culture is good for both men and women, as well as that the physical working environment is designed to suit both genders. An environment that promotes equal working conditions encourages physical and psychological well-being and has a positive effect. It has an effect on well-being, job satisfaction, motivation, employee initiatives and creativity. Gender equality in working life and in private life is connected to health. Work environment issues and gender equality issues are also interlinked.

Working with gender equality issues means striving towards improving the working conditions for men and women. This means working with health factors, since good working conditions can lead to a decrease in the amount of sick leave. Dissatisfaction and a bad working climate are risk factors, but a business strategy that promotes good health leads to profit and success. This is important since a large proportion of our time is spent at work.

An in-house gender equality programme increases well-being within the company, thereby improving productivity. The working environment is improved, staff become more creative and it is also noticeable that sales increase.

Sweden's Equal Opportunities Act

Sweden's Equal Opportunities Act has been in effect since 1980. The purpose of the Act is to promote equal rights in the workplace for both men and women and it falls under the legislative framework of the General Labour Law. The government authority that supervises employers' gender equality programmes is the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, JämO. The Equal Opportunities Commission imposes penalties which JämO imposes on those employers who, despite many warnings, do not comply with the law.

The law has three main parts:

- a ban on sexual discrimination in the labour market
- requirements for *all* employers to take active measures to create gender equality in the workplace
- implications and penalties for non-compliance with the law.

Employers who discriminate on the basis of gender risk having to pay compensation. The ban on sexual discrimination includes, for example, decisions about who to employ, wages and redundancies. Occasionally JämO receives reports about poor working conditions, transfers and redundancies that may be connected to pregnancies or parental leave.

Both men and women report problems in their working lives that have arisen in connection with parenthood, which shows a working life that is not family friendly.

Every year JämO requests and audits a number of employers' gender equality plans in order to see they fulfil the legal requirements. This authority also works with increasing knowledge and providing employers with information that will enable them to develop high quality strategies.

The requirement to actively work towards gender equality means that all employers, including those with less than ten employees, are to purposely strive for equal opportuni-

ties for men and women and to counteract sexual harassment in the workplace.

Employers with more than nine employees must draw up a special gender equality plan every year. The plan does not have to be a document in its own right; the areas that should be addressed can be integrated into other documents. Drawing up the plan is to be done in consultation with the employees and is to include an overview of wage differences between men and women, quantifiable goals for increased gender equality in the workplace, clear measures for implementation and a specific timeframe. The responsibility for conducting an active gender equality programme is always the employer's.

There are legislative regulations about the gender equality plan's contents. It should be produced jointly by the employer and employees and contain the following areas:

- **Working environment and conditions**

Each organisation and its working environment should be suitable for both men and women. It should be possible for individuals to influence their work situation and there should be opportunities for employee development. No person, regardless of gender, may be prevented from being offered employment due to physical barriers. Employers have an obligation to adapt the work environment to enable access for all employees, including the use of different aids to facilitate a working environment for both men and women! With regard to the psychosocial working environment, the workplace should have an atmosphere in which no one feels victimised or unwanted.

From a practical point of view this may include separate showers and dressing rooms for men and women, supplying lifting aids and providing work clothes in different sizes. This can be facilitated by employing good management which has knowledge and understanding of the different conditions under which men and women live. Men and women require balance in their lives so that they can cope

with the demands from both work life and family life. If this equation does not add up it tends to lead to sick leave, which costs society a significant amount of money. The causes are often complex and it is important for organisations, both within the private and public sectors, to advocate preventative measures and take responsibility.

- **Employment and parenthood**

There are good opportunities for combining work and family life in Sweden. Examples include parental insurance, the sick child leave and the right to work part time. However, these opportunities are mostly used by women.

Life is like a puzzle. Both men and women should be able to piece together work and family life in a way that results in a fulfilling life! The employer should help out, for example by conducting meetings during hours that are suitable for the parents of young children, informing those on parental leave of what is happening at the workplace, allocating management responsibilities fairly, encouraging fathers to take parental leave, letting employees work from home or adapting working hours to encourage a positive combination of work and family life.



There is also the opportunity to view parental leave as a part of personal development. There are employers in Sweden that consider parental leave to be a qualification that enables the employee to take on new job responsibilities and climb the career ladder. The reason for this is the training in making quick decisions, handling conflicts and managing many responsibilities that will have been a feature of the parental leave.

One common reason why women take the majority of parental leave is that men tend to have a higher salary. If the woman takes leave the family will not lose as much money in relation to the benefit.

- **Sexual harassment**

The workplace should be kept free from incidents of sexual harassment and gender-related violations! The management is responsible for communicating that sexual harassment and violations are not tolerated in the workplace. One way to clarify company policy is to establish an action plan for how problems should be handled if they arise.

Sexual harassment is not just pinching and groping. It could also include unwanted compliments, suggestive looks and other degrading or humiliating expressions, or being ignored. All the staff should be informed about the plan. It is often mandatory to educate managers in this area.

It is important to remember that a lack of complaints does not necessarily mean a lack of sexual or gender-related harassment. It can occur, even if few people want to see it or talk about it!

- **Competence development**

The employer should have a strategy for obtaining an even gender distribution within different professions and at all levels in the



workplace. An even gender distribution means that any one gender is represented to at least 40 percent in any one occupational group. The goal is more women in male-dominated areas and more men in areas dominated by women.

This requires a plan for competence development which includes areas outside the normal work tasks that employees are currently assigned to. Employers often look for competence outside the company or workplace without seeing the potential resources that already exist. It is possible to introduce work rotation, mentorship and to employ members of the under-represented gender as temporary staff.

- **Recruitment**

Women and men are involved to the same extent in the labour market in Sweden, but there is a gender-divided labour market. Many occupations are traditionally considered female or male. Men and women often choose different areas of education and as a result end up in different labour markets. This is due to the values and standards instilled in the early years of schooling. There is also a wage gap between sexes; men in the Swedish labour market earn an average of 25 percent more than women. Ten percent of this cannot be explained by anything other than it is gender-related. This suggests that women's work is less valued than men's. Furthermore, gender division can be seen at different levels; women are often under-represented in higher positions, especially in the private sector. The labour market is both vertically and horizontally divided by gender.

We know that mixed-gender workplaces function best! It may take time to reach this goal, so it is important to have a long-term recruitment plan. When this plan is produced, questions must be asked: What are the qualifications that are in demand and what value do we give to different qualifications? Are there other qualifications that can complete or replace the traditional ones? You can also use recruitment advertisements that will appeal to both genders and interview equal numbers of men and women. Interviewers

YUP, THERE'S 100%
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BOSSES – ME!



can work in pairs; a man and a woman. Positive discrimination (employing a person with enough qualifications even though there are applicants of the other sex with superior qualifications) is allowed if it is stated in the gender equality plan or other personnel policies.

- **Survey of wage differences and gender equality wage analysis**

Wage discrimination based on sex is prohibited in Sweden. Each year the employer should conduct a survey of wage differences and ensure that there are no non-objective wage differences based on gender. All employees, including part time and casual staff, should be identified. A staff representative should also take part.

Each year the employer should establish an action plan for equal wages. This plan should show wage differences and be presented to staff and related stakeholders. Differences that cannot be explained in an appropriate way should be corrected. The plan should also contain a cost estimate and a timescale for making the required corrections. Any adjustments should be completed within three years.

The survey of wage differences should contain a comparison of equal and equivalent jobs. When producing an aid for gender neutrality and establishing fair wages, it may be practical to use some sort of tool for systematic work evaluation. This tool should provide a way of valuing and comparing different types of jobs in the workplace. When analysing results, it is not the way the job is being carried out by the employee that is evaluated, rather the different demands of different jobs. The demands that are being evaluated are knowledge, skills, responsibilities and working conditions.

Management

It is very important that the management set a good example! A leader who clearly shows the importance of the issue and who is a driving force will become a role model and a source of inspiration. Not only will employees notice the message, but also other stakeholders such as clients, suppliers, investors and share owners. It will soon become evident whether someone is saying that they are in favour of gender equality just because it is politically correct to say so. Gender equality programs are based on the co-operation of management and employees who are both involved and who work together. This creates the right conditions for clarity of values and goals.

Trade unions

The two biggest issues for trade unions are wages and the working environment. These areas are also important in gender equality programs. Therefore, gender equality legislation is a good tool for trade unions to use when they want to raise issues about the working environment and wages. Our experience is that they have not yet taken advantage of this opportunity. Among those workplaces that have participated in this project, only a few have had a trade union as the driving force for their gender equality program.

Notes

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Step by Step

How to carry out a successful gender equality programme – from words to action

A successful gender equality programme uses the legislation as an initial guide. The programme should then use organisational knowledge in carrying out an appropriate adaptation process. There are many pitfalls and it is advisable not to be too ambitious in the beginning, but instead make sure that you have the energy to direct the process forward. The first gender equality plan is likely to take some effort, but if time and resources are invested to ensure a solid foundation, future work will be so much easier.

The points below describe the first gender equality plan. Once it is finished, its annual revision will require an update of the survey of wage differences and goal adjustment. If there are already activities that update information about wage differences throughout the year, the end of year review programme can concentrate on updating goals and future objectives.

A programme may look like this:
year 1:

- Form an employee-management team
- Outline areas covered by legislation
- Analysis of legislative requirements
- Establish goals and define procedures
- Establish a timetable and specify which people are responsible for different activities
- Implement measures



subsequent years:

- Review programme areas and the analysis
- Have the goals been achieved?
- If necessary, update goals and procedures
- If required, establish a timetable and specify which people are responsible for different activities
- Implement measures



Start by forming a team

It is important that the programme is well supported. For example, staff, trade-unions and the employer should meet during the development of the gender equality plan. Some employers assign staff to create a draft or make suggestions

for a gender equality plan, which will later be approved by management. Other employers choose to do the opposite; draft a plan that is to be approved by the employees. However, it is better for management and employees to create a draft together. The risk of losing good ideas between the initial draft and its final form is reduced. However, this can be difficult because employees may become reserved in front of their boss; employees may not wish to



express their views. In these cases, management may attend group discussions occasionally and allow employees to speak more freely.

Gather ideas and facts

The very first thing someone should ask is: Are there differences in men's and women's conditions in this workplace? This question can partially be answered by having a discussion, where ideas are generated. Preferably, the discussion should be held before reading the law. Some ideas will fall flat, while others may turn into gems that make a particular gender equality program unique and successful! It is important that someone has the task of writing down everything that is said at these discussions. Making a plan is a long process. It is easy to forget what was said at the last meeting.

After ideas have been discussed it is time to take a look at how the workplace operates. This can be achieved by performing a current situation analysis. This involves gathering statistics and dividing up the information according to gender. There are differences between men and women that need to be made visible. Good preparation will make the rest of the task much easier.

If it is difficult to separate the different parts of the statistics, a survey can be conducted amongst the employees. Talking with employees and asking questions are important parts of the programme. Interaction allows the programme to become known to staff. This awareness is often most difficult but may be achieved through use of an initial employee survey.

If you feel that conducting a survey, gathering the results and analysing them is taking too long you can choose to conduct interviews with workers and assess the "gender equality thermometer" at the workplace. That is, take the "temperature" of an issue and investigate different staff opinions about gender equality.

Examples of items to include when documenting a gender equality plan:

- Number of employees on different types of assignments
- Wages, outlined according to occupation, task and gender
- Sick-leave, work-related injuries, early retirement
- Projected resignations, such as retirements and longer planned leave
- Physical and psychosocial work environment
- Work hours: full or part time, overtime, flexible time, shift
- Use of parental leave, including leave to care for a sick child
- Number of days for education
- Staffing levels during the year
- Work climate and business culture with regard to sexual violations and harassment, whether actual or potential. These include written material, individual actions or offensive images.

Draw conclusions

It is important to reflect and understand the results. It is not good enough to just establish the facts; you have to think about why things are the way they are in order to establish good goals and procedures. Try to find signs of imbalance



and any potential obstacles for gender equality. This takes knowledge of why society is the way it is. Wage differences are not a modern-day phenomenon. Even back in the 1800s, a farmhand had a salary that was 25 percent higher than the maid's. This same difference continues to be valid today.

Men's and women's conditions in their working lives mirror a pattern that has been built up over a long time. It is dangerous to explain today's differences with myths, for example "women do not wish to be the boss" or "men do not want to go on parental leave". There must be a reason why female managers are under-represented, or why fathers do not take advantage of their share of parental leave. In order to establish the right measures, these reasons need to be identified.

Establishing measurable goals

A good gender equality plan contains realistic, measurable goals and concrete procedures for each area. This includes consideration of the local circumstances. These measures do not need to cost a lot of money. With a little bit of inventiveness you can go a long way! It is also possible to prioritise. Not everything needs to happen at once; some goals may be long term, possibly aiming ten years ahead. It is important to set up some time frames and select those who are responsible for each measure. This helps both with carrying out the measures and with the plan's annual revision.

Sometimes it can be hard to draw conclusions based on the gender differences that have been found. If that is the case, you have the option to document that difference in the gender equality plan and appoint a team to analyse differences and establish proper measures.

The gender equality plan should be written in simple language that everyone can understand. Start with a summary of your current situation and then move on to the dif-

ferent areas required by law, so that the plan “is by the book”. Be specific, and avoid opt-out phrases such as “ought to”, “stimulates”, “strive for”, “as far as possible”, “shall be observed”, “aimed at”. Do not forget to report the results of the survey of wage differences and include a possible plan of action.

Gender equality plans can be different in many ways

As part of the *Know How* project, we have predominantly seen two different models of gender equality plans. One type has the six different areas of the Swedish Equal Opportunities Act as separate headings. Under each heading are the differences that have been found, followed by goals. These goals are set over varying periods of time and a person is assigned to be responsible for that goal. The second type of plan is not based on the different areas but includes all the areas as one unit. This version details an introductory chapter with a description of the background, including wage differences and analysis, followed by goals and measures. You can divide up different areas into appropriate sections, for example placing issues relating to working conditions in the policy concerning the general work environment.



Participants in the Know How project

The overriding aim of any plan is that gender equality be integrated into all policies and procedures within a workplace. Which method is better depends on the extent of the plan and the nature of the workplace. For a small workplace, a simple plan might be best. If, on the other hand, it involves a considerably larger workplace, then the plan may be divided up and linked to other already existing policies.


Follow up and recharge

A plan with clear and concrete goals is easy to assess at the end of the year.

A new survey is then carried out using an analysis comparing the previous results with current information. Is there a difference in the amount of sick leave, personnel distribution or parental leave? Has the number of female managers increased? Compare the goals previously established with the new results. If any goal has not been achieved you should explain the reasons why. Do not view it as a failure if the goals have not been met, but keep in mind the importance of analysing the reasons as to why they have not been achieved. Were the goals too high, was the time perspective too short or have circumstances changed? Ensure your goals continue to be realistic. If you have conducted a survey, save it and re-do the same survey in the future. That will give you a good understanding about what has really happened in the organisation. This evaluation forms a good base for next year's plan. Inform everyone at the workplace of the results and have a discussion about new goals.

Notes

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The image features a solid purple background. Overlaid on this background are several thin, white, overlapping circles of various sizes and orientations, creating a complex, abstract pattern. In the center of the image is a large, solid white circle. Inside this white circle, the text "Step into the Future" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and vertically.

Step into the Future

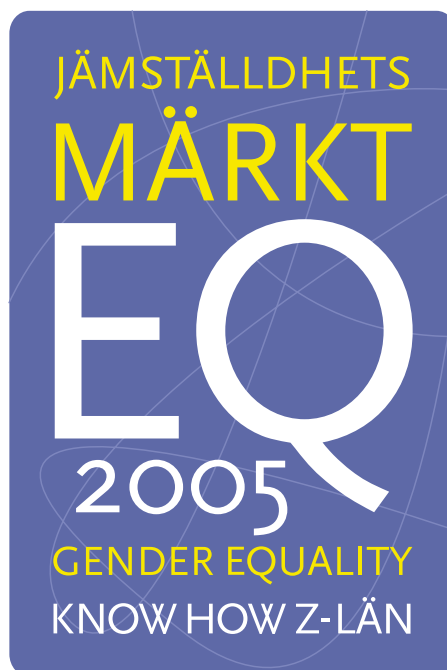
The gender equality standard

It is legally established that Swedish employers must work towards gender equality. However, to be able to work towards a quality standard makes it so much more interesting and attractive. To encourage companies to get involved in gender equality programs in Jämtland, there has been an opportunity to receive a quality standard for achievements in the area of gender equality.

The equality standard that has been introduced by the *Know How* project is unique to Jämtland. This has been named EQ-Z-County, where EQ stands for Equal Opportunities i.e. the same opportunities for both men and women. An equality standard is one way for companies to obtain positive PR and goodwill for their achievements. This gives competitive advantages and makes working with equal opportunities profitable. Consumers are able to make conscious choices. An equality standard is a source of information that contributes to the ability to choose between various companies and products. This standard also indicates that this company is an attractive employer.

The companies that have received the EQ-Z-County standard have worked from the perspective of gender equality in the following areas:

- Working conditions and the work environment
- Family life and work life
- Competence development
- Internal and external recruitment
- Sexual harassment
- Survey of wage differences
- The company's impact on society





Marknadsfakta Åre AB,
recipient of EQ-Z 2004

These criteria are connected to Sweden's Equal Opportunities Act but also consider their impact on society. In addition to working internally in the workplace with gender equality issues, they have taken the initiative to influence others, for example other companies and employers, customers, schools, shaping public opinion and so forth.

Examples of what companies can do externally includes inviting teachers, guidance counsellors and students to a study tour or going to the schools and talking about their particular line of business. Through such activities you may increase the interest of girls to apply for jobs in traditionally male trades. Other examples of what you can do are to award a gender equality prize or ask for a gender equality plan during purchase procedures.

In order to maintain credibility and keep the standard, you have to keep the gender equality program alive. The gender equality program may not wind down once you have received the equality standard. The standard is only valid for one year, after which a new application must be made.

Influencing society

Everybody has a responsibility to make society more equal and there is a lot we can do in order to speed up development. There is hardly anyone who wants to find themselves, their daughter, their son or partner discriminated against because of gender.

There are many good examples of companies and other workplaces in Jämtland that have taken on the responsibility of trying to influence society. We will now tell you about a few of them.

The local daily newspaper **Östersundsposten, ÖP**, in Östersund, Jämtland, is working towards a more equal society by critically examining society from the perspective of gender equality and so creating opinion about the issue of gender equality. The newspaper has as a policy of reflecting men and women on equal terms, for instance in the sports section. Besides that, the newspaper has had many series of articles and columns dealing with unequal conditions both in the everyday life of Jämtland and society at large. The reactions to these articles have been strong, from both men and women. This proves how strong the invisible structures are that maintain the fact that men and women live under different conditions. In cooperation with Jämtland's County Administrative Board, **ÖP** award an annual gender equality prize, where good examples of achievements which promote gender equality are highlighted.



Östersundsposten



The Swedish labour market shows a distinctive gender division into male and female occupational areas, despite the fact that all professions are open for both genders. This is due to traditional conceptions about what are typically female and male occupations. Even very young children have a clear image of those occupations that are female and male, for example who should be a kindergarten teacher or who should be a soldier, policeman or train driver. We also have gender segregated educational choices in upper secondary school and tertiary education which, in turn, adds to the gender segregated labour market.

Sweden has made attempts to correct this gender segregated labour market by trying to interest women in traditionally male occupations, but also by getting men interested in female professions. Despite this, there are structures that maintain gender division within different occupational areas and at different levels. We also wish to raise the status of female professions since they are less valued than male professions.

It is not easy to break gender boundaries, but the following are a few examples of workplaces that have initiated change.

The Swedish manufacturing and mechanical industries are male-dominated, but the company **Engcon Nordic Ltd** in Strömsund, Jämtland, is actively participating in changing the gender segregation on the labour market. Engcon Nordic Ltd is the leading manufacturer of tilt rotators on the world market. Tilt rotators are used within the contracting and forestry industries. The company is a very attractive employer. Engcon Nordic Ltd is an ISO-certified company and view gender equality as an important quality issue; they have integrated gender equality into their quality handbook. For instance, they have incorporated gender equality into their recruitment processes and they are actively searching all over the country for women with the technical competence to cover future needs. The company works actively against gender-based wage discrimination and, additio-



Engcon Nordic Ltd

nally, they work outwards eliminating prejudice about women not being suitable for an industrial environment. Personnel from the company visit schools to inform students about the industry. The idea is to push development towards less gender-based professional choices.

Engcon has a positive view of parents taking parental leave, since the company believes that being at home and taking care of children is a way to increased competence. Parental leave can be compared to leadership training!

Even other companies within the manufacturing and mechanical industries, where it is predominantly men working in production, have invited students and teachers from all levels of school and university to inform them about the

industry and to change the traditional image of it being hard and dirty work. The idea is, in the long term, to widen their recruitment base by tempting girls to try traditionally male occupational areas. Career guidance counsellors are also invited to these companies.

Students in Sweden sometimes do a one or two week long internship at different workplaces in order to get some insights into working life. In order to break the traditional gender patterns, companies have taken the initiative to offer half of their internships to girls and half to boys. This idea represents a kind of “gender fulfilment” for the internships.

Healthcare and nursing is, on the other hand, a typically female occupation when compared to the manufacturing and mechanical industries. At **Omsorg Norr**, a care company in Östersund’s local authority, they consider that an active gender equality program is necessary to raise the status of the occupation, and because they believe that an even gender distribution in the workplace results in a better atmosphere and hence a better psychosocial working environment. Omsorg Norr is actively working towards getting more men into this area since it is mostly women working with caring and nursing.



Omsorg Norr

The sanitary and cleaning industries are also typically female occupational areas. At **Lokalvården**, a cleaning company in Strömsund’s local authority, they are working on employing more men, since they believe that a more even gender distribution is beneficial in many ways. Amongst other

things, there is research showing that the social climate is improved and that the number of people on long-term sick leave is less at workplaces with an even gender distribution.



Lokalvården

There are also other ways for companies to influence their surroundings. A few years ago a company within the transport sector introduced gender equality into their purchase procedures. Companies tendering for work receive extra points if they can show that they have got a gender equality plan. This has resulted in more and more entrepreneurs placing tenders that include correct and current gender equality plans – because they want to get full points when their tender is assessed.

There are also companies that sponsor different types of sports associations. The companies can then make demands for gender equality, i.e. ensure that the sponsorship will benefit boys and girls to the same extent.

It takes time to correct the imbalance when it comes to the gender segregation of the labour market. Recruitment companies are an example of the type of company that can contribute by, as much as possible, steering personnel of the underrepresented sex to those workplaces that need new staff. Recruitment companies can participate in getting more women into occupational areas dominated by men, and more men into the ones dominated by women.

The school – a workplace for both students and personnel

The school is a workplace for both students and school personnel and it is important with a good working environment, not the least considering the children's education. If you are not happy at school it makes it hard to learn anything. Gender equality is one of the issues relating to the working environment. All the staff in schools and pre-schools are, according to the Swedish curriculum, obliged to work towards improving gender equality in the school and the prevention and avoidance of sexual harassment, gender-based bullying and other violations.



Dvårsätt School

Dvårsätt School in Krokom's local authority, Jämtland, has 220 students from pre-school to year 9, and there are about 30 teachers and other staff. The school is investing in building a common system of basic values for both staff and pupils. Gender equality is a part of this value system. Dvårsätt School wrote an action plan for how to deal with these issues and received support from the County Administrative

Board's project *Know How – Gender equality, Profitability and Health*. Their goal is a school free from any type of bullying or harassment. Through project Know How the school was the opportunity to arrange a course with Doris Marydotter, a gender equality consultant who visits Swedish schools to inform the students, staff and parents about sexual harassment and bullying. The girls were helped to improve their self-confidence and learned how to recognise the violent characteristics. She talked to the boys about their view of girls, how they define rape and how to achieve loving relationships. The teachers and parents were educated about how to identify gender patterns and signals in society and how to define sexual harassment.



Another school participating in *Know How* is **Parkskolan** in Östersund, which has pupils from grades 6–9. Parkskolan has a cooperation group where both staff and pupils from the school's gender equality group are included. They are going to produce a gender equality plan including pupils and teachers, they have conducted a survey in the school, had different activities amongst the pupils on the theme of gender equality, staff have participated in lectures and seminars regarding educational gender equality and so forth.

Dvärsätt School



Parkskolan



Odenslundsskolan

Odenslundsskolan is another school in Östersund that is participating in project *Know How*. The school has pupils from pre-school up to grade 5. The staff are continuously working with the use of language amongst the children, to avoid name calling and the use of derogatory words. These children later move up to Parksskolan. The staff have participated in lectures on the subjects of genus pedagogy, gender mobbing and sexual harassment, and also received invitations to all the seminars arranged by Know How.

The schools of **Hoting** and **Backe** in Strömsund's local authority are also taking part in *Know How*. The age of the children ranges from pre-school up to year 9. Teachers from the different schools are a part of a network in *Know How* where they can get support and advice on how to work with gender equality issues in the school. For example, the pupils have examined how girls are portrayed in newspapers, magazines and other types of media. Staff have also taken a course about how to work with gender equality plans, arranged by the *Know How* project.



Personnel from Hoting and Backe Schools

How I put on my “gender spectacles”

Dan Humble, Marketing Manager

Once upon a time... what I have experienced is like a story, a fairytale, and I would now like to share it with you.

It was just an ordinary day at my previous job when my manager came to my office and said, “You, Dan, are going to be a part of this company’s gender equality group”. What have I been lumped with now, was my first thought. I, the Marketing Manager, have got so much to do and as a member of the company’s management group, I’ve already got more than enough work. There just isn’t enough time; but I had no other choice but to do as he said.

We, that is myself, my manager and another couple of colleagues were supposed to draw up a gender equality plan for the company. It was an assignment that we did not have a lot of insight into. We sat down one day, and after a few

Dan Humble and Monika Erlandsson, Inlandsbanan



hours we had managed to get a few sentences down on a piece of paper.

We realised pretty quickly that we did not quite understand what it was all about, we didn't know enough. There is legislation in Sweden that states that a company should conduct an active gender equality program and we were only novices in this area. This insight made us invest in courses. No one else in the company grabbed the chance to educate themselves, so I and my colleague Monika felt obligated to do it. Luckily for us, as it would later on turn out, but at that time it felt like a weight on my shoulders. We attended a 10-credit course called Women's Conditions, at the University of Umeå. With the benefit of hindsight, this is the type of course that I hope more men will take the chance to attend.

One thing early that on made me understand the differences in men's and women's distribution of responsibilities in the home was when, during the course Women's Conditions, we were given an assignment to keep a record of statistics in our own home. We were told to make notes of who did what in the household, that is doing the laundry, the dishes, vacuum cleaning etc. I considered it to be a contest and worked as hard as I could. I think that my wife probably wondered if I had gone crazy. I have never – not before or later – worked so intensively around the house. After three weeks I came out as the final victor! But inside of me, I knew what it was all about – normally, my wife did all these tasks – and sure, I would vacuum once in a while, but that was nothing to speak of, really. This was my first insight into the domestic work distribution between men and women. I am now aware of all the work that needs to be done at home, and that it is not something my wife sees as her natural task or something that she likes to do of her own accord. These days the total household chores in our home can symbolically be expressed as a big circle where a number of hours should be spent on getting the work done. The most important thing is *how the hours are distributed*

between both of us, rather than doing the laundry every second day, for instance. Anyway – it suits us.

On the whole, it's like a journey for me, where structures and norms have been made clear. It has at last given me a pair of "spectacles" through which I can see the problems with gender equality. These gender equality spectacles demonstrate the injustices between the sexes that women speak of, and we men generally find hard to understand, whether in everyday life or in society at large. When the topic is discussed it easily turns into a question of guilt, which in turn leads to stalemate in the discussion and not to something constructive or changes. The times when you succeed you can introduce changes that benefit everybody.

After some time I started, as Marketing Manager, to realise a most embarrassing fact: I had previously missed out on practically half of the market. What I mean are the women who make up 50 percent of the population – why had no one pointed that out to me sooner? It is not until you recognise the social structures that you understand how much there is to be done. With new insight into gender perspectives, the marketing changed, such as advertisements, campaigns, announcements to the press etc, at the company where I worked. Different investments were analysed from a gender perspective before being launched, i.e. are we gender blind or gender neutral? Another new thing was to air everything from different aspects within the company before making final investments, because having more people participating enriched the whole. Afterwards, I can see how many resources were used up without quite understanding the whole market. One example that describes the whole problem – even if it sheds light on a different organisation – is a



story about a road tunnel being built. The men were diligently discussing how the lighting was to be arranged so that you could see where to put your foot down. When the women were given the same task, they discussed how to arrange the lighting so you could be seen by others. Nobody was right or wrong on this issue, both needs had to be met, but how often do we take things for granted in a single-gender working group.

What we were soon able to distinguish at my work was that resistance towards changes developed when the results became clearer to the people at the company. Previously, we used to encounter resistance that was subconscious – that is, individuals did not always recognise the gender structures. However, with these people there was possible to have a normal conversation and their thoughts enriched our work.

Later on we encountered conscious resistance to the proposals we wished to introduce at the company. Berit Ås, Professor of Social Psychology (Oslo, Norway) has described different domination techniques and they correlate well with what we experienced. We experienced everything from unwanted comments to the spreading of rumours of a sexual nature. Domination techniques were used to ridicule us and obstruct change. The conscious resistance that now occurred was much more worked out. Along with such resistance arises what I have chosen to call “the double organisational cost”. Who can afford that, regardless of whether it is measured in time or money; the company is paying partly for making a change and partly for the people who are, of their own accord and completely against the management group’s decision, obstructing these changes. There is a lot more to be said about this, but let’s save it for another time. However, watch out for it in the future because it is completely unacceptable, regardless of the issue at hand.

We moved on with the gender equality program at the company and began working with ideas that we introduced, major changes affecting others outside the company more

than internally. The company was financed by government funds, so we considered it a natural step to request gender equality at purchase procedures. The opponents of change realised the problems and pointed out that we would risk legal action. To me, as Marketing Manager, that was not a problem at all but rather an opportunity – what massive media attention we would receive if that was the case; an “advertising campaign” that we never would be able to purchase ourselves. With that the “problem” was solved and we moved on. Since there was no model for gender equality demands during purchase procedures we had to develop one. We awarded points at different levels depending on the company’s development on the subject. A gender equality plan attached to a tender would receive the highest score. We started applying this model and at the first purchase very few companies attached a gender equality plan – they just did not exist. People had experience of presenting environmental and quality programs etc, at purchase procedures, but not this. Eventually, everyone knew what it was all about and we managed to contribute with an obvious change.

Later on the company started making demands when sponsoring sports organisations – both genders should benefit if we were to contribute with financing. At the companies’ ten year anniversary, a competition was announced among the schools regarding different aspects of the future, one of those being gender equality.

There is a lot to be done and with my “spectacles” on there are challenges all the time. I hope that this piece of writing may help someone. For my own sake, I am glad that my manager came to my room that day a few years ago and wanted me to participate in the gender equality group. I am also glad that there were more of us who were involved otherwise we never would have reached as far as we did.

CONCLUSION

Stagnation or development?

Gender equality is an issue of equal rights, a question concerning human rights, but it is also an ethical issue since it deals with the equality of all humans, regardless of whether they are men or women. As working with gender equality deals with improving the conditions in working life for both men and women, it also contributes to better health. Health is a fundamental right of every human being, according to the World Health Organisation's health declaration of 1978. Health and well-being is the ultimate aim of economic and social development according to the WHO's strategy, "Health 21" (1998). They emphasise the ethical principles of equality, harmony, social justice and the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into all the strategies aimed at reaching the goal, Health for All.

Working with gender equality does not solve all problems, but it does contribute to a strategy for developing and creating a good business culture and working environment, both physically and psychosocially. A working environment where men and women get on well, feel good and that they are important; an environment that promotes health, efficiency and productivity. With today's tough competition for market shares, but also for recruiting competent personnel, it is important to improve the workplace on all levels, in any possible way and using any means. We need to develop jobs that everyone can cope with, and a bit of stretching during the tea-break is just not enough. It is about being given the possibility to participate and influence your own work situation. It is also about changing organisational structures. An active gender equality program is a good aid in such situations.



Next generation have already put on their gender spectacles...

Working with changes can be difficult and it is therefore important to publicise the fact that companies and organisations can actually profit from making changes. Working with equality issues is not easy and requires support from everyone. Responsibility for this type of work cannot be left to one person, however enthusiastic that person may be. The meaningful involvement of management and directors is of the utmost importance. Indeed, involvement is necessary at all levels if an equality policy is to be successfully integrated in the workplace.

These were a few examples of how you can carry out a successful gender equality program. In Sweden they are additionally adapted to the existing legislation. A few examples probably feel more useful than others. Some things you will figure out on your own during the course of the work. There are many routes to take, but the most important thing is that you find a way, a method, that suits just your workplace.

Good luck!

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes, with a large light purple circle overlaid in the center.

This book aims to be a source of inspiration for those who want to begin working with equality in the workplace. It also provides guidelines about what action should be taken, step by step. We have based our ideas on the Swedish equal opportunities legislation, but the method can also be used in other countries.

We have also written about the interesting work put into developing the quality assessment, EQ-Z-County. This assessment is a symbol that shows that the workplace actively encourages equality in thought and action.



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Camilla Simonsson is linked to the project as an equality consultant. She works with guidance, education, evaluation and project management within the area of gender equality.



Dan Humble is linked to the project as an equality consultant. He works with guidance and education about equality issues, especially from a marketing perspective.



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