

WISE – Women in Stora Enso

The core messages from the WISE research project carried out in 2002 showed that top women in Stora Enso enjoy their work, but feel that a change in attitudes has to take place to create truly equal opportunities for female managers. In particular, those involved believe that the company should start recruiting women to the Executive Management Group as well as to top positions in divisions, and set measurable goals for diversity.

To identify the factors that either support or hinder women's careers, 23 of the 25 top female managers at Stora Enso were interviewed. An independent consulting firm interviewed each woman for between two and two and half hours, and presented the results at a joint workshop. Six male managers were also interviewed to provide a male perspective.

"Market yourself!"

The female interviewees had several common features: a high level of education and a strong professional track record. However, only few had applied actively for key positions. Interviewees enjoy their work at Stora Enso, deliver results, and focus on doing a good job.

They also believe that a job well

done should be sufficient to promote their careers. The research indicates they do not generally express what they want or what they have achieved. In this sense, they are passive and modest. "Market yourself – if you've done a great job, tell them," was one interviewee's comment.

Respondents felt that women and men are channelled into different areas, often at the recruiting phase. In production in particular, women's career paths are perceived as being less accessible. Experience in production, however, was seen as a precondition for a top career in Stora Enso.

Regular career planning was seen as important for overcoming personal and organisational barriers. Other suggested actions were investigating current recruitment behaviour and stopping thinking in terms of specific male and female areas of expertise. Practically all interviewees were against quotas, even when appointing members to task forces and working groups.

"Pick the right boss!"

Interviewees believed that there is a glass ceiling at Stora Enso. Excellent leaders are appreciated, because they identify a person's potential and channel it optimally. They see women as individuals with specific expertise rather than representatives of their gender.

In the best cases, women have found that their superiors provide



Most interviewees seem to believe that merely doing your job well is enough to promote your career, but not all. As one female manager put it: "You must also market yourself – if you've done a great job, then tell them about it."

encouragement and coaching; others, however, have experienced little or no communication between male superiors and female managers. “You really have to pick the right boss if you want to make a career,” commented one manager.

“The sauna door is closed”

Interviewees stressed the importance of good networks, but creating them does not seem to be very successful generally. Women feel that men tend to favour men, particularly when it comes to choosing informal mentors and internal allies.

Other informal behavioural patterns also tend to form barriers. It is common in the Nordic countries to combine business with sauna and hunting, for example. Female managers do not hunt typically and also find themselves sitting alone for a

major part of the evening when male colleagues continue the day’s discussion in the sauna.

“When I was younger, I thought everything was possible. But now, I don’t know. It seems impossible to go higher. The sauna door is closed,” said one interviewee.

Certain countries and locations are also perceived as ‘out of bounds’ to women.

“It will take a lot”

Interviewees underlined the importance of a supportive family, as building a career “takes a lot”. On the other hand, getting the balance between work and personal life right should not be seen only as a female issue.

“I hope we don’t only want divorced people and people without children working at Stora Enso,” commented one woman manager.

Combining work and family seems easier in some countries than others. Some people commented that sites in Sweden are probably more flexible in this respect.

Many women appear to handle their professional and family roles well. Some interviewees pointed out that managing both successfully calls for prioritising. “You have to give up something,” said one of the managers interviewed.

Ready to change

Based on the results of the study, both long and short-term action plans will be prepared and approved by top management. The plan will focus on increasing the number of women in top management positions, creating better possibilities for internal networking, and improving the visibility of women in Stora Enso. ■