

## English summary

In 1993 the Government instructed a Commission to collect and collate information about progress towards an even representation of women and men at managerial level in different companies and industries. The work of the Commission led to the report *Men's perceptions of women and management*, Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU) 1994:3. In May 2002 I was commissioned by the Government to undertake a follow-up inquiry to that report. After nine years there was a need to update the picture and investigate current patterns of change and, perhaps, the will for change, as regards women in leading positions in the business sector. The terms of reference for this inquiry state that the Commissioner is to follow up on the previous inquiry and shed light on developments since 1993. The inquiry is to produce statistics on women and men in leading positions in different industries and different counties. It is to map the progress towards an even representation of women and men among corporate managers. Patterns of change and the will for change are to be studied on the basis of interviews with managers, agents of change and professional women. The inquiry is to include an account of research and development in Sweden in the area of gender and organisational structures since 1993.

The empirical section of the follow-up consists primarily of a new survey of large organisations and new interviews with agents of change. The survey has been carried out using a questionnaire focusing on two areas: first, sex distributions among senior personnel, and secondly, measures taken by organisations to promote change in the sex distribution in managerial positions. The sample in the interview study consists of 20 agents of change. The theoretical frame of reference has been deployed over a number of different chapters. The overview of theoretical studies on women as managers that is given in this report has been taken over from SOU 1994:3. The theoretical position adopted in the field of orga-

nisational structure and gender follows a tradition characterised by a critical power and structure-based perspective on questions of management and gender. Proceeding from this perspective, certain new themes have been taken as the starting point for linking this inquiry to research in the field. These themes are women's opportunities to be owners and entrepreneurs in historical retrospect, a discussion of women's representation on boards of directors, men as corporate leaders and the construction of masculinity, the situation of young business leaders, and research on processes of change. These chapters together make up the interpretative framework for the empirical sections of the study.

## **Results**

Most of the organisations in the study are privately owned limited companies. A total of 500 organisations are included in the survey. 87 per cent of the organisations studied have boards dominated by men, i.e. more than 60 per cent of board members are men. In the group of privately owned companies, 93 per cent of company boards are dominated by men. 42 per cent of the organisations have no women on their boards. On average, women make up 17 per cent of the boards in the study and men 83 per cent. In privately owned companies, the proportion of women is lower (13 per cent). A large proportion of the women on company boards are union representatives – 31 per cent of the female board members in all companies and 37 per cent in privately owned companies.

86 per cent of the organisations have top management teams that are dominated by men. In 32 per cent of them, the management is made up exclusively of men. For privately owned companies the corresponding figures are 90 and 34 per cent respectively. Women constitute 18 per cent of management in all organisations and 16 per cent in privately owned companies. The most common sphere of responsibility for women in top managerial positions is personnel/human resources (24 per cent). The next most common activity for women in top managerial positions is financial management. Turning to organisations with young managers (aged 35 or younger), 42 per cent have no women at managerial level.

The historical background presented shows the conditions facing women board members and managers. There are few studies in this area. The research review shows that women have worked and

run companies in spite of the obstacles posed by legislation. Both civil law and labour legislation have made it difficult for women to take part in working life. The study described in chapter 2 has mainly discussed women on the boards of limited companies during the period 1918–1973, based on data from the Swedish Industrial Directory. The findings are unambiguous: women have played a very minor role in company boards during this period. The role played by women in the companies discussed here shows that they have owed their opportunity to exert an influence to their family ties to the companies concerned. Relatively small family firms seem to have constituted women's opportunity to work as board members.

Theories about management and gender largely have to do with knowledge of gender constructions in organisations, and the practical consequences of gender-based structures. One issue that has occupied a central place in the research has been the search for interpretations of the reproduction of male dominance in positions of power. One conclusion that can be drawn from the research is that the sex distribution in leading positions, with men in the majority and women non-existent or in a minority, has consequences for both the shape taken by management and organisational structures. There is an exaggerated tendency to cherish expectations that organisations will change simply because younger people take a place in them. This conceals the fact that women and men do not enter and establish themselves in organisations on equal terms. The view that gender equality is a generational issue, moreover, ignores the fact that progress towards a more equal society has been prepared by certain historical conditions and substantial efforts to bring about change.

The findings show that 78 per cent of the organisations carry on systematic gender equality work. In the 1993 questionnaire survey (SOU 1994:3), 58 per cent of the organisations responded that they had systematic gender equality work. A gender equality plan is the most commonly occurring form of gender equality work, which is hardly surprising given the fact that a gender equality plan is required by law. The next most common forms of gender equality work target recruitment, wages and salaries, working hours and other conditions of work. 18 per cent of the organisations have courses on gender issues and just 12 per cent use networks for women. 50 per cent of the organisations state that they have decla-

red officially that they want to increase the number of women managers.

The review of theoretical studies of gender equality work shows that a great deal is known even now about the forms such action takes, the resistance it can encounter and the results that are often aimed for. We also know a certain amount about the parties generally involved in the work and the influence this has on its prospects. However, the research draws attention to the fact that this is a complicated area and that it is appropriate to constantly question both methods and assumptions regarding problems and solutions.

The results of the interviews with agents of change provide a picture of the methods used to promote change. Some of the methods that occur are the same as in the earlier study, while a number of new approaches have also shown up. The changes that have taken place can be described in two ways: changes in the way organisations are working and shifts to other arenas. Within organisations today, there are fewer individual, targeted projects in the area of sex distribution in leading positions. Action to promote change is now more often integrated into other activities. In addition, we observe that reform endeavours have shifted to the social and individual levels.

### **Concluding reflections**

We have seen that men continue to dominate leading positions in large organisations in the private sector. We have also seen that organisations are engaged in efforts to bring about change, aiming to create a more even representation of the sexes. There has been a trend towards an increased proportion of women in leading positions since 1993. It has further emerged that gender equality work at organisations has grown in scope since that time and has also, to some extent, changed in character. Half of the organisations in the study indicate that they regard the skewed sex distribution at managerial level as a problem, compared with just a third in 1993. In other words, there are indications of an increased awareness of the problem. On the other hand, the proportion of women among young managers is low. Most of the reform endeavours that are undertaken are of the type prescribed in the Act concerning Equality between Men and Women. As has been the case historically, the legislation continues to play a major role in the work of establi-

shing a level playing field for women and men in working life. The number of targeted projects taking place within organisations and aimed explicitly at increasing the proportion of women in senior positions has declined. Looking at the overall attitude to the issue in society, it appears as if support for change and resistance to change have both increased. Paradoxically enough, increased visibility in the public arena has sometimes had the effect of making the issue less visible within organisations. At organisation level too, there is a feeling that though there is more “talk” about the issue, it is not necessarily linked to “action”. How is this perceived discrepancy between words and action to be interpreted? One interpretation is that it constitutes a new form of resistance to change. An alternative interpretation is that it is a necessary stage in a process of change, in which there is inevitably a certain time lag between words and action.