

# How to achieve gender balance at the top in business



Norwegian Ministry  
of Children and Equality

Norwegian Ministry of Trade,  
Industry and Fisheries

# TIPS FOR BETTER GENDER BALANCE AT THE TOP

Norway is one of the world's most gender-equal countries. But atop the Norwegian business community, women are far from equal participants. Numerous studies show that companies with a diverse senior management have better earnings and a competitive advantage. Improved gender balance will benefit women and men alike while enhancing companies' productive power and society's sustainability.

Among Norway's 200 largest companies, only one of 10 chief executives is a woman. In the top executive committees of those companies, the share is 22 per cent. We have grown weary hearing some companies excuse their lack of diversity at the top by claiming there are no qualified women for certain positions, or that those who are qualified don't want the job.

Qualified women exist, and companies must take charge of ensuring that more women are given an opportunity to work their way up and gain leadership experience. Companies must actively facilitate the hiring of managers who reflect our society's diversity. Some companies have stepped forward to do just that, and we believe their experience along the way will be useful in challenging other companies and promoting change.

We have therefore invited business leaders and the executive search firms to discuss what the business community itself can do to improve gender balance in the upper levels of management. One result is this overview of measures which the business community itself believes – and research from the Institute for Social Research/CORE shows – are the key ways of increasing diversity.

Recruiting senior executives from the entire population strengthens companies in the battle for the best minds. Diversity at all levels boosts innovation power and can make a difference to the bottom line. That's a language we know business people understand.

That is why we also expect private enterprises to step up and assume responsibility – by applying purposeful strategies, deliberate recruitment practices and other measures to improve gender balance so that diversity in business will increase as it has in other sectors. Strong individual women and bold companies have begun to crack the glass ceiling. It is now time to break through.

# KEY FIGURES

Few female  
senior executives



22 %

Few female  
CEOs



10 %

Few female  
board members



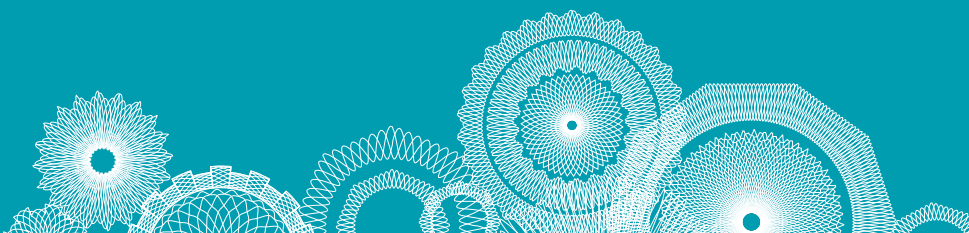
31 %

SHARE OF WOMEN IN THE 200 LARGEST COMPANIES BY REVENUE, 2018.  
ALL FIGURES: CORE NORWEGIAN GENDER BALANCE SCORECARD.

## A TOOLBOX OF STRATEGIES AND MEASURES

Here are the business community's best ideas for increasing the share of women in top management. Together they amount to a toolbox of ways to inspire change.

The business community is made up of large and small enterprises spanning sectors and industries. For that reason, not all measures will be equally effective in all cases. Pick from the toolbox those that suit your company best in the effort to improve gender balance at the top.





## TOP MANAGERS MUST TAKE CHARGE

Gender equality begins with the board and executive committee. They must take active responsibility for getting more women into the top ranks. Companies that succeed are those that set goals and make gender equality an integral part of company strategy.

- Make a gender equality declaration
- Set goals for gender balance at all levels
- Discuss gender balance and gender equality at executive meetings
- Tell employees that the board and management team are working to get more female executives
- Evaluate managers annually on movement towards gender balance
- Ensure that the administration has ownership of the goals



*The chairman must make demands of the chief executive. That was done to me in 2008, when we had 23 per cent women in levels 1 to 5. I was evaluated at the end of each year, and if I didn't make progress I really heard about it. If I didn't make progress I felt, quite simply, that I hadn't done my job.*

Rune Bjerke, DNB



## HAVE GOOD PLANS

To achieve the goal of greater gender equality, the board and management team must take charge by creating a clear strategy and action plan to achieve the goals set by the company.

- Produce an overview of the share of women and men at different levels
- Analyse the figures and identify the company's challenges
- Use the analysis to set concrete, realistic goals and make a plan to achieve the goals
- Announce the plan to everyone in the organisation, raising awareness about the work to be done



*From medicine we know that if you make the wrong diagnosis, the treatment won't work. We'd be very dissatisfied with a 16% success rate for treatment. That is why we use an evidence-based approach in medicine.*

Marie Louise Sunde, #SheGotThis



## MEASURE PROGRESS

What gets measured gets done. If the results don't show progress towards gender equality, the actions and plans being implemented must change.

- Measure changes in gender balance over time
- Evaluate actions you have implemented
- Make changes if you don't see progress
- Announce the results to employees, for instance at an open staff meeting



*We have developed tools that let us measure whether the company is succeeding in regard to women's representation in management (...). What we want, we achieve!*

Petter Stordalen, Nordic Choice Hotels



## RECRUIT

Recruiting must be done in a thorough, structured and systematic way. Require executive search firms to include equal numbers of men and women in all phases. It is crucial that both sexes are represented in the final round when recruiting a new manager.

- Establish requirements and formulate job announcements to attract both female and male applicants
- Make demands of head-hunters, but let them challenge you in the recruitment process
- Be flexible and dare to think fresh. Consider candidates with different career backgrounds and expand the age range
- Always have men and women on the final list



*Our customers often have a certain set of specifications and a background in mind for their favourite candidate (...). But the challenges the executive faces will quite likely be completely different.*

Trine Larsen, Hammer & Hanborg



## BUILD TALENT

Good leaders are built early. The company must work long and strategically on talent development, manager development and succession planning. Those in charge must ensure openness about career pathways and what kinds of expertise the company values. Strong support from an immediate superior is important in motivating and encouraging young talent to accept leadership positions with profit and loss responsibility.

- Evaluate young talent throughout the organisation – consider both women and men
- Leadership development must extend to managers at all levels
- Ensure that talented people of both sexes acquire the expertise necessary for a top management position, for example by facilitating mobility between staff and line positions
- Create internal networks and meeting places across the industry
- Establish mentor and sponsorship schemes to motivate talented people to seize opportunities that arise



*We believe that having a sponsor helps women to grow and flourish. A mentor ensures that women survive in their current positions.*

**Ingjerd Birkelund, Experis**





## FACILITATE

Companies must show that combining career and family is both possible and desirable. Management must take responsibility for helping to change stereotypical attitudes about gender, leadership and management roles.

- As a leader – set a good example and show that it's possible to successfully combine family and career
- Show that you expect fathers to take parental leave and stay home with a sick child
- Counsel women and men who return from parental leave and make sure that their career and salary plans are addressed
- Prevent and have zero tolerance for sexual harassment, intimidation techniques and discrimination



*When my partner and I choose to have children sometime in the future, it must be equally career-impeding for both parties. Expect him to take a long parental leave and help clear the way for it. And when I am on leave I want follow-up support with good communication. When our children are in kindergarten and you see my husband at work at 8 a.m. on the 13th of December, then yes, I think you should go up to him and ask why in the world he's not at kindergarten celebrating Saint Lucy's Day.*

Marie Kjellstrøm Thorkildsen, ADA



## UTILISE RESOURCES

The business community should make optimal use of available resources. Failing to use available labour capacity benefits neither corporate value creation nor society's overall sustainability.

- Make it clear that women and men in all phases of life fit into the company – in all types of positions. Good opportunities include job announcements and picture selection for company profiling
- Work to create interest in your company and its business. For example, a technology company could pursue activities that spark interest in technology among girls and boys



*Show that men and women in all of life's phases are welcome in the company. Women squeezed for time, parents of small children – I have never seen anyone work as fast as they do. For many of us, they are worth emulating.*

Rune Garborg, Vipps



## TAKE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The business community has a social responsibility to help achieve gender equality in working life, as does each company as part of its overall strategy.

- Require partners and suppliers to commit to gender equality
- Work for gender equality measures, such as parental leave, when operating in the global market
- Collaborate with organisations and groups that support gender equality and gender balance



*We have just introduced parental leave globally. Not for women, but for all employees. The goal is to signal that everyone is equally valuable, but also to allow people who want more balance in their working life (...) to see that it's possible to also have a management career.*

Magne Hovden, Equinor

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