

Involving men in the challenges of gender equality



I. Why include men in professional equality processes?

What is changing now

Men have had little say on the subject of professional equality between themselves and women up to now, as if the question could only be viewed from a female perspective. Is this due to men's lack of interest in the issue? to male introversion? to an under-estimation of the stakes at play and the benefits that could be derived from greater professional equality?

These remarks mask many others. Just like women, men are prisoners of gender stereotypes, which perpetuate the traditional distribution of male and female roles in their professional and private worlds, as well as workplace behavioural norms that are today out of step with the major changes in society that have taken place since the 1960s.

- women have massively entered the workforce ;
- in the majority of couples, both partners work ;
- family patterns have altered (rise in divorce rates);
- male identity has evolved, accompanied by new professional and personal expectations.

Restricted logics that lock up men and women in their respective gender stereotypes also penalize businesses, preventing them from benefiting from the advantages of gender diversity. The relative "breakdown" in professional equality processes focussed solely on women has obliged them to start thinking and acting differently.



I.1. Corporate obligation to act

- Men are starting to air their views and express their desire to become involved in daily, paternal relations, to reach a better work/life balance, to include more flexibility in their organization of work.
- DHR and some managers recognize that work/life balance issues are raised more openly by men, especially younger men, in the business world.
- Through the European Commission and the Council of Europe, Europe is encouraging national governments to develop action promoting the inclusion of men in professional equality processes.

There are many benefits to share, for men and women as much for organizations.

- "Equality allows each of us, women and men, to have a more complete life ", as the Council of Europe points out;
- It also allows organizations to modernize their corporate culture, to make all of their processes more efficient (recruitment, organization of work, career management) and coherent with social responsibility, a vector for social justice, attractiveness, loyalty and performance.

I.2. ORSE broadens the issue to include men

More and more businesses are accepting the need to approach these problems openly and make them a subject of dialogue with unions.

The role of Orse (the French Study Centre for corporate social responsibility), an association set up in 2000 to

bring together representatives of corporate management, trade unions and government, is to promote and accompany this movement; and share the most recent thinking and good practices as widely as possible, so that professional equality between men and women may gain new strength.

2. Gender stereotypes, cultural constraints: men also want to break free!

After 25 years of French public policies to promote professional equality between women and men, one thing is sure. Action centred specifically on women has shown its limits. Professional equality cannot be achieved without involving men and promoting the benefits equality holds out for them.

Indeed, equality is beneficial to everyone. Thus, the 2007 Gender Gap Report demonstrates an observed correlation between gender equality and the level of development in countries. Many studies have shown that reducing gender inequalities contributes to increased productivity and economic growth.

Involving men in the pursuit of equality thus appears to be the logical next step. As such, an overall debate must be held on the traditional roles attributed to women and men, gender stereotypes and the promotion of equality in private, public and economic spheres.

"If we really want to make progress on the issue of professional and domestic equality, if we truly want to make progress on the issue of harmonization of working and private life, we must take an interest in men... involve men", says Sylviane Giampino, psychoanalyst

An original initiative - The Norwegian men's panel

In 2007, the Norwegian Minister for Childhood and Equality, Karita Bekkemellem, set up a "men's panel", comprised of 32 men from the political, artistic and sporting worlds as well as personalities from the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, to discuss the rights of men (notably concerning divorce, guardianship of children and health).

In March 2008, the panel drafted a memorandum, in contribution to the preparation of a government white paper on "the role of men in society", and proposed a series of recommendations on the issues of education, violence, health and the integration of migrants. The white paper was debated in parliament in autumn 2008.

2.1. Male identity built on career and professional commitment

2.1.1. Traditional models of masculinity

By raising the model of the man as "bread-winner" to the status of norm, industrial society has contributed to fashioning a representation of male identity in which work plays a central part. However, while traditional representations of the woman as mother and guardian of the home have gradually been challenged by feminist movements and the massive entry of women into the workforce, male identity still remains largely circumscribed to the professional sphere.

Reconsidering the image of masculinity: observations made by the Council of Europe

At a conference organized by the Council of Europe in 1997, one of the workshops evoked the traditional role of men and its resulting constraints:

Masculinity is customarily associated with power, the exercise of authority and force. The following assumptions derive from this male stereotype:

- men must dominate to prove their masculinity;
- power, emulation and authority are necessary ingredients for the affirmation and confirmation of masculinity;

- work and career are the main criteria of masculinity;
- men believe that work and success guarantee personal happiness;
- men's self image and self respect depend essentially on success and progress.

Only 5.7% of men work part-time in France

These are all reasons for businesses to launch awareness-raising campaigns and training sessions in order to trigger discussion with their employees - especially management - on the potential advantages for the company of replacing a male culture with a human culture. "Men are worth more than the male society".

In France, the percentage of active men between 15 and 64 years is 74.6%, as against 65.3% for women. Moreover, 30.2% of women worked part-time in 2007, according to a study by INSEE, compared to only 5.7% of men. Thus, men are massively more implicated in the working world than women.

2.1.2. A lesser commitment to the personal and family spheres

A study of current data on the division of tasks and distribution of domestic work shows persistent inequality. It is clear that this is a key source of inequality with direct consequences on the access of women to diversified professional careers and on their work / life balance.

According to a BVA poll conducted for ORSE in November 2008, 81% of the French consider that women could make a career more easily if men were to become more involved in family and domestic activities.

- Women devote twice as much time to domestic tasks as men. Whereas 60% of women with 2 children (including one under 3 years old) remain active, the rate drops to 37% for 3 children or more (INSEE 2008), clearly showing the impact of family life on female careers.
- Moreover, this imbalance does not seem to satisfy men. Those least happy with their work / life balance are the men for whom the share of domestic and parental tasks is also the least egalitarian.

2.2. The emergence of new aspirations in the face of die-hard stereotypes

2.2.1. Men determined to devote time to their private lives: has this tendency come to stay?

More and more men are challenging the role of work as central to their identity. They aspire to a better balance between their professional and private lives, whether the aim be to devote more time to their family or to their personal projects outside work.

Sylviane Giampino, psychoanalyst, explains: "Men now agree with women on one point: don't stake everything on work to succeed in life. Managerial violence, bottom-line management, ejection seats at all levels... all these are triggering reactions.

Men who, until the 1990s, relied on their career investment to secure their future and that of their family, have since discovered that regardless of their personal merits and skills, and despite having devoted all their energy to working for them for generations, businesses can no longer be relied upon."

They then find themselves confronted with many stereotypes and restrictions that impinge on their true aspirations. Indeed, paradoxically, the higher men rise

within the hierarchy, the more they are confronted with the company's pressing demands on their availability, resulting (sometimes despite themselves) in their giving higher priority to their professional activity.

A study of a group of 400 father / managers and 60 father / senior managers and directors in major French companies reveals strong, practical expectations from employees with respect to balancing issues. Two out of every three father / managers aspire to a better work/life balance.

"I take account of the life balance variable in managing my career evolution. I try to pass messages and I have my limits; if I exceed them it could lead to a divorce from the company. We live in a two-speed company. Most of the older colleagues do not understand this sort of issue."

20% of the fathers questioned in a study on "Father managers", would be ready to change companies to improve the balance between their professional and private lives.

2.2.2. Stereotypes that continue to hem men into unlimited professional commitment

Restricted logics that limit men and women to their respective, stereotyped, gender roles penalize both businesses (which cannot draw benefit from gender diversity), and women (who cannot make a career despite having all the necessary professional qualities) but they also penalize men who endure their daily work without being able to enrich it through their non-professional lives.

The sociologist, Dominique Méda, explains that "the men she has interviewed state that, when they have decided to temporarily interrupt or reduce their

worktime (only 6% of men do so upon the arrival of a child, as against almost 40% of women according to a recent survey), the business, their colleagues and even their entourage have reacted very badly".

"When a man embarks on a career, performance rhymes with presence, and total availability to the company..."

As long as this model of work organization continues to structure most companies, there is a good bet that the social models concerning distribution of domestic and family tasks and the sharing of private and worktime hours between women and men is unlikely to change", adds Rachel Silvera, economist.

■ The culture of physical presence

However, these expectations are held in check by a male organizational culture that manifests itself in total, even sacrificial, availability of men with responsibilities. As Frédéric Tiberghien, Honorary President of ORSE, explains: "in France, senior managers and directors are still required to be physically present. This remains a positive criterion of performance assessment."

Personal accounts collated for a study project bear witness to these difficulties: "part-time work is clearly seen as an obstacle to a man's career. And for fast track potential, it is simply unthinkable!"

"A brilliant manager did not get promotion because he wanted to go home every evening at 7p.m. Yet everyone knew he was the right person for the job".

■ Gradual change

Nevertheless, senior management is gradually becoming aware of the extent of such aspirations. Philippe Vivien, DHR for the Areva group, considers that "the generation that has just arrived in the company more firmly expresses its ability to take a break between professional and private life. I think that the aspirations are not new, but they were not expressed before."

Bernard Thibault, Secretary-General of the CGT employee union, sees gender diversity as an opportunity to reconsider the strenuousness of some working conditions, and describes "work worlds impregnated with a male chauvinist culture in which daring to say that one is suffering is seen to be proof of weakness".

2.3. What can men and women gain?

2.3.1. Involve men for greater equality

Involving men in corporate professional equality policies:

- frees women from the "fragile or discriminated minority" category - which can actually be harmful to them in the long-run - in order to concentrate on the inequalities experienced by all employees;
- avoids setting categories of employees off against each other: women against men, employees with children against employees without children, youth against seniors;

- avoids gender stereotypes that penalize women and men, thereby enabling modernization of corporate culture;
- federates all employees on a subject that concerns them closely: greater harmony between their professional and private lives; and
- leads to reconsideration of processes, action and tools which will in the end be beneficial to all and enable organizations to become more efficient.

2.3.2. Men also benefit from action undertaken on behalf of women

The report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, dated 23 October 2008, entitled "Involving men in achieving gender equality", states that men have more to gain from a more equal society. In effect, gender equality is not a zero sum game. Reinforcing the role of women does not weaken the position of men – on the contrary. It is noted, thus, that action in favour of women's careers provides as many benefits to men in the end.

■ Adapting working conditions

This is notably the case for the adaptation of working conditions undertaken in order to allow women to access certain jobs (weight to be carried, ergonomics of equipment, etc). The feminisation of certain jobs, made possible by the adjustment of working tools and efforts on ergonomics, tends to reduce their overall hardship with direct spin-offs for men.



■ Introduction of services for better work/life balance

Businesses that originally introduced services with a view to promoting the careers of women by easing their domestic tasks, such as corporate day-care, services aimed at linking employees with people offering personal services, or corporate concierges, observe that men also make regular use of them.

Jean-Claude Legrand, DHR and Global Diversity Director at L'Oréal, states that "today human resources directors and managers have to be creative and audacious to manage dual careers as best they can. In France, in order to simplify life for these young parents, we have opened three corporate day-care centres in the space of two years in the Paris region alone, and we plan to open some in our provincial facilities as well. And this does not just concern women. Today, 20% of our employees with a child in company day-care are men."

3. Businesses: good reasons to involve men

"In France, equality between men and women at work and between fathers and mothers at home does not add up. Why do we continue to use the same old recipes?", Sylviane Giampino, psychoanalyst

Professional equality cannot be achieved without involving men in the process. While this calls for targeted public policy, notably the adoption of measures allowing men to balance their private and professional lives better,

it also requires the active participation of businesses.

As the sociologist, Dominique Méda, points out, French men and women "expect greater involvement on the part of businesses to improve the reconciliation of professional and family life, both through reorganisation of work schedules and through the provision of child-care structures."

3.1. A conducive European framework

In France, the involvement of men in equality processes may appear to be a recent preoccupation. Europe, however, has considered the involvement of men to be one of its strategic orientations since the early 2000s and has been encouraging businesses to innovate and act accordingly. Two European bodies are working in this direction.

■ The European Commission

- An injunction: "The Roadmap for equality between women and men", a 4 year framework for action

From 4 to 5 May 2006, the Commission presented its "Roadmap for the period 2006-2010" to all European actors in the area of equality between women and men. The Roadmap outlines six priority areas for EU action:

- equal economic independence for women and men;
- reconciliation of private and professional life;
- equal representation in decision-making;
- eradication of all forms of gender-based violence;
- elimination of gender stereotypes;
- promotion of gender equality in external and development policies.

■ Monitoring: Annual Equality Reports

- The 2007 Equality Report provides precise recommendations for action: "It is important to ensure that parental leave is targeted at both men and women and is, in particular, individual (non-transferable) and financially attractive, that it can be taken over several periods, and that its duration is not a barrier to returning to work"; "It is opportune to promote paternity leave which makes it possible to involve fathers in domestic and family responsibilities from the day their children are born"; "The fight against stereotypes should be intensified at all levels by all parties involved and should be aimed, in particular, at men and companies".
- The 2008 Equality Report concluded that there is a need for "improving both the supply and quality of services helping to reconcile professional and private life for both men and women"; "tackling stereotypes in education, employment and the media and emphasising the role of men in promoting equality".

■ The European Commission

- A recommendation: involve men

On 28 November 2008, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the body responsible for making recommendations to national governments on all human rights related action, adopted a recommendation entitled "Involving men in achieving gender equality" and urged governments to:

- educate men on gender equality issues and offer a framework to encourage them to take an active part in tasks traditionally assigned to women (childcare, management of social and educational matters) ...;
- promote the position of women on the labour market and their access to decision-making positions, and thus help to tackle unequal pay; and

- accordingly, introduce special programmes to promote parenthood and ways of reconciling work and private life among male employees in the civil service and encourage companies in the private sector to do the same.

- An observation: persistent curbs on the involvement of men

"Despite the adoption of legal measures in favour of better involvement of men in family life, male wage-earners balk at resorting to these mechanisms. This may be explained by a culture of presenteeism, the dangers involved for professional career development, the persistence of stereotyped representations in society (the "male bread-winner" versus the "woman ideal home-maker") and in the business world, as reflected in advertising, as well as the incomprehension or hostility of one's employer, colleagues or family group".

3.2. What can businesses gain?

Benefits of promoting gender diversity

In sum, including men in the review of professional equality issues is not just a question of social equity. Businesses that tackle this task will gain in a number of ways:

- Attractiveness: men, especially younger men, are very aware of work/life balance issues because work is no longer their only source of personal well-being nor the only basis for their social ties.
- Quality of life at work: employees who express this wish do not want to work more, or less, but better. Taking an interest in the articulation of their working hours and free time promotes the quality of their working life.

- Innovation and efficiency of human resources: taking account of the needs of all employees concerning free time facilitates the adoption of better means of work organization and better management of professional careers.
- Social innovation: the involvement of men in equality action will make it more effective and allow businesses to benefit from the advantages of gender diversity.
- Economic performance: the correlation between gender diversity within teams, notably at the highest levels, and corporate performance has been regularly demonstrated by a number of studies. (MacKinsey, Catalyst ...)
- Loyalty and motivation: wellbeing at work, social equity and more generally the social and societal commitment of businesses are all key factors for retaining the best talent.

3.3. Ways to act and examples of good practice

Increasingly, businesses are taking a direct approach to the issue of male involvement in professional equality processes. They turn it into a subject of dialogue with unions and sign enterprise agreements on professional equality that mention the responsibility of the business "to challenge cultural stereotypes of the image of men and women faced with family constraints". They implement targeted action directed at men and have begun to participate in ORSE working groups.

The French believe that in order to "allow parents to better reconcile work and family life" businesses should give priority to the adjustment of work schedules (61%) and the development of in-house child care (58%). Equal numbers of men and women (51%) ask for a change in the mentalities of company managers and directors. ("Men and women face to face with family and professional life", ORSE/BVA poll, November 2008).

Businesses that tackle this issue must:

- Reconsider business culture to combat gender stereotypes and introduce a real debate between men and women on the benefits of shared equality;
 - Overhaul the entire HR process, especially work practices and professional career management, so that men, like women, may balance their professional and private lives better.
- Modernize business culture and combat gender stereotypes

Here are some examples of leverage for corporate action.

- Promote the involvement and exemplariness of Directors

Leading male decision-makers to personally testify to their choice of work/life balance, by asking them to express the difficulties they have met with and any regrets, can help other employees who do not normally dare to express their difficulties (often men) to speak freely. Designating a male director to talk about the issue, both internally and externally, has exemplary value.

- Help employees, especially managers, to question gender stereotypes through awareness raising action

Some businesses now propose dedicated training modules for managers and employees concerning professional equality and the articulation of professional and private life. This training allows them to better understand and combat gender stereotypes.

- Use women's and/or mixed networks to involve men in professional equality issues

Some businesses have set up women's networks open to men, or voluntarily mixed networks, in order to raise the awareness of men on professional equality issues, benefit from their contribution and debate the common risks and benefits.

- Develop gender diversity in all debating and negotiation arenas and raise the issue of reconciling work time for all

As some professional equality agreements point out, the success of action aimed at promoting gender equality within a business depends on the mobilization of all the actors: the Board, communication director, DHR, managers, employees and union representatives.

- Allow men to comment on work/life balance issues.

Such an initiative was taken by BNP Paribas in 2008, when it conducted an original survey among male employees on the theme of "work/life balance".

- Use in-house communication channels to promote commitments made to male employees to help them better reconcile their professional and private lives.

AXA France - Extract from the Guide to good practices: "diversity and equal opportunities"

As a father, can I ask to work part-time?

Yes. Just like any other employee within the company. Measures in favour of parenthood apply to all parents without distinction. Fathers can thus benefit from flexible working hours. The charter on parenthood also takes specific account of the problem of the rhythm of work with regard to individual constraints and needs.

*Interview with Frédéric Lavenir, DHR of the BNP-PARIBAS Group
At BNP Paribas, what have you done to help employees surmount stereotypes?*

"Our network of women, called MixCity, is an example of a concrete response to this question. Its meetings are always held during working hours of course. We have sought to give visibility to the network so that men may feel challenged, or perhaps even discover common interests with women. Even if MixCity is a women's network, they regularly invite men in top management to come and speak. The latter are challenged because they have to reply to questions from a group of women. It works; the reactions are varied, serious, pontificating or sometimes ironic, but it destabilises men and obliges them to question themselves. It can even lead to changes in management behaviour when they feel criticised. I believe a great deal in the value of management example

- Adopt more flexible routines, reconsider professional careers and improve accompaniment

"If we have to reorganise working time, the best solution would be to redistribute it between fathers and mothers, for the greatest good of everyone: couples, children and businesses."
Sylviane Giampino, psychoanalyst

- Regulate work meetings for everyone

Many businesses have adopted "meeting charters" that lay down principles regarding efficiency (agenda, objectives sought) and rules on scheduling. These allow all employees to better articulate their professional and private lives.

- Promote male / female equality in work time reorganisation

Men questioned during an inquiry observed that flexible working mechanisms, especially part-time work, remain relatively "taboo" for men. Management can tackle this issue and propose action to promote equal access of men and women to the reorganisation of working time.

"In France, the on-site presence culture, the overwhelming weight of men in corporate management and the unilateral power of business owners recognized by the French Employment Code, means that we have progressed more slowly than other countries on issues of reconciling private and professional life"
Frédéric Thibergien, Honorary President of ORSE.

- Allow men to take leave during unforeseen family crises

Corporate integration of unforeseen family events and child sickness leave still continues to be seen as a problem for women. Discussion forums can propose an even-handed debate on these issues to ensure that men, like women, benefit from the greatest possible organizational flexibility.

- Promote recourse to paternity leave

PSA Peugeot Citroën (2007)

"Nationally, disparities subsist between the professional career paths of women and men, due in particular to the fact that leave for family reasons is almost invariably taken by women.

The Parties agree that corporate professional equality will not be able to progress unless parenthood is better integrated within businesses, such that men also take this type of leave, without being discredited by their colleagues and hierarchy."

"We have worked a lot on individual career paths by taking targeted action on levels of promotion, disengagement, identifiable glass ceilings, etc. By dealing with these career management issues for women as well as men, we also want to allow men to make the choice of a professional career integrating a family dimension."

Frédéric Lavenir, DHR of the BNP-Paribas Group.

A Website: www.all-together.org, "Decalogue for companies and Organizations" (10 reasons to facilitate the involvement of your male personnel in their family and domestic responsibilities)

- And elsewhere?

Information campaigns for men in Belgium, Denmark and in France

Some countries have established information campaigns aiming to inform fathers about their right to paternity leave: in Belgium; in Denmark, including a brochure "Take your leave!" by the Danish ministry for equality, and even in France, with a campaign entitled "Take the time to be a father" launched by the National Information Centre on Women's and Family Rights (CNIDFF).

"However, even if they are very effective, these information campaigns cannot correct the structural weaknesses in the system in depth", observes the