

# **BACKGROUND CARDS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES and QUALITY SYSTEMS: WHY**

Today an unprecedented importance is attached to equal opportunities in enterprises and, more generally speaking, in society, due to a whole set of very important - economic, historical, strategic and organizational - factors.

For several years, the European Union has highlighted the importance of these factors and has recognised the strategic role of equal opportunity policies in the framework of its treaties, acts, directives, documents, programmes and action plans.

In the following Cards we intend to outline an overview of this development which none of us can any longer ignore, not just for democracy and ethical reasons, but also for economic reasons, because of its decisive contribution to the competitiveness of the *European system* and the social cohesion, as clearly advocated by the Council of Lisbon in 2000.

## CARD 1

### CHANGE FACTORS AND THE COST OF NON- EQUALITY

One of the major factors of change on the labour market, which started already in the period soon after the second world war, is the ever growing participation of women in the labour market.

The most evident change factors are:

- The traditional work force decline due to the fall in the birth rate and the increasing number of jobs occupied by women: the highest rises in employment rates are especially due to the entry of women into the labour market and the trend is bound to continue
- An increase in the number of households where both men and women work and ever fewer women stop working after the birth of their first or second child
- The education level of women becomes increasingly higher: today the education level of women entering the labour market is higher than that of men
- The aging of the workforce: there is an ever greater scarcity of qualified human resources and women become the main components of the available labour force

At the Lisbon Council, the European Union set a target of 60% of women in employment by 2010.

On the one hand, if this feminisation of work results from the ongoing changes, on the other hand it has to be a reason for change.

As a matter of fact, in spite of an increasing number of working women, the labour market is characterised by a vertical segregation (i.e. there are few women occupying medium-to-high ranking positions and very few in top positions) as well as by a horizontal segregation (i.e. the presence of women is concentrated in a few sectors and in the medium-low levels).

At a closer look, we see that women are often confined to disadvantaged positions: they do not get on as much as men do, they tend to occupy more low-ranking positions or/and they *provide assistance to* men's work; few of them hold management jobs, even when they are the majority of the labour force; they are confined to disadvantaged and marginalized positions if they

decide to work on a part-time basis; they are discriminated during the selection phase and they are excluded from power groups and from strategic information flows; they are paid less than men for jobs of equal value; they are less involved in training, or in decision-making groups; they are not fully appreciated and rewarded for their job. Most women are confined to positions that give them few skill development opportunities, access to training and knowledge related to the whole work cycle.

This under-utilization of a large portion of the workforce (and the poor recognition of its potential) translates into a waste of resources for enterprises in economic/competitive terms, which is the so-called '*non-equality cost*'.

Women have now changed as well as society and social structures, but the enterprise culture has not changed much as it is, in large part, still tuned in to male needs and conditions, still suited to the traditional family pattern of the man working while his wife takes care of his home, children and elderly parents. Yet, we all know very well that this model is now crumbling down, even though its underlying culture is not.

## CARD 2

### THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS POLICY

Equality between men and women is a fundamental democratic principle, as confirmed by the Treaty of Amsterdam, thus making the integration of this principle into the various policies compulsory. Europe is fully aware of the fact that without an ever more qualified and greater participation of women in the labour market, it cannot reach the targets set by the Lisbon Council (i.e. becoming the most competitive society in the world that knows how to reconcile development, economic growth and social inclusion).

Equal opportunities are therefore regarded as an integral part of the European employment policies in order to achieve two objectives: attaining 'gender equality' by providing women with greater access to the labour market and improving their position and the quality of their work.

EU has identified *gender mainstreaming* as the central strategy to foster equal opportunities: "Gender mainstreaming is about learning to do things differently and adopting new approaches"<sup>1</sup>.

*Gender mainstreaming* is today a definition known only by a few experts of the field, but it is necessarily bound to become better known and implemented by both social and economic partners. This means that the gender issue, i.e. the recognition of men/women difference, must be taken fully into account in the definition, identification and implementation of each policy at all levels and environments, since the decisions that are made often have a different impact on men and women, given their different needs, conditions and situations. At a Public Administration level, *gender mainstreaming* means providing better quality services which are more specifically targeted to meet beneficiaries' requirements; at the enterprise level *gender mainstreaming* means adopting a culture that takes into account and enhances differences, by recognising that the management of gender difference is in itself a competitive advantage (as, for instance, the implementation of work/family life balance policies, better if designed with the local stakeholders).

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<sup>1</sup> Jill Rubery *et al.*, *Gender mainstreaming in European employment policy*, A report by the European Commission's group of experts on gender and employment in the Framework of the Fourth Action Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 1998

EU has dealt with equal opportunities already since several years, by implementing treaties, rules and regulations, directives and action programmes. The highlights are:

The **White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment** of 1993 acknowledges the importance of equal opportunities in the workplace and the **Green Paper on Partnership for a new work organization** of 1997 addresses the issue of equal opportunities in the new work organization.

The **Treaty of Amsterdam** of 1997 includes equal opportunities for men and women among the tasks (art. 2) and actions (art. 3) to be pursued by the Community. The Treaty sets forth the Community's commitment towards **gender mainstreaming**, by identifying men/women equality as a specific task to be undertaken by the Community and as a horizontal objective that cuts across all the Community policies and programmes.

Following the adoption of the Treaty of Amsterdam, during the Summit of Luxemburg it was decided that the European Strategy on Employment should be based on **thematic priorities grouped under 4 Pillars**, which are described in the Guidelines for Employment.

The four Pillars are:

- ? *Employability* intended as a better work integration capability
- ? *Entrepreneurship*, aimed at supporting entrepreneurial skills
- ? *Adaptability* of the workforce to economic changes (globalisation, new technologies, strong service development) and therefore to the new work organization forms and their related updating of skills
- ? *Equal opportunities* aimed at increasing women employment rates, rebalancing women's participation in a few economic sectors and professions, reconciling work and family life, reintegrating women into the labour market

These Guidelines are transferred into the National Action Plans for Employment of EU member states. In addition to specific Guidelines on equal opportunities, member states are invited to integrate equal opportunity objectives across the board in all their policies and measures.

The Lisbon Council of 2000 recognized that equal opportunities cannot be regarded as an issue exclusively concerning women and it invited the Commission and the EU member states to promote all the aspects related to equal opportunities in their employment policies, including the reduction of professional segregation and the promotion of work/family life balance. Furthermore, a set of quantitative objectives have been provided for, to further equal opportunities between men and women in economic life, among which the increase of women employment rate from 51% to more than 60% by 2010 at Community level.

Equal opportunities policies must therefore meet two objectives: a greater and better participation of women in the labour market.

### CARD 3

#### WORKING MEN AND WOMEN WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

The main quality factors in the workplace are related to the quality of work, of the organizational context and of relations between men and women. The underlying tenets of quality are the acknowledgement and enhancement of individual identities of men and women by fully respecting their different needs, conditions and motivations.

Gender - male or female - deeply affects work life through the assignment of different tasks, which is known as the *sexual division of work*. Society tends to have a gendered view of work, by making a distinction between typically male and female activities. Such a gendered approach strongly affects both the way in which tasks are to be distributed and the expectations that both sides have about who should perform - and how - a certain job.

Such a *sexual division of work* tends to affect and debase women's work: for instance, when there is a significant increase in the number of women in a certain job or profession, there is a tendency to underestimate it and remuneration levels tend to drop and often, the presence of men working in that same sector is also belittled, and it is regarded as a second choice.

Employers and employees, of both sexes, bring a *gendered attitude* to work, based on several stereotypes that tend to strengthen segregation, through their daily interactions and relations with colleagues, superiors, and through the employers' policies and practices.

The socialization process according to gender roles, activated at school, in the family, at work, the media, tend to shape social expectations about men's and women's lifestyles, the way they dress, talk, behave, spend their leisure time, their aspirations, education and work choices, which are further confirmed and strengthened by social control.

Boys and girls are influenced by society in different ways. They are thus led to looking for those jobs that are regarded as socially acceptable according to their sex and they are led to have different visions of life, with repercussions also on their work.

The socialization of gender roles is also a ground for inequalities at work.

The **separate sphere** ideology originates from the industrial revolution when home became a place distinct from production. Men went to work in factories,

while women stayed at home and took care of their families. Men and women's role became more clearly defined, but only men received social recognition, prestige and power, whereas women remained confined to the domestic sphere, carrying out unpaid work and totally depending on men.

The sexual division of work (men engaged in paid work away from home and women engaged in unpaid work at home) entailed that employers organize work on the assumption that men, the breadwinners, have a home where women take care of their families and that, women who work, are expected to work only temporarily and to leave their job soon after marriage.

Employers do not have any interest in taking into consideration working women's needs and as a consequence, men have the best paid jobs, invest in their education and acquisition of skills, and of course, have the best careers and are in the decision making positions.

Things are changing and the situation above described has greatly improved, but, as the '*Report on Equal equality between women and men, 2004*' from the European Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, points out, too slowly and there is a lot to do for equality at work and in the society.

## CARD 4

### INVESTMENT ON HUMAN RESOURCES, THE NEW WORK ORGANIZATION AND GENDER

“We’ve gone from being an information society to a knowledge society. Information was about computers; knowledge is about people... We live in a knowledge economy where our main asset resides in people.”<sup>2</sup>

Investment in *people* has become a *crucial key factor* in a *knowledge-based* economy; hence human resources are regarded as the main asset of enterprises. Some of the most critical factors leading to the creation of greater value for customers, productivity, quality of work and professional life and to the growth of the European economies are: male and female workers’ learning skills and their ability to adjust to a rapidly changing world; enterprises’ ability to enhance different potentials, to identify and acknowledge individual needs, to highlight the quality aspect of relations, to provide a meaningful organization context and a motivating and involving work environment. These are the main prerequisites, which are based on innovation, quality, human resources, learning skills, gender difference management, and need new management and work organization methods.

These central factors bring to the forefront the issue of equal opportunities, because enterprises are not *neutral* entities but they are made of men and women with their specific male and female gender identities and differences, different needs, conditions, aspirations, achievements, motivations and emotions.

An enterprise strategy, which is based on the central role played by human resources and on diversity management as the main competitive factors, must lay the accent on the integration/consideration/enhancement of the female human resource.

It is no longer *convenient* for enterprises to leave women at the margins of work life, since this would translate into a cost, also in view of the fact that:

- ? Women will be ever more willing and ready to be integrated into work life at all levels

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<sup>2</sup> Rajan A., *Leadership in the Knowledge Age*, Chief Executive, RSA Midlands, 21 May 2002

- ? Competitiveness requires strong creativity, which can be fostered only through diversity, since uniformity would just lead to conformity
- ? A work organization no longer closed and hierarchical needs the promotion of an active involvement of all workers and employees, team work and group co-ordination
- ? Enterprises need to attract the best resources that are available on the market regardless of their sex, if they really want to be competitive
- ? If enterprises' true asset is its workforce, then women's expectations must be held into consideration
- ? Competitiveness - the external customer satisfaction - is ever more linked to the quality and customisation of services, to the internal partner/customer satisfaction and motivation, that is both men and women workers

The way and extent to which all these concepts are understood, considered and enhanced, becomes a key to success, competitive advantage and added value, in terms of creativity and innovation.

## CARD 5

### THE FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION LEADING TO GENDER SEGREGATION: ENTERPRISE-BASED EXPERIENCE

The greatest difficulties that women have in being fully employed in enterprises depend, on one hand, on *cultural factors and, on the other hand, on the lack of awareness that gender issues involve.*

Equal opportunities are still perceived as support actions that enterprises *kindly* put at the disposal of a few categories of women who need support. An old and obsolete notion of equal opportunities still prevails, which does not seize the strategic value underlying the female resource management, which goes much beyond the significance of a single action undertaken in a specific sector.

Thanks to the several meetings and interviews with HR managers we have been able to identify the various issues and critical points related to human resource management from a gender point of view:

- *Gender difference* is not enhanced: for instance, a female leadership style is often underestimated simply because it is different (the male style is the point of reference in order to be appreciated)
- The lack of awareness of one's personal behaviours shaped on the basis of *gender stereotypes*, which 'frame' and confine women into precise niches of tasks, jobs and behaviours, from which it is difficult for them to get rid of (i.e.: 'women don't understand a thing about technology')
- The lack of awareness of discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and choices (a meeting is *chaired by a man*, because he is considered to be more authoritative and *the minutes are usually drafted by a woman*, even when she has a higher role, because as a woman *she undoubtedly is a better secretary*)
- The natural tendency to work and feel at ease with similar people (hence, the tendency to hire other *similar men*, regardless of the value of other job applicants)
- The development and practice of men's lobby and club culture, from which women are excluded (during breaks, social reunions, leisure or working activities)
- The lack of awareness that *non-equality* implies a high cost that negatively affects turnover, motivation, self-realization, personal involvement and productivity

All these attitudes are so ingrained in the enterprise culture that they are not even recognised as discriminatory. When the top managers or human resource managers tell us that that in their companies there is no gender discrimination they say so in good faith. Yet, when they start analysing data by comparing them, for instance, with the number of women managers or the lack of women sitting in Board of Directors, they end up realizing about the conscious or unconscious discriminatory behaviours that indeed exist.

The motivations they usually provide are that women are not discriminated, but they simply *cannot get on with their jobs and careers* because they have children and therefore cannot devote themselves to their work as they should, or simply they cut themselves off by their own will, even before getting up to top positions.

Of course, the needs of women with children must be fully taken into account. Their requirements, as mothers and wives, are considered to be an unavoidable necessity by companies and the only solution they find is discriminating them in stunting their professional growth, according to the following equation: more time for one's family means less time available for the enterprise, lower professional commitment leading to limited career development.

Yet, many tools and facilities are today available to support working mothers and to reconcile both women and enterprises' requirements.

Furthermore, from an economic point of view, if human resource managers performed more thorough cost-benefit analyses, they would probably realize that:

- ? Implementing a Work/Life Balance Plan during certain life cycles in women's lives – thus preventing them from leaving their jobs putting a halt to their careers – costs less money than looking for, training and preparing employees to do the same job. Instead a win-win solution could and should be found
- ? Convening meetings at other times during the day, *rather than in the evening, is indeed possible*; furthermore it is not worthwhile and productive working long hours until late in the evening (as proven by several studies on the so-called *façade work*)
- ? A woman occupying a management position can also successfully telework for a few days a week (often achieving even better results and performances)
- ? And so on...

## CARD 6

### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AS A STRATEGIC FACTOR OF ENTERPRISE POLICIES AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, FOR CORPORATE QUALITY**

Today, several studies highlight the importance of equal opportunities as a means to assure enterprise quality, as well as satisfaction and motivation for men and women in particular.

We think it important that quality audits include gender equality elements (that is consideration and value of gender differences).

The spirit underlying the new ISO 9000:2000 standards goes towards the direction of simplifying procedures and of *paying greater attention to enterprise processes aimed at achieving quality through continuous improvement*. Our proposal is undoubtedly considered extreme and not relevant in the ISO standards context, by those people who do not agree to take into consideration gender differences, allegedly for the sake of neutrality. Yet, neutrality is nothing but a comfortable alibi if there is a discriminatory attitude.

*If quality* is the result of a prevention-oriented work style, it is clear that it should **also** be a gender discrimination prevention-oriented work style.

*If quality* can be measured according to the non-conformity cost, it becomes clear that it is necessary to prevent the non-equality cost.

It is therefore desirable that the equal opportunities designing, planning and implementation process becomes an integral part of the whole process that has to be audited. In other words, a planned process should be put in place, agreed upon and shared throughout the organisation, so that the auditors will include all these items in the assessment. Equality is an integral part of the whole organization quality, it is neither an external nor a marginal issue, but is part of the strategic processes. If the equal opportunity notion were built into all the processes, a full-fledged Quality System would be in place. As a matter of fact, if forms of gender discrimination and segregation exist within an organization, it would not be possible to talk about quality, since it would be a contradiction in terms.

It is therefore astonishing that the issue has never been clearly and thoroughly addressed in the quality environment. The male-oriented culture is probably so deeply rooted that it does not allow to perceive discrimination against women as a non-quality element. This is even more bewildering in a quality system based on continuous improvement.

The **Enterprise Equality Plan** might therefore become the equality standard assessment tool at the disposal of enterprises.

Assessors/Auditors should: be aware of the equal opportunity related problems and of all the elements that need to be taken into account in the process aimed at the implementation of the **Enterprise Equality Plan**; see the objectives set in the annual plans; highlight the improvement processes as well as non conformities; suggest the possible solutions to be adopted.

Those enterprises for which the staff skills and ability are regarded as essential to achieve the business objectives should recognise that the equal opportunity management is a strategic objective to be achieved and spread as **a standard procedure**.

The **Enterprise Equality Plan** should apply to all the processes and components across the board (*gender mainstreaming* strategy), envisage phases/methodologies common to other processes: input, output, resources (human, economic, structural), constraints, timing, responsibilities, indicators and related objectives, just like any other improvement project, according to a top-down and bottom-up process.

A high quality element of an Equality Plan is that it should not be confined only to the Human Resource Management sector, which is of course the one which is most concerned, but it should be introduced into the whole enterprise culture, making all the employees, from rank-and-file workers up to top managers, men and women alike, aware of this issue.

Some of the factors to be taken into account, from a *gender point of view*, are:

- top management involvement in equality politics and strategies
- staff statistical data disaggregated by gender
- analysis of horizontal segregation
- analysis of vertical segregation
- analysis of career plans
- participation in training
- participation in information flows
- participation men-women in meetings, commissions, missions
- attending and chairing meetings
- selection criteria, methods and gender awareness
- enterprise work/life balance plans

- both implicit and explicit enterprise culture
- work assessment method

Equal opportunity policies should be implemented as follows:

- be retained over time
- involve the enterprise as a whole
- concern all the gender-sensitive processes, practices and procedures.

The most sensitive and updated enterprises have already become aware of these issues and have already developed and implemented gender-sensitive strategies in addition to all the other strategies that are necessary to assure competitiveness and to achieve business objectives.

## CARD 7

### THE EQUALITY PLAN AS A PROCESS TO BE ASSESSED/AUDITED

In order to implement the **Equality Plan** the following process phases, which are critical for its success and which the auditor shall have to assess/audit, must be envisaged.

As in any other process, it is important to identify, plan and monitor all the following different phases:

- **Awareness-raising** of decision-makers (top management) on equality policies within organizations
- **The enterprise situation analysis from the equal opportunities perspective**, both at a quantitative and qualitative level, including all the processes and sectors, ranging from the top management involvement to gender training of those in charge of recruiting staff (internal or external), to the work/family life balance problems and solutions for men and women, to the change of the enterprise culture
- **Identification of criticalities**
- **Definition of set objectives**, ordered by priorities and time phases and identification of indicators
- **Designing and planning of actions** concerning organization, training, seminars, work environment/structure, on-the-job training
- **Identification of the resources to be involved** (men and women, costs and structures), including trade unions and external experts as well as internal partners
- **Sharing of the information about** the actions that are undertaken to all the organization members, preparation and distribution of material, newsletters, internal network
- **Taking into consideration** people rejecting change
- **Monitoring and evaluation** of quantitative and qualitative objectives in relation to each step
- **Planning of improvements to be achieved** also in the light of the previous phases results

The introduction of equality into the enterprise culture requires a long time to allow people to realize and accept the new policies and to adjust to the new processes, as is often the case with innovation with a strong cultural connotation.

The equal opportunity management, in particular, calls into question deeply rooted attitudes, behaviours, stereotypes, values, culture, practices and

procedures inside and outside enterprises, especially for less young generations.

We believe, nevertheless, that it is a fundamental process for our economies and societies.

## **CARD 8**

### **ADVANTAGES OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICIES FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES**

The findings emerging from the study on a few excellent enterprises that have implemented equal opportunity policies point out advantages both for men and women employees and for employers themselves.

Advantages for women are:

- A larger number of hired women
- Increase in the number of women in senior managerial and top positions
- Increase in the number of women present in non traditional areas
- More training, skills and career development also through mentoring activities
- Implementation of work/family life reconciliation policies
- Greater empowerment
- Greater evaluation of 'soft' skills provided by women

Advantages for employers are:

- Greater staff retention and less turnover
- Greater ability to attract young talented women devoted to their jobs and careers through an awareness-raising campaign on equality plans and on work/family life balance plans
- Less absenteeism and greater levels of satisfaction deriving from work
- Change in the enterprise culture: in the leadership profile, in the career models and in the gender difference awareness
- A less conflictual environment
- Greater ability by men and women to work in team hence more competitiveness and creativity
- Better public image
- Better perception of women's skills
- Better understanding of gender differences and of their impact on organizations

## CARD 9

### **THE STRATEGIC ELEMENTS IN ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: A FEW CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRAINING**

There are several strategic factors in relation to equal opportunities within the enterprise processes. Here are the most significant that will have to be taken into account for the 'situation analysis'.

#### ***- The involvement of the top management***

This is a fundamental element to build equal opportunities into the enterprise strategies, which has a repercussion on all the company's management and organization aspects. The top management should recognize the important role played by equal opportunities also in terms of their business value. As a consequence, they should put in place an Equality Plan, allocate resources, appoint people in charge of them, assess results, plan improvement actions, contribute to the cultural change through their behaviour and commitment to both internal and external customers.

#### ***- Human resource management***

Human resource management undoubtedly is one of the most sensitive areas to promote and implement equal opportunities. The most critical factor is the HR managers lack of knowledge and awareness of gender issues and of diversity management. The direct consequence of this is their inability to enhance gender differences, to get rid of gender stereotypes and to make unbiased choices for the best interests of both employees and employers.

The role played by HR managers must today be proactive and farsighted in foreseeing the future needs and therefore in training men and women to perform the necessary tasks that the enterprise will require. At the same time, they must take into account individual employees' needs, motivations, aspirations and potentials in order to create a well-bound and strongly motivated environment.

#### ***- The enterprise culture***

An enterprise, as any other organization, tends to perpetuate social homogeneity and to reproduce social stereotypes and to bind them to the economic value system, thus strengthening them even further and finally making things worse.

### ***- Staff recruitment***

Staff recruitment is a further critical step in the whole process. Gender stereotypes and the enterprise culture related to equal opportunities often guide the selection and recruitment criteria and methods – regardless of the talents and skills of the job applicants. Such a biased attitude applies both to the way in which job applicants are judged and to how the enterprise and its requirements are described to them.

The assessment of potentials and personalities of job applicants during interviews, especially of young inexperienced job seekers, is filtered through gender stereotypes, which translate into either favourable or unfavourable judgements according to the gender stereotypes ingrained in the manager in charge of selection.

Similarly, the enterprise presentation will vary according to whether job applicants are men or women, since they are expected to have different stereotyped behaviours: men are expected to be more interested in good career prospects and therefore good growth opportunities are illustrated to them, whereas women are expected to have lower aspirations or to resign at the moment when they have a child and, as a consequence, the required tasks and the working hours are clearly listed to them.

Today, instead, it is very likely that talented and motivated young women are interested in having good job and career opportunities; therefore they will probably not accept to be hired by an enterprise that is not ready to offer them any professional growth opportunities, that has no work/family life balance plan in place and that has already decided beforehand no career prospects for them, that has already discriminated against them, on the grounds of gender, already during the selection phase, regardless of their actual skills.

Consequently, the stereotyped role expectations, on the grounds of gender, which more or less consciously guide people in charge of personnel selection, are very far from reality and might go to the detriment of the enterprise itself. People in charge of personnel selection, both directly working for the enterprise or externally on its behalf, must be properly trained to identify talents in a clear and unbiased way, beyond any gender stereotypes, or any stereotyped sexual division of work - looking beyond all socially biased differences - and they must be able to spot the job applicants' natural differences, as well as their skills and potentials.

### ***- Professional development, leadership and career structure, decision-making process and the man/woman presence in management and top positions***

In 2001 a questionnaire was addressed to 100 human resource managers (from a Northern Italian region, enjoying a high economic, industrial and social development level). When asked: “*To your opinion, to what extent do the following factors affect the low presence of women in Top Management*

positions?”, 72,2% of them replied: ‘*Women are not easily accepted by men in management positions*’.

The replies highlighted many of the problems related to women’s career, or lack of women presence especially in top management positions. Women are allowed to get on up to medium-high levels, but they rarely get to the top, in key decision-making posts. And the same is also true when it comes to the representation of men and women in public bodies.

Enterprise culture and management and work organization models negatively affect women’s professional development, as for instance: lack of any planned career structure (development and competence); evaluation systems based on presence, availability and visibility (male) criteria; the welcome into a new department in a better or worse way according to the prevailing group’s composition and attitude.

Once again, the personnel management guiding principles are such that they are not closely related to people’s real and objective skills, but they are based on a strongly subjective judgement, closely linked to the company’s history and to the desire to have colleagues who are as similar as possible to them and share the same gender culture.

- ***Skills development and training processes, knowledge communication and sharing system and gender criticalities***

Some of the factors that lead to organization excellence are:

- *Communication and sharing of information*: the most common factor leading to the marginalisation of young women, as against their male colleagues, who have been hired at the same time, is their exclusion from the flow of information and communication; this marginalisation becomes soon irreversible, thus confining women into less qualified jobs with fewer opportunities of having a good career structure and better wages
- *Skills development and knowledge acquisition through training and tutoring*: women are less involved in training activities often because they are organized at times that do not suit women’s needs and also because the teaching methodologies do not take into account their learning requirements (i.e. ICT learning); furthermore, less qualified tutors are usually chosen for women
- *Empowerment and active participation*: women self-margination is very widespread because the discrimination factors put into motion a vicious circle from which it is difficult to get out of

- ***Work organization, flexibility and work/family life balance***

Work organization is still strongly affected by the sexual division of work that confines women to typically female roles and tasks, thus preventing their access to different roles and positions. This domain is still strongly affected by

groundless gender stereotypes and prejudice, which are only intended to resist change and to hold on to power.

Work organization must today take into account different major factors, such as enterprise flexibility, work/family life balance and new technologies.

These are the three main factors that are closely interrelated both at organizational level, and for the 'non tangible' implications that are entailed, i.e. employee motivation, satisfaction, and involvement. If, on one hand, new technologies and globalisation impose specific time rhythms and new work styles that require involvement, empowerment and availability, on the other hand, enterprises are expected to take into account and to meet their employee needs, for instance by means of work/family life balancing programmes and actions.

## **CARD 10**

### **LACK OF EQUALITY IN ENTERPRISE CULTURE**

If we read the several reports written by authoritative experts on human resource management, quality systems and training of those in charge of HR management within the enterprise organization, we realize that no reference is usually made to gender awareness and skills acquisition from a gender perspective. It is as though the problem did not exist; it is as though gender-related enterprise data had no significance at all, from all points of view, i.e. cost, quality, organization, optimisation, and improvement. As a matter of fact, gender issues are never perceived as such.

Training proposals are put forward to achieve excellence in all domains, but a macro problem is usually ignored, namely women marginalisation and inability by enterprises to manage female resources in a different way, taking into account changes occurring in women's skills, aspirations, motivations, needs and potentials.

From this point of view, the notion of continuous improvement, which is one of the core concepts underlying the quality system 'philosophy', has a lot of opportunities to be taken into consideration.

## **CARD 11**

### **MOTIVATIONS TO CHANGE**

Enterprises' awareness, need and readiness to change depend on a whole set of both internal and external factors.

The best practices related to the implementation of equal opportunities within enterprises in some Northern European countries, clearly derive from the importance attached to these two factors.

On the one hand, enterprises realize that they need to adjust to a changing reality; on the other hand, they are obliged to do so to comply with the new national and regional laws and directives.

A sort of virtuous circle is put into motion and its different internal and external factors are self-fuelled, thus becoming at the same time 'innovation-oriented driving forces' and 'followers'.

External factors having an impact on enterprises include national and regional laws, directives, rules and regulations, labour market and market conditions, social and cultural changes.

Internal factors depend on the top management involvement, agreements with the social partners, human resource policies and the ICT development.

## CARD 12

### TRAINING FOR GENDER EQUALITY

“The essential plan to become competitive and innovative is the management and improvement of knowledge, organization and human resources”<sup>3</sup>

If the main objective to be pursued by enterprises is to attract, motivate and retain the best people, the equal opportunity policies are the strongest factor of attraction for employees, as they affect the quality of life of people and of women, in particular.

The key role to promote the equal opportunities culture and to implement it is undoubtedly played by the human resource manager. That is why we have entrusted training development within the enterprise with the HR manager. Of course, he/she should not work in isolation but within the human resource work team, in the framework of relations, of the whole work system and context, because the ultimate beneficiary of change-oriented training strategies is the enterprise system itself. Therefore, individual skills, the organization and relations system must be ready to accept and foster change both at an individual level and at a system level.

The integrated training concept is fundamental in this context, because it is necessary to take into consideration working men and women's needs, the enterprise culture, the work system and environment, finally all the variables at stake.

Equality-oriented training is today all the more urgent, because the worker profile in the enterprise framework is now undergoing a deep change: employees are now collaborators who work in partnership with their colleagues to achieve the set objectives and to assure the best quality as possible. These targets can be attained only if all people work in harmony with the same degree of commitment and quality, throughout all the various processes.

It will be ever more difficult for women to survive in their safe niches within the obsolete Fordist hierarchical pyramid where they expect little and give as much.

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<sup>3</sup> Aurigemma S., *La formazione per la qualità e la qualità per la formazione*, Nuovo Studio Tecna, Roma, 2002

The new work organization requires, instead, a strong participation and commitment, accountability, updated skills and readiness to work in coordinated teams.

The most recent studies carried out by gender and organization experts on the ongoing changes try and understand how and to what extent, these transformations will affect women's work and the quality of their participation. The more women and organizations will be able to adjust to the ongoing changes, in terms of the quality of women participation's in the world of work, and to organizational changes, the more positive these changes will be.

Women need to strengthen their empowerment to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as their vocational skills. Organizations are expected to take stock of the ongoing changes concerning the access and presence of women in the labour market and to become equipped with the necessary tools and skills to assure an effective human resource management, able to enhance the different conditions and needs of both men and women.

Equality-oriented training refers to cultural changes, attitudes, behaviours, and stereotypes. It is a kind of training which is difficult to accept and which is often 'dismissed' as negligible, using more or less superficial or obvious statements. Often, in the best-case scenario, the reaction is that 'there are more important things to be done first'.

This reaction is due, on the one hand, to the very bad reputation equal opportunities have, since they are still too often perceived as "hysterical feminist claims" or as a support to a disadvantaged group of women. On the other hand, the gender discrimination problem is not perceived as the 'non-equality cost', without understanding its strategic importance also for business. We are thus confronted with a set of cultural obstacles that concern both the individual private sphere and the organization culture sphere.

The problem is undoubtedly difficult, but we are also convinced that it is absolutely urgent to start facing it given the changes that are under way and that directly concern women, the world of work, market conditions and the current organizational changes.

Over the past few years, several enterprises have implemented work/family life reconciliation practices, in terms of working time flexibility and/or part-time jobs. Yet, these are only isolated actions; even though they take women's flexibility needs into account, they do not affect the enterprise culture, indeed they might sometimes even worsen the situation by creating a sort of ghetto reserved only for women.

An important strategy is to involve the key people in the company organization. Being a kind of training that is particularly difficult to be accepted, it should not be imposed on the company according to a top-down

approach. Instead, a workgroup should be set up serving as an interface between training designers and beneficiaries, whose task is 'to listen to' and 'to identify' the needs, 'to suggest' strategies and 'to support' actions. The company management's direct involvement and support is equally important.

## CARD 13

### EQUALITY-ORIENTED TRAINING FOR HRM

Equality-oriented training is a two-fold challenge/responsibility: acquiring a gender culture first of all requires a self-analysis, challenging one's own stereotypes and taking up a different stance vis-à-vis men/women relations. This subjective/individual dimension inevitably *affects* the choices and policies that are implemented at work.

Gender training is strongly based on awareness (i.e. *being*) and only when it has been acquired, is it possible to learn the gender HR management tools (i.e. *doing*).

“Ultimately, the competences that emerge under certain working circumstances on the one hand derive from one's personal history and achievements, in general and specific terms, and on the other hand from the inner state of that individual in that particular situation, including his/her motivations, emotional reactions, mood, but also perception, attention and memory processes, etc...”

The subjective dimension of competence has recently been further enhanced, given the important role played by one's personality, as a result of one's individual gene pool, primary and secondary socialization and cultural processes.”<sup>4</sup>

Hence, the working skill development depends on one's personal history, life experiences and one's original personal traits. The subjective dimension is thus taken into account along with the inter-subjective dimension and the context.

Challenging one's own experiences according to a gender perspective is therefore aimed at letting one's stereotypes and personal culture surface with reference to the gender relations. Such an awareness-raising process is therefore important to challenge one's attitudes and attach a new significance to one's own professional experiences, to unveil discriminatory behaviours, to clarify the enterprise culture influence on choices, expectations and motivations of both men and women. It is ultimately important to carry out a gendered overview of the company, highlighting its criticalities and weaknesses, which have a detrimental effect on both tangible factors (costs) and non tangibles ones (motivation, involvement, expectations, lack of

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<sup>4</sup> Pellerey M., *‘Evoluzione e sviluppo degli approcci per competenze nella formazione professionale*, in “La competenza”, Il Mulino 2002

commitment, and so on), and also becoming aware of one's own attitudes and behaviours.

The main aim is to understand "...the very nature of the skills that have to be developed as well as their value. A deeper analysis should then follow to fathom how they take shape and become manifest. A third step concerns their identification through a self-evaluation of the gap existing between the present skill level and the envisaged one".<sup>5</sup>

The more differentiated and specific the training process will be, the better: face-to-face classes, group discussions, individual meetings, enterprise practice analysis, individual and group feedback. The role of the teacher must first of all be that of a facilitator and/or consultant providing the necessary information and interpretation tools, facilitating the awareness-raising process and a critical review, by stimulating the exchange of opinions between participants.

A very important factor is the sharing of experiences and the exchange of opinions. Hence the training method must also include group meetings to foster the sharing of experiences, emotions and solutions and the mutual learning process.

It is also important that the problems that are discussed are directly taken from the participants' working experiences, so that the teacher/trainer can become a trainer/consultant. Yet, this step requires an in-depth knowledge of those enterprises in order to facilitate the continuous flow between the training system and the enterprise system.

Both analytical approaches - allowing the analysis of individual performances, occupational profiles or individual operational units - and system approaches, are required to assess relations with reference to results, processes, contexts, output, interactions, characteristics, etc...

The time devoted to information and awareness-raising of gender issues and gender stereotypes is modulated according to the gaps that have been identified with regard to gender and real experiences, through a process that starts from the individual and leads to the analysis of critical areas, their underlying causes, costs that are involved, possible solutions, improvement processes that must be put in place to involve the whole enterprise.

It is important to have a feedback after and during training itself, based on the daily work within the company, which must be discussed and analysed, to understand how and to what extent knowledge has been translated into skills, capabilities, problem solving attitudes. A few meetings must be organised and

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<sup>5</sup> Pellerey M., *'Evoluzione e sviluppo degli approcci per competenze nella formazione professionale, , in "La competenza", Il Mulino 2002*

devoted to these issues as follow-up activities some time after the end of training.

Training is also designed to allow the enterprise to embrace a common and shared vision on equal opportunities. It is important to enable people to share and agree upon the new policy through a learning, creation and knowledge management process, towards the improvement of individual and the organization skills. “From this perspective, a learning organization constantly analyses the different organization-related learning processes, monitors and develops them, transforming them from spontaneous or implicit processes to thoroughly managed processes targeted to the achievement of improvement and innovation objectives within the organization”.<sup>6</sup>

Of course every enterprise differs from the others especially because of its history and culture. Therefore, it will always be necessary to adjust one’s knowledge and methods to individual situations. It is not possible to say: ‘this is the way things should be done’ and to apply the same method in all cases, but it is important to let people *go through* a process of change, to bring about a true *cultural and personal change*, allowing them to identify problems and seize opportunities.

“...the challenge involved in a quality training is to be able to shape an organization context in such a way to allow people to acknowledge that it is worth while taking up certain attitudes and behaviours reconciling one’s own needs as well as the company’s requirements at the same time”<sup>7</sup>.

Training must help people acquire a broader view, learn how to link different pieces together, take up a proactive attitude, understand the surrounding background and update one’s new personal skills.

HR managers are in the best position to transfer the lessons learned during training activities in the framework of the enterprise quality systems so that the cultural change can *also* be formalized into procedures and models.

For instance, in a gender-sensitive enterprise culture, the personnel selection is left into the hands of people aware of gender stereotypes that take action in the various steps of this process. This task must be envisaged in the framework of procedures leading to the implementation of this process.

Hence, it is up to HR managers to shoulder the greatest responsibility for change management, which includes the following stages:

? Listening

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<sup>6</sup> Tomassini M., *L’audit dei processi di apprendimento organizzativo*, in ‘Formazione per la Qualità e la Qualità della formazione’, by Aurigemma S., Nuovo Studio Tecna, Roma, 2002

<sup>7</sup> Gamberi M., Redolfi M., *Creazioni di contesti di apprendimento come presupposto ad una formazione di qualità*, in “Formazione per la Qualità e la Qualità della formazione”, by Aurigemma S., Nuovo Studio Tecna, Roma, 2002

? Support

? Acknowledgement

The listening stage is intended to identify the weaknesses caused by non-equality both inside and outside the company. Interviews and questionnaires allow to take stock of the situation and to process data to identify gaps.

The support stage implies the setting up of action plans for problem-solving purpose: identification of the problem and of its causes, impact, priorities and solutions, costs-benefit analysis, tools for the evaluation of results.

The result evaluation and acknowledgement stages, following the implementation of equal opportunities actions, are fundamental to strengthen the new culture and to trigger off self-assurance and self-esteem among workers.

In any organization the staff satisfaction degree is one of the key factors for the development of innovation and competitiveness.

There is a close relationship between the staff satisfaction degree and the work effectiveness degree: the more people are actively involved in decision-making processes - as well as in the problem identification and problem-solving processes - the more people will be satisfied of their job. The more they are satisfied, the more they are motivated to do their best to work towards a common goal. It is thanks to this kind of active employee involvement and participation that enterprises can enjoy a long-term and sustainable competitive advantage. Whereas, if a woman feels discriminated because her work is not fully acknowledged, or because her work/family life reconciliation needs go unheeded, or if she is marginalized because of a culture that attributes less value to her job, in these cases her commitment and motivation will be very limited.

## CARD 14

### **THE ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE AND EQUALITY: THE FUNCTIONAL HIERARCHY JUXTAPOSED TO THE PROCESS-BASED HORIZONTAL STRUCTURE**

The new edition of the ISO 9000 standards urges enterprises to implement a process-based management.

The key element in the process-based management is taking the enterprise into account as a whole, with a special focus on the whole organization structure rather than on its individual sections as underlined in *Gestione per processi, Vision 2000 per la piccola impresa*, A.Pamploni Scarpa, M.G.Conca, Consorzio Qualità, Sole 24 Ore, 2003:

“A process is a set of interrelated or interacting activities, which turns input elements into output elements. The key to the process is to start considering an organization as a whole process and then to work out all the individual processes, starting from the more important to the less important ones.”

The new rules are therefore based on a quality management system aimed at a continuous improvement.

The gender mainstreaming strategy, which cuts across the whole enterprise, must be read within the framework of this *continuous improvement-oriented process-based management*, according to a ‘business-oriented’ principle, striving towards competitiveness.

The functional organization management system (hierarchical-vertical), easily allows women to be excluded from the vertical structure of the pyramid, on the grounds of a very strict task division within the company departments; given this type of organization, the overwhelming majority of women performs specific and repetitive tasks, sometimes on *behalf of someone else*, with low strategic benefits in terms of professional growth and development, providing them with little knowledge and motivation about their work, both upstream and downstream; the hierarchical authority/control/supervision requires a limited autonomy in performing tasks as well as little responsibility.

The horizontal *process-based management* calls seriously into question this hierarchical position/evaluation, which is now under discussion: the horizontal approach puts forward new models, culture and methods also with regard to gender. The new work organization requires, or even demands, a gender-sensitive and aware management that is able to enhance and value gender differences.

## CARD 15

### HUMAN RESOURCE ENHANCEMENT PROCESS IN VIEW OF GENDER EQUALITY: *Governance and Improvement*

The most significant and relevant components of a process-based organization are:

- ? **The strategic component** (the strategic objectives set by the top management, shared by the enterprise management and by the area managers);
- ? **The human component** (know-how, know how to do, know how to be, know how to let others know).

Gender prejudice must be unearthed and challenged within the various steps of the process, in view of a continuous qualitative improvement. Hence, no discrimination and segregation on the grounds of gender is allowed.

Every step of the process envisages a set of:

- ? *activities*
- ? where *input* turns into *output*
- ? that require *implementation methods*
- ? involving *people* to carry out activities, according to their roles and responsibilities
- ? to whom the necessary *resources* should be allocated
- ? the whole process must be *monitored* through control procedures to *measure and assess* the process, products and achievement of objectives
- ? the whole process is expected to go to the benefit of all the parties concerned

In the **7 Process Governance Activities**, a special attention must be paid to equality:

#### **Activity 1**

Definition and strategic review of objectives

#### **Activity 2**

Identification of the main processes

#### **Activity 3**

Identification of the key processes

#### **Activity 4**

Definition and documentation of the whole process

#### **Activity 5**

Implementation of the process

**Activity 6**

Check list of the process

**Activity 7**

Check list of the continuous improvement

It is inside Quality procedures that both the enterprise and auditors should consider and assess the equality elements at the same level and attention of all other quality factor that is strategic for the organization management.

Auditors and assessors should attend training to be able to detect all the gender-sensitive factors that affect quality inside processes. They should therefore, to get the skills to be able both to read the equality elements inside the procedures and at the same time, to suggest the improvement strategies as regards equality.