

ARE YOU A WOMAN ASPIRING TO BE A LEADER?
ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND, WHAT KIND OF MOTHER ARE YOU?

GITTE RANDRUP

HR BUSINESS PARTNER, CONSULTANT/RECRUITER, BLOGGER



Copyrighted by Gitte Randrup

Are you out of your mind? What kind of a mother are you?

We're aware of it. We've heard about it for years: the general female deficit on boards of directors and among top managers. Each year in March on International Women's Day, the media focus on the subject and the reasons why we're not making more progress. The numbers speak for themselves. According to Catalyst.org, among S&P 500 companies (2016 numbers) women held 21.2% of all board seats and 25.7% of all new director seats. Twenty-one percent of the companies had one female director, and 16.9% of them had boards consisting of over 30% women. We know that diversity leads to a better bottom line, so why haven't we made more progress?

The Danish Women's Society, where GR Consult interviewed Gender Diversity & Inclusion Research Associate [Bushra Hanif](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bushra-yasmin-hanif/) ([linkedin:bushra-yasmin-hanif/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bushra-yasmin-hanif/)), has an opinion about this. In her daily work, Hanif advises companies on how to get more women into leadership positions and on boards of directors.

The fixed structures – motherhood, work/life balance and the division of roles:

According to Hanif, the main factors are the fixed structural frames within motherhood and the division of roles in homes. These structures spill over into the workplace. She believes that these structures would change if we dared challenge society's norms and traditions, which say that women are traditionally the ones who take care of their children. As she says: "We've always considered the mother as the nursing mother. We need a change of mindset because I believe that there are a lot of fathers who want to take a more active role when their children are small. But it takes a structural change of our mindset."



The current norms make it difficult for women to break the pattern. For example, it's not uncommon for a woman to be regarded as a bad mother if she takes a short maternity leave. Our society is not geared towards this. An example from real life is the following comment, which a woman heard from a colleague when she returned to her job:

"Are you out of your mind? What about your child? What kind of a mother are you?"

We are not supposed to be female versions of men

A tendency among top female managers is to act like men. This is seen, for example, in the way they dress and in their use of voice and attitude. For some women, this is a role they take on. These women often forget to be themselves and have trouble finding their own authentic leadership styles. Furthermore, these women often end up feeling as though they're not good leaders, as they are not being themselves. According to Hanif, this change happens because women feel insecure when sitting among a group of men:

"It's a big problem that women don't feel strong enough. Why I don't know ... All the women I've interviewed told me that they haven't felt strong enough at wage negotiations, for example." And maybe a lack of role models also comes into play. When there are no other women to emulate (women who dared to be

themselves and who found their own authentic leadership styles), it can be difficult to find the courage to express one's own personal leadership style.

More difficult to be acknowledged as a female leader

The Danish Women's Society has found that it takes more for

women to be acknowledged and respected as leaders. They have to fight for it. For some reason, it seems as if employees generally respect male managers more. Women tell the Danish Women's Society that it takes time for them to be acknowledged as managers. Hanif says:

"A lot of women feel better about a male manager, whom they respect to a higher extent. Actually, I guess it's all about the fact that women don't support each other. For many years, women haven't sympathized with each other. I also believe this has to do with where you work. It's a problem, and it causes a lot of conflicts if women do not help one another."

We don't know whether these issues have something to do with the tendency for women to act like men when leading. More examination and research is required to draw this conclusion.

That said, it's also important to discuss solutions and, more importantly, work on ways to get more women into leadership positions. The next paragraph contains a few tips.

What can companies do?

1. **Support mentoring programs** – it's necessary to have role models to emulate.
2. **Set specific targets for diversity** – it can also be KPIs.
3. **Be aware that, as human beings, we tend to unconsciously choose people who are similar to us** – use IT programs to hide the name, sex, etc. in recruiting systems and CVs.
4. **Know that communication style can unintentionally attract one sex over the other** – for example, in job ads.

The good example

Though the gender balance in management positions and boards of directors leaves much to be desired, some companies are performing better than the average; they are aware of and working towards improvement. One of these companies is the biotechnology and research company Zealand Pharma. In 2017, 46% of all personnel managers were women, 20% of the management committee was women and 50% of the board of directors was women. CEO Britt Meelby Jensen believes that the company's focus on values and culture have created a better gender balance. ~*Gitte Randrup*

<http://grconsult.dk/en/>
LinkedIn: [Gitterandrup](#) FB: [@Gitterandrup](#)



Gitte Randrup is an HR expert based in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the founder of GR Consult.

She is an advisor and HR Business Partner to managers on a wide range of HR subjects, such as recruiting, onboarding and organization and management.

Her vision is to create mutually satisfactory long-term working relationships between employers and employees combining business needs and strategy with the wants of the employees.

Gitte holds university degrees within HR, Organization & Management and Languages. She has worked with HR in companies, such as GEA and Nordea.

She is also an HR expert blogger on the Danish online debate forum Amino with more than 100,000 debaters and readers. <http://grconsult.dk/en/>
LinkedIn: [Gitterandrup](#) FB: [@Gitterandrup](#)

Need to Rent a HR Business Partner?

Need a Better On Boarding Process?

Need Help With Recruiting People?

Let us help you find the right new hire
and help them settle in fast.

<http://grconsult.dk/en/>



Bushra Hanif has during her 3-year career gained skills within leadership, diversity management, and inclusion. She calls herself a feminist, fighting for gender equality, equal pay, and equal parental leave. As a Research Associate at The Danish Women's Society, she is a key player when it comes to researching on reclaiming equal rights. Daily, she encounters a various number of tasks

concerning unconscious bias in the Danish society, not to mention Danish organizations. Paraphrasing these unconscious biases into new elements and relabeling them is what she ought to do, in order to help women, achieve higher positions. Bushra speaks to the subject on feminism, when she experiences organizations and employers, who are grounded in traditional roles, and have a high tendency to hire based on gender. She advices on initiating structured strategies and offers her knowledge on specific gendered issues, the task of hiring a wide range of employees in order to have a balanced workforce. [LinkedIn: bushra-yasmin-hanif/](#)