

Keeping gender balance a priority requires institutional commitment: A look back at day three of the Ecsite Directors Forum 2012

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The final day of the Directors Forum 2012 opened with a keynote speech from Lars-Eric Aaro, President and CEO of Swedish mining company LKAB (Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag) which mines iron ore in northern Sweden. Eva Jonsson, deputy director and head of education introduced LKAB as one of the founders of Teknikens Hus.

Aaro opened by talking about his company's role in society, bringing wealth and making the region attractive. The company is state-owned, 122 years old and growing. The mines are located 2-4 hours north of Lulea, and to get people to work there, LKAB needs to be an attractive company.

Steel is made from iron ore mined in Sweden. Steel is recyclable but 70% of it must come from mined iron ore. Research and development is essential for LKAB to stay ahead of the competition. LKAB works closely with the university's department of metallurgy. The market has grown 250% in the last ten years, largely because of China, which doesn't have high quality iron ore. China is producing 50% of the steel in the world and a 70% dependence on imports, and rising. Even if China is not a big client of LKAB, its demand has increased the price. All companies depending on export need some kind of flexibility. Who knows when the next financial crisis will occur? This flexibility must be in the geographical location and in the product portfolio.

Until 1976, it was forbidden for women to work in mines. Today, 17% of LKAB's 4200 employees are women. LKAB ensures 90% of the EU's iron ore production. LKAB's current growth strategy aims to increase the company by 35%. The mining site is very well served by infrastructure, road and railway, and has a city, Kiruna, close by. There is no unemployment in the area and a constant shortage of housing. The city also has to move to be able to mine the ore under the city.

LKAB focuses on jobs, housing and education for its employees and their families. It needs to attract the best professionals, and keep them there. This means sustainable, creative and livable cities. The company employed around 400 people last year, coming from all over the world, out of around 15 000 applications. It needs 1200 new employees by 2015. It therefore strives to create attractive communities with responsible urban transformation, schools etc.

To be competitive, the mining industry needs to attract skilled people from across the population. LKAB works in small rural towns, while many young women move to larger cities. Families move to places where women get interesting and well-paid jobs, and contribute to a positive regional and local development. Gender equality creates attractive communities where people want to settle and remain. Equality and diversity gives more focus on a safety culture – something very important in mining. The image of the company and its culture must keep up with the rest of society to be attractive. The aim of positions filled last year was 30% and the company managed to reach 29%.

As Richard Florida wrote in *Cities and the Creative Class*, diversity and equality allows the company to reach more talent. Leadership is crucial to ensure this culture is a part of the company. A close partnership with the university has resulted in 30 PhD students working on issues relevant to LKAB. The percentage of women at LKAB has gone from around 4% in 2000 to around 17% today, at management level as well as overall.

An LKAB Academy has been set up, funding an elementary school, high school, university and employee training. LKAB is funding specific research into gender and the mining industry. Last year LKAB had a 50% profit margin, a turnover of 3.5 billion euros, and so paid 0.7 billion to the state in dividends and 0.8 billion in taxes.

One delegate asked about LKAB's role in communicating on gender to the rest of society as well as within the company. Aaro responded that this is something very important to LKAB and which he feels industry often neglects. Another delegate asked what attracts women to LKAB. Aaro responded that the company has a lot of positive stories to tell when it comes to gender equality, and that he has figures to back up the company values to show that LKAB walks the walk. LKAB talks about the great careers that women have there, showing that they have interesting jobs and a good professional situation. They work actively to expose these good examples, to the extent where some of the women in the mine are tired of being photographed and interviewed.

One delegate asked how these stories are shared. Lotta Fogde, Director of Communications for LKAB talked about an improvement in internal communications including interviews in the company magazine which acts as a major channel. LKAB also communicates with local communities through information centres on both major sites, where these stories are shared. A survey has shown an interesting positive trend: men used to think LKAB was gender equal but women were not so sure. Now the gap is closing – women's opinion on gender equality at LKAB is much closer to that of men.

One museum director asked about Arctic drilling. Aaro mentioned a visit from Catherine Ashton, the EU foreign minister who was astonished about the level of technology in the mine, including shops and restaurants down in the mine. She felt that LKAB was a great example of mining in the Arctic. Aaro feels that in general, LKAB has some of the toughest regulations in the industry. He stated that if there is a strong legislation, environmental permits are not easy to obtain, and it happens in a way that society would approve of. Aaro focuses on the positive economic and social aspects. His iron ore pellet gives one seventh of the carbon emissions of any other iron ore pellet produced in the world.

The next question from a science centre director: are women employed across all sectors of the company? Which profiles are more male oriented? Aaro answered that all sectors are open, and that LKAB actively promotes women into jobs. Another participant asked about salary equality. Aaro stated that this is ensured 100%.

Where would the company be if LKAB hadn't put gender on the agenda? Aaro replied that he thinks the situation would be much worse, especially on the image side. Gender has been neglected by the industry for so long.

Sheena Laursen was next up to speak about the outcomes of the TWIST project. She announced that the project managed to make gender and diversity the topic of this year's Directors Forum. It was not easy, and took some lobbying on the part of the project. It takes some time to learn, and share, and find out what works. Last year it was considered that directors and CEOs would not attend if the topic was gender. And yet the turnout at this

event has been as strong as ever. It's also notable that there are a greater proportion of female participants this year, and let's hope this continues.

TWIST stands for Towards Women In Science and Technology and has aimed to challenge our stereotyped ideas of scientists, focusing on female scientists and motivating young people, especially girls, to take up a career in science. Laursen presented the project partners and mentioned the difficulties of reaching boys as well as girls to talk about gender. ASDO from Rome were useful for this. King's College London also gave advice and made recommendations. She presented the activities which took place as part of TWIST: the exhibition, gender day, 3-day programme of activities, teaching guidelines and workshops, guidelines of gender equality and workshops for science centre and museum directors. She told stories about how these activities have worked, including stories about how the virtual puppet reached adults as well as children.

Laursen talked about the closing event in Dublin which was a significant success, with the participation of Maire Geoghegan-Quinn and other EU officials who took on board the results of the project. One key finding of the project was that the activities were raising the self-esteem of the young people involved. The teacher workshops at the seven science centres was something new for many teachers – they hadn't previously reflected on gender, and the workshops sparked several moments of self-awareness where teachers realized how they could be more gender-inclusive, and how often their expectations regarding boys and girls were self-fulfilling.

Laursen invited four science centre and museum directors to speak about how they found TWIST activities affected their institutions.

Eva Jonsson, as deputy director and head of education at Teknikens Hus, and Board Member of Ecsite, ensured that the gender perspective was reflected in the science centre and museum network. Jonsson said that TWIST had brought gender back onto Teknikens Hus' agenda, and it gave the centre the opportunity to stop, reflect, work internally with the staff and make this agenda sustainable throughout the institution, with a lot of input from the project research.

Anne-Marie Bruyas, head of international relations at Città della Scienza, Naples, highlighted three main learning points. The first was that it was a crucial platform to share experience and ideas from different countries. There is such a variety of gender perspectives according to cultural and social identity and this brought a great richness to the project. The second was the work with women scientists. This was a chance for CdS to really actively involve women scientists and it resulted in a very good relationship with the network of women researchers at the University of Naples. They came to work as explainers in the science centre and gave their perspective as scientists. The public have to see these positive new role models, and the TWIST database served this purpose. The third main impact was institutional: the Italian Minister of Research visited and saw the TWIST exhibition, as did the EU Commissioner for Industry. This showed policymakers that science centres can be key players on issues like gender in research.

Asger Hoeg, CEO of Experimentarium, Hellerup, Denmark, found that through TWIST that it is important to update our methodologies in order to reach boys and girls. Social inclusion has improved in Experimentarium as a result of the project, and it is part of the institution's 2015 strategy. The decision was made at the Directors Forum to include gender balance as a part of this strategy. A corporate branding process is currently underway, and Experimentarium aims to increase its societal role for Denmark, holding a key position. Part

of this branding has to include gender balance. One last story: the richest foundation in Denmark has always been in the pipeline of funding Experimentarium's expansion. The foundation's director was called over by Twisty, the TWIST exhibition. He spoke to Twisty for five minutes, came to the meeting room in a great mood and the result was €27million funding.

Michiel Buchel, CEO of NEMO, Amsterdam talked about the teacher training workshops and guidelines, produced by the NEMO Learning Centre. TWIST brought gender to NEMO's internal agenda. Safety, creativity, sustainability are all issues for NEMO, and gender has now been added to this list. When the NEMO management team was discussing NEMO's future development, gender came to the table thanks to TWIST. NEMO employs a large proportion of women, around 60% of the 200 employees, and this is reflected in the management team but not yet in the board of directors, but the focus on the gender balance of the board is now also an issue. Another result was in terms of the Dutch national science centre network which distributed the outcomes to all the institutions in the network. Other types of museums have also requested the guidelines. This has been good for NEMO's role in the country. He added that to find good female role models it means looking beyond the usual contacts, and that is one big advantage to the science centre as an institution.

Laursen took the floor again to state that visibility of women in STEM has to be present at all times, in all our activities. TWIST is a project which has stretched far beyond the funding allocated to it by the European Commission – it has changed science centres and museums for good. Our institutions can't just disseminate science – they have to play a societal role. A focus on gender can help science centres and museums reach out to all kinds of organizations, and these relationships can be incredibly fruitful. Laursen emphasized that the most important outcome of the project is the change in mindsets that she has seen across the three years of the project, which has resulted in a lasting change.