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Wrap-up

Vanessa Williams

Founding Member of EWLA

It is clear to me that everybody worked very hard this afternoon and engaged fully with the discussions. I did my best to walk around as many of the groups as I could and dipped into the debates. I thought it might therefore be useful just to share a few observations having had the opportunity to compare the different approaches. The first comment that really struck me was that apparently some of the men at the AGMs were concerned about equality for their daughters but were not ready at this point in time to address the issue for the current generation of women trying to forge their careers. They did not appear to be aware until the issue became directly relevant to them.

There was a very different approach to running and attending AGMs across the countries. Some, in particular in Germany, were very well attended, they were treated almost like a day out! Whereas I think it was in Hungary there were some cases where the AGMs were advertised but when somebody turned up there was actually no meeting taking place and everybody was scrambling around trying to get some cups and saucers together and a few secretaries together to make it look like a meeting was happening.

One of the issues that has been mentioned here – and I thought was important – was that at the recruitment level we need to look more widely at the skills that women have and to recognise skills that are acquired in non-traditional work place environments that are transferrable into workplace settings. One example I heard was that any woman who has three children and manages a full time job and manages all the children's activities is clearly super-capable in time management and multitasking. And that experience outside of the work place environment is still relevant when applying for a job and being considered for board roles.

Mentoring was clearly a very strong theme across the groups. Mentoring should be undertaken by men as much as by other women. And thank you to all you men who came today and stayed through till the end and engaged with the issue. This is not a female issue, it is a people issue. By getting engagement from both sides of the gender divide is where we start to make some progress.

There is a very strong cultural backdrop that seems to impact on the position of women on boards. There was one comment from Latvia that the women there had a culture of having to be self-sustaining, having to work throughout the years, there was an expectation that as a woman you would work throughout your life. And that seems to impact on the stance that the women take within this country on their own rights, on their own progression within organizations and led to a greater expectation of reaching board positions. The discussions highlighted a sense of historic/cultural backdrop in a country and that the past was very much still impacting on the stance taken by different countries today on this issue. One interesting comment was that in some countries

there are some very long maternity leave provisions, which are supposed to be supporting women. In fact, they are actually creating a problem for women because of the amount of time that was being taken out of a woman's career. In one instance maternity leave was as much as three years! A popular comment was that actually this is where shared parental leave and paternity rights could really make a difference. This would lessen the impact on the woman's career if both parents can take some time off to look after children and spread both the child care and the career break. For some women who maybe have several children, maternity leave can mean a very long time out of the market, resulting in losing their networks, losing their connections and, to some extent losing their skills in a professional capacity. There is a very strong need for networking in order to progress in a career. The importance of female professional networks cannot therefore be stressed enough. Not every environment is easy for women to break into at a senior level. For example in law firms, that are very male dominated, it can be difficult for women to get to know the partners at a social level as the messages can be mixed if a woman goes for drinks with a male partner. For a male lawyer, it is easy to get to know the people who will be making decisions about them over a beer. So the work that has been done by countries here and coordinators in creating those forums for women to come together and support one another is very much appreciated.

On several of the tables that I went to the concept of quotas for all companies was being stressed as a way of making progress in the same way as quotas have changed the balance for quoted companies. But, there was a sense that quotas were really only the beginning of the change and that we actually needed to look much further across all corporate life to bring fundamental changes about.

Education came out as a strong theme and that was one of the recommendations from the project. And another thought that came out was whether there is a generational component to this. From my own experience, young men who worked for me have got a very different view of what they see what they perceive of as the lack of work life balance in my own generation. I don't think it is necessarily therefore just a female issue in the younger generation – the young men as well are looking at the people who have gone before them and saying 'this is not for me; I want to have a work-life balance'. So I wonder what impact that shift in our culture and our thinking about work and life will have as time moves on.

So, to draw things to a close, it seems to me that quotas have the quickest impact in getting women onto boards but that doesn't mean that voluntary regimes haven't had their own successes. They are progressing, they may be slower, perhaps, than in the case of Finland, but certainly in the UK the voluntary regime is having an impact. But there is a definite movement towards gender balance and peer pressure, transparency and greater reporting very much seem to be the key to that progress. And so finally, I would really like to say it is truly wonderful to be in this room of women supporting

