

Women, Company Boards and Quotas Why there will be quotas

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In 2015 the UK **will** have legislation forcing company boards to have a minimum representation of women. That is, if the promise of Lord Davies, in his recent report about the lack of gender diversity on UK boards, is acted-upon. Why? Because a voluntary code to promote more women and hit a target of 25% by that time will not work. Lord Davies almost said as much himself when he summarised his findings about why currently, the economically active workforce is 46% female, but among the FTSE top 250 company board members only 7.3% are women. One of his reasons to explain this fact was the mindset among incumbents.

And there is the rub – mindset. It is all to do with psychologies; those of the men in the boardroom club and those of the women who are capable to join, but don't. The psychological mechanisms that are relevant are deeply subconscious and universal to our human species. Men recruit close working colleagues in their own image, creating a clan with behaviours that are knowable, comfortable and predictable. The reason why men select other men is that it reduces their own anxieties of having to deal with the slightly less familiar and probably different behaviours of the fair sex. After all, we all want an easy life and the more alike the people around us are, the more efficient we will work together, finding it easier to resolve issues and come to decisions.

Then there is the other side of the gender equation – the female brain. The vast majority of women, Lord Davies said, don't want quotas to be the route to equality, instead they want recognition. So here is the second rub! Women want men to see they are capable through dint of their excellent work and to **earn** their place on the Board. What women don't understand is that men are being influenced by their own subconscious psychology of selecting for familiar behaviours more typical of males, like: overt displays of credentials, skill at competing and confidence in their own abilities.

So, men don't 'get it'. The female preference to be 'noticed' is counter-intuitive to the male mind. And the same goes for women; the need to behave against the grain of their nature results in them choosing not to play the games required to succeed to the top. Women leave to set-up their own companies with behaviours that are understandable to them. Men continue to look for behavioural cues that are typically alien to women.

That is why in 2015, quotas forcing female promotion to UK boards will become law.