

8. Having and Exercising the Right to Make Decisions

ONISHI Sachiyo

An announcement by the World Economic Forum in October 2016 ranked Japan 111th among all countries in terms of gender equality¹. I was surprised to find that our country had fallen six places from the previous year, largely due to the extremely low percentage of women in decision-making positions in the economic and political spheres. Although Japan has been actively working for the advancement of women in recent years, we seem to have been overtaken by other countries, resulting in a relative decline.

In the world today, some companies have achieved the target of having over 30% of women in board member positions with the right to make business decisions, while others have established cross-company networks of top executives to achieve this target together. The 30% Club², a UK national network of top business executives launched in 2010, runs a programme to help women learn the skills necessary for serving as a board member from the start of their career, and actively to hire the female executive candidates thus developed. The network was born from the awareness that top executives need to work together across industries to tackle this issue, in order to ensure the sustainable development of society on which their businesses are founded.

In her book *Lean In*, Cheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, calls on women more actively to seize and exercise the right to make decisions, as women tend to be reserved about taking risks and reluctant to assume responsibility³. This message is rooted in her own experience in career development and her perspective as a business executive.

Many companies, both in Japan and abroad, are taking proactive measures to increase the percentage of women in management positions, not

only at the director level but also at the senior executive and middle management levels. Actions include: (1) enhancing the pool of candidates, i.e. developing as many candidates as possible for key positions; (2) building a distinct pipeline, i.e. charting the course for promoting candidates selected through action (1); and (3) bringing the ratio of males to females of new recruits to 6:4 to facilitate actions (1) and (2)⁴. It should be noted that even in Europe and America, where employment is more mobile, businesses are seeking to ensure the development of necessary skills by setting a target for the male-female ratio of new recruits.

However, such measures may privilege employees who are also caregivers to the detriment of other employees, who are required to take on extra work, resulting in an environment that is the complete opposite of a "pleasant workplace." This is an issue to be addressed throughout the world.

Thus, a major Japanese manufacturer has adopted a rule that requires anyone in a VP position or above to recommend three successors to the post, one of whom has to be a woman. This has facilitated actions (1) and (2), as executives have started to identify and develop potential female candidates. Men must also reconsider how they work and do business in order to bring about structural change. For instance, a global consulting firm launched in 2016 a 'mostly men's group,' in which 80% of the members are men. This move is intended to encourage male executives to discuss how to improve diversity and inclusion as a requirement to ensure their own successful career development, in an effort to effectively promote the advancement of women.

Hopefully, such corporate efforts will increase in intensity and scale, eventually improving the gender equality score of Japan.

¹ The World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016*, 2016.

² <https://30percentclub.org>

³ Cheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*. Knopf, 2013.

⁴ UN Women, *Corporate Parity Report 2016*, 2016.