

Edge Debate/Debate 53 – Construction needs Women because

31st January 2013 – The Danish Embassy, 55 Sloane Street, London SW1X 9SR

WELCOMING REMARKS

ANNE HEDENSTED STEFFENSEN - Her Excellency the Danish Ambassador in London

The Ambassador welcomed the Edge to her residence at the top of the Danish Embassy and introduced the session by confirming the advanced position of women in Denmark. She referred to a [Mckinsey study](#) linking improved performance with the number of women in leadership positions and the specific behaviour that they bring to the situation.

CHAIR - HARVEY FRANCIS, Vice-President Skanska UK

HF opened the debate by reminding participants of the major challenges of diversity, and that the key to resolving this was inclusivity. HF noted the lack of women (16%) coming out of built environment degree courses and that there was clearly a need for work to be done in both training and in awareness raising. In the industry there tended to be a lot of commitment at the top but the commitment dropped as you approached site level.

PRESENTATIONS

CHARLOTTE MORGAN, Partner at Linklaters

CM noted [Vince Cable's letter](#) that morning to the remaining 7% of FSTE 100 companies without women on their boards. CM used her own career to illustrate that issues like frequent travel and children; she had four; were not an excuse to appoint the women who have the skills to senior positions.

She noted the differences between male and female behaviours and how Robert Winston showed how mothers and fathers interact with their children. Fathers (in general) encouraged their children to take risks while mothers evaluated situations and urged them to take precautions. CM said it was a clear that a balance of both approaches was needed and that the same was true of company boards. In a like for like comparison one

woman on the board of a company results in it outperforming those companies without women on their boards. This balance helps manage risk, thus providing the best results.

She noted that company boards need to represent society as a whole with 50% of customers generally being women, and this increasing to 70% in the retail sector, Vince Cable's recommendation concerning more female board members must make sense. However, Government intervention is required through tax breaks.

With 60% of university graduates being women, Linklaters is focussing on talent retention. They carry out regular engagement survey with all employees and have a gender action plan to provide strong role models, including a women leadership programme. Linklaters provides opportunities for more flexible working and allows one day a week working at home. This requires cultural change and a serious management commitment but it makes a real difference to retaining talent. In the legal profession the starkest gender difference was whether people stay and progress in private practice to partner level (women 10%, men 60%) or whether they leave to take in-house positions in companies elsewhere (30% of women end up not working, 30% in other industries and 30% in in-house positions).

STEPHANIE WRAY, Sustainability Consultant

SW said she had worked in the construction industry for twenty years but there were many other women still making the tea. She had been appointed the first female board member at Hyder when the firm was 150 years old. The hard playing aspect of construction was not really there anymore but nevertheless women coming back to work after children became disillusioned and undoubtedly part-time or term time only working was stopping some women from reaching their potential.

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SW asked why so few women were entering the industry in the first place, why were they not attracted to engineering and construction. Perhaps it was because although engineers need to be thorough and logical they was little requirement for creativity and people focus until the later stages of their career. SW noted the differences between women and men described by the scientist Steven Pinker in *How the Mind Works* (1997). Career decisions were largely made by the age of 16 when only 18% of girls chose to do the maths and physics A-levels necessary for engineering (and then mostly with a career in medicine in mind) because women viewed these subjects as socially isolating. There was a need to show that engineering was a rounded career choice. Society needs renaissance engineers, working creatively and innovating, and more women.

SW asked why there are only 15% engineers in the UK, whereas in the rest of Europe there are at least 20%. She mentioned the difficulties that women have returning to work after maternity breaks, becoming junior to male colleagues who were previously of similar seniority, and earning less. Flexibility, home working plus a 'returners programme' are critical for equality.

KATHARINE WHITEHORN, longstanding *Observer* journalist and author

KW confessed her lack of experience in the construction industry. She had left the AA after one term but the generality of the position of women was the same elsewhere women trying to make it in the world were up against the accepted norms of how things are done. Journalism had been all about business, sport, politics and low cunning and had not covered human relations at all until one woman on the *Manchester Guardian* decided to publish things of interest to people like her. Now everything has changed in journalism and reporters work the way they want to and not the way it should be done. Now the only person the *Daily Mail* really fears is Polly Toynbee. What women are up against is the male conviction that they know how to do it – women do it differently.

Her experience on a number of company boards showed the difference a few women could make. KW recommended the book "Let IT Go" by Dame Stephanie Shirley.

Both men and women have their own needs and fortunately the rigid structures that obstructed them being satisfied are going.

Asked how women can best succeed in a world dominated by men where they are up against accepted norms KW noted jokingly that power retreats until it ends up in the gents! Creating an inclusive environment for everyone, with a unisex culture is critical to inclusivity and team building.

DEBATE

(Following the Chatham House Rule, remarks from the floor are not attributed).

1. Referred to the work done by [Gloria Moss](#) on gender design difference. Although the differences were great, the female default was more acceptable to men than vice versa. Does the construction industry go into schools to promote the industry?

SW STEM ambassadors are sent into schools from the industry

2. A programme called Budding Brunels takes bright young industry professionals into schools. But what about the issue of women working on the tools. We need everyone to be included.
3. Making a case for women is absurd. It reinforces the norm where there is a need to change the norm, to deal with childcare etc. Finding influential women in infrastructure for an article was very difficult but in particular the tunnel design engineer, Kata Cooksey, is inspirational. What about affirmative action?

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| <p>CM Have flip-flopped on affirmative action – have a dislike of quotas. You can over-promote people and can then damage career paths for others. The moral imperative is to create an environment where everyone who wants can succeed. It is about choice.</p> <p>KW The trouble with quotas is the male-female separation. Change the culture but not with quotas.</p> <p>HF The women in Skanska don't want quotas.</p> <p>4. What about leadership training. There is a great role for men in mentoring – they bring the same issues as women but don't express it in the same way.</p> <p>CM Making a sweeping generalisation (eg. life is terrifying for men at the school gate because no-one ever talks to them) men pick and choose elements from a range of role models but women choose one role model and then try to re-model themselves.</p> <p>5. The Canadian Navy says: "It can't afford to fish in half the gene pool". It is necessary to address early years education at Key Stages 1 and 2. If we are going to encourage engineering thinking before it is too late. Many primary school teachers are not science-based.</p> <p>6. Those who work in large organisations don't understand the difference with the world of small builders. These are answers only for large organisations. How can we reach the very large number of grass roots organisations? Where are the connections?</p> <p>7. Women in Construction have a majority of members from SMEs. Networks are hugely important and there is a groundswell in that area.</p> <p>6. Wouldn't sacrifice my daughter to the construction industry at present.</p> | <p>CM Networking across construction companies has been hugely successful</p> <p>8. Firm has a co-operative structure that allows people to give their best. Ours isn't large at 30-40 but co-ops work at a large scale too.</p> <p>FH Would the approach that firms have made in recent years to health & safety work for gender issues?</p> <p>9. Firm is a micro-business and it is difficult to match issues experienced in small and large firms.

Would it be good for sustainability if more women were in the industry? Should we concentrate on the opportunities to improve the world? More women might choose to enter the industry because they want to save the planet.</p> <p>10. Are district heating systems an answer. They are complex to operate but my 10 year old daughter now outperforming me in most subjects.</p> <p>11. Women outperforming but also need to be more assertive. The building industry highly competitive and women can change that war-like approach using their facilitation skills.

Wouldn't agree about encouraging the use of technology. It is more important to encourage using your hands and to develop more creativity in teaching.

I've spent time on site instructing men how to use tools and never had any problem.</p> <p>12. Women have been more than half of architecture students for many years but there are only 20% in practice. Medicine changed its gender balance in a very short time. Show patience - universities got rid of the maths requirement and replaced it with a requirement for problem solving. They are doing a reasonable job of bringing women in.</p> |
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13. Traditionally design teams male dominated but on London 2012 it was very different with a very strong sustainability agenda. The team for sustainability was 80% female. There was an overarching requirement for sustainability so the team had power – with gentleness.
14. Studied engineering but now working in medical technology sector. Chose to leave – but feedback would have been good.
15. In US Football there is the Rooney Rule that requires teams to consider all candidates. We should learn from the 30% Club and drive to women at the top. Top companies need to come together to achieve the necessary momentum.

CHAIR'S SUMMING UP

- Importance of role models
- Importance of Management/Leadership commitment
- Perception of the industry – needs to change
 - Male oriented routines and rituals – accepted norms
 - Importance of educational influence – choices at 13
 - Positioning – “Making life better”, not just about spreadsheets etc.
- Flexible working – impact on school run – not well catered for currently
- Impact of talent loss from the industry
- Break the belief that male way is the right way
- Role for men in mentoring women
- Recognise not all women that same/not all men the same
- Education – need to get earlier – key stage 1 or 2
 - and educate the teachers
- Is the industry ready for more women?

What can we do?

- A Returners programme – fast track programme for post maternity returns
- Influence/change the culture – do what you can personally
- Educate the next generation – create new role models – get into schools – our industry is key to saving the planet
- Mentoring – change regularly to keep perspectives and role models fresh
- Influence the supply chain
- Do the double check – make sure what we do/write/talk about doesn't reinforce male perspectives
- Listen – what do people want?
- 'Rooney rule' – make sure each recruitment shortlist has a diverse candidate on it.