


How to build a business case for female leadership

An interview with Tine Willumsen, Above & Beyond Group CEO



Tine Willumsen, Above & Beyond Group CEO

“I have always viewed gender diversity as a business case – an absolute necessity for development and progress at a global scale”

Mercuri Urval

It's All About People™



Tine Willumsen, CEO of Above & Beyond Group

Tine Willumsen is the initiator of The Danish Diversity Council, Founder of The Womenomics Nordic Business Conference. Today she acts as the CEO of Above & Beyond Group.

In the article “Becoming a champion of inclusion: How to release the true potential of diversity in your leadership team” we elaborated on the importance of leadership and culture to increase and manage diversity in terms of age, cultural background, and gender. **But what are the business advantages to be gained from working with gender diversity in particular?**

To further explore the specific topic of gender diversity and female leadership, we reached out to Tine Willumsen. She is initiator of The Danish Diversity Council, Founder of The Womenomics Nordic Business Conference and CEO of Above & Beyond Group – an international advisory offering services connected to diversity to both corporate companies and global brands. Early on in her international career within the diamond business at De Beers, Tine realised the enormous potential of

female consumers and leaders. Building on these international insights, she moved back to Denmark 10 years ago to embark on a journey towards unlocking the true potential of gender diversity.

From the position as CEO of her own consulting agency, Above & Beyond Group, Tine initiated the celebrated Womenomics Nordic Business Conference to highlight and award extraordinary female leaders around the world. At the conference of 2016, Above & Beyond founded The Danish Diversity Council (DDC) along with strong partners such as McKinsey & Company, Maersk, PwC and Microsoft, with the sole purpose of getting more women into top leadership positions in Denmark.

“I have always viewed gender diversity as a business case – an absolute necessity for development and progress at a global scale. To move this agenda forward, we need to create corporate structures where people and companies put their money where their mouth is, and build joint solutions. Both Womenomics and DDC proof the positive change that can happen when businesses actually invest in gender diversity”, Tine explains.

“

Gender diversity is simply a business imperative for growth and competitiveness”

Tine Willumsen, Above & Beyond Group CEO

What is “the business case for gender diversity”?

“Simply put: companies need to talk intelligently to women. Let me give you some examples, today 25 percent of all luxury cars sold globally are bought by women, yet you only see male drivers behind the steering wheel in executive car commercials! The car companies are simply forgetting to talk to ¼ of their client segment. In a similar way, international jewellery companies, still mainly have male CEOs who cannot wear or relate to their own products. This is acceptable within the business community – but just imagine if Carlsberg had a whole board of directors, where no one drank alcohol? Or if no one in the management team of a car company had a driver’s license? Tomorrow’s clients and consumers are going to demand diverse teams and intelligent communication that matches the market potential and actual consumer base. Once this happens the new insights will fuel tremendous growth and opportunities.”, Tine says.

The longest study of gender diversity in a business context was a 19-year examination of 215 Fortune 500 companies by Glass Ceiling Research Center, showing strong correlations between a better balance of men and women in leadership positions and higher profitability. Similar findings come from McKinsey, Bloomberg and other research institutions, which have all found that companies with the highest percentage of women show the best performance and financial results.

“Gender diversity is simply a business imperative for growth and competitiveness. Stakeholders know it, and soon all companies and corporate leaders will have to acknowledge and adapt to this fact in order to remain successful.”

Once a company has recognised the need for increased gender diversity, how do you actually make it happen?

“Changing behaviour always takes time, and all organisations are at different phases. But the key to success is being open and honest and asking for help and advice. Try to learn from other compa-

nies’ mistakes and successes, and share learnings”, Tine says, and again emphasise the importance of knowledge sharing.

Over the years, the Danish Diversity Council has developed their own model for increasing gender diversity and promoting female leaders.

“The basic steps of our model are to first define a strategic platform, where the keys to success are dedication from top management, diagnostics to define the company’s starting point, and definition of existing structures. The next, and perhaps hardest step is the execution in order to reach real changes in behaviour. Here the organisation in question needs to develop programs, track the behavioural changes, and actively drive transformation.”

According to Tine, another core focus of an organisation’s gender diversity efforts must be to get more women to actually enter the talent pipeline in order to build a stronger internal pool of female employees to further grow and develop.



If you want more women in the top management team, then the existing top managers need to commit, show up and mentor existing female talents in the organisation”

Tine Willumsen, Above & Beyond Group CEO

How do you attract and retain female talents and leaders?

“If you want more women in the top management team, then the existing top managers need to commit, show up and mentor existing female talents in the organisation. Also, we need more female role models to speak up regarding the value they already provide for their organisations,” Tine states and continues:

“From my experience, there are four core focus areas a company should excel in, to attract and retain female leaders: identify the high performing female talents early and send them on as many executive leadership courses as the men, secure career opportunities within the company’s pipeline (meaning, include gender diversity in the succession planning), aim to become the preferred workplace of the future, and, of course, make sure to promote and financially award inclusive leadership.”

Finally, what are the key steps towards building an inclusive culture?

“Firstly, you need commitment to a shared vision of an inclusive culture from top management. The initiatives and efforts need to come from the top down, and you need to have a strategic approach as such a cultural transformation will take years to truly implement. Once the entire top management team is on board, the main task is to communicate the vision and get the whole organisation involved.”

According to Tine, an important key for ensuring that the vision trickles down throughout the organisation, is to provide training for every single employee to reach self-awareness of their own unconscious biases. You need to give them an “aha-moment”, and thereby make them realise the true potential of inclusion and diversity – for the organisation and themselves.

“The next step is team workshops, to facilitate interaction and learning between colleagues and within teams. You need to “tip the iceberg”, and get the majority on-board with the company’s vision and initiatives”, Tine further explains, and continues:

“

“The final step is to recognise that the process of creating an inclusive culture is not linear, but circular. Once the entire organisation has received training and the tools necessary to execute change, leadership must acknowledge and award champions of diversity (through the KPIs etc.) within the company to create internal role models. Finally, top level management must continually assess the results of all efforts and initiatives, to ensure that the entire organisation is contributing to the inclusive culture”



www.mercuriurval.com

Mercuri Urval

It's All About People™