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# *All things are not equal*

Is introducing quotas to increase the number of women on company boards tokenism, or a necessary intervention?

How far should government, and business in general, go to ensure that the percentage of women in the boardroom fairly represents the percentage of women in business? It's an emotive question and one that might soon be answered. The European Union (EU) is drawing up proposals for a voluntary code on female directors but is also threatening to force a 40% female boardroom quota on public companies if they fail to sign up by the end of the year.

Such a decree would force UK businesses in line with those in Norway, France and Spain where quotas have already been introduced, but there is consternation among the business community over whether a quota system is fair on business, on the directors already sitting on boards – both male and female – and, indeed, on whether it is fair on the very women it may fast-track to the top. In his recent report on women directors, Lord Davies, the former trade minister, shied away from imposing quotas and instead called for 'recommended' levels of women on company boards. Whatever measures end up being introduced in the UK, and by whom, it's clear that there's an issue for women at business.

Dianah Worman, diversity adviser at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, agrees that “issues concerning ability and opportunity to work more flexibly”, are relevant when looking at the reasons for the lack of women on boards. But she adds that often the problem is “an issue of culture and how people relate to each other – it's not deliberate.” Jacey Graham, visiting fellow at Cranfield and Director of Diversity and Inclusion at consultants Brook Graham, agrees that this is a key point. “Diversity and inclusion is a big movement in large organisations,” she says, “but the effects have not yet reached the top. Further down the talent pipeline women are coming through in large numbers.”

When business leaders asked about the reasons for a lack of female directors, she points out, one gets a “different response when you ask senior men and senior women. On the face of it the men will say that it's difficult when women are juggling a career and a family, and that that's just the way the world is. [But] talking to women, there is more discussion about the clearly prevailing culture. That's the crux of it. Organisations are established by male rules of operating. Leadership style is male. If you're knocking against those doors, do you flex your own style to suit it?”

You can read the full version of this article in the April issue of *Hourglass*, which will be available next month.



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