



Get the ball rolling ...

... to develop board work. Challenges and opportunities according to 27 Board Chairs from Swedish team sports.

By Annika Grälls



The project **Get the ball rolling** is based on three sports associations, the Swedish Handball Federation, the Swedish Basketball Association and the Swedish Fotball Association, and is financed by funds from the Swedish Sports Confederation.

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This publication is an adaptation and shortened version of the scientific report *Sport, gender equality and organizational power, opportunities and obstacles for women and men to reach high leadership positions in team sports*, which was authored by Daniel Alsarve from Örebro University from the project. The report is written based on current research, interviews and the workshops that were conducted within the project *Get the ball rolling*.

Please note that linguistic adjustments from spoken language to written language have been made to make it easier to read the quotes from the interviews. However, the meaning of the quotes has not changed. All quotes are marked with italics.



1. Introduction

The goal for 2025 – and some observations

IN RECENT YEARS, issues such as democracy, sustainability and justice have taken an increasing place in sport. Gender equality, inclusion and social justice are self-evident in the Swedish Sports Confederation's strategy 2025 and the objectives are as follows:

- Women and men in all decision-making and advisory bodies are represented by at least 40%.
- Nomination committees at all levels consist of an equal number of women and men.
- The proportion of women and men in senior positions, such as Secretary-General/ Head of Federation, Sports/Education/Development Manager or similar, in the various sports organizations amounts to at least 40%.
- The proportion of female and male coaches in each sport is at least 40 per cent:
 - in children's and youth activities at club level,
 - in National Sports Upper Secondary Schools (RIG)
 - in nationally approved sports education (NIU)

OF COURSE, IT is easier to talk about this in theory than it is to put it into practice. Sport was created by men for men and masculinity and its norms have therefore permeated sport and its conditions, both economically and socially. In addition, non-profit organizations are generally more conservative and thus more difficult to change than companies and other organizations.

For almost 50 years, the sports movement has had the ambition to become more equal, but to date this has not been reached, with the goal consistently shifting back. In 2019, during the Swedish Sports Council meeting, the decision was made that the gender distribution in the different federation boards would be 40/60. That is, at least 40 percent of the underrepresented sex.

But gender equality is not only about numbers, but also about roles. Who is listened to, who speaks the most, can everyone influence equally? Equality is both representation and power.

IN OUR SPORTS clubs, it is the board, the elected representatives, who make the decisions for the business/ club. It includes everything from how resources are distributed to what values exist and are prioritized, and how the business should develop. Sometimes goals and values can be contradictory, such as education versus competition, gender equality versus integration ... Or can they be combined?

What requirements are reasonable to place on elected officials and people who are voluntarily engaged? Is it even possible to make demands on people's leisure and non-profit engagement? Positions of trust take a lot of time, in some cases at least 20 hours/week, which from the start does not even make participation possible for everyone who wants to.

A board of directors can promote or hinder progress towards greater equality and social justice through its decisions and actions. It can be about training times, resource allocation, facilities and training. Something that can be seen, measured and followed up. Attitudes, on the other hand, are more difficult to influence.

Research, including in a Danish study, shows that a board that allows gender equality issues to permeate its work differs markedly from one that only adds issues of gender equality to the agenda and activities.

When gender equality is added, it often leads to the perception that “girls and women need to be helped” instead of the conditions for leading and practicing sport being as equal as possible.

“A typical example that I have been through several times is that if I say something, then it is like people do not hear it. But when a man says the same thing a moment later, everyone hears it.”

“We’ll be truly equal the day gender is of no importance whatsoever, but when we value each and every individual based on competence and what they have to offer.”

2. Project statement

Why get the ball rolling?

THE PROJECT *Get the ball rolling* has been initiated by three federations; The Swedish Handball Federation, the Swedish Basketball Association and the Swedish Football Association and is financed by funds from the Swedish Sports Confederation. The project is about being able to identify obstacles and opportunities for equal board work based on in-depth interviews with Board Chairs of federations, districts and leagues from basketball, handball, and football. And in the long run, find a way towards more equal sport.

The questions that have been asked in the interviews are straightforward: What do the Chairs perceive as obstacles to gender equality? How do they perceive the environment for equal board work? What needs to be done to achieve gender equality in the three ball sports and in sport in general?

The selection of interviewees was conducted in two stages. First, women who were Chairs of federations, districts or leagues in any of the three sports were offered to participate in the project, and then an equal number of men in corresponding positions were asked. A total of 27 people were interviewed by researcher Daniel Alsarve. The gender distribution was 15 women and 12 men, in other words, not all men accepted to participate. One man replied that he did not have time to spend 30 minutes on an interview regardless of the time, but instead referred to a woman in the organization. The interviews have been transcribed and anonymized.

WHY BOARD AND management? An organization's management/board of directors can promote or hinder the movement of the business towards increased gender equality in its leadership. In light of this, it was important to focus on the boards and the Chairs that exist within the three sports, whether it was federations, districts or leagues. The interviews focused on the following questions:

- The ideal member and board member
- Gender equality and governance
- Power and change ahead

After the interviews, two workshops were conducted with the participants where they could reflect on and continue sentences that began as follows:

- The cause of inequality in sport is ...
- This means that ...
- The solution to this problem is to ...

Based on the interviews and workshops, a number of areas were crystallized that were perceived as the main obstacles to achieving more equal board work and thus decision-making. These were:

- Structure/norms
- Board work
- Networks
- Resources

FINALLY, THE AVERAGE age of the interviewees was 56 years (born 1964). The youngest was 33 years old and the oldest 70 years old. The majority had a sporting background of some kind. This, combined with an interest in sport, has led to them being given positions of trust. The fact that everyone holds leadership positions in each sport can affect both the will and the ability to look critically at their own movement, as it is always more difficult to objectively review the activities for which one is responsible. People "endorse" more often of the reasons why it looks the way it does.

3. Background

Why is gender equality important in sport?

“Equality to me is that men and women have equal positions of power in an organization. Then it is equal. Not that it’s a certain number.”

SOMETIMES GENDER EQUALITY is perceived as a way to “help women”. This is not only true in sport, where men have historically had an advantage in terms of power, but a view that is also present in many other parts of society.

Initially, gender equality was seen as a women’s issue, but in the 1990s men were also included in the issue and its potential solution. It became a question for everyone to relate to. In various areas, policies were adopted, and processes, programmes and projects were initiated to map, study and find solutions on how best to deal with the gender equality issue.

They were encouraged to work according to the 3R method: to study their own representation, resource allocation and then formulate a revised goal/reality for the business (realia). Today, gender equality is an important part of agenda 2030, the UN’s sustainable development goals.

For the sports movement, gender equality is about equalizing power differences between women and men. Inequality is a problem for all clubs, associations and society at large, as well as for both men and women.

The research shows that equal organizations and activities work more profitably, both economically and socially. But also, that the quality of decisions is improved and are more successful as more perspectives are included.

SO WHY DOESN’T equality increase if there are gains to be made? The problem is not that women and men are different, but men’s activities, as well as the male characteristics, have become the norm one acts according to in the sports movement. This means that women’s activities and characteristics are subordinated, marginalized and sometimes disparaged, which in turn affects how we view each other both socially and economically.

In other words, this is a long way from getting a level playing field for leading and practicing sports. Where women and men are systematically divided, as in sport, there are therefore great risks that different conditions for women and men, girls and boys, are created.

The problem of inequality in sport is real. Unfortunately, there is not an easy solution to the problem, as the lack of gender equality is linked to both culture and the economy. The cultural injustice in sport is about the prejudice that women are not as good as men, and the economic misallocation of resources. The cultural belittling makes it possible to continue to skew resources, and this in turn creates worse conditions for women sportingly, creating a catch-22 scenario. Participation on equal terms is created through a fair allocation of resources and mutual recognition of equal status.

IN THE BOARDROOM there are also informal obstacles: men interrupt women, men speak more than women, women are more often ignored. Therefore, both men and women on the board must be aware of the informal obstacles in order to counteract them.

There are two important components for moving forward. Partly participation on

equal terms, and partly distribution of resources so that both parties have influence and no one is dependent on the other.

This excludes all forms of economic dependence and inequality. Gender equality is not just about numbers – it is also a qualitative condition, being equal and interacting on equal terms.

*** Raewynn Connell.**

Australian sociologist. Her work and her book “Masculinities” (1995) have had a major impact on the studies of masculinity.

IF YOU TAKE A CLOSER LOOK at the sport of yesterday, and even today, you see that it is one of the most male-dominated spheres of society where injustices are maintained through economic, social, institutional, and emotional power factors. Connell* has described the rules of sport as follows:

- a) Men/boys and women/girls should be separated.
- b) Girls aren’t as good as boys, and if they happen to be, they shouldn’t be.
- c) It is men’s sport that is really important.
- d) Of course, guys should control the sport!

A SIMPLISTIC PICTURE of resistance to change is that there is someone or some in the club, board or elsewhere in the organization who benefit from the current system and therefore do not want to bring about a change, as it risks causing a deterioration for them personally.

Today’s research suggests that all organizations contain elements that maintain unfair conditions for its members in some way. This also applies to organizations that work to combat injustice, as they also tend to develop their own injustices over time.

“They want to stay in their comfortable world somehow. A typical example that I have been through several times is that if I say something or have some kind of suggestion, then it is like people do not hear it. But when a man says the same thing a moment later, everyone hears it.”

IT IS EASY to believe that all resistance is conscious and clear, but that is not the case. Not all people are aware that their actions and attitudes offend or disparage others. You don’t see things from a different perspective than your own.

One’s own perspective is based on privileges that one takes for granted. This means that men find it difficult to see the privileges that they have on the basis that they are men. Whites don’t see their skin color privileges, the upper class doesn’t see their class privileges, and so on. This causes some to experience problems that others do not see or understand. In male-dominated boards, gender equality tends to become a non-issue.

“Perhaps the most difficult thing is that we need to find structures in the football movement, in the boardrooms and in other contexts that are adapted to the opportunities for girls and women to participate. That the structures are truly inclusive.”

PERHAPS THE MOST famous of various resistances are the so-called master techniques. The five most famous are: invisibility, ridicule, withholding information, double punishment and imposition of guilt and shame. These techniques are used by both women and men.

Resistance is also about control. Those with power can control the conditions for

others' ability to participate by withholding information, excluding, or belittling to name a few examples. Regardless, it makes it more difficult to make the organization fairer and to challenge the power relations.

So, it may be wise to create change by starting with a specific demarcated area rather than trying to change the entire organization at once. Preferably an area where there is a public opinion that supports the change and where you can show that others have made the change and succeeded.

The point, as the research also shows, is that a diverse and “mixed” organizational management/board has a higher awareness and can therefore prevent injustices at an earlier stage.

Notes:

4. Male and female leadership

How do they differ?

“I am the kind of person who dares to speak up and always has. But if you’re not, I think it’s very, very easy for you to get fed up as a girl.”

SO WHAT ISSUES are elected officials expected to pursue and is there a difference between what men and women are expected to pursue? Can men ignore equality? What are the expectations of the members, sponsors and other financiers?

In a Norwegian research study, women and men were interviewed about what beliefs existed about their leadership linked to sport.

The male leader is described as trustworthy, decisive, and authoritarian while the female leader is portrayed as adaptable, consensus-seeking and focuses on relationships rather than goals.

In another interview study, it emerged that the interviewees felt that women were less competitive, had a harder time making tough decisions and were not as good at the informal power game as men. The explanation would be that women are often in the minority in leadership roles, thus diverging and thus being scrutinized more harshly and questioned more, which would make them more cautious in their actions.

The same study finds that women often become complementary to the male leader and must always relate to him in some way and thus are forced to adapt to the space given.

And those women who do not adapt, are competitive, make tough decisions and take their place are judged to be unfeminine and dissentient.

“I think it usually results in some kind of frustration, I really don’t understand why it happens like this. Why the conversations are between men when I try and think I’m doing a good job of driving the conversations and discussions.”

.....

“You want to be liked by men. For women, this is the norm. Some women become this ‘little girl’, because you will be liked and accepted into the group.”

THE POSITIVE ASPECTS of female leadership are that they contribute to a more open climate, teamwork, democracy and empathy. In addition, they have the ability to put new and sometimes controversial issues on the agenda, such as gender equality. Which in itself can lead to women more often feeling that it is challenging and lonely to sit on a board. And also have the feeling that the male members think that they are not engaged in the core business or the right issues.

Preconceived notions that emphasize differences between men’s and women’s characteristics almost exclusively result in the male being placed at the top and the female being marginalized. So even if we land in a distribution of 40/60 in the boardroom, there is a risk that men’s leadership will still become the norm and that women will be a complement to it.

There is also another aspect of the above-mentioned conditions: expectations

mean that women, generally speaking, work twice as hard to be accepted, valued and respected as board members. But also contributes to many women using male characteristics and attributes to fit in.

Therefore, the 40 percent limit, i.e. at least 40 percent of the underrepresented gender should sit on a board or management team, can be a solution. Then the degree of “self-deprecating behavior” can decrease when you are no longer a representative of your gender but an individual on the board.

ACCEPTING POSITIONS OF trust creates expectations of being available in the evenings, weekends and almost 24 hours a day, which affects the conditions for being with the family. The passion for, or love of, sport is something that permeates the mission – and the expected commitment.

None of the twelve men interviewed in our study said they had discussed their nomination for a position or board post with their family and how it might affect the family. The women, on the other hand, said that they had reconciled the matter with the family and their partner before deciding whether to accept or refuse the assignment.

It can also be said that women suffer a kind of double punishment when board assignments are to be combined with family life. Either you are perceived as a poor recruitment if you prioritize the family alternative to a bad mother or partner if you prioritize the assignment. A situation that does not seem to apply to men.

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a solution to this problem at the moment. Sport representatives also do not seem to want to accommodate by reviewing meeting times, structures and other things in order to be able to achieve a broader representation on the board.

“The structure so far has made it very difficult for working mothers and women to participate. Partly because things are scheduled at difficult times, and partly because people don’t use technology. We need to change this. Much older people and self-employed people who can control their time can participate in a completely different way.”

MANY WOMEN ALSO testify to a different problem. They feel that they must not be ambitious, but they should still do a good job. Women who are perceived as driven and competent risk challenging men/power.

In other words, you should be good as a woman – but not too good.

5. How do we break the pattern?

”And I was very particular about that and said that I also want to be chosen for my competence, not just for what gender I have.”

THE MALE MAJORITY in boards and nomination committees in sport is large as a whole, which at present means that men have a decisive role if we are to have more equal sport. Through their actions, they can promote and affirm that more women come in and get the conditions to do good board work.

Of course, boards should have the right people for the assignment, according to the interviewees in our study, and it is important to understand that women’s subordination is wrong in itself and does not stand in contrast to competence requirements. The view that “we have women on our board” shows that one has a starting point that men are the norm and that women are a bonus.

In the long run, it will be a simplification of gender equality, where there is no interest in inclusion and gender equality remains a complement and a side issue that can be opted out of.

HOW DO YOU break this pattern and behavior? The question of quotas and whether it is the right way to break up historically created injustices has long been the subject of discussion. Another way may be to call and publish that you want to recruit, as recruitment through informal contacts tends to increase gender gaps. Research shows that men tend to exclude women.

“A man who is 60 years old and who sits on the club’s board, does not think that he is unequal. But maybe he really is. With his background and experience and the structures that he has grown up with and so on, he is embossed and lives by them. Then it will be a little awkward to, well, how should we think about this from a gender perspective?”

.....

“The biggest problem, in all categories, when it comes to gender equality issues is precisely the power of the male networks. If you can’t access the network, you can talk until your lips are bloody without achieving the slightest success ...”

RESEARCH IDENTIFIES SOME areas to investigate to understand why inequality is maintained among women and men in leadership positions. This applies, for example, to qualities that are valued, decision paths, networks, recruitment processes.

Changing these patterns requires knowledge and action. Among other things, mentoring programs can be introduced, flexibility (digital meetings and custom meeting times) so that more young people and those with smaller children can participate, introduce more transparent recruitment processes, and increase understanding of “unequal” behaviors.

These types of measures/changes make it easier to retain women in board work, but the flip side of the coin is that women do not reach the same level and status as men and thus risk preserving the structure rather than changing it.

Sport was created by men for men, which means that what is perceived as a sporting norm is often linked to “masculinity”. In order to discern and be able to

work on changing this, we need to pay more attention to how the norm manifests itself and affects gender equality work.

For example, representation in the boardroom may be equal numerically, but if decisions are made not in the board but in an informal circle, it matters less.

“This does not mean that you are equal because there are so many women or men, but equal on the day when gender really does not matter, that you see each individual based on competence and what you have and contributed with.”

SOMETIMES, HOWEVER, IT is difficult to perceive the prevailing power structures in one’s own organization. The Golf Federation has, for example, as a counterforce to this, developed a method ”without looking, no clue” where the participants are tasked with looking for power and norms in their own operations. From this point on, you can then try to change patterns and behaviors.

Notes:

6. Project fatigue And other challenges

“It doesn’t matter if we run 30 activities and projects that will attract women if the structures are wrong for them to participate. You have to understand the reasons ...”

.....

“We have worked on various projects that have popped up and that have since died. We said a lot of nice words and then not much happened.”

PROJECTS ARE SOMETIMES perceived as the solution to gender equality in sport. However, the people interviewed in our study showed a clear fatigue of projects that pop up and then disappear just as quickly, without any real change being noticed. The challenge, therefore, is to work with the right issues and to do it consistently and to let it become a natural part of ordinary activities.

The pitfalls of projects are many. During the process of changing an organization, the focus risks shifting from the actual issue over time. Sometimes, for example, incentives with project money can have the opposite effect than the first intended one. There are also projects that are launched solely to be able to receive the funds for gender equality. The applications are adapted to the funder’s wishes, but then the same work is done as before.

Another challenge alongside project fatigue, which emerged from the interviews, is that there is not a clear and common picture of the problem or what the measures should be to counteract it.

One thing that is also pointed out is that those who have been in the corridors of “sports power” are dulled/blinded by how their own business looks, especially when it comes to injustice.

As mentioned earlier, there are also more or less stated expectations that the women elected to boards will solve the gender equality issue. An expectation that is not placed on the men. This can be tiring for many women.

“You may not always want to be the women’s cause woman. You want to be one of the group.”

MANY OF THE interviewees say they are unsure of the solutions. If the problem is that it is difficult to recruit women, it requires one type of solution, if the male network and their impact on sport is the problem, then another and so on is required.

Even if a board or management team were to agree on what constitutes the problem, according to the research, there is a risk that the measures decided will further marginalize women and that men’s power is reshaped, but not reduced.

To further show how complicated equality work can be is that many women “accept” the norm themselves. This is because they are used to it, from, among other things, working life. As a result, they do not challenge the current unequal order, as they do not perceive it as limiting.

“I’ve never felt that there’s a difference, that it’s ‘us and them’ or anything like that. I think maybe that’s been my advantage as well and that I’ve come into these different boards and just worked on, not being careful and thinking that ‘no one comes and listens to me because I’m a woman’.”

Through self-confidence, competence, and a way of looking at other people as equals, women create their own influence, women gain access to boardrooms and become attractive to collaborate with.

It is important that we focus on individuals and structures in the boardroom to create change. Some of the interviewees in our study put their hopes that it will resolve itself over time. In other words, it is the younger men and women who will contribute to the solution.

“The younger women have paved the way for saying: ‘It’s not okay that there are only white middle-aged men on every damn board. It’s actually not that.’ So, from that the question has been non-existent, it is very much a high priority now.”

HOWEVER, THERE ARE arguments against this expectation. Some interviewees argue that the younger ones do not view positions of trust in the same way as the current generation.

You do not work non-profit “out of duty” but are more focused on what the mission has to offer them themselves. How attractive is it as a woman to spend your free time on a business that risks both treating you and your sport unfairly?

In other words, the obstacles to achieving gender equality in the sport’s boardrooms are many and complicated. The most important thing, however, is that the majority of the interviewees saw that there is a gender equality problem within the Swedish sports movement.

“They say it well at AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) that the first step to getting sober is that you realize you have a problem. That’s where we are in the sports movement. We now realize that we have to do something about this. But I don’t really think we’ve figured out what it is and how to deal with the problem.”

7. The trust assignment

Who is it that has the power?

“Commitment, drive, and for me it is incredibly important to be knowledgeable. And then it is important that you are open minded, that you don’t sit (on the board) for your own sake, but that you sit there to drive development in your club ...”

WHAT, THEN, CHARACTERIZES the ideal elected official according to the interviewees in our study?

They highlight qualities such as open minded, engaged and visionary. In addition, you need to be active on the board and want to drive development.

But their answers also show the complex reality that characterizes a position of trust: to organize, lead and manage the business based on an identified goal and at the same time have the right skills and commitment, but also find it fun to get involved.

SO WHY DO YOU take on an assignment? You do it because of your own commitment and for your own personal development, but of course for the good of the club or the federation, according to the interviewees. What is required is to be responsive to what the members want, but at the same time be strategic and drive development forward.

It is thought that Board Chairs are the ones that should have the vision and the purpose of the club most clearly in mind and then get the other members and stakeholders with them on the journey.

“The Chair needs to be able to identify, see some kind of goal, have some kind of vision in front of them. What is the purpose of this activity? That’s why I think there’s a difference between one Chair and the rest because a Chair, for me, needs to be a little more visionary and more communicative to both see a goal in front of them, but also create a common goal for the people who are in this business.”

IN CONNECTION WITH the interviews, questions were also asked about power and how it could appear in the boardroom. Power can both preserve and change, but above all it is difficult to do something without it.

“If I’m sitting as a younger woman next to a man who’s 15 years older, people assume him to be the one who is important in the room.”

Another interviewee said that power “comes with respect and knowledge.” Anyone who knows the business is listened to:

“So I think you earn power. You have to earn it somehow before you can get it. They (the board members) are quite unpretentious and no one is power-mad or power-addicted. Everyone has their power, you might say, and their knowledge.”

MANY OF THE INTERVIEWEES point out that the culture or structure is male dominated. This means that men set the conditions for what changes are possible, but also that they accept changes once they arrive:

“This is what happens when there are too many men in a group, when they become too many, they become small, they support each other, they lift each other up and maybe are a little afraid to let women in. But as soon as the women come in, no one thinks it’s wrong really.”

Interestingly, all interviewees point out that the optimal board consists of a mixed and blended group of people who have different skills, age, gender and ethnicity.

“There should be different outlooks and that applies to both ethnicity, gender and age so that you get the different points of view, that we are not too uniform, that we do not have exactly the same background.”

Notes:

8. A women's trap

So the thing about quotas

“If you’ve been in the football world all your life, you’ve bought the norm from the time you were very small. Once you buy it, you’re mostly just grateful for the little that’s being done, and there I am.”

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT women in male-dominated environments fall into a kind of “trap”, that they become prisoners in their gender, while men, on the other hand, usually appear neutral/universal. This phenomenon is expressed slightly differently in the different interviews, but several answers clarify this intractable problem.

For example, several of the interviewees in our study have spent many years in sport and thus been shaped by and accepted the norm within it, which makes it difficult to recognize that the conditions differ based on gender.

The quote below shows how “natural” the male norm in boardrooms is and how power can limit without even appearing threatening or disparaging:

“My husband is a hundred times better than I am at seeing these errors in the norms. I find it very difficult to be critical. I see all the positives as that ‘but hey, check this out, now the ladies got publicity,’ for example ...”

IT IS NOT ALWAYS the case that women see themselves as someone who wants to drive change, some of them have managed to reach positions within the current system. However, more of them have felt how expectations have been placed on them to pursue discussions about gender equality, even though they are not even interested in the issue.

Some even express the desire to fit in and be liked, especially by the men.

To adapt or to quit, should these really be the options available if you are a woman on a sports board? Speaking out, at the risk of creating a bad mood, is of course a big challenge that requires courage. An easier and less problematic path is to adapt and laugh along with the jokes.

“As a woman, you want to be the norm and then you want to be liked and part of the gang of boys, which you still don’t become. Then you try to adapt and then you can be joking about the same things and be the same way and embrace the behavior instead of actually seeing that ‘that’s not okay’.”

SPORT AND CLUBS have their democratic form through elections. The Nomination Committee itself has a key role to play in enabling changes in the composition of the Board. If it has the knowledge and interest to contribute to equal composition of members, then of course much is gained.

What opportunities does it have to create an even composition more quickly? Here are two mentioned in this context:

- **Quotas.** However, this is not an easy solution, as there are few women, if any, who want to be elected because of their gender. While many believe that if the nomination committee has to appoint a certain number of a certain gender, we “suddenly” find suitable candidates.

- **Shared Board Chairs.** This is a method for increased gender equality, which is presented in positive terms in some of the interviews in our study. In some committees, the Chair position is shared by a man and a woman. This means that the workload is reduced and there is someone to discuss with who has the same type of responsibility/role. An initiative that could certainly work in more places in the sports movement, according to the interviewees.

“I’m told that, ‘but there are no women’, or ‘but there must be women from the clubs so that we can choose them’. But that’s not the case now, then we can go on for another 40 years before it happens. We need to find other ways to recruit them. We have to headhunt good women so that we can create this ‘flow’.”

.....

“I think it is correct that the Swedish Sports Confederation for example sets requirements over how boards should be composed in their member organizations. And I think quotas are necessary to break the male dominance. So I think it has to be a collaboration between an active method to recruit leaders from different categories and both genders in order to get a change.”*

*The Swedish Sports Confederation's strategy 2025 states that the gender perspective should be incorporated into daily operations and permeate all areas of activity.

9. How are resources allocated?

“In the women’s clubs, we can’t even afford to have a club manager. We in the board who work completely non-profit get to do this job, and it is not sustainable. It’s not going to work, I can’t work for free 20 hours a week, you can’t do it in the long run.”

SPORT SEEMS TO be in constant need of more resources. It’s about more money and more people. However, resource allocation can also be about the allocation of training times, education level of coaches, changing rooms, equipment and more. But also, symbolic resources such as social media posts, where from a gender perspective can be about who is noticed and what the imagery looks like between the different teams.

In other words, it is an important issue for the board to know what the allocation of resources looks like. How are existing resources distributed within the business? Is it based on sports level, club fostered or gender? And what do we want it to look like in the future?

MORE CLUBS HAVE started looking at these issues. For example, Brommapojkarna in Stockholm. It has done extensive work to map how their resources are distributed and how they should be distributed if they are to be distributed equally.

Other clubs have begun to look at how to allocate resources from sponsors based on conducting both men’s and women’s activities. The method commonly used is 3R (representation, resources and realia).

“And then maybe you place a percent or a little less than that on the women and then of course it will be better than before for the women, but there will be no big change in the system itself, right?”

“I’m not going to hang out with eight old men in a sauna. But conversations that I’m not a part of will take place there. Not every discussion is held in a board room, that we must keep in mind.”

10. What can we do?

“In conclusion, I can say that I am not so surprised that the world looks the way it does. I mean, it’s this inequality globally. Football is conservative in many respects. It is difficult to change traditions and traditional thinking, and it requires active decisions to create change.”

FINALLY, LET’S LOOK ahead at what we can do, supported by research, to create change. Increased knowledge is a way to raise awareness of gender inequality. The fact that gender equality is always on the agenda and included in discussions and decisions is another way. A third is to create networks and use mentoring to change the dominance of men and men’s standards.

If we focus for a short time on the knowledge piece, it can easily be obtained through targeted training efforts. For example, by training the members of the sports movement’s boards. Partly to raise awareness of the individual members, and partly to the whole group. This applies not only to the issue of gender equality, but also to increasing the understanding of one’s own person. Here are some examples:

1. Increase *self-awareness* that is about self-confidence or self-image..
2. Increase their insight into *self-morality* and involve issues such as credibility and own responsibility.
3. Increase knowledge of what *motivates*, what drives initiative, devotion, or optimism.

The first three points are all based on the individual themselves. But board work, like so much else, is about the interaction together with others. That is, social capital (leadership development).

1. Social awareness and empathy skills.
2. Social skills that deal with the ability to create social ties, networks, team or group feelings, collaboration but also touch on issues such as conflict management and change management.

As the education will affect both individual and group, it increases awareness, which in turn increases the ability to see and put words to unfair conditions. It contributes to decisions that are more inclusive and fair.

The “training cases” developed within the project *Get the ball rolling* can be the beginning of more insights into justice issues and equal governance.

MOST OF THE INTERVIEWEES in our study highlighted the added value that existed and was created in a board with both men and women of mixed age. Such a board is characterized by broad competence where issues can be discussed from different perspectives.

In this way, good conditions are also created for an equal dialogue where you meet each other with respect. By putting gender equality on the agenda in a structured way, the members are trained on the issue and gender equality as a perspective is gradually integrated into action and the organization.

In terms of resources and their distribution, it is a difficult question to avoid when we talk about gender equality, but also extremely difficult to give a good answer to:

- Is it possible to achieve gender equality without radically changing the economic structures of sport?
- Is equal recognition possible when the activities of men/boys and women/girls are continuously separated?

FINALLY, OF COURSE, sport is affected by it being part of society, for example through grant schemes, agreements with partners, media attention, audience figures, and salary levels. At the same time, social development will require a reduction in the dominance of the male norm and a fairer distribution of resources.

For this to happen, more people in the sports movement need to pay attention to how they maintain the standards first. The scope for action has its limitations, but each federation can push the issue and change within its limits.

“We work with the coaches of the district teams, men and women should be involved as leaders and coaches. If we can then get networks, training and show good examples, it is a very clear signal that we have somehow taken a step away from the male domain and the male norm.”

11. Final word

READY-MADE SOLUTIONS TO the inequality of sport do not exist, even in theory. Therefore, conscious work is required to challenge the dominated power and its norms through education and broadened perspectives. As our study shows, much remains to be done.

At the same time, it is gratifying that a lot of positive things are happening right now. Some examples:

- The majority of those interviewed in our study point to, for example, how change management has created a new understanding of the sports movement of today, where, among other things, national teams receive equal status, recognition, and that financial resources are distributed evenly.
- The proportion of women in sport has increased and continues to increase, including in the case of positions of trust (it should be stressed, however, that when it comes to the positions of Chairs, Secretary-Generals or the prestigious international assignments, men have clear dominance.)
- More federations today work with gender equality and many of them believe that more women need to be recruited to these positions for sport to become more equal.
- More and more people are aware of the importance of having women and men in leadership positions both as elected representatives and employees. This makes more people feel welcome and at home in sports.

Get the ball rolling to develop board work

In recent years, issues such as democracy, sustainability and justice have taken an increasing place in sport. Gender equality, inclusion and social justice are evident in the sport strategy 2025.

The research shows that equal organizations and activities work more profitably, both economically and socially, and partly because the quality of decisions becomes higher and more successful when more perspectives are included.

So how can more federations and clubs develop their board work in this direction?

In interviews, 27 Chairs of team sports from three federations; The Swedish Handball Federation, the Swedish Basketball Association and the Swedish Football Association have been given their views on challenges and opportunities linked to gender equality and board work.

The answers highlight the importance of the board consisting of a mixed group of people who possess different skills, characteristics, gender, age and ethnicity. It shows how difficult it is to create this. But the interviewees also have thoughts and suggestions on how we can together achieve a more equal sport at all levels.