

WHAT ABOUT CAREER?

a comparison of opinions and opportunities of career among female and male engineers in Sweden.

By Inger Grufman, BSc

The Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers
Box 1419
S-111 84 Stockholm
SWEDEN

BACKGROUND

The Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers (CF) organises about 85 % of all Swedish graduate engineers, which means 42 000 male and 8 000 (16%) female engineers. There are also 11 300 male and 2 000 female (20%) undergraduates among the members of the organisation.

The Executive Committee of CF consists of 3 women and 12 men. In 1994 the Committee had ordered and received a report on gender equity and working conditions of the female members. In this report there was a short description of the doctoral thesis of Anna Wahl at the Stockholm School of Economics (1). In this thesis the career development and the career gap for female engineers was discussed.

A male member of the Executive Committee said that there is a career gap even for male engineers between the kind of career they want and the kind they actually get. The Committee decided to make a survey among both female and male members.

FACTS ABOUT THE STUDY

The study was made in 1996 by Inger Grufman, Gender Equity Officer of CF, in cooperation with Ulla Blomqvist at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Umeå University, who earlier had made a study among graduates from her university (2). A postal survey, containing 32 questions about both career and family situation, was answered by 396 women and 351 men, which means 75 percent.

THE CAREER CONCEPT

For her thesis, Anna Wahl (1) asked the female engineers what the career concept meant to them. Wahl divided the answers in five different groups of

definitions:

- One definition was the **traditional** one of high salary, high status and managerial position.
- A second definition was career as **self-fulfilment** with learning, own development and new challenges.
- A third one was responses of a **combination** of the descriptions above.
- A fourth, a **negative** description and
- the fifth a **double** one i.e. both positive and negative.

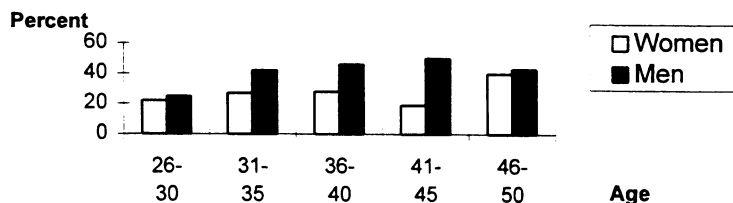
In 1985 the largest group of the women (37%) described career in the traditional terms.

In 1996, eleven years later, most of both women and men (67 and 57% respectively), defined career as a combination of traditional values and self-fulfilment.

There are differences in the methods, but we believe there have been a real change in the conception of career. Nowadays both women and men think that a career involving challenge and individual development of themselves is more important.

THE CAREER GAP

The majority of women and men discribed the career in the same way. When we asked them if they themselves had made a career, we got the following results:



There **are** big differences between women and men in all age-groups except in the oldest one, where the results are not so reliable as the women are few.

There is a general idea among men that women do not want to have managerial tasks but when we questioned them, there were almost just as many women (25%) as men (26%) who answered that they did **not** want such tasks. More men than women had

already such tasks. Accordingly more women than men answered yes to the question. It's time to kill the myth that women do not want to be managers!

COMMENTS

The enquiry consisted of 31 written questions and one open question with a space for comments which was used by rather many of the respondents. The persons were guaranteed anonymity, which means that we only know their sex and age.

Some comments:

- Female engineer
Post-graduate
Age 25 - 30 years

"I'm invited when there are foreign guests (men), not because I know something about research but in order to be beautiful and social."

- Female engineer
Age 30 - 35 years

"It's hard to be a female manager and be questioned all the time. Your decisions may become better but you must be very selfconfident not to step back."

COMBINING CAREER AND FAMILY

The inquiry dealt both with job conditions and family situation.

For women in Sweden sharing responsibility for home and family with their spouses is a condition of making a career.

We got some encouraging results in this field. One of these positive results was the length of parent-leave among the engineers. In Sweden we have a legislation which entitles the parents to an allowance from the state, normally 75 percent of the salary, during 360 days after the birth of a child. Out of these days 30 days are set aside for the father.

We got the following answers from female engineers:

Mother took all days	25%
Father took one month	14%
Father took 2-6 months	52%
Parents shared the days in another way	9%

Another question dealt with how they shared their housework with their spouses.

Among the women we got the the following results:

I do much more	16%
I do more	42%
We share equally	38%
I do less	4%

We compared these results with those from a big national investigation on 1 900 couples made by Göran Ahrne and Christine Roman (3) where the corresponding groups to our first three groups were called:

Patriarchal	27%
Conventional	61%
Equally	13%

Our results are better after all (for the women!). When we chose the fourth part of the women with the highest salaries, we got the following results:

Much more	20%
More	22%
Equally	53%
Less	5%

One can wonder if the last results depend on that the women got their high salaries because their husbands shared the housework equally and the women could devote themselves more to their jobs or if the women with high salaries had better positions for negotiations with their husbands.

CONCLUDING WORDS

The results of the study have been used in many ways, not only in discussion of gender equity, and have contributed to an increased knowledge of the career opportunities and job conditions for our members. The study has also been met with interest in Swedish newspapers and at universities and institutes which educate engineers.

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2. Blomqvist, Ulla (1990)
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Arbetsrapport, Umeå Universitet.
3. Ahne, Göran & Roman, Christine (1997)
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