How can the work environment be better for both women and men?
Women and men have the same right to a good work environment, but more women than men are sick-listed from work, and more women are forced to end their working life prematurely for health reasons.

In this folder we give some examples of how you, as an employer, can increase the quality of your work environment management by a gender perspective. We have also compiled a number of questions that can help you to see possible risks and shortcomings in the work environment for your employees.
How does working life look for women and men?

- Women and men exist to the same extent on the labour market today (78 per cent and 82 per cent respectively in 2014). The proportion of those employed is highest for men born in Sweden and lowest for women born abroad. The labour market is very gender-segregated. Women work mainly in sectors and occupations with many other women, and men in sectors and occupations with other men. Of all employees, only 14 per cent of the women and 13 per cent of the men (2013) are found in occupations with an even gender distribution, that is to say between 40–60 per cent of each gender. Of the 30 largest professions, only three have an even gender distribution: chefs, doctors, as well as university and university college lecturers.
- Women have higher absence due to illness than men. This applies in total and when women and men have the same occupation.
- Women report more work-related illnesses while men report more work-related accidents. Accidents with fatal outcome are more common among men than women.
- More women than men are forced to end their working life prematurely for health reasons.
- Despite women’s absence due to illness being higher than men’s, it is more difficult for women to have a work-related illness approved and to receive an occupational injury annuity.
- Significantly more women than men are underemployed – that is to say, work less than they wish.
- Part-time work is more common among women than men (30 per cent women compared with 11 per cent men in 2014). Part-time work affects, more than anything else, income. Fewer hours worked gives a lower income, which in its turn affects compensation during parental leave, unemployment and illness, as well as future pension. Part-time work can also lead to a worse wage development and worse career possibilities in the long term.
- Women have also, compared to men, a more insecure connection to the labour market than men; they have, to a higher degree than men different forms of employments for a certain period.
How work is organised affects who develops musculoskeletal disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders are a common cause of reported work-related injuries for both women and men. The report *Physical loads, gender and health in working life* (The Swedish Work Environment Authority 2013:9) shows that the organisation of work at a workplace has great significance for the development of musculoskeletal problems.

Women and men often do different things at work – even if they have the same occupation. That is the most important explanation for women having more pain and more musculoskeletal disorders. Biological differences, on the other hand, play only a small part. The report shows that men generally have a larger variation in their tasks at work, while women work in a more repetitive way. Women pick things up with their hands and stretch themselves in uncomfortable working positions using repeated movements. Men do quick heavy lifting, drive the machines and use tools. Even when women and men carry out exactly the same working tasks, the physical load can differ because the equipment is often dimensioned for an average man.

Some examples:
- Women help persons to transport themselves, while men lift things.
- Women are often tied to one place in their work, while men have more moving working tasks.

Tips:
- Work to reduce the monotonous and repetitive jobs.
- Where this is impossible, divide working tasks between individuals of both sexes so that all have variation.
- Design workstations so that they suit both women and men. Look up and wonder what governs who ends up doing which working tasks and has influence over the organisation of the work at your job.

Why should I, as an employer, work with a gender perspective?

- Absence due to illness is lower in work with an even gender distribution.
- Notions of what is allowed and possible for women and men are limiting, not just for the individual’s possibilities to develop, but also for companies, organisations and society as a whole.
- A better work environment can be created if the organisation’s conscious and unconscious ideas and expectations of how women and men
should be can be identified, and the structures can instead be more open to individual variations.

- An even distribution of women and men at a workplace is one way to prevent harassment.
- Workplaces that are educated in dealing with differences and diversity perform several times better compared to a homogenous group. The really innovative ideas are born through meetings that are characterized by differences. Creativity and efficacy increase with mixed work teams.
- Companies with a higher proportion of women in management present better results.
- Work with gender equality improved effectiveness for Ericsson in Hudiksvall by close to ten per cent. Hälsinglands Sparbank’s management-steered work with change will, in two years, almost double their profit. These are some of the examples from the book ‘Gender aware leadership – the journey from non-question to growth question’ (Liber, 2012).
- Diversity benefits development. In the EU’s 2020 strategy, it states that ‘discriminating measures during employment and at work reduces the accessible workforce and competence resources, and society as a whole is affected by slower economic growth’.

- Several reports show a connection between gender-equal companies and organisations, and profitability:
  - There are several advantages with increased equality: greater motivation among staff, full use of resources, and contact surfaces that open up to possibilities for rewarding synergy-effects (‘Equality and profitability’, Nutek 1999)
  - Private companies present positive results from gender equality work: increased productivity, quality, delivery assurance, a better working climate, creativity and cooperation (‘Always Profitable’, Centre for Change Management, 2003)
  - In the book ‘It is profitable’ (The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise Leadership Academy 2010) the authors show that a gender aware management and governance of the company is profitable. The book is based on a research project at the workshop company Indexator.

- An investigation that the construction sector did, ‘The Construction Barometer’ (2013), shows that they lose competent personnel due to a ‘guys’ attitude and a tough working climate. Several women leave the sector because they feel they are being opposed and not given the same career possibilities.
The segregated labour market reinforces traditional gender patterns

The notion of differences between men and women has led to us in Sweden having one of the most gender-segregated labour markets in Europe. This is clear in the report ‘Under the magnifying glass – a gender perspective on work environment and labour organisation’ (The Swedish Work Environment Authority 2013:1).

The notion that women are born with better ability for caring than men has, for example, contributed to our health care and social care sector being dominated by women.

In the report it is clear that in workplaces with men, their perspective and way of working has become the norm. Women more often than men lack the possibility of influencing their work situation. In addition, there are fewer women the higher up in the organisation one goes.

The report also shows that you as an employer can reduce the risk of discrimination, harassment and conflict, and increase creativity and profitability through actively working for a more gender-equal workplace.

Tips:
- Create an image of where women and men exist in the organisation and how the structures for gender order look.
- Identify different vocational groups’ degree of demand in the work, own control and social support, and compare between women and men in these occupational groups and between the groups.
- Map any pay differences. Are working tasks valued differently for women and men within the same vocational category?
- Do women and men have equal possibilities for competence development?
- Do women and men have the same possibility to take parental leave?
- Do women and men experience stress to the same extent?
How can I as an employer work with a gender perspective?

We have compiled a number of questions for you as an employer, from three perspectives: human, technology and organisation. By going through these questions, you can identify and assess risks and shortcomings in the work environment, related to the notion of gender. The answers to the questions can hopefully lead to ideas about how such risks and shortcomings can be dealt with.

**Human**

- Does our work environment management have a gender equality perspective?
- Is there a notion that certain tasks or areas are more suited to women and men to work with, respectively?
- Do women and men have the same possibilities of influencing and participating in questions concerning work environment?
- Are there pictures, texts or objects at the workplace that can be considered degrading? Is there use of language or jargon that can be experienced as degrading?
- Is the workplace inclusive or exclusive? Do staff members feel included, irrespective of gender?
- Is the workplace characterised by mutual respect and tolerance?
- Is the attitude to parental leave the same for women as for men?
- Do women and men have the same possibility for competence development?

**Technology**

- Are tools at the workplace adapted for both small and large hands and bodies?
- Is there protective clothing and work clothes that fit, irrespective of gender?
- Are there changing rooms for women and men respectively?
- Are workplaces individually and ergonomically adapted? Are there differences between female and male dominated occupations when it comes to protective clothing, conditions and tools etc.?
- Are there machines or tasks which have been ‘gender-stamped’, that is to say that are only used/performe by women or only by men?
- The official statistics show that women are sick-listed more than men, and that more women than men are forced to end their working life early because of ill health? Can it be linked to tools not being adapted for both women and men?
Organisation

• How many employees are there?
• How many are women? How many are men?
• What do the women and men do? Have women and men the same positions?
• If women and men have the same positions, do they have the same working tasks?
• If women and men do different things: what do the risks for the women and men look like, respectively, in their working tasks?
• Is there a striving for more equal distribution between the number of employed women and men?
• The official statistics show that women are sick-listed more often than men and that more women than men are forced to end their working life early due to ill health. How does it look at my workplace? What can the possible differences be due to? Can it be because women and men do different things?
• What prerequisites do men and women have at the work place to enable them to work with the same things?
• Do all employees have the possibility of influencing their own work situation? Which employees have high work tempo, machine- or client-governed work speed, lack of development or being physically bound to the workplace?
• How do different operational decisions affect women’s and men’s exposure to different risks, and ill health?
• Do women’s and men’s opinions and points of view of problems and improvements in the work environment receive the same attention?
• If musculoskeletal disorders arise, can work rotation be a way to reduce and prevent injuries?
• Are there employees who have chosen to go down to part-time due to shortcomings in the physical or psychosocial work environment? Are there differences between men and women?
• How does the distribution of men and women look in work groups, project groups and development groups?
What has happened from a historical perspective?

That which we take for granted today has not always been so. Much has, for example, happened on the labour market. Here are some milestones in history that have influenced women’s and men’s working life.

1859  Women have the right to hold certain teaching positions.

1925  Women have, with certain exceptions, the same right as men to state positions.

1939  Ban on dismissing working women on account of pregnancy, birth or marriage.

1947  Right to equal pay for the same work introduced for state employees.

1958  Women have the right to become priests.

1960  SAF and LO decide to, within a five year period, abolish special pay for women and men (men had higher pay because they were considered the breadwinners).

1971  Separate taxation replaces joint taxation.

1974  Parental insurance is introduced, giving parents the right to share the parental leave at the birth of the child.

1980  The law against gender discrimination in working life is introduced.

1983  All work is open to women, even within the military.

2009  The Discrimination Act comes into force.

Sweden has, since the 1970s, driven gender equality policy that aims at giving women and men the same possibilities, rights and obligations in all areas of life. Women and men should have the same power to shape society and their own lives.

• Since 1979, there has been a convention against the discrimination of women. This is considered the most important international document for fighting discrimination of women. In the latest inquiry about gender equality policy, SOU 2015:86, the development on the labour market is described, among other things.

• Despite women’s participation on the labour market, there are wage differences, part time work, gender-segregated education and labour market, as well as an uneven taking out of parental insurance. This has consequences for the pension.

• Gender stereotypes and traditional gender patterns remain.
Would you like to know more?

In 2011, the Swedish Work Environment Authority received a special assignment from the government to highlight women’s work environment because of the inequalities that exist between women and men in working life. We should increase knowledge about women’s health in working life and prevent women from being knocked out of the labour market due to work environment related problems. With increased equality in working life, the work environment will become better for both women and men.

Read more about our task on our website www.av.se – search for ‘women’s work environment’.

Do you have questions? Contact our customer service on +46(0)10-730 90 00.
Our vision: Everyone wants to, and can, create a good work environment

Sources:
