

Backwards in High Heels: Gender and Career in Danish Upper Secondary School Management

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Abstract

We often describe Denmark and the other Nordic countries as successful when it comes to equality between the sexes. However, is this true? If we survey the management of Danish upper secondary schools, only one third of the top managers are women, an inequality that will not necessarily change in the coming years. The demand for management is increasing and should result in new career possibilities for all, but in fact we may see a new form of gendered division of labor, a scenario where men as top managers (COEs or A-leaders) deal with externally oriented economic and strategic tasks and women as middle managers (assistant managers or B-leaders) take care of internal “housewife work” relating to employees and students and teaching and learning.

Keywords: Danish upper secondary school, School management, Gender equality and diversity, Gendered patterns in recruitment and employment

1. Introduction

Interviewer (I): What would appeal to you in a headmaster's position?

Respondent (R): Being able to—and this is not to sound like an individualist—but still, **to have more influence**. It's simply that.

Female middle manager, 2015

I: Did it never occur to you to become a director of education?

R: No, because **the fun is actually this—to participate in starting new projects**. It's not really running the day-to-day stuff that's exciting.

Male middle manager, 2015

In international comparisons, Denmark appears as a society with a culture characterized by equality and informal social interaction. In Denmark, we appreciate values such as empathy and concern—traditionally denoted as feminine—in both management and public life (Hofstede 1985, 2012, 2015). However, this is a truth requiring some modification, at least when it comes to school management.

Over the past 10 years, Danish upper secondary schools have undergone a series of governance and organizational reforms that have resulted in a greater demand for management. The transformation of the classic Nordic welfare state model towards a more market-oriented state model in terms of global competition necessitates changing conditions for public service, including education (Esping-Andersen 1990, Pedersen 2011). The preambles of the guidelines for the Nordic schools still highlight the democratic purpose of education—“to create a democratic society and citizens for democracy”. However, the performance of the students in national and international rankings has been increasingly emphasized (Hjort 2013). A reform of the upper secondary schools' 2005 curriculum encourages interdisciplinary cooperation and new practically applicable activities, which creates a greater need for project management and coordination. A 2007 law transferred the schools from public ownership to semi-privatization, which means that management must strategically align themselves with themselves strategically toward their respective boards of directors, other educational institutions, and local political circles. A relatively new labor agreement in 2013 (OK13) determined that the definition and coordination of professional tasks are no longer based on local collective agreements—as has usually been the case in the Danish labor market—but are rather built on individual negotiations between management representatives and individual teachers.

In other words, the reforms have made school management more varied and more complex. New management tasks have emerged that should presumably lead to more possibilities for new forms of career advancement among upper secondary school teachers (Hjort & Raae 2014, Raae & Jørgensen 2013, Raae 2014).

What does this mean on the gender front? The proportion of women in the management of the Danish upper secondary school education has increased considerably in the past 10 years. Can we expect a “switch”, where younger women kick open the doors and place themselves in the director’s chairs? And if this occurs, will gender even make a difference in (school) management?

1.1 Feminization of Management?

Top management in Danish upper secondary schools has traditionally been dominated by men, but this has begun to change. In 2009, only 17% of headmasters or A-leaders were women. By 2014, this figure increased to 26%. Among the assistant managers in formalized positions, that is, the middle management or B-leaders, the proportion of women has grown from 39% in 2009 to 43% in 2014.

	Women 2009	Women 2014
COEs		
Top managers or A-leaders	17 %	26 %
Assistant managers		
Middle management or B-leaders	39 %	43 %

Seen from a gender equality perspective, this development is positive. Indeed, it might seem like a reasonable assumption that the remaining inequality problems will solve themselves within the next few years. We have examined this issue via surveys of top and middle management in 2009 and 2014 (referred to as TOP09, MM09, TOP14, and MM14), but our empirical material cannot univocally assume this trend toward equality. There is evidence both for and against the idea of “organic” or self-arising equality of opportunity.¹

The tendency to describe management in terms that suggest a more *feminine orientation* (for example, that managers could be empathic, employee-oriented, flexible, and non-hierarchical), is valuable compared to earlier conventional ideas [... but] the demand for new elements in management [may] imply a higher degree of *gender-neutralizing* than feminization, and there is more of a “leveled playing field” in the pursuit of these posts

¹In 2009, we mailed questionnaires enabling both quantitative and qualitative responses to 212 top managers (rectors and directors) and 657 middle managers (defined as managers with formal titles on the schools’ websites). The response rate was 47%, equally divided by gender. In 2014, we sent an identical questionnaire to 771 middle managers. The response rate was 52%. We supplemented the questionnaire with eight qualitative interviews with middle managers in 2015. Moreover, we drew on information collected from a random sampling, STIK15—10% of the national total—comprising all management titles and descriptions of management functions in upper secondary schools as of July 2015 and on an analysis of all job postings for top managers in the upper secondary magazine *Gymnasieskolen* from the period June 2013 to June 2015.

(Billing 2005, p. 207-208).

One possibility is that skilled, well-educated, and serious women will seek out management jobs on equal footing with men. A second possibility is that in the future, we will see the establishment of a new form of *gendered selection* where the majority of top posts with strategic and financial responsibility will be taken up by men, while the many new “soft” middle management posts will be mostly held by women. A third possibility is that we are experiencing a *gender neutralization* of school management, where the traditional distinction between men and women and masculine and feminine is blurred.

This can prompt a series of discussions. Is this a matter of free choice, which does not require further attention, or is it an issue of inadequate job designs that, seen from a democratic angle, would call for an overhaul to ensure that jobs are attractive and available to people in different life situations? Such discussions are especially critical, as the education of youth helps draw the horizon of what is possible for new generations.

Before we plunge into such discussions, we want to give a further description of which new findings about gender and career possibilities our analyses point to regarding gender and careers in Danish upper secondary education during these years. First, we wish to describe the individual career strategies we have identified in our material. We will then focus on current tendencies and future possibilities in institutional recruiting practices. Along the way, we will illustrate our points using quotations from the individual interviews conducted in 2015.²

2. Career Strategies

As we have shown in earlier studies of top management from 2009 (TOP09), specific *career strategies* tend to be the most effective for teachers with regard to advancement and obtaining top positions in upper secondary schools in Denmark. “Risk taking” as a radical shift in one’s scope of work or workplace is obviously more efficient in career promotion compared to “domain building” or gradually expanding one’s area of work at the same workplace, for example, moving from teaching psychology to working in student counseling. The first (and most efficient) strategy is still more prevalent among men than among women. The pattern is obvious among the middle managers in MM14 and MM09 (Abrahamsen 2009, Abrahamsen & Hjort 2012, Abrahamsen 2013).

Moreover, we can note that to a greater extent, men articulate an explicit wish to advance, and try to *steer* their careers, while women more often speak about going with the flow and “seeing how things turn out” (Gold 1996). When women express themselves, they speak less about possibilities for *social status* and influence and more about the potential for self-expression in work, including being more involved in the professional and pedagogical processes. Therefore, they also appear to be attracted to the so-called “soft management tasks” relating to personnel and students. However, it is important to emphasize that we can

²Interviewer: Marianne Abrahamsen. We have, apart from the first two quotes, chosen not to specify the age and gender of the respondents we quote to emphasize that we are not speaking specifically about biological sex but rather about positions that are often gendered.

find both attitudes represented by men and women, as we can see in the initial quotes.

It is probably also true, that we can construct women/men so that they fit/don't fit to what is currently demanded of candidates for management posts" (Billing 2005, 207-208).

To want a management position is one thing; obtaining it is another. Therefore, we have highlighted the recruiting practices of the institutions. Which positions are advertised, and how are they filled? After the reform of OK13, we saw what we describe as a *management explosion*, where the number of management positions drastically increased (educational and financial managers, pedagogical managers, team leaders, team coordinators, etc.) Overall, women and men are equally represented, but the establishment of a new form of task distribution has become visible. The financial and strategic responsibility goes to the top management, while the didactic or pedagogical responsibility—teaching and learning—descends in the organizational hierarchy not just to B-managers but also to a (new) level of C- and D-managers.

The qualifications for new top managers found in the job postings for these years confirm this tendency. The postings list experience with economic management and organizational knowledge and strategy as essential skills to obtain a top post.

From a gender perspective, the most interesting finding in our material is the existence of one particular group that seems to fit these job advertisements perfectly, that is, a group of potential candidates that might come into play when the contemporary generation of headmasters is ready to retire. The members of this particular group have experience in economic management, a complementary graduate level education in management and organization, and the ambition to become headmasters within the next five years, and they are predominantly men. They might be "the dark horses" that surprisingly win the race.

3. Feminine Values Govern-- Men Lead

When we compare the 2009 and 2014 surveys, we can see both continuity and change—numerically and in terms of education, families, values, career strategies and the use of networks and mentors among managers. As mentioned, an important change is the significantly higher number of women in top management in 2015 compared to 2009.

The analyses of middle managers' responses from 2009 and 2014 corresponding many ways with the results of TOP09. The female middle managers in upper secondary schools are just as well-educated as the men or are even better educated. Men often supplement their primary qualification with a diploma, while women often obtain a higher qualification, such as a Master's degree or a PhD. Family obligations are often described in the international (non-Nordic) literature as hampering women. In our questionnaire, no response points to such a trend (Kanter 1997, Alvesson & Billing 1997, Gold 1996, Coleman 2002, Billing 2005, Storvig 2009). However, something new has emerged in the qualitative comments from MM14. Women do not express concern about whether a management job can be reconciled with the well-being of children. Rather, they are worried about taking care of their own

parents.³

This brings us to the question of *values*. In constructing the questionnaires, we used the same categories as the British management researcher H.L. Gray as a starting point (1993). These categories are consistent with those of Hofstede (1984, 2015). It is significant that both male and female managers describe themselves as open, empathetic, welcoming, and good listeners; in fact, more men than women described themselves this way.⁴ If we are to believe our respondents, the “feminine” qualities govern in Danish upper secondary schools, even though men are still at the helm. This seems to fit both the recommendations in the management literature for the past 10–20 years (Billing 2005, Robinson 2014) and the wishes and ambitions that the managers themselves have for their management. The egalitarian aversion to hierarchy and bureaucratization expressed in MM09 is even stronger in MM14 (Hjort & Raae 2014).

As a manager, I would like to be perceived as a one who is **available, can communicate, capture**-- maybe some tendencies before being “known.”

However, certain changes have occurred. New notions, such as “recognizing/coaching” and “strategic/development-oriented” have emerged, and now it is not only women but also men who describe themselves as “disciplined.”

4. Self-Expression and Social Status

As mentioned, we can observe the same gendered patterns in career paths in MM09 and MM14 as in TOP09. Men are likelier to take chances and move professionally, institutionally, and geographically. Expanding a “comfort zone” is more common among women, including work in associations linked to their respective subjects (language, literature, mathematics, etc.). However, if we focus on the individual career strategies in MM14, we can find gendered patterns regarding motivation, the use of networks and mentors, and relations to colleges.

The first new finding was that women more than men formulate the desire for self-expression and to have *fun* in their work, while men explicitly wish for a *social position* that can give them influence and the ability to make changes. We stress again that we speak here of patterns that more or less dominate among both sexes.

If a (position) came up that dealt with something **pedagogical or with development in the management team where I would feel that it could be fun to do**, then I would like to apply.

A second interesting discovery is that women and men apparently do not make use of their networks and mentors for their careers in the same way:

³ This concern may have something to do with the age group, but we could also read it as a comment on how the current generation of middle-aged upper secondary school employees in Denmark had access to good kindergartens but now lack similar resources for the elderly.

⁴ Regarding this phenomenon, Gold (1996) states that it is less dangerous for male managers to call themselves too caring because, unlike women, they do not expose themselves to the suspicion of being “too soft” for the job.

We invite each other to lunch, and we talk on the phone.

I: Do you also use each other for promotions, or to apply to other positions?

R: We probably do that. I myself do that.

Overall, women ostensibly do not take advantage of professional and personal networks to the degree that men do when they apply for jobs. Women who indicate that they have a *mentor* apparently more often use this person as a source of personal advice rather than as someone who has the ability to influence the hiring process.

A third discovery that may be less surprising is that no matter the career perspective, it is apparently difficult to avoid collegial “challenges” or resistance/aversion on the part of colleagues in the transition to a formalized middle management job.

I have experienced **resistance, especially from women in their 40s**, whom I have felt disliked me almost before I had opened my mouth. Once you have shown your worth, that you are just a normal person, then...

Theories of organization have traditionally described Danish upper secondary schools as professional bureaucracies with a very horizontal division of labor and a low degree of hierarchy and distance from management. The contemporary school reforms introduced new centralized ways of decision making. The management is involved in shaping individual teachers’ portfolios and professional planning, so room for conflict has expanded (Abrahamsen 2013, Raae 2005, 2011, 2015).

It may sound arrogant, but early on, I became **tired of this teacher culture**. The fact that one does not want to cooperate when thinking about teaching and new subjects that can be really difficult.

The new managers can handle these challenges in different ways, but women especially stress that they must handle them with care.

... some of the hardships that you run into, when you suddenly become **management’s lapdog**-- one of the nicer words that can be used about you-- is that you become, if not tough, then hardened.

5. Institutional Recruiting Practices

The career path potential managers individually follow or attempt to follow is one thing. The recruiting practices in and across institutions are something else. Who is promoted and how? That is, who is positioned by who, and according to what criteria are candidates selected? How are “objective” or pre-defined criteria combined with more “subjective” criteria, such as likes and dislikes, trust and distrust, common values and differences? How are these criteria managed and negotiated in a context of interests or power politics? Who should use whom for what? New appointments are significant in determining which power positions in and around the organization are strengthened and weakened. What are the consequences in terms of who is hired, and which demands and expectations are delegated to the newcomers?

We can view the question of recruiting from many angles as both one of formal hiring criteria and hiring procedures and one of interests, conflicts of interest, alliances, and compromises. From a psycho-social perspective, one could ask which gendered and/or generational patterns are activated in the hiring process. In the international literature, it is documented that men in both business and academia traditionally hire men who are similar to themselves (Hoejgaard 1990, Kanter 1977, Storvik 2009). Is this going to change now the older generation of male rectors is retiring? Are the top jobs going to be held by “daddy’s girls”, ambitious and serious young women with strong male role models and promoted by an impressed “father”? Or will we see a pattern where women actually support women, following the “Madeleine Albright principle”⁵? Are “mammy’s boys”, creative and clever young men adored by the “mothers”, going to enter the scene, or are the new group of dark horses—the “self-confident strategists” who, as our information seems to indicate, are tucked among the potential managers—going to march strongly into the arena (Visholm 2006, Skogemann 2014)?

At any rate, it is a prerequisite for hiring that there in fact exists a job that can be applied for.

6. Management explosion and division

As stated above, the number of female top managers or A-managers increased markedly between 2009 and 2014. However, women still account for less than a third of all rectors. However, if we look at the STIK15 sample (consisting of 10% of Denmark’s upper secondary schools), we find that something noticeable has occurred.⁶ Among the 25 A-managers, 16 are men and 9 are women. This is a gender distribution that accurately corresponds to TOP14, but with regard to the B-managers, the ratio of men to women is equal. The “push” may as a consequence come here. The women are apparently situated to take over the positions of their male colleagues or perhaps even overtake them when it comes to management.

However, it seems that the relationship between A-and B-managers is quickly changing. The ratio of top managers to middle managers was constant from 2009 to 2014; however, based on STIK15, the number of people each top manager has under him or her increased significantly in the last year. In 2009 and 2014, the ratio between A- and B-managers was around 1:3. For every rector or other top manager, there were two to three middle managers employed in formalized positions. Our material suggests that in 2015, the number of these B-managers has exploded. The A:B ratio in 2015’s random sampling is 1:6.

It’s us who actually play “ping-pong” with teachers and students. **Rectors may have their heads in the clouds.**

At the same time, we see a new kind of division of work. In terms of job profiles, 40% of the B-responders in 2009 indicated that they had an economic responsibility. In 2014, that decreased to 25%. The percentage of the B-group that indicated they had pedagogical

⁵Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (1996–2001) is quoted as saying “There is a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women.”

⁶We created STIK15 in July 2015 using information collected from school websites. We have recorded the titles of the managers given on the websites, which function areas they are connected to, and how the schools themselves describe their organizational and decision-making procedures.

responsibilities increased from 59% to 72%.

That we as educational managers should take more **and more of the uncomfortable things of the everyday**: a complaint about a teacher, a teacher than cannot control a class. In these problems, they could first go to the educational director, since it's not so "dangerous" as going directly to the rector. (...)

If we assume that the responsibility and work of economic management is not reduced by institutional self-ownership, this indicates a division of labor where economic affairs "ascend" in the organization to the rector (and Board of Directors). Meanwhile, the "soft" functions of pedagogy (students, subjects, personnel) both expand and "descend" to the group of "new middle managers" (B-managers and probably C- and D-managers). Such a condition can be categorized as a new form of the traditional gendered division of labor in which the "housewife" (male or female), for better or worse, has the responsibility for daily tasks without necessarily having influence over the decisions that underlie them (Hochschild 2005, Hjort 2012).

7. Invisible and Interrupted Work

Of course, we cannot conclude what the actual practice is from the organizational models and functional descriptions available on the schools' websites. The models and descriptions are generally characterized by ambiguity with regard to the communication channels and decision making. The ambiguity could be experienced as freedom if the managers prefer to seek self-realization rather than govern. They might also respond to increasing pressure from below for a new type of boss who can act both democratically and sympathetically, ambitions that the managers share and that are supported by the newer management theory (Robinson 2014, Hjort & Raae 2014, Raae 2015). At the same time, the ambiguities could expose managers because the legitimacy and authorization is unclear.

A majority of schools talk openly about delegation, self-management, and self-responsibility. Despite this, the importance of the management tasks that all employees, including B- and C-managers, are involved with can be made invisible in the unclear organization models. As mentioned, these tasks can become the type of "housewife work" that only becomes visible if *not* done. Therefore, this work does not receive much credit in terms of time, salary, or status.

In addition, the management work today—especially that of B-managers—often takes place in a work environment marked by what Swedish sociology work would call interrupted or intermittent work. Such work is characterized by continuous interruptions and tasks that should be performed at the same time by the same person, even though they cannot be performed simultaneously (Aili, 2007). The tasks are of crucial importance for the school's daily routine but do not necessarily "count. One respondent stated that:

An example is **that suddenly someone is standing in the door saying "I'd like to ask you something."**

The interrupted work can be handled in different ways, but some employees let it get to them more than others. The qualitative comments in our surveys and the qualitative interviews

indicate that female managers let themselves be bothered or stressed by the demand for “*service*” to a greater extent than their male counterparts.⁷ At the same time, these women easily end up in the role of “Mother Superior,” who must set the boundaries for “stray” teachers and students. This behavior might be perceived as “crisp, clear, and decisive” for male managers but not necessarily for female managers.

But me and a colleague that has also been there for many years may sometimes become “**the tough bitches,**” where the rector actually smooth things out a little. But he has said to us at one point that “you should also be careful, that you don’t become too tough.”

8. Passionate and Reliable

To form a more precise picture of what is required if one wants to advance and become a rector or vice-rector, we have analyzed all 17 job advertisements for rector/director positions and all 17 for vice-rector/dean positions published in the magazine *Gymnasieskolen* during the period June 2013–June 2015.

The job announcements are amazingly similar. Despite the fact that the new conditions for the individual schools imply that they must profile themselves in relation to the surrounding institutions in order to attract students and external cooperating collaborates, as municipality, private enterprises etc. something else takes place. In fact, a dominant discourse is established in the announcements, which indicates the symbolic function is crucial (Hatch, 2003).

All rectors should manage high-functioning organizations and be engaged, effective, and innovative. In general, upcoming top managers are required to be passionate and ambitious; effective and strategic; communicative; skilled professionals; and entrepreneurial with an interest in rebuilding and buying school buildings. These are large demands that point in many different directions but also demonstrate the cross-pressure schools experience as public or semi-public organizations. Schools are simultaneously politically controlled and market-dependent, and they have to work professionally in relation to their clients, the students, and their learning (Hjort & Raae 2013). Who matches these almost superhuman requirements? What does the management potential look like, and who seems to have the best chance in a hiring situation?

9. The Dark Horses

In order to get a better impression of who can match the qualification requirements stated in the job announcements, we analyzed MM14 with a focus on the two outer points in the institutional division of labor: the group with financial responsibility and the group with pedagogical responsibility.

Markedly more men than women have experience with *financial responsibilities*. The group of women with pedagogical responsibilities is the highest educated, while women with economic responsibilities are the least educated. A noticeable majority of the men with financial responsibilities express a desire for a rector position when asked about whether they

⁷ We have no figures on the stress load among managers and middle managers in upper secondary schools, but among the teachers, women seem to be hardest hit (Rasmussen 2014, GL 2015).

will apply for one within the next five years, 10 years, or never. Women are more reserved in this way. Less than a quarter of those women with financial responsibilities and less than half with pedagogical responsibilities express any ambition to apply for top management jobs. Conversely, over half of the many women with pedagogical responsibilities indicate they are *not* interested in a management post.⁸

I actually don't feel that the rector's job is that interesting anymore. I feel the rector's job is too broad. From my perspective, it's the educational managers that are really hands-on, who are rooted in the daily substance of things, and it doesn't actually matter if it's my area or someone else's, like buildings, for example.

If we compare these statements with the requirements found in job announcements, the male employees are clearly at an advantage. If you have rector ambitions, economic experience, and a Master's education, you fit the job announcements perfectly. Here, we might find the hidden "dark horses" who could overtake in the race to top positions.

The future managers should demonstrate their ambition, passion, and optimism for development. "Soft criteria" that could be interpreted in many ways and the aforementioned "sympathy factor" or tactical qualifications could come into play in choosing one candidate over another. A Master's education is a relatively clear criterion, but many teachers have this degree. Experience with and interest in economic management can therefore become the decisive factor, that is, the critical selection criterion in negotiating with the hiring committee. Is the future rector equipped to speak in a qualified manner with his or her Board of Directors about economics and investments? This gives an advantage neither to the "clever women" nor the "creative boys" but rather to the group referred to as "confident strategists," whatever gender they may be.

10. Backwards in High Heels

If we are interested in gender equality in the top management of Danish upper secondary schools, there are factors that speak both for and against the idea that such equality comes automatically. *Pro* speaks to the still greater number of female middle managers. *Contra* speaks to women's larger engagement in the professional/didactic/pedagogical spheres. *Pro* refers to a general cultural development that makes it still more "natural" for women and men to manage the relationship between family and career in the same way, including having the same expectations regarding each other's competencies. *Contra* refers to the new gendered divisions of labor in the organizations, where top managers deal with financial issues and strategic affairs and middle managers take charge of the "soft" processes between people.

Women might advance to top management, but it may well be a dance "backwards in high heels". It is *backwards* because it is not possible for women to "go with the flow". Instead they have to go *against* it. Resistance may come from "outside" from the group of "dark horses", which as mentioned is predominantly male, but resistance might also come from "within". To undertake a management job can *also* mean to renounce some of one's own

⁸ That women with financial responsibilities score so low on education and ambition may be because such financial responsibility could imply more administrative functions, such as budgeting and planning.

preferences, for example, didactic engagement or having a close collegial community. It is *in high heels* because the future rectors—according to the job announcements—should embody passion and engagement; demonstrate youth, innovation, and dynamism; and paint an attractive picture of the school to the outside world. In this context, it most likely would not hurt to be young and attractive and a little taller than average so women are at eyelevel with male colleagues (Hakim 2011). However, this does not necessarily coincide with ambitions for management and teaching space, where different types of knowledge and experience count regardless of gender.

From a democratic perspective, it is problematic if A-managers are increasingly separated from the organization's daily work in order to take care of traditionally male tasks, such as financial and planning tasks. This is especially so if it means that “the mothers” at home, the B- and C-managers, are given the responsibility of running things without necessarily having any influence on the decisions they are dependent upon. Seen from a management or business angle, it is also not reasonable if the most distinguishing quality of a top manager is not knowing anything about what he or she is managing.

Seen from an equality perspective, it is also problematic if the possibilities for women's advancement depend on whether they are able to outmatch men “on a leveled playing field”, as Billing(2005) speaks of. This would require exceeding them in terms of demonstrating not only well-developed strategic abilities and tactical sense but also well-developed confidence and self-sufficiency. Witz (1992) calls this proxy masculinity—that women, in order to succeed, practice an excessive potentiation of the technical instrumental rationality that has classically been defined as masculine.⁹ We can also speak about the “Anniegetyourgun” syndrome: “anything you can do, I can do better.”¹⁰ If this is the case, we have just conducted a “gender reassignment” and replaced organizations run by men with “female values” with organizations run by women with “male values.” But we have not dissolved traditional gender stereotypes and hierarchies. Therefore, we might not have moved at all, or we may even have moved one step forward only to take two steps back.

However, what is most central is that upper secondary school education plays a role in drawing the horizon for possibilities for new generations. If we want to continue having our young people position themselves amongst the world's elite in terms of the democratic formation (Bruun 2011), the gender situation is also worth considering. It is a transnational, national, and regional political question, but it is also a professional political question and a question for individual educational institutions.

This could become a discussion on gender quotas, even though quotas are very unpopular in Denmark, unlike in Norway and Sweden. But it could also be a call for current managers to support their employees' qualification development at all levels, even though they risk losing the talented to competition. It could also emphasize to potential managers that good management is an art form. Not everyone has the talent. It must be learned, and it requires

⁹ The phenomenon of proxy masculinity has also been described among Danish educators in relation to the current professionalization efforts in this profession, which consists mainly of women (Witz 1992, Boeje, 2015).

¹⁰ Irving Berlin's musical *Annie Get Your Gun*, 1946.

hard work.

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