Cilla Benkö on International Women’s Day: I hope that I’ll never feel entirely satisfied

Swedish Radio was named Sweden’s most gender-equal workplace in 2019. But it hasn’t always been this way. In many ways, the media world that I entered in 1985 was a completely different one, writes Swedish Radio’s Director-General Cilla Benkö in connection with International Women’s Day on 8th March.

When I started out at Swedish Radio as a 21 year-old trainee working at Radiosporten the sports desks were a male stronghold. There were around three female sports journalists in the entire country – all media outlets included. To be young and a woman in that context was tough. There were plenty of gibes and taunts and the audience comments could be downright malicious.

The criticism was almost never about the content of my reporting, but almost always about my being female. I often think that it was fortunate for me that social media didn’t exist at that time. If someone wanted to incite a large group of people to hold a grudge against me, they would have had to physically knock on doors and get a bunch of people to send actual letters in the post. Today, it’s much easier to mobilise thousands of critical comments targeting an individual who is simply trying to do their job.

Perhaps this start in my own career made it especially important to me to work very consciously with gender equality issues in my leadership role. Since I became Director-General of Swedish Radio, the entire management team have made it their business to ensure that we work more actively to include managers, co-workers, and with support from our HR department – and it has produced results. A number of directors-general before me also made gender equality a matter of priority. It takes time to make lasting changes!

In May last year, Swedish Radio was awarded Nyckeltalsinstitutet’s prize as Sweden’s most gender-equal workplace in 2019. The prize looked at a range of indicators of gender differences in the workplace: pay gaps, employment rates, sick leave and the gender distribution in the management. Swedish Radio scored consistently highly in these categories, and in some cases topped the scores for Sweden as a whole.

Today, roughly 9 of the 32 people who work at the sports channel, either full-time or part-time, are women. Many more than just three for the entire country in other words. But we still have a long way to go.

We have provided special courses at Swedish Radio many times to get more talented women interested in wanting to become really good commentators, not just presenters and reporters. In 2014, Swedish Radio’s Susanna Andrén made history when she became the first woman in the world to referee an opening match at the FIFA World Cup for men.

Great and truly important steps, but not nearly enough.

Swedish Radio today has a senior management team with a balanced representation of women and men – currently 45 per cent women and 55 per cent men. In the managerial ranks directly below this there are currently more women than men, and among co-workers in general the distribution is even.

I am naturally glad that our combined efforts have led to real change, but I also hope that we will never feel entirely satisfied. There are still areas where we need to do much better than we are doing today.
In technical jobs for instance, there are still more men than women, and in administrative jobs it’s just the opposite – more women than men. We measure, identify and follow up gender imbalances regularly and make concrete efforts to reduce them in certain occupational groups. A concrete example is that we have actively sought contact with women developers in closed social media groups to attract more of them to apply to work at Swedish Radio. From having had only one female developer in spring 2018, over a period of just one year we have managed to recruit seven women and one non-binary. I think that’s solid evidence that it’s very possible to change patterns.

Swedish Radio is meant to be for all of Sweden and offer as many perspectives as we possibly can in our programmes and broadcasts. We aim to be a company where opportunities are open to all our co-workers, regardless of gender, background and past experience. For me as Director-General, it’s very clear that more perspectives, more voices also leads to higher quality and greater success in general.

Since the beginning of the year, we have had a new vision for Swedish Radio. *More voices and more powerful stories for greater understanding* This couldn’t be our aim if we weren’t also making sure that we keep getting better at including more perspectives, more voices, in our own ranks, and in this endeavour gender identity is just one of many aspects that we need to have in mind.

In a world where there is more choice than ever before when it comes to consuming media content, it’s not just important to ensure that we include a variety of perspectives in our programming and in our internal discussions. It's a matter of pure survival.

**Cilla Benkö, Director-General, Swedish Radio**