

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

## WEPS IN ACTION

**Principle 1: Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality**

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## CASE STUDY: SODEXO

### BUILDING A GENDER-BALANCED BUSINESS

#### LESSONS LEARNED

- Having a highly committed CEO can often provide the first much-needed push towards setting new gender equality goals and objectives.
- Providing a clear business case, such as Sodexo's in-house Gender Balance Business Study, can be key to creating leadership buy-in.
- Getting male champions involved is important.
- Creating change does not only have to be top-down, but also bottom-up, and middle out.
- Being flexible through an evolving governance structure of the board, including a steering committee, members of the global executive committee; and influential leaders representing all regions and business units, was critical.
- Having clear metrics and target-setting is important. For Sodexo, this included the goal of 40 per cent women in top roles by 2025 and KPIs for senior executives linked to 10 per cent of their incentives

## CONTEXT

Sodexo is a French facilities management and food services company based in 72 countries. When its leadership team called together senior women in 2007 to address the disproportionately low number of women in senior roles, they were met with resistance. Having successfully navigated the corporate ladder themselves, the consensus was that other women could get there if they worked hard enough.

The leadership team, including then-CEO Michel Landel, knew there were serious structural inequality issues in the organization and was committed to tackling them. In 2009, women made up only 17 per cent of the company's senior

leadership and most of those were in corporate functions like human resources and communications rather than major business operations.

Getting senior women to the table was the first step on a long and evolving journey. What followed was two years of awareness-raising and discussion, input from women in other parts of the organization, and sharing of external benchmarking information to make sure everyone was on board. Today, the company has buy-in from both women and men throughout the ranks and women make up 37 per cent of its top 200 positions with a goal to reach 40 per cent by 2025.

## ACTIONS

It was clear from the outset that tackling gender inequality in an organization with 470,000 employees in 50,000 locations would need a global plan and strong leadership. The answer was SoTogether Gender Advisory Board, launched in 2009 to spearhead Sodexo's gender equality agenda.

The board was to be the catalyst for change. It had three objectives:

1. To lead and drive the organization's gender equality strategy.
2. To enlist highly influential individuals onto the board who could effectively champion its work in their region.
3. To make high potential women visible across the global organization, something which had already been shown to be instrumental in helping them progress.

The structure and composition of SoTogether evolved over time. Initially it was only made up of senior women. A second phase saw more junior women getting involved, who the board wanted to make more visible.

**Male champions were later included, recognizing that real change comes from men and women working together to solve gender inequalities. Most recently, mid-level women in operational roles have joined the board.**

Making sure that the board was representative of all business segments, lines and regions was important. The company's diversity team led the selection process in partnership with Human Resources. Two executive-level sponsors, both of whom report directly to the CEO, were included on the board to represent the global executive committee. Most critically, and signaling the importance of the work, the chair of the Sodexo board, Sophie Bellon, chaired SoTogether for several years.

A steering committee tracks the board's progress and helps maintain momentum. It consists of two people who focus on each of the following five priority areas for action:

- Influence HR processes, recommending practices to improve the gender balance and challenge measurements.
- Provide development opportunities to increase the pipeline of female talent, including mentoring, sponsorship and internal leadership development programmes.
- Strengthen a common identity and connect existing gender networks to engage women and men in building an inclusive culture where women thrive.
- Make Sodexo's commitment to gender equality visible and engage all staff in the effort.
- Use external partnerships to improve the quality of life for women in communities.

Today, the advisory board community has 41 members, including alumni, representing 20 nationalities.

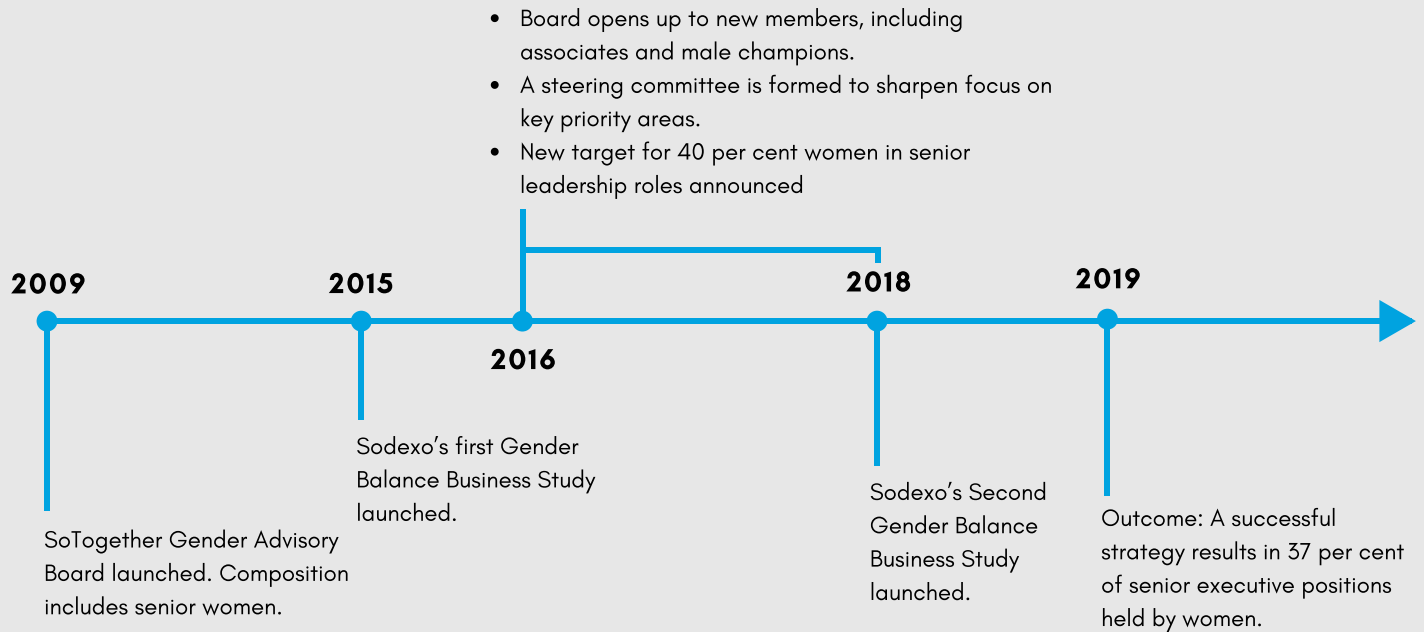
With the support of the executive committee, the board put in place clear metrics to ensure its goals were being met and individuals could be held accountable. In 2016, the company put a stake in the ground and set a goal of having at least 40 per cent of its senior positions occupied by women by 2025. To sharpen the focus, 10 per cent of the company's annual incentives for executives were linked to meeting this target.

Sodexo also has a target that all employees will work under gender-balanced management teams by 2025. It stands at over 50 per cent today. Key performance indicators were put in place for the executive team, including that their performance was measured on them having diverse successors.

**Linking executive-level achievement to the company's progress towards its gender equality goals has been a critical success factor.**

Setting out the solid business case for gender balance has also helped gain the commitment of leadership teams. The Gender Balance Business Study drew on Sodexo's own data, capturing the insight of 50,000 managers from 100 entities over a five-year period. It has made the argument indisputable: teams with a ratio of 40-60 per cent women outperform other teams.

# TIMELINE



## CHALLENGES

In an organization as large and complex as Sodexo, one of the largest challenges was making sure that every business line, every unit and every region were taking part. The board was key to this. Its continually evolving make-up made sure it reflected the latest phase of the work, while bringing in people with the power to influence their local leaders made sure the whole company was involved.

The lack of awareness about the basic problem of gender inequality, not just by men but also women, was also a challenge. Consistency and personal commitment on the part of the CEO and board really helped here, with both ma-

king significant personal effort to make it real for people. They drew on internal and external benchmarks to show why it mattered and simply kept pushing till it was understood.

The last big challenge was getting everyone to buy-in and commit to do their bit. This was where the company's Gender Balance Business Study came in. Interestingly, it was the passion project of a highly motivated HR professional but was picked up by the CEO and head of the board who spotted that it could help make the business case for gender equality in the workplace.

CHALLENGE

Scale the gender equality work across every business line, in every unit and every region.

Lack of awareness among both women and men about the need to address gender inequality.

Getting buy-in from everyone.

**A continually evolving governance structure of the Board and involving highly qualified individuals with the power to influence leaders in their regions.**

**The consistency and personal commitment of the CEO, who pushed and raised awareness of why gender equality matters.**

**The company's Gender Balance Business Study which made the business case for gender equality in companies.**

HOW IT WAS ADDRESSED

# RESULTS

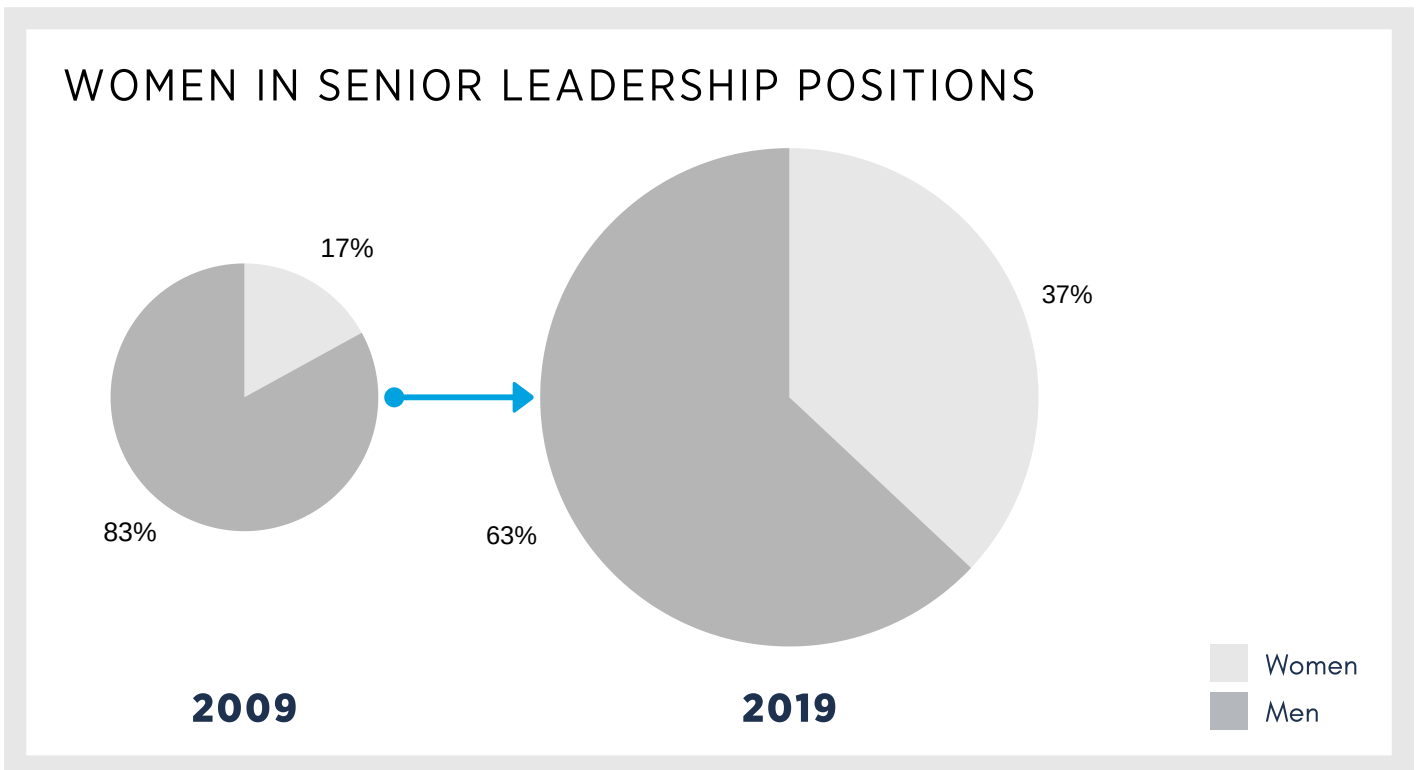
From just 17 per cent of senior leadership roles held by women in 2009, ten years on that figure has jumped to 37 per cent. Equally impressive is the fact that diversity has been one of the top two drivers of employee engagement in the company for several years. The SoTogether board has been the platform and the catalyst for this progress.

There are specific goals and targets for each of the five priority areas. The work that happens under each area is tracked and collectively it helps measure progress outside of the headline ambitions.

- So far, 21 gender networks that were already running have come together under the SoTogether umbrella. One of these is the Women in Facilities Management network. It has 200 members around the world and the work is an area where women are significantly under-represented. The network's activities focus on the development and advancement of women, with senior leaders invited to share their experiences.
- 500 women have participated in a women's leadership development programme for mid-level managers and many have gone on to be promoted and take on global roles.

- The Gender Balance Business Study has really made the company's commitment to gender equality visible and helped engage the whole workforce. Work supporting International Women's Day and the fact that almost 60 country offices have now signed up to the Women's Empowerment Principles have also helped raise awareness and get more staff involved.
- Diverse recruitment has been a focus for HR, with the introduction of candidate lists that must contain a suitable number of women and a shortlisting policy which promotes equality. Work around succession planning has also made sure that a diverse range of qualified candidates are included.
- When it comes to empowering women in communities, work has focused on ending violence against women; empowering women in the supply chain; and SheWorks, a job shadowing programme which more than 500 people from 20 countries have participated in.

Delivering all of this under the SoTogether banner has given real focus and visibility to the work and helped demonstrate the company's total commitment to gender equality.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Building a solid business case which demonstrates the bottom-line benefit of a gender-balanced business is the place to start and is key to getting senior leaders on board. Identifying and recruiting champions in the rest of the business, both women and men, also helps create a critical mass of people to give momentum to the mission.

When it comes to the role of leaders, it is important to identify ways for them to be actively involved rather than be supportive bystanders. Building a business case is part of this process, but they could also, for example, be involved in mentoring programmes.

A Sodexo regional CEO had so far not engaged with the programme and was not convinced it was needed. This presented the diversity team with a challenge. They knew that the CEO liked to network with other CEOs and spotted that this might give an opportunity to gain his support.

The head of the global diversity programme, Rohini Anand, invited him to participate in a mentoring programme with a female CEO in a different country office. When the woman was being laid off, she shared her experiences with him. It was a light-bulb moment – he was shocked to hear first-hand what can happen to women in the workplace. He asked Rohini to put everyone on his team through the same mentoring programme so that they too would understand women’s perspectives better.

Ten out of 12 women were promoted following the mentoring programme. One senior man who had been on it and subsequently appointed a woman said:

**“If you had put two candidates in front of me, a male and a female, and asked me to choose the best qualified, I would have chosen the male. After mentoring [the woman], I won’t let my unconscious bias influence me.”**

## THE ROLE OF WEPs

The Women’s Empowerment Principles have played an important role in Sodexo’s gender equality programme. The head of the diversity programme, Rohini Anand, believes that when country CEOs commit to the WEPs, they become accountable and really have to live up to their promises. “It has been extremely important for engaging our leaders,” Rohini said.

When multinationals sign up to the WEPs at corporate level, it is important that all country affiliates are involved. This was important for Sodexo because in a company as large and geographically dispersed as they are, top-level policy decisions don’t always fully trickle down.

Principle 1



Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.

Principle 2



Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.

Principle 3



Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.

Principle 4



Promote education, training and professional development for women.

Principle 5



Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.

Principle 6



Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.

Principle 7



Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality



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