TOWARDS A DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AGENDA

Construction and development firm Skanska is increasingly active on the international scene, making a culture of diversity and inclusion all the more vital.

By Katarina Grönwall

When thinking of the construction industry, diversity and inclusion is probably not the first thing that comes to mind. For years, the construction industry has been an industry with strong local presence and known for an ethnically homogeneous workforce dominated by men. With rising international competition, migration within EU and across the globe, increasingly ethnically diverse populations in the EU and US, growing number of women engineers as well as growing number of women and ethnic minorities in public decision-making positions, the industry needs to change. If not there is an overwhelming risk that it becomes out of touch with the society in which it operates, the talent it wants to attract and the clients it serves.

One company that has faced this brutal fact, and has embarked on a change journey, is Skanska. Founded in 1887 in Sweden, Skanska has
Another important step was taken at the end of 2012, when Pia Höök was recruited to the position of full time global diversity manager. Prior to Skanska, Pia was an associate professor in organisation, management and gender at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. She has also worked as the diversity director for Volvo Group. The need for a vision communicated by our senior executive team became obvious to her when she, as a new Skanska employee, traveled to meet employees and managers in different markets, and was continuously asked: “So what does the senior executive team have to say about this? Why more diversity? Why is this important to us?”

**RAISING THE COLLECTIVE AWARENESS**

Once back in Sweden Pia began to work with the senior executive team on creating a vision. More than a matter of writing a few statements, this process aimed at increasing the collective awareness of strengths, weakness, opportunities and challenges related to diversity and inclusion. It consisted of individual meetings, assignments and joint workshops.

Responsible for such sustainable buildings as the Swiss Re UK office (left), Skanska launched its Diversity and Inclusion Vision in 2013.
The vision that the senior executive team finally decided on states that “Skanska aims to be recognised as a leader in diversity and inclusion in all home markets. We mirror the diversity in society on all levels of our organisation. Our leaders are excellent in fostering an inclusive culture.”

**SELLING SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY** Compared to Skanska’s previous diversity approaches, the present strategy put much stronger emphasis on inclusion. An inclusive workplace ensures that the talents that are recruited also stay and develop with the company. It is through inclusion that the benefits that come with diversity – increased engagement, creativity, agility – can be leveraged. And although many Skanska business units have put lots of resources into attracting and recruiting efforts targeting diverse candidates, inclusion has still been a challenge to many. With this new approach there is an increasing understanding of the interdependence between attract, recruit, workplace culture and employer brand.

As Veronica Rörsård, Skanska’s executive vice president of human resources and information technology, explains: “Our strong employer brand, moving us up from number 15 to seven on the list of most attractive employers for engineers in Sweden, and being the most attractive employer among women engineers in Poland, is partly due to our diversity and inclusion work. Talents prefer companies that contribute to societies and where diversity and inclusion is part of that value foundation. Using our diversity and inclusion work in branding helps us to recruit the best from a larger pool of talents.”

In addition to the focus on inclusion, the new vision and strategy put strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion as a competitive advantage in the marketplace. This is also in line with recent changes in the EU strategy regarding public procurement.

Skanka’s chief executive officer, Johan Karlström, says: “We see a growing interest for our diversity and inclusion work among our clients. Thus we have also come to use the vision, strategy and film in meetings with clients and in procurement processes. We foresee that this trend will increase with the new EU strategy in place, which makes it possible for public organisations to make social sustain-
The analysis addresses four focus areas of the strategy: 1) attract and recruit from a diverse pool of talent; 2) secure an inclusive workplace; 3) develop and promote from a diverse pool of talents; 4) use diversity and inclusion in the marketplace. In addition to these four focus areas there is a fifth – management skills, awareness and commitment – but business units don’t need to assess this since it is something they all should work with irrespective of any analysis result.

To quote Pia Höök again: “Management commitment is incremental in any change process, and even more so when it comes to diversity and inclusion as these change efforts address historic stereotypes and status hierarchies, and therefore are sometimes met by resistance”.

PROMOTING DIVERSITY AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE. The analysis provides each business unit with a picture of the present situation in terms of diversity and inclusion, and helps to prioritise improvement efforts. In addition it serves as the basis for a workshop in the business units’ management team resulting in business-unit-specific actions and targets in line with the group vision. Since there are different challenges and opportunities in different countries, targets and actions need to be local. And in a decentralised company like Skanska it is important that the ownership lies with each business unit. Having that said, in order to secure learning across all units, all inclusion advocates and human resources managers have been divided into smaller learning communities, which meet regularly to share analysis results, actions and targets.

As Veronica Rörgård describes it: “The fact that we are on many different home markets gives us a competitive advantage as different markets are strong in different aspects of diversity and inclusion. Our ambition is to take the best from different business units to achieve great progress.”

Katarina Grönwall
Senior Vice President, Communications, Skanska

Katarina Grönwall has worked at Skanska since 2009. She is responsible for external and internal communications as well as brand for the Skanska Group and reports to the chief executive officer. Prior to Skanska she spent 10 years as an executive partner of Sweden’s largest corporate communications agency, Hallvarsson & Halvarsson. She has also worked for the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises, where she managed two political campaigns connected to Swedish referendums.