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Women Leaders Insight Paper published by CEO Worldwide

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN... CAPABLE OF BEING CORPORATE DIRECTORS?

Written by Viviane Strickfaden

One article among others in France highlights "A scarcity of women with CEO's experience, one of the profiles that companies are seeking widely for their board of directors".

This implies that in order to validly exercise a mandate in France, it is almost essential to have managed a company, at least a business unit?

Not to mention the essential financial expertise... Do we often become CEOs after having been CFOs? Not so sure: that's not the point here.

The purpose is to guide the gaze in another direction, to make people aware that there are many women with demonstrated leadership. All you have to do is look and see, open your eyes wide, even better your ears and your heart.

Other types of responsibilities may have been exercised and real added value may have been added to a Board of Directors/Supervisory Boards (BoD/SB). If this works for foreign companies, is it worth missing out on in France?

FIRST AN INTRIGUING QUESTION "A PREVIOUS CEO'S EXPERIENCE" FOR WHICH REASONS?

- Have already held a corporate office? For legal liability? For the complexity of stakeholder relations? For the loneliness of the leader? The reservoir to satisfy these demands goes beyond the scope of companies alone: without looking very far, chairing a non-profit organization already requires knowing how to play, or even juggle, with these components. And in many cases, with the added complexity of the absence of a strict hierarchical relationship...

- Have an ambition for the company, a sharpened understanding of its challenges, a strategic vision? Have the foresight to apply it in activities, taking advantage of transversality up to the operational level? In other words, being open to the environment of the company and the sector of activity, being in contact with its customers and more generally its external partners, its teams and in particular the managerial line and of course the directors? Here again, acquiring and cultivating skills can be done through other channels, other responsibilities.

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In fact, it could be a risk. The non-executive director is not a CEO bis. Its mandate can thus be justified through skills that the CEO does not have, whether they are more specialized or from another perspective that enriches the debate.

ONE CAN HAVE SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED BUSINESS WORTH MILLIONS OF € (\$) WITHOUT EVER HAVING HELD THE POSITION OF CEO.

This is the case of a contract/project pilot because this responsibility requires knowing how to act in complexity, to find the right alchemy to satisfy paradoxical injunctions.

A multiple strategic vision.

- External: linked to the client's environment, its transformations. This has to be taken into account to help the client succeed, decode and take advantage of power games, skillfully set up alliance strategies, ensure congruence in decision-making and the implementation/effectiveness of actions...
- Internal: that of the employing company, which has its own environment to decipher, its ambitions to satisfy, its power plays to take into account... For which an enlightened contribution to the elaboration of the strategic plan and a strong commitment in its deployment are expected.

The strategic evolution factors of the customer(s) may also be factors for the company... or not. It is necessary to be comfortable with this point to deliver value-added products/services.

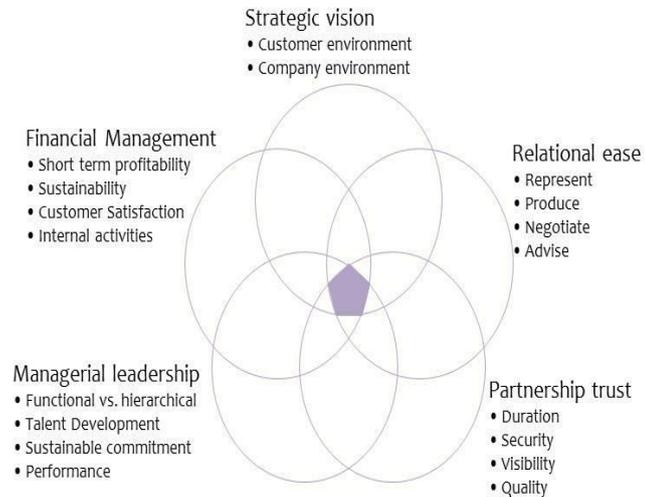
Various operational constraints.

- Relational: adjusting customer interaction flexibly to meet justified needs, avoiding commercial risks and maintaining a relationship of trust over time, in other words knowing how to combine various relational modes
- Represent the company to the client
- Deliver product/service
- Continuously negotiate (many multi-year contracts/projects now mean a "permanent sale" within the framework of existing legal support. This requires acting as a value-added "advisor").
- Partners: establish a balanced relationship with partners and service providers to ensure their long-term success, by securing their achievements (at stake: customer) and giving them sufficient visibility on their revenue so that they can organize themselves as effectively as possible. Proactive and reactive management.



• Managerial: exercise a functional and cooperative management, satisfying divergent de-mands.

- Actively contribute to the development of teams (medium- to long-term progress, diversity in their activities) and optimize the quality of production.
- Find the right balance between immediate performance (working with those who already know how to do) and sustainable performance (and commitment) (taking risk)



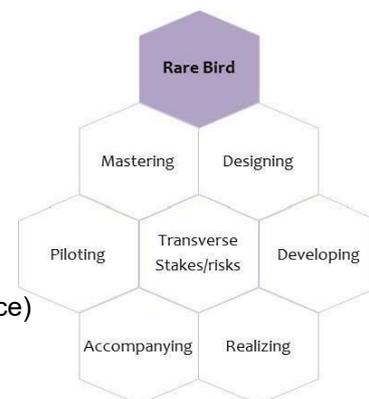
1The contract/project pilot has a wide range of skills

- Financial: dealing with the internal pressure that poses a multiple unknown equation:
 - Always more profitability by producing at the lowest cost,
 - Be 100% focused on satisfying the customer's right need (medium term) and/or the need to sell (short term),
 - Maximize customer contact while supporting non-productive internal activities that are essential to the smooth operation and her visibility inside her company.

A type of experience that therefore combines:

- strategic and operational,
- transversal vision,
- sales/development,
- production,
- management (people including paradoxical hierarchy, and performance)

In other words, significant challenges and risks to be controlled.



2Skills of the true (?) CEOs

1 What is valid at the board table can also be valid for managing a SME.

2. As a minimum, let us say from the lower third of the SBF 120 and all the ETI/PMEs



A downside? If you "fail" on a contract/project, you are not likely to sink the company. Not sure. This depends on the contract/project (e.g. share of activity) and the reason for the failure.

This is similar to what a large number of SMEs and even TWAs, depending on major contractors, are experiencing. Is it a strategic or operational error? Who/Where are the safeguards?

In terms of turnover and number of employees, many SMEs are "smaller" than multi-year contracts/projects. ***Managing a contract/project means managing a profit and loss account, ensuring the level of profitability expected by shareholders... with a team that is not always chosen.***

So when you have successfully evolved in a complex universe and have been able to adapt to it, you are, a priori, able to find your place in the group that is a BoD/SB . Able to bring value to it thanks to the speed of adaptation and reaction to situations, to all the relational intelligence developed to successfully manage a contract/project.

These are indeed essential skills when dealing with stakeholders with diverse or even divergent interests. They are very useful to quickly understand what is at stake for the company, the alliance games within the members of the existing BoD/SB, to co-develop the strategy, to act in the most effective way to ensure its sustainability and development.

A contract/project pilot has all these skills.

If you agree to look in this direction, to open up to these talents, the "pool" of female non-executive directors² immediately becomes much richer.

Where are the women... potential independent/external directors? Everywhere if you want to get out of the frame, out of the mold, out of the clone and dare (a little!) something different. Want to move forward? Innovation? Agility?

Where are the women... potential independent/external directors? Everywhere if you want to get out of the frame, out of the mold, out of the clone and dare (a little!) something different. Willing to move forward? Innovation? Agility?



PROFILE

CEO and Founder of 2 consulting firms; professional background in major international consulting firms.

Specialist of management and innovative & strategic change | Non-executive director | Executive coach | Emotional intelligence | Startups development

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Reorganization of a support function: 100 sites grouped into 30; more than 500 individuals impacted without social movement. Budget: 7 m€ - direct report team: 10 - 15 people - RFD won for 130 m€ with a team of

30 people; 1st contract won for 7.5 m€

Click here to [view Viviane's Short Bio](#)

ABOUT FEMALE EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Female Executive Search is a brand of the international executive recruitment company CEO Worldwide Ltd, operating since 2001. The intention of Female Executive Search is to actively support women leaders on their way to Top-Level-Positions bringing more diversity to company boards.

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