

# A FEMALE COOPERATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON POWER, INFLUENCE AND OWNERSHIP

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a report of an extended study of power, influence and ownership in a co-operatively owned organization, Kooperativa Förbundet.

I have had three different perspectives: as an employee and as an owner's representative, and as a researcher. As an employee responsible for employing clerks within a purchasing department I had many opportunities to study the recruitment process, and I was astonished at the fact that only males with experience of sales work in department stores were chosen as buyers with career possibilities and a high salary. Females with experience of purchasing work in a purchasing department who had near contacts with suppliers and a good knowledge of the assortment of merchandise seemed to be out of question. Why did they have to stay in dead-end jobs with a low salary but with the important task of teaching purchasing policy to the salesmen? This confused me since KF is a co-operative / democratic corporation, owned by people at grass roots level.

I could not change this imbalance from inside due to the traditional rules of the hierarchy. Although managers stated their desire to have a balance, (Bergström, 1978 "Organizational development through cooperation") in reality nothing has changed. Also, from outside, as an owners' representative I was unable to alter the balance. The only way open to me was the official method of writing and of defending motions at the annual meetings. Those motions were all considered unimportant.

The purpose of my thesis is to deal with the hypothesis of the superiority of human resources to financial ones. The ineffective use of bright females at my work place was not an exception. In my opinion it ought to be possible to "dig gold" on the floor of any large organization. Therefore, I found it necessary to study the mechanisms of the observed imbalance, and from a woman's viewpoint.

Besides being employed and acting as a representative of the owners/members, I also performed an extensive data gathering from many seminars, aiming at creating motivation and commitment among all employees. This material was evaluated in accordance with statistical methods which showed that the seminar activity had not been successful. Therefore I took an opportunity to apply complementary, pedagogical methods.

I draw the conclusion that my idea of utilizing human (female) resources has to be done by means of a trustful cooperation between men and women. The thesis ends in an imaginary verbal interpretation of the sign of infinity, an interpretation which per se might lead to a development of the market economy - the superiority of human resources to financial ones, a welfare goal.