

Conversations with Senior Male Executive Champions



Mr Hideo Tomita

Managing Director, Japan

Thomson Reuters



THOMSON REUTERS

Why are you personally committed to gender diversity?

I am a firm believer that women contribute to the success of our business and that female employees are instrumental to helping us achieve our goals. When we deal with customers we put together a team of men and women and I see that we complement each other very well.

Engaging men in the discussion of gender inclusion is seen as important in bringing about positive change. To what extent do you agree with this – and why?

I totally agree with this statement. It is important that men are involved in these discussions so that we can talk about how we can help each other. There tend to be various unconscious obstacles or difficulties that female employees face in our working environment – many of which I believe could be solved with the co-operation of men. For example, if men were more aware of some of the challenges women face juggling responsibilities at home and at work, they might be more understanding and supportive.

According to our study which benchmarked 26 multinational companies in Japan, women hold an average of 11.0% of senior roles in Japan. What is your reaction to this percentage?

This is fair reflection of the current status in Japan. But this is not static – our society is changing very rapidly. I believe this rate will rise quickly in the future.

What are some of the dynamics you see at play in the Japan market that explain this?

In the past women's participation in the workforce has been relatively low in this country. This is due to our historical and cultural background in Japan where the tradition has been that men work and women take care of the home. But this is not so much the case anymore as everybody realises that this is not sustainable and not a good solution moving forward. Today we have an aging society and in order to secure enough workforce to support the growing Japanese economy, it is widely recognised by government and industry that much more active participation of women is required. The current Japanese administration is pushing this, and that is why I believe this percentage will rise.

On the other hand, I do not believe there will be drastic change. In Japan, many employees work for the same

company for most of their career; we talk about life time employment. This means mid-career recruitment from outside happens rarely so it will be difficult to change the number dramatically. It will be a gradual change.

Our study shows that increasingly companies have policies and programmes in place to create an enabling environment for women – and this is particularly true in Japan. Why then, do you think we are still not seeing a greater representation of women in senior positions?

A change is happening. In recent news articles you can read about women being appointed as directors or senior executives for the first time. The process has started, but it will take some time to see more remarkable change.

What are you personally doing to create a culture that is more inclusive of women in your organisation in Japan?

It is not so much about driving a mandate from the top, but rather showing my personal commitment to diversity and inclusion, walking the talk and acting as a role model. I think this is the way to change the culture and influence mindsets and behaviour. Interestingly, since I joined the company the participation of women in our workforce has increased and I notice that people are now proactively asking for more female candidates.

I am deeply involved in organising our D&I related events. This includes activities such as our Women at Thomson Reuters events, our Kids Day and the Financial Industry Women's Network events that happen at various times in the year. I also always make sure diversity and inclusion is on the agenda of my monthly leadership team meetings. We look at some of the issues and how we can reinforce the right message across the company.

Does your company and/or do you personally have stated KPIs or targets to drive and track gender inclusion efforts in Japan?

We do not have specific KPIs. Personally, I do not think these things are achieved just by having a quota. But of course we should be aiming for more of a 50/50 split and at Thomson Reuters we are moving towards that goal.

What do you think it will take for us to see further improvement in the representation of

women in senior positions in multinational companies operating in Japan?

As in our company, it is important to stress the importance of diversity and inclusion, so that the concept is really embraced naturally by all employees. This might have been more difficult in the past, but today – as far as gender is concerned, most people understand and recognise the economic imperative of including women.

There are some practical things that need to change too. Our country does not have enough childcare or baby care for working parents. If that issue is solved it would be much easier for women with children to come back to work.

We should also make sure we help senior female leaders to be successful in their current positions. I personally feel that the first generation of female leaders is under huge pressure. Because female leaders in Japanese business society are still rare, the media is constantly highlighting the first female CEO in a certain industry, the first female director, etc. I worry this exposure and publicity gives them too much pressure. Better to highlight their accomplishments after they have been in the role for a period of time, rather than just focus on their appointment. We should accept that having women leaders is a natural thing.

How can companies encourage more men in their organisations to follow your example and take gender inclusion seriously?

One of the best ways is to create the opportunities for men to hear and listen to the perspectives of female employees. Then they can better understand some of the difficulties women face. Men should be encouraged to participate in various diversity events, including women's network activities and these events should be supported by senior management. These are not drastic measures but it is about a consistent approach, increasing understanding it and spreading it gradually.

What is the risk of not ensuring greater gender diversity at senior levels?

If a company does not ensure greater gender diversity, that company will not be able address and respond to the needs of the business community appropriately. Women have growing influence in our society and business world – they represent our customers, partners, suppliers and we need to be able to understand, reflect and respond to their needs as well as men's.