

Equality and diversity: Netlight's cornerstone and strategic objective



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Supporting work–life balance and addressing women’s underrepresentation in the labour market: approaches and good practices in the ICT sector

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Netlight is a medium-sized IT company that operates in seven countries and has 1000 employees. In Finland, Netlight employs around 40 people and provides a variety of services from software development to IT strategy consultation. The proportion of women in the company is between 25 and 30%. Netlight considers equality to be its cornerstone, and a competence that is valued and reinforced in all activities. All Netlight partners sign the company’s Declaration of Equality, and an equality clause is included in all agreements signed by the company. Netlight has a policy on harassment and an internal group that continually develops new initiatives to promote equality.

In order to strengthen equality and in the company, a strategic initiative called Vostok was launched in 2012. It includes activities such as Code Pub and Tech EQ, which aim to build networks and share know-how among women working in ICT. Netlight also invests in recruiting new talents, and maintains a strong gender focus throughout the whole recruitment process. Indeed, beyond enhancing diversity and productivity, Netlight's ability to recruit women is considered crucial to the company's future. Netlight also implements a range of measures for parents of young children including providing compensation for periods of parental leave, reduced working hours following parental leave and children's playrooms in all of its offices.

On the one hand, ICT workplaces enjoy more flexibility compared with many other sectors because technology-based work is often not tied to a location or timetable. On the other, ICT workplaces compete for top employees for whom a good employer image is important.

Country information – policy in context

Equality and flexibility in Finland

Finland has an historic tradition of women's, often full-time, participation in working life, and options for flexibility are a key feature of working life generally. Due to Finland's relatively generous parental leave and its well-developed public day-care services, education, health and infrastructure, workplaces have not been put under major pressure to develop further measures to support work–family life reconciliation. Nonetheless, the ICT sector has been a forerunner in developing such measures. Finland has always been among the best-performing countries in the EIGE's equality index. Yet levels of segregation in the labour market are relatively high in Finland, and women spend significantly more time on housework and childcare compared with men.

Segregation in Finland starts early. In education, girls tend to opt for health and welfare professions over technical ones. In later life, the number of women leaders is low, and gender disparities in salaries lead to smaller pensions for women.

Several activities are currently under way to support fathers' participation in child care, especially taking up parental leave. The Family Federation of Finland's 2015 initiative, the Family Barometer, demonstrated that uncertainties in working life have impacted negatively on the country's birth rate, which is at its lowest in decades.

Women in ICT

ICT is among the most male-dominated sectors also in Finland. The low representation of women in ICT starts in education. According to Statistics Finland, women made up 18% of the students enrolled on the post-graduate master's degree course in IT in 2016, and only 16% the master's in Engineering in Telecommunications. In the same year, just 7% of young women aged between 15 and 29 named ICT as their favorite profession, compared with, say, the 82% of girls who cited the health and welfare sector (Youth Barometer in Finland).

Introducing work–life balance measures: good practice

Netlight: Equality and diversity – cornerstone and strategic objective

Netlight is an IT company providing a variety of services from software development to IT strategy consultation. Founded in 1999 in Stockholm, Netlight established its Helsinki unit in 2013, and currently employs around 1000 people in seven countries, 47 of whom work in Finland.

Equality at Netlight

Netlight considers equality to be its cornerstone and a strategic objective since 2012. All Netlight partners sign the company's Declaration of Equality, and those in Helsinki have signed an agreement on promoting equality. An equality clause is also included in all job contracts and client agreements.

Equality is a mainstreamed ideology from strategy level to the everyday behaviour of each individual employee. In practice, equality is emphasised throughout the entire recruitment process and induction of new employees. Netlight's ongoing in-house recruiting of new talents ensures that role models for women can be found, and good practices disseminated and developed.

The company aims to be a role model in equality across the industry. It wants to show that positive change can occur through positive action. While diversity is a stand-alone value, it also relates to innovation and productivity. Therefore, Netlight's strategic line comes to life at every level of the organisation, from the highest-level manager to the newest employee, every day.

Equality in practice

At Netlight, efforts are made to give everyone the same conditions and possibilities, regardless of gender, religion, age, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Equality is one of Netlight's core competences, promoted, for instance, through a transparent wage policy: everyone knows everyone else's salary, at all levels. Career advancement is also common knowledge throughout the company.

Edge Equality is a forum for all Netlight personnel to share and grow this competence. Through meet-ups, seminars and other activities, equality skills are developed which add value to professional roles, to deliver equality as 'Netlighters'. Netlight also has an equality group, which serves as a forum where all equality missions are highlighted across the company with the aim of inspiring mutually, helping out with internal marketing and discussing more missions to further develop equality at Netlight.

In order to follow the development of Netlight's experiences in equality, a yearly equality survey was conducted between 2013 and 2016. This was carried out in autumn using an online survey tool, and the responses and comments were collected and analyzed by the equality group. The final summary and conclusion will be completed in April 2018.

Policy against harassment

Netlight offers employees a working environment free from any form of harassment. Harassment means unwelcome conduct at work that violates an employee's integrity on the basis of gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, disability or age.

Examples of harassment include:

- Derogatory jokes that may be offensive or hurtful
- Generalizing statements and disparaging attitudes and language use
- The presence or spread of pictures or links with pornographic, racist or other discriminatory content
- Other actions that degrade or ridicule, or are perceived as an insult to the employee

Harassment can manifest in different ways. For example, documents and statements are ignored by freezing someone out; someone is made to feel invisible or ridiculed; information is withheld; a person is subjected to guilt and shame.

All employees share responsibility for achieving a climate that stops harassment occurring and, where it does, responds to it case by individual case. Netlight has a responsibility to intervene on behalf of employees who are, or have been, exposed to harassment. The company prevents harassment from progressing and supports victims so that they can continue working without suffering harm. Offenses are reported to the police. All Netlight personnel should be made to feel that they will be taken seriously if they report being subjected to any form of harassment in the workplace. Victims of harassment should always be made to feel that there is someone at Netlight to turn to; any harassment must be identified by a mentor or the HR department.

Vostok – a strategic initiative to attract more women to IT

Vostok is Netlight's strategic initiative for recruiting more female Netlighters and attract more women into the industry. Launched in 2013, the initiative is named in honour of the first woman in space, Valentina Tereshkova. The initiative goes beyond the company's immediate scope to address the industry as a whole, and for the benefit of all. Vostok consists of several practices, such as a network of companies, TechEQ, which aims to promote women's participation in IT; or the Code Pub for coding, networking and knowledge sharing.

The Code Pub initiative sprang from Vostok. A meet-up event for women who wish to learn more about IT, the Code Pub is open to beginner as well as professional developers. If a woman would like to join a Code Pub event, all she has to do is go to the local meetup.com site. For more information, visit www.netlight.com/we-are-all-equal/, and see previous tech meet-ups on social media here via #thecodepub.

TechEQ, another initiative that grew from Vostok, works for gender equality in the IT and tech industries in Sweden and Finland. The network has grown to around 100 companies, all of which are listed on techeq.se. The Code Pub in Finland, Women in Tech and Girls in Tech joined forces and created an events calendar for female tech enthusiasts at <http://techeq.fi>. The WordPress site was built by female hackers during a Code Pub event at Netlight Helsinki.

The latest initiative inspired by TechEq movement is "He for She" practice, where men at Netlight are included in the work towards a more equal IT industry. This makes the equality work in itself more equal. The CEO of Netlight Erik Ringertz (a man) is very engaged in driving diversity and equality.

Practices for supporting work–life reconciliation

Every employee has their own career mentor, with whom the employee can discuss and agree on work–life balance measures, developmental needs, parental leave and working arrangements in a safe space. A wide range of flexible working arrangements are available.

The company makes every effort to take into account the national characteristics of the work–life environment; for example, by developing country-specific benefits. Netlight provides support in terms of both salary and time to those on parental leave: in Norway, the company covers up to 49 weeks, including the state’s 12 weeks. Netlight tops up the difference between state provisions for its employees’ full salary. In Sweden, Netlight supplements the salary paid by the state and allows a 25% reduction in working hours after parental leave. Also, playrooms are available in all offices, allowing employees to take children to the office. The company also aims to enhance uptake of parental leave among fathers.

Women at Netlight

The outcomes of the different measures to strengthen equality, enhance work–life balance and increase the proportion of women the company are measured regularly. The share of women in the company is followed in order to maintain a relatively high proportion of women across diverse roles. The number of women in consultant roles with a more technical background is also followed; the proportion of women here is 25%, compared with a total share of 30%.

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Further information

Netlight - We are all equal



[Netlight - Who we are](#)



[Vostok - competence has no gender](#)



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