

COMMENT

Paying women the same as men isn't only a matter of principle, it's also a promotional opportunity, says **Jacqueline Gold**

To increase retail sales, just pay women more

Whether you're managing the budget for your stores or you're figuring out budgets for a country, the key questions are broadly similar.

Should we invest more in capital projects and staffing to stimulate future economic growth, or cut budgets in order to maximise short-term profits?

Should we invest millions in a store refurbishment programme for our businesses or wait another year, run a skeleton staff and hope our brand and service don't suffer? What's going to give us the best ROI?

The challenge

The problem with too many of these investment decisions is that we rarely challenge our own preconceptions and prejudices before we immerse ourselves in the decision-making process. We also tend to have a linear view on the choices presented to us.

Take the perennial debate about investment in, and the management of, our railways.

We'd all like journey times to be cut and better rail capacity to make trains less overcrowded. Faster, modern, more efficient, environmentally responsible – what's not to like?

What's missing is an alternative perspective. Driverless electric cars that can travel nose-to-tail at high speed could do to the railways what steam engines did to canal barges – put them out of business. More flexible working and virtual offices could also negate the need to physically travel for work.

But before we start assessing the pros and cons of these projects, we



need to take a step back and acknowledge our personal paradigms because they may need shifting.

It's the same with gender equality in the workplace – something else that needs a paradigm shift. There's a universal consensus that men and women doing the same job should get paid the same wage. It's the law.

However, some men may excuse the fact there are fewer women in their boardroom and senior management team because they chose to be the primary carer for their children.

While women were on maternity leave they may have missed out on a promotion or a pay rise, in part because these matters are often discretionary and in part because we still don't do enough to make it easy for parents to return to work, such as more wraparound childcare.

Taking the initiative

However, maybe we're looking at the gender pay gap from the wrong angle. Instead of seeing gender pay equality as a matter of principle, let's view it as a promotional opportunity.

Seventy per cent of household purchases are made by women. The vast majority of our staff are women. And businesses with mixed gender boards perform better.

So, if we want to grow retail sales we should find ways to pay women more; we'd certainly get more bang for our buck – something we've always been rather good at, at Ann Summers.

Jacqueline Gold is chief executive of Ann Summers