



Interviews



CEPE
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and artists' colours in Europe



Paula Salastie is the owner, Board member and CEO of Teknos Group Oy. She is also a member of CEPE board since 2018.

What are your priorities for 2021?

As for everybody the year 2020 has been an unorthodox year due to the pandemic. The first quarter changed our daily reality. We had to learn to work differently. In the future, we will continue to work remotely work. We have learned from this experience and are keen to see what new opportunities will arise from it. Also, this year will bring new opportunities for growth, both organic and through acquisitions. For us, recruitment will be on the top of the agenda. To be able to grow, we need to ensure that we have a strong organization to support our target. This, in turn, means that we need to connect with people in a different way than we have been used to date.

You are a successful business leader, what so far is the achievement in your career that you are most proud of?

As I have been in the industry for more than 20 years, there are a few moments. Possibly, the first one set the course; it was my decision to take over the company. For a family business that meant to

buy out my brother. However, what I am most proud of has been the implementation of our new strategy and that we were able to keep the family spirit. This was ensured by a flat organisational structure that enables our, almost 1800 employees, to communicate with each and every one, despite working for a global coatings company with operations in more than 20 countries with net sales of about €400 million.

Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook said “in the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders”. What are your views on this quote?

I was brought up within the traditional Finnish culture which, in a way, is very tolerant. Gender equality has been a reality in Finland for quite a long time. For me, it was never a question to be “allowed” to do what I wanted. Whether you are female or male is decided by chance, as is whether you have brown or blue eyes. Having said that there will be just leaders, but it will still take some time to truly get to this point. Therefore, we must put a lot



of emphasis on diversity and on creating equal opportunities for anybody who is willing to take on challenges.

I hate the question: how do you like your job as a female? That would just be the same as if I would be asking somebody: how can you handle the family life balance as a man? I do not think that plays a role. If you are good at what you do, you are good at what you do.

What are, in your view, tomorrow's challenges for the coatings industry?

Well, our industry is heading in the same direction as everybody else. In future, I see more focus on connectivity with customers, partners, and our own people. The key question is: how can we ensure a

long-term relationship with all our stakeholders? It will be especially crucial to further identify our customers and to find new ways to engage with them, possibly through joint development operations, to discover their needs. This will be important, because we, as industry are going through the change of communicating more about the life cycle analysis and the full impact of coatings. That means that we need to be able to translate that into a story and make our customers aware. For us sustainability will be a key component of the future, but not only from an environmental perspective, but also in terms of company sustainability and sustainability in our relationships with customers and suppliers.

Jaintske Feenstra has been the managing director of VVVF since October 2015. She is also the chairwoman of the CEPE Green Deal.



What are your priorities for 2021?

Knowledge comes first for me, along with sharing that knowledge. Within the coating association VVVF, each employee brings its own area of knowledge. A newly created position at the office is manager sustainability who will start next month. Our team counts in total 5.5 people and we hire additional experts for special cases. With this team the office is ready for the further roll-out of the

European Green Deal, which forms the basis of my priorities for 2021.

The 2021 priorities are in line with previous years, to which the Green Deal has been added. We continue informing our members about the plans of the European Union and national government and what it means for them. The government can make plans, but it is after all, the companies that have to implement them. That is our second priority: our



members have a lot of R&D expertise and they are thus essential to achieve the sustainability goals. Thirdly, coatings are important in our daily life. This year we will record a short video to share on social media.

Having a more diverse workforce is important, especially in senior management teams. Yet women are underrepresented in senior management positions. How could the coatings industry attract more female talents?

I am the 4th child of a family of five girls. My mother's motto was "what a boy could do, you can do too". She was right, but she forgot about stereotypes. When I started working after university, I noticed that being a woman had a certain impact. It was in my second job that a not well-functioning male colleague was given a raise "after all, he has a family", was the explanation my managing director put forward for justifying his decision. I had reached all my targets and I did not get a salary increase, because "a compliment is nice too". We had a good conversation afterwards, I can assure you.

I have the impression that a lot has changed since then. I have worked in the industry for many years now and board members and managing directors have always taken me seriously. Besides, you need to take your own knowledge, work and effort without a grain of salt. Women tend to belittle their contribution, while men sometimes give their contributions extra weight. I will not say that one is better than the other, but it is important that managers are aware of this, as this will allow more women to automatically enter senior management positions.

What are, in your view, tomorrow's challenges for the coatings industry?

The government is sending contradicting signals to entrepreneurs: some room for manoeuvre is needed for innovations, but laws and regulations are becoming stricter and stricter. In addition, industry has to deal with increasing administrative burdens, which puts SME's in particular under pressure. That is a challenge for our industry.

Nevertheless, I am very optimistic about the coatings industry's future. There are member companies that have existed for decades or even centuries, and entrepreneurs have always shown to be creative and flexible leading to new solutions. I am therefore confident our industry with its long history, will find opportunities and continue to flourish in the future.

