Part Three

Towards Organizational Change: Measures and Initiatives

In addition to the research described in the first two parts of this book, the FRONT project has consisted of various measures, in order to promote gender equality at the faculty. An important strategy has been *to combine* the implementation of measures with research, that is, to create initiatives that could be applied in practice and at the same time generate new knowledge. In this part of the book, which consists of three chapters, we will describe and analyze some of the measures. These include initiatives for leaders, PhD supervisors, and top female researchers.

The three chapters are based on some common methodological and theoretical points of departure. The research following the measures was based on methodological elements from action research. This implies, among other things, that the researchers worked directly with the initiatives, and that these were developed and adjusted along the way in line with new knowledge that came to light. As a theoretical framework, the "doing gender" perspective was chosen, with particular emphasis on

the American sociologist Joan Acker's research. In this introduction, the common methodological and theoretical perspectives in the book's third part are briefly explained.

Action Research

Action research was developed as early as the 1940s by, among others, Kurt Lewin and John Dewey (Hansson, 2003), and may be described as both a theory and a method (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Hansson, 2003; Johannisson et al., 2008; Nielsen & Svensson, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). An important point of departure recognizes that knowledge is created through practical action. Action research is often used to make knowledge, attitudes, and expectations visible – things that are "taken for granted" in an organization – and thereby create a basis for change. The participants in an action research group are central to the research process, and the purpose is to create shared learning among participants and researchers.

One branch of action research is action-oriented gender research, which combines research on gender with both learning and action theory (Amundsdotter, 2009; Amundsdotter et al., 2018). In this same knowledge process, through which the participants, who know their own organization, meet researchers with theoretical knowledge on gender, opportunities for experienced-based learning are created. As a result, both participants and researchers acquire new and well-founded knowledge (Andersson, 2009; Gunnarsson et al., 2007).

An essential difference between action research and other types of research is that the researcher becomes an agent of change through actively participating in the process. The researcher's position and function may vary, as can the dilemmas that may arise (Westlander, 2006). According to Westlander (2006), being an action researcher involves taking on a double role. One must both meet the participants' needs and wishes, and at the same time conduct research that provides new knowledge and is open to a critical, reflexive, and scientific discussion.

In FRONT, the action research perspective meant that the researchers became involved in a learning and knowledge process along with the participants in the project's initiatives. The participants' experiences, observations, and reflections were examined in light of theoretical perspectives from gender research introduced by the researchers. The researchers conducted research *with* the participants rather than *on* or *for* them. However, the participants and the researchers had different goals for knowledge production. When the participants' intention was to create knowledge that could be used directly in the initiated work for change, the researchers' role was to develop that knowledge into interpretations, theories and models that could be reviewed and disseminated in the scientific community.

Action researchers have often been regarded as external agents of change, although some action research traditions have emphasized the internal organizational process, in which the researcher should be a neutral mediator, who helps create change based on the employees' wishes as formulated, for example in dialogue conferences (Holter, 2008). Despite different emphases, successful action research is usually seen as a good combination of external and internal agency.

In FRONT, the external agency was clear – the measures were designed to improve gender balance in the faculty. The internal agency was developed and formulated among the participant employees along the way, in order to help implement the measures and overcome obstacles and barriers.[1]

The researchers following the measures described in part three of the book had somewhat different roles. Herr & Andersson (2005) describe how the researcher's position can vary from being an *insider* researching one's own practice, to being an *outsider* to the context in which the research is taking place. An outsider may also hold different positions, such as an *outsider within* – a sort of in-between position, where one has knowledge about a local context without necessarily being part of it (Herr & Andersson, 2005). Some of the researchers were employed in the same organization as the participants but had a different role. We refer to them as *outsiders within*. Others have only been involved in one of the

initiatives, for instance, leading workshops, and are therefore referred to as *outsiders*.

The empirical material consists of field diaries and interviews. The researchers took notes by hand during the workshops, and at the end of each day they reviewed their individual notes and wrote a joint field diary. Flip-over sheets and other material produced by the participants were also collected and documented in the diary. In addition to the field diary, the empirical material for Chapters 10 and 12 consists of individual interviews with the participants. The semi-structured interviews took one to two hours each and were recorded and transcribed.

In the introduction to each chapter, we describe how we collected the material relevant to the chapter, as well as how we worked with the analysis of the empirical data.

Theoretical Approach to the Initiatives

The work within the initiatives was based on a scientific perspective, in which people create and construct their reality through interaction and dialogue with each other (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This involves seeing organizations as social constructions, and gender as an integrated part of the organization's practices, culture, and power relationships (e.g., Acker, 1990, 2000; Butler, 1990, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This approach is often referred to as "doing gender".

The FRONT project's main objective was increased gender equality in the faculty. From an action research perspective, the first step in this work for change was to engage the organization in exploring and understanding where and how inequality is done – in other words, what is the point of departure for working towards the change that is about to happen? In the practical work with the initiatives, we therefore needed a method that could help increase awareness of and interest in how gender is, in fact, done in the organization. Choosing a method meant taking several things into account. For the method to work as an adequate point of departure for the initiatives, it had to be relatively easy to understand, and thus easily communicated and applied to the employees' work for change at the faculty. At the same time, the method must be scientifically

sound, have broad empirical support, and be able to combine various aspects of gender and organizational change. Gender had to be made visible as both a personal and a social pattern, which, among other things, involves how discursive structures and cultural expressions are internalized through (physical) practices. Due to all these factors, we ended up choosing the American sociologist Joan Acker's research and work on organization theory. The next three chapters show how this has been used in working with the initiatives.

Doing Gender in Organizations

The *doing gender*[2] perspective was first described in the article "Doing Gender" by Candace West and Don Zimmerman from 1987. In this article, the researchers argue that gender is not something we human beings are or have – it is something we do. We are taught how to do gender throughout our lives, and we are "rewarded" by society and our culture when we do it right – and punished when we do it incorrectly. Our upbringing entails that we usually do gender without thinking about it. The act has become automatic. Elin Kvande (2003) uses the metaphors of gender as a noun, gender as an adjective, and gender as a verb to describe the difference between the doing gender perspective and the gender perspective that has formed the basis of previous research. Gender as a noun means that we look at gender as something natural, fairly static, and unwavering. Biologically, we are either female or male, and our biology explains how we behave. Gender as an adjective means that we have both a biological gender, which is steadfast and rather absolute, and a culturally defined gender, a gender role, which can change. Since women and men have learned different things and have different experiences, we behave differently. Gender as a verb shifts the focus to how gender is done. The opportunities we have to behave are affected and limited by the body, but that does not mean that there is a natural behaviour that emerges if we just allow it. Gender continues to be something we do. Holter (1989, p. 110, translated from the Norwegian) summarizes it in the following way: "Social gender is something we *do,* but it appears as something we *are*." When individuals do gender in the

same way, patterns and structures are created that affect our experience and behaviour. When we do gender automatically, without thinking of what we are doing, we follow the structures and thus contribute to reinforcing and reproducing them. If we are conscious of how we do gender, we can instead choose whether we want to reproduce or break the structures.

According to Sylvia Gherardi (1994), we do gender in two ways: through actions and through thoughts. It is much easier to make actions visible than thoughts – therefore, it is easier to change what we do than how we think. The gender we do through thinking often consists of cultural archetypes – in other words, something that is independent of historical time, society and culture, and therefore more stable and difficult to change than the gender we do through our practices and actions.

Four Analytical Approaches to Examine How Gender Is Done

In the work with measures and initiatives in the FRONT project, we chose to use Joan Acker's (1990) model as a point of departure for analyzing how gender is done in organizations. The model describes four analytical approaches or pathways. These approaches are linked and can therefore be difficult to distinguish in the practical everyday life of an organization. An approach should be seen as both a methodological and an analytical tool that can be applied in order to examine how gender is done in an organization. We wanted to offer these tools to the participants of the FRONT initiatives to help them develop new knowledge and understanding.

Acker's efforts were aimed at understanding the "gendered" organization's modes of operations – that is, an organization that "does" gender even if it is officially neutral. Acker's model for organizational change has later been developed further by Nordic researchers (among others, Linghag, 2009). In our present work, we have chosen to refer to the analytical categories as structure, culture, interactions, and identity work.

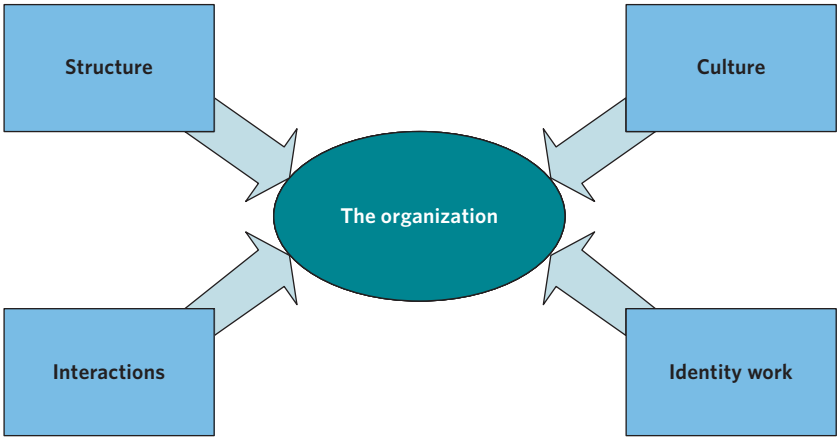

Figure 3.1.1. The model of four analytical approaches to how gender is done in organizations. Based on Acker (1990).

The first approach is *structure*, meaning everything that is done within the organization to structure the work. Much of the work in an organization is not governed in detail by formal guidelines. Routines, ways of doing things, have often developed over time. But according to Acker, it is a mistake to consider the formal organization as objective, rational, and thus gender-neutral, and the informal as subjective, irrational, and less gender-equal. She claims that gender is done through an interaction between the formal and the informal organization. Unfortunately, informal conditions cannot be rectified from above through the formal organization, but must be changed within a model of interaction where all levels of the organization are involved.

According to Acker, culture is the focus of the next approach to examining how gender is done in organizations. The organizational culture becomes visible, and is expressed through symbols such as names of positions, duties, groups and meetings, work wear and dress codes, web pages, and different types of rewards, as well as the layout of the premises and the types of pictures hanging on the walls. The culture shows who is expected to work in the organization, and what they are expected to do. This means that the culture legitimizes the organization's gender and power structure, and at the same time makes it natural.

Acker's third approach to examining gender-doing in an organization is interactions. This entails all the situations within an organization

where people interact: in meeting rooms and by the coffee machine; on the phone and via email; when we talk to or about each other; when we suggest someone for a position; and when we agree with something someone else has said in a meeting. Interactions determine how the meetings take place, how power alliances and subgroups are created, and how they include and exclude different individuals or groups in the organization.

The last analytical approach is identity work. Acker describes identity work as bringing together the conflicting expectations of gender that exist in an organization into an understandable whole. We all interpret different expectations within an organization in terms of how someone with our gender, in our position, should behave. A major part of doing gender happens automatically, in that we adjust to expectations without being aware of doing so. If we are aware of the expectations, we can instead choose either to adjust to them, modify them, or break with them.

The four approaches model was used by the participants in the initiatives to examine their own organization. Their own and others' observations have been systematized through the model's four approaches, which in turn made it possible for the participants to discover patterns and structures in the organization's everyday life.

Briefly About the Chapters

The three chapters in the third part of the book differ from one another. We have obtained the empirical data from a range of measures and initiatives, we have collected it in different ways, and we have chosen to analyze it based on different theoretical frames of reference. However, we have been inspired by action research in all three studies, and all groups of participants have used the four approaches model described above to examine and systematize their own and others' experiences of how gender is done within their organization.

In Chapter 10, "From Biology to Strategy: The Development of a Management Team", we describe a series of workshops for the faculty's management team and discuss the management team's role in gender equality work. What can the team do, specifically, to ensure a culture change towards gender equality in the organization? And what sort of

development does the management team need to be able to do what needs to be done?

In Chapter 11, "From Resistance to Change? Processes for Change Within an Organization", we examine whether the management team's measures have had any effect within the organization through an analysis of another initiative, namely workshops for PhD supervisors on the topic of gender equality.

In Chapter 12, "From Exception to Norm: The Development of Resilience in a Network", we analyze the effects of a network for female professors and associate professors. We examine what it means to be in the gender-minority group, and discuss how a network may develop resilience within an academic organization.

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Notes

1 Note that this agency was in fact internal to the faculty and the university, who had asked for the project – but not to the local units – institutes and independent sub-organizations.

2 The development of the doing gender tradition is discussed and analyzed by Snickare (2012).