

CHAPTER 11

From Resistance to Change: Processes for Change Within an Organization?

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Abstract: Management is often identified as the key to success when changing an organization. In chapter ten, the role of the management team in gender equality work is analysed, as well as what the team needs in order to address these issues. But has the faculty management team's commitment to gender equality work had any effects on the organization? Has the discourse changed? Are things done differently? This chapter analyzes the effects of the management team's efforts by studying a seminar series for PhD supervisors. The series consists of two parts: five seminars before the management team embarked on gender equality work, and seven seminars after. The data show that when the management team clearly stated that gender-related challenges remained within the faculty and offered a theoretical approach and method for the organization's gender equality work, the seminar discussions moved from resistance, denial and ambivalence, to an interest in understanding one's own role and potential for improving gender equality. When the management team contributed to the knowledge base through education in gender perspectives and offered a method for the organizational work that all employees could apply in their everyday activities, this opened opportunities for change at all levels in the organization.

Keywords: gender equality, resistance, supervising, organizational change, academia

Citation: Snickare, L., Amundsdotter, E. & Holter, Ø. G. (2022). From resistance to change: Processes for change within an organization? In Ø. G. Holter & L. Snickare (Eds.), *Gender equality in academia – from knowledge to change* (Ch. 11, pp. 323–348). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.179.ch11>

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This chapter explores whether, and if so how, a management team's work on gender equality impacts the organization. In the previous chapter, we discussed how the management team at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences in Oslo University approached the issue of gender equality. Was anything achieved? Has the resistance to gender equality increased or decreased in the organization? Was anything changed in the implementation of other parts of the FRONT project?

Our analysis is based on material from a workshop series for doctoral student supervisors, where the aim was to encourage research management on all levels to engage in gender equality work. The 5-hour workshops were held on twelve occasions for groups of 25–30 participants. Supervision of doctoral students is a common point of reference, and is something that researchers undertake throughout their career. A workshop on gender equality for those supervising doctoral students was therefore considered to be a good starting point in the efforts to change the faculty's culture.

The chapter is structured as follows: We begin with a short summary of research on resistance to gender equality work. Next, we describe how the workshops for doctoral student supervisors were carried out, and how the data we analyze was gathered. The main part of the chapter focuses on describing the change that took place in the groups, using two scenes: one from one of the first and one from one of the last workshops respectively. Finally, we analyze and discuss our results in light of other research.

Gender Equality Work: Resistance and Change

Gender equality work can be described as a complex development process aimed at changing an organization's structure and culture, thereby influencing the scope of action and power relationships of individuals and groups (e.g., Andersson et al., 2012; Cockburn, 1991; Lindholm, 2011; Pincus, 1997; Spets, 2012; Wahl et al., 2001/2018). This process often encounters resistance (Amundsdotter et al., 2015; Lindholm, 2011; Spets, 2012; Wahl et al., 2001/2018). Some of this resistance can resemble the scepticism that may affect social innovation in general, regardless of whether it relates to gender or other issues. Innovation challenges habitual

approaches and expertise, and organizations often suffer from inertia, even when it comes to constructive innovation and reform (Holter, 2007; Puchert et al., 2005). Feminist research, however, shows that gender equality work also encounters other forms of resistance, since the process challenges the organization's existing power structures (Ahmed, 2012), and how individuals perceive themselves and their identity as women or men (Acker, 1994, 1999; Hård, 2004; Jutterdal, 2008). Women's identity construction contains strategies of dealing with belonging to a socially subordinated group (Ethelberg, 1985), whereas men's strategies consequently involve belonging to a superior group. Women often opt to handle subordination using one of four strategies: denial, acceptance, exploitation or change. The first three can thus be seen as expressions of resistance to gender equality work (Wahl, 1992).

Resistance to gender equality is defined as resistance to change towards greater equality and wanting to maintain the status quo, as opposed to, say, resistance to a dominant social order, where resistance strives to effect change (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013). This resistance can be described as actions to prevent gender equality work (Cockburn, 1991; Pincus, 1997; Spets, 2012; Wahl et al., 2001/2018). Pincus (2002) defines acts of resistance as passive or active, where passive resistance is most common. Passive resistance can be expressed as lack of interest, withholding of resources and "silence", for instance by forgetting gender equality work or silencing gender equality issues.¹ Passive resistance can become active if change intensifies. Active forms of resistance include openly questioning the process or the legitimacy of its representatives.

Lombardo and Mergaert (2013) describe how resistance can be expressed by prioritizing certain tasks within the organization. Gender equality work is highlighted as important, but is put on the back burner for the sake of more important tasks, such as core activities. In Norwegian research, this is described as the duty to yield (Skjeie & Teigen, 2003) – meaning when different perspectives or priorities are compared, gender equality is sacrificed (Skjeie in Haugsvær, 2003; see also NOU, 2011:13, 2012:15).

Different ideas on what gender equality work should achieve, and how it should be carried out in an organization, can be seen as another form

of resistance (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010; Magnusson et al., 2008). An ambition to achieve gender equality is expressed without initiating a concerted and focused project, which leads to nothing being accomplished within the organization (Lombardo et al., 2009). Change can only be achieved if there is an understanding of where and how gender inequality arises in the organization, and what the problem is (Rönblom, 2011; Tollin, 2011). Different, and sometimes unclear, perceptions of why gender equality work is needed may result in the focus of the project being deflected from the desired change to the methods and tools to be used (Amundsdotter et al., 2015). This focus on methods and tools can be interpreted as yet another expression of resistance (Fraser, 2011).

Lack of knowledge is often considered an obstacle to gender equality, and projects therefore frequently include training aimed at enhancing awareness of inequality within the organization (e.g., Ahmed, 2017; Amundsdotter et al., 2015; Höök, 2001). Studies show, however, that increased awareness does not automatically lead to increased gender equality (Nilsson & Trollvik, 2011). On the contrary, awareness can lead to more qualified resistance to the organization's gender equality work (SOU, 2003:16). Rönblom (2011) furthermore claims that a focus on raising awareness of gender inequality can be seen as a resistance strategy in itself, since the lack of awareness, rather than gender inequality per se, is identified as the problem that needs solving.

Amundsdotter et al. (2015) describe resistance to gender equality as a counter-influence to the influence exerted by the gender equality work, defining three forms of power techniques, or relationships between power and resistance: repressive, pastoral and regulating (see also Linghag et al., 2016). Repressive forms are distinct and direct. They consist, for instance, in openly questioning the gender equality process, or ridiculing or belittling the person in charge of the gender equality work. Pastoral resistance is more subtle. The gender equality worker is expected to understand that the organization knows that gender equality is important, but that other priorities must be made at present. Regulating resistance entails, for instance, claiming that the mandate to implement the gender equality initiative lies elsewhere, beyond the individual, group or organization where it is currently taking place.

Different types of transformation processes provoke different types of resistance. In other words, resistance adapts to the process of change (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Kirton & Greene, 2000,2016; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Pincus, 2002). But the transformation process is also influenced by the resistance. In a study of how gender equality workers respond to resistance, the gender equality workers discovered that they themselves were influenced by the resistance they encountered. Repressive resistance, for instance, was often met with repressive strategies (Amundsdotter et al., 2015).

As described earlier, gender equality work often meets with resistance. Although management commitment is pointed out as being crucial for gender equality work to be successful (e.g., Acker, 2000; Franzén et al., 2010; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; NOU, 2012:15; Pincus, 1997; SOU, 2003:16; Åberg, 2012), few studies have been dedicated to finding out if – and how – the efforts of management teams affect resistance in the organization. The question we will examine and discuss in this chapter is whether the gender equality work of the faculty’s management team has had any effect within the organization. We have chosen to do this by analyzing how resistance within groups participating in another part of the FRONT project, a workshop for doctoral student supervisors, changed.

Workshops, Empirical Data and Method

The purpose of the workshops was both to increase the participants’ awareness of gender inequality in the organization, and to provide an opportunity for them to share their experiences and thoughts. Reflecting on one’s own experiences and those of others, in combination with research-based knowledge, is one way of developing an understanding of how gender is done,² in one’s own organization and in academia in general. The workshops alternated between group discussions and short lectures in the research field of gender and organization. The purpose of the group discussions was to offer participants opportunities to scrutinize their own experiences as supervisors, relating to research on gender equality in academia.

Each workshop had 25 to 30 participants, divided into groups of five. The smaller groups mixed participants from different departments, to elevate the discussion from a specific research team to the faculty level. All supervising doctoral students were invited to the 12 workshops.

Workshop activities were inspired by the action research methodology described in detail in the introduction to Part 3 of this book. They were planned and carried out by the FRONT research team. One of the researchers participated in all workshops, while others participated in parts of the series. The researcher who participated in all the workshops has been employed by the same organization as the participants, but in a different capacity, and can thus be described as an *outsider within* (Herr & Andersson, 2005). Other researchers in the group can be described either as *insiders*, that is employed by the same organization and in the same capacity as the participants; or as *outsiders*, if they were only partially involved in the series and were not employed by the organization (Herr & Andersson, 2005).³ The qualitative material was gathered through participant observation and is documented in the form of a field diary. In the workshops, researchers took notes by hand. These notes were reviewed directly after each workshop and entered into the field diary.

Analysis began with repeated examination of the material, to identify recurring themes in terms of similarities and differences. This inductive approach to the material had the informants' own descriptions and terms as the starting point. In the next phase, the material was compiled into two scenes. The first is based on one of the earliest workshops, and the second is from one of the workshops that took place after 18 months. The scenes are written according to a method used in action research. It is based on analyses and discussions in the research team rather than exclusively representing the individual researcher, but the subjectivity is intentional and is comparable to field notes, a practice report, or a page from a diary, in which the researcher's encounter with the field is essential. The method includes a phenomenological analysis and is not an attempt to "objectively" describe what takes place overall. The descriptions are limited to certain specific cases, as they were actually perceived, without any form of analysis or filter. The scenes thus illustrate different aspects of the

organizational change. The workshop participants are diverse and react differently. Some are sceptical to the FRONT project, while others are more positive. Looking at this from an action and innovation perspective, the first scene is “before” and the second “after” the management team’s somewhat new way of acting after the management development described in Chapter 10.

In the analysis, we will focus on whether the gender equality work within the faculty’s management team has had any effect within the organization. We do this by analyzing whether resistance against gender equality has increased or decreased during the workshops for doctoral student supervisors.

Two Workshops

So, what does resistance to gender equality work in the organization look like? We describe it through two workshops for PhD supervisors, one early and the other late in the project.

Scene One: A Failed Workshop?

It is 11:00 a.m. and time to start the workshop. There should be 24 men and six women in the room, but several places around the six tables are still empty. I am annoyed. It is impossible to divide participants into groups with so many absent. For instance, the women were supposed to be in twos in the groups, but I now see that two of them are alone at their tables. Also, one table has only three people, and another only two. So, they have to be moved in order to make the discussion groups large enough. Why did so many people enrol and then just not turn up?

The workshop starts with asking the participants to evaluate statements about women and men doctoral students, individually, before discussing them with their group. The group discussions are subdued and lethargic, except at one table, where one of the men draws a Gaussian curve, while explaining with gusto that average intelligence is the same in male and female groups. However, there are more men than women at

either end of the Gaussian curve – those with really high and low intelligence. Since universities want to recruit the most intelligent candidates, and men are more highly represented in that category, this gives rise to a natural gender imbalance. I consider interrupting the discussion. What does he actually mean? He is implying that the women in his group are less intelligent than he and the other men are. Moreover, he dismisses the entire purpose of the workshop by claiming that gender imbalance is not due to inequality. But I choose to stay out of the discussion, and make a note to myself to address the subject when all the participants gather for a plenary discussion. However, to summarize this plenary discussion, only a few participants can see any major gender differences in how doctoral students are evaluated and treated. One group says that female doctoral students are perhaps a bit more focused on taking responsibility for social relations in the research team than their male colleagues. Neither the man who drew the Gaussian curve nor any other participants in his group mention differences in intelligence as a possible cause of gender imbalance.

A few minutes into my lecture on research on gender in academic organizations, a man raises his hand and asks if all the studies I will cite were carried out in the USA. When I reply that many of the studies are based on empirical data from the USA, but that I will also include studies from Norway and Sweden, he says that studies from the USA cannot tell us anything about what it is like at a university in such a gender equal country as Norway. The man sitting beside him agrees, and points out that the studies are also old. He has noticed years such as 2009 and 2012 in the references. After proceeding with my lecture, I get another question about the quality of the studies I cite. A male participant asks if there are any quantitative studies within gender research? Most of my references are interview studies, and interviews only show what individuals think about things, he adds. When I explain my views on qualitative research, and try to get the group to discuss a few of the results I have described by asking if this feels familiar to any of the participants, a compact silence fills the room. Finally, a male participant breaks the silence by asking if there is no recent material from Oslo University. In that case, it might be interesting to discuss it.

The lecture is followed by a coffee break. At the sink in the ladies' restroom, I am approached by a woman participant. I was looking for you, she says. I just want you to know that it is not as gender equal in our department as it may seem when we talk. I recognize practically everything you described in your lecture. When I ask her why she did not say anything about that in her group, she is quiet. Then she says that she could not face the discussion this would provoke.

I have prepared a case study for the participants to discuss in groups after coffee. They can choose from four cases and talk about as many of them as they have time for, and in any order. The case studies are:

- A. A supervisor who is planning to attend a conference with a doctoral student of the opposite sex. When colleagues find out, they ask if the relationship is purely professional.
- B. Choosing between a woman and a man for a doctoral student position, with suggestions that the woman is likely to become pregnant, in a project that is already running late.
- C. An assistant supervisor finds out from the woman doctoral student that the main supervisor (in charge of the research project where the assistant supervisor is working) makes negative remarks about women researchers.
- D. What consideration a supervisor should give to a doctoral student's personal situation when distributing tasks.

I go round the tables and listen, answer questions and occasionally comment. At one table, one of the men asks a woman participant in his group for her opinion. Has she ever seen or experienced any gender inequality at Oslo University? She answers evasively that she does not feel discriminated against, but has heard from colleagues at foreign universities that it is hard combining family life with a research career. Everyone at the table nods and says that this is probably the case. They agree that a research career and family life are hard to combine for both women and men, even in equal opportunity Norway. But in view of the competition for international jobs, publication and research funding, that cannot be changed. At another table, one of the men asks if the others agree that there are

definite differences between how female and male managers work. In his experience, women managers are less strategic than men, and often get stuck on details. Before the other group members have time to respond, he adds that this is his personal experience, and may come down to the specific female and male managers as individuals. No discussion ensues in the group. Someone comments that it sounds familiar to him, but that his experience is also just personal, and the others remain silent.

When we gather to discuss the case studies, it turns out no groups chose case A. When I ask why, they answer that the situation is too far-fetched. That sort of thing would never happen at Oslo University. Case B is also dismissed, with the comment that if a project has no room for a doctoral student to take parental leave for a year, then the planning is wrong. As for case C, the groups that chose it describe the formal channels available for a doctoral student to lodge a complaint and possibly change supervisor. This is not a matter for the assistant supervisor, and thus this is another wrongly-constructed case study. Most groups chose case D. They agree unanimously that a supervisor should not meddle in the doctoral students' private life. All doctoral students should have equal opportunities, such as being invited to participate in conferences, and deciding for themselves whether or not they can attend.

The workshop concludes with one of the deans explaining why the faculty wants to address gender equality. Participants have no questions and the workshop ends. As I go round the room tidying up papers and coffee cups, the woman, who was asked in her group whether there was any gender inequality in her faculty, comes up to me and says she has something to tell me. Her research team was recruiting a doctoral student and there were many qualified applicants. A few days ago, when they were interviewing, she noticed that women and men were judged according to different standards. That study you described in your lecture, that is just what it is like here too, she says. We referred to the men as competent, and the women as ambitious and hard-working, and even if the comment was immediately followed by an apology, it was also mentioned that it was very likely that the women would take parental leave for a year or so. When I ask why she did not speak up at the workshop, she replies that when she had mentioned it in the recruitment committee, everyone

had just brushed it off and said it was not true. Now she was reluctant to revisit that discussion.

A few days after the workshop, I receive an e-mail from a woman participant, requesting a meeting. When we meet, she says the workshop was unsettling. She felt that as a woman she was expected to be able to describe in which ways the faculty was gender unequal and what should be done to make it more equal. That her role in the group was to prove to the men that gender inequality existed.

Scene Two: Will the Discussion Never End?

The workshop is about to begin, and I am nervous. Nearly 18 months have passed since the last time, and so much has happened in the project. My introduction will be entirely different, and I wonder how the participants will react to it. Will they all get up and leave when I tell them that the management team claims that gender imbalance in the faculty is at least partly due to gender inequality? After all, I do not have any results yet from studies carried out in the faculty.

I welcome everyone and talk about the gender equality project that this workshop is part of. I also say that this is the first workshop after an interval of more than a year. I then go on to explain that the faculty's management team, during five workshops days, have been working on gender equality in the same way that they will be working today. The management team, like them, were aware of a gender imbalance in the faculty. Some departments, for instance, have few women professors, even though most of the students have been women for a long time, while others have research teams that are predominantly female or male. Based on research on academia from the perspective of gender equality, the management team came to the conclusion that this imbalance was at least partially caused by gender inequality in the organization. They decided to proceed according to the research perspective of "doing gender" and a method based on Joan Acker's research,⁴ to examine where and how inequality is done at the faculty. The results from these studies are not available yet, but will be reported as soon as possible. When I finish off by asking if anyone has any questions or comments regarding what I just

said, everyone is quiet. But most participants look interested, and no one seems to want to leave.

The workshop continues along the same lines as before. Participants are asked to comment on and discuss a number of statements about doctoral students, they listen to lectures on gender equality in academic organizations, and they discuss case studies. No matter what part of the programme it is, discussions become lively as soon as participants are divided into smaller groups. Not everyone takes part, but more than half of the participants at each table seem to get very involved. As I move around the room, I hear them sharing personal experiences with each other. For instance, one says that he feels it is much easier to talk about things while going for a walk. The discussion is much more focused than at a meeting in the office. But he does not know how to do this with his women doctoral students. Can he go for a walk with them outside the university campus? Another says that he wants to go away for a weekend to write with his doctoral students. But he feels that would be difficult in a mixed-gender group. A third asks the others for advice, explaining that he had had knee surgery and could not get to work and had invited a woman doctoral student to his place so they could work together. He goes on to say that even though they sat in his study all the time, and did not talk about anything personal or private, he would nevertheless not have dared do that if his wife had not been home the whole time.

The discussion moves back and forth. Some say that all supervision should take place at the university. Neither female nor male doctoral students should be exposed to situations that could be perceived as informal, and consequently uncomfortable. Others say that even if you skip writing weekends and walks, academic life unavoidably includes informal situations. Not inviting your doctoral students along to the pub after a conference dinner would be the same as not sharing your network with them. One supervisor says he never thinks about gender. He has never experienced any awkwardness with regard to inviting both female and male doctoral students to his informal networks. Another describes how he tells his women doctoral students that it is okay if they do not want to join him for dinner after the conference.

He wants them to know that they do not have to be good company over dinner in order to get good supervision or a great start to their academic career.

The women participants are in the minority, as usual. They do not participate as actively as some of the men in the discussion, and they often describe a more formal approach to supervision. They might possibly have coffee in the university cafeteria with a doctoral student. But this would be an exception, since 99 per cent of supervision takes place in the office. Someone adds that drinking beer at conferences as a way of building networks is overrated. The important thing is to make contact during the sessions themselves, when research is actually being discussed. Another describes her experiences as a doctoral student, how she, as the only woman in a group of men, often felt uncomfortable in informal situations.

When it is time for a coffee break, I am happy and relieved. This workshop is going so much better than the ones a year and a half earlier. I am alone in the classroom, making a few adjustments to the course material, when one of the women participants enters and approaches me. She says she wants my advice. She was recently appointed head of division, and discovered that teaching duties are unevenly distributed. A few of the older male professors teach hardly any classes, even though this is included in their job description. When she mentioned this at a group meeting and presented a fairer proposal, the men who would have had to teach more protested. Especially one, who was very rude to me, she says. But nobody spoke up against him. They let him battle it out with me. I know exactly what you should do, I tell her. I was planning to let you all work on case studies after the break. But forget about the case studies in your group and discuss this instead! You will get lots of useful tips from the others in your group. No, I cannot do that, she says. That is too personal. When the other participants return to the room, she takes her seat.

After a lively discussion about the case studies, it is time for the dean to round off. The participants continue to be talkative. For instance, someone asks a question about how to give career advice to doctoral students and receives a concrete answer.

From Resistance to Communication

We have chosen to interpret the above scenes as development phases – before and after an intervention. This is a useful starting point, we feel, but are aware that a process of change naturally has both intermediary phases and different trajectories for groups and individuals. In effect, one and the same scene includes various understandings and behaviours in relation to gender, represented by different participants. We can discern clear tendencies in the scenes – while the material also contains wide variations.

Expressions of Resistance

The first of the two scenes above is characterized by various forms of passive and active resistance (Pincus, 2002). The importance of gender equality work is not openly challenged. Most of the resistance is passive and is expressed mainly by remaining silent and not participating in workshop discussions. Enrolling for the workshop but not turning up could be interpreted as another form of passive resistance. There were also several forms of active or repressive resistance (Amundsdotter et al., 2015; Pincus, 2002). These were revealed primarily through explicit scepticism to the workshop contents and its leader. Resistance is frequently presented as if it were a case of purely objective or subject-related protests. The nature of these protests is often twofold: that gender equality is important but the workshop is not good enough; that the lecture theme is interesting but the lecturer lacks knowledge; or that it is interesting to discuss supervision from a gender perspective but the case studies are irrelevant. At the core is a mixed message, in which counter-arguments are converted into factual issues rather than presented straightforwardly. Gender equality is described as being important, but it is inferred that the workshop leader has not prepared properly. The research is considered too American, too old or based on the wrong methods. It is relevant to question whether the results of empirical studies in other academic environments can be used to understand the situation at one's own faculty. But when those who raise the question are unwilling to discuss the studies, they are,

in effect, questioning the lecture itself. Resistance is presented in the guise of a factual discussion.

These mixed messages can also be seen to indicate that resistance adapts to the process of change (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Kirton & Greene, 2000, 2016; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Pincus, 2002). It is clear that the participants are aware that it is wrong to be opposed to gender equality, and this influences how they formulate their counter-arguments. They do not, for instance, question the purpose of the workshop, only its execution. Resistance is not aimed at the faculty management and its decision to improve gender equality in the faculty. Instead, it targets a lower level in the organization, the gender equality project and its activities.

The discussion about how it is hard to combine a career in academia with family responsibilities reveals yet another form of resistance, what Amundsdotter et al. (2015) call regulating. Workshop participants claim they cannot do anything about the inequality that may arise because women take more responsibility for their families than men. This is a private choice that is made in the family, and the employer or supervisor neither should nor could get involved. Moreover, the overall issue, that an academic career is hard to consolidate with family responsibilities, is beyond their control. The university operates in international competition. The prerequisites for an academic career are determined internationally and consist of “objectively” founded stipulations that the faculty has to comply with and cannot influence. The concept of a systemic problem within one’s own organization is redirected towards a discussion of other issues and other systems.

If we interpret scene one in relation to hegemonic masculinity (see Connell, 1995; Connell & Messersmith, 2005; Messersmith, 2015), a new hegemony clearly emerges. Some of the male participants openly defend the existing gender order, by devaluating both the workshop and the workshop leader. Their attempt to gain support from the other men is successful, in that none of them object.

Moreover, dismissing three out of the four case studies as unrealistic can also be seen as a form of resistance. Change requires a shared understanding of where and how gender inequality is created in the organization (Rönblom, 2011; Tollin, 2011). The non-existent discussion of the

case studies showed that this shared understanding was prevented from developing. In the workshop described in scene two, the male supervisors said that they found it more problematic to supervise their female doctoral students. In the first workshop, the participants emphatically denied that this was a problem. Likewise, the participants in the first workshop avoided discussing problems relating to the doctoral students taking parental leave, or that their colleagues had made sexist statements. As all subjects were discussed energetically in the workshop in scene two, this dismissal can be interpreted more as resistance to the workshop and the gender equality work it is part of, than as a conviction that the problems did not exist.

Constructing Identity

Whereas the workshop in scene one is characterized by various forms of resistance, the resistance described in scene two is less pronounced. Both women and men participate in the often lively discussions and contribute many personal examples. Gender inequality is no longer seen as something that exists elsewhere or only concerns women. The issue has been moved to one's own organization, and is about relationships between women and men.

However, although major changes occurred from scene one to scene two, there are still differences in how the women and men participate. Whereas the men dare to share their personal experiences, the women more often choose to remain silent. A few of the men are very open and share deeply personal experiences, while most are active in the discussions but slightly more restrained with their own experiences. None of the women participate as actively in the discussions, and all are more hesitant in describing personal experiences. When the workshop leader asks a woman participant to tell the group about her leadership dilemma, the woman responds that it is too personal. The women also describe a more formal approach to doctoral students and supervision, compared to the men.

As individuals in an organization, we deal with sensemaking,⁵ that is, understanding what is expected of us and what scope of action we have

(Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Critical sensemaking theory emphasizes the importance of acknowledging how surrounding structures influence the construction of identity that sensemaking entails (Mills et al., 2010). Individuals in an organization are expected to act in various ways, and this consequently limits the individual's prospects for identity construction, and also means that certain identity constructs are rewarded, while others are ignored or counteracted (Acker, 1999; Mills et al., 2010).

Gender equality work affects how individuals perceive themselves and their identity as women or men, by highlighting and examining how identity construction is done and influenced by surrounding structures (Acker, 1999; Hård, 2004; Jutterdal, 2008).

We have chosen to base the workshops and seminars in the FRONT project on a revised version of Acker's model⁶ (1999), with four approaches to exploring how inequality is done in an organization: structure, culture, interaction and identity work. This means that part of the task has been to examine how the identity construct of *researcher* is affected by structures, culture and interaction. In effect, the participating researchers are expected to examine how the perception of them as women or men has impacted and continues to impact their place and latitude in the organization.

At the workshop described in scene one, it is obvious that several of the women participants are reluctant to discuss gender inequality, even though they see that the organization is unequal. Some, for instance, seek out the workshop leader during the break or after the workshop has ended, instead of sharing their experiences with the group. The women are quieter than the men even in the workshop in scene two, when it comes to talking about personal experiences, and again they contact the workshop leader during a break. The women's reluctance to describe their experiences of gender inequality can be interpreted as a fear of exploring the identity construct of a female researcher. They want to be seen as competent researchers. To describe their experience of gender inequality means defining themselves as women, and thus as members of a subordinate group, which is associated with feelings of shame (e.g., Ethelberg, 1985; Wahl, 1992). If the women do not perceive woman *and* competent researcher as a possible identity construct,

this makes it hard for them to share their experiences of gender inequality.

Part of men's identity construction consists in belonging to a superior group. In the second workshop, they describe, for instance, an imbalance of power in relation to their female doctoral students. A factor that is not mentioned, however, is that their superior position may have had positive effects for them as individuals, for instance by benefitting their career. A critical scrutiny of the identity construct of man *and* researcher would entail questioning their own competence.

Thus, sharing and reflecting on one's own experiences within a gender-unequal organization can be unfavourable to one's own identity construct. For women, seeing themselves as a subordinate group also means seeing themselves as part of a group that is not expected to achieve as well as the superior group, and therefore does not get equal career opportunities in the day-to-day activities of the organization. Conversely, for men, this entails seeing themselves as members of a superior group, who get more and better career opportunities than they deserve, since competence is regarded as an effect of their superiority. For both women and men, an identity construct that acknowledges gender inequality in the organizational structure is also an identity construct that is hard to consolidate with competence.

Management's Role in Gender Equality Work: Responsibility for Describing the Problem

There were major differences in participation and discussions in the workshops from scene one to scene two. The forms of resistance had weakened and changed, and the active resistance that was obvious in scene one was totally gone in scene two. More women shared their experiences of gender inequality, even though they were less forthcoming than the men.

The purpose of the workshops for doctoral student supervisors was to increase participants' awareness of gender inequality in the organization. In addition to lectures, the workshops included exercises that provided a framework for participants' discussions. The lectures offered a theoretical framework for how gender is done in organizations, which

participants were expected to utilize in the exercises to analyze and systematize their own experiences and observations, and thereby become more aware. The examples from empirical studies presented in the lectures were also intended to be useful to the participants when they examined their own organization. New knowledge and awareness, and above all hearing the examples and reflections of others, were expected to alert participants to elements of their everyday life that may otherwise have gone unnoticed. While a personal episode is often regarded as an exception, hearing that several others have had the same experience helps us see a pattern. Sharing experiences in a structured way in the workshop exercises should improve the participants' awareness of gender inequality in the organization.⁷

Why, then, is resistance so much stronger in the workshop in scene one than in scene two? The workshops had the same structure, mixing lectures and exercises. What had changed in the eighteen months that had passed? We will start by examining the underlying reasons for resistance in scene one.

The workshops provided exercises and models, but participants were expected to fill them with descriptions from their own lives. These could be everyday situations where they had been unfairly treated or judged, and where they, in turn had treated and judged others' gender unequally. To be in a position to share their experiences, gender inequality and the participants' various positions in relation to it, their identity constructions, needed to be made visible. This requires women to identify with a subordinate group, and men to identify with a superior group. Even if women and men as individuals relate to, and are influenced by, structures of gender inequality in different ways, sharing their experiences of inequality divides them into two groups, subordinate women and superior men.

According to critical power theory, a subordinate group is in a better position than the superior group to see both the mechanisms of subordination and the superior group's privileges.⁹ Thus, the women participants in the workshop exercises should generally be in a better position than the men to give examples and clarifications of the effects of gender inequality. However, although the women participants could be more aware of

gender inequalities than men, they are expected to say the opposite. The only explanation that does not challenge the existing power structures or identity constructions is that the organization is gender equal (Ahmed, 2012; Hård, 2004; Jutterdal, 2008). This, therefore, is the only version that is comfortable for the organization and its members (Wahl, 1992). As members of the subordinate group, women can free the organization from demands for change by affirming that gender equality has already been achieved (Wahl, 1992).

The discussions in the first workshop scene can be interpreted as resistance to being divided into a superior and subordinate group respectively, and to change in general. When one woman is asked about her experiences of gender inequality, she answers that she has no such experiences, that is, that no change is necessary.

In the 18 months that passed between scenes one and two, the management team had worked with sensegiving¹⁰ (see Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) in relation to gender equality, by describing the organization as gender unequal and defining this inequality as a problem. The faculty is characterized by gender imbalance, and management has intervened to ensure that this is acknowledged as a gender equality issue. In other words, management has *challenged* the prevailing order, and *balanced* the staff's contributions, so that those who experience the problem of gender inequality are no longer the ones who have to point it out.

When management acknowledges the lack of gender equality as a serious problem, it is no longer up to the individual to decide whether the organization is gender equal or not, or whether or not this is a problem. Since defining the organization as unequal, and stating that something needs to change, is to challenge the prevailing order, both in terms of the existing power structures and identity constructions, those who continue to argue that nothing needs to change often win. This reveals the organization's inertia (see, for instance, Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Pincus, 2002; Holter et al., 2005). When management argues for change, this alters the power balance in the discussion in favour of those who, like management, perceive the gender inequality and want to change it.

As described above, the workshop in scene two begins with a summary of management's views on, and measures to promote, gender

equality. When management decisively takes responsibility for describing the organization as gender unequal – and pro-change – this should impact the framework for discussions in the participant groups. For instance, it reduces the pressure on women participants to free the organization from the need to change, under the pretext that equality has already been achieved. Likewise, the burden of proof is transferred from those who claim that the organization is gender unequal, to those who deny gender inequality. We do not interpret the change that took place between scenes one and two as exclusively, or maybe not even predominantly, the effect of the gender equality work pursued in the organization by the faculty management. The two occasions had different participants, and one or more strong personalities can set the tone for an entire group discussion.¹¹ In the 18 months between the workshops, social debate also changed, and this may have contributed to the group atmosphere. Other possible causes could be that the workshop leaders had also developed, and thereby contributed to the change in the discussions. However, our empirical studies show that management's involvement may have led to the participants becoming freer in their interpretation of events and situations, and thereby seeing things in new ways. The new group atmosphere could be linked to the management describing gender inequality as a systemic problem, *challenging* the notion that the numerical gender imbalance in certain positions is not a problem or simply the effect of women and men making different choices and priorities with regard to family and career.

Management has not only addressed sensegiving by clearly stating that gender inequality is a problem. They have also utilized tools for analyzing the organization. As described in the introduction to chapter three, a processual approach to gender, meaning seeing gender as an integral part of everything that goes on in an organization (e.g., Acker, 1990; Butler, 2006, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987), underpinned the project. This approach is often referred to as “doing gender”. An elaborated version of Acker's model (Acker, 1990, 1994) was applied to all project activities. The model helped participants to systematize their observations, which, in turn, enabled them to discover patterns and structures in everyday operations within the organization. The chosen pedagogical method of letting

participants make their own discoveries, combined with listening to and reflecting on the discoveries, observations or research made by others, and together analyzing and highlighting patterns from different angles, can also be seen as a model.

The fact that management not only described inequality as a problem, but actively addressed the problem utilizing methods of working with change, is also likely to have influenced the atmosphere in the group. Management was able to show where and how inequality is done – not in every separate case, or in every research team, but through examples from their own organization. Since management's approach is based on a processual perspective on gender, and Acker's model for examining where and how gender inequality is done in the organization, both the approach and method are legitimized by the organization. The problem – gender inequality – is not dumped on the workshop participants with instructions to do something about it. Instead, they are provided with an approach in the form of a processual perspective on gender and tools to achieve change, in the form of Acker's model.

Conclusion

The FRONT project included workshops for doctoral student supervisors. Participants displayed strong resistance during the first workshops. In subsequent workshops, group discussions showed that a change had taken place. The forms of resistance had abated, and both women and men participated in the often lively discussions and contributed many personal examples. For both women and men, sharing and reflecting on experiences of gender inequality entails positioning themselves according to gender: as subordinate women and superior men. This is an identity construction that both men and women find hard to reconcile with their self-image as competent researchers, and it therefore awakens strong resistance. Moreover, gender equality work also challenges the organization's power structures, and generates resistance. If management changes the framework for sharing experiences by establishing that the organization is gender unequal, and provides an approach and tools for examining how gender inequality is done, resistance weakens.

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Notes

- 1 Passive resistance, often in the form of avoidance and ambivalence among the participants in the organization, is discussed further in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 of this book.
- 2 See the introduction to Part 3 for a definition of “doing gender”.
- 3 See the introduction to Part 3 for a more extensive discussion and definition of the various roles of the researcher.

- 4 A description of the doing gender perspective and Joan Acker's model is found in the introduction to Part 3 of this book.
- 5 For a more detailed description of the term "sensemaking", see Chapter 10.
- 6 The model is described more extensively in the introduction to Part 3 of this book.
- 7 The perspective on knowledge and how knowledge is developed is the same as for the work with the management team described in Chapter 10. The premises for the workshop are different, however. The participants were not acquainted beforehand, which leads to lack of trust in the group, and the format is limited to a half-day instead of five full days.
- 8 Critical theory on power is discussed more extensively in Chapter 8.
- 9 For a more extensive description of the term "sensegiving", see Chapter 10.
- 10 See, for instance, research on decision-making and setting the agenda.