

Institutional Transformation

Dealing with resistance

Gender mainstreaming, change and resistance

This section of the module on institutional transformation is addressed to **agents of change** within an organisation. When supporting gender equality they are the group who are especially confronted with resistance. It is explained why resistance is part of organisational change. The first section highlights the different types of resistance as well as its causes. The second section gives advice on how to deal with these forms of resistance.

The section gives three main messages:

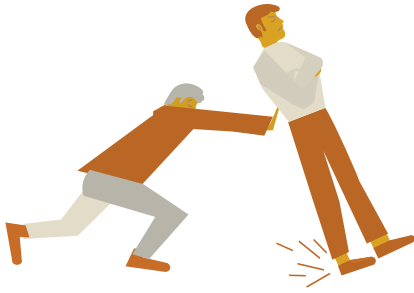
- 1 Resistance is part of any change process
- 2 Resistance can be used to promote change
- 3 There are ways of dealing with resistance

Experts on organisational change give the advice to anticipate resistance within a change process and to also deal with it from the very start of a change process. (e.g. Schein 2009: 15). It is also important to know that signs of resistance are not necessarily a reaction to the specific topic of gender equality or gender mainstreaming but they can be a reaction to change as such.

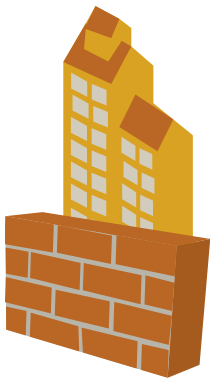
How to react to resistance: Statements and reactions

Sometimes there are good reasons for asking critical questions – sometimes those questions are a sign of resistance. In any case critical questions should be used to elaborate on the advantages and benefits of change processes targeted at gender equality

Types and causes of resistance



Individual level



Organisational level



Discourse level

There is a broad range of manifestations of resistance:

- 1 Passive resistance: unconscious or deliberate non-reaction or slowing down of a processes as well as active resistance, e.g. ridiculing, open boycott or even attacks on individuals representing change.

Hidden resistance: objections that are uttered in a factual and reasonable way – but which, in reality, are forms of hidden resistance (i.e. verbally showing openness to gender mainstreaming but not acting accordingly). On the other hand, there are objections that are substantiated and are helpful in critically reflecting a process of institutional transformation.

- 2 Forms of passive and hidden resistance are more difficult to deal with because they cannot be directly addressed and discussed.

Erfurt (2011: 13f.) identifies resistance on two levels – firstly, resistance caused by individual (non-)acceptance and secondly, resistance caused at an organisational level. In addition, resistance can also come from outside an institution at the level of a wider discourse on gender issues.

