

Institutional Transformation

How to react to resistance? Statements and reactions

Sometimes there are good reasons for asking critical questions, but 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. IN the following section we present typical questions on gender mainstreaming and which possible answers can be useful to reduce the level of resistance in an organisation.

Statements and reactions

Statement:

There will be additional work with the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Our workload is high already!

Possible reaction: First of all, this can be a very eligible question – for example if the gender mainstreaming implementation process was not endowed with enough resources, then this is an important question indicating a not adequate process.

At the other hand it should be assessed whether the question arises only in the case of gender mainstreaming – whereas other processes of change which also cause a shift in working processes (e.g. the introduction of new software) are not questioned in regard to unacceptable rise in workload.

The important argument/answer to this is: “Gender mainstreaming in contrary aims at the diminution of workload on the long term. Yes, at first there may be more work because with gender mainstreaming new knowledge comes into play and actors are asked to have a closer look at possible outcomes. This however leads to more sustainable services and policies as well as a more efficient work – therefore, in the long run there will be less work. “

Statement:

There is yet another process of change. We first have to recover from the last one and have it all settled before embarking a new process.

Possible reaction: This is often uttered in institutional setting in which constant learning is not part of the organisational culture. It is important to make clear that in today's working environment there is nothing like a stable setting, but organisations have to adapt to a changing environment in a constant learning process – irrespective of the issue of gender equality.

Statement:

Gender Equality is imposed on us (by the DG ..., the EU, the federal government...) but it is not in our interest.

Possible reaction: At the one hand it is important to show the intrinsic benefits for an organisation, like quality of services provided, better assessment of impact and others (see #> benefits#). At the other hand it is important to make clear that there is a legal framework for gender equality and public organisations have to operate in accordance with these legal requirements. Therefore it is not a question of imposing gender equality but a question of basic rights and democratic consent. Also a strategy can be to compare gender equality with other policy fields: If we would talk about issues like child labour, conservation of the environment or working in an efficient and cost saving way - would the allegation of imposing something also be kept up?

Statement:

We do not discriminate against women, we treat anyone equally. So it is not necessary to address gender issues.

Possible reaction: Equal treatment in a situation of unequal preconditions can have adverse effects - as this illustration shows:

Statement:

There are more important problems than gender equality – for example discrimination of people with disabilities.

Possible reaction: Gender is a concept which intersects with all forms of social categories. For example statistics show that handicapped women in average are worse off than handicapped men. Gender is not about “the” men and “the” women as alleged homogeneous social groups but it refers to a structural pattern in society (IN gender studies this concept is called “intersectionality”). In gender mainstreaming one social group is not played off against the other social group but when looking into a certain field of intervention, social structures as well as women and men in their diversity are taken into consideration.

Statement:

Women and men are different - why making efforts to make them equal?

Possible reaction: Gender equality is not about sameness – it is about equal opportunities and equal rights.

“Gender equality doesn’t mean that the sexes should do the same things. It means equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities for women and men” (Nordström/Simonsson et al. 2007: 5)

Statement:

Gender is an ideology challenging the natural biological differences between man and women. Gender and gender mainstreaming is therefore aiming at destroying the normal family.

Possible reaction: This is a misperception of gender as a concept and gender mainstreaming as a strategy which expresses political enmity. Gender refers to the realm of the social. Gender studies have shown that femininity and masculinity are not fixed patterns: What it means to be male and female depends on time and cultural patterns. Also what is considered to be natural or normal has changed and is constantly changing.

The allegation of ideology can easily be turned around: To state that only one model of a family is “normal” is indicating an ideology that excludes forms of living and privileges others.