Institutional Transformation

Organisational level

All organisations are endowed with certain inertia; they all have a certain history and tradition. Transformation cannot be achieved by simply changing rules and procedures – it has to trickle down through all aspects of organisational culture.

Organisations are not gender neutral, they are often aligned with norms like: Real performance is only possible in a full-time positions; or: staff has to be available any time. The collective pattern of orientation is put into question if institutional transformation for gender equality is taking place. This can lead to irritation and resistance.

Another source for resistance is a gendered internal hierarchy. In many institutions we find male-dominated groups at the top. In a research study on a private company, Erfurt Sandhu shows the "hyper-inclusion" mechanisms of a certain type of a male manager. This hyper-inclusion will strengthen the homogeneity of this top level group in an organisation.

In addition, (male) homogeneity can be maintained by mechanisms in personnel development such as biases in selection and performance appraisal criteria. Also, gender stereotypes can hinder womens' advancement by creating wrong attributions as well as wrong expectations in regard to performance (Heilman 2012).

If the implementation of gender mainstreaming is accompanied by equal opportunities activities within an institution (for example, mentoring or coaching for women and gender quotas for executive positions), this questions existent hierarchies as well as existing systems of status and privilege. This in turn may also cause resistance, especially if the senior management level is dominated by men.

Booklet: Resistance against gender mainstreaming

The Swedish Jämtland County Administrative Board has published a booklet on how to deal with resistance with practical examples and illustrations: "Facing Resistance – managing gender mainstreaming in organisations"

How to deal with resistance on an organisational level

Staff are often tired of organisational rearrangements and change processes. In this case, it is important to focus on the added value of gender mainstreaming – the focus on outcomes and results will eventually lead to more targeted and sustainable services. Mainstreaming gender will lead to more evidence-based decision-making, monitoring and a focus on the effects of services. This modern style of governing should also be in the interest of civil servants.

One common argument against gender mainstreaming is that it is a policy that is imposed upon an organisation. Depending on the administrative level, this is done by the UN, the EU, a federal government or other higher level institutions. In this case, it is important to highlight the intrinsic benefits as described in this section so as to show that there are advantages for both the organisation and its staff.

Resistance to changing hierarchies caused by equal opportunity policies is not easy to tackle. However, gender biases in human resource management can create additional costs – the most qualified and suitable person should be selected for a certain position regardless of his or her sex. There is evidence of homo-social settings to be less innovative and creative than a team with members from diverse social and cultural background; however, the causality between diversity and performance of teams is still discussed controversially in academia.

Again, resistance at this level can be tackled by highlighting the role of men in gender equality and the respective advantages (see above).

Using Facts and Figures to overcome resistance

Resistance is also caused by a lack of knowledge. It is therefore important to introduce key facts and figures. Questions and answers which are adapted to suit the target group's knowledge and field of experience are even more appealing and effective. For example, a quiz also showing gender disparities in one's own organisation or in sectorial fields of the organisation may lead to "Aha!" Experience.