

Transformative resistance and change

How to foster a culture of inclusion and equality?

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GenderAct

- “Towards **Gender** Balance through Knowledge Based Cultural Change and **Actions**”
- ‘Cultural change’ → *collective learning process*
 - Increase knowledge: how does gender work as a sociocultural phenomenon? what organizational patterns and processes enable gender skewed patterns to persist?
 - Change practices: what do we want to change to avoid negative effects of gendered patterns? How can we act (and think) differently?
 - Engage and distribution of responsibility/agency: Who can act differently, when and how? Who are in position to do what about these patterns and processes?



Outline of talk

1. Methodology applied in GenderAct
2. Research findings: gender patterns and forms of resistance
3. Change and resistance – how to deal with it?
4. Reflections on the way forward (a call for persistence!)



Changing 'culture' to enable equality – how?

Meaning of culture in English

f

culture

noun

UK  /'kʌl.tʃə/ US  /'kʌl.tʃə/

culture noun (WAY OF LIFE)

Add to word list

B1 [C or U]

the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time:

- *She's studying modern Japanese language and culture.*
- *This is one of the most ancient cultures in the world.*

+ E

[C or U]

the attitudes, behaviour, opinions, etc. of a particular group of people within society:

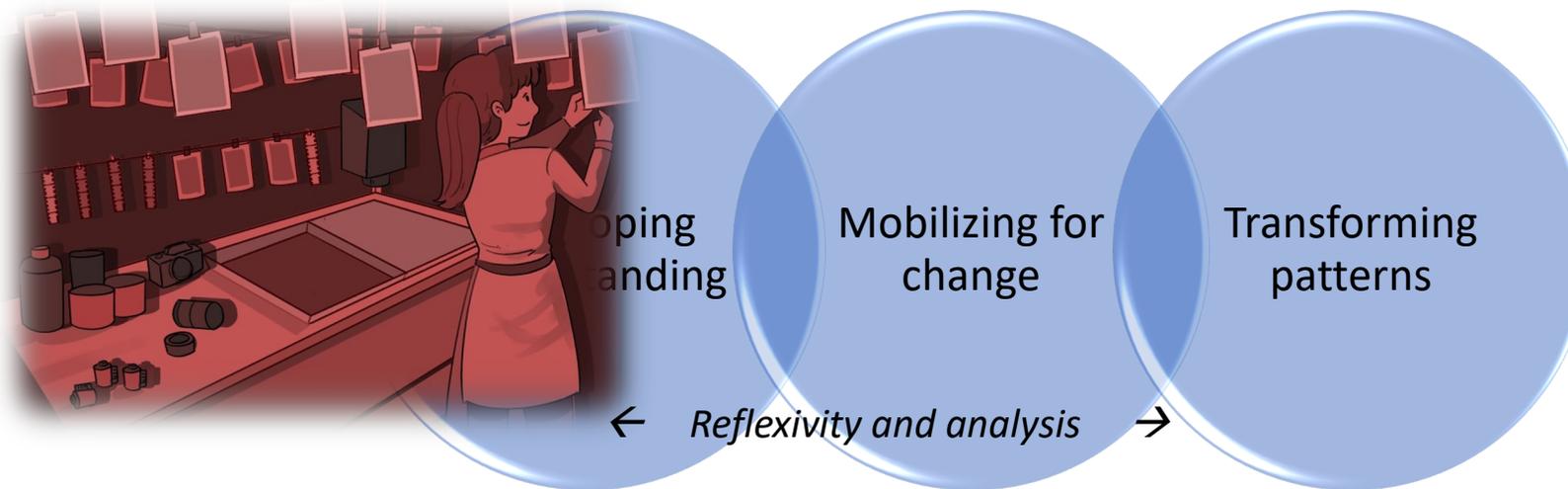
- **culture of** *The investigation found there was a culture of sexism and racism within the organization.*

popular/working-class culture

- *Pattern: a repetitive, regular or intelligible form*
- Need to identify existing patterns, and imagine different ones
- Creating alternative patterns through changing behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions
- Not a linear process...



Facilitating change in organizations



- Articulate the **problem**
- Observations of local environment
- Knowledge about gender
- Articulate **goals**
- Challenge what is 'taken for granted'
- Initiate **actions**
- Continued development of knowledge

(Amundsdotter 2009)



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Sørensen, Siri Øyslebø; Lagesen, Vivian Anette; Sørensen, Knut Holtan; Kristensen, Guro Korsnes. (2019) Kjønnbalanse gjennom aksjonsforskning og lokal kunnskap. Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning 43(2): 108-127

Developing understanding: Seeing and recognizing gender in organisations

Theoretical knowledge

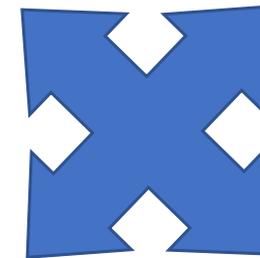
- **Doing gender:** Practises, interactions, language
- Masculinity as norm
- Homosociality/ heterosociality
- Privileges and ignorance
- Situated knowledge / 'outsider within'

- Organisations as 'inequality regimes'

Observing gendered patterns at MatNat UiB

Structures

Interactions



Identities

Symbols

Based on Joan Ackers theory of organisations as inequality regimes



The attention is constantly directed towards the women, there is reluctance to engage in conversation about masculinity, demanding men to change anything.

(senior researcher)

Senior women states that gender is not at problem. It feels like they are straight up lying, and then interaction becomes weird, when gender is 'denied'

(early career researcher)

I feel that I am often the only woman in the room, and I don't know if I am a good – or if I *want* to be at all – the representative of all women

(early career researcher)



Collective approach

Tendency to individualise problems and solutions → possible to refuse responsibility

We are all taking part in shaping patterns of practices and perceptions, we can all contribute to change (although positioned differently)

Identify problematic patterns – aim to change





TAKE
ACTION!



Change



“Change is like a stone tossed into a still pond, which causes ripples to radiate in all directions with unpredictable consequences”

(Kreitner, 1992, quoted p 6 in Salminen-Karlsson, Minna 2016.
The FESTA handbook of organizational change. Implementing gender equality in higher education and research institutions)



Resistance

«a phenomenon that emerges during processes of change [and] is aimed at maintaining the status quo and opposing [such] change»

(Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013: 299).



Resistance towards the topic of gender as such, common in academic institutions:

- Gender hostility - discomfort associated with becoming aware/ conscious
- Gender blindness - strong belief in meritocracy as neutral

(Lombardo, Mergaert, 2013)

“The influence of the organizational culture where stakeholders feel uncomfortable to talk and work on gender equality shows a sign of gender hostility.”

(Festa handbook, 2016: 14)

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Different forms of resistance – a few examples

- Undermining
- Distract attention
- Pretending
- Sabotage
- Avoidance
- Disclaiming

Brorsen Smidt, Thomas, Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir & Þorgerður Einarsdóttir (2021) When Discourse is Hijacked: An Implicit and Performative Resistance Strategy to Gender Equality in Higher Education, *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 14:2, 143-165

Linghag, Sophie, Mathias Ericson, Eva Amundsdotter och Ulrika Jansson (2016). I och med motstånd. Förändringsaktörers handlingsutrymme och strategier i jämställdhets- och mångfaldsarbete. *Tidsskrift för genusvetenskap* 37(3)

Lombardo, Emanuela & Lut Mergaert (2013) Gender Mainstreaming and Resistance to Gender Training: A Framework for Studying Implementation, *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 21:4, 296-311

Jones O, Smolović, Smolović Jones S, Taylor S, Yarrow E. 'I Wanted More Women in, but . . .': Oblique Resistance to Gender Equality Initiatives. *Work, Employment and Society*. 2021;35(4):640-656.

Peterson H., Carvalho T., Jordansson B., de Lourdes Machado-Taylor M. (2021) Institutionalised Resistance to Gender Equality Initiatives in Swedish and Portuguese Academia. In: O'Connor P., White K. (eds) *Gender, Power and Higher Education in a Globalised World*. Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education.

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Resistance is fueled by

- Conformity
- Lack of trust
- Fear of loosing status
- Limited resources
- Lack of progress and results
- Lack of motivation and priority



“In gendered academic cultures time burdens due to heavy workloads often provide academics with a convenient excuse for refusal to participate in the activities concerning gender projects or conceal the low priority assigned to such endeavors.”

(Festa handbook, 2016: 13)



Working with resistance – example from GenderAct

- Existing research as input, knowledge (ref previous slides)
- Three scenarios were developed based on observations of resistance during the evoking & mobilizing phase:

A) No open reactions, just ‘whispering in the hallways’

B) Action plan is approved, but not followed up on

C) Open critique in plenary meeting

Group work:

→ Identify and describe the resistance – how to understand it? – what can be done?



Group work with scenarios (examples)

Identified form: **diverting attention**

Understanding the resistance:

«Lack of recognition of gendered structures – or perhaps knowing that there is, but better off with status quo, thus sabotaging the change»

Potential actions: short term - bring conversation back on track, long term - increase knowledge, discuss priorities

Identified form: **avoidance, strategic ignorance**

Understanding the resistance:

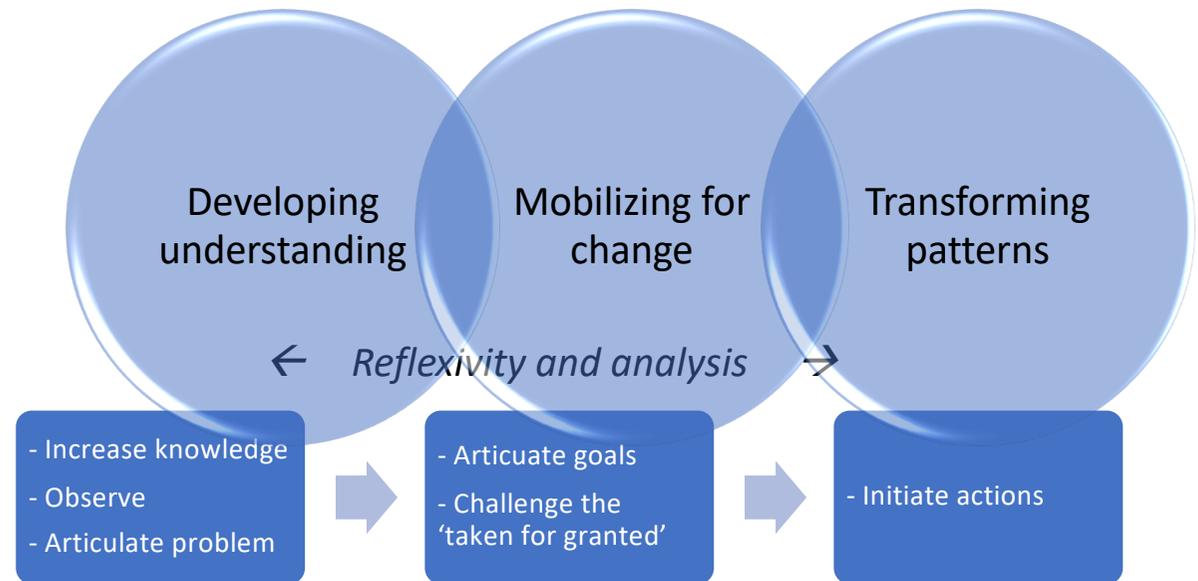
«To acknowledge that there is a lack of gender equality may imply a fear of stigma, being victimized or being suspected to not compete on equal terms»

Potential actions: address problems as structural, collective, rather than individual.



Moving from gender to 'diversity'

- Knowledge about other 'differences that makes a difference' and varieties of power dynamics: positionalities
- Pay attention to intersections of gender, race, LGBTQ+, ability, class etc. and differentiate problem understandings
- Parallel and multiple processes of changing patterns of inequality
- Resistance as part of the learning process → transformation



Persistence



«The struggle for diversity to become an institutional thought requires certain people to “fight their way.” Not only this—the persistence required exists in necessary relation to the resistance encountered. The more you persist, the more the signs of this resistance. The more resistance, the more persistence required.» (Ahmed, 2012: 25)



- **Ahmed**, Sarah 2012. On being included. Racism and diversity in institutional life. Duke University press
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- <https://www.festa-europa.eu/public/handbook-resistance-gender-equality-academia>



Thank you!

<https://www.uib.no/en/genderact>

