

Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in the European Academic and Scientific Environment. Power, Support and Motivation in Professional Promotion

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Abstract

The existent agreements and beliefs in the organisational culture, predominantly male, resist the possibility to find alternatives to even the chances for promotion in an academic and scientific career for men and women. The more a person identifies with the norms and culture promoted in an institution, the more difficult it is for them to see alternatives. Acker (1990) explain that such persons (who normally have management positions), socialised in the male culture of the academic and scientific world, benefit the most from the existent arrangements and stand to lose the most if the existent practices of the academic world are changed. The European Union has been focusing on a new direction to eliminate gender obstacles in the academic and scientific world. The new approach for activities related to gender equality has focused on academic and research organisations and institutions rather than only on the women themselves. „Administration improvement” has become the new objective. One of the ways this new objective has been implemented concentrated on integrating the gender dimension into research.

Keywords: power, promotion, gender dimension, gender practices, gender barriers

Résumé

Les accords et les croyances existant dans la culture organisationnelle, principalement masculine, résistent à la possibilité de trouver des alternatives à même les chances de promotion dans une carrière académique et scientifique pour hommes et femmes. Plus une personne s'identifie aux normes et à la culture promues dans une institution, plus il lui est difficile de voir des alternatives. Acker (1990) explique que ces personnes (qui occupent normalement des postes de direction), socialisées dans la culture masculine du monde académique et scientifique, profitent le plus des arrangements existants et risquent de perdre le plus si les pratiques existantes du monde universitaire sont modifiées. L'Union européenne s'est concentrée sur une nouvelle direction pour éliminer les obstacles

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liés au genre dans le monde universitaire et scientifique. La nouvelle approche des activités liées à l'égalité des sexes s'est concentrée sur les organisations et institutions universitaires et de recherche plutôt que sur les femmes elles-mêmes. «L'amélioration de l'administration» est devenue le nouvel objectif. L'une des façons dont ce nouvel objectif a été mis en œuvre s'est concentrée sur l'intégration de la dimension de genre dans la recherche.

Mots-clés: puissance, promotion, dimension de genre, pratiques de genre, barrières de genre

Rezumat

Acordurile și credințele existente în cultura organizațională, predominant masculine, îngreunează posibilitatea de a găsi alternative în ceea ce privește șansele de promovare într-o carieră academică și științifică pentru bărbați și femei. Cu cât o persoană se identifică mai mult cu normele și cultura promovate într-o instituție, cu atât este mai dificil pentru aceasta să observe și alte alternative. Acker (1990) explică faptul că astfel de persoane (care dețin în mod normal funcții de conducere), socializate în cultura masculină academică și științifică, beneficiază cel mai mult de aranjamentele existente și au de pierdut cel mai mult dacă practicile existente sunt modificate. Uniunea Europeană s-a concentrat pe o nouă direcție pentru a elimina obstacolele de gen din mediul academic și științific. Această nouă abordare a activităților legate de egalitatea de gen s-a concentrat pe organizațiile academice și de cercetare, mai degrabă decât pe femeile în sine. „Îmbunătățirea administrației” a devenit noul obiectiv. Astfel, unul dintre modurile în care acest nou obiectiv a fost implementat s-a concentrat pe integrarea dimensiunii de gen în cercetare.

Cuvinte-cheie: putere, promovare, dimensiune de gen, practici de gen, bariere de gen

Introduction

The persistence of structures and beliefs common to gender inequality in the academic world can, on the one hand, be attributed to the institutional processes which sustain and support the assumed legitimacy and neutrality of these arrangements. For example, in the academic field the productivity necessary to advance to a superior position, around which universities are structured, implies a maximisation of academic aspiration, while many want to start a family. The system of academic productivity was not suggested on purpose in order to disadvantage women. In spite of its gender discriminating effects, this type of system endures because it is deeply rooted in the mentality and beliefs of the academic world. As a result, it is difficult to imagine an academic and scientific institution not structured around the academic productivity system (Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007).

At the same time, one of the problems identified by the European Commission report „Structural change in research institutions: Enhancing excellence, gender equality and efficiency in research and innovation” regarding gender obstacles in the academic world is the opacity of the decision making process: in spite of significant progress in Europe, lack of transparency continues

to affect structures and processes, a phenomenon associated with the „old boys” networks. The report suggests that both women and men would benefit from a system where there is clarity regarding what is necessary for researchers, where information is available freely and where (clear) criteria are used in the decision making process (European Commission, 2012). The nature of procedures can influence women’s chances to occupy an academic and scientific position (managerial or not). Recruitment procedures can be defined as open (the job is promoted in the entire academic world) or closed (the applicants are selected by nominalisation). Women tend to have more success in open competitions (van den Brink et al., 2006).

Power, support and ambition in the academic and scientific promotion

Gender practices represent a set of often hidden processes based on power reproducing gender differences in the social practices by means of organisational and individual means (Acker, 1990).

The structural conditions existent in the academic and scientific world influence the chances women and men have with the construction of their careers. In this context, power relations are seen as „a complex administrative, managerial and professional organisation that regulates, organises and controls” (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012, p. 227) It also indicates the fact that objective forms, rational procedures and conceptual organisation create the illusion of neutrality and impartiality of organisations (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012).

Another aspect of power refers to the strict dichotomy between explicit power (for example, authority and bureaucratic power) and hegemonic power (implicit and latent). Hegemonic power has been regarded as routine, an invisible direction towards respect and agreement (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012).

In close connection to the notion of power in the academic and scientific world, the meritocracy system, when it comes to advancing and promotion in the academic and scientific field, has different results when the person’s gender is taken into account, causing a paradox, a dichotomy regarding the support women and men may have in the academic and scientific field. By establishing and pointing out this paradox it is shown that the support men often receive in their academic careers tends to be accepted, while women are expected to advance on their own in order to prove they are qualified for the position (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014).

The members of the dominant group want to keep the impression that they have earned their positions believing at the same time that meritocracy operates in the academic field and most of them also have the tendency to consider that interventions regarding gender equality undermine fair decisions. Men offer favours one to another and get help by means of informal support systems (men’s club) (van den Brink & Benschop, 2011). At the same time, men tend to receive more encouragement to apply for academic management positions from their own male support network. Women do not benefit in the same way from

such support networks, so their initiatives regarding gender equality in the academic field are necessary to compensate the structural disadvantage women face, supporting women by means of gender equality programs does not automatically imply lowering the quality standards of the academic field (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014).

Another approach in gender, support and negotiation study focuses not on what he or she does, but on the way stereotype gender expectations have effects on the way to act. Stereotypes can activate or restrain actions. Role models or subtle discrimination can partly be explained by these stereotypes (gender patterns). Gender patterns imply sets of hypotheses and assumptions about gender differences. Such patterns can give rise to discriminations with the women's professional evolution and conduct and to lower professional performance as compared to men within various men and women groups (Kolb, 2013).

Motivation (or the lack of it) is often used to explain the slow progress of women's academic and scientific careers. Motivation is defined as a one dimensional orientation regarding priorities linked to career, career mobility, influence and power (van den Brink, 2011).

This „motivation paradox” is gender discriminating because it is extremely important for women to show their career ambitions as it is not self-understood that women may have such motivations. There are several gender stereotypes linked to motivation. Thus, it has been observed that it is generally self-understood that men are ambitious in order to progress in their career, so it is not necessary for men to make their motivations explicit. For women, though, and especially for women who have children or older people in their care, this is different. Working women need to articulate and prove their motivation before they are recognised as candidates for a management position (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014).

Gender practices in the academic and scientific world

Starting with 2010, the European Union has been focusing on a new direction to eliminate gender obstacles in the academic and scientific world. The new approach for activities related to gender equality has focused on academic and research organisations and institutions rather than only on the women themselves. „Administration improvement” has become the new objective (European Commission, 2010).

One of the ways this new objective has been implemented concentrated on integrating the gender dimension into research, a strategy that was also included in the ETAN Report (European Commission, 2000).

The integration of the gender dimension is a gender equality strategy which aims at transforming organisational processes and practices by eliminating gender discrimination and involving in the transformation process the very actors who are the object of cultural changes and modifications. The integration of the gender dimension is regarded as an opportunity to counterattack gender

discrimination with all policies, as well as to avoid the continuous reproduction of the masculine norm with policy development. The integration of the gender dimension has as purpose the elimination of the feminine and masculine discursive and material constructs which are formed and form the organisation system, the working practices, the norms and identities (Benschop & Verloo, 2006).

There were two main key-ways for the integration of the gender dimension into research that have been established. First, as part of a policy to introduce gender balance with the research teams in order to access research funds, career breaks caused by the birth of a child during a project were authorised. Secondly, as regards research quality and its relevance by counselling applicants, it has been decided to take gender into account with the analysis of the research content (European Commission, 2014).

From a general perspective, gender is an individual characteristic. It is reflected in what people are, in the way they behave and the way they see themselves.

In Acker's (1990) vision, the notions of gender process and gender practice are related and they refer to actual practices modelled by and in distinctive terms regarding feminine and masculine, women and men, respectively. As regards personal identity, people are identified – and they identify themselves – as men and women. Identification implies accepting and reproducing not only the psychological and biological distinctions between men and women, but also the implicit and explicit norms and rules to evaluate being feminine and being masculine. The essential point is that men are taken as model and it is expected for women to behave similar to men, to have the same characteristics and patterns in life (Acker, 1990).

To get a better understanding of the persistency of work gender division, Acker examines the rules and codes prescribing work behaviour and the relation between private life and professional life. These rules are based on the abstract idea of the „bodiless worker”, an „ideal” worker who does not have body or gender (Acker, 2006).

The characteristics of the „bodiless worker” (for example, the availability to work full time, high qualifications) are presented in all organisational documents as gender neutral. However, the characteristics of the „bodiless worker” correspond to male characteristics rather than female. As stated above, gender practices contribute to the apparition of some differences between men and women and give rise to notions such as the „bodiless worker”. The abstract notion of the „bodiless worker” is implicitly loaded with male connotations (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012). This gender preconception is supported by two factors that influence gender practices at the work place: the gender connotations of the care responsibilities and of the qualification profiles. These connotations cause and consolidate unequal opportunities for men and women when they want to get high qualification or management positions (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2006).

Gender stereotypes operate differently depending on the personal and professional status. As far as personal status is concerned, for example mothers can confront more negative reactions than other women groups regarding their salary and promotion. The professional status, in the meaning of position in the hierarchy, also has different effects. A gender behaviour is regarded as legitimate for both women and men in high positions with the organisation (Kolb, 2013).

The invisible barriers that have effects on the professional development of women in the academic field are caused by the fact that a lot of women and men state there are no gender inequalities in their organisation, especially their department. However, actions within organisations which cause gender inequalities are clearly visible and easily recognisable. Because of the dominant discourse of the equality between men and women, gender practices cannot be interpreted as such. This discourse can be interpreted as a manifestation of the gender norms defining gender relations as normal and harmless for women in the academic and scientific field. Thus, many employees identify themselves with the organisational norms and values, assimilating them as appropriate for the achievement of organisational objectives (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Champagne, 2009).

The second generation gender barriers represent invisible barriers for women to climb to academic management positions, having their roots in gender cultural convictions, as well as in the work place interaction structures, practices and models that favour men. The second generation gender practices can appear neutral at first sight (as regards gender), but they can result in different experiences for men and women and for the various groups of men or women. From this point of view, gender is much more than an attribute of the person, being regarded as an institutionalised system of social and cultural practices incorporated into the negotiated order (Kolb, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, one last aspect regarding the second generation gender barriers having to do with the negotiation for compensation and position within the organisation, focuses on the relation between the work place and other aspects of personal life. The flexible working programme, formally or informally adopted, also lies in the negotiation application field. Access to benefits is modelled by hypotheses regarding who can make use of them and the way in which these choices can affect careers. As a result only some persons can be regarded as legitimate to negotiate flexible working policies, men being less susceptible to negotiate these benefits. Negotiation for a position in academic and scientific management can attract attention on the fact that women are often overlooked, and the poor valorisation of invisible work can underline the fact that preconceived thinking can influence performance assessment and compensations.

Being aware of the gender problems implies the availability of a person to admit the way gender differences and privileges are profoundly incorporated into

organisational and societal assumptions, expectations or actions. Being aware of the gender problems is the key to link unequal regimes and action for change.

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