

# The FESTA handbook of organizational change

*Implementing gender equality in higher  
education and research institutions*

Minna Salminen-Karlsson  
with FESTA partners



Female Empowerment in  
Science and Technology Academia

**FESTA** (Female Empowerment in Science and Technology Academia) is a structural change project financed by a FP7 grant during 2012–2017. The aim of FESTA has been to address the gender imbalance in research by improving the working environment of in particular junior researchers and in particular in areas where deficiencies are known to be especially harmful to women researchers. To this end FESTA has worked with organizational statistics, perceptions of excellence, meeting cultures, formal and informal decision-making processes, PhD supervision and junior researchers' career development strategies, as well as analyzing resistance to gender equality work. In addition to working as change agents at our own institutions, FESTA partners have produced tools and/or recommendations in all focus areas of the project, to enhance improved gender practices in research institutions outside the FESTA consortium. All FESTA work has been done in close collaboration between partners from different countries, taking into account national differences.

The FESTA partners are as follows. All partners – both team leaders and team members – have in different ways contributed to this final report.

**Uppsala University, Sweden**

*Minna Salminen-Karlsson, Nina Almgren, Elisabeth Larsson, Ulrike Schnaas*

**University of Southern Denmark**

*EvaSophia Myers, Liv Baisner, Gitte Toftgaard Jørgensen*

**University of Limerick, Ireland**

*Pat O'Connor, Clare O'Hagan, Ita Richardson*

**RWTH Aachen University, Germany**

*Manuela Aye, Sabine Bausch, Eva Lübke, Andrea Wolfram*

**Bruno Kessler Foundation, Italy**

*Ornella Mich, Tatiana Arrigoni, Valentina Chizzola, Mario Conci, Daniela Ferri, Marco Filippozzi, Anna Perini, Barbara Poggio, Alessandro Rossi, Liria Veronesi, Marco Zamarian*

**Istanbul Technical University, Turkey**

*Gülsün Saglamer, Mine Tan, Hülya Caglayan*

**South-West University, Bulgaria**

*Georgi Apostolov, Irina Topuzova, Ivanka Asenova, Snezhina Andonova, Dimitrina Kerina, Iliya Gudzhenov*

This Handbook has been reviewed by  
Jörg Müller, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya  
Blanka Nyklova, Czech Academy of Sciences

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# Introduction

The FESTA handbook of organizational change consists of the central issues and recommendations that partners in the FP7 project FESTA have worked on. The handbook is written for everyone who believes that women and men are equally capable of producing good research and should have equal opportunities to do so. We believe that women face other and more extensive problems than men in making a research career, and that these problems mainly pertain to the organizations they work in. Consequently, we believe that organizational change is needed to enable both women and men to do research on equal terms.

We are aware that organizational contexts look very different in different European countries. The FESTA teams represent very different institutions: in the beginning some had no gender equality policies at all and hardly any awareness that there might be a problem, while others had policies in place and gender equality had been on the agenda for years. However, the problem with women's and men's different conditions exist in them all, in various ways. Because of the different starting points, gender equality issues need to be addressed in different ways. FESTA has worked in scientific-technical research areas, i.e. areas where women usually are a minority, and our recommendations are adapted to those types of environments. The situation may look different when it comes to humanities and social sciences. Thus, not all recommendations in this handbook fit all contexts, but every context should be able to pick up something that is doable in that particular location.

The handbook is divided into three parts, with somewhat different target groups. The first part is a summary of our experiences and recommendations at a fairly general level. The second part deals with some particular areas that the FESTA project has worked on, often on departmental and faculty level, and the aim is giving leaders on those levels basic understanding on different gender related problems, and what to do about them. This part is about using organizational statistics in raising gender awareness and monitoring progress, creating more transparent decision making processes and improving organizational communication, creating gender-inclusive meeting cultures, implementing gender sensitive PhD supervision, supporting female researchers' career development, and creating gender neutral appointment and promotion processes. In this part we refer to the different FESTA tools and reports, all of which can be downloaded at the FESTA webpage [www.FESTA-europa.eu](http://www.FESTA-europa.eu). The third part is a text in a more personal style aimed at new gender equality workers, based on our personal experiences when conducting the project.



## PART ONE: General remarks and recommendations

The academic environment has been male dominated for centuries, and it is only in the last hundred years or so that women have had access to it at all, and women have been more than just very marginally present for only a few decades. Thus, the academic environment, its ideals, values, cultures, policies and processes were originally created by men for other men. Even if radical changes have taken place in the European academic scene, the historical roots still play a role. More importantly, as a remainder of that history, most senior positions, and decision-making positions in the academe are still populated by men – who unreflectedly reproduce the historical structures and cultures.

Academia prides itself on being purely meritocratic. However, a number of studies have shown that academics, just like humans in general, do not make judgements on a purely intellectual basis.<sup>1</sup> A main problem for women's advancement in research is not outright discrimination, but the more subtle mechanisms of male networks and male homosociality.

Homosociality is a well-established concept in gender research, used widely on research on gender in organizations. It refers to the bonds men make, and in particular the bonds that by excluding women, contribute to inequality between genders.<sup>2</sup> It has been shown to exist in organizations of various kinds, and is often, even if not always, unreflected. Women in male dominated organizations, in particular those wanting to make a career, more often show heterosociality, i.e. they form professional relationships with both women

*I see that networking is much easier for men. I generally observe that men can easily get together. They gather frequently to play football for instance. Social networks are crucial for better relations in academia and getting socialized is easier for men compared to women. (Female researcher)*

<sup>1</sup> Langfeldt, Liv (2004) Expert panels evaluating research: decision-making and sources of bias. *Research Evaluation*, 13 (1) 51–62; Van den Brink, Marieke, Brouns, Margo and Waslander, Sietske (2006): Does excellence have a gender? A national research study on recruitment and selection procedures for professorial appointments in The Netherlands: *Employee Relations*, 28 (6) 523–539; Lamont, Michèle (2009). *How professors think: inside the curious world of academic judgment*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; Ahlqvist, Veronica et al (2015) *A gender neutral process?: a qualitative study of the evaluation of research grant applications 2014*. Stockholm: Swedish Research Council. See also [www.genderportal.eu/resources/paradox-meritocracy-organizations](http://www.genderportal.eu/resources/paradox-meritocracy-organizations)

<sup>2</sup> Bird, Sharon (1996) Welcome to the men's club. Homosociality and the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. *Gender & Society* April 1996 vol. 10 no. 2 120–132. Rogers, Everett M. & Kincaid, Lawrence D. (1981) *Communication Networks*. New York: Free press. A similar term is homophily, which refers to the tendency to form networks with people similar to oneself, not only in terms of gender, but also when it comes to race, ethnicity or just opinions and preferences. Homosociality, in referring to men, has in practice become a more precise term than homophily when gender in organizations is studied.

and men. For them, same-gender working relationships are not rewarding in the same way as they are for men, as most power positions in organizations are still held by men.

However, gender structures in organizations are not straightforward and simple. There are women who have strong positions in the academic hierarchy.

*Head of HR involved all the people from the HR team for the elaboration of policies. They organized a small internal workshop during which they talked about possible new policies addressing gender. This is an example of good experience because it shows how HR did not wait for the solutions provided by the FESTA team but actively worked for the creation of a list of policies to merge with our findings. (FESTA partner)*

Their existence does not prove that women as a group is not disadvantaged. Likewise, there are men who are in no way privileged in the academic hierarchy. There is a large variation in and between the groups of women and men, but all FESTA partners, just like previous research, have found that, at a general level, women are disadvantaged in different ways when compared to men.

The variation among women and men is partly due to the fact that other characteristics, such as ethnicity and race, or class background can modify the effects of gender. In the FESTA project we have concentrated on

gender and only monitored our efforts in relation to gender equality. However, we believe that many of our efforts, which basically are about increasing transparency and giving voice to a disadvantaged group, also are beneficial to men who are marginalized in the system. We recommend that organizational statistics be gender specified where possible. Throughout the handbook we write about women and men as two separate groups. We think that it is justified to do so in a handbook on how to challenge gender inequality, until differences between these groups have expired.

Organizational change towards gender equality requires changes at individual, cultural and structural levels. Structural level – changing the composition of decision-making bodies, changing organizational policies and processes so that they do not disfavour women, etc. – and cultural level – making people aware of gender equality issues, making different kinds of gender unequal behaviour socially disapproved, etc. – interact. Changes at the structural level become ineffective if the staff is not gender aware and see the meaning of it all, and changes at the cultural level are easily extinguished if there are no structures that promote gender equality. To promote lasting change both levels have to interact.

Changes at the individual level can prompt changes at the other two levels, in particular if the individual has a decision-making position. (However, a change towards gender awareness, at an individual level can also be a painful experience in an organization where the other two levels are gender blind.) Changes that are dependent on individuals are fragile. If changes initiated by

individuals are not integrated in the organizational structure, they are likely to disappear when the engagement of that individual for one reason or another no longer is available.

However, supporting the individuals who are interested and want to take action for gender equality is one of the ways to come forward. When it comes to gender awareness training one size does not fit all. Organizing activities, seminars, workshops and the like with an explicit gender focus normally only attracts those who already are interested, unless there is strong support from the leadership (for example by themselves attending and being clear about their expectations of others' attendance). However, such activities may still be valuable for those interested, in increasing their knowledge base and creating networks. To reach all staff, gender issues need to be part of different kinds of meetings, seminars, trainings and information events, where even those who initially are not interested in gender issues attend. It is important to give room for discussion in these occasions. Taking in information about gender issues often raises questions, as it may influence one's personal worldview. Finding the right people to do the gender training is important: they need knowledge of the target group and of gender issues, as well as legitimacy in the eyes of the target group.

Gendered practices are not always recognized as such. To see that a practice has gendered consequences often requires an interest in and knowledge about gender issues. This also has the contradictory effect that starting to work with gender equality and raising the gender awareness in the organization sometimes seems to worsen the situation: new issues seem to pop up, more discrimination is reported. Most often this is due to the fact that people see issues that have been there all along and start to react. The realization that the organization which everyone thought was gender neutral actually is not can be painful, but it is a necessary precondition for making sure that the organization gives both men and women the same opportunities to realise their potential.

## General Recommendations

### Getting started

- *Encourage and support decision makers at all organizational levels to accept a need for change and motivate them to embrace change.* There are a number of counter-forces trying to preserve the status quo, so both support and engagement are needed. A highly visible commitment from organizational leadership is essential.
- *Decide on problem areas to be addressed.* In addition to overall awareness raising, it is beneficial to focus strategically on some organizational

areas and processes at a time and set goals, make changes and monitor progress in those areas.

- *Formulate measurable goals and ambitions* by deciding on numerical indicators which can be collected recurrently and show the progress.
- *Be realistic about the timeframe for change.* On the one hand, changing organizational structures takes time and changing organizational culture may take even more time – and these two interact. On the other hand, allowing too much time will risk that the issues disappear from the central agendas.
- Involve both women and men in gender equality work.
- *Do not do gender equality work in isolation*, but keep in contact with other institutions and other bodies working on the same area. Others may have already tried solutions to problems that you have identified. Keep abreast with the national and international developments through conferences, literature etc.

### **Gender equality specific actions**

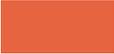
- *Make sure that there are resources allocated for gender equality work.* Just like most activities in an organization, gender equality work requires resources, and for it to be sustainable long term resources are required. By allocating funds for gender equality work the organizational leadership also signals that this work is to be taken seriously.
- *Create permanent institutional support structures* if they do not exist already – gender equality officer, equalities office, gender research unit or department, gender library, etc.
- *Make sure that any gender equality policies, measures and commitments are communicated to all concerned*, in particular to those who are expected to benefit from them.
- *Take initiatives to empower women.* However, for these to be effective, the organization as a whole needs to show commitment to addressing gender (in)equality. This means that other actions have to be taken in parallel.
- *Make awareness raising a systematic activity* with two parts:
  - 1) organizing series of seminars and workshops and encouraging people to attend
  - 2) raising issues about gender equality in any information and training activities organized by the institution.



### Creating gender equal structures and cultures

- *Make both formal and informal decision-making processes more transparent.* Also, pay attention to vertical and horizontal communication channels. Work to make “the hidden rules of the game” transparent and known by all staff as far as possible.
- *Pay particular attention to possible gendered distribution of benefits and gendered distribution of work.* In both areas there are several aspects that easily escape notice.
- *Facilitate combining work and family.* Which measures are the most pressing depends on the national context. Implement concrete measures, but also make it a cultural norm to accept that parenthood and research are possible to combine and that men have caring responsibilities for their children, too.
- *Pay particular attention to the situation of PhD students.* PhD studies is the period of introduction to a life as a researcher. If that period is not satisfactory, for example because of problematic organizational culture or conscious or unconscious gender unequal treatment, female talent may be lost at an early stage.
- *Increase the employment security for young researchers* if that is a problem in the national context. The problem itself concerns both women and men, but in the present system, where men can expect more sponsoring, it is particularly hurtful for women.
- *Improve the employment conditions for young researchers* if that is a problem in the national context. For example, is women’s part time voluntary or partially enforced by the employment conditions?





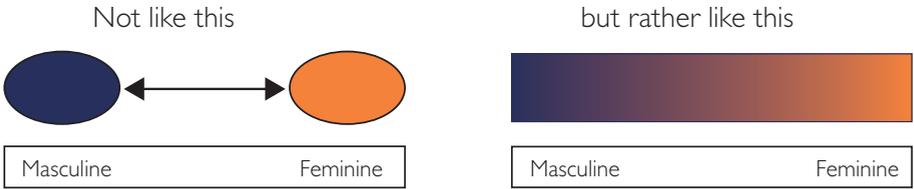
# PART TWO: Changing practices and processes in different areas of activity

## Introduction

FESTA has been a gender mainstreaming project in the sense that most of the actions have not directed themselves to women in particular, but have aimed to improve organizational practices and processes to make them more transparent, fair and inclusive. Our basic assumption is not that the academe consists of (male) individuals who want to discriminate women. Instead, many practices and processes in the academic context are not gender neutral, in that they give room for personal bindings, power plays, male homosociality and networking and the accompanying marginalization of those who do not “belong”.

*There is a tendency for guys to band together. That's a different thing. Guys tend to group together, they tend to form teams. It's something that's, I think it's natural in guys to do that. ... And in the process of doing that, if you're not on the team, you're outside the team. And there could be, not a, not if you like an overt gender bias, but there could be an implicit one on that basis.*

It is important to remember that even if this document is about women and men, the organizational reality is much more complicated. We have different kinds of women and men in our organizations. Masculinity and femininity can be depicted as a scale, instead of two separate areas.



We would expect more women to be on the right hand side and more men on the left hand side, but we could also see that many individuals are in the middle region, exposing more or less characteristics of both genders. In particular, women in scientific and technical research environments are bound to move towards the middle area, as being extremely feminine – whatever that entails in the society in question – is seen as contrary to academic legitimacy.

As a structural problem gender equality is about resources and positions, division of work and decision making, both formal and informal. As a cultural problem it is about the way women and men interact; the way women and men – at the workplace, in society in general and, for example, the global research community – are talked to, listened to and talked about, as well as what

is valued and not valued (for example when it comes to research methods, projects and areas) in the environment.

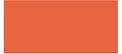
Patricia Martin<sup>3</sup> claims that the disadvantage to women in many organizations is a by-product of the importance for men to do masculinity amongst themselves. There is other research that agrees<sup>4</sup> with its notion of the academic structure reproducing the hierarchy between men. Originally, women as “imperfect men” would have to share the lower positions of the hierarchy with men of “lesser value”. With this view, gender equality work, ultimately, would change the foundations of the academic system. The FESTA project has not had such far-reaching aims, but our recommendations would in many cases improve the situation of even other individuals and groups who implicitly are regarded as having “lesser value”, either because of their gender, their ethnicity or other characteristics which set them apart from the male norm of the academe.

In this second part we use concepts like “organization” or “institutional environment” as much of what is discussed is relevant for actors on different levels – research group, unit, department or institution. We are aware that the conditions between different European countries vary, and that it is hardly possible to write a handbook on change that is equally relevant in all European contexts. However, the experiences of all FESTA partners, representing different corners of Europe are integrated in the text. And in all FESTA countries, to implement gender equality in academic organizations, we need to advance along three tracks in parallel:

1. Improving policies, processes and practices
2. Making all members of the organization more aware of the implicit gender biases inherent in all individuals, and how they influence the organizational life
3. Supporting and encouraging female researchers in particular, as long as the organization is not gender neutral.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, Patricia Y. (2001) Mobilizing masculinities. Women's experiences of men at work. *Organization*, 8 (4) 587–618.

<sup>4</sup> Husu, Liisa (2001) Sexism, Support and Survival in Academia: Academic Women and Hidden Discrimination in Finland. Helsinki: University of Helsinki; Conrad, Peter et al (2010) Hierarchy as a Barrier to Advancement for Women in Academic Medicine. *Journal of Women's Health* 19 (4) 799–805; Morley, Louise (2013) The rules of the game: women and the leaderist turn in higher education. *Gender and education*, 25 (1) 116–131; O'Connor Pat, O'Hagan Clare and Brannen Julia (2016) Exploration of masculinities in academic organisations: A tentative typology using career and relationship commitment. *Current Sociology*, 63 (4) 528–546.



In all FESTA environments, policies, processes and practices can be improved, even if some of us have worked with mandatory gender equality plans for years, and others have previously not been prompted to even think about gender equality as a problem. Improving policies and processes has two sides: making them more fair and transparent as such, and making sure that they do not inadvertently disadvantage women. When gender equality work is in a starting phase, policies are very important, but when established and accepted in the organization they can risk reducing gender equality work to an administrative task which does not particularly initiate further changes.

The gender awareness of people in our organizations also varies. When introducing gender equality as a concept in a basically non-gender aware environment, three reactions can be expected: curiosity (in particular from female members) and denial (in particular from male members), in addition to indifference. However, indifference or faked indifference (instead of open resistance) may be a more common reaction in environments where gender equality discussions have been going on for some time. In such organizations normally a number of interested and even knowledgeable people can be found, but there may be many people in crucial positions who are not receptive to the message.

The conclusion that the structure and the culture of the academe, rather than shortcomings of the women themselves, are the problem, is based on experiences in countries which started supporting female researchers for a couple of decades ago, and where a number of studies about their experiences have been made. The conclusions normally point out that trying to find the root of the problems in women's characteristics and behaviours to a large degree is equal to blaming the victim. Thus, supporting women in particular is not generally a popular method for gender equality work in these contexts. These countries often have a societal ideology of women and men not being very different, either in regard to their characteristics or to their responsibilities and possibilities in society. However, in other contexts, where expectations of men's and women's societal and work-life roles differ, it may become quite obvious that measures that only benefit women are needed. In addition, as long as the academe de facto is not gender neutral, particular measures for women can be motivated – as long as they are not seen as the final solution to the gender inequality problem.

## **Change is a long process**

Just like researchers before us, the FESTA partners and the organizations they work in have discovered gender biases in a number of different processes. The good news is that working with several of them in parallel has synergy effects and success on one front often facilitates success on another. For example, a

PhD supervisor's increased gender awareness, which may be initiated by an insight given by communicated organizational statistics, is likely to show even in his other interactions with his colleagues, and after having been similarly engaged in the very beginning of both female and male PhD students' research careers, he is also more likely to promote gender equal promotion and appointment practices.

However, changing people and changing organizations is not easy. That is the experience of many optimistic gender equality workers – whom we address in part 3. To make profound changes takes time. That is why it is extremely important that gender equality measures are thoroughly embedded in organizational processes and policies. They must as little as possible be dependent on single dedicated individuals. Such individuals can make a profound difference, in particular if they get the support they are entitled to, but the need to guard the progress made, and to advance gender equality further is likely to last longer than any individual's position at an institution.

There are studies which show that women are less interested in organizational politics than their male colleagues, also in academic environments, and that even those women who are interested in organizational politics are excluded from them<sup>5</sup>. This becomes easily a vicious circle and, hence, to influence permanent change so that women's and men's needs are equally considered, it is important to make organizational politics worthwhile for women researchers to engage in.

Our experience shows that it is not enough that policies and procedures are examined and reformed at one point of time to be gender neutral. Constant monitoring is needed to ensure that the policies and procedures are followed. If there are no gender watchdogs, it is likely that gender biased practices will sprout again. Those of us who have done gender equality work for a number of years have witnessed how other organizational changes have more or less wiped out gender equal practices, how a new set of policies substituting old ones seemingly has not considered gender aspects at all, how funds that were there are now needed for something else, how procedures that were implemented disappear when certain employees disappear. Although we have also witnessed the opposite – new people instigating new policies and practices and funding new initiatives – we have learnt to keep an eye on any changes in the

<sup>5</sup> Fox, Mary F. & Colatrella, Carol (2006) Participation, performance, and advancement of women in academic science and engineering: What is at issue and why. *Journal of Technology Transfer*, 31: 377–386. Morley, Louise (2006) Hidden transcripts: The micropolitics of gender in Commonwealth universities, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29 (6) 543–551; Davey, Kate M. (2008) Women's Accounts of Organizational Politics as a Gendering Process. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 15 (6) 650–671.

organizational environment as they can influence the work that we thought was completed.

While it is natural that gender biased practices sustain as long as we are inclined to see the world in gendered ways, part of what happens in such occasions can also be labelled as passive or active resistance – those who actually do not like practices and procedures being gender equal “forget” them when they have the opportunity. When doing gender equality work, resistance is always something to be taken into account. Promoting gender equality requires courage and stamina even from persons in leadership positions, in particular in an academic setting, where leaders are elected and/or there are powerful actors on whom the leaders depend. Resistance can be based on the discomfort people feel when the perspectives and world views they have taken for granted are challenged, but it may also be, more or less subtly, a reaction to the fact that when women get equal possibilities to those of men,

*In connection with a FESTA kick-off meeting one of the Heads of Department at our Faculty decided to come with us. When informing one of his employees about it and the FESTA project the employee used 2 hours to give his opinions about women getting all the possibilities and men being at a disadvantage. (FESTA partner)*

men will face greater competition in different areas of academic life. A maybe subconscious notion that the competition might not have been fair in the past, i.e. some men who hold high positions should have been surpassed by more competent women, may be yet another source of resistance. Resistance is further elaborated on in part three, from the perspective of a grassroots gender equality worker.

Resistance is further elaborated on in part three, from the perspective of a grassroots gender equality worker.

## Funding issues and organizational position

In the FESTA project, we have had the advantage of project funds to initiate and enhance the gender equality work. Earmarking funds for gender equality work is necessary, but there is a balance to be struck between gender equality funds and integrating gender equality work in the ordinary procedures of the organization, financed for other reasons. It should be obvious for the organization that gender equality work costs and cannot be done, for example, by female researchers without compensation, as is sometimes the case. Gender equality is a competence area and finding and bringing in that competence in the organization has its cost, but money is also necessary for structuring gender equality work, raising awareness, monitoring actions and progress etc. This is true in organizations that just start this work as well as in organizations where this area of work is well established. Particularly dangerous is financing this work with project money, as this is a long term commitment and projects

come to an end. Thus, while project money may finance some particularly important initiative, it should be clear from the start how the results of the project will be employed in the organization and financed in the long run.

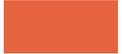
Particular gender equality funds are more or less precarious – they can be reduced or withdrawn in the face of other needs that the organization finds more pressing. They may also foster an impression that gender equality is what is done with these funds, and that no gender equality work needs to be done unless it is funded by this particular money. That is why it is important to even financially integrate gender equality work in the ordinary policies and procedures of the organizational context.

Another consideration is where in the organization the core of gender equality work is to be located. The FESTA experience is that even if most of our actions have had the improvement of the working environment as their goal, the effort is more wide reaching. For example, a position at an HR department, where some of the FESTA team members, and many gender equality officers in different institutions find themselves, is too restricted. In FESTA we have also dealt with central monitoring instruments such as statistics, with PhD education, and we have worked with appointments and the distribution of research resources. As ordinary gender equality work even comprises measures directed towards students, it is quite clear that the core of gender equality work needs a central position to be able to address all the different organizational aspects. This is also important in the light of our (and others') experiences that solid support from organizational leadership is essential and the location of the gender equality function itself creates or reduces legitimacy.

## What part two is about

All FESTA actions have been connected to one or more of the three tracks of (1) structural change, (2) awareness raising and (3) support for female researchers.

Collecting and using gender *statistics* forms a baseline in both raising awareness of gender bias and its results, and in laying a cornerstone for better practices, and evaluating the results of any reforms. Statistics need to be collected, interpreted and disseminated. Which statistics are likely to reveal existing gender gaps is worth consideration, as well as the effort-value relation between different statistical indicators, as this varies. Statistical indicators may need complementing by other kinds of data, to be correctly interpreted. How statistics are delivered is also important, if they are expected to result in action.



Even in a gender aware institution, decisions which are crucial for both men's and women's wellbeing and careers are often made in contexts where women are not present. These contexts can be both formal and informal. To improve the *transparency in decision making* is a basic prerequisite for giving organizational attention to both women's and men's needs and preferences.

In *interactional processes* in everyday organizational life, gendered expectations and gendered behaviours are lived out and reproduced. To the extent that these have been unconscious, increased gender awareness is likely to change them. An effective way of increasing gender awareness of everyday interactions is to discuss gendered behaviours when they occur. In the FESTA project we have chosen meetings, i.e. semi-formal occasions, as a setting where this can be done.

*PhD supervision* is conducted differently in different countries and research environments. Sometimes it is almost entirely a one-to-one relationship, but often this relationship is framed by a research group where relations are more or less informal. The extent to which this relationship is surrounded by different formal policies and practices varies. The process of PhD supervision can give room for gender biases, of which neither the supervisor nor the PhD student may be aware. The process itself may also need improvement, to ensure that all PhD students, regardless of gender, get the support they need to successfully complete their PhDs and embark on a research career, if they choose to do so.

*Mentoring and sponsorship* are measures that are needed to support female researchers while the institution is working on creating equal opportunities for everyone. They are not to be seen as something that should be offered because women have particular problems, but something that the organization offers to compensate its female researchers for the fact that it does not offer equal opportunities to everyone. In addition, sponsoring female researchers is likely to facilitate the road towards gender equality. Even if the number of women in decision-making bodies does not guarantee that decisions will be gender-aware, there is a correlation.

When it comes to *recruitment and promotion*, practices and procedures can be improved to make sure that the most qualified candidate actually gets the job and that women and men of equal qualifications get equal promotions. In addition to improving the practices, people deciding on promotions need to be aware of their possible implicit gender biases.

## 1) Informal decision making

When it comes to gender equality, informal decision-making processes have shown to be extremely important. In countries where gender equality has been on the agenda for several years both in legislation and in institutional policies, it is largely the informal processes that obstruct progress.

With informal decision making we mean decisions made in informal contexts – even if they later can be confirmed in formal meetings. Commonly these are described as corridor talk, lunch meetings, pub meetings, informal talks with those in power. A number of these discussions, which then result in action, take place in locations where women have no access, where they feel uncomfortable, or where they just have no interest in staying.

The informal processes of decision-making and communication have great relevance in the understanding of the daily working environment. They do

play an active role in influencing decisions to be taken as well as the behaviours and perceptions of the actors involved in them; not considering the “informal” means fails to take into consideration input, strategies, approaches and discussions that are strictly linked to the formal processes of deci-

sion-making and communication and to the meeting culture. However, finding out about the informal decision making processes is not always easy. Those who participate in such processes may not always even realize that they are engaged in such an activity, or do not want to discuss it.

Informal decision making processes, and how they influence gender equality, vary greatly between different European countries, which is witnessed by the various FESTA teams. It is possible that informal decision making processes sometimes actually promote gender equality, in contexts where there are not formal policies in place, but there are individuals who want to promote gender equality, or in contexts where women do not have a voice in formal decision making, but know how to strategically influence decisions through informal channels. Informal decision making as such can be viewed as positive, as informal decisions can result in fast action. However, because of male networks, men generally have more easily access to information about how to influence decisions informally. Informal decision making which women are not aware of or in which women cannot take part, risks ignoring women's right to equal treatment.

Informal decision-making is closely tied to departmental communication. It is when decision-making and the decisions made are communicated only to

*At least two inner circles are perceived at our department and an example given of their informal power is that when a programme coordinator is to be appointed they decide who it will be. (FESTA partner, interview summary)*

some the members of a department or unit, normally those who belong to the right networks, that it becomes problematic for women and others who find it more difficult to get access to those networks. If communication is open about who makes decisions and on what grounds, and which decisions have been made it is easier for all concerned to influence them. Open communication not only diminishes inequality, it also improves organizational culture.

Recommendations from the FESTA project, when it comes to decision making and communication, may seem general and not gender specific at all. However, when these aspects of organizational life malfunction, women suffer more than men do. That is why a general improvement of organizational decision making and communication processes is important for gender equality.

The FESTA teams that have worked with informal decision making and communication have faced very different organizational contexts. Thus, the measures taken in different institutions are very different. Below we give examples of some improvements, big and small, as an inspiration, rather than a recommendation. They have mostly been made at departmental or division/unit level, because those are the levels where the FESTA teams have worked.

### **Recommendations: Decision making**

- In particular, *with substantive changes in the formal organization, be aware of which informal patterns may be influenced and how this may affect gender equality.* Preferably try to assess the change in informal decision making alongside the formal organizational change.
- When possible, create formalised *possibilities for appeal.* If a decision is found to be made on unhealthy grounds there should be a possibility to require that the issue is reconsidered.
- Organize *regular scheduled meetings between a department head or other persons in leading position and different groups that may have common issues* (PhD students, post docs, research assistants, foreign junior researchers, gender equality group, parents of small children, groups using or needing particular infrastructure, those with a heavy teaching load etc.) to gather their needs and experiences. Give these groups a possibility to prepare for the meeting.
- *Beware where formal and informal decision making intersect:* reflect on how boards and committees are put together, whose interests are catered for and why. Creating a formal decision-making body quite often involves a considerable amount of informal decision making about candidates. The simple rule of thumb of having a representation of both women and men in a committee needs more scrutiny: Sometimes a particular committee is not important enough for a female researcher

to be part of – it is better if she saves her precious time for some more crucial board. And sometimes the woman suggested for a committee is not really the woman who should be there – for example a junior woman may be suggested, while a senior woman would be needed to really improve the balance in, not only numbers but in influence.

- If you are a department head/unit manager: *Do not forget the women.* If they do not turn up in your room or accompany you to lunch to the extent that their male colleagues do, seek them out.
- *Formalise duties connected to teaching as much as possible*, for example how teaching tasks are allocated and by whom and how much time different tasks (planning a course, preparing a lecture, grading exams on different courses) are expected to take. Make sure that this planning is realistic and be prepared to make adjustments when needed. Make also clear which administrative assistance can be expected and required for teaching tasks. As expectations on women in relation to teaching often are greater than on men, from the part of colleagues, superiors and students (and female staff themselves), the time and energy that women can allocate to research is curtailed. Thus, decisions made on unclear grounds may be harmful in this area.
- *Decision making about gender equality issues should be both informal and formal.* Hence, consider appointing a particular committee, which is responsible for gender equality work at the department. If you do, make sure that it has a good status, clearly stated authorisation in relevant issues as well as allocated resources and that it is directly responsible and in close communication with the department/unit board and/or the head/manager.

### **Recommendations: Communication**

- *Create a document that clarifies who or which group at the department/unit is in charge of which decisions.* Update regularly. The actual situation and not official policy should be the starting point. Include not only a composition of different groups and committees, but how they are selected (the criteria to belong to a group) and by whom. Make sure that each new staff member gets a copy and that staff members get alerted when the document is updated.

- *Regular communication* – newsletters and meetings at regular intervals, normally at least once a month – *is a backbone*. Depending on the size of the department/unit, meetings may take place in sub-units. If information meetings are not well attended, the reason should be sought out and the meetings improved.
- *An introduction package detailing not only decision making, but different benefits and routines, as well as expectations* on employees should be prepared and delivered to every new employee or placed as a particular folder on the department/unit website. Update regularly. Consider appointing a “mentor” for new employees, with the task of initially keeping regular contact and answering any questions.
- If there are a number of international staff, *make sure that any information is given in a language that everybody understands*. (Normally this means a national language and English.)
- Do not forget to *keep the staff informed about the economy of the department/unit* in general terms: Where do resources come from and how are they allocated to different work areas, people and projects? The presentation of the economic considerations should be pedagogical enough so that it can be easily understood.
- *Inform the department/unit when people join or leave*. To get introduced to a unit makes it easier to get integrated. E-mails when people leave the unit are not only informative. They also tell the remaining staff that people are seen – nobody disappears without notice.
- *Inform the whole department/unit about someone’s achievements* (successful funding applications, PhD defences, important publications etc). Preferably celebrate together. Make sure that all members of staff are celebrated this way – even if they would not put themselves forward.
- *Organize social events where it is possible for all staff to attend*. Remember that it may be difficult for parents of small children to attend social events in evenings or weekends (unless children are welcome, too). If there is an international mix of staff, make sure that a common language is widely used on the occasion.
- *Make sure that the scheduling* (including teaching schedules) of activities in the department/unit *makes it possible for all the staff to attend information meetings and social events*.

*In one of the departments it was proposed that all course schedules would be coordinated so that all department members could be free on the same day, at the same hour. Finally, a common slot was arranged for all members to meet; they all have a free common time in their weekly schedules for attending meetings. (Festa partner, interview summary)*

## 2) Using statistics to increase awareness

Statistics can be a powerful tool to increase awareness of gender issues. Many people who have believed that the academe is reasonably gender equal have been convinced about the opposite when confronted with "hard facts" on what the situation actually looks like. When working with research environments in science and technology, "hard facts" are even more important. Valid data is important for convincing opponents of the importance of gender equality work.

Four FESTA teams have worked on this issue and detailed descriptions of their experiences on which statistics are possible and useful to collect, and the effort/value relationship of different measures can be found in the "*FESTA toolkit WP3.2. Towards Raising Organizational Awareness*". Their experiences of

using these indicators for awareness raising and monitoring, can be found in the report "*Raising Organizational Awareness*". This report also contains their experiences condensed in a number of recommendations.

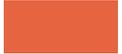
Different institutions in different European countries are in very different positions when it comes to gender statistics, or even general staff statistics. In some institutions,

gendered data does not exist at all, in some others data exists in several systems and locations and mainly needs to be collated. Which statistics are seen as sensitive varies also between countries and cultures: in one country salaries may be absolutely confidential, while in another, salary statistics at a collated level may be openly accessible for all employees. Also, which statistics can be seen as useful can vary: statistics for sick leave can be interesting to present if sick leaves are perceived to be due to working conditions, but less interesting to present, if sick leaves are perceived to belong to the private sphere altogether.

Using statistics is not all that simple. There are questions of

- What statistics to collect?
- Who should have access to the collected data?
- To whom and how should statistics be presented?
- How to use statistics for monitoring?

*We offered to present and discuss findings within the faculties. We contacted the coordinators of the formal or informal structures and offered them to present our FESTA results in one of their meetings. We received big openness and in the case of the informal structure we immediately got a concrete date for our presentation. (FESTA partner)*



### What statistics to collect?

Core indicators that are valid for all situations and all universities do not exist, even if some indicators are generally more useful than others. When it comes to deciding which data to collect three aspects need to be considered:

1) What can this data be used for? If it indicates gender differences, what can the underlying reasons be assumed to be? Can those reasons be addressed by gender equality work? For example, data showing that women get fewer research grants than men may be seen either as indicating that women are disadvantaged by the grant distribution system, or that women are not as capable researchers as men.

2) What is the effort/value relation of collecting the data? A sub-question is whether the data can be collected at all. In lucky circumstances, data is readily available in local databases, but that is seldom the case. Normally, somebody has to collect the data, either from existing records, or by sending out surveys.

Much of the data, for example about scientific production that the FESTA teams wanted to collect proved to be impossible to acquire in any reliable way. Examples of such data are the number of research projects a researcher is engaged in or prizes and awards received by single researchers. Surveys to researchers themselves may be a solution to find out about facts that are not previously collected and compiled. However, they are time consuming and if the response rate is not high enough their results can always be questioned.

If the data can be expected to have great news value, it may be worthwhile to put some extra effort into collecting it. The situation is different, if the plan is to use the data for longitudinal monitoring of gender equality work. In that case it should not be too difficult to collect and compile. The intervals for collecting data, to see how gender equality develops, needs to be decided. This will also signal that gender equality has to be a sustainable undertaking.

3) Is it possible to collect *and to publish* the data? Much of the data that the FESTA teams thought would be desirable and useful was not possible to collect because of integrity reasons – sometimes legal and sometimes due to institutional policies and practices.

Basic data that FESTA partners have found important is the gender distribution of

1. Employment conditions and terms (fixed term vs permanent, full time vs. part time, salary)
2. Parental leave and other absences for care
3. Success rates of applications for different positions (lecturer, professor)
4. Leadership positions
5. Membership in boards and committees

6. Turnover/retention
7. Number of publications

In addition, there are a number of other statistical indicators that can be used, depending on the institutional context. They can be found in the 3.2. toolkit. Sometimes it is interesting to collect indicative data about issues which may not be decisive as such but which illuminate the fact that there are gender differences (e.g. number of conference trips, size of office or lab space). When gender equality becomes a topic in an institution, new assumptions of gender differences often emerge and can be verified or falsified by statistics.

In the FESTA 3.2. Toolkit, Raising Organizational Awareness, there are examples of indicator families, i.e. different indicators that can illuminate a particular aspect of gender equality. For example, gender equality in budgeting can be indicated by negotiated resources in appointment negotiations (salary and equipment), salary including bonus of scientific staff or financing of projects led by women and men. Likewise, career development can be measured by contract conditions (part time/full time, duration of contracts), success rate of applications for professorships of men and women, age at first appointment on professorship, share of women in boards and committees etc. Using an indicator family gives a more multi-faceted picture of this particular area of potential inequality and when using the statistics for action and monitoring, some figures may be more motivating than others. If the particular aim is to increase gender equality in budgeting, a couple of particular indicators may initially be chosen, and if the aim is to facilitate women's career development, a couple of others will be relevant.

### **How should statistics be analysed and understood?**

Most importantly the analyses should be robust and not open to question. Our experience is that when presenting unexpected and potentially uncomfortable data, one of the reactions is to question its validity<sup>6</sup>. Some data is simple, such as the number and percentage of women in leadership positions. Some data may need more elaboration, for example correlating different indicators with age or parental status or national origin. More elaborate analyses give a better picture of what the situation actually is in the organization. However, care should be taken that the base for analyses is large enough to give robust results, so that periodic fluctuations or a few exceptional individuals do not influence the statistics.

<sup>6</sup> See also Berger Laura, Benschop Yvonne and van den Brink, Marieke (2015) Practising gender when networking: The case of university-industry innovation projects. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22 (6) 556–578, about reception of gender knowledge.

Quantitative indicators often need to be complemented by qualitative data. Unexpected results may have unexpected causes which may be found out by talking to the people concerned.

### **What statistics should be presented and to whom?**

Numbers do not speak by themselves, they need to be connected to a “story” of the organizational reality. The needs and preferences of the group you want to address decides which statistics should be presented and how. Generally, the closer the statistics are to the target group the better – even if it is also good to have similar statistics from a wider group for comparison. Thus, the statistics collected at one institution are likely to confirm patterns that are already widely verified by research – but they are needed to raise the awareness that these general patterns also exist in this particular organization. To increase gender equality, data showing how women are disadvantaged is, of course, essential. However, it is equally important to present signs of success. If the data indicate unequal career prospects, people can be alerted. If the data indicate improvement, the feeling of being capable of putting things in motion is created .

Presenting data to key decision makers is not necessarily the same as presenting data for all staff. Key decision makers are expected to use the statistics to initiate and monitor change. This implies that even if some striking statistics can be used as an eye-opener, the core of the presentation should be about facts that can (hopefully) be changed by institutional policies and recommendations.

Which statistics “all employees” want to see depends on the group in question. However, a general advice is to have few robust figures that either arouse curiosity (especially in an initial phase of awareness raising) or point out some particularly problematic areas (when there already is some awareness). It is important to be able to give a background to the figures, to delineate the problems that they point out. All this implies that the presentations need to be tailored for each target group individually. For example, researchers may be mostly interested in funding and appointments, while also turnover/retention and the gender distribution of different working conditions and contracts may be interesting to HR staff.

The FESTA partners have found out that the most effective way is to present statistics both to key persons and to all employees – but if only one group

*The presentation included quantitative data showing gender gaps and qualitative data which analysed transcripts of interviews and focus groups. There were approximately thirty men and two women at the presentation. Several of the men were aggressive, hostile and angry. They challenged the research methodology and the research findings. Many refused to accept the findings as valid. One man in the group defended the presentation, but he was silenced by the angry voices of the majority. (Festa partner)*

should be chosen, key decision and policy makers would be the most important one. Key persons may include rector/vice-chancellor, department heads and centre directors, deans, faculty boards, department boards, management groups, professors' groups, and university administration, in particular HR, etc. If gender equality officers and groups are not doing part of the work of collecting and analysing the data, they, of course, are key recipients of it.

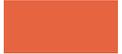
"All employees" include different constellations, and presenting awareness raising data in different venues where people come together (kick-off meetings, general faculty and departmental meetings etc.) can have an impact on the culture. To have gender data readily available for all employees, for example in the intranet, is good for stimulating discussions and giving arguments for equality-minded people in different positions in the organization. However, some data may be possible to collect only if it is not spread widely.

Gender equality minded people are yet another group, who can be reached by organizing special events to present the data.

### **Using statistics for monitoring**

Successful gender equality work should improve the statistics. When improving the situation is (almost) wholly dependent on the organization, goals can be set up, success can be measured in relation to them and rewards or sanctions may be used for those sub units that manage or do not manage to reach the goals, respectively. However, most statistics reveal issues that are only partly due to organizational factors. The number of female researchers in certain disciplinary areas is a case in point. There, statistics can be used as a performance indicator with no pre-set goal, but expecting constant improvement and requiring explanations if improvement is not shown. While numerical indicators should be part of the monitoring of gender equality work, it is important not to let them be the only indicators. On one hand, even determined gender equality work can fail to improve figures, at least during some periods. On the other hand, improved figures do not always guarantee that gender equality actually has substantially improved.

If statistics are planned to be used for continuous or recurring monitoring of the gender equality situation in the organization – which hopefully is the case – somebody needs to be responsible for updating them. A good solution, if that is possible, is to get a data collection component in the different organizational monitoring systems, i.e. to make them gender sensitive. For example, the statistics on how many women and men applied for positions and succeeded in securing one should be quite as easy to obtain as the gender blind statistics of the total applicants. If changes are not easy to implement to systems already



in use, they need to be added as a feature when systems are updated or new systems are implemented.

If that is not possible, updating statistics manually at some time intervals needs to be done. This interval should preferably be stated already when the first statistics are collected, and made a part of the recurring routines of the organization – with clear address of responsibility.

### **Recommendations: Using statistics to increase awareness**

- *Statistics have to be reliable.* Objective data are necessary to give evidence of possible (gender) biases.
- *Focus on a core set of indicators.* The indicators should spotlight the most important facts. By deciding on a limited number of indicators, the structural shortcomings should clearly be visible so that the institution can react and concentrate on resolving these issues.
- *Collect statistics on issues in which there are certain gendered assumptions.* For example, if perceptions of inequalities in allocation of research funding abound in the environment, quantitative mapping can indicate whether this is the case or not.
- *Quantitative data needs qualitative data.* Quantitative findings need to be supplemented with qualitative measures. While quantitative data show a picture of how the organization looks from a gender point of view, qualitative data is often needed to understand why it looks that way and what can be done about it.
- *Present data in different ways depending on the context.* The gender equality indicators should be addressed in different ways depending on the context (including the gender composition). The better you know the audience, the better you are able to decide which statistics will stimulate discussion and motivate action.
- *Present data in a clear way by using few but powerful slides.* Put effort in the choice of the graphs, charts or tables used to convey your information and efficiently deliver the message. Use a few but powerful slides with few selected data. The slides should show a problem that something can be done about, not an overall negative image of the organization.
- *Boards and management should follow-up with the implementation on an on-going basis.* Formal procedures for internal reports from departments and institutes to boards and upper management should be established, which make it possible to monitor the development in regard to the indicators.

- *Connect the various gender control systems.* If there are different gender control systems in place, cooperation between the respective actors can be very productive when they all work towards the same goal.
- *Think about action.* Working with statistics and plans risks to be reduced to mere desktop work. It is important to keep the implementation focus. If some indicators lose their capability to raise awareness and monitor progress, they are not useful any more and should be substituted by others.

### 3) Meetings

The FESTA project has identified meetings as a particularly important organizational feature in reaching gender equality. This is because formal and informal values, policies and codes of conduct are played out in meetings. Apart from constituting one of the principal formats for achieving results, meetings encompass a myriad of encounters, cooperative endeavours and relations. These may support creative and constructive interactions or the opposite.<sup>7</sup> These dynamics often consolidate the subordinate position of women in an organization. Other often marginalised groups who are affected by these dynamics are, for example, junior researchers and non-white researchers.

Gender inequality in meetings can be purely interactional, for example men dominating over women when it comes to talking time, getting other participants' attention, deciding when an issue has been sufficiently dealt with, etc. But gender inequality in regard to meetings can also happen outside the meeting itself: who gets invited to the meeting and whose schedule meeting time is adapted to, what information is given to whom before the meeting, how the decisions made in the meeting and the ideas that have come forward are or are not implemented etc. There are several crucial gender equality aspects to meetings:

- If the meeting has gender unequal interaction patterns which are not made conscious and commented on, the meeting reproduces (and, thus, strengthens) gender unequal organizational culture.
- Women who repeatedly attend meetings with gender unequal interaction patterns, (often without being aware of it) more easily lose self-confidence and feel marginalised in the organization.
- Any efforts to improve gender equality by creating gender balanced boards and committees are hampered if the meetings of those committees are not conducted in a gender equal way.

<sup>7</sup> Weisbord, Marvin & Janoff, Sandra. (2007). *Don't Just Do Something, Stand There! Ten Principles for Leading Meetings that Matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers; Ravn, Ib (2013) A folk theory of meetings – and beyond. *European business review*, 25, (2) 163–173.

Conversely, creating meetings where men and women participate on equal terms improves the gender equality of the organization in several ways: Such meetings create and sustain gender equal everyday culture, they encourage women researchers to take part in the organizational politics and help them feel included and assert their rights, and they make it easier for boards and committees to create and implement effective measures which also take gender aspects into account.

Meetings in the academe are part of a competitive, exclusionary and sometimes discriminatory culture. Thus, giving training in how to conduct inclusive meetings with respectful collaboration is no guarantee that meetings actually will be so – for example, a meeting that is held to legitimize decisions a particular person or group among the participants wants to make, is not likely to be inclusive, regardless of what the participants know about good meeting culture. However, many meetings are held by academic chairpersons who have an egalitarian ideology, but just have no clue, neither of how participants can become marginalised nor what to do about it. The basic assumption underlying our recommendations is that the meeting is intended to include all participants – otherwise there is no rational reason why they should be taking part in it.

We are well aware that improving meeting culture always happens in a certain institutional culture, and has to adapt to it. While members in some organizations are familiar with the idea that meetings can be facilitated, and maybe have some ideas of what makes a good meeting, in institutions in other national and cultural contexts the idea of meetings needing particular considerations to make them inclusive, may be a novelty. However, in our experience, most academics have suffered from unproductive and time-consuming meetings themselves and are interested to know how meetings can be improved.

Often gendered interactions in meetings are invisible, and neither men nor women are conscious of them.<sup>8</sup> Women who talk the same way as men do meet more negative reactions.<sup>9</sup> It may also happen that there are one or two women in the meeting who talk as much as the male participants – and the common perception is that women are very assertive. Similar patterns may apply to other groups, even if most research has been done on gender relations.

That is why it is often an effective start to *observe* what happens in meetings in a certain context. Getting feedback on one's own meetings is much more

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<sup>8</sup> Berger Laura, Benschop Yvonne and van den Brink, Marieke (2015) Practising gender when networking: The case of university-industry innovation projects. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22 (6) 556–578.

<sup>9</sup> Mast, M.S. (2002) Dominance as expressed and inferred through speaking time: A meta-analysis. *Human Communication Research*, 28 (3) 420–450  
Brescoll, Victoria (2011) Who Takes the Floor and Why: Gender, Power, and Volubility in Organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 56 (4) 622–641.

powerful than learning about meeting strategies in general. Structured observations may be made by somebody outside the meeting group, or by one or two of the members (in which case the task should circulate). An outside observer is to be preferred, as she can often give a more comprehensive picture. Videotaping a meeting and studying it afterwards is even more effective – both because it makes it possible to study the meeting more in depth, and because certain key sequences may be used when giving feedback to the meeting leader or the meeting participants. However, many meeting participants feel uncomfortable with the idea of being observed and the method has to be adapted to what is feasible. Such things that can be observed are (gender differences in), talking time, interrupting each other, positive (different kind of affirmations) and negative (arguments, silences, ridiculing) feedback to other participants, seating arrangements etc. It is common that men and women show different patterns in regard to these aspects, and such observations can be used as a basis for discussion on what this means for the working culture of the group, and how differences that signal differential influence could be changed.

When analysing meetings in detail, it is sometimes easy to be overwhelmed by what can be seen as problematic interactions. However, when giving feedback, it is better to concentrate on very few observations. People cannot be expected to suddenly change complicated patterns of behaviour, but can modify their behaviour in some particular aspects.

Meeting facilitation is an art form – mastery requires *constant practice* and there will never be just one right way to do it. That is why it is important to offer recurrent occasions for training and to discuss the meeting cultures at the institution every now and then.

*People who chair* (lead, facilitate) the meetings are the most important element in the meeting culture, and the first to be trained. Even if all participants

have the responsibility to make meetings inclusive, the main responsibility for what kind of interaction takes place lies with the leader. That is why they also are in the position of being change agents.

However, the leader does not always hold the most power in a meeting. Power relations from outside the meeting room are present even in the meeting, in particular if decisions which will affect (some of) the participants are to be made. While a

meeting leader cannot undo power relations outside the meeting, she may be able to create a space in the meeting where these relations are modified. How-

*So many meetings are held, and nobody has (to my knowledge – at least not me or my nearest co-workers) any formal training in meeting technique. There must be something to be gained there. I am sure we could be better with awareness of the meta-level of meetings. But, please, not a course by a “theorician”, or evangelist of specific “schools of meeting structuring”. Just some basic, no-nonsense and practical ideas. (Comment in survey)*

ever, in the academic setting where the meeting leader often also is part of intricate power relations, creating democratic spaces often requires, not only the knowledge of how to do this, but the courage to do it. A great deal can be done by creating and insisting on certain meeting structures, and choose these so that all participants are encouraged to speak and hold to their views. Another important factor is making sure that all participants have all the relevant information. If they have not received it with the agenda, they need to be informed in other ways, or decisions may have to be postponed until everybody is sufficiently informed.

In particular junior academics who become meeting leaders may need a reminder of the fact that institutional power politics always exist and that they are likely to appear in the meeting room in one form or another. Understanding the institutional power politics sometimes makes comprehensible what seems to be irrational behaviour in the meeting.

A clear *meeting structure for the department* or unit, where the objectives of recurrent

meetings are outlined may help to keep the meetings structured and to the point. An understanding of which meetings are for information, decision making or bringing up and formulating ideas, respectively, can help participants to prepare properly for the meeting. If there is an overview of which meetings happen regularly, and which people take part in them, it is also easier to see whether all meetings are necessary, whether some meetings should be added and how women are represented in the different meetings as chairs and as participants.

### Master suppression techniques in meetings

For addressing gender problems in meetings in particular, we have used the concept of master suppression techniques.<sup>10</sup> They are interactive patterns, which, often unconsciously, are used by a dominating person or group to marginalise others. These techniques are not only active in meeting settings, but in other everyday professional interactions as well. In addition, they do not only appear in relation to gender; but can be used in relation to other people or groups, too. Knowledge of these behavioural patterns helps those who are subjected to them, but they are also useful for anyone who is interested in fostering gender equality in everyday interaction.

The master suppression techniques are:

<sup>10</sup> Ås, Berit (2004). The five master suppression techniques. In B. Evengård (ed.) *Women in White: The European Outlook*. Stockholm: Stokholms läns landsting. 78–83 These techniques are used widely by feminists in Norway and Sweden. Here, we have adapted them to an academic setting.

1. Treating a person as if she/he is invisible  
When a person speaks up or takes her turn in a meeting, others stop listening. Instead, they start leafing through their papers, whisper or talk to each other or interrupt the speaker as if she had not been speaking at all. This technique is very effective because, unless the speaker is aware of it being used, it not only makes her opinions unheard, it also fosters self-doubt. An “invisible person” loses the power of initiative and his/her drive.
2. Ridiculing  
This happens when jokes are told or invented or derogatory language is used about the group a person belongs to, or about the person herself. This is an effective technique, if those who use it can get away with “it’s just a joke” and label the person subjected to this technique as over-sensitive. It harms gender equality, not only because somebody is not listened to, but also because the situation requires those subjected to this technique to join in the laughter and, thus, support and reinforce the belittling behaviour. Many female researchers in science meet this technique – some adapt to it, others find it very disturbing.
3. Objectifying  
In research contexts this happens, for example, when a person who expresses herself as a researcher, based on her scientific merits, is treated according to some stereotypical image of a woman. For example, she is complimented for something that has nothing to do with her scientific merit. Many female researchers can tell about occasions where their male colleagues or superiors seemed to think it more important to comment on their appearance than on their argumentation.
4. Withholding information  
This happens often before the meeting. In addition to the official information sent out (which should be timely and comprehensive), there may be a lot of information that pertains to the object of the meeting and the decisions to be taken, but which is not sent out to all participants. There may be discussions and even decisions taken before the meeting, by a few selected meeting participants, often in informal occasions. The person from whom the information is withheld easily speaks up for “wrong causes”, she appears as not knowledgeable and this may damage her overall standing. If the aim is to demonstrate to those higher up that the person is incompetent, this is a sophisticated technique.

5. Damn you if you do, damn you if you don't
- This is about the impossibility for a person who is not part of the majority (or the “norm”) to be respected and accepted. People bring their expectations of female and male behaviour with them even to the academe, at the same time as the academic meritocracy officially is gender neutral. This gives the possibility to criticize women both if they behave more according a female stereotype (because they do not follow the academic norm) and if they behave like their male colleagues do (because then they do not follow their gender norm). For example, a woman who has an authoritarian and dominating style for chairing meetings, similar to some male professors at her department, will be disliked as the harsh “iron woman”, (in particular if she stands up against some subgroup’s interests). If she, instead, adopts a soft and collaborative chairing style she may be accused of being too soft and weak to lead such important meetings. The same can happen to participants – women who stand up can be seen as dominating, and women who smile and try to mediate can be seen as decorative elements whose opinions do not count.

All these techniques, in addition to making some participants’ opinions silenced, contribute to inflicting guilt and shame in those who are subjected to them. The effects of these techniques do not stay in the meeting room but contribute to the well-being of those who have to face them.

On an organizational level, what can be done is, firstly, to make those who are likely to be subjected to these techniques aware of their existence. A way to counteract the techniques is to name them in the meeting – preferably by someone who is not directly subjected. If that is not possible, knowing what is happening will at least diminish the feelings of shame and blame.

*People don't voice their opinion even though it would be acknowledged. There is a habit of staying quiet. Unfortunately. This gives outputs from meetings that are not likely representative of what people wanted or thought was right. (FESTA partner)*

Making those who are likely to be subjected to the techniques aware of them is more effective than training those who are likely to use these techniques. Again, their usage, while it may be unreflective, is often connected to needs of a (male) group to retain their influence or their (possibly unreflected) ideas of male superiority, and knowing how not to behave is not a guarantee that the behaviour will not appear.

However, in organizational cultures where men and women actually are seen as equal contributors, there is less room for the suppression techniques.

Creating such a culture will certainly also influence what happens in meeting rooms.

### Recommendations in short: Improving meeting culture

- If you are in a leadership position: *Stressing the importance of good meeting cultures and acting as a role model* is a first prerequisite to improving the culture
- When possible, *choose people with an inclusive leadership style to lead meetings*
- *Provide training and feedback for meeting leaders.* Allow for personal styles, as long as they are inclusive of all participants.
- *Discuss meeting cultures at the department/unit.* Stress the responsibility of each participant in contributing to a positive meeting culture and the fact that to be meaningful for participants, most meetings need to take everybody's opinions into account. The FESTA "*Facilitators guide to gender aware meeting practices*" includes a number of suggestions on how to improve meetings.
- *Find out how people at the department/unit view the meetings they participate in,* for example by a survey, by examining meeting attendance, by gathering opinions in group discussions or by asking individuals. Pay attention to possible gender differences.
- *Make meeting observations.* Either by somebody who does not belong to the meeting, or by meeting participants themselves. Make people aware of possible existence of master suppression techniques.
- *Get an overview of what meetings occur at the department/unit.* Map the chairpersons and participants by gender to see if both genders are represented to a reasonable extent.
- Make sure that *documentation before and after meetings* is undertaken: that the participants get agenda and the necessary documents in time and that minutes (even when short and informal) are taken and circulated among the participants.
- Be aware of and, as far as possible, manage the *power plays* expressed in meetings. Stress the legitimacy of meeting leaders who are "weak" (for example due to gender or age).

## 4) PhD supervision

PhD education is a crucial period for young academics, it is their introduction to academic life and their decision to pursue an academic career is made during this critical period. Supervisory relationships are not gender neutral, and gendered interactional patterns can have negative effects on female PhD students' careers. There is a growing body of international evidence which demonstrates that female PhD students within science and technology have more negative experiences of their PhD education than their male peers.

The supervisor – PhD student relationship has been described as a master–apprentice relationship<sup>11</sup>. The relationship is not only about learning, but includes more interpersonal elements. This relationship also supports the traditional academic hierarchy. (This is particularly obvious for those PhD students who have worked outside the academe, maybe in leading positions, before taking on PhD studies, and find themselves figuratively speaking degraded to empty vessels.)

The extent to which the PhD student–supervisor relationship is regulated by institutional policies and practices varies greatly between different European academic cultures. While the apprenticeship model is always the basic idea, the institutional environments offer both support and control to different degrees. In spite of the differences, in many countries there is a growing trend towards perceiving PhD education as an institutional responsibility.

The apprenticeship model has effectively concealed that PhD study is not only about doing a research project and learning certain skills, but that it is a project about enculturation in the academic environment and profession. The apprentice, the PhD student, has not only learnt his skills from the master, the supervisor, but the master has also served as his role model. In addition, the master has prepared for the apprentice's entrance into the guild of

*During a FESTA study circle for PhD supervisors a younger male supervisor launched into a long tirade against gender measures and quotas, questioning the need for gender awareness, as it was all up to the individual to excel. It was merely a matter of wanting to work hard – science is an elite sport, and women are maybe simply not prepared, they are more tuned into taking care of families and they make other choices, He kept interrupting the FESTA facilitator and other participants with a rather aggressive style and rhetoric, referring often to his own wife and family and the sacrifices he had been willing to make for his science etc. One of the other participants managed to turn the discussion into a more reflective dialogue, where all of the people present reflected on where their views originated. This other participant (another young male associate professor) just quietly stated that his experience and view and interest was the opposite of what the first person expressed, and it was this quietly assertive and openly interested and engaging attitude that in the end relaxed the atmosphere considerably. (FESTA partner)*

<sup>11</sup> Vehviläinen, Sanna and Löfström, Erika (2016) 'I wish I had a crystal ball': discourses and potentials for developing academic supervising, *Studies in higher education*, 41 (3) 508–524.

researchers. This traditional model works better in male dominated environments with masculine culture when both the master and the apprentice are male. When this male hegemony is disturbed, it is more likely that problems appear. Today, the traditional model is not only disturbed by more women engaging in PhD studies, but the student body in general is more diverse, with students with different backgrounds. What often worked without reflection in traditional supervisory relationships, now needs to be consciously addressed. That is why more reflexivity on the part of the supervisors and more support for them is necessary – as well as support for the PhD students in addition to the supervisory relationship. In particular, there is often a need to make the invisible functions of the apprenticeship model more explicit, and make sure that all PhD students get the benefits of those. For example, students who cannot “copy” their supervisors need to find other models of being an academic and supervisors may need to think particularly of how to promote female PhD students’ ways into disciplinary networks. For gender sensitive PhD supervision, both supervisors who acknowledge and deal with their own gender bias and institutional support structures for supervisors and PhD students are important. A first step should be adequate supervisor training, which includes dealing with gender and other diversity issues.

The FESTA web tool for gender sensitive PhD supervision ([www.festatool.eu](http://www.festatool.eu)) addresses both PhD supervisors themselves and those who are responsible for the institutional context where these supervisors work. Most recommendations in the tool do not concern female PhD students and supervisors in particular, but deal with good supervision practices in general. That is because building up better support and improving the PhD process in general often is beneficial for female PhD students in particular. The FESTA project is explicitly a gender equality project, but its recommendations for gender sensitive supervision to a large extent also ameliorate the situation of international students, who likewise often suffer from biased views and of not being seen as natural apprentices of their masters.

### **Stereotypes and gender biases**

PhD supervisors are crucial for gender equality in the academe. They foster the new generation. They are not only crucial for retaining female PhDs in the academe, but also for transmitting and building up values, among them those concerning gender equality, that permeate the daily working environment of the female PhD students and will permeate the academe in the future. Thus, even PhD supervisors who only supervise male PhD students need to be equally gender sensitive. Female and male PhD students themselves need to learn about gender biases in the academic environment, and if they cannot

get that education from their supervisors, there should be other occasions, arranged at departmental or institutional level.

In the depth of the minds of many academics there is still an idea that excellent research can only be done by men, and possibly also by some really exceptional women. Depending on the cultural context this idea is more or less possible to express to others, or to be conscious about oneself. However, it influences something that is crucial in PhD supervision: the expectations of the PhD student's abilities, results and future. This is a most fundamental gender bias that supervisors – both men and women – need to be conscious of.

The hidden conception that only men can do science is particularly problematic in PhD supervision also because, in contrast to senior female researchers who at least have proven that they can do research, a female PhD student is young and unproven. While a mediocre male PhD student bears some resemblance to his mediocre supervisor and thus can create affinity, a mediocre female PhD student is more easily seen as a woman trying to do science but not really having the aptitude for that. It is much more rewarding to engage in promising PhD students than in mediocre ones, and promise is more easily seen in male than in female PhD students. While the PhD student is struggling to find ways to adapt to a male dominated environment, the supervisor may see her primarily as a *female* PhD student.

That supervisors are natural role models and sponsors does not exclude two-gender supervisory relationships. Women who have made successful research careers often relate back to their male PhD or post doc supervisors, who have promoted them and given them good support. Learning to live in a male dominated academic science environment means learning to live among male colleagues and one's male supervisor is one of them. Both for combating the perception that men are better researchers than women, and to give female – and male – PhD students a larger variety of identification possibilities, it is important that the academic environment includes both male and female supervisors. It is also important that both male and female researchers get to supervise PhD students early in their careers. Making the supervisory relationship less exclusive by introducing co-supervisors or other more collaborative approaches gives a larger variation of resources for the PhD student to draw on. However, when creating collaborations it is important to make sure that women's role is not seen as “doing the social stuff” while the male supervisors “take care of the science part” – that would only reinforce the image of men being the real scientists.

The question of sexual harassment is relevant in all academic environments and particularly relevant where power differences are great, as in supervisor–PhD student relationships. Far too many female researchers have stories about

sexual harassment in particular during their junior years, and we do not know how many of those women who finish their academic career with a PhD do it at least in part because of sexual harassment. The academic environment with the emphasis on the one-to-one supervisory relationship and the dependence of the PhD student on just one senior person facilitates this phenomenon. Thus, the department or unit needs to have a clear definition of sexual harassment and clear policies – that actually are enforced – if such things happen, and all staff need to be made aware of them.

Gendered stereotypes are not dealt with once and for all. Discussing gender issues, as well as other issues that arise in supervisory relationships, among colleagues is recommendable. In the competitive research environment it may be difficult to realise these kinds of conversations but institutional structures that facilitate them can be built up.

For the foreseeable future there will be a number of PhD supervisors who do not acknowledge that they or their colleagues have any gender biases. While gender awareness training can be made to a requirement for a supervisor position, there is no guarantee that it will change underlying attitudes and the behaviour of a person. These supervisors can, in addition, be quite popular, for example because of their scientific merits and the networks they can offer to their (male) PhD students. However, it is important that the persons who are responsible for the PhD education at the department or unit as a whole are chosen largely on basis of their competence to ensure equal opportunities for all PhD students. They need the institutional legitimacy to enforce structures for the PhD study and the time and competence to interact with and support both supervisors and individual PhD students.

The gendered stereotypes can also influence the supervisory relationship the other way round – the expectations that PhD students put on their supervisors may also vary by gender. Again, a culture, which acknowledges female and male researchers as equally capable is the best way to prevent situations where a male PhD student may feel that his female supervisor cannot give him the same advantages as a male supervisor would, and possibly seeks advice and confirmation from the female supervisor's male colleagues for that reason. While it in general is positive for PhD students to get a wider circle of academic advisors than just the supervisor, it is problematic for the female supervisor's academic self-confidence and her subsequent interest in supervision – and thus advancing her career – if the reason is mistrust in her competence. In addition, it perpetuates the gender order in the academe.

Another side of the coin is the expectation of empathy and engagement that is often placed on female supervisors to a larger extent than on their male colleagues, in particular by female PhD students. Female PhD students are

striving to create themselves an academic identity in a male dominated environment, and a female supervisor may be the only role model available. While many female supervisors live up to this, such expectations can also be quite taxing and make the professional relationship more complicated. Clear institutional processes around PhD study and supervisors' duties and responsibilities and broadening the circle of people positively engaged in single PhD students is a remedy even here, as well as supervisor training that also takes up the issue of limits between private and professional.

### What problems do female PhD students experience?

The problems that female PhD students report in surveys and interview studies are often related to a feeling of marginalization, problems with the supervisory process and problems with stress. All these can have several different causes.

The feeling of marginalization can have its origins in not being part of the informal chatting in the research group or not enjoying the tone in which it is conducted. It can also stem from not being invited to academic activities, such as presenting and discussing in research seminars, writing research applications, taking part in research collaborations with people outside the research group, travelling to conferences as often as male colleagues, being part of a group trying a new experiment etc. This kind of marginalization happens surprisingly often without anybody reflecting on it, unless the female PhD student brings it to notice. This, in turn, does not always happen, as it is a common reaction for a PhD student to see the problem as personal i.e. be unsure of whether it is her personal qualifications or unconscious discrimination that results in marginalization.

Problems with the supervisory process can deal with communication problems ("not talking the same language"), too low or too high expectations, questions of getting acknowledgement for the work done (for example in publications), too little support in different ways, such as inadequate feedback or too few initiatives from the supervisor; etc. Supervisory problems can be connected to the marginalization problem, if the PhD student sees that she is treated differently from her male peers. The problem of dependency is more complicated for a female PhD student also because of the common gender

*While discussing independence, supervisors at one of the study circles pointed out that independence includes a range of skills that have to be trained and developed over time rather than expected from the student from the very beginning. Furthermore, some supervisors had experiences with male students overestimating their own skills and independence. Based on that, supervisors discussed if gender stereotypes might influence students' as well as supervisors' perception of creativity and independence; there might be a gendered view on who is considered to be independent and creative and who is not. (FESTA partner)*

stereotype that women are less independent than men.<sup>12</sup> Her supervisor may regard her as potentially less independent than her male peers and treat her accordingly. At the same time it is even more important for her than for a male PhD student to prove that she is independent, in preparation for future evaluations.

For future evaluations it is important that female PhD's become part of international collaborations, that their seniors introduce them to their colleagues and networks and, most importantly, make them a part of international research collaborations early on, so they have the chance to develop long lasting professional relationships. They need to get introduced to visiting researchers to their own institutions and informal socializing with such visitors should include also PhD students of both genders. They also need to travel to international conferences and, in case it is difficult for them to do a lot of traveling, they may at least initially benefit from advice on which conferences to choose. The purpose of all this is to, from early on, make it a natural part of the research job to engage internationally, and open multiple avenues to realise that part. On the family side, the negotiations about travelling come gradually during the PhD career.

Problems with stress can also have different origins. One is the insecurity – which, in turn, might partly be due to supervision problems and marginalization – about the requirements and whether one's achievement level is sufficient. In such a situation it is more difficult to be relaxed than if one – because of supervisor and peer support, and maybe earlier sponsoring – is more confident about one's abilities. Another reason may be that female PhD students actually seem to often do more invisible work than their male peers: just like women in later stages of their careers there are risks that they get to do more demanding teaching, more petty administrative things and more tasks that have to do with the social environment of the group, unit or department.

To create a sustainable academic life, a person needs to learn to balance work and leisure in a reasonable way. One part of it is learning to focus on the most important things in work. Male PhD students often to a higher degree than females concentrate on their research. This is both due to their discarding other tasks and to them not being asked to do other tasks to the same extent. The “invisible” work that female PhD students do and are expected to do benefits the working environment, and that is why it is convenient for the environment not to see it and count the hours. However, it takes time from their research, and thus, to make things equal, it is important that it is seen and ac-

<sup>12</sup> Ahlqvist, Veronica et al (2015). *A gender neutral process?: A qualitative study of the evaluation of research grant applications 2014*. Stockholm: Swedish Research Council

knowledge and divided among both genders – even when male PhD students and their supervisors may oppose the “extra burden”. (The process can be compared to sharing invisible housework – there is more of that than many husbands have realised, and defining it, so it can be shared, is not always popular.)

It is also during the PhD period that the future academics get an insight in their future working conditions. A number of female PhDs leave the academe because they perceive it as a place where you are supposed to work all the time.<sup>13</sup> If they do their PhD study in an environment where this is actually the case, it is important that this attitude at least is not reinforced by the conditions of the PhD study.

The working conditions of PhD students vary greatly in different European countries. Apart from the PhD thesis, i.e. doing and writing up research in a specific project, which is the core of the work, there are differences in the financing of the studies, length of the studies, amount of coursework required, possibilities or requirements of teaching, status at the workplace, presence at the workplace, amount of supervision to be expected, possibilities for travelling abroad etc. Supportive measures thus have different starting points and no model fits all. However, as asserted above, opening up the supervisory relationship to include an engagement from more individuals and structuring the PhD process so the requirements and the different steps to be taken and different skills to be acquired become more transparent, is something that should be possible to implement in most environments. Such reforms are important even from a gender aspect, as they to some extent spell out what has been invisible in an all-male master–apprentice relation, and may be lost in a relation where the apprentice is not perceived to be or become an approximate copy of the master.

*Interviews with supervisors showed that many of them believe that academic cultures and norms do not align well with other private interests and a family life. Supervisors stressed that senior staff might act as role models for younger academics by supporting students in making priorities and realizing a suitable work-life balance. (FESTA partner)*

<sup>13</sup> Newsome, J. L. (2008). The chemistry PhD: The impact on women's retention. *A report for the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET and the Royal Society of Chemistry*, 1–38; Mason, Mary Ann, Goulden, Marc and Frasci, Karie (2009) Why graduate students reject the fast track. *Academe*, 9 (1) 11–16; Isaac, Carol et al (2014) A qualitative study of work-life choices in academic internal medicine, *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, 19 (1) 29–41.

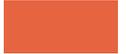
## Recommendations in short: Gender aware PhD supervision

### 1) For the benefit of PhD students

- *Arrange a local induction for the PhD students* and inform about the organization, administrative routines, whom to contact in different issues, local policies surrounding the PhD study, behavioural norms etc.
- *Make sure that both male and female PhD students are aware of the gender policy of the institution.* In particular, inform what is regarded as sexual harassment, and whom to contact when experiencing or witnessing such behaviour.
- *Introduce mentoring.* To have somebody to turn to in addition to one's supervisor is important, in particular in the beginning. Later in the PhD career, a senior researcher who can give advice on how to navigate the academic environment is useful, in particular for female PhD students.

*To support new PhD students at their arrival, one FESTA partner organizes "welcome days" during which a third-year PHD student explains to the newcomers the activities that must be performed during the program.*

- *Arrange or facilitate informal social occasions among the PhD students,* such as group coffee breaks or lunches. Choose activities that do not exclude anyone. In case female PhD students take initiatives to arrange all-female activities, support them.
- *Provide clear information about rules and routines for switching supervisors* addressed to both students and supervisors.
- *Clear policies for parental leave during PhD studies need to be created – and enforced.* Relying on these policies should not be "punished" in any way. Guidelines and policies for interruptions in PhD studies apart from parental leave in connection with childbirth should also be created.
- *Discuss policies for crucial aspects of the academic work of PhD students,* such as authorship in articles, attendance in international conferences etc, to ensure that all PhD students get fair treatment and a reasonable level of benefits.
- *Make sure that teaching duties and administrative tasks are distributed equally among PhD students.* Try to get knowledge of the "invisible work" by discussing with PhD students their whole work situation, what they find stressful, their time management.



2) For the benefit of supervisors

- Provide gender awareness training for supervisors
- *Provide mentoring for new supervisors.* As far as possible choose gender aware mentors.
- *Organize sharing of experiences for PhD supervisors.* Literature based group discussions, where supervisors' own experiences are related to literature is one way. When possible, use gender sensitive literature
- *Pay attention to recruitment* in case the PhD student body is not gender balanced. In particular, encourage female students to apply, and be open to different styles of self-presentation in interviews. See Recruitment and promotion chapter in this report.

## 5) Mentoring and sponsorship

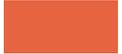
For a number of organizational representatives the suggestion that women would need mentoring and sponsorship more than men is problematic. The main issue is: Women should not need any special measures, because they should advance in the academic system by their own merits. Having special initiatives for women can be regarded as 1) being unfair to men, because it distorts the academic competition as they will not have the same opportunities as the women and 2) being unfair to women, because it makes it seem that they are not good enough by their own merits and so downgrades their academic reputation. To make things straight we need to see that:

Making an academic career is not only about academic ability as such. It is about networks, sponsoring and knowing the implicit rules of the career game<sup>14</sup>. Currently, when still more men than women hold influential positions in the academe and when the homosocial principle (men in working life feel more comfortable with other men than women) is still in operation, these other aspects often come easier to men than to women. Thus, helping women to navigate in the system is not about saying anything about their academic competence. On a general level it is not, either, about giving them advantages in the career competition, as they only receive what men in general receive in informal ways – even if the situation sometimes can be skewed on an individual basis, when some women get a benefit that is denied some men who are not, either, at home with the implicit rules.

Thus, changing the culture and structure of the gender biased academic meritocracy should be the end goal in promoting gender equality in research. While striving towards that final goal, helping women to survive and use their potential is a legitimate activity. The FESTA project has developed nine training modules to empower women and provide them with skills and knowledge with the aim of accelerating their careers: *Description, exercises and planning of 9 training course modules – to enhance your career path*.

The FESTA project has worked in environments of science and technology, and many of these are more or less male dominated. Thus, the text in this section implicitly refers primarily to such environments. For simplicity, representatives of the leadership are denoted with “he” in the text. However, the reader should be aware that the responsibilities of leading people in the institutional environment are the same, regardless of gender.

<sup>14</sup> Sondergaard, Dorte M. (2005) Making sense of gender, age, power and disciplinary position: Intersecting discourses in the academy. *Feminism & Psychology*, 15 (2) 189–208; Morley, Louise (2006) Hidden transcripts: The micropolitics of gender in Commonwealth universities, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29 (6) 543–551.



## Creating an awareness of entitlement

A feeling of entitlement is a basic prerequisite for formulating and achieving career goals. Both research<sup>15</sup> and FESTA results indicate that men behave as if they are more entitled than women to belong to and succeed in the workplace. They take as their due right to be promoted and advanced, whereas women more often feel that they might not really have earned the right to advance, not quite yet.

The concept of entitlement is preferable to talking about women's low self-confidence, which often has been blamed for women's more careful negotiation patterns and relative reticence in elbowing themselves along a career track. The concept of entitlement is aimed to indicate that the issue is not about a general psychological characteristic, but an attitude towards a certain context and certain issue. A feeling of entitlement can be achieved and the FESTA training modules encourage young researchers to affirm their entitlement and to enhance it with rational thinking: Why should they not feel as entitled as anybody else? One reason might be that in many European countries it is an unusual choice for a woman to be a researcher in science and technology, and many women in their social life outside and sometimes even inside the university recurrently meet people who, even when admiring their choice, seem to think it odd. Meeting with this kind of reactions, even if subtly, is bound to influence one's feeling of entitlement for a career.

*Women waste their time doing the right thing. And I would say doing the right thing. They are more committed lecturers; they are more committed to the peripherals than the men, looking after the students, being more diligent with lecture preparation and commitments to the communities. And all those other areas which give them no brownie points, when it comes to promotion. Not quantifiable.*

The feeling of entitlement can be disturbed or cultivated by the organizational context. In contexts where some individuals are not "seen" the same way as others or are marginalised, the feeling of entitlement is hard to achieve and keep up. Conversely, where the environment notices and notifies others about the achievements of an individual, the feeling of entitlement is easier to acquire.

Having clear policies of what entitles to what – for example, what is required to achieve promotion – provides a measuring rod for an individual and makes it easier to see when she has reached a milestone. This should preferably be combined with encouragement for those individuals who have reached a target, to apply for or negotiate about the appropriate recognition as soon as pos-

<sup>15</sup> Roos, Patricia, A and Gatta, Mary L. (2009) Gender (in)equity in the academy: Subtle mechanisms and the production of inequality. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 27: 177–200.

sible. While not reaching a desired recognition may cause irritation and anger for a (male) researcher with a strong sense of entitlement, the same situation may discourage a (female) researcher with a weak sense of entitlement from making new efforts in the near future. Thus, in addition to supporting a feeling of entitlement by encouragement, it is also beneficial to create an organizational culture where failures are seen as belonging to the normal course of the day.

The different degrees to which men and women, in general, feel that they are entitled to devote themselves to their research are, naturally, influenced by the societal and personal expectations for women to engage in their families. However, there are also indicators internal to the academe which show that women to a higher degree give preference to the expectations of others: women are more often expected to be approachable by their students, and they may agree on doing petty administrative tasks and service functions at the department.<sup>16</sup> Regarding “my research” as more important than demands and expectations that other people come with is often necessary for success. The organization can facilitate this concentration on research. When it comes to expectations from students, general guidelines of which level of engagement is expected from the teachers can be discussed. When it comes to administrative and service tasks, it is important to regularly make an overview of how they are distributed at the department or unit.

An awareness of entitlement also plays in when people negotiate. When supporting junior female researchers it is important to be aware that still today men and women, as groups, have partly different negotiation styles. However, it is quite as important to be aware that the woman’s counterpart is likely to, unreflectedly, expect a different behaviour from a woman and to offer different deals to her from what he would offer a man in the same situation. One of the FESTA training modules is designed to help female researchers to acquire good negotiation skills. But a woman who has learnt to negotiate “just like a man” will not necessarily reach the same success as a man, if her counterpart expects her to conform to an implicit female norm, and is taken aback by her way of approaching the issue.

In any negotiation, it is reasonable to be prepared for a woman maybe not negotiating deals in exactly the same way as many men do. If the task of the representative of the organization is to get a deal that is as good as possible from the organizational point of view, he might need to think of both the long term and short term effects. If he believes that gender equality and equal op-

<sup>16</sup> Valian, Virginia (2005) Beyond Gender Schemas: Improving the Advancement of Women in Academia. *Hypatia* 20 (3) 198–213; Carvalho, T and Santiago, R. (2010) New challenges for women seeking an academic career: the hiring process in Portuguese HEIs. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32(3), 239–249.

portunity are good for the organization, he should make sure that the results of negotiations contribute to that.

### **Organizational support for enhancing scientific merits of young researchers**

The basic requisite for making an academic career is doing good research. Normally this is proved by publications, preferably widely cited ones. For a young researcher it can make a world of difference to be part of a research environment where her contributions are duly recognized and encouraged, compared to being part of a research environment where a senior researcher or senior researchers are the hub determining the research activities and publication patterns of the group.

However, not only publications count. A young researcher needs to do the right amount of teaching – enough to prove herself as a teacher, but not too much, so it takes too much time from her research. Thus, the way teaching duties are distributed can be crucial for a young researcher's research results – not only in regard to how much individuals teach, but also how “heavy” the courses are that they teach. Young researchers of both sexes also need to have an equal possibility to supervise PhD students and teach on courses at advanced level.

Fulfilling administrative duties is also important for an academic career. Again, a young female researcher needs to do the right amount and right kind of such duties. It is important for her to be put forward when candidates are sought for to fill different administrative positions, but it is also important that she is put forward for positions which really matter career-wise, and not only to be the token woman and possibly even doing a lot of work in less important administrative positions.

Being seen as an independent researcher is extremely important. This seems to be easier for male than for female junior researchers – when it comes to female researchers, proof is required, while male researchers more often can be seen as being in a process of becoming independent<sup>17</sup>. Thus, it is important that in particular young female researchers have the chance to prove their independence.

The importance of being international is often more difficult for a young female researcher than for a male one, in particular if being international only means doing a post doc abroad.<sup>18</sup> A post doc is often done in a phase of

<sup>17</sup> Ahlqvist, Veronica (2015). *A gender neutral process?: a qualitative study of the evaluation of research grant applications 2014*. Stockholm: Swedish Research Council

<sup>18</sup> European Commission (2004) *Gender and excellence in the making*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

life where the question of having children is actualised. In several European countries, it may be possible for a male PhD to take his wife and child along to another country and have a stay-at-home mom for a couple of years. For a female PhD it may be much more difficult to convince her husband to be a stay-at-home dad in a foreign country, while she is working on her post doc research. Thus, women often face a very different choice between career and family than their male peers do.

Finding creative solutions to becoming international is about finding ways to compensate for the fact that an individual may not be able to move abroad for an extended period of time. Different models have been tried in some European contexts: “sandwich” post docs, with a number of shorter stays at the target institution, finding target institutions within easy commuting distance, having enhanced international engagement at one’s home institution, collaborating intensively in international research collaborations etc. Support and mentoring from the part of the home institution will help in finding and realising this kind of options. Also, when evaluating somebody for appointment or promotion, different forms of internationalisation should be valued according to how they enhance the research competence of the applicant, rather than according to a traditional perception of a two-year stay abroad always being the optimal solution.

Still another important facet of making an academic career is getting grants. Because of male homosociality, male PhD students more naturally get involved into grant writing processes with their supervisors and in this way get more insight in the tricks of the trade. Thus, it is important that all young researchers get training in grant writing, both by being included not only as names in the applications of their supervisors, but also in the actual writing of them, and by getting collegial feedback and advice on their first own efforts on the area. It may also be particularly important for young female researchers to get encouragement to write applications, to aim high and to come again after rejections.

The FESTA training module on networking and visibility stresses the importance for junior researchers to strive to belong to international networks and networks where they collaborate with senior researchers. Junior researchers should be known by colleagues on an international arena and be able to foster their academic skills by interacting with senior researchers who already have those skills.

What the institution can do is, firstly, to stress the importance of networking. For a junior female academic, who struggles with her passion for research, her passion for good teaching and her duties in private life, taking time to participate in organized networks, to travel to conferences or to socialise with junior and senior colleagues and guests may get quite low in the priorities list. In

those cases people in her environment may need to point out the rules of the academic game: Networking is not only crucial for creating a good career, but a necessity for being able to do research in the first place, as it, in the long run, influences one's possibilities of publishing and getting and being part of research grants. The understanding that conferences are not only for presenting your work but for creating relationships sometimes needs to be clearly communicated. Also, a junior researcher may need encouragement to contact a well-renowned senior herself, and to discover that even well-renowned people are approachable – and that even if they are busy, they in turn may have contacts who can become valuable parts of one's networks.

To facilitate young researchers' networking, senior researchers should be encouraged to reflect on in which ways they introduce junior researchers of both genders into their networks. They should also be aware that creating contacts in conferences, meetings and workshops may be problematic for a young female researcher, in particular if the area is male dominated. It is not unusual for a young female researcher to be taken for an assistant or a secretary, and that is hardly a good starting point for building research contacts. Thus, it is important in particular for male senior researchers to be aware of their responsibility of introducing both junior women and junior men in their networks, and to counteract any implicit assumptions that female researchers are less qualified, by introducing and treating them as equally valued colleagues.

### **Supporting female researchers' careers in the institution**

The extent to which young researchers have access to trainings related to their careers varies greatly between institutions. Improving the selection of such trainings, partly for all junior researchers and partly for junior female researchers will aid the institution to foster the next generation of leaders and excellent researchers.

Female networks cannot be created, but they can be promoted. The first thing departmental or institutional leadership can do is to acknowledge their right to exist and their importance – it is quite common that the need for their existence is questioned by male colleagues. It requires a firm standing from the leadership, as well as good knowledge of their own and of general patterns of male networking and homosociality to counter arguments about women's "ghettoising" as soon as their networks take on obvious professional support. Secondly, women's networks can be promoted by funds – for meeting costs, for guests, for socialising and study trips.

To encourage female talent, in particular all-women leadership trainings have often been recognised by participants as important for several reasons: they are a sign of commitment to advance women's leadership from the part

of the institution, they give the participants valuable leadership skills and, by being one gender only, give them a freedom to discuss gendered patterns and

*One of the first things that was done for me when I got this position is I was given a mentor and it's my mentor that kind of said to me you know, you have to be abrasive, you have to, if you want something done you have to ask people. You can't sit in your office and hope somebody knocks at your door and that has made a massive difference. (Female researcher)*

how to manage them in a safe environment. In addition, they often form bases of networks, which can be important once the participants have advanced in their careers.

One of the FESTA training modules stresses the importance of a mentor for a young researcher. The institution can help the individual in this process by functioning as an intermediate, for example by finding

suitable mentors. Organizing mentoring programs, where both the mentors and the mentees are brought together for common activities have the additional benefit of building networks. Whether these mentoring relationships should be gender mixed or female varies according to the organizational context and the wishes of the mentees. However, a male-female relation has some advantages: by mentoring a female junior researcher many a senior male researcher has reached new insights in the conditions of women in the academe.

### Family and career

There is no coming around it: in most European countries, children are regarded as women's responsibility. There are countries where men often take a fair share of everyday childcare, in some other countries there are discussions that men should be and are becoming more involved, and still others where women's responsibility for childcare is mostly not even questioned. The FESTA project has worked in a number of different cultures and seen how the demands put on women researchers, and their responses to those demands, vary.

*Half of the women who start in computer engineering are not motivated enough to take on this demanding job, and many believe that they would have to give up their families if they remained in science and engineering. True, society makes it difficult to do research and take care of a family at the same time... That is difficult, but it is not impossible. However, when offered the opportunity to leave research and do something else, women are usually more likely to accept than men.*

The FESTA career advice recommends making sure that one's family relationships

are not substituted by work, by planning for both family and career. For some periods, family clearly needs to take preference. How long and how foreseeable those periods are, depends on the individual situation of the researcher, as well as the societal expectations of parenthood.

Something that female researchers mention as being problematic are the common expectations that children in general will influence their career neg-

actively. There are environments, where the implicit expectation is that once women have children their brains will somehow change and become less adapted to research. However, having a family can be supportive, both in mental and in practical terms. A young researcher who can work fewer hours can be much more effective during those hours than one who can spend unlimited hours in the office. The actual period of time children demand that a parent stays at home is very short in a research career perspective. Thus, female researchers would be well served by being evaluated by their merits, once the actual time children require for them to be away from work and the time it takes to catch up after a longer absence, is accounted for, without stereotyping potential effects of children on their research careers.

To facilitate the combination of work and family, of course, childcare is a primary issue. However, many other measures can be arranged also. And, most importantly, the culture should allow the staff to use those measures that are there: It does not help if there are measures facilitating work-life balance (working from home, leave policies for caring for sick children, part time work by reduction of teaching load, work hours policy including having meetings only during office hours, facilitation to keep in contact with workplace during parental leave, permissive attitude for bringing babies to work etc) if using the measures put you into a disadvantageous position in the eyes of your colleagues. A most important cultural feature that can be put forward by the institutional leadership is to implement the opinion that male researchers are fathers just as female researchers are mothers – that is, whenever referring to parenting or parenting policies, not mention women in particular. If male researchers are encouraged to use the policies available, they will be easier to use for the female researchers also.

### **Recommendations: Organizational support for women's careers**

- Organize *career training*.
- Set up a *mentoring program* for female researchers
- Encourage *female networks* if they are initiated by women themselves
- Organize *leadership courses* for women in early mid-career
- Have clear and *clearly communicated policies for what is required* for different positions and benefits
- *Regularly review how different administrative tasks, both simple and highly valued, are distributed in the environment.* Make adjustments in case of gender imbalance.
- *Regularly review how teaching is distributed in the environment* – number of courses, number of students, level of courses, proximity to own research area. Make adjustments in case of gender imbalance.

- Regularly review how research support – research assistance, lab time, equipment, administrative assistance etc – is distributed in the environment. Make adjustments in case of gender imbalance.
- Make senior researchers aware of their responsibility to introduce junior researchers of both genders in their networks
- Make sure that female researchers, already during their PhD studies and then continually, are confronted with *international contacts* in travelling to conferences, meeting visitors, getting engaged in international research collaboration setc – on terms that are acceptable for them.
- Investigate *different ways of being international and mobile*, and when appointing, evaluate positively individuals who engage internationally in a different manner than the ordinary post doc appointment.
- Encourage the use of any measures that are in place to facilitate *the combination of work and family*. Do this also in regard to male researchers with children.

## 6) Appointment and promotion processes

The FESTA teams that set out for creating gender equal appointment and promotion processes soon discovered that these processes cannot actually be separated from other organizational processes. They also found that each institution has its own local logic when considering what constitutes excellence in candidates for positions and promotions.

While communication and teamwork can be important in one context, management and teaching skills are promoted in another, and an ability to work long hours may also be a more or less implicit requirement. Neither is gender the only personal characteristic that can be of interest in evaluations:

*"The criteria are equally achievable for both – male and female candidates. Yes, here I have never made a difference between men and women. ... I almost put equality between men and women scientist only with the exception of the fact that a woman has always more family duties." (Female researcher)*

sometimes the age of the applicant is put weight on, while other aspects of the background – such as class – may play in at other instances. In regard to all this, the FESTA teams found that evaluators often select 'safe' candidates, those who possess qualities familiar to the evaluator. Gender may be one of these qualities. They also found a "care ceiling" in operation in their institutions. This care ceiling puts a clear and definite limit to the levels people with care responsibilities can aspire to reach in universities. Their findings can be found in the FESTA report *"Report on perceptions of excellence in hiring processes, its comparison between participating partners and a conception of a gender awareness workshop for members of selection committees at the partner institutions."* They also echo a large number of research projects with similar findings, across Europe as well as the USA<sup>19</sup>.

Appointment processes are crucial for creating numerical gender balance in the organization: if a department or unit recurrently decides that areas where there are few women are more important than areas where more women can be found, the task of creating a gender balanced workforce becomes much more difficult. When recruiting staff in a research area where women are scarce, they need to be found if the male dominance is to be changed. They may be there, they may be well qualified, but may not belong to the same networks as members of a male dominated appointment committee. In search

<sup>19</sup> See for example: Lamont, Michèle (2009). *How professors think: inside the curious world of academic judgment*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; Rees, Teresa (2011): *The Gendered Construction of Scientific Excellence. Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, Vol. 36, No.2, pp. 133–45; Van den Brink, Marieke, Brouns, Margo and Waslander, Sietske (2006): *Does excellence have a gender? A national research study on recruitment and selection procedures for professorial appointments in The Netherlands: Employee Relations*, 28 (6) 523–539.

for female candidates one may need to leave one's comfort zone. And in the end of the process, after the job has been offered to a candidate, the negotiations about working conditions, in particular salary issues, can have unequal outcomes for women and men. Thus, appointment processes start when an institution or unit decides which research areas will be promoted or which competence needs have priority, and they do not end until new researchers are in place and have found their places in the local scientific community. What gender pitfalls can be found at different stages of the process is described in the FESTA report "*Gender Issues in Recruitment, Appointment and Promotion Processes – Recommendations for a Gender Sensitive Application of Excellence Criteria*".

Promoting gender equality in appointments is a difficult issue to work with. To start with, it is easily seen as messing with meritocracy, which is a basic value in the academe. Appointment processes are the core in which meritocracy needs to be upheld. Unless those academics responsible for appointments and promotions become aware that the academic meritocracy is not objective, not much will be won by different obligatory measures. For the second, appointment processes make obvious the fact that gender equality is not always a win-win game: normally, when there is a woman who gets a position, there is also a man who would have got it, if she had not been part of the game. The fact that men lose can be hard to accept in a homosocial context. To affect change, both structural and cultural means need to be employed. Structural means, such as gender balanced committees, requirements of finding female applicants, gender balanced criteria, gender watchdogs etc can be neglected and counteracted, if there does not exist a cultural awareness of the existence of a possible cultural bias and the importance of creating a gender equal playfield – whether it be for reasons of general justice, or because the institution emphasises its need for female talent.

If that cultural awareness does not exist, measures that have been taken to compensate for the implicit biases in recruitment processes do not always have the intended effects, and may sometimes even be counter-productive. A requirement to always "have a woman on the list" – the necessity to have at least one woman applicant, or one woman in the shortlist for interviews or at some other stage of the recruitment process – keeps the gender question on the agenda, and lifts up the fact that there are merited women, but it is easily seen as biasing academic meritocracy and raises reactions if including a woman means excluding a man from the list.

Previous research has concentrated on the evaluation of male and female candidates and the gender biases that are inherent there. The FESTA teams also discovered these kinds of biases. If women are disadvantaged in appoint-

ment and promotion processes, if affects gender equality at several levels: institutional (fewer women make it into the institution), departmental and research group (less diversity and male domination influences the working environment) and individual (a woman's career advancement).

### Gender bias in evaluation of merits for appointment and promotion

Evaluating academic excellence is not only a counting exercise: counting the number of different publications and other recorded contributions to the candidate's research field. However, it is normally a more or less important part of the evaluation. While the counting itself should be a gender neutral process, it is not always so: some of women's merits may be "forgotten". More importantly, it is often difficult to know how different evaluators do the counting. Is the number of publications set in relation to the timeframe they have been produced in, and does that timeframe account, for example, for parental leave?

*In my view, there is neither precisely defined term nor scientifically grounded answer to what 'excellent research achievement' means. That's why I think that, at this stage, the evaluation board decides on the excellence of one or another research outcome.  
(Evaluation committee member, female.)*

The importance and not only the number of different publications needs to be evaluated, and this allows a lot more space for gender bias. How do different evaluators value joint publications? There are disciplinary differences in how the merit value of single authored and joint publications are viewed and how the order of contributors is to be interpreted – but there are also individual differences. The same applies to books, conference presentations, journal articles as such, and journal rankings. How important is the number of citations in relation to the number of different publications?

The possibility and necessity of individual judgements implies that if a male candidate is seen as "naturally" superior, because of implicit gender bias, his scientific contributions can also be rated as being more important. I.e. it may not be the scientific production that decides the candidate's scientific standing, but the assumed scientific standing of the candidate that decides the value of his publications.

One way of weighing some publications as inferior to others is by saying that these are outside the exact research area stated in the job announcement. This argument can seldom be defied, as the people who do the evaluation, in particular peer reviewers, where such are engaged, often are part of the process exactly because of their knowledge of the research area.

A gender biased criterion is one which men find easier to fulfil, or which generally is associated to one gender. Often it is the explicit or (more often) implicit specification of a criterion, rather than the criterion itself that may be

problematic. One example is a requirement of international mobility. It can be equalled to mean a long period of stay abroad, which is often more difficult for women to attain, or to be fulfilled with different kinds of visits and collaborations. If there is a bias, the specification of criteria should be reconsidered or the criteria should be assigned less weight.

For lectureships, teaching skills may be a requirement, or might be made a requirement, in addition to scientific production. For professorships, leadership

skills are often an additional requirement. While there are traditional guidelines for evaluating scientific merit (publications), even if these evaluations can be gender biased, the situation is even more problematic when it comes to evaluating skills on areas where the academe does not have previous guidelines. Leadership can be executed in many ways, and even if every individual evaluator may have their image of a good leader, there is a risk that presenting

oneself as divergent from traditional academic leadership disadvantages a candidate. Also, when it comes to teaching skills, where these requirements do exist, they might be conceived as giving women a better chance – if women teach more and put more effort in their teaching. However, teaching skills are, for the first, difficult to evaluate, as the academe does not have a standard way of doing this. In addition to quantity of teaching duties, in some cases a trial

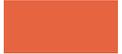
lecture is employed, but it is problematic as an indicator of something which is such a multi-faceted task as university teaching. For the second, expectations of female and male teachers vary, and we know that similar teaching performances made by women and men are evaluated differently by students – and possibly evaluation committee members. Knowing that women's and men's behaviour in general is interpreted differently makes the impression a candidate

makes in an interview a risky evaluation criterion, if the interviewers are not alerted to their possible gender biases.

Hence, when it comes to evaluating other skills and capacities than scientific publications, there also need to be clear criteria, and an awareness of a possible gender biases when implementing them.

*For example when I attend conferences and see successful researchers, who are then also called to other conferences, those are not necessarily the best scientists, but they are the ones who have great communication skills. Usually it is those people who get called to lead a group. In the last committees and selection interviews I realized that the questions were less technical but more aimed at understanding how you are as a person. (Male researcher)*

*Men and women struggle with the same difficulties in their career advancement. The fact that men often ignore part or all of their household duties provides them with more spare time, while a woman usually cannot do that. She tries to compensate – at home, as well as at work, making so many compromises. It is not fair but I don't think it's reasonable to suggest additional criteria favouring women in promotion procedures.*



When employing a person, not only her past merits but also her possibilities to contribute to the working environment in a fruitful way, play a role in the evaluation. Whether it is expressed directly (not so common), or is just subtly influencing the frames of thought of the evaluators, the fact that women are expected to take the main responsibility for raising children may give them an extra minus when different applicants' Pros and Cons are considered for the final decision.

### **Recommendations: Gender equal appointment and promotion processes**

- To attract female scientists, you need to systematically *focus on that goal*. Just waiting that they will appear and reacting with a disappointed shrug when they do not is not enough
- A *well-defined recruitment process* is important. To be able to do systematic recruitment work, different steps in the process need to be monitored. If the process is clear, its deficiencies are easier to find and address
- Pay attention to the *wording of job advertisements*. Language can be stereotyped, even when it looks neutral when read hastily through. Research shows that we are influenced by subtle messages even when we are not conscious of them.
- *Female scientists should be contacted and encouraged to apply*. They can be approached personally, via different mailing lists, or via other networks. All possible venues should be discovered and used. In addition to reaching more women in this way, they will also be reached with the message that the institution really makes efforts to improve the gender balance, i.e. it is supposedly a women-friendly institution.
- *The criteria* against which the candidates will be measured have to be explicit, transparent and formalized for the entire process, and communicated to the candidates in the job advertisement. Enhanced gender awareness and a reflective process helps to avoid gender biases. Training in defining criteria in an unbiased way, and watchdogs who make sure that biased criteria do not enter the process improve gender equality.
- *Briefings on gender inequality for appointment commission members* and other people taking part in the process are often needed to raise awareness
- A *diverse selection committee* includes different views towards the candidates. This fosters a less biased selection procedure. A selection committee should have a numerical gender balance. It is also important that

there is a gender balance in terms of seniority: the committee is not balanced if all women are junior and all men are senior. The committee members should be receptive to discussing their own biases.

- The *meeting culture* needs to be such that it allows for open discussions and involvement of every participant, to minimize the misuse of communicative power. In particular, the leader, but even the members, need to be aware of interactional patterns that restrict participation. Training or at least discussions may be needed.
- It is important that only the criteria agreed upon have an impact on the decision and are applied equally to every candidate. Starting from the situation in many appointment and promotion committees today, this requires *much more discipline in what is discussed* in the meetings.



# PART THREE: Insights and experiences for the hands-on gender equality worker

## Introduction: Strategies

The following pages contain a collection of the experiences of the FESTA people who have worked to bring in gender equality in their research institutions in different European countries. We want to share them with other people working in the same field and, in particular, with you who might be newcomers to this field of work. We are people with different backgrounds, we are different personalities and we work in very different national and institutional contexts. Some of us started the project in environments where gender equality work was an established activity, others have worked in environments where gender and gender equality have been far out in the margins of the institutional interest. Thus, we have encountered very different situations and we have handled them in different ways. We have been happy to have the support of each other in this work – being more than one person in our local contexts, and having the FESTA community to talk to.

When we write this letter we are thinking of each other, of what we have learnt during our project and what we would like to share with you, especially if you were a newcomer among us. We know that we all are a part of something very important. In the first place it is about equal opportunities for all men and women who do research, but we believe that in the long run this will result in changing research and changing the benefits that society gains from research.

The path from here to there is not straight and easy, though. In the following, we will recount a number of problems we have encountered. Therefore, sometimes the text may feel disheartening. But that's the way it is. Gender equality work is not like any change work you may do in academic organizations. Gender equality work is about extending privileges, including resources, to new groups. Those who have seen themselves – or the younger versions of themselves – as obvious recipients of institutional favours have something to lose. Gender equality disturbs some very fundamental power structures in the academe – not only between women and men, but also between different groups and categories of men. Effective gender equality work shakes the whole academic building. It's a bit scary but fascinating to be one of the catalysts for that process.

## What does the FESTA point of departure mean in practice?

In the FESTA project our basic assumption and our experience is that our institutions need to change. Trying to change women's characteristics and behaviours does not bring about gender equality. However, this does not mean that we should not have any activities directed to female researchers. It will take time to change an organization, and during this time women have to live in it, make their careers in it and preferably get into positions where they can influence it. So, for example, mentoring programs, leadership courses, female networks can be part of the environment parallel to the organizational change. When to organize these for women only, and when to include even men is a matter of consideration in the local organizational context. (Can an activity for women be arranged without hostility from the part of men – and how serious is that hostility? Involving men may open up their eyes for the gender equality problems – or it may not. Etc.) Normally, any valuable women-only activity needs to be motivated by showing that women are at a disadvantage in the organizational context. Measures for work-family balance are often conceived as measures for women only, but they can be motivated by saying that they make life easier for all employees with children.

A most important thing to keep in mind is that when we talk about the exclusion of women from benefits, resources and decision making, we are simultaneously talking about the inclusion of men in the same. However, in practical terms, trying to prove for men that they have special benefits and are included in the way women are not often raises resistance. Keeping gender equality a women's issue keeps it also farther away from threatening those privileges. Gender equality workers need to balance between what they see are the roots of the problem and what they think is doable to attack the problem, (and, in the long run, preferably also its roots).

The phrase "gender differences" sometimes causes problems and is to be used very sparsely. It indicates that women are different from men, which easily leads to women being regarded as "the other", whose different physical and psychological set-up requires an adaptation from the part of the organization. Scientifically we do not know very much about such gender differences that would be relevant when it comes to making an academic career. We know that women give birth to babies, and in most cultures even breastfeed them, but very few other differences have been scientifically proved. (How differences that appear to be scientifically proved actually are not is eloquently explained by Cordelia Fine in her scientific writing<sup>20</sup> and a number of Youtube lectures.)

<sup>20</sup> Fine, Cordelia (2010) From Scanner to Sound Bite: Issues in Interpreting and Reporting Sex Differences in the Brain. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 19 (5) 280–283

The concept of gender differences is also blurred in a beneficial way if we assume that gender is something that is “done”. That is, in particular in science and technology, many women have learnt to “do” male gender; to more or less behave like men. Thus, the differences at a certain unit or department may not be between women and men as such, but between women and men who do male gender – in many scientific environments this means being competitive and extremely career oriented, as well as playing the power game with some skill – and women who have chosen – consciously or unconsciously, for one reason or another – to take on a behavioral pattern that is seen as more “female” in the local context. In such a unit gender differences between different women can be large. Also, not all men “do” the masculinity of a traditional researcher; and may find themselves also at disadvantage, and this choice can also be conscious or unconscious. However, because of societal expectations, in many countries it is far more difficult for men to reconcile themselves with the idea of not succeeding in their research career.<sup>21</sup>

*Well, if we talk about women in Science, I am of the opinion that women should stop feeling sorry for themselves and fight back. I think most of the barriers lies within ourselves. (Female scientist)*

So, instead of simply talking about gender differences, a variety of ways to do gender would be a more proper concept. However, in the practical work, when talking to institutional actors, especially to those for whom the whole idea of gender equality is relatively foreign, the concept of gender is often understood as meaning women and men, whatever you say. Also, collecting statistics and other information and creating overall policies normally have to relate to well-defined groups, such as women and men, even if this, strictly taken, does not talk to the needs of all women or men.

As we have to use gender as a shorthand for women and men, in FESTA we have tried to bring forward the idea of the interesting differences being in how the organization treats its female and male employees (and how they treat each other), and how this, in extension, contributes to different behavioral patterns. If you never get encouragement at your workplace, your performance may deteriorate. If you have no access to the networks where decisions are made and no understanding of how privileges are distributed, you may accept a subordinate position. If your colleagues think that you are the one who is good at organizing social stuff and listening to their troubles, you may well take that role, even if it impacts on your time with your research negatively, etc. Of course, for institutional actors this is far more uncomfortable than thinking of

<sup>21</sup> O'Connor Pat, O'Hagan Clare and Brannen Julia (2016) Exploration of masculinities in academic organisations: A tentative typology using career and relationship commitment. *Current Sociology*, 63 (4) 528–546.

women as a group that is in need of support, as it puts the spotlight on everybody's behavior.

A dilemma confronted by many of us is that by doing gender equality work, by bringing about awareness of the differences in the situation of women and men in the organization, we also reproduce these differences. Even if you are careful to point out that what emerges as differences between women and men often have their roots in the different experiences of women and men, also in the organization, rather than any inherent differences in their psychological set-ups, you will still be talking about two groups as if there were no overlaps and as if their experiences were totally different – which is seldom the case. If your ultimate aim is that it should not matter at all whether you are a man or a woman in the organization, you can be criticized for starting by emphasizing the differences. This is also an act of balancing: As long as there are inequalities between the large groups, which we define as men and women we need to be able to show them, to be able to work on them. At the same time we need to be aware of all the variation in and between the groups and not talk about them as self-evident entities. It is tricky and we have found no simple solution.

### **Something to think about at the start**

Being an expert in organizational change processes certainly helps when doing gender equality work. It is good to know about the normal ways to handle suspicion, sell in changes, handle anxiety when facing the unknown, persuade, reward etc. But we doubt that it is enough. Most change implementation literature is written for managers who want to introduce changes in their organizations – and in non-academic organizations at that. Gender equality changes are only occasionally something that academic leaders feel very strongly about. It is more common that gender equality is worked with because it is perceived as a common good, something that an organization should work with, a requirement from the outside and possibly leading to some undefined benefits from the organizational point of view. Where academic leaders really are engaged in gender equality, changes do happen – even if some leaders, too, have been surprised at how tricky it is to work with gender equality compared to many other organizational matters. However, it is more common that gender equality changes have to be sold in from a middle ground, more or less sanctioned by the leadership.

The Gender Action Plans of every single institution have not been the prominent feature of the FESTA project. Each institution has one, with the problem to be addressed, the ways to address it, the expected results and sustainability. However, we have seldom talked about them. And that may mirror our gen-

eral attitude to gender action plans: Of course there needs to be a plan, giving the work a structure, telling which problems should be addressed and how and who is responsible, and how success is to be evaluated. A plan accepted by the institutional leadership gives stability and legitimacy to the work. However, we also think that not everything can be planned. Gender equality work may meet resistance and have to be creative in finding new paths to the goal. And gender equality work also needs to seize opportunities that arise, even if they are not in a plan. Gender equality plans are not transferable, but have to be anchored in the institutional context and also in a national cultural context. Not all actions are possible or reasonable to do in all institutions or countries – something that we have become acutely aware of, when trying to implement same FESTA actions in different countries. So, how much and what the gender action plan should contain, who should sign it and who is to be responsible for its execution, how it can be made a living document, and how it should be renewed so that it can give stability to gender equality work over a number of years, are all questions with no self-evident answers.

## **Mobilizing the good forces in the organization**

This section comes with a positive note. Doing gender equality work is not only about confronting inertia or open resistance. Most likely there is also support in the organization. Sometimes it is easily found, sometimes you will have to look for it. There are people who support your work right from the beginning, there are others who might be positive but hesitant at the start, and still others who may be converted during the project. Many institutional actors actually do think gender equality is something to be promoted, but may feel that they do not know enough about the issue and about what to do. If you come with solutions that are doable for them, they may be very grateful and you can have a great collaboration. (Though sometimes what you think should be perfectly doable for them, is not so at all from their perspective – so it is important to be responsive.) The people who support you and may stick their necks out for the first time in openly supporting gender equality measures may also need your support. Some of them may not be as well prepared as you are to be confronted by hostility and resistance.

Doing gender equality work is a good way to learn to know an organization. And it is crucial to know as much as possible about the organization to be able to do gender equality work. Universities and research institutions are normally complex organizations, where different units and even individuals have a lot of independence – and cherish this independence. This means that even if your work is sanctioned from high up in the organization, you still need to win over people at different levels. You need to know both the formal and informal hier-

archies – both who has the formal power in a certain unit and department, and which people are looked up to, for different reasons. FESTA has been a five year project, and we know a lot more about the people and informal power relations in our institutions now than when we started, but even after these years we learn new things. This is also because informal relations shift – people change formal positions and gain or lose in reputation.

If you are new to the organization, you might, by and by, get bits and pieces of the history of its gender equality work. At which point of time do you come in – are you part of a new movement, are you supposed to revive something that once was there, are you coming into a smooth ongoing operation, or is gender equality work in a state of crisis? Is there any documentation from before? (You should make sure that your work results in solid documentation.) It is not only good for you to know, but talking to people about history helps to know them and their attitudes towards gender equality work.

Also your own position in the organization matters, as well as your background. Coming from a peripheral part of the organization (such as an HR unit or a sub-unit at a peripheral department) and having a background that is not respected in the organization (academic credentials normally add to legitimacy) makes your position very different when negotiating at different levels of the organization compared to being a professor with a direct contact to the highest organizational level. It is possible to compensate for a weak position by being strategic and by good social skills, but the outset is very different. Gender equality work is largely networking, as it is networking that may get you into contact with people who are eager to know more, who are eager to help you, who think this is important.

Whether what you do is called gender mainstreaming or not, our experience is that to reach people in the organization, gender issues should as far as possible be included in different activities, rather than being a separate track. That is why you need to know what is going on in the organization. In particular, when things change there might be an opportunity. Are there other organizational projects going on? Are there new trainings that gender could be part of? Are there new people in important positions – not only academic but also administrative? Maybe one of them is really interested in gender equality issues? Maybe they really want to know more?

In many cases collaboration is about sneaking in gender. Organizing gender events or gender trainings often attract a limited number of people, and often those who already are interested in gender equality and not those whom you may really want to reach. It is often better to be part of someone else's event or training. Maybe it puts limits to how much you can do – but you reach more people.

It is also about embedding gender in other issues that are actualized in the organization. What are the questions of importance for the person you want or need to collaborate with, and how can gender equality be part of them? FESTA is a gender and working environment project, and our stated aim is to improve everybody's but in particular junior researchers' working environment – concentrating on aspects that we know are particularly problematic for women. So, depending on the interests of the person we have talked to, we have presented FESTA as a gender project, a working environment project or a diversity project.

It is often hard for people, both women and men, to admit that there is gender inequality in their daily working environment. They easily see it as if the discussion on gender inequality puts them into the roles of victims and perpetrators. To win people over it is important to stress that whatever inequalities exist in the organization, they are not unique, but something that can be found in many other organizations, too (unluckily, this tends to be true). Stressing the structural and cultural perspective – the fact that we are brought up in a gendered, unequal society and that unavoidably colours the way we think and the structures we build up – serves to lift out the blame from the local context and single individuals.

*It is good to create role models by promoting talented female scientists, but somehow I think it is just treatment of a symptom if the problem basically is the way the university system works contra what most women want – then you do not solve the actual problem by taking a few women and promoting them.  
(Male associate professor)*

## What can you do about the men?

### Most importantly: Engage them

An unconditional factor in gender equality work is to involve men. That is both because they normally have positions of power, but also because men most often listen to other men more than they listen to women, even when the hierarchical difference is not that large. A further reason is the conceptualization of gender equality as an organizational structural and cultural issue that concerns everybody, not only women. As long as only women work with gender equality in mixed gender organizations the work can only get so far. Depending on the organizational context and the history of gender equality work in the organization, men and women may have different roles in this work, but both need to get engaged. (However, it is important that women do not get volunteer roles involving a lot of work, while men's roles are more peripheral with tasks that can be executed with much less effort.)

**But how do you motivate the men? What is there in it for them?**

Some men can easily be seen as winners: Those who care about the overall performance of the institution and who have understood that there are many bright women who would do excellent research, given the chance. There are also those men who themselves are not attracted by research careers as they look now. However, those men who feel well at home in the current culture and who see themselves as fostering a new generation of researchers to take their place and do research the same manner as they do – it is not unreasonable if they see themselves as losers when you want to make the organization more hospitable to women. But even among them there are men who think that equality is a decent thing to do and once they have understood that the environment actually is not equal, they can be engaged in gender equality work, in different ways.

There is a lot of research on how men's networks are an obstacle for women's careers in the academe. It is not only that these networks have power and influence and support each other. At a more fundamental level, if you are not part of a network, you do not exist. Strange as it may sound, there are large numbers of men who actually have never seen their female colleague as a colleague at an equal level, or her research as something important. (And who may get perplexed and sometimes annoyed if her research is rewarded by some outside body.) Of course, this blindness can be intentional, but if the person has been socializing in all-male networks all through his academic career, it is also possible that there is a truly blind spot. This invisibility may explain some of men's reactions: for example, if your group of colleagues, locally and internationally has always been male, and women not get the research grants you applied for, it is easy to think that the system is biased: Where did all those women come from? Making women visible in the minds of their male colleagues is a cultural change that takes time and cannot be done by a gender equality worker alone. We need help from all levels of the research society to recognize and promote women researchers. However, as a gender equality worker it is sometimes good to remember that some attitudes and statements may really be due to large blind blurs and that you can be part of the work of filling them with relevant information.

### Why you can't count on women to be your allies

As a gender equality worker you might expect that you and your work would be welcomed by female researchers. After all, you are doing it mostly for their benefit. And it is true that women more often than men are interested in gender equality issues and do gender equality work – often unpaid, in addition to their research. But this is not always the case – and as to unpaid work, probably should not be the case, either.

Some of us have been aghast when being ignored or attacked by female researchers. However, thinking about it, their behavior is very reasonable.

In particular in the areas where we have been working, science and technology, women often work in male dominated environments. Oftentimes they have attended male dominated educational programs with male teachers, most of them had male supervisors for their PhDs and they are keenly aware that a number of their colleagues, more or less subtly, regard them as less capable researchers just because they are women. Many have encountered discrimination and harassment. There is a life situation they have to handle. And for many the position of “honorary men”, has worked the best – even if not perfect. That is, they have learnt not to bring out their gender more than necessary. Quite a few say that they have never been discriminated. That is their experience. A gender equality worker who comes in and brings out the fact that women are treated differently from men, and more or less puts a spotlight on them as women goes against this whole construction and is sometimes not very popular. In addition, feeling that you are a victim does not go well together with the self-image of an academic.

There are different variations to this theme. The most common is the conviction that in the academic meritocracy gender does not play a role at all. Another standpoint is that the academe is not a pure meritocracy, but that there are different kinds of biases – not only concerning gender but concerning races, ethnicities, able-bodiedness etc. Women who acknowledge these biases may still not want to stress their femininity, even if they are willing to question the objectivity of the academic meritocracy at a general level.

Getting engaged in gender equality work and in that way emphasizing one's gender is a risky business for a female researcher in regard to her scientific credibility in many local contexts. In addition, engaging in this work that is often unpaid, stretches the already long working hours and may take time off

*At a meeting in the Faculty Equality Committee one of the members was asked to give an update on a network for women and the activities of this network. The member reacted strongly and said that they only meet once a year and described how she used to be one of the front persons fighting for gender equality through the network. However, as the network felt this fight for gender equality was without any effect, she refused to use any more time leading the network or initiating any kind of new actions. (FESTA partner)*

from research or from family. Amazingly many female researchers are engaged and without their contributions gender equality in the academe would be far behind what it is today. But just being a woman does not make one a gender equality advocate.

## Resistance

Resistance is something every gender equality worker is bound to confront. Actually, if you do not confront resistance, you should make sure that you actually are affecting change. Changing gender relations is changing power relations, and a normal thing for those in power is to object to losing power. And it is not only a question of powerful individuals. There are practices, structures and features in the organizational culture that underpin the present power relations. They may also be very change resistant.

In the FESTA project we have had long discussions and reflections on resistance. When talking about our experiences we have sometimes used the four-step scale of active resistance – passive resistance – passive advocacy – active advocacy. When talking about resistance, active resistance is the kind that most often comes to mind. It is the verbal arguments, it is open refusals, angry comments – occasions where an adversary to gender equality work openly shows her or his aversion. Passive resistance is a fuzzier concept. Here, an adversary may behave in a neutral way, or even give out an image that she or he is positive to initiatives, but nothing happens. Agreements are forgotten, resources do not materialize, administrative processes take unduly long time and a number of small obstacles for any suggestions emerge. Passive advocacy denotes an overall positive attitude, as long as the persons exposing that attitude do not need to be engaged themselves. It is not unusual that the resources asked for gender equality work are difficult to find, even if they are quite negligible in the overall time or financial budget. However, lack of resources is an argument that is difficult to counteract.

Passive advocacy means that your work is appreciated, you get at least some resources for doing it and your positive results are proudly presented. However, the institutional actors concerned do not engage in the work themselves. They do not visibly show their support and their commitment, with an expectation of commitment also from their subordinates. Finally, active advocacy is expressed by institutional actors who relate to gender equality in a number of different situations, who remind their subordinates of its importance and who smoothen your path in different ways. Obviously, you can do a lot more with an active advocate than an active adversary. However, the middle positions are probably more common and sometimes it can be good to reflect on where you are on the scale, when things do not seem to go your way.



On the very general level we believe that resistance to gender equality is connected to power issues – at the institution, and, in consequence, in the society at large. However, in the practical gender equality work this may show in different ways. In contexts where gender equality issues have not been discussed very much it can show as lack of awareness and accompanying lack of interest. Even in contexts where gender issues are prominent, lack of awareness and interest can appear – in a form that can be labelled as active ignorance, a more or less conscious choice not to get informed. Thus, trying to inform these institutional actors about gender equality is met with passive resistance – these actors prefer to maintain their ignorance as far as possible.

One common explanation used by those who are not interested in learning about and engaging in gender issues, they may be actively ignorant or not, is the lack of time or, when it comes to engagement by decision makers, lack of resources. While it is not to be expected that gender equality work is the most important concern of institutional actors, the time and other resources they are or are not prepared to commit says something about how gender equality work is valued in relation to other activities.

In societies where men's and women's roles in general are still very differentiated, and where academics have grown up with a more or less fixed idea of differences between women and men and what is appropriate behavior for each gender, discussing and questioning these "natural" gender roles can in itself be uncomfortable. The fact that the discussion is imported from (in the case of a European project) the EU headquarters does not make the situation easier. In all countries, different local contexts, such as departments, can also offer more or less comfortable environments for discussing gender – often this is connected to the overall discussion climate at the department which, in turn, often depends on the attitude of the leadership.

Being a gender equality worker means knowing your organization and counteracting resistance already before it has manifested. Talking in a very general way, you may meet three kinds of people: 1) those who openly resist and who will not be convinced by any arguments, 2) those who can be made to understand that gender equality issues are really there, and who have a sense of justice and 3) those who recognize the importance of gender equality and do something about it.<sup>22</sup> All groups consist of both women and men. The first group may not be worth wasting too much energy on, the second group needs to be approached with a language and with arguments that they do not shy

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<sup>22</sup> To be compared with Berger Laura, Benschop Yvonne and van den Brink, Marieke (2015) Practising gender when networking: The case of university-industry innovation projects. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22 (6) 556–578.

away from and the third group needs to be supported and sought support from.

Most of us have been to meetings where we have encountered open resistance, expressed by more or less heated arguments. Often, but not always, these arguments are put forward by persons high up the academic ladder, and more often than not by men. And because the academe is a very hierarchical environment, what is said by renowned professors is very seldom openly questioned by junior researchers. However, even if nobody may support you in the meeting (there might not be a person from category 3 in the room), a number of people in category 2 will hear what you say and consider it. And we have experienced that people have contacted us after such occasions, apologizing for their colleagues, even if they have been quiet in the occasion itself.

Resistance may pop up even when you have thought that you have succeeded to affect permanent change. This can be because new patterns never really were or because the resistance has been simmering undercover all the time. Resistance may surface when gender equality achievements pass a tolerance level and cannot be regarded as an exception to a rule any more: A couple of women with power are OK, but women reaching a steady percentage is not, employing two female professors instead of none is OK, but the third procedure may meet with subtle or open resistance. A couple of women with high salaries are OK, but we cannot afford high salaries to all new female appointees.

There is a lot a resistance out there. That is why all victories are worth celebrating. And that is why it is extremely important that any gender equality measures are properly codified in policy documents. People change, the supportive people may change positions or institutions. Even policy documents change – any achievements as to new rules, policies and procedures implemented, can after some time be counteracted by still newer rules, policies and procedures which work for maintaining gender inequality. But even if the work would take two steps back, the third step that you took forward will actually bring gender equality a little further.

### **The most basal argument – women are not suited for science**

Some of us were taken aback the first time we heard somebody (normally a male professor) seriously assert that women do not have the brains or the interest for doing academic work. The fact that we as gender equality workers initiated such heightened emotions and, to our understanding, unreasonable argumentations about women was a slightly unpleasant experience. Not only because it is always uncomfortable to be confronted, but also because we

realized that the work we were about to do had to start at a far lower level than we had assumed.

When a person is this convinced, it may, indeed, not be reasonable to engage in a dialogue. But similar opinions may exist, even if they are less distinct and more subtle, even among many of the institutional actors we need to collaborate with. And they are not restricted to elderly male professors, but can also emerge, for example, among young men who somehow find it natural to expect that they will have that academic career and can get very disturbed by realizing that they have a female competitor. Naturally she must be inferior, unless really proven otherwise. There are academics who truly believe that if more women get distinguished positions as scientists the quality of scientific work will deteriorate.

Unluckily, this kind of opinions are very difficult to influence if they are deeply rooted. Proving them wrong with statistics or scientific arguments or counter examples seldom works. (When using research on gender in the academe among researchers in science and technology, you will need to be prepared to explain the methodology of the study you are referring to and why this research is reliable. Very little of that research is quantitative, and is often questioned by researchers in fields of “absolute truths”.) Most often it seems not to be a question of intellectual understanding, but of protecting the image of the meritocratic academe and the excellent male researcher – an image where the person finds himself at home.

*During dinner the other participant commented nastily on a point our team member had made about career programmes, saying that no matter how much we thought that women could be trained for a career in science there was never going to be any room for them, simply because women are not cut out for science. He then launched into a long and heated monologue about women not being born and bred for maths and science studies giving several examples, for instance that women had done nothing during their childhoods other than play with dolls, thereby losing all rights and skills for science. Our team member was completely taken aback by his position and tried to understand what he was saying. She asked him how he came to have such a view and yet decide to partake in a project that was based on the opposite understanding. However, this only increased his carrying on about women and their lack of scientific capabilities. In the end, our team member left the table, without making any progress in engaging in a dialogue and in a state of mild shock. (Festa team member)*

### **To be invisible and ignored**

One effective way of quenching activities is making them invisible or ignoring them. When it comes to gender equality work it can happen in many ways.

Maybe you have been strategic and approached a positively-minded senior, who has encouraged other people to collaborate with you – in whatever way it may be. The fact that these people are friendly and positive when you contact them, but are also very slow in replying can, naturally, have a number of different reasons and there is no reason to become paranoid about them

ignoring you because of you represent gender equality. However, in our work we have often met with situations where we have had to decide whether we should contact a person once more, or just let it be and accept to be ignored, and think that even if we would get a reply and collaboration it would probably be so sparse that it would not be worth the trouble.

It is not, either, uncommon to be sidestepped. Whatever your organizational position or the position of your project may be, it is possible that you will be forgotten from invitations you think you should have got, or your project will not be remembered or mentioned when you think it would have been appropriate. Again, it may be difficult to know whether your assessment of the situation is correct, and it is often easier to shrug and think that it does not matter. But sometimes it does matter, and if it becomes a pattern it definitely does. We have been in situations where we have weighed our options and duties in making ourselves and our project more visible in our organization, when we assume that they have been ignored. What are the risks, what are the gains? To have

*During the one hour and a half workshop there was no any response or reaction even though we were trying all the time to encourage the participants to comment our findings, ask for clarifications, question our conclusions, etc. That silence was absolutely unexpected for us since we all had known each other for many years, being close friends with some of them and collaborating regularly with many of them. We didn't succeed in getting participants' feedback [...] We only concluded (from the face expressions of some participants) that they agreed with some of our conclusions [...] It seemed that the female participants silently agreed with our descriptions of gendered issues while male participants were entirely unconcerned.*

somebody else in the organization to discuss with is an advantage in those situations.

Still another way of becoming invisible is being ignored in occasions where we have presented findings or recommendations. One form of it is nobody turning up which, again, can be due to the time constraints of those you want to attract, or an indicator that they think that what you have to say is not important enough to listen to. But even when people turn up – maybe encouraged by a superior – your work can be made invisible:

In this kind of situations it is easy to start doubting yourself. But sometimes it really is difficult to present a subject which is seen as very touchy (as in the case above) in a way that does not trigger rejection. Sometimes it is hard to foresee what in a message can be so touchy that communication breaks down and you are met by blank faces. But there is always hope that things are still happening at least behind some of those faces.



## Talk but not action

This section is mainly related to experiences in countries where gender equality measures are part of what is expected from the administration of research institutions. Gender equality work is structured. Everybody knows that expressions which denigrate women or question their capability as researchers are not politically correct, and, thus, everybody supports gender equality work. Everything looks good at the surface, and the fact that different indicators show remaining inequalities is something that will certainly improve with time.

But you find that it does not. It seems that, in different ways, on different levels, gender equality has come to a standstill. It can be relatively comfortable to be a gender equality worker in this kind of environment, if you are satisfied to follow the established administrative processes: write the gender equality plans, compile the statistics, perform the agreed-on trainings for different groups etc. However, if you come to this situation with the ambition of making change, it can be utterly frustrating. Why no change?

To start with, the overall positive attitude to gender equality work probably masks a much more conflicting picture in at least parts of the organization. Many of those men who express themselves in clearly supporting terms about gender equality in general, are not prepared to go into any great lengths of trouble when it concerns their own daily actions. While only those who feel that their position and reputation at the institution is secure enough question gender equality measures in public, in more private or informal contexts other attitudes can surface, more or less visibly. For a gender equality worker it is often better to hear and meet the arguments against gender equality work, even if that may be psychologically exhausting, than to meet a sleek and polished surface. Thus, one reason why things do not happen might be that there are people who, in spite of what they publicly say, do not want them to happen. Being aware of this makes it easier to put it on the table, in one way or another, and deal with it.

Another reason might be a feeling of disappointment. Maybe there are people in the organization who actually have wanted to change things, who may have gone into the existing structures of gender equality work and then realized that they were only caught in a routine. Often they did not get the support from their superiors that would have been needed for them to really make a difference: no supporting statements, no particular authorization, no resources to do the work. This results easily in disheartened people, who learn to comply to the administrative procedures, if they do not leave the work altogether. Enlivening these people's original engagement may be difficult. In any case, to make change, there has to be visible support from above. (Try

to make sure that you yourself, as a gender equality worker will not become discouraged in this way.)

Another form of disappointment, in particular in science and technology, may be a general feeling that all the gender equality work that has been done

*In connection with the proposal writing process of FESTA we gathered a group of women and men, 6 persons. The first resistance already showed up when arranging the first meeting: why do we need a gender project? Is it useful? In general the group showed resistance against yet another project, doubting especially EU-projects and their applicability and usefulness. The expressed resistance was due to fatigue of projects in general and of administrative measures. And also fatigue of involving the selected few women in a gender equality project. It was regarded as a "hand-washing measure" so that the Dean may "check that box". (FESTA partner)*

during years and years has not resulted in any great changes, so why put in more effort. In Scandinavia, where the situation of structured gender equality work is common, not only in the academe, but in different societal institutions, there is a concept called "gender fatigue". It's an expression of "oh, not another gender equality project" or "oh, don't come and talk about gender now again". These expressions can come both from by people who would like gender projects to come up with more concrete results, and from people who think that gender equality problems are important,

but not important enough to be talked about "all the time". For their different reasons these people, even if in principle positive towards gender equality work, are not keen on supporting another gender equality project.

This also connects to the question of priorities. Being a gender equality worker, your first priority is gender equality work. However, this is certainly not the first priority of the researchers and other institutional actors. The people who are interested and positive towards gender equality work have it somewhere in their priorities list. Being disappointed in results is likely to move it down the list and an awareness that it is important in the eyes of a superior probably moves it up a bit, for example. But how much support you can get does not only depend on how important the people concerned think gender equality is, or on what you need and what you can offer, but also what other things are on those lists – and normally you cannot influence that to any great degree. So, an obvious disinterest in contributing even with just a little time does not necessarily mean that you have met a hard-headed adversary to gender equality, but only a busy person. However, sometimes it is difficult to tell. In a context where saying no to gender equality work or a gender equality worker is not what you are supposed to do, but being busy is highly valued, never finding time for an appointment can be a strategic way of resisting gender equality. (That having been said – our experience tells that there are institutional actors who always seem to have equality towards the top of their lists, whatever order things have below.)



## Seize any support from the outside

We hope that, personally, you have support structures and support people in your organization. You will need them. Support structures to carry you through gray days and failures and support people to share both your strides and your victories, your disappointments and your joys. If that does not exist in your organization, try to get some from the outside. Especially on national level, coordinated actions may significantly increase the impact of what you do. If there is no gender equality worker, maybe there is somebody else whom you can collaborate with. And if you are looking for best practices – check the most renowned universities of your country, or internationally, to see if they have policies that you can advocate. Status and legitimacy are important in the academic world.

Mailing lists are good for questions, but to share the emotional ups and downs you might want to have somebody to talk to. In addition to national seminars, conferences and workshops (which you might have to arrange yourself with your collaborators), international conferences are good for information and networking. Also, whichever is your country, there is always something you can learn from other countries. In addition, because the research community is international, it is good if you can show that you are international, too. (If there is institutional travel money for the researchers, there should be some for you, too.)

In addition to knowing your organization, it is good if you can keep an eye on what is happening at your national level and also at European level when it comes to gender in research. In many countries, national research policies are engaged in gender equality in research, and the Horizon2020 program certainly has such ambitions.

There is a solid body of research on gender in the academe. It can be assessed, for example, through the GenPort portal ([www.genderportal.eu/](http://www.genderportal.eu/)), which also includes more practical advice. Our experience is that the gender equality work community by and large is friendly and helpful (even academic competition and suppression techniques are not totally absent here, either). We know that measures for gender equality in research need to be implemented in most institutions for them to really penetrate the international research community, and that is why we need to work together.



## Appendix: The FESTA partners

**Uppsala University** is an old university with about 4,000 academic staff and about 40,000 students. While having its mission as providing world class teaching, it is also a renowned research university and is ranked as one of the top 100 in Times Higher Education world university rankings. Active gender equality work has been undertaken for two decades, with a number of different measures aimed to provide equal working conditions for women and men, and to promote female leadership.

**SDU** is a comprehensive university with both research and teaching at all levels. It has five campuses and was the first Danish university with decentralized campus structure. SDU was established in 1966. It has a student body of 31,299 and 3,838 employees. The gender equality work is rooted in the Development Contract for 2012–2014 and the Gender Equality Act of 2013. The Equality Board under the Rector has the operational responsibility and initiates appropriate actions, but FESTA represents the first attempt to look at gender systematically and in depth.

**RWTH Aachen University:** With its 260 institutes, 407 professors, over 6,600 personnel and around 40,000 students it is one of the largest universities of technology in Germany and renowned in Europe for its excellent education and research. It is also one of the most progressive German universities with regard to gender and diversity management. RWTH Aachen University is certificated as family-friendly university. At RWTH Aachen the FESTA team is situated at the Rectorate Staff Unit (Integration Team – Human Resources, Gender and Diversity Management).

**University of Limerick** is a young, internationally focused, independent university, which provides research and teaching from undergraduate to postdoctoral levels. There are four faculties: Science and Engineering; Arts Humanities and Social Sciences; Education and Health Sciences; and the Business School. Within each faculty there are academic departments and research institutes and centres. Overall the institution has over 13,000 students and 1,300 staff. Since the 1980s, there has been an active tradition of work in gender equality.

**Bruno Kessler Foundation** is the research agency of the Autonomous Province of Trento working in the field of scientific technology and human sciences. FBK consists of over 350 researchers; 220 thesis-writing students, doctorate and post-doctorate students, 5 research centres; 7 laboratories, explorative

projects and research units; 14 spin-offs, start ups and joint companies and an extensive network of local and international alliances.

**Istanbul Technical University** is the oldest technical university in Turkey that has been founded in 1773. It has 2134 academic staff, 35,000+ students of whom 38 are graduate students, 14 faculties and 6 institutes. 34 percent of the students and 46 percent of the academics are female. Since 2000, research activities have been carried out on women in HE. Women Studies Centre in SET has been established in 2009 and the “University Strategic Plan” has certain statements/measures for gender equality since 2010. The Executive Board accepted new regulations for sexual harassment in 2014. University policies include equal opportunities for teaching, research and academic promotion.

**The South-West University** – Neofit Rilski – in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria is a public higher education institution established in 1975. It offers study programmes on Bachelor, Master and PhD levels and various courses for continuing education. Currently it consists of 9 faculties. Around 14,000 undergraduates and post-graduates currently pursue their studies at the University and around 700 of them are international students. The number of staff is around 1,000. There are over 30 laboratories and research centres. The University implements various research projects funded by national and international programmes and funds and cooperates with training and research institutions from all over the world.

**FESTA partners at a glance**

Sources: SHE figures, Global Gender Gap index, organizational data.

	Uppsala University Sweden	University of Southern Denmark	RWTH Aachen University Germany	University of Limerick Ireland	Bruno Kessler Foundation Italy	South-West University Bulgaria	Istanbul Technical University Turkey
<b>NATIONAL</b>							
Global gender gap index ranking	4	5	12	8	69	22	125
Women's share of time spent in unpaid work	57%	57%	62%	70%	75%		76%
<b>HIGHER EDUCATION</b>							
Percentage of women grade A	24%	19%	17%	28%	21%	32%	31%
Percentage of women heads of institutions	50%	33%	16%	18%	23%	22%	10%
Proportion of research institutions with gender equality plans	79%	16%	81%	38%	25%	24%	6%
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>							
Percentage of women professors in STEM	16%	11%	10%	29%	0%	25%	35%
Percentage of women PhDs in STEM	35%	44%		42%	23%	43%	42%
Percentage of women in highest governance committee	53%	33%	50%	17%	22%	32%	30%
Gender equality board	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Gender equality officer	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Gender equality plan	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No



[www.FESTA-EUROPA.eu](http://www.FESTA-EUROPA.eu)

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