Submission for the 10th Biennial Gender, Work and Organization Conference 2018

Possible streams:
1. Gender and public management: doing and redoing gender?
2. Beyond the glass ceiling? Women professors between recognition and marginalization
3. Methods and Methodologies: Interrogating Knowledge, Power and Privilege

A dynamic approach to conceptualising and assessing gender equality interventions in research

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Over the last decades, gender equality (GE) interventions in research, as other kinds of policy-making, have led to increased attention to the societal effects of different types of policies and measures. Further, with the rise of the idea of evidence-based policy-making (Solesbury 2001; Sanderson 2002), expectations have grown concerning the use of scientific knowledge in policy. Consequently, there have been several efforts to establish a link between GE policy implementation and observed effects in research teams, organisations and national systems.

Key drivers of change have been identified in the literature, such as the recognition of complexity, the importance of context, and an increased emphasis on impact (Vogel 2012). All three elements have become increasingly important in the field of gender equality in research. However, establishing causal relationships between policy interventions and observed changes pose theoretical challenges as well as empirical and methodological problems (Benschop and Verloo 2011). Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2017) note how most approaches looking into societal effects focus on simple, linear models and that these often embed a reductive causal chain logic. As a rule, conventional attempts and traditional approaches have thus been used to conceptualise and study gender equality interventions within research and document their effects.

This paper has as point of departure a study of the different types of interventions that aim at better integrating women into research systems, which positively impacts the quality and relevance of research. The study focuses on (the conceptual framework and lens we look at) the link between GE interventions and effects. Taking into consideration the complexity of this relationship (see Beijenbergh, Benschop and Vennix 2015), the aim of the study is to develop an innovative conceptual framework for the identification and study of the linkage between gender equality interventions and effects.

The ambition is to go beyond traditional linear and quantitative approaches by paying particular attention to the contextual and others factors of significance for the relationship. More recent research (Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace 2017, 103) argues that “linear models and monodimensional approaches are not
sufficient in effectively assessing the actual impact of gender equality programs or in adequately designing them in the first place” and point to the lack of studies that consider the entire range of complexity in GE interventions when studying their effects. Therefore, rather than attributing notions of effects, in this study the relationship intervention-effects is addressed through approaches that pursue intervention contributions to achieve effects. As underlined in the literature, the ability of programmes to foster the right conditions for change is central in complex interventions (Reale, Nedeva, Thomas & Primeri 2014), and studies have to account for whether adequate conditions to achieve anticipated effects are in place.

Drawing on a review of the literature and existing practices, and the identification of best practice examples in assessing gender equality interventions within research, the paper presents and discusses a conceptual framework to study gender equality interventions at team, organisation and system level adopting a dynamic, non-linear, holistic approach. The framework is tested and validated in 26 selected contexts in seven European countries i.e. Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Spain and Sweden.

References


Nielsen et al. (2017) Gender diversity leads to better science. PNAS vol. 114, no. 8: 1740-1742.


