

Editorial: Gendering Change: The Next Step

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To find ways to change organizations into more gender-equitable or gender-balanced workplaces remains one of the core issues in the field of gender, work and organization (Acker, 1992; Ainsworth *et al.*, 2010). Feminist scholars and practitioners alike have made various kinds of attempts to come up with strategies, policies and practices to realize change towards greater gender equality in organizations (Ferguson, 1984). These attempts are well documented and many articles on change have found their way to the pages of this journal.

This special issue arose out of our shared interest in understanding two key aspects of gender and organizational change: how do we translate gender inequities insights into processes of organizational change to deal with those inequities and what can we learn from insights into processes of organizational change and their impact on gender regimes? (Miller *et al.*, 2009; Mills *et al.*, 2010). These ideas were explored through two special issues of the *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences* (issues 26/3, 2009 and 27/3, 2010) that broadly examined gender and diversity at work: changing theories, changing organizations. They were taken up more specifically through a sub-theme of the European Group of Organization Studies conference in Amsterdam in 2008, which focused on gendering change: the next step. This special issue arises out of the call for papers following the latter conference. While in some ways the collection of articles confirmed our existing concerns that the complex nature of gendered processes does not lend itself to simple (if not simplistic) solutions, it nonetheless provided insights that go some way to bridging the critique–application divide: indicating strategies of change that take into account the discursive, intersectional, situated and paradoxical character of both gender and organizational change. We shall explore all four of these elements in relation to each of the articles below.

Despite the ever-growing body of literature on gender and change (Ely and Meyerson, 2000), we observe that we know relatively little about how to ensure sustainable change. Many texts about change programmes and interventions targeted at gender equality in organizations are critical of, or even sceptical about the possibility of change (Britton, 2000). They focus on the

persistence and resilience of inequalities and emphasize the partiality and incompleteness of the changes realized. Other studies show that organizational changes such as mergers and acquisitions, restructuring and downsizing, too, tend to have detrimental effects on gender equality (Morgan and Knights, 1991; Tienari *et al.*, 2005).

Like the societies they are part of, organizations remain gendered. While some progress has been made to overcome the most obvious discriminating practices, gendering and discrimination in their more subtle forms too often remain a taken-for-granted, naturalized and often subtle and unintentional element of everyday life in organizations.

Apparently, gender and change do not go together well, and the quest for effective strategies and interventions that can bring about systemic change in organizations and societies continues. There are many barriers and impediments to change that should be dealt with and there are no simple answers. Gender is no exception, as genuine organizational change is habitually portrayed as complex, difficult and problematical (Greenwood and Hinings, 2006), no matter what the specific subject of change is. These observations raise several questions that form the base for this special issue on gender and change.

Gender, change and discursivity

One of the timely questions pertains to the very construct of gender equality. Theoretical debates about equality have largely taken place outside the immediate field of management and organization studies (Squires, 2007; Walby, 2005) and involve questions of similarities and differences between women and men as well as femininity and masculinity. A balanced numerical representation of women in all ranks of the organization is sometimes used as an indicator for equality but counting bodies (Alvesson and Billing, 2002) is a contested way to understand gender equality and fairness. So what kind of discursive and material practices are we looking for in organizations when we are calling for change toward gender equality?

There is a discursive dimension to this question, reflected by a continuing change in terminology. Since the birth of gender equality policies in western organizations in the 1970s, strategies and interventions have been labelled and re-labelled equal opportunity or affirmative action, positive discrimination or gender mainstreaming and, today, gender or diversity management, or both. While there is an element of fashion to these discursive changes and certainly an overlap in the actual practices and interventions that make up the various strategies, this is not only a matter of terminology as the scope of the change envisioned is different in the respective strategies (Benschop and Verloo, 2011).

Improving the position of women and including women in organizations, as we know them, requires changes in current organizational practices but the scope of these changes is relatively mild compared to other strategies. A revaluation of the hierarchical order in organizations so that the special feminine contributions are valued and no longer inferior to the masculine requires profoundly different interventions of change. Transformative approaches go even further and aim at changing gender as a structure, changing everyday organizational routines and interactions so that they stop (re)producing gender inequalities.

Intersectionality

A second question pertains to the fact that gender is but one of salient identity categories to take into account when aiming for more equitable workplaces. As Holvino (2010) convincingly argues, projects on gender equality in organizations urgently need to address the implications of gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, (dis)ability and sexuality when aiming for equality, fairness and inclusion. These categories can be conceived as social, historical and political constructions, something continuously being (re)produced in social interaction in different contexts. They intersect in everyday experiences and practices and should be taken into account in projects that aim to change inequalities in organizations.

Situatedness

A third question pertains to the context and situatedness of change. The big picture is changing rapidly. The concept of globalization has become a central part of how society in the age of late modernity or postmodernism, that is, contemporary society, is depicted, described and understood. Globalization reflects large-scale economic and social change, driven by the internationalization not only of organizational entities but also of identities. It is also clear that gender is an inherent part of globalized capitalism as a gendered (and ethnic and racialized) global division of labour is constituted (Acker, 2006; Mohanty, 2004) with associated identities and subject positions.

However, global processes must be nuanced with local specificities (Calás *et al.*, 2010). Globalized capitalism takes a variety of forms in different nation-states and local settings. What constitutes change in a particular context? Each local context comes with its own peculiarities that impact on the antecedents of, attempts for, and consequences of, change. Change initiatives in organizations may take different forms and shapes within the 'same' industries and occupations in different nation-states and local settings. Analyses of gender

and change thus need to find ways to simultaneously consider the global or transnational (universal) and the local (particular), and the ways in which the two become intertwined. The particular specifies and illuminates the universal, to paraphrase Mohanty (2004); or perhaps the global and the local are but abstractions of the outcomes of actor networks, neither truly local nor truly global but situated labels that actors reproduce in specific settings (Latour, 2005).

Paradox

A fourth and final question zooms in on the paradoxes of change, as change always simultaneously contains elements of stability and flux. Paradox refers here to the simultaneous presence of contradictory, even mutually exclusive, elements (Cameron and Quinn, 1988). We observe that strategies and interventions for change address the *status quo* of gender relations, disrupting some of the self-evident gender norms and expectations in organizations. Yet, this disruption is usually not complete, nor fully shared by everyone, leaving traces of the old gender order to co-exist with an emerging newer and more complex notion of gender at work. Change initiatives arguably often fail to take into account the historicity of the actors involved.

The notion of paradox has been related to gender in work and organization before. Gherardi (1994, p. 598) notes how 'ambiguity and paradox are the distinctive features of the symbolic order of gender which opposes male to female'. Olsson and Walker (2004, pp. 246–50) conceptualize female identity as inherently paradoxical in 'a world of corporate masculinity' and show how women executives' identity work 'involves shifting, relational and frequently contradictory discursive constructions'. Paradoxes remain unresolved, Olsson and Walker (2004) argue, and women constantly (need to) negotiate identity vis-à-vis the dominant corporate masculinity. Nonetheless, we would note that there is also some potential for gendering change in the notion of paradox because it opens up contested spaces and the potential for different voices (Calvert and Ramsay, 1992), discourses (Ferguson, 1984), sense-making (Helms Mills and Mills, 2009), and possibilities of enunciation (Ermarth, 2001).

In the answer to the question of what elements remain stable and what become subject to change may be the keys that we need to take things forward. The organization change literature points out that resistance to change is typically strong when the cultural norms, beliefs, routines and values of an organization are the target of change efforts. Yet open resistance does bring to the surface norms and routines that were taken-for-granted before, allowing for debate and contestation where there was once silence (Benschop and Van den Brink, 2011).

The next step

Each in their idiosyncratic ways, the four articles included in this special issue take stock of one or several of the questions raised above. In their article, Daphne Berry and Myrtle P. Bell confront the powerful research literature on 'expatriates' (white, usually male, business travelers) in the field of international management (IM). They show, firstly, how the literature renders invisible 'migrants' (usually non-white, often women) whose position and experiences do not qualify as relevant and, secondly, how disparities based on gender, race and class are thus sustained and reinforced. This is particularly problematic in the contemporary global economy where the mobility of people intensifies and takes a multitude of forms. Importantly, Berry and Bell remind us of the role of researchers in representing and interpreting social reality in particular ways — thus giving truth value to a particular understanding of what is going on, while marginalizing and excluding other understandings. In working for meaningful equality, they suggest, we must address (by recognizing) the discursive effects of IM as a field of study that limits the term 'expatriate' to a minority of 'relatively privileged people'. They call attention to the way that such discursive effects serve to confound the intersections of race, gender and class in and through the creation of the expatriate subject and the marginalized (missing) poor, largely non-white, women and men who also cross national boundaries in search of work. And they also encourage us to become more sensitive to the variety of intersectionalities in our own research. In this latter regard we are reminded of the problematic, even paradoxical, nature of IM's standpoint that takes the local to mean western and global to mean uber-western. Meaningful change for Berry and Bell involves starting with the dominance of a particular field of enquiry (IM) as a discursive framing mechanism for the production and reproduction of discrimination. In this spirit, Berry and Bell call for scholarship that would make visible 'other' expatriation that involves migration, with a thoroughgoing exploration of our own role as researchers in the processes of discursive understandings of the world.

Moving from expatriate employees to the field of healthcare workers, Marita Husso and Helena Hirvonen draw on Bourdieu's theory of practice to examine the role of emotions in gender stability and change. In a complex interweaving of ideas Husso and Hirvonen essentially argue that particular forms of change (such as the introduction of new public management [NMP]¹) can have paradoxical effects. On the one hand, the stability of gendered identities can be seen as linked to 'structured gender patterns' that are reproduced through 'situated social practices' such as health care. For example, the notion of womanhood is often linked to forms of caring and emotionality that both inform and reinforce particular understandings of gendered relations. Thus, change that focuses on alternative ways of being (such as the rationalities and efficiencies of health care) can lead to emotional

suffering as women face a disconnect between the habitual needs they bring to the field (of health care) and the new, supposedly gender-neutral expectations. On the other hand, such dramatic change can also open up the space needed to challenge stable gendered practices. Firstly, it can serve to reveal the social roots and cause of the suffering — ‘the knowledge of these practices [having a potentially] emancipatory horizon’. Secondly, the change process can serve to challenge the habitual nature of the gendered processes and lead to a disconnection between the ideas and practices that work in tandem to create a discursive field. This leads Husso and Hirvonen to conclude that while the process of dramatic change can have dire consequences for the women involved, ‘habits and practices related to care can also change, and discursive practices can produce, perpetuate or question the gendered presumptions and expectations of caring’.

In their study, Jim Barry, Elizabeth Berg and John Chandler return us to the issue of NMP reforms; this time in higher education in the UK and Sweden. The authors suggest that these reforms, which have brought about a sharp division of labour, have disadvantaged and sharpened inequities for women, whose numbers are concentrated at the lower and middle level positions. However, arguing that change is contested rather than consensual, Barry *et al.* see hope in social movement theory. They contend that while the strength of NPM is its discursive link to ‘neo-liberal regimes’ and associated coalitions of practice — serving as ‘the organizational glue’, its (potentially) critical weakness is the very fact that it is a coalition rather than a social movement. Barry and his colleagues see hope in the existence of social movements in academe, particularly women’s movements that are capable of utilising a broad range of civil society discourses to expose and weaken the narrow interest groups of NPM. Specifically they suggest that in the university system one way to overcome gender inequity is to focus on social movements, in this case women’s movements, which are strong in academe, and the role these movements play in academe to promote gender equity through management reform. The authors conclude that they are optimistic that empirical work using social movement theory provides a necessary means of exploring attempts to change management because it includes all interested constituents. And they content that, paradoxically, while the NPM is a threat to women’s movements, the women’s movement is a potential obstacle to managerialism.

In our final article Marieke Van den Brink and Yvonne Benschop examine the slow pace of change in academia by looking at how gender inequality practices in the recruitment and selection of professors interact with gender equality practices. In their view gender equality goes beyond the inclusion of women in the professoriate and entails a revaluation of masculinity and femininity so that the social relations between women and men will become characterized by a balance of power. Analysing the different faces of gender inequalities in the humanities, the medical sciences and the natural sciences,

Van den Brink and Benschop argue that change efforts should take into account the structural and cultural specificities of these different academic subfields. Centrally they contend that gender inequities are a series of intersecting practices (they use the metaphor of the seven-headed dragon) that feminists have traditionally tried to deal with through one-dimensional equity strategies: in the event failing to achieve sustainable change because a shift in one area of discrimination often ends up by being undermined by other, intersecting, inequitable practices. Instead, they conclude, a more fruitful strategy would be 'to distinguish between multiple inequality and equality practices' to deal with gender regimes at multiple levels across several fronts. This offers an insightful look into the complex nature of the task ahead and the foci and associated forces needed to overcome a seemingly unassailable dragon.

If we were to draw conclusions from the collection of articles in this issue for the steps to come in changing organizations it would be the following. Firstly, the goal of organizational change towards equality and inclusion is multifaceted and inequalities are bound to be produced in all attempts to change. The notions of equality and inequality are contested and to understand what is at stake in specific settings, we need to analyse the discursive and the material practices of equality and inequality. Secondly, this analysis will bring insights into how broader ideas and practices are translated into localized understandings, as all locations make for distinct sites of gendering practices and there is much to learn from the similarities and differences between those different sites. Spaces for working for equality and inclusion vary, and different spaces must be enacted differently (Tienari *et al.*, 2010). Thirdly, this issue also underlines the need to pay closer attention to the way in which gender intersects with other identity categories and to what effects for issues of equality and inclusion at work. Finally, a fourth conclusion pertains to the strategies of paradox that use organizational change activities to identify and expose gender regimes while simultaneously seeking to unite some of the disparate elements that divide potential social movements.

We are aware that these are partial accounts, that the disruption of gender regimes is far from simple and that there is a lot of research and innumerable insights yet to be unearthed. Yes, we do see direction, actionable insights and recommendations in this collection that encourage us to develop strategies of reading feminist research not just for its critique, or theoretical insights but also for its implied strategies of change.

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Note

1. Simply put, new public management refers to 'attempts to introduce marketization and, in particular, private sector managerial control' into the public sector (Chandler *et al.*, 2004, p. 123; see also Oakes *et al.*, 1998).

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