

UNIVERSITY OF SZCZECIN
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND HUMAN
CAPITAL IN THEORY AND PRACTICE.
CHOSEN ASPECTS

“Human Capital Management” Series
Seria “Gospodarowanie Kapitałem Ludzkim”
No. 7

Szczecin 2015

Scientific Editor

Sandra Misiak-Kwit

Rewievers

Katarzyna Włodarczyk

Patrycja Zwiech

Typesetting

Sandra Misiak-Kwit

Szczecin 2015

ISBN 978-83-7867-338-5

ISSN 2353-5660

Printing and Publishing

volumina.pl Daniel Krzanowski

Ks. Witolda Street 7-9, 71-063 Szczecin

Tel. 91 812 09 08

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www.voluminamarket.pl

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction	5
Chapter 1 Innovative and Norm-Critical Research Approaches Supporting Entrepreneurial Thinking – Gender Equality Development in the Faste Laboratory a Vinn Excellence Centre (Ewa Gunnarsson)	7
Chapter 2 Social Capital As An Asset Facilitating Entrepreneurial Behaviour (Marta Młokosiewicz)	25
Chapter 3 Factors Affecting Women's Entrepreneurship in Lithuania (Ilona Kiausiene)	41
Chapter 4 Academic Entrepreneurship - Challenges and Opportunities (Anna Szymoniak)	67
Chapter 5 Managing a Company Image Using the "Glassdoor" Site (Kalina Kukiełko-Rogozińska, Krzysztof Tomanek)	79
Chapter 6 Theoretical Overview of Age Theories (Wojciech Jarecki, Sandra Misiak-Kwit)	93
Chapter 7 Managerial Competencies of Executives Personnel vs. the Results of Dairy Cooperative Operations - Concept Research (Barbara Wyrzykowska)	111
Bibliographical Notes on Authors	125
Winnet Centre of Excellence – information sheet	139

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CHAPTER 1

INNOVATIVE AND NORM-CRITICAL RESEARCH APPROACHES SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURIAL THINKING - GENDER EQUALITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE FASTE LABORATORY A VINN EXCELLENCE CENTRE

1.1. Introduction

The main aim of the chapter is to explore the innovation potential in gender mainstreaming research combined with an action oriented approach.

The research project described in this chapter is an example of MODE II research and a Triple Helix formation i.e. a form of cooperation between academy, industry and VINNOVA¹ (a research fund) with the aim to contribute to increase Sweden's competitiveness and sustainable growth.

The gender mainstreaming research- and change project presented in this chapter is part of the VINNOVA TIGER programme and based in The Faste Laboratory, a VINN Excellence Centre, consisting of 8 industrial partners and 6 academic partners at Luleå University of Technology (LTU) in Sweden.

¹ VINNOVA stands for the Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems. It is a state authority that aims to promote growth and prosperity throughout Sweden.
www.VINNOVA.se

1.2. The TIGER gender mainstreaming project

In 2008 VINNOVA announced the TIGER programme for applied gender research for strong research- and innovation environments.

The aim of the programme is described in the following way: “The main goal with the call is to contribute to an increase in Sweden’s competitiveness and sustainable growth through developing and strengthening – gender knowledge- and gender perspective in research- and innovation environments with relevance for VINNOVA’s fields of activities. The expected results from the projects are change actions and new internal processes that in the long run will strengthen the competitiveness in R&I environments” (Extract from the VINNOVA call 2008, p.1, translated by the author.)

1.2.1. The emergence of the explorative field

A strong argument behind the project proposal from the Faste Laboratory was that an increased gender equality integration and gender competence could create a more innovative culture that can promote the development of new products and services and thereby open up for new markets. Another argument was that it was unfair and undemocratic to treat women in a marginalised way in today’s modern society, not acknowledging women’s potential.

During spring 2008 a pilot study was carried out as a joint anchoring and problem formulation process where the industrial partners, the director of the Faste Laboratory and one gender expert participated. It resulted in the sharing of experiences and discussions about previous gender equality efforts. In common for the companies involved was that previous equality activities had not been successful in terms creating sustainable results. The discussions with the industrial partners served as an informative basis that led to the formulation of research areas. Based on the results of the pilot study the main project was focused on following areas of exploration:

- The pilot study emphasised the need to explore development- and research questions related to the strong need to broaden the recruitment base in order to meet future requirements. This required the ability to recruit, promote and keep especially women, but also different types of masculinities, different ethnicities and ages. Different aspects related to recruitment processes, the formulation of competences and career possibilities became a strong focus in the project;
- Increased gender equality integration and gender competence in the Faste Laboratory's sphere of activity was also expected to support the development of new products, services and markets. Another important part in the project was therefore to create innovative development- and change processes;
- To achieve more sustainable change processes, action oriented research approach, procedures and participatory methods were integrated in the gender mainstreaming project. Different methods and procedures were explored and used to make visible values and norms that were obstacles to an increased and sustainable gender equality integration.

1.2.2. Project design

To achieve a sustainable change process for the overall innovation system the project was initially designed as a network. It consisted of the centre director, one project administrator, two gender researchers and a group of 10-12 researchers from technical divisions at LTU as well as two – three engineers from each of the seven industrial partners.

Initially the network participants were involved in different activities however, the network did not become the strong driving force within or the innovation system as it was intended, leading to a redesigned project model. Two case studies, hosted by one industrial partner and one by the academic partner, have been the main driving forces in the project. The focus of this chapter is the industrial case study. A more comprehensive research report will be published during 2016.

1.2.3. Processes, procedures and activities

Two intertwined knowledge processes were applied during the project to increase gender equality and competence, and to explore and make explicit cultural norms and values that hinders gender equality integration and competence. These processes were supported by an action-oriented approach with joint reflective learning procedures involving practical and theoretical input. It is not possible to separate the processes in relation to their influence on learning and knowledge, and the two cannot be measured separately. They interact closely with each other to create gender equality and gender competence. The two gender researchers have had partly different responsibilities within the study. One of the researchers had a greater responsibility for the research process and the increase of gender competence, whilst the other one had increased responsibility for driving and facilitating the process aimed at making visible cultural norms using action-oriented and interactive methods.

To early in the project clarify what can be conceptualised as researchers' and participants' expanded responsibility, including a cooperation agreement with clear commitments, is necessary for creating trust and respect for the participants/partners different expertise knowledge.

Kristiansen and Bloch Poulsen (2013) argue that allowing for dissensus in a development process is an important potential to create a better basis for sustainable change. It is also making space for a critical voice.

1.3. Combining gender and action research to expand the innovation space

In order to transcend the limits of the dominant paradigm in the Faste Laboratory, two norm-critical perspectives were used, action research and gender research. An action-oriented gender perspective and an action research approach with procedures and participatory methods were chosen

to strengthen the possibilities to achieve a more innovative and sustainable development- and change process, to achieve an increased gender conscious and acting innovation system.

Gender action-oriented traditions and action research both emphasise the necessity to in theory and practice to expand the arena of knowledge production. This from being a partially excluding arena to becoming a more inclusive one (Gunnarsson, 2006, 2007). The author argues that it is in the democratic vision of change that includes the women's and the participant groups and/or stakeholders experiences that these traditions meet. Their shared visions also point towards a joint need for a wider conceptualisation of validity to create stronger robustness in social sciences². This expanded knowledge arena contributes to knowledge production that increases what Lather (1986) labels transcendent validity aspects. These aspects of validity are related to knowledge that transcends and scrutinizes what we already know. For example paralogical validity that transcends authoritarian limitations and existing norms i.e. knowledge made invisible due to the hierarchies and norms in society. The validity dimensions will promote a paradigm shift towards a more innovative and creative ability within science and it could also contribute to increased entrepreneurial thinking. For

a comprehensive discussion of validity aspects and a typology of validity criteria in action research see Herr and Anderson (2005).

Both gender and action research focus social relations. Gender research does it by opening up for women's and men's experiences and everyday life practices, and the relations between women and men. For example through linking the gendered relation between reproduction and production in order to create a more grounded and robust societal knowledge.

From action research perspectives the argument is that equal terms between participants and researchers can, through a joint praxis, generate challenging new and more grounded knowledge and qualitatively different

² Novotny, Scott and Gibbons (2001) developed the concept of robustness to emphasize the need to achieve a stronger contextualisation in social sciences.

knowledge that ideally promotes for the involved participants and researchers. Knowledge is here also understood as having its roots in the participants' and researchers' everyday practices. With respect to the roots of knowledge there are strong similarities between the two traditions (Gunnarsson, 2006, 2007). Action research has been strongly criticized for not involving a gender dimension (Maguire, 2001). Very interesting work on systemic action research and complexity with relevance for innovation systems and change have been done by Burns (2007), Burns and Worsley (2015).

Action research has on the other hand, to a much higher extent than gender research, argued for the necessity of also involving the participants in joint reflective learning processes from the initial formulation of the research problem, in the co-researching and analysing phase, to the final phase of dissemination of knowledge (see for example Nielsen and Svensson, 2006, Gunnarsson, Hansen, Steen Nielsen and Sriskandarajah eds. 2015, Hansen, Steen Nielsen, Sriskandarajah and Gunnarsson eds. 2016). In the ambition to operationalize this communicative space (see for example Eikeland, 2006, Gunnarsson, 2006), researchers and participants have to be acknowledged as equal actors that partly embody different forms of knowledge and expertise.

Gender action oriented research has today particularly in gender mainstreaming research and applied gender research been much improved by incorporating the idea in action research of joint learning processes on equal terms between researchers and participants.

For both action research and gender action oriented research, it is argued that, there is a challenging need for developing what can be conceptualised as an expanded and explicit responsibility. A responsibility that also includes the researchers' and participants' awareness and reflexivity of their roles as experts, process facilitators and participants, as well as scrutinizing together the gap between what the different participants say and do. This has been a neglected area of reflexivity that needs to be explicit to create trustworthy processes and a respectful culture

1.4. Doing gender in organizations

The gender theory used in this project is based on theoretical work within the international doing gender research orientation (Acker 1999, Fenstermaker and West, 2008). Since the 1990s different doing gender approaches have been used within the Nordic research field of gender and organisation (Gunnarsson, Andersson, Vänje Rosell, Lehto and Salminen-Karlsson, eds., (2003), Andersson, Berglund, Gunnarsson and Sundin, eds. 2012).

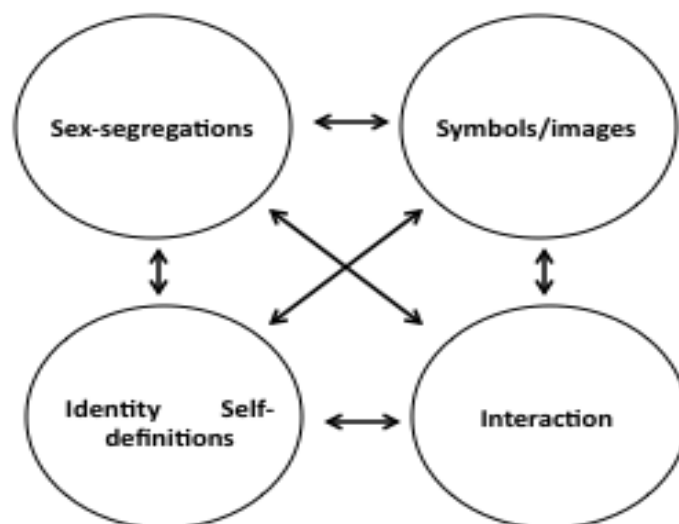
Within this orientation there are different approaches; the ethnomethodological, the cultural, the processual and the performative (Korvajärvi, 1998 p.22). Common for all the approaches is that doing gender is seen as an ongoing activity and interactive action between women and men, between women and women, and between men and men. The doing gender orientation links the everyday doing of gender and at the same time creates a relation to the institutional level, as well as making social power relations visible. The theoretical focus in the processual doing gender perspective makes it well suited to combine with action research theory and praxis (Gunnarsson, Hansen Steen Nielsen, Sriskandarajah, 2015). The alignment between everyday life activities and the institutional level opens up for understanding how concepts like work-life balance and gender contracts are intertwined and permeated with institutional gender orders and norms in society. Acker's (1999) process orientation in doing gender adds a deeper understanding on the structural as well as group/individual level to make gender inequality visible in organisations. She distinguishes four sets of processes or points of entry to make gender equality and inequality visible:

- Procedures, activities and divisions,
- Images, symbols, form of consciousness,
- Interactions between individuals and groups,
- Internal mental work.

The interplay between the individual/group level in organisations and the system-/institutional levels are intertwined in complex processes defining the space of action for women and men. Acker's points of entrances have in this project been linked to measure qualitative as well as quantitative changes. The handbook for participants: Innovation and gender – how to boost and measure change (Wennberg, Gunnarsson, Källhammer and Teräs, 2013) gives examples of how this can be carried out in practice.

This strategic, theoretical and activity based model is used in the overall innovation system. This model is a development of an earlier project model (Gunnarsson, Westberg, Andersson and Balkmar, 2007). It is a multiple method model aiming at making gender equalities and inequalities visible on different organisational arenas and levels and tries to explore the links between structures, processes and practices (individual/groups). In this model changes in processes and practices are seen as asymmetric dimensions that continuously interact with each other resulting in contextual variations in gender orders.

Figure 1.1. The tailored model used primarily in the case studies and initially based on Acker's work (1999).



Source: own compilation based on Acker's work (1999).

When practiced in the project the model is linked to an action oriented approach with interactive procedures to promote reflective learning processes in order to create a more sustainable successive owning of the change processes by the case study groups and the organisations.

The necessity to understand the variations in different contexts and the interaction with other social dimensions is handled in a slightly different but complementary way by Thurén (1996). She argues that gender aspects also must be analysed in terms of force, scope and hierarchy where:

- Force deals with the importance of gender. Is gender governed behaviour well defined? Are there sanctions for those who break the gendered patterns of behaviour?;
- Scope deals with the number of areas that are affected by gendering, divisions of labour, life styles, interests, body dynamics etc.;
- Hierarchy has to do with power and assessment of value. Is one gender more powerful or considered more valuable than another?

1.5. The industrial case study

This chapter illustrates, with a focus on the industrial case study group, the design, the work processes and activities carried out together with the gender researchers. The initiative to participate in the case study was taken by two female HR persons, one with an engineering background, and a male product manager.

The core participants in the industrial partner's organisation consisted of 12 middle managers on different levels in R&D and Product Management (10 men and 4 women) and two HR Advisors (both women), which have participated in the group since the beginning of the project. The group has shown a strong commitment to participate in the project even though the company during the project's initial stage went through a tough reorganisation process due to the global situation.

One driving force within the organisation, in spite of the economic situation, was the need to broaden their recruitment base when the economic situation changed. Most of the participants in the group were

middle managers, a neglected category, that today is given more attention in gender mainstreaming processes due to their powerful role in practice to negotiate the space of action for men and women (Andersson and Amundsdotter, 2012).

1.5.1. Processes, procedures and activities

The industrial and the academic case study groups started in the early and late summer of 2009 with two separate workshops, both carried out during two days. Before attending the workshops the participants were asked to read a popular and rather provocative book on gender equality. One of the groups also had the task to make a gender observation before they came to the workshop. The workshops gave them an opportunity to reflect on gender issues in their own organisations as well as in their own personal lives. It was a kick-off to start joint learning processes on gender equality and gender competence. The participants also reflected and discussed issues that they thought were important to explore further within their organisations. During the workshops gender lectures were mixed with smaller team workshops and individual reflective work. These initial workshops were then followed by two workshops per year during the three years long project. Between these workshops the case study participants met 10 times for half-day workshops. The groups progress was presented and discussed on the half- day workshops linked to the innovation systems partnership meetings (four times) and was as well given space on the regular partnerships meetings to discuss and inform the innovation system network.

Example of activities carried out in the industrial case study were for example:

- To explore interactive methods that make explicit values and norms that hinder gender equality integration and an increased gender competence. Example of methods: gender observations, value exercises, discourse analyses of policy documents and reports, explore the vertical and horizontal gender segregation in the company, gender analysis of an

enquiry of the working conditions in the organisation, scrutinizing career possibilities;

- Input of general gender science knowledge and more specific knowledge about organisational- and change processes, gendered meanings embedded in skills and competence;
- Invitations of external researchers in interesting related fields;
- Different forms of interactive and reflective methods were explored, such as concentric circles, to support joint learning processes;
- To formulate needs and activities in the organisation to achieve sustainable gender mainstreaming.

During year three of the project the participants in the industrial case study showed increased motivation and interest in taking over and own the gender mainstreaming processes themselves. This led to a more explicit extension and inclusion of the ethnicity dimension. The organisation described the project as the ignition to the extensive gender equality and diversity education that started late 2010 for top managers and middle managers (around 50 persons). It was followed by gender equality and diversity education for all staff (about 500 persons) during early 2011. This education, led by two consultants, resulted in benchmarking with American companies to share experiences on diversity policies and training programs.

Today, gender equality and diversity are since some years important dimensions integrated in the company's employer brand. Higher and middle managers are trained in gender and diversity competence and practice in the their global consortium.

1.5.2. Exploring recruitment procedures

Dimensions and aspects related to the need to broaden the recruitment base were explored in different ways. For example an exercise was carried out in the industrial case study to explore the recruitment of middle managers. The 14 core participants in the case study group, 13

were active as middle-managers, were first asked to in small groups formulate and list what they thought was necessary requirements for recruiting competent middle managers. The participants were then asked to categorise the competences in relation to the following four categories;

- Formally acknowledged (paid for):
 - General,
 - Specific.

- Not formally acknowledged (not paid for):
 - General,
 - Specific.

The four categories are used in Andreasen's and Jørgensen's qualification research when they explore gender bias in this field (1987; cf. Abrahamsson and Gunnarsson, 2002, Gunnarsson, 1994).

When the groups had carried out the task and together reflected over the results it became obvious for them that experience from their own specific company culture was a prerequisite. This competence was placed in the box of specific not formally acknowledged competence. When the participants became aware of this they became very cheerful and started to laugh. They realised that they recruited people like themselves and therefore not created any space for renewal or to broaden the recruitment base.

This workshop and other activities around competence and recruitment aspects led to a radical change in the industrial case study's organisation. It resulted in recruitment procedures that were initiated to avoid gender bias in advertisements etc. This radical change resulted in the recruitment of more women, other masculinities and other ethnicities. A very surprising effect was that more competent persons were applying for the jobs than earlier. Whether this is a sustainable effect or not will be followed up during 2016.

1.6. Conclusions

One general conclusion is that the project Gender and Equality development in the Faste Laboratory has shown that gender research combined with an action-oriented approach can be a fruitful leverage to achieve more innovative and sustainable organisational development- and change processes. In this chapter this is illustrated by the work carried out in the industrial case study. It resulted for example in an extensive redesign of the recruitment procedures and consciousness to promote also women to leadership positions. The radical change also resulted in the recruitment of more women, other masculinities and other ethnicities. Today this company's global consortium has integrated gender equality and diversity as a strategic part in their Employer Brand, and has started a education and training program for top- and middle managers. They have also recruited more women to strategic top positions. The gender and diversity project can in this sense be seen as a strategic functional product innovation implemented on the market for increasing g competitiveness.

A very surprising effect was also that more competent persons were applying for the jobs when the recruitment advertisements were redesigned. If that is a sustainable effect or not will be investigated during 2016.

Another result is that the project helped the case study group to articulate gender biases in the organisation and to argue for changes. In the beginning of the project they felt that something was wrong but they could not articulate it.

The Faste Laboratory's partnership meetings as well as the internal meetings have increasingly been inspired to use interactive and reflective procedures when discussing research progresses and new innovations.

It is necessary to emphasize that this kind of research – and development processes are much more time consuming than traditional research. It is also a real challenge for both researchers and participants, however rewarding in relation to knowledge production. This type of knowledge processes are required in the new era of Mode II research, i.e. Triple Helix constellations, where the academy only will be given resources

for large research programmes from EU if they cooperate in joint knowledge processes with stakeholders outside academy such as industries, public institutions and/or governmental institutions. It is also in line with the Horizon 2020 strategy to promote gender equality mainstreaming in the research programmes as well as using interactive approaches and participatory methods in the cooperation between industry and academy. The potentials in norm-critical perspectives such as gender research and action research approaches with interactive learning procedures are important strategic dimensions to increase the quality in the knowledge exchange utility and transformative ability in an academic and industrial cooperation.

The gender equality project in the Faste Laboratory is internally financed since 2013 until the end of 2016. To follow the progress in the project see the homepage under the Faste Laboratory portal: www.ltu.se/faste/gender.

1.7. Dilemmas and potentials

Changes in an organisation's everyday life are seldom experienced as radical or innovative, and therefore are often not worth mentioning or making visible. The author's own experiences from organisational change processes are that small but sometimes very important changes are not articulated. To make them visible, more in-depth reflective and interactive processes are necessary even for gender equality actors to articulate them (Gunnarsson, Westberg, Andersson and Balkmar, 2007). Another aspect of invisibility is related to the marginalisation of women's experiences in society in general, which therefore makes them less visible than men's experiences.

Requirements of so-called evidence based results are normative in technical environments i.e. in a context where a technical-economic rationality is given strong privilege of interpretation. Evidence-based measurements and results match the dominant knowledge paradigm existing in the industrial partner's and the academic divisions environment

in the Faste Laboratory's innovation system. These measurements are perceived as natural and objective but are problematic and often inadequate for measuring progress and change in qualitative research. A challenge in the project was therefore to develop a model including the articulation of qualitative measurements for change and innovation and make explicit their potentials for innovative thinking and practice. It is necessary to develop excellence criteria and expanded validity concepts to fully legitimise these tradition's scientific potentials in relation to innovation and creative thinking.

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