

EO agents: institutional entrepreneurs or organizational facade?

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ABSTRACT

Studies on EO policies in organizations demonstrate the importance of specific actors (e.g. women representatives) for the success of these policies (e.g. Tatli et al. 2006). Yet, the empirical literature on the role of specific actors within the field is rather limited (however e.g. Lawrence 2000). The aim of this article is to explore more deeply the impact of works councillors and equal treatment commissioners as EO agents on gender dynamics in organisations. Our study is based on 32 in-depth-interviews with Austrian works councillors and equal treatment commissioners, which we analysed using content analysis. Works councils are a key and widely accepted element of the Austrian industrial relations system. Equal treatment commissioners, on the other hand, were legally introduced in 1993 and, therefore, represent a relatively new institution focussing on gender equity in public organisations.

Our analysis is based on the theory of structuration (e.g. Giddens 1992), particularly, on the idea of potentially knowledgeable and reflexive agents. We refer to the conception of the 'quadripartite nature of structuration', which Stones (2005) uses to enhance structuration theory and offer a systematic framework for empirical studies. It includes four inter-linked aspects of Giddens' "duality of structure": external structures that pre-exist agents, internal structures of agents (conjunctually-specific knowledge, general dispositions), practices of agents and outcomes.

We use this framework to explore the potential of EO agents to act as institutional entrepreneurs', who are able to break the dominant institutional logic in an organizational field (e.g. Battilana 2006). For EO actors that means to achieve substantial changes towards less gendered organisational structures and practices. Analysing the capabilities and limitations of specific agents to influence a particular field it is important to understand their social positions since it "may be a key enabling condition for institutional entrepreneurship insofar as it relates individuals to the structural context in which they are embedded." (Battilana 2006, 655).

The scope of action and influence of EO actors are confronted with considerable external constraints that have a strong impact on the successes or failures of their activities. However, the internal structures of these actors, particularly their perception of gender and organizational situations, designs and cultures have the potential to reinforce but also weaken these external constraints. Therefore, we do not only discuss the external and internal barriers for EO actors to establish themselves as 'institutional entrepreneurs' but also identify unexploited potentialities to strengthen their impact on gender equity.

The restrictions we identify are characterized by different intensities and levels of complexity:

- 1) Open resistance of superiors and employees against the very idea of gender equity and the influence of EO actors.
- 2) Micropolitical strategies to limit the influence of EO actors on and in decision-making processes.
- 3) Rhetoric of equality that makes it culturally more demanding to uncover gender inequalities and discrimination.
- 4) The gender subtext of organizations (Benschop & Doorewaard 1998) that undermines activities and policies to sensitize organizations more fundamentally for gendered practices.
- 5) The limited understanding of gender (and organization) of many EO actors. They hardly relate to the (social) process of gender but concentrate on the unequal 'material' results of gendered practices.

INTRODUCTION

Studies on EO policies in organizations demonstrate the importance of specific actors (e.g. human resource managers, works councillors, supervisors, women representatives ...) on the success of these policies (e.g. Tatli et al. 2006; Freich 1997). However, the empirical literature on the role of specific actors within this field is rather limited. This paper explores more analytically and on a qualitative basis the impact of works councillors and equal treatment officers on EO in organizations in Austria.

Works councils are a key element of the Austrian industrial relations system (e.g. Traxler 1998). The regulations of the Works Constitution Act (1974) establish them as the legal representative of the workforce at company level. The mode and scope of representing the employees' interest by works councils is precisely defined by statute. Of all European works councils, the Austrian and German systems include the most extensive rights to information, consultation and joint decision-making (Jenkins & Blyton 2008, 347). These regulations empower works councils to ensure equal treatment of all employees (§ 92) and to suggest programs to support women (§ 92b). Equal treatment officers, on the other hand, have been legally introduced in 1993 (national Law of Equal Treatment) and, therefore, represent a relatively new institution focussing on gender equity in public organizations. They are - besides their normal duties - responsible for issues of equal treatment, the promotion of women within the organization, and even for the consideration of affirmative actions.

In the nature of their formal position works councillors and equal treatment commissioners are expected to work as a kind of "institutional entrepreneurs" (e.g. Battilana 2006, 657-8) in favour of more equality between men and women. Analysing the capabilities and limitations of specific agents to influence a particular field it is important to emphasise their social positions (Giddens 1992), since it "may be a key enabling condition for institutional entrepreneurship." (Battilana 2006, 655) Therefore, we explore the elements that undermine but also (potentially) support the social position of EO as a kind of change agent for gender equity. We relate to Giddens (1992, 84) who defines a social position as "a social identity that carries with it a certain range (however diffusely specified) of prerogatives and obligations that an actor who is accorded that identity (or is an 'incumbent' of that position) may activate or carry out [...]".

Our analysis is related to the construction of the 'quadripartite nature of structuration', which Stones (2005) uses to critically but appreciatively enhance structuration theory (Giddens 1979; 1992) and to offer a systematic framework for empirical studies. It includes four separated but inter-linked aspects of Giddens "duality of structure": External structures that pre-exist agents, internal structures of agents consisting of conjuncture-specific knowledge but also of more general dispositions, active agency or practices of agents and outcomes. We use this framework to explore the potential of individual agents to achieve substantial changes towards less gendered organizational structures and practices. Our data is based on 32 qualitative interviews with Austrian works councillors and equal treatment officers and on the structural analysis of the concepts of codetermination of works councils and EO policies. The study is not a random generalized study, but rather it gives a qualitative picture of the social practices of these EO actors in Austria. The structural analysis does not only include the legal basis but also the normative, ideological and practical conception to achieve gender equity in organizations.

The structure of our article is as follows: in the first section we present the 'quadripartite nature of structuration', particularly the role of social positions and position-practicing within this concept, as the framework for our analysis. Following this we discuss the wider context of society as an important part of the external structures, the specific external and internal structures as well as the activities and the corresponding results of works councillors and equal treatment officers. Finally, we analyse the barriers and potentials of EO agents to influence gendered structures and practices as institutional entrepreneurs in the organizational field of gender equity.

THE 'QUADRIPARTITE NATURE OF STRUCTURATION' AND SOCIAL POSITION

Since we are interested in the analysis of the impact of specific groups of agents the concept of social position within structuration theory is of particular importance. Social position "relates individuals to the structural context in which they are embedded." (Battilana 2006, 655) Social positioning, therefore, describes the process of integration of an individual within a network of social relations and patterned practices. Points of reference, or social spaces, can be the family, organizations, workplace, etc. but also (organizational) fields such as EO policies.

To form a more specific theoretical basis for our empirical study we differentiate the concept of social position(ing) on the basis of Stones (2005) analytically separated but inter-linked aspects of the duality of structure ('quadripartite nature of structuration'):

External structures: As Stones (2005, 84) argues external structures are independent of agents. External structures not only exist in a material and cultural sense but also in and through the relevant networked agents-in-context (Stones 2005, 93), which implies structured systems of social positions within which struggles take place over resources, chances, and access (Battilana 2006, 656). There is not just a potential tension between the requirements loaded onto a position and the abilities of an agent to carry out such expectations but also potential lack of cultural understanding or willingness to meet these expectations.

Internal structures emphasize the perception of the social context, the knowledgeable ability of agents of the structural characteristics and dynamics of the social system within which they act (Giddens 1992, 90-2). Here, we stress the sense of capability the agent-in-focus has, including potential usage of specific resources and the availability, knowledge and prospective handling of rules/norms to stabilize or change the social situation. The level of distancing from specific social situations varies from a 'taken-for-granted duality' to 'critical duality'. "The latter [...] refers to instances in which the agent has a degree of critical distance from the internal structures" (Stones 2005, 57) 'Taken-for-granted' duality, on the other hand, suggests that the meaning of the situation cannot be questioned by the agent-in-focus because of a strong personal involvement or commitment to an organization, institution, principle or whatever.

Active agency refers to the ways in which the agent uses his/her internal structure to act routinely, without reflecting the specific circumstances, and strategically, based on a critical distance to the perceived conditions. The agents' scope of action depends mainly on their knowledgeable ability. However, agents are not restricted to their own individual expertise but are able to use the knowledge of other individuals within social systems. Activities of actors can be understood as position-practices that also include the often simultaneous processes of active positioning and passive becoming positioned of agents.

The aspect of *outcomes* incorporates effects of external and internal structures and agency. These results, including successes or failures of agent's purposes, again become part of the external and internal structures and influence active agency. However, also different levels of change or stabilisation of institutionalised social positions, position-practice relations, patterns of position-practices, position identities and knowledgeable ability can be covered by the dimension of outcomes. As Giddens (1992) emphasises, the outcomes of activities are not always intended. Moreover, actors have very different capabilities to change or stabilise social orders (Stones 2005, 67).

WELFARE SYSTEM, FAMILY CULTURES AND LABOUR MARKET – THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THE SOCIETY

The gendered structures of the wider society are particularly important in the context of EO policies. EO actors are influenced by regulations and cultures of national states, their welfare and education systems, and discourses about family, gender, economy, etc. The Austrian framework can be characterised in terms of strongly gendered labour market structures, a

conservative/corporatist welfare system, combined with rather traditional family cultures (Dörfler 2007):

- Gendered employment behaviour, wage differentials, hierarchical and occupational segregation are depressingly persistent in Austria (Commission of the European Communities 2006). Women account for around 80 % of part-time workers. They are still very much concentrated in a narrow range of low-paid occupations, in sectors such as health and social services, retailing, education, public administration, and tourism, 70 % of workers in marginal employment are female and the number of women in management positions is still very limited.
- The conservative/corporatist welfare regime emphasises the duty of the state to provide financial compensation for important societal tasks (Esping-Andersen 1990). Whenever labour market participation is not seen as acceptable or desirable the state arranges financial compensation for parents (Doorne-Huiskes et al. 1998). This 'familialisation' of the Welfare State and the high transactional benefits re-emphasise the traditional role of mothers and fathers and, therefore, the gendered division of labour (OECD 2003; Bradshaw & Finch 2002). This familial approach is complemented by a modified male breadwinner/female part-time model that favours mothers who prioritise childcare but also accept some limited labour market participation (Haas 2005).
- Normative ideas about the nature of family, motherhood and fatherhood very much reflect the Austrian socio-political design of gender equity and reconciliation of work and family (e.g. Auer & Welte 2010). Studies also see low cultural acceptance of full-time employed mothers (in particular with young children) in Austria (Neuwirth & Weinhart 2008; Nebenführ 1998; Bradshaw et al. 1996).

The EO actors in our empirical study face a rather conservative environment characterised by traditional values concerning the societal roles of men and women. The material and symbolic strength of this setting is strongly based on its acceptance and support not only by the management but also the majority of the employees. These general-dispositional frames of meanings include a rather individualistic, liberal approach towards gender relations in organizations and often refer to typical male and female stereotypes and behavioural patterns.

EO actors are hardly aware that their discourse is part of cultural discrimination, constituting female employees as if they were deficient and shaping the self-perception of many women who are, in principle, committed to their work career. EO actors partly contribute to this gendered process by rarely discussing structural and cultural barriers for women who apply for leadership positions. Even when they acknowledge difficulties women may expect in reconciling a top position and their family work they do usually not refer to societal and organizational structures. Partly, this is the result of neglecting gendered structures at the labour market and in families and organizations.

WORKS COUNCILLORS: CAUGHT IN THE CONCEPTION OF 'CODETERMINATION'

Similar to the industrial relations system of Germany, works councils in Austria already have a long tradition and are of particular importance for negotiating and establishing working conditions in organizations (Hermann & Flecker 2006). The Austrian Works Constitution Act (1974) forms the legal basis of codetermination by works councils in Austria, granting the strongest forms of participation in relation to personnel and social issues but offering very limited participation rights in economic matters of the organization. Formally they have an independent position from the employer. Of course, they have to negotiate and agree with the management on many issues but they are mainly accountable to the employees they represent. The transfer of regulations of working conditions (e.g. working hours) from the level of collective bargaining to the plant level gives works councils an even more important but also more challenging and difficult role (e.g. Auer & Welte 2001; Jenkins & Blyton 2008, 354; Traxler 1995).

Besides the general legal norms on equal treatment the Works Constitution Act includes the protection and promotion of women at work and the reconciliation of work and family (§ 92b)

as specific issues of the participation of works councils. It clarifies that the works council has the right to suggest and discuss measures in these areas with the employer. However, the employer is not obliged to apply these suggestions. On the other hand if the employer and the works council approve it is even possible to implement formal workplace agreements on these issues. These regulations do not offer a strong basis for activities of works councillors regarding gender equity. EO active works councillors strongly depend on the backing of the works councils as an institution, the support of the employees as well as the good will of the management.

First of all, we have to look at the legal and social position of works councillors as representatives of the workforce that also have to pay attention to the interests of the company and their usually close relationship to trade unions. Fürstenberg (1958) already described the resulting problems: professional and authentic representation of heterogeneous interests of the workforce, cooperation with the management to integrate interests of the workforce and the company and solidarity with general trade union policies. Particularly the problems of representation and integration have an impact on the social position of works councillors as EO actors.

In some cases EO active works councillors vigorously raise issues of gendered organizational practices that privilege men over women and, therefore, may create conflicts and become part of (micro)political struggles. These works councillors may find themselves in difficult strategic positions since many employees ignore, avoid or even rigorously reject gender issues. Therefore, such activities are seen as 'de-legitimizing' works councils and hardly support the social position of works councillors. They often act without strong structural and social support and must try to convince and use the works council as institution in favour of EOs.

The traditional concentration of works councils is related to working conditions in a narrower sense (working hours, social benefits, physical conditions etc.). Moreover, works councils are institutionally characterized by a lack of gender-awareness and gender-knowledge (e. g. Danieli 2006; Wajcman 2000; Krell 1999) also because of its history and tradition. Men have not only dominated works councils with respect to numbers but also in a cultural-valuational sense. The masculine tradition of works councils may also be a reason for the rather conservative approach towards gender issues of EO active works councillors. Discursively EO measures are often seen through the lens of work-family policies.

Another strong feature of the participation of works councillors in the area of EOs derives from the "constitutional approach" (Frege 2005, 159) towards organizational democracy that characterizes codetermination in Austria (and Germany). This approach means first of all that the state has the right to intervene in workplace relations (Frege 2005). A consequence of this tradition is the legally explicit and cultural implicit concentration of employee participation on works councils/councillors. Therefore, many employees themselves understand their role in the participation system usually as rather passive and depending on the institution 'works council'. This may be even stronger in a field that is characterized by little knowledge and limited awareness, such as gender issues.

Without directly participating, developing deeper knowledge and experiencing the problems of decision-making processes many actors will remain uninvolved to participation and codetermination. The lack of participation has an impact on the social position of works councillors in general but particularly on the effectiveness of their participation in the area of EOs. Since discrimination often does not take place visibly, publicly, intentionally and even consciously (e.g. Czarniawska 2006; Martin 2006), involvement and active participation of employees seem to be important to develop sensibility and knowledge on the issue of EOs. For EO active works councillors the lack of attention and awareness of the majority of employees forms an important barrier in becoming active, developing initiatives and improving gender equity.

EQUAL TREATMENT OFFICERS: CONTRADICTIONS AND DILEMMAS

Equal treatment officers are nominated by committees within the organization and act formally independent. The official position as an equal treatment officer is something additional to the 'normal' job in the organization and is fulfilled voluntarily. Therefore, these actors have diverse professional functions and are located at different hierarchical levels. Rather similar to EO active works councillors equal treatment officers refer to their personal experiences in their education and/or employment history and to their personal values such as fairness and justice which they want to support with their engagement.

Equal treatment officers are allowed to act without restrictions within the framework of the law. They have to be informed by executives or heads of departments about any processes and decisions that affect equal treatment within the organizations. Moreover, they have the right to be present during formal decision processes. If equal treatment officers notice discriminatory effects they can intervene and stop the decision process. Since the Law of Equal Treatment (2002) directly and solely aims at improving EOs for men and women it offers stronger support than other labour legislation, particularly the Works Constitution Act.

In public, bureaucratic organizations the law represents a main value and is in accordance with the 'logic' of how these organizations function. Equal treatment officers are constituted by the law, it represents the normative basis of their work as equal treatment officers, offers regulations and legitimates their influence and power, etc. Therefore, to refer to the law offers a strong basis to act. At the same time equal treatment officers criticise the law as too weak in terms of long termed structural changes because it offers hardly any accurate sanctions in cases of discrimination, decision processes take very long in cases of conflicts, and their competencies are often limited to uncover discriminations and to intervene with the relevant decision makers. However, the sheer existence of equal treatment officers has an impact on gender equity since it becomes an institutionalised part of organizations which exists just for the purpose of equality between men and women.

Similar to works councillors equal treatment officers, firstly, depend on the awareness and willingness of employees to inform and cooperate. Equal treatment officers make the contradictory experience that activities as EO agents are seen as positive by many employees but at the same time a large group of employees is not even aware of their function and do not perceive them as possible institutional support. Secondly, although equal treatment officers are legally independent from the top-management and superiors for the purpose of achieving real changes, they need the acceptance and support of them. Comparing to works councils the low acceptance of the institution equal treatment officer by superiors and sometimes even the top-management represents a fundamental problem: They have to fight for (the notice of) their functions and role. To inform equal treatment officers about and integrate them in decision-making processes is often seen by the management as an imposition and a formal act. Therefore, equal treatment officers usually get only acceptance if they challenge (decisions of) the management and reinforce their function and rights.

Some equal treatment officers seem to have a more sophisticated, analytic and complex understanding of gender than most of EO active works councillors. This approach goes beyond "body-counting" (Alvesson & Billing 2002), meaning the allocation of men and women to specific jobs, hierarchies, functions, careers, etc. on the one hand and an understanding of gender as a variable emanating from certain individual beings (Lewis 2006) on the other hand. These equal treatment officers additionally emphasise structures, institutional and cultural practices but can hardly refer to and rely on this understanding of gender (Nentwich 2006). Explicitly or implicitly the interviews make clear that body-counting and gender as an outcome of individual activities represents the dominant, taken-for-granted approach to gender. Of course, that reduces the scope of actions for them and does hardly allow going beyond obvious discrimination by specific actors.

ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

To understand the activities and engagement of EO actors it is also important to pay attention to the different formal and informal positions they have in an organization. Besides other structural elements this constellation constitutes the social position of EO actors. They will use their professional position, including their functions, hierarchical position and social status to enhance their chances of acting in favour of gender equity; at the same time this constellation will restrict their scope of action since they have to pay attention to contexts and occupational tasks. They have to reflect on the different opportunities and risks involved (similar Acker 2000, 627). Generally speaking, the reflexive-monitoring actor "must also keep in mind her other projects, their likely contexts, and what is likely to be required to fulfil them." (Stones 2005, 26)

EO actors do not just aim at transforming gendered processes and outcomes but also try to enhance their social acceptance and position within the organization. Particularly equal treatment officers try to change their often negative attributed social identity into a more positive one; EO active works councillors on the other hand work on their recognition as being responsible for gender equity of the management and employees but also within works councils. Remarkably, the recognition of works councillors and, even more, equal treatment officers mainly derives from their professional function, personal qualities, and, particularly, their social integration but not from their position as being formally responsible for EOs.

The form the activities take mainly consists of informing about, monitoring as well as controlling (standard) procedures and legal norms and dealing with individual cases of (potential) discrimination. Whereas the interviewees describe the former as a kind of routine activity the latter is perceived as rather stressful, often very contentious and, therefore, personally challenging. Another form of their activities is participating in or even initiating specific change or reform projects in areas such as salary structures, organizational design or, of course, EO programs. However, from the interviewees' perspective the strength of their social position and also the impact on gender equity depends on the capability to deal socially acceptable, often consensus orientated with all these different issues and actors.

To keep up their knowledgeability, to understand practices and dynamics of the organization and to become or remain integrated EO actors need to be involved in the 'public life' of organizations. From the interviewees' perspective it is necessary for their success to be present, in formal meetings and trainings but also informally by communicating with different actors (especially heads of departments, superiors), who have the potential to influence EOs.

EO actors do not stress their formal position (Stones 2005, 67) but try to relate their professional and personal recognition to their activities. Moreover, they refer to elements of the culturally accepted, official organizational context (e.g. Gherardi 1995). Establishing aspects of EO within corporate culture can considerably strengthen the social position of EO actors since it supports gender equity at a symbolic, interpretative dimension. One way to 'break the ice' is to relate to hard facts of material inequality as one element of the organizational logic. Another core element of the 'logic' of public and bureaucratic organization is the law and therefore EO agents in public organizations highlight it as a main value. Diversely works councillors in private companies compared to those in the public sector are more reluctant to use legal norms as means of power and pressure in their representation activities, also in the area of EOs. Although they clearly state that the law is an important basis and background for their work, for them it is the last means they want to use (similar Quinn 2004, 651). This is not necessarily related to weak representation politics: Works councillors explain that it is just not necessary to involve legal aspects because the climate between the works council and the (top) management is characterised by pragmatism, co-operation and compromises.

CONSTRAINTS AND POSSIBILITIES

The social position, scope of action and influence of EO actors are confronted with considerable external constraints that have a strong impact on successes or failures of their policies and activities. However, the internal structures of works councillors and equal

treatment officers, their perception of gender, particularly in the context of organizations, and awareness as well as interpretations of organizational situations, designs, cultures and practices have the potential to reinforce but also weaken these external constraints. Therefore, we do not only discuss the main external and internal barriers (and their interplay) for EO actors to establish themselves as institutional entrepreneurs but also identify unexploited potentialities to strengthen their impact on gender equity in organizations. The restrictions EO actors are confronted with are characterized by different intensities and levels of complexity. We will move – exemplarily - from rather simple barriers to deal with to very complex and intensive constraints that single actors can hardly overcome.

Reports from interviewees of obvious acts of resistance against the participation of EO actors can be positioned on a rather simple level. This is mainly the case when supervisors are not aware of or do not accept the participation rights of EO agents. For them this situation seems to be the most unproblematic one to deal with since it is possible to straightforwardly apply the law and complain to the top management; the involved actors, usually supervisors can be forced to correct their behaviour. However, they may only change at a formal level but not their general-dispositional approach towards gender equity and the role of EO actors.

A second barrier represents the overt resistance against the very idea of gender equity. Although openly neglecting EO is hardly tolerable for top-management positions anymore, it can still be located at lower hierarchical levels. Supervisors, but also employees may (re)produce female and male stereotypes and, thus, usually discriminate against female employees in their professional development and career and male employees in their ambitions to engage in private care responsibilities. These attitudes and decisions can already create a strong barrier since equal treatment and opportunity policies have to be implemented and carried out within subunits and by supervisors.

Explicit (micro)political strategies that formally fulfil the law but are simultaneously directed against the idea of gender equity constructs an even more complex situation for EO actors. If the top management and/or supervisors want to achieve a certain result, they may apply strategies to officially meet the norms of the law but at the same time make sure that the 'right' decision is made. The setting of these strategies is often a traditional, male dominated organizational (or departmental) culture. In this kind of organizational culture, the agenda of gender equality is confronted with (emotional) rejection, and/or reduced to a formal problem. Generally speaking, the strategy of just formally meeting the law but substantially neglecting the idea of gender equity creates a demanding situation for EO actors. Therefore, building up organizational networks and coalitions that allows to (quickly) get necessary and sometimes underhand, maybe even confidential information, to be able to involve other actors and to enhance the social standing and backing in decision-making processes is fundamental.

Interviewees mention organizational rhetoric of equality as an additional barrier to challenge discrimination. This rhetoric is rather common and covers the persisting inequalities between men and women (Wilson 1999). Processes of discrimination are then explained by individual differences, and not related to organizational structures and practices. For EO agents it is a delicate matter to argue against this rhetoric of equality. The management as well as employees may perceive this criticism as not acknowledging previously and currently taken organizational EO efforts.

The gender subtext of organizations (Benschop & Doorewaard 1998) does not only hinder the uncovering of gender discrimination, it also undermines the impact of policies to increase equality between men and women. The lack of success is not due to open resistance but to 'normal', cultural accepted unequal practices. The gender subtext also weakens activities and policies of EO actors to sensitize organizations more fundamentally for gendered practices. Therefore, they are hardly capable of substantially challenging the "gendered substructure of organizations" (Acker 1991). The failure or at least limited success of EO policies and regulations creates a difficult situation for EO actors because on one hand they (have to) favour and even fight for these measures/rules and on the other hand they need to

criticise and challenge these material, ideological and symbolic structures that strongly restrict their success.

In order to reverse processes and results of discrimination EO actors have to rely strongly on their knowledgeability of the social system they are within. However, profound knowledgeability has to be combined with a complex, reflective understanding of the role of gender in organizations. Still, many EO actors limit gender dynamics in organizations to body-counting. Furthermore, they strongly relate to material inequality but almost not to the cultural-symbolic dimension of inequality relating to devaluation of femininity and the privilege of masculine norms (Fraser 1997; Gherardi 1995). However, the economic and the cultural dimension "intertwine to reinforce each other dialectically because sexist and androcentric cultural norms are institutionalised in the state and the economy, and women's economic disadvantage restricts women's 'voice', impeding equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres and in everyday life." (Fraser 1997, 21) To enhance their scope of action EO actors need to address this "vicious circle" of cultural, symbolic subordination and socio-economic discrimination. That makes it necessary for EO agents to develop a more complex understanding of gendered organization and EOs to be better prepared to deal with subtle, invisible forms of discrimination.

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