

## ***Towards a gender equality Action Plan for INFN***

### **Gender and HRM**

#### *Gender equality at the core of research strategy*

By O. Di Carlo

*«A good gender equality policy is not just a statement of intention to respect “equal opportunities”. A gender equality policy should be an instrument to help organisations improve their overall performance in terms of social responsibility, scientific excellence and economic sustainability.»*

#### **Why “Structural changes”?**

The key role given to research and innovation in striving towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe means that *the EU should make full use of its human capital – thereby involving both men and women.*

Gender-aware management of universities and research organisations would have a positive impact on policies and practices in the recruitment, promotion and retention of both women and men, thus ultimately benefiting the very quality of research.

Evidence<sup>1</sup> shows that research performance is limited by the perpetuation of direct and indirect sex discrimination and that *promoting gender equality at all levels contributes to achieving excellence and efficiency.*

‘Structural change’ in universities and research institutions means making them more gender-aware, thereby modernising their organizational culture. This has important implications for equal opportunities, full use of talent, appeal of scientific careers, and quality of scientific research. It implies systemic, integrated, long term approaches rather than piecemeal short term measures.

In order to overcome the barriers to effective practice that are created unwittingly within organizations over time, certain basic conditions must exist. There must be a statistical base, to provide accurate sex-disaggregated data which can be assessed. There must be a willingness at the top to open up discussion and to support the process of self-study. There must also be acknowledgement of the importance of the multifaceted role of department chairs and unit heads, who oversee the key processes of recruitment, retention, promotion and pay. Fortunately, establishing these basic conditions is quite feasible and ultimately beneficial to the organization in the long run.

#### **ILO Thematic Report “Gender and HRM”**

Gender equality is frequently considered as a separate agenda, disconnected from other levels of organisational functioning and rarely accompanied by appropriate enforcement and monitoring mechanisms. This is exactly one of the reasons why these policies do not seem to work as they should.

*At the same time, lack or scarce attention to gender equality and/or diversity issues appears a symptom of the broader need to upgrade the human resource management function both in centralised systems and procedures and in the way in which team leaders manage the everyday work of research.* The latter is a finding that emerged as a need across the geographical and scientific diversity of all partner institutions and it clearly finds its origins in the challenges faced by today’s “*post-academic research*”: pressure for money, the dynamic relations with

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<sup>1</sup> Structural change in research institutions: Enhancing excellence, gender equality and efficiency in research and innovation, EUR 24905 EN, 2011.

the private sector, competition for visibility, need to set up large collaboration teams, international mobility, quest for innovation, multiculturalism...

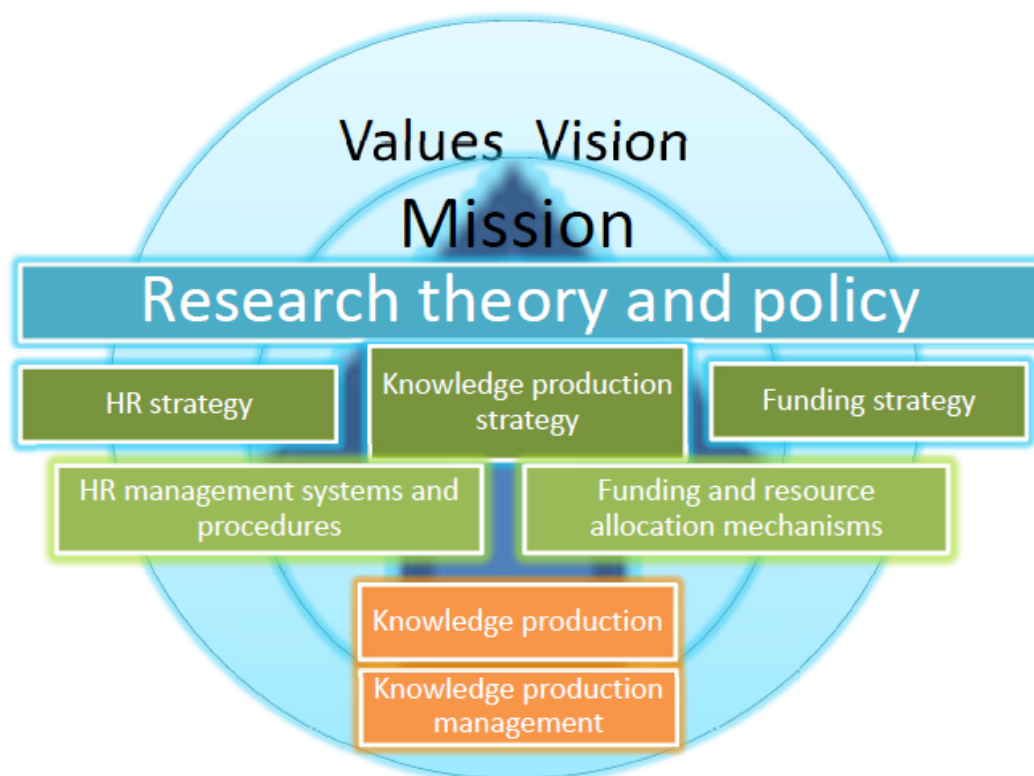
The ILO Report looks at ways in which explicit organisational strategies, processes and mechanisms can be revisited so as to limit and address the influence of stereotypes and create the enabling conditions for “gender- and people”-friendly organisations. It presents the rationale and some tools that can be used to revisit HR strategies in a perspective which is free from gender bias and also proposes some practical measures – as way of example - which have proved to be successful to achieve better gender equality in institutions.<sup>2</sup>

A broad corpus of research<sup>3</sup> proves that when adequately managed :

- gender balance among teams can greatly improve organisational performance and innovation capacity;
- women’s participation in teams has a positive correlation with increased collective IQ of the team;
- a critical mass of women in leadership positions positively correlates with organisational performance.

A gender equality policy can work and be a plus both for organisations and individuals only if adequate implementation mechanisms and cultural changes are planned and put in practice at all the components of an institution’s strategy.

Figure 1 shows the different areas where gender equality –as equality at large - should and can be practically integrated as an objective of its own right.



<sup>2</sup> PRAGES – Guidelines for Gender Equality Programmes in Science, offers a plethora of examples and practical tools.

<sup>3</sup> Catalyst ([www.catalyst.org](http://www.catalyst.org)) has conducted extensive research on the correlation between women in management positions and organisational performance in the private sector.

FIGURE 1 -GENDER EQUALITY AS PART OF A SYSTEM

These areas are related to three<sup>4</sup> different aspects of decision-making:

- macro level (overall policy and decision-making, core value setting, overall objectives);
- meso level (formal implementation structures, rules, normative dimension, resource allocation, occupational profile) and
- micro level (everyday management, projects, inter-personal dynamics, individual mind sets as influenced by culture, empowerment or disempowerment of individuals etc.).

Assumed the engagement of our top management for the first level: gender equality as a policy goal/dimension, with clear goals and a timeframe, we can concentrate on meso and micro level as **priority areas for action:**

- Meso: strategic plans for HR and research; informing rules, procedures, culture; resource allocation.
- Micro: gender-sensitive management (research and teams); gender friendly work organisation; empowerment of individuals.

#### ESTABLISHING THE GENDER EQUALITY POLICY OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

It is important to recall that real action towards gender equality may require change of formal processes and different mind sets, and therefore is likely to meet various forms of conscious and unconscious *resistance*. Change can be supported only if those affected by change can perceive its benefits in terms of work satisfaction and welfare, so *building on existing positive attitudes is an important condition for sustainability and success*. For this reason formal and informal consultation processes should be part of the development of policy objectives.

#### INSTITUTIONAL SET UP FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Equality Committees are normally established with promotional, technical advice and monitoring functions. They may be supported by Gender Focal Point Networks. These structures, which are often of bipartite nature, are essential. However experience shows that in lack of comprehensive accountability frameworks these committees remain isolated while everyone assume that the implementation of the equality policy is not a common concern.

Responsibilities with the ultimate achievement of the policy should rest with top management. *Accountability lines should then be established, so that all staff, at different levels, have a shared responsibility*. These should include staff at managerial levels as well as both administrative and research staff.

#### EMBEDDING GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES IN HR MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Policies and action plans to promote gender equality in an organisation require a revision of HR systems and procedures, from a gender equality perspective.

HR management systems and practices are the tools through which an institution can attract and retain people, namely the most precious resource they can rely on to achieve their strategic objectives. This is particularly important when the institutions' mission is research – human knowledge production.

In many cases the negative gender impact of HR practices is due to the presence of involuntary and unconscious gender biases in relation to the different capacities, ambitions and needs of women and men. Unveiling these biases is not only useful to promote gender

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<sup>4</sup> This categorization is broadly used in gender analysis and planning for policy design. Cfr. For instance EC (2010) *Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in EU-funded research* among others.

equality, but it benefits the institution overall as it help adopting more transparent, efficient and non-discriminatory HR management systems.

#### KEY CONCERNS FOR HR SYSTEMS

Looking at HR systems through a “gender lens” means to be able to recognize if existing procedures and practices challenge or reinforce existing inequalities and gender discrimination. Institutions which are truly concerned with the low representation of women at the top of scientific research should address these concerns:

1. Building capacity to document existing inequalities and discrimination;
1. Spreading the awareness that gender issues are important for both women and men
2. Gaining and maintaining leadership commitment,
3. Challenging the idea that Science is by definition “neutral” and “meritocratic” and unveil how gender stereotypes have a negative impact in organisational cultures and HRM practice, leading to implicit acceptance of existing inequalities in the scientific environment;
4. Need to promote an healthy balance between work and private life, for all;
5. Need to support the parental rights of young women and men, with due consideration of the impact of maternity on women’s careers
6. Need to directly address existing inequalities by e.g. supporting women’s careers and promoting their participation in the practice and management of research.

#### RESPONSIBILITIES

A typical aspect of research and academic institutions (particularly in the public sector) is the tension between a highly, if not totally, decentralized level of responsibility in human resources management (performance management and evaluation, including evaluation of scientific production) and a typically centralized system of regulations for recruitment and employment conditions.

Putting gender equality in the agenda of the HR dialogue is a first step to define the level of autonomy and responsibility that these different organisational functions (administrative director and scientific director) have in terms of proactive measures towards gender equality, and accountability lines towards their implementation.

#### MONITORING, EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP

The achievement of the objectives of the gender equality action plan should be regularly monitored and evaluated also to allow for possible adjustments to be made. It is important that these results are also made public and that the monitoring indicators (quantitative and qualitative) are agreed by those responsible for the various actions.

Equality Committees (CUG) have monitoring functions and are responsible for reporting to national level equality bodies.

#### PROMOTING EQUALITY AT ALL STAGES OF THE HR CYCLE

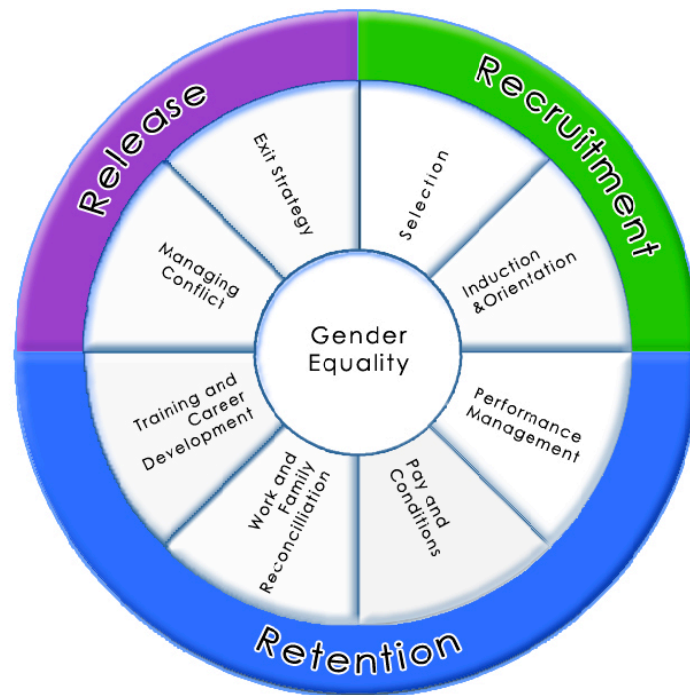
There is a natural “life cycle” of HR management. The starting point is recruitment, followed by retention and ending with release. Each of these stages include sub-elements that address the different aspects of an employment relationship:

- “Recruitment” includes induction of new employees and orientation of employees who have transferred to new responsibilities.
- “Retention” generally comprises pay, employment conditions; working conditions; performance management; work and family/private life reconciliation; performance evaluation; training, rewards and career development.

- “Release” covers retirement, health, return to study as well as leaving for end-of-contract, downsizing, redundancy, underperformance, or misconduct.

This cycle has been described “an Iris”<sup>5</sup>. Looking at the Iris through a gender lens is the first step towards a gender-sensitive HR system as it helps discover the existence of inequalities and unveil practices and attitudes which have a different impact on women and men, their career opportunities, and their capacity to give the best of their talent to the institution.

### The HR Iris<sup>6</sup>



A gender sensitive HR system will integrate the objectives of the gender equality policy and action plan at each of these stages, as relevant, and on the basis of the inequality data collected at diagnostic stage.

### SELECTED ACTIONS:

To establish coherent criteria for staff selection and evaluation it's necessary to introduce a 'Competency Model' for all the areas of HRM.

#### Area: Recruitment

- Organise training initiatives on bias- free evaluation for members of selection and recruitment committees
- Revise selection and evaluation criteria to avoid penalising non-linear careers
- Publish all the curricula of selected staff
- Prepare a leaflet containing instructions for selection committees to avoid biased evaluations

<sup>5</sup> EC(2009) *Break Gender Stereotypes, Give Talent a Chance: Tips and Tools for Smart HR Managers*

<sup>6</sup> EC(2009) *Break Gender Stereotypes, Give Talent a Chance: Tips and Tools for Smart HR Managers*.

### **Area: Retention - employment conditions**

- Introduce a job evaluation system based on neutral criteria, i.e. assess requirements according to their actual importance to the institution and not according to generally accepted social criteria (C.M.).

### **Area: Retention - Promotion and career development**

- Introduce transparency criteria into selection procedures: advertisement, publishing of assessment criteria and grading system.
- Publish advertisements for promotions on a regular basis and use clear and transparent assessment criteria.
- Establish working time flexibility and teleworking.

### **Area: Working conditions - Pay / Salary**

- Perform a pay discrimination audit to assess the causes of pay differentials

### **Area: Working conditions - Working time / reconciliation of personal, family and professional life**

- Introduce a system for managing proposals aimed at promoting the reconciliation of family and personal life.
- Analyse the gender impact of usual working hours / overtime
- Establish some flexible working hours for all staff categories (see American Express good practice: to allow 1 day x months working at home
- Organise information and awareness-raising days about paternity leave to show that the institution has an open attitude towards employees taking such leave.

### **Area: Working conditions - Sexual and sex-based harassment**

- Raise staff awareness about the adopted code of conduct and the role of the Consigliere di Fiducia through a leaflet and other forms of communication.

Annexes:

*The CERN 'competency model'*

*(by P. Cenci)*

*HRS for researchers*

*(by M. Paciello)*