

Impact Story Obtaining gender balance in decision-making positions

Impact Story

Obtaining gender balance in decision-making positions through increased academic and leadership qualifications from international research mobility and leadership training

Intervention Definition

Increased academic and leadership qualifications can be obtained in several ways, e.g. through learning-by-doing, by mentoring sessions, through longer stays in other research organisations or by leadership training activities. The present intervention demonstrates two ways to increase female qualifications and obtain balance in decision-making positions in academia.

One instrument is international mobility that allows young researchers to develop professionally, by experiencing and learning from new and different academic environments, their cultures and work methods (e.g. VINNMER 2007a, 2007b). A long stay or several shorter stays abroad, and the international network they support, are often seen as prerequisite for a career as researcher and ultimately as a leader within academia or in research organisations. Another instrument is an intervention directly targeting gender balance in decision-making positions through increased attention and acquiring knowledge on organisational and hidden structural gender barriers. The intervention can be in form of official leadership training courses and meetings for up-coming researchers in the organisations, like the programme "The Accountability of Academic Colleagues" (AKKA), a leadership-training programme implemented at Lund University as described by Lövkrona and Widén (2012). Such an intervention is an example of an intervention aimed at (among other things) improving the awareness and insights into organisational and hidden structural barriers for gender equality.

Both instruments have the purpose of increasing female researchers' qualifications and correspondingly obtain gender balance in decision-making. However, they both have implicit barriers. The requirements of international mobility for career promoting purposes often coincide with the period of people's lives during which they start families. Especially in families with smaller children, stability and job security are highly valued by the researchers in general and perhaps such considerations weigh more heavily in the minds of women researchers than men researchers. Setting the scene for a better and more understanding mind-set in research organisations regarding such obstacles in academic career progress are important to articulate and target by management and Human Resources departments in the academic research environment (Widén and Lövkrona 2012, 2015). Other obstacles among the family constraints to especially female researchers' international mobility include the strain of absence on the spouse or partner's career and financial worries, for instance, if the spouse is the main 'breadwinner' (Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science 2015). Although male researchers at universities in many research leading countries worldwide are also increasingly limited with respect to international mobility due to dual-career issues, traditional gender roles and gendered patterns of distribution of home and family responsibilities still constitute greater constraints upon women's mobility than they seem to do upon that of men (Jöns 2011).

Therefore, a mobility programme targeting female researchers operates by financially bolstering opportunities for women's leadership qualification through increased national (e.g. university-private sector research collaboration) and especially international mobility. A well working mobility-enhancing programme can be structured around administrative family-related support functions and financial incentives to research institutions as well in order to improve the organisational engagement and commitment. To combat family related logistical problems, especially hindering younger researchers with dependent family members, e.g. smaller children or career focusing spouse, the programme can defray the expenses associated with any accompanying family as well (VINNMER 2007c).

One example of such a mobility inducing intervention is the Swedish mobility programme VINNMER (VINNMER 2007c). VINNMER can be characterised as a comprehensive intervention with a large budget, promoting opportunities for women's leadership qualification through national and international mobility. Sweden's Innovation Agency (VINNOVA) covered half the salary of the researcher, while the Swedish research institution, where the researcher was employed, was expected to cover the remaining half (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al 2017).

The second example of an intervention that increased attention and knowledge of organisational and hidden structural gender barriers was AKKA (Widén and Lövkrona 2012, 2015). AKKA boosted the outcome and impact of the programme aiming at targeting gender balance in decision-making positions. The university-internal leadership training programme consisted of meetings, courses and reflections upon topics such as organisational structures and processes of universities, academic, strategic and personal leadership, and of course gender and academia. As such, AKKA raised awareness and provided knowledge to organisational actors about organisational barriers to achieve gender equality in decision-making.

Intervention Definition Short

Geographical and inter institutional mobility supporting interventions involves giving female researchers better opportunities to stay at other private or public sector research environments, e.g. move abroad for a period or invite female researchers from foreign universities or research organisations. Leadership training interventions on organisational and hidden structural gender barriers involves training to increase awareness and knowledge about organisational barriers to achieve gender equality in Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI). Both instruments have the aim to obtain gender balance in decision-making positions through improved academic and leadership qualifications.

Objectives

- (1) Increase the number of women in R&I positions
- (2) Improve work conditions/work-life balance
- (3) Boost professional capabilities of women to pursue promotion
- (4) Implement gender-fair organisational structures

Output

Immediate output of the Intervention is an increase in the availability of funding for research mobility and leadership training activities that explicitly targets women and consequently an increase in the number of female researchers participating in the mobility or training programme.

Output Short

Direct outputs of an intervention targeting gender balance in decision-making positions include an increased number of female researchers achieving qualifications and leadership knowledge through participation in the intervention.

Output indicators

- 2.1.1 Opportunity to bring family along during stay abroad
- 2.2.1 Award or honour by institution
- 2.2.1 Events to create visibility and credibility and specific types of recognition for women
- 2.3.1 Contracts take major life events into account (e.g. child birth)
- 2.3.2 Received personal and professional support from institution
- 2.4.1 Access to necessary facilities and work space

<p>3.1.1 Implementation of leadership development programme</p> <p>3.2.2 Support to create/sustain networks</p> <p>3.2.2 Existence of women-only groups/ networks</p> <p>3.3.1 Institution's commitment to promote equality and diversity</p>
<p>Outcome</p> <p>Long international research stays abroad are expected to benefit both home and host research institution by ensuring collaboration, knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing (Jöns 2011). Hence, the main outcome of research stays ideally include concrete outcomes, such as publications, networking, participation in conferences, as well as strengthened leadership capabilities, which are assumed to promote women's qualification routes whereby research career progression is fostered (VINNMER 2007c).</p> <p>The main outcome of university-internal leadership training programme is development of leadership skills and competences among participants as well as motivation to run for leadership positions at the university and increased confidence about own ability to take up a leadership position (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al. 2017a). Such diversity-related leadership trainings for all members of an organisation, especially leaders, raise gender awareness and consciousness of bias.</p>
<p>Outcome Short</p> <p>Increased research experience, improved networks and collaboration possibilities, more co-authorships and publications in general and correspondingly improved leadership and management experience for participating female researchers. Similarly, improved experiences and development of leadership skills and competences are the outcome from the targeted leadership-training programme. Further direct outcomes are the increased perception of women researchers' own opportunities for progress in their research careers, including the attainment of leadership positions, through better qualification opportunities.</p>
<p>Outcome indicators</p> <p>1.1.2 Increase in leadership positions by women who participated in the programme</p> <p>1.1.2 Taken up leadership positions such as rector, associate professor, dean/associate dean, centre director, head of department, leader of research</p> <p>2.2.3 Sense of belonging to group</p> <p>3.1.1 Ability to apply and exercise learned leadership skills</p> <p>3.1.1 Contribution to the participant's self-perception as a primary investigator/project leader</p> <p>3.1.1 Visibility of women at the university/organisation</p> <p>3.1.1 Strength of identification as a female leader</p> <p>3.2.1 Knowledge about leadership and university governance</p> <p>3.2.1 Improved understanding of different departments'/sections' culture and procedures</p> <p>3.2.2 Ability to create/enhance/sustain new networks/contacts/ collaborations</p>
<p>Impact</p> <p>The long-term impact resides in the presence of significantly more qualified individuals, i.e. female researchers, who can become future leaders of research producing organisations (VINNMER 2007c, Widén and Lövkrona 2015). Subsequently, increasing the representation of women in leadership is likely to improve research performance through, among other things, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive organisations (Widén and Lövkrona 2015), enhanced</p>

problem-solving (Woolley et al 2010), employee satisfaction (Enchautegui-de-Jesús et al 2006, Munoz 2005 cited by Hunt et al. 2015) and innovation (Börjeson and Nielsen 2016), provided that women achieve a critical mass within the leadership teams (Cain and Leahey 2014). Another impact is young female researchers' strengthened perception of their own chances of progressing in their research careers, i.e. role models, and achieve decision-making positions.

Impact short

More confident, visible and productive female researchers in academic leadership positions. Hereby, the intervention increases women's visibility as role models, increases organisational gender awareness, influences positively the productivity of female researchers and rebalances power in research organisations.

Impact indicators

- 1.1.2 Proportion of women in leadership positions
- 2.3.1 Flexibility in promotion policy
- 3.2.1 Opportunities for publishing
- 3.3.1 Scale of organisational commitment to gender diversity (measurement through regulations, contracts' re-formulation, founding of new initiatives)
- 3.4.1 Proportion of women receiving a grant
- 4.1.1 Acknowledgement of gender issues
- 4.4.1 Share of men and women among successful applicants
- 5.1.5 Beliefs and unconscious assumptions
- 5.4.2 Percentage of research projects including gender analysis/gender dimensions in the content of research
- 5.4.3 Perception of rebalancing power, especially in relation to women at organisational level

Policy Context

Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2017, 2018) showed the importance of policy (as well as organisational) context for the impact of interventions while the VINNMER and AKKA interventions provide illustrative examples of how to obtain gender balance in decision-making positions with targeted policies. In general, it is decisive to consider how and to what extent gender inequality issues are acknowledged in specific socio-cultural and political environments, as the Swedish interventions show. In Sweden, gender inequality is perceived as a persistent problem, and the Swedish government has for a long time promoted gender equality policies through gender mainstreaming and specific strategies and programmes. In Swedish research environments, gender equality interventions are more accepted and are often financed through government programmes without being criticised for discriminating men, as might be the case in other countries, e.g. Denmark (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al 2018). Hence, targeted interventions aiming for gender balance is generally accepted.

It is also important to consider the governmental institutions' willingness to contribute to gender equality programmes, since it signals a top-down political support as well as a funding opportunity. In the case of Sweden, governmental institutions (such as VINNOVA) have been active in promoting and financing programmes targeting gender equality to address structural barriers, providing female researchers' equal career opportunities. In that regard, political will and consensus among policy makers encourage the establishment of mobility and training interventions, and in most cases, they are also a necessary precondition for such programmes to succeed (VINNMER 2007d).

Organisational Context

As is the case with most gender equality programmes, they need support from the management at organisational level in order to be implemented. The organisational top-down support is crucial, not only for establishing the mechanisms needed for the interventions; it is also of vital importance concerning their success and sustainability, i.e. a successful outcome for the individual researchers and the research environment they are part of (Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace 2018).

In the case of the mobility programme VINNMER, institutional initiation and implementation by a strong national innovation body as VINNOVA and support through co-funding from the home research institution of the female researchers guaranteed success of the programme. Mobility of female researchers is not only the concern of the individual researcher, but also the funding institution along with the home and the host institution. Thus, the latter play a crucial role in encouraging and supporting female researchers to move abroad or to other domestic universities or to private sector firms.

In the case of the AKKA programme, a leadership-training programme implemented at Lund University, institutional involvement and support was guaranteed through a remarkable outspoken top-down support to the intervention. AKKA was concluded in 2014 due to lost top-down support from the university management and the Human Resources department, which sought after new forms of leadership training programmes.

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