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Why are WE Not More Attractive for Women?
Different Perspectives on a Collaboration Process to Increase Gender Awareness

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Summary

Access to human resources is a crucial factor in most cases of business and regional development. Due to demographical changes, urbanization and new values among the next generation, the competition to find the right workforce is likely to increase. Reports have stressed that the difficulties for companies to find the right labor can become a hindrance to sustainable business and regional development. Considering the low proportion of women in the field of engineering, only 20 percent, one must ask: Why are WE (Works in Engineering) not more attractive for women? The purpose of this thesis is to describe the collaboration between an expanding enterprise in a semirural area and a gender research project, from three different perspectives in order to find some answers for the overarching question. In the first paper, the purpose is to describe and analyze the creation of a process model for gender awareness within an enterprise. The second paper will, with the same empirical data, focus on the interdependence between enterprise and region. Finally, the last paper, written for a conference in India, addressing readers unfamiliar with the gender equality issue in the Swedish context, describes how a male facilitator combines disclosing personal life experiences with other methods, as a strategy to inspire men to consider a gender perspective, to use gender glasses.

Gender equality has been a topic on the political agenda in Sweden for a long time. Although much progress has been made, many obstructive structures remain. Sweden is one of the European countries that have the highest participation rate for women in the labor force. However, the labor market is highly gender-segregated, both horizontally, which refers to the concentration of women and men in different types of jobs, and vertically, the concentration of women and men in different job-tasks and positions. Due to this background, the innovation system, Triple Steelix, was granted funding by VINNOVA for the project “Gender Perspective for Attractive Work”, in the fall of 2008. The purpose of the research project was to develop methods and knowledge that would contribute to increased gender awareness in order for employers to become more attractive to current and potential staff.

The framework for the collaboration is action research in combination with feminist theory, the concept of “doing gender”, theories of masculinity, and attractive work theories. Different approaches and methods, such as analogies, anecdotes, and pictures, have been used during workshops with the organization, in order to nourish the joint learning process.

Findings are that in an industrial environment with an “engineering discourse”, driven by a technical-economic rationality that prioritizes market demands, gender issues are not often seen as a parameter for sustainable business or regional development. Nevertheless, the project demonstrates that with an interactive approach and an open dialogue that considers the company’s needs, arguments, and intervention for more gender-equal workplaces do not necessarily meet resistance. In this case, the concept of employer brand was the admission ticket for the collaboration.
The combination of different participatory methods that were adapted to the context made it possible to counter resistance from individuals and to discuss gender from different perspectives and ways of reasoning. Another conclusion is that when launching long-term transformational processes in an organization, gender should not remain a “non-issue”. When gender issues are integrated, it will contribute to examining the organization from a new perspective regarding issues such as power, symbols, and relations. In the described collaboration, gender perspective was integrated and the enterprise became more aware of gender issues as an important component of strengthening the employer brand. The principle of the described process model can probably be used in similar cases if adapted to a local context.
Acknowledgments

Doing action research is not possible without a place to “act” from and a partner to “act” with - I am thankful to Jernkontoret for hiring me and making the innovations system, Triple Steelix, become my everyday base, with appreciated colleagues; Bosse Lilja, Lena Norrström, Maria Engholm and Tina Thelander. A special thanks to former HR manager Eva Martinsson, who convinced the “guys” on the managing board at the enterprise, Dellner Couplers AB, to collaborate with our gender research project, and for her support in general. I also want to direct my appreciation to all the personnel at the enterprise for their openness in discussions that contributed to a joint learning process.

Becoming an action-oriented doctoral student requires that you surround yourself with support persons on the journey, friends that believe in you, and professionals that guide you. I owe them my deepest gratitude. Some persons that have had a direct impact on this journey are, in chronological order; professor Ing-Marie Andersson and professor Gunnar Rosén, who opened the door to higher academia and directed me to my supervisor, professor Ewa Gunnarsson at Luleå University of Technology. Thank you Ewa, first for accepting and then directing me to this point. You saw my needs at our first meeting and recommended me to both contact and contract associated professor Hanna Westberg. Hanna has been a faithful and trustworthy partner in this struggle. Her patience, humility, and generosity have contributed to the best possible circumstances a doctoral student can dream of. I am also grateful for all the encouraging discussions over lunch and in the gym on the cross training machine, with professor Rune Wigblad.

Finally, thanks go to Malin Lagergren, my life partner – it would not have been possible without you, your great support, and your forgiving attitude in our private life.

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Introduction

This licentiate thesis (henceforth just called thesis) includes an introductory overview and three papers based on the same empirical material, but written and published for different purposes. It is a milestone on my road towards a final doctoral thesis in the future. Looking back on the past years, I find that my work, starting in confusion, now rests on some fundamental concepts, pillars, or guiding-stars that have become important as a foundation. So far, the works on my explorative journey are based on ideas on attractive work, theories of doing gender and action research. My driving force is that I believe that sustainable development for business and regions depends on access to human resources (competent and efficient personnel) that are sharing a common vision. In order to retain, develop, and attract human capital when developing attractive work, I believe that a gender perspective is important; in particular, when an enterprise or organization is improving its employer brand.

At the beginning of the century, I was a contracted project manager at Dalarna University, and was involved in a research group exploring what employees perceive as attractive work and how employers can develop the work conditions that would make them both safer and more attractive. The overall purpose was to find useful methods to counter the predicted labor shortage. The researchers were collaborating with small and middle-sized manufacturing companies in the region of Dalarna, and the theoretical framework was based on work science in combination with action research, aiming to be beneficial for both the practitioners and academia. Since the European Regional Development Fund funded the projects, we were required to take gender into consideration in all activities. This requirement often felt like a burden, but was solved by vague promises, like “strive for a balance...” At that time I experienced gender issues as important in general, but as a burden within the project. Today, understanding and observing the construction of gender (“doing gender”), my point of view is quite different, as readers of this paper will find out forthwith. During my years with the research team at Dalarna
University, my curiosity for “digging deeper” – for doing research – started to sprout when I saw the effects of participatory research: joint knowledge production between regional enterprises and the researchers, knowledge beneficial for both the academia and the practitioners, due to the used framework, Action Research.

Research Question
The title for this thesis and my overall research question is “Why are WE not More Attractive for Women?” It is a pun not claiming to be grammatically correct. However, with less than 20 percent of women working in the engineering sector, the question could be formulated: “Why is Work in Engineering not More Attractive for Women?” If we look for a quick answer to that question, we may settle on the “poor physical conditions”. But considering that men not only dominate numerically, but also often hold the leading positions, set the agenda, and form the culture, discourse, and norms within the engineering industry, the question could be reformulated as “Why are WE men not more attractive for women?” In this thesis, the first steps will be taken on the way to an answer to the question.

The Emergence of a Gender Project
In 2001, when VINNOVA\(^1\) launched a long-term cluster program, VINNVÄXT\(^2\), the Swedish Steel Producers Association, Jernkontoret, together with regional authorities and enterprises in Bergslagen\(^3\) applied for funding to develop an internationally competitive research and innovation environment. In the requirements for funding, VINNOVA requested measures for sustainable growth, including operational action for gender equality. In 2004, Jernkontoret was granted funding for the establishment of a steel cluster, Triple Steelix\(^4\). Some years later, when following up all the VINNVÄXT winners, VINNOVA found that gender issues were seldom, if ever, integrated as planned for the current innovation systems. Because of this, a targeted program for gender mainstreaming, Applied Gender Research for Strong Research and Innovation Milieus (TIGER)\(^5\), was launched.
In the spring of 2008, I was granted the mission from Jernkontoret to design a project plan for the TIGER program to address the needs within the innovation system, Triple Steelix. In order to pinpoint the perceived needs, I visited enterprises willing to discuss collaborative measures for gender mainstreaming. Most companies were willing to collaborate with a gender research project but expressed that gender equality, that is, an equal opportunities plan, was not a priority as long as they were fulfilling legislative demands. However many companies expressed a worry not being able to find the right labor. This worry was also confirmed by reports from the Swedish Public Employment Services (Ura 2006:4) and SME Barometer\textsuperscript{a} (2007). The reason for this negative prediction is partly found in demographic changes (Nygren 2006) and the migration of young people. In the region of Bergslagen, the traditional structure of regional economic life is cemented. Men work in the private industries and women work within the service and care sectors and the dominant male norms persist. When regional development does not build on gender equality, the effects can be negative. As a result, women move to larger cities for further education or employment in other industries (Region Bergslagen 2002; Forsberg et al. 2006; Hedlund 2008; Westberg 2008).

With a segregated labor market, both horizontal and vertical, and with many gender-marked jobs, the resources for an engineering enterprise to recruit from, in theory, becomes limited. When thinking of labor segregation, the predicted lack of labor within the engineering industry, and the impact the steel and engineering industry have on this sector, the future looks dark. Why does it have to be like this? One reason for the existing labor segregation can be found in the early exclusion of women from the labor market and from different social restrictions that made it difficult for women to achieve equal possibilities and rights with men (SOU 2004:43). The industry might still have the image of requiring specialized labor and demanding physical strength, but today, with all the technical equipment, very few jobs or tasks require specific physical characteristics or a particular gender. Still, this type of gender segregation remains. Westberg (1996) found
that the sexual division of labor is maintained through socialization, but above all, through immanent pedagogy\textsuperscript{7}. The conceptions about sexual division of labor are transferred to both sexes. Westberg (1996), and Gonäs (2005) emphasized that, despite the need for women in the labor force, they have not been given access to all areas and levels of the labor market. And here I think WE are making a mistake. Men’s interpretative prerogative when defining qualifications is also used for keeping women from technical work (Gunnarsson 1994; Abrahamsson and Gunnarsson 2002). Men can act as “doorkeepers”, citing biological and/or socialized differences as arguments against accepting women as co-workers. Some arguments used to constitute this resistance are men’s familiarity with mechanics, physical strength, and willingness to take risks.

**Action needed for gender awareness**

Based on the above background, and inspired by successful projects/processes such as “Learning by Fighting”\textsuperscript{8} (Gunnarsson, Westberg, Andersson, and Balkmar 2007) and the Fiber Optic Valley gender project\textsuperscript{9} (Andersson, Amundsdotter, Svensson 2008; 2009), among other former and contemporary projects, I developed the project plan, “Gender Perspective for Attractive Work” (GATT) for the innovations system, Triple Steelix. The objectives of the project are to:

- Develop insight regarding the potential for increased gender equality
- Start the processes of change towards gender equality in participating companies
- Initiate and evaluate methods for sustainable gender equality, jointly between researcher and companies

The three objectives are all placed in the context of regional development and growth. However, based on conclusions from the pilot study when designing the project, it became important to ask an overall question; “Why are WE not More Attractive for Women? (WE is Works in Engineering)”
For the planned interaction and research, the project was staffed with me, as a PhD student with extensive experience in business and project development, and Hanna Westberg, a senior support associate professor with long experience in gender research and fieldwork in collaboration with engineering enterprises.

The project was granted funding from the TIGER program in the fall of 2008. About one month after that, Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc., a global financial services firm and the fourth largest investment bank in the USA, filed for bankruptcy, which contributed greatly to the global financial market crisis. At the same time, highly motivated by the notion of participatory gender research, we reconnected with companies that had earlier expressed interest in cooperating with this study, but now the economic situation for our target group was dramatically changed: we were met with polite but definite rejection regarding cooperative knowledge production.

In the spirit of action research, “being out there”, we finally found a partner. In cooperation with the county council, Triple Steelix, arranged an open meeting to discuss the meaning of the concept of “employer brand” (Sullivan 2004; Backhouse and Tikoo 2004; Parment and Dyhre 2009). That evening, the HR manager at Dellner Couplers AB (DCAB) attended because of her curiosity about the concept of employer brand. For more information about the company, see primarily Paper A. After discussing basic values, we both agreed that a sustainable change process for more attractive work would be better if a gender perspective was included, and we decided to meet again. Thus, the opening notion and the point of departure for the collaboration process became the concept of employer brand.

**Purpose and disposition**

The purpose of this thesis is to compile and give an overview of three different papers that are based on the same empirical material. Empirical material was developed in participation with an expanding engineering enterprise and the action-oriented project “Gender Perspective for Attractive Work” (GATT). In this thesis, I have chosen to present the papers in prioritized rather than chronological order.
The first is the central contribution, since it describes the development of the collaboration and the process model. The papers will be presented in following order:

Paper


Each paper was written for different purposes and target groups using different perspectives and theoretical frameworks. In the first paper, the purpose is to develop, reflect on and analyze the creation of a process model for gender awareness within an enterprise. The second paper will, with the same empirical data, focus on the interdependence between enterprise and region and consider increased gender awareness as an innovative tool for boosting development. Finally, the last paper (but the one first written) was written for an international conference in India. Due to the target group, which is unfamiliar with the gender equality issue in the Swedish context, the background description is extended to include both a historical and legal perspective. The purpose is to highlight how a male facilitator reflects on personal life experiences as a strategy to inspire men to consider a gender perspective, to use gender glasses.
The disposition of the work is as follows. It starts with a short description of the background, the situation, and the perceived problems that initiated the project and the collaboration. After the background, the theoretical framework that inspired me will be presented as an orientation, followed by a description of the most important methods used for the process. In order to provide an understanding of how theory, methods, and action were used during the process, the different steps will be described, from the point of departure to landing. The contribution ends with a discussion, followed by some concluding reflections. After this overview, each paper will be presented as submitted.

**Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

In the introduction, three concepts that have inspired my work were mentioned: attractive work; doing gender, combined with theories of masculinity (Hearn 2001; Kimmel 2005) and action research. The concept of attractive work can be seen as a utopia, something desirable to strive for. In this explorative journey it has been in combination with action research and a gender perspective. For an overview of the model of attractive work, see Åteg, Hedlund and Pontén, 2004. Below, the theoretical framework for doing gender and action research will be briefly described.

**Doing Gender**

Before introducing the notion of “doing gender” – which turns the word *gender* into a verb – I will provide a short definition of gender. The word *gender* emerged in use during the 1970s when feminist theory used it to explain the distinction between biological sex and the social construction of gender; see Gothlin, 1999. In social science, gender refers to the socially constructed roles that a society considers appropriate for men and women. There is a variety of ways the constructions are enacted, depending on the context. Gender is an ongoing interaction between individuals and has to be seen as a process or relationship. It can be seen as an activity and interaction between men and women, among men, and among women (Gunnarsson et al. 2007). When West and Zimmerman published their ar-
article “Doing Gender” (1987), they put a finger on a theme that, in different variations, has influenced feminist theory in the late part of the 1900s. The concept of “doing gender” can be used to explain what is happening in every day practice in organizations. Although gender patterns vary in different societies, sectors, and organizations, there are enough similarities to make general statements about organizations in the rich Northern nations. For an overview see “Where have all the structures gone? – doing gender in organisations, examples from Finland, Norway and Sweden” (Gunnarsson 2003). Despite ongoing societal and organizational development, gender stereotyping and segregation persist, e.g., men continue to dominate the field of engineering and skilled blue-collar occupations. To understand how these patterns are perpetuated, it is necessary to look at organizations and their internal processes. Joan Acker, who was early to challenge how gender at work was conceptualized, introduced four different “points of entry”, or perspectives, from which to examine gender in an organization (1999, pp. 180-185). These entry points can be useful when exploring a long-term change process for an organization:

- **Procedures, activities, divisions.** Here we find activities and procedures that keep the organization going: hiring, promotion, evaluation and so on, which result in organizational gender division, segregation, and hierarchy.

- **Images, Symbols, Forms of Consciousness.** These are images, symbols, and forms of consciousness made by the members in an organization that legitimate the division of gender. For example, beliefs that certain knowledge or skills are innate to men or women.

- **Interaction Between Individuals and Groups.** The interactions form the organization, gender as a practice, the context within which people experience and create dominance and subordination, alliance and exclusion.

- **Internal Mental Work.** This is required to understand the gendered organizations expectations and opportunities including gendered behaviors and attitudes.
The four “points of entry” have inspired many different interpretations with similar meanings and the strategy has been proven to be successful in earlier interventions (Gunnarsson et al. 2007; Andersson et al. 2008). The use of the entry model or similar tools can be useful to create insight, in that organizations and workplaces are often gendered. Here, awareness of “doing gender” on a structural level can contribute to a better understanding of the construction of gender in everyday life.

However, in trying to become aware of doing gender, we have to be aware of the existing resistance that follows the process. Regarding position, Hearn (2001) states that men benefit from living in a patriarchal society and that it is difficult to identify men’s general interest in gender equality. Men’s practices and attitudes are obstacles to women’s equality. In other words, most change processes will at some point meet resistance and hesitation, in particular processes that challenge norms and traditions. For example, in the field of engineering, men’s interpretative prerogative is used in defining qualifications, keeping women from technical work (Gunnarsson 1994; Abrahamsson and Gunnarsson 2002). Amundsdotter (2009) describes different kinds of resistance and refutation as male power strategies. She highlights three issues for women: the fear of being declared hysterical or crazy, the fear of losing position, and the fear of facing opposition. Kimmel (2005) has a more positive standpoint when stressing that men will gain benefits from a more equal society. Kimmel believes that feminism is important because it promotes an examination not only of men, but also of the interactions and institutions in which men participate. Accepting the notion of gender as an ongoing social construction, and becoming aware of the concept of doing gender, can provide helpful insights for innovation and more long-term sustainable development.

For an overview of the field of gender and organization, see for example, Handbook of Gender, Work & Organization (Jeanes E. L., Knights D., Martin, P. Y., Eds., 2011, Handbook of Gender, Work & Organization).
**Action Research**

With a background as a consultant, and experiences from market-driven business aiming for “results”, I found action research (AR) to be a natural choice for my framework. It has a pragmatic perspective in which knowledge and change are created through collaborative action with practitioners, and the framework offers a combination of research and development that is beneficial for both partners in a joint learning process. On my explorative journey within the science, I have found that wherever one finds a theoretical framework, there are always variations and different notions within the field. In general, there is a division between pragmatic and critical orientations towards AR.

In the chapter “Methodologies in Action Research” by Aagaard Nielsen and Nielsen, a brief summary is provided explaining the differences and the persons behind the different directions:

In contrast to Habermas and pragmatic Action Research, the critical utopian action research inspired by Adorno, Horkheimer, Oskar Negt, Ernst Bloch, Regina Becker-Schmidt and Robert Junk points to social imagination, experiments and sketching “alternative futures” to be discussed in public as the important elements in knowledge creation. Habermas and the pragmatic approach point out the dialogue and language as the primary medium for construction of new knowledge (Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson, 2006, p. 84).

Without becoming bogged down in a discussion of the differences, I would consider myself pragmatic; action keeps the process going. However, with a starting-point in feminist theory, I also adopt a critical perspective for reflecting on ways of unveiling gender and power structures, and strive for normative change. Feminist research can be used as a critical potential in the learning process, which, for example, is the objective when arguing for men to use “gender glasses” (Paper C). Gunnarsson (2007) emphasizes that action research and feminist research have a joint democratic ambition, and argues that a feminist point of view adds benefits for the validity of the research. She argues that including gender and
feminist research, especially in the field of qualitative methods, contributes to an increased social robustness in interactive research processes. In order to counter some of the criticisms primarily raised regarding validity and reliability, Reason (2006) underlines that to be aware of the choices that are made and their consequences is the primary rule in approaching quality. He points out four characteristic dimensions describing AR: “worthwhile practical purposes, democracy and participation, many ways of knowing, and emergent developmental form—that present a broad range of criteria beyond those of the empirical research paradigm against which quality research might be judged”.

He explains that the purpose of AR is:

   to address issues of concern to individuals and communities in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose is to contribute to the increased well being — economic, political, psychological, spiritual — of humanity and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part (Reason and Bradbury 2001a, p.191).

The "ideal" interactive research process involves the researcher and practitioner on the basis of their experiences and knowledge. Together they formulate the research plan and then work together throughout the entire change process, which involves planning, research, analysis, and recording and dissemination of the results achieved (Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson, 2006; Svensson 2002; Gunnarsson et al. 2007). In practice, however, the degree and level of interactivity often varies at different phases of the research process. Drewes Nielsen (2006) states that the demand for action-oriented research can be found in the need for: methods that can handle the complexity and insecurity situation; a democratic dialogue among the stakeholders regarding the development process; cooperative production of knowledge and change among researchers and other actors. In the mutual exchange between researcher and practitioner, the produced knowledge should be of practical relevance and of a high scientific standard. In this case, to challenge a male dominated positivistic engineering environment with arguments for in-
creased gender awareness and reflection regarding the masculine norm must be considered a situation suitable for Drewes Neilsen’s arguments. Since AR is not a collection of principles with distinct theories and methods, but rather is based on a number of different theories and methods applied depending on the context, (Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson 2006), the researcher and the participants have the freedom to maneuver within the process. Reason (2006) argues that AR draws on an extended epistemology that integrates theory and practice (p. 188). Hansson (2003) points out that an action researcher must be able to move between different practices and between practice and theory. She emphasizes that to be an action researcher is border-crossing, and that brings about difficulties. The researcher must be responsive and have faith in the process (ibid. p. 276).

The interactive approach underlines the supportive role played by the researcher. This role constitutes an important feature of the interactive research process. Hence, a distinction is made in relation to the more traditional role of researcher as observer. Also emphasized is the difference between the supportive role of researcher and the more advisory role of consultant or therapist (McGill and Brockbank 2004; Gunnarsson et al. 2007). Participating in a process, the researchers see themselves as co-producers in the creation of new knowledge without being in a privileged position in this joint learning process. Consequently, in order to establish interactivity, the researcher can neither take a position of being a fly-on-the-wall, objectively observing what is happening, nor a position were she/he approaches as “the righteous missionary” redeeming the crowd (Tranquist 2008, p. 303). The researcher has to be aware of how her or his presence influences the research. Since an aim for the researchers and practitioners is to alter the course of events, and also to generate new knowledge from the change, it is important to create arenas for interactions that allow the participants and researchers to share knowledge and experiences (Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson 2006).
Methodology for Forming a Process

As briefly described in the background, the explorative collaborative journey between the project and Dellner Couplers AB took its point of departure from the concept of employer brand that was discussed among volunteers at an evening gathering. Shortly after that meeting, the HR manager and I started to design a joint process plan. They had not considered integrating gender issues before we met, however this was the main objective of the project; gender issues were interwoven in the long-term change process. For a more in-depth description of the steps, measures, and reactions from the collaboration, see Paper A.

The methods used to proceed and progress in the process are briefly described in the table below. Reason (2006) points out that one challenge for action research is to make all the choices when action is taken, something that I agree with. The possibility of using different methods depending on the context is an advantage for nourishing and enriching the development of the process. During the collaboration, a variety of methods were used; see the list and descriptions in the table below. The reason for using several different methods was due to the explorative and interactive approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logical Framework</td>
<td>When planning a project/process, the principles of describing the plan as a logical framework helps to easily communicate the plan activities and motivate each action. This document could have been used if an evaluation was needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>To motivate and engage the employees in the change process and to have “measurable facts” as a starting point for discussions in the workshops.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Continuation of Table 1. Method and purpose, intentional use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analogies and Anecdotes</td>
<td>Analogies were used in the communication to broaden the understanding of gender issues in the context. Anecdotes, self-revealing stories based on personal experiences, were used to establish trust, supporting exchange of experience and knowledge. (Used in the feedback process and in dialogues with different stakeholders, individuals, and groups).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Space and time to gather the participants to discuss the results from the questionnaire and introduce the concept of doing gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>Pictures from situations and artifacts were showed on a screen in order to initiate a reflective discussion regarding what we perceive when looking at the pictures with a gender perspective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the dialogue with the HR manager, in the process of forming the plan, I used analogies\(^\text{11}\) to illustrations and explain ideas and establish a common understanding (Gavetti et al. 2005; Ullmark 2007; Coro and Taylor 2007). For example, comparing arguments for building product brands with similar arguments for building employer brands. The jointly-formed plan was documented and visualized as a logic model, also known as a Logical Framework, Chain of Reasoning, or Theory of Action (Annemalm and Bergling 2007), describing causality among resources, activities, results, and effects, in order to facilitate communication and argumentation on a comprehensible level. (The picture below shows the draft from the early planning. The activity “Feedback” became later the feedback workshops.)
As soon as the managing board approved the time investment and legitimized the process, the HR manager informed all the personnel via the intranet, a special bulletin board, and orally at a general assembly.

Entering a culture with a positivistic paradigm and an engineering discourse, we decided to start the intervention with a questionnaire addressing all the employees at the plant. This was to identify the opinions of the employees regarding qualities that contribute to an attractive workplace and how the employees perceive their current job, and was also a way of declaring a start and encouraging participation in the forthcoming process. The questionnaire (att-questionnaire) was based on a model that describes the qualities of an attractive job (Åteg, Hedlund and Pontén 2004), developed by the research team, Theme Working Life, at Dalarna University. The questions were developed to be gender neutral, not considering gender issues at all. In order to get as many responses as possible, the response period was four weeks in total and the questionnaire could be filled out either by computer or on paper. By the closing of the period, a total of 130 persons had responded (72 percent of the employees). All the collected data were stored and processed with a special Excel application from Theme Working Life.
Ten of the total thirteen feedback workshops that were conducted during the fall of 2010 were located in a parish house, within walking distance from the plant. From a fumbling start of the workshop series, we experienced that the feedback process was unsatisfactory. This was also the opinion of a male manager who encouraged us to become more provocative. From the fourth meeting we decided to dramatically rearrange the three-hour feedback process. The structure of the workshop was divided into three phases:

- Introduction, socialization, and background for the collaboration
- “Doing gender”; how gender is constructed in our daily life and at work
- Presentation of the results from the att-questionnaire with discussions regarding suggestions for improvements for more attractive work; action lists

Inspired by results from Hee Pedersen (2008), who reported good experiences from combining action research, gender theory, and pictures as workshop methods, we started to use pictures when introducing the concept of doing gender. Pictures were combined with provocative questions asking for the attendees’ reflections. Here, anecdotes and my personal reflections from life as a man were useful when trying to provoke reflections and discussion. Coro and Taylor (2007) promote the use of analogy as a strategy when a complex technology is explained, and in this context, the concept of doing gender is the complex issue that needed explaining. Sole (2002) argues that well-designed storytelling and anecdotes can be seen as knowledge sharing, which can help us learn from the past in order to respond in future situations.

The presentation of the results was combined with small-group discussions where participants were asked to write suggestions for how to maintain the good qualities and improve the poorly rated qualities. The presentation material consisted of three charts presenting the 15 most valued, the 15 least valued qualities and the 15 qualities with the biggest discrepancy.
The final task for the groups during the workshop was to answer an additional questionnaire concerning whether there is a difference in the views of work and work conditions between men and women.

**Purpose and Results of Appended Papers**

Here I will offer a short summary of the three papers included in this thesis. They are all based on the same empirical material that emerged from the collaboration described earlier. Each paper was written for different purposes and target groups using different perspectives.

**Paper A, Employer Brand Opens up for a Gender Process Model**

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The purpose of Paper A was to explore whether the theories and methods used in the collaboration could be seen as useful elements in a process model, in this case, for creating an awareness of the notions of doing gender and attractive work. My conclusion is that merging the two scientific fields, gender research and action research, was a key combination for the achieved results; the process model worked well for both the enterprise and the project. The combination of
different participatory methods, such as using pictures, anecdotes, and analogies adapted to the context, made it possible to counter resistance and to discuss gender from different perspectives and logical frameworks. In a collaboration like this, I would like to stress the importance for the researcher as a facilitator to have an open attitude, and to share personal thoughts; this contributed to making the gender issue less dramatic and I found that it opened up discussions with agreeing and disagreeing arguments. With a trusting atmosphere, it was possible for the participants to contribute experiences and reflections from their own lives. This involvement and possibility to formulate the problem are important, as are the personal reflections, for a sustainable learning process. During the process, the enterprise became more conscious of the potential to be a gender-equal employer. The principle of the described process model can be a used in similar cases if adapted to the local context.

**Paper B “Doing Gender” in a Local and Regional Context**

This paper, written by Lundkvist H. and Westberg H., has been submitted for an anthology.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process model as an innovation for making gender visible through flexible methods and to underline the relationships between organizational and regional development when exploring the empirical material. The chapter shows how gender mainstreaming became an innovative tool for boosting the development of an expanding enterprise in a semi-rural region. The chapter also stresses the context between enterprise and region. For an enterprise, the main objective has to be profitability, but for more long-term sustainable development on both company and regional levels, organizations have to consider the importance of increased gender awareness and awareness of individual conditions in the workplace. For example, the att-questionnaire indicated that women, in general, found commuting back and forth to work more of a problem than men. This is not a problem related to the company, rather it is an example of how regional planning in general is still based on a masculine norm. If such dis-
crepancies were seen as general and not gender-related problems, their solutions would benefit both women and men.

**Paper C, “Strategies for Making Men use Gender Glasses”**


The objective of this paper was to describe how I, as a male facilitator in the workshops, used a combination of reflections on personal experiences from life as a man, analogies, and humor in order to challenge ingrained opinions. This was done to encourage the formation of new conceptions and inspire the use of “gender glasses” (gender perspectives) in an engineering enterprise. When reflecting on the empirical material, I have quoted some of the spontaneous comments that were expressed in different situations; for example, "Is this some stupid feminist initiative?" a male participant spontaneously expressed when doing gender was introduced. Quotations will be found in Paper A and Paper C. Humor, self-distance and using experiences from life was proven to be a useful tool for turning resistance into engagement and motivation. The use of pictures from the design field, artifacts with forms and functions challenging daily opinion, was another good method for encouraging interaction. In this way, the issue of equality did not come too close to an individual's private sphere. The interaction gave the participants new knowledge regarding doing gender to reflect upon in daily work. A conclusion from the workshops was that discussing gender issues often triggers emotions and sometimes resistance. But the resistance was not as strong as first expected. It was interesting to notice that the spontaneous resistance came from both men and women.
Conclusions and Future Research

Findings from Theory and Methods
Using the concept of employer brand when approaching a market-driven business-oriented company was a determining factor for the collaboration. Thanks to using a notion that the managing team had an explicit interest in, my arguments for increased gender awareness were perceived as giving rise to possibilities, rather than being a burden for the enterprise. This shows both the need and the possibility of open dialogue when researchers and practitioners strive for participatory knowledge production that is beneficial for both parties. In this environment, and since the funding was dedicated to applied gender research, the framework of action research combined with feminist theory was the obvious choice as a theoretical platform. The choice of framework also gave the researchers freedom to redesign the workshops after realizing that the first strategy used did not contribute to the process as expected.

To keep the process dynamic, open, and alive, we used different methods adapted to the context. Thus, different methods created a process, and the process can be considered as a method for increasing gender awareness. A summary of the methods and their estimated usability can be seen in the table below. More is to be found in Paper A, including comments on the collaboration from the HR manager.

Table 2. Methods and a summary of their Usability in the Process

| Logical Framework                  | This was an appreciated way to give a panoramic view of the planned process. It served as a “blueprint” for the managing board when describing the planned activities and expected outcome. However, the document was not used as a “roadmap” to evaluate the process. |
Continuation of Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Using a questionnaire was a good measure when approaching a culture with an engineering discourse, to start the process and to motivate the personnel. It gave the company measurable facts and a picture of the starting situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogies and Anecdotes</td>
<td>Analogies, anecdotes, and metaphors are useful when used with a balance and contextualized. However, it is important to be aware that using analogies and metaphors carries the risk of being misunderstood by the participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>To bring the staff to workshops for an introduction to “doing gender” and getting feedback from the questionnaire was a very practical and appreciated measure for a common dialogue and exchange of thoughts and knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>Showing pictures and discussing what we see and how we feel about what we see was a very fruitful method that helped initiate discussions. Everybody saw the same image, was on the same basis and no one was singled out or challenged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the empirical material, I believe there are several findings indicating that the process model (Paper A) was successful and affected both the company and the individuals (Paper C).

**Future research**

In this introductory overview of my research as a doctoral student, I have, above, given an overview of the collaboration that resulted in the empirical material. As part of my research, this empirical material has been viewed from different perspectives for different publications. The goal of my scientific journey is to increase the understanding regarding men’s conceptions of why the proportion of women in the engineering industry is so low: “Why are WE not more attractive
for women?” The intention of addressing the question to men is, besides gaining knowledge, to inspire them to reflect on the construction of attractiveness perceived by current and potential employees. The answers will become affirmative knowledge for companies so they can become more attractive to women, and through that, also to men, thus building a stronger employer brand.

However, before the qualitative interviews, asking the question I believe that a contemporary platform resting on the empirical pillars is necessary. This platform now exists. Due to the collaboration with the enterprise, I (and hopefully my readers) now better understand how gender is constructed and enforced in an organization. From the work done, we know that arguing for increased gender equality will often be met by, more or less, resistance. This resistance is most often an unconscious resistance based on ignorance or fear of changes, which it is possible to address, as shown in the collaboration. The key is to find contextualized arguments for reflections and change processes. From my empirical material, one finding was that the concept of employer brand is a key for initiating a change process. I have also found that when launching long-term transformational processes in an organization, gender must be integrated because it will facilitate a new perspective for the organization with regards to issues such as power, symbols, and relations, which are important issues for human resources.

In the described process (Paper A), gender was integrated and the enterprise became more aware of the importance and possibilities of gender issues. Examples will be found in the papers.

I believe that there is a need for more research regarding the concept of employer brand, in order to reinforce the connections between “attractive work” and “doing gender” from a brand perspective. Employer brand is a core issue for sustainable business and regional development since it most often is a matter of access to human resources and talent.
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Region Bergslagen, 2002. Euro Futures AB


SOU 2004:43, Den könsuppdela arbetsmarknaden, Stockholm: Fritzes


Ura 2006:4, Arbetsmarknadsutviklarna för år 2007, Nässjö, Nässjötryckeriet AB


Endnotes

1 Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems. VINNOVA’s mission is to promote sustainable growth by developing effective innovation systems and funding needs-driven research.

2 VINNVÄXT aims to promote sustainable regional growth by developing internationally competitive research and innovation environments in specific growth fields. This is done by funding needs-driven R&D to strengthen the cutting-edge competence of the respective environments, and by means of strategic efforts for the development of innovation systems.

3 Bergslagen is a historically, culturally, and linguistically distinct mining district located north of Lake Mälaren in northern Svealand, Sweden. In Bergslagen, mining and metallurgic industry have been important since the Middle Ages. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bergslagen)

4 Triple Steelix, innovation system for the development of Small and Middle sized Enterprises, (SMEs) working with steel in the industrial region of Bergslagen.

5 Within the program “Applied Gender Research for Strong Research and Innovation Milieus”, financed by VINNOVA; 10 different projects were granted 2008.

6 An annual investigation made by the Swedish Federation of Business Owners and Swedbank.

7 The importance creating learning from the values and representation existing in society, which are transmitted unconsciously.

8 Learning by Fighting was a project within the organization of VINNOVA during the period of 2003-05. The purposes were to develop gender mainstreaming in the organization and to strengthen the gender competence when launching programs and evaluating applications.

9 The innovations system, Fiber Optic Valley, ran an action-oriented gender research project, “Gender network”, from 2005-08. The purposes were to develop the participating organizations and generate new interesting gender research; the target group was middle managers in 12 organizations/enterprises.

10 Dellner Couplers AB is an expanding company that manufactures, sells, and maintains couplers for trains in a global market.

11 Here I make an analogy to transferring information and perspectives about a particular concept by describing similar causality through invoking a concept familiar to the participants.
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Employer Brand Opens up for a Gender Process Model

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ABSTRACT
Regardless of a long tradition of legislation, policymaking and practical achievements, the issues of gender equality and of the segregated labor market still remain a matter of concern in Sweden. This paper describes a collaborative process between a research project and an engineering enterprise. It describes the point of departure, based on the concept of employer brand, of a long-term change process and the different phases and activities during an intensive period 2009. The collaboration aimed to develop innovative methods, and to apply them in order to achieve increased gender awareness, and thereby to be able to retain and attract the best labor for tomorrow. Different approaches and methods as analogies, anecdotes, and pictures were used to nourish the process. Findings showed that the interactive process contributed to increased awareness. During the process the enterprise became more conscious of the potential of being a gender equal employer.

KEY WORDS
Action research / attractive work / employer brand / gender equality / process model.

Introduction
The access to human resources is a crucial factor in most cases of business development. Competent and effective personnel, sharing a common vision, is essential for a profitable long-term success. Signs of labor shortage were confirmed by the Swedish Public Employment Services (Arbetsmarknadsutskiter 2007, Ura 2006:4) and SME Barometer (2007). The reports stress that companies difficulties to find the right labor can become a hindrance for sustainable business and regional development. Reason for this negative prediction is found in the demographical changes (Nygren 2006) and migration of youngsters, in particular young females, from the rural areas to the bigger cities (Region Bergslagen, 2002, Euro Futures AB).

In international comparison, Sweden is often considered as a country that has succeeded to reach gender equality in work- and family-life contexts, and great changes have taken place both in society and in people’s minds since the concept was introduced in the 1960s. Different approaches have been tried with various success to create a more equal and less segregated labor market, but even though both the concepts and the discussion have been updated in the last 50 years, there is still a long way to go. A lot of differences still remain between women and men regarding resources, influence, and career possibilities. The gender wage gap, gendered segregation in work and education, and the hierarchic difference between the valued masculine and the devalued feminine have still not
disappeared (SOU 1998:6; Gonäs, 2005; Heiskanen, 2006). The labor market is highly sex segregated both horizontally, which refers to the concentration of women and men in different types of jobs, and vertically, the concentration of women and men in different job-tasks and positions. One reason for the existing labor segregation can be found in the early exclusion of women from the labor market and from different social restrictions that made it difficult for women to achieve equal possibilities and rights with men (SOU 2004:43). Thanks to technical equipment very few jobs or tasks require specific physical characteristics or a particular sex. Still, this type of gender segregation remains. Its explanations can be found in deeply rooted traditions as well as in the daily construction of gender in both society and work life. Westberg (1996) states that the sexual division of labor is maintained through socialization, but, above all, through immanent pedagogy.

The conceptions about sexual division of labor are transferred to both sexes (Westberg 1996), and Gonäs (2005) highlights that, despite the need of women as labor force, they have not been given access to all parts and levels in the labor market. Within the technical field, one explanation identified by feminists is men’s monopoly of technology development, a strategy to maintain their power, and women’s lack of technological skills is described as an important cause for women’s dependence on men (Wajcman, 2004). Men’s interpretative prerogative when defining qualification is also used for keeping women from technical work (Gunnarsson, 1994; Abrahamsson and Gunnarsson, 2002). The phenomenon is described as “doorkeepers” advocating biological and/or socialized differences as arguments for not accepting women as co-workers. Some arguments used to constitute this resistance are physical strength, men’s familiarity with mechanics, and willingness to take risks. This notion can be one of many answers to why the industry has such a low rate of female workers: approximately 20%.

The labor segregation is not only a matter of democracy for the individuals; it is also an economical issue that has negative effects for private-, business-, and public stakeholders.

Being gender equal is widely seen as positive and as an achievement that many organizations and businesses want to highlight. Both enterprises and individuals often believe themselves to comply with the expected level of gender equality. However, a close and thorough examination often shows a gap between discourse and practice. The way organizations interpret the legislative requirements, they might fulfill them, thus achieving a hygiene level for political correctness. Therefore, it is a difficult and challenging task to start discussions about equality and the invisible influence of masculine dominance in the industrial sector.

In a Nordic context, stressing the necessity for both women and men to contribute and to take part in paid work, as well as in unpaid domestic work and care, has contributed to the strong tradition of gender research. There is a tradition of policy driven, demand based research, projects funded by the state through different research organizations. This tradition of feministic research, expected to deliver a great deal of usefulness, struggles with similar valid problems as the field of action research. The demand for participatory research at workplaces has resulted in a social robust knowledge based on joint knowledge production with practitioners in different fields (Gunnarsson 2006). Many of the Swedish and European research granters expect multiple stakeholders to be involved in order to fund research projects. This reality, combined with the increased demand for practically applicable gender projects and the common denominators: knowledge, democracy and change, becomes a good platform for merging the two traditions of science. From different perspectives, but with similar epistemology, both
traditions emphasize the necessity to move from a partial “exclusive limited area” to an “inclusive extended arena” for knowledge production (Gunnarsson 2007a). This project will combine the action research approach with gender theories.

**Purpose and disposition**

The purpose with this contribution is to describe and analyze a process model for gender awareness based on giving all the employees an introduction to the concept of *Doing Gender* and attractive work. A process developed in collaboration between an interactive oriented gender project and an engineering enterprise with a desire to become a more gender aware and attractive employer in order to attract employees regardless of sex.

The paper will describe how researcher and practitioners cooperate for production of contextualized knowledge useful for both parties. It will cover different theories and actions all integrated for a sustainable purpose. A short description of the framework and the used methods will be followed by the joint actions taken during the process and the steps in the process. An interactive process emerged during the collaboration suited to the context of the enterprise. The contribution ends with a discussion followed by some concluding reflections.

In order to fulfill the different demands and wishes for usefulness, and in order to contribute to a sustainable change process in a company the project team, inspired by successful projects/processes such as *Learning by Fighting* (Gunnarsson, Westberg, Andersson and Balkmar 2007b) and the Fiber Optic Valley gender project (Andersson, Amundsdotter, Svensson, 2008; 2009) among other former and contemporary projects, felt that action research, and related methods with a clear gender perspective, (“doing gender” and “point of entry”) would be the best approach. An approach used in both Learning by Fighting and in the Fiber Optic Valley projects, but in contrast to these mentioned projects this project was directed to one company during a short period (approximately one year) and with the ambition to engage all employees in the change process. Another early standpoint for the project was neither to do research about gender equality nor to do research on a company. The research was *for equality with a company*.

When planning the project and arguing for companies to participate in this collaborative learning process on increased awareness regarding gender and equality in workplaces, the project team often met diffuse, but polite resistance. Many projects, both with and without a gender perspective, have been launched with the purpose to counteract the upcoming labor shortage. However, in this case the discharging concept, in the attempts to find a partner for collaboration, was neither gender equality nor segregation; it was the concept of employer brand. The fundamental logic presented by the project team was that a more gender equal workplace also would be perceived as a more attractive workplace.

**Framework for the Process**

**Employer Brand**

The decisive discourse for collaboration was the use of the concept *employer branding* introduced in the middle of the 1990s. Sullivan (2004) defines the concept as “a targeted,
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A long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), “the term employer branding suggests the differentiation of a firm’s characteristics as an employer from those of its competitors. The employment brand highlights the unique aspects of the firm’s employment offerings or environment” (p 502). Parment and Dyhre (2009) claims that the most essential factor in strengthening an employer brand, and to position the organization uniquely, is to define and develop the employer value proposition, EVP: the working conditions offered to the current and future employees. In order to find and develop the EVP the project believes that efforts for becoming a more gender aware employer with gender aware personal can be one strategy in the process of building the employer brand, “an identifiable and unique employer identity” (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p 502).

Gender

In social science, gender refers to the socially constructed roles that a society consider appropriate for men and women. Gender is an interaction going on between individuals and has to be seen as a process or relationship. When West and Zimmerman published their article “Doing Gender” (1987) they put the finger on a theme that, in different variations, has emerged in feminist theory on sex/gender in the second half of the 1900s. The concept of “doing gender” can be used to explain what is happening in practice within a company. It can be seen as an ongoing activity and interactive action made between men and women, between men and between women (Gunnarsson et al. 2007b). Although gender patterns vary between different societies, sectors and organizations there are enough similarities to make general statements about organizations in the rich Northern nations. Despite societal and organizational changes as ongoing development the sex typing and segregation persist, e.g. men dominating the field of engineering and skilled blue-collar occupations. To understand the reproduction of these patterns it is necessary to look at organizations and their internal processes (Acker 1999, p 179). Awareness of “doing gender” on a structural level can also contribute to a better understanding of the construction of gender in everyday life.

For the participating enterprise the vision was to become a more attractive employer, to develop a stronger employer brand. In this contribution we addressed the concept of “doing gender” as an ongoing process for a change of norm and discourse, and as a strategy for gaining increased gender equality within the enterprise.

Most change processes will at some point meet resistance and hesitation. Amundsdotter (2009) describes different kinds of resistance, i.e. refutation as power strategies. She highlights three dimensions: the fear of being declared hysterical or crazy, the fear of losing one’s position, and the fear to face opposition. Regarding position, Hearn (2001) states that men benefit from living in a patriarchal society and that it is difficult to identify men’s general interest in gender equality. Men’s practices and attitudes are obstacles for women’s equality. With this in mind, to start change processes for more attractive work, partly based on gender discussions, can be considered as a hazardous adventure. On the other hand, in the article “Why Men Should Support Gender Equity” Kimmel (2005) states that men will gain benefits from a more equal society. He argues that:
We need these men to demand parental leave, we need policies that encourage and support it, and we need to change the culture of our organizations to support men taking parental leave – because ONLY when men share housework and child care, can we have the kinds of lives we say we want to have, and ONLY when men share house work and childcare will women be able to balance work and family, be able to have it all. This, it seems to me, is the promise of gender mainstreaming (p 113).

He also claims that feminism is important because it promotes an examination not only of ourselves, but also of the interactions and institutions in which men participate. Examination will make men understand these interactions and institutions as organized by power. For examination the four different “points of entry” or perspectives defined by Acker (1999, p 180–185) can then be useful as pathfinder in the discussion for increased gender awareness:

1. Procedures, activities, divisions.
2. Images, Symbols, Forms of Consciousness.
3. Interaction Between Individuals and Groups.
4. Internal Mental Work.

This strategy has been proven to be successful in earlier interventions (Gunnarsson et al. 2007b; Andersson et al. 2008), and will be used as a frame for forthcoming workshops.

**Action Research**

When planning the project the theoretical framework of action research was found to be most suitable for the purpose to develop methods and practice for sustainable gender awareness. For an overview of the field of action research see Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson (2006). Lewin saw the researcher’s influence as something productive in the knowledge production process, and in interactive research the “joint learning” during a project is stressed. Compared with the tradition in interactive research, action research goes a step further and calls for a component of action to support a normative change in some direction. Drewes Nielsen (2006) states that the demand for action-oriented research can be found in the need of methods able to handle the complexity and insecurity in the society of today, in the need of a democratic dialogue among the stakeholder in developing processes, and finally in the need for researchers and other actors to produce knowledge and change together. In the mutual exchange between researcher and practitioner, the produced knowledge should be of practical relevance and of high scientific standard. Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson (2006) stress that the field of action research is not seen as a collection of principles with distinct theories and methods. It is based on a number of different theories and methods used depending on the context and has a more pragmatic perspective where knowledge and change are created in collaborative action with practitioners. The researchers see themselves as co-producers in the creation of new knowledge without being in a privileged position in this joint learning process. Consequently, to establish this cooperation the researcher can neither take a position of being a fly-on-the-wall, objectively observing what is happening, nor take a position
were she/he approaches as “the righteous missionary” redeeming the crowd (Tranquist, 2008, p 303). The researcher has to be aware of how her or his presence influences the research. Since an aim for the researchers and practitioners is to alter the course of events, and also to generate new knowledge from the change, it is important to create arenas for interactions that allow the participants and researchers to share knowledge and experiences (Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson, 2006).

In previous section different research fields, employer brand, “doing gender” and action research have briefly been described so as to be able to develop a process-model that will contribute to a more attractive work.

Process

Partners

Triple Steelix is an organization with the mission to “with steel as the base – promote increased development and growth in the region of Bergslagen”. Within this mission Triple Steelix manages the research project GATT, financed by VINNOVA within the program Needs-Driven Gender Research for Innovation. In the beginning, the project was looking for companies with a genuine motivation to work on a long-term basis with gender perspectives for developing a more equal and attractive work, irrespective of gender. Due to the global financial crisis, in the fall of 2008, it was not easy to find suitable partners, but after an evening gathering with volunteers discussing the concept of employer brand the HR manager at a company and one of the researchers in the project started to discuss openings for cooperation. Prior to this event the company had recognized the need for decisive action in order to meet future challenges, partly because of the expansion, but also as a preventive measure to meet demographic progress with expected difficulties in recruiting the right employees. The concept of employer brand was the point of departure for the collaboration between the company and the researchers.

Two researchers from the project, an associate professor, female, with a long experience from gender research and fieldwork in collaboration with engineering enterprises, and a male PhD student, with extensive experience in business and project development, collaborated with the company’s staff during 2009. Based upon her long experience from feminist action research the associate professor’s role was to support and guide the PhD student in action planning and in his role as a facilitator during the change process and workshops. With a degree in mechanical engineering and several years in the engineering field, the male facilitator was familiar with activities within engineering companies, both in terms of production and commercial requirements. As a man, father, earlier not reflecting on gender roles or order, and being part of the hegemonic masculinity forming the norm in the Swedish society, he nevertheless had an understanding of the tension that exists around the gender equality debate. When entering the collaboration these personal experiences contributed to a wider understanding of the complexity and the resistance that exists when sex and gender equality are discussed.

Dellner Couplers AB is an expanding engineering company that manufactures, sells, and maintains industrial products for a global market. The headquarters with corporate management, development department, and production of certain goods is located in a semi rural area 250 km from Stockholm. Production facilities are also located in
Poland, USA, India, and China; sales and service organizations are found in several other countries. The annual total turnover for the entire enterprise is close to 100 million USD. Total number of employees worldwide is 500 people.

Despite the mobility of young, well-educated labor and the attraction that cities can have, the managing team had, due to the company’s history since 1941, decided to keep the headquarters in Vika, even though the location in Vika could be seen as an obstacle when expanding.

In order to counter this, the company wanted to build a better reputation on the labor market, become more attractive and strengthen their employer brand. Seen historically, the company has however been quick to lay off in crisis, something that can affect the reputation of the company as a stable and attractive employer. When launching the collaboration 2009, the plant in Sweden had 180 staff members, 75% men, and 25% women (a total of 45), and the average age was 40 years. Among the employed women two-thirds (30) were office workers with administrative duties and one-third worked within production. In business management there were six men and one woman. With a total of 25 persons in middle management, 21 were men and 4 women. The proportion of women in managing position was thus 19%.

**Launching**

The female HR manager, who became the key- and contact- person for the project, had been working at the company for about two years when the collaboration started. She was responsible for IT strategies, communication, recruitment, and the ambitious transforming process decided by the Board of Management. For the partnership, her mandate and motivation were crucial. When jointly forming the process plan the male researcher used analogies to explained the logic with comparing strategies for example product brand versus employer brand, in order to create mutual understanding. After a consensus was reached with the HR manager on desired processes and methods, company management approved the collaboration and the HR manager was given the mandate to get the intervention started. The preliminary agreement process plan was documented as a logical model (logical framework) describing the theoretical causality between inputs (resources) and outcomes (results and effects). The model can be used as support in evaluation, planning, management, monitoring, and communication of activities. It serves as a mediator providing an overview as well as creating the conditions for participation in and understanding of the process and its expected results (Annemalm and Bergling, 2007). In this case the documentation was just used for describing the joint intention of the process.

**Questionnaire**

A good start for a long-term change process concerning the conditions in a workplace is to identify the opinion of the employees, regarding qualities that contribute to an attractive work and how the employees perceive their current job. The research team, Theme Working Life, at Högskolan Dalarna has developed a questionnaire (att-questionnaire) based on a model (Åteg, Hedlund and Pontén 2004) that describes the qualities of an
attractive job. It was developed with a supposedly gender neutral approach and does not address the gender dimension, but has proved to be a useful tool to start discussions on the subject of work situations. Another argument is that many people depend on “measured facts” as a take off point, and then a questionnaire can be a complementary tool.

After informing all the staff, through intranet, orally at a general assembly, and through a special bulletin board, about the planed interaction the *att-questionnaire* was launched. All employees were encouraged to answer. Still, participation was optional. In order to increase the numbers of respondents the employees were given two optional media and could answer via a web-based version or in paper form. The questions were identical regardless of media, and all responses were entered into the same database. Since the company was well organized and divided into functional groups it was practical to use the same structure to allocate the respondents into groups, in which they would later discuss and give suggestions for improvements during the feedback process. A dedicated computer was placed in the lunchroom for answering the web-based survey. The employees were given access for answering the “*att-questionnaire*” during a two-week period to begin with. The first results of the survey came at the end of May 2009. By then only 103 persons had responded to the questionnaire, which was regarded to be too few, since merely 58% had responded. The measurement period was extended two weeks more in order to increase the proportion of respondents. In the middle of June 130 persons (72%) had answered the *att-questionnaire*, an acceptable response frequency.

Between the two answering periods, the anchoring process continued with an internal leadership conference, where the researchers described the project, its process steps, aims, and the desired results for a group of 20 of a total of 25 middle managers. This gave the managers an opportunity to discuss specific questions with the male researcher, but also an opportunity for the researchers to stress the importance to inspire the rest of the staff to answer the *att-questionnaire*. In connection with the meeting an extra questionnaire was handed out with general questions about gender equality. The purpose of this action was to introduce the ideas of gender equality to the supervisors, and to get a hint of to what extent they reflected on the differences in employment for men and women.

**Workshops**

Information, anchoring, and answering the questionnaire about attractive work was the first step of the process. The second step was to inform and reflect over the results from the questionnaire with the employees in workshops, and add a gender perspective. The workshops started in September 2009 after the summer vacations and were implemented during the fall. All employees were invited to attend the workshops. In total 13 workshops were conducted with between 4 and 22 participants in each, covering approximately a total of 130 persons. A parish house close to the plant was used for the workshops 10 out of 13 times.

Being aware of the reaction gender discussions can cause, the researchers were in the beginning very humble and kept a low profile the first three workshop occasions. The combination of integrating the result from the questionnaire with discussions about the influence of gender was a new approach, never tried before. When the researchers,
after the second workshop, reflected on the implemented process they felt that they had not accomplish the aim to create a reflective dialogue with the participants. This also caused a reaction from one of the participating managers who protested after the third workshop, and criticized the approach regarding the issue of gender to be too modest and cowardly. Due to this critique, the design of the workshops was dramatically rearranged and became more specific and challenging. The male researcher started to use pictures, anecdotes, and provocative arguments to contribute to a more active interaction, and thereby a more efficient learning process.

Hee Pedersen (2008) indicates the usefulness of pictures and describes good experiences from merging action research, gender theory, and pictures as methods in transformation projects. Pictures transform abstract and complex feelings, opinions, experiences, concerns, attitudes, and worries into tangible objects the practitioners actually can talk about, explain, and expand. Images have a broader and more open content than single words. From her research Hee Pedersen concludes that inclusion of pictorial material is a useful way to develop poststructuralist thinking technologies to further expand our understandings of the complexities of communication in individual as well as collective sense-making. In order to create understanding, in a dialogue between designer and client about planned target image, Ullmark (2007) recommends the use of analogies, which can be used as an eye opener to explain complex matters. Analogies to the past, to other firms or industries, and to other competitive settings like sports or war are useful in strategy discussions (Gavetti, Levinthal and Rivkin, 2005). Coro and Taylor (2007) promote the use of analogy when a complex technology is explained as a strategy to get prospects to comprehend a unique offer. In this context the concept of doing gender is the complex issue to explain.

An additional strategy that can be used in an action research process is the use of anecdotes, e.g. based upon personal experience from life. Anecdotes or storytelling can be seen as knowledge sharing stories, that if well designed, well-told, can help others learn from past situations to respond in future situations (Sole, D. 2002). This can contribute to a more open atmosphere encouraging the exchange of thoughts, if handled with care.

**Workshop 4 to 13 was divided in three phases**

The new structure of the workshop was divided into three phases: introduction, “doing gender”, and, finally the presentation of the results from the att-questionnaire including discussions regarding suggestions for improvements to be done for a more attractive work, action lists.

The first phase of the workshop included socialization, presentation of the two researchers and their different roles in the process, information about the project and the financier VINNOVA. The participants were also given a brief description of why the enterprise and the project cooperated, and what kind of benefits each actor (company/researcher) expected to gain through the partnership. The interactive approach was also explained: that researcher and participants in dialogue jointly should develop common knowledge. Furthermore, the participants were given a description of how the questionnaire had been developed, as well as of the methods and tools that would be used during the workshop.
The second phase in the workshop was to initiate reflective discussion on social construction of gender. The goal for this process was to raise awareness about how gender is constructed in our daily lives and how this may affect the perceived attractiveness of the workplace. As the discussion about sex and gender often results in feelings of guilt and accusation, mostly among men, the researcher emphasized that this was not the intention of the presentation. Most of the times the declaration of aim did not meet any protests but at one occasion a male participant protested and said: “Is this some stupid feminist initiative?”. But at the end of the workshop the subject was not so uncomfortable for him. In order to de-dramatize the discussion and to create an open and permissive climate, the male researcher used his own personal experiences from life as a husband, father, and professional in different types of businesses. He explained how he always considered himself as a caring father and an understanding husband, but also how he could remember argumentations about parental leave and domestic work versus work on the house or in the garden. The used examples were based on a life as a gender blind, non-reflective man, and the participants were asked to give feedback and comments from their own experiences. Depending on the group’s level of openness, the researcher used provocative analogies to start discussions. An example of discussed topics was whether different steel qualities are used in razor blades for males and females, within the same price range: Mach 3 versus Ladyshave, and if so, why? One man insisted that there was a difference, and he knew this from his own experience: “I use Ladyshave because I find it better”. On another occasion, one man presented an opposite view, also based on self-experience. Another example of provocative questions was if any of the attendants knew why the insurance premium is higher for a young male compared to a female of the same age. Usually, often after a joke, someone explained it was due to the higher risk for young males to be involved in accidents. The analogy would then be connected to the question: “Who will most often use new technical investments, for example an advanced numerically controlled machine?” Most the time this provocative analogy started a short discussion and gave the workshop participants an opportunity to reflect upon how males more often are taken for granted as operators when new technology is introduced. A man from the maintenance department stated that he “…considered women to be more cautious with the machinery than the men”, a comment another man questioned by saying: “Why just go 80 when you can do 120?” The dispute was followed by a short discussion about gender, productivity, and risks.

In the relaxed atmosphere the participants opened up and gave both positive and negative examples from the workplace. Yet, it was only on few occasions that these stories related to gender issues or construction of gender: Once a female worker expressed that “…it seemed like the guys get cordless telephones, mobile phones and PowerBooks, whether they need it or not…”. After one of the workshops, a man told the story of his first summer job back in the 1960s: the women had lower wages, despite the same tasks, a situation that he considered unfair.

The final phase, presentation of the results from the *att-questionnaire*, was divided into three steps. In the first step, an overhead picture was shown on a screen and copies of the picture were distributed. It described a graph, based on the group’s answers on the *att-questionnaire*, with both the 15 most valued qualities for a work to be perceived attractive and the value of how the group estimated their current jobs. After a brief explanation the attendants were divided into “beehives” to discuss and write down suggestions of activities to maintain or achieve those prioritized qualities. The
discussion was combined with a coffee break. In the second step, the qualities with the
greatest discrepancy between desired and experienced work conditions were presented.
The groups were again asked to discuss the result and write down suggestions on what
measures that might be taken in order to reduce the gap. Phase three was completed by
letting the groups discuss a short, additional questionnaire concerning whether there
is a difference in the views of work and work conditions between men and women.
Before completion of the workshop, the researcher asked the participants “What was
this like?” in order to get spontaneously feedback regarding the content and methods.
One young man commented that “…it gave me a new perspective”, his partner who
was working at the same department was at the time on parental leave to take care of
their child.

Follow-up/Feedback

Half a year after the last workshop was conducted with the managing board, the re-
searchers started to work with a group of volunteers from the enterprise. The purpose
for this collaboration was to deepen the understanding of gender, but it also gave the
researchers the opportunity take part of the experiences from earlier actions. Later the
same year (2010) the male researcher met the HR manager for an interview to get her
impressions and experiences from the collaborative practice. It was an open interview,
discussing: What have you learned from our collaboration? Was the process of use? And
can you give any examples of results for the enterprise?

Result from the joint action

The small questionnaire addressed to the supervisors gave the researchers some indica-
tions regarding the current awareness of gender equality and work life issues. The result
showed heterogeneous knowledge about current legislation and awareness on gender
issues. Among the managers as many as 79% believed that the labor market is gender
segregated and a majority of the ones arguing for this standpoint believed it was due to
cultural norms. Moreover, 61% of the responders believed that jobs and/or job tasks are
associated with a specific gender.

To handle the complexity of the change process, a democratic dialogue (Drewes
Nielsen, 2006), all employees were invited to first express their opinion in the att-
questionnaire and then join the workshops. In total 130 (72%) persons answered the ques-
tionnaire and about two thirds of all employees were participating during the fall of
2009. They got feedback from the result of the att-questionnaire and most of them got
an introduction to the concept of doing gender, the importance of gender equality and
time for reflection about their work conditions at the plant. All participants were asked
to express their own thoughts, opinions and suggestions how to improve the enterprise
to become a more attractive employer. After the final workshop the enterprise had 147
written suggestions how to develop the company. A majority of the suggestions were
about leadership, physical work conditions, acknowledgement (feedback), and relations.
The managing team was aware of the shortcomings concerning the physical conditions,
since many of the premises were inadequate.
One qualitative result of increased awareness regarding gender issues was demonstrated when an architect was later given the assignment to propose an extension of the building. When the architect submitted the first draft of the extension the management noticed that the locker room for female employees was much smaller than the locker room for men. Since the management did not want to get caught in old structures the new proposal had a movable wall between the two sections.

Another result and sign of awareness was noticed when the enterprise started the process of developing a new website, with a sub-directory for job advertisements. The HR manager now emphasized the importance for the subcontractor to be aware of gender equality aspects when designing the website since they now were eager that the layout would be appealing regardless of the visitor’s sex. This is an important alertness since the page for job advertisements communicates a first impression of the company to applicants (Parment and Dyhre, 2009).

In order to maintain the increased awareness regarding gender equality a number of employees (a gender group) were permitted to voluntarily participate in a series of seminars giving them more inspiration and knowledge about “doing gender”, so as to become more gender aware. The purpose was to secure the sustainability of the new knowledge and attention regarding gender as a potential and positive component for building a stronger employer brand. The group was given the mission to present a new policy plan regarding gender equality at the company. When the researchers and this group after the main process cooperated, additional reactions revealed that also can be seen as result of the former process. For example, at one occasion a woman declared her conclusion that “it’s not about gender, it’s about power”, which started a good discussion related to the gender system, men as the norm and the suppression of women. One man expressed his appreciation saying “it’s good to broaden the blinders”, and at another occasion a woman expressed her frustration: “I do not know if I manage more gender perspective”. This spontaneously expressed feeling gave nourishment to wider and deeper discussions in the group.

When asking the HR manager what they had learned from the collaboration the answer was that, as an employer, it is important to be courageous and daring to ask coworkers about what is considered important when choosing the place of work. Due to problems in the past they had been nervous before the results from the questionnaire came: “I was most afraid that we would not be able to take care of the result afterwards…”. The collaboration gave the enterprise new experiences and knowledge for their journey to become a more attractive employer.

Discussion

The described collaborative process, carried through during almost an entire year, did not start, as hoped for, with a horde of eager enterprises wishing to participate. Finding an enterprise willing to invest time in an applied gender equality research project was harder than expected. It was not until the researchers listened to the companies’ genuine needs and thoughts on future developments that collaboration could be initiated. The opening notion and point of departure for collaboration was the concept of employer brand (Sullivan 2004; Backhouse and Tikoo, 2004; Parment and Dyhre, 2009). This indicates the importance of both flexibility and of an open, humble attitude when
researchers strive for participatory joint knowledge production. Since the funding was dedicated for applied gender research, the framework of action research was considered the obvious choice as a theoretical platform. Different theories and methods were used depending on situation in order to reach both joint and individual objectives for the enterprise and the research project. The choice of framework also gave the researchers a freedom to redesign the workshops after realizing that the first strategy used did not contribute to the process as expected. After re-arranging the agenda the remaining workshops became much more successful, with better interaction and involvement in the dialogue. Reasons for this improvement can partly be found, as Hee Pedersen (2008) argues, in the use of pictures contributing to transform abstract and complex feelings, opinions, experiences, attitudes, et cetera. Especially, the controversial examples of well-known consumer products, for example a drill machine and a rod mixer, provoked reactions. Also, images targeting gendered consumer groups, e.g. female/male razors, inspired the discussion and challenged the normative thinking. Open opposition, towards the workshop and gender issues, turned to interest when humorous observations were used. It was of use to choose images that the participants recognized; pictures, which were also contextualized, for the target group. This way, the steel structure of razors can bridge resistance from those who work in the steel industry. One explanation for the good result can be found in that the attendants focused on the pictures instead of defending their private sphere when discussing gender. The discussions were most of the time kept on a more structural level. It gave the participants an introduction of how gender is done (Gunnarsson and Westberg, 2007).

To document the agreed jointly formed plan in the beginning of the collaboration and to visualize it in a chart, logical model (Annemalm and Bergling, 2007), was a useful strategy for the initial information, although it never was used as a plan for an ongoing evaluation.

A finding was that the combination of different participatory methods, as pictures, anecdotes, and analogies (Gavetti et al. 2005; Ullmark, 2007; Coro and Taylor, 2007) adapted to the context made it possible to counter resistance and to discuss gender from different perspectives and logics. Another finding was the importance of an open attitude, sharing personal thoughts, which made the gender issue less dramatic; and it opened up for discussions with agreeing and disagreeing arguments. It made it possible for the participants to contribute with own examples and reflections from their own lives. This involvement and possibility to formulate the problem are important, as are the personal reflections, for a sustainable learning process. Humor and new patterns of thoughts, sometimes provocative, were useful tools to turn resistance to motivation.

Using the *att-questionnaire* as a starter to gather the employees’ opinions about attractive work (Åteg et al., 2004), and creating a curiosity for the result of the questionnaire was a strategic approach to get access to a result driven engineering enterprise. Still, it was not possible, from the results, to make any statements regarding whether or not there were any un-equalities concerning gender issues from the *att-questionnaire*. It might have been better to use a questionnaire with questions addressing gender and organizational issues, for example based on the four “points of entry” by Acker, since organizational behavior were frequently discussed. Before the graphs with the results from the *att-questionnaire* was presented a chart describing the percentage of men and women divided in different ages was shown. This gave the researchers an opportunity to raise questions related to Ackers “points of entry” letting the participants reflect on
whether the organization is gendered or not, gender division of labor/segregation pattern, activities, symbols, and interaction at the workplace.

It was favorable to locate most of the workshops in the parish house, a neutral arena outside the daily workplace and unfamiliar to most of the participants and to the researchers. This reduced possible power struggles between the researchers and the participants, and between the participants (Aagaard, Nielsen and Svensson, 2008). Yet, and regardless of the physical conditions, the most vital factor for a participatory learning process is the established relationship between the participants. Depending on the distance between the practitioners and the researcher from the start, the co-production of knowledge rests on unstable pillars and that can easily tilt if the researcher fails to sense the atmosphere and adapt to the participants context. It is important how the researcher positions her/him-self in the interactive process (Tranquist, 2008).

For a company in the size of Dellner Couplers it can be difficult to reach out with information to all staff members. Information is important, and whether or not it was because of information disappeared, or lack of interest, or poor communication with the nearest supervisor that information was lost, many of the participants who came to the parish house did not know why they should be there or what the purpose of the workshop was. “They were told to go there” by their boss or colleagues without understanding why. To inform in different ways and to give awareness time to settle is of great value since confusion distracts both the motivation and the process flow. It is therefore of great importance that the middle managers understand the value of high numbers of participants. When discussing the intervention with the HR manager a year after the last workshop, she expressed some regrets for the high pace in launching the process: “If I could rewind the tape I would have liked to give more information from the company”.

When asking whether she was satisfied with the process model the HR manager’s answer was promptly: “Yes, I think it was very good.” Her argument was that she felt so confident since the process model was scientific and developed in collaboration. As an example of advantages she stressed that the idea of integrating gender equality in the discussion about employer brand would not been possible without the inspiration and support from the project:

“I think like this, it is still sensitive to bring up and especially for me as the only woman in the managing team….. for me to take the frontline role and argue for letting more women getting a chance, that is tough, so I really think that we got real benefits from the project, but we have still a long way to go”.

The HR manager was later promoted to Sales & Marketing Director for the company, something she believes was a normative breakthrough thanks to the gender awareness project.

Conclusion

Integrating the two scientific fields of gender and action research must in this case be considered as a key combination for achieved results; the process model worked well for both the enterprise and the project. Three different strategies, approaches, were basically
used - employer brand, the logic model and the concept of Attractive Work in order to get access to the managing board and start fruitful discussions regarding collaboration for increased attractiveness and gender awareness. Using the concept of employer brand was a determining factor for the collaboration, and making arguments for increased gender awareness was perceived as giving rise to possibilities rather than being a burden for the enterprise. This shows the importance of open dialogue when researchers and practitioners strive for participatory knowledge production beneficial for both parties. Furthermore, it also demonstrates that when the company’s current needs are addressed, arguments and intervention for more gender equal work places do not necessarily meet resistance. A vital finding is the importance of informing all the stakeholders engaged in the process. Without adequate information, and information that is perceived as logically true for business and individuals, the process might be regarded as a pastime activity rather than an investment.

Another conclusion is that when launching long-term transforming processes in an organization gender cannot remain a “none issue”, it must be integrated because it will examine the organization in a new perspective regarding issues as power, symbols and relations. In the described collaboration gender was integrated and the enterprise became more aware about the importance and possibilities of gender issues as an important component for strengthening the employer brand. The principle of the described process model can be used in similar cases if adapted to the local context.

References


Hearn J. (2001) “Resistance, Responsibilities and Reaching Out”, conference; *Men and Gender Equality*, Orebro, Sweden, This meeting was part of the Swedish EU Presidency Calendar of Meetings in Sweden.


**End note**

1 Swedish Public Employment Services.

2 An annual investigation made by the Swedish Federation of Business Owners and Swedbank.
A comparison of women and men’s average pay throughout the labor market shows that women earned 84.2 per cent of men’s pay in 2008. Thus the pay gap was 15.8 per cent. The gender pay gap for the labor market as a whole has remained fairly constant during the period 1992–2008. Summary Annual Report for 2009 National Mediation Office Sweden.

The importance of the creation of learning from values and representation existing in the society which are transmitted unconsciously.

Number of economically active (daytime) by industry and NUTS2 (EU Standard) SCB Statistic Sweden 2009.

Here, one who practices something, an occupation, profession or technique.

Learning by Fighting was a project within the organization of VINNOVA during the period of 2003-05. The purposes were both to develop gender mainstreaming in the organization and to strengthen the gender competence when launching programs and when evaluate applications.

The innovations system Fiber Optic Valley ran an action oriented gender research project, “Gender network”, between 2005 – 08. The purposes have been to both develop the participating organizations and generate new interesting gender research; the target group has been middle managers in 12 organizations/enterprises.

Within the program “Applied Gender Research for Strong Research and Innovation Milieus”, financed by VINNOVA, 10 different projects were granted 2008.

The four “points entry” defined by Acker, has inspired to many different interpretation with similar meaning.

Triple Steelix was one of five winners of VINNOVA VINNVÄXT 2004, an initiative taken by Jernkontoret (the Swedish Steel Producers’ Association).

Bergslagen is a historically, culturally, and linguistically distinct mining district located north of Lake Malaren in northern Svealand, Sweden. In Bergslagen mining and metallurgic industry have been important since the Middle Ages. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bergslagen).

Acronym for “Gender perspective for attractive work”.

VINNOVA, Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems, is Sweden’s innovation agency. Our aim is to increase the competitiveness of Swedish researchers and companies.
Title: Doing Gender in a Local and Regional Context:
An Innovative Process of Mainstreaming Gender Equality

Submitted to: VINNOVA, Forthcoming, “Doing Innovation - Doing Gender”
‘Doing Gender’ in a Local and Regional Context: An Innovative Process of Mainstreaming Gender Equality

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Abstract
Sustainable regional and business development depends on the access to people motivated to invest their lives in the region and the enterprises. However in a time of demographical changes, urbanization and new values regarding life and work among the next generation the issue of being attractive is crucial for both a region and the workplaces in the region. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process model as an innovation for generating gender awareness through flexible methods and to underline the relationship between organizational and regional development. It is a description of an interactive collaboration of researchers and an engineering enterprise in a semirural area in Sweden. A collaboration aiming for a more gender mainstreamed organization in order to retain and attract the best-suited labour for tomorrow. During the long term process the enterprise became more conscious of being a gender equal employer. The interaction gave the enterprise a platform for continued development with gender equality and in the long run improved prerequisite for sustainable growth.

Keywords: attractive work, employer brand, gender, innovation, sustainable growth
Introduction
Steel and engineering industries and their related services are important as Swedish exports. A significant portion of these products is produced in the region of Bergslagen, where Jernkontoret runs the innovation system, Triple Steelix, which is a cluster consisting of about 700 SMEs, seven steel producing companies, manufacturers of mechanical equipment for metal forming and industrial IT, 13 municipalities, universities and research centres, regional actors and regional authorities. The aim is to create new knowledge and competence through connections and interaction between smaller and larger enterprises, universities, research institutes and the community.

However, since all regions, innovation systems and enterprises are dependent on access to people, the current demographical changes, urbanization and new values concerning life and work present employers with challenges regarding the supply of employees among the next generation. The ageing population in EU countries indicates that the struggle for talent and competence has only just begun. The lack of competent labour is already a problem for many companies in the industrial region, and reports show that there will be a shortage of approximately 10 000 (varies) workers on the labour market by 2015. Thus, demographic development, migration and strong labour market segregation are expected to be obstacles for industrial as well as sustainable regional growth. In this situation and since the steel and engineering industries are dominated by male workers with a tradition to employ mainly men, it is important to raise the awareness, become attractive and see the potential in well-educated women already living in the region. When regional development does not build on gender equality, the effects can be negative. How-

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1 Bergslagen is a historically, culturally, and linguistically distinct located northwest of Stockholm, Sweden. The district covers parts of three provinces and is well known for the mining and metallurgical industry that has been important since the Middle Ages (Wikipedia 2011).
2 The Swedish Steel Producers’ Association
3 An initiative started by Jernkontoret
4 Small and Middle size Enterprises
ever, the traditional structure of regional economic life is cemented, and the dominant male norm remains. As a result, women relocate to larger cities for further education or employment in other industries (Region Bergslagen, 2002; Forsberg et al. 2006; Hedlund 2008; Westberg 2008).

For this reason, in the spring of 2008, Triple Steelix developed the project, “Gender Perspective for Attractive Work” (GATT). Later in the same year, Jernkontoret received the encouraging message that Triple Steelix had been granted funding by VINNOVA\(^5\) for the GATT project. This project focuses on the actual needs perceived by the enterprises for recruiting the right talent.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Develop insight into the potential for greater equality
- Start the processes of change towards gender equality in participating companies
- Initiate and evaluate methods for sustainable gender equality, jointly between researcher and companies

All three objectives are placed in the context of regional development and growth. This agrees with the ambition of the European Union, which was expressed in the Lisbon strategies to make Eurozone “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment” (http://europa.eu/growth and jobs).

With secure financing and highly motivated for participatory gender research, the researcher reconnected with companies that earlier the same year had expressed interest in cooperating with this study. A female associate professor with long experience in gender research and fieldwork in collaboration with engineering enterprises and a male PhD student with extensive experience in business and project development were assigned to work on the project. However, due to the global fi-

\(^5\) Within the program, “Applied Gender Research for Strong Research and Innovation Milieus”, financed by VINNOVA, 10 different projects were granted in 2008
nance crises, the motivation for participation was significantly reduced. The researchers were then met by polite but definite rejection regarding cooperative knowledge production. One company even replied that their focus was on continuing to exist for another three months. This reaction indicates that the motivation for private businesses to participate in regional initiatives for sustainable change processes is influenced by the state of the market. Thus, finding an enterprise willing to invest time in an applied gender equality research project became even more difficult. It was not until the researchers listened to the companies’ genuine situated needs and thoughts on future developments that collaboration could be initiated. Further description of the enterprise and the cooperation will be explained later on.

**Purpose of this chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process model as an innovation for generating gender awareness through flexible methods and to underline the relationships between organizational and regional development when exploring the empirical material from the collaboration between researchers and an engineering enterprise. In addition, this chapter shows how gender mainstreaming became an important notion, developing parameter, for an expanding enterprise in a semi-rural region.

**An example of regional collaboration**

**Innovative interaction between actors**

Development trends in regional economic policy are influenced in large part by interests in various forms of interaction and systems (such as innovation systems). Governments and researchers of different disciplines have pointed out that innovations of different kinds occur in interactions between actors, which are important

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6 In this contribution we addressed the concept of gender mainstreaming as an ongoing process for a change of norm and discourse and a strategy for gaining increased gender equality within the enterprise.
for regional development (Brulin and Nilson 1997; Brulin and Westberg 2000; Westberg ed 2005; Reflection Note on Integrating partnerships in ESF programmes 2007-2013; Svensson and Nilsson, eds. 2008; Innovation & Gender 2011). Collaboration can take place between different types of organizations that have both complementary and similar orientations. The researchers also see collaboration between different actors in the development of strong coalitions as a base for learning and to meet future changes (Gustavsen and Hofmeier, 1997; Etzkowitz och Leyersdorf 1997; Svensson, Jakobsson and Åberg 2001; Husu et al., eds. 2010). Over time, various theories form the understanding of innovation and new ideas, trying to incorporate the processes and relationships as keys to innovation and learning. These ideas are a reaction towards the innovation theories that reduce everything to structure, actor and system and which do not include the processes, procedures and relationships that exist within the system. Incorporating a gender perspective in an innovative environment does not necessarily lead to gender equality, but it can reveal injustice and how gender is done in this environment, which will create gender awareness and knowledge of action. In this case, the gender perspective can be an important contributor to innovation and sustainable growth. The benefits of gender equality are further enhanced through a more gender-balanced family and work life, which in addition to economic growth, increases the quality of life and wellbeing for both men and women. Thus, gender mainstreaming in innovative environments can contribute to gender equality and sustainable growth (Westberg eds. 2005; Innovation & Gender 2011).

In the GATT project, we focus on knowledge production and reflections regarding gender issues with the employees at one company. This company Dellner Couplers AB (DCAB) is an expanding company that manufactures, sells and maintains couplers for trains in a global market. The headquarters, which comprises corporate management, the development department and production of certain goods, is located in Vika, a semi-rural area 250 km northeast of Stockholm. Production facilities are also located in Poland, the USA, India and China; sales and service organizations are located in several other countries. The annual total turnover for the en-
tire enterprise is close to 100 million USD. The total number of employees worldwide is 500. In the enterprise’s plans for future expansion, the headquarters will remain in Vika, a geographic location that is based on the company's history from 1941. However, this location can be seen as an obstacle. In order to counter this drawback, the company expressed the need to build a better reputation on the labour market, strengthen their employer brand and become more attractive as employers. When the collaboration between Dellner Couplers and the project was launched in 2009, the plant in Sweden had 180 staff members, 75% men and 25% women (a total of 45); the average age was 40 years. Among the employed women, two-thirds (30) were office workers with administrative duties and one-third worked with production. In business management were one woman and six men. Of the total of 25 persons in middle management, 21 were men and 4 women. The proportion of women in managing positions was thus 19%.

**Framework and Collaboration**

When VINNOVA opened the call for funding applications, they requested projects focusing on “applied gender research within strong research and innovation milieu” (TIGER). This objective was suitable for Triple Steelix, a pragmatic organization with the mission to support regional development based on prosperous enterprises. With this in mind, an interactive approach was chosen as the method of the collaboration (Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson 2006) combined with theories of masculinity (Hearn 2001; Kimmel 2005), ‘doing gender’ (Acker 1992, Gunnarsson 2007) and attractive work theories (Åteg, Hedlund and Pontén 2004). The methodological framework is based on different interactive tools with the intention to establish social capital (trust) creating discussions and reflections in order to widen the participants’ views regarding ‘doing gender’ and, in the long run, improving prerequisites for sustainable growth.

**Interactive research**

The interactive research perspective aims for equal exchange of experience, learning and knowledge between researcher and participant. The "ideal" interactive re-
search process involves the researcher and practitioner on the basis of their experiences and knowledge. Together they formulate the research plan and then work together throughout the entire change process, which involves research, analysis, and recording and dissemination of the results achieved (Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson, 2006; Svensson, 2002; Gunnarsson, Westberg, Andersson and Balkmar 2007). In practice, the degree and level of interactivity often varies in different phases of the research process. The role played by the researcher in the interactive approach underlines the supportive part played by the researcher. This role constitutes an important procedure in the interactive research process. Hence, a distinction is made in relation to the more traditional role of researcher as observer. Also emphasized is the difference between the supportive role of researcher and the more advisory role of consultant and therapist (McGill and Brockbank, 2004; Gunnarsson et al. 2007).

**Resistance**

The project strategy was to take steps towards a vision of gender equality in enterprises, through raising awareness about gender structures. These structures are often hidden, and we are all more or less influenced by them, implying that the project could face both conscious and unconscious resistance. Women, who are wishing to enter the male-dominated fields must often break through resistance from men who defend a male marked workplace, where the power relations concern fields and positions. It is important to find a balance so that the awareness raising process is initiated with as little resistance as possible. Other projects have conveyed the experience of being forced to consider how progressively the issue of gender can be approached in a change process without causing strong resistance (Coleman and Rippin 2000; Gonäs ed. 2005). In other words, most change processes will at some point meet resistance and hesitation in particular processes that challenge norms and traditions. For example, in the field of engineering, men’s interpretative prerogative is used in defining qualifications, keeping women from technical work (Gunnarsson, 1994; Abrahamsson and Gunnarsson, 2002). Amundsdotter (2009) describes different kinds of resistance and refutation as
power strategies. She highlights three dimensions: the fear of being declared hysterical or crazy, the fear of losing position, and the fear of facing opposition.

**Trust, a basis for mutual development**

The building of social capital is due to the ongoing discussion regarding the citizens’ trust in public institutions, the citizens themselves, and the present social and cultural climate. Social capital is understood in different ways by different researchers, but in short, trust in civic society is a very important part of social capital (Putnam 1996; Holmberg and Weibull 2000; Uslaner, 2000). Similar to social capital in the civic society we believe that social capital is needed in a collaboration project between researchers and the enterprise.

Whether or not social capital in a society is a positive resource depends heavily on the rationality on which it is based, that is, on technical-economic rationality or responsible rationality. Technical-economic rationality views people as a means to an end. Responsible rationality, on the other hand, sees people as an end in themselves. (Gunnarsson 2004; Westberg 2006; Westberg and Eklund 2008).

How social capital is generated and functions depends on the type of rationality that is dominant in society. In many contexts, the concept of technical-economic rationality is perceived super ordinate to responsible rationality. The apparent gender-neutral orientation of a prevailing technical-economic rationality does not identify gender equality as a resource except when a win-win situation is demonstrably possible. The profitability of the market-economy approach, which is based on the values of technical-economic rationality, sometimes conflicts with the intention of the national strategy of a sustainable society, which is based on the values associated with responsible rationality.

Approaching an engineering enterprise that originated from a positivistic paradigm and was formed by a technical-economical rationality, with issues regarding gender equality and social construction, we tried to understand their mission, aims, problems and solutions in order to establish trust and participatory faith.
The collaborative process

As researchers in the GATT project, we do not want to do research on, for, or about the company. Instead, we seek a participatory approach with the aim of developing new knowledge together with the company. Based upon her long experience in feminist action research, the associate professor’s role is to support and guide the PhD student in action planning and in his role as a facilitator during the change process and the workshops. With a degree in mechanical engineering and several years in the engineering field, the male researcher is familiar with the activities, including design, production and commercial requirements, within engineering companies. Moreover, as a man, father, and part of the hegemonic masculinity7 that forms the norm in Swedish society, he also has an understanding of the tension that exists around the gender equality debate. His experiences contribute to a wider understanding of the complexity and the resistance that might exist when sex and gender equality is discussed. In order to establish a sustainable relationship with mutual trust between the parties, the collaboration started with an open discussion between the male researcher and the HR manager. Using the concept of employer brand was an important strategy for the HR manager, who would present the plan to the board, which was comprised of mostly men. The discussion was summarized in a logical framework that described the causality among different activities, with the intention of contributing to a more attractive work for both women and men. After informing the company management about the planned activities, the logic, methods and expected results of the change process, the HR manager was given the mandate to begin the intervention. The plan for intervention encompassed two major activities involving the whole company during the year of collaboration

- Invite all the employees to answer a questionnaire regarding attractive work

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7 Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue. (Conell, R. W. and Messerschmidt, J.W. 2005)
• Request all the employees meet for a mutual exchange regarding the results from the questionnaire and the concept of ‘doing gender’

Supported by the researchers, the HR manager was responsible for informing both the managing team and the personal during the process. She accomplished this by using different media, such as a special bulletin board, intranet and oral presentations at a general assembly. By inviting all the personal to participate in the change process, the enterprise expected to accomplish a genuine solid platform for a continued process without support from the researchers.

Starting with questions about an Attractive Work

The interaction started with an employee questionnaire (att-questionnaire) developed by the research team, Theme Working Life at Dalarna University. The questions are based on a model (Åteg, Hedlund and Pontén 2004) that describes the qualities of an attractive job. The questionnaire was distributed to identify the opinions of the employees regarding qualities that contribute to attractive work and how they perceive their current job. It was developed with a "gender neutral" approach and does not address the dimension of gender. The major reason for choosing the att-questionnaire was its local competence and proven results as a good starter for a process of discussing work conditions. This strategy was used in order to respond to the culture that we perceived was prevalent at DCAB. However, since the questionnaire was not developed to concern gender, we decided to raise gender issues in the forthcoming workshops, which were interwoven in the questionnaire-feedback-process without disapproval or accusation of the poor current situation. The aim was to increase awareness of gender issues as a component for future success and appreciative new knowledge.

All employees were given the option to answer the questionnaire. In order to obtain an acceptable number of answers, the employees were given two different choices to fill in the questionnaire, either via a web-based version or in paper form. The questions in both formats were exactly identical and all responses were entered into the same database. To obtain enough responses to the att-questionnaire,
two answering periods were conducted. Between the two answering periods, the anchoring process continued with an internal leadership conference, where the male researcher described the project, its process steps, aims, and the desired results to a group of 20 of the 25 middle managers. This gave them an opportunity to discuss specific questions with the researcher and it was an opportunity for the researcher to stress the importance of inspiring the rest of the staff to respond to the *att-questionnaire*. In connection with the meeting, an extra questionnaire was handed out with general questions about gender equality. The extra questionnaire was extracted from a gender sensitive checklist. The reason for using this extra questionnaire was to get some information on opinions regarding gender from inside the enterprise before other actions were started to develop a method of mainstreaming gender for sustainable development and growth.

The old topic “gender equality”—again?

As mention above gender issues creates reaction. The gender equality concept is quite unclear. The meaning varies between fairly weak expressions such as ‘equal formal right for men and women' to more extensive descriptions of how the prevailing gender order should be abolished. “The overall objective of Sweden’s gender equality policy is to ensure that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives. Gender equality also contributes to economic growth by encouraging the development of people’s skills and creativity”.

Gender equality has been a topic of discussion in Sweden for a long time. Although much progress has been made, many obstructing structures remain. The statistics show that Sweden is one of the European countries that have the highest participation rate for women in the labour force. At the same time, Sweden has the most gender-segregated labour market. In a practical sense, there is one labour market for women and one for men. The labour market is also vertically gender-

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8 In total, 19 staff members (management and middle management) answered the questionnaire.
9 A strategy for gender equality in the labour market and the business sector.15 October 2009 Ministry of Education and Research
segregated with a majority of women in lower level positions and men in higher positions (Gonäs et al. 2005; SOU 1997:137; SOU 2004:43).

Since the objectives for the project and the mutual beliefs were that a more gender-aware employer and workplace are more attractive and that this awareness is beneficial for the value of the employer brand, the concept of ‘doing gender’ and the social construction of gender was interwoven in the feedback process, the workshops.

Workshops

During the fall of 2009, 13 workshops were performed with the participation of approximately 130 employees divided into groups of between 4 and 22. The composition of the groups was based on the company’s organizational structure. A majority, 11 of 13, workshops took place outside the company in a parish house. This was an advantage, since in the field of action/participatory research, it is important to create arenas for interaction that allow the participants and researchers to share knowledge and experiences (Aagaard Nielsen and Nielsen 2006, p. 79). The parish house was a neutral area for all involved and a traditional meeting place for thoughts and reflection. The duration of each workshop was three hours.

The purpose of the workshops was to present and discuss the results from the att-questionnaire and raise awareness regarding gender issues. After the two first workshops we (the researchers) did not feel satisfied with the implemented process because we felt that we had not accomplished the aim of creating a reflective dialogue with the participants. Our strategy for interweaving gender in the interactive process based on the results from the questionnaire did not work out satisfactorily. This was also recognised by one of the managers who protested after attending the third workshop and criticized the approach regarding the issue of gender as being too modest and cowardly. An explanation for this insufficiency is that our awareness of the reaction gender discussions can cause made us approach the subject very cautiously at the beginning of the workshop series. Due to the unsatisfactory result, the design of the workshops was dramatically rearranged and became more
specific and challenging. This flexibility was both a possibility and requirement regarding the chosen research strategy of action research. Briefly, the new agenda for the workshop sessions was divided into three phases: an introduction phase, a gender perspective phase (‘doing gender’) and a phase in which the results from the survey were presented, discussed and an action list was jointly made.

Aiming for an open atmosphere based on mutual trust, the workshops began with socialisation, presentation of the participants, and some information about the project, project owner, Jernkontoret/Triple Steelix and the financier, VINNOVA. The participants were also given a brief description of the project’s objectives for the enterprise and what benefits each actor (company/researcher) was expected to gain through the collaboration. Since the time for the workshop was limited, this opening phase was crucial for establishing a foundation of trust (social capital) between the participants and the researchers.

In the second phase, the gender perspective (‘doing gender’), the purpose was to raise awareness of how gender is created in our daily lives and how it may affect the perceived attractiveness of the workplace. To support the process, we started to use pictures, anecdotes, and provocative arguments to contribute to a more active interaction.

Pictures from the design field showing forms and functions challenging daily opinions were chosen. In this way, the issue of equality did not come too close to an individual's private sphere. Everybody saw the same pictures, everyone was on a common basis, and no one was singled out or accused. However, on one occasion, a man loudly commented, “Is this some stupid feminist initiative?” By the end of the workshop, however, he was more relaxed. Hee Pedersen (2008) advocated the usefulness of pictures and concluded that inclusion of pictorial material is a useful way to develop “poststructuralist thinking technologies” to further expand our understanding of the complexities of communication in both individual and collective sense making. She stated that images have a broader and more open content than single words and that pictures transform abstract and complex feelings, opin-
ions, experiences, concerns, attitudes, and worries into tangible objects that the practitioners actually can talk about, explain, and expand.

Depending on the group's level of openness, in addition to the pictures, we very often used anecdotes, analogies and provocations to start discussions. In order to de-dramatize the discussion and to create an open and permissive climate, the male researcher used his own personal experiences as a husband, father, and professional in different types of businesses. He explained that he always considered himself as a caring father and an understanding husband, but that he could remember arguments about parental leave and domestic work versus work in the house or in the garden. The examples he used were based on his life as a gender-blind, non-reflective man, and the participants were asked to give feedback and comments from their own experiences. An example of an analogy was when we asked the participants if anyone knew why the car-insurance premium is higher for a young male compared with a female of the same age. Usually, often after a joke, someone explained it was due to the higher risk of young males getting involved in accidents. The analogy would then be connected to the question, "Who will most often use new technical investments, for example an advanced numerical controlled machine?" Most of the time, this provocative analogy started a short discussion and gave the workshop participants an opportunity to reflect upon how males are more often taken for granted as operators when new technology is introduced. A man from the maintenance department commented that he “…considered women to be more cautious with the machinery than the men”, a comment another man questioned by saying, “Why just go 80 when you can do 120?” The dispute was followed by a short discussion about gender, productivity, and risks. At another workshop, a female worker expressed, “… it seemed like the guys get cordless telephones, mobile phones and PowerBooks, no matter if they need it or not…”.

Anecdotes or storytelling can be seen as knowledge sharing stories, that if well designed and well told, can help others learn from past situations to respond in future situations (Sole 2002). This can contribute to a more open atmosphere encouraging
the exchange of thoughts if handled with care, nourishing the social relationship at the moment. The use of analogies is a method that Ullmark (2007) recommended when striving for understanding in a dialogue for example between a designer and client about planned target images. It can function as an eye opener to explain complex matters. Analogies to the past, to other firms or industries, and to other competitive settings like sports or war are useful in strategy discussions (Gavetti, Levinthal and Rivkin, 2005). Coro and Taylor (2007) promoted the use of analogy when a complex technology is explained as a strategy to get prospects to comprehend a unique offer. In this context, the concept of ‘doing gender’ is the complex issue to explain.

The final phase of the workshop, the presentation of the results from the employee questionnaire, was divided into three steps. In the first step, an overhead picture describing a graph with the 15 most valued qualities according to measurements considered important for work to perceived attractiveness was both shown on a screen and copies were distributed to the participants. The chart also showed the value of how the group estimated their current job. After a brief explanation, the participants were divided in "beehives" to discuss and write down suggestions of activities to maintain or achieve those prioritized qualities. The discussion was combined with a coffee break. In the second step, the qualities that had the greatest discrepancy between desired and experienced work was presented. The groups were again asked to discuss the result and write down suggestions on what measures they could take in order to reduce the gap. The final part of the workshop was used for a discussion regarding five questions concerning differences in views of work and work conditions between men and women. These questions were taken from the employee questionnaire; the questions were those that the researchers had found differences in the answers of men and women.

Before ending the workshop, we always asked the participants "How has it been?" for spontaneous feedback regarding the content and methodology. Many participants expressed their appreciation for taking part in the process.
Effects for the enterprise in the region

During the time of collaboration, the enterprise invested a vast amount of the employees’ productive time in the change process, an investment that in the long term is expected to pay off with a more attractive and gender equal workplace. More than two thirds of the employees at Dellner Coplers participated in the workshops. They all received feedback from the results of the *att-questionnaire* and most of the participants were introduced to the importance of gender equality, ’doing gender’ and reflection about their work conditions. Their new insights can be beneficial not only as employees but also as civilians in the local and regional society. Lindgren and Forsberg (2010) described gender contracts "as the informal regulations that govern the everyday relations between men and women". According to them, gender patterns exist in general, but there are local and regional variations in these patterns. From a historical perspective, various economic systems as well as local economies form contracts, which are repeated through practice when challenged in the context of economic and social transformations. This is important and will continue to be important to consider as DCAB has a long history in a small village located in a rural area where they also have decided to remain.

During the three-hour workshop, all the participants had the opportunity to express their thoughts, opinions and suggestions about how the enterprise could become a more attractive place to work. After the final workshop, the enterprise had received more than 140 written suggestions on how to develop the company. A majority of the suggestions were about the same issues, such as physical work conditions, leadership, acknowledgement (feedback) and relations.

The managing team was aware of the shortcomings concerning the physical conditions and that many of the premises were inadequate. Therefore, an architect was given the assignment of developing a proposal for an extension to the building. When the architect submitted the first draft of the extension, the management noticed that the locker room for female employees was much smaller than the locker room for men. Inspired by the gender process, the management did not want to get caught in old structures and asked for a new proposal. The new revision had a
movable wall between the two sections. Thus, knowledge and awareness of management regarding gender equality had been increased. Another sign of this new awareness is that in the process of developing a new homepage with a subdirectory for careers, the subcontractor was ordered by the HR manager to be aware of the gender equality aspect when designing the page. They now understood that the layout must be appealing regardless of sex. This awareness is important since the page for job advertisements communicates the first impression of the company to the applicant (Parment and Dyhre, 2009).

The two examples above shows that gender mainstreaming as a strategy for achieving equality between men and women in all areas of decision-making. As a result of the increased awareness of the importance of gender issues, a number of employees at Dellner Couplers participated in a series of seminars that gave them more inspiration and knowledge for the ongoing internal process. The purpose was to secure the sustainability of the new knowledge and attention regarding gender as a positive component for building a stronger employer brand.

**Findings from the collaborative process**

The questionnaire was effective as "door opener" to gather employees for a discussion of the construction of gender in the same way as the concept of employer brand functioned as a key notion for getting the technical-economical rationality driven management to pay attention to the suggestions to include gender issues in the collaboration to develop more attractive work in the organization.

Whether or not it was because the information had disappeared, lack of interest or poor communication with the nearest supervisor, many of the participants who came to the parish house did not know why they were there or the purpose of the workshop. This confusion enabled a discussion that most often contributed to the process of creating a foundation of trust between the researchers and participants.

When the gender related discussions began, a clear scepticism was noticeable. However, when the pictures were shown, everybody focused on the images, and the subject became suddenly less uncomfortable and the reaction was positive, of-
ten with spontaneous comments. Furthermore, the anecdotes that the male researcher shared from his life started discussions that included arguments that both agreed and disagreed. Sometimes the discussions were really humorous. An example is a discussion of whether the razors for male and females in the same price range have different qualities of blades, Mach 3 versus Ladyshave, and if so, why? One man insisted that there was a difference and he knew this from his own experience because he had used Ladyshave. On another occasion, one man presented an opposite view also based on self-experience.

When a trustful atmosphere was created, the participants opened up more and gave both positive and negative examples from the workplace. However, it was only in few occasions that these stories related to gender issues or construction of gender. Many participants expressed great appreciation for knowing the results of the questionnaire and being involved in the process because they had not expected to participate. As a sign of participation, a man, after one of the workshops, told the story of his first summer job back in the 1960s: the women he worked with received lower wages despite the fact that their tasks were the same, a situation that the man considered unfair.

When the HR manager was asked what the company management had learned from the collaboration, the answer was that it is necessary for employers to be courageous in daring to ask co-workers about what they consider important when choosing a place of work. Due to problems in the past, the management had been nervous about the results of the questionnaire. She stated, “I was most afraid that we would not be able to take care of the result afterwards…”. The collaboration gave the enterprise new experiences and knowledge for their journey in becoming a more gender aware and attractive employer. When asking whether she was satisfied with the process, the HR manager’s prompt answer was “Yes, I think it was very good”. Her argument was that she felt very confident since the process model was scientific and was developed in collaboration. As an example of the advantages, she stressed that the idea of integrating gender equality in the discussion about
employer brand would not have been possible without the inspiration and support of the project:

I think like this, it is still sensitive to bring up and especially for me as the only woman in the managing team..... for me to take the frontline role and argue for letting more women getting a chance, that is tough, so I really think that we got real benefits from the project, but we have still a long way to go.

The HR manager was later promoted to Sales and Marketing Director for the company, something she believes was a normative breakthrough thanks to the gender awareness project.

**Final discussion**

In an industrial environment with an “engineer discourse” driven by technical-economical rationality prioritizing market demands, gender issues often become a “side car”, not integrated in the organization and not seen as an important parameter for sustainable corporate as well as regional development. The lack of concern for openly discussing gender equality may perhaps be explained by the belief that society and most workplaces are gender equal. It has been documented, both in Sweden and abroad, that a high level of employment does not automatically result in an integrated workforce in which women and men are equally spread throughout the professions and management (Emerek et al., 2002; Rubery, Smith and Fagan; 1999). The pattern of technical-economic rationality is pattern found within the innovation system, Triple Steelix and among many companies in the industrial region. The main objective of enterprises has to be profitability, but for a more long-term sustainable development on both company and regional levels, organizations have to consider the importance of increased gender awareness and awareness of individual conditions in the workplace.

The collaboration with the enterprise revealed a lack of awareness regarding the concept of gender equality, irrespective of sex. Both women and men gave exam-
amples of both resistance and ignorance at the beginning of the workshops. Gender was not seen as an issue before it was presented from the perspective of equality, and gender differences were not considered a major problem. This probably represents opinions regarding gender equality in contemporary society in general. We found that physical work conditions, relations (power structures), management, internal organization and communication between the different departments were more frequently debated. Women and men in the same structural position behave similarly, but women may be more likely to be discriminated since they are positioned on lower levels in the power hierarchy. For example, responses to the attachment questionnaire indicated that women in general found commuting back and forth to work more of a problem than men. This is not a company related problem rather an example of how regional planning in general is still based on a masculine norm. If such discrepancies were seen as general and not gender-related problems, their solutions would benefit both women and men.

Social sustainability includes gender equality, which is also to be seen as a driving force for development and achievement of regional sustainable growth (Westberg 2008). Experiences within European social funding programmes and regional growth programmes show that while the various project owners have an interest in gender equality, knowledge is lacking on how this might be achieved in practice (Gunnarsson and Westberg, 2003; Westberg, 2005; Balkmar, 2006). Regions, enterprises and individuals often believe that they comply with the expected level of gender equality. This belief is also true for the innovation system, Triple Steelix and the company we have collaborated with.

Gender equality is a matter of structural awareness in the interaction among all stakeholders that are dependent on sustainable regional development. Therefore, we think that it is important to start a process for increased awareness adjusted to the context of the addressed agent. “Getting under the skin” of an organisation to find its needs regarding gender equality will be a part of the solution. Since employees are part of other associations in society, the discussion about ‘doing gen-
der’ will not only benefit the development of the employer brand but also contribute to deeper understanding of gender on a societal level. Whether we strive for development on regional, business or individual levels, we have to think in new ways and abandon traditional norms.

One example in order to understand the genuine needs of companies for the researchers was to participate during an evening when volunteers representing different regional organizations gathered to discuss the meaning of the concept of employer brand. During the evening the project finally found a partner for future collaboration. After the meeting, the HR manager at DCAB, who had attended because of her curiosity about the concept of employer brand, expressed great interest in collaborating with the GATT project. Since both she and the researchers believed that in order to retain, motivate and recruit staff for future expansion, the company had to develop their employer brand (Sullivan 2004; Backhouse and Tikoo, 2004; Parment and Dyhre, 2009) and that a sustainable change process had to include a gender perspective to develop a more equal and attractive work irrespective of gender. Due to a flexible approach the notion of employer brand made it possible for a collaboration involving gender issues in the change process. This shows the great importance for researchers in their interaction with companies to be open-minded trying to understand the companies daily reality, the rationality, the regional gender contract, and gender issues in general.

The collaboration between the project and the enterprise is an example of an innovative process created to make gender visible within the innovation system Triple Steelix.

**Conclusion**

Despite regional gender contracts and different terms of ignorance and resistance, we argue that it is possible to increase gender awareness in enterprises and organizations. We also believe that a gender perspective most often will increase the innovative process and enlarge the alternatives for success. In order to succeed we believe that it is crucial for the researchers to have the ambition to meet the com-
panies in their actual contemporary needs and knowledge – find an opening for a collaborative journey based on mutual respect. This will demand an open attitude, flexibility and the use of innovative methods for an interactive, mutual learning process.
References


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Strategies for Making Men use Gender Glasses

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Introduction

This paper is based upon empirical research carried out in collaboration with an engineering enterprise, situated in semi rural area in the middle of Sweden, and a gender project within the Triple Steelix innovation system. The company and the research project share the belief that a workplace will regarded as more attractive by current and potential employees when there is a deeper understanding of gender issues within the organization.

The strategy is based one a combination of the researchers personal reflections from his position as a middle-aged man with theoretical experience as a researcher in the field of gender studies. His driving force was a conviction that a more gender equal work life will contribute to a more sustainable development for individuals, enterprises, and local communities. In accordance, method and theory are combined in a interactive research approach in this project.

Triple Steelix, owned by Jernkotoret¹, is an innovation system and organization

¹ The Swedish Steel Producer’s Association
aiming to “with steel as a the base – promote increased development and growth in the region of Bergslagen”. Within this mission Triple Steelix runs the project “Gender-Perspective for Attractive Work”, financed by The Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems (VINNOVA).

**Background**

In December 1979 the Swedish Government adopted the Equal Opportunities Act, the first law regulating gender issues in work life, which came into force in 1980.

1 § This law has the objective to promote equal rights for women and men in terms of work, employment and other working conditions, and potentiality at work (equality in the workplace).

The act aims to improve women’s conditions, particularly in workplaces. From the start, the idea was that employers should work systematically and proactively to develop plans for increased equality. A written “equal opportunity plan” was required for employers with ten or more employees, was introduced in 1992. Effective from 2010, only workplaces with more than 25 employees need to have an equal opportunity plan.

According to the “National Strategy for Sustainable Development” (2001/02: 172), work for greater equality in society has a high priority, and equal power and influence for women and men, equal rights and opportunities regarding economic and other living conditions are central in public gender policies. The document also stresses that the overall strategy for achieving gender equality and sustainable development is to mainstream gender in all political issues and activities. Also, regional policy makers emphasize the value of proactive efforts to increase equality in the workplace as it is an important factor in sustainable regional development.
The VINNOVA Report “Then what happened?” (VINNOVA 2004), describes a number of national initiatives undertaken since 1950 to increase greater equality. The programs have aimed to change attitudes, but several of them have also been action-oriented, primarily concerning women’s actions.

Over the years, not only national efforts, but also regional, local, and thematic ones, have been made to promote equality. Nowadays it is often a requirement to describe how the publicly funded projects take gender into consideration in all activities. EU-funded projects must describe, as horizontal issues, the impact the project has on the environment, cultural diversity, inclusion, and equality. A requirement which in many cases have been solved by vague promises such like “strive for a balance ...”, but many projects, primarily funded by the ESF², have had a stated goal of greater equality and inclusion.

Sweden is often considered as a country which has succeeded to reach gender equality in work life and family life. Still, the Swedish labor market is highly sex segregated both vertically (organizational position) and horizontally (kind of job). We can also find gender marked work tasks without rational explanation. Thanks to technical equipment very few jobs or tasks require specific physical characteristics or a particular sex. Still, this type of gender segregation remains. Its explanations can be found in deeply rooted traditions as well as in the daily construction of gender.

Being gender equal is widely seen as positive and as an achievement that many businesses want to highlight. However, a close and thorough examination often shows a gap between discourse and practice. Organizations might fulfill the requirements the way they have interpreted them, thus achieving a hygiene level for social acceptance. However, we believe that the proactive integration of gender

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² European Social Fund
mainstreaming has a deeper meaning, and requires an ongoing process which is constantly reviewed. Also, the incitements should go beyond the pursuit of social acceptance: With increased knowledge and understanding the gender equality issue is not, as often perceived, a burden, but an additional parameter to sharpen business development opportunities.

Great changes have taken place both in society and individuals minds regarding the awareness of gender equality since the concept was introduced in the 1960s. Yet, even though both the concepts and the discussion have been updated in the last 50 years, there is far more to wish. Amundsdotter finds that despite the fact that a lot of efforts have been made, Sweden has still not achieved gender equality. There are still a lot of differences between women and men regarding resources, influence, salaries, and career possibilities (Amundsdotter, 2009, p.239, SOU 1998:6).

Different approaches have been tried with various successes to create a more equal and less segregated work. Proposals for more operational efforts for increased gender equality are frequently met with resistance and comments that threaten to take the edge off the drive. Not seldom in recruitment discussions statements similar to “We'd love to employ women, but they do not have the right skills” are heard, without defining the concept of skills.

**Objective**

The objective with this paper is to describe how a male facilitator, in a participatory research approach, uses a combination of reflections based on personal experiences from life as a man, analogies and humor in order to challenge inbuilt opinions to form new conceptions, and to inspire use of gender glasses in an engineering enterprise.
Theory

Action Research

Action and interactive research depend upon knowledge production based on the interaction with practitioners and their contributions. In the mutual exchange between researcher and practitioner the produced knowledge should be of practical relevance and of high scientific standard. Lewin\(^3\) saw researchers’ influence as something productive in the knowledge production process. Interactive research stresses the “joint learning” during a project. Action research takes the process a step forward and is supposed to have a component of action: to support a normative change in some direction. Aagaard and Svensson (2008) stress that action research is not seen as a collection of principles, with distinct theories and methods. Within the scope of action research there are a number of different theories and methods used depending on the context and a more pragmatic perspective through which knowledge and change are created in collaborative action with practitioners. Therefore the researcher cannot assume the traditional position, objectively observing what is happening, s/he can no longer be “a fly on the wall”. Instead, in the capacity of action researcher one has to be aware of how one’s presence influences the research. Thus, action and interactive research have a higher degree of participation than traditional feminist and gender research (Gunnarsson 2007).

In her thesis “How can norms about gender be ‘developed’, be made visible and altered?” (2009) Amundsdotter describes that the field of action and interactive research is not constituted as a single distinct theory or method: it is an approach to research and to the role as a researcher. Action research is based on democratic values in which participation is essential. Through dialogue between researchers and practitioners a shared learning will be established. Within the field of action research the researchers and practitioners are aiming to alter the course of events

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3 Kurt Zadek Lewin, often recognized as the "founder of social psychology"
and create new knowledge from that change.

Doing Gender
In social sciences gender refers to the socially constructed roles that a society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender is an active interaction between individuals and has to be seen as a process or relationship. When West and Zimmerman published their article “Doing Gender” (1987) they put the finger on a theme which had occurred in different variations in feminist theory on sex/gender for at least forty years. Doing Gender can be “seen as an ongoing activity and interactive actions that is made between women and men, between men and between women” (2007b, pp. 12). In consequence, a “doing gender” perspective has the consequence that the focus shifts from an individual to an interactive level, and, in the context of this project, wearing “Gender Glasses” means observing workplaces and situations with the sociological definition of gender in mind. This paper gives some examples from an interaction where the purpose was to put the gender glasses on in order to create insight and knowledge, which hopefully could contribute to positive changes and increased awareness of the importance of gender equality.

Employer Branding
Employer Branding, described by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) as “a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm”, or a process of building “an identifiable and unique employer identity”. Thus, the employer brand puts forth an image showing the organization as a good place to work (Sullivan, 2004).

Analogy
Analogy can be used as an eye opener, explaining complex matters, or as a managing strategy common in varying sectors. Analogies to the past, to other firms or industries, and to other competitive settings, like sports or war, come up frequently in strategy discussions (Gavetti, Levinthal, Rivkin, 2005). Coro and
Taylor (2007) promotes the use of analogy when a complex technology is explained as a strategy to get prospects to comprehend a unique offer. In this project, analogies have been used frequently in the interaction with the company, in order to explain why they should integrate gender issues in their company program for change.

**Resistance**

Jeff Hearn states that men benefits from living in a patriarchal society and that it is difficult to identify men’s general interest in gender equality (Hearn 2001). In accordance, men’s practices and attitudes are often an obstacle to women’s equality. On the other hand, Kimmel states, in the article “Why Men Should Support Gender Equity”, that men will gain benefits from a more equal society. He argues that “we need these men to demand parental leave, we need policies that encourage and support it, and we need to change the culture of our organizations to support men taking parental leave – because ONLY when men share housework and child care, can we have the kinds of lives we say we want to have, and ONLY when men share house work and childcare will women be able to balance work and family, be able to have it all. This, it seems to me, is the promise of gender mainstreaming” (2009). He states that feminism is important because it promotes an examination of, not only men, but also of their interactions and the institutions in which men act, an examination which will make men understand these interactions and institutions as organized by power.

**Method**

In order to engage and motivate the employees for the planed interaction a questionnaire about characteristics for an attractive work was presented to the whole staff of the enterprise. It was optional to answer the questionnaire. From the questionnaire it was possible to get a picture of how the employees think about attractive work and how they evaluate their current job. This was a first step in the process, the second was reflective feedback meetings, workshops. When answering
a survey regarding the opinions about one’s work, the individual’s curiosity and thirst for feedback is awoken. The results from the questionnaire were presented in workshops.

The analogical method was used both in the discussion with the manager and during the workshops. For example, the process facilitator asked the attendant if anyone had an answer to why the insurance premium is more expensive for a young male compared to a female of the same age. Usually, often after a joke, someone explained it was due to the higher risk that the young male would get involved in an accident. The analogy will then be connected to the question “who will most often use new technical investments for example an advanced numerical controlled machine”. Most often this analogy provoked a short discussion and gave the workshop participants an opportunity to reflect upon how males often are taken for granted as operators when new technology is introduced.

In order to identify the employees’ opinions on the qualities that contribute to an attractive work, and how they perceive their current job, the interaction began with a questionnaire developed by the research team Theme Work at Dalarna University. The questions are based on a model (Åteg et al., 2004) which describes the qualities of an attractive job. The questionnaire was developed with a "gender neutral" approach and does not address gender dimension. Yet, since the questionnaire proved to be a good starter for discussions of the work situation the project team decided to use it, but with additional questions regarding sex and age.

Another method used in the process was applying anecdotes based on personal life experiences. As a method the facilitator used his own personal experiences from life as a husband, father, and professional in different types of businesses. He explained how he had always considered himself to be a caring father and an understanding husband, but also how he could remember argumentations about parental leave and domestic work versus work in the garden. These were
experiences from a life as gender blind without reflecting upon the masculine norms that set the everyday conditions for most people.

**Interactive Process**

Dellner Couplers AB is an expanding engineering company, which manufactures, sells, and maintains couplers to trains for a global market. The headquarter with corporate management, development department, and production of certain goods is located in a semi rural area 250 km north east of Stockholm. Production facilities are also located in Poland, USA, and China; sales and service organizations are found in several other countries. The annual total turnover for the entire enterprise is close to 100 million USD, and the total amount of employees worldwide is 500 people.

At the plant in Sweden 180 persons are working, 75 % men and 25 % women, and the average age is 40 years. Of the employed women two-thirds are office workers with administrative duties and one third works with production. Of the business management one is a woman and six are men. There are a total of 25 staff in middle management, 21 men and 4 women. The proportion of women in managing position is 19%.

In order to retain, motivate, and recruit staff for future expansion the company expressed a wish to build their employer brand (Backhaus, K., Tikoo, S. 2004) by developing a more equal and attractive work irrespective of gender. Employer Brand was the point of departure of the collaboration between the company and researchers.

Two process leaders have been collaborating with the company’s staff during the autumn of 2009. These are Hanna Westberg (female), associated professor with a long experience from gender research and fieldwork in collaboration with engineering enterprises, and Hans Lundkvist (male), a PhD student who is inexperienced’s as a scientific researcher, but has extensive experience from business and project development. Based upon her long experience from feminist
action research the role of Westberg has been to support and guide Lundkvist in his role as a facilitator and PhD student. Lundkvist has had the main responsibility, established the contact and led the workshops. The work done in workshop was actively supported by Westberg.

The collaboration started with an open discussion between the project and the company’s HR manager. The interaction process-plan was jointly developed with regards to both parties’ interests and goals. The plan describing the process was documented as a “Logical Framework” (Chain of Reasoning) describing causality between inputs and outcomes.

The principles for a logical chain can be described with the topics: Effects, Results, Activity and Resources. A group of stakeholders can discuss and describe each step that has to be taken in order to reach the goals. “If we do this the result will be...”, or “In order to get this effect or result, we have to do...”. The structure is visualized as an image, which makes it easy to follow and communicate. The discussion and the scheme will involve everyone and help the group to reach consensus.

In order to describe planned steps of interaction and the management the analogy

In the discussions and planning together with the management the process leader used analogies, product brand versus employer brand, as a methodology to describe the planned process and possible outcomes, a method Ullmark recommends for the dialogue between designer and client to create understanding about a planned target image (Hjelm et al, 2007, pp. 27). The visualized logical framework was also used to motivate collaboration and to describe the plan.

After consensus was reached with the HR manager regarding desired processes and methods the collaboration was approved by the company management. The implementation, the anchoring process, continued as the process leader described the project, process steps, aims, and desired results for a group of 20 supervisors at a leadership conference. This gave the supervisors an opportunity to discuss specific questions with the process leader.

Since anchoring is an important step, the HR manager informed the staff about the
planned interaction through the intranet, but also in person at a general assembly, as well as through a special bulletin board. The process started with a questionnaire that all employees were encouraged to answer.

In action research it is important to create arenas for interactions that allow the participants and researchers to share knowledge and experiences (Aagaard 2006, p. 79). Therefore, it was an advantage that 11 of 13 workshops took place outside the company, in a parish house which constituted a neutral area for all involved, and also traditionally a meeting place for thoughts and reflection.

During the fall 2009, 13 workshops with approximately a total of 130 participants participated, divided into groups of between 4 and 22. The composition of the groups was based on the company’s organizational structure. The time allocated for each workshop was three hours.

After the first three events the process team, as a result of the interactive spirit, decided to change the presentation to be more specific and challenging in the discussion of sex and gender construction.

The program, briefly described, was divided into three phases: an introduction phase, a gender perspective phase (construction of gender), and a phase where the results from the survey was presented, disused and action lists were made.

The first phase included a presentation of the two facilitators, the project owner Triple Steelix / Jernkontoret and the financier VINNOVA. The participants were also given a brief description of objectives for the enterprise and the project, and what benefits each actor (company/researcher) expected to gain through the collaboration. The interactive approach was also explained, that researcher and participants would develop common knowledge jointly and in dialogue. Furthermore, the participants were given a description of how the questionnaire had been developed, as well as the methods and tools used during the workshop. The initial phase covered approximately 20 minutes.

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4 Associated professor Hanna Westberg and PhD student Hans Lundkvist
The next step in the workshop was to initiate reflective discussion on the social construction of gender. The goal of this process was to raise an awareness of how gender is created in our daily lives and how this may affect the perceived attractiveness of the workplace.

As discussions of sex and gender often result in feelings of guilt among men who represent the hegemonic masculinity, the facilitator emphasized that this was not the intention of the presentation. The aim was to highlight how gender is created unconsciously in our everyday lives. In order to de-dramatize the discussion, and to create an open, intimate and permissive climate, the facilitator used examples, experiences and reflections from his own life as a man, in combination with selected images of consumer products that exemplify the prevailing gender norm. Depending on the groups’ transparency the facilitator used provocations to start discussions.

The third phase, the presentation of the results from the questionnaire, was divided into three steps. In the first step an overhead picture was both shown on a screen and copies was distributed, describing a graph with the 15 most valued qualities for work to be perceived as attractive. The chart also showed values illustrating how the group appreciated their current job. After a brief explanation the attendants were divided in “beehives” to discuss and write down suggestions for activities aiming to maintain or achieve the prioritized qualities. The discussion was combined with a coffee break.

In the second step, the qualities that had the greatest discrepancy between desired and experienced were presented. The groups were again asked to discuss the result and write down suggestions on what measures they can take to reduce the gap. Phase three was completed by letting the groups discuss a short questionnaire

5 Images from a study made by Karin Ehrnbergers work, described by Gislén and Harvard, “The intersection of gender and design” (Hjelm et al, 2007, pp. 20).
concerning whether there is a difference in view between men and women about some selected questions.

**Results**

The questionnaire was effective as catalyst, so that employees gathered for a discussion about the construction of gender. It worked as a “battering-ram”, in the same way as the concept of employer brand functioned as a door opener that made the management pay attention to the suggestions to include gender issues in the collaboration on developing more attractive work in the organization.

Whether or not it was because the information had disappeared on the way, lack of interest, or poor communication with nearest supervisors, many of the participants who came to the parish house did not know why they should be there or what the purpose of the workshop was. This created some confusion in a few cases, but it also revealed that such a problem could contribute to the socialization process between facilitators and participants.

A distinct scepticism was noticeable when the gender-related discussions begun. “Is this some stupid feminist initiative”, said a male participant spontaneously. Nevertheless, when the pictures were shown everybody focused on the images and the subject suddenly turned less uncomfortable: the reaction was positive, often with spontaneous comments. Also, the provocation and anecdotes the male facilitator gave from his life opened discussions with arguments, both agreeing and disagreeing. Sometimes the discussions got really witty and light-hearted.

An example of discussed topics was whether razors for male and females, in the same price range, have different qualities in the blades, Mach 3 versus Ladyshave, and if so, why? One man insisted that there was a difference and he knew this from his own experience, he used Ladyshave. On another occasion, one man presented an opposite view, also based on self-experience.
With the accomplished relaxed atmosphere, the participants opened up more, and gave both positive and negative examples from the workplace. Still, only on few occasions did these stories relate to gender issues or construction of gender: “... it seemed like the guys get cordless telephones, mobile phones and PowerBooks, no matter if they need it or not...”.

After one workshop, a man approached the researchers about his first summer job back in the 60s: the women had lower wages, despite the tasks being the same. A situation that he considered unfair.

Many participants expressed great appreciation for getting to know the results from the questionnaire and the fact that they got involved in the process, a participation they had not expected. It seems crucial that the company try to maintain this engagement carefully in forthcoming processes.

**Conclusion and discussion**

Since the researchers and most of the participants were unfamiliar with the parish house the choice of location for the workshops offered a neutral arena outside the daily workplace. This reduces possible power relations between the researchers and the participants and between the participants: In short, it produced a good workshop condition for interaction and development of mutual knowledge.

A conclusion from the workshops, at the engineering enterprise, was that discussing gender issues often activate emotions and sometimes even resistance. Still, the resistance was not so strong as first expected. It was interesting to notice that the spontaneous resistance came both from men and women. One explanation can be the long political tradition in Sweden of problematizing gender issues: it is possible that people in general feel exhausted or unconcerned to a certain extent. Remarks as “it is not a problem here/for me/us/... maybe other people or elsewhere...” demonstrate a spontaneous and initial denial, even though it is an issue that concerns everyone more or less.
The method of using analogies, anecdotes and the male facilitator’s personal experiences was productive and added a personal touch to the discussions. An open attitude, sharing personal thoughts, made the gender issue less dramatic and opened up for comments and reflections. It made it possible for the participants to relate to, and join in with examples and reflections from their own lives. This involvement and possibility for formulating the problem is important for a sustainable learning process, just as the personal reflections are. Humor can also be a useful tool that makes resistance turn into engagement and motivation.

The use of pictures from the design field, artifacts with forms and functions challenging daily opinions was another beneficial method, which offered a distance to the individuals’ private spheres. Everybody saw the same pictures, everyone shared a common ground, and no one was singled out or accused. The project illustrates that joint discussions and reflections in groups on neutral ground outside the normal environment can contribute to new and robust knowledge, as Gunnarsson also observes (2007a). The individuals carry with them to their daily work the knowledge produced in this fashion, a knowledge that hopefully will be a foundation for increased awareness of gender constructions which ultimately contributes to long-term change.

Some risks can be observed with the described strategy, e.g. if the contact between the facilitator and the participant is never established, or if the facilitator position him/herself as a “missionary redeeming the crowd” (Tranquist 2008). Depending on the initial distance between the practitioners and the researcher, the interaction rests on unstable pillars, which can easily fall over if the facilitator ignores or fails to perceive the atmosphere and adapt to the participants context. This can be avoided through questions regarding the participants interests, or by bringing up current events. If the introduction fails the chances of mutual respect and participatory discussions will decrease dramatically.
In the examples from the interactions we can clearly see that open opposition towards the workshop changed to interest, when humorous observations were utilized. These observations and examples are also chosen to fit the work-area where the participants are situated. In this way the steel structure of razors can be a way to overcome resistance among those who work in the steel industry. Humor and new patterns of thoughts, sometimes provocative, are also useful tools to turn resistance to motivation. The best example from a provocation leading to a constructive end was the discussion about steel quality in razorblades, something to remember.
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