ESTABLISHING INTEGRITY TO ELIMINATE WOMEN DISCRIMINATION IN SCIENCE: IMPLICATIONS FROM EMPIRICAL RESEARCH IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract

The paper presents some findings of the European Commission-funded project "Women in Sciences and High Technology". The authors aim to identify organizational obstacles for women advancement in academia in Lithuania and discuss measures which could help to realize anti-discriminatory policies. The data were gathered by 30 in-depth interviews in 12 Lithuanian academic institutions. The research findings indicate that discrimination is prohibited *de jure*, yet exists *de facto*. We contend that organizational obstacles for women advancement to leading positions could be eliminated once their human resource management practices are based on ethical principles such as justice, transparency and universalizability. They support the system of meritocracy and promote integrity. Moreover, to ensure effectiveness of anti-discriminatory measures, particular policies such as affirmative action, diversity management should not be mechanically copied from other (Western) societies and their organizations but adapted to a definite socio-cultural context.

Keywords: academic institutions, ethical principles, integrity, organizational practices, women discrimination.

Introduction

Women discrimination is defined as unfair and unjust treatment of employees when organizational decisions of hiring, training, promotion, retention etc. are based on sex but not on the criteria of qualification, competence and ability to perform a definite job (Trevinõ & Nelson, 2004; Werhane & Freeman, 1997). Despite equal opportunity acts, affirmative action policies, diversity management programmes, prior research indicates that discrimination still persists (cf. Goldman *et al.*, 2006; Hede & Ralston, 1993; Hochschild, 2006; Korac-Kakabadse & Kouzmin, 1997; Maume, 1999; Oakley, 2000). Women discrimination is a social issue which becomes particularly acute when it comes to education and academic institutions. In this sphere it is not only the profession, the organization or the field of science that suffers losses of social, human, intellectual capital. It is also the country or an entire region (e.g. Europe) that may lose development opportunities and competitiveness (Klasen, 2005).

In this paper, we present some findings of the sociological research "Career of women in science and high technology in Baltic states" that is a part of the Baltic States Network (abbreviated to BASNET) project "Women in Sciences and High Technology" carried out under the European Commission's Framework Programme 6 (No 017170 2006-2007). The research on women discrimination in science was conducted in the Baltic countries, namely, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland with the aim to increase women's equal participation in exact sciences and high technologies (HT) as well as in decision-making processes of science policy and its management in the participant countries. In our paper we present the research results obtained from the fieldwork just in Lithuanian academic institutions.

The sector of exact sciences and HT was chosen because the percentage of women scientists in this sector is among the lowest ones, e.g. women researchers in engineering and technology and the natural sciences in the government sector in the EU constitute correspondingly 22.3 and 31% (EC Directorate-General for Research, 2006). The data from the Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2005) indicate a small proportion of women in the leading positions in exact sciences and HT. So far no empirical research to identify and explore the causes for a low proportion of women in the sector has been conducted.

Based on the previous studies on women discrimination in science in Lithuania (Žvinklienė, 2003; *cf.* Blagojević *et al.,* 2004; Novelskaitė, 2001), it was assumed that women discrimination is a factor that affects women advancement in professional fields. Thus, the **aim** of this paper is to analyse causes for women discrimination from the perspective of organizational practices and contribute to the discussion on measures that help to eliminate women discrimination. In particular we stress the importance of managing integrity in an organization to prevent and eliminate discriminatory practices. The **method** of data gathering is an in-

depth interview, conducted with 23 women and 7 men from 12 academic institutions. The fieldwork took place in 2006.

The paper is structured into three basic parts. In the first one, based on prior research, the causes of women discrimination are briefly overviewed and the concept of integrity and its management at an organizational level is tackled. In the second one, the research setting is described and the findings are presented. It is followed by a discussion and conclusions.

Causes of women discrimination

Based on the prior research, it can be stated that women discrimination originates from two basic sources: 1) social stereotypes ascribing certain psychological characteristics and social roles to genders and 2) organizational practices which fail to promote women (Eyring & Stead, 1998; Goldman *et al*., 2006; Korac-Kakabadse & Kouzmin, 1997; Oakley, 2000; Thomas & Bierema, 2004; Wood & Lidorff, 2001; Žukauskienė & Šakalytė, 2003; Žvinklienė, 2003). A typical example of social stereotyping is ascribing "soft" qualities (e.g. gentleness, kindness, helpfulness) to a female and "hard" qualities (e.g. rationality, temperance, assertiveness) to a male and, correspondingly, servicing, caring or leading, dominating roles, occupations and professions (Goldman *et al*., 2006; Wood & Lindorff, 2001; Žvinklienė, 2003) to them. Hence, when it comes to sciences, particularly exact ones, such stereotypes may affect woman's choice of a professional field. For example, physics, mathematics, astronomy, biochemistry etc. can be turned away for being "unfeminine" occupations, although a woman (girl) has a gift for the subject.

Moreover, when the society ascribes the responsibility for childcare (or other dependents' care) to a woman, which requires taking breaks in career, working part-time, social preferences for a man in the leading position in an organization may become stronger (Mavin, 2001). When such preferences establish a traditional organizational practice, women may experience difficulty in being promoted to a higher position as they are socially different from "the old guys" in power and do not have a social network to support them (Eyring & Stead, 1998; Maume, 2004; Oakley, 2000; Thomas & Bierema, 2004). Besides, if, in public opinion, discrimination is an exaggerated issue and complaints about it are considered a hysteric tactic to attract attention, discriminated women (as well as other discriminated groups), even though deeply sensitive to discriminatory practices, may choose not to protest or even refuse to acknowledge the fact of being discriminated (Hochschild, 2006). Hence, if organizations do not consider these factors in their practices such as promotion, training and career development, fail to integrate women into informal networks, provide them with institutionalised support on balancing work and family life, their environment can favour women discrimination and condition losses related to it.

In order to secure themselves from intellectual losses caused by women discrimination, businesses have been developing affirmative action and diversity management practices to eliminate it (Eyring & Stead, 1998). These range from awareness-raising, gender training and mentoring programmes to women-oriented networking seminars as well as practical networking with successful men and women, special councils for women issues at workplace and special executive bonuses for promotion of qualified and talented women. However, most universities are different from businesses in their purpose and management principles. They often have a considerable pool of theoretical and empirical knowledge on gender issues, work organization, human resource management, yet fail to apply it to their own practice (Benschop & Brouns, 2003). Most universities make anti-discriminatory statements in their policies, yet the issues of women's family duties, career breaks, a higher lecturing workload and administrative work and, thus, less valuable or fewer publications which determine career advancement have not been solved and continue hindering women's advancement in science (Benschop & Brouns, 2003; Deem, 2003; Doherty & Manfredi, 2006; Probert 2005; Thomas & Bierema, 2004).

The divergence between organizational declarations and real practices calls attention to the issue of low organizational integrity. The etymological derivation of the word *integrity* stems from Latin *integritas* denoting wholeness, completeness, harmonious integration of various aspects of a character as well as consistency in adhering to moral principles, "walking the talk", honesty (Martin, 2000; Kaptein & Wempe, 2002; Paine, 2003/1994; Waters, 1988; Worden, 2003) and can be applied to both an individual and an organization. Organizational integrity has gained particular attention from both management scholars and practitioners after the scandalous cases of *Enron*, *World.com* and other notorious corporations which failed to bring their ethics to practice and disappeared from the business map (McMurrian & Rustogi, 2004). These cases gave a lesson that complex, ethics-related organizational issues cannot be left to their employees'

individual responsibility but should be dealt with institutionally. Therefore, organizations concerned about their reputation and long-term development devote particular attention to policies and practices which enable them to manage integrity. The essence of such policies and practices is organizing adequate conditions to the employees so that they could follow organizational values, behave authentically and responsibly in their work-life. Thus, the term *integrity management* in this paper denotes a systemic institutionalised process of setting principles and value-laden standards of decision-making and behaviour, integrating them into all organizational practices, their reflection and self-governance, auditing and corrective measures (Ulrich, 2001; Vasiljevienė, 2004).

It should be noted, however, that managing organizational integrity demands respect to the rule of law in the society. Hence, such societies like post-socialist ones, in which it historically has not developed, are characterized by weak(er) integrity in social and, thus, organizational life (Freitakienė, 2001; Ungvari-Zrinyi, 2001; Vasiljevienė, 2002). Lack of integrity can be explained by the fact that laws, principles, behaviour norms and rules in these societies were created disregarding the knowledge, capabilities, skills, resources of the individuals who had to comply with them. As a result, the normative regulations became too exalted, irrational and costly and encouraged individuals to imitate norms and/ or develop moral justification for violating them (Vasiljevienė & Freitakienė, 2002). Therefore, in such societies the normative may be assumed as a relativistic conventionality which can be bypassed when necessary, particularly when the benefit from violations exceeds penalties for them. In the end, such a pattern of thinking and behaving determines fictitiousness of values, inefficiency of laws and regulations and may account for diminishing effectiveness of laws aimed at eliminating women discrimination. For example, anti-discriminatory policies may be passed just for window dressing, and supportive or control mechanisms which guarantee the realization of the policies not constructed (Benschop & Brouns, 2003, p. 201).

Research setting

The research was an exploratory study in which data were gathered with in-depth interviews. The fieldwork took place from May 1, 2006 to August 30, 2006. The method of the data analysis was narrative analysis. The criterion of sample representativeness, which is typical of quantitative studies, was legitimately not used in this study. In general, statistical data on women in science are scarce in Lithuania. Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania provides data on employment in research and development by fields of science, however, these data are not sufficient to evaluate the situation in regard of gender issues in science in Lithuania. The statistical data of 2005 maintain that women researchers with scientific degree and academic title comprised 19% in technological sciences, 29% in physical sciences and 53% in natural sciences.

In total, 23 women and 7 men were interviewed. They were interviewed on the basis of availability at the workplace at the time of the fieldwork, good-willingness and openness to discuss the issue of women discrimination. One of the difficulties faced by the research team was persuading women in the field of exact sciences and HT to give an interview on the issue. Although anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed, many women refused to talk, claiming that their identities could be traced because of the small number of women employed in their institutions and they "did not want problems" afterwards. The argument signalled that (indirect) discriminatory practices are present in the institutions.

The interviewees represented 12 academic units (institutes and faculties) in the fields of chemistry, physics, mathematics, biochemistry, astronomy and information technologies in two major universities which have the largest departments of exact sciences and HT in Lithuania. At the moment of the interviews nine women held senior research and pedagogic positions, seven - middle positions and six were at the junior scientific and pedagogical level. Five of them held senior administrative positions. Among the men, five held senior scientific and pedagogical titles, and two were at the beginning of their scientific and pedagogical career. Two of them were heads of departments. Most respondents were above 30 and under 60 years of age.

The interviews also had an implicit objective, i.e. to raise the interviewees' awareness on discrimination forms. Therefore, some questions prompted socially-desired answers. From this viewpoint, the research can be considered a social intervention. To identify and understand the influence of organizational, in particular HRM, practices which raise barriers to women advancement and determine women discrimination, the interviewees were questioned about hiring procedures, work and task distribution, work culture, roles in a team of scientists, attitudes to problem-solving.

Research findings

Considering the content of the negative answers about existence of women discrimination, it should be noted that most understandings dealt with the forms of direct discrimination (Trevinõ & Nelson, 2004), e.g. evidently aggressive behaviour, purposive impediment to accomplish work-related tasks. The respondents' answers indicate that they did not reflect forms of indirect discrimination: "I think they [women] do not experience discrimination. In my opinion, in our field at least formal conditions seem to be equal" (female, chemistry, 46 years). "…people compete with each other by their work results and the level of professionalism" (female, physics, 38). However, a part of the respondents who initially denied the existence of women discrimination gradually changed their opinion and at the end of the interviews agreed that women discrimination in science does exist. For example, the respondent who claimed that "formal conditions seem to be equal" noted afterwards that a male colleague "can take the liberty of saying at a coffee break *well, those women...* [it is said with a disdainful intonation and expresses an attitude that women are limited in capabilities and interests and tend to indulge into gossiping, emotional overestimations of the things etc.] and that "it is a common situation in the society that one can say in the way *well, those women*", so "this could, in fact, be discrimination" (female, chemistry, 46). The interviewee who at first stated that people are evaluated on the basis of performance results and professionalism, on the second thought, admitted that it is but an official declaration: "Only if equal conditions were reachable… it is too difficult to establish equal conditions [in practice]" (female, physics, 38).

The interviewees' perceptions of discrimination became quite strong when describing concrete situations in which criteria other than qualification and competence were applied in HRM practices, e.g. hiring, performance evaluation, promotion, recognition: "In a contest for a vacancy…between a male and a female, even though the candidates are absolutely equal, it is a male who always wins" (female, physics, 38). "They invent reasons why they cannot hire you now; later, when you come next time, you find out that someone has already taken the position and, of course, the person is not a female but a male. So such things are real" (female, physics, 29). "As to me, I faced discrimination many times. Indeed, it would be easier to compete if I were a man" (female, mathematics, 37). "…women's labour is underrated" (female, biochemistry, 26). "…compared to men, women's performance results are degraded *a priori*" (female, astronomy, 27).

The majority of the respondents (even the ones who denied existence of women discrimination at first) emphasized that women "…must really work extra" (female, physics, 38) to be at least noticed. Their narratives speak of dual standards applied to men and women when evaluating their merits and the absence of universalizable organisational criteria:

"[in my department] I was offered to work just part-time from September, while a guy, a young scholar who is coming back from America was offered a full-time job. I do not know whether he gets a one-year or a five-year contract. I would be happy to get a contract for a year. All depends on bosses who offer me just a part-time job and a half-year contract. Formerly I was offered to work as a lecturer only when I've defended my PhD, while today there are men who work [here] as lecturers without a PhD. Yes, there are some men like my colleague who give courses to undergraduate students without a PhD. I cannot imagine that somebody could let me instruct students without a PhD" (female, mathematics, 37).

As it was expected at the beginning of the empirical research, patriarchal stereotypes in the society which ascribe caring, servicing, mothering roles and corresponding occupations to a woman also play a role in promoting discrimination in the organizations. According to the interviewees, they determine men scientists' perceptions that a woman *per se* cannot equal to them by the scope of interests, productivity, achievements: "I've had a chance to meet some scientists of the older generation who have preserved a conviction of yore that a woman's place is in a family and … that she in principle cannot be a good scientist" (male, IT, 28). "…men do not consider women as competitors. … They cannot endure women who are professionally superior and express their attitudes" (female, physics, 54).

Women who have higher aspirations and ambitions in science, who are more advanced in their professional field and conscious about that are mocked, abused by derogative epithets, isolated, their achievements are demeaned. The interviewed women scientists mentioned examples when "dirty", shady methods were used against such women, e.g. their students' graduation papers were assessed unreasonably low: "…one cannot tell why, perhaps from envy that he did not defend a degree himself" (female, mathematics, 37). Some narratives indicate that ambitious women are treated as disadvantaged, doomed, "feminists" etc: "If you want to be appreciated in such a male collective, first you have to prove that you're

not an elephant" (female, physics, 59). A "normal" woman behaves herself – she is "modest, beautiful". The environment of such women in science "is not aggressive", they are "allowed to work". Therefore, a woman who does not want to work in a hostile atmosphere, waste her resources and energy for fighting against injustice, either isolates herself from the problem or is made to assume a role of an assistant: "..a woman is perceived like a pure attendant, operating personnel, that's all" (female, physics, 40).

Yet, beside social stereotyping and corresponding reasoning of a women's role in science, lack of certain organizational practices which do not help to prevent discriminatory attitudes and behaviours was also implicitly mentioned. One of the most frequently mentioned points in the respondents' narratives was as follows: if a female is discriminated it is *only her individual problem:* "…it [discrimination] is the problem of an individual, but not a global one" (female, physics, 59). It is not comprehended as a problem of a university's dishonesty and as a disgrace to a profession when performance of a scientist is assessed by her gender but not by objectively measured achievements. The research findings indicate that there is no organizational structure, an impartial instance, a competent official who would investigate claims about discriminatory practices in the researched organizations. Moreover, there are no definite principles, criteria and procedures to be relied upon and followed when an instance of discrimination occurs. As there is no one to report to or ask for help, the wisest decision seems to accept the situation, keep silence and "not to spoil one's health". As a result, the phenomenon is sustained.

Another organizational factor precluding women advancement in science is the subjectivity of an institutional order, lack of objectivised rules, professional standards, transparency in decision-making, accountability for decisions. Such a situation creates favourable conditions for bosses' subjective will in hiring, rewarding, offering the terms of employment, for compromising an academic institution's mission and disregarding public interest. Consequently, women who are socialized in such a system believe that their careers depend on the opinion, attitudes, prejudices of a definite subject (e.g. the dean or the chair of a department) or a certain group in power (e.g. a board, a committee) but not on factual results of their work. Hence, the conditions for predominance of subjectivity instead of objective indicators in the system are formed: a career is determined not by diligence, hard work or the level of professionalism but on "somebody who is going to vote" in a "somewhat board" (female, physics, 54). Such a system further sustains women discrimination and discourages young women from pursuing career in science.

The narratives do not indicate that the interviewees have been acquainted with the view that not only an individual but also an organization (an academic institution) is responsible for ethical practice. Hence, they support our claim that a systematic approach to eliminating women discrimination in Lithuanian academic institutions is not taken, although it is in fact needed. If employees are systematically assessed by their results, quality of the performance, abilities to generate ideas, values, norms and standards (the prescriptive) are established in practice. In this way, justice and fairness are instrumentally implemented in organizational reality (the descriptive) and enforce preventive measures against discrimination. Such a system favours not only women but every individual employed in the organization.

Discussion and conclusions

Analysis of the narratives reveals that the main reasons for women discrimination in exact sciences and HT are:
1. *the understanding of the phenomenon of discrimination* which is limited to direct forms and forms of indirect discrimination are not reflected. Such an understanding results in a paradox when women (and men as well) take legal documents or publicly declared statements as facts. The respondents maintain that formally (documentarily, publicly) there is no discrimination: universities are subject to the laws of the country and international conventions, most of them have a declaration of anti-discriminatory policy.
2. *stereotypical attitudes* to woman's roles and capabilities, which hold that woman cannot be a good scientist in the fields of physics, chemistry, biology etc. Since the fields of exact sciences are dominated by men, their attitudes and subsequent behaviour determines the character of organizational practices, in particular HRM ones.
3. *HRM practices* which are not based on *objective principles* that are useful and just for all employees. Injustice to women is particularly obvious in hiring decisions, performance evaluation and distribution of workload. Training on discrimination forms and other ethically sensitive issues at work is not provided either. Moreover, the institutions do not have any grievance procedures or mechanisms which would

enable discriminated people to report about injustice and psychological pressure, and leave individuals to fight "their problems" alone.

Therefore, the research findings allow to conclude that women discrimination in Lithuanian academic institutions is banned only *de jure,* yet exists *de facto*. The interviewed women take legal documents and anti-discriminatory declarations to public as facts, however, their illustrations from practice indicate the opposite. Thus **the normative, prescriptive** is confused with the **factual, descriptive**, which confuses women themselves and even those who are in fact discriminated feel uncertain about that. They are ashamed to collect evidence which may help to prove the fact or complain about that to any official institution: "[I spoke about discrimination] only non-officially. I've never testified to being discriminated. Besides, I am not going to because I am not sure if it is permissible in general" (female, mathematics, 37). Hence, unreflected distinction of the normative and the factual paradigms leads even to a more serious problem, i.e. when discrimination may be viewed as not important or not *that* important, which strengthens an attitude that it is a matter of a subjective opinion but not a fact of violating a definite standard or a norm. Thus, as behaviour standards and norms are not clearly defined, it is believed that women's complaints about being discriminated are an expression of individual dissatisfaction, emotional outburst.

The research findings also suggest that the researched academic institutions in Lithuania lack integrity, and lack of organizational integrity accounts for discriminatory practices against women. Considering the damage to public interest caused by discrimination we suggest that in order to eliminate discriminatory practices, academic institutions in Lithuania should pay particular attention to establishing and managing integrity, i.e. making *de jure* statements *de facto*. It can be possible when the declared statements are operationalized. Thus, drawing on the frameworks by Ulrich (2001), Wieland (2003), Vasiljevienė (2004) we consider the following processes crucial for establishing integrity in academic institutions in Lithuania:

- *Setting or critically reconsidering the mission of an academic institution* and its commitments to various stakeholders. The focus in this process should be on meeting the society's expectations and satisfying public interest.

- *Creating a culture of discussions* in which decisions are made based on arguments but not a subject's will. Although an academic community, as a matter of fact, should base their discussions on facts and arguments, the narratives of the interviewees suggest that women's word could be less heard because of the gender and stereotypical attitudes to women's capabilities but not the content of the message. Thus, members of academic institutions should also be trained to sustain a culture of critical discussions concerning not only a field of science but also organizational practices which determine a microclimate in the organization, productivity of individuals and their teams and, hence, organizational results. Moreover, it is also important that a culture of discussions and networking promotes not the gender aspect but the principle of meritocracy. Affirmative action can even strengthen men's negative attitudes to women as scientists and stigmatize them even more.

- *Deepening the understanding of women discrimination, enhancing sensitivity to its forms*, making the standards which help to identify (women) discrimination comprehensible.

- *Setting the standards for hiring, evaluating, promoting and establishing the principle of universalizability* in organizational practices at a *systemic level*. This means that abstract metaphysical values which can be subjectively interpreted, relatively used and, thus, account for abuse of power are transformed into definite values of fairness, responsibility and accountability which are embodied in definite criteria and standards for decision-making and behaviour. In this way, for example, evaluation of an organization's members is transferred from an individual's (subjective) will ("some board" "somewhat voting") to objectively measured facts (performance results, merits). As a result, the conditions for acting dishonestly, hypocritically, using Machiavellian methods are reconstructed and the possibilities of self-regulation both at an individual and organizational level increased. Moreover, the established standards should be regularly and systematically used in decision-making process and procedures related to it. They could strengthen compliance and respect to the rule of law, which are very actual in the post-socialist societies. In particular, compliance programmes may help to resocialize individuals who are used to think that "formalities are formalities, and real life is another thing".

- *Revising management principles, organizational structure and aligning them with declared mission and normative statements* is also very important considering the narratives which indicate that most researched institutions base their practices and interrelations on a traditional hierarchical structure which creates favourable conditions for abuse of power, "dirty" methods in competition, delayed information

and decision-making, diminished responsibility and accountability, which contradicts signed official documents, anti-discriminatory statements and publicly made obligations.

- *Auditing the realization of mission, value statements, official commitments and making necessary corrections*. The process is necessary to monitor the progress in solving the issue, detect signs of occurring discriminatory practices and eliminate their causes. It stimulates employees' reflection, ensures feedback on the initiated changes from them, enables to measure the effectiveness of the used measures and make the necessary improvements. In this way, auditing promotes an institution's continual progress, helps it to insure a positive reputation, retain the best professionals and increase human potential.

In sum, these processes enable establishing integrity, i.e. transferring anti-discriminatory statements from the level of *de jure* to the one of *de facto*. They entail *standard operating procedures* which make declarations on human rights, employee rights valid and functional and, thus, eliminate women discrimination at the factual level. Moreover, they eliminate the necessity for women to fight for their rights themselves (most interviewees mentioned this action as the only possibility to change the situation). These rights were won and put into laws decades ago, so now they need to be followed.

As a final comment, it should be mentioned that the narrative analysis we presented is limited to the data obtained from 12 academic structures, therefore, we are aware that discriminatory practices may be absent from other academic institutions and their units in Lithuania. Therefore, further research in other academic institutions in the country could contribute to the discussion. Moreover, the data on women discrimination could be expanded by research into social sciences and the humanities. Comparison of the findings could help to identify certain perceptual and/or organizational causes of sustaining or eliminating women discrimination in science.

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