

# **CENTER FOR GENDER IN ORGANIZATIONS**

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## **WAITING FOR OUTCOMES: ANCHORING GENDER EQUITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS**

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This paper<sup>1</sup> argues that strategies to promote gender equity in organizations need to focus on the assumptions in the organizational culture that underpin work practices and behaviors. An analytic case is used to demonstrate the importance of bringing cultural assumptions to the surface during the change process and examining their implications for both gender equity and organizational effectiveness. Initial efforts aimed at changing work practices were disappointing. However, understanding that cultural assumptions had unintended consequences for both gender equity and organizational effectiveness provided a foundation for the organization to continue to experiment after the initial intervention and move the change effort forward as opportunities opened up. The paper argues that linking changes in work practices and processes to underlying assumptions provides a basis for the organization to engage in an on-going and iterative process of inquiry, experimentation, reflection, and learning that can generate surprising and positive outcomes over time.

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### A. BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, we have undertaken a series of collaborative action research projects with corporations and non-profit organizations that have a dual aim – to promote gender equity and enhance organizational effectiveness.<sup>2</sup> Our work began about six years ago with a Ford Foundation study, *Relinking Work and Life Toward a Better Future* (Rapoport et al., 1996; Bailyn et al., 1997). With a core value of promoting gender equity, the project explored the connections between work and family life. Historically, gender equity referred only to women and efforts that provided them with the individual skills and organizational mechanisms that would provide equal access and opportunity in the work place. Indeed, this notion of gender equity is still a prevalent one. While these efforts resulted in some advances for women, gendered social relations in our society remain largely unchanged. Men still run the major institutions in society in overwhelming numbers and women still bear the primary responsibilities for family and home. Thus, any notion of gender equity would need to take into account the different social constraints under which men and women operate.

The Relinking Project explicitly linked the domains where opportunities and constraints exist. Gender inequities in the family are reflected at work and work critically influences what happens in the family. Without changes at work that enable people to better integrate their work and personal lives, it was unlikely that changes would occur in families, perpetuating gender inequities in both domains. The workplace was, therefore, a natural place to begin.

Over the past decade an increasing array of benefits and policies that enabled people to accommodate, but not integrate, their work and family lives were developed in the workplace. Accommodations occur in two ways. Provisions for childcare paved the way for people to keep their family lives separate from work. In this sense, family was accommodated by the workplace. Other provisions, such as flex-time, part-time work, job shares, among other so-called “family-friendly” policies, left the accommodation to individuals who made their own arrangements with bosses and peers. While such arrangements clearly made it easier for parents to manage their work and family lives, it was hard to detect changes in gender equity in either domain (Bailyn, 1993). Family-friendly policies are used disproportionately by women. Choosing to use these options can stifle a career, lead to backlash against people who use them, and the benefits of these policies can be more illusory than real. The mother’s role as major caretaker in the family is actually reinforced.

These programs were obviously a preliminary attempt to create organizational change, but they did not go far enough. They failed to question work practices and organizational cultures that made using them problematic. If one wants to create change, it is necessary to challenge the basic assumptions that underlie work practices and organizational cultures. Our work is about modifying these assumptions.

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of our research method and use a particular case to demonstrate one critical feature – the role of cultural assumptions in organizational analysis and experimentation. Whether we are working at the nexus of work and personal life or on other aspects of gender relations in the workplace, our goal is to promote change in organizations – changes that enhance both gender equity and promote organizational effectiveness – what we call the *dual agenda* (Bailyn, et al, 1997; Merrill-Sands, et al., forthcoming). Although there may be other ways to accomplish these ends, it is our belief that one needs to bring to the surface deeply embedded assumptions about work and work practices to focus the organization on changes that could achieve these dual agenda objectives. These underlying assumptions are critical because they anchor the learning and experimentation in ways that are not necessarily planned for or programmed into the work. An organization can continue to develop organizational change focused on the dual agenda of strengthening organizational effectiveness and gender equity using the narratives that emerge from organizational experimentation, creating a critical constituency for change, and adapting the organization to reflect the experiences of increasing numbers of people well-versed in alternative work practices.

## **B. APPROACH**

There are three characteristics that differentiate the work we have done from others: the use of the gender lens to analyze organizations; the method of collaborative interactive action research; and the linking of gender equity to strategic organizational issues.

First, we use a gender lens to analyze organizations (Merrill-Sands, et al., forthcoming; Meyerson and Kolb, forthcoming). Influenced by recent feminist organizational scholarship, we look at gender and gender equity, not as characteristics that differentiate men and women, but as features of organizations (Acker, 1990; Martin, 1990; Ely, 1995; Calas and Smircich, 1992, 1995; Kolb and Putnam, 1997; Fletcher, 1998; Merrill-Sands, et al., forthcoming; Meyerson, 1998). Having been created largely by and for men, organizational systems, work practices, structures, and norms tend to reflect masculine experience, masculine values, and masculine life situations. As a result, most of what we come to regard as normal and commonplace at work tends to privilege traits that are socially and culturally ascribed to men while devaluing or ignoring those ascribed to women (Bailyn, 1993; Fletcher and Merrill-Sands, 1998). For example, a gendered assumption in many organizations is that ideal workers are ones who are able, willing, and eager to put work first. This assumption fits workers who do not have primary care responsibilities outside of work and makes it difficult for women and men who cannot meet unbounded demands on their time.

When we look at an organization through a gender lens we question those practices and cultural assumptions. How do the formal benefits and reward systems promote certain kinds of behavior and influence for some staff while excluding others? To what degree do informal work practices and cultural assumptions reinforce certain work processes and outputs and narrow definitions of what it means to be a committed and competent worker? How do current work practices make it difficult for people to integrate their work and personal lives and what repercussions does this have for women and men in the workplace and in the family? Our goal is to have people question these cultural assumptions so they can begin to see how gender inequities occur, and from that understanding, begin to develop a collaborative strategy to deal with the dysfunctional aspects of these cultural assumptions (Kolb et al., 1998).

The second key feature of our work is that it is collaborative and research-based. Indeed, we label the method, *collaborative interactive action research* (Rapoport et al., 1996). The term is significant in several ways. A gender lens guides us in choosing the work practices, values, and assumptions on which we focus when we gather data in the organization. This approach enables us to name explicit deep assumptions about organizational practices and culture that have an impact on both gender equity and organizational effectiveness. It is those assumptions that we present back to the organization that become the bases for ongoing dialogue between us as researchers and organization members (see Figure 1). In the process, assumptions may be modified, extended, revised, or accepted. This aspect of mutual engagement is one part of what we mean by the interactive part of our work.

Collaboration is key to this interaction. We are committed to producing knowledge that enhances people's capacity to take action within their organizations, actions that promise equity and effectiveness. For that to happen, we need to work closely with people inside the organization. There is another important reason for collaboration. We work at the nexus of business or organization strategy and gender. We can never really know enough about a business or organization and their issues and challenges, yet in our method, we must work on these business issues to see their connections to gender. So we become the experts in some sense on gender or work and personal life and our inside collaborators are the experts in their organizations. Together we work on creating, designing, and implementing experiments that promise to meet dual agenda criteria that derive from the underlying assumptions.

**Figure 1. Working with a Dual Agenda for Change:  
Linking Organizational Effectiveness and Gender Equity**

- View work through a gender lens
  - What cultural assumptions explain presenting issue?
  - How do cultural assumptions support organization?
  - What are the unintended consequences of assumptions for organization?
  - What are unintended consequences for gender equity?
- Identify leverage points for change
- Brainstorm and design experiments that meet dual agenda
- Develop understanding, or narratives, that link gender equity to business objectives

The third feature that distinguishes our work is our connection of gender, work and personal life to strategic organizational issues. It has been typical, especially in the U.S. and we think increasingly so in Europe, to treat work and personal life issues, gender and diversity issues, as separate, even marginal to the strategic issues of the organization. They are the responsibility of human resource professionals, gender, work–family, and diversity specialists. While the work of these professionals is very important, it is our belief that if one really wants to engage senior managers in discussions about gender, and work and personal life, one has to connect these to

issues that matter to them. Obviously senior managers care about equity and diversity, but their primary concerns are inevitably survival and, in some cases, growth. So to keep them involved in these issues, we try to connect gender to business issues like effectiveness, innovation, growth, and productivity. It is important to emphasize that this stance, the dual agenda, is not purely instrumental. We believe, and our research to date has demonstrated, that there *really* is a connection between how an organization deals with its gender and work-personal life issues and how effective it is (Bailyn et al., 1997).

Our basic approach is to analyze work through a gender or work-personal life lens to uncover deep assumptions about work. Collaboratively we identify leverage points for change, create, design, and implement organizational experiments and then try to foster learning by creating narratives that link the experiments or other changes to the gender equity and strategic objectives. We used this approach several years ago in a major collaborative project with an international, non-profit research organization we call AGRO<sup>3</sup> (Kolb and Merrill-Sands, 1995). The initial outcome was disappointing. Although the analysis uncovered cultural assumptions that had negative implications for the organization's performance and for gender equity, most of the experiments the organization committed to undertake were quite superficial and limited in what they might achieve. They would not, we believed, significantly alter work practices and, thus, have an impact on basic assumptions about work that were affecting both gender equity and organizational effectiveness. While these concerns were true in the short run, we were not prepared for other ways our agenda might be achieved in the longer run. Indeed, the organization is now working on changes that were not possible several years ago.

As we saw these changes unfolding, we began to look more deeply at the work we had done. We concluded that our focus on cultural assumptions about work, assumptions that connected gender issues to strategic concerns, anchored people's understanding of the issues and allowed them to work on them independently as opportunities rose within the organization. As they experimented with new work practices, they made sense of those changes in the context of the cultural assumptions we identified in the original project.



## II. AN INITIAL CASE OF FAILURE?

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AGRO is an organization of 120 professional social scientists and support staff. It has a mandate to carry out policy-related research intended to have an impact on agricultural and food policies in the developing world. Its culture reflects the academic disciplines (primarily economics) from which it draws most of its researchers. A culture of individualism was seen as critical to the organization's success. They believed that individual production of high quality research, published in prestigious journals contributed to their ability to raise funds and shape policy formulation at the global level. The individual stars of the organization, and the culture that supports them, were seen as central to AGRO's reputation. There was a practical issue as well. People did not stay in this organization for their entire careers. They would move back and forth from AGRO to academia. To make these transitions, researchers needed to be well published. In an era with abundant resources and the dominance of particular research paradigms, AGRO flourished and had considerable impact on policy makers in the developing world through formal academic channels. However, significant changes in the environment of AGRO have challenged this culture. Donors have put pressure on AGRO to demonstrate the impact of its research and to focus more on influencing policies on-the-ground rather than carrying out strategic research aimed at the academic community. Client countries, reacting against perceived intellectual elitism and top-down policy advice, are demanding stronger collaboration and accountability. Growing attention to natural resource management policies means that AGRO has to work with new partners (e.g., environmental groups and local organizations of resource users) and engage a broader spectrum of disciplines in carrying out policy research. And, core funding has declined and grown less stable, forcing AGRO to rely much more on special project funding.

### A. INITIAL ANALYSIS AND INTERVENTION

The impetus for the project was a concern, held by the Director and some female staff, that women were underrepresented at AGRO at the professional and managerial levels and that the environment was experienced as inhospitable to women (about 20% of the professional staff are women and no women belonged to senior management).<sup>4</sup> We interviewed about 25% of the AGRO staff, using questions based on a gender lens. We asked them about their work and how they spent their day. We focused on decision-making and reward systems, and the informal work practices and cultural assumptions that guided the work. We were particularly interested in how time was used and the work demands on the research and support staff.

Our findings suggested that a gender lens brought into sharper focus the challenges AGRO was facing in adjusting to its new external environment (see Figure 2). The challenge was to shift from a culture of individualism that prized the accomplishments of talented "stars" to one where collaboration and teamwork would allow it to meet its mission more effectively. The problem was that the existing assumptions and structure and reward system reinforced the former and created a barrier to achieving the latter, despite its strategic importance.

### Figure 2. Salient Features of the Culture of Individualism

- Individual stars are what makes AGRO's reputation
- High quality research is an individual enterprise
- Quality is judged by quantity of articles in prestigious publications
- Resources flow to researchers who do high quality research
- Professionals set their own standards for work

When we looked at the formal system, we saw that it rewarded individual enterprise, based primarily on tangible outputs, defined as singly authored, prestigious publications. Because AGRO had difficulties evaluating impact on food policies in developing countries, which is what it was in business for, it used a surrogate measure to assess quality, papers published in prestigious journals. The reward system had significant gender (and diversity) implications. Other work, such as outreach, capacity-building, and collaborative research in partner countries, was rendered “invisible” (Fletcher, 1998; Fletcher, 1999). Yet, we found it was these alternative outputs that were of high priority for a large number of the women and staff from developing countries. So women and staff from developing countries were spending time on outreach and building collaborations in the field *and* they were also trying to publish their articles in prestigious journals. These groups felt overwhelmed and were concerned that they could not succeed in a system that recognized and rewarded only certain kinds of work.

There was a deep belief in a meritocracy at AGRO. If you did not succeed, it was because you could not measure up to the organization's high standards. Access to donor funds, for example, was believed to be based on merit and performance. If you did outstanding research, you could get money to support your work. Informally, white western males had more access to donors than the women and people from the developing world. Therefore, they had more money in their research accounts and so could hire research assistants to help them. The outcome was that certain people were undertaking a larger agenda and doing it with fewer resources.

Time was also a significant problem. People felt overwhelmed by their workloads. The shift in organizational priorities, the demands of collaboration across divisions, and the need to work more closely with scientists and policy makers in developing countries meant that meetings and other types of professional interactions were encroaching on much of the work day. People worked incredibly long hours. Indeed, the researchers did most of their data analysis and writing, their primary work, in off-hours, at night and early in the morning. Many staff felt that this was undermining the quality of their work. The problem was even greater for women and/or staff from developing countries, whose lack of access to donor networks translated into fewer staff to help in research and writing. Their commitment to outreach and in-country collaboration put even more demands on their time. And, of course, the problems were exacerbated for men and women with families for whom time for off-hours work was more constrained.

We presented these findings to the entire AGRO community. We described the culture of individualism and how it had served the organization in the past. We showed how this culture now had unintended consequences for the organization and its mission: how difficult it was to get collaborative projects up and running; how the primary work was pushed into off-hours, leading to quality problems; and how this time pressure was creating a crisis mentality in the organization that also had quality and efficiency implications. We traced for them the consequences for gender equity: the problem of long hours for people with caretaking responsibilities; the devaluing of invisible work both within AGRO and externally to it; and the inequalities in resources and staffing (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Unintended Consequences of Culture of Individualism**

**For Organizational Effectiveness**

- External pressures for collaboration conflict with individual model
- Collaborative work adds on to individual work
- Collaborative projects get stalled even though essential to new organizational strategy
- Research and writing done in off hours; quality concerns
- Continual crisis and reactive mode
- Outreach and country relations devalued

**For Gender Equity**

- Not everybody can work long hours
- Focus on tangible outputs renders other kinds of work invisible -- helping, collaboration, forward planning, teamwork
- Work such as outreach and country collaborations are seen as individual choice with career consequences
- Differential access to resources -- fewer resources to do more work
- Monocultural model of effective researcher -- others told to fit model

The findings became the basis for staff round tables. The round tables reacted to the findings and then “brainstormed” possible organizational experiments and interventions that would address the cultural assumptions and their problematic manifestations in terms of work practices and behaviors. Some of the possible leverage points for change were time and how it is used, the formal and informal reward system, changes in the way resources were secured and allocated, and strengthening team work and shared organizational goals among the senior managers. More than 90 suggestions were generated from the round tables. These were prioritized and then numerous, albeit modest, changes in work practices were implemented. Examples include training and activities to strengthen project teams, use of Division retreats, the inclusion of criteria recognizing team work and collaboration in formal performance review, use of more facilitation to enhance

staff participation in meetings and seminars, and the inclusion in work plans of work carried out for the benefit of the organization.

## **B. QUIET TIME EXPERIMENT AND ITS AFTERMATH**

The experiment of most interest here is *quiet time*. This was not an experiment we enthusiastically supported. It was not organic, in that it did not emerge from the cultural analysis and process at AGRO (Rapoport et al., 1996). It was an experiment that had been tried with engineers at another site and the AGRO scientists decided to give it a try (Perlow, 1997). If they were doing their research in off-hours, they reasoned, then they would set aside three mornings a week where people could close their doors and do their "real work" of writing and research. For the support staff, this would be time for planning and organizing work. The goal of quiet time was to protect time during the normal work day for researchers and administrative staff to do their primary work. What was not addressed was the volume and pace of work, and there was no reason to believe it would change. Nor did AGRO try an experiment that could challenge the cultural contradictions of an individual meritocracy and the changing environmental realities that were creating the time problem in the first place. We were not optimistic about the quiet time experiment, because we saw it as too limited to have much of an impact on the much deeper issues that were causing the "time famine" at AGRO.

Eighteen months later, we went back to evaluate the quiet time experiment. We were not surprised to find that it had not been systematically adopted. The only part of the experiment that survived was the commitment not to have meetings during quiet time. Most of the researchers, the primary group that the experiment was supposed to assist, did not make use of it at all. Some of the support staff closed their doors during quiet time or used quiet time as a way to protect time for work and fend off requests. The only consistent users were staff from the travel office. They refused to answer their phones during quiet time, a situation that frustrated time constrained researchers and staff!

In terms of its stated objectives, quiet time was a failure. Yet, we noted in our feedback to AGRO, that the experiment had had a broader impact on the culture; it had had an impact on the norms and assumptions about the use of time. We reported:

- Many argued that quiet time played an important role in legitimating staffs' right to raise the issue of time pressures and to assert control over their own time.
- Staff may not use the formal quiet time, but they use the concept to develop their own means for protecting time.
- Others noted that quiet time was beneficial because it communicated that AGRO accepted responsibility for some of the time pressures staff experience. This was a significant change, as the belief in the organization *had* been that time problems were the result of individuals who either could not manage their time or who chose to spend long hours at work.

- Others felt that the concept of quiet time made it more legitimate for staff to make “trade-offs” around time and negotiate priorities with supervisors and colleagues. Staff now feel more empowered to say “no” or “yes, but...” when faced with unanticipated requests for interviews or meetings passed down from management.
- Some staff noted that the attention quiet time brought to time pressures led managers to build more slack into the system by hiring more staff and budgeting resource allocations more realistically.

These observations were supported by changes in actual behavior. The researchers began to do more of their work at home during the day. They ceased to be available for unannounced meetings. They began to bound the time they were willing to give to the organization. AGRO’s Director, consistent with the culture of individualism, always said that researchers worked long hours because they are committed professionals and that is what professionals do. The researchers started to disagree. Similarly, the administrative staff began to “push back” on last minute requests and demands and began to challenge the work behaviors that contributed to crisis management. Staff began to see the time issue as a systemic problem that was rooted in the contradictions senior management in the organization were not addressing. The organization was, in part, responsible for creating the time problem. The quiet time experiment clearly had, more than expected, an impact on when time was used and also on how it was used. Indeed, the volume of work and the cultural assumptions that drove it were now on the table in a way that had failed to happen at the time of the initial intervention.

### III. UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

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Recently, the "time famine," as it is now called, has come back onto AGRO's agenda. The senior management team has taken the issue on board and significant changes are under consideration. These changes build directly from the cultural assumptions identified during the initial analysis and feedback. The quiet time experiment collectively changed how people thought about and used time. Time came to be seen as a valuable commodity; it was no longer a free good that individual researchers and staff could be expected to give. People started to cost it out. They decided that they would begin developing *realistic work plans*. This is very interesting because at the time of the intervention, that was one of the experiments that emerged from the round tables. We thought this would be an easy experiment to implement. After all, who could object to realistic work plans? But, senior management had resisted the idea because they were afraid it would compromise productivity and quality and would have consequences for funding. Now they are experimenting with realistic work plans and this has important implications for the culture. It means that outreach and collaborative work that was previously invisible and unrewarded will be built into work plans. Putting time into work plans means that strategic work besides publishing papers is now accounted for. There is even a proposal to make time investments more visible to donors. The plan is to fully load proposals even if they do not expect to be fully funded. It is just another way to make time more visible. Some more immediate relief may be built into the system – creating a specialized team of research floaters who can help out in crisis situations. Management practices are also on the table. Rather than letting staff sink or swim, managers at all levels are starting to take more responsibility for securing funds and allocating them in a more equitable way. Proposals include negotiating for more core funding to give researchers more time for other activities. It also means helping people gain more access to donor networks. Not only does this make it easier for women and men from developing countries to secure more funding; it begins to challenge the fundamental assumption of individualism and meritocracy. And finally, there is serious consideration being given directly to the reward system. One of the proposals is to reward the *totality of the work*. That would include formal recognition of outreach and collaboration with partners in the countries, as well as the teamwork now part of AGRO's work.

What a surprise. When we look back at the leverage points for change that came from the analysis five years ago, we see that the changes and proposals now being discussed address them. What could not happen then seems to be happening now. There are probably several explanations, but the one we find most compelling is the fact that the method we used probed below work practices and exposed basic cultural assumptions at AGRO. We spent a great deal of time with individuals and groups, working through the analysis to show how the cultural assumptions about individualism created problems in the changing environment. But we also could trace the gender equity and diversity consequences. It is important to re-emphasize that this is an organization that cares about equity. It was clear in the feedback sessions that staff at all levels connected with the cultural analysis. What they were not ready to do at that time was experiment in ways that would seriously challenge these assumptions. That took time, and over time, other things happened that made change more of a possibility.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

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As we reflect on the surprising changes that occurred at AGRO, three features seem particularly important: the development of understanding, or narratives, that connect experiences to cultural assumptions; first-hand experience of the cultural contradictions; and the creation of a constituency for change.

The contradictions between the cultural assumptions and the changing reality, especially around time—on other issues as well—served to anchor the process. As new ideas were tried both informally and formally through experiments, people could connect back to the assumptions and the implications they had for effectiveness and equity. The concept of narrative is useful in thinking about how this occurred (Polkinghorne, 1988). The experiments do not speak for themselves. Narratives are the meanings or the stories people tell themselves about their experiences. In working on these dual agenda projects, it is important that narratives situate the work at the nexus of gender and strategic organizational issues or else it will be relegated to the margins (Ely and Meyerson, forthcoming). The story of the quiet time experiment could have been told as a failure because it failed in its explicit purpose. However, a different narrative evolved as staff connected it back to cultural assumptions.

The experiment changed staffs' understanding about time and that understanding eroded the individual narratives that had dominated previously. We contributed to that narrative by pointing out the symbolic changes in people's understandings about time and by documenting what changes had occurred. Support staff saw it as empowering them to gain some control over their work and to redress some of the power imbalance between support staff and researchers. The research staff adapted the experiment to fit their needs. Out of the office more, they were less available for last minute meetings and interviews from visitors. Their narrative linked time back to unresolved contradictions in the basic assumptions of AGRO, the systemic factors that created the time problem. Our evaluation and our feedback eighteen months after the quiet time experiment began, helped to solidify the new narrative about time as a systemic problem rather than an individual problem.

A second feature that seems important in accounting for the change is the development of a constituency that held the narrative and supported change. A small group of people, especially some of the women and men from the developing world, had a vested interest in change. They constituted a core of a growing constituency and they were the ones who held the narrative. They could make sense of changes with reference back to the systemic issues. As different individual staff and groups and even departments experimented with different ways of working, a constituency for change started to expand. Many in the support staff were part of the constituency, but the critical turning point was probably when senior research fellows, among them some of the "stars," also started to see and use time in a different way. Having this coalition in place, as informal as it was, empowered fellows and others to push back on requests and to start to bound the organization's greed around time (Lax and Sebenius, 1991). They held the narrative that the problem was not theirs but the organization's. In other projects, we have found that having a core constituency is critical to the process (Merrill-Sands et al.,

forthcoming). That constituency continues to give meaning to changes so that they remain connected to the agenda of changing cultural assumptions.

The third feature that we think helps explain the changes is an ever-widening group of staff and managers who experienced the time problem. AGRO is similar to many of our projects in that the driving force behind it was to help women. Obviously, if there were sufficient women in positions of influence in the organization, it would not be as necessary to undertake these projects. Further, it is quite common for a certain amount of backlash to exist around these projects. Or, as in the case of AGRO, one often finds resistance to change among people who have succeeded under the existing cultural assumptions (Ely and Meyerson, 1997). But as a constituency for change emerges that keeps the issues salient, critical people in the organization may also experience the cultural contradictions and so become themselves a force for change. That happened in AGRO. As researchers began to push back on managers and bound their time commitments, those managers were forced to address the problem and find ways to pick up the slack. Time pressures and overloaded work plans were now their problem as well.

Working with organizations on a dual agenda for change holds a great deal of promise for those of us interested in promoting gender equity in society. Our work organizations are critical players, and so change there has a good chance of influencing other domains of life. The advantage of the dual agenda approach is that it ties gender issues critically to the strategic issues an organization faces. However, there are many challenges to doing this work. What we have learned in the five years we have been associated with AGRO is that when one brings deep cultural assumptions to the surface and promotes narratives around them, one enhances people's capacities to take actions in their organizations that promote the dual aims of equity and effectiveness.



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## ENDNOTES

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1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented by Deborah Kolb at the conference *Gender and New Forms of Working Life*, Norway, November 1998, and at the conference *Women and Family*, Boston, November 1998. This paper has been accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of *Women in Management Review*.
2. The 'we' includes Lotte Bailyn, Gill Coleman, Robin Ely, Joyce Fletcher, Maureen Harvey, Deborah Merrill-Sands, Debra Meyerson, Ann Rippin, and Rhona Rapoport.
3. AGRO is a fictitious name developed for the purposes of this paper.
4. These gender-related concerns led to the establishment of a Gender Committee (GENCOM). GENCOM drew men and women as members from all functions and levels within AGRO. It developed its mission through widespread consultation with management and staff in the organization. It defined its objectives as: 1) identifying gender-related issues that affect organizational effectiveness and productivity; 2) cultivating awareness and stimulating interest among staff to address gender issues; and 3) advising management on policies and practices for creating a workplace and organizational culture that is supportive of both men and women and free of discrimination on the basis of gender. To further these aims, AGRO formed a partnership with two external consultants who would aid in inquiry, analysis, and intervention.