



THESIS SYNOPSIS

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A chance or a trap?

**Understanding gender equality schemes
in management**

titled Ph.D. dissertation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Research Topic and Literature Review | 4 |
| <i>1.1 Relevance of the topic</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>1.2 Theoretical framework</i> | <i>6</i> |
| <i>1.3 Research questions</i> | <i>9</i> |
| 1.3.1 Gender equality schemes and women advancement programs | 9 |
| 1.3.2 Male and female managers' perceptions and experiences | 10 |
| 2. Research methodology | 13 |
| 2.1 Company document analysis | 14 |
| 2.2 Semi structured interviews | 15 |
| 3. Key findings | 16 |
| 3.1 Deep ingrained gendered processes in France and Germany | 16 |
| 3.2 Mapping companies' policies | 16 |
| 3.3 Voices of managers | 19 |
| 4. Results discussion | 21 |
| 4.1 Covered by equality...contemporary patriarchy is perpetuated | 21 |
| 4.2 Backlash and restoring processes | 22 |
| 4.3 Contouring change: Undoing gender and questions of emancipation | 23 |
| 5. Conclusions | 24 |
| 6. List of references | 27 |

1. Research Topic and Literature Review

1.1 Relevance of the topic

The present dissertation deals with the persistent issue of gender (in)equality in organisations, in particular in management. An ever increasing number of studies in the past decades investigated the barriers hindering the advancement of women into management, indicating that gender equality issues in the workplace are multi-dimensional, say, governmental and organisational (Kantola & Ikävalko, 2013).

These efforts integrate feminist knowledge and principles and let it flow into the managerial and legal expertise of the organization (Prügl 2014). According to Prügl (2014), *governance feminism*, namely the efforts to integrate feminist knowledge into the governing instances of organizations, plays an extensive role in the ongoing gender mainstreaming processes framed by the European Union organs. Virtually all large companies in Europe have implemented gender equality measures, ranging from leadership and management training programmes aimed at women, family friendly benefits to anti-discrimination policies.

Yet women's progress towards gender equality is slow (Britton 2000, England 2010). Women continue to face crying discrimination in terms of pay and authority, despite making the majority of graduates and accumulating expertise and knowledge. Women account for only 16,6% of the membership of governing bodies such as boards of directors and supervisory boards.¹In addition, not a single company, on France CAC 40 or German DAX, is run by a woman.

The recent years have seen the rapid development of radical actions (Pfau-Effinger, 2004; Gröschl and Takagi, 2012) as a response to efficiently tackle these persistent disparities. Gender quota obliging all publicly held companies to reserve 40% of their seats on their board by 2020 became the preferred response across Europe. Strict quotas and measures on the side of governments raise new concerns regarding the right method to integrate and ensure advancement of women in the workplace. In the light of the Norwegian example, studies have shown the limit of a restrictive measure. (Storvin and Teigen 2010, Ahern and Dittmar, 2012).

¹ European Commission, Women and Men in Leadership positions in the EU, 2013

These recent developments have heightened the need for a critical lecture of gender equality issues in management. The present study aims at contributing to improve the understanding of the dynamics underlying these organisational interventions from a sociological point of view.

The critical question of gender equality draws particular attention towards an industry, that has historically employed few women in most countries; namely the automotive industry. The automotive industry in Europe being the largest producer of motor vehicle in the world, and one of the most influential employer across the European union with nearly 13 million individuals in EU 27, has a crucial political, economic and social impact especially in France and Germany.

Despite various measures implemented since decades to counter the striking gender disparity, the glass ceiling in the French and German automotive industry is firmly in place. Very few women are represented at the executive levels and on boards of directors. Additionally, while various feminist empirical studies investigated the issue of gender discrimination and women's underrepresentation in diverse Science, Technology and Engineering organisations (Hanappi-Egger 2011; Williams et al. 2012; Abrahamsson 2015) no comparative study to date has been conducted to track and explain the situation, alternatively in France and Germany (Martinuzzi et al. 2011).

Moreover, the continuous structural crises as well as the growing digitalization the sector undergoes more than a decade puts the relative fragile position of women and the question of social justice and equality in these organisations at risk (Weinkopf 2014). The present study therefore argues for the urgency to examine the underrated topic of women in management in the male dominated automotive sector through a gender and sociological perspective.

Consequently, the focus of the present research is on the study of the interventions and initiatives for gender equity/gender diversity and other women advancement programmes within a male dominated organisation. The European automotive industry thus is an ideal setting to study gendered organisations and organisational change for its activities as mentioned earlier have a great impact on women's and men's lives, on paid and unpaid work.

The purpose of this study is novel and twofold; first it examines and compares the gender equality schemes in two seemingly similar companies, one auto manufacturer located in France and the other one in Germany, it explores how the interventions are designed, which factors are at play when defining and implementing these specific measures. Second, it

explores and once again compares the perceptions and experiences of male and female managers of the French and German organisations, it precisely investigates how managers view these programmes, but also how they view gender issues when ascending to or holding positions of management in their organisations. The country comparison gives a contextual and richer account of the research problem. The findings of this study will contribute to the understanding of organisation as location of gendered practices, norms and values on the one hand, and to the examination of equality/diversity production within and by the organisation. In this respect, this study seeks to enrich the scholarly understanding on gender organisational change by revealing how gender equality strategies are embedded in the social structures of a particular context. This study intends to make an empirical and theoretical contribution to the critical literature, in a context where gender is an ongoing and persistent source of inequality but where gendered effects are being increasingly concealed and denied (Kelan 2010, Maruani 2011). Doing so the objective is to analyse how “women advancement programs” and “gender diversity” initiatives at once reflect underlying gender, but also class, race and age relations and how such meanings in turn inform managerial practices.

1.2 Theoretical framework

The careful review of selected classic and recent interdisciplinary body of research encompassing feminist sociological perspectives and organisational studies (Acker 1990, 1992; Wajcman 1998, Connell, 2002; Gherardi 2007, Calas and Smircich 2009) delineated the concept of gender in organisation. The theories of Gendered Organisations dispute the claim that organisations are gender-neutral. In all organisations prevails a normative notion of the worker, which is dominantly associated to masculine ideas of work. Within this ideal, it is expected, especially for managers and professionals, to be available long hours, to show distance to any family and care responsibilities, and willing to relocate or expatriate on demand (Wajcman 1998, Kelan 2009).

Subsequently, due to a mixture of societal and cultural expectations in terms of family and work, women and especially working mothers cannot fulfil the full commitment ideal largely regarded as sign of excellence and performance. Consequently, women having a different career path than men may very much not be in the position of getting financial recognition associated to the “ideal worker” profile. The field of “gendered organisations studies” has expanded over the last decades and explored the different and often hidden ways women are subordinated through for instance the gendered divisions of labour, the management, the media and communication. (Acker 1992, 2006, Martin 2003, Meyerson and Kolb 2000, Kelan

2009, Gill et al. 2017, Hanappi Egger and Eberherr 2016) where crying disparities are maintained and hinder access to opportunities and resources in the organisation.

While overt gender practices such as masculine work culture are easy to detect, gender as structural instrument of stratification may be deeply hidden in organizational processes. The outcomes are covered by rhetoric of objectivity considered universal.

Hence, the „gendered substructure“ of an organisation as it is coined by Acker (1990) is located in the arrangement of work, in the rules prescribing behaviour, and in the relations linking work life to social life.

Similarly, the theoretical knowledge elaborated by Ely and Meyerson (2000a) captures the multifaceted dimension about gender issues in the workplace. Indeed, Ely and Meyerson's (2000a., 2000b) and followed by Fletcher and Ely's (2003) empirical based research led to the elaboration of four approaches or “frames” for understanding what gender is and why gender based inequality in organisational setting persists. According to this “*fourfold framework*”, Ely and Meyerson argue that the first three frames are the most used approach to achieve gender equality in organisations nowadays.

Within the frame “*Fix the Women*” differences of socialisation and skills are the cause of gender issues, women need to be trained to do “as good as men”. The “*Equal Opportunity*” frame is essentially policy based and aims at correcting asymmetry in terms of outcomes by reducing the barriers women have to overcome. Formalised hiring procedure, neutral job description and differentiated targets are typical measures under this frame. Alternatively the frame “*Celebrate the Difference*” calls for the acceptance of diverse standpoints, and in particular, the appreciation of feminine attributes of management such as inclusiveness and collaboration.

While interventions within these frames have proven significant gains for women, the overall progress is limited. The major problem lies in the fact that women are located as source of gender inequality, this view of gender corresponds to the essential differential assigned to men and women. Structures and processes remain unquestioned.

According to Ely and Meyerson (2000b), the fourth frame instead provides a more complex approach to understanding and conceptualizing gender. The “*Revise the work culture*” frame implies the change of deep structure of gender beliefs and unconscious bias that pervade every layer of the organisation and maintain the unequal gender order (Meyerson and Kolb,

2000a). Among others, the fourth frame implies the dismantling of dominant discourse of masculinity underpinning managerial and organisational practices.

Rao and Kellehar's (1999, 2005) comprehensive work on organisational change in terms of gender equality and empowerment offers a theoretical pendant to the Ely's and Meyerson's fourfold framework. As a result, the four frames can be further categorised within four range of actions; whether it targets formal or informal structures and whether it achieves individual or systemic change.

The above mentioned theoretical tools elaborated by Ely and Meyerson (2000a, 2000b) and Rao and Kellehar (2005) constitute the main analytical framework in order to make sense of the gender equality challenge in organisation bringing thus feminist thoughts into organisational studies.

Another line of scholarship was developed in the last decade, criticizing the unilateral dialogue between organisation and gender studies and pointing out the subtle and growing silencing of gender discrimination in the context of post equality societies. To grasp this complex phenomenon, there is a shift away from the "gender labyrinth" to explain processes hindering women's advancement to new concept of the "gender fatigue" (Kelan, 2013) or the denial of gender discrimination that impact women's professional life. These studies show how insidious and implicit processes of discrimination are becoming more difficult to detect together in a context of omnipresent gender rhetoric, hence women stay subordinated to men (Kelan, 2013) showing apparent consent. Similarly, Gill, Kelan and Scharff (2017) elaborates on a post-feminist sensibility at work, arguing that the rejection of gender inequality in the workplace, the attitude suggesting a gender fatigue and the acceptance of the unequal status quo are important discursive enactment of women's, and to a certain extent men's subordination. Hanappi-Egger and Eberherr (2016) note that in the European context where the ongoing debates of the last decades about "gender quota", work life balance" and "family friendly workplace" direct an intensified attention and put a greater pressure upon organisations to achieve gender equality, gender relations within and outside the organisation are significantly being shaped by this dynamics of "gender equality pressure". Unintended bias and gender stereotyping remain an inherent part of apparently gender neutral organisations.

In order to examine how gender equality interventions and other women advancement programmes are applied and experienced in the automotive organisations in France and

Germany , two levels are under focus namely; the organisational level with its structures, cultures and practices and the individual level composed of perceptions, and experiences of managers.

1.3 Research questions

Considering the theoretical arguments on gender and/in organisations, equal opportunity, diversity, and the previous empirical evidence on women in management, my primary research questions can be divided into two iterative strands of inquiry. This distinction is for analytical purposes, but it is important to bear in mind that the two lines of questions are intertwined.

On the one hand, a "tangible" object of study is examined: the gender equality programmes which are essentially made from the local production of texts and different sort of organisational documents, and on the other hand, the perceptions and views of managers towards these programmes are collected analysed and interpreted. These experiences correspond to the discourses expressed by various employees holding managerial positions in the selected organisations.

1.3.1 Gender equality schemes and women advancement programs

What composes a so-called gender equality/diversity program? How does it work? What are their components and resultant course of actions?

As various feminist lectures examining organisational issues have demonstrated, definition and practices of gender and gender issues at work vary greatly across corporations and countries (Calas & Smircich 2009, Ely & Meyerson 2000a, Hanappi-Egger 2006) .This includes a wide range of interventions, ranging from strong interventionist actions to market driven programmes (Fletcher and Ely 2003). As a result, the response to correct gender inequality changes in a given organisation. The first research question thus aims at "dissecting" and understanding the various components of a gender equality programme in organisations.

How do these measures vary from one company to the other? To which extent do environmental/societal factors influence the design of these programs? Is there some constant variables when defining those interventions?

As mentioned in the previous research question, the very notion of gender and gender equality underpinning these programmes explain at least partly the variations of design and implementation of corporate measures. Hence, the idea of gender equality is contextual as explained by Tatli and colleagues (2012) and call for an “embedded” treatment when analysing these questions. Tatli and colleagues. (2012) however indicate that this “contextual embeddedness” is to be understood as dynamic and changing, rather than fixed. The focus is therefore set on the organisational context to explore the constant and variation in the practice of gender equality measures.

Hence, the research question aims at integrating the diverse factors that influence the approaches to gender equality in the selected organisations. As prior research has suggested (Olgiati and Shapiro, 2002; Gröschl and Takagi 2012), we contend that the practice of women advancement programs and gender equality measures are rooted in different cultural, national and supranational contexts, and at the same time ruled by internal mechanisms such as human resources practices and organisational cultures. As a result, contradicting standards and conceptions may compete against each other, rendering the reading of these initiatives often opaque and diffuse.

How do Human Resources and companies’ key stakeholders conceptualise gender equality within their particular organisational settings?

Hearn and colleagues (2009) in their extensive work on transnational organisations and the question of gender in management in Finnish organisations, acknowledge that human resources play a key role when recruiting, promoting and retaining women in management. The authors claim that human resources are the gatekeepers of hidden structures and values. (Hearn et al. 2009). Alternatively, Hearn and colleagues (2009) also suggest that HR officers may also instigate and steer (positive) change in the corporate environment, by defining and disseminating new conceptualisation of gender equality.

Therefore, the objective of this question is to identify which role the respective Human resources officer/ key stakeholder plays when talking about gender equality in the chosen organisation: a positive or negative instrument; a gatekeeper or agent of change.

1.3.2 Male and female managers’ perceptions and experiences

How do female and male managers perceive and experience these programmes?

A large body of literature argues that many women in positions of power and authority, have assumed the persona of „socially functioning men” in order to achieve high levels of success and competence in the workplace (Acker 1990, Martin and Collinson 2002, Hanappi-Egger 2011, Kelan 2009). These studies put forward the view that still nowadays; hierarchical advancement within an organisational setting means for women and to a certain extent some men to silence female attributes in order to fit in the mould of “masculine manager”. In this context, gender equality interventions, mostly aimed at women, point out, the feminine dimensions of the worker, in particular its limits and defects that are to be corrected in order to be able to enact as the “ideal worker”.

As Ely and Meyerson (2000a) claim maternity leave, flexible time, leadership training programmes are primarily addressed to women, but further empirical evidence show that women in management do not take particular advantage of the benefits settled for women to pursue a career, hence they tend to repudiate them.

Following these lines of arguments, I therefore hypothesise that women due to the heightened visibility in managerial positions, in a context of competition for advancement against other men located in a male dominated sector, reject these programmes. They may be viewed as another form of stigmatization and/or victimisation. Moreover, based on the available evidence suggesting that affirmative action and assertive targets may push corporations to hectically select incompetent or insufficiently competent women at managerial position, I assume that women may show anxiety when ascending to position of authority (Eagly and Karau 2002).

As Wajcman (1998) formulated, I seek here to not only detect the “contemporary patriarchy”, i.e. the subordination of women within a framework of gender equality but also shed (nuanced) light on the way women observing these gender based inequities discursively explained these phenomenon.

In addition, there is a growing number of research (Cockburn 1991, Wajcman 1998, Hanappi-Egger 2012, Wright 2015) reporting, how men in particular those working in male dominated industries where managerialist discourses, practices, and culturally coded masculinity prevail, view elements of gender equality initiatives such as flexible work benefits, as open attack against the very idea of equal treatment. The collaborative study and practice-oriented study of Kolb and Meyerson (2000) demonstrated how these benefits are differently experienced by men, mainly seen as a “lowering of standards”.

Hence, collecting and exploring the perceptions of female and male managers about gender equality programmes in their organisations may not only support or negate my assumptions based upon the specific literature, but may also provide new insights on, an often overlooked and simplified formulation of gender equality.

How do women and men managers perceive the question of gender when ascending to managerial positions or when already holding position in management level?

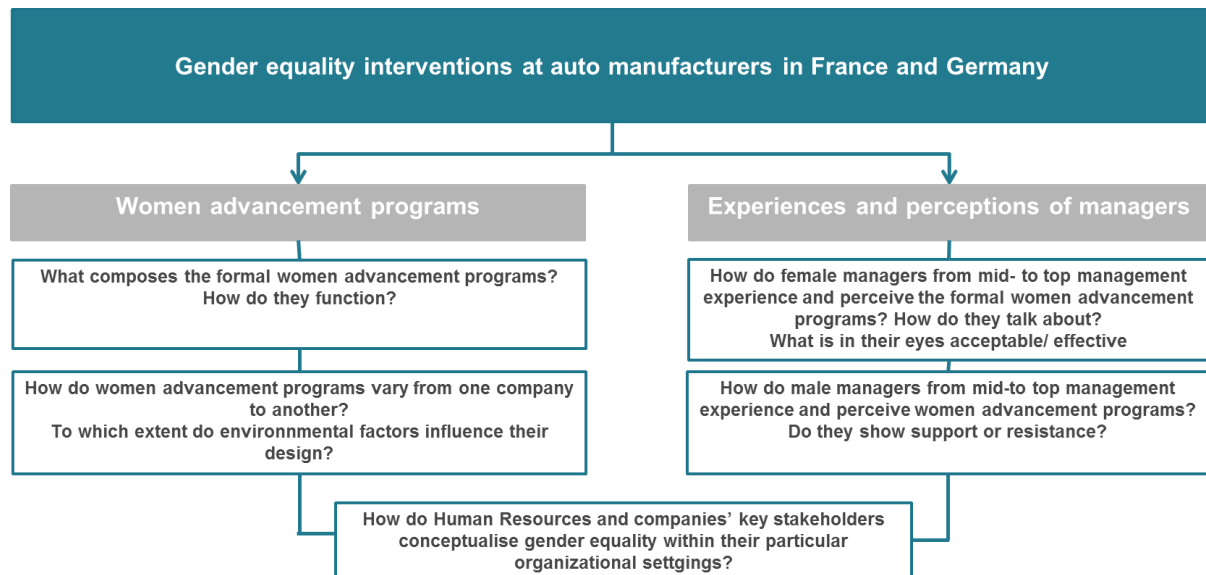
An ever-growing body of research on management and masculinities has questioned the normative assumptions underpinning the definition of career and named the invisible oppressive roles of prevalent masculine values characterised by hierarchy and control (Collinson and Hearn 1994, Connell 2001). Based on these deep entrenched practices, women and men negotiate managerial identities differently (Whitehead 2000, Pringle 2008, Ely et al. 2011).

Seminal research on gender relation at the workplace such as West and Zimmerman (1975, 1987) and recent empirical evidence (Alvesson and Due Billing 2009, Kelan 2009, Zanoni 2011, Abrahamsson, 2015) claim that gender as individual categorisation changes according to the context that the salience and type interactions. The intersectional literature posits that other power categorisation may play a greater role intersecting with gender such as race, class or age (Acker 1992, Bell and Nkomo 2001, 2013). I thus take the multi-dimensional concept of gender and assume that women and men in the workplace do and undo gender depending upon the context and the situation (Deutsch 2007, Ely and Meyerson 2010) they are into. Based on the theoretical models of doing gender outlined earlier (West and Zimmerman 1987, 1995; Butler 1990), the aim of this research question is to identify how gender is done and undone, for instance when, how and if gender disappears and become less relevant at some point.

This is crucial to detect eventual discrepancies between the theoretical objectives and the social practices of these measures. In other words, as gender structures every level of social life, it also structures and shapes the way individuals in organisation perceive gender order and any attempts to correct or change the status quo.

The figure below summarises and articulates the set of research questions around the two strains.

Figure 1. Overview of research questions



Source: author's schema

2. Research methodology

To address the complex set of research questions, a qualitative case study approach was adopted based alternatively on documentary analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

Hence, the primary aim of the study is to offer a differentiated and rich understanding of the mechanisms of organisational change, by unveiling the unexpected even pervert effects it can bring about. Doing so, the study adopts not only a critical feminist lens but also locates culturally diverse practices and subjectivities based on a comparison between two countries, two organisational systems, two contexts. As organisations, reflect the model of socio-cultural systems in place and time, and a conglomerate of interest groups (Lammers, 1990), comparing France's and Germany's "local products" in terms of gender equality forms in the organisation and management provides an increased applicable knowledge on how to bring about substantial change.

Logically, the case study method appeared to be the most appropriate empirical research strategy to employ, for that studying woman in management shall take into account the social context and further complex surrounding factors (Fagenson 1993, Stake 2000, Yin 2009). It follows a quasi-tradition when conducting research through a gender lens (Kanter 1977, Liff

and Wajcman 1996, Acker 1990; Ely et al. 2000; Hearn et.al. 2009, Kelan 2009, Hanappi-Egger 2010, Abrahamsson, 2014). Thereafter the case study enables the researcher to take a deep dive in the context and the object of study.

The comparative (or multiple) case study strategy, while merely qualitative offers a wide range and richness of data sources and material to ensure validity and credibility (Yin 2009).

My comparative case study is based on documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. Hence, my goal by using a wide array of methods was to collect diverse data in order to generate new insights about the persisting gender issues in management in an era of gender quota and various gender equality/diversity interventions in organisations (Bhattharcherjee, 2012).

2.1 Company document analysis

Through a systematic reviewing, documents can provide various types of information and support the researcher interpretation and analysis. For example, the preliminary document collection of the case companies provided substantial empirical background information in order to design and contextualise the study. The company document analysis gave me also hints and orientation for conducting my interviews. Finally, based on the document analysis, I could articulate my findings in line with my theoretical framework and elaborate a rich discussion. I collected and divided company documents from both sites in France and Germany into the following categories:

- Yearly review which comprises quantitative data on personnel situation and repartition, vision and strategy statement of the company
- Gender diversity/equality reports describing and monitoring the extent to which the case companies apply and measure the progress of its gender equality programmes
- Detailed brochures, booklets and internal material on the companies related measures

Some of these documents were openly accessible through the companies' website, while some were granted after informing the companies' HR chief officer of my intention and research project and upon acceptance of a confidentiality and anonymity clause. Therefore, all information related to the identification of the studied organisations are removed from this paper.

Data collected stretches within the period 2000-2014.

In addition, all this material was to be read together with the governmental and trade union regulations and cartel agreements on the respective national and regional levels to which the case companies had to submit. The above named documents are designated as supplementary documents.

2.2 Semi structured interviews

Alongside the dissection of gender equality interventions as a temporal, contextualised and cultural object based on the document analysis, semi-structured interviews were addressed to female and male managers of both case companies.

The field study conducted between 2013-2015 on both sites, in France and in Germany, generated data based on semi-structured interviews format comprising open-ended questions and addressed to 25 respondents, female and male executives from 28 to 59 years across the managerial hierarchies, in all core business units, fairly divided between the two company sites (12 interviews in France and 13 interviews in Germany). The non-probability snowball sampling is purposely heterogeneous (no filtration of age, ethnics or educational background) in order to integrate in my analysis the crucial question of intersectionality and ensure a certain representativeness in the population of interests

I conceived the interview guideline in order to seek for subjective views rather than absolute truths. My objective was to identify emerging patterns and themes, in line with a social constructivist approach, to unveil how the interviewee understands a phenomenon lies at the core of the research design. The goal of the interview was to find out how people perceive the organisational interventions, how they talk about and which meaning they attribute to it (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Therefore, the interview technique included three types of questions: main questions, follow-up questions, and probes. The main questions were designed to focus on the substance of the research problem. The main questions were therefore broken down into two major blocks thematising and addressing the research puzzle formulated as follows:

- *Managing in the automotive industry/ gender of/in management.* The objective of these questions were to grasp the extent of awareness on gender issues and relations in management and collect their individual views about this matter. Indeed often as pointed out in the large body of research (among others Williams,) the gendered nature of an organisation and the

gendering practices in place in particular in male dominated economic domains are not overt but subtly maintained and validated.

- *EOP Equal Opportunity Policy and other women advancement programs*. The goal of these questions was to uncover how male and female managers perceive and experience the question of gender equality/gender diversity in management in their respective organisation. Questions seek to find out whether they have been in contact directly or indirectly with such initiatives and how they understand them.

3. Key findings

3.1 Deep ingrained gendered processes in France and Germany

The examination of the gendering processes in both organisations illuminated the way every layer of the organisational life is pervaded by gender. Gender being a powerful if not the central organising principle within each organisation as formulated by Acker (1990) and later by Kolb and Meyerson (2000), the analysis of the local gendering processes shows how deep gender inequality is produced and maintained with minor variations between the two companies. In both companies, power relations and discourses of masculine managerialism combined with the exclusion of women in the SET fields dominate the structures and symbols in place. The study of gendered identities and interactions reveal strong gender bias in favour of men in both sites. However, while the analysis of the gendered processes at the French company shows clear unequal gender order, there is a conscious yet embryonic trend towards a sort of inclusion of women, in particular at the structural and discursive levels in the French company.

3.2 Mapping companies' policies

The various methods applied have generated rich and multi-dimensional data. Before further discussing the findings of the study, let us first summarise the key results by answering the research questions.

What composes a gender equality/women advancement programme? How do these measures vary from one country to another? How do Human Resources conceptualise gender equality in their particular organisational settings

The documentary analysis applying Ely and Meyerson's fourfold framework merged with Rao and Kelleher's quadrants for grasping organisational change revealed differentiated

understanding and conceptualisation of gender equality in the French and the German organisations. Whereas the German company uses essentially two frames namely the Equal Opportunity and Fix the Women frames, the French company relies on a diversified set of frames composed of Equal Opportunities, Celebrate Differences and Revise Work Culture.

Doing so, the companies actions are directed towards different level of change: while both companies target structural and systemic factors, the German company leaves the gender status quo intact and locates instead the gender issues in women's deficiencies. The French company, alternatively, calls for a "feminisation", women are not viewed as deficient but as positive change. The initiatives also tackle the prevalent masculine practices prevalent in the company

The interviews with HR chief officer of both companies, illuminates these differences by explaining the main mechanisms and factors at play when designing and implementing these programmes. The multiple partners and instances of control in France, and the cartel system in place in Germany can explain these differences. As a result, actions undertaken in the French company are under the scrutiny of external audits while the German company remains the sole responsible and designer of its strategy with only a requirement for reporting progress.

Doing so, the following matrices (see Figure 2 and 3) offer an overview of the interventions studied at the French and German companies, and identify four areas of impact and change: formal and informal, individual and systemic. (Rao & Kelleher's 2005). It provides a dynamic visualisation of the frames following Ely and Meyerson's conceptual framework (2000) and integrates the principle of gender change in organisation formulated by Rao and Kelleher (2005)

Comparison of gender equality measures between the *German and French companies*

Figure 2. Mapping of company interventions in the German company

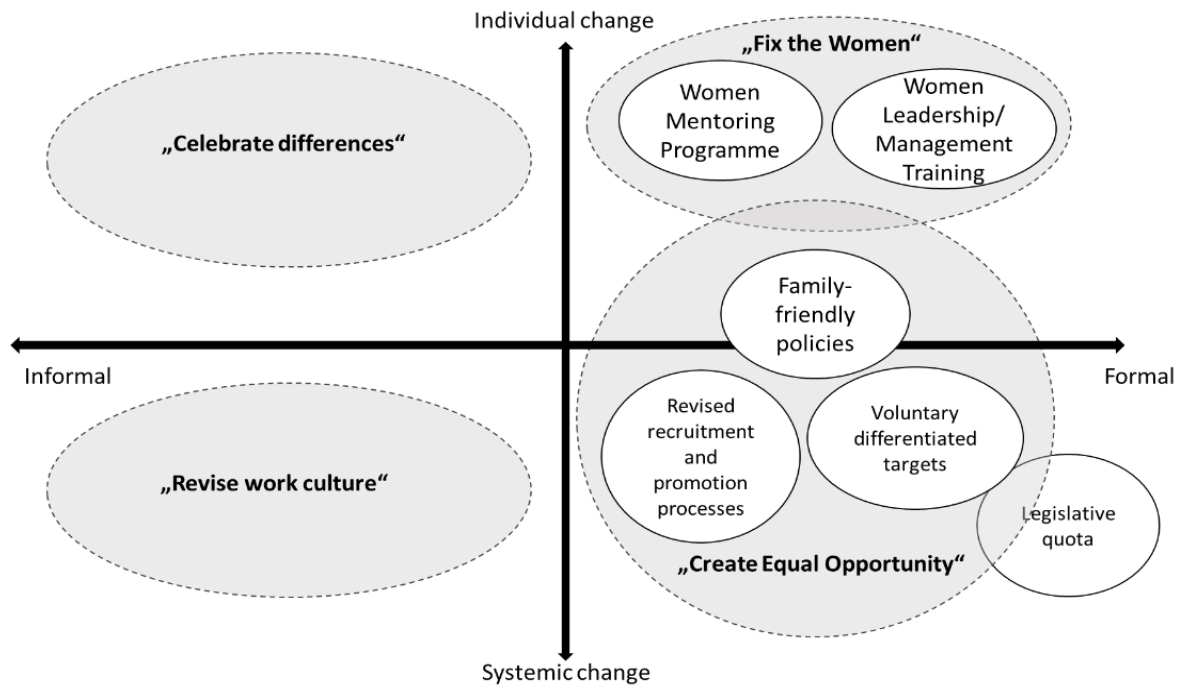
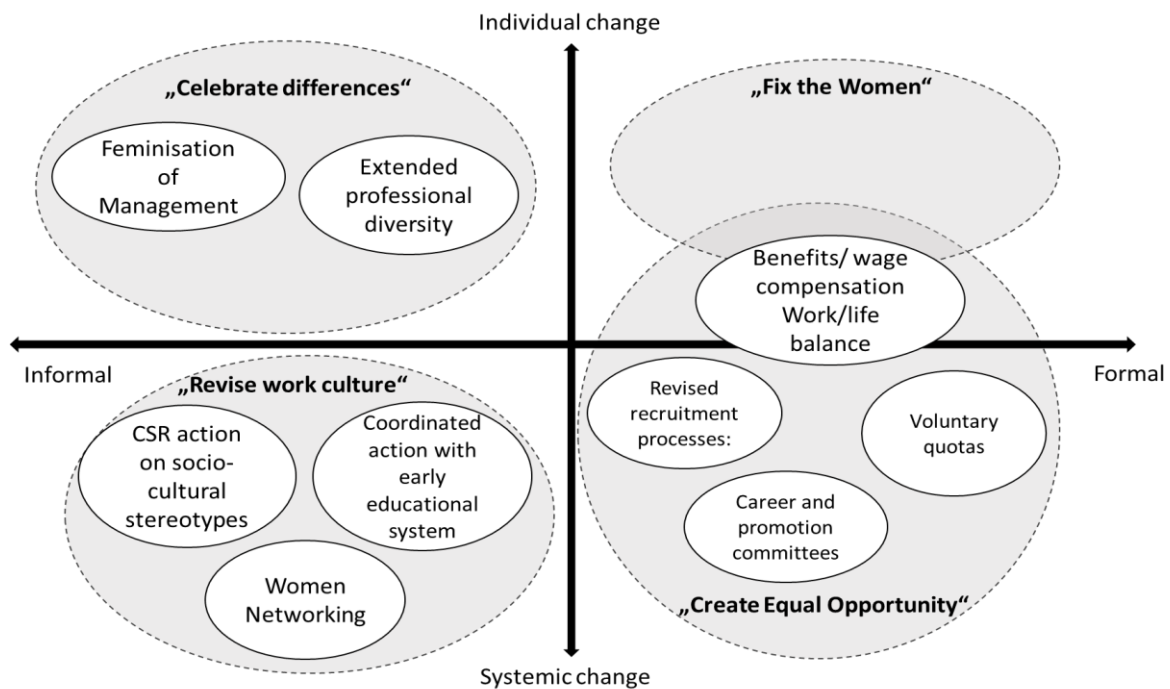


Figure 3. Mapping of company interventions in French company



Source: Author's combination and adaptation of Ely and Meyerson's (2000) fourfold frames and Rao and Kellehar's (2005) Impact and change of company actions

3.3 Voices of managers

The main findings stemming from the interviews conducted in the sample in France and Germany simultaneously show similarity and contradictions in the individual perceptions and experiences on the diverse gender equality interventions.

First, concerning the research question on gender in/of management, the overall sample in France and Germany while being aware of relative gender bias in some punctual circumstances, demonstrated a solid belief in the meritocratic systems built in their organisations practices and processes. Men and women in both sites believe that discrimination bare other forms, and most importantly gender alone is no longer the sole category discriminated, but stereotypes and prejudices around race/ethnics and age implicitly or directly affect greatly their career advancement in management. Gender is, thus, concealed as a second hand issue and individualised in some particular cases, as a result the concomitant intersection of gender race and age is overseen.

Second, the interviews from both groups; say male and female on both interview sites France and Germany reveal an underlying resistance towards affirmative actions such as gender-targeted quotas aiming at advancing women's career. These matters lie at the heart of their (partial) understanding and perception of gender equality in organisations. This can be explained by the temporal and contextual debate that shaking for instance the grounds in the economic and political landscape in France, and the subsequent controversy raised in Germany. The discourses reflect different forms of resistance among men and women managers, and logically between France and Germany.

In the German company, men managers tended to express irritation and rancour when talking about gender quota or amusement mixed with indignation when mentioning women advancement programmes. In the French company, men adopted a slight different line of attitude, by pointing out how regrettable and ineffective gender quotas are, but also underlining the need of such radical actions to reach substantial progress. Alternatively, men in the French company showed a bright acceptance concerning other gender equality programmes in place in their organisation.

Women managers showed distance towards gender quota for fear of being stigmatised, whereby female managers at the German company categorically repudiated any of these programmes ranging from differentiated quota to special training for women including

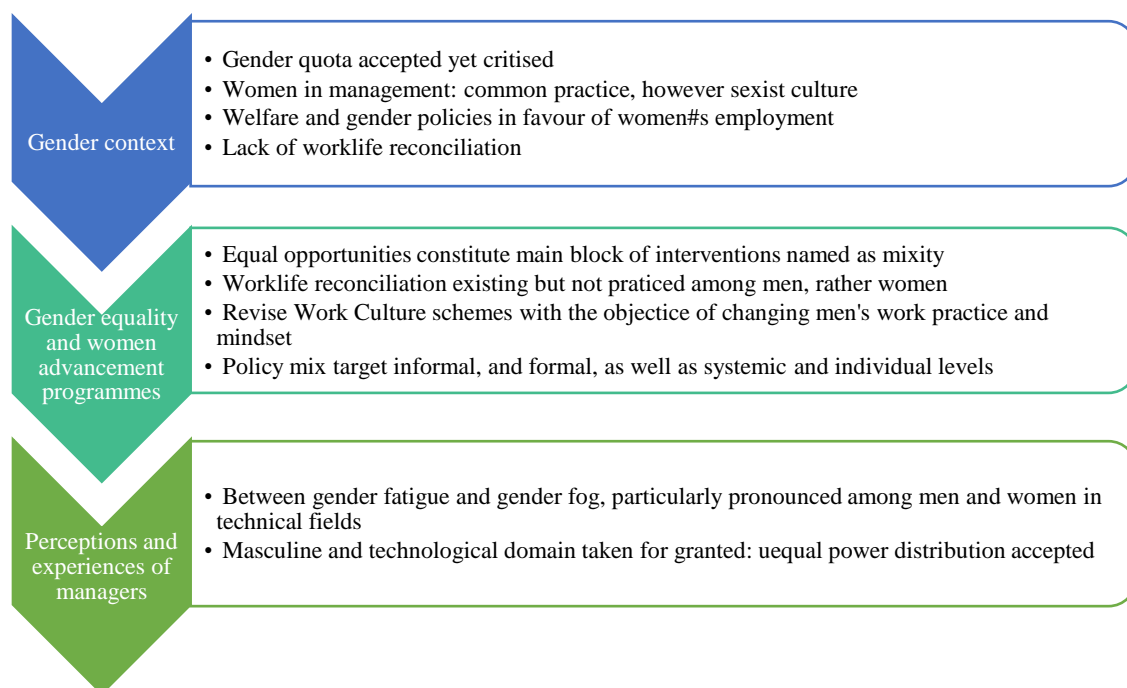
mentoring and networking. Female managers at the French company expressed nuanced feelings, like their male counterparts they questioned the long-term efficiency of gender quotas but underlined the crying need for change. Additionally in the French company, women variously embraced different elements composing their gender equality programmes, by selecting the one they found useful. (i.e. work life reconciliation measures, training and networking)

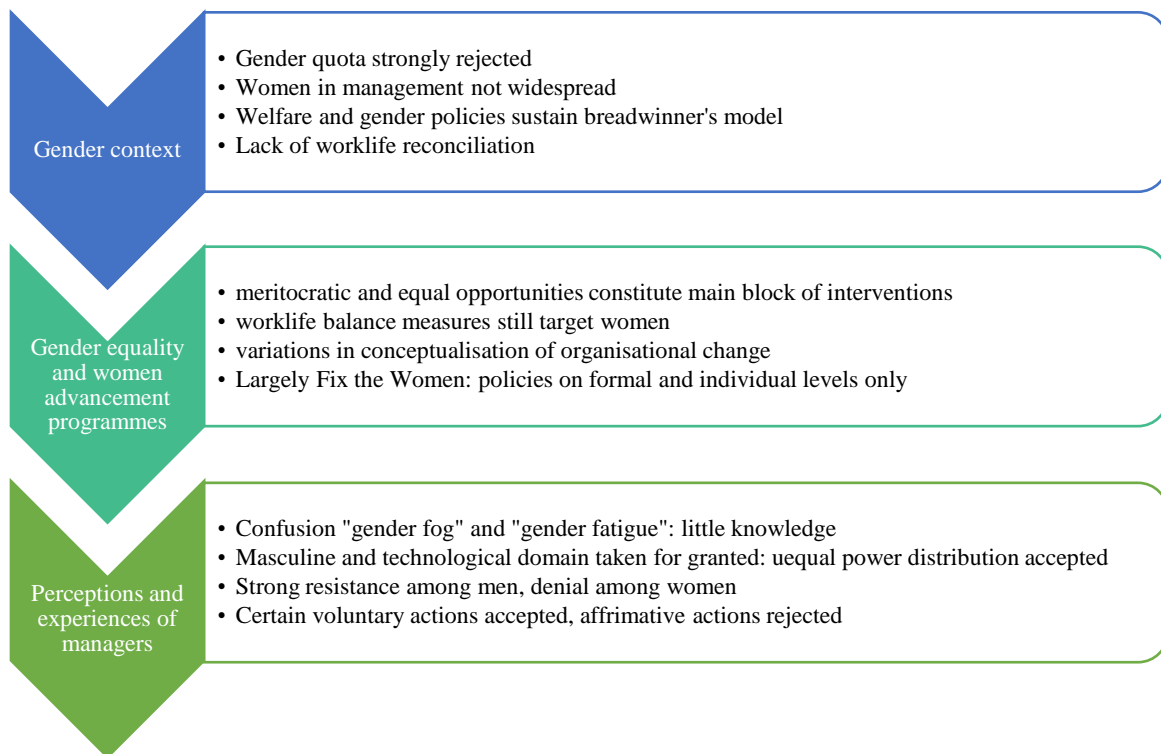
Finally, all interviewees clearly stated the importance of informal strategies over formal policies.

The figure below summarises the findings related to the research questions formulated earlier in this thesis

Figure 4. Comparative summary of findings

The French company





After having summarised the main findings of the present case study, the following part further discusses the reasoning behind these results, and attempts to formulate empirically driven and theoretical sound interpretations

4. Results discussion

4.1 Covered by equality...contemporary patriarchy is perpetuated

The thematic analysis of the interviews confronted to the mapping of company policies of each country shows the resurgence of neglected topics such as power relations (Acker 2010, Alvesson and Willmott 2011, Calás et al. 2014) and patriarchal capitalist system of subordination (Mies 2014). There is a need to bring back these axes of thinking into the centre of feminist sociological research. The research findings point towards a “structural adjustment” where women are seen as “part to be added on”. The belief in meritocratic systems stemming from liberal thoughts valuing individual work and competences as warrant of the equal opportunity and diversity logic resulted in the silencing of the gendered issues in the organisations studied. Covered by gender equality rhetoric, new forms of discrimination have gone underground. While the discourse of gender equality interventions in company have brought substantial change for a certain part of the female population in both organisations, when examining the interviews alongside the document analysis, discrepancies

appear: in fact what appears to be improvement is in fact only a reconfiguration just as Kelan et al. (2009) described in their research in ICT companies. The patriarchal system, say the institutional dominance of men power characterised by hierarchy and competition in both companies is firmly in place and perpetuated by means of two phenomenon observed; namely *the gender fatigue and the gender fog*.

As discussed earlier, toss up with gender fatigue (Kelan, 2009) and a sort of denial of discrimination affecting their professional life, the large majority of women managers interviewed seem to be lost in a “gender and diversity fog”. While insidious and implicit processes of discrimination are becoming more difficult to detect together with the omnipresence of gender rhetoric, women stay subordinated to men (Kelan, 2013) showing apparent consent. Additionally they include themselves in a greater “diversity project” so that gender is not made salient. These patterns are observable in both companies and strongly suggest toward what Gill, Kelan and Scharff (2017) elaborated as post-feminist sensibility at work. The authors argue that the rejection of gender inequality in the workplace, the attitude suggesting a gender fatigue and the acceptance of the unequal status quo are important discursive enactment of women’s, and to a certain extent men’s subordination. Hence, the research findings are documented witness of an operating distorted change, under the label of gender equality; gender order is being re-made, re-settled even polarised. (Campbell, 2014)

4.2 Backlash and restoring processes

As explained in the previous part, the results of the comparative case study shows that a neo patriarchal gender order persists taking different and subtle forms within the modern organisations, and camouflaged under a “Europeanised” rhetoric of gender equality (Maruani 2011). The interviews demonstrated how the concept of “gender fatigue” is largely in place, and the document analysis pointed out the individualisation of gender issues at the German company and the strong grip of meritocratic values in both companies. The study identifies further key mechanisms contributing to the perpetuation of the neo-patriarchal system. These mechanisms are responses against attempts to bring about organisational change.

According to a growing body of literature (Cockburn 1991, Ely and Meyerson 2000a, Kelan 2009, Hearn et al. 2009, Abrahamsson 2015) and drawn from the results of our interviews, organisational change provoke backlash/resistance in particular among men managers but also among women. Abrahamsson (2015) in her study of organisational change implementation in a Swedish lean production, coins this process as “restoring response” in particular in gender-

segregated or gender homogenous organisation, as it is the case in the present study. The data in our case study indicate that affirmative action's such as gender quota lead to new variations of gender unequal status quo. The dominant group, here men, view these measures as unfair advantage for the minority; thus women. They do not deserve such a treatment. The striking majority of men managers in our sample do not realise their privileged status and act gender neutral, by not feeling responsible for any gender issues, they disregard the organisational interventions and dismiss them as irrelevant. *This is ridiculous, there is already a well-functioning programme leading to management, this is open to both sexes, so why now having a specific one for women, offering even by-pass to higher positions (D. man, entry-level management, Germany).*

As mentioned earlier, the most pronounced and vivid resistance was perceptible among men managers in the German company, whereas in the French company timid but visible changes is occurring.

4.3 Contouring change: Undoing gender and questions of emancipation

The document analysis brought evidence that the large majority of measures adopted in both companies affected the structural formal and individual levels, mostly addressed to women. Very little is done to tackle the deep embedded gendered beliefs and cultural assumptions underpinning organisational practices, processes and interactions. In fact, only one company attempted at the time of the study to tackle the unconscious bias maintaining masculine norms of work, these interventions targeted mainly men. These attempts are enacted in forums, and training and seek to dismantle the traditional "gendering" of the professions. It unveils and decodes the dominant forms of masculinity embodied in the "ideal worker" attitudes such as presentism, language and so forth. These hidden adopted by the dominant group; remained until this action was undertaken, unspoken and invisible hence unquestioned and natural. In this respect, the experimentation of the French company points to the multiple "degendering" logic, (Deutsch, 2007) where various types of masculinity and femininity are brought about and, most importantly, accepted. The results of interviews in the French company confirm Ely and Meyerson's (2010) views and Hearn's (2011) work on masculinities. If control on men managers' ideas and behaviours is loosen; according to Ely and Meyerson (2010), possibilities to undo gender emerge accordingly. These lines of actions can consequently be qualified as "emancipatory" (Alvesson and Willmott 2011). While these actions enable the re-definition of masculinities in the French organisation thus undoing the typical gender roles,

women still suffer from a double burden, and are accepted to do well in their professional and their care work. Likewise, whereas the images and symbols machinery in place in both companies are largely masculine and normative in all respects, the latest limited yet notable interventions, in both companies deserve attention and discussion as they represent another mean for “degendering” the sector. The German company media covers women engineers, and disseminate a “girly” image of technical professions in graduate schools. In the French company women, engineers and managers are broadcasted and extensively displayed in the website or other social media, it produces “new faces” of management and technical fields. This mechanism renders visible a segment of the population who is normally invisible. It offers an alternative to the binary representation of genders associated to technical and managerial skills.

Finally, the interviews point toward a degendering process through the salience of other power relations such as race and age. At many occasions, in particular for women managers, age and race have played a more significant role on the interactional level.

Consequently, whereas it remains marginal, and constitutes small pockets of undoing gender, the results of this study suggest that a degendering and emancipatory trend is occurring to a certain extent at the symbolic level (Gherardi 1994, Acker 1992) and at the individual and interactional levels.

5. Conclusions

The qualitative study per se lacks generalisability criteria; the results are driven from a particular sector and industry, and highly contextualised. Whereas the findings are local, they offer a deeper insight into a complex phenomenon, that still nowadays puzzle scholars and practitioners. The multiple case study presented following a rigorous analytical “template” is replicable, the variety of methods used reinforced the internal as well as the external validity, so that the procedure although time consuming can be replicable and verifiable by other parties.

7.5 Recommendations for further research

In terms of direction for future research, this study points towards various strands of work. Further research using deconstructivist approach and critical discourses analysis could unveil the hidden meaning and subtext of gender equality discourses in a more articulated and focused manner. In order to overcome the increasing concealment and denial of gender-based

inequality, mind-subscripting technique (Hanappi-Egger 2012) can be used to debunk hidden messages.

Additionally, future research investigating the gender relations and interactions among managers employing focus group technique could bring greater insights in the issue of perception of gender equality/diversity schemes and how hanging identity of management of work life unveil invisible process of how gender gets done.

The above-mentioned techniques shall be applied alternatively to focus on “women’s voice or/and integrating men and masculinities. These lines of research can in future investigate not only the public spheres, i.e. private organisations but also the private realm, where the present studies and previous scholarship locate a persistent inequality.

Further work using the innovative conceptual and analytical tool presented in the study earlier can and should be conducted in other industries, for instance, a cross-sectorial study, or within a country could pinpoint fine-grained similarity or differences. Moreover, a transnational strategy similar to the present research but comparing for example third world and post-industrial societies could offer greater insight. These strategies can better locate to which extent company culture play a role and how the greater cultural and institutional framework shape the meanings given to gender equality measures.

More work is needed also to uncover the determinants of informal against formal networking and mentoring and how men and women make use of it, as the findings highlighted the crucial meaning given to these strategies regardless of the age, gender and company. Another intriguing result that emerged from the study is the rather unexpected effects of intersectionality in different contexts of gender equality on performing/doing gender at work and in particular at the higher management levels. This calls for deeper intersectional and cross cultural research. The study finally set the ground and opened up new lines of feminist and organisational inquiry to be further carried on not only in particular organisation or sector, but in a cross sectorial and transnational perspective. This dimension implies more interdisciplinary exchange and knowledge.

.This approach inscribed in a sociological comparative perspective could unveil the matches and the gaps between the theoretical assumptions underpinning the programmes and their “local” reception by the public concerned. Doing so the present case study bridged the individual, organisational and societal levels of analysis by combining various methods of inquiry: documentary analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. By building cross bearings between the two case, it could raise new differences or in contrary emergent convergences: This thesis could shed new interesting light on our understanding of

gender equality change in organisations. Opening the black box of corporate gender equality interventions with the help of an “embedded approach” generated deeper insights and crystallise factors that characterises a successful from an erroneous action, pointing out what is yet to be done.

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