



Turning good policies into good practice: Why is it so difficult?

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Where am I coming from?

- **Genders in/of Engineering:** ethnographic research on gender dynamics in three engineering fields
- **Prometea:** EU project on women in public and private sector engineering research; case studies of good practice
- **SIGIS:** EU project on gender inclusion in ICT use and design



Gender/women in STEM

- The problems
 - Recruitment
 - Retention
 - Career progression
- Structural/institutional factors
 - Education and socialisation
 - Lack of family friendly work practices
- Cultural factors ... *less well understood*

Strength of numbers

- Workplace cultures
 - Everyday interactions: work and non-work
 - Majority group creates a culture comfortable to them
 - In/visibility paradox
 - Women simultaneously visible as women and invisible as engineers
 - Subtly undermines self-esteem and confidence
- > *Women have to work harder to 'belong'*



Good policies

- Work practices for better work-life balance
 - Flexible and reduced hours
- Family/care-friendly policies
 - Parental leave, childcare, care flexibility
- Career development support
 - Networks, role models, mentoring, training, ongoing guidance
- Nurturing inclusive workplace cultures
 - Diversity training and awareness



Why IS it so difficult?!

- A. Implementation of policies \neq effective
- B. Attitudes and awareness
- C. Inadequate organisational commitment



A. Implementation failings

1. Policies not adequately publicised and promoted
2. Additional changes in organisational practice needed
3. Managers often impeded uptake of policies
4. Uptake and impact of policies not monitored and evaluated

B. Attitudes and awareness

- Resistance to change
 - ‘Gender is not a problem’
 - Persistence of gender stereotypes and norms
- Opposition to ‘preferential treatment’ for women
 - ‘for women’ policies
 - ‘positive discrimination’



Need to 'win hearts and minds'

1. Demonstrate the existence of inequality ... with 'hard evidence' on retention and progression
2. Make the case for intervention ... the business case for diversity and social justice
3. Increase awareness of how inequality happens ... so win support for specific measures
4. *Help people think about how they individually might contribute to enhancing or inhibiting equality and diversity*



C. Organisational commitment

- Commitment needed from the top, including commitment to:
 - Package of measures to address the issues
 - Adequate resourcing to implement effectively
 - Building support at all levels of the organisation
 - Learning how to improve on good practice
- Integrate equality and diversity into the core business ... mainstreaming

Conclusion: the need for 'culture change'

- Compulsion/legislation is not enough:
 - “need to win hearts and minds rather than just achieve compliance ... based on the understanding that *it is organisations not women who have the problems*” (Liff and Cameron, 1997)
- Requires changes in organisational cultures and practices, but also in gender cultures and practices beyond.
- ... *for all our sakes!*