

Women's Point of View

Women who are actively involved in the promotion of gender equality in organizations are frequently frustrated by the disparity between their ability to identify, understand, and analyze exclusionary organizational practices and their capacity to find simple and effective ways to mitigate them, not to mention the immense difficulty they encounter in trying to effect change. Agents of gender equality who advocate for the advancement of women, individuals tasked with prevention of sexual harassment, diversity monitors, and feminist activists speak of an exhausting struggle to make their points of view and arguments heard amid a cacophony of objections, humiliations, contempt, and apathy. The point of view they are trying to put on the organizational agenda with regard to practices and procedures in their workplaces is neither present nor considered worthy of being present in the decision-making processes that establish an organization's day-to-day reality. The prevailing assumption that organizational decision-making is rational, objective, and gender neutral obscures the fact that, in most cases, women's points of view, experiences, interests, and priorities do not feature in these decision-making processes, let alone in meaningful and impactful ways. Replete with gendered arguments and implications, these processes are certainly not gender neutral.

The main claim in this handbook is that **the process of change for gender equality in organizations is a process of representation, recognition, and validation of women's point of view on the practices of the organization.**¹ We propose that **what is excluded or disempowered in organizations are not necessarily women as such, but their point of view.** By "women's point of view" we mean: the collective way women participate in, experience, and give meaning to organizational practices. Organizational practices that exclude women are reproduced and persevere over time primarily because of the exclusion of the point of view of women from arenas of power in the organization and from planning and decision-making processes that shape an organization's day-to-day realities. Women are excluded when their point of view is neither reflected in nor shaping actual, day-to-day organizational practices.

1 In this handbook, we employ the term Point of View (POV) to bring to light the different experiences, voices and perspectives of women from diverse social groups and organizational positions. This usage overlaps with the concept of intersectionality, frequently utilized in the academic literature and public discourse to refer to the interlocking of gender, race, ethnic, class, and other social locations. Our preference for POV over the more familiar concept of intersectionality derives from the understanding that POV allows us to translate the more abstract notion of intersectionality into organizational practices. The concept of intersectionality is therefore inherent in the POV approach.

Hence, the long journey toward gender equality in organizations is also the long journey of women's point of view from the margins of organizational "attention" to the corridors of power and meeting rooms where decisions are made.

In this long journey, the women and men who are agents of gender equality may be seen as "travel agents" for the feminist perspective on organizational practices. The agent's actions are intended to accrue validity and power for this perspective, to recruit allies to support and recognize it, and to transform it into a significant and valid actor at the decision-making table. The journey takes place inside a network of organizational actors saturated with power relations in which women are often actively silenced. Organizational actors respond to women's point of view in various ways: from lack of interest to objections, from draconian tests of feasibility to mockery and hostility. The effect of all of these is the same: the marginalization and silencing of women's point of view.

This handbook provides a map to navigate this journey. We address the question of how to bring women's point of view from the margins of the organization to its center. To this end, we propose theoretical knowledge and practical strategies to promote gender equality in organizations. We analyze a broad array of organizational practices as exclusionary gendered practices: from human resource recruitment to work procedures and job assignments, from intra-organizational tracking and promotion to the prevention of sexual harassment, from practices of pay and compensation to organizational leadership. We examine various aspects of organizational life with the aim of identifying and understanding the exclusionary gender implications implicit in each, and propose remedial inclusive practices and the interventions needed to realize them and implement them in the organization. These are planned initiatives and are led by agents of gender equality – be they formal or informal – within the organization. Dealing with gendered organizational practices requires an infrastructure of organizational knowledge, recruitment of allies who will successfully represent women's point of view, and recruitment of various stakeholders in the organization to work on solutions in processes and sites of decision-making.

This handbook is intended for women and men who serve as agents of gender equality or agents of social change in organizations.² They may do so in their formal roles as gender equality officers or as advisors regarding gender equality or sexual harassment. They may assume these roles on their own initiative out of a sense of solidarity with their women colleagues or out of a desire to deal with their difficulties and improve their own situation. These agents often undertake the task with inadequate training and without a suitable foundation of knowledge in the field of gender in organizations.

2 In the handbook we refer most often to women as the agents of change, although both women and men can be agents of gender equality.

In the absence of this foundation, there is significant difficulty in strategic planning toward gender equity. It is also difficult to ensure that these activities yield significant organizational changes that enable women to participate in more significant and more equitable ways in the organization. This disparity between the agents' motivation to engage and the knowledge and tools they have at their disposal compounds the inherent difficulty of promoting gender equality in organizations. Unfortunately, the result is often a proliferation of ritualistic activities due to the absence of an overall focus or strategy.

The previous handbook we published, *From Gendered Practice to Practice of Equality* (2015), presented a broad overview of **the practical approach to gender equality change**. This handbook describes a series of organizational interventions for the promotion of gender equality - i.e., deliberate and pre-planned initiatives and actions to address exclusionary gender practices in organizations and replace them with inclusive practices that are beneficial to both women and men. We call this a "practical approach" because it is both implementable and practical, focusing on routine organizational practices, and because we base it theoretically on what is known as "the practice turn in the social sciences" and the pragmatic approach in sociology (Schatzki *et al.* 2001).

In this handbook, we provide a well-equipped toolbox for agents of gender equality and social change – both women and men – who initiate, lead, or coordinate planned collective action to promote gender equality in organizations. Each one of the proposed interventions is designed to give a voice and amass organizational power to the point of view of women in the organization. Taken as a whole, these interventions can provide a basis for a wider process of organizational change. The interventions are presented in three sections: deciphering and representing women's point of view, recruitment of allies for this point of view, and interventions to challenge exclusionary organizational practices.

Section One presents tools the agent of gender equality may utilize in order to decode and represent the point of view of women in the organization. This provides the foundation for the agent's work and provides a road map for changing gendered practices in the organization: where to intervene, what to promote, what to change, and how to set priorities. Women experience organizational practices as a personal rather than a collective experience, and thus interpret the difficulties they encounter as their own private problem rather than a general problem of the organization.

We offer several means of translating personal experiences into organizational practices. These include providing women with opportunities to express their personal and everyday experiences in the organization, find common ground with other women, decode and conceptualize these experiences as encounters with exclusionary organizational gendered practices, and imagine and design inclusive alternatives to the existing situation. Chapter 3, “The Point of View (POV) Group,” presents methodology for identifying exclusionary gendered practices in the organization from women’s point of view, while creating a common language and solidarity among members of the group. Chapter 4, “Catalog of Gendered Practices in Organizations,” supports translation of women’s personal experiences in the organization into an effective tool that visually represents the various gendered practices as perceived from their point of view. Chapter 5, “Assessing the Status of Gender Equality in Organizations: Quantitative Monitoring,” is a further layer in representing women’s point of view, this time by means of quantitative data from the organization. The importance organizations attribute to statistical data is well known and agents of gender equality can take advantage of this by formulating an organized and detailed portrayal of gender disparities in the organization. The three chapters in this section provide a broad foundation for designing and leading a strategic program for gender equality intervention in organizations, anchored in the experiences and points of view of women working in those organizations.

As noted, processes of gender equality change occur in organizational contexts that are saturated with political and power relations; these power relations are the main obstacle blocking the path to gender equality in organizations. Given this, **Section Two** of the handbook addresses recruiting allies for women’s perspective with a focus on the obstacles encountered by agents of gender equality as they work toward effecting change and implementing inclusive organizational practices. The chapters in this section deal with the core issues at the heart of gender equality change in organizations: recruiting power and giving women’s point of view weight and influence that can become compelling and even coercive in decision-making processes within the organization. Chapter 6, “Mobilizing Allies,” offers tools for recruiting allies, both from within the organization and from outside sources, to act and advance the process of change. This chapter is based on the understanding that a point of view is as strong and powerful as the organizational actors committed to its promotion. Therefore, one of the main roles of gender equality agents is to negotiate with different actors in the organization – supporters, opponents, and the apathetic – in order to promote the inclusive practices they aim to implement.

The chapter analyzes the recruitment process and presents different methods of recruiting allies and partners. Chapter 7, “Regimes of Justification, Controversies, Resistance, and Support,” focuses on one of the main obstacles that agents of social change and gender equality must overcome: regimes of justification. In the chapter, we explain in detail what they are, how they silence and invalidate women’s points of view, their role in the recruitment process, and how they can be dealt with in various contexts. Chapter 8, “The Leadership Group: Developing Leadership from a Gender Perspective,” the last in this section, focuses on recruiting women with power and influence in the organizations as agents of gender equality. The chapter presents a gender-sensitive conceptualization of the concept of leadership and practical ways to recruit women to join an intra-organizational feminist leadership group or forum. This group is a powerful tool for promoting gender equality change in organizations in partnership with a formal agent of gender equality. The section in its entirety provides a variety of strategies for achieving legitimation and support for activities directed at gender equality change in organizations.

Section Three of this handbook presents concrete activities and interventions for promoting gender equality in organizations. The success of these interventions rests on significant and compelling representation of women’s point of view and on recruiting the power of various organizational stakeholders and actors to the cause. The chapters offer a series of interventions in gendered practices common in organizations: decision-making, professional tracking, sexual harassment, silencing in speech acts, work-family balance, gender gaps in pay and compensation, and gender budgeting. Each chapter presents a detailed analysis of exclusionary gendered practices: their origin, how they function, how they are maintained, and their exclusionary implications for women. In addition, we offer organizational interventions aimed at remedying the exclusion inherent in the various practices and provide inclusive alternatives to these practices.

Our approach to promoting and achieving gender equality in organizations is based on theoretical approaches and an abundance of research in the fields of feminism, gender and organization, and the sociology of organizations. We chose to write this handbook in a non-academic format to make it more accessible to a broad and diverse group of readers and users. In this vein, the main body of the text contains few references to academic sources; instead, a list of resources for further reading can be found at the bibliography included at the end.

We wish you a useful and enjoyable reading experience,

Hadass and Zeev