



Details of counselling approach

Introducing and embedding gender mainstreaming in an organisation is a comprehensive change process. Change initiates movement; familiar territory is abandoned. This might trigger fear and resistance among female and male executives and employees. So if gender as a structural feature and analysis category takes centre stage, it is very likely that additional, very specific resistance will occur. Consequently, these change processes should not be implemented without internal and/or external gender competence.

Gender-oriented change processes

In practice, gender mainstreaming processes start at different levels and therefore place different demands on the gender competence of gender advisers.

Hence, we distinguish between gender mainstreaming (implementation) counselling that requires (for example, gender competences for the composition of organisational development processes) on the one hand, and gender counselling that is based on gender competence (for example, to implement gender training courses or gender-oriented project counselling)¹. Counselling is specifically tailored to a particular organisation. The basis is results from gender research and experiences from the gender mainstreaming counselling practice.

Gender-oriented change processes also always affect one's own identity and/or employees' individual ideas of those involved in the process. Gender counselling takes this into account without making people's personal resistance and fears the central issue of the change processes. At the professional level, implementation and application difficulties often occur due to the different approaches to gender-political questions and problems taken by the men and women concerned in organisations. We call this the "asynchronicity of the gender dialogue". This also describes the different experiences that women and men have gained in or through women's / men's movements.

¹ According to our knowledge, the difference between gender mainstreaming competence and gender competence goes back to the *Gender Institut Sachsen-Anhalt* (GISA). Cf. <http://www.g-i-s-a.de/content/artikel/508>



Levels of gender counselling

Gender mainstreaming is organisational development

Gender is a category that affects structures; the views on femininity and masculinity prevailing in a society are also reflected in corporate structures. Dominance cultures develop that are coined by the particular history and development of an organisation. Here, we distinguish between "male"- and "female"-influenced organisations, i.e. rationally dominated organisations are called "male-connoted structures" while emotional and social structures tend to be "female". It goes without saying that there are also emotionally dominated structures. In the profit-making business, we meet "male-connoted structures" more often, while in non-profit-organisations – and here especially in the social sector – female-connoted structures prevail.

Gender mainstreaming is HR development

The application of gender affects the personal (personnel as in 'of employees?') and thus also the individual level of executives and employees. Among others, this concerns the following questions: what gender role images, i.e. what normative ideas of women and men, do people have? What gender role images do they meet in the organisation? What gender competences do executives need to acquire in order to be able to lead their teams productively? What gender competences do executives need in order to lend professional support to their employees in the application of gender as an analysis category?

Gender at the professional level

is another relevant analysis category: it concerns taking the gender category into account in the planning and development of projects or professional emphases from the very outset.

The transfer of gender as an analysis category and the integration into professional work is currently the biggest challenge for all organisations that have triggered gender mainstreaming implementation processes at one of the three levels.

Assumptions of our counselling approach

The gender-political strategy of gender mainstreaming stipulated by the EU in the Treaty of Amsterdam is based on the following assumption: gender is a main criterion when it comes to solving economic, operational, social, societal and political issues. Therefore, gender is also a main criterion in the context of organisational development, HR development and professional quality development.²

We perceive gender as a structural feature, an analysis category, and invitation to act. This approach refers to a change of perspectives: from women's promotion to a focus on gender issues and gender relations. It is no longer about perceiving and seeing women as "discriminated" persons or persons in deficit. Embedding gender issues in the social, political, organisational and professional level is the core of this approach. As a result, male and

² For us, gender is a category that has a special effect on structures. It is differentiated, for example, according to age, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, social status / stratum, attitude towards values, educational level, family background, living situation etc. (gender diversity).



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female approaches as well as male- and female-connoted structural features are taken into consideration.

The introduction of gender mainstreaming aims at changing organisational structures and cultures under gender-related aspects. For this reason, gender-political and gender-democracy objectives always need to be formulated and, if required, negotiated with reference to a specific society or organisation.³

Organisations must be able to implement gender perspective at all levels, i.e. at organisational, personnel, professional and project level. While doing so, they consistently integrate the findings and experiences of gender-related research, counselling and training into their own professional work. The gender competence that is required is imparted through gender training courses and gender counselling.

Clarification of one's own counselling attitude

Good counselling depends on one's own attitude: do I understand counselling as expert counselling or as professional support like coaching or supervision?

Expert counselling implies high professional expertise, and great responsibility to know the right things. In expert counselling, the customer relies upon the expertise of the counsellor, he/she expects others to solve their problems or to give advice. This requires a high degree of professional know-how and field competence.

Professional support, on the hand, is based on professional distance, understanding by asking professional questions, and modesty when sharing expertise; on the other hand, it is about giving advice on how to combine gender with expertise and/or process knowledge. Professional support implies the ability to withhold one's own solution competences and approaches. Knowledge about process development and the understanding of group-dynamic processes are part and parcel of this knowledge.

With professional counselling in the sense of supporting and accompanying clients, it is necessary that clients are interested in solving problems and issues themselves.

Consequently, personal responsibility increasingly takes centre stage.

³ These lines refer i) to the changes in the organisational culture, i.e. a connection between gender and organisation needs to be established so that gender can be perceived as a structurally effective category within an organisation; ii) to decision-making processes at the different levels, i.e. in teamwork between men and women in their diversity, in communication structures, team development, conflict management and project work; and iii) to quality development and quality improvement at a professional level by applying gender as an analysis category.