**The effectiveness of a disruptive policy to increase**

**gender equality at a STEM university**

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The STEM sector (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) demonstrates a considerable gender gap (Catalyst, 2019). Women are not only underrepresented in STEM, they are often paid less, experience frequently more discrimination, and are more often excluded from crucial work processes compared to their male co-workers (Funk & Parker, 2018; Sherbin, 2018). Guaranteeing gender equality at a STEM university is of high importance because products that are generated by STEM institutions, such as artificial intelligence, are restricted in their functionality if developed and operationalized by people who are very similar to each other (West et al., 2019). The underrepresentation of females in men-dominated workplaces received prominent attention in research (e.g. Tsui, 2007; van Veelen et al., 2019). Studies have analyzed the causes for this phenomenon and pointed out that stereotypes and expectations regarding “women’s work” has substantial impact on the fact that fewer females choose a career in STEM (Hill et al., 2010). Additionally, more women than men opt-out during their scientific careers (Carlana, 2019). Overall, the lack of access to women peers, role models, and mentors displays a problem for sustainable gender equality (Madgavkar et al., 2019).

Recently, calls have been rising that to efficiently address these inequalities disruptive strategies are required for recruitment and retention of women in STEM occupations (Gender Action, 2020). Disruptive policies are defined as “measures that have the potential to produce significant and bold changes in the status quo in the short to medium term” (Gender Action, 2020, p.1.). However, only a very limited number of such disruptive approaches are known. Regarding the existing approaches we lack sufficient understanding of their implementation process as well as their impact. This study, therefore, describes the implementation and evaluation of a disruptive gender equality policy into the recruitment process at a European technical university. To boost the numbers of women academics the university board decided to open academic positions at their institute exclusively for female candidates for a period of six months. They additionally offered women a starting grant and mentorship.

We will investigate multi-sourced data from a one-year case study to formulate new insights on the intended and the perceived implementation process. Therefore, we contribute a detailed account of a realized disruptive gender equality policy. We will analyze interviews, archival data, and online surveys from multiple stakeholders of the implementation process to describe the preparation, introduction, operationalization, and revision of the policy. Based on our mixed-method research, the theoretical model will present an overview of the diverse stakeholders (i.e. organizational management, implementation agents, new hired employees, rejected candidates, as well as external public and national institutions) involved in the policy implementation process. Furthermore, the model illustrates the interplay of the stakeholders and their interdependence with such a disruptive gender equality policy. In addition, we will show the impact of the disruptive gender equality policy on the female representation within the STEM university.

Overall, with this study, we aim to contribute to the existent knowledge gap regarding disruptive gender equality policies, their components and impact. We aim to discover new explanations based on our theoretical model that help account for the persistence of gender inequality in STEM. Additionally, we would like to discuss an existing approach with its main learnings and inform other institutions on how disruptive gender equality programs can be implemented within their organizational policies and practices.

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**Janna Behnke** conducts her doctoral study at TU Eindhoven within the Human Management Performance research group at the department of Industrial Engineering and Innovation Sciences. Her research aims to investigate which factors contribute to a successful management of workforce diversity in STEM organizations. Primarily, the focus lays on examining the role of leadership in fostering an inclusive climate in organizations. In this respect Janna Behnke develops, gives and evaluates diversity interventions which focus on the daily processes and interactions of employees among themselves and between themselves and their supervisors. Janna studied Human Resource Studies at the Tilburg University and obtained her master’s degree with cum laude in January 2018. Her master thesis was concerned with gendered wording in entrepreneurial advertisement and how this masculine attributed wording undermines women's interest to apply for jobs in start-ups.

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