

Getting access to the field of labour organizations with a non-issue: Is the topic of „involved fatherhood“ incompatible with organizational values – or is it just of no relevance?

In this paper we discuss in how far the topic of „involved fatherhood“, which is implicitly included in our research question, affects the chances of getting access to the very object of inquiry. We argue that by entering the field of labour organizations with this specific research topic we will gain some instructive information about dominant cultural values in the field. Particularly the refusal to participate in a study, which aims to analyse the reciprocal impact of work organizations and employees on the realization of „involved fatherhood“, may reveal reservations on the part of organizational decision-makers. Our research topic might be in itself a challenge to gender norms and values, especially those incorporated in management.

In our qualitative research project we use three different approaches to recruit organizations of private and public sectors: 1. informal contact; 2. multipliers (insiders and experts); 3. cold calling. We present the outcomes of these attempts of getting access to the field and analyse how companies justify their rejection. To explain disapproval towards our study, we establish three methodological hypotheses:

- a) “Non-profit-topic”-hypothesis: Organizations refuse to be researched in general. Most of all, they fear disturbances of organizational routines, loss of time and resources (due to the research, e.g. interview time), difficulties when legitimating the research face to face with the general management or shareholders, and the publication of organizational secrets. Organizations tend to realize projects outside their direct organizational range or purpose (like CSR or diversity management) when they go along with organizational discourses and when the organization is able to make the benefit accountable by creating operating figures or legitimating common practices.
- b) “Non-issue”-hypothesis: The topic of “involved fatherhood” or work-life balance for men seems to be a non-topic for most organizations both in the economic and public sectors. Traditionally, limited availability due to family responsibilities is associated with female employees. There is no equivalent on the male side nor does male practice show any signs of altering this situation. Since organizations do not find themselves confronted with this issue there is no need to do something about it.
- c) “Taboo-topic”-hypothesis: We assume that the concept of “involved fatherhood” is not only seen as a threat to representations of hegemonial masculinity in the organization, it can also contest widespread norms about working hours and working arrangements. Especially past biographical decisions of (older) employees and managers may be called into question.

In our analyses we refer to various documents and data. A qualitative content analysis of websites of the respective companies serves as a basis to exemplify official organizational values in terms of “family-friendliness”. The presented statements will be contrasted with the arguments that were used to justify rejections of participating in our research project. To document our field contacts we designed a structured diary in which telephone calls, emails and letters were recorded in a chronological order. This instrument allows a detailed reconstruction of first contacts to selected organizations. In addition we refer to interviews with experts regarding stories, statements and comments on “family-friendly culture” in organizations. Overall, the aim is to shed light on those social mechanisms in organizational culture that undermine the power of heterogeneous practice.