



Best Practice

Organisational Culture

What is organisational culture?

“A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved problems ... that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”

(Schein, 1992, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Jossey-Bass)

There are three layers of culture:

- Artifacts: visible structure and practices, such as policies and procedures, which can be monitored and changed if necessary.
 - Espoused values: what people say they believe – these are not generally a problem, for example, most people believe that appointments and promotion should be fair and based on merit.
 - Underlying assumptions: unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, thoughts, and feelings – ultimate source of values and actions – these are much harder to change, though their effects can be mitigated.
- Which aspects of organisational culture are relevant to advancing women in SET?
- Department openness and inclusivity – how are part-timers and those on maternity leave, career breaks or sabbaticals included in the ongoing life of the department? How do departmental processes, procedures and practices impact on staff with caring responsibilities or part-time workers? Are senior staff accessible to more junior staff? Are social activities inclusive?
 - Departmental roles and responsibilities – are committees reviewed for gender balance? How often is membership reviewed and renewed? How is overload avoided on small numbers of women available? How are committee decisions, including on budget allocation, communicated more widely? Is participation on committees and panels recognised as part of the appraisal process and as a contributory factor towards promotion?
 - Visibility of women – are women at all levels encouraged to raise their profile externally, e.g. at conferences, and professional society activities, and internally by contributing to departmental seminars and presenting to research sponsors?

- Invited speakers – is the gender balance of invited speakers monitored? Are events organisers instructed to provide a gender balanced list of potential speakers? Is the percentage of female seminar speakers representative of the proportion of women at postgraduate level?
- Valuing staff contribution – how are achievements recognised and rewarded? Is teaching and administration and pastoral support to students as highly valued as research: if so, how? Is women's contribution recognised, for example, in publicity, departmental or university newsletters and websites, as that of men?
- Workload allocation – is it transparent? Is gender an issue in teaching and administrative workloads? How often is workload reviewed? Who takes ultimate responsibility for workloads?
- Induction and training – is there a formal university and/or departmental induction programme? Is there a mentoring or buddying programme for new staff?
- Appoint Female Faculty Ambassadors to support fellow female academics in their professional development and to work with senior staff on events and activities for women (*Imperial College*).
- Set out a clear pledge from Senior Management to address the challenges facing academic women and the action to be taken (*Imperial College*).
- Senior staff should regularly remind department members of the importance of gender issues (*York Chemistry Department*).
- Monitor male attendance at management training on gender and equality issues and target males to increase attendance if necessary (*Reading University*).
- Operate an open door policy by Heads of Department which encourages staff to discuss matters informally (*York Biology Department*).
- Heads of Department to host bi-monthly informal lunches with small groups of invited staff, such as junior academics, to share concerns and ideas (*York Biology Department*).

Quick Wins

These are some of the ways in which Athena SWAN award winners have developed a gender-friendly culture in their institutions and departments:

Leadership

- Set up a high level committee to review and address barriers and challenges to women academics (*Imperial College*).

Working Practices

- Consult staff about how they prefer to receive information, for example, via the departmental website or a web-based newsletter (*York Chemistry Department*).
- Provide a timetabled induction programme for all new members of staff which enables them

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to meet all key departmental personnel within their first month of employment (*York Biology Department*).

- Consider a system of allocating resources in proportion to the level of each person's research activity, taking into account publications, staff and grant applications (*York Psychology Department*).
- Ensure that administrative responsibilities, student supervision and marking workloads are transparent (*York Psychology Department*).
- Consider introducing a university-wide workload model to ensure consistency between departments (*Reading University*).
- Make sure that departmental meetings are scheduled at times when staff with caring responsibilities can attend (*Bristol Physiology and Pharmacology Department*).
- Hold lab retreats and larger departmental retreats each year so that academic staff and PhDs can come together and discuss topics relevant to all in the department relating to future directions and strategic planning (*Bristol Physiology and Pharmacology Department*).
- Make sure that there is a central social space so that staff can network on an informal basis (*Bristol Physiology and Pharmacology Department*).

Committee Representation

- Publish gender balance of committees (*Reading University*).

- Ensure that all staff members know the membership of key committees and that minutes are published openly on websites (*York Chemistry and Psychology Departments*).
- Make appointments to committees on a fixed term basis to ensure that membership changes regularly (*York Chemistry Department*).
- Take specific actions to encourage increased representation of women on committees, including by reviewing the selection processes. Steps might include: writing to all eligible women staff to encourage them to apply, asking ex-officio members whether they might nominate a woman to attend in their place, drawing up a suitable list of women to encourage to apply for lay positions, asking existing committee members to buddy new members, monitoring committee membership annually (*Kings College London*).
- Ensure that women are well-represented on decision-making committees, including as Chairs (*York Psychology Department*).
- Be mindful of 'committee overload' – the pressures that can be placed on the time of senior women as they are often invited to sit on committees and panels, not only for their experience, but also for gender diversity. Ensure that women have the necessary support to balance such commitments against their day jobs (*Bristol Physiology and Pharmacology Department*).
- Include representation from undergraduate and postgraduate students and post-doctoral fellows at staff meetings, Research and Teaching Committees (*Nottingham Psychology Department*).

- Be proactive and encourage women to sit on grant awarding bodies (*Bristol Physiology and Pharmacology Department*).

Raising the profile of Women in SET

- Promote the achievements of women in the departmental newsletter and in university magazines and annual reports where appropriate (*York Chemistry Department*).
- Make a conscious effort to invite female speakers from outside the department or university for seminars and issue guidelines to events organisers about the importance of ensuring a greater number of female external lecturers and visiting professors (*York Chemistry Department*).
- Hold an annual lecture on the theme of women in SET to provide a focus at least once a year for women in the institution to meet (*Imperial College*).
- Commission a work of art to celebrate women in science (or more widely) for display in a prominent place (*Imperial College and Queen's University Belfast*).
- Be proactive and encourage women to join external bodies, such as Editorial Boards of Journals, as this provides valuable networking opportunities and benefits long-term career prospects (*Bristol Physiology and Pharmacology Department*).
- Invite all female SET staff to join the GetSET database run by the UK Resource Centre for

Women in SET to have their details available for media appearances, public appointments, training etc (*Reading University*).

Sources of further information and guidance

The Athena SWAN Charter is a scheme to recognise and share good practice on gender equality in higher education employment. www.athenaswan.org

The Cultural Analysis Tool is a questionnaire developed by the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET (UKRC) to assist employers in understanding and benchmarking their workplace culture with respect to gender equality. The three questionnaires are for management, staff and HR and are analysed by UKRC who help the organisation develop a tailored action plan. www.ukrc4setwomen.org

The Royal Society of Chemistry's publication *Planning for Success: Good Practice in University Science Departments* includes lots of tips and advice on organisational culture. www.rsc.org

The Institute of Physics Project *Juno* also includes criteria for measuring organisational culture. www.iop.org

Why So Slow: The Advancement of Women by Virginia Valian describes many of the underlying assumptions which disadvantage women.

A presentation on benefits of changing culture in academic institutions is available at www.advance.gatech.edu/2004conf/3a_trower.ppt