The Dual Agenda and Collaborative Interactive Action Research Methodology: Reflections on Gender, Methodology and Organisational Change

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This paper explores the process of research and qualitative methodology using an explicit gender lens. In particular, the paper offers reflections on our experience with the ‘Dual Agenda’ concept of gender equity and organisational effectiveness and its associated methodology, as we have applied it in two Australian organisations. We report on the organisational entry and diagnosis stages; reactions from organisational members; and our experiences as an all female research team interrogating gender, organisational effectiveness and the ‘ideal worker’. In the new industrial relations environment we suggest that it will become even more critical that the link between gender equity and organisational effectiveness is made. Yet, if our research is a guide, this is not easy to achieve.

Introduction

This paper explores the process of research and qualitative methodology using an explicit gender lens. In particular, the paper offers reflections on our experience with the ‘Dual Agenda’ concept and the associated Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) methodology of Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher and Pruitt (2002). This concept argues that gender equitable organisational change can only come about by interrogating the core concepts of work organisation and the ideal worker and re-examining the ideologies underlying the gendered spheres of work and home.

We are currently applying the concept and methodology in two large organisations,1 UtilityCo and ManuCo. To our knowledge, this is the first time this has been done in Australia.2 The project has been underway for almost one year and here we report on the first two research stages of the project: organisational entry and organisational diagnosis; the reactions from the organisational members (managers and employees) to the concept and approach; and finally, our own experiences as an all female research team interrogating gender and the notion of the ‘ideal worker’ in male-dominated organisations.

Our attraction to the concept stemmed not so much from the organisational change perspective, but from our inter-related concerns about women and work in Australia, the rising debate about work-family tensions (Pocock 2003; Campbell and Charlesworth 2004; Buchanan and Thornthwaite 2001) and the lack of gender awareness in much industrial relations research (Baird, 2003; Pocock 2001; Pocock 1997). To us, Rapoport et al.’s explicit recognition of gender in the research was very appealing, as was the observation that a departure from established work-family research had to be made, ‘by re-framing the issues in terms of gender, directing attention to the role played by strongly held, usually tacit assumptions about how work should be done, assumptions that are linked to the traditional separation of work and family spheres and to stereotyped views of the role of men and women.

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2 We do know, however, of one other application of the process currently underway in the NT public sector.
in each.’ (xiii) Adopting this approach leads directly to interrogating the construction of the ‘ideal worker’ (Kanter 1977; Williams 2000), assumed to be a full-time male employee, unencumbered by family or domestic responsibilities and around whom organisations based their work practices and organisation of working time.

The Dual Agenda and the CIAR methodology

Rapoport et al recognised that while many companies in the US had introduced family-friendly policies during the 1990s, ‘few people were using them, and since nothing else had changed, those who were - mainly women – risked career repercussions’ (p xii). To them ‘[I]t seemed there was a need to make more systematic changes in work cultures and structure.’ (p xii). At the same time, a similar pattern was emerging in Australian companies, with researchers recognising that traditional, gendered work processes, organisational norms and structures often undermined and rendered ineffective the implementation of work-family and diversity policies (de Cieri et al 2002; Gray and Tudball 2003). To address this problem, Rapoport et al advocated an action research approach which sought to purposefully bring researchers and organisations together in identifying barriers to effective use of policies and assist in implementing experimental changes to improve the utilisation of family-friendly policies. The researchers’ role in the process is to identify the organisational barriers, suggest intervention points for change and to track and assess the outcomes.

Initially, the novelty and uncertainty of the research approach made it difficult to find participant organisations, but eventually Xerox took the initiative and an action research project was launched in 1991 (Rapoport et al 2002, xiii). The aim was to ‘use work-family issues as a catalyst for organisational change at the level of work practices’ (xii). The results of that project led to the finding that ‘it is possible to restructure work in ways that actually enhance organizational effectiveness while making the workplace more equitable and improving the quality of working people’s lives’ (and xii). Thus the notion of the ‘dual agenda’ - of organisational effectiveness plus gender equity - emerged. Since then, the dual agenda concept and methodology has been used in a number of cases in the US and the UK, although with varying degrees of success (Lewis 2001; Lewis and Cooper, 2005). Lewis’s and Cooper’s case studies demonstrate some of the difficulties associated with maintaining organisational commitment to research of this kind.

In Australia (as elsewhere) issues about the availability, access and utilisation of family friendly policies are about gender as much as industrial relations and the ‘dual agenda’ approach therefore offered us an opportunity to link the two areas. Furthermore, Rapoport et al also recognised the emergent state of their conceptual framework and methodology, and so this project provided an opportunity to test both the concept and the methodological approach.

The CIAR methodology is a qualitative approach aimed at getting beyond and below taken-for-granted assumptions about the ‘ideal worker’ and the organisation of work. It is based on a cohesive set of underlying principles which set it apart from other, conventional case study approaches. In being so explicit about the role of the researcher and underlying assumptions in the research process, the CIAR approach is also more akin to feminist methodological styles and consequently, is different to the conventional approach to industrial relations research, which has tended to be gender blind (e.g. Danieli and Greene 2003; Hansen 2002; Wajcman 2000). The CIAR principles are:

- ‘mutual inquiry’, intending to approach relevant issues with a goal but not pre-determined solutions;
• ‘fluid expertise’, outlining the roles of active learners and teachers of both researchers and organisation members;
• ‘honouring resistance’, reminding all participants of the recurrent, yet normal resistance to change; and
• ‘keeping the dual agenda on the table’, emphasising the need to maintain the connection between organisational effectiveness and employee personal life/well-being (Bailyn 2003).

There are four separate stages during the research process:

1. Identify the work practices and work-life policies that have implications for organisational effectiveness and gender equity.
2. Provide a work culture diagnosis for the organisation. This makes the costs and consequences of the work practices visible.
3. Identify leverage points, so-called ‘interventions’, for ‘small wins’ change that would both benefit the people who are doing the work and the work itself.
4. Help the organisation to implement the changes, that is, the ‘interventions’, and evaluate the outcomes.

While the stages appear to occur in a uni-directional fashion, the reality of the research process is far less linear with some retracing of steps and merging of the first two stages. Having said that, we are now at the third stage of identifying, or at least suggesting, the ‘leverage points’ in both organisations and can report on stages 1 and 2. Before detailing these research phases, however, we describe the two research partner organisations.

**Gaining Entry**

CIAR is action research specifically directed towards change in the organisation for the improvement of gender equity and organisational efficiency. With this aim in mind, the organisations had to be ready to accept such a research philosophy and style. Entry to the organisations was negotiated through 2004. As others have noted, this can be a difficult phase and may be expected to be more contentious when dealing with the gender issue, but assisting us was the fact that in both cases, we had established connections through personal contacts and previous research. Importantly, both organisations also had accepting research cultures and some pride in their work-life policies. Further, in the case of UtilityCo, earlier research on work life had been conducted which portrayed the organisation in a favourable way (Wright and Sheridan, 1998). At ManuCo, the announcement of 14 weeks paid maternity leave and the introduction of a work-life strategy were favourable backdrops. However, in both cases organisational and management interest really stemmed from the issues of work-life tension and work-family balance, rather than gender. Gender, it must be said, was not their primary concern.

Arrangements for the research were finalised in late 2004 and the project commenced in 2005. The research process, however, is challenging and not without complications. One complication is that the two organisations in which the research is undertaken are located in different states, one in NSW and the other mainly in Victoria and South Australia, adding an extra dimension to research coordination and logistics. To provide the academic support for the project we therefore organised an academic research team that was also located in the same cities as the head offices of the organisations. Thus, one chief investigator and one research assistant are located in Sydney, the other chief investigator and research assistant are
in Melbourne. Both chief investigators have full-time university positions and the research assistants work part-time on this project. As our interpretation of the CIAR method was to have a researcher working in the organisation for two days a week over the project’s life, we also had to find researcher assistants willing to become embedded in the organisations to this degree. Furthermore, the methodology requires internal collaborators. We are fortunate to be joined by two willing liaison people from within the organisations, both located in the HR divisions of their companies. In one organisation, however, there has been turnover of people in this internal management role as well as other HR roles, and this has required additional and repeated validation of the methodology and objectives by the chief investigator.

The Organisations

UtilityCo is a NSW state owned corporation and has a workforce of just under 3,500. For UtilityCo, the concerns which initially attracted them to the project were how to maintain the health and well-being of their workforce, while at the same time attracting and retaining a younger and more gender balanced workforce. The composition of UtilityCo’s workforce is predominantly male, with only 23.4 per cent female representation. The workforce is culturally diverse, with 21.4 per cent of employees from Non-English speaking backgrounds, representing 64 different languages. Over one-third of employees are managers and professionals and 16 per cent are labourers. The average employee age is 44 with 72 per cent of the workforce over the age of 35 and an average length of service of 15.67 years.

ManuCo, located mainly in various sites in Melbourne and in Adelaide, is the major employer in the Australian auto assembly industry. For ManuCo, the immediate employment and work-life concerns are how to recruit more women, how to re-orient the company culture to be more ‘work-life’ and ‘family-friendly’ and how to successfully introduce and diffuse throughout the whole workforce a new program of work-life policies. At the commencement of the research ManuCo had a workforce of some 9500. The workforce is predominately male (90 percent), blue-collar (75 percent in hourly, plant-based positions, 25 percent in salaried, managerial or professional); culturally diverse (more than 60 nationalities) and aging, with 51 percent aged over 35 years. While these features are broadly characteristic of the industry as a whole, ManuCo has comparatively fewer females than the other auto assemblers.

Both organisations are relatively highly unionised. At UtilityCo 60-65 percent of employees across the organisation are union members. At ManuCo, most of the blue-collar workforce is unionised, while relatively few of the white collar, managerial employees are union members. Structurally, both organisations still have a separate industrial relations function (albeit located under the umbrella of HR), and in both organisations there is a hardening of management’s approach to the unions. At UtilityCo this seems to be driven by new senior management, some from the private sector, as well as a political climate questioning third party involvement. At ManuCo, the influence of head office is increasing with a newly appointed American CEO and pressure to streamline operations.

Applying the CIAR Methodology

As the CIAR methodology is a collaborative relationship between the academic researchers and the organisation, a liaison person in the organisation is needed. From the beginning we had very willing ‘contact’ people in both organisations who became in effect ‘insider’ researchers. They, together with the four academic researchers formed a research team. At the first meeting of this team on 2 March 2005, the name DART (Dual Agenda Research Team) was coined for this group. It was perhaps no coincidence that the team members are all
females; Rapoport et al (2003) found themselves in the same position and also commented on the gender construction and inter-relations of their dual agenda research team.

The research assistants entered the organisations in early 2005. With key support from our liaison people, they were readily accepted into the HR divisions and quite soon became embedded in the organisations. They have access to desks, computers, telephones and each organisation’s intranet. This gives them an insider’s perspective and allows a certain degree of ethnographic research and participant observation to be undertaken. So accepted have they become, that one of the challenges is how to maintain their independence and research status and to avoid being drawn into organisational politics – of which there are many. Focusing on ‘salient business needs’, such as workforce demographics and sustainability, provides an important ‘hook’ for the projects. At ManuCo for example, the main such goal was to increase the representation of women both for long term workforce sustainability and to improve market share by better harnessing female customer demand for cars.

Rapoport et al say that ‘[A]t the beginning of a CIAR project, some excitement and energy is likely. Moving from the concept to its implications for workplaces is, however, not straightforward. Linking gender equity and organisational effectiveness is counterintuitive to most models of organisational success’ (2002, 76). The energy and excitement were also definite characteristics of the very early stages of our project. One of the researchers reported at the first DART meeting that there is a noticeable degree of ‘excitement on being on site at ManuCo and being ‘embedded’ in the organisation’ (Minutes of DART meeting 2.3.05). At the same meeting the UtilityCo researcher reported that ‘there is a very high level of enthusiasm for the research and this comes from various workers of UtilityCo, especially women’ (Minutes of DART meeting 2.3.05). While the enthusiasm has not waned, maintaining the project has become more time consuming and intensive as the stages of collecting data and providing feedback gathered speed, and indeed as the organisational context for the project has changed. At ManuCo for example, job losses of some 1400 positions following the decision to remove the third line production line in Adelaide has made keeping a broader organisational focus on the project more difficult.

The position of the ‘insider’ researchers is another issue worth examining. Both are located under the broad HR umbrella and while the general manager of HR in both cases supports the project, they are not actively engaged with it on a day-to-day basis – nor would we really expect that. More specifically, both projects are located with the diversity/equity group rather than industrial relations group. This may reflect the more masculine orientation of traditional industrial relations in these organisations and the more female orientation of equity and diversity policies. Another aspect is that being located within HR can make it difficult to get beyond to the business centres of the organisations – where organisational change really does have traction. Upward recognition is a further issue. We have entered both organisations at a mid-point (albeit reasonably senior) in the hierarchy, but are still working up to recognition from the most senior levels of management and the Boards. Having said that, the projects appear to have good acceptance in both organisations, and earlier feelings of needing to justify our presence have abated. The next stage is to actually implement the intervention points – and this is proving to be where some of the predicted resistance emanates.

The stages set out in the CIAR approach suggest a linear and sequential approach to the research. For example: ‘The research part of CIAR refers to the process of surfacing underlying assumptions, identifying their role in the way the system works, and showing the links to work practices that may have unintended negative consequences for equity and effectiveness’ (Rapoport et al 2002, 74). To date we have found the process to not be nearly as linear but, instead looping round – taking some time to surface underlying assumptions, to work out the system and then to return to the underlying assumptions. Though guided by the
directions set out by the CIAR methodology, our researchers have learnt on the job as well, and have also had to pursue a rather organic path to find their own way in and through the organisations. In the first stage, the aim is to identify any cultural or organisational structures, policies, practices and assumptions that might impede or undermine gender equitable work-life integration and organisational effectiveness. Following Bailyn and Fletcher (2003) key questions that shaped our investigations were: Who is the ideal worker in this work/area? How is performance/commitment measured, rewarded? How and for what purposes is work organised? How do these norms affect men, women, those with caring responsibilities?

A multi-method approach to gathering data for the organisational diagnosis has been used in both organisations and Table 1 summarises the techniques used to date. For the most part, the inside researchers undertake the ongoing data gathering, with visits, interviews and input from the two chief investigators at various points and for various issues. For example, the focus groups at UtilityCo and ManuCo have been conducted by both the inside researchers and the external academics, and plant visits and some interviews have also been done this way.

**Table 1. Summary of data gathering techniques used in the conduct of the research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UtilityCo</th>
<th>ManuCo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic style research, including observation of, and interactions and discussions with, HR personnel</td>
<td>Ethnographic style research, including observation of, and interactions and discussions with, a range of personnel including white collar and plant employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination of organisational charts, statistical employee data, awards, policies and employee opinion survey results</td>
<td>Examination of organisational data, including employee and HR data, awards, internal presentations, policies, records of other internal projects, employee assistance program data, EOWA submissions/reports and employee opinion survey results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 formal interviews with UtilityCo staff</td>
<td>33 formal interviews with ManuCo employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 roundtable focus groups (about maternity leave)</td>
<td>6 focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Formal presentations to UtilityCo staff</td>
<td>Attendance/presentations at 5 Women’s Committee meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Feedback sessions to UtilityCo’s HR staff</td>
<td>14 feedback sessions to ManuCo employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions regarding collaboration between Spokeswomen’s Program and ‘Dual Agenda’ project</td>
<td>Presentations to HWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal and informal presentations to Spokeswomen’s Program</td>
<td>4 Field Visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Field Visits</td>
<td>on-going liaison with ‘insider’ researchers</td>
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<td>On-going liaison with ‘insider’ researchers</td>
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After almost 10 months in the organisations we are approximately at the half way point in terms of the CIAR stages. An organisational diagnosis was developed and feedback sessions undertaken across both organisations which has led both to a further refinement of both diagnosis and possible interventions and an increase in organisation awareness about the project. We are now preparing for the interventions. This is where the research moves from the traditional case study approach to a more action based and change approach. Although it should also be noted that in many ways the presence and involvement of both the insider researchers and outside academics has catalysed a number of issues and raised the prominence of gender in the organisations – thus being interventions in themselves. Perhaps it is the hardest time: first, to get agreement on where the interventions should be and second, to get acceptance for carrying out the interventions. The latter issue appears to be more of a problem.
in UtilityCo than ManuCo. However, the downsizing at ManuCo and the loss of the HR Executive who supported the project within the organisation and who also was a prime driver of the Women’s Committee (WC) may limit the reach of the agreed interventions.

While the purpose of this paper is to focus on the methodology of the project rather the findings, it is worth noting the issues identified as we near the end of the first two stages and discuss our diagnosis with the organisational members. At UtilityCo we first identified a long list of issues that affected gender equity and organisational effectiveness and then distilled this to three suggested intervention issues. The first was to change the very ‘blokey culture’ of certain parts of the organisation; the second was to attract, retain and promote female employees; and the third was to improve access to and quality of existing part-time work arrangements. At ManuCo the issues that came to the surface were the patchy knowledge of the work/life strategy/policies across the organisation, especially around part-time work; the long hours demands and culture, particularly for salaried employees; and different organisational understandings of the gender ‘problem’.

Reactions from Organisational Members

Of course, in organisations the size of UtilityCo and ManuCo there is a wide and diverse spread of managers and employees and the researchers have admittedly not been able to talk to every person or even every group. The groups with a direct interest in the dual agenda project can be divided into those employees with gender or work-life concerns; and those managers who have some connections to these employees or the project. Other potentially interested parties are the unions, senior management and other lobby groups within the organisations.

In both organisations, we have been given eager reception by most employees. Facilitated by management we have been able to hold focus groups of employees, not always an easy thing to manage because, of example in the case of ManuCo they have to be taken off line, and at UtilityCo have to come in from distant plants. This spatial spread has also meant that not all employees who would have liked to have been able to be involved. However, through a mixture of phone calls, email communications and interviews, we believe we have been quite effective in reaching many in both organisations.

One interesting example of the positive response to the project was the very quick identification with a group of women who had concerns about maternity leave and return to work options at UtilityCo. Very early in the project a focus group was organised – even before the diagnosis was complete – and some action was taken. More work needs to be done to complete this part for the project as an intervention, but it is a clear example of where the stages overlap and researchers are in danger of running ahead of themselves.

As noted above, to some degree the project has become ‘owned’ by the diversity and equity groups in both organisations. This has meant we have had to work hard at times to go beyond those boundaries, even though the subject matter clearly intersects with other areas of management and the organisation. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly given the gender silence in organisations, the women’s committees in both cases have worked hardest at forging links with the dual agenda research team. In the case of UtilityCo, this has also been one way for their women’s committee to be reinvigorated. Given the contracting market for ManuCo’s products, however, the change in senior personnel and the stress many are under to deal with ‘core business’, appears to have led to a waning attendance at WC meetings. The identification of the project with the WC may make it more challenging to spread the interventions across the organisation. Proving the value of the research to the organisation is
one real obstacle. For example, being able to gauge the financial costs to the organisation of
the gender and work-life/family tensions is necessary both in terms of the dual agenda
concept and methodology, and in terms of getting organisational, (i.e. managerial), acceptance
of proposals to change. That is, business case arguments to change gender inequity are
needed, and yet this financial data, such as costs of turnover, costs of discrimination claims,
costs of lost time due to dissatisfaction, can be very hard to obtain – often because the
organisations do not specifically collect this data. More input from the organisation members
is probably required but this too is also a drain on their time and energies. On the other hand,
a business case argument for advancing gender equity also presents some very real problems.
For example, the contracting environment at *ManuCo* when there are redundancies rather than
any expansion of employment makes a business argument for increasing the representation of
women seem much less relevant.

Justifying the methodology used is another issue. In particular, we noted that the qualitative
methods quickly met with scepticism if the feedback the managers were receiving was not to
their liking. Questions and comments such as: ‘How many people did you say you
interviewed?’ and ‘It’s only a small sample’, or “why have you interviewed so many women,
when they are not representative of the organisation” were ways of undermining the
credibility of the findings from the diagnosis phase – despite the fact that the findings were
generally seen as accurate and accorded with previous studies and climate surveys.

**Reflections on Gender in Organisations and Research**

The dual agenda concept explicitly brings gender to the fore and as we reflect on our
experience of the CIAR methodology to date, we can now identify some core themes, issues
and challenges for us to consider as feminist researchers. The first is the gender of the
research team. The DART research team is all female and most of our interactions have been
with females in the organisations. At *UtilityCo* the female employees were most excited about
the project, especially those with pregnancy and maternity experiences and also those with
harassment and discrimination grievances. At *ManuCo*, one comment from a male focus
group participant was about the alleged biased nature of the research because it focussed on
women. For us as researchers, there have also been discussions about our own reactions to
working hours, overwork and sharing the load; furthermore, authorship and ownership of the
project have been explicitly aired so that we practice what we seek to preach.

The second is the challenge of keeping gender on the table and not burying or avoiding
reference to gender in our interactions for fear of backlash or reprisal from the organisation.
This was especially so in the early phases of the research we were pleased to have got into the
organisations and were somewhat wary of being too explicit about the gender issue! However,
one the gender issues began to surface as key problems in the organisation then we felt more
secure about being more explicit. However, particularly in the face of some pockets of
resistance it is not easy to maintain that strength and we often have to remind ourselves that
that is the principle of the dual agenda research: to keep both gender and organisational
effectiveness on the table.

The third issue is role of the research assistants who have been embedded in the organisations
and carrying a dual role as ‘insider/outsider researchers – and as female researchers. As
mentioned earlier, this insider/outsider role can lead to some delicate relationship issues. The
longer the researcher works inside the organisation, the more they become accepted and part
of the organisation, and yet they need to constantly remind themselves and others that they are
researchers first - as well as collaborators with the organisational link partners. The partial
withdrawal of the research assistant at ManuCo for the analysis/organisational diagnosis phase has proved important in her re-establishing some independence from the organisation.

The fourth is the inside researcher’s role as an ‘organisational therapist’ also became slightly problematic – and revealing at the same time. This was especially the case at UtilityCo where many of the employees interviewed in the early stages were grieving about their work-life and work-family tensions and were so keen to tell their stories to an independent researcher. The burden then falls on the researcher to seek more immediate remedies and solutions than the project’s resources really allow. We wonder if the all female nature of our research team and perceptions of women as more caring increased this particular effect. In both cases, some concern has been expressed in feedback sessions about whether any interventions will in fact come out of the project and the researchers have been feeling some pressure to ‘keep faith’ and deliver on the interventions within a context where this is really beyond their control.

Finally, the next issue follows from the ‘organisational therapist’ role and is about the confidentiality of issues raised. Tapping into the notions of the ideal worker and gender in organisations produced an unexpected outpouring of responses, some of which we were asked to keep confidential by the respondents, but about which we also felt an obligation to report on in general terms and also in feedback sessions. The ‘insider’ researchers facilitated many of the initial interviews. This has led to lists of interviewees being circulated to managers and also some tensions where the researchers have made and followed up on their own contacts within the organisations. Managing the fine line of confidentiality and obligation to the organisation has, at times, been a challenge, but we have persisted and feel confident that all parties’ interests are being respected.

Conclusions

Our experience to date leads us to believe that the CIAR methodology does have a value beyond the methodologies that we have used in other qualitative, organisationally based research. But we also consider some modifications of the CIAR method could be made. In particular, our progress through the stages has not been as linear or predictable as recounted by Rapoport et al (2003). Further, the emotional and temporal intensity of the approach, as we have practiced it at least, needs emphasising and understanding.

In the context of the two organisations in which we have applied the dual agenda concept and the CIAR methodology, we see that our research has been an external force used to revitalise gender as an issue in both organisations. However, this explicit focus on gender has not been without its challenges in a male-dominated organisation and has led to some concerns being expressed in feedback sessions about the privileging of women rather than men. In the process, it has also brought the issue of our own female gender and our interactions with each other and the organisations more sharply into focus.

We have also found that despite our efforts, it has been difficult to spread information and understanding of the project across both organisations. To a degree we have been siloed into the more ‘gender friendly’ diversity and equity areas. The process also suggests that gender is a difficult concept to operationalise in organisational research, even organisational research on work/life integration (see Charlesworth et al 2005, 9-13). Both organisations have had to be persuaded that organisational effectiveness is related to gender – the very reason Rapoport et al (2003) argued the need for their integration. We have a sense that the organisations do not believe it, but are willing to go along with the rhetoric up to a point. They definitely seek more concrete evidence as the project processes and suggestions for intervention are raised, and at this point the qualitative methodology is also brought into question.
Despite one organisation being in the public sector and the other in the private sector, despite the fact that they are in very different industry sectors and in different Australian states, the research experience and path has been surprisingly similar in both organisations. It is true that we set about to conduct parallel studies of the dual agenda, but we did not set out, necessarily, to have the same experience in doing so. However, the research has highlighted common methodological issues. In both organisations, the research has come to be associated with the equity and diversity areas, highlighting gender and recognition issues within organisations. In both cases the ‘official’ women’s groups of the UtilityCo and ManuCo leveraged off the dual agenda concept and in both cases the issue of qualitative methodology versus quantitative reality has arisen. Finally, on the broader topic of the interaction of industrial relations policy and gender awareness, the increasing deregulation of industrial relations and the lack of legislative or policy progress on work-family, let alone gender equity, makes it critical that gender equitable change is pursued at the site of the workplace or the organisation. If our research is a guide, then it is also imperative that it can be shown that gender equity and organisational effectiveness are linked, yet as we have shown, this is not necessarily easy to achieve.

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