Finding suitable Work Place Cultures

Objectives

Participants learn about the concept of workplace cultures and get to know three ideal-typical cultures of physics cultures, the Workerbee-, the Caretaker- and Hercules-culture. They learn how diverse these cultures can be, what their characteristics are and in which countries they can expect finding aspects of each of the three cultures. Furthermore, they reflect on their own experience concerning workplace cultures, get aware about their preferences and develop strategies to get information about workplace cultures in a physics department they are interested in, e.g. in the context of applications.

Introductory Notes

The analysis of different workplace cultures of physics is the basis for the participants’ reflection in what kind of working environment they want to do their research. In order to allow this analysis the lesson focuses on the international research project UPGEM (Understanding Puzzles in the Gendered European Map) which was financed by EU’s 6th framework programme in the period 2005-2008. The overall objective of the UPGEM project was to understand why one finds cultural diversity in the proportion of female physicists employed at universities across Europe (cf. Hasse/Trentemøller 2011). The project conducted 208 qualitative interviews at more than 20 universities in five European countries, Denmark, Italy, Estonia, Finland and Poland which led to three different but interrelated ideal type workplace cultures that are characterized by different cultural values, traditions and norms (ibid.). It is discussed how competition, creativity and risk-taking work differently in the three different scientific workplace cultures and how local meaningmaking patterns can in- and exclude male and female researchers for different reasons in the three workplace cultures.

In-Class-Time

150-165 minutes, including 30 minutes break, depending on group size.

Schedule and Teaching Instructions

Homework for the participants in preparation for the session:

• Read the article of Hasse/Trentemøller (2011)
Lesson Plan 7

Group Work: 60 minutes

Building groups. Groups should not be bigger than 4 people.
Exercise on Work Sheet in Groups

Participants’ Break:

30 minutes

Group Presentation: 60-75 minutes

Let each group present for 10 minutes at maximum their results to task number 1 and ask for aspects in their institute’s culture that are Hercules-, Caretaker or Workerbee-like. This can be the department where they work on their Bachelor, Master thesis or PhD as well as the departments they have spent some time during a summer school or an internship.

In a second step ask for their preferences concerning workplace cultures.

In the third step collect the ideas how to find out something about the culture of a (fictive) team/institute they are interested in. Discuss and evaluate the ideas. Here you can give them advice drawn from your own knowledge or experience.
Rethink the different prototypes of work place cultures in the text of Hasse/Trentemøller 2011: the Hercules Culture, the Workerbee Culture and the Caretaker Culture.

1. Then, think of your own experiences in physics departments and the research groups where you have been so far, e.g. during your master or bachelor thesis, or during this summer school. Do you recognize patterns of the Hercules, Caretaker or Worker Bee culture? Use the table from Hasse/Trentemøller 2011, page 11:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Patterns of meaning in the three work place cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work relation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotion to physics. No intersection of family with work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work place identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power structure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Which work place culture does suit you best, and why? Or, which features of the three cultures would you like to find in your own (future) research team in physics?
3. When you consider entering a new work group, say for your master thesis or when applying for a PhD position, how can you find out how it will be like? Think about specific questions to ask:

a) the graduate students

b) the postdocs

c) the group leader

d) the gender equality officer
Obligatory Reading


Further Reading


Additional Resources and Materials

The project UPGEM: http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/51993_de.html