

Illuminating gendered organization assumptions: An important step in creating a family-friendly organization

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Abstract

One key to why organizations have been less successful at integrating a work family agenda into their organizational cultures is that workplaces have failed to consider how gender assumptions influence workplace practices, policies and cultures. This paper presents a theoretical framework for considering how gender role assumptions have prevented organizational attempts to become family friendly. Further, this paper uses an organizational case study to illustrate this point. Specifically, a theory of gendered organizations is used to frame an analysis of 30 employee interviews. Data suggest that gendered organizational assumptions inherent to several workplace policies and practices contribute to employee strain associated with negotiating the demands of life on and off the job. Further, the findings show that these gendered organizational assumptions prevent organizations from developing workplace cultures responsive to employees' work, family and personal needs. A brief review of the interdisciplinary work family field is presented, followed by a discussion of gendered organizations. Then, using interview data collected from management and 'front-line' female and male workers employed at a municipal government, this paper examines how workplace practices, presumably gender neutral, affect employees and the organizational culture in which they work.

Keywords: gendered organizations, organizational change, work-family