

Is a Caring Workplace Possible? Targets for Organizational Change

Helen Mederer
Jessica Sherwood
Barb Silver

University of Rhode Island

Presented at the Carework Conference
August 10, 2007 CUNY

Supported in part by National Science Foundation Institutional
Transformation Award SBE-0245039

STEM Disciplines

Historically white, male, and family-unfriendly

- 15.5% full professors are women
- 45% of STEM female professors are childless (compared to 26% of male professors)

Work climate of “complete devotion”

- “80-hour workweek” model
- Ideal worker norm
- Heavy research, service, teaching, travel expectations

2



Description of Institutional Transformation grants

There is increasing recognition that the lack of women's full participation at the senior level of academe is often a systemic consequence of academic culture. . . . Institutional Transformation awards provide flexibility. . . to [create] effective approaches to increase the . . . advancement of women faculty members into the senior and leadership ranks of science and engineering, and to implement the changes necessary to institutionalize those approaches through changes to institutional policies and practices. By supporting the groundwork necessary to transform institutional practices systemically, the IT awards seek to create positive, sustainable, and permanent changes in academic climates.

3

National Science Foundation ADVANCE Program

- 29 institutions to date, each with unique programs sharing common goals toward sustainable institutional transformation
- \$3.5 million - \$4.3 million each
- Recruitment
- Retention

4

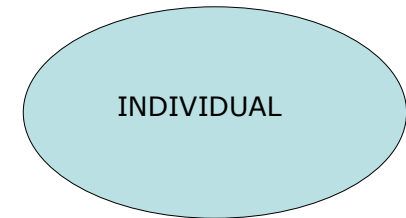
2003 - 2008 \$3.5 million
NSF Institutional Transformation Award

URI ADVANCE Leadership Team

Lynn Pasquerella (P.I.), Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Barb Silver (Program Manager), Psychology
Lisa Harlow, Professor of Psychology
Joan Peckham, Professor of Computer Science
Karen Wishner, Professor of Oceanography
Faye Boudreaux-Bartels, Professor of Electrical & Computer Engineering
Helen Mederer, Professor of Sociology
Mercedes Rivero-Hudek, Professor of Chemical Engineering
Judith Swift, Professor of Communication Studies
Nancy Fey-Yensan, Professor of Food Science & Nutrition

5

Targets for Institutional Transformation



6

Individual Level Targets

- *Do individual faculty support the goal of gender equity?*
- *Do individual faculty support the goal of diversity?*
- *Are individual faculty willing to engage in key behaviors that support the careers of women in STEM?*

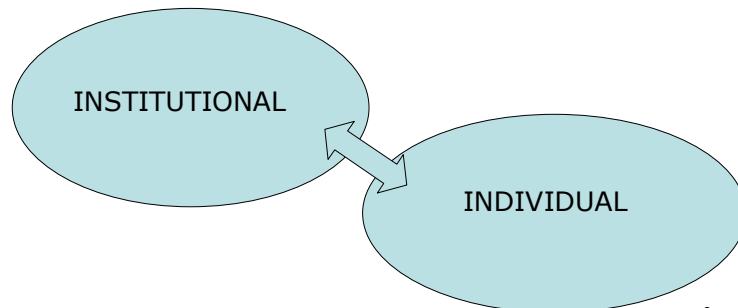
7

The Individual Level

- URI assessments of individuals' readiness to change: survey results found high support of diversity and equity goals
 - 80% reported they were "already" engaged in supportive behaviors
- Versus numerous reports and observations of "chilly climates," and higher attrition among female faculty

8

Targets for Institutional Transformation



9

Institutional Level Targets

- *What types of work-life policies are in place?*
- *What sorts of faculty development policies and programs does URI have?*
- *What targeted recruitment efforts are there?*
- *What overarching philosophy about diversity and equity exists at URI?*

10

The Institutional Level

- Philosophical Statement
- Recruitment Program
- Faculty Development
- Work-Life Policies
- Permanent ADVANCE Office with newly created Equity Coalition
- Connections with other Diversity Initiatives

11

And then it dawned on us:

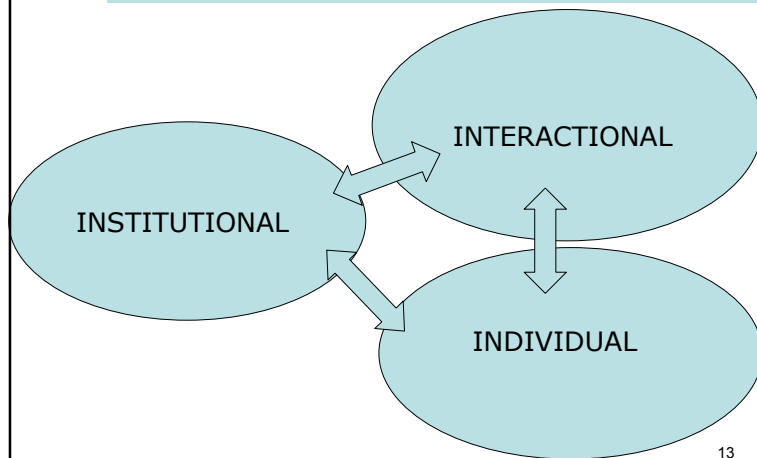
Gender as Social Structure applied to
Institutional Transformation

- The Individual level
- The Institutional level
- and*
- The Interactional Level

(With thanks to Barbara Risman and
others)

12

Targets for Institutional Transformation



13

Interactional Level Targets

- What are the “status expectations” within departments?
- How inclusively do departmental and larger social networks operate?
- How encouraging are colleagues about using family- and life-friendly policies (a “culture of coverage”)?
- How much overall responsibility for departmental climate do colleagues accept?

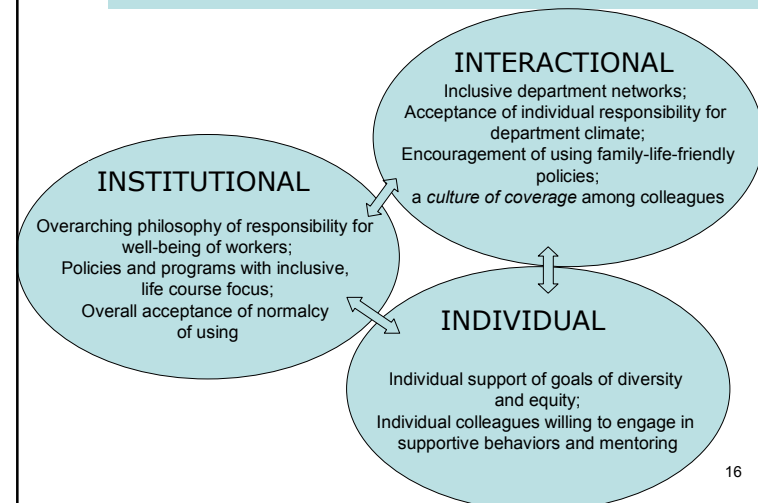
14

The Interactional Level

- Department Climate Change Workshops
 - Group responsibility to translate individual behaviors into collective practices
- Department Chair Workshops
 - Importance of Chair in creating inclusive community, communicating and normalizing institutional policy use
- Opportunities for Networking

15

Three-Level Model of Caring Workplace



16

Challenges to Institutional Transformation

- State Institution budget woes: sustainability after ADVANCE?
- Idiosyncratic history of Rhode Island
- Importance of maintaining three levels
- The larger context of political economy

17

Societal Challenges

- Cultural Contradiction between “Ideal family” and “Ideal worker”
- Definitions of gender equality
- The politics of caregiving

18

A Larger Three-Level Model (Heymann and Beem 2005)

The State

Social policies: health insurance and retirement

Work Organizations

caring workplaces: transformation not accommodation; life course view

Families and Individuals

shared care work

19