Managerial ‘Mommy Tracks’
Feminization of Middle management in Finnish and German Banking

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In this article, we explore managerial ‘mommy tracks’ (cf. Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). We present in-depth empirical evidence of organizational reform/change and feminization of lower middle management in two banks, located in societies with apparently divergent gender cultures and gender orders (i.e. Finland and Germany).

The organizational reforms addressed – e.g. events of restructuring or reorganization – are associated with elements of decentralization of decision-making authority and a return to more centralized procedures, specialization of managerial work, and downsizing. We specify the longitudinal relationship between reforms, change and feminization in each bank, and, based on a comparative analysis, suggest conclusions on the gendering of specific managerial positions.

We maintain that two dominant contemporary approaches to organizational change, i.e. the managerialist literature and its socio-political criticisms, have predominantly been gender-blind. We argue that the unfolding of organizational reforms in bureaucratic business firms cannot fully be understood without reference to how managerial jobs are redefined in relation to each other, and to what are the gendered connotations involved and the type of workforce sought for the newly defined jobs. These gendered demands of reforms must, moreover, be addressed in association with what comes to be seen as the adequate (male and female) supply by top decision-makers in the bureaucracy.

We contend that the gendered patterns inherent in organizational reforms can only be discerned if the research takes into account the ways in which reforming is intertwined with developments in the division of labour, in power and authority relations, and in norms and values prevalent in the proximate business environment and the society at large. This leads us to suggest analysis which identifies processes of organizing as constructed under, but not fully determined by, specific spatial and temporal conditions of gendered social practice.

Through a detailed cross-national comparison, we propose a common fundamental operating mechanism for the reform-gender link within organizations. This mechanism is related to changing content of jobs, perceived status and attractiveness in terms of career. We then go on to specify a number of differences in the form of the reform-gender link, moulded by societal particularities. These differences are notably influenced by prevalent images of femininity and motherhood and the resultant gendered practices…