



Driving Change in Research Institutions: From Compliance to Commitment

Marcela Linková

Head of Centre for Gender and Science, Institute of Sociology, Czech
Academy of Sciences

MS Co-chair, ERA Forum Sub-group on Inclusive Gender Equality



The Change Agent's Institutional Dilemma

- Often labelled troublemakers, sidelined or isolated
- Gender equality work seen as 'soft' or 'ideological'
- Lack of recognition in work performance evaluation

Perseverance in doing indispensable work for institutional change

The Change Agent's Personal Dilemma

- Often new to the topic of gender equality
- Awareness grows—and changes everything
- Change comes at personal cost: isolation, conflict, emotional strain

Transformation begins within the change agent

A Policy Window Opens: From 2019 to Now

- **Horizon Europe's GEP requirement** transformed the landscape
 - Introduces *value-based conditionality* for EU funding
 - Marks a shift from voluntary to mandatory institutional action
- **Offers legitimacy and leverage**
 - Especially vital in the Widening countries
 - A crucial fallback for change agents in the absence of national support

External mandates create space for internal change

Accelerating Change Since 2021

- **Stronger EU and Member State policy frameworks and discursive alignment**
 - GEP requirements adopted in more than half of MS
 - National-level GEP monitoring emerging
- **New policy frontiers opened**
 - Tackling **gender-based violence** including power hierarchies
 - Advancing **inclusiveness** and **intersectionality**
 - Building **monitoring and evaluation systems**
- **Unprecedented alignment across EU actors**
 - Commission ↔ Member States ↔ Funders ↔ Institutions

What Makes a Good Workplace

Individual

- Hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism
- Willingness to take risks
- Autonomy
- Empowerment

Team

- Supportive leadership
- Psychological safety
- Sense of community
- Participation and open culture
- Sense of justice
- Reconciling work and family

Organisation

- Positive leadership
- Social responsibility
- Strategic planning
- Innovation & adaptation
- Financial resources

Source: Cunha et al. (2020); Reatze et al. (2021) in Zábrowská et al. (2025)

Psychological Contract Breach and Its Consequences

People  Institution
Trust, respect, loyalty, commitment

Consequences of psychological contract breach (Chahar 2019)

Protest

Strike

Job alienation

Absenteeism

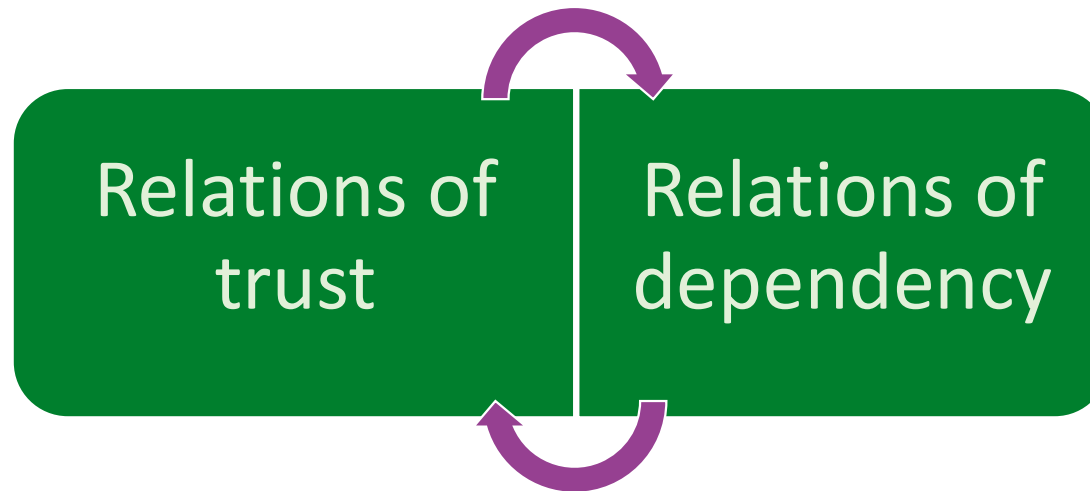
Tardiness

Disengagement

Exit

Institutional Betrayal & Cowardice

- **Institutional betrayal:** The failure of systems to respond adequately when harm occurs (Smith & Freyd 2014, Freyd 2025)
- **Breach of duty to care** by institutions on which people depend
- **Institutional cowardice** (Brown 2020)



Leaders' duty: prevent, respond, repair

Leadership & Institutional Courage

- **Institutional courage** (Freyd 2025)
 - Take moral action despite risk; protect those who depend on the institution
- **Leadership = day-to-day relational labour:** show up, listen, respond, create space
- **Live the values:** equality & inclusion as mission-critical, not PR or a funding ticket
- **Accountability:** name harm & be transparent; protect reporters; repair with apology & substantive steps; no retaliation; introduce matching KPIs for assessment
- **Make psychological safety measurable:** assess & reward leaders on safety, fairness, and team growth

Leadership Commitments to Change Agents

- **Support safety, mental health and wellbeing**
 - Psychological safety: capacity building; regular check-ins; visible support; anti-retaliation
- **Workload recognition and remuneration**
 - Adapt workload models and research performance expectations
 - Recognise and credit gender equality work in promotion and remuneration

Fatigue among us

- Change fatigue in R&I (precarity, workload, AI)
- Polycrisis & shifting global order
- Gender fatigue + diverging youth trajectories
- Mental health & online harms
- Policy–practice gap



Safety & well-being = bedrock of excellence and innovation

- Risk-taking and creativity need safety
- Make well-being, justice & inclusion everyday practice
- Empower discovery by protecting people





Thank you

Marcela Linková

marcela.linkova@soc.cas.cz

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/marcela-linkova-a5ba9156/>



Centre for Gender and Science

- Gender Equality National Contact Point
 - [Gender Equality Plans](#)
 - Training, consultations, [e-learning](#)
- [Community of Practice](#) 'Community for Change'

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- [Mobilisation network](#)
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