



THE FOUR ROOMS OF CHANGE

Case Study - Four Rooms of Change at the Municipal Workers' Union

Background:

The Swedish Municipal Workers' Union ('Kommunal') is Sweden's largest trade union. It has about 570,000 members whose work includes care of the elderly, child care, health care, bus services, roads, parks, refuse collection and agriculture. The members work in the local authority sector; that is county councils, municipalities, municipal companies, co-operatives, private companies and with the Church of Sweden – see www.kommunal.se.

The history of Kommunal mirrors the Swedish welfare society. Kommunal was established in 1910 and at that time had 593 members, all men. Many municipalities only had one or two employees and roads and refuse collection constituted the core activities. Today, eight out of ten members are women and half of them work in the care sector. One third are aged 30 or younger and the organisation rate is high; approximately 90% of the employees in the designated occupational areas are members of Kommunal.

Applications:

The union had reaffirmed its commitment to gender equality in the workplace and decided that it wished to review its own internal practices and explore how gender equality was currently experienced by staff members. A workgroup of 17 men and women was formed and tasked with discovering the role of gender within the union and acting as change agents whenever gaps in practice and/or culture were identified. This first group committed to ten two-day meetings over an 18-month timeframe. Two consultants, Eva Amundsdotter and Søren Holm were asked to facilitate the process and support the group. This first group included four internal trainers who later took over the role of facilitator for this and a further three groups with supervision and mentoring support from the consultants.

Amundsdotter and Holm worked with the groups to increase gender awareness and identifying action that could be taken. This meant facilitating dialog in which experienced tensions could be shared and understood but also involved helping the groups to act as researchers; observing gender differences in the workplace. The consultants recognized that the groups needed a common language in order to process their experiences and introduced the Four Rooms of Change; using both the Outsider Scale and the Organizational Barometer. Through this work people were able to see how denial – both unconscious and conscious – had shaped their experience of gender in the workplace.

Testimonial:

Working with the Four Rooms of Change allowed us to be bolder and stay with the process of feedback even when it didn't seem as if change was possible. The process of dialog deepened from meeting to meeting and the changes that ultimately emerged have proved sustainable. Two years after the project, I met with a group of sixty employees who still talk about the Four Rooms of Change in the context of gender equality at Kommunal.

Eva Amundsdotter, Gender Researcher & Consultant

For more on the Four Rooms of Change® go to www.fourroomsofchange.com.au .

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