

Submission for Track #2: Vielfalt organisieren: Solidarische Strategien und Perspektiven

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Openness and gender (in-)equalities: Mechanisms and Implications

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Abstract

Abundant information and communication technology enhancing communication across organizational boundaries have changed how organizations interact with their environment (Altman et al., 2014; Haefliger et al., 2011; Lakhani et al., 2013). Overall, we observe a trend towards greater openness concerning both sharing information and items with as well as receiving it from external audiences (Dahlander & Gann, 2010; Dobusch et al., 2015). This trend challenges the dominant closed model rooted in large vertical integrated organizations favoring secrecy and control (Langlois, 2003; O'Toole & Bennis, 2009; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014; Tapscott & Ticoll, 2003).

Addressing the trend towards greater organizational openness, scholars formulated several concepts paving the way for an “openness paradigm” in management thinking. The most prominent examples are open and user innovation (Chesbrough, 2006; von Hippel, 2005), crowdsourcing (Afuah & Tucci, 2012; Bauer & Gegenhuber, 2015; Jeppesen & Lakhani, 2010), crowdfunding (Bellaflamme et al., 2014; Mollick, 2014) co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Fuller, 2010), open strategy (Whittington et al., 2011; Hutter et al., 2016), open government and data (Janssen et al., 2012; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010), peer production (Benkler, 2006) as well as open and crowd science (Franzoni & Sauermann, 2013).

At first glance, one would suspect that openness, particularly organized through online platforms, leads to more gender equality because it provides generally an easy accessible environment where everyone can contribute (e.g. opinions, ideas, etc.). Indeed, Jeppesen and Lakhani (2010) find that women are more successful in (blind-reviewed) innovation contests. In the domain of crowdfunding, women are more likely to raise funds on the donation-based platform Kickstarter, particularly in those industries dominated by men (Greenberg & Mollick, 2016). Greenberg and Mollick (2016) show that the mechanism enabling women to successfully raise funds is „activist homophily“ – that is funders helping women who share the gender and a categorical identity (i.e. operating in the same male-dominated industry).

On the other hand, as the Wikipedia example with only 15 % female contributors amply demonstrates, openness may result in creating an inequality-enhancing environment (Collier & Bear, 2012). Similarly, Nafus (2012) argues that openness in open source development is not only about making the code available for everyone; it constitutes a meaning system around issues of authorship, agency, knowledge exchange, and code production. Men reduce

openness to technological issues – by ignoring the social dimensions they „monopolize code authorship and simultaneously de-legitimize the kinds of social ties necessary to build mechanisms for women’s inclusion“ (Nafus, 2011: 669).

Given these quite contradictory findings, I seek to address following questions: How does platform-driven openness impact gender equality? To shed light on this issue in the full paper, I will first review (mostly empirical) studies that consider the gender dimensions in various forms of openness. The focus is on openness enacted through online platforms but I also consider how the effects of these platforms relate to “offline” situations of women. For instance, more opportunities on a platform may at the same time reflect inequalities in another social world, conversely, discrimination on platforms may stem from widespread and well-known stereotypes. However, I do not consider work on openness in intra-organizational contexts, such as Wickham and Knights’ (2013) insightful study on how open innovation reinforces male-dominated discourses within the organization. The aim for the full paper is to further identify generalizable mechanisms fuelling or hampering gender equality on platform-driven openness. I will bring the paper to a close with implications for practice and research.

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