Creating Change: An invitation to reflect on the CHANGE project...

Prof Pat O'Connor, Professor Emeritus Sociology and Social Policy, University of Limerick
Visiting Professor, Geary Institute, UCD, Ireland

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

So......

After all the deliverables, the advocacy, developing policies, GEPs etc etc…..

- **A moment of reflection…**
  - **What you learned about yourself and RPO* during the project**
    - ***** i.e. The research performing organisation you work in….

Odd keynote….. Format- overwhelmingly consists of questions…..
  - Ones that I hope you will think about –and share those reflections….

Questions
  1)Fundamental questions-about gender equality; its causes and solutions
  2)Qs about structure and culture of your RPO and women's careers in it
  3)Qs about key sites for change, power, institutional resistance, knowledge
  4)Qs about you as change agent and where you go from here….

06.11.19

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

1) Fundamental questions…at the start of project

- **What did you think gender inequality was about? And now?**
  - Improving women's position? (gender profile of senior positions/pay gap/etc)
  - Changing the valuation of women and their work?
  - Changing the organisational structure? culture? Or what??
- **How did you explain gender inequality in your RPO then? And now?**
  - Women's lack of confidence/political skills/child care/ excellence/ choice?
  - Problematic structures/criteria/workload models/procedures/processes?
  - Differential evaluation of men/women; men's privileging/homosociability/etc
- **What did you think the solution then was? And now what do you think?**
  - Fix the women e.g. mentoring; courses; networking etc
  - Fix the structure e.g. workload; criteria; procedures; quotas; cascade model etc
  - Fix the knowledge e.g. more gender modules/courses etc
  - Fix the culture e.g. awareness; male privileging; homosociability; violence etc
  - Transform the RPO e.g. its hierarchy; managerialism + all of above…

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

2a)What did you learn about structure of your RPO?

- **About the 'normal' decision making structures?**
  - What are they? Who chairs each of them? (gender? level?)
  - How big are they? (40+-are they really just 'talking forums?)
  - Which-if any- control/allocate resources? (money/people)
- **Have they changed at all over the project? In what way?**
  - **What is the gender profile now of members? chairs? At start of project?**
  - What difference –if any- do you think this has made? (Specify)
    - How similar are the women (background/attitudes etc) to the men?

Generally: centralisation of power in the Rector/President/VC in RPOs
- **Many of the structures cannot allocate resources (i.e.'talking forums')**
- **Structures with power are most likely chaired by Rector/VC/President**
- **Changes in gender profile can be symbolically important but…..**

06.11.19

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

2b)Gender equality structures in your RPO?

- **Did they exist? Do they now?**
  - What is their purpose? Window dressing? Awareness? Driving change?
    - A space for women to share experiences??
    - To co-ordinate gender studies teaching?
- **What level of resources do they have? (money? space? staffing? leverage?)**
  - Who is heading them? (their position in the hierarchy? gender?)
  - Who do they report to? (same qs..)
- **What is their position relative to the 'normal' structures?**
  - Has this implications for the extent to which they can drive change**?**

  Typically: These structures are 'added on' to the existing structures
  - **Often headed by people who have little power (or corporate apologists…)**
  - **Even if they create change, it can be eroded by the 'normal' structures**

06.11.19

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

2c)What did you learn about culture in your RPO?

- **How important is hierarchy?** (e.g. in terms of access to power holders)
- **Are predominantly female staff areas differently valued from male ones**?
  - In terms of resourcing models? status? access to power holders?
- **To what extent are GE policies implemented? (or just in the file…)**
  - Examples?? Are there consequences for failure to implement policies?
- **Do line management (HODs/Deans etc) see organisation as 'gender neutral'?**
  - How do they explain e.g. the absence of women in senior positions?
    - Choice? 'nature', deficits, discrimination?
  - Do they see their role as delivering on GE? Important in their role? Personally?
- **What did you notice about informal patterns of interaction in your RPO?**
  - Do you think homosociability exists? In management? elsewhere? Its impact?
  - What about sponsorship? (opening doors/recommending/investing)

Generally: higher educ instit are male dominated and masculinist
06.11.19
- **Gender inequality less likely to be 'seen' by men-less likely to be v important**

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

2d**What did you learn about women's careers?**

- **In academic area: At the bottom? At the top?**
  - At PhD? Post doc? Getting on the permanent career track?
    - Obstacles/Facilitators on that route? (Criteria/procedures/processes etc)
    - The impact of discipline? (STEM versus non STEM)
    - The importance of sponsors?
    - Intersectionality?
    - Microaggressions, gender-based violence and harassment?

- **In non-academic/other professional areas: At the bottom? At the top?**
  - Absence/presence of a permanent career path?
  - Recruitment/promotion?

How do you explain these patterns? (e.g under-representation of women in senior positions even though they are the majority in the pipeline? The lower valuation of predominantly female areas?)

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

3a)**What did you see as key sites for change then? Now?**
- **What really needs to change/will make a difference? E.g.**
  - The drafting of charters? (but if not linked to action…)
  - The drafting of policies? (but if they are not implemented…)
  - Representation of women in 'talking forums'/web? (symbolic but….)
  - Drafting of GEPs (but if no mechanisms to implement them..)

  - Recruitment/promotion: criteria, procedures processes? (can be subverted..)
  - Gender auditing of workload models (can be distorted..)
  - Gender auditing of budgets/allocation models (can be distorted…)
  - Mechanisms to implement change (can be distorted..)
  - Mechanisms to sanction/reward compliance (may not be implemented..)

  - Hierarchy; performativity and other reflections of managerialism? (such as..)
  - Differential valuation of gendered disciplinary areas (may be rooted in state..)
  - Managements' track record of GE action before appointment? (can change..)
  - Identification of local champions-preferably men…(any round??)

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

06.11.19

3b) What did you learn about power in RPO?

- **Where is the power to make things happen located?**
    - Does it vary depending on the initiative? or not?
- **Where is the power to stop things happening located?**
    - Does it vary depending on the initiative? or not?
- **What did you learn about institutional resistance to change?**
    - 'Patterns of organizational behaviour that decision makers or people in power positions employ to actively or passively **deny, reject and refuse to implement, repress or even dismantle** gender equality change proposals and initiatives' (Agócs 1997: 918).
- **Manifestations of it??** ('No gender inequality here'; foot dragging on implementation; changing agreed procedures producing change etc…)

Often academics assume that if changes are 'right'; reasonable; clearly argued, that they will happen- but this ignores power/vested interests and resistance….Implications of this??

06.11.19

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

3c)What did you learn about implementation?

- What actions were most likely to be implemented?
    - Drafting of charters? Policies? GEPs? Other?
- What actions were least likely to be implemented?
    - Procedures or criteria involving recruitment/promotion?
        - Targets? Quotas? Cascade model?
    - Resource allocation (e.g. between faculties; depts; areas)
    - Workload models
    - Rewards or penalties for the achievement of gender KPIs

If GE is about organisational transformation, then those who are benefitting from the existing system will be least likely to implement change which transforms it…..

06.11.19

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

3d) What did you learn about the gendering of knowledge in your RPO?

- **The response of power holders in the RPO to your research?**
  - Accept it? Question it? Challenge the methodology? Act on it?
- What parts were most/least receptive to your results? (disciplines? levels? gender?)
- What parts of the RPO assume that knowledge is gender-neutral? (same qs)

- **What did you learn about integration of gender in terms of content**
  - Into curriculum? (UG?PG?)
  - Into PhD research topics?
  - Into other research projects?
    - Impact of EU on this? (through research funding? other strategies?)

Is recognition of the gendering of knowledge- less likely in STEM? middle levels? men? Rhetorical compliance? (e.g. copying/pasting funding applications??)

06.11.19

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

4a)Your positioning as a change agent in your RPO….

- **Formal position in structure?**
  - Were you permanent or temporary? level?
  - What about the person you reported to: permanent? level? gender?
  - Who were the other internal stakeholders? permanent? level? gender?
  - Other stakeholders/communities of practice/allies? –same qs
- **Extent of your influence with most senior power holders?**
  - Person you reported to? Internal stakeholders? Other stakeholders/allies?
- **Implications of co-production model? (pluses? minuses?)**
  - Did it encourage stakeholders to 'buy in' to change? Specify who…
  - Encourage a focus on activity which would not threaten power structures e.g.
    - Drafting policies or GEPs; symbolic change; fixing the women; minor changes in structure or culture….

Generally: RPOs are v hierarchical and gendered. V difficult to initiate change from a position of little power; co-production can generate collusion….

06.11.19

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

4b)Your experience as a change agent??

- **Positives?**
  - Successes?
  - Allies/support you got?
  - Things you feel most proud of….
  - What was the most important factor in creating these successes?

- **Negatives?**
  - Failures/things that did not work/disappointments
  - Barriers/foot dragging? By whom?
  - What was the most important factor in creating these?
  - How might things have been different?

Generally: being a change agent can be satisfying but hard: 70% of change initiatives fail…and even those that succeed may not happen during the project

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

4c) Looking back….

- **Where did most of your effort go in the project??**
  - Fixing women? structure? culture? or what?
- **What did you hope would change in your RPO at the beginning? Later?**
  - If you had your time over, anything that you would do different**?**
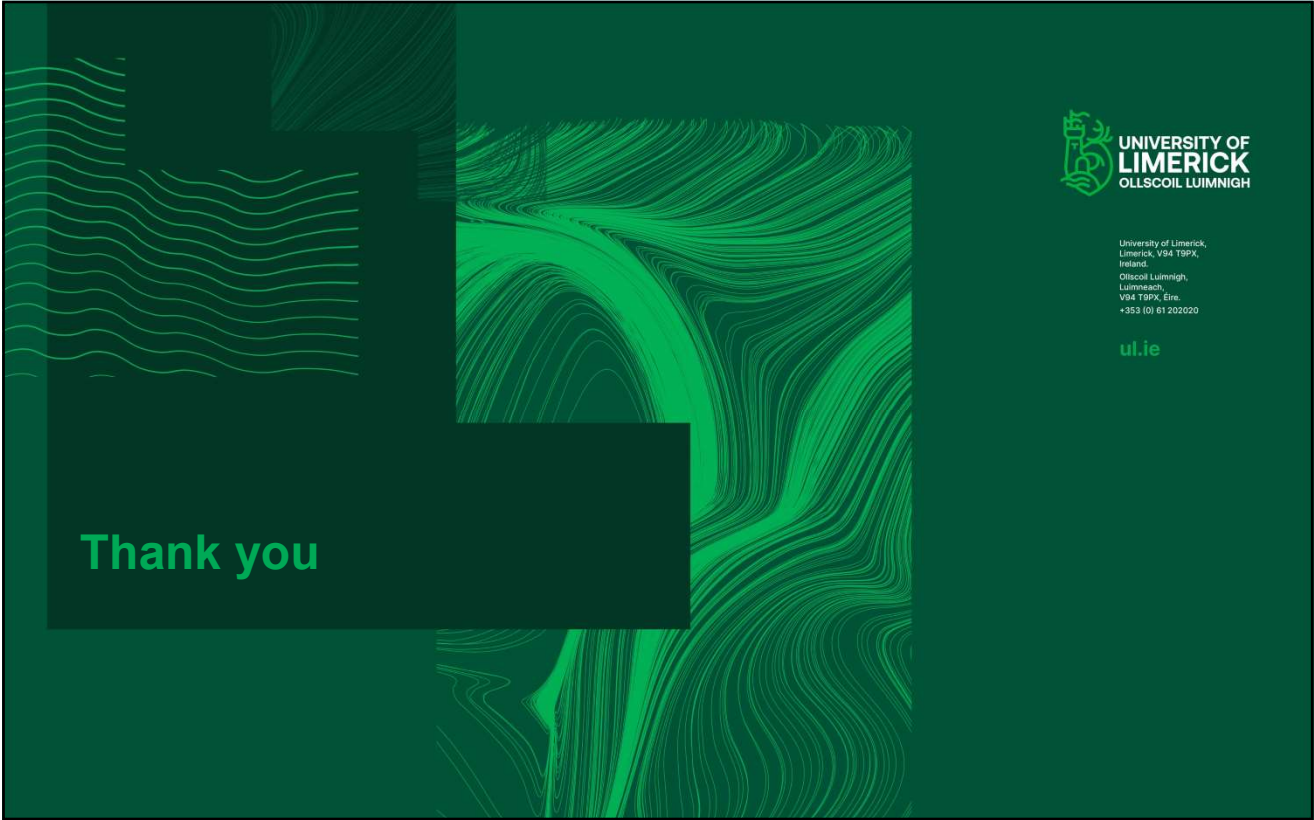- **What was your (implicit) model for change?**
  - Top down? Bottom up? Cumulative awareness? Attitude to power?
  - **Any advice that you would give to someone starting a project?**
- **What impact has the project had on you?? Personally? Career wise?**
  - Are you more/less committed to GE now than at the beginning?
  - Where do you go from here- job wise?? research projects?

Remember: creating change is throwing a stone in a pond- you never know where the ripples will end…. Thank you for your work

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Thank you

UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

University of Limerick,
Limerick, V94 T9PX,
Ireland.
Ollscoil Luimnigh,
Luimneach,
V94 T9PX, Éire.
+353 (0) 61 202020

ul.ie