



Doctoral Thesis in Industrial Economics and Management

Shaped by Culture

Gender Equality Practices in Male-Dominated,
Technology-Intensive Contexts

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Abstract

This thesis examines how organizational culture shapes gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations in Sweden. The study is situated within contemporary societal challenges characterized by technological development, the climate crisis, and persistent gender inequality, where organizations are often portrayed as central arenas for change. At the same time, previous research demonstrates that many technology-intensive organizations are characterized by norms, hierarchies, and knowledge ideals that reproduce inequality.

Drawing on feminist organization studies, organizations are understood as gendered, and gender equality practices are conceptualized as situated, relational, and culturally embedded processes through which gender is done. The thesis consists of four studies in two interconnected yet organizationally distinct contexts within Sweden's technology-intensive landscape: technical higher education and the financial technology (fintech) industry. The first context is a technical university, where future engineers study, and technical knowledge is produced and disseminated. The second context is the Swedish fintech industry, with a particular focus on rapidly growing scale-up organizations in which engineers work and technological innovation is commercialized. Both contexts are numerically male-dominated and subject to expectations to engage in gender equality and diversity work, yet are characterized by different organizational logics and understandings of change.

Methodologically, the thesis employs a qualitative research approach combining interviews, job shadowing, and document analysis. The first two papers analyze gender equality practices in engineering education and demonstrate how

androcentric cultures shape both the scope of such practices and the organizational conditions that enable them. The latter two papers focus on the fintech industry and analyze how understandings of diversity are constructed at the industry and organizational levels, and how gender equality practices are integrated into, and constrained by, homosocial cultures.

By synthesizing the findings from the four studies, the thesis makes three key contributions. First, it demonstrates that gender equality practices in these contexts are shaped more by cultural norms than by strategic problem analysis, resulting in initiatives that signal progress while leaving deeper power structures intact. Second, it advances understanding of homosociality by showing how men's engagement is both enabled and constrained by the masculine legitimacy they embody, positioning them as legitimate actors of change, yet often without disrupting underlying hierarchies. Third, it contributes to research on organizational change by revealing the inherent ambivalence of gender equality practices: practices aimed at transformation may simultaneously reproduce gendered power relations.

Sammanfattning

Denna avhandling undersöker hur organisatorisk kultur formar jämställdhetspraktiker i mansdominerade, teknikintensiva organisationer i Sverige. Studien tar sin utgångspunkt i samtida samhällsutmaningar präglade av teknologisk utveckling, klimatkris och ojämställdhet, där organisationer ofta framställs som centrala arenor för förändring. Samtidigt visar tidigare forskning att många teknikintensiva organisationer präglas av normer, hierarkier och kunskapsideal som tenderar att reproducera ojämställdhet.

Med utgångspunkt i feministiska organisationsstudier betraktas organisationer som könsmärkta och deras jämställdhetspraktiker som situerade, relationella och kulturellt inbäddade processer i vilka kön görs. Avhandlingen bygger på fyra delstudier som undersöker jämställdhetspraktiker i två sammanlänkade men organisatoriskt skilda kontexter inom Sveriges teknikintensiva landskap: teknisk högre utbildning och finansiell teknologi (fintech). Den första kontexten utgörs av ett tekniskt universitet, där framtida ingenjörer utbildas och teknisk kunskap produceras och sprids. Den andra kontexten är den svenska fintech-industrin, med särskilt fokus på snabbväxande scaleup-företag där ingenjörer arbetar och teknologisk innovation kommersialiseras. Båda kontexterna är numerärt mansdominerade och omfattas av förväntningar på jämställdhets- och mångfaldsarbete, men präglas av olika organisatoriska logiker och föreställningar om förändring.

Metodologiskt bygger avhandlingen på en kvalitativ forskningsansats som kombinerar intervjuer, skuggning och dokumentanalys. De två första artiklarna analyserar jämställdhetspraktiker inom ingenjörsutbildning och visar hur androcentriska kulturer formar räckvidden för jämställdhetspraktiker samt

vilka organisatoriska villkor som möjliggör dessa praktiker. De två senare artiklarna fokuserar på fintechindustrin och analyserar hur förståelser av mångfald konstrueras på bransch- och organisationsnivå samt hur jämställdhetspraktiker integreras i och begränsas av homosociala kulturer.

Genom att syntetisera resultaten från de fyra studierna gör avhandlingen tre centrala bidrag. För det första visar den att jämställdhetspraktiker i dessa sammanhang i högre grad formas av organisationskulturer än av strategiska problemanalyser, vilket resulterar i initiativ som signalerar framsteg samtidigt som djupare maktstrukturer lämnas intakta. För det andra fördjupar den förståelsen av homosocialitet genom att visa hur mäns engagemang både möjliggörs och begränsas av den maskulina legitimitet de förkroppsligar, vilket positionerar dem som legitima förändringsaktörer men utan att förändra underliggande hierarkier. För det tredje bidrar avhandlingen till forskningen om organisatorisk förändring genom att synliggöra jämställdhetspraktikers inneboende ambivalens: praktiker som syftar till förändring kan samtidigt reproducera könade maktrelationer.

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Erika Blomstrand

Uppsala, February 2026

List of publications

Paper I

Blomstrand, E., Holgersson, C., and Packendorff, J. 'I'm not expected to know this' – engaged male faculty positioning gender knowledge in engineering education. Second round of revision in journal.

Paper II

Blomstrand, E., Holgersson, C., and Packendorff, J. "That's when I dare to push it" – enabling male faculty to challenge androcentrism in engineering education. First round of revision in journal.

Paper III

Blomstrand, E. Scaling up inequalities when scaling up the business? Diversity management among high-growth firms in the Swedish fintech industry. Submitted to journal.

Paper IV

Blomstrand, E. När det blev viktigt blev det manligt? Om mångfaldsarbete och homosocialitet i den svenska fintechbranschen. Submitted to journal.

CrediT authorship statement

Paper I. 'I'm not expected to know this' – engaged male faculty positioning gender knowledge in engineering education.

Erika Blomstrand: conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; visualization; writing – original draft preparation; writing – review and editing. | Charlotte Holgersson: conceptualization; supervision; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing | Johann Packendorff: conceptualization; supervision; writing – original draft preparation; writing – review and editing.

Paper II. "That's when I dare to push it" – enabling male faculty to challenge androcentrism in engineering education.

Erika Blomstrand: conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; visualization; writing – original draft preparation; writing – review and editing. | Charlotte Holgersson: conceptualization; supervision; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing | Johann Packendorff: conceptualization; supervision; writing – original draft preparation; writing – review and editing.

Paper III. Scaling up inequalities when scaling up the business? Diversity management among high-growth firms in the Swedish fintech industry.

Erika Blomstrand: conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; visualization; writing – original draft preparation.

Paper IV. När det blev viktigt blev det manligt? Om mångfaldsarbete och homosocialitet i den svenska fintechbranschen.

Erika Blomstrand: conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; visualization; writing – original draft preparation.

Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Exploring gender equality practices	2
1.2	The empirical context.....	4
1.3	Overview and contributions.....	9
1.4	Language as border and bridge: on accessibility in the thesis	11
2	Conceptual foundations.....	12
2.1	Introduction to feminist organization studies	13
2.2	Reproduction of male dominance	18
2.3	Challenging male dominance	21
2.4	Theoretical positioning of the thesis	26
3	Methodological reflections.....	27
3.1	Positionality statement	28
3.2	Research process and overall design	30
3.3	Empirical material	34
3.4	Analysis of empirical material	39
4	Summary of papers.....	41
4.1	Paper I.....	43
4.2	Paper II.....	44
4.3	Paper III.....	45
4.4	Paper IV.....	47
4.5	Contribution to the thesis	49
5	Discussion	50
5.1	Male-dominated, technology-intensive cultures.....	51
5.2	How male-dominated cultures shape gender equality practices	53
5.3	Implications for work for change.....	56
6	Conclusions and contributions.....	58
6.1	Conclusions	59
6.2	Contributions	60
6.3	Avenues for future research.....	61
7	References	63

1 Introduction

We are living in a time marked by climate crisis and rising global temperatures, rapid technological innovation, and the proliferation of artificial intelligence, as well as persistent gender inequalities that permeate both societies and organizations. Inequality, technology, and climate change exemplify what scholars refer to as grand challenges: large-scale, complex, and uncertain issues that are value-laden and involve intertwined technical and social dimensions (Benschop, 2021; Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Ferraro et al., 2015). Organizations, as central arenas for economic activity, technological development, and knowledge production, are key sites where these challenges are shaped, reproduced, and potentially addressed (Benschop, 2021).

Technology-intensive organizations are frequently positioned as central actors in addressing these grand challenges, with technological innovation framed as the primary driver of sustainability transitions (Christley, 2025; Atomico, 2025) and contributing to more equal and inclusive societies (Chen et al., 2023). Engineers, who have gained increasing status within organizations and society at large, are consequently portrayed as key contributors, positioned as critical assets in shaping how these challenges are defined and addressed (World Economic Forum, 2025a). At the same time, these organizations remain deeply embedded in gendered norms, hierarchies, and practices that reproduce inequality. Within organizations, inequalities are manifested in multiple and intersecting ways: through unequal pay, (sexual) harassment, unequal opportunities for career advancement, and exclusion from informal networks of influence and power (Wahl et al., 2018). Inequality also manifests through processes of knowledge production, shaping what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is recognized as a legitimate knower (Åsberg, 2021; Bell et

al., 2020; van den Brink, 2015). In male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts, where claims about technical rationality, objectivity, and neutrality are highly valued, these dynamics become particularly salient (Lund, 2023; Beddoes, 2012; Salminen-Karlsson, 2005).

While a substantial body of research has demonstrated how technology-intensive organizations reproduce gender inequalities, we know considerably less about how gender equality practices are enacted from within these contexts, and how such practices are shaped by the very cultures they seek to transform. In particular, there is a lack of empirical research examining how gender equality practices unfold in contemporary, innovation-oriented, male-dominated organizations, where pressures for change coexist with entrenched masculine norms (Callerstig et al., 2024). Adopting a feminist organization studies perspective, I understand gender equality practices as situated and culturally embedded processes that are both enabled and hindered by structural and cultural organizational conditions (Acker, 1990; Sobering, 2016; Wahl et al., 2018). Feminist organization scholars have long argued that efforts to address gender inequality are embedded in existing power relations, cultural norms, and institutional logics (Wahl et al., 2018; van den Brink and Benschop, 2012; Ely and Meyerson, 2000). From this perspective, organizational change is inherently ambivalent as it may challenge existing inequalities while simultaneously reinforcing gendered norms and power relations. Responding to calls for “more work to face the grand challenge of actually changing inequalities” (Benschop, 2021), this thesis examines gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts.

1.1 Exploring gender equality practices

This thesis is grounded in feminist organization studies, a research field concerned with examining the meanings of gender in organizations. A central aim of the field is not only to describe and analyze gender inequality, but also to imagine alternative organizational arrangements and to contribute to processes of societal and organizational change (Calás and Smircich, 2006; Ferguson, 2017; Benschop, 2021). Feminist theory is, in this sense, always political: it entails a critique of the status quo and a commitment to transforming existing power relations (Calás and Smircich, 1996, p. 231).

Within feminist organization studies, scholarly attention has traditionally focused on identifying and deconstructing organizational processes through

which gendered hierarchies and power relations are reproduced (Acker, 1990; van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). This body of research has been influential in exposing how assumed gender-neutral organizational structures and cultures systematically privilege men and masculinity and disadvantage women and other marginalized groups. At the same time, scholars of feminist organization studies have repeatedly shown that efforts to address gender inequality often encounter resistance, particularly in male-dominated organizational contexts (Ringblom and Johansson, 2020; Bleijenbergh, 2017; Benschop and Verloo, 2006).

Despite long-standing efforts for increased gender equality, progress has been uneven and, in many technology-intensive contexts, notably slow (Abrahamsson et al., 2023; Bairoh, 2023). Engineering education and technology industries continue to be characterized by persistent gender imbalances and masculine norms (Beddoes, 2019; Ottemo, 2019; Faulkner, 2009; Cockburn, 1983). While feminist research has generated extensive knowledge about how gender inequality is reproduced in such settings, comparatively less attention has been paid to gender equality practices – that is, the situated efforts through which organizational actors seek to challenge, disrupt, or transform existing inequalities (van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). Such practices can take multiple forms and are always shaped by organizational understandings of gender, power, and change (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). However, research on gender equality practices has demonstrated that formal commitments to gender equality do not automatically translate into transformational change (Ely and Meyerson, 2000).

Building on feminist organization scholarship, this thesis approaches gender equality practices as situated, relational, and culturally embedded. The focus is on how gender equality practices are produced and constrained by the interplay between organizational structure, culture, and agency (Wahl et al., 2018; Acker, 1992). Specifically, this thesis examines how organizational culture shapes gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts. Gender equality practices are explored in two such contexts: a technical university where engineers study, and the financial technology (fintech) industry where engineers work. The thesis demonstrates that gender equality practices are shaped by what aligns with dominant organizational cultures rather than by strategic analysis of inequality, resulting in initiatives that enable incremental change while leaving deeper power structures largely intact. The

following section motivates the selection of male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations in Sweden as the empirical context of the thesis.

1.2 The empirical context

This thesis is situated in Sweden, a national context often portrayed as a global frontrunner in gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2025b). Gender equality has long been a central political objective, supported by comprehensive legislation, public policy initiatives, and a longstanding public discourse that frames it as a core societal value (see, for example, the important milestones presented in the report *Women and Men in Sweden*, Statistics Sweden, 2024). Sweden's gender equality policy is structured around seven overarching objectives, including equal power and influence, economic equality, equal education, and an equal distribution of unpaid work and care (Swedish Government, 2025a). In addition, the Swedish Discrimination Act requires employers with at least 25 employees to actively and systematically prevent discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities through documented measures (Swedish Discrimination Act, 2008:567).

Gender equality is also firmly embedded in Sweden's research and innovation policy landscape. The national innovation agency Vinnova explicitly integrates gender equality into its mandate, emphasizing that a gender perspective should be included in research and innovation funding processes (Vinnova, 2012). Within higher education, gender mainstreaming has been introduced as a national policy, requiring universities to integrate gender perspectives into governance, leadership, and core activities such as education (Peterson and Jordansson, 2022; Engstrand, 2019). Together, these frameworks create formal expectations that organizations, both public and private, should actively engage in gender equality work. Despite these longstanding commitments, gender inequalities persist across Swedish working life. The labor market remains highly gender-segregated, with women and men concentrated in different industries and occupations (Statistics Sweden, 2024). Men continue to dominate senior leadership positions in private industry, including executive management teams and boards, and inequalities in pay, career progression, and access to power and influence remain well-documented (Statistics Sweden, 2024). These patterns point to a persistent gap between Sweden's formal commitments to gender equality and the everyday organizational practices through which working life is enacted. It is within this tension – between

ambitions and organizational practice – that gender equality practices become particularly salient as an object of study.

The technology industry constitutes a particularly salient context for examining this tension. Often celebrated as innovative, future-oriented, and meritocratic, the technology industry plays a central role in Sweden's economy and national self-image, employing approximately 260,000 people in 2024 (TechSverige, 2025). At the same time, technology-intensive organizations cannot be treated as a homogeneous category. Technology-intensive organizations vary in size and organizational structures, and research has demonstrated how the gendering of technology varies across technological domains, professions, and organizational contexts (Mellström et al., 2023; Alegria, 2019, 2020; Ahl and Marlow, 2012).

Drawing on these perspectives, the thesis examines two empirical contexts that represent distinct yet interconnected parts of Sweden's male-dominated technology industry: a technical university, where future engineers study and engineering knowledge is produced and disseminated, and the fintech industry, where engineers work and technological innovation is commercialized. Both contexts are numerically male-dominated and subject to external expectations regarding gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, yet they differ in their organizational logics and understandings of change.

1.2.1 Technical universities and engineering education in Sweden

A technical university represents a central empirical context for this thesis, as it is a key site where future engineers are educated and where technological knowledge is produced and disseminated. Beyond their role in knowledge formation, these institutions shape professional identities, organizational norms, and assumptions about who belongs in technology-intensive fields. As such, engineering education plays a crucial role in both the challenge and reproduction of inequality within technology-intensive organizations.

In Sweden, engineering education and the engineering profession have traditionally been dominated by men, a legacy rooted in their military origins, in which engineers were primarily men (Wormbs, 2021). Engineering education was formalized in 1877, yet women were not granted access until 1921, owing to both structural and informal barriers (Berner, 2004). Today, gender inequalities in Swedish engineering education persist, both numerically and culturally. As of 2023, women constituted 36 per cent of graduates from Master of Science in Engineering programmes (Universitetskanslerämbetet, 2025). However, this

aggregate figure masks substantial variation between engineering disciplines. Fields such as electrical engineering, computer science, and mechanical engineering remain heavily male-dominated, with men accounting for 75-85 percent of graduates, respectively. In contrast, programmes such as biotechnology, chemical engineering, and technical design have a higher proportion of women graduates, ranging from 55 to 70 per cent (Universitetskanslerämbetet, 2025). These patterns indicate that gender inequality in engineering education is intertwined with the cultural valuation of different engineering fields (Jansson and Sand, 2021).

Research has shown that engineering is culturally associated with masculinity, technology, and power (Ottemo, 2019; Mellström, 2004), reinforcing a symbolic alignment between men and technology (Berner, 2004; Kleif and Faulkner, 2003; Faulkner, 2000). Gender inequality in participation and retention in engineering education is further sustained by what Husu describes as the “complex dynamics of gendered patterns and relations” in academia (Husu, 2001, p. 179). These include processes through which men become increasingly entrenched within academic and professional hierarchies over time (Silander 2021; Chrapkowska, 2006). As a result, men tend to remain in engineering to a greater extent than women, both during education and across engineering professional trajectories, contributing to the persistence of gender inequalities within engineering.

Alongside these enduring inequalities, Swedish technical universities have undertaken efforts to promote gender equality within engineering education (Silander et al., 2022). These initiatives can be understood through Schiebinger and Schraudner’s (2011) framework of “fixing the numbers”, “fixing the institutions”, and “fixing the knowledge”. Since the 1970s, the dominant focus has been on “fixing the numbers” of women in engineering, through outreach activities, targeted marketing, and preparatory programs (Nordvall, 2023). These efforts have, however, been criticized for their one-dimensional focus on women's individual choices, rather than addressing the masculine cultures, values, and power structures embedded within engineering education (Nordvall, 2023). More recently, attention has also shifted toward “fixing the institutions”, emphasizing the need to address organizational cultures, discriminatory practices, and structural barriers that hinder women’s participation and progression within engineering education and profession (Lo Andersson, 2025). These efforts have recently been reinforced by Sweden’s national STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) strategy,

which seeks to stimulate interest in STEM, particularly among girls and young women (Swedish Government, 2025b), among other measures. Moreover, institutional efforts towards “fixing the knowledge” (Salminen-Karlsson, 1999, 2002) have been reinforced by national policy initiatives, such as the Swedish government’s 2015 mandate on gender mainstreaming in higher education (Peterson and Jordansson, 2022; Engstrand, 2019). These policy efforts emphasize the integration of social, humanistic, and artistic perspectives into STEM education.

Engineering education is thus positioned at the intersection of persistent gender inequalities and expectations of change. The increasing demand for technical expertise, combined with persistent gender inequalities and efforts for change, makes a technical university and engineering education a particularly revealing context for examining how gender equality practices are shaped by organizational culture. In the following section, I turn to the second empirical context of this thesis – the Swedish fintech industry – which represents a distinct yet interconnected context where engineers work. Alongside more traditional industries such as manufacturing and mining, fintech has become increasingly attractive to engineering graduates (Virgin, 2021). These new engineering workplaces are rapidly becoming integral to Swedish industry, with a strong demand for engineers.

1.2.2 The fintech industry in Sweden

The second empirical context of this thesis is the Swedish fintech industry, which, since the 2000s, has been a rapidly expanding segment of the technology industry characterized by rapid growth, competition, and a strong emphasis on innovation and speed (Eklöf, 2022). Over the past decade, fintech has become an increasingly important part of Sweden’s economy and a central arena for technological development, employing engineers, software developers, data scientists, and other technical professionals (TechSverige, 2025).

This thesis focuses primarily on fintech organizations in a scale-up phase, while also situating these within the fintech industry more broadly. Scale-ups are organizations that have moved beyond initial startup survival and are characterized by rapid expansion across workforce, markets, investments, and product development. Organizationally, they are often described as flat, flexible, and fast-paced, with short product cycles and a strong orientation towards scalability and market responsiveness (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Lindvert et al.,

2025). In such environments, technical expertise is highly valued, time is scarce, and organizational priorities are continuously negotiated. These conditions shape not only how technological solutions are developed but also how work for organizational change – such as gender equality and diversity – is framed, justified, and enacted.

Despite its emergence as a new industry, fintech is culturally rooted in long-standing, male-dominated sectors such as finance and information and communication technology (ICT), alongside entrepreneurial discourses that have traditionally privileged masculine norms, practices, and male-dominated industries. Research indicates that gender inequality remains prevalent in fintech (Atomico, 2019, 2025) and that masculine norms are well-established within the industry (Fox-Robertson and Wójcik, 2024). This inequality manifests in multiple ways: in the adoption and use of fintech products (Chen et al., 2021), in women's underrepresentation both numerically and in positions of power within fintech organizations, particularly in technical and leadership roles (Fox-Robertson and Wójcik, 2024; Gromek, 2018), and in ownership structures. A survey of 25 Swedish fintech companies, collectively valued at over 100 billion Swedish kronor, reveals that women own 0.8 percent of the companies' value (Breakit, 2021). The Stockholm Fintech Report further highlights that only 6 percent of CEOs are women, whereas women comprise 17 – 25 percent of developers and information technology (IT) employees (Gromek, 2018). Moreover, Snickare and Gober (2025) demonstrate how homosociality shapes the fintech industry through processes of seeking seed capital, pitching to investors, recruitment, and the circulation of capital in the form of money, influence, and networks within an increasingly closed circle.

At the same time, diversity and inclusion have become increasingly visible concerns within the Swedish fintech industry, often articulated in relation to business-oriented perspectives such as innovation, employer branding, and talent attraction (Swedish Fintech Association, 2022; cf. Johansson and Ringblom, 2017). Beyond national laws and regulations, fintech organizations face additional expectations to demonstrate a commitment to gender equality. These are articulated through investor demands, industry standards, and broader societal discourses on equality (Atomico, 2025).

As a male-dominated and rapidly scaling industry operating within a network of actors with diverse expectations and demands (Lindvert et al., 2025; Reyes and Neergaard, 2023) – one such as gender equality and diversity – fintech provides a particularly illuminating context for examining how gender equality practices

unfold. Examined side by side, the empirical contexts of a technical university and the fintech industry highlight distinct yet interconnected dimensions of gender equality practices within Sweden's technology-intensive landscape. Together, they enable an analysis of how different organizational cultures shape gender equality practices within male-dominated, technology-intensive environments.

1.3 Overview and contributions

This thesis comprises four papers, across which I examine how organizational culture shapes gender equality practices within male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations in Sweden. Empirically, the thesis focuses on two distinct yet interconnected organizational contexts: a Swedish technical university, where future engineers are educated and where engineering knowledge is produced, and the Swedish fintech industry, where engineers work and technological innovations are developed and commercialized. Taken together, these contexts represent central arenas in Sweden's technological landscape, each characterized by masculine norms and traditions, and explicit expectations to engage in gender equality and diversity work.

The four papers employ a qualitative research design combining interviews, job shadowing, and documentary analysis. This approach enables an in-depth examination of how gender equality practices are constructed through discourse and enacted in everyday organizational life, and how broader organizational conditions, professional cultures, and institutional expectations shape these practices. Papers I and II are based on empirical studies conducted at a Swedish technical university and focus on efforts to introduce gender knowledge into engineering education. Paper I examines how senior male faculty position gender knowledge in relation to engineering knowledge, and how these positionings shape the scope of such gender equality practices within engineering education. Paper II shifts analytical attention from discourse to practice, examining the organizational conditions that enable engaged male faculty to introduce gender knowledge into engineering education. Together, these papers illuminate how epistemic hierarchies, professional norms, and organizational arrangements shape practices of gender equality in engineering education.

Papers III and IV focus on the Swedish fintech industry and organizational approaches to diversity and inclusion. Paper III examines how problems and

interventions related to diversity are constructed by industry stakeholders, highlighting how diversity work is framed. Paper IV moves from discourse to practice by examining understandings of diversity management and gender in a fintech scale-up organization, and how work for change is shaped by organizational culture. Together, these papers reveal how homosocial cultures, entrepreneurial masculinity, and strong expectations of alignment with business objectives shape gender equality practices in fintech.

While each paper makes an independent empirical and theoretical contribution, the cover essay provides an analysis that moves beyond the individual studies. In the cover essay, I synthesize findings from the four papers to address the thesis's overarching research question: how does organizational culture shape gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations? By bringing together insights from engineering education and fintech, the synthesis highlights shared patterns across these contexts.

By synthesizing the findings from the four studies, this thesis makes three interrelated contributions to feminist organization studies. First, it shows that gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts are shaped primarily by organizational cultures rather than by strategic problem analyses, resulting in initiatives that signal progress while leaving deeper power structures largely intact. Second, the thesis advances understanding of homosociality by demonstrating how men's engagement in gender equality work is both enabled and constrained by the masculine legitimacy they embody, positioning them as legitimate actors of change, who can gain recognition and influence, yet often without disrupting underlying hierarchies. Third, the thesis contributes to research on organizational change by highlighting the inherent ambivalence of gender equality work. Practices aimed at transformation may simultaneously reproduce gendered power relations, underscoring that efforts to address gender inequality are embedded in and enacted through existing cultural norms and power structures.

Empirically, the thesis provides in-depth insights into gender equality practices in two central yet underexplored arenas of Sweden's technology-intensive landscape: engineering education at technical universities and the fintech industry.

Methodologically, the thesis demonstrates the value of studying engaged actors in male-dominated contexts by showing how change is enacted from within dominant positions and shaped by the very structures it seeks to transform. This perspective offers new analytical insights into organizational change processes.

Practically, the findings highlight the need for male-dominated organizations in technology-intensive contexts to attend to the cultural shaping of gender equality initiatives. Without critical reflexivity and explicit challenges to epistemic hierarchies, homosocial processes, and androcentric norms, well-intentioned efforts risk reproducing existing inequalities.

The thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, I outline the conceptual foundations. In Chapter 3, I present the methodological approach, research design, and empirical materials, and further motivate the selection of male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations in Sweden as the empirical context. In Chapter 4, I summarize the main findings of the four papers and their contribution to the thesis, which are discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by outlining its main contributions and suggesting avenues for future research.

Before turning to the conceptual foundations, I briefly comment on the linguistic choices made in this work.

1.4 Language as border and bridge: on accessibility in the thesis

Although this is an academic dissertation, written to meet scholarly standards, academic language can often be experienced as complex, intricate, and at times exclusionary. Writing a dissertation, therefore, involves navigating a tension between fulfilling the formal and linguistic requirements of academia – a form of scholarly craftsmanship evaluated by senior peers – and striving to make the text accessible to readers who may not be accustomed to academic language.

To address this tension, inspired by Karlsson (2020), I have chosen to begin each chapter with a summary in Swedish. These summaries are written in a more accessible style, with limited use of academic terminology, and employ concrete examples to make abstract concepts more tangible. They are intended as points of entry that provide an overview of the chapters' central arguments and themes, though they may not cover everything in the chapters. The summaries are not direct translations of the academic text, but rather complementary texts written for readers who may approach the material from different backgrounds or with different needs.

By introducing these summaries, I aim to make the thesis more accessible and to enable more people to engage with its ideas than would have been possible through the academic text alone.

2 Conceptual foundations

This chapter develops the conceptual foundations that underpin this thesis and that have guided the methodological choices and analytical approach throughout. The point of departure is feminist organization studies, which provides analytical tools for understanding the various ways in which gender matters in organizations. Drawing on this field, the chapter situates gender equality practices as organizational processes shaped by power structures, professional norms, and institutional expectations.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Det här kapitlet handlar om de teorier som ligger till grund för den här avhandlingen. Teorier kan jämföras med olika bestick i en besticklåda. Forskare väljer teori (bestick) beroende på vad de vill undersöka (äta)¹. Med andra teorier hade jag kunnat tolka mitt material på andra sätt och därmed kommit fram till andra slutsatser.

Jag utgår från feministisk organisationsforskning. Den växte fram på 1970-talet som en kritik mot forskning som såg organisationer som neutrala och rationella, utan att ta hänsyn till kön. Feministiska forskare visar i stället att kön spelar stor roll i organisationer. Det påverkar till exempel hur arbete fördelas, vem som får vissa jobb och vilka värderingar och oskrivna regler som styr arbetsplatsen.

¹ Tack till Lotta Snickare för denna metafor (ett annat ord för metafor är liknelse eller bildligt uttryck).

I avhandlingen studerar jag både jämställdhetsarbete och mångfaldsarbete. Jämställdhetsarbete handlar om ojämställdhet mellan kvinnor och män. Mångfaldsarbete handlar om representation av personer med olika bakgrund, till exempel när det gäller etnicitet, sexualitet och klass. Jag samlar båda dessa under begreppet *jämställdhetspraktiker*, eftersom de har samma mål: att utmana orättvisa maktförhållanden.

Fyra grundläggande idéer är viktiga i avhandlingen. Det första är att kön skapas i vardagen. Kön är alltså inte något man bara är, utan något som formas av hur vi pratar, arbetar och betar oss. Vissa egenskaper som teknisk kunskap och risktagande kopplas ofta till män och maskulinitet, medan omsorg och samarbete ofta kopplas till kvinnor och femininitet. Dessa kopplingar är inte naturliga utan inlärd och de kan förändras både i tid och rum.

Den andra idén är att organisationer är *könade*. Det syns i hur arbete organiseras, vilka värderingar som dominerar och hur människor förväntas agera. Till exempel är chefer oftast män och det finns ofta förväntningar om att alltid vara tillgänglig för jobbet. Det gynnar personer som inte har huvudansvar för hem och barn.

Den tredje idén är att jämställdhetspraktiker påverkas av vem som får bestämma vilket problem som ska lösas och hur. Olika personer kan ha olika syn på vad som behöver förändras. Vissa vill till exempel satsa på ledarskapsutbildningar, medan andra menar att normer och värderingar kring ledarskap måste ändras.

Den fjärde och sista idén är att män som förändringsaktörer är viktiga att studera. Män har ofta makt eftersom de sitter på inflytelserika positioner. Samtidigt kan deras engagemang för jämställdhet vara präglad av osäkerhet och motstridiga förväntningar.

Med hjälp av dessa idéer undersöker jag hur organisationskulturen formar jämställdhetspraktiker i mansdominerade och teknikintensiva organisationer.

2.1 Introduction to feminist organization studies

The research field known as feminist organization studies emerged in the 1970s as a critical response to the gender-blind assumptions underpinning mainstream organization theory (Calás and Smircich, 2006; Wahl et al., 2018). While mainstream organizational research largely treats organizations as neutral and rational systems, feminist organization scholars demonstrate how

organizations are sites where gender is continuously produced and reproduced. Although feminist organization studies constitute a heterogeneous field, it is united by a shared ambition to describe, interpret, and problematize the meanings of gender within organizations (Wahl et al., 2018). Central to the field is a critical and emancipatory ambition that combines analytical inquiry with organizational change (Benschop, 2021; Ferguson, 2017; Calás and Smircich, 2006). Through this dual focus, feminist organization studies have expanded and reoriented organization theory by demonstrating how organizational processes reproduce and challenge inequality.

Within feminist organization studies, several theoretical traditions have developed over time. In this thesis, I draw on two key traditions within this field: the Anglo-American and the Nordic research traditions. Without claiming to provide an exhaustive account, the next two sections outline how the Anglo-American and Nordic traditions have conceptualized the field's development across different theoretical strands and themes.

2.1.1 Feminist theoretical strands in organization studies

Within the Anglo-American tradition, Calás and Smircich (2006) identify several strands of feminist theorizing in organization studies. Early feminist organization research, often referred to as liberal feminism or women in management, emerged in the United States during the 1970s and focuses on the characteristics of women in managerial and leadership positions. This body of research typically adopts an individual-level perspective, examining whether women can attain managerial positions and the leadership styles they exhibit. While this work has contributed important insights into barriers to women's advancement, it has been criticized for leaving organizational power structures largely unproblematized.

Socialist feminist research developed in part as a response to these limitations during the 1970s, shifting attention from individual women to the structural conditions through which gender inequality is produced and reinforced. Research within this strand has also turned attention to men and masculinities, examining "men as men" and how male dominance is reproduced through managerial practices, organizational norms, and taken-for-granted assumptions about competence, leadership, and authority (e.g., Collinson and Hearn, 1994).

Alongside socialist feminism, feminist poststructuralist research has played a central role in shaping contemporary feminist organization studies. This strand gained prominence from the 1980s onward and emphasizes how meanings of gender are produced within specific organizational, cultural, and temporal settings and how these meanings shift over time. Rather than assuming a single, coherent experience of gender inequality, feminist poststructuralism highlights multiple, sometimes contradictory, realities shaped by local conditions, institutional arrangements, and prevailing discourses (Frost and Elichhoff, 2014). Central to this perspective is an attentiveness to difference and variation. Feminist poststructuralist research resists binary categorizations of gender, such as “man” and “woman”, and instead understands gender in relation to other axes of power, such as class, sexuality, and age, and how these intersections shape both possibilities for action and experiences of inclusion or marginalization.

Complementing feminist poststructuralist perspectives, transnational feminism has developed since the 2000s and further problematizes universalist assumptions of gender by situating gender relations within global and transnational power structures. The critique highlights how Western-centered knowledge production informs and often constrains interpretations of gender in the rest of the world (Calás and Smircich, 2006).

2.1.2 Feminist theoretical themes in organization studies

Central to feminist organization studies is the concept of gendered organizations, which foregrounds how gender inequality is created and reinforced within organizational settings. One of the most influential articulations of this perspective is Acker (1990). Drawing on earlier feminist analyses of organizations (e.g., Kanter, 1977), Acker (1990) argues that gender is embedded in organizational processes that construct gendered structures allocating work and power, and organizational cultures that reproduce gendered norms through symbols, meanings, and taken-for-granted assumptions, as well as through everyday interactions and identity work (Acker, 1992). From this perspective, gender is constructed through ongoing organizational processes and is enacted by organizational members. A key contribution of this work is a critique of the dominant assumptions in organization theory regarding the supposedly neutral figure of the “ideal worker” and the gendering of this ideal. Acker demonstrated how this ideal rests on masculine norms, including

uninterrupted career trajectories and the absence of care responsibilities, thereby privileging men's experiences and life situations (Acker, 1990). Subsequent scholarship has elaborated this insight by understanding gendered organizations as operating across interconnected dimensions of structure, culture, and agency (Sobering, 2016). At the structural level, formal organizational arrangements such as policies, career systems, and resource distribution, organize women and men in ways that sustain gender inequalities. At the cultural level, gender is embedded in norms, values, artefacts, and everyday practices, resulting in the inclusion of some men and the exclusion of women and other men (Rutherford, 2001). At the level of agency, organizational members continuously perform and negotiate gender through everyday social interactions and identity work within a specific context, thereby doing gender in the workplace (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Nentwich and Kelan, 2014).

Within feminist organization studies, particularly in the Nordic research tradition, feminist theorizing has been organized around thematic areas rather than theoretical strands. This approach offers a complementary way of mapping the field's contributions by foregrounding how gender is produced and sustained through various organizational processes (Wahl et al., 2018). The significance of organizational structure and its numerical representation was early articulated by Kanter (1977), who emphasized how numbers, power, and opportunities constrain men and women in organizations. Subsequent research has drawn attention to such patterns of gender segregation, highlighting how women and men are distributed across different occupations (horizontal segregation), hierarchical levels (vertical segregation), and tasks and responsibilities within similar roles (internal segregation). Structural perspectives have been further developed through concepts such as opportunity structures (Kvande and Rasmussen, 1990; cf. Rundberg, 2023), segregation processes (Lindgren, 1985), and gender structures (Wahl, 1992). Gender structure refers to the numerical distribution, the degree of segregation in tasks, occupations, and positions, and the distribution of influence and power between women and men (Wahl, 1992). As such, it can be viewed as an expression of gendered processes within organizations and shapes conditions for discrimination and opportunities for development and career progression (Wahl et al., 2018).

A closely related thematic research area concerns organizational culture and the gendering of norms, values, artefacts, and everyday practices (Wahl et al., 2018; Rutherford, 2001). As such, organizational culture may be both visible and

invisible at first sight. One key concept is gender coding, which captures how tasks, roles, and occupations become associated with men and masculinity or women and femininity (Petersson, 2007; Fogelberg Eriksson, 2005; Abrahamsson, 2002). Peterson (2007) demonstrates how gendered consulting ideals in the Swedish IT sector are defined through traits traditionally associated with men and masculinity, such as assertiveness and aggressiveness. In addition, the ideal consultant is expected to be constantly available and to prioritize work above all else, thereby reinforcing male dominance (Peterson, 2007). Similarly, technical education and technical expertise are often coded as masculine (Johansson Palmkvist, 2023; Ottemo, 2015; Berner, 2004, 2003, 1997, 1982), while roles related to human resources and leadership roles are coded as feminine in technology-intensive contexts (Alegria, 2019). Research further shows that work coded as masculine tends to be more highly valued, regardless of the nature of the task (Acker, 1990). This dynamic is illustrated in Alegria's (2019) study in a technology-intensive context, which shows that although leadership and managerial roles are traditionally coded as masculine, they become coded feminine in technology-intensive contexts, as roles closer to the organizational core, namely those associated with technological development, are regarded as more highly valued. As Abrahamsson (2002) observes, whatever is perceived as masculine is considered important, and when something becomes important, it becomes masculine.

Gender coding also extends to technical artefacts and products themselves. Research on norm-critical design demonstrates how technical products are often designed with implicit assumptions about users – assumptions shaped by gender among other social categories (Ehrnberger, 2017). When design processes operate from narrow conceptions of a “norm user,” the resulting technologies function seamlessly for some while failing or functioning poorly for others, thereby materially reproducing inequalities (Ehrnberger, 2025; Johansson Palmkvist, 2023).

From the perspective that gender is constructed through situated social interactions, in other words, done in organizations (West and Zimmerman, 1987), constructions of men and masculinity and women and femininity are context-dependent and always in the making. This perspective highlights how multiple constructions of masculinities and femininities can coexist and compete within organizations (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Within this line of research, scholars have examined masculinities in organizations, particularly in male-dominated contexts, to identify which norms and ideals are pursued in

different male-dominated cultures (e.g., Mendick et al., 2023; Mellström et al., 2023). From this perspective, organizational norms operate through distinctions between the norm and the deviant, with important implications for power and inclusion.

2.2 Reproduction of male dominance

Understanding how male dominance is reproduced within organizations is central to analyses of organizational cultures and gendered power relations (Wahl, 2014). Conceptualizing gender as continuously done through everyday organizational practices (West and Zimmerman, 1987) makes visible how seemingly ordinary and taken-for-granted organizational processes contribute to the persistence of male dominance over time (Tienari et al., 2013).

Acker's (2006) concept of inequality regimes provides a broader framework for understanding how gender inequalities are systematically produced and sustained through the interplay of organizational structures, cultures, and practices. Inequality regimes direct attention to how power, resources, and opportunities are distributed in ways that appear neutral but are deeply gendered, thereby contributing to the ongoing reproduction of male dominance within organizations. At the structural level, male dominance is reproduced through processes such as recruitment, promotion, and career systems, in which criteria of competence, merit, and "fit" often favor men and masculine norms, thereby granting them legitimacy and power, as well as access to informal networks that advantage men. At the cultural level, norms and values concerning the "ideal worker" (Acker, 1990), leadership, and technical expertise shape which contributions are recognized and which are marginalized. According to Lindgren (1985), a gender power system is activated when women enter male-dominated organizations. In such contexts, gender segregation tends to emerge as women are channeled into less valued roles or positions, which in turn contributes to the reproduction of male dominance. Structures, such as gender segregation, and cultures, such as gender coding, thus operate both as conditions for and outcomes of gendered power relations (Wahl et al., 2018).

Empirically, feminist organization research has shown that organizations tend to be gender segregated, with women and men concentrated in different occupations, tasks, and hierarchical levels. Men continue to dominate positions that grant access to power, influence, and resources, and this segregation is

closely tied to status and authority. One way to understand the reproduction of male dominance in organizations is through the concept of homosociality. Originally introduced by Lipman-Blumen (1976), homosociality refers to how men orient themselves towards other men within a society where men dominate positions of power (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). Through such orientations, men contribute to the reproduction of male dominance and existing power structures. Homosocial practices are not limited to elite positions but can also shape interactions and relationships across organizational levels. Moreover, homosociality has been theorized as a gender-ordering process, highlighting how exclusion and inclusion are actively produced through everyday organizational practices (Holgersson, 2006). Importantly, such processes are not fixed but may be challenged by changes in the organizational context, such as the introduction of new technologies or forms of organizing (Lindgren, 1996). For example, Lindgren and Packendorff (2026) show how neoliberal performance management systems can disrupt traditional homosocial processes, creating competitive homosociality when established hierarchies are challenged. This suggests that homosocial processes are not uniform but vary across institutional contexts.

Homosociality can, among other things, take the form of co-optation, understood as the principle that those who already hold power in organizations also determine who is granted access to positions, resources, and influence (Lindgren, 1996). Such processes of co-optation have been examined in recruitment processes, where those responsible for hiring possess interpretive authority over what counts as competence. This enables them to redefine competence in ways that advantage certain men while excluding women and others who do not conform to the dominant masculine norm (Holgersson, 2003). Research further shows that the jargon circulating within homosocial cultures contributes to the construction of a shared ideal, often described as a phantom, which simultaneously confirms the dominant groups' superior position and operates as a disciplining mechanism by defining which behaviors and characteristics are desirable (Lindgren, 1996). For example, Mellström and colleagues (2023) describe how technological entrepreneurship is shaped around a masculine phantom grounded in historically male-coded ideals such as heroism, risk-taking, and hyper-individualism. This phantom operates as a normative yet unattainable persona that embodies traits associated with success, a passion for technology, and a strong association of technology with masculinity. In this way, technological entrepreneurship contributes to the reproduction of male dominance within technology-intensive contexts. In other

words, the homosocial culture functions as a “pleasurable centre of power,” while simultaneously normalizing and regulating the scope of action available to its members (Lindgren, 1996). Studies of homosocial cultures also demonstrate that women contribute to the reproduction of male dominance by exhibiting heterosocial behavior (Lindgren, 1996; Regnö, 2013; Wahl and Linghag, 2013; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2026). Importantly, this behavior should not be understood through essentialist interpretations. Rather, it reflects a culturally conditioned orientation towards power: since men occupy most positions associated with authority, legitimacy, and decision-making power, those with less power, such as women, are likely to orient themselves towards men to gain access to recognition and organizational legitimacy.

Relatedly, Kanter (1977) introduced the concept of homosocial reproduction to describe how those in positions of power tend to recruit, promote, and support others who resemble them, and the mechanisms by which women are excluded from leadership positions. In organizations where men predominantly hold leadership positions, such processes reproduce male dominance. According to Kanter (1977), male dominance and homosocial reproduction have concrete consequences for women who break the pattern, including heightened visibility, pressures to assimilate, and contrast in relation to the dominant group.

Research on technology and gender further demonstrates how male dominance is reproduced through symbolic and material processes. Studies show that technical competence is coded as masculine, whereas social aspects are coded as feminine (Faulkner, 2000). This close association between masculinity and technology has been extensively documented in studies of engineering education (Ottemo, 2019, 2015; Beddoes, 2012) and technical work (Mellström et al., 2023). From this perspective, male-dominated organizations in general (Bell et al., 2020) and male-dominated and technology-intensive organizations in particular are often characterized by androcentrism, in which men’s experiences and perspectives are treated as universal, privileging problems, methods, and applications rooted in historically masculine perspectives, while marginalizing alternative ways of knowing (Schiebinger, 2008). These epistemic hierarchies are sustained through organizational processes that normalize and reproduce male dominance (Beddoes, 2012, 2019). In the next section, we turn to how to challenge male dominance. Such practices unfold in interaction with established gendered assumptions in organizations (Abrahamsson et al., 2023).

2.3 Challenging male dominance

Research on how to challenge male dominance has long highlighted that male dominance in organizations is not merely a matter of numerical imbalance but is sustained through organizational cultures, structures, and agency (Acker, 1992). In organizational rhetoric, concepts such as gender equality and diversity are often used to denote both a desired future state and the efforts undertaken to achieve it. These concepts are embedded in organizational strategies, national objectives for higher education, policy documents, and management practices. While gender equality efforts traditionally focus on inequalities between women and men in their diversity, diversity work often encompass representation of people with different backgrounds such as ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other categories (Fägerlind, 2024; Wahl et al., 2018; Romani et al., 2017) and frequently tied to business rationales, emphasizing benefits such as improved innovation and enhanced problem-solving capabilities (Omanović, 2009; Holck, 2017). To address these distinct efforts, this thesis employs the concept of gender equality practices to encompass organizational initiatives that promote both gender equality and diversity. This choice is based on the understanding that these efforts share similar overarching goals, even though they focus on different dimensions of inequality. Following van den Brink and Benschop (2012), gender equality practices are understood as “the policies and processes that aim to bring about gender equality,” that is, practices that seek to undo gender inequality (p.74).

2.3.1 Approaches to challenging male dominance

Gender equality practices can take different forms, grounded in various understandings of the nature of the problem and the types of interventions deemed appropriate. Consequently, there is no single way of “doing” gender equality. Organizations differ, and gender equality practices are therefore enacted in different ways across organizational contexts.

A widely used framework for understanding different approaches to gender equality practices is provided by Ely and Meyerson (2000), who identify four approaches: fix the women, value the feminine, create equal opportunities, and assess and revise work culture. The “fix the women” approach is grounded in liberal feminist and individualistic assumptions of organizations and society. Gender inequality is framed as a consequence of women’s deficiencies in skills, confidence, or experience, leading to interventions such as leadership training,

mentorship programs, and women-only networks. While such initiatives may support individual women, research shows that they lack a power perspective, leaving organizational structures and cultures largely unchallenged and thus limiting their potential to address systemic gender inequality (van den Brink and Benschop, 2012; Benschop et al., 2015).

The "value the feminine" approach seeks to counter gender inequality by recognizing and valuing traits and competencies traditionally associated with femininity, such as caring and collaboration. Although this approach can challenge dominant norms, it risks reinforcing gender stereotypes and relies on the assumption that increased awareness automatically translates into organizational change, thereby limiting its transformative potential (Ely and Meyerson, 2000).

The "create equal opportunities" approach locates gender inequality in organizational structures and emphasizes measures such as affirmative action, transparent recruitment and promotion processes, and work-family policies. While these interventions are essential for addressing unequal structural conditions, they often have limited impact on informal norms, homosocial practices, and everyday interactions through which inequality is reproduced (Ely and Meyerson, 2000).

Finally, the "assess and revise work culture" approach targets the cultural conditions for inequality. From this perspective, gender is understood as a dynamic power relation produced through organizational practices. Interventions emphasize critical reflections of power across formal structures, informal norms and routines, symbolic expressions such as language and narratives, and everyday social interactions, and aim to continuously revise organizational cultures and structures to disrupt gendered power relations (Ely and Meyerson, Benschop et al., 2015).

Complementing this framework, Schiebinger and Schraudner (2011) propose a typology particularly relevant for technological research and innovation contexts, distinguishing between three intervention levels: "fixing the numbers (of women)," "fixing the institutions," and "fixing the knowledge". The first level, "fixing the numbers", focuses on increasing women's representation through measures such as networks and women's training for them to become more competitive in their careers within technology. The second, "fixing the institutions", addresses structural and cultural barriers within organizations, including policies and practices that sustain inequality. The third level, "fixing the knowledge", goes beyond representation and institutional reform to

critically examine how gender inequality is embedded in the production of knowledge itself, such as in research priorities, methodologies, and curricula development. This approach recognizes that achieving gender equality requires not only changing who participates but also transforming what knowledge is produced and how it is produced.

From a power perspective, the prominence of certain approaches over others can be understood in relation to whose interpretations of the problem of gender inequality are legitimate within an organization and whose interests they serve (Wahl et al., 2018). How gender equality practices are talked about, by whom, and for what purposes shapes which measures become possible, which are translated into action, and which outcomes can be achieved (Peterson and Jordansson, 2022). The framing of gender equality practices is further complicated by the ways in which these efforts are justified within organizations. Research shows that diversity initiatives are often legitimized through business arguments, emphasizing potential gains in innovation and problem-solving rather than concerns for justice or equality (Omanović, 2009; Holck, 2017). Scholars have observed a gradual shift from structurally oriented change efforts toward more individualized approaches, in which equality work is incorporated under diversity management frameworks (Wahl and Höök, 2007). This reframing tends to favor symbolic measures, such as training programs and representation targets, over substantive challenges to power structures and systemic inequalities (Heath et al., 2023; cf. Benschop et al., 2015; Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Thus, what diversity means and how it is enacted remain inherently shaped by organizational interests and power relations.

Due to the nature of gender equality practices challenging the status quo in some way or another, which often means redistribution of resources and power, resistance is a recurring effect of such efforts (Hearn, 2000). Research identifies resistance as a key reason why gender equality practices frequently fail to achieve their intended outcomes (Benschop and Verloo, 2006). Resistance can take visible forms, such as open opposition, but also subtle and normalized forms, including silence, the trivialization of inequality, and the denial of responsibility for efforts to effect change (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013; Amundsdotter et al., 2015). In her study of engineering faculty members, Beddoes (2019) demonstrates a cultural production of resistance and knowledge ignorance, where faculty members claim an inability to understand gender issues because they are not women or assert that gender is irrelevant. Moreover, resistance may also emerge through attempts to distance gender from core

organizational concerns, framing it as irrelevant or external to “real” work (Alnebratt and Rönblom, 2016). At the same time, resistance should not be understood solely as something that should be avoided. Scholars argue that resistance can also be a sign of successful gender equality work and may create opportunities for learning and reflection (Stierncreutz and Tienari, 2023; Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013; Amundsdotter, 2009).

Importantly, feminist scholars have also shown how gender inequality tends to be both challenged and reproduced through the gender equality practices themselves. In particular, when initiatives lack a power perspective, they risk ineffectively countering inequality, especially in traditionally masculine environments (Snickare and Wahl, 2023; van den Brink and Benschop, 2012).

2.3.2 Actors, agency, and ambivalence in challenging male dominance

Gender equality practices have traditionally been carried out by women, both in research and practice, while simultaneously highlighting men’s resistance or lack of engagement (Nixon, 2017; Benschop and Verloo, 2006). Women and minority employees often occupy positions of limited formal power, acting as micro-change agents (Mattis, 2001) or tempered radicals (Meyerson and Scully, 1995), negotiating between commitment to their organizations and recognition of persistent inequalities. This demonstrates the ambivalence inherent in attempting to challenge organizational hierarchies from marginalized positions. Likewise, actors formally responsible for gender equality practices, often women or other marginalized groups, navigate a complex role marked by tensions between legitimacy and marginalization; without real authority, these positions risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative, and require continuous strategic negotiation to gain influence (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019). This situation is often characterized by strategic adaptation to institutional constraints, shifting among arguments to gain legitimacy and create change (Utoft, 2021; Ahmed, 2007).

The challenges faced by individual change agents underscore the importance of collective mobilization and relational infrastructure. Recent research has introduced the concept of communities of change to describe how diverse actors within organizations can create sustainable conditions for gender equality practices (Chaves Pérez and Benschop, 2025). Such communities are characterized by shared values, collaborative action, and the sharing of different forms of expertise and legitimacy. Importantly, communities of change

distribute the emotional and socio-political costs of gender equality practices across multiple actors, making change efforts more resilient than individual initiatives. This collective dimension suggests that lasting change requires not only committed individuals but also organizational conditions that enable different actors – whether women in marginal positions, men in positions of power, or formally designated gender equality officers – to collaborate and support one another.

Scholars have emphasized the importance of management's involvement in gender equality and diversity work as essential to drive meaningful change (Lansu et al., 2020). As gatekeepers, leaders and managers – most of whom are men and occupy most influential positions – hold the structural power to shape strategic directions, establish accountability through their authority, and model inclusive behavior necessary to transform organizational cultures (Kelan and Wratil, 2018). Consequently, recent research has increasingly focused on men as potential agents of change, given their positions of power and influence that create opportunities to facilitate transformative change. A study by Kelan (2020) highlights several subject positions available for men in relation to gender equality practices: as inclusive leaders who actively promote equality, strategists who engage for competitive or instrumental purposes, and forced altruists who participate due to external expectations rather than personal commitment. All positions, however, construct men as structurally disadvantaged by systems that favor women – the reverse logic that applies to women who are often individually responsible for their success or failure by denying structural inequalities (Kelan, 2020). Research also reveals that gender norms and ideas about masculinity can limit men's ability to act as change agents within male-dominated organizations, as these norms often conflict with the need to challenge established power structures and efforts to achieve gender equality (Humbert et al., 2019). In their study of male entrepreneurs in the Scandinavian tech sector, Balkmar et al. (2024) reveal that despite increasing awareness of gender inequality and will of engagement, it remains a complex and sometimes paradoxical process for these men to embrace and implement gender equality in their businesses due to the challenge of attempting to change unequal conditions while being part of the majority group.

Men's engagement at the mezzo level, however, is more ambivalent. Middle managers often resist gender equality practices due to insufficient resources, legitimacy, or autonomy, and may perceive themselves as recipients rather than agents of change (Lansu et al., 2020). Yet, research also demonstrates that this

positioning can shift when men experience affective solidarity with women, highlighting the relational and cultural dimensions of change agency (Bleijenbergh, 2024). Ambivalence emerges not only from structural constraints but also from the emotional challenges men face in engaging with feminist knowledge. Tienari and Taylor (2019) reflect on the vulnerability and uncertainty experienced by white, middle-aged, permanently employed men in academia when confronting their own privileges.

2.4 Theoretical positioning of the thesis

This thesis builds on feminist organization studies to understand how gender is constructed within organizations. Four key theoretical assumptions guide the analysis. First, gender is understood as a processual and relational phenomenon (Wahl et al., 2018). Second, I understand organizations as gendered through structures, cultures, and agency (Acker, 1992). This perspective highlights how gender is continuously done in everyday organizational practices, providing a foundation for examining how gender equality practices simultaneously reproduce inequalities and create openings for change, thereby shaping both opportunities and constraints for actors engaged in equality work. Third, gender equality practices are situated doings, meaning that their form and impact are shaped by power relations, making these processes complex and often contested. Fourth, men as agents of change are analytically important. While men hold most of the influential positions in organizations, with structural power and agency that can facilitate change, their engagement is often ambivalent, and dominant norms of masculinity and organizational expectations may constrain it.

Together, these theoretical insights underscore that power relations shape gender equality practices, and that change is typically incremental, contested, and ambivalent. This framework provides the conceptual foundation for the empirical analyses presented in Chapter 5. In the next section, I outline the methodological reflections underpinning the thesis.

3 Methodological reflections

The research process has been shaped by a series of methodological choices and coincidences that warrant critical reflection. As such, the chapter begins with a positionality statement, situating me as a researcher in relation to the research topic and empirical field. It then presents the research process and overall design, outlining the study's research approach as well as its epistemological and methodological foundations. Thereafter, the chapter presents the empirical material and details the data collection and analysis procedures across the four studies included in the thesis.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Det här kapitlet beskriver hur jag har genomfört min forskning och vilka val jag har gjort. Jag utgår från att forskarens bakgrund påverkar hur forskning bedrivs. Därför börjar kapitlet med en beskrivning av min bakgrund som civilingenjör, av studier inom feministisk organisationsteori och av min arbetslivserfarenhet. Genom att vara öppen med detta vill jag göra forskningen mer transparent och visa hur mina erfarenheter påverkar mitt sätt att forska.

Min forskning är feministisk, kvalitativ och utforskande. Det betyder att jag använder ett feministiskt perspektiv för att kritiskt granska organisationer och arbetar med djupgående material, som intervjuer och observationer. Målet är att förstå hur jämställdhetspraktiker formas av specifika sammanhang snarare än att hitta generella svar som ska gälla överallt.

I avhandlingen har jag valt att fokusera på genus som den viktigaste analysvinkeln. Jag är samtidigt medveten om att andra faktorer, som klass,

ethnicitet och sexualitet, också påverkar ojämställdhet och makt. Att fokusera på genus är därför ett medvetet val, inte ett sätt att bortse från andra maktrelationer.

Jag har studerat svenska teknikintensiva organisationer. Sverige ses ofta som ett föregångsland i jämställdhetsfrågor. Samtidigt är teknikindustrin och ingenjörutbildningar fortfarande starkt mansdominerade. Detta gör Sverige särskilt intressant att studera, eftersom det visar på en spänning mellan höga jämställdhetsambitioner och ojämställdhet i praktiken.

Avhandlingen bygger på fyra olika studier. Två studier handlar om ett svenskt tekniskt universitet och baseras på intervjuer med manliga lärare som har infört genuskunskap i ingenjörutbildningen. De två andra studierna fokuserar på den svenska fintech-branschen, det vill säga företag som med hjälp av digital teknik erbjuder finansiella tjänster som betalningar, lån och sparande. Dessa studier bygger på intervjuer, observationer och så kallad skuggning, där jag följde en ansvarig för mångfaldsarbetet under två arbetsdagar. Dessutom har jag undersökt dokument, till exempel hållbarhetsrapporter, hemsidor och nyhetsartiklar.

Urvalet av intervjupersoner gjordes strategiskt. Jag kontaktade personer som var involverade i jämställdhetspraktiker. Även om det inte var ett krav att deltagarna skulle vara män, var det främst män som deltog, vilket senare blev viktigt för analysen. Totalt genomförde jag 25 intervjuer. De flesta genomfördes digitalt på grund av covid-19-pandemin. Intervjuerna var semistrukturerade, vilket betyder att jag hade förberedda frågor men också lät samtalet utvecklas fritt. Alla intervjuer spelades in och skrevs ut ord för ord. De analyserades oftast med tematisk analys. Det innebär att jag letade efter återkommande mönster och teman i intervjuerna. Alla tolkningar och beslut gjordes av mig och mina medförfattare.

Genom dessa val och tillfälligheter har jag analyserat hur organisationskulturer formar jämställdhetspraktiker i mansdominerade och teknikintensiva organisationer.

3.1 Positionality statement

Reflecting on my career trajectory to date, I position myself as an engineer currently engaged in doctoral research on organizational change from a feminist organization studies perspective. My empirical focus on technology-intensive

organizations is not coincidental; I have been embedded in such environments for many years.

I entered engineering education relatively late, not primarily out of a passion for physics or mathematics, but because I sought a broad education that would offer diverse career opportunities. Through a technical foundation year, I transitioned into a five-year Master of Science program and later specialized in production. During technology internships in the Swedish manufacturing industry, I encountered everyday practices that reproduced gendered notions and inequality, including sexist images of sparsely dressed women in snow-covered Swedish landscapes that adorned the screens of the production computers.

My theoretical orientation toward feminist organization studies is likewise not incidental. During my engineering education, an elective course on practical gender equality and diversity work in scientific, technical, and industrial environments equipped me to recognize the gendered organizations of which I was a part. This knowledge rendered visible the male dominance of engineering education and industry, as well as the strong associations between technology and technical tools and men and masculinity. Together with a fellow student, I co-founded a student association to advance gender equality within our chapter by addressing everyday practices, student culture, and representation. These experiences, alongside further coursework in gender and organization, informed my master's thesis on gendered organizational cultures in the Swedish ICT industry. Understanding that my own experiences of engineering cultures have structural and cultural roots was, in many ways, liberating.

Following my Master of Science degree, I worked in management consulting and later in a large Swedish IT company. Across these contexts, men dominated senior and technical positions, while responsibility for human resources, marketing, and diversity management was put on ambassadors, diversity groups, and culture committees. These experiences further shaped my interest in how gender equality practices are organized, legitimized, and enacted in technology-intensive organizations. As a PhD student in feminist organization studies at a technical university, I have, in many ways, returned to higher engineering education, now teaching courses on gender and organization and on gender and technology. This position affords both proximity to and critical distance from the organizational contexts studied in this thesis.

What does my background have to do with my research? Everything, I would argue. I likely would not have chosen to study gender equality practices in

technology-intensive organizations from a feminist organization studies perspective without these experiences. In line with Haraway's (1988) notion of situated knowledge, I view knowledge production as shaped by the researcher's privileges and perspectives. I hold privileges associated with whiteness, heterosexuality, middle-class status, and able-bodiedness. I'm a feminist and an engineer. These positions have implications for the research process, influencing access to the field, interactions with participants, the interpretation of empirical material, and reactions to the research (Harding, 1987; Mulinari, 2005). The purpose of this positionality statement is therefore twofold: to account for my engagement with the research topic and to render my position visible, rather than presenting the analysis as produced by an invisible or neutral observer (Harding, 1987). Making these positions explicit is intended to enhance transparency and invite critical reflection on the research presented in this thesis.

3.2 Research process and overall design

This thesis adopts a feminist (Calás and Smircich, 1996), qualitative, and explorative research approach to explore gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations. The feminist research approach is understood here as enabling critical analysis of organizational processes from a gender perspective. Gender equality practices are understood as situated and relational doings, shaped by organizational cultures, power relations, and everyday practices. In parallel, the research process itself is understood as a situated and relational endeavor. In line with feminist epistemologies, this thesis approaches knowledge production as a social practice shaped by context, researchers' positionality, and relationships formed throughout the research process (Harding, 1987, 1991). Methodologically, this thesis focuses on gender as a central analytical perspective shaping gender equality practices and technology-intensive organizations. Across the four studies, I examine how actors engage in and make sense of gender equality practices and their organizations. Participants were interviewed in their capacity as organizational actors involved in ongoing change processes, rather than as individuals reflecting on personal identities. While I acknowledge that multiple intersections, such as class, ethnicity, race, age, dis/ability, and sexuality, are inseparable from gender in shaping how inequality, privilege, and marginalization are reproduced and challenged (Holvino, 2010; Crenshaw,

2006), these dimensions were not explicitly foregrounded in the analysis. Engaging them meaningfully would have required different research questions and data collection strategies to avoid a superficial focus on identity categories while overlooking the structural dynamics and systems of domination through which gender inequality is produced (Dhamoon, 2011; Liu, 2018). The decision to center gender should therefore be understood as a deliberate analytical delimitation rather than a theoretical denial of other intersecting power relations.

A qualitative approach enables in-depth exploration of organizational practices and meanings, offering partial, contextually grounded insights rather than claims of universal representation (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). As such, the study is exploratory, aiming to generate nuanced understandings of how gender equality practices are enacted and navigated in specific organizational settings. The overall research design is summarized in Table I.

Epistemology	Knowledge as situated, relational, and context dependent
Theoretical framework	Feminist organization studies – gender as socially and culturally constructed, doing gender, gendered organizations
Methodology	Explorative research based on research participants, their interpretations, and descriptions as central
Methods	Qualitative in terms of semi-structured interviews, job shadowing, observations, and document analysis
Analysis	Thematic analysis based on an abductive approach

Table I: Summary of research design.

The empirical focus on Swedish technology-intensive organizations is analytically motivated. Sweden is often portrayed as a forerunner in gender equality policy and interventions, while the Swedish technology industry and engineering education remain male-dominated both numerically and culturally. This combination renders Sweden a particularly relevant context for exploring the tensions, contradictions, and possibilities of gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive settings. Following the actors involved in such practices in a context where equality is both institutionally promoted and organizationally constrained enables a critical exploration of how gender

equality practices are framed, legitimized, and practiced in everyday organizational life.

The four papers included in this thesis – each based on an empirical study – explore different dimensions of how discursive constructions and organizational conditions in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts shape gender equality practices. While each paper addresses a distinct research question, all are grounded in the same epistemological and methodological approach, and together they form a more multifaceted understanding of how organizational conditions shape gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations. Data collection for Papers I and II was conducted between 2020 and 2021, whereas Papers III and IV draw on empirical data collected between 2022 and 2023. Paper I served as the entry point into the research process. It examines discourses surrounding gender equality practices within a Swedish technical university, drawing on 14 semi-structured interviews with senior male faculty members who have introduced gender knowledge into engineering education. The analysis explores how male faculty position gender knowledge in relation to engineering knowledge, and the implications of these positionings for the introduction of gender knowledge in engineering education. Paper II builds on Paper I and draws on the same set of interviews as in Paper I. It investigates the organizational conditions that enable male faculty to engage in gender equality practices in engineering education.

Paper III shifts the empirical focus to the Swedish fintech industry. Based on interviews, observations, and documentary material, it explores how the problem of diversity and diversity management practices are understood in scale-up fintech organizations. Paper IV offers an in-depth study of a Swedish fintech scale-up with diversity ambitions and a designated diversity manager. Drawing on interviews, job shadowing, observations, and documentary material, the paper examines how notions of diversity management and gender shape work for change and, in turn, the diversity manager's scope of action. An overview of the four papers included in the thesis is provided in Table II.

Paper	Research question	Empirical material	Methodological approach	Main focus
I	How do engaged male faculty position gender knowledge in relation to engineering knowledge, and what are the consequences of such positionings for the introduction of gender knowledge in engineering education?	Interviews (14), documentary material.	Explorative research based on research participants, their interpretations and descriptions as central.	Examining the discursive positionings of gender knowledge in relation to engineering education.
II	What organizational conditions enable male faculty to introduce gender knowledge in engineering education?	Interviews (14), documentary material.	Explorative research based on research participants, their interpretations and descriptions as central.	Understanding the organizational conditions that enable faculty members to engage in work for change.
III	How is the problem with diversity and its interventions understood within the Swedish fintech industry?	Interviews (6), observations, annual and sustainability reports (15 + 5), websites (15).	Explorative research based on research participants, their interpretations and descriptions as central.	Discursive framings of problem formulations and interventions related to diversity management.
IV	How do notions of diversity work and gender shape efforts for change?	Interviews (6), job shadowing, press coverage, internal and external documents.	Explorative research based on research participants, their interpretations and descriptions as central.	Exploring how organizational culture shapes the transformative potential of diversity work and room for maneuver of diversity manager.

Table II: Overview of the four papers included in the thesis.

3.3 Empirical material

The empirical work presented in this thesis builds on four qualitative studies, forming the basis of Papers I, II, III, and IV. Each study explores a distinct dimension of how gender equality practices are shaped by discursive constructions and conflicting organizational conditions in technology-intensive organizations, drawing on a range of qualitative materials. I have collected all empirical material included in this thesis. Some parts of the empirical material, such as specific interviews and media articles, are used across more than one paper. These materials have, however, been re-analyzed using analytical frameworks tailored to the specific research question of each paper. Reusing empirical material in this manner is consistent with qualitative and feminist research traditions, in which empirical richness and the researcher's situatedness enable multiple analytical readings (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Table III provides an overview of the empirical material included in the thesis and its use across the four papers.

Data source	Collected by	Time period	Used in Paper(s)
14 semi-structured interviews with informants from a technical university	Erika Blomstrand	June 2020 – May 2021	I, II
11 semi-structured interviews with informants from the fintech industry	Erika Blomstrand	May – October 2022	III, IV
Job shadowing of one informant from a fintech scale-up organization	Erika Blomstrand	May 2022	IV
Observations from two fintech networking days	Erika Blomstrand	February 2023	III
36 media articles from Swedish newspapers retrieved from media archive database Retriever	Erika Blomstrand	October 2022	IV
Documentary material including internal	Erika Blomstrand	May 2022	I, II, IV

documents such as policy documents, course syllabi, presentations and email conversations			
Documentary material including external documents such as press releases, official reports, and home pages	Erika Blomstrand	May – October 2022	III, IV

Table III: Overview of empirical material and their use across the papers.

3.3.1 Sampling

The sampling for this thesis was strategically and theoretically grounded. I sought to contact individuals whom I assessed as particularly well-positioned to address the thesis's purpose of exploring gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts. Accordingly, the inclusion criteria focused on individuals who were actively involved in gender equality practices and ongoing organizational change processes. Whether participants were men or not was not a criterion for inclusion, nor was it something I intentionally sought. However, the majority of participants were men, which subsequently shaped the thesis's analytical direction. In other words, although gender was not a basis for recruitment, it became analytically relevant given the sample's empirical composition.

The selection of informants evolved iteratively. I intended to gain access to multiple technology-intensive organizations, guided by an understanding of organizations as open systems shaped by, and intersecting with, broader industry and societal contexts. Initial contact was established with seven informants at a Swedish technical university, forming the empirical basis for Papers I and II. These contacts were mediated through my professional network and were individuals working with gender inequality issues at the university at the time of the study.

Access to informants from several organizations within the fintech industry was facilitated through my professional network, thereby providing the empirical basis for Papers III and IV. Some individuals did not respond or declined participation. Three initial contacts were established, who subsequently referred me to additional participants through snowball sampling (Bryman, 2018),

resulting in a total of eleven informants within the fintech industry. These informants represent different organizational positions and contexts within the fintech industry: three diversity managers, two investors, and one industry expert from six organizations, as well as five informants, including one of the diversity managers, from a single scale-up company.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw, and how the empirical material would be used. In presenting the findings, care has been taken to protect participants' anonymity and to avoid representations that could cause harm to individuals or organizations.

3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews constitute the primary empirical material of this thesis. Across the four studies, interviews are combined with other qualitative materials, such as job shadowing and documents, in different ways. In total, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted: 14 at a Swedish technical university and 11 in the Swedish fintech industry. All interviews were semi-structured and conducted using an interview guide, allowing for open-ended questions, follow-up inquiries, and elaboration. Each interview began with information about the study and the interview structure, after which participants were invited to ask questions.

I approach the interview as an interactionist exchange between researcher and participant (Kalman & Lövgren, 2019), with analysis already embedded in the interview itself. Five interviews were conducted in person, while the remaining interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is not possible to determine how data collection would have unfolded under other circumstances, conducting interviews digitally was not my preferred choice. Detailed descriptions of interview contexts and participants are provided in Papers I and II (technical university) and Papers III and IV (fintech industry). Table IV provides an overview of the interviews conducted.

No	Role of interviewee	Date and duration	Form	Used in Paper
1	Vice Program Director	June 2020, 41 min	Digital	I, II
2	Program Director	June 2020, 56 min	Digital	I, II
3	Program Director	June, 2020 47 min	Digital	I, II
4	Program Director	June 2020, 27 min	Digital	I, II
5	Program Director	June 2020, 30 min	Digital	I, II
6	Program Director	June 2020, 26 min	Digital	I, II
7	Course Coordinator	June 2020, 23 min	Digital	I, II
8	Program Director	March 2021, 35 min	Digital	I, II
9	Program Director	March 2021, 37 min	Digital	I, II
10	Vice Program Director	March 2021, 39 min	Digital	I, II
11	Program Director	March 2021, 47 min	Digital	I, II
12	Program Director	March 2021, 46 min	Digital	I, II
13	Program Director	March 2021, 46 min	Digital	I, II
14	Course Coordinator	March 2021, 26 min	Digital	I, II
15	Diversity Manager	May 2022, 86 min	Physical	III, IV
16	Diversity Ambassador	May 2022, 37 min	Physical	IV
17	Diversity Ambassador	May 2022, 37 min	Digital	IV
18	Diversity Ambassador	May 2022, 32 min	Digital	IV
19	Industry Expert	June 2022, 45 min	Physical	III
20	Diversity Manager	September 2022, 45 min	Physical	III
21	Diversity Ambassador	September 2022, 39 min	Physical	IV

22	Diversity Ambassador	September 2022, 56 min	Digital	IV
23	Diversity Manager	September 2022, 42 min	Digital	III
24	Investor	October 2022, 55 min	Digital	III
25	Investor	October 2022, 25 min	Digital	III

Table IV: Overview of interviews.

Many participants described the interviews as relaxed and reflective, and several noted that the interviews offered an opportunity to reflect on their own role in gender equality practices in ways they had not previously considered. While this reflexive engagement can enrich the empirical material, it also raises questions about how the interview situation itself shapes participants' accounts.

My position as a woman and a PhD student in gender and organization may also have shaped the research encounter. In one interview, a participant explicitly commented on my gender and research focus. I have reflected on how the empirical material might have differed had I been a man. It is possible that expressions of enthusiasm for gender equality would have been less pronounced, or conversely, that a sense of homosocial solidarity might have shaped the interaction differently. Such dynamics cannot be fully accounted for, but acknowledging them is part of maintaining reflexive awareness throughout the research process.

3.3.3 Job shadowing

Job shadowing was conducted with one participant at a single organization over two working days. The organization was a fintech scale-up, and the participant was a diversity manager responsible for diversity and inclusion initiatives (for more details on the organization and the broader study, see Paper IV). This participant was selected for their central role in diversity management within the company and their willingness to provide access to routine work practices, including meetings, informal interactions, and decision-making processes. The selection was purposive, guided by the aim of studying gender equality practices in action within a fintech context. This method involved observing and

interacting with the informant in his work context to gain insight into everyday activities, interactions, meetings, and informal practices. Field notes were taken both digitally and by hand, depending on situational constraints. Shadowing was chosen as a method because it can capture organizational interactions and informal contexts that would not be accessible through interviews alone (Czarniawska, 2007, 2014). At the same time, the method posed challenges. Observing another person over extended periods required sustained attentiveness, and the reliance on field notes meant that not all interactions could be captured in detail. The absence of audio recordings during shadowing was a deliberate ethical and methodological choice, as recording was deemed inappropriate in that context.

3.3.4 Documentary material

In addition to interviews and shadowing, I collected official reports and organizational documents from my informants, from the business archive Retriever, and from organizational websites. These materials included policy documents, emails, internal communication, media articles, and official documents, all of which were included in the analysis or as contextual background.

3.4 Analysis of empirical material

All interviews were audio recorded with participants' informed consent and transcribed verbatim. Transcription was conducted shortly after each interview, enabling close engagement with the material while the interview situation was still fresh in mind. This process constituted a second analytical phase, allowing for familiarization with the data and repeated exposure to the participants' narratives. Following transcription, I read through the empirical material multiple times. The material was examined both within each interview and across interviews, comparing how different informants addressed similar questions and themes. This cross-sectional reading supported the identification of patterns, similarities, and divergences across the empirical material.

The primary analytical approach employed was thematic analysis, inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach enabled me to maintain an active, interpretive engagement with the material while remaining grounded in the empirical data. The analysis proceeded through line-by-line coding of interview

transcripts, documents, and field notes, with an openness to themes emerging from the material. In addition to thematic analysis, the analysis was informed by theoretically driven questions posed to the material, inspired by Grodal et al. (2021).

Qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) was used to support the systematic coding of the empirical material (Maher et al., 2018). NVivo served as a tool for managing and structuring the analysis, with interpretive decisions remaining my responsibility as the researcher. While the overall analytical approach remained consistent, each paper employed a distinct analytical focus, as detailed in the next chapter, in which I summarize the included papers and their contributions to the thesis.

4 Summary of papers

In this chapter, I summarize the four papers that constitute this thesis. Each paper addresses various aspects of gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations. Together, they contribute to the overall purpose of exploring how organizational culture shapes gender equality practices in such contexts. The summaries outline the purpose, empirical material, analytical approach, and main contributions of each paper, as well as their relation to the overall thesis.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Det här kapitlet sammanfattar de fyra artiklarna som ingår i avhandlingen.

Den första artikeln bygger på intervjuer med universitetslärare som är män vid ett svenskt tekniskt universitet och som har infört genuskunskap i sina kurser. Vi visar att lärarna har en ambivalent syn på genuskunskap i relation till ingenjörskunskap. Ibland beskrivs den som något politiskt och icke-tekniskt, som inte alltid passar i ingenjörsutbildningen. Andra gånger ses den som viktig och användbar för att förstå teknik. Lärarna skiftar mellan dessa synsätt. Studien visar också att lärarna uttrycker en vilja att lära sig mer. Detta beskriver vi som en form av *kunskapsnyfikenhet* – de vill lära sig mer om genuskunskap även om det känns osäkert och att detta skiljer sig från många andra universitetslärare som ignorerar sådan kunskap. Vår slutsats är att ambivalens inte bara behöver vara något dåligt utan kan också skapa utrymme för lärande och stegvis förändring.

Den andra artikeln handlar om vilka organisatoriska förutsättningar som gör det möjligt för manliga universitetslärare att införa genuskunskap i ingenjörsutbildningen. Studien bygger på samma intervjuer som i första artikeln. Vi identifierar tre viktiga förutsättningar. För det första finns det förväntningar och uppmuntran från bland annat studenter och universitetsledning om att arbeta med jämställdhet. För det andra har lärarna makt genom sina positioner som män och professionella roller. För det tredje har de tillgång till stöd och kunskap genom samarbete med genusforskare. Tillsammans skapar dessa förutsättningar en början på *gemenskaper för förändring* som möjliggör för lärarna att agera som förändringsaktörer. Artikeln visar även att personer från den dominerande gruppen kan bidra till förändring som så kallade *lagomrebeller* som balanserar förändring med lojalitet mot organisationen.

Den tredje artikeln handlar om hur mångfald förstås i den svenska fintechbranschen. Studien bygger på dokument från femton fintechföretag och intervjuer med sex nyckelpersoner – mångfaldsansvariga, investerare och branschexperter. Resultaten visar en skillnad mellan vad företagen säger offentligt och vad som faktiskt händer. Mångfald motiveras nästan alltid genom affärsargument om innovation och vinst. Konkreta åtgärder är begränsade till utbildningar om omedvetna fördomar, kvinnonätverk och sponsring av externa evenemang. Intervjuerna avslöjar att mångfald nedprioriteras när ekonomin är ansträngd och att kvinnors underrepresentation förklaras med att kvinnor ”inte vågar” snarare än med strukturella och kulturella hinder. Det råder också osäkerhet kring vad som är tillåtet att göra. Artikeln bidrar genom att visa hur mångfaldsarbete fungerar som fantasmagori – det skapar en illusion av engagemang men döljer att ojämställdhet förblir intakt.

Den fjärde artikeln är en studie av ett fintechföretag som har en mångfaldsansvarig som är man. Han beskrivs som uppskattad och viktig för företagskulturen. Hans trovärdighet bygger delvis på att han är man och passar in i organisationens normer. Samtidigt är hans handlingsutrymme begränsat. När han föreslår mer genomgripande förändring möter han motstånd. För att bli lyssnad på måste han tala om mångfald i termer av lönsamhet och innovation, snarare än rättvisa. Artikeln introducerar begreppet *homosocialt alibi* för att beskriva hur jämställdhetspraktiker kan ge organisationen trovärdighet och förändringsaktören legitimitet utan att maktstrukturer förändras.

4.1 Paper I. ‘I’m not expected to know this’ – engaged male faculty positioning gender knowledge in engineering education.

In Paper I, we explore how male engineering faculty at a Swedish technical university position gender knowledge in relation to engineering knowledge, and what these positionings mean for efforts to introduce gender knowledge in engineering education. The study focuses on male faculty members who have introduced gender knowledge into male-dominated engineering education, despite not being feminist scholars and not being formally expected to engage with gender equality practices.

The analysis draws on semi-structured interviews with program directors and course coordinators responsible for course design and delivery. Beyond building on research on gendered engineering education and work for change (e.g., Lo Andersson and Landström, 2023; Pla-Julian and Diez, 2019) and research on feminism and men (e.g., Tienari and Taylor, 2019; Holmgren and Hearn, 2009), the analysis is informed by positioning theory (Davies and Harré, 1990), which conceptualizes identities and subject positions as discursively constructed within specific organizational and cultural contexts. Our reflexive thematic analysis, inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006), identified two competing discourses shaping how gender knowledge is positioned. One discourse constructs gender knowledge as separate from engineering knowledge, framing it as non-technical, ideological, or external to “real engineering”. The other discourse constructs gender knowledge as part of engineering knowledge, framing it as practical, relevant, or even transformational for engineering knowledge.

A central finding is that these male faculty members’ engagement with gender knowledge is characterized by ambivalence, manifesting as unstable and sometimes contradictory positionings. The interviews reveal how faculty shift among these discourses, at times reproducing stereotypes of engineers as capable only of dealing with objective data and of students as resistant to politics or to positions that are overly feminist, while at other moments articulating transformative visions in which gender knowledge is embedded across engineering domains. Several male faculty members describe how acquiring gender knowledge reshaped their understanding of everyday practices, enabling them to recognize problems they had previously been unable to see. However, this learning process is also marked by uncertainty regarding theoretical grounding and concerns about further advancing their efforts.

The study also illuminates how male faculty members' awareness of their gendered position shapes their engagement. Faculty recognize that, as men, they are granted legitimacy in gender equality work with relatively little engagement, and they receive praise for even modest knowledge. Yet this privilege does not exempt them from challenges; promoting gender knowledge in engineering education can position them as “strangers,” necessitating strategic rhetorical adjustments to legitimate its relevance to engineering students. The study reveals what we conceptualize as *knowledge curiosity*: a willingness to learn about gender and develop understandings of gendered dynamics in engineering practice, which stands in contrast to the knowledge ignorance documented in previous research on engineering faculty (Beddoes, 2019).

Paper I contributes to feminist organization studies and research on gender in engineering education by showing that ambivalence is not merely a sign of resistance but can also emerge as a productive but unstable mode of engagement that simultaneously constrains deeper involvement while opening space for knowledge curiosity, reflection, and incremental change. However, the analysis also identifies risks, such as the instrumentalization of gender knowledge into a general awareness of inequalities, which obscures its epistemological dimensions and may lead to epistemic appropriation, in which contributions from gender research become invisible.

4.2 Paper II. “That’s when I dare to push it” – enabling male faculty to challenge androcentrism in engineering education.

Paper II explores the organizational conditions that enable senior male faculty to introduce gender knowledge into engineering education. Higher engineering education continues to face persistent inequalities despite ongoing efforts to promote gender equality. While men’s engagement in such efforts is recognized as important, little is known about the organizational conditions that enable such engagement in engineering education specifically. Building on research on gendered organization theory and engineering education (e.g., Acker, 1990; Nordvall, 2023; Secules, 2019; Schiebinger, 2008) and gender equality work and communities of change (e.g. Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Kelan, 2020; Chaves Pérez and Benschop, 2025), the analysis focuses on how male faculty experience the organizational conditions rather than on their individual motivations.

Drawing on the same interviews as in Paper I, we followed an abductive approach (Bates, 2021), iteratively moving back and forth between the empirical data and our theoretical framework. The analysis identifies three organizational conditions that enabled male faculty to introduce gender knowledge in engineering syllabi: (1) stakeholder pressures for change – participants describe experiencing explicit and implicit expectations from university management, students, and colleagues, articulated through institutional values linking gender equality to sustainability goals and reinforced through leadership and student practices such as praise for change efforts; (2) position within hierarchical structures – through their structural privilege as men in a male-dominated context and as program directors and course coordinators, participants hold organizational authority to initiate syllabi changes; and (3) access to gender expertise through collaboration with gender scholars, which provides male faculty with knowledge, pedagogical resources, credibility, and reduces the perceived risks associated with introducing contested forms of knowledge. Together, we argue that these organizational conditions contributes to early stages in the formation of what Chaves Pérez and Benschop (2025) conceptualize as a *community of change* – characterized by shared values, relational infrastructure, and resources – in which the male faculty experience themselves able to “dare to push it” and act as tempered radicals (Meyerson and Scully, 1995), challenging androcentric norms and disciplinary boundaries in engineering education.

Paper II contributes to feminist organization studies and to studies on gender in engineering by extending the concept of tempered radicalism beyond its original focus on marginalized organizational members to include members of the dominant group who occupy middle-level positions, positions typically associated with resistance to gender equality efforts (Lansu et al., 2020). It highlights the enabling role of organizational context in supporting such engagement, showing how pressures for change, powerful positions, and access to gender expertise facilitate the emergence of a community of change.

4.3 Paper III. Scaling up inequalities when scaling up the business? Diversity management among high-growth firms in the Swedish fintech industry.

Paper III examines how the problem of diversity and diversity management are understood among scale-ups in the Swedish fintech industry. Drawing on

critical diversity studies (Klarsfeld et al., 2022; Luring, 2013; Calás et al., 2009), the paper analyzes dominant understandings of diversity and its related interventions, situating them within a rapidly expanding, male-dominated, and technology-intensive industry.

The study draws on official documents and public statements related to diversity and diversity management from fifteen Swedish fintech organizations, supplemented by interviews with six key industry stakeholders. Inspired by Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach (Bacchi, 2025), the analysis explores how diversity problems are constructed and how these problem formulations shape which forms of diversity practice are considered legitimate.

The analysis reveals a disconnect between official discourse and behind-the-scenes constructions of diversity and its management. Six of fifteen organizations made no reference to diversity in their official materials. Among the nine that did, diversity is defined in broad, vague terms, with little explanation of how the dimensions of diversity relate to power or inequality. Officially, diversity is consistently framed through business-case logic, justified primarily based on anticipated contributions to innovation, financial performance, and customer understanding. Concrete interventions mentioned in official materials are limited to two types: external sponsorships, such as scholarships and women-focused tech events, and internal awareness-raising, such as unconscious bias training and women's networks. Notably absent were measures targeting structural inequalities, recruitment practices, or power distributions.

Behind the scenes, stakeholders revealed significant tensions. External stakeholders acknowledged that diversity is deprioritized during financial pressure. Stakeholders also position competence in opposition to diversity. Moreover, the underrepresentation of women is attributed to women's individual characteristics rather than structural barriers. Stakeholders described it as "difficult to attract women to the tech side" and expressed a desire for "more young women to dare to start companies," implying that women lack courage or initiative.

Internal stakeholders (diversity managers) discussed diversity work almost exclusively in terms of gender representation. Diversity managers describe gender equality as being treated as "something nice to have" rather than as a strategic priority, akin to charitable giving. Concrete initiatives include employee resource groups, support for parental leave, and reviews of pay and

title structures that reveal gendered patterns in how titles are claimed. Diversity managers also expressed uncertainty about legal requirements for data collection, indicating a lack of understanding of how to address inequality systematically.

Paper III contributes by empirically examining diversity management in the understudied context of Swedish fintech scale-ups, revealing a fundamental disconnect between official diversity commitments and organizational practice. Through dual-level analysis of formal documents and stakeholder interviews, the paper demonstrates how diversity operates as "phantasmagoria" – maintaining an illusion of engagement while being hard to concretize and masking structural inequalities (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015). The study also shows how diversity work creates an illusion of progress while leaving power structures intact (cf. Snickare and Gober, 2025). The study advances understanding of how diversity management functions in entrepreneurial contexts where business case logic and Sweden's reputation for progressive equality paradoxically coexist with traditional gender hierarchies and masculine organizational norms, and with a notable absence of engagement with Swedish legal frameworks that require active anti-discrimination measures.

4.4 Paper IV. När det blev viktigt blev det manligt? Om mångfaldsarbete och homosocialitet i den svenska fintechbranschen.

Paper IV is an in-depth qualitative study of a Swedish fintech company in which diversity has been placed high on the organizational agenda and formalized through the early establishment of a diversity manager role, which a man holds. Drawing on theories of gender and organizations (e.g., Acker, 1990; Lindgren, 1996; Ahl and Marlow, 2012) together with research on gender equality and diversity work in male-dominated organizations (Holgersson and Romani, 2021; Abrahamsson et al., 2023; Nadiv and Kuna, 2025), the paper analyzes how notions of diversity work and gender shape gender equality practices in a male-dominated, technology-intensive scale-up context.

The analysis begins with an overall review of the empirical material to identify when and how diversity, gender equality, and inclusion became visible. All material was examined through a reflexive thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which facilitated a structured engagement with the empirical material. To analyze the organizational culture, I draw on Rutherford's (2001)

framework to examine how the case organization's culture contributes to both the reproduction and the challenge of exclusionary practices. This analytical lens is complemented by insights from Acker (1990) and Wahl (1992), which highlight how gendered power relations can be challenged and reinforced through organizational practices.

The empirical analysis reveals that colleagues describe the diversity manager as "one of the most appreciated people we have" and as someone who "creates the culture". His legitimacy appears to stem not only from the organization's stated commitment to diversity but also from his personal characteristics, particularly his gender and physical presence, suggesting that it rests on his membership in the organization's majority group. However, this legitimacy proves conditional. When he proposes structural interventions, his ideas are dismissed, and the analysis also shows how he needs to adapt his rhetoric, framing diversity management in terms of profit and innovation rather than justice and equality, a language compatible with the scale-up's dominant business logic.

These dynamics illuminate how organizational culture simultaneously enables and constrains change efforts. The company displays multiple markers of engagement, such as a code of conduct emphasizing inclusion, senior leadership taking parental leave, and a diversity manager who is engaged and appreciated. Yet, the organizational context is characterized by an entrepreneurial masculinity typical of startup environments, in which innovation, rapid growth, and business value are paramount.

In contrast to previous research, which characterizes diversity managers as marginalized or symbolically included (Nadiv and Kuna, 2025, 2020), the findings reveal that the diversity manager emerges as legitimate and valued yet constrained in his scope of action. To capture this dynamic, I introduce the concept of *homosocial alibi* to describe how diversity work can be incorporated in male-dominated organizations without challenging underlying power relations. A homosocial alibi functions as a bidirectional arrangement: the organization gains legitimacy as progressive and inclusive, while the diversity manager receives recognition and access within carefully bounded parameters. Both parties have something to lose if the relationship breaks: the organization risks its legitimacy, while the diversity manager risks their valued position. The arrangement persists because visible diversity work is enabled while its transformative potential is neutralized, and the diversity manager must learn and navigate within established boundaries to maintain legitimacy.

Paper IV contributes to feminist organization studies by extending theories of homosociality (Lindgren, 1996; Holgersson, 2003, 2006), demonstrating how homosocial processes adapt to contemporary expectations of gender equality and diversity. The concept of homosocial alibi reveals how inclusion, rather than exclusion, can reproduce gendered power structures – a mechanism particularly salient in scale-up contexts where companies face legitimation pressures to appear inclusive while prioritizing growth. While resonating with prior research on strategic switching (Ahmed, 2007), the findings show that such switching can be understood as a practice shaped by homosocial cultures rather than an individual choice. In doing so, the paper problematizes assumptions that men possess greater potential to drive organizational change, showing instead that their legitimacy is conditional and their scope of action structurally constrained by the logics of the homosocial alibi.

4.5 Contribution to the thesis

By adopting diverse empirical approaches and drawing on various theoretical frameworks, the papers offer distinct perspectives on gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts. Paper I contributes to the overall purpose of the thesis by illuminating how organizational members, in engaging in gender equality practices, discursively position contested forms of knowledge in relation to engineering knowledge, and how ambivalence in such positionings shapes gender equality practices in technology-intensive, male-dominated organizations. Paper II highlights how organizational conditions can enable organizational members to engage in gender equality practices, showing how cultural pressures, hierarchical position, and access to expertise shape the emergence of communities of change in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts, which, in turn, enable mezzo-level change agents to act as tempered radicals. Paper III contributes to the overall purpose of the thesis by situating gender equality practices within an industry-level context and demonstrating how official and internal discourses of diversity and its management constrain the transformative potential of gender equality practices. Paper IV illustrates how homosocial processes shape the possibilities and limits of gender equality practices, even when they are formally prioritized. By introducing the concept of homosocial alibi, the paper shows how gender equality practices can be incorporated in ways that award legitimacy without fundamentally challenging existing power relations.

5 Discussion

This thesis set out to explore how organizational culture shapes gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts. Drawing on feminist organization studies, particularly the interrelated dimensions of structure, culture, and agency (Wahl et al., 2018; Sobering, 2016; Acker, 1990, 1992), this chapter synthesizes the findings across the four papers to examine how gender equality practices unfold within such contexts. The chapter proceeds in three steps. First, I discuss the male-dominated, technology-intensive organizational cultures identified across the empirical contexts. Second, I examine how these cultures shape gender equality practices. Third, I discuss what these findings reveal about the transformative potential of gender equality initiatives in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations.

Sammanfattning på svenska

I detta kapitel diskuterar jag resultaten från avhandlingen. Syftet är att förstå hur organisationskulturen formar jämställdhetspraktiker i mansdominerade och teknikintensiva organisationer. Kapitlet sammanfattar resultaten från de fyra studier som ingår i avhandlingen.

Först beskriver jag vilka kulturer som präglar dessa miljöer. Sedan diskuterar jag hur kulturerna formar jämställdhetspraktiker. Till sist reflekterar jag över vilka möjligheter och begränsningar detta innebär för förändring.

Analysen visar att organisationskulturerna präglas av normer kopplade till män och maskulinitet, manscentrerade hierarkier kring kunskap och en stark tro på teknik. I ingenjörsutbildningen ses teknisk kunskap ofta som objektiv och

neutral, medan annan kunskap som feministisk eller erfarenhetsbaserad kunskap ges lägre status. Detta skapar en snäv bild av vad kompetens är och vad som räknas som viktig kunskap.

I både ingenjörutbildning och fintech är män och vissa former av maskulinitet norm. Män kopplas oftare till kompetens och auktoritet. Samtidigt finns krav på förändring. Trots detta är det ofta oklart vad problemet är. Ojämsstäldhet förklaras bland annat som ett individuellt problem, till exempel att kvinnor saknar intresse, snarare än som ett organisatoriskt problem.

Organisationskulturen påverkar hur jämställdhetspraktiker utformas. Arbetet utgår ofta från vad som uppfattas som möjligt i organisationen, snarare än vad som skulle behövas för verklig förändring. I fintech fokuserar arbetet ofta på att öka antalet kvinnor. I ingenjörutbildningen handlar det mer om att införa genuskunskap.

Män som engagerar sig i jämställdhetspraktiker möts ofta av stöd och låg grad av motstånd. De ses som trovärdiga eftersom de passar in i den rådande kulturen. Samtidigt kan deras engagemang användas för att visa att organisationen tar frågan på allvar, utan att maktförhållanden förändras. Mäns handlingsutrymme möjliggörs alltså av kulturen, men begränsas också av samma kultur.

För att få stöd anpassas jämställdhetspraktiker ofta till organisationens mål, som innovation, tillväxt och affärsnytta. Initiativ som ifrågasätter normer möter mer motstånd eller ignoreras. Det finns ett glapp mellan vad aktörer vill göra och vad de faktiskt kan göra.

Sammanfattningsvis visar avhandlingen att jämställdhetspraktiker i dessa kontexter har begränsad möjlighet att skapa djupgående förändring. Arbetet möjliggörs men formas så att det inte hotar rådande maktordningar. Samtidigt visar den på möjligheter till förändring genom engagerade personer och samarbete.

5.1 Male-dominated, technology-intensive cultures

The analysis demonstrates that homosociality, androcentrism, epistemic hierarchies, and technology worship characterize organizational cultures in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts. These dimensions operate as interconnected processes through which gender inequality is reproduced across structures, cultures and agency of organizations (Acker, 1992; Sobering, 2016).

In Papers I and II, this is evident in descriptions of engineering education as shaped by masculine norms and a strong belief in the inherent value, neutrality, and objectivity of technology and technical knowledge. Within the technical university context, organizational culture is characterized by established epistemic boundaries that define what counts as legitimate engineering knowledge (cf. Schiebinger, 2008; Beddoes, 2012). Engineering knowledge is constructed as objective and measurable, reflecting what Schiebinger (2008) identifies as androcentrism – the treatment of men’s experiences and perspectives as universal while marginalizing alternative ways of knowing. In contrast, alternative ways of knowing – such as qualitative methods, critical perspectives, and knowledge grounded in norms, power relations, and lived experiences – are constructed as secondary or marginal. I argue that this reproduces a narrow understanding of both competence and technology itself. Papers I and II further illuminate a persistent dualism between the “technical” and the “social” (cf. Faulkner, 2000; Ottemo, 2015), where understandings of gender are framed as external to the core technical domain, reinforcing epistemic hierarchies that privilege traditionally male perspectives while devaluing knowledge deemed “social” (Beddoes, 2012).

Papers III and IV further illustrate an androcentric culture through the valuation of men and dominant masculinities as the implicit norm against which legitimacy, competence, and authority are assessed (cf. Acker, 1990). This androcentrism operates not only through explicit valuation but also through taken-for-granted assumptions about who embodies competence and leadership potential. Papers II and IV show how legitimacy in position is closely tied to gendered bodies and identities, shaping who is recognized as a legitimate actor in organizational change processes.

Homosocial processes (Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Holgersson, 2006; Lindgren, 1996) across these contexts are illuminated in all four papers. These processes produce inclusion for some men and exclusion of women and other men through organizational practices (Holgersson, 2003, 2006). In Paper I and II, male faculty members’ legitimacy in introducing gender knowledge is granted through their membership in the dominant group. Paper II further illuminates how homosocial processes enables certain forms of change agency: the male faculty members’ structural privilege as men and their positions within organizational hierarchies grant them authority to initiate syllabi changes. In Paper III, homosocial processes operates through the framing of competence in opposition to diversity, revealing how male-coded competence remains the

unquestioned standard. Paper IV captures how the diversity manager's legitimacy stems from his membership in the organization's majority group, exemplifying how homosocial processes shape who is granted authority in equality work itself. These homosocial cultures can be understood as "pleasurable centre of power" (Lindgren, 1996) that simultaneously disciplines its members.

At the same time, the actors studied experience expectations of change from multiple directions. In Papers I and II, there are calls for the education of engineers with broader competencies, including gender knowledge, while Papers III and IV illuminate investor expectations emphasizing equality and diversity. These expectations reflect broader institutional and market pressures that create conditions for gender equality practices to emerge. Despite these expectations, ambivalence persists regarding the nature of the problem. Paper III shows that inequality is often individualized and framed as a women's issue, explained through women's lack of interest, confidence, or willingness to enter or remain in male-dominated environments, rather than as a structural and organizational issue rooted in gendered structures and cultures. These understandings are consistent with liberal feminist approaches that focus on the barriers women encounter and on women as the solution, i.e. "fixing the women" (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). This ambivalence may reflect limited gender knowledge, shallow awareness of problems, and the use of vague diversity language (Papers III and IV).

5.2 How male-dominated cultures shape gender equality practices

The male-dominated, technology-intensive cultures described in the previous section shape how gender equality practices are understood and disseminated. Drawing on van den Brink and Benschop's (2012) understanding of gender equality practices as "policies and processes that aim to bring about gender equality" (p.74), the analysis reveals how such practices unfold as culturally situated doings shaped by power relations.

Across the empirical material, gender equality practices emerge not primarily from an analysis of what would be required to address gender inequality, but from what is perceived as possible, legitimate, and culturally acceptable within these organizational contexts. As a result, equality work is shaped less by problem definition and more by cultural suitability, a pattern that demonstrates

how organizational culture operates as both a condition and hinder for change initiatives.

In the fintech context (Papers III and IV), gender equality practices primarily address numerical imbalance, which can be described as “fixing the numbers” (Schiebinger and Schraudner, 2011), with a focus on recruitment, retention, and representation, with approaches such as women-only networks and employer resource groups targeted to women. These initiatives are often framed as necessary to secure talent, remain competitive, and signal engagement to stakeholders. Efforts also include cultural interventions, such as unconscious-bias training and structural interventions such as policy changes, which align with “fixing the institution” (Schiebinger and Schraudner, 2011).

In the technical university context (Papers I and II), initiatives target gender knowledge in engineering education, consistent with “fixing the knowledge” (Schiebinger and Schraudner, 2011). This approach recognizes that achieving gender equality requires not only changing who participates but also transforming what knowledge is produced and how. Yet the analysis reveals how epistemic hierarchies hinder these efforts: gender knowledge remains positioned as supplementary to, rather than constitutive of, engineering knowledge.

Taken together, gender equality practices in these male-dominated, technology-intensive environments reflect the three approaches to gender equality work identified by Schiebinger and Schraudner (2011) – “fixing the numbers”, “fixing the institution”, and “fixing the knowledge”. However, rather than being selected through strategic assessments of organizational needs, the initiatives examined in this thesis are shaped by what fits within the core business and the dominant androcentric and homosocial cultures of the male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations studied. This demonstrates how whose interpretations of the problem are granted legitimacy and whose interests are served shapes which measures become possible and what outcomes can be achieved (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Peterson and Jordansson, 2022; Wahl et al., 2018).

Across the studied contexts, gender equality practices are initiated when actors perceive that the organization ought to change and that such efforts are the appropriate course of action. These actors operate with varying degrees of formal mandate, resources, and institutional support. Across all four papers, homosocial processes shape who is granted legitimacy, whose competence is recognized, what forms of change are considered acceptable, and how gender

equality practices are incorporated without fundamentally disrupting existing power structures. These processes operate through networks, norms, and cultural logics that systematically advantage men while framing their dominance as natural, competence-based, or business-driven rather than as the result of gendered power relations (cf. Holgersson, 2003).

The studies show that when men engage in gender equality practices, their engagement is generally met with low resistance and high levels of encouragement, recognition, and support (Papers II and IV). The organizational culture positions men as legitimate and credible agents of change by embodying a masculine norm. As a result, men are granted authority, trust, and space to act, even when they lack knowledge or formal responsibility for gender equality practices (Papers II). At the same time, this legitimacy is ambivalent. In this sense, men as agents of change risk becoming homosocial alibis, whereby their presence signals commitment and offers legitimacy without challenging underlying power relations (Paper IV). Thus, male-dominated, technology-intensive cultures both enable and restrict men's agency in gender equality practices: men become possible and legitimate actors, yet their room for maneuver is shaped by the very homosocial processes that grant them legitimacy in the first place (Papers I, II, and IV). However, given the understanding of homosocial alibi as context-specific and always in the making, communities of change (Chaves Pérez and Benschop, 2025) seem important to prevent a homosocial alibi from becoming permanent and hindering change (Paper II and Paper IV) by bringing together different forms of legitimacy and expertise and distributing the emotional and socio-political costs of gender equality practices across multiple actors, creating more resilient conditions for transformative change in homosocial cultures.

The organizational cultures in the studied contexts require actors to adapt their language, framing, and strategies to dominant cultural logics to gain support for their initiatives. This is evident in the rhetorical alignment of gender equality practices with innovation and business value (Papers III and IV). Only initiatives that align with organizational priorities are granted sustained legitimacy and resources (Papers III and IV): how gender equality practices are talked about, by whom, and for what purposes shapes which measures become possible and which outcomes can be achieved (Peterson and Jordansson, 2022). Gender equality practices that risk slowing growth by questioning core assumptions or challenging dominant masculinities encounter resistance. Across the four papers, such resistance takes visible forms like open opposition, but also subtle

forms including silence, trivialization of inequality, and distancing gender from core organizational concerns (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013; Alnebratt and Rönnblom, 2016; Beddoes, 2019). However, actors demonstrate awareness of structural and cultural gendered processes, yet their ability to act on this understanding is constrained by organizational culture. There is a recurring gap between problem insight and practices: actors sometimes understand more than they can do. Agency in gender equality practices is therefore shaped not by what the problem requires, but by what the culture allows. This dynamic resonates with the concept of tempered radicalism (Meyerson and Scully, 1995). Yet the findings extend this concept by showing how even those in positions of power – men in leadership or influential roles – can act as tempered radicals within homosocial cultures. Organizational conditions, such as androcentric norms, epistemic hierarchies, and homosocial practices, both constrain and enable this form of engagement. Change is enacted in ways that signal progress and modernity, while deeper structural and cultural inequalities remain largely intact (Papers III and IV). In this sense, male-dominated, technology-intensive cultures do not prevent gender equality practices; rather, they shape them into forms compatible with, rather than disruptive of, existing power relations.

5.3 Implications for work for change

The discussion presented above shows how organizational culture shapes gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations. This section examines what this implies for their possibilities, limits, and transformative potential.

That dominant organizational cultures shape gender equality initiatives means that change initiatives are filtered through androcentric norms, epistemic hierarchies, and homosocial practices (Acker, 1992; Schiebinger, 2008; Holgersson, 2006) that define what kinds of change are understandable and accepted. As shown across the four papers, gender equality work is most likely to gain traction when it can be aligned with existing organizational priorities, such as technical knowledge and innovation. This has two important implications. First, gender equality work becomes selective: certain dimensions of inequality are rendered visible and actionable, while others remain marginal or invisible. Second, gender equality initiatives are often framed as additive rather than transformative, positioned as complements to existing organizational logics rather than as challenges to them. In this sense, the

cultural shaping of initiatives does not merely limit their scope; it actively produces gender equality practices that are compatible with the reproduction of male dominance.

Despite these constraints, the analysis also reveals openings for change. The presence of engaged actors, collaboration among actors, and expectations regarding gender equality and diversity collectively constitute the emergence of communities of change (Chaves Pérez and Benschop, 2025) in the contexts studied. These openings allow gender equality initiatives to emerge, gain legitimacy, and in some cases disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions. Such openings are fragile because they rely on alignment rather than confrontation. The analysis thus aligns with previous research suggesting that equality work in male-dominated organizations often proceeds incrementally rather than through radical transformation (Abrahamsson et al., 2023; Meyerson and Scully, 1995).

Taken together, the findings suggest that the transformative potential of the studied gender equality initiatives is limited, though not absent. This pattern aligns with Acker's (1990, 1992) argument that organizations are deeply gendered in their structures, cultures, and agency, making transformational change difficult without addressing these foundational processes. In the technical university context, the persistence of epistemic hierarchies and androcentric culture means that gender knowledge remains positioned as supplementary rather than constitutive of engineering knowledge. In the fintech contexts, the dominance of market logics and growth imperatives constrains gender equality practices to initiatives that do not threaten the homosocial culture. Yet the identified openings point to possibilities for incremental transformation. When engaged actors collaborate across positions, when men in power leverage their structural advantages to challenge rather than reproduce homosocial cultures, and when gender equality practices become embedded in broader organizational discourses of change, the potential exists for gradual shifts in what counts as legitimate knowledge, valued competence, and acceptable practice. Whether such shifts accumulate into more fundamental transformations or remain within existing inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) depends on the continued contestation of gendered organizational processes at multiple levels. In the next section, I present the thesis's conclusions and contributions.

6 Conclusions and contributions

This doctoral thesis sought to examine how organizational culture shapes gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations. Drawing on feminist organization theory and scholarship on the reproduction and change of male dominance, the thesis shows how gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts are shaped more by culture than by strategic problem analysis, resulting in initiatives that signal progress while leaving deeper power structures intact. Through its empirical studies, the thesis demonstrates how organizational conditions simultaneously enable and constrain change, and how androcentric and homosocial cultures limit actors' room for maneuver. In the following, I outline my main conclusions and contributions as well as suggestions for future research.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Denna avhandling har undersökt hur organisationskulturen formar jämställdhetspraktiker i mansdominerade och teknikintensiva organisationer.

En viktig slutsats är att jämställdhetspraktiker formas efter vad som passar in i den rådande kulturen. Vissa problem blir synliga och möjliga att arbeta med, medan andra hamnar i skymundan. Jämställdhetspraktiker blir därför ofta ett tillägg till det som redan finns, snarare än något som utmanar organisationens sätt att fungera i grunden.

Avhandlingen visar också att organisationskulturen påverkar mäns möjligheter att verka för jämställdhet. Män möts ofta av stöd och ses som trovärdiga aktörer

för förändring. Samtidigt finns tydliga gränser för hur mycket de kan utmana kulturen. Ett återkommande mönster är att det finns ett glapp mellan förståelse och handling. Många aktörer har kunskap om hur kön, makt och normer skapar ojämställdhet, men deras möjligheter att agera begränsas av vad kulturen tillåter. Därför leder jämställdhetspraktiker ofta till små stegvisa förändringar snarare än till djupgående omvandling.

Avhandlingen bidrar med kunskap till feministisk organisationsforskning genom att visa hur jämställdhetspraktiker både möjliggörs och begränsas av normer kopplade till män och maskulinitet och av att män väljer män. Den visar också att mäns engagemang kan vara en resurs för förändring, men att detta engagemang är villkorat och inte nödvändigtvis utmanar maktstrukturer på djupet.

Praktiskt bidrar avhandlingen med nya insikter om jämställdhetspraktiker inom två viktiga men mindre utforskade sammanhang: ingenjörsutbildning vid tekniska universitet och fintechbranschen. Genom hur den är utformad visar avhandlingen på värdet av att studera förändring inom organisationer och att undersöka hur personer i maktpositioner försöker skapa förändring.

Avslutningsvis pekar avhandlingen på behovet av framtida forskning som följer jämställdhetspraktiker över tid, jämför olika typer av teknikorganisationer och i större utsträckning studerar hur kön samspelar med andra maktfaktorer som etnicitet, sexualitet och klass. För att uppnå förändring krävs också forskning som synliggör motstånd mot jämställdhetspraktiker och hur detta tar sig uttryck i organisationer.

6.1 Conclusions

A central conclusion of this thesis is that gender equality initiatives in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts are largely shaped by the prevailing organizational culture. Change efforts are shaped by androcentric and homosocial cultures rather than being guided by a deeper analysis of the gendered practices that produce inequality. This means that certain dimensions of inequality become visible and actionable while others remain marginal, and that initiatives tend to be framed as additive complements to existing logics, rather than as fundamental challenges to gendered structures. Second, the thesis illuminates how organizational culture also shapes men's scope of action in gender equality work. Their positions are characterized by low resistance,

strong support, and high legitimacy, which makes them accepted and often appreciated agents of change. At the same time, this agency is conditional as there are limits to how much the culture can be challenged. This risks men as actors of change to become homosocial alibis rather than transformative agents of change. Thus, the same cultural logics that enable men's work for change also limit its radical potential.

Third, the thesis reveals a gap between problem insight and practice. Actors across the studied contexts demonstrate awareness of structural and cultural gendered processes, yet their ability to act on this understanding is constrained by organizational culture. This gap illuminates why gender equality work in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations often yields incremental rather than transformative change. Finally, the thesis shows that gender equality practices in these contexts are characterized by inherent ambivalence: the same initiatives that open space for change simultaneously reproduce existing power relations. This ambivalence is not incidental but structural, arising from the fact that change is enacted from within cultures that value masculine norms and technical expertise.

6.2 Contributions

The thesis contributes to feminist organization studies by showing that gender equality practices in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts are shaped by organizational cultures rather than by strategic problem analyses, resulting in initiatives that signal progress while leaving deeper power structures largely intact. Thus, it advances knowledge on how gender equality practices are enabled and constrained through the interplay between androcentric and homosocial processes and organizational logics of legitimacy and change. Second, the thesis advances understanding of homosociality by demonstrating how men's engagement in gender equality work is both enabled and constrained by the legitimacy they embody as men, positioning them as legitimate actors of change, thereby leveraging their legitimacy while constraining their scope of action. Third, the thesis contributes to research on organizational change by highlighting the inherent ambivalence of gender equality work. Practices aimed at transformation may simultaneously reproduce gendered power relations, underscoring that efforts to address gender inequality are embedded in and enacted through existing cultural norms and power structures. Finally, the thesis shows that men's engagement in gender equality work can be an

important resource for organizational change, but this engagement is not without limitations. Men's legitimacy as change agents is conditional upon not challenging dominant cultures too fundamentally, which means their agency often serves to signal progress without disrupting underlying power relations.

Empirically, the thesis provides insights into how gender equality practices are understood, negotiated, and carried out in two central yet underexplored arenas of Sweden's technology-intensive landscape: engineering education at technical universities and engineering work in the rapidly growing fintech industry. While both contexts have attracted policy attention and change initiatives, empirical investigation into how gender equality practices unfold in these settings remains limited. The thesis thus fills an important empirical gap.

Methodologically, the thesis contributes by demonstrating the value of studying engaged actors in male-dominated contexts. Rather than focusing solely on resistance or on women's experiences, the thesis shows what can be learned by examining how change is enacted from within dominant positions and how this enactment is shaped by the very structures and cultures it seeks to transform. This approach opens new analytical perspectives on organizational change processes.

Practically, the findings suggest that organizations seeking to promote gender equality in male-dominated, technology-intensive contexts must attend to how initiatives are culturally shaped. Well-intentioned efforts may reproduce inequality if they do not explicitly challenge epistemic hierarchies, homosocial processes, and androcentric norms. The thesis thus underscores the importance of critical reflexivity in organizational change work by continuously examining not only what is being done, but also how change initiatives themselves are embedded in gendered power relations.

6.3 Avenues for future research

This thesis points to several directions for future research. First, there is a need for longitudinal studies that follow gender equality initiatives over time to better understand how initial openings for change develop and whether they lead to sustained transformation or are neutralized by organizational cultures. Second, comparative research across different types of male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations (e.g., established corporations versus startups, hardware versus software firms) would help identify which cultural and

structural conditions enable transformative gender equality practices. Third, more research is needed on intersectionality in male-dominated, technology-intensive organizations. While this thesis has focused primarily on gender, future work should examine how gender intersects with ethnicity, race, class, and other social dimensions of difference in shaping both inequality and change initiatives. Fourth, this thesis has focused on engaged men in positions with various mandates. Future research could further examine how other organizational structures and cultures shape such actors' agency and room for maneuver. Moreover, future research could usefully examine other actor groups, including women change agents and grassroots initiatives, to understand how different positionings shape possibilities for change in male-dominated contexts. Finally, there is a need for research that explicitly examines resistance to gender equality work in technology-intensive organizations, including both overt opposition and more subtle forms of organizational resistance.

7 References

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