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From Heterogeneities to Inequalities

Gaining Access to the Field of Work Organizations with the Issue of "Work-Family-Life Balance" for Fathers

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DFG Research Center (SFB) “From Heterogeneities to Inequalities”

Whether fat or thin, male or female, young or old – people are different. Alongside their physical features, they also differ in terms of nationality and ethnicity; in their cultural preferences, lifestyles, attitudes, orientations, and philosophies; in their competencies, qualifications, and traits; and in their professions. But how do such heterogeneities lead to social inequalities? What are the social mechanisms that underlie this process? These are the questions pursued by the DFG Research Center (Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB)) “From Heterogeneities to Inequalities” at Bielefeld University, which was approved by the German Research Foundation (DFG) as “SFB 882” on May 25, 2011.

In the social sciences, research on inequality is dispersed across different research fields such as education, the labor market, equality, migration, health, or gender. One goal of the SFB is to integrate these fields, searching for common mechanisms in the emergence of inequality that can be compiled into a typology. More than fifty senior and junior researchers and the Bielefeld University Library are involved in the SFB. Along with sociologists, it brings together scholars from the Bielefeld University faculties of Business Administration and Economics, Educational Science, Health Science, and Law, as well as from the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) in Berlin and the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. In addition to carrying out research, the SFB is concerned to nurture new academic talent, and therefore provides doctoral training in its own integrated Research Training Group. A data infrastructure project has also been launched to archive, prepare, and disseminate the data gathered.

Research Project B5 “Work Organizations and Life Conduct of Fathers”

Research objectives and interests

This project examines the social mechanisms in work organizations and private life that influence fathers’ participation in the family. It aims to analyze the reciprocal impact of work organizations and employees on the realization of personal and professional life goals. The project focuses on the question of how heterogeneities among the members of an organization result in social inequalities with respect to their capabilities at work and in family life. It asks what role is played in this process by “old” and “new” lines of differentiation; how the underlying, gendered norms of availability and expectations of compatibility between work and family life are constructed; and the extent to which processes of the production of inequality reinforce or attenuate each other within the various fields of action.

The project works with a model of social inequality that analyzes the unequal distribution of opportunities for participation in the various areas of life; it is oriented on Amartya Sen’s “capability” approach.

Levels of analysis

On the organizational level, the project investigates how life conduct and the compatibility of family and career are discussed, which models and forms of legitimation acquire relevance, and how heterogeneity among the organization’s members influences their capabilities at work and in family life. The analysis looks at micropolitical negotiation processes within work organizations and the role of the actors participating in these, along with the ways that the life conduct of fathers is influenced by the framing conditions of the workplace and its organizational culture. The social construction of expectations of compatibility and norms of availability is examined in the context of organizational cultures and gender norms.

On the level of private life, processes of negotiation within the couple relationship are analyzed in terms of their impact on the compatibility of work and parenthood for fathers. Relevant aspects here are patterns in the intrafamilial division of labor; the economic, social, and cultural resources of the partners; time budgets; and gendered models of parenthood and employment. In addition, individual life choices and cultural models may influence capabilities at work and in the family, as may individuals’ evaluation of their own capacity to act, their life skills, and the expectations of compatibility they place on work organizations.

Project design

In its first phase, the project is designed as a qualitative study, carrying out parallel case studies in selected companies. The case studies address the respective work organizations and their structural and cultural features, as the context for the investigation of fathers’ life conduct, orientations, and strategies and the negotiation processes within the couple. The analysis of the organizational context deploys document analyses, expert interviews, and observation. For the analysis of individual life conduct and couple negotiation processes, the project will carry out problem-centered interviews with fathers and their partners, group discussions with fathers, and interviews with mothers in the company being studied.

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Keywords: fathers, work organizations, gendered organizations, field access

SFB 882 – Project B5

"Work organizations and life conduct of fathers"

1. Introduction

In contemporary societies reconciling family and working life is becoming increasingly important for men (Oechsle/Müller/Hess 2012). But a father's time and his engagement with his own children during the working week are still dominated by his role as the main breadwinner (Grunow 2007: 71) and hence are primarily structured by workplace requirements. So work organizations[1] are important agents in the process of traditionalization in family constellations (Klenner/Pfahl 2008) and hence may contribute to persistent gender inequalities.

The project "Work organizations and life conduct of fathers" examines the social mechanisms in work organizations and private life that encourage or discourage fathers in reconciling work and family life. We aim to analyze the mutual impact of work organizations and employees on the realization of personal and professional life goals. The project focuses on the questions of how heterogeneities among the members of an organization may result in (new) social inequalities with respect to their *capabilities* (cf. Sen 1999) at work and in the family and to what extent organizational cultures are to be considered influential factors. Although German companies claim to be family-friendly (cf. Seyda/Stettes 2010), the question arises as to whether and how they actually meet this claim in practice and how far fathers are recognized as a target group for reconciliation programs at all.[2]

To investigate these questions in a qualitative case study design, we depend on the cooperation of selected companies, to be able to talk to fathers employed at every hierarchical level as well as to experts within corporate human resource management, the staff council and diversity management. However, winning over work organizations to cooperate with us proved to be difficult. Facing these unexpected obstacles during the initial process of our research, we decided to take a closer look at what was happening. What were the decisive factors in gaining access to work organizations? What are the crucial terms and conditions for gaining access, especially when the research deals with an inequality topic (here: the issue of reconciling work and family for fathers)?

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[1] The term "work organization" refers to a perspective on organizations as employers. Both private sector organizations and the public sector are included.

[2] Fathers often do not feel addressed by family-friendly measures in their companies. The study „Familie hat Zukunft" IGS 2007) found that about 40% of surveyed fathers reported that they think the measures offered are sufficient. Possinger (2010) examines barriers in companies for fathers who attempt to reconcile work and family. She notes that there is no data about "whether the offered measures meet the demands of employees and whether employees make use of the measures" (2010: 5; our translation).

In this paper, we highlight the process of gaining access to the research field as being itself a source of knowledge. By analyzing the data generated within this process, we are pursuing two main objectives. Firstly, we intend to enrich our knowledge about the research field (a) by evaluating the data gained by documenting our contact attempts throughout the access phase and (b) by interpreting the expert interviews that were conducted at the same time. Secondly, we derive theoretical conclusions about the relevance of our research topic to work organizations.

In the following sections, we show how the process of gaining access to the field is used to gain insight into our research topic. We then develop four hypotheses which are used as heuristic theoretical constructs to examine the logics and relevancies in the field of work organizations. The latter, we argue, may affect the outcome of our requests for cooperation. On the basis of these theoretical assumptions, we discuss our experiences during the access phase, which were systematically documented in *contact diaries*, compare the outcomes of different access strategies, and evaluate the findings gained from our complementary *expert interviews*. Finally, we draw conclusions about indications of inequality in work organizations as well as the relevance of documenting the process-produced data for first findings in research. Thus, the hypotheses will help to generate new theoretical and methodological findings about the opportunities and difficulties of inequality research in work organizations. By doing this, we intend to conquer new methodological territories as both the systematic analysis of process-produced data generated during the access phase, particularly the difficulties and setbacks, and the use of hypotheses as heuristic reference frameworks have as yet received little attention in qualitative social research methodology.

2. Field access as a source of knowledge

In the qualitative research literature, field access is generally considered to be a methodological and empirical problem. Entering the field means to dive into a new and strange environment (Wax 1971; Böhnisch 1999: 36ff.) and qualitative researchers often face difficulties in gaining access to their field of studies. Researchers therefore have to face a paradoxical challenge: before they even know or understand what is "going on" (Geertz 1983) in the field, they have to use some basic knowledge about that same field in order to gain access. The impression of a "basic connectivity" is crucial for a successful *"getting in"*; it often derives from the compatibility of the research topic "with local worldviews, interests and processes" (Wolff 2000: 340; our translation). For example, with respect to our very field of study, as Wilz and Peppmeier (2009) stress, seeking to enter an organization with a gender-based topic (such as an inequality topic) can be an impediment to access, but it can also function as a door opener (190/191).

In quantitative research, the topic of non-cooperation has been studied thoroughly and with respect to specific target groups (Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 1994; Schnell 1997; Haunberger 2011). In contrast, in qualitative research and especially qualitative *organizational* research, access to the field has not been treated as a substantial topic. Although scholars and research textbooks have tried to provide some insights into dealing with the problems of gaining access (Wolff 2000; Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2010: 56ff.), a detailed reflection and discussion of appropriate instruments regarding this phase of the research process is rare.

The work of Lau and Wolff (1983) is an exception. They argue that access to the research field is an "opportunity to learn about the subject and to increase sociological knowledge" (Lau/Wolff 1983: 418; our translation). They describe their methodological approach to exploring their field of investigation, taking organizations in the public service sector as an example, to illustrate the different reactions of organizations towards researchers' requests for access. Lau and Wolff present two requirements for successfully gaining access to the field: firstly, knowledge of the common evaluation standards of the specific field of research ("standards in decision making" – 1983: 421; our translation); and secondly, knowledge about specific internal organizational practices in decision-making processes ("the rational way in which they perceive responsibilities and cope with problems" – 1983: 422; our translation). They understand the organizational processes set in motion while deciding whether or not to cooperate with a research project as "types of constellations of action" (Lau/Wolff 1983: 218; our translation) and argue that the different approaches to entering the field should be considered as a "theoretical sample" (Lau/Wolff 1983: 218) in order to examine them as an example of typical social processes in organizations: "The starts, detours and blind alleys, and even the failed attempts to gain access can be considered as 'critical incidents' that open up research possibilities", Wolff (2000: 336; our translation) later elaborates in his methodological reflections. As this shows, Lau and Wolff have already generated important findings about the objects of their investigation by reflecting upon access to the field during the very early phases of the research process.

In our project, we adopt a similar approach. We use the information gained in the process of preliminary communications with the field as research data. Our requests for access to companies are considered as open or completed social processes and are analyzed as such. Therefore, different topics are taken into account: The methods of making and establishing contact; the trajectories of our requests within the companies; and the role, function, and statements of the people involved in these processes. Based on our data, we ask what kind of information can be deduced from the knowledge gained during the access phase, and especially what specific logics and assumptions of rationality in work organizations can be discerned. Therefore we draw conclusions about our research topic as well as about specific implications for seeking access to work organizations for scientific research that deals with (gender-)inequality matters.

3. Theoretical approaches and research assumptions

In the following section, we present different theoretical approaches that give us insights into the internal logics of work organizations. Based on each theoretical framework, we generate hypotheses and use them as heuristic instruments within our analysis (Kelle/Kluge 2010: 39) of the process of gaining access. Unlike hypotheses in quantitative research, we refer to them as propositions for structures and functionalities in the field of work organizations (Hopf 1996: 11-12). Following Blumer (1954), we consider them as “sensitizing concepts”.[3] We make use of the hypotheses in different ways: firstly, the theoretical assumptions will help us to pick out the sociologically relevant phenomena in our findings (Hopf 1996: 14; Kelle et al. 2003: 251); secondly, we test these theoretical perspectives against our data either to confirm existing assumptions or to reach new conclusions (Meinefeld 2000: 273); thirdly, the different theoretical concepts are used as a basis of interpretation for different, possibly surprising findings (Kelle/Kluge 2010: 32); fourthly, based both on the elaborated heuristic concepts and our research data, we aim to formulate empirically enriched sociological categories and conclusions (Kelle/Kluge 2010: 39-40; Witzel 2000).

3.1 Communication between science and work organizations as a problem

Sociological research into the uses of knowledge in praxis conceptualizes science and professional praxis in work organizations as separate but equivalent worlds with different

[3] “Sensitizing concepts” are theoretical concepts that “sensitize the researchers to the perception of socially significant observations in concrete fields of action” (Kelle/Kluge 1999: 26; our translation) and open their eyes to discoveries in the empirical material.

languages, stocks of knowledge, rationalities, values, laws, strategies and sytems of relevance (Alemann 2002; cf. Beck/Bonß 1991; Caplan 1979). Bringing these two worlds closer together usually requires specific conditions for interaction (Beck/Bonß 1991; Caplan 1979). First of all, the communication and understanding between the different actors will succeed only if the parties involved are able and willing to adopt other perspectives (Daheim et al. 1989). Furthermore, the premises for successful communication include openness to the interaction partner, the absence of claims regarding the superiority of one's own knowledge, and at least *one* common interest (Daheim et al. 1989). Giesen and Schneider (1984) describe a number of different interaction scenarios for successful or failed interactions: (1) mutual indifference and contempt, (2) disappointed hopes, (3) unbalanced cooperation, (4) conflict or strategic games. Summarizing the above, it can be said that connecting two different fields of society is complex and full of preconditions.

These findings can be adapted to the cooperation between research projects and work organizations: scientific research and work organizations are following different priorities, languages, and logics (Heitmeyer/Alemann 2003: 4-5). One can assume, therefore, that the prospects for the commercialization of research results are less important for scientists, and that their language is fundamentally different from the language in administration or in the private sector. In this respect, we support the notion of a partial incompatibility between science and work organizations that may lead to the failure of attempts at cooperation. We refer to these theoretical assumptions as the *two-communities hypothesis*.[4]

3.2 Work organizations' rationale of profit-orientation

For work organizations, participation in a research project may be associated with certain costs and risks. They may fear disruption to their organizational routines or loss of time and other resources due to the research. Further difficulties may be anticipated due to the possible publication of organizational secrets (Brandl/Klinger 2006). On the other hand, participation in scientific research may be seen as a resource in itself. Based on their research about elites, Brandl and Klinger (2006) have identified various motives that may increase the willingness of managerial staff to participate in a research project. As their focus is mainly on profit, they need to anticipate some benefit from their participation. Decisions to cooperate therefore

[4] This expression goes back to the work of Nathan Caplan (1979); in his study on the use of scientific knowledge by politicians, he found that scientists and politicians live in different worlds with different values, languages and systems of relevance.

depend upon a presumption of some kind of “object-related benefit” (Brandl/Klinger 2006) for the company. One such benefit may be the prospect of a knowledge advantage; another anticipated benefit is the improvement of internal processes within the organization (Brandl/Klinger 2006). In addition, managers and other high-ranking members of the organization sometimes use interviews to reflect on specific professional issues and are therefore able to come up with new ideas (Trinczek 2001). Emphasizing the balance of benefits and costs, especially regarding time resources, seems to be characteristic of private sector companies; this is also becoming true these days for organizations within the public sector (Brandl/Klinger 2006; Trinczek 2001).

Building on these findings, we assume that work organizations are interested in cooperating with research projects only if they are able to anticipate some benefits for themselves. Therefore, their willingness to cooperate with a research project increases with the possibility that the research process itself or its outcome will provide relevant knowledge for managerial staff or the organization as a whole. We refer to this kind of explanation as the *profit hypothesis*.

3.3 Discourses and organizational practices

However, neo-institutional (Hiß 2006; Curbach 2009; Lederle 2008; Müller 2010) and micro-political researchers (Riegraf 1996) have raised doubts about an exclusive orientation towards economic rationality and utility in companies. Using the examples of gender equality policies, diversity management and corporate social responsibility, they show that the economic benefits of such measures and programs are “as yet barely proven by empirical examples” (Rudolph/Grüning 1994: 234; our translation). Instead of cost/benefit considerations, they assume that for work organizations the driving force in establishing such programs is the need for *legitimacy* within both their organizational field and society at large. Legitimacy as the crucial resource for actions and communication requires organizations to respond to external expectations, e.g. contemporary discourses and political developments. As external expectations change over time, organizations need to adapt their existing formal structures to the new external requirements. In terms of contemporary discourses about the need to reconcile opportunities for working parents, this means that they need to integrate family-friendly measures and simultaneously equip them with the notion of economic rationality. In fact, this does not necessarily involve a change either at the operational level or in the exact calculability of the alleged economic profit. As only the *idea* of the productivity of these measures is important, this refers to the neo-institutional concept of rational myths (Walgenbach 2002), which describes the fact that assumptions about rationality are considered valid even when they do not necessarily comply with actual rational practices within the organization.

We suggest that the issue of reconciling family and professional responsibilities for fathers is, in public discourse, only starting to be recognized and defined as a problem. As yet, it has not been transformed into a strong normative external expectation to be met by work organizations; in fact, the issue of "work-family-life balance for men" still seems to be a non-topic in both the economic and the public sector. Instead, limited availability due to family responsibilities continues to be associated only with female employees (Possinger 2010; Höyng 2010). Additionally, at present, work organizations consider the under-representation of women in professional and managerial positions to be an even more relevant gender-based topic. In this respect, our research topic may not be anticipated as being a currently relevant topic within the organizations and therefore cooperation may not be considered worthwhile. We refer to this explanation as the *non-issue hypothesis*.

3.4 Work organizations as generators of gender inequalities

To go one step further, explanatory approaches from gender research may be included. Here, work organizations are considered to be "sites for the production of social inequality" (Hofbauer 2010: 25; our translation). One main reason for the gendered structure of career opportunities in organizations, as Acker (1990) points out, is the fact that they are made up of gendered substructures, which are incorporated into the formal structures. In particular, Acker criticizes the conceptualization of employees as *disembodied workers*: "In organizational logic, both jobs and hierarchies are abstract categories that have no occupants, no human bodies, no gender" (1990: 149). She emphasizes the fact that organizational processes are constituted through this assumption and hence produce gender inequality in work organizations: the closest possible approximation to the ideal of a disembodied worker can be reached by men whose wives take care of all family matters. Even if not every man matches this ideal completely, it is usually true for those who advance to higher positions in an organization. Connell (2010) depicts the logic of a "career machine" that crushes all those who do not match (by cutting their opportunities for career advancement) and enhances the chances of all who meet the requirements. According to her, there is no alternative model to this “hegemonic configuration of masculinity” (Connell 2010: 22). Consequently, most men (and fathers) may not feel inclined to challenge traditional working practices and lifestyles. What is more, the traditional female sphere is connected with social degradation, which also affects men if they engage in the family sphere (König 2012). All in all, managers (as well as employees in other positions) may critically project the costs of their career advancement onto their personal lives (Liebold 2005), but up until now focusing on work requirements seems to be the most adequate way for men to take on family responsibilities. In addition, corporate cultures may enhance or decrease the opportunity to reconcile work and family life. Cultures of work performance and working time are characterized by gender-based connotations; they are closely intertwined with constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Collinson/Hearn 2005). According to Liebig (2000), gender cultures in work organizations differ in their gender-based connotation of the reconciliation of work and family life and in their understanding of reconciliation as an issue external to organizational relevance (and the responsibility of the state, or the individual) or as a productive resource to be included in the planning of operational processes.

We suggest that the issue of reconciling work and family for fathers may eventually become seen as a threat to representations of hegemonic masculinity in work organizations. It contests widespread norms and symbolic practices concerning working hours and working arrangements (Collinson/Hearn 2005). Past biographical decisions of (particularly older) employees may be called into question; therefore, requests by fathers for working arrangements that allow more daily engagement in childcare may trigger conflicts in the workplace. We argue that those agents within organizations who decide about participation in our research project may be aware of the conflicts related to “old” and “new” lines of differentiation in the company and know about the implicit standards set by corporate culture, but probably do not want to face the problem. Following Martin (1990), we consider the “intersections between the public and private spheres” (1990: 348) to be an “organizational taboo” and argue that managers avoid or hesitate to address it. This explanation we refer to as the *taboo hypothesis*.

In the following, we review the research data gained during the phase of field access in the light of our hypotheses. On the one hand, we systematically analyze the different methods used in the process of gaining access to the field of work organizations; here we take methodological as well as theoretical research questions into account. On the other hand, we present the data gathered from interviews with experts in work-life balance matters within organizations. As already described, we derive knowledge about the field logics, especially specific constructs of organizational rationalities, and build towards our conclusions about some considerations regarding the different methods of gaining access for research as well as about our particular research questions relating to inequality issues for men in work organizations.

4. Data base and analysis of data

The contact requests were preceded by theoretical reflections about what would constitute a suitable sample of a wide variety of companies representing the relevant dimensions of our research. Therefore, our theoretical sample – as recommended in grounded theory (Glaser/Strauss 1979) – was structured according to the principle of maximum contrast (cf. Glaser/Strauss 1979; Kelle/Kluge 2010). The organizations were to represent a variety of structural and cultural contexts. In particular, organizations both with and without explicit programs for work-life balance for fathers or audited family-friendliness were to be included. We selected companies in economic areas with a medium level of flexibilization and a wide range of qualified service and knowledge work in mixed-gender industries. The organizations were to be different both in size and in cultures of working time, and they were to act, where possible, in transnational areas.

At first, we intended to gain access using informal contacts with employees of the various work organizations. Since this procedure proved to be very lengthy, and time was pressing, we tried three other recruiting strategies: (1) cold calls via telephone, (2) personal letters to top managers and boards of directors, and (3) an emailing campaign to key communicators in chambers of commerce and industry (in German: *Industrie- und Handelskammer;*[5] abbr. *IHK*). In all, 42 companies were contacted directly, 15 of them informally, 27 by cold calls via telephone. Additionally, we sent emails to 96 people situated in different regional IHK offices, and wrote covering letters to managers at the top level of 46 companies. The progress of our contact requests was recorded in *contact diaries* to document the processes; they constitute our first set of data.

[5] The German chambers of commerce and industry act as autonomous public-law corporations to represent the interests of companies and entrepreneurs vis-à-vis municipalities, state governments and regional state agencies.

Further data was generated by five qualitative expert interviews on the topics of *reconciling family and career* or *work-life balance*. These experts were selected due to their different perspectives on work organizations based on their specific fields of activity in research, education, and training.

In the following sections we compare and analyze the different strategies of establishing contact; afterwards, with the goal of gaining further insights into logics and relevancies in the field, the data based on the expert interviews will be analyzed and interpreted.

4.1 Gaining access to the research field of work organizations

4.1.1 Informal contacts

The first attempts at gaining access were made through *informal contacts* with employees in upper or middle management positions in companies that complied with our sampling criteria. The individuals with whom we made contact gave us information about existing structures and decision-making processes in their work organizations. In some cases, the people contacted were in charge (e.g. equal opportunity management, diversity management or human resources departments). Introducing these individuals to our research project, we asked them to promote our cooperation request to the company's management. A professionally designed handout provided them with information about the research questions, the extent of our desired access, and the anticipated benefits for the organization. Frequently, the process of negotiating took several weeks; in some cases even months. Despite the fact that the first signals given by our contacts were often promising, in the end most companies refused to participate in our project.

In hindsight, we realized that the internal decision-making process about cooperation with our research project was not being given priority in the companies. The relatively long duration of our attempts to gain access may be partly explained by this. However, in some cases the companies' decision-making processes caused protracted deliberations. All in all, we learned that in some work organizations the works council had significant authority regarding decisions about research cooperation. Here, for example, data protection matters had to be discussed with the employees' representatives. In one company, our contact person had at first shown great interest, but in the end she had to refuse to cooperate since a focus on fathers in her work organization was perceived as being inappropriate. The management feared that dealing with the topic of "reconciling work and family for fathers" might trigger an (unwanted) organizational change.

Several reasons were given in cases where cooperation was not confirmed. One argument was that organizational capacities were already fully committed due to current restructuring processes. In two cases, the refusal was based on the fact that activities within the organization were being conducted on similar topics simultaneously. In the first case, a bank had just introduced a new project concerning reconciliation issues for fathers. The second company, from the industrial sector, denied cooperation because it was currently dealing with a competing objective: the topic of "women in leadership positions". A further argument for rejection was provided by a gender equality officer who had to refuse any cooperation because of internal company instructions. She stated that all external projects were to be rejected until 2014 because of an "efficiency program".

All in all, the knowledge gained through the process of attempting to gain access through informal contacts was very instructive for us. But as fifteen companies had been informally asked for cooperation and until now only one of them has finally agreed to participate, this methodological approach of gaining access to the research field has to be assessed as inefficient. However, these experiences gave further insights into our field of investigation. As we will explain later, we obtained detailed knowledge about a company's internal constructions of reality, routines, and authorities of legitimation as well as about the specific negotiation processes in work organizations. However, it became clear that seeking access through informal contacts did not meet our requirements within the research process.

4.1.2 Cold calls via telephone

As our informal contacts turned out to be less effective than initially anticipated, another methodological instrument for gaining access to our research field was introduced: *"cold calling"*[6] *by telephone*. As part of this instrument, a concept for the first contact via telephone was developed as well as a draft for an email with information about our research project. Within the process of establishing contacts on the phone, these instruments were constantly adjusted to the needs and wishes expressed by the organizational actors. Over time, the presentation of our research topics became less important; instead, questions about duration and costs or anticipated benefits in the form of individualized reports came to the fore. In

[6] This term originates from the business sector and is used to describe telephone contacts made without announcement by the calling party, usually for the transmission of offers (Marketinglexikon 2012).

pursuing this method of seeking access we adapted to the logics and modes of language in work organizations and our access strategy became increasingly successful.

For contacting via telephone we had to locate the appropriate contact partner(s) in an organization: who was the "right person" for a first response, and who could finally decide on behalf of the company to cooperate with our research project? We quickly realized the important position of telephone exchange personnel as the crucial gatekeepers of an organization. Here it was decided which departments were to be seen as responsible for our request and whether a connection to the senior staff was possible. During our first phone calls we were often referred to the public relations or gender equality department, which then – remarking that it was not the right place for this sort of request – connected us to the human resources department. Hence, we later decided to direct our contact requests to the senior staff of human resources from the outset.

Whether a connection attempt was rejected immediately or promoted to a higher level within the work organization depended significantly on the contact person. Some of them expressed their interest in the subject and told us of concerns about engaging with the issue of fathers by themselves. Some people asked us to explain our research subject in more detail, indicating that our research topics were not familiar to them. Overall, the people we approached turned out to be open-minded; they rarely answered our request for cooperation with immediate refusal.

While carrying out telephone calls it became clear that our scientific background, meaning university, institute and project leader, was of great importance. Questions were often asked about the names of the participating professors, sometimes about the name of the university. In any case, people who asked these questions generally mentioned that they had a university degree themselves or could be identified as such by their doctoral title.

In the end, our attempts to gain access to work organizations using this approach were more successful than anticipated. As of now, we expect a minimum success rate of 1 in 6. Refusals to cooperate were usually communicated via email. In most cases the reasons for rejection were explained to us with friendly wishes for the further success of our research project. Altogether various reasons were given for the rejection: either the employees in charge said that they were not able to participate due to work overload or we were told that the company had "no resources" and declined for the reason of "a lack of capacity". Overall, within *cold* *calling* via telephone, work overload and availability problems of the experts as well as operational restructuring can be seen as the main reasons for explaining a refusal to cooperate.

4.1.3 Access via personal letters to top managers

Besides these two bottom-up approaches, we also tried to enter the field by contacting the top level of organizations. We wrote personal letters to top managers and to members of boards of directors. In the letters, we informed them about our research project, mentioning institutional context and funding. We also indicated the benefits for the company and asked for cooperation. None of the people we contacted by letter ever answered our request. All in all, this strategy turned out to be totally useless in gaining access. Although we cannot reconstruct the reasons *why* managers did not respond to this attempt at communication, we can at least presume that the scientific reputation of the project's context (the SFB) was of little interest to the members of the field.

4.1.4 Access via key communicators

In addition to the strategies outlined above, we decided to contact economic institutions to serve as key communicators. For this purpose, we sent an email including our project flyer to several regional chambers of commerce and industry (IHK), asking for their support in spreading our request to companies.

Some regional IHK offices answered promptly, promising to advertise for research cooperation within their lists of contacts. As a consequence of this approach to seeking access we received nine contact requests from work organizations.[7] However, whereas the informal contacts and contacts through cold calls via telephone gained us access to large companies in the private sector, through this contact strategy we gained access to medium-sized companies and public sector organizations[8]. The individuals who made contact with us were senior staff members of human resource or gender equality departments. All of them showed great interest in cooperating with our research project and often they had already talked to their

[7] However, we do not have details of the population of organizations contacted by the key communicators. We do not know, either, if the companies learned about our research project by emailing campaigns, information on IHK websites or via personal contacts.

[8] We do not know how and why public sector organizations got the information about our project via IHK communicators, having acted on the assumption that IHKs are organizations of and for commerce and industry.

superiors about this matter. Some of them confirmed participation at once without asking any further questions. Here, work-life balance for fathers was anticipated as a contemporary issue that had to be dealt with. The people contacting us were convinced that they would benefit from participation in a scientific project. They believed in the necessity of implementing measures to support work-family matters for fathers. However, most of them also asked for detailed information on the costs and benefits of such cooperation. Surprisingly, data protection was not a prevalent issue. Arrangements for a personal presentation meeting where further questions about the research project could be asked were made promptly and the process of gaining access for our research advanced quickly. The access via key communicators proved to be quite successful and particularly efficient with regard to our expenses and outcomes. However, it has to be noted that control over the sampling is limited and the form of information flow is beyond our knowledge.

4.1.5 Different approaches to gaining access to the field: summary and findings

In sum, until now we have gained cooperation confirmation from eleven companies. 18 work organizations refused to participate and a further 22 requests are either open or discontinued processes[9]. To give a well-founded evaluation of the different access strategies we will focus both on the cases where organizations were open to cooperation and on those where organizations refused to participate in our research project.

Each of the three access strategies led to important findings. A first lesson for us to learn was about the rules and unwritten standards that we were expected to follow when presenting a request for cooperation to work organizations. In some ways, these proved to be different from the standards of presentation we were familiar with in the field of science. Based on the questions asked by the people we contacted in the work organizations, we learned about the priorities of companies: Firstly, the *scheduled time* for conducting interviews was a major issue for the companies, as they had to check whether this was compatible with internal planning. Furthermore, they were interested in the *target group* and *the number of employees* we wanted to interview, as well as in the anticipated *length of time* spent on each interview. Some companies required information about the *costs* incurred. In addition, the *benefits to the company* were discussed. In most cases, the companies asked us to work out precise measures and recommendations to improve the work-life balance of fathers. We can therefore say that,

[9] See table 1 in the appendix.

all in all, in discussing possible cooperation, *costs* and *expenditures of time* were the major topics that had to be dealt with.

Within the three methods applied in seeking access to our research field, different factors defined whether cooperation with a work organization could be obtained. For all three methods of contact, a successful approach was mediated through the following conditions:

1. We could establish *contact with one person* who was responsible for issues of work-family reconciliation, authorized to make decisions, *and* interested in our research topic.

2. The companies or influential contacts could *make sense of the research subject*, either because of personal experiences or due to corporate considerations.

3. Our experiences led to the belief that the company or contact person anticipated some *benefit* from cooperation. This benefit did not necessarily have to be quantified, but it did have to relate to contemporary issues within the organization.

4. In some way it was important either to build on or to create a *point of reference for the subject of our research*. In the end, most of our successful contacts were made with companies that had already begun to deal with these topics.

5. Finally, it was necessary to arrange *face-to-face meetings* with senior staff members who had the *power of decision-making in the company*.[10]

As well as these factors,[11] further valuable insights can be gained from analyzing the reasons for refusal that were given to us. To sum up, we can say that three main reasons were mentioned in this regard:

1. The argument of lack of resources: Many companies anticipated that, if they cooperated with our research project, too many resources would be bound up. They were afraid of overloading their employees' resources through interview time; this holds especially true for the required interviews with managers. Mostly, this argument was stated in the requests via telephone. As this argument was in some cases given to us in a seemingly 'automatic' manner we conclude that it is possibly a standardized answer to scientific research requests.

[10] In many cases our contacts were not authorized to make the decision about cooperation. Thus, it was important to arrange personal meetings with those who were authorized in order to persuade them regarding cooperation or to learn about the reasons for their refusal.

[11] Our findings correspond to those of Meyermann et al. 2009 (pp. 20-26) and to those of Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 1994, who identify authority, capacity, and motive to respond as measures for the probability that organizations will cooperate with research.

2. *The argument of restructuring processes:* This argument mentions current restructuring processes and/or a difficult economic situation in the work organization. In some cases it was stated that at present no external projects could be accepted due to the fact that the employees had to concentrate on dealing with "serious problems within the organization". Under these circumstances, cooperating with a research project was, from the companies' point of view, clearly a subordinate matter.

3. *The argument of competing programs:* This argument relates to a situation of competition either with existing programs concerning *other* issues or with existing programs dealing with issues *similar* to our research. In the first case, on the practical and symbolic level, the subject of "women in leadership positions" and that of "measures for fathers to reconcile professional and family life" are constructed as competing and mutually exclusive objectives. This means that if the decision makers are pursuing the goal of advancing women into leadership positions they consider the reconciliation of work and family life for fathers to be less important and not legitimate enough to be processed simultaneously. In the second case, the company has already planned its own employee surveys or evaluations on similar issues and does not need a further cooperative venture with external researchers. These two arguments lead to fundamentally different conclusions about the organization: while organizations adhering to the first argument are not interested in our research topic of the reconciliation of work and family life for fathers, those that refuse participation due to the second argument have already made this topic one of their primary concerns.

If we compare the three methods of gaining access to the field of work organizations, we can identify substantial differences in terms of various questions, costs, and benefits.[12]

The first difference regards *time exposure or time resources of the research project*: requests for access via informal contacts led to a lengthy process in every case, whereas many contacts via telephone, as well as access via key communicators, could be made rapidly. A second difference is the proportion of *expense and delay*. The lowest costs were incurred by the emailing campaign to key communicators. All the companies that got in touch with us after being contacted by our key communicators were interested in cooperation and ready to confirm our request. However, some of them did not match our sample criteria. In contrast, the informal contacts required the largest effort and brought the lowest success rate, but

[12] For an overview of the effort and outcomes of the different strategies see fig. 1 in the appendix.[13] The "*audit berufundfamilie*" of the Hertie Foundation certifies work organizations that implement a sustainable family-friendly policy. It is also a strategic management tool to improve the balance between work and family life (http://www.beruf-und-familie.de).

(would have) perfectly fulfilled our sample criteria. The cold calls via telephone took a lot of time, but in the end they brought large quantitative and qualitative benefits to our sample. Finally, the personal letters to top managers have to be considered a failure, as much effort was expended with zero success.

However, all these access strategies brought us valuable *insights into organizational processes and practices*. They turned out to give different perspectives on the research field, providing us with knowledge about typical rationales and procedures within work organizations. To sum up, some characteristic features of those companies that we were able to enter are worth mentioning: half of them are audited in the prestigious certification program *audit berufundfamilie* ("Work and Family Audit")[13] of the Hertie Foundation. Four of them belong to the public sector or are associated with it, and most of them are service enterprises. Also, most of the companies consist of a gender-balanced workforce, in many of them the proportion of female employees is even over 50 percent. Our attempts to gain access to transnational organizations were only successful in a few cases and most of the recruited companies were small and medium-sized enterprises. This means that sector, gender-balance, and size as well as certified family-friendliness seem to be important for gaining access to work organizations with work-family issues for fathers.

4.2 Results from the expert interviews

The expert interviews provide us with additional insights into organizational logics and discourses and confirm some of our findings from the access phase. Above all, they shed light on the typical behavior patterns and contemporary rationalities in companies that determined the connectivity of our research project to organizational praxis. The interviewed experts agree on the fact that most German companies state for the record that they highly value family-friendliness and consider the subject worthy of promotion, but these announcements are often not put into practice. In this sense, the head of the certification program *audit berufundfamilie* ("Work and Family Audit") of the Hertie Foundation reports:

> All companies are family-friendly. (...) There is no one left who publicly disclaims the importance of family-friendliness (...). But the actual corporate culture in the company takes place in practice with your colleagues as well as with your direct supervisor (...)

[13] The "*audit berufundfamilie*" of the Hertie Foundation certifies work organizations that implement a sustainable family-friendly policy. It is also a strategic management tool to improve the balance between work and family life (http://www.beruf-und-familie.de).

> In fact, family-friendly corporate culture can only be established if there are appropriate measures available for all employees at all levels. (Our translation)

Here, the expert outlines the difference between "talk" and "action" and refers to the neo-institutional concept of decoupling: According to the neo-institutional approach, structures are decoupled from each other and from ongoing activities (cf. Curbach 2009). On the level of public representation, companies claim to be family-friendly in order to make themselves attractive to future employees. But in actual daily practice informal barriers prevent the implementation of a family-friendly corporate culture. In particular this can be observed when family-friendly policies are not institutionalized or when there is no evaluation or audit of existing measures.

Our experts note that the first people to address are the managers themselves since their attitude towards family-friendly praxis is determined by their own experiences as well as their "individual images". Their attitudes, in part, determine their everyday interactions at the workplace and their decisions on work-life balance measures for their staff. Thus, implementing a family-friendly policy based on gender equality requires the executive staff to become sensitized to issues of reconciliation. Executives may set an example of ideals to live up to for colleagues and staff and they decide about the implementation or rejection of new policies for the company.

According to the experts we interviewed, the majority of companies apparently do not prioritize the subject of compatibility of work and family life for fathers. For example, with regard to parental leave, managers are more likely to resort to proven patterns: they still assume that women – even those with management responsibilities – will take parental leave for one to two years. After that, these women are no longer considered eligible for leadership positions. In contrast, expectant fathers are warned against opting for parental leave because of the inherent disadvantages to their career. After the birth of their child, fathers are promoted or entrusted with increasing responsibility. In this way, traditional role models as well as gender-stereotyped mechanisms are generated by work organizations.

On the individual level, however, the experts report a change: employees are observed to be seeking new ways of reconciling work and family life. One respondent states that 95 percent of the students and graduates who participate in her workshops on the topic of work-life balance are male. However, alternative role models in senior positions for men with family and women with career orientations, respectively, are missing. Additionally, companies lack the willingness to support career-oriented women and family-oriented men. Furthermore, the majority of older executives are rather skeptical about new working models such as job sharing and part-time working at the managerial level. According to an expert who is particularly well-informed about the managerial level, “there is still the dominant concept that the easiest way to do things is with all of them being always available, preferably from eight a.m. to eight p.m.” Moreover, the expert observes that the permanent presence of all employees at the workplace leads to an “ad hoc management culture”. In contrast, discontinuous and non-permanent presence at the workplace would call for “new management requirements.” But because, in most companies, family-friendly strategies are not embedded, managers are not trained to deal with this subject. Nor do they receive any support from the organizational structure:

> Top management says, most easily: we have such and such models, now the ball is in your court! But the managers – who are mostly male – do not know how to implement the models. (…) Neither are they supported by the working conditions. Just because there is a strong pressure to compete; especially in large companies cost-reduction programs are implemented (…). The staff is reduced, there are fewer people available to do the work, but the work is not diminished. (Our translation)

Although there are “standard” family-friendly policy portfolios in large companies, this information often does not reach the employees and their supervisors. In addition, competing corporate goals prevent managers from adopting existing measures. Companies argue that the strained competitive environment in the current economic situation requires fully operational readiness for the company and goes against considerations of work-life balance issues for fathers and leaders. On the other hand, smaller and medium-sized companies implement reconciliation programs quite strategically to “score points in the region”: If a company seeks qualified staff but can only pay lower wages (in comparison to larger companies) it has to offer other incentives to be attractive to employees. An expert on the topic of fathers in companies reported cases of highly qualified employees who left large companies for medium-sized ones, trading a significant loss in income for a better work-life balance. For this expert, it is no surprise that large companies refuse to participate in a project about work-life balance for fathers as they presume they will not benefit from it: They still count on a large pool of applicants who are attracted by the name (and importance) of the company and the higher salaries. This is confirmed by another expert on “fathers in companies”. He is skeptical about studies that predict quantifiable economic benefits for companies that adopt family-friendly policies[14]. According to him, companies should focus on long-term organizational development if they want to react appropriately to the social changes in gender relations. In this context, an expert on diversity management told us that large companies, especially stock corporations, are driven by quarterly figures. However, work-life balance and diversity measures lead, at first, to capital spending and their benefits only appear a few years later.

The analysis of the expert interviews indicates a considerable mismatch between the external (official) representation and internal implementation of family-friendly policies in companies. In particular, traditional role models seem to be more likely to prevail in the higher management positions. This is important to keep at the back of our minds, as managers are the ones who make important contributions to corporate policy and work out new strategies. In addition, companies do not provide leaders with sufficient strategic tools for implementing family-friendly measures and policies. What is more, large companies currently seem to pursue different goals. Therefore, a research project explicitly addressing the question of work-life balance for fathers will face substantial difficulties in convincing companies of the benefits of the reconciliation of family and professional life for fathers.

5. Discussion of the results on the basis of our hypotheses

Finally, we are going to evaluate our findings as a whole and set them in relation to the hypotheses set out in Section 3. Firstly, we will focus on the theoretical conclusions drawn from the analysis of the contact data and the expert interviews. Here, the following questions will be discussed (Section 5.1): Is there evidence of different evaluation schemes within scientific and corporate contexts that lead to incompatibilities between our research project and corporate practice, and are there specific “rules of the field” or “standards of language” that favor the connection to the field (*two-communities hypothesis*)? What is the role of cost-benefit arguments in the access phase and what do the experts have to say about this kind of argument (*profit hypothesis*)? What can be said about the connectivity of our research topic to the field of work organizations (*non-issue hypothesis*)? And finally, can we identify defense mechanisms related to our research topic (*taboo hypothesis*)?

[14] The respondent referred to the study of the Prognos AG (Prognos 2003). There are other studies as well and even internet portals where companies can calculate the costs and benefits of work-life balance measures.

However, the hypotheses give us not only theoretical ideas about the research field but also methodological insights into how to gain access to a research field. We will discuss these in Section 5.2.

5.1 Theoretical conclusions

The experts draw attention to the different logics of science and the economic sector, which were also important during the process of acquiring companies. We found that the theoretical implication of inequality referred to in our project was of no relevance to the work organizations. Moreover, the question of inequality calls rational patterns and common behavior patterns of the companies into question because it is not their concern either to realize equality or to provide equal opportunities – their goal is to maximize profit and to establish a specific profile. Thus we cannot assume that inequality research is a common interest. In addition, the *two-communities hypothesis* is confirmed both by the different rates of success of our access strategies and the opportunities they opened to adopt the project inquiry according to the logics of organizations. The *cold calls* were especially appropriate for establishing linguistic and thematic connections and to learn about typical methods of communication and apportioning responsibilities within the companies. This informal access gave us opportunities to learn whenever the people we contacted gave us insights into the internal discussions. However, it was difficult to resolve misunderstandings, for we rarely participated in face-to-face meetings with decision-makers. The same applies to our failed attempt to establish contact with upper management by writing personal letters. The access via key communicators, finally, shows that our approach to the field was successful where trustworthy institutions and networks drew attention to our research project. This access point was nearest to the field of work organizations because the IHK offices were members of the economic sector themselves.

With regard to the interaction process, it was important to adjust our standards of language to those of the work organizations. For example, our professionally designed project flyer and PowerPoint presentations about the research project provided a positive first impression. However, the reputation of the project's *context* was of little interest. Although DFG's Collaborative Research Centers enjoy a high reputation in the scientific world, in the world of work organizations – both in the public and the private sector – the information appeared to have little effect on the acquisition of organizations to be researched.

In contrast, it was important for the representatives of the companies to learn about the benefits to be gained from cooperating. This gives support to the *profit hypothesis*. The expert interviews confirm these experiences and explain that the issue of “involved fatherhood” is adopted into organizational logics if companies can profit from it. In this case, it will be provided with economic legitimacy and management rationales. For example, this holds true for small and medium enterprises and public sector organizations which, to counter the national lack of qualified workers, try to attract employees by adopting family-friendly policies, including measures for fathers. These organizations perceived that our research project was compatible with existing internal plans or measures. First of all, they asked us to work out precise practical measures and recommendations, which – being a basic research project – we were neither able nor willing to do. Nevertheless, we had to respond to these expectations to some extent in order to secure access. Therefore we promised every company (individualized) feedback to meet the exigencies implied by the *profit hypothesis*. However, the companies were not interested in quantifiable economic benefits which, in a narrow sense, contradicts the *profit hypothesis*. For the companies, profit seems to be more important in quality than in quantity. For instance, some of our contacts in HR departments mentioned that they expected to benefit from our research by gaining knowledge for their organizations. The companies also signaled that they wanted to learn more about the subject of involved fatherhood to be able to pass the next certification process of the *audit berufundfamilie*.

For this reason we conclude that in most cases thematic connectivity was a crucial factor in gaining their interest in cooperation: companies in which the subject was already on the agenda reacted most promptly and cooperated eagerly. In our telephone calls to the companies we were able to emphasize the importance of the topic by drawing attention to government publications. This means, in the logic of the *non-issue hypothesis*, that gaining access to companies in which people were already aware of our research subject (either on the basis of the personal experience of the contact person and/or decision-makers, or in the context of organizational references) was much easier than in other cases; in addition, political legitimacy seems to be conducive to this awareness. According to the experts, although the issue of involved fatherhood is quite well disseminated in the public discourse, most work organizations do not see the necessity of implementing family-friendly measures for fathers; where there is some attention given to the issue in some companies, it is treated rather cautiously. The connectivity of our project thus results from what the addressees read into it, and their perspective is largely based on their individual images of the topic. This was an important experience during the field access phase: In many cases a successful cooperation request depended on the prior experiences of the people we contacted with the topic and the benefits they were able to attribute to our project.

However, in some companies father-friendly measures are already being established. In these cases, companies preferred to cooperate with renowned experts or to employ their own staff. Thus, the reason for refusing cooperation with our project was not the incompatibility of the topic but the openness of the company to it. In these cases, the denials are based on a *competition between persons*. Other companies, however, refused to participate because of a *competition between topics*: Here, the subject of involved fathers competed with *other issues* such as “women in leadership positions” or “managing a structural change”. In these companies, involved fatherhood turned out to be a non-issue. Thus, it was not considered important enough for gaining benefits in terms of legitimacy and it was assumed to confuse organizational matters. Such concerns indicate effective, competitive, rational myths given the fact that, in the economic sector, discourses *exist* that consider family-friendly policies to be economically “rewarding” for companies. Each of them is based on different constructions of efficiency that apply to the currently prevailing rational myths. The same refers to the norms, values, and beliefs of the organization’s members, which are shaped by the corporate culture. The specific corporate culture determines the daily activities of the staff and provides them with a realm for action. Thus topics that contest organizational norms, values, or world views are both concealed and denied by the companies, as represented by our contacts.

In this sense, we can also detect a confirmation of the *taboo hypothesis* in the rejection of our requests for cooperation by organizations. However, this hypothesis is difficult to prove, at least with the data we obtained, because it deals with implicit, underlying social norms in work organizations. In fact, it was apparent that managers were interested in our research topic when they had experienced the problematic reconciliation of work and family life themselves. In contrast to this successful experience, we can assume that the taboo nature of the problematic reconciliation of work and family life for fathers led to a rejection of our research request. This turned out to be the case in one company, where our contact person told us that a special focus on fathers would go too far beyond the planned evaluation of family-friendly measures and the ongoing reorganization of the structure of the company. Our contact explained that a special focus on fathers would lead to “raised eyebrows” in the company, meaning that this focus would lack legitimacy. She worried particularly about the greater organizational effort that would be required if fathers also solicited parental leave and part-time arrangements as mothers did. All in all, the decision to pursue the subject of involved fatherhood was considered to be unjustifiable.

The results of the expert interviews provide further evidence for the *taboo hypothesis*. The experts highlighted the important role of managers in the implementation of family-friendly policies in their company. On the one hand, (particularly) male executives who live the traditional breadwinner model in its purest form embody prevailing gender stereotypes and, in this sense, represent strong obstacles to the reconciliation of work and family life for fathers. On the other hand, they are a particularly important target group for the implementation of reconciliation measures since they have to be implemented, consistently, at all levels of the company in order to develop a new corporate culture. Wherever taken-for-granted behavior patterns in organizational life are required to change, e.g. demands on availability, norms about working hours and working arrangements, fears arise about how this will challenge the increasing demands for work efficiency and competitiveness. The inclusion of the sphere of family in the focus of work organizations – as has been the case for *women* – appears to be particularly disconcerting when *men* are now addressed as well. Only if the reconciliation topic concerns *both* sexes does it become obvious that “measures” for individuals will not be sufficient and that a fundamental organizational change of behavior patterns, working hours, and corporate culture is required.

In terms of the relationship between organizations and contact people, our findings indicate a further observation that refers to the concept of *micro-politics in organizations* (cf. Section 3.2). Noting that the interest of our contacts in the research topic did not necessarily result in cooperation, we conclude that company members are only able to put their interest in the subject into practice (in the form of cooperating with our project) if they have sufficient power and authority within the company. This holds true particularly in the case of the owners of small and medium-sized companies. In large companies, in contrast, corporate logics were given priority over the interests of individual decision-makers.

5.2 Methodological conclusions

As illustrated, we selected various approaches to attract work organizations to cooperate with our research project. These approaches showed differences in their success in terms of gaining access to the research field. In the following section we discuss which methodological procedures are appropriate when seeking access to the field of work organizations and we ask about the methodological reasons for the different outcomes of the various access strategies.

Based on our hypotheses, we are able to answer these questions with a plausible theoretical foundation. We have a strong indication of the impact of the two separate worlds or *communities* of work and science organizations on the success of our access strategies. For instance, it was evident that the reputation of our research context, a DFG's Collaborative Research Center, was not sufficient to gain confirmation of cooperation quickly enough when contacting the organizations via informal contacts. In this contact strategy, our request for access was often delayed or given a low priority. Often we were not able to talk personally to the individual(s) who could decide about cooperation. However, via informal contacts we were able to discover the reasons why companies refused to participate and we learned that it is useful to connect our research topic with organizational discourses. The strategy of cold calling, in contrast, taught us to be aware of the appropriate standards of language as well as the extent to which aspects of our research subject can be connected with the interests of the companies. Finally, the success of gaining access via key communicators shows the importance of mediation between science and professional praxis by actors who are familiar with both worlds. They can help to legitimize a research project to the business world and can transfer their own reputation in the field to the researchers.

It is, however, difficult to decide which approach is the "right" one. Actually it is precisely the interaction of the various access methods that has proven to be insightful. One might assume that the selected access strategies mutually "control" each other. For instance, although the access given by key communicators was relatively successful, it did not entirely meet the criteria requested by *theoretical sampling*. Informal access, in contrast, offered the best way to comply with the research design but did not prove to be sufficiently successful. The cold calling, again, rendered both control over the sampling and a relatively successful outcome – but it required a persistently high tolerance for frustration that had to be maintained over a relatively long period of time.

As we have seen, many factors affect the outcome of the attempts at access. They are partly related to field-specific characteristics, and partly also to the research instruments. In addition to the expert interviews, the different perspectives we gained – by analyzing the access methods – helped us to optimize our research instruments in response to the patterns of perception and assessment in the field. We learned, for example, that it is essential to arrange a meeting with relevant decision-makers in the organization to give them an impression of the benefits they will accrue from participating in our research project. If the contact with an organization does not lead to direct contact with the people in charge, the attempt is likely to fail. Connectivity of the research topic with discourses inside the company turns out to be an important factor as well: This is generally gained if influential organizational gatekeepers are convinced of the importance of the research project because they will then advocate for the project in the company. Even when the issues of involved fatherhood and the reconciliation of work and family life for fathers have no lobbyist in the company, these influential people can help to bring it onto the organizational agenda as an important and profitable topic. Furthermore, it seems that in most cases the decision to participate in our research project was taken at the level of middle and higher management. Thus, the decision to participate is probably made by people whose own work-life balance has to take second place behind the exigencies of their professional life and whose behavior patterns are called into question by our normatively charged subject. This makes it difficult to secure access to the field of work organizations because it seems to break an organizational taboo. For this reason, organizational researchers are asked to deal sensitively with the idiosyncrasies of their field.

6. Final Conclusions

In this paper, we have presented the first findings of our research project “Work organizations and life conduct of fathers”. As the project focuses on the question of how heterogeneities among the male members of an organization may result in (new) social inequalities with respect to their *capabilities* to achieve life goals both at work and in the family, we used the process of gaining access for research to uncover the first indications of inequalities for fathers.

First of all, we highlighted the process of gaining access to the research field as being in itself a source of knowledge and were able to show how the data collected in the process of gaining access to the field may be used to obtain initial insights. By understanding the difficulties of access as a problem of different communities, we gained crucial knowledge about methodological topics as well as about our research field of work organizations. We had to acknowledge that science and the economy operate with different logics, languages, and priorities, and that a researcher’s success in gaining access to the field is mediated (at least partially) through adaptation to these.

We used four different methods of seeking access. Although they were not equally successful, all the strategies gave us valuable insights into organizational processes and practices. While negotiating cooperation with our research project, we gained initial insights into the relevance of the topic of fathers in work organizations. We found great differences: some companies had already implemented work-life balance measures for fathers, while others were completely unaware of these topics. In the expert interviews, our interlocutors pointed out that these measures never proved to be sufficient on their own , since at the same time there has to be an organizational culture that transposes formal regulations into practice.

We based our analysis on four hypotheses. They turned out to be helpful in understanding our field as well as in gaining new methodological and theoretical insights. Firstly, we learned from the *two-communities hypothesis* that getting access requires an acknowledgement of the differences between different fields of knowledge and praxis. Secondly, we confirmed the assumptions made in the *profit hypothesis* that work organizations need to anticipate some benefits from the research topic in order to be open to cooperation, on the one hand, and to implement measures regarding the reconciliation of work and family life for fathers, on the other. The *non-issue hypothesis* can only be partly confirmed. We learned that, in many companies, discourses about work-life balance for fathers were well known, and this was a sufficient condition for cooperation with our research project. Whereas, for these companies, the non-issue hypothesis has to be rejected, in other cases it can be confirmed. In addition, we can say that there are different levels of recognizing the entitlement of fathers to work-life balance measures: the formal existence of such policies in a work organization does not automatically provide fathers with the ability to make use of them. Regarding the *taboo hypothesis*, our findings confirm the propositions of social inequality research that organizations are central generators of social inequality and have, themselves, no interest in identifying or tackling it as a problem, nor do they have the goal of solving it (Lengfeld 2007; Stainback et al. 2010). What is more, dealing with inequality calls organizational routines, beliefs, values, and cultures into question and therefore it mostly comes equipped with notions about ineffectiveness, costs, and other disadvantages. These notions give strong indications of social inequality as an organizational taboo.

All in all, by using our hypotheses as *sensitizing concepts*, we have provided an example of the usefulness of working with hypotheses in qualitative research. As each of the four hypotheses enriched the findings generated from our data, we attribute great value to this approach to gaining knowledge as well as gaining access to the field.

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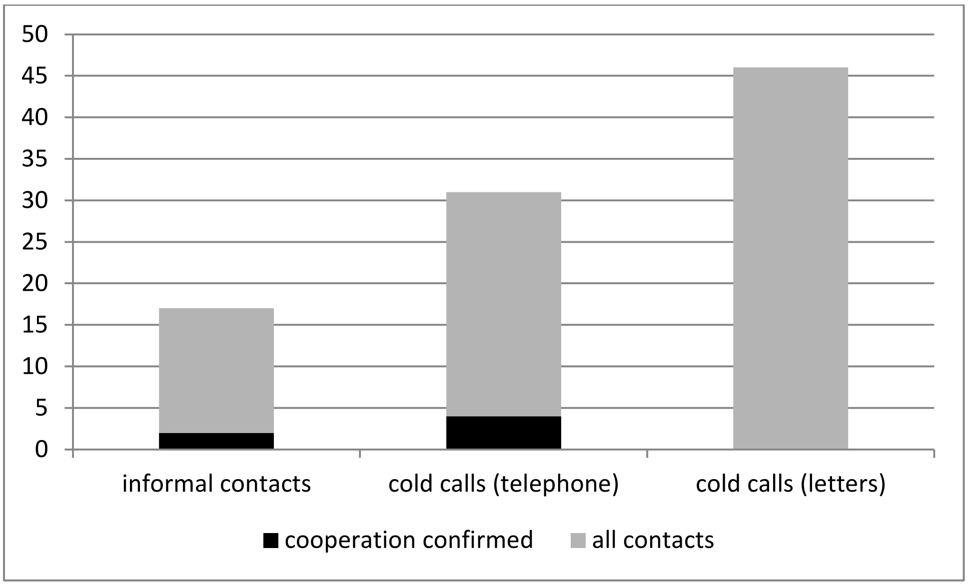
Appendix

Table 1: Overview of the contacts gained within the access phase (in numbers)

Overview contacts				
	all	informal contacts	cold calls	contacts via key communicators
Cooperation confirmed	11	2	4	5
Refusals	18	7	11	-
Confirmation uncertain	13	4	5	-
Discontinued contacts	9	2	7	4
In total	**51**	**15**	**27**	**9**

Fig. 1: Effort and outcomes of three different strategies of contact (in numbers)



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