The Co-Creation of Evoking Change Talk: A Method for Shifting Workplace Culture

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Abstract: This paper introduces *Evoking Change Talk*, a gender-responsive method co-created within a Feminist Living Lab in a global tech company. The approach uses short, recurring knowledge impulses on topics like implicit bias as starting points for team-based dialogue. These micro-interventions are embedded into regular meetings and aim to trigger ongoing "change talk"—structured conversations that promote reflection and inclusive action within teams. Grounded in behavioral design and feminist theory, the method shifts the focus from one-time awareness to continuous cultural learning. Initial implementation in some developer and leadership teams suggest increased awareness, surfacing of blind spots, and first steps toward inclusive practices. Reflective diaries capture these shifts and support iterative development. *Evoking Change Talk* offers a low-threshold, transferable model for embedding equity into everyday tech work and highlights the importance of peer facilitation, psychological safety, and small-scale interventions as levers for structural change.

Keywords: Living Lab Research, Gender, Tech Workplace Culture

1 Introduction

Achieving gender equity in tech organizations requires more than isolated training or top-down mandates—it demands sustained cultural change embedded in everyday routines. This paper introduces *Evoking Change Talk*, a participatory method co-created within a Feminist Living Lab in the EU project GILL (Gendered Innovation Living Labs). The method centers on short, recurring impulses—brief, targeted inputs on gender-relevant topics such as implicit bias or evaluation fairness. These impulses act as structured entry points to evoke "change talk" [MR13], i.e., self-generated, value-aligned arguments for more equitable behavior, emerging within team settings over time.

Drawing from Motivational Interviewing [EBK17] and Lewin's field theory [Le47], the approach operationalizes behavioral design [Bo16] to shift workplace norms from within. It builds on feminist innovation research [Sc21] and participatory co-creation practices [Ah20] to support ongoing, team-based engagement. The ongoing implementation in a global tech company suggests that brief, recurring impulses can spark inclusive reflection and dialogue, thereby making gender equity a tangible part of daily workplace practices.

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2 Structural Approaches and Behavioral Design

Traditional gender equality efforts in tech have often focused on individual-level interventions—supporting women to adapt to and succeed within biased systems. Increasingly, scholars and practitioners argue for a shift toward *structural approaches* that address the institutional and cultural conditions reproducing inequality [Wi14; Wo24].

Within the broader discourse on structural change in science and technology, Londa Schiebinger has played a pivotal role by advancing the concept of *Gendered Innovations*. Drawing on feminist epistemologies, particularly the works of Evelyn Fox Keller [Ke85], Donna Haraway [Ha88], and Sandra Harding [Ha91], Schiebinger emphasizes that uncovering gender bias is only the first step. What follows must be action-oriented innovation strategies. Gendered Innovations integrates sex, gender, and intersectional analysis as tools to foster discovery and improve the quality of research [Sc21].

Building on decades of empirical and theoretical work, Schiebinger systematized three main strategies, often referred to as the "Three Fixes" [Sc21]. The first, *Fix the Numbers*, aims to increase the participation of women and marginalized groups in science and technology through programs such as mentoring, scholarships, and recruitment initiatives. The second, *Fix the Institutions*, targets organizational practices and aims to reduce structural inequalities—such as biased evaluation criteria or exclusionary hiring processes—by redesigning institutional policies and cultures. The third, *Fix the Knowledge*, focuses on integrating gender and intersectionality into research content and methodology. This approach seeks not only fairer representation but more accurate and innovative knowledge production.

The GILL EU project builds on this Gendered Innovations foundation from Schiebinger by proposing a fourth strategic pathway: the *Fourth Fix*, also referred to as the *Cultural Fix* [Ch24]. This approach emphasizes the need to transform the cultural underpinnings of innovation ecosystems by changing everyday practices towards gender fairness. It calls for reflexive and interdisciplinary tools that extend and combine previous fixes. Rather than applying standardized checklists, the Fourth Fix encourages situated co-creation methods that consider power, practice, and meaning-making processes within organizations. By changing practices, institutions can fix the culture by not only addressing individual participation or isolated knowledge gaps, but also the everyday cultural configurations that shape whether inclusion and equity can take root and persist. This means a shift from a individual to a structural approach.

Structural approaches focus on changing the conditions under which gendered disadvantages emerge and are reproduced. In tech, this includes auditing data pipelines, questioning default technical assumptions, and redesigning evaluation protocols to detect and mitigate discrimination [BG18; Ha17; SKC24]. These methods do not rely on individual awareness or goodwill, but institutionalize equity by design by adapting the structure of the collaboration in teams and in the organization. For example, recruitment algorithms or ranking systems must

be evaluated for embedded assumptions and re-calibrated to prevent bias from amplifying in large-scale automated processes [Ga16; Me21]. As shown in studies of platform economies, biased input, such as user ratings shaped by gendered perceptions, can produce visibility gaps and unequal access to opportunities [Ha17]. Structural fixes are necessary to disrupt such self-reinforcing cycles.

A key mechanism for enacting this shift is *behavioral design*—a methodological approach from behavioral economics that alters decision-making contexts to promote fairer behavior without coercion [Bo16]. Behavioral design has led to impactful interventions such as blind orchestral auditions [GR00], which helped correct bias by modifying environmental cues. In tech, behavioral design can be used to challenge biased defaults and reshape hiring, evaluation, and team processes from the inside out [Ha17; Me21].

Importantly, behavioral design interventions work best when integrated into broader structural frameworks. Combining participatory co-creation methods with behavioral insights ensures that gender-responsive tools are not merely appended to existing workflows but become integral to how innovation is structured [Ah18a; SM24]. This is particularly crucial in the tech sector, where rapid prototyping and time pressure often push equity considerations aside [Wi14]. By embedding equity-oriented behavioral interventions, organizations can shift from reactive to preventive models of change. Ultimately, the structural turn in gender equality work marks a necessary evolution. Rather than placing the burden of change on marginalized individuals, the focus turns to institutions, infrastructures, and practices that shape opportunity and exclusion. The Fourth Fix and behavioral design converge in recognizing that equitable systems are not the natural outcome of neutral procedures but the result of intentional design choices [Bo16; MRPed; Wo24].

Not only women benefit from this approach, but this group is representative of people from (several) marginalized groups, as it is an attempt to break up entrenched structures and make them fairer.

3 The Living Lab Context

Within the EU project GILL (Gendered Innovation Living Labs), a catalog of gender-responsive methods was co-developed to address gender inequality through situated, low-threshold interventions [SM25]. These methods are designed on behavioral design principles to initiate small but meaningful shifts in daily routines and interactions that accumulate into sustainable cultural and structural change. Across 14 use cases in 8 countries, the consortium of the GILL project tested these approaches in diverse organizational contexts using a Feminist Living Lab methodology.

Feminist Living Labs represent a participatory research framework that embeds gender equality into innovation processes by design. Building on the Living Lab approach, these prioritize co-creation, iterative collaboration, and inclusive stakeholder engagement to

challenge structural gender inequalities in technological development and organizational culture [Ah20]. In contrast to traditional innovation settings, feminist Living Labs provide safe spaces for dialogue, reflection, and collective learning. They serve as experimental contexts in which interventions can be developed and tested in collaboration with those affected by gendered dynamics, ensuring both contextual relevance and transformative potential. The methodological foundation of Feminist Living Labs follows a four-phase structure: understanding, co-creation, implementation, and evaluation [Ah18b]. In the understanding phase, existing gender-related barriers, power relations, and cultural dynamics within an organization are systematically explored through qualitative and quantitative methods, such as interviews and surveys. The co-creation phase brings together diverse organizational actors to collaboratively design interventions that address these challenges. Implementation then tests these approaches in real-world environments, ensuring their practical applicability. In the final evaluation phase, feedback is systematically collected, and results are iteratively reflected upon and integrated into future cycles. This cyclical structure enables continuous adaptation while maintaining a strong focus on inclusivity, transparency, and responsiveness to change. As Ståhlbröst and Holst [SH17] emphasize, such iterative frameworks are crucial for embedding reflection into the innovation process and for creating interventions that are both sustainable and deeply anchored in practice.

The method *Evoking Change Talk* was developed in the second of two iterative rounds of the understand-co-create-implement-evaluate cycle within a Living Lab use case in a global tech company. This is one of the 15 use cases of the GILL project. The tech company is a multinational corporation with a strong presence in Europe and a large network of partners and customers across various industries. The company is a leading provider of technology solutions and has a strong focus on innovation, customer satisfaction and employee experience.

In the first cycle, surveys and interviews regarding the situation of women in this company where conducted, various interventions from the perspective of behavioral design were tried out and a women's network was implemented. In this case, co-creation means working closely with different groups within the company: For example, from the workers' council, with female managers, with female employees marginalized on different dimensions, and also employees from HR development. In many individual conversations as well as in a discussion round at the women's network, various people expressed the concern that male colleagues do not perceive or recognize the barriers that women and other marginalized groups face. Some women shared that men who are aware of how different the situation is for women are much more likely to respond to a sexist comment or stand up for women, especially if they are in the position of a manager. One manager and one developer in particular were actively involved in this co-creation process, yet various reports from the women's network were always taken into account.

In response to these insights, and building on Lewin's framework for change through group dynamics [Le47], the research team collaboratively developed an intervention designed to activate conversation and engagement from within teams. This approach centered around

brief, recurring "impulses"—short, focused knowledge inputs on gender-related topics such as implicit bias or informal expectations. Crucially, these impulses were not framed as complete solutions, but as starting points for change talk: team-internal reflection and discussion that reconfigures how gender is understood and enacted in the everyday.

Evoking Change Talk is thus not a one-off awareness campaign but a method to integrate equity-promoting micro-interventions into organizational routines to adapt the structure of the teams and therefore the organisation. These concise impulses—delivered regularly within team meetings—serve as triggers for cultural reflection and conversational shifts. When repeated over time, they normalize engagement with gender and diversity topics, making such conversations part of how a team functions. In this way, impulses help move teams toward inclusive practices not through mandate, but by cultivating shared meaning, values, and accountability from within.

4 Theoretical Background in Lewin's Ideas about Change and Motivational Interviewing

The method *Evoking Change Talk* arises from the theoretical framework developed by Endrejat, Baumgarten, and Kauffeld [EBK17], who propose an integration of Kurt Lewin's foundational theories on behavior change with the principles of Motivational Interviewing (MI) as developed by Miller and Rollnick [MR13]. Their approach addresses a pressing challenge: the need to increase energy-saving behaviors within organizations. [EBK17, p. 101]. Lewin's early contributions, especially his research at the Harwood Manufacturing Company between 1939 and 1947, demonstrated that behavior change in organizations is most effective when interventions are participatory and grounded in group processes [Bu07; De02]. Endrejat et al. [EBK17] build on these findings. [CF48; LG45]. To demonstrate the contemporary applicability of these ideas, the authors transfer Lewin's legacy into the context of ecological sustainability. They argue that their example of energy-saving should not be viewed merely as a technological or infrastructural issue, but as fundamentally behavioral [EBK17, p. 102]. This aligns with Lewin's broader aim of applying psychological insight to improve social conditions, and it reflects his view that crises, such as today's ecological crises, create opportunities for constructive change [Le47]. To operationalize this framework, the authors invoke Lewin's well-known distinction between driving forces and restraining forces. Driving forces push individuals toward a certain behavioral goal (e.g., peer expectations to turn off lights), while restraining forces hinder movement toward that goal (e.g., habits or infrastructural obstacles such as automatic lighting systems). Importantly, Lewin postulates that simply increasing the number of driving forces may backfire by amplifying resistance; instead, reducing restraining forces is often the more effective strategy [Le47].

Simultaneously, Endrejat et al. draw on Motivational Interviewing as a facilitation method to enhance intrinsic motivation for change. Originally designed for clinical contexts, MI is a collaborative, person-centered method that aims to elicit individuals' own arguments for

change, referred to as *change talk* [MR13]. In contrast, *sustain talk* refers to arguments that support the current behavior. The goal of MI, and of the workshop structure proposed by the authors, is to strengthen change talk while reducing sustain talk—thereby shifting the internal balance of motivational forces [EBK17, p. 106]. Endrejat et al. build on the conceptual parallels between MI and Lewin's force field model. They equate MI-consistent facilitator behaviors, such as affirming autonomy or expressing empathy, with the strengthening of driving forces. Conversely, MI-inconsistent behaviors like coercion or pressure tend to reinforce restraining forces [KPK15; Ma14]. In MI terms, the process of "evoking" involves facilitating the articulation of personal values, goals, and motivations in a way that leads to change talk. In Lewinian terms, this would be interpreted as a shift in the life space and a movement out of a quasi-stationary equilibrium [Le47], a state in which behavioral inertia is sustained by the balance of opposing forces. This theoretical integration allows Endrejat et al. to develop a workshop format for behavior change that reflects both MI's procedural logic and Lewin's group-based intervention philosophy. The MI process structure—comprising the phases of *engaging*, *focusing*, *evoking*, and *planning*—is embedded in a setting that draws on field theory and group dynamics. Participants are not told what to do but are encouraged to identify meaningful change targets and collaboratively develop action plans. This ensures not only behavioral alignment with personal and collective values but also a norm-setting dynamic that is essential for sustainable change (cf. [Le51; Sc11]). The overarching rationale, as stated by the authors, is that change becomes more likely and more stable when individuals are given the opportunity to articulate their own motivations, embedded in a group context that promotes shared values and reinforces norms through public commitment [EBK17, p. 109]. This exactly is the goal of the gender-responsive method of evoking Change Talk that has been co-created within the feminist living lab framework of the GILL use case. To promote the public comitment of talking about equity withing the organisation and to make the toplic more visible. This would mean a shoft away from individual responsibility of women to conquer inequalities to a structural, sustainable anchoring of the topic equality. In this way, *Evoking Change Talk* is a central element of an integrated approach to participatory organizational development.

5 Steps for Implementation

In implementing a structured format for these impulses to evoke change talk in the organizational settings, a number of preparatory and procedural steps are essential to ensure both acceptance and effectiveness. These steps have been co-created within the collaboration of the GILL use case and the tech company mentioned before. They reflect the needs of the women who worked in this company for several years. The process begins with *securing explicit support from team leadership*. Approval from the team lead is not merely formal; their active endorsement frames the sessions as a legitimate and integral part of team communication. Once leadership buy-in is ensured, the *frequency and format* of the sessions should be defined. A practical approach is to allocate a short, recurring time slot—such as the final five minutes of regular team meetings—and to fix the rhythm (e.g., once or

twice monthly). This predictability helps normalize the impulses within the team routine. Prior to each impulse, organizers should *select one clear and concise topic*, such as Prove it Again bias or shadow requirements for women, to ensure focus and relevance. The impulse itself is then *delivered as a short knowledge input*, meant as a starting point for an ongoing discussion in the team that will then evoke change talk.

Together, these steps support the implementation of low-threshold, high-impact impulses that can raise awareness and fostering a shared baseline for talking about equity-related issues.

6 Starting Change Talk: Peer-Led Reflections in Tech Teams

The first implementation of the Evoking Change Talk method is currently running in two teams within the global tech company: a management team (13 members, including one team lead) and a developer team (6 members, including one team lead). In both cases, the intervention was championed by two women—one manager and one senior developer—who decided to regularly incorporate impulses into their regular meetings and also acted as the presenter of the impulses within their respective teams. Both are part of the management team, which ensured vertical visibility and internal alignment. The implementation was supported by the research team through content inputs, collaborative preparation, and ongoing exchange.

To accompany the intervention, a short baseline survey was conducted with members of the developer team (n=7). The survey aimed to assess participants' initial attitudes, prior knowledge, and expectations regarding gender equality.

This is currently an anecdotal insight into the ongoing research as the implementation phsase has not yet been completed and the entire evaluation phase for example on the barriers, success factors and power dynamics of the method is still pending.

The survey consists of the following items:

- Do you believe that teams are more successful when they are diverse?
- To what extent have you already dealt with the topic of gender equality?
- How often do you talk about gender equality in a work context?
- Would you like to deepen your knowledge of gender equality?
- Do you know how you can promote gender equality in your team/department?
- Have you already been shown specific measures or opportunities to actively promote diversity in your team?

The responses indicate that all team members believe diverse teams tend to be more successful, reflecting a strong shared value around the benefits of diversity. Most participants

also reported having at least a basic level of knowledge about gender equality, suggesting some prior exposure to the topic. However, the majority stated that they rarely engage in conversations about gender equality within their work context, highlighting a gap between personal attitudes and everyday workplace discourse. While there was a clear willingness to deepen their understanding of gender-related issues, most respondents indicated that they were unfamiliar with specific methods for promoting gender equality and had not previously encountered concrete measures aimed at fostering diversity within their team.

In addition to the survey, the implementation was accompanied by reflective diaries. Both facilitators—along with one researcher from the project team—documented their experiences using a structured diary template. Reflective diaries have been widely used in interdisciplinary and participatory research to surface the lived experience of implementing interventions and to trace changes in perception, understanding, and behavior over time [Ah20; CL22].

Here, too, is an initial insight that does not claim to be generalizable, but this is to be understood as to how the introduction of such method can be accompanied and provides examples of which reactions were documented in our case.

The diary template consisted of three main sections:

1. *Meeting description:* Format (online/offline), duration, participant composition, facilitation role.
2. *Guided reflection:* Gender dynamics, group inclusivity, power relations, intersectional positionality, meeting culture, and language.
3. *Method reflection:* Planning and delivery of the impulse, group reactions, personal insights, and anticipated next steps.

So far, two diary entries were completed following the ongoing implementation of short knowledge impulses in executive team meetings. The topic of both sessions was the "Prove It Again" bias—a well-documented phenomenon in which women must repeatedly demonstrate competence to receive the same recognition as their male colleagues [Wi14].

In the first diary entry, the facilitator described a virtual leadership meeting with ten participants, including two women. The intervention consisted of a short, data-driven presentation on the "Prove It Again" bias, followed by a brief discussion. The facilitator noted that initial reactions were marked by subtle defensiveness. Some participants argued that gender bias did not apply in their context, citing a meritocratic hiring system and an assumed lack of interest in tech roles among women. However, the managing director openly supported the intervention, reinforcing its legitimacy. The facilitator also reflected on how their own positionality—as a senior developer with a migration background—shaped their experience. Their technical credibility and prior experience with diversity topics enabled them to confidently navigate resistance and facilitate discussion. Although the initial exchange was limited, a follow-up session was planned to delve deeper into the topic using team-specific data and statistics.

In the second diary entry, a different facilitator reflected on their preparation and delivery of the same "Prove It Again" content. Together with a colleague, they designed three PowerPoint slides that combined research findings with real-world examples. During the session, several team members contributed reflections on their own hiring experiences, perceived barriers for women in tech, and the role of gender stereotypes in the broader social context. One participant referenced the lack of female role models in STEM education and media. Others raised questions about international differences in gender equity, particularly between East and West Germany. The facilitator noted that some of the examples shared during the session resonated strongly with participants' own observations. As a result, the team decided to collect data on hiring and promotion within their own department to inform future discussions.

Both diary entries reveal that while the short impulses may initially trigger defensiveness or skepticism, they also open space for dialogue, reflection, and future-oriented action. The consistency of the intervention and the perceived psychological safety created by peer facilitation were critical for moving from awareness to engagement. Furthermore, the diary format itself functioned as a reflexive space, supporting facilitators in interpreting group dynamics and adjusting their approach.

7 Discussion

Evoking Change Talk reframes organizational approaches to gender equity by shifting from sporadic, often top-down awareness measures to a participatory format grounded in everyday team practice. Rather than aiming to persuade through intensive training or one-time workshops, this method offers a sustainable structure for change: short, recurring knowledge impulses that function as catalysts for reflective dialogue within teams. These micro-interventions are intentionally low-threshold and embedded into regular team routines, such as the last five minutes of a meeting. Their primary function is not to provide exhaustive knowledge, but to legitimize and normalize the ongoing discussion of gender, bias, and diversity within work settings.

The method operationalizes key principles of both Lewin's model of change and Motivational Interviewing. Drawing on Lewin's concept of quasi-stationary equilibrium, the impulses function as gentle disturbances that loosen habitual patterns without triggering defensive resistance [Le47]. Simultaneously, by fostering autonomy and internal motivation through reflective discussion, they align with MI's emphasis on "evoking" change talk rather than prescribing action [MR13]. In this sense, the impulses act as both a structural and psychological nudge—creating space for individuals to articulate their own perspectives and values in relation to equity.

Crucially, the aim is not to deliver a fixed message or directive, but to create a shared conversational space in which reflection and learning emerge organically from within the team. The first findings from the developer team's survey suggest that while participants

already value diversity, they rarely engage in related conversations at work. This highlights the significance of the impulses: they do not introduce an entirely new agenda, but activate and sustain conversations that are latent, sidelined, or difficult to initiate without a structured prompt. Reflective diaries show first examples on the reactions to this method.

In contrast to many organizational change programs that rely on external experts or high-effort interventions, *Evoking Change Talk* works through internal facilitation, low time investment, and integration into existing team structures. It is this simplicity and adaptability that make it scalable and sustainable. The impulses do not require comprehensive training to implement, yet they set in motion a process of reflection, norm-setting, and behavioral alignment over time.

In sum, *Evoking Change Talk* can be understood as a structural-behavioral intervention that integrates Lewinian change theory and motivational psychology into a simple but effective practice. By focusing on continuous learning rather than one-time enlightenment, it increases the likelihood that individuals will see themselves as capable actors in the promotion of equity—both cognitively and behaviorally. This approach is in line with the principles of behavioral design, which aims to alter decision-making contexts to promote fairer behavior without coercion, and is particularly relevant in the tech sector, where rapid prototyping and time pressure often push equity considerations aside. The aim is to implement the fourth fix of the EU-Project GILL, which builds on Schiebinger's Gendered Innovation fixes: In addition to the fixes Schiebinger has identified as classic fields for gender equality work, this fourth fix is about focusing on everyday working life, whereby we want to move away from individual solutions and efforts towards a structural change within working culture. Future work will examine the extent to which this approach leads to sustainable change across different organizational layers and whether it can serve as a scalable model for participatory gender equality strategies in tech and beyond.

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