

# Chapter 12

## Challenges With Gender Diversity Issues in Higher Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The increasing trend of integrating diverse community of students and faculty in higher educational institutions brings with it challenges. It is important to look at the challenges that leaders face if gender diversity is not considered in their decision making. Does gender diversity even matter in the way their decisions are made? Does gender diversity affect the selection of leadership? It is important to understand as to what extent growing gender diversity in colleges and universities has an impact on decision making for leadership in higher institutions.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The quality and status of higher education is a useful indicator of socioeconomic development in a country. Apart from its contribution towards knowledgeable and highly skilled individuals, gender diverse backgrounds provide a critical influence on the depth and quality of public policies. The proactive promotion of a gender diverse environment and extensive participation of both men and women in the leadership of higher educational institutions is a significant area of concern (Acosta et al., 2020). Past researchers have shown gender diversity in First-Time Leadership brings many advantages to an environment of higher learning: increased productivity and creativity, stronger governance, and better problem-solving abilities (Cletus et al., 2018; Fores, 2018; Garza, 2019). According to Acosta et al. (2020), leaders working together with gender-diverse backgrounds bring into play their own outlooks, thoughts, and understandings, helping to create environments that are resilient and effective, and which outdo other settings of higher learning that do not invest in gender diversity.

Learning to respect, appreciate, and recognize other's cultural and stylistic differences and behaviors that influence interaction with one another may enable leaders to address the problems associated with

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diversity and derive maximum benefits (Fine & Handelsman, 2010). Gender diversity and inclusion requires every leader to work together to create a culture that embraces the diversity of opinions and installs the vital best practices and resources to make the most of abilities, progress, and overall fulfillment. Diverse First-Time Leaderships have to continuously focus their decision making on leveraging and enhancing existing differences among the faculty and students in the higher educational environment. However, women continue to be under-represented in leadership roles in higher learning institutions. In the United Kingdom, women in leadership comprise an under-represented group for roles in higher learning institutions (Manfredi et al., 2019). According to Manfredi et al. (2019), only 23.6% of institutions' board chairs and 24.3% of principals and vice-chancellors are held by women. Yet over 56.7% of the student population and over half of higher learning institutions' workforce is comprised of women (Manfredi et al., 2019). Cardel et al. (2020) reveals that, as of 2015 in the U.S., 51.5% of assistant professors, however women are unlikely to achieve tenure compared to men and comprise only 32.4% of full professors. The chapter presents a systematic review of gender diversity issues and women under-representation in leadership at institutions of higher learning including the challenges that arise with gender diversity within higher education:

1. The first challenge a leader might face is, not understanding why people behave in manners different from that which is expected. As Kezar et al. (2006) state: "Leaders are encouraged to learn the art of perspective thinking, which involves listening to and absorbing information skillfully, recognizing other people may view a situation differently, understanding other people's assumptions may be different, and accepting the limitations of one's own point of view" (p. 55). Understanding why people behave in diverse ways does not mean the first-time leader must agree with the point of view presented (Tie Suk Kee et al., 2020). Instead, it should assist the leader in accepting and acknowledging differences. Listening and recognizing these differences may help with appropriate decision making.
2. The second challenge leaders may face is with teams or members performing at various levels. Putting a diverse team in place may just be the first step. A first-time leader may have the difficulty of being able to motivate a team with a diverse grouping (Erciyes, 2019). In making decisions, leaders must create appropriate motivational techniques to stimulate performances and increase feelings of appreciation and belonging among diverse groups (Swanson & Holton, 2009). Being able to bring together different ideas at different levels in order to come up with the expected result is important to the success of a First-Time leader. Giving the right guidance the team members at these various levels would enable them achieve the expected goal together.
3. Third, an absolute change in demography requires a change in leadership styles. The challenge may be a change in the selection of a leadership style that needs to be relearned in order to fit the change. Leaders will have to engage the process of transitioning the focus from the regular norm to the rapidly changing society. As Howard (2007) put it, styles of leadership will need to transform by building trust, engaging personal culture, confronting social issues, transforming instructional practices, and engaging the community of leaders. First-Time leaders need to consider information about gender differences when creating a plan in engaging others. Adapting a personal leadership style encompassing traces of the demography change would be ideal in meeting a success. While this may be easier said than done, it is something a First-Time leader should aim toward.

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