

# Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

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## Empathic understanding and diversity management leadership: Facilitating greater gender diversity in European business schools

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### Recommended Citation

Remke, R.V., and Roseberry, L. (2016). *Empathic understanding and diversity management leadership: Facilitating greater gender diversity in European business schools*. Paper presented at Closing the Gender Gap: Advancing Leadership and Organizations. DOI: 110.5703/1288284316083

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Like several other industries, European business schools in higher education struggle to promote and then retain female faculty and managers. According to the Financial Times 2013 European Business School Rankings, the average proportion of women on the faculties of the top 75 business schools is 27.5%. The individual institutional ratios of women on business school faculties span a wide range: 8 business schools are below 20%, and a few of those are below 10%. At the other extreme, 9 are above 40% with one at 50%. The remaining 58 cluster around 30%. The under-representation of women on business school faculties most probably follows the pattern of male dominance in European (and American) higher education institutions generally. A number of publicly funded studies of factors contributing to the gender gap in the faculties of European HEIs have produced evidence of a number of obstacles that keep women from advancing through the academic pipeline at the same rate as their male colleagues (e.g. LERU, 2012; European Commission, 2012b). A number of studies also describe various practices adopted by American and European universities to address these obstacles (LERU, 2012; European Commission, 2008). However, few studies address the specific issue of how managers in HEIs actually view and deal with this issue. This study, guided by the research question, *How do European business school managers address under-representation of women on their faculties?* attempts to address this lack.

Specifically, this paper, using both qualitative interview and quantitative survey data, highlights an alternative logic or rationality that manager utilize to not only legitimize and justify gender diversity initiatives, but that actually guides their diversity management strategies and processes. Our findings suggest that while most European business school leaders believe faculty gender diversity is important and would like to do something, their commitment does not lead to effective action in part because they lack information about effective strategies. Research on the effectiveness of diversity strategies in general is only in the beginning stages and remains primarily focused on the United States. Similar work on effectiveness of gender diversity strategies in European business schools would benefit European business school leaders as well as other European business leaders and researchers.

Although a substantial literature documents a number of factors that cause women to drop out of academic careers at a faster rate than men, and gender diversity in Higher Education Institutions has been on the agenda of European policymakers for decades, European business schools still struggle with a lack of faculty gender diversity, especially in the highest ranking positions. The present research indicates that while a slim majority European business school leaders are committed to the concepts of gender equality and faculty gender diversity, they lack the expertise and information about best practices necessary to develop and support effective gender diversity strategies. The business schools that perform the best with regards to increasing faculty gender diversity have adopted theoretically driven, if not always empirically tested, policies and

demonstrate a good understanding of the psychological and social phenomena that contribute to the leaky academic pipeline. Their successes underscore the importance of relying upon evidence-based diversity strategies that can more effectively eliminate the obstacles that too many women encounter on their way up the academic hierarchy.