Achieving diverse leadership in a research environment - notes


What are the barriers to diverse leadership? Amanda Aldercotte, Advance HE; Professor Carole Mundell, University of Bath; Professor Lesley Yellowlees; Professor Tom Welton, Imperial College London

Tom Welton

- We are all driven by status
- Funders give prizes for diversity and inclusion but we all know those aren’t the same as real prizes (Welton is on steering group for RS Diversity programme)
- Must change the concept of scientific excellence to include ‘being good with people’
- If we want to see change, define leadership as being inclusive and give this value. No separate prizes but inclusivity mandatory and in the criteria for any award

Amanda Aldercotte - Unconscious bias training should be part of staff induction

Lesley Yellowlees

- Leading review RSE Tapping All our Talents (due to be published 12/11/18 but appears to be delayed) https://www.rse.org.uk/rse-reviews-women-stem-report-tapping-talents-six-years/
- No progress on the leaky pipeline (losing women at each stage). Why do women leave academia?
  - Long working hours
  - Lack of support
  - Unconscious and systemic bias
  - Macho culture
  - Family unfriendly
  - Inflexible structures
  - Isolation
- Those seeking promotion do not always believe that the criteria have changed unless they witness it
- Universities can shift criteria and change paperwork accordingly
- Referees tend to be senior academics – often don’t read the paperwork and write a reference on what they remember to be the criteria. Need to do a sales pitch to let people know
- Why take a leadership role?
  - Interesting and fun
  - Selfish (promotion)
  - Pragmatic (I can do it better)
  - Altruistic (my time to give back)
- Barriers to diverse leadership
  - Lack of networks – networks tend to be for ‘people like you’ but what if there aren’t people like you?
  - Middle management blockage, too busy and don’t get what diverse means
  - Critical mass – change from looking at 20-30% as the breakthrough and start to look at it as no one group holding sway
Diversity Conference 2018: Achieving diverse leadership in a research environment
The Royal Society, 1 November 2018

Carole Mundell

- Can’t just advertise diversity welcome, must seek it out – diversity by design
- For every man you think of to give a seminar, think of an even better woman/other
- There’s a problem if all of your team looks like you
- Unconscious bias – just because you do the training doesn’t mean you’ve beat the problem
- If power is accompanied by responsibility for the people in your team, then you care more
- Committees – minorities say no because the same people are being asked all the time and because of fear of tokenism

Discussion

- How would we get out of the award mentality? We can’t so we change the criteria to reflect what we want from our leaders. To get an award, must behave differently
- Women do not nominate for prizes as often as men do – often anyone can nominate, so more women should
- It is not a problem just because you need wheels to get around – design should facilitate access and if you design for disability, everyone benefits
- Ask the right question: example from TW that if he is asked if he has a disability, he will tick yes, if he is asked ‘are you disabled’ the answer is no
- Microaggressions
  - Importance of being an active bystander – **we should all have active bystander training** (already in place in some HEI). New Hampshire model cited [https://www.unh.edu/sharpp/bystander](https://www.unh.edu/sharpp/bystander)
  - Setting the tone of the culture – leaders must not stand for any nonsense and back anyone standing against it
- Leadership in the research environment
  - Pressure: research, teach, manage, mentor. Lack of support and no extra money – not surprising people don’t step forward
- But we are all leaders and have agency

The Glass Cliff, Prof. Michelle Ryan

- [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=734677](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=734677) - the phenomenon of the glass cliff, whereby women (and members of other minority groups) are more likely to be placed in leadership positions which are risky or precarious
- Why are women picked in times of crisis? It’s not that women are seen to be good in a crisis, it’s not setting them up for failure, it’s more likely a shorthand way to signal change. But given that the crisis is in place when the change signalled, it is quite likely that the company or group continues to fail and the new leaders are associated with the failure and stereotypes reinforced. Very difficult to combat
- Women may take more dicey posts as they have fewer choices at that level and because they have lesser networks which would give them a heads-up that things are already going to hell in a handcart
- Equal opportunity is about the nature of leadership positions as well as the number
- It is important to note not just that the quantity of women in senior positions is low but the quality of those positions is typically low too
How do we support under-represented groups to put themselves forward? Faye Banks, Costain Group, Dr Elin McCormack, The Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Dr Shakir Mohamed, DeepMind, Professor Paul Upchurch, University College London

Shakir Mohamed

- The question itself is uncomfortable – who is ‘we’ and who are ‘themselves’?
  - Who holds power
  - Why can’t they put themselves forward?
  - Implies that they must put themselves forward and releases the represented groups from responsibility
- Needs restoration of self-confidence and self-ownership and uniform access across groups
- We are all responsible: transformation lives in the mundane and the everyday
- [http://www.deeplearningindaba.com/](http://www.deeplearningindaba.com/) ‘The Deep Learning Indaba exists to celebrate and strengthen machine learning in Africa through state-of-the-art teaching, networking, policy debate, and through our support programmes, such as the IndabaX and the Kambule and Maathai awards. We work towards the vision of Africans becoming critical contributors, owners, and shapers of the coming advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning.’

Challenges

- How diverse was the team of collaborators on the last few papers or projects?
- When we accept invitations, are we lending our voice to events that make positive changes?
- When organising, how do we champion diverse voices and reflect the reality of excellence?
- How do we question our own assumptions of people and systems?