GEDII

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Gender Diversity Impact. Improving Research and Innovation through Gender Diversity.

Policy Brief 2/6   **http://www.gedii.eu**

Introduction – Human Resource Management

There is ample evidence that all key aspects of an organization are hallmarked by an inequality regime, be it the organizational structure, job profiles or the organizing of work. So far, however, attention has yet to focus on the level below that of organizations, which for many institutions – particularly those that rely on high skills levels such as research performing organizations – is the level at which much of the interactions take place. HR policies and interventions to promote greater gender diversity in organizations have yet to be more fully deployed at the level of the team. Consequently, HR departments are well advised to consider team level dynamics when designing their interventions.

Why is it important to target teams with HR interventions?

The link between diversity and performance is complex and calls for more comprehensive approaches to HR that include every aspect of a researcher's employment. The GEDII project shows that there is no direct relationship between gender diversity and team performance. However, more inclusive teams outperform homogeneous teams. In other words, inclusion mitigates the gender productivity gap: within teams where there is greater gender inclusivity, women's propensity to publish less disappears. HR professionals can affect the team context by ensuring that recruitment to a team is fair and inclusive so that it leads to more congenial and inclusive environments for researchers, as well as prevent dominant societal stereotypes to create optimal conditions which foster overall organizational performance.

Key points and recommendations

The effectiveness of gender interventions in HR has been fiercely debated. So far, corporations have paid huge sums in diversity training programs, with only limited results. Evidence suggests that, at best, results last only in the short-term, and at worst, can create a backlash. Research also suggests that managers who believe they operate in a meritocratic environment might be more prone to make biased decision. So what would work instead?

- Train employees in engaging or managing team problem solving processes: Research shows that mandatory diversity trainings can activate biases. Moreover, managers can become resistant if they feel their autonomy is affected. Instead of promoting short trainings as remedies, employees should be invited to engage, for instance, in mentoring programs for women and minorities. If people work with colleagues from minority groups, they are more likely to become equality champions. This is further supported if there are mechanism that prepare and empower to implement meaningful changes within the organization.

- Employee training should target three distinct levels of team collaboration: the team knowledge (shared mental models, task understanding), the team skills (communication assertiveness), and team attitudes (trust, psychological safety, cohesion). Scientific leadership is one among several other ingredients of effective teams.

- Monitor teams against the Gender Diversity Index. Evidence shows that monitoring, reporting and reflecting on gender diversity within teams supports efforts towards inclusion. One main benefit of the Gender Diversity Index is that it goes beyond 'counting heads' and captures the outcomes of gendered processes. The Gender Diversity Index calculates a team score that reflects their inclusivity and thus emphasizes areas where practices might need to be examined. However, it should not be used as a tool to fix 'others', but instead should be considered as a tool to help address inequalities and biases more profoundly.

- Make the tools and initiatives for greater inclusion more easily accessible. Promote mutual learning by enabling employees to effectively interact with a wide range of people in the organization. This should allow everybody to formulate private opinions and concerns without before these are explored in a moderated discussion. This behavioral, cognitive and affective learning process should be extended beyond single interventions and be conducted within a safe environment.

- Become aware of micro practices: Formal policies are often in place, which reflect efforts to achieve greater gender equality. Standardized routines are devised in an attempt to remove biases, but in practice are ineffective if they are not followed or taken seriously. It is also important to check whether specific criteria are implicitly gendered, for example in recruitment or promotion processes. Are all specified requirements really necessary? For instance, do all people in leadership roles have to be present full time or work overtime? Moreover, micro practices often undermine objective criteria. For instance, the perception of performance might be altered by non-performance related factors, such as likeability. The potential effects of micro practices need to be analyzed to ensure the effectiveness of gender equality policies.

Five Must Reads

National Research Council (U.S.), Nancy J. Cooke, and Margaret L. Hilton, eds. 2015. Enhancing the Effectiveness of Team Science. Washington, D.C: The National Academies Press.

Acker, Joan (2006) 'Inequality Regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations', Gender & Society 20(4), 441–464.

Dobbin, Frank and Kalev, Alexandra (2016) 'Why Diversity Programs Fail. And what works better.', Havard Business Review (July-August), 1–10.

Fujimoto, Yuka and E.J. Härtel, Charmine (2017) 'Organizational diversity learning framework: going beyond diversity training programs', Personnel Review 46(6), 1120–1141.

Vinkenburg, Claartje J. (2017) 'Engaging Gatekeepers, Optimizing Decision Making, and Mitigating Bias: Design Specifications for Systemic Diversity Interventions', Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 53(2), 212–234.