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Factors that Enable Women of South Asian and African Descent To Succeed In Leadership Positions in Higher Education

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Abstract

This research study focused on the factors that enable women of South Asian and African descent to succeed as leaders in the college system. The findings were derived from online questionnaires and in-depth interviews of 16 racialized women from two Greater Toronto Area (GTA) colleges. Many factors and recommendations were shared. Some of the recommendations made were the need to have targeted employment equity plans that aim to increase representation of quality employees of diverse backgrounds by instituting measures that provide needed understanding and support of employees, particularly racialized leaders. Increasing recruitment efforts and better training hired managers to conduct and supervise staff of various backgrounds was also another general recommendation articulated.

Introduction

An indicator of employment equity advancement would be increased representation of marginalized groups in senior management positions (Agocs, 2002). Given the current numbers of people of colour in the general population, representation in the workplace, particularly at the senior levels, has not kept pace with demographics (Lewington, 2009; Agocs, 2002). According to Cukier and Yap (2009), out of the 3257 organizational leaders identified in Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Markham and Richmond Hill, which constitutes 72.5% of the Greater Toronto Area region, only 13% were identified as visible minorities. The education sector came out ahead of other sectors with 20% of their school and Post Secondary Education (PSE) institutions' top positions held by visible minority members (Cukier & Yap, 2009). However, this still does not reflect the region's more than 40% racialized population despite the fact that on average racialized people in the Greater Toronto Area are more educated than the mainstream Canadian population (Canadian Press, 2008). The representation of women in leadership positions in the college system tends to be comparably higher than in other sectors, yet the representation of visible minorities remains comparably low despite reports of fairly high numbers of well educated, work ready racialized people. "Compared with women of colour, white women have made the greatest gains in achieving upper management and professional positions. Women and men of colour face the additional constraints of racial discrimination and informal barriers to occupational advancement" (Davies- Netzley, 1998, p. 339).

Colleges have evolved into huge, complex organizations with hundreds of employees, multiple campuses and budgets exceeding several million dollars. An increasing emphasis on accountability has forced colleges, much like the private sector businesses, to employ administrators with exceptional leadership and management skills (Murry & Hammon, 1995). The turnover of senior level college administrators is unprecedented. In the States, it was reported that over 45% of college presidents are 61 years of age or older which indicates the career pathways within their community colleges need to be given greater attention (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008).

The number of women of South Asian and African descent who occupy administrator positions in colleges is exceedingly low (Owens, 2004). When researching this topic, I unfortunately found it extremely difficult to find relevant literature addressing the experiences of racialized women leaders in post secondary institutions. Further, I didn't find any references in the Canadian context. There is a need to further study the experiences of racialized women in higher education given that according to Opp and Gossetti's (2000) research, to date

this has been limited and inconsistently assessed. Though there are barriers for women entering and within the workplace, and though it is reportedly worse for women of visible minority groups, there are a small percentage of women leaders who have overcome these barriers. This study explored the experiences and factors that enabled some women of African and South Asian descent to succeed as leaders in two Ontario colleges. I chose these two racialized groups knowing that people of South Asian descent and people of African descent currently comprise the first and third largest visible minority groups in Canada respectively (Toronto Training Board, 2009).

Methodology

This was an exploratory descriptive study that sought to explore the factors that enabled racialized women leaders to succeed in their profession as perceived by the study participants. The study findings were based on the qualitative data collected.

The questions that drove the research were:

Research Question 1: What are the key factors that have enabled the participants of this study (who are of African and South Asian descent) to succeed as leaders in their Ontario colleges, as perceived by these participants?

Research Question 2: How do the self perceptions of the women leaders of South Asian descent compare with those of the women leaders of African descent?

Research Question 3: What do the study participants perceive to have been their successes in leadership roles?

Research Question 4: What are the best strategies to recruit and retain qualified women of African and South Asian descent in college leadership positions as perceived by the study participants?

For the purposes of this article, I will discuss the first and last research questions concerning key factors attributed to the success of these women and the participants' recommendations regarding more inclusive recruitment and retention of leaders of racialized backgrounds.

To explore the factors, I elicited insight from anonymous online questionnaires and interviews of my sample of 16 women. The questions on the questionnaire were related to the participants' academic and career backgrounds and their insights. The personal information that was collected included the participants' academic credentials. Each participant was also invited to participate in an individual interview with the researcher. The interview was used to gather specific information, reflective thoughts and additional information that may not have been provided in the questionnaire responses.

The position of leaders was broadly defined. For the purposes of this study, administrators were people who have managerial or policy making accountabilities and have a staff role. Administrators may be fully or partially responsible for the management of a division or department (Williams, 1989). Some of the women in this study may not be formally categorized as administrators in their respective colleges, however, they undertook administrator roles as described above. The positions of the women ranged from college coordinators to deans. The sample is a purposive sample of convenience. The sample size was small and the most important limitation was that the findings were not generalizable but still valuable. The sample size was small because of the low number of racialized women leaders in the colleges identified.

To recruit participants, I contacted the Human Resources managers at both colleges for assistance in identifying potential participants based on leader status, gender, racial background and salary level. The Human Resources managers at both colleges identified and referred me to women leaders they perceived to be either of African descent or South Asian descent. Interestingly, during the interviews when I asked the women how they identified ethnically, though some were quick to state their cultural background, many more engaged in a longer conversation describing to me the complexities and challenges the question of racial identity posed for them. Several of the women identified as having blended heritages.

To maintain non-identifiability, participants' names were changed to pseudonyms in the study. The

institutions were assigned labels, (i.e., College A, College B) and not identified in the reports. The descriptive analysis of the interviews brought to light the common values, motivations, challenges and successes of the racialized women leaders who participated.

Findings

Background

To ensure non-identifiability, pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' names. The women were, in alphabetical order: Akie, Antoinne, Athena, Burton, Farah, Halle, Ibonny, Jazz, Kim, Maya, Mercedes, Nan, Sarah, Sienna, Tamela, and Yolana.

The 7 women who identified themselves as women of African descent described themselves as Jamaican, Cuban, African-Caribbean, Barbadian, from Belize and blended. The 6 women who identified themselves as women of South Asian descent described themselves as Indian, East Indian, West Indian, and Middle Eastern. The 3 remaining women preferred to be identified as blended, mixed and both African and South Asian. The leadership positions were varied among the women. College A had markedly fewer higher level administrator participants who were women of African and/or South Asian descent than College B. The Human Resources managers forwarded to me the names of women who were in current and past leadership roles in their institutions. Two women indicated their roles were deans. One woman indicated her role was a chair. Another woman indicated that she was a chair before she retired. Two women identified their roles were directors. Three women were managers. Five women indicated they were coordinators. Two women faculty identified as current and former managers of educational programming external to their respective colleges.

Key Factors that Enabled Women Participants to Succeed as Leaders

When the women were discussing their motivations for pursuing leadership roles, four general themes emerged: inherent drive and character; the need for change; relationships and support; and a passion for education.

Inherent Drive

The common theme that ran through the women's responses in the interviews, despite having vastly different personalities, was their articulated gravitation towards teaching and leadership. Getting involved and contributing to educational efforts from an early age gave the women personal satisfaction and incentive. Burton spoke about her inborn drive to teach: "teaching was always something I loved doing. At eleven years of age, I worked with young children in my community (teaching them Mathematics and English) to prepare them for the Common Entrance examination".

Over the course of their careers, all of the women had worked in multiple roles and were responsible for various deliverables that provided them with a broader perspective of their most current college positions. With these broader perspectives, some women felt they developed greater mindfulness and humility to be vigilantly inclusive. Sienna shared how the different aspects of herself lent to her greater effectiveness as a leader. She said:

I think my location in life, as a visible minority female, as a survivor of trauma, as a first generation I guess citizen and learner, as a single mother, I think all of those complexities of my life within my culture and within the Canadian culture help... and I think that's something I bring with me to the role.

The women generally considered how they were going to respectfully address people and situations given their social-political location in society. Farah shared that she was "very cognizant of heterogeneity, of diversity, of students and peoples, where they come from, their sensitivities".

The majority of the women interviewed were the first women of colour to hold their particular positions and in some cases the first women of colour in their departments. For instance, Athena disclosed: "this department has been around since (the) 1960s and I was the first visible minority on staff and that was in

2005. The first visible minority faculty... and I know for a fact that I am the first visible minority coordinator that they had hired”.

As the women discussed their experiences with me, it became apparent that with their experiences often came challenges and difficult lessons. Recognizing these challenges as learning opportunities, overall the women used the challenges they faced to their advantage. Sienna reflected on “(two former supervisors) with whom I had a very difficult time working and learned some tough lessons but who knew their stuff inside out ...I learned a lot about the system, and I learned a lot about voice and having a voice (through them)”. The challenges she faced under the direction of these supervisors were ironically rewarding. Sienna disclosed, “I also learned about this sub culture within the academic community and unfortunately that piece I learned by being excluded and not being included so you know there is a duality to the lessons”. Given her observations and experiences, Akie developed a protective response at work which she termed “flying below the radar”. She argued, “The people who challenge and the ones who don’t fit in get exited, so I do my work and I do the things that I’m good at and I try to profile those things and act on behalf of my staff... If you really challenge in the institutional setting you can be, if not terminated, reorganized out of the org chart.”

Three of the women expressed that their faith was foundational to their success as leaders. None of the women spoke about their particular religions in detail, however they did share briefly how the principles of their faith give them resolve to move forward. For instance, Tamela declared, “The Lord says that ... we are supposed to be head but not the tail, to be above, but not beneath. You can quote that scripture until you are blue in the face but if you don’t do something to be above then you’re not going to be above. That in itself has motivated me”.

The Need for Change

All of the participants articulated a need for change, whether personal or political, as a motivator for being in leadership. Some women said moving into leadership positions came from necessity. Sarah said that after enduring two faculty strikes as a professor she found “it was so difficult to deal with not being paid for the weeks ... and then to have to work your way out of that again ... I had a great yearning to be in charge and I enjoy teaching but I wanted to help other people and I felt that I could”. Kim echoed most of the participants’ thoughts when she discussed the need to reach out to students of colour:

I really wanted to make a difference, especially for students. The College has a diverse student population, many of which are of African/Caribbean background. I wanted to ensure that their needs were being met and that there was a voice at this level to bring to light certain areas that others wouldn’t necessarily be able to identify with.

The majority of the women were or are teachers. Nan shared how teachers themselves were also leaders: “As a professor I see myself as a leader not in a position of administration but definitely as one who has more power than the students and maybe some of the admin (sic) and support staff”. Mercedes furthered the point when she said, “I don’t see the teaching and the coordinating as so very different because a coordinator is in a sense a teacher who takes a leading role in the program area. Part of the responsibilities I take on (is doing the) administrative side of the program”. She further explained how teaching and coordinating were connected when she said,

(it is) a different perspective on what we do so that I could be relied on to be insightful, to be the person who can see where to bring together other people’s ideas and to see how we can make that work for the program. That always has to connect right back into the classroom.

All the women who identified as coordinators appreciated the ability to be a liaison between part time faculty, students and the other members of their respective departments. Other women voiced an appreciation for the opportunity to liase on a larger scale. Akie shared

there aren’t a lot of senior administrative roles in the college who are interacting with community based organizations or the community that is representative of the clientele that the college serves so I have been that sort of liaison to the community.

Relationships and Support

When the women leaders were asked about the people who had influenced or inspired them, it was incredible to hear the stories of encouragement and support they received. The women talked about former supervisors, both male and female, current supervisors, teachers, family members particularly mothers, friends and human resources managers. Though very few people called their influences 'mentors', there were some common attributes shared by the people they held in high esteem.

Ten of the women identified supervisors, mostly former supervisors, and one person mentioned human resource managers as influences in their career. They commonly described their supervisors as people who showed a keen interest in them, believed in their abilities to succeed and empowered them by providing opportunities to progress. For example, Antoinne shared:

From day one he's been very supportive of me and wanted to help me in ways that I didn't even want to be helped. I felt that he was taking a personal interest in making sure that I did those things, by coaching me, encouraging me and just telling me that there's more for me in this college, there's more that I can do, there's more that I should do. I should be more ambitious in things. He would find conferences for me that he thought I should do then he would find a replacement for me so I could go and do it. (H)e would just take me to meetings to meet people that were Managers. He wanted to introduce me to Managers because he thought these are the people that can help you move along, you need to have your name on these people's lips.

Jazz also shared a lesson that had stayed with her over time: "I have learned from her that in conflict resolution, you can have win/win outcome. (H)er big mantra is flexibility without compromise. So you can be very flexible in order to get to the outcome, but at the end of the day you have not compromised the standards."

Seven women identified teachers as their greatest influence. Common attributes of these teachers were that they cared about these women's learning, were not self serving, offered assistance, willingly shared information, appreciative, and made them feel connected to the class and the course material.

Mothers topped the list of family members who positively influenced our participants. Ibony shared with pride, "I take it from my mom who has raised 8 kids; myself being the youngest. She has raised all of her kids to be in highly professional, successful positions".

Children came in a close second as key familial influences. Maya expressed it best when she said "(t)he other factor that has guided me in a leadership position would be my family and I think my kids are my best... they tell me the truth as honestly as truth can possibly be told".

Two women discussed friends as influences. The attributes the women described were their friends were of like mind, supportive, upwardly mobile and protected them by sharing their insight.

Some women alluded to how they appreciated their work and families, though at times they have had to sacrifice one for the other. For instance, Halle remarked, "it is not unusual for me to be here at work at 8, 9 o'clock, take work home, come in on the weekends, just so you can keep up with the day to day stuff because you get interrupted". She also shared that "at a young age I ended up getting very senior positions. That was unusual at that time. I started my family a lot later because my career took over".

Women shared how they developed ways of coping with the responsibilities of work and family and still stay motivated in their careers. Nan, for example, spoke about how others have provided her with support: "I think I'm a very fortunate person to have a partner who is solidly there for me, good friends and a life that has interest and excitement and we can create that (balance) for ourselves".

Blending life and work, bringing their personal selves to their leadership roles was essential to the effectiveness of their work performance. Yolana was very direct when she said

I believe I am a natural nurturer. Some people are very much alone and they just need someone

to love them. People may say I am not paid to love; but... it is in my very core to know that some people need that person outside their home to see that something in them and to help them.

Passion for education

All of the participants were keen learners and held learning in high regard. Nine women indicated attaining their advanced credentials as one of their greatest successes. Many women shared how they had to simultaneously face challenges in order to attain their degrees, such as dire health issues and balancing family responsibilities, which made the achievement that much more rewarding. Challenges also came from people questioning their decisions as Jazz stated “Everyone kept asking why I was undertaking this challenge (getting the degree) when it wasn’t required. That was my personal goal”. In the eyes of the women, learning was not limited to academic degree attainment but also encompassed their ongoing experiences, particularly in the college system. Halle’s recollection of her journey was inspiring. “Being within the HR area because it was growing and because of the issues we were dealing with, it was the right place, right experiences, right time for growth and I happened to be part of that and I actually loved it!”

Values

I left the definition of the values to the individual participants. Interestingly, what the women tended to value was sometimes principles they found lacking in their own work experience, for example some women who would identify respect as a value may have felt disrespected at times in their position as leaders. The top values identified as the absolute needs women required in order to be in their leadership positions were:

1. Trust and Honesty, relational orientation (5 participants chose this value as their absolute out of 9 participants)
2. Respect, achievement orientation (4 participants chose this as their absolute priority value out of 8 participants)
3. Motivating and Inspiring Others, relational orientation (4 absolute out of 12 participants)

Some of the other values mentioned by the women included:

1. Relationships and teamwork, relational orientation (12 participants)
 2. Excellence and Achievement (9 participants)
 3. Commitment (achievement), responsibility (achievement) and loyalty (relational orientation) (9 participants)
 4. Appreciation (relational), recognition (achievement) and being taken seriously (relational orientation) (5 participants)
- And,
5. Risk taking, achievement orientation (5 participants)

Trust and Honesty

The participants that discussed trust as one of their values, also stated that without trust they were not able to do their jobs with authenticity. Sienna explained that “I can’t work in an environment where I can’t trust the environment to be what it said it was going to be, what it claims to be. You can’t hit a moving target, and so I can’t take risks unless I trust.” Sarah said it this way: “I learned that just because there are people in higher positions it doesn’t mean that I have to trust them or feel inspired by them but I have also learned that if I don’t trust them and I’m not inspired by them I can’t function.” Halle however provided an alternative viewpoint:

I will trust anybody new or anybody to do their job because I believe that people are generally good in their nature and are knowledgeable in their field. Unfortunately, there are others that through experiences ... have been burned. I am really trying not to let them influence the way I think.

Other women discussed how there were different levels of honesty in the college system. Akie shed some light on this:

There are those who feel it's okay to be dishonest in the sense you only tell people as much as they need to know. ...the opposite of honesty is devious and regrettably when you function in a management position there is a lot of deviousness that you have to deal with ... Once you get into an administrative role, people will do and say things with their own interests in mind and they have agendas and sub-agendas. I strive for honesty in the workplace, in the working relationships that I have with people and I try to model that so people know that is one of my values.

Some women discussed how it was sometimes difficult to be honest but wholly necessary in order to eliminate double standards and instill trust in working relationships. Sienna reinforced this point by saying "if you're honest with people they don't like it but they can live with it. Honesty is a lot of work because you have to really self reflect ... and understand why you're doing things". Being this honest leaves some people feeling vulnerable, however, being transparent helps the team understand one another and move the process along. As Mercedes remarked "life is about having to figure out what people really mean and what people really want because it is idealistic to believe that you'll ever really know that everybody is on board and that everybody is saying what they mean". She maintained "you have to be savvy and strategic enough to make sense of a situation beyond what people say and do".

Respect

When folks don't feel respected it forces them to act as though they are disrespected and that's a very unhealthy dynamic...Where I come (from) I don't have a tolerance for being disrespected, in fact it's probably a trigger point for me. I could spend a lot of energy coming to work feeling disrespected and not being productive and I guess I'm at that point in my life where I don't feel like I need to do that anymore. (Sienna)

The women's discussions regarding respect had many dimensions. Some women were general in their views of what respect entailed. Other women were keen to point out how and who deserved respect. Some women believed respect ought to come with the position. For instance, Halle remarked, "they have to respect the position that a leader is in. They also need to understand that whatever it is, ultimately the leader is accountable". She continued to speak about her expectations as a leader: "I would like to be treated with respect by them and also for my own boss (to) appreciate my views; know that you are paying me to give you my views and...(though) you may not agree with me, at least respect what I have to say". Ibony emphasized this point by saying, "They may feel that they have been here for a long time and should be in my job. So I had to prove to them that I am more than capable to sit in this chair". Some women believed that they had earned respect by attaining their position without the aid of any network or connection. Akie asserted, "I got here because of my own individual effort which is so different from others in this institution. Because of that I feel I deserve respect and I demand respect". Other women believed as Yolana did that "we have to give respect in order to earn respect".

Motivating and Inspiring Others

Like excellence, motivating and inspiring others was a theme that spanned all the interviews. For some women, being motivated by others was something they themselves wished they had had in their own experience. For instance, Antoinette disclosed,

I make sure I do ... what managers didn't do for me. Thank them, ... let them know they've done a good job, ... trying to assign things that they may not know how to do ...I give it to them knowing they may have a difficult time with it (but let) them know that I'm there to help them.

Yolana also remarked that some students may need extra support and direction. She said, "Sometimes we don't know why people ended up coming through our doors... and sometimes they do feel like giving up because it is hard, because they feel alone, because everyone is here on their own agenda". Motivating others was of overall importance to these women leaders. Some women shared how inspiring others often would be reciprocated. By bringing their full selves into their leadership and teaching roles, there is opportunity to engage students and staff on a deeper level. Sienna expressed it this way

it's extremely important that I motivate and inspire others because it's out of that diversity and inspiration and (my own) kaleidoscope of lens that comes innovation and creativity and change and laughter and validation and actually it's very inspiring for me.

Best Strategies to Recruit and Retain Quality Women of African and South Asian Descent in College Leadership Positions Current Positive Practices

Most of the women indicated that the opportunities to further one's education through the colleges was a great advantage. The ability to either receive tuition assistance or sabbatical leaves to complete degrees was mentioned as valuable benefits.

Some of the women also indicated some of the initial orientation had been helpful. For example, Antoine believed the new manager training was, "good training for those that are new to the college and from the outside ... everybody got up and introduced themselves". From the questionnaire, women indicated that the orientations: established the context, provided necessary information about the college and how to navigate the system, was structured and gave them an opportunity to coordinate with other, more knowledgeable and experienced people.

Representation and Systemic Discrimination

The provision for employers, such as colleges, to execute voluntary employment equity programs was made in both the Canadian Human Rights Act and Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Agocs, 2002). Both colleges collected employment equity statistics, however, the women were not aware if the colleges purposely planned goals, measures or timetables to ensure that the underrepresentation of racialized persons in administration was addressed. Nan spoke for many of the women when she admitted, "I'm actually not ... aware of what the college is doing right now but do they have targets of recruiting people from these areas and these particular groups and if we don't have it, why not?"

Another point that was mentioned by Akie concerned the motivation and the consistency of statistical data collection regarding equity seeking groups, (e.g., women, people of colour, people with disabilities and people of Aboriginal heritage). According to her, having this information is essential to acknowledge and address gaps in representation and service, however, "acknowledgement of that throws the whole system on its head ... (because) there is a great reluctance to proactively go after diversity (and) there is the sense that that is not equitable, that there are some people who will be disadvantaged ... those who are already over represented in those positions in the college". According to the Employment Equity Regulations (1996), as outlined in the Employment Equity Act, section 3: 6 (a) "The questionnaire shall indicate that responses to the questions on the questionnaire are voluntary". Though women observed discrepancies in recruitment and retention of racialized persons, particularly in management positions, the statistical data were collected voluntarily in their colleges therefore not completely accurate. Despite this however, the statistical information available still showed a markedly lower level of racialized persons in administrative positions in both colleges.

Some women felt some managers alternatively operated under an unwritten quota system or as Tamela said, "To have someone of colour ... just to ... set your portfolio". The quota system was perceived to be demoralizing and isolating. For instance, Farah described the practice as detrimental:

kind of fashionable one day and not fashionable the other day meanwhile people's lives are at stake and their livelihoods and their souls ... for them (the college management) (it) is an option, (but it) is not an option for people who live it". She went on to explain how she believed the quota practice was not rooted in true change or acknowledgement of racialized persons: "when I took the job it was in an environment which existed in the college system where there seems to have been a thrust towards diversity hiring. Over the course of the 15 years I've been here, at no point in time have there been more than 2 people of colour as Chairs. This has said to me that this initiative ... has amounted (to) tokenism. So the college is happy with tokenism.

Tamela advised: "if you do nothing more than acknowledge (that) this is an issue and we are going to try to

do something about it... the next time you get ready to create a position, create a position and take one of those people that you know is a good person and put that person in that position so then it's real clear we acknowledge this person knows what they are doing". Athena offered this advice in regards to where to target racialized women for management positions: "I think that in terms of leaders and hiring a diversity of women here... it comes from faculty level ... that is where it has to start". Kim also offered the following advice:

They would have to give this person ... reign to develop and bring in programs that would help the students of different ethnic backgrounds – within reason of course, within Ministry guidelines and within College policies.

Akie pointed out that the same criteria that expected of people hired from the outside for senior positions should be for those who are internally hired or appointed. She elaborated: "we are putting in criteria and experience and qualifications benchmarks particularly because we are looking externally to find these people. They become barriers that really they are new barriers because the existing people ... nine times out of ten ... didn't interview for those jobs. Someone just offered them the job and they got it". In summary, identifying, hiring and promoting people of racialized backgrounds is a step, however, giving support, trust and creating the environment to take risks, is the necessary next step, not only for women to thrive in their leadership positions but to counter quota practices that in the long run lower morale and fail.

Akie also asserted the advantage of leaders and students having similar backgrounds as it related to student retention: "(representation) actually benefits the students... There is... benefit to be gained by sharing the background experience, cultural heritage and this is in an institution ... that has a very high attrition rate of people of colour. ... One of the things is because they don't see themselves in the institution". She perceived the college intentionally didn't acknowledge a need for representation to avoid accountability:

because if you name it you have to do something about it so let's not talk about it... that's one of the major challenges faced in H.R. But H.R. doesn't make the rules; the institution has to provide H.R. with that mandate, whether through the board or through the strategic plan... The fact is the words do appear in those documents but they don't manifest themselves in any different approach to hiring or any different outcome from the hiring process.

Most women were concerned about management's perspective of 'fit' and Canadian experience and how they were barriers to increasing representation. Akie discussed the irony of fit:

why would only someone who looks like you fit especially when the population you serve is diverse? In fact those serving now don't fit, when you look at who is on staff as the senior administrators, as the academic leaders, as the faculty, they are out of step with the population they are serving.

Like most of the participants, Jazz believed that the barriers would be addressed once managers understood the value of transferrable skills and giving new hires support: "When I am hiring ... if you've got the credentials I am looking for then I will give you a chance... We will mentor you ... We will team up a new member with a senior ... member ... (who) will help you to understand how we do things". In terms of providing support, Nan suggested people with international credentials, given their degrees may be undervalued in Canada, may benefit from gaining experience: "give them an opportunity... can they come into a classroom and work with one of us ... not necessarily as an employee initially... that is a way to leverage experience". Akie was quick to point out: "an academic leader in the Canadian college system (compared to) an academic leader in a university in China or a university in Bangladesh ... there have to be some common principles and basic skills that those individuals bring". Akie continued:

there are other value added pieces that those individuals bring that will compensate for any skills gap... We have to change the system to value what they bring as much as we value what Canadians (bring) and that is where we are butting up against the systemic racism.

In summary, Burton advised that managers "really seek after those that are motivated and want to get somewhere... to give the individual the same support and respect that they give to others".

Acknowledgement

Managers need to realize that for the colleges to progress, change is required to allow more perspectives and contributions to be incorporated. Mercedes explained it as:

institutions are systems which very often ... think they change and adapt but very often they are pretty mainstream... as long as you get the same people in terms of cultural values, or traditions ... and priorities it will still be going in the same direction. I'm not saying that only racialized woman can change things but what an institution has to realize (is) that if you have ... predominantly white men then you bring in some white women, men have to expect that the conversations will be different. ... They have to expect changes in the system which is the whole point of bringing in the women because otherwise (we are) window dressing. So if you have a predominantly white system that is mainstream... when you are bringing in non white people, and especially non white women, the conversations have to be different. Institutions have to expect that unless they are going to be putting tape on our mouths we will be saying things from who we are or where we are... We want to participate... assuming we can participate in authentic conversations... There has to be the readiness, ... We will be asking for different directions, we will be engaging in ways which will take people out of their comfort zone. So it can't be business as usual... If an institution recognizes the need to be more representative it's not just in hiring the people, it's in following through, allowing those people to bring themselves into the system and to actually change the system. It's the same with the curriculum, we can't just do status quo, and once we do something different, there are changes which we can't anticipate and we have to be prepared to go in the direction they lead us because otherwise ... it's all superficial.

The same way women described how their influential supervisors had acknowledged and respected them is the same way women believed all managers and colleagues should treat one another every day. Sienna believed respect is demonstrated when everyone's contribution or "quirk", which establishes our unique environments, is recognized. She described respect as

enjoying that (contribution) and if we can't enjoy that and we can't offer respect, I don't know why we expect people to behave in a way that feels respected ... that is the foundation of a healthy environment and for me personally it's not negotiable.

Ibony believed that acknowledging for managers could be as easy as making

a point to walk about your department and to say hello. Make your presence felt, because if you don't do that, you're losing the human touch. That is advice for the people that are already here as well as for the new ones coming in. Make the new person feel a part of your team. Welcome them.

Redefining what it means to be different and acknowledging difference was also mentioned by many women in the study. Akie spoke to this point when she said,

The system isn't changing to suit the clientele and within the institution the perception is that change is diminishing quality and if you changed then you would be hiring less qualified, less skilled ... Even though (we) are saying ... let's value different things we aren't saying not (to) value skills.

Sienna also asserted that managers ought, "not to be afraid of acknowledging difference. ... take the time to understand, to stop assuming that everybody comes to the assumptions that they have... that doesn't mean better than or worse than it simply means different. If you say that you value diversity then do it and do it with conviction not with obligation". It was important to the women that managers understood that different doesn't mean deficient but in fact is necessary and valuable for positive change. It was important to the women that people are able to bring their whole selves to their work and workplaces, and not just what was acceptable by mainstream standards. Mercedes explained this as when "people have to sometimes change themselves in order to make contributions which are valued. It deals with ... marginalizing people instead of

ever expanding the circle”.

In terms of recruitment therefore, the women believed managers needed to be cognizant of their biases and give applicants opportunities to discuss their differences. Maya suggested that during interviews, managers give candidates the opportunity to talk about the qualities that make them different by asking:

them (applicants) questions about what is unique about you. What are some of the pieces that you can add value to in a way that goes beyond the expectations of what we bring? So that it would be okay mention culture... (O)ffer scenarios that will help them to speak about something within their culture and see how that relates to their giftedness.

It was important for many of the women that potential and demonstrated excellence of candidates and current employees be acknowledged and encouraged. Some women believed that though everyone who is new in a position has learning curves due to new environment and/or responsibilities, some people are not perceived as being able to overcome learning curves therefore not given the same access to positions and/or resources to address gaps in knowledge. Akie explained it this way in relation to racialized candidates,

acknowledge that it's a learning curve (and know) there are other value added pieces that those individuals bring that will compensate for any skills gap... if they are as we know them to be coming with good work ethic and the ability to hit the ground running and to give it their 150% then they will acquire those skills and bridge those gaps quickly.

She gave the example that “faculty members (who) were hired as Chairs... didn't have those skills either”. The issue for some of the women was that the excuse that the learning curve may be too steep for potential candidates, whether within or external to the college, served as a block to being considered for available positions. One suggestion Nan gave was to strategically consider the community the colleges served, and consider how the college could ensure candidates from these communities are given the tools needed to succeed in positions. Nan also recommended that the Masters degree not be the heaviest consideration when hiring:

how do we help to build acknowledgement and to say that while this person doesn't have a (Masters) degree ... everything that they've done to help entrench these 10 learning goals for the students and to meet outcomes indicates that they are at the highest levels of excellence and ability ... how do we build partnerships with those people and how do we bring them in?.

Acknowledging good workers was also a need many of the women articulated. Many women believed that giving them the added responsibility would clearly signal “we acknowledge this person knows what they are doing, can do a really good job and could teach some other people”. Akie used her personal situation to illustrate:

So you could manage... 100 people but you ...aren't good enough to be a dean or director...that is where the challenge lies. You get a lot of credit for doing a good job and you manage to hang on to your job but you are still doing the same thing.

It was also recommended that when managers err, they ought to acknowledge that they made a mistake and correct themselves. By admitting their error, they restore the trust with their staff, colleagues and students. Burton gave a personal example,

there were so many things going on and this one day I had to go to an (Educational) fair ... but at the same time I also had a calendar that was due and I had to get this information to the typesetter... My boss said 'oh don't worry about it I'm going to take care of the fair' ... I got this call from these other individuals waiting for me saying nobody is here from (College A) so (I) ran to him and said 'I thought you said...' and he said 'hey you're not supposed to tell anyone that I'm responsible' ... it was all of a sudden my problem it's not his problem and that was a challenge. How do I tell this man that you need to be a little more responsible? ... I am here and we are both working in this position ... the idea is get someone and if you can't get someone let me know that you couldn't get someone and then I could try to find someone ; it's the courtesy.

So since then I'm a little more careful.

Some women valued managers who were able to be open when things were not going well. Sarah said bluntly,

Acknowledge when you've made mistakes hiring people, you get them out of there... get rid of the people who are not doing anything for the organization and ... just hire a good person... You need to think about whom you've got and get rid of the garbage, because there is a lot of garbage and it doesn't get put out.

Sienna gave another perspective when she said "I need to trust people to say when things are not going well... they don't have to be really profound or difficult things they may just be the one dissenting voice". Sienna pointed out that by admitting error or need for change, managers are not only affecting their direct reports but the college and community at large as well in terms of service quality and reputation. She explained,

I really feel (responsibility) directly to the people who will somehow vicariously be touched by the experiences that I've had a hand in either creating or managing or leading or not ... it's naive not to think that what we decide today is so isolated in education that it doesn't have those far reaching impacts.

Support and Support Networks

Support generally means to sustain, withstand and uphold. All the women expressed how important support was for there to be better retention of quality employees. Tamela defined support as:

not to agree with everything I do or say or think, but just let me know that you are there as a sounding board first off. ... (If I am going to be out there on a limb, ... and I've outlined the facts and explained my goals, ... if there is going to be some turbulence ... that you are going to be there for me to help it to be successful.

Akie also offered this definition of demonstrated support for people of diverse backgrounds: "there really is a need to communicate to the wide, broader community and to the internal college community that diversity is a value...that there is value in having a diverse work force and not only communicating that but also in demonstrating that".

Some women made the link between support and trust and/or risk taking. With support women generally believed leaders could be more innovative and open to try new initiatives in their work without the fear of punitive consequences. Unfortunately, some of the women had experienced low support and felt subjected to unrealistic expectations. For example, Akie shared that:

I've discovered that ... amongst my colleagues who are ...of African Caribbean heritage, they all realize that the way to get ahead, you have to perform well and there is no room for error ... because if they screw up it's not overlooked... you can't afford to screw up even once because it could be a fatal flaw.

The need for support networks was voiced by a few women. Being able to connect with other leaders or employees of similar background was felt to be valuable. Support from management and human resources would be necessary for such groups to be successful. Akie voiced a concern regarding the support her network received in the college where she is affiliated:

... we have an organization called the (X) and I have, on the advice of my colleagues, ... never been the President of that group because as an administrator I can be terminated without any recourse... the few instances where employee groups like the (X) have attempted to raise ... issues we've been stymied, directly or indirectly.... 'we don't want to know that' or 'we don't have that information' or 'how dare you ask for that, what is your intention?' The sense being the intention has to be not something that could be good for the institution, so the fact that an

organization or a group of employees feels they are underrepresented in the institution and for us to advance that effort to increase our representation, that is not perceived by the institution as a good thing.

Recruitment Efforts

A few women indicated that the colleges' recruitment efforts needed to be more targeted to attract racialized candidates. Nan gave this example of some of the considerations the college could make when recruiting: "it's really looking at where are the places that you recruit people, would it be in centers of higher learning? ... the work places?" Though the colleges advertised in some local ethnic papers, the outreach was limited, therefore the pool of potential candidates was also limited. Akie described the assumed attitude:

It's almost as if we have a position and we're going to put it in the Share (newspaper) or Tsing Tao ... and they feel that is due diligence... The fact that at the end of the day nobody from that community got hired it's not our problem they were not the best candidate.

She also believed the equity statement in the ads were empty words:

The issue for us is that the postings for all the colleges say 'we are an equal opportunity institution' so we have equity in opportunity but not equity in access because they will get 150 resumes ... but who gets hired at the end of the day?

Jazz admired the recruiting efforts of a college in the Greater Toronto Area, not associated to this study. She stated: "X College has just embarked on a plan where they have invited people of colour who want to work in their institution to attend an information session to learn how to apply for positions". The invitation was to an Employment Open House which read they were "committed to a workforce that reflects the diversity of our students and our city and actively seek qualified individuals with the skills and knowledge to work in this environment". It also provided a link to their careers website which featured a video of the college president introducing the initiative and its vitalness to the success of the institution.

Training, Orientation, Job Shadowing, Mentoring and Pilot Project

Some women stated they had access to professional development training, however, due to workload and/or scheduling they were not able to take advantage of that. As many of the participants indicated, teaching and learning often occurs in the day to day work. According to Bossidy and Charan, "80% of learning takes place outside the classroom. Every leader and supervisor needs to be a teacher" (cited in DeSmet & McAlpine, 2010, p. 1). Training shouldn't be solely left to Staff Development and Human Resources. Every administrator has the responsibility of teaching and collaborating with their reports since they are in the perfect position to share organizational context, expectations and cultural knowledge. Given many of the participants stated time was an issue when it came to attending training sessions, imbedding at-work learning opportunities in the daily work schedule is both time and cost effective (DeSmet & McAlpine, 2010). Staff Development may want to explore ways to support administrators to equitably coach and train of their staff.

When the participants were asked what type of training they would benefit from, they frequently said sessions that provided information on the following information: college policies and procedures; the college's hierarchical structure; roles and responsibilities of the staff, (i.e., colleagues, and direct reports); specific details of their leadership functions and position, preferably by the supervising manager; advice from peers; finance, budget; and conflict resolution and diversity.

A few women believed that the training attendance of senior management needed attention. Yolán expressed this as "the people that need to hear are always detached from it, because they don't believe that they need to hear it".

The women believed that senior managers needed further training regarding interviewing best practices. Athena shared her experience to illustrate how senior managers may create barriers in the hiring process:

with the higher positions, I don't see that kind of diversity in their interviewing and whom they

recruit. I actually sat on one of their panels where there was one woman and she was the only visible minority... that was not the reason I felt she was the best candidate. She was the best candidate.

She continued to describe the dynamics of the interviewing panel:

I remember that 3 out of 6 thought that she was fabulous. And there was one higher up that didn't think she was and just kind of railroaded the entire hiring committee and I just thought 'oh wow! Now I see how things work at the higher levels'.

Sarah's comment supported Athena's observation when she stated:

I've experienced bullying, this needs to be acknowledged and I think somewhere in the hiring process if ...you clue into the fact that this is an issue you could catch that in an interview, I'd say look for it, it's a serious problem. It's a really serious problem with some administrators so check those interviewing skills.

Managers and other staff involved in the interviewing process need more training regarding equitable and collaborative interviewing skills and practices.

It was felt by many participants that candidates may be disadvantaged by managers who judge them based on their accents. It's important for managers and other interviewers to recognize their bias and listen to the content of the candidates' discussion as opposed to being distracted by their intonation.

I think Burton made a suggestion that departed from the other participants' that is particularly noteworthy. She suggested that managers purposely ask candidates after they've interviewed to provide them with feedback regarding the process. She elaborated:

you are not the only one giving the feedback as a Human Resources person but get feedback from the individual as well because there are a lot of things that we take for granted ... if you allow this person to offer ideas about what is working or not working for her then we become as a Human Resources department... a stronger area ... more respected area.

Orientation

Of the 13 responses to the questionnaire question about orientation, 69% (n=9) of the participants stated they did not receive an orientation. When asked what the women desired in an orientation, they generally indicated information regarding the following would be ideal: ethical behaviour; commitment to the team; engagement in all key academic teaching and learning aspects; and how to support full time and part time faculty.

Ibony, who had not been to an orientation, described what she hoped to experience during a session:

Tell people up front these things are available to you. Don't give people a book because ... we don't have the time to read the book. Talk to them, explain these things to them. When you are finished ... take them to the manager, who will then walk them through their job or their expectations of the job.

As a person who has been with a college several years, Antoinne believed having different types of orientations would be beneficial based on if the managers were new to the college or veterans. She explained: "They need to ask people what do you need out of this, what do you want ... there's a difference... Maybe they assume that because I'm within I know these things".

Job Shadowing, Mentoring and Pilot Project

In alignment with the section discussing support networks, many of the women expressed how job shadowing and mentoring would be beneficial to women in leadership in particular. Burton stated for

example: “To ensure that the attrition rates of racialized women in leadership positions are minimal, it is important that during the probationary period, these women are given ample opportunities to job shadow, to meet with other women in a similar position and discuss how they, other leaders, conduct business”. She continued to say this would be an opportunity for leaders: “to provide verbal/written feedback of what seems to work or not work, (and) to provide (suggestions regarding) professional development opportunities”. Maya also provided another perspective on mentoring when she said: “have them mentored in a way that would ... go beyond a job description that might be necessary but not spoken about. ... I also think that for any leader it is very important that they have a group of people that they can turn to, to run an idea, a concern, a query (by) as opposed to having to make a decision in that moment”. Nan suggested: “there (should be) some kind of mentoring of people like ourselves who are here already are prepared to mentor (others) who are coming in... not just in the same departments but it could be across departments ... where they can just talk about workplace issues”.

Jazz also shared her unique experience of being a part of a pilot project her college had sponsored many years ago. She described it as an experience that helped her build confidence to pursue leadership in subsequent years. Unfortunately due to funding deficiencies, the project was discontinued. She describes the project and its effects in the quote below:

the college had a pilot program called, ‘Women into Management’. It was a program that was created to try to attract more women into management. I was one of the candidates selected. I was one of about 12 candidates. And as part of the training, you went to seminars and workshops for the first part of the program, and the second part of the program was an internship somewhere in the college where you would be in a position that would have required you to use leadership skills and management skills... think there has to be more than lip service.

Conclusion

The theme of being an outsider, isolated and lacking support was overwhelmingly articulated by the participants in this study. Tierney stated that marginalized people have to struggle perpetually with their authenticity in the realm of PSE (cited in Wane, 2009). The literature revealed that women in elite positions are less integrated in informal discussion networks and remain outside of the central circle of influential, high level, position holders which hampers their career advancement and success (Davies-Netzley, 1998; Harvard, 1986). Eddy (2008) and Williams (1989) found that being faced with isolation forced racialized women to find ways to deal with resistance and use failure as a learning tool which then better prepared them for change at other institutions.

Consistent with the findings in the literature, the participants in this study found coming from a position of unequal power caused them to find alternative ways to excel in their work and feel affirmed when faced with the lack of recognition. According to Collins (1990) in order for groups to have the ability to make their standpoint known to themselves and others they need to share equal power with other groups (Wane, 2009). Not uncommon, women of this background who had advanced to higher positions had done so based on their previous work experience, academic credentials, previous job title, and political savvy. This is not unlike women of European descent, however, it was commonly expressed in the research literature that women of colour believed they had to work twice as hard as those of European descent for the same recognition and status (Williams, 1989; Bowens Boyd, 2002). It was generally recommended that college leaders acknowledge and support the efforts of these and other potential racialized leaders by ensuring they have access to resources, focused training and internal networks. The general belief held by these racialized women leaders was that they should be viewed as competent socialized leaders who increasingly reflect the communities the GTA colleges are serving.

Given the sample size and limited focus of this study, it is recommended that more research regarding the experiences and best practices of racialized women in colleges and universities across Canada be conducted.

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