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Leadership Development Programs for Women

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Abstract: Leadership development programs are designed for male leaders. Literature concerning women’s career development and leadership development are reviewed. Session participants will discuss the need for leadership development programs designed specifically for women.

Keywords: career development; leadership; women’s leadership development

Background

Hopkins, O’Neil, Passarelli, and Bilimoria (2008) noted that women face different barriers than men in their career development, and using evidence from over one hundred and fifty studies, they showed that men and women have different leadership styles. Men tend to have autocratic leadership styles while women possess democratic leadership styles. In addition to having different leadership styles, those women who obtain leadership positions in the workforce are faced with challenges that men do not experience in leadership roles. Therefore, leadership development programs for both men and women leaders would fail to focus on the challenges that are specific to women leaders.

Day (2001) defines leadership development as “expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes” (Day, 2001, p. 582). A group of individuals at the University of Cincinnati developed the Women’s Leadership Program (WLP) to give women who were in lower-level leadership roles at the university an opportunity to go through a year-long leadership program. The goal was to develop a group of women who would be prepared to move into full-time administrator positions at the culmination of the year-long program (Berryman-Fink, LeMaster, & Nelson, 2003). The design of the WLP can serve as a model in discussing the need for leadership development programs designed specifically for women.

Purpose of Roundtable

In referring to women being aware of discriminatory practices and career barriers, Thomas, Bierema, and Landau (2004) state, “awareness is the first step toward meaningful change” (p. 73). The purpose of this roundtable is to raise awareness of discriminatory practices and career barriers impacting women and use this information to support the need for leadership development programs designed specifically for women.

Roundtable Activities

By discussing pertinent literature on women’s leadership development programs, participants will discuss the need for leadership development programs designed specifically for women, determine ways to implement such programs, and outline important knowledge and skills that should be addressed in the leadership development programs.

References

Berryman-Fink, C., LeMaster, B., and Nelson, K. (2003). The women's leadership program at
the University of Cincinnati: A case study. *Liberal Education* 89: 3-7.