

A Framework for Promoting Gender Equity in Organizations *

Frame 1: “Equip the Woman”/Prepare Women for Success

The goal of the “Equip the Woman” is to minimize differences in experience and academic and business socialization between women and men so that women can compete as equals. Women in engineering programs and executive development programs for women represent the hallmark of this approach. Many women have learned valuable skills from these programs. However the focus is on the individual level, not on changing the systemic factors within organizations and institutions that create an uneven playing field for women.

Frame 2: Create Equal Opportunity / Level the Playing Field

This frame focuses on structural barriers within organizations and institutions—in the many recruitment, admissions, hiring, evaluation, tenure and promotion processes that are biased against women and impede advancement. The goal of this approach is to create equal opportunity by eliminating discriminatory structural and procedural barriers. Interventions in this frame tend to be legalistic and policy-based. They include affirmative action initiatives, revised recruiting and selection procedures, more transparent promotion policies, sexual harassment guidelines. These are a critical part of gender equity initiatives, however they are insufficient in achieving lasting gains because they have little direct effect on the informal rules and practices that govern workplace behavior. In the absence of cultural changes in the organization, structures and policies cannot, on their own, create equitable organizations.

Frame 3: Value Difference/ Value Diversity

The third frame shifts the focus from eliminating difference to valuing difference. This frame often places gender equity within a broader diversity perspective, acknowledging gender as one of many important differences among students and future workers and valuing diversity as an important contributor to innovation and overall business performance. Strategies include diversity training to promote tolerance and understanding of difference. Including team building and consensus-building in expectations for student teams or workplace performance criteria may increase awareness that “people skills” are important in the workplace. It does not address the power of the masculine image that underlies most generally accepted models of fields of study, occupations success, leadership, or managerial acumen.

Frame 4: Re-vision Work Culture

Gender equity in the fourth frame focuses on the underlying systemic factors in institutions and organizations that lead to inequity. This frame starts from the premise that organizations are inherently gendered and gender is considered a social rather than biological construct. Historically or recently created largely by and for men, educational and organizational systems and their various practices, structures and norms tend to reflect masculine values, experiences and life situations. It includes systems of reward and recognition that promote specific kinds of behavior as well as systems of communications and decision-making that bestow power and influence on some individuals while excluding others. Interventions from this frame are not formulaic or procedural, rather are based on an ongoing process of inquiry, experimentation, and learning. This approach focuses on systemic changes in cultural and practices that will benefit women, men, and the organization that are both effective and gender equitable.

*Source: CGO Insights, Briefing Note No. 1, Simmons Graduate School of Management, <http://www.simmons.edu/about-simmons/centers-organizations-and-institutes/cgo/publications/cgo-insight-briefing-notes>