


Chapter 3


Self–Care for Women Leaders in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Whether physical, emotional, intellectual, or social, women leaders in higher education need to make sure that their self-care is paramount. Self-care is prioritised by women leaders leading to increasing their resilience, leadership effectiveness, and overall wellbeing. Flexible policies, mentorship, and inclusive leadership cultures are important for being able to provide institutional support necessary for fostering leadership which is sustainable. This chapter discusses the role of self-care and institutional support in helping women leaders to be successful in the long run and contribute to more equitable environments in academia.

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INTRODUCTION

The administration of a complex professional life in which administrative tasks, academic aspirations and personal needs have to be right on time. And those roles are filled with multiform challenges – everything from faculty satisfactions to institutions growth to students success to keeping up with research and scholarship. With all the bespoke, complex demands of leadership in academia, women leaders feel under particularly high pressure, increasing the risk of burnout (Lester, 2015). On top of all that, the gendered nature of leadership in higher education further complicates the women's experiences of leadership in those roles. Systemic barriers that women face include gender bias, inequities in the workplace, and the glass ceiling that still plagues them from advancing their careers. (Morley, 2013). Recent research shows that women in positions of leadership may have to work harder than their male counterparts to be recognized and recognized, and this puts additional demand and emotional burden on them (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In addition, these microaggressions, implicit bias, and stereotypical expectation that often avoid their authority and leadership potential (Rios et al., 2020).

In this context, self care becomes a key element for the success in the long term because it keeps women leaders in good performances, good mental state and good well being. Leadership sustainability is not an individual thing, rather it is a strategic necessity for self care (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). By doing these self care practices women leaders can build their resilience and enhance their emotional intelligence; this will enable them to lead with confidence and clarity (O'Leary & Minnis, 2020). The general concept of leadership self care has dimensions which involve physical, emotional, psychological, and social dimensions, respectively (Neff, 2011). Physical self care include regular exercise, good nourishment, and having sleep. Based upon studies, leadership that prioritizes physical health is associated with higher energy levels, better cognitive function, better stress management skills (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). As women in higher education leadership are often very busy, they don't have time to be doing these activities, but even inserting very little wellness habit can significantly enhance their overall well being (Simmons and Nelson, 2007).

However, emotional self care is something women leaders have to do, whereby, they need to engage in activities that would enhance their emotional wellbeing such as mindfulness, meditation and seeking professional assistance when needed (Goleman, 1998). It is shown that women leaders who are more mindful and also more capable of being emotionally self regulated are more likely to cope with the workplace challenges with composure and endurance (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). In addition, being able to express emotions constructively and seek support from colleagues and mentors can reduce stress as well as create a feeling of community in an academic environment (Gill & Arnold, 2015). Just as important for women leaders in

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