

Gender, Power and Management

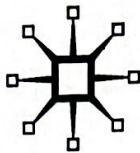
A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Higher Education

Edited by

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and

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This book is dedicated to the senior managers who participated in this research and to women who are still challenged in universities worldwide

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Research Design

Jenny Neale and Özlem Özkanlı

3.1 Introduction

The research reported here is the first multi-country study to examine the dynamics of men and women working together in higher education senior management teams. It provides a comparative analysis of gender, power and university management across eight countries: Australia (AUS), Ireland (IRE), New Zealand (NZ), Portugal (PT), South Africa (SA), Sweden (SWE), Turkey (TR), and the United Kingdom (UK).

This chapter outlines the research design and critically explores and analyses the approach taken. The three phases of the research were:

- quantitatively analysing the representation of women in HE senior management in each country;
- undertaking qualitative research with senior managers, including current and former Rectors/Vice-Chancellors/Presidents, that focussed on getting into and getting on in senior management, doing senior management, and perceptions of broader management culture; and
- development of interventions for women who are interested in applying for senior management positions.

In the first stage of the research, investigators in each country analysed the representation of women in senior management, using publicly available data from university websites and government sources such as Ministries and Departments of Education. Trends in the representation of women in university management were then analysed. This confirmed that the continuing under-representation of women in the professoriate, which acts as the recruitment pool for senior management (as discussed in Chapter 2), meant that universities could argue there

are insufficient eligible women available to undertake such positions. Further, those in physical sciences, engineering and technology (SET) are more likely to reach the top because of the focus on international collaboration, the predominant tradition of working in research teams with assistants to carry out the day-to-day research, and the large sums of research money they are able to attract. Therefore, discipline area becomes important, and the majority of senior management in most of the countries under study came from a SET background (Machado, Özkanlı and White 2007).

Having established the broader context for this study in relation to senior management, in the second stage of the research the aim was to explore the career experiences of women and men in senior management positions. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to capture this information. In qualitative research, the challenge is to assess the fit between the purpose and method (Maxwell 2005; Richards & Morse 2007; Patton 2002; Abrahamson 1983; Berg 2001), and in this case the research questions could only be answered by qualitative data. The chosen method was individual semi-structured interviews. 'Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit' (Patton 2002, p. 341).

3.2 Interviewing senior managers

There is a general tendency for researchers to study down rather than up but, particularly in the current study, this was not such an issue, as senior managers, as an elite group, were considered likely to share with the researchers the academic value ascribed to research (Lee 1993). Senior managers in universities can be considered an elite group in that they have established barriers that set them apart from rest of society (Hertz & Imber 1993). Access to elite groups for the purposes of research is often considered to be difficult, though difficulties may be exaggerated. Access can sometimes be easier for those who already have links with prospective participants (Duke 2002; Ostrander 1993). While two of the researchers were members of senior management at their universities, the other researchers were not part of this elite group. However, most had links that enabled them to access the appropriate people to interview. Half of the researchers interviewed at least one senior manager from their own university.

Hertz and Imber (1993) point out that elites have an expectation that interviewers will have done their 'homework' and know something about the situation they are researching. As academics themselves,

the Network researchers had a good knowledge of the sector they were researching, and the interviewees thus felt they could share meanings of concepts without the need for extra explanation. On the one hand, the researchers could be regarded as having 'insider' status because of this. Herod (1999) indicates that often being positioned as an 'insider' is considered preferable and a more authoritative place to be than that of an 'outsider'. Outsiders see things but only understand some things (Acker 2009 personal communication). In the present research insider-blindness was minimised because of the multi-country perspective and co-operation with team members across countries.

On the other hand, we were not all members of senior management and were thus 'outsiders' in this respect. As Naples (1996) points out, discussion of outside/insider locates the possible positions of the researcher as being polar opposites, which does not acknowledge the inherent fluidity of the position, which may change. All researchers start with different positions at different times and with different people, and this is important to bear in mind. When the researcher assumes the role of 'informed outsider' (Welch, Marsechan-Piekkari, and Tahvanainen 2002, p. 625), the research experience becomes a continual balancing act in reconciling the roles of 'insider' and 'outsider'. The distance between the interviewer and interviewee cannot be eliminated, but it can at times be turned to advantage, for example, when asking for clarification around answers.

Access, power, openness and feedback have all been identified as issues when interviewing elites. Respondents may take control of the interview (Ostrander 1993; Duke 2002; Welch, Marsechan-Piekkari, and Tahvanainen 2002), as they are accustomed to having others interested in and listening to what they have to say. Thus, the exchange between interviewer and interviewee has implications for reliability and validity. Further, Ostrander (1993) notes that there can be difficulty around 'exposing' the real concerns and viewpoints of the interviewees. There is a balance to be struck between being appreciative of subjects' willingness to participate and being deferential; and interviewers must avoid the assumption that interviewees will answer questions as fully and directly as they can.

3.3 Feminist research

As discussed in the introduction, this research adopts a feminist standpoint, which foregrounds women's experiences in university senior management. Stanley and Wise (1993) suggest that one of the tenets of

feminist research is that the personal is political, and although women may not agree on analyses about oppression, they share the experience of its consequences. Thus, analysis of individual stories and experiences join to create patterns where the personal is political. A further development of feminist consciousness is that in which women see 'the same reality differently' (Stanley & Wise 1993, p. 64). Women come to appreciate diversity, difference and the contradictions inherent in everyday life. What distinguishes feminist research from other forms of research is the 'question we have asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions and the purpose of our work' (Maynard & Purvis 1994, p. 14).

Several researchers have emphasised the importance of lived experience and the significance of everyday life and knowledge as women, as a basis for feminist research (for example, Stanley & Wise 1983, 1991; Weiler 1988; Mies 1983). To paraphrase Cummerton (1986), our research is undertaken from a feminist perspective where women's experiences, ideas and needs are valued in their own right, and where women are at the centre of the study providing a unique perspective from their own lived experience.

3.4 Women interviewers

Flores-Macias and Lawson (2008) suggest that the gender of the interviewer does need to be considered. They posit two competing explanations for the differences found when respondents are interviewed by same or opposite gender interviewers. Differences are either due to the effects of respondents wanting to please certain interviewers or alternatively the gender of the interviewer makes the questions more salient to considerations that respondents already hold.

All the Network researchers are women and, except for in the UK, Sweden and Australia, the majority of those being interviewed were men. In terms of the power differential between the interviewer and the interviewee, and the display of typical masculine traits, women interviewing men raises some of the same issues as does the interviewing of elites. Like elites, men often attempt to control the interview when being interviewed by women, thereby challenging the power of the interviewer (McKee & O'Brien 1983 in Lee 1997). Oakley (1981) and Finch (1984) discuss the opposite situation, which arises when women interview women, and stress the way the commonality of gender creates a rapport and a non-hierarchical situation; but they also caution that the perception of similarity may lead to a greater level of disclosure, with

which interviewees may subsequently feel uncomfortable. However, in the current research, the difference in status between the women being interviewed and the women doing the interviewing was in most cases likely to be a mitigating factor.

Respondents may assume different shared experiences based on the gender of the interviewer, thus making the interview itself another gendered experience. As Williams and Heikes (1993) found with in-depth interviews, male interviewees took the gender of the interviewer into account by developing responses within a gendered context, endeavouring not to offend the interviewer.

Female interviewers elicit different considerations on gender-linked topics compared to male interviewers (Huddy et al. 1997). Of particular relevance to the current research is the contention that males answer differently to women interviewers on more commonly debated topics like work-place gender inequity. Kane and Macaulay (1993) found that both male and female interviewees express more egalitarian gender-related attitudes or are more critical of existing gender inequalities when responding to female interviewers. Further, men offer different responses to questions dealing with female employment inequality, while women's responses concentrate more on gender-related collective action, policy, and group interests. Kane and Macaulay (1993) suggest that this may be a reflection of the gender constraints that apply generally in female/male interactions. Thus, because the interviewers were all women, the responses elicited during the current research may be more of a critical appraisal than may have occurred if there were both female and male interviewers.

3.5 Interview schedule

The researchers constructed the interview schedule, taking into account themes that arose from the initial analysis from stage one, as well as those identified from relevant literature. The schedule included three sections: getting into and on in senior management; doing senior management, including the dynamics of men and women working in senior management teams, and gendered leadership styles; and a final section, which focussed on the structure and broader management culture in the Universities. This final section, included the typical career path into senior management, the typical appointment processes for Rector/VC/President, and influential bodies in these processes, and the gender profile of senior management. There were additional questions for Rectors/VCs/Presidents (see Appendix 2 for the interview schedule).

3.6 Ethics

The researchers from Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and the UK applied for ethics approval through their respective universities. Detailed information on the process is provided on each of the university web sites (see the reference list at the end of this chapter for details of the relevant web sites). The South African researcher obtained verbal consent from each participant and, where requested, a summary was emailed to participants after the interview for their approval and before the information was included in the data set. Ethics approval is not required for research in Turkey, Sweden and Portugal. However, in these countries there is tacit agreement that the identity of interviewees will be kept confidential. In Turkey, an official letter from Ankara University was presented to each participant. An interview summary was emailed to each participant for comment before the data was finalised.

3.7 Sample selection

A sample of male and female senior managers, including current and former Rectors/Vice-Chancellors/Presidents was interviewed. 'Senior Management' was defined in this study as those academic managers at Dean level or above with university wide responsibilities, who were currently or who had been in senior management in the past five years.

The process for the appointment of senior managers differs in the participating countries. In Ireland, Presidents are appointed by a Selection Board in the majority of universities. The appointment is for a fixed term, and typically they do not return to academia at the end of their contract. Rectors in Portugal, Sweden and Turkey are elected for a fixed term and then often return to academia. VCs in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK are appointed by the University Council or Senate and are unlikely to return to academia at the end of their contract (the only exceptions are VCs who are appointed from smaller to larger universities).

The interview sample (see Table 3.1) in the study is purposive rather than representative. In selecting the sample, the researchers mostly started at the top and worked their way down. The majority of Rectors/Vice-Chancellors/Presidents are male, with women in support roles. The composition of the sample therefore reflects the reality of the situation in senior management. In some countries, all universities were covered and in others the sample was drawn from a selection of universities, reflecting the size of the sector. In New Zealand,

Table 3.1 Interviews by country and gender

Country	Female	Male	Total
Australia	14	7	21
Ireland	9	14	23
New Zealand	13	13	26
Portugal	9	14	23
South Africa	8	9	17
Sweden	7	2	9
Turkey	8	16	24
United Kingdom	18	–	18
Total	86	75	161

there are only eight public universities and the sample included senior managers from them all. In Australia, Ireland, Portugal, South Africa and the UK participants were selected only from the publicly funded universities. In Turkey and Sweden, the sample was selected from public and foundation (private) universities.

3.8 The interview process

The interviews in each country were conducted by the Network researcher(s) in that country over the two-year period 2008–10. It is acknowledged that significant changes in HE systems occurred in some countries (for example Portugal) either during or after data collection. Interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to two hours, with the majority of them being over an hour. Even though confidentiality was assured, on occasions where the interview was being recorded, participants requested the researcher to turn off the tape while sensitive information was being discussed. This information was not included in the interview summaries.

The Australian participants were identified from the Universities Australia list of senior managers in the 38 publicly funded universities, and were then contacted by email. Once they agreed to participate, the plain language statement, interview schedule and consent form were forwarded to their executive assistants. All interviewees were required to complete the consent form before the interview commenced. Australian interviews varied in length from 45 minutes to two hours. All but six of the Australian interviews were tape-recorded and took place face-to-face. The remaining six were by telephone due to the challenge of distance. The researcher took notes during telephone interviews with these six.

In Ireland, the participant interviewees were contacted initially by email, with follow up contact being made at the secretarial level. Because of their level, and to ensure an adequate response rate, all interviews were conducted by the Irish investigator, who signed the introductory letter formally as Dean. It was clear from several of the interviews that this enhanced the credibility of the exercise. Interviews varied in length from 40 minutes to 90 minutes, with the majority of them being over an hour. All of the interviews were face-to-face and tape-recorded, with detailed verbatim notes being made during the interview. Following the interviews, the tapes were replayed and any additional material was inserted in these verbatim notes.

In New Zealand, initial contact was by email, with a follow-up phone call. Because of the relatively small size of the university sector, identifying senior managers was straightforward, and only two of those approached to participate were unable to do so, both due to time constraints. A formal letter, consent form and interview schedule were sent to each of the participants once they had agreed to be interviewed. Twenty-four interviews took place in the office of the interviewee and the other two were by phone. Interviews generally lasted about one hour, varying between 30 and 90 minutes. Extensive notes were taken and subsequently the transcripts transferred to computer.

In Portugal, prospective participants were approached by the researchers after initial contact was made by a former Rector; and president of National Council of Portuguese Rectors (CRUP). All the interviews except one were tape-recorded.

In South Africa, all participants were initially approached by email. They were invited to participate in the study, provided with a copy of the interview schedule and assured of confidentiality. A total of 20 interviews, each over an hour in length, were conducted, of which 17 met the sample criteria of academic managers. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and tape-recorded and, when requested, summaries were posted to participants prior to data analysis.

In Sweden, all participants were initially approached by email and invited to participate in the study. They were informed about the study, its aim and questions and assured of confidentiality. A total of nine interviews were carried out, taking between 60 and 90 minutes. Eight interviews were conducted face-to-face and tape-recorded and there was one phone interview.

The majority of interviews in Turkey were face-to-face and ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in length. There was one phone interview during which the researcher took notes. All the other interviews

Table 3.2 Numbers interviewed by position

Position	Female	Male
Rector/Vice-Chancellor/ President	14	38
Vice-Rector/Deputy Vice- Chancellor/Vice-President	24	23
Pro Vice-Chancellor	24	2
Dean	14	5
Other*	10	7
Total	86	75

* Former Vice-Rectors, assistant VC, Deputy PVC, Acting PVCs, Bursar.

would not be reported – for example Rector/VC, Vice-Rector/PVC – to ensure anonymity, particularly in those countries where there were a small number of universities and few women in management roles (see Table 3.2 for summary statistics on the roles of the participants).

While each chapter in the book takes a thematic approach and includes data from each of the eight participating countries, it is important to remember that the interviews were carried out by the investigator in each country, who then summarised them. The advantage of this approach is that each interviewer has a broad understanding of the HE system and major policy debates in their particular country and of legislative change that impacts on the operations of the university sector. Thus, when the chapters were in draft form, errors of interpretation could be addressed.

This study, as a collaborative piece of research, has the methodological advantage of exploring in some depth a topic on which it is difficult to obtain robust statistics, but one that is of common interest to all the countries involved. The use of an agreed interview schedule and sampling procedure enables comparisons to be made across the participating countries as like is compared to like. The diversity of backgrounds of the researchers provided further rigour, especially at the data analysis stage, as they were able to draw on both common and disparate sources of earlier research aligned to their disciplinary background. The uniting factor was the belief in gender equity and the importance of 'voice'.

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Ethics web pages

- Monash University, Australia: <http://www.monash.edu.au/>
- Loughborough University,
UK: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/index.html>
- Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand:
vu.ac.nz/Amphora!~policy.vuw.ac.nz~POLICY~000000000744.pdf
- University of Limerick, Ireland:
<http://www.artsoc.ul.ie/Userfiles/fahssrecguidelines.pdf?PHPSESSID=4dbd97ede416204a40c0fa2c8d302390> and www.ul.ie/researchethics
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