

QUICK GUIDE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A GENDER-RESPONSIVE AND DIVERSITY-CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP CULTURE



A university's leadership culture can be described as the sum of the interactions between leaders and staff: How do they lead or allow themselves to be led, how do they communicate with each other and what values and attitudes guide all those involved? This also raises the question: What do gender equality and diversity sensitivity mean, in concrete terms, for a university's managers and leaders and how can they shape their everyday management activities accordingly?

Diversity sensitivity means being aware of the diversity of employees, promoting the participation of all social groups and strengthening their cooperation. Managers and executive staff members are responsible for reflecting on the strengths and competences of their employees and using them in a goal-oriented and equal-opportunity-oriented way.

Gender equality means reducing the under-representation of women and structural obstacles for under-represented genders. Goethe University is also committed to a gender-equitable organisational structure with regard to working conditions, performance evaluations and career opportunities.

This leadership culture is already anchored in various guidelines and structures of the university, such as its **mission statement** [↗](#), the **Equal Opportunities Action Plan 2019-2024** [↗](#) and **Gender Equality und Diversity Action Plans** [↗](#) of the faculties as well as in the **anti-discrimination policy** [↗](#).

The recommendations for a gender-appropriate and diversity-conscious leadership culture presented here can be traced back to a project of the State Conference of Hessian University Women's Representatives (LaKoF), which was funded by the Hessian Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and the Arts (HMWK) and supported by the presidents of the Hessian universities and colleges. Approximately 60 contributors from 11 Hessian universities reflected on and discussed ideas for gender- and diversity-sensitive leadership culture with various renowned speakers in two workshops. Representatives from executive board, personnel and organizational development, women's and equal opportunities officers, staff councils and interested university managers were involved. The brochure "Gender- and diversity-sensitive leadership culture – a handout for managers and university administrators" now is the final outcome of this project. One of the project's aims was to adopt the recommendations for action in university practice.

With this quick guide, we would like to provide you, the managers and leaders of Goethe University, with further recommendations for a gender and diversity-conscious leadership culture. It should help you to reflect on your attitudes towards these issues and professionalize your proficiency in the areas of gender and diversity. We would like to support you in promoting your employees as equals from the very beginning and in assessing their performance fairly, regardless of gender diversity, age, ethnic origin, religion or other such aspects.

Gender-responsive and diversity-conscious leadership – based on eight key leadership situations



In the course of employment, there are eight typical, recurring leadership situations that influence the working relationship between employees and their managers/supervisors. In all of these situations, it is pertinent that leadership actions are gender-responsive and diversity-conscious. This brochure offers tips and advice on how to make your leadership behavior gender-responsive and diversity-sensitive in each situation. You can find further information in the **LaKoF brochure “Gendergerechte und diversitätssensible Führungskultur”** (2020) [🔗](#).



Job advertisement

- First of all, think about the profile you are looking for in a candidate and which qualifications would make a good addition to your team.
- When creating the job posting, question the qualification profile critically and show it to other members of your team to uncover things you might have missed: Did you incorporate your own subjective impressions and/or unconscious prejudices that could lead to bias or stereotyping? What qualifications does the task really require?
- Scrutinize whether the words that you have chosen appeal to certain people more than others. Do you have a certain person in mind? What gender is s/he? How old is s/he? The vacancy should not unconsciously exclude anyone in advance, but use words and images that appeal to a diverse group of applicants.
- All jobs must be advertised in a gender-inclusive manner, regardless of whether the posting is internal or external. With the legal introduction of 'diverse' or 'no specification' for gender, every advertisement must include the abbreviations (m/f/d) after the job title.

Practical tips:

- You can check your job advertisement for gender fairness with the TU Munich's **Gender Decoder** [🔗](#).
- The **"Guide to active recruiting"** [🔗](#) helps you to find qualified applicants, especially for a professorship. Departments that invite interesting female scientists to give a lecture for this position can receive additional financial support from a central **fund** [🔗](#).
- The Equal Opportunities Office provides **"Gender-inclusive language guidelines"** [🔗](#).



Application phase

- To practice diversity-oriented personnel selection, define the assessment criteria before you look at the applications. Then create a comparison table. Analyze and sort the applications based on how they fulfill the formal and content-related criteria, which should be formulated in a gender-neutral and diversity-friendly way.
- Anonymized application procedures are an important tool to counteract unconscious prejudices: If possible, have the application documents submitted without a picture or name.
- Prepare a structured interview guide for the interviews: the questions and behavioral anchors can be derived from the job requirement analysis.
- Allow enough time for the interviews (at least 1 hour) and start organizing them early.

Practical tips:

- The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency offers a [guide](#) and [sample templates](#) on anonymized application procedures.
- You can find [examples of evaluation criteria](#) in the LaKoF brochure “Gendergerechte und diversitätssensible Führungskultur“ .



Selection process

- Ask all candidates the same questions and, if possible, prepare a work sample that simulates a realistic and representative task from your field. This will give you a better impression of your candidates' skills.
- Keep gender and diversity aspects in mind when assembling your selection panel. Make the guidelines, work sample and evaluation criteria transparent.
- Double-check your first impression. If your impression is more positive, ask critically and in detail. If, instead, your impression is rather negative, ask positively in more depth.
- At the bottom of your notes and evaluation sheet, remember to make a note of your overall impression, too – this way you leave space for your gut feeling.
- Then question yourself: Are there similarities between you and the applicant that could trigger particular sympathy and influence your assessment of the person?
- Before making a final decision, reflect on whether your selection process minimized the influence of subjective attitudes and stereotypes with regard to diversity dimensions.

Practical tips:

- Try out the University of Heidelberg's **online tutorial on gender bias** [↗](#) in the hiring process.
- The Center of Excellence Women and Science (CEWS) offers possible **solutions for reducing gender bias** [↗](#).
- Examples of the **structure of and questions in a selection interview** [↗](#) can be found in the LaKoF brochure "Gendergerechte und diversitätssensible Führungskultur" [↗](#).
- Uncover unconscious attitudes and stereotypes and test yourself with Harvard University's **Implicit Association Test*** [↗](#).

* **Implicit bias** or **unconscious bias** are unconscious processing patterns of the brain that group perceived information into categories and schemata. This can lead to undesirable effects in assessment and selection situations. For example, when applicants or employees are over- or underestimated in terms of their competences.



Probationary period – feedback

- Start the new employment relationship with a structured “welcome” on the first day of work – an introduction plan, an organizational chart and a list of contact persons and regular appointments as well as a mentor make it easier for employees to get acclimated to their new workplace.
- Use the probationary period to get to know the new employee and seek a personal interview to get to know the person, their skills and strengths. For diversity-conscious leadership, it is helpful to know and reflect on employees’ individual needs, different backgrounds and experiences. This makes employees feel seen and recognized, and you can help them to reconcile demands from their respective life situations (e.g. care work) and professional work. In this way, you can work together with your employees to create working and living conditions that are conducive to opportunities and promote and use their strengths and competences in a goal-oriented way.
- Actively ask for concrete expectations of your leadership, tasks and work environment and colleagues. Enter into a dialogue about your expectations and about what is helpful and useful for the tasks and the team.
- Give regular feedback – appreciative, clear, timely and personal: What worked well, what do you wish was different and how exactly could it have been better?



Annual employee development meeting (MAEG)

- Ask yourself: Who is receiving your attention? Who was entrusted with career-enhancing and prestigious tasks? In what way did you take note of and assess the results? What influence do the attendance and availability of the employees have on your evaluation?
- Set concrete and fair criteria for performance assessments and apply them to every interview. Be aware of possible errors and reconsider your assessment if necessary.

Practical tips:

- For the annual MAEG, use the **information** provided by the Human Resources and Organizational Development department [↗](#).
- Examples of **typical evaluation errors** [↗](#) in the context of implicit bias can be found in the LaKoF brochure “Gendergerechte und diversitätssensible Führungskultur“ [↗](#).



Everyday Leadership

- Reflect on your previous knowledge of gender-equitable and diversity-sensitive leadership and develop your own inner attitude towards it:
 - Knowledge: Which studies and statistics on gender equality and diversity do I know? Where do I expect diversity-related differences between people, such as gender-stereotyped appearance, age, disability, religion or migration experience? What do my own assumptions have to do with my (binary) gender role images and my own socialization/ biography?
 - Ability: Can I put myself in the same situation as people who feel discriminated against? Do I recognize and work on aspects of gender justice and diversity sensitivity for my area of responsibility?
 - Will: How well can I acknowledge that – despite one’s best efforts – discrimination can occur and that I too (unconsciously) act in a discriminatory way? How open am I to discussing the issues of gender equality and diversity sensitivity?
- In your leadership role, you set the framework for your staff to perform to the best of their ability and you hold a powerful position. Therefore, build the structures, processes and instruments together with your team in such a way that all employees feel appreciated and supported in an environment that is as free of discrimination as possible.
- Establish commitment: Your team needs information and clarity about the goal and the way to get there.

- Participate fairly and equally in decision-making, communication and, if necessary, selection processes.
- Encourage: Based on your employees and their different biographies and backgrounds (e.g. gender diversity, age, social and educational background), they may need stronger individual encouragement for career development. The relevance of gender and diversity aspects is often not immediately apparent.
- Be a role model: The way you lead and deal with gender and diversity issues sets the tone for your team.

Practical tips:

- Make use of the **Human Resources and Organizational Development** department's [offers](#) on diversity-conscious personnel management.
- Make use of the **Equal Opportunities Office's** diversity offers [offers](#).
- Watch the University of Hamburg's video: „**Subjektive Diversität und Teamerfolg**“ [offers](#).



Conflict resolution

- If you perceive conflicts in the team, remain neutral, observe and resolve them impartially: What are the content-related points of contention? Who are the parties involved? How has the conflict progressed and to what level has it been escalated? What attempts have already been made to resolve the conflict? Try to analyze the situation from different perspectives.
- Be aware that conflict resolution strategies differ from person to person. Existing stereotypical attributions and expectations of behavior, e.g. due to gender or other aspects, can also lead to conflicts.
- To prevent conflicts, it is advisable to conduct team building or team coaching at regular intervals. This can clarify mutual expectations and requirements for cooperation and interaction at an early stage.

Practical tips:

- Involve supporting units if needed: [Psychological Personnel Counselling](#), [Staff Council](#), [Human Resources Department](#), [Personnel and Organizational Development Department](#), [Equal Opportunities Office](#) or external mediation.
- Listen to the University of Hamburg's podcast: "[Vielfältige Teams und was wir daraus lernen können](#)".



Change of job

- Conduct a final interview, if necessary, with documentation in the personnel file in the case of an internal transfer.
- Ask about the reasons for the change and get personal feedback: What did you, as a leader, do well for the employee and what could you have done better or differently? How could you lead in a more gender- and diversity-conscious way?
- Say goodbye to your employee in an appreciative way and in an appropriate setting, which you should have discussed in a personal meeting beforehand.

Good luck!

Imprint

Frankfurt am Main, 2021

V.i.S.d.P.: Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

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