

Women Chief Information Officers in Higher Education: Voices From the Field

Today's universities and colleges rely immensely upon their information technology divisions for expertise and guidance related to the implementation and use of administrative and academic applications that require a robust infrastructure. The executive information technology leader, often entitled Chief Information Officer (CIO), has become recognized as an institutional leader.

Purpose and Nature: According to Katz et al. (2004) women hold approximately 21% of the CIO positions in higher education in the United States. Little is known about these women holding positions traditionally dominated by men and the avenues they have traversed. The genderedness of higher education information technology promotes an environment that often silences and marginalizes women, promoting male hegemonic traditions and processes. My dissertation study will give higher education information technology women CIOs a voice as it seeks to determine the patterns and themes of those elements characterizing women who have achieved CIO positions in higher education institutions. It will also identify obstacles and opportunities that presented themselves in the process of aspiring to and acquiring the CIO position. Methods of overcoming obstacles and facilitating opportunities will be discussed in relation to the women participants' lived lives and experiences. Examining institutional gendered norms will accentuate the thoughts, values, practices, and processes that lead to muted women's voices and the continuation of male-dominated organizations and social structures.

Scientific Merits: A theoretical base will inform and guide this study via the intersection of applicable elements from feminist standpoint theory, organizational theory, and gendered organizational theory. The study is significant in the following ways: 1) Findings may aid in the construction of non-gendered organizations, contributing to a non-debilitating or less debilitating social structure and society; 2) Higher education institutions will be assisted in their abilities to retain and benefit from the talents and abilities of female leaders or those striving for such positions; 3) Higher education information technology leaders will be assisted in understanding male hegemony and obstacles women face; 4) New thoughts, values, and practices may institutionally be considered leading to the design and implementation of programs assisting women in overcoming obstacles and facilitating opportunities for women aspiring to leadership roles, in general, and specifically CIO leadership roles; 5) Findings may allow for a better understanding of factors characterizing women higher education information technology leaders; 6) Opportunities and obstacles experienced by these women will be explored; and 7) Findings may assist women seeking similar positions.

Expected Outcomes: A conceptual framework utilizing feminist standpoint theory and gendered organization theory will allow for the revealing of intersections of perspectives from the co-narrators within the historical context of their lives. Intertwining gender, power, and the co-narrators' voices and lived lives will aid in offering a complete conceptual and operational understanding of the situated nature of women higher education information technology CIOs.

Research Funds: The research funds will assist in funding mileage expenses. At least two in-depth face-to-face interviews will be conducted with each of three women participants. Female higher education CIOs holding permanent positions in Master's Medium and Master's Large public universities were invited as participants.