

# New organizational models for flexible work arrangement: Strategies for dealing with biased work conditions and shifting cultural values in order to increase the amount of women in academic leadership roles

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CHES Project: New Organisational Models for Part-Time Leadership at the UZH, 2017-20

## Initial Situation

### Gender Action Plan 2017-20 and CHES Goals

Co-leadership, Part-time, Job-sharing, Home office – flexible work models are gaining importance. If applied correctly, these new models can promote work-life balance as well as gender equality. These formats are also gaining significance at universities.

In Switzerland, the University of Zurich (UZH) is reacting to these developments by integrating flexible hiring practices into its gender policy. In 2017, the project «New organizational models for part-time leadership at the University of Zurich» was established as part of the University's equal opportunity action plan 2017-2020 («Program P-7 Equal Opportunity and Higher Education development», funded by swissuniversities).

With this project, CHES is pursuing one of its objectives of initiating an interdisciplinary and university-wide scholarly debate regarding these relevant university development topics. Additionally the project consults with all relevant stakeholders at the UZH in order to develop appropriate new flexible work models tailored to university management and administration positions.

The project thus also takes up one of the main recommendations presented in the 2018 LERU advice paper "Implicit bias in academia: A challenge to the meritocratic principle and to women's careers - And what we do about it" (comparisons recommendation R8).

### Women in Leadership Position at the UZH, 2017

In 2017, out of the total 663 professors at the UZH, only 155 (23%) of them were women. On an organizational level, the University faces an even larger gender gap. Within the University board, two members from a total of eight are female and only two out of the seven faculties are led by women. The number gets even smaller with the Executive Board, showing only one female member out of the total six. Additionally, only 34 out of 172 Institutes have women at the top.



Figure 1 – Female academic leaders in higher positions.  
Courtesy of The Gender Equality office at UZH

## Approach

### Challenges

Lack of personnel due to shifting demographics, the blurring of lines between work and private life in the Sciences and the increasing complexity of leadership/ management tasks at Universities, are all challenges faced by leaders in academic as well as administrative positions. A shift in cultural values follows these changing requirements and will undoubtedly impinge on university leadership practices. Due to raised competition, processes of digitization and globalization, these challenges demand the development of transparent and innovative framework conditions in order to attract, retain and support outstanding professors and executives throughout their work life into retirement.

### Reflecting on Leadership Culture and Biases in Academia

Progressive approaches to the work and leadership culture can contribute to increasing the proportion of women in professorships and executive positions. The share of female professors in Switzerland in 2016 was 21.7 %, emphasizing the need for a sustainable increase of the proportion of female executives and professors on many different levels.

At the same time, flexible work models such as part-time work have a high potential to reinforce existing gender images and gender bias. In Switzerland, (academic) women hold more part-time jobs than their male colleagues. Additionally, flexible work models are frequently linked to maternity and work life balance issues. At the same time, the opportunity to develop a part-time management position rapidly diminishes in the course of a career.

The project therefore also takes up the important challenge of finding ways of initiating a change in values at the university that develops bias-free work and management models for both genders.

### Flexible leadership as a promotor for cultural change

University leadership can be a key factor in bringing about a culture change. Beyond the existing difficulties, we also observe how lifestyle models have changed dramatically in recent decades. Highly qualified managers experience changing needs throughout the different stages of their careers. The resulting demand for new modern work models should be taken into account by scientific organizations such as universities. Particularly noteworthy is the compatibility of work and family responsibilities for men and women, which within the context of rising care work, is predicted to increase significantly.

The aim here is to create improved conditions, which facilitate entry and retention of management positions at the university.

In this context, alternative work models promote diversity in executive positions, increase satisfaction, motivation and productivity of employees. Additionally they increase the identification between the staff and the larger university organization.

## Aims and Measures

### Aims

#### Organizational development and strategy

- Increased work-life balance in University leadership culture
- Counteract brain drain / demographic change / shortage of skilled workers
- Institutionalize flexible work models, in job descriptions / framework documents / management practice

#### Innovation and Sustainability

- Implementation of discipline-specific organizational models (internal best practices / external models)
- Sustainable organisational change
- Increased diversity among managers
- Development of best practices > transfer potential > additional exposure

#### Competition for the best minds

- Increased attractiveness for future leaders
- Transparent management, leadership and work culture
- Increased satisfaction, motivation and productivity
- Greater identification with the overall organisation UZH

### Measures

#### Information / Familiarization, such as

- Communicate concept (website, stake holder)
- Exposure and educating (toolbox, events, consulting)

#### Institutionalization, such as

- Integration into framework documents, recommendations
- Models in job listings and recruitment processes

#### Implementation in internal processes, such as

- Optimizing existing models
- Focus groups / pilot projects

## Contact

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