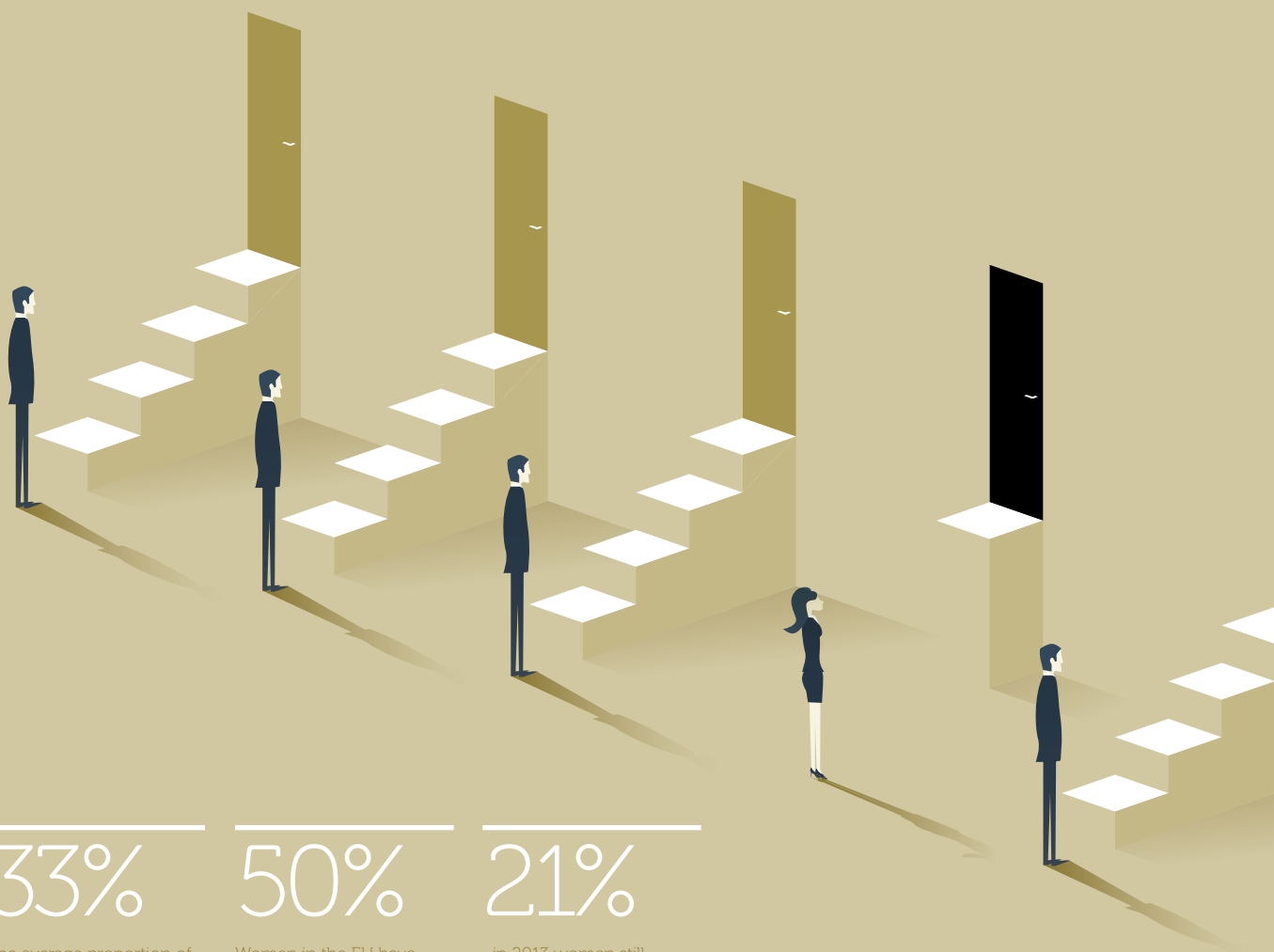Research shows that the gender gap in faculty in European business schools is not closing. **Lynn Roseberry** suggests some reasons why and what can be done to improve it

Mind the gap

33%

The average proportion of _all_ full-time female faculty employed by the top 85 business schools is 33% – this number is even less (23.3%) at the top 10 business schools on the list

50%

Women in the EU have represented more than 50% of university graduates since at least 1999 yet...

21%

...in 2013 women still represented less than 21% of Grade A academic staff in the vast majority of EU member states

To say there is a gender gap among faculty at European business schools is an understatement. The *average* proportion of *all* full-time female faculty – not just senior professors – employed by the top 85 business schools in the *Financial Times* 2015 European Business School Rankings is 33%. This number is even less (23.3%) at the top 10 business schools on the list.

The lack of gender diversity at the top of the business academic hierarchy mirrors the pattern in higher education institutions throughout the European Union. Women in the EU have represented more than 50% of university graduates since at least 1999 yet in 2013 women still represented less than 21% of Grade A academic staff (the highest position in the academic hierarchy) in the vast majority of EU member states.

This persistent gender imbalance has been the object of academic research for years and a large body of literature on gender balance in organisations describes an array of institutional and cultural factors that contribute to women's under-representation in leadership. However, little is known about what strategies work to increase gender diversity or the role and characteristics of leadership that might call for and produce greater gender diversity.

This article presents the results of a research project that sheds light on the latter issue. The project was initiated in 2014 and funded by EFMD, EQUAL and 11 European business schools. I led the research team, which consisted of associate professor Robyn Remke at Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, and professors Johan Klæsson and Thomas Holgersson at Jönköping International Business School in Sweden. Data collection began in early 2015 and the results of the project were submitted to the project Steering Committee in February 2016.

The project approaches gender diversity in European business schools from the perspective of organisational change because the institutional and cultural factors that contribute to the under-representation of women in leadership positions have proven not to disappear by themselves.

In fact, progress towards gender integration across all sectors, occupations and organisational hierarchies has stalled since the late 1990s. Early gains in the 1970s came about mainly from the movement of women into middle-class occupations and, to a lesser extent, from the expansion of more integrated sectors and the shrinkage of segregated ones. Those were the easy gains.

But if compliance with prohibitions against sex discrimination and the passage of time were enough, occupational segregation by sex should have declined steadily and more or less uniformly across sectors. It has not.

Change initiatives have, unfortunately, a discouraging tendency to flop. Change management scholars began focusing their attention on this tendency in the 1990s. In a 1989 article published in *Strategic Management Journal*, one of the earliest comments on the subject, Bill Wooldridge and Steven Floyd hypothesised that the success of change initiatives depends in part on the extent to which organisational members at multiple levels understand the strategy (cognitive agreement) and are committed to it (affective agreement). They illustrate the possible configurations of understanding and commitment with a 4-cell matrix (Figure 1).

Wooldridge and Floyd explain that the most successful implementation of change occurs when organisational members have a high degree of understanding and a high degree of commitment (cell 1). When commitment is high but decision makers misunderstand the strategy, individuals are well intentioned but ill-informed (cell 2). When decision makers are sceptical (they understand the strategy but are not committed to it), cynicism and resistance may develop (cell 3).

Floyd and Wooldridge note that both understanding and commitment are likely to be low in the early stages of the change process but, as it proceeds, there are opportunities to improve understanding and commitment.

	High Under-standing	Low Under-standing
High Commitment	1	2
Low Commitment	3	4

Figure 1:
Configurations of shared understanding and commitment.
Source:
Wooldridge, B. and Floyd, S. W. (1989). 'Strategic process effects on consensus'. Strategic Management Journal, 10, 3, 295–302

The results indicate that while a majority of European business school leaders are committed to the concepts of gender equality and faculty gender diversity, they lack the expertise and information necessary to develop and implement effective strategies

Research approach

Using this matrix as the starting point for our investigation of how European business school leaders might approach gender diversity, we formulated the following research question:

How do European business school leaders' understanding of and commitment to faculty gender diversity affect action taken by their business schools towards achieving gender parity?

By "understanding" we mean a cognitive awareness or knowledge of the main factors long identified in research as contributing to the under-representation of women among business school faculties. These factors include:

• Conflicting expectations about male versus female leadership, career development and academic behaviour

• Unconscious bias in evaluating female academics' qualifications and performance

• "Chilly" academic cultures that prevent women from "plugging in"

• Expectations about productivity (publications, teaching, service) that do not harmonise with individual obligations to take care of the home, children and/or other family members who need care or assistance

• Penalties for career interruptions related to maternity and child care

We define "commitment" in accordance with a definition suggested in a 2005 article in *European Management Review* by Johan Roos and Robert Said: commitment consists of a private and a public dimension; the private dimension of identifying with the goal of gender diversity and the public dimension of taking action to achieve the goal.

We first collected data through a quantitative survey. The survey questionnaire included 39 Likert-styled questions that focused on the respondents' understanding of the factors affecting the gender diversity of their faculties and their own commitment to gender diversity. The sampling frame comprised the deans and directors of 316 European business school members of EFMD. The survey resulted in 108 viable responses, about 34%.

We also selected four business schools to serve as illustrative cases, using data developed from qualitative interviews with members of their leadership teams. The four cases are geographically, structurally and organisationally diverse:

• **C1:** university-situated business school located in the UK/Ireland

• **C2:** stand-alone business school located in Scandinavia

• **C3:** stand-alone business school located in Southern Europe

• **C4:** stand-alone business school in the German-language region

316

We collected data through a quantitative survey, which included 39 Likert-styled questions. The sampling frame comprised the deans and directors of 316 European business school members of EFMD. The survey resulted in 108 viable responses, about 34%

Results

The combined data from the survey and qualitative interviews show that:

1) the majority of business school leaders participating in this study is fully committed to the principle of gender equality and uncomfortable that women are under-represented in business academia. They regard the lack of faculty gender diversity as a problem for both the quality of education and the reputation of their schools

2) a majority of the business school leaders have a low level of understanding; they did not seem to be aware of the main factors contributing to lack of faculty gender diversity

3) a leader's personal commitment towards greater gender diversity does not by itself drive active engagement in promoting gender diversity initiatives

4) results of existing diversity management initiatives vary widely and depend heavily on the most senior leader's understanding. Initiatives that achieve the greatest success respond directly to specific challenges women face in their own business schools

5) prompting by stakeholders – employers of graduates, alumni, students and government – spurs business school leaders to engage actively in promoting gender diversity

6) leaders with a high degree of both understanding and commitment seek out the input of gender balance experts and take seriously what junior female faculty tell them about their experiences

Conclusions for business school leaders

These findings imply that translating commitment to faculty gender diversity into effective strategies requires business school leaders to:

1) seek out, listen to and learn from the experiences of their female faculty members

2) provide unequivocal and visible support and accept ultimate responsibility for all gender diversity initiatives, including the work of any appointed gender diversity committees, advisers or experts

3) seek expert help in reducing the impact of gender bias in the formulation and application of hiring, tenure and promotion criteria

4) consider adopting "soft" positive action measures such as reduced teaching load on return from maternity leave and rules requiring applications from qualified candidates of both sexes for academic positions

5) professionalise work on gender diversity at business schools, for example, by appointing an expert in gender and diversity to a full-time position that reports directly to top management

6) enlist multiple stakeholders – students, alumni and employers – to inspire and legitimise gender diversity initiatives.

The results of this project indicate that while a majority of European business school leaders are committed to the concepts of gender equality and faculty gender diversity, they lack the expertise and information necessary to develop and implement effective strategies.

The best-performing business schools in gender diversity are led by men and women who have a good understanding of the psychological and social phenomena that contribute to the leaky academic pipeline. Their successes underscore the importance of asking for input from qualified experts and female academics to ensure that high commitment is coupled with high understanding.

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