

Barriers to Developing Diverse Leaders

by Capella University



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about barriers to developing diverse leaders in business professions. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Stereotypes
2. Tokenism
3. Lack of Examples and Mentors

1. Stereotypes

Studies aimed at identifying strategies to develop racial and ethnic minority leaders identify barriers to pursuing or attaining leadership roles. Many of these barriers are the same across multiple racial and ethnic minorities and some are unique to individual groups. Perceived lack of qualifications, lack of support and opportunities, and stereotypes or racism were barriers identified in several articles addressing diversity in leadership for racial and ethnic minorities in the United States (Briggs, 2020, Mitchell, & Coyle, 2019, Sy, Tram-Quon & Leung, 2017).

A unique leadership barrier is the stereotype that Asians are the model minority in the United States. The model minority perception includes a notion that Asians are high-achievers, submissive, and quiet. These attributes are viewed as favorable but do not translate to promotion for this minority group because these are not considered the characteristics desirable of executive leaders.

Asian minorities may also experience what is known as the “bamboo ceiling”. The bamboo ceiling refers to racism and stereotypes that Asian Americans may face that prevent them from career advancement. Lack of communication and leadership skills are common stereotypes held about Asians, that hinder professional advancement (Inouye & Alpert, 2018). Stereotypes prevent individuals from being appreciated and respected for their unique personalities and contributions to society.

2. Tokenism

Other unique barriers faced by African American and Latinx nurses were identified through studies in the profession of nursing. In these studies, nurses reported concerns of tokenism as barriers to pursuing nurse leadership roles (Iheduru-Anderson, 2020, Villarruel, 2017). Tokenism or being thought of as the token

minority in a leadership position devalues the qualifications of the leader for the position that they hold. If it is a widespread belief it may contribute to the manager not being respected and ultimately can impact their ability to be successful in their role by damaging their self-confidence and their subordinates' willingness to deliver the outcomes and metrics by which the leader is evaluated upon.

3. Lack of Examples and Mentors

Lack of examples and mentors further contributes to barriers to minority leader development. In all the studies mentioned mentorship was critical to the leadership development of the minority leader. When a leader is also an underrepresented minority, even if they are not a formal mentor, they are an example to other business professionals with similar backgrounds. They often represent the promise of what is possible, they may shape and influence career goals. Because there are so few racial and ethnic minorities in executive leadership positions, there are limited examples and few mentors available to formally help develop minority leaders in the future. This is probably the most significant barrier because mentoring relationships are so impactful to the mentee, mentor, and the organization's culture. Mentors listen and give invaluable guidance, they remove obstacles, seek out opportunities for their mentee to grow and develop, and they provide a safe space to share challenges and successes. Most leaders identify having multiple leaders over their career to whom they may credit their professional success. The need for mentors to develop the next generation of racial and ethnic business leaders is great.

Authored by Khaliah Fisher-Grace, PhD(c), MSN, RN, CPHQ, PCCN-K

Support

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