

Dealing with Segregation and Bias as Woman CDO

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In the rapidly evolving world of data management and analysis, the role of Chief Data Officers (CDOs) is critical in driving organizational success. However, there are often additional hurdles for women serving in this position. Dealing with segregation and bias presents a unique set of challenges that can impact the effectiveness and recognition of women CDOs. In this essay, we will explore the various obstacles women face in this role, shed light on the significance of addressing segregation and bias, and provide valuable insights into strategies that women CDOs can employ to navigate these challenges and make a lasting impact in their Organizations.

My Role as a Leader

In all of my roles, not just as a data leader but as a management consultant and when I was working primarily in a portfolio and senior program management, and in every profession, you will experience a certain amount of discrimination, be it gender bias, color – whatever combination. Maybe you are a foreigner. I am not talking about anything that most people have not experienced. Yes, I have experienced it.

My experience

One particular time, it was very in my face. This particular situation happened to be two middle-aged white gentlemen – European gentleman – and one of them – love him to death, a wonderful man – got pulled into something. He was hijacked into it. He was as shocked as I was but could not say anything now: I was called to a meeting to present my strategy. I presented the strategy, and they said, "This is great..." Then, one of the gentlemen turned to the other as if I was not in the room and said, "Okay. Let's get this strategy from her." He talked about giving it to a guy he used to work with and who he was bringing in to take over his role. He said it as if I wasn't even in the room.

What was happening here was an apparent old-boys network, and I was not a boy, and I was not old – well, at least I was not as old as I am now! Was it specifically racism? Personally, I think it was more that I was not part of that power network in his eyes. But when working with this gentleman, I did feel that there was a certain amount of envy or discomfort, as though he was thinking, "You shouldn't have such a powerful position." Was it because I was a lady? Not sure about that. It could have been. There's a bit of sexism (maybe more than in North America) when you're working in corporate in Europe, but I think it was less about me being a female. I think it was more that I was a Black, foreign female. With that combination, he thought I had too much power, and he would knock me down a level.

Now, I knew what was going on, and at the time, I realized that the universe was telling me I needed to be in a better place. I got that. But at the moment, it was unfair. As I said, the other gentleman was as shocked as I was, but because he was on the board (these were two board members), he couldn't take him down a notch in front of a subordinate, which I understand. But it was wrong.

That particular good gentleman I still have contact with. He also referenced me for that role, and he's a wonderful man. But it does happen. It is real. I am sure there are even more stories than that. I've had other incidents, but I just wanted to give you that in particular.

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How things changed

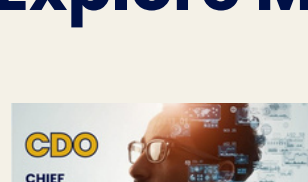
Society has absolutely changed. One of the things that I have noticed in getting older is that realization: "Oh, my gosh. I'm 10 to 15 years older than the people on the floor." Going as a contractor from job to job is where you feel the ageism, even though you're very good at what you do. Sometimes I've noticed a bit of ageism, but I was lucky because I had such scarce competencies and abilities that it didn't affect me as much.

How have things changed? I'm now here in the Middle East. It's not that I have that much of a different color than everybody else. Most of the people here, as foreigners, are from Central Asia or Asia. The locals are also mixed, so different types of power dynamics exist. I wouldn't say it's as much racism as color. Sexism is as vibrant as it is in Europe. People might say that it would be more racist and sexist here because you're in the Middle East, but that's not necessarily the truth. Throughout my career, I had the most sexism against me in Europe. I've felt it in every single role, almost. So, things have changed, and if I look at my colleagues in Europe, yes: the landscape has changed there, but not that much.

Conclusion

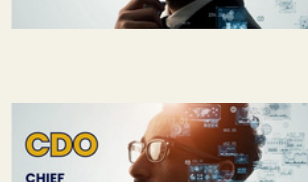
Women in leadership often face barriers and biases in male-dominated fields like data. To overcome these challenges, women CDOs must champion gender diversity, mentor other women, and build strong networks. They should demonstrate their expertise, continuously learn, and seek leadership opportunities to challenge stereotypes. Promoting inclusive practices and unbiased decision-making is crucial. By taking these actions, women CDOs can significantly impact, break down barriers, and inspire future generations of female leaders in the data field.

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