Management meeting

Miriam Blaauboer

The scene is a management meeting at an academic institution, around 2050.

‘So,’ the hawk-like woman said. 'What exactly are we going to tell the board about the budget deficit?'
She looked around the table.
‘We overspent more than 20 million,’ the director continued. ‘The renovation of the crèche, the generous start-ups for Flowerstein and de Braaf, the increasing salary costs ... They are bound to ask critical questions next week.’
She peered over her horn-rimmed glasses.
A short woman who was sitting at the middle of the table was the first to speak.
‘I still think it is a shame that we only raised the salaries of our female faculty members,’ she said.
The director looked at her. ‘It was a tough decision,’ she said. ‘But we had no choice. Given that we already overspent…’
‘It does not do much good for the reputation of our institute,’ the short woman persisted. ‘It may be seen as over-positive discrimination.’
‘Rubbish,’ a brisk-looking woman said. ‘We hired the top two female physicists on the market, which has brought our faculty female:male ratio to 3:1. Our crèche and the adjacent boarding school are a huge success, and...’
‘Didn't Helena Flowerstein join us because of that school?’ a mousy woman interrupted.
The director nodded.
‘We did not overspend,’ the brisk woman continued. ‘We merely consolidated our advanced gender position. The board of the Foundation must sympathize with that. Our institute is an example for the other 42.’
A murmur of agreement sounded around the room.
‘Thank you,’ the director said. ‘I'll take that along. Any other remarks?’
She glanced around.
‘If not, let's move to the next item on the agenda.’
She looked at the screen in front of her.
‘The faculty search committee. Who is going to report?’
The short woman in the middle cleared her throat.
‘We received an interesting application from W. Daring,’ she said. ‘PhD Harvard, postdoc Munich, currently faculty at…’
‘Where is she from?’ the mousy woman asked.
The short woman hesitated almost imperceptibly. ‘He is British,’ she said.
For a moment the room was completely silent.
'He does have rather a lot of publications in Nature and Science,' she quickly added. ‘And an H-index of 33.’
'Has he published with female scientists?’ the director asked matter-of-factly. ‘How about his FC-index?'
In the back the brisk woman pressed her neighbour’s arm.
‘It is a really useful criterion, isn't it?’ she whispered. ‘The Female Co-authorship-index we introduced? The number of female co-authors divided by the total number of co-authors?’
The neighbour gave a nod in agreement.
‘0.5,’ the short woman replied. ‘Which, I guess, is not too bad.’
‘But certainly not outstanding,’ the brisk woman loudly remarked.
A few women shifted in their chairs. Nobody spoke.
The director looked around the room.
‘Since his credentials on this point are not clear,’ she slowly said. ‘I propose we do not invite him.’
She addressed the institute secretary.
‘Let him know something like…’ she paused for a moment. ‘Although we think that the scientific aspects of his research are excellent, we unfortunately feel that the cultural side of it is not quite up to our standards.’

© 2014 Miriam Blaauboer
This column has been published in the newsletter of the Kavli Institute of Nanoscience Delft in March 2014. All rights, including for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies, are reserved.