

DIVERSITY & CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN AN ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTER:  
ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN A COMPLEX SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Academic health centers are responsible for training new health care providers (AAHC, n.d.). These institutions have increasingly experienced more pressure to improve diversity and cultural competence in their organizations because of the poor health outcomes of low-income and minority patients (AACN 2008a; AACN, 2008b; AACN 2009; AAMC, 2005; AAMC 2008; ADA, 2011; Elwood, 2012). The changing U.S. population and the implementation of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* will likely exacerbate this issue.

The case study research examined organizational leadership issues and adaptability of an academic health center through the lens of Complexity Leadership Theory (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). Data collection consisted of a document analysis, personal interviews, and onsite observation. Inductive themes include examples of the organizational values of diversity and cultural competence; an organizational phenomenon based on the relationship of money, the recruiting funnel and the development of partnerships; the emotional overlay of diversity-related initiatives; and the role of accountability. Conceptual themes were those related to the administrative, enabling and adaptive functions of leadership. Conclusions included evidence of academic health centers as complex adaptive systems and the importance of time and money to advance diversity goals. Implications included the emotional aspects of diversity efforts, the role and importance of positional leaders, tempering the use of partnerships and listening to stakeholders to foster organizational learning.