

BUILDING MEN'S SOLIDARITY FOR WORKPLACE EQUALITY

A Guide for Workplace Leaders

A NOTE TO WORKPLACE LEADERS: HOLD THE LINE!

We are witnessing, in real time, alarming backslides on women's rights the world over.¹ The workplace is not immune, and employers that do introduce initiatives to diversify their workforce, create a more equal playing field for employees, and promote inclusiveness by attending to visible and invisible forms of discrimination may find themselves facing skepticism and hostility for their efforts.

In the face of a backslide, this report calls on leaders to *hold the line*.

As a place where people spend a great deal of their time and energy, a workplace is a critical arena and can affect all facets of a person's life. When a person is included, rewarded, and feeling *seen* at work, workplaces can be transformed: Social cohesion and collaboration go up, and so does productivity. But this only happens when leaders like you have fully bought in.

It shouldn't be controversial to say that people of all genders and in all their diversity should be able to compete equally in a work environment. It shouldn't be controversial to say that there are people and whole groups who have had easier paths to success. Oftentimes, this is mediated by gender, race, immigration status, and socioeconomic class, and so it should also not be controversial to examine the barriers individuals in these groups have faced in their lives, and consider ways to end them.

One way through is by examining your organizational culture. According to a McKinsey & Co. study of 27,000 employees,² female leaders were more than 1.5 times as likely as men at their level to have left a previous job because they wanted to work where there was more commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Conversely, when women do find organizations that support them, they thrive – and so do their companies: another study conducted by McKinsey & Co, this time of 1,000 companies across 12 countries, concluded that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity were 27 percent more likely to outperform their national industry average in terms of economic profit.³ More and more, employees are looking to work for organizations that align with their values and sense of well-being.⁴

“I want to emphasize that what I have learned – that in contexts like ours, where I sit, you need an intersectional approach. And that is very important. I am worried about a framing that is only about male allyship for gender equality, that does not integrate multiple layers of intersectionality.”

-Srilatha Batliwala, Senior Advisor, CREA

Prioritizing workplace culture also means acknowledging that workplaces do not fit neatly into a box where all individuals of a supposed privileged class succeed, and those not in said class, fail. Gay men, for example, experience what has been a “gay glass ceiling effect,” whereby their chances to rise beyond low-level manager positions fall vis-a-vis heterosexual men.⁵ Indeed, it is easy to find scores of articles pointing at the differences between men and women on a number of leadership indicators. Despite calls to incorporate a more nuanced understanding of employees’ experiences in diversity efforts,⁶ comparing men’s and women’s experiences continues to be the dominant frame. And there is evidence that such black-and-white thinking may run counter to the aims of organizational culture change initiatives. Indeed, recent research (2022) on workplaces in Ethiopia, India, Kenya, and Nigeria found that while the majority of men support women’s leadership initiatives overall, many feel unhappy with their implementation: the men described feeling left out or not considered in policies, such as the short duration of paternity leave and exclusion from mentorship programs.⁷ Indeed, as a study of white men in U.S. workplaces found, the single biggest challenge men report engaging in DEI efforts is knowing whether they are “wanted.”⁸

This does not mean that a focus on men’s roles in achieving workplace equality is misplaced. Rather, our emphasis must be on men being a part of the change, rather than on the outside. Future DEI efforts must be oriented toward building solidarity so the struggle against all forms of inequality in the workplace (and perhaps beyond) is seen as *everyone’s* struggle. Men must see the struggle for substantive gender equality as their own; we need the solidarity of heterosexual and cisgender workers to eradicate homophobia and transphobia; we need solidarity from able-bodied people at work to eradicate discrimination against people living with disabilities...and so on.

There is no “quick fix” and no “secret sauce.” Rather, there must be serious, rigorous work over time, based on a deep understanding of the context and intersectionalities and matched by efforts to effect paradigm shifts in where certain groups – often men – have long enjoyed power and privilege. It can also be an inspiring and creative process: creating new narratives and new opportunities for innovation, while lifting the burdens of inequality for *everyone*.

What could this solidarity agenda look like? What are some practical ways to encourage men’s engagement as part of a wider effort to promote a more diverse and innovative workplace? In the following pages, we offer some suggestions, drawing on new data from those working to promote male allyship for gender equality in workplaces from all corners of the world.



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ABOUT OUR FINDINGS

Gender at Work and Equipundo bring more than 50 years of expertise to this joint inquiry into how much workplace male allyship programs are positively impacting gender equality and women's leadership outcomes.⁹ Specifically, we examined what it really takes to achieve measurable change in workplace cultures and norms, behaviors, and actions: What can we expect when time and resources are invested into programs and “deep dives” with organizations of all types to enhance cultures of gender equality, equity, and true feminist male allyship, from HR offices to C-suites, from middle management to spaces for senior women's leadership, from nonprofit environments to the private sector and multilateral entities?

This report aims to support the Gates Foundation's goal of understanding male allyship as an essential component of future initiatives to support the development of women's leadership. It considers several key questions: What kinds of male allyship strategies are organizations undertaking? How do we know they work? How do they incorporate the voices of diverse groups of men and women into their design? And what absolutely must be included in the application of these initiatives to maximize their success?

To answer these questions, we conducted:

- An online survey with 26 senior male allyship leaders (35 percent in the United States/Canada, 19 percent in the Asia-Pacific region, 19 percent in Africa, and 17 percent in Europe)
- Nine expert interviews¹⁰
- Desk research involving gray and peer-reviewed literature (30 articles)
- Case studies (long-form storytelling) on male allyship initiatives, with thanks to Oxfam America, Rowad Modern Engineering (Egypt), Champions of Change Coalition (Australia), Equipundo's allyship team (Nigeria, India, Dominican Republic, Liberia, and others, and an anonymous institute of higher education (United Kingdom)
- Dozens of key informant interviews and informal consultations

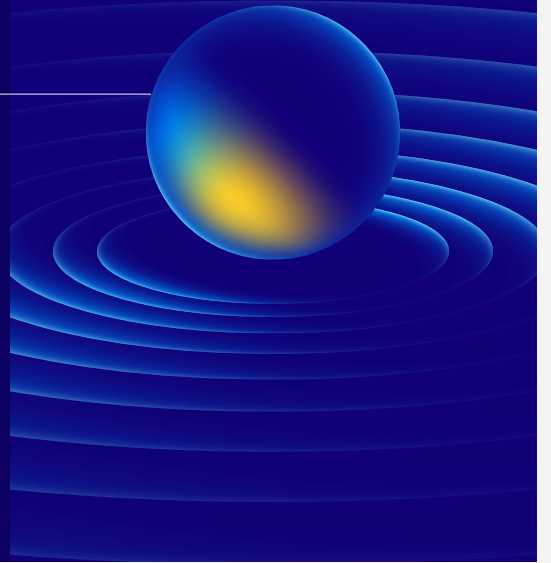


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1

INTRODUCTION



TROUBLING TIMES, SOME PROMISING SIGNS

According to the World Economic Forum's *Gender Gap Report 2024*, at the current rate of progress, it will take 134 years for women to achieve parity with men in their economic participation, educational attainment, health outcomes, and political participation and leadership. Gender-based discrimination persists with tenacity in the workplace, including in hiring, salary, benefits, mentoring, and promotion. The gender pay gap – women earning less than men while doing work of equal value – is at 19 percent globally, ranging from 13 percent in low-income countries to 21 percent in upper-middle-income countries.¹¹

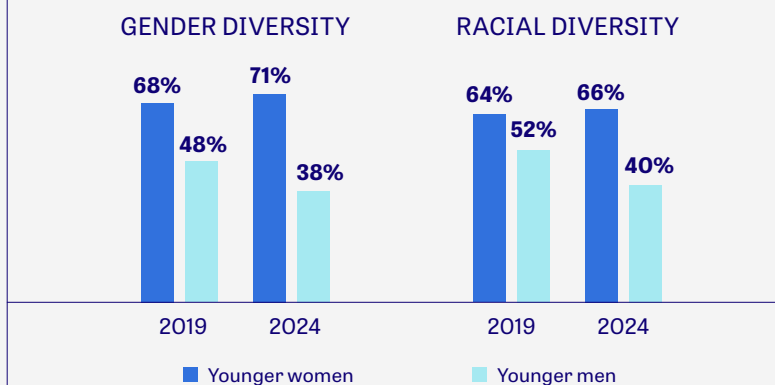
Gender-based discrimination also continues to be reinforced in the home in the unequal division of childcare and household labor between partners. Most unpaid care work and domestic work is done by women and girls: In the Global South, women do three to seven times as much, while in the Global North, women do 1.2 to two times as much.¹² The COVID-19 pandemic only intensified difficult circumstances for women globally. According to a study published in *The Lancet*, between March 2020 and September 2021, 26 percent of women reported losing their jobs compared to 20 percent of men; women were 140 percent as likely to drop out of the workforce or formal schooling to take care of others, and reports of violence against women increased by 23 percent **due to women spending more time at home and increased financial pressures on households**.¹³ Globally, one in three women worldwide (736 million women) have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.¹⁴

Troublingly, the 2024 Reykjavík Index for Leadership, a measure of how women and men are perceived in terms of their suitability for leadership in G7 countries, shows declining support for women's leadership across G7 countries.¹⁵

Similarly, a study of 281 organizations and 15,000 employees in the United States and Canada found increasing support for gender and racial diversity among by women younger than 30, but declining support for by men of the same age group. This led study authors to conclude that “gender and racial diversity are both a higher priority to women than men, underscoring the importance of engaging men in efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.”¹⁶

Younger women are the most likely to say that gender and racial diversity are high priorities to them, while younger men are the least likely-and this gap is widening.

% of women and men under 30 who say that gender and/or racial diversity are a high priority to them



These trends are not likely to shift in the positive direction in the near-term as several Western governments have also significantly pulled back commitments to women’s health and gender equality in their foreign aid programming in 2025, among them the U.S., Dutch, U.K. and German governments.^{18,19}

But there are also promising signs:

- Over the past 50 years, 47.2 percent of the 146 countries surveyed by the World Economic Forum have had at least one woman leader in the highest political office, and gender parity in parliamentary representation reached a record high of 33 percent in 2024, almost doubling the 2006 level.
- In the past half-century, the average number of maternity leave days has increased from 63 to 107, and paternity leave days have increased from less than one to nine on average.²⁰
- Two-thirds of developing countries have achieved gender parity in primary education.²¹
- 51 percent of nonprofit board chairs were women, up from 30 percent in 2018, and half of nonprofit CEOs in their sample were women.²²
- The United Nations Global Compact’s Target Gender Equality Accelerator, a program for employers to set and make progress toward gender equality goals, now includes more than 2,000 companies in more than 60 countries.²³
- The Spotlight Initiative, a multi-donor effort to prevent gender-based violence in 43 of the world’s poorest nations, has directly led to more than 540 new laws or policies passed, with 6 million men and boys educated and a 13-fold increase in national budgets to address gender-based violence since the initiative began in 2017. Companies are increasingly setting gender quotas as a means of meeting company goals around women’s representation, and the existence of equity-focused goals (such as Sustainable Development Goal 16.7.1) offers tangible opportunities for governments to report on progress.

This is the moment we find ourselves in, with visible, tangible progress – especially if measured over dozens of years – in the midst of a regression for women’s rights in general, including within workplaces.

“It is clear that complacency and a reliance on ‘the passing of time’ is not an effective strategy to address deep-seated prejudices that exist within our societies, systems, and institutions.”¹⁷

-The Reykjavík Index for Leadership 2024

ALLYSHIP PROGRAMS

In the global human rights community that had emerged from World War II, the consensus began to grow starting in the 1970s that gender inequality could be eliminated both by providing material advantage to women, and by changing gendered norms and expectations (e.g., normalizing women breadwinners). Still, little rhetorical attention was paid to men's roles in achieving gender equality. It was not until the 1990s that the key role of men and boys in achieving gender equality was identified. The 1994 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasized the need for a "transformed partnership" between women and men, one based on "the principle of shared power and responsibility...at home, in the workplace, and in the wider national and international communities."²⁴

Over the last three decades, community activists working to engage men and boys in support of gender equality efforts have coalesced into formal institutions and networks such as the White Ribbon Campaign (1991), Instituto Promundo (1997), the MenEngage Alliance (2006), Men Advancing Real Change via Catalyst (2009), the EDGE Certified Foundation (2009), the MenCare Campaign (2011), and HeForShe (2014). Movements emerging in the last 10 years, such as Ni Una Menos (Latin America), I Will Go Out (India), and #MeToo (US, global) have explicitly encouraged men to play an active role in the struggle against gender-based violence. In this context, male allyship workplace initiatives have grown, with firms such as Catalyst and Champions of Change among industry leaders.

“Male allyship programs can contribute to greater diversity and inclusion by actively involving men in the conversation about gender equality, ensuring a broader spectrum of perspectives is considered and valued.”

-Fidèle Rutayisire, Founder and Executive Director, Rwandan Men's Resource Centre

Allyship posits the existence of hierarchical social structures wherein dominant groups accrue unearned privileges, resulting in inequitable resource distribution and compromised psychological and physical safety for non-dominant groups.²⁵ Consequently, allyship denotes the active and sustained engagement of dominant group members in dismantling systemic oppression through advocacy and support for marginalized populations.²⁶ Allyship is an aspirational process involving a complex interplay of motivations that, over time, work to end the system of oppression that gives greater privilege and power to non-dominant groups based on their social group membership.²⁷

In this report, we ground our analysis in two conceptual frameworks: First, the Aspiring Social Justice Ally Identity Development model,²⁸ developed by Keith Edwards, guides our understanding of allyship as a *non-linear process* that is proactive, is ongoing, and involves the incredibly difficult practice of unlearning and re-evaluating.²⁹ Second, an analytical framework developed by Gender at Work³⁰ guides our understanding of how oppression and domination show up in everyday workplace practice and policy and in organizational structures and cultures at both the individual and systemic levels within organizations.

Aspiring Social Justice Ally Identity Development Model

The Aspiring Social Justice Ally Identity Development model identifies individuals' motivations for allyship, grouped into three categories:

- 1. Ally for self-interest:** A self-interested ally is primarily motivated by allyship behaviors, which mainly reinforce their power and maintain the status quo. In gender relationships, this may look like protective behavior (e.g., using violence to defend a woman's honor). This category of ally may be effective in preventing a negative workplace outcome in the short term (e.g., an episode of workplace harassment) but does little to impact the overall structure of power in a workplace. These allies may vaguely accept values of equality and justice but lack the skills and awareness to understand how their actions may be ultimately perpetuating the system of oppression.
- 2. Ally for altruism:** An altruistic ally has a good foundational awareness of how their dominant group exerts power over another group. They may feel a great deal of shame or guilt for previous blindness or for existing within the dominant group, yet they may also see themselves as "one of the good ones," creating a binary in which people in their group either "get it" or don't. This approach may unconsciously feed their sense of power and privilege. However, when they are confronted by others for bad behavior, these allies may become defensive, ready with a laundry list of the ways in which they've acted as allies. Their role as rescuer is very important to them.
- 3. Ally for social justice:** The last type of ally is one that sees everyone's suffering as interlinked and interdependent and, therefore, works together with members of non-dominant groups to overcome inequality. Understanding their own upbringings and fallibilities, allies for social justice build systems of accountability with others. Because their motivations are partially self-interested (spiritual or moral liberation), their allyship is sustainable and may be more joyfully enacted. Allies of this type appreciate feedback or criticism and practice ways to receive it without defensiveness.

As Edwards notes, individuals of a dominant group do not move linearly along these ally types but actually select from their options depending on context. The social justice ally should be thought of as an identity to always be working toward, avoiding regression to self-interest or altruism in more and more interactions until these motivations are stamped out completely. **It is, therefore, a lifelong pursuit.**

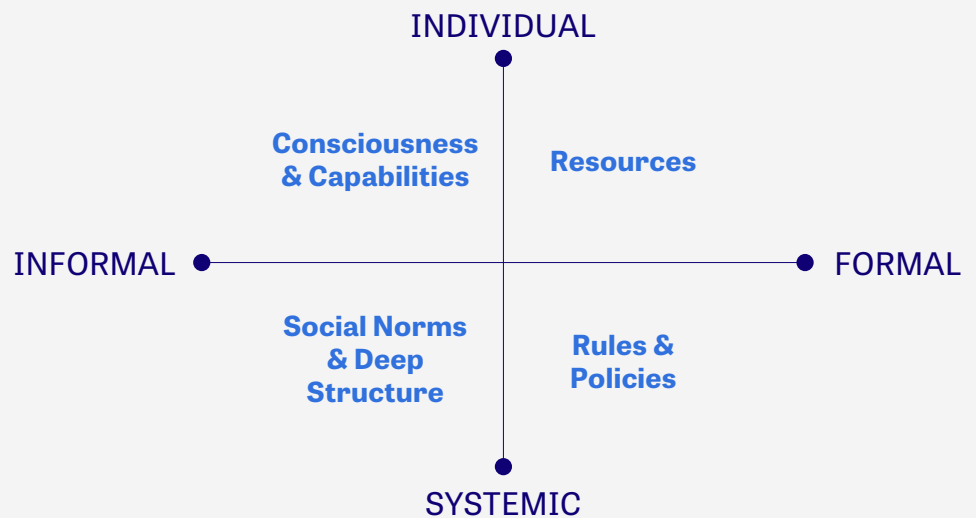
The Gender at Work Analytical Framework

Relatedly, the Gender at Work Analytical Framework is an accessible tool that can be used to identify and highlight deep structures of inequality and discrimination as well as the entrenched social and cultural norms on which they are built, which impede efforts to advance gender equality in organizations and in diverse contexts.

The framework's top two quadrants address the **individual level**: Consciousness and capabilities (top left) include individuals' knowledge, skills, political consciousness, and commitment to change toward equality, while resources (top right) include voice, budgets, and access to health and education. The bottom two quadrants address the **systemic level**: Social norms and deep structures (bottom left) include those that are discriminatory and maintain inequality in everyday practices; these are often "invisible" and vary by context. Formal rules and policies (bottom right) are those laid down in constitutions, laws, and policies.

Transforming the status quo means that **change must take place in all four domains** and especially in the bottom-left quadrant.

We can use the Gender at Work Framework to highlight deep structures of inequality and discriminatory social norms in organizations and communities



Gender at Work Framework (n.d.). <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>. Used with permission.

The framework can be used to look at what changes we want to see in societies and organizations, map challenges and opportunities, and change strategies and outcomes. It can also be used to understand how power is distributed within a workplace and even within a unit or sub-unit (e.g., a team). It can be used by change agents (such as allies for gender equality and for social justice more broadly) to uncover opportunities and barriers to guide efforts and mark progress toward organizational aims.

The Complexities of Solidarity, Social Norms, and Power

The perception of men as powerful is a complex issue rooted in historical, social, and cultural factors. Historically, societies have been structured with men holding positions of authority in politics, economics, and social life. This has led to an association between masculinity and power. Cultural narratives, including those in literature, religion, and media, have often reinforced this association. Relatedly, traditional gender roles, which are learned at a young age, prescribe that men should be assertive, dominant, and in control. These traits are often equated with power. Studies have shown that some physical attributes that are more common in men, such as height, and a deep voice, are associated with the perception of dominance.³¹

The perspective may change when taking into account men and women's own *perceptions of their power*. In one study in the United States, researchers found that men perceive themselves as having more power in public life, while women perceive themselves as having more power in their private life. However, when researchers asked men and women in which arena they *preferred* to have power, both said in their private lives.³² Perceptions of others and self-perception matter a great deal in this area: a 2024 review of meta-analyses found that gendered differences in power are really *power differences*: that is, those who feel powerful often ape behaviors they *associate* with boys and men, rather than their being any sort of biological essentialism in leadership and sex/gender.³³ This research affirms that perceptions and stereotypes of what men and women are supposed to be and do in any given setting significantly influence individual behavior.³⁴

Gender-transformative approaches are interventions and programs that account for both of these factors – gender-based power and gendered social norms – in their design and implementation. These approaches “encourage critical awareness among men and women of gender roles and norms; promote the position of women; challenge the distribution of resources and allocations of duties between men and women; and/or address the power relationships between women and others in the community.”³⁵

Such approaches when applied to male allyship are not simply about engaging men to think differently about women's experiences in workplaces. Rather, it is an attempt to transform the norms, power dimensions, and roles in a given setting. When done well, such programming acknowledges the nuances in power addressed above, including that men also experience challenges and vulnerabilities due to rigid gender norms (e.g., notions that men should not seek help when they need it or that any sign of weakness or vulnerability is shameful). Transformative programming also acknowledges that both men and women may act in accordance with negative, unequal, or restrictive norms or with more positive egalitarian roles.

There can be a tendency to distinguish between “masculine” and “feminine” styles of leadership or ways of wielding power. Such distinctions, however, maintain the very gender binary that transformative approaches challenge and ultimately seek to undo. If our task is to make it possible for anyone to be able to access leadership roles and thrive in the workplace, then a key starting point is to recognize how gendered ways of seeing and being reinforce deep structures of inequality and exclusion in workplaces and beyond. Our view is that this is a valuable exercise for workplaces particularly those where diversity is lacking, as we point out below.

“It’s less discussed, but social class is also critically important – a lot of the conversation in research circles is around senior positions, and so much of the work around middle management is left out – we need to have a rich conversation about what it means to be an ally while you are also advocating for yourself.”

-Meg Warren, Associate Professor, Western Washington University

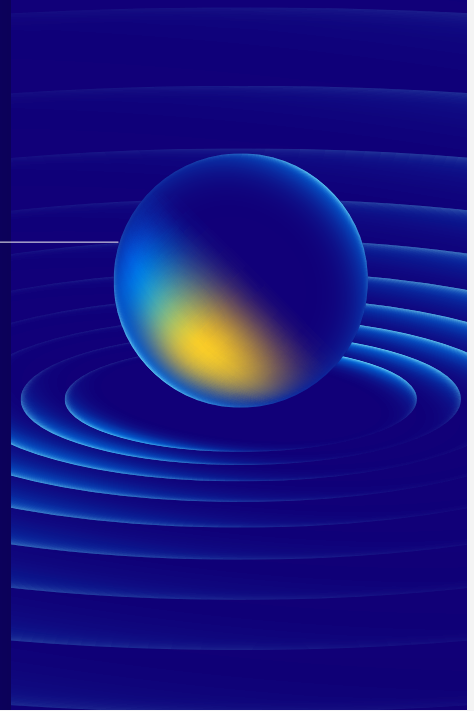
THEORY OF CHANGE AND EXPECTED IMPACT

Our scan of the literature, interviews, case studies, and field surveys provide some understanding of how allyship initiatives can contribute to broader organizational gender equality initiatives.

Organizations adopt values and practices that enable a work environment in which everyone can meet their full professional and personal goals.		Impact statement	
Employees perceive their workplace as a safe place to express concerns, take risks, and ask questions.	Leadership grows more empathic, aware, and capable of promoting equality and healthy ideas of masculinity.	Long-term outcomes	
Organizational policies, procedures, and culture are more aligned with equality aims.	Diverse women at all levels of the workplace experience concrete shifts in who is able to gain and hold power.		
Women believe their male colleagues genuinely care about gender equality.	Men feel a sense of injustice/unfairness about conditions in the workplace.	Intermediate outcomes	
Male employees become more aware of systemic workplace discrimination and bias, how power operates, and their harms.			
Engage champions who are consistent, trusted, and motivated – and follow their lead.	Create a persuasive rationale for what needs to change with a diverse set of staff.	Develop clear goals, objectives, and timelines linked to broader organizational objectives.	Solidarity strategies
Make the initiative visible, including with public expressions of support from managers, HR, and senior leaders.	Design solutions that allow for enthusiastic employee participation.	Frame support for equality as in everyone's best interest (not "zero-sum").	
Measure allyship program success, relying on voices from diverse men and women.	Use the lessons learned to improve your program, communicate with clients, and to communicate both internally and externally.		
It takes time. Think and act on a multiyear time horizon to get to where you want to be.	As change happens, nurture a culture of care among staff: This is hard and needs patience and acceptance of others' limitations.		Accountability principles
Allyship initiatives should act alongside broader reforms (not exist on their own).	Lean into discussions on who holds power in your workplace, and encourage vulnerability.		

2

THEORY OF CHANGE AND EXPECTED IMPACT



LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Our scan of the literature, interviews, case studies, and field surveys provide some understanding of how allyship initiatives can contribute to broader organizational gender equality initiatives. A failure to include a male allyship dimension makes gender-related DEI initiatives more challenging to accomplish simply because deep structural change requires “all-hands-on-deck” strategies and approaches. In our scan, for example, we saw that male allyship programs show a more appreciable impact on the improvements to women’s and workers’ experience of the workplace in places where there are already robust gender equality initiatives in place and/or an explicit commitment to gender equality from senior management. This fits with other research that shows that top-down equity policies work better in egalitarian work cultures; and in inegalitarian work cultures, such equity policies can backfire.³⁶

Overall, our research highlights several key ways in which male allyship programs can make an invaluable contribution:

Employees perceive their workplace as a safe place to express concerns, take risks, and ask questions. People cannot perform well at work if they feel physically or psychologically unsafe.³⁷ When workers feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to speak up without fear of reprisal. Through their emphasis on accountability, trust-building, sharing power, and openness to new possibilities, allyship programs can support the creation of a more secure environment for employees by surfacing and engaging with the deep power structures within organizations.³⁸

Leadership grows more empathic, aware, and capable of promoting equality and healthy ideas of masculinity. Strong initiatives act as safe training grounds for male leaders, many of whom feel – even if they do not share it publicly – that they have been elevated to their roles due in part to unearned privilege. Freire and Bishop argue that men, whether they say it or not, are often motivated to join these programs out of interest in their own liberation: that is, facing their unearned privilege, which they feel deep down is there.³⁹ Even if this is not the case, elevating men’s empathy, their awareness of how gender transformation benefits them, and their awareness and knowledge of women’s daily experiences at work (especially focusing on the difference in experiences at work between men on the one hand and women and those who

don't fit neatly into those boxes on the other) all expand the possibility of taking concrete action to advance gender equality in the workplace.

Organizational policies, procedures, and culture are more aligned with equality aims. Given the preponderance of men in senior positions, strong male allyship initiatives must take a whole-organizational approach, implicating organizational policies, procedures, and culture. These aims should be explicitly stated at the outset of programs and built into their design. The more these programs operate with adequate leadership attention, are grounded in accountability to women, and are consistently embedded into efforts to advance gender equality, the more they will create and maintain working environments in which everyone can participate authentically.

Diverse women at all levels of the workplace experience concrete shifts in who is able to gain and hold power. One of the potential weaknesses of male allyship initiatives is a focus on men's experiences and growth without adequate attention to the impact on women and their experience of gender inequality in the work environment. Allyship programs that center intersectionality and encourage participants to tap into their own experience of marginalization – at home or work – and simultaneously raise awareness around systems of privilege and power have greater potential to lead to change. And everyone can take part: allies in positions of greater power, such as managers, can see their critical role in advocating for better enabling policies, while allies in positions of less power, like junior staff, may be able to offer more time to allyship initiatives.⁴⁰

“In 2024, LinkedIn data shows that women’s workforce representation remains below men’s across nearly every industry and economy, with women accounting for 42% of the global workforce and 31.7% of senior leaders.”

-2024 Women in the Workplace Report⁴⁰

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Our scan of the literature, interviews, case studies, and survey data also surfaced several specific outcomes of successful allyship initiatives:

Women believe their male colleagues genuinely care about gender equality. There is a great deal of skepticism about men's participation in DEI efforts; namely, their ability to perceive the severity of the problem. A 2019 study found that while 77 percent of U.S. men reported doing “everything they can” to achieve gender fairness at work, only 41 percent of women agreed that men were doing so. Similarly, when men were asked if they would be a good listener to a woman reaching out to them about experiences of workplace harassment, 89 percent of men said they would be, but only 58 percent of women agreed. This “intention gap” has also been affirmed by other research.⁴² In our study, two-thirds of survey respondents with deep experience in allyship initiatives reported an increase in men's capacity and commitment to gender equity (64 percent) and in progress toward an inclusive workplace culture (65 percent).

Men feel a sense of injustice/unfairness about conditions in the workplace. In one study, it was men's sense of fair play, not their awareness of gender bias, that ultimately predicted whether they made themselves visible as gender equality allies in the workplace.⁴³ When recruiting men as allies, highlighting issues around fairness can encourage them to join the initiative.

Male employees become more aware of systemic workplace discrimination and bias, how power operates, and their harms. Data point after data point suggests that men are unaware of the ubiquitous experiences of workplace discrimination and bias. Awareness alone is not sufficient, but awareness-raising efforts do help give men an empathetic narrative about, and insight into, different women's experiences in the workplace. As witnessed in the MeToo movement started by Tarana Burke in 2006 and then popularized in 2017, creating more understanding of how these dynamics are baked into whole cultures can be a powerful way to open up understanding of diverse women's experiences in the workplace. It can also help men understand how their work and home lives are impeded by harmful gender expectations.⁴⁴

For example, a meta-analysis of 62 studies of gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment showed that compared to men, women identify a broader range of behaviors as harassing.⁴⁵ Similarly, female faculty perceive greater gender inequality than men and these differences hold across tenure levels and in private as well as public institutions and are particularly strong in male-dominated disciplines.⁴⁶



SOLIDARITY STRATEGIES

To achieve these outcomes, we found that a small set of strategies underpin successful initiatives to promote solidarity and maximize the chance to build an enabling work environment in which women, and all employees, can thrive.

At the Outset

1. ENGAGE CHAMPIONS WHO ARE CONSISTENT, TRUSTED, AND MOTIVATED – AND FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

The role of one or many consistent, trusted, and motivated champions cannot be overstated. Champions organize other employees and mobilize them to take concrete action, and depending on their other roles in the organization, they can be helpful advocates with senior leadership. Most initiatives tend to have life cycles, and there is often a “fall-off” or flagging energy over time, so it’s important to **build and maintain a team of champions** who can ensure the initiative continues when that inevitably happens. At an early stage, **champions may find the most success in simply creating discussion spaces** with even one or two men to discuss topics related to gender and power in the workplace.

2. CREATE A PERSUASIVE RATIONALE FOR WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE WITH A DIVERSE SET OF STAFF

Building a relevant, coherent, and compelling narrative for change, using the combined power of statistics and stories, is key to growing and sustaining male allyship in any organizational context. Dubow and Ashcraft (2016) suggest three elements of a strong rationale:⁵⁶

- **Recreate motivating personal and professional experiences.** Set up situations where men are in the minority or being mentored by senior women.
- **Listen to stories and have conversations.** Use real-world examples that educate men about the ways diverse women at all levels experience the workplace differently than they do, playing to a sense of fairness.
- **Be persistent.** Men may find themselves hesitant or skeptical at first, but over time, when encouraged to practice new behaviors, they may find old defenses falling.

3. DEVELOP CLEAR GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND TIMELINES LINKED TO BROADER ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Leaders and participants should seriously ask themselves questions such as:

- What are we trying to do here?
- How will it support women’s lives at work?
- How will it support social justice in general?
- How can we minimize harm?
- What do we need to do to ensure this effort succeeds?

Included within Gender at Work’s approaches are some of the key principles of emergent learning,⁵⁷ such as collectively asking powerful questions, which can play a critical role in any attempt to deeply understand workplace power dynamics, especially as experienced by different genders. Asking powerful questions enables groups to develop a shared understanding of an issue and work out any possible solutions and strategies. Additionally, asking powerful questions allows people to experience their own agency to dream and imagine things differently.⁵⁸ Asking questions does not have to be seen as confrontational but rather as an expression of loyalty and aspiration to improve the work environment. Fostering a practice of asking questions in the workplace can help people to discover together what questions matter the most. **Create space for collective brainstorming and inquiry.**

Inquiries should lead to an action plan that includes the rationale, goals, objectives, and eventually, tactics:

- **Goals** are your highest-level aims and should be defined by your company before starting. An example goal could be increased women's representation at certain levels of the organization.
- **Objectives** are the measurable success indicators specific to your male allyship initiative that help you achieve your company's goals.
- **Tactics** are the activities you plan to accomplish your objectives. We look more closely into those in the next section.

In the current environment of deepening skepticism around DEI programs, leaders must be even more guided and precise in their goals, language, and vision. Defining this at the outset sets your company up for success: When programs are not realistic about what they hope to achieve within a given time frame, it can lead to disappointment and bitterness.

Importantly, goals and objectives lend themselves well to indicators you can count (e.g., number of women promoted). Alongside these, management must insist on qualitative evidence (such as stories and testimonials) that amplifies the lived experience of marginalized employees, with a focus on women and women-identified folks, to truly understand if and how power is shifting within an organization.

Messaging

4. MAKE THE INITIATIVE VISIBLE, INCLUDING WITH PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT FROM MANAGERS, HR, AND SENIOR LEADERS

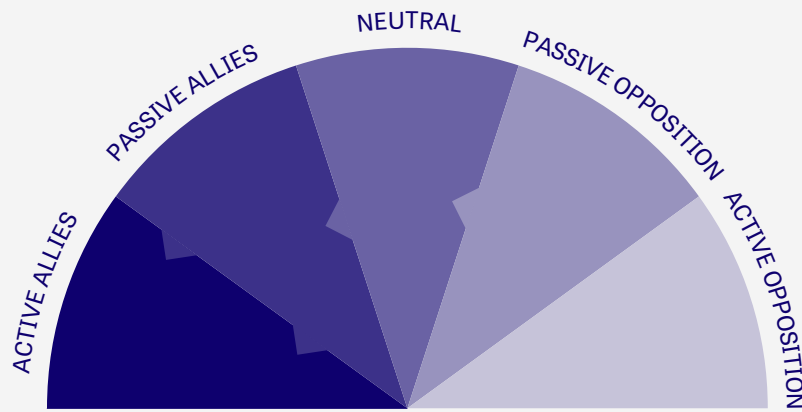
Male allyship programs often face skepticism, particularly from diverse groups of women who are accustomed to little change when it comes to creating workplace cultures that work for them. For example, an influential study from the United States found that men's self-reported allyship was a weak predictor of women's perceptions of their allyship: that is, **women need to believe it and experience tangible differences in their workplace environment that can be attributed to the work of male allyship.**⁵⁹ Making the allyship program visible – whether through a brand and identity, open meetings and workplace chat groups, or public events and pronouncements – is critical to enhancing its impact and credibility, leaning into the necessary public accountability for the program that will keep it grounded in diverse women's experiences.

5. DESIGN SOLUTIONS THAT ALLOW FOR ENTHUSIASTIC EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION

The top predictor of whether or not managers express interest in attending a diversity training course is their perception of whether other managers will be interested in attending. Influential managers, especially men, **should be active in recruiting staff to join initiatives and even in the delivery of training content** where appropriate.⁶⁰

Further, men are more inclined to participate in DEI training if they believe the training is relevant to their work. Align training content closely and explicitly with participants' day-to-day responsibilities and tasks, as well as a clear, intentional process to ensure that men understand the importance of these initiatives to their work. Even if colleagues want to participate, they may face the very practical pressures of time, low support from managers, or team turnover. One senior leader we spoke to from the United Kingdom suggested **making participation in allyship initiatives an official component of individuals' roles/terms of reference** rather than a voluntary time commitment competing with other priorities.

The following figure shows the Spectrum of Allies proposed by Training for Change.⁶¹ The purpose of the spectrum is to help identify approaches and types of messages that may support progress along the continuum. Successful male allyship initiatives do not need to – and, in fact, should not aim to – target a “general public”; rather, they **should focus on moving an audience in a particular wedge one step to the left**. Social change campaigns often fail when social change tactics target more than one wedge at a time. However, it is possible to create multiple strategies at the same time, each targeting a different wedge.



To use this spectrum, it is important “to decide which slices provide the best opportunities at the moment and create tactics that will speak to those slices.”⁶² Practitioners could, for example, choose to focus efforts on shifting a passive group of individuals or an institution with a passive approach into activism, or a hostile group into neutrality.⁶²

Once a target wedge is selected, use the following “Levers of Change” table to effectively adapt the lessons or change messaging to a specific group. This allows you to ask: Who are we actively engaging with this technique, and what would this look like? Importantly, the table shows how these levers can be applied. The time required to change gender norms varies based on the lever used, and multiple levers can be used in tandem. For example, a behavioral change strategy can be paired with a technology solution, like auto-generated reminders or artificial intelligence-powered chatbots.⁶³

“A CEO who shows up to attend an internal affiliation event or conference, for instance, can help signal the importance of the topic more than any number of press releases or emails.”⁴²

Five Ways Men Can Improve Gender Diversity at Work, 2017

LEVERS OF CHANGE - First developed by Alexa Hassink and Lindsay Breier, Equipundo

Lever	Example(s) of How Lever Could Be Applied
<p>Warm fuzzies: Men often lack other men they can open up to. This is as true in their social lives as in their work lives, yet men crave this in their social/professional interactions. Opening up space for this kind of relating can be a powerful tool for moving men along the spectrum.</p>	<p>Passive → Active: Work on ways to create a safe space (e.g., “warm up” a meeting room) to come together and unpack gender and power in the workplace. This can be done with food and other meaningful aesthetic touches. Leverage champions to break the ice with easy-to-answer questions. Over time, grow this community.</p>
<p>Reminders/cues: These signals remind us to engage in certain behaviors. Using cues, such as text messages, can increase behaviors if used at strategic times. Text messages remind participants to attend sessions or complete homework.</p>	<p>Neutral → Passive: As a companion to a workplace allyship initiative, send text messages to employees with data pointing to gender-based discrepancies at work.</p>
<p>Social accountability/exposure: Social accountability encourages compliance with positive behaviors, as it activates humans’ social needs to fit into groups and also provides social support/reinforcement for adopting positive group behaviors.</p>	<p>Passive opposition → Neutral: As part of a campaign, publicize data on how many men already support having more women in positions of leadership and positive shifts in cultural norms.</p>
<p>Social accountability/incentives: Incentives provide a positive reinforcement of a behavior in real-time. The reward must be something that male allies actually value.</p>	<p>Passive opposition → Neutral: Make allyship behaviors a part of an employee’s annual evaluation. Encourage everyone to contribute to an atmosphere where others can also thrive.</p>
<p>Nudge (positive behaviors): “Behavioral nudges” are signals that trigger positive behaviors. The idea is to remove friction/barriers/effort from positive behaviors, or make them easier for someone to engage in, by nudging them toward participating in a more positive action.</p>	<p>Passive → Active: As part of a male allyship workplace engagement, put up signs around the office like: “Today: Acknowledge good ideas from colleagues” or other action prompts to remind employees of concrete actions they can take.</p>
<p>Apply friction (negative behaviors): The same way nudges remove friction around positive behaviors, friction can also be strategically added to negative behaviors to make them more difficult to do.</p>	<p>Passive opposition → Neutral: Require board approval if an interview process for a new position does not net an equal number of male and female candidates.</p>
<p>Visualization: Visualizing the end result of an action allows individuals to foster awareness of the consequences or results of choices they make and breaks them out of autopilot or default modes of thinking.</p>	<p>Neutral → Passive: Ask new or expectant fathers to visualize how the work environment can support their parenting. What needs to change? How might this be different for mothers?</p> <p>Passive opposition → Neutral: In a male-only ally group, have participants visualize certain barriers they may encounter to raise awareness and understanding of the realities of gender-based discrimination in the workplace.</p>
<p>Visual representation: Visual representation or modeling of a behavior normalizes that behavior. Visually seeing more diverse representation normalizes the belief in equality.</p>	<p>Neutral → Passive: In your company newsletter, feature images of same-sex parents; multigenerational families; different races; and men doing chores at home. Create a vision of the workplace and world you want to see.</p>
<p>Design equitable spaces /de-bias the environment: We can also build in tools to de-bias our environments rather than de-biasing individuals. This looks at designing processes and institutions to produce better outputs. Applications of this tool include designing workplaces, institutions, and hiring and recruitment processes, to be more gender-equitable and “nudge” individuals toward greater gender equality.</p>	<p>Neutral → Passive ally: Institute a “use it or lose it” policy for paternity leave if it doesn’t prejudice maternity leave.</p> <p>Active opposition → Passive opposition: Where permitted institute hiring practices that include quotas for diverse and representative women candidates, and institute pay transparency. Create anonymous, safe reporting structures for those experiencing harassment.</p>
<p>Automate/default option: Automate healthy, supportive options. This tool works well for those who fail to be an ally due to indecision or allyship being “too much work,” as automation removes the (guess)work for individuals. Humans tend to select the default option, so the idea is to make the default the healthiest option.</p>	<p>Passive → Active: Send and pre-sign a petition for gender equality in your sector that a program participant needs to opt out of signing each week.</p>

6. FRAME SUPPORT FOR EQUALITY AS IN EVERYONE'S BEST INTEREST (NOT “ZERO-SUM”)

Across all of our sources, we found that men's discomfort, fear, and anxiety are the predominant reasons that men's allyship initiatives fail. Ultimately, individual men do stand to lose power and privilege in the long arc of a gender equality initiative – within a company, industry, or overall economy – as more women vie for positions not previously available to them, they advocate for equality and safety as never before, and systemic power imbalances are righted. **Recognize these fears as legitimate and realistic.**

However, organizations will find that a great number of their male employees are fed up with the hypercompetitive, hypermasculine cultures in workplaces.⁶⁴ This includes men who occupy non-dominant identities. Dominant men may be accepting of allyship initiatives and their aims, but they may not have a clear roadmap of how to divest from certain behaviors and attitudes, lack the space to practice them safely, and feel uncomfortable in the interim. Companies can and should honor this journey, its discomfort, and its promise. **Incentivize authentic participation in male allyship initiatives.**

Further, gender equality in the workplace is often instrumentalized in how it is understood – as being simply about promotions for women, pay equity, and so forth. Our research found that one male allyship initiative on its own is unlikely to lead to these outcomes; therefore, it may be prudent to communicate that the initiative's goal includes the types of impact indicators listed earlier (e.g., psychological safety, empathy, building greater trust). Through this, men may find a more authentic route to allyship for gender equality and may even experience “empathic joy” at this form of allyship.⁶⁶ Women, for example, will be supported to advocate for pay equity or report sexual harassment in the workplace. **Male allyship initiatives should contribute to creating an enabling environment without privileging male voices and experiences over women's.**

Measurement

7. MEASURE ALLYSHIP PROGRAM SUCCESS, RELYING ON VOICES FROM DIVERSE MEN AND WOMEN

Organizations should identify a set of metrics for tracking the contribution of male allyship initiatives to the organization's goals, as defined at the outset. These metrics should go beyond “vanity measures” and simple quantitative indicators to actually track men's self-reported shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and practices around workplace gender equality and – critically – diverse women's perceptions of those efforts. Define these measures together in a participatory way with the help of outside consultants or the HR department. These means of assessment and tracking should be linked to the tactics of your allyship program and feed into your organization's wider DEI goals.

“Men will remain indifferent and, therefore, unlikely to support gender equality unless they appreciate how they can gain personally from changing the status quo.”⁴³

–Catalyst, Engaging Men in Gender Initiatives

While increases in knowledge, awareness, and ally actions can be assessed more frequently when measuring shifts in attitudes, it is best to carry out pre- and post-testing over a longer period of time, including for a period after a particular allyship initiative has concluded. If you decide to measure shifts in gender-related attitudes, you can do so by including key attitude-related statements in the first pre-test at the start of an initiative and in the post-test at the end of the final training session.

The *Engaging Men for Gender Equality* training manual suggests constructing outcomes related to **knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes**.⁶⁷ Some examples of possible outcomes related to increased knowledge, skills, and abilities are:

- Increased knowledge of how gender roles influence the distribution of care work within the household and workplace
- Increased skills for building a safe work environment
- Greater ability to understand and explain how values, attitudes, and beliefs affect how we behave and our expectations of each other

In addition to outcome measurements, take stock of your program's success through periodic debrief sessions. Facilitators who are tasked with implementing an allyship initiative can organize periodic debriefing sessions (face-to-face or online) with other facilitators to provide a platform for reflecting on what has worked well (and not so well), analyzing challenges, articulating lessons learned, and proposing solutions. These sessions can also boost facilitators' confidence and ownership of the allyship initiative. The qualitative data from monitoring visits, facilitators' self-appraisal exercises, and participants' evaluations are important inputs for the debriefing sessions. Facilitators can also set up a semiformal community of practice, such as a WhatsApp group or company chat group, through which they can share learning and insights as well as support each other with planning and executing activities.

“When measurement is absent or irrelevant, DEI interventions are denied the opportunity to succeed nor fail; they simply exist, at least until stakeholders get tired of sponsoring them and withdraw their support.”⁶⁵

–Senior leader, U.K. University

In an ecosystem of multiple organizational change strategies, it is difficult to pinpoint where male allyship programming has had a significant, tangible impact. In fact, the programs we scanned typically did not aim for transformational change on their own but rather to contribute to some greater impact combined with other initiatives. Yet, we find that male allyship initiatives often fail to meet even intermediate standards of measurement, limited to before-and-after shifts in awareness and attitudes, if measurement even occurs at all. Of the nearly 24 programs reported to us by male allyship program practitioners, only 30 percent featured an evaluation, and only 20 percent measured women's perception of allyship behaviors; none measured these perceptions six months or more after the program was implemented.⁶⁸

Allyship initiatives are – inherently – goal-based, with the aim of bringing awareness to the ways in which inequality sits within an organization and creating actionable opportunities to overcome this inequality. Thus, it is striking that few of the programs measure the perceptions or opinions of any participants, particularly diverse groups of women.

8. USE THE LESSONS LEARNED TO IMPROVE YOUR PROGRAM, COMMUNICATE WITH CLIENTS, AND TO COMMUNICATE BOTH INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

Amplify and share your initiative's story widely, both internally and externally where possible. Sharing externally will signal to clients and partners that you are serious about your commitments, while sharing internally will promote valuable discussions about where the program succeeded, where it failed, and where changes could be made. Make time for this and be open to feedback and challenge, encourage nuanced conversations, and capture this feedback qualitatively. The core team managing the program especially must sit with program findings, ask questions, celebrate, and then intentionally work to improve the next iteration of the offering.

“Around the time I started the group, I had my first child. Our parental leave policy wasn’t in line with similar organizations, so this prompted a four-plus-year campaign to challenge this. People at the negotiating table were part of our Men and Masculinities Group. There was a change from 24 days to 60 days of paid leave, and there was a significant link to our group reflections around what it takes to care for each other.”

–Study Interviewee

ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES

IT TAKES TIME

Irrespective of whether or not an allyship initiative is being introduced within sectors where the vast majority of employees are male, gender equality interventions have to be implemented gradually. It is incumbent on management to build in time for participation in such interventions, noting that these initiatives are indispensable.

Rather than seeing them as impediments to workflow and productivity, allyship initiatives should be seen as necessary pre-conditions for a thriving workplace. It takes time for organizational culture change to happen.

NURTURE A CULTURE OF CARE

Organizational change efforts aiming to fundamentally shift power and promote diverse women's leadership are arduous and taxing, especially at the beginning. Those leading an allyship initiative may find themselves the target of backlash, either immediately and explicitly or over time in subtle, tacit ways. A culture of care needs to be nurtured within organizations and among the community of change agents so they can feel supported in doing this work and also feel that the initiative is valued by leadership/management and their peers/colleagues.⁶⁹

MALE ALLYSHIP SHOULD COMPLEMENT, NOT SUPPLEMENT

Male allyship initiatives alone will not achieve substantive gender equality in the workplace. They must complement pre-existing policies and/or measures for advancing gender equality and increasing women's leadership in the workplace. This is a critical aspect of understanding the role that male allyship initiatives can best play in the workplace: a complementary role that fits into a broader panoply of efforts in which broader goals of inclusion and equity are front and center.

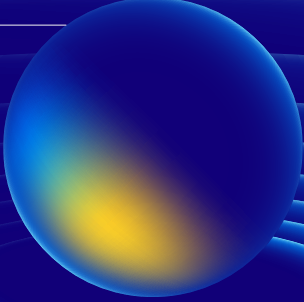
MAKE POWER VISIBLE

An important dimension of gender equality work is identifying and naming the underlying power dynamics that keep the deep structures of workplace inequality in place – the hidden rules, norms, and behaviors that really govern workplaces, which must be unpacked in safety over time. This promotes the kind of psychological safety that workplaces need for actual creativity and innovation to take place. Opening up space for this kind of inquiry, while uncomfortable, indicates you trust your employees enough to invite good-faith criticism and shows your commitment to the cause.⁷⁰

“I want to take a hard line and suggest that we shouldn't have male allyship initiatives unless there are robust, substantive gender equality initiatives in place firmly focused on women's leadership and empowerment.”

**–Michael Flood, Professor, Queensland University of Technology
(Study Interviewee)**

3 CASE STUDIES



Male allyship strategies tend to center a multitude of training methodologies, including some self-paced and group *learning opportunities* with the aim to raise awareness, *practical trainings* with the aim to support practicing new behaviors, *advocacy* for new policies/initiatives, e.g., increasing paid leave, and gender-segregated open discussion in ‘safe space’ environments. Allies may also take part in networking opportunities or contribute to company blogs/internal communications. The case studies illustrate some of these efforts. Resources are included at the end of the document to go deeper on certain methodologies.

ROWAD MODERN ENGINEERING - EGYPT

Rowad is an international construction company working on both the construction and restoration of antique buildings and sites, with 2,500 permanent staff members and an additional 11,000 on-site workers. In Egypt, Rowad operates 60 projects. The construction field remains one of the most male-dominated fields globally, where women are employed in very specific roles and positions. Very few women work in construction sites in Egypt; one can find female engineers at headquarters and in site offices located in caravans. However, women on site rarely interact with construction workers even if their jobs require this, and almost all site engineers who work directly with construction workers are men.

In 2015, Rowad's parent company encouraged it to sign onto the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). Under the WEPs process, Rowad created an action plan that included creating the company's first-ever code of conduct policy, including a sexual harassment policy and a gender, inclusion, and discrimination policy, which all new hires are required to review and sign. Still, the company looked to do more to address conscious and unconscious discrimination and bias, which proliferated despite the policies in place. A key leader took on a training course offered by Pathfinder International with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funding, which prepared the organization to apply for the Egyptian Gender Equity Seal, a certification led by the country's National Council for Women that encourages companies to conduct wage gap analyses and correct gaps over time. Signing onto both of these commitments also led to several in-person trainings for staff to raise awareness on existing policies, two sessions on gender discrimination and bias with HR, and a training on stereotypes.

Further, the initiative began to shift the organizational culture. For example, a male engineer, reflecting on his own behavioral shift toward acting as an ally and mentor to a female colleague in the field, believes his actions had helped improve her self-confidence and performance: "She knew I had her back, and she could therefore focus on her job." Similarly, female participants reported greater workplace psychological safety in speaking up. One female colleague, a restoration specialist who worked on site and had participated in the "understanding discrimination" session, said she felt empowered by the framing of violence against women as an intentional choice by her male colleagues, not anything she was inviting. She felt encouraged to discuss equal pay issues with Rowad management when she discovered she was making less than her male colleagues for the same work; as a result, she earned a pay raise to be on par with her male colleagues.

Exposure to training also progressively affected organizational policy and practice. For instance, trainers helped HR colleagues look at the way they wrote job vacancies and how it might be less inclusive of women applicants. As a result, recruiters are now very careful while drafting job vacancies and know how to write them in gender-neutral language.⁴⁷ This process also triggered the rewriting of a workplace attire policy, which previously had different standards for men and women.

Finally, Rowad identified that women were interested in careers in engineering and design. As part of its Rowad 2030 program (initiated in 2017), the company worked in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Planning and Economic Development to support 700 women from the Womenpreneurs 2030 program. The program is a business accelerator to support commercial projects and provide opportunities for women to launch and develop their businesses. It also raises awareness and provides resources for establishing emerging projects in Egypt.

The Rowad case study shows the value of combining strategies for gender inequality, targeting individual attitudes and behavior change as well as developing organizational policies and procedures to support equal opportunity and enhance accountability. Together, these two strands of influence have begun to feed into the deeper challenge of tackling and transforming a masculine workplace culture that has been embedded in the company's field site operations.

EQUIMUNDO - DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, INDIA, NIGERIA, GHANA, LIBERIA, TUNISIA, THE UNITED STATES & CANADA

Equimundo has partnered on several male allyship initiatives aiming to promote the leadership of women in male-dominated industries. For example, Equimundo partnered with the mining corporation Rio Tinto in 2017 to support the rollout of the company's new domestic violence policy for the United States and Canada. This policy provides paid leave and other resources to employees experiencing or at risk of experiencing domestic violence, and also extends support to immediate family members of employees experiencing domestic violence. To accomplish this, Equimundo conducted interviews and focus groups with more than 60 Rio Tinto employees and developed an online survey for all Rio Tinto North America employees to better understand the prevalence of domestic violence in the selected communities and gauge the office climate around these issues. Based on these interviews and the survey results, Equimundo developed a training package with the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children at Western University in London, Ontario; this training package for managers and HR staff focused on the impact of domestic violence in the workplace to better prepare these professionals for understanding and working with the policy.

Additionally, Equimundo began partnering with Engendering Industries in 2020 to design and deliver the Engaging Men for Gender Equality training program.⁴⁸ Through workshops and training, men commit to concrete actions that advance gender equality at home, in communities, and in the workplace. In 2022, Engendering Industries launched its male engagement curriculum, developed in partnership with Equimundo. The curriculum catalyzes workforce reflection and dialogue as well as highlights the ways gender norms and inequalities lead to disparities in rights, workforce opportunities, and access to resources for men and women. Through group activity and individual reflection, the curriculum promotes changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices to build equitable, respectful, and collaborative corporate cultures. As a part of the Engendering Industries program, this methodology has been implemented with utility companies in various contexts around the world, including the Dominican Republic, India, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Tunisia.

“By creating conditions that focus people on the real requirements of the job, rather than on stereotypical images believed to equate with competence, organizations can free employees to do their best work.”

**-Robin J. Ely and Debra Meyerson,
“Unmasking Manly Men”**

In male-dominated sectors, the bottom line is often a powerful hook for gender equality advocacy. Pitching the business case in this way is especially important for senior leadership buy-in and enthusiasm, which Equimundo's programs have found to be a mandatory element for success. This reinforces the notion that targeting men who are more likely to be the leaders and decision-makers “holding the keys” is a key component. For example, in the case of Rio Tinto, there was a concern that domestic violence at home could spill over to increased accidents or other consequences that would ultimately affect the bottom line.

The high stress of highly masculinized environments is a well-known phenomenon: In one documented instance with teams aboard oil rigs, managers encouraged workers to focus on safety and effectiveness in completing tasks, disincentivizing macho behavior common in such environments. Over the 15 years that these changes were implemented, the organization's accident rate declined by 84 percent, while several economic measures on productivity and output improved.⁴⁹

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE - AUSTRALIA

Champions of Change is an Australia-based initiative focused on building executive support for diverse leadership and inclusive work environments. Established in 2010 by Elizabeth Broderick, AO,⁵⁰ the coalition of now more than 260 members aims to “bring together and engage industry leaders to develop initiatives that capitalize on the talent, innovation, competitive and positive social impact opportunities on offer when gender equality and inclusion are prioritized.”⁵¹ These organizations operate in more than 155 countries and represent more than 1.4 million employees globally.

Initially called Male Champions of Change, the coalition's unique strategy is engaging CEOs with deep learning and reflection exercises, and then moving them into a cohort of other CEOs, where they act together (sometimes in sector, geography, or thematic groups). These cohorts engage CEOs personally to develop and deliver innovative strategies and initiatives to accelerate change.

Peer pressure is an important lever for the success of the Champions of Change model. CEO cohorts meet once per quarter, and CEOs cannot delegate members to attend; attendance is recorded. At the same time, those supporting CEOs – dubbed implementers, or non-executive senior leaders – also assemble in a cohort to address the same topics as CEOs but strategize as to their implementation. Still a third role is that of a convenor – an ally and champion who is selected carefully to keep the CEO and implementers on track through “prompting, challenging, cajoling.” This person may help facilitate a leadership transition, for example, by onboarding new leadership on what is expected of them in terms of program participation.

To track progress, members voluntarily disclose key measures of inclusive gender equality. Of the 260 member organizations, 69 percent publicly disclosed gender equality targets and annual progress against them in 2023. These measures are self-reported and at the output level: Questionnaires ask companies about their progress in a number of domains, such as actions to highlight and address everyday sexism, strategy and policy to improve men's uptake of parental leave, and other indicators relevant to gender-equal workplaces.⁵²

One of Champions of Change's cohort groups is the Fire and Emergency Group, which has 30 members and one convenor from that male-dominated sector. Since the group's founding in 2018, its focus has been in two areas: one, growing the talent pools through the recruitment, promotion, and progression of women; and two, building buy-in for gender equality and fostering safe and inclusive workplace cultures, which includes respectful workplace environments.

“The special sauce is the CEO engagement. When it sits in HR – and this is tremendously important, of course – it can languish. When it sits with [the] CEO, then the HR piece also gets hugely elevated.”

–Champions of Change leader

Specific strategies to achieve this have included:

- In the NSW State Emergency Services, ensuring gender-balanced recruitment panels and the provision of inclusion training for all members, and replacing keywords in role titles (for example, replacing “commander” with “manager”)
- In Parks Victoria and Emergency Management Victoria, focusing on the sponsorship of women, pairing high-potential women with senior leaders across the sector to gain exposure to networks and opportunities that will support their development
- In Country Fire Authority Victoria, developing activities that increase access to both operational training and leadership development for women volunteers, such as Women’s Challenge Camps and Women’s Burn Days
- In several sites, a focus on cultures of inclusion and harassment

Since its founding, the group has seen an overall increase in women of 26.5 percent, with a specific increase of 33 percent achieved in key management personnel (CEO-1) and 38 percent in general manager roles; 41.2 percent of new hires across the group were women in 2022.⁵³

While masculinities and allyship are not explicit aims of current Champions of Change approaches, the coalition has sought the expertise of leaders in this field and will be piloting a program focused on masculinities in the sport group, with results to come later. Champions of Change also seeks to improve its approach to intersectionality, drawing on lessons from the United States and other places.

“Most initiatives focus solely on the nature and prevalence of exclusionary or discriminatory behavior and prescribe or mandate behavioral change. They don’t explore the root cause – the suboptimal beliefs and behaviors absorbed from an early age – or the harmful impact on those close to them: female colleagues. It’s a deeply personal, empathic approach eliciting a self-motivated desire to be part of the solution.”

–Male allyship practitioner, Australia

OXFAM US - UNITED STATES

During an Oxfam US (OUS) staff gender justice retreat in Lima, Peru, in 2018, word reached participants of a breaking story that Oxfam staff in Haiti had been accused of sexual abuse and exploitation.⁵⁴ The initial reaction of staff at the retreat was one of anger and disappointment, and colleagues quickly started to talk about their response, asking, “Where do we go with this?” It was a pivotal moment: A shocking crisis had created a sense of urgency among staff at OUS to start thinking about how to interrogate the power structures and systems that allowed rampant exploitation to occur at the hands of a leading human rights organization.

The idea to form a men's group evolved from this moment. The result was an OUS Male-Identified Group, later relabeled the **Men and Masculinities Group**, being set up in the Boston office. The group was centered on voluntary participation, initially by male-identifying employees only, in regular group meetings. A staff member led the group's coordination and facilitation.

The group was conceived simply as an exploratory space, with no clear sense of content or direction; the idea was to have a group in which transparency was everything and in which people could be “held accountable with love.” The group's facilitator made it clear that this process would only work with commitment – he put his cards on the table early on, telling the group, “I'm willing to work as a resource but only if you want to do this.” He also laid out the rationale for this group in no uncertain terms, emphasizing that this was not some glorified therapy or “men are victims, too” session but rather was designed to tackle toxic structural masculinity in the organization.

However, while OUS's Men and Masculinities Group was not set up with a blueprint and specific goals beyond a broad commitment to reflecting on masculinity in a feminist space, the process has been a supportive element of a wider gender justice policy and framework advanced through the organization.

“I explained, ‘This is not a space to complain about how tough it is for men. And we are not doing this as a selfish, capitalistic thing; we’re doing this work because we had a crisis and a broken system. We have to be better and talk about the issue, which is about imbalances of power in a capitalistic system.’”

–Senior gender advisor, Oxfam America

At the time of writing, the OUS Men and Masculinities Group had been running for some 5.5 years and had convened some 108 sessions. While triggered by the crisis, the initiative was also clearly anchored, in the eyes of the wider OUS community, in a broader policy commitment to gender justice under Oxfam's strategy for gender justice and inclusion. OUS's chief gender justice and inclusion officer in particular made this connection and flagged its importance.

What this tells us about initiatives, especially externally driven initiatives, is that the origin story, rationale, and motivation of members to contribute really matter, especially the motivations of senior leaders. Additionally, it seems highly significant to the effort's success and sustainability that the allyship process evolved organically from its inception – it wasn't imposed or heavily curated. As one group member put it: “It hasn't been a grand design with a curriculum and modules.”

One of these evolutions has been a shift from being men-only to fully inclusive of anyone who wants to join. The group evolved to understand masculinity as not belonging solely to men but rather something that everyone has within.⁵⁵

UNIVERSITY (ANONYMOUS) - UNITED KINGDOM

A university in the United Kingdom has a male allies initiative that has lasted more than six years. This university, which wished to remain anonymous, is a fast-paced, competitive, and highly diverse academic environment that has a longstanding women's leadership development initiative for its staff.

The impetus for starting the male allies program was the identification that despite this women's network existing and there being overall gender parity, significant gender diversity gaps remained in the upper echelons of the university, with men dominating senior positions. This data was hiding in plain sight but was not readily available or announced: Something was amiss in the "informal managerial psychology." Well-meaning senior men, identifying this, supported the creation of an allies initiative within the existing women's network.

The allies group's main output has been a series of workshops focused on skills development, leadership training, networking, and an annual conference facilitated by the women's network that allies group members are invited to. Any of the allies programming is open to the entire university community. A senior leader said the allies didn't have a clear mission or what objectives or goals they should have. In this case, the group decided to promote awareness of gender discrimination and bias, but has not gone beyond this to anything more ambitious. As the leader said: "The role of allies is not to steer the boat, but to do some of the rowing."

When the allies group first started, there was some pushback; some felt it was "self-congratulatory" when women still continued to struggle. However, over time, the genuine nature of the allyship group's leadership and accountability to the overall women's leadership network garnered support and trust. The success of the allies initiative can be attributed to the strong show of support from the institution, including by advertising the network on its own discrete web page, ensuring the network involves senior leaders, and providing funding to group activities. Moreover, every "network" at the university must have a senior manager sponsor, which gives staff a direct line to those in power.

"The representation of women at the higher levels has improved. Hopefully, male allies were helpful somewhere in doing that. But they [the suite of women's leadership initiatives] all create the conditions for other pieces of change. They create a set of expectations and a culture whereby other changes become easier."

–Senior leader, U.K. University

CLOSING

Based on the data collected for this study, we have presented some strategies for nurturing the development of workplaces where everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive.

The reality is that we are nowhere near achieving gender equality in the workplace, or in society, the world over; we are also not close to seeing equal representation of women in leadership positions. Feminist organizations and advocates have experienced dynamic tensions as they watch funding to male allyship and male engagement work increase or become a funding stream without norms and standards by which to measure their effectiveness or hold these efforts accountable.

The recommendations here reflect both the difficulty and the promise of effecting transformative change that dismantles systems of patriarchal privilege and increases the number of women in leadership positions in the workplace. Nowhere, throughout our inquiry, did we discover a male allyship initiative in a workplace that could be credited with transformative outcomes. It would take more research and case studies to conclude that this is the nature of all or even most male allyship work. In fact, Equimundo and Gender at Work's experiences of trying, trying, trying to conduct such transformative programs in workplaces and communities in nearly every corner of the globe have found that a holistic approach is necessary if real change is to be realized. Yes, there has been a wealth of interesting and progressive outcomes and discussions that have resulted from engaging men in attempts to address gender inequality. Yet, without a multifaceted approach – as we've discussed in this report – and without a courageous, bold, and determined intention to examine, understand, and address deep structures of organizational culture (from top to bottom), gender inequality will remain firmly in place.

We end, however, on a hopeful note: Everywhere, people are calling for a better world for themselves and their children and struggling against cynicism in the face of difficult global circumstances. Men, in particular, are looking to shed harmful notions of manhood that hinder their personal growth – too often, with disastrous ramifications for the entire planet and all who live on it. Progress toward gender equality is now seen as inevitable. Leaders can and should embrace these trends and create work environments that work for everyone.

“We have complex problems ahead of us – we need the brightest minds on this. This doesn't come from a narrow demographic, leadership, and mindset. How do we unleash that creativity and potential in an environment in which everyone feels they are playing a valued role?”

-Robert Baker, Potentia Talent Limited Consulting

RESOURCES

For companies wishing to develop male allyship initiatives inside their workplaces, there are a number of resources to recommend:

Methodologies

This comprehensive methodology can be implemented in your workplace by a workplace consultant or by your own staff.

- [Engaging Men for Gender Equality in the Workplace - Manual](#) (available in Arabic, English and Spanish): designed to engage both male and female employees in dynamic group activities and discussions, as well as individual reflections, to promote equitable, respectful, and collaborative corporate cultures.

Self-Paced Courses

Use these to learn more about allyship programs, and share with interested colleagues.

- [How to be an ally for gender equality? 45-minute introductory course](#)
- [Mainstreaming Male Allyship: An Action Guide for Business](#). Lengthier course designed to help companies go to the next step. Developed by Equimundo for the UN Global Compact.
- [Beyond Male Allies](#) 15-session lessons developed by Next Gen Men to move beyond allyship and step into more effective and inclusive leadership.
- [Allyship](#): Free, 7-module course designed specifically for the Canadian context by White Ribbon Canada

Note that to take these courses, you'll need to be a member of the UNGC. Join [here](#).

Organizations

We recommend the following firms that can facilitate longer-term change processes in concert with your organization's staff.

- [Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice](#) (Global)
- [Gender At Work](#) (Global)
- [International Center for Research on Women](#) (India)
- [John Hopkins Gender And Work Initiative](#) (U.S., Global)
- [MenEngage Alliance Africa](#) (Sub-Saharan Africa)

To be connected to any of these organizations, or to learn more about these methodologies, please contact the study team at contact@equimundo.org. We would be happy to share more!

Individuals Interviewed for this Study

We're grateful for the thought leadership provided by this amazing group of people!

We encourage you to follow their work and get in touch.

- [Robert Baker](#), Potentia Talent Limited Consulting (U.K.)
- [Srilatha Batliwala](#), CREA (India)
- [Dr. Michael Flood](#), Queensland University of Technology (Australia)
- [Dr. Michael Kaufman](#), Consultant and co-founder of the White Ribbon Campaign (Canada)
- [Fidèle Rutayisire](#), Rwandan Men's Resource Center (Rwanda & pan-Africa)
- [Dr. Ravi Verma](#), International Center for Research on Women, South Asia (India)
- [Dr. Meg Warren](#), Western Washington University (U.S.)
- [Dr. Wessel van den Berg](#), Equimundo (South Africa, Global)

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