

The more men know about work gender inequality, the more they act as advocates

blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2016/11/01/the-more-men-know-about-work-gender-inequality-the-more-they-act-as-advocates/

11/1/2016



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In the workplace and society, being male has innate advantages, even though this ‘[male privilege](#)’ can be difficult to see and recognise. This privilege is rooted in organisational [talent management](#) systems, which may be biased in ways that disadvantage women and promote people who mirror the current senior leadership team.

It can be hard for men to accept that they are in a privileged position by virtue of their gender.

Explaining why, Jeff Barth, Programme Director at Catalyst for [MARC](#) (Men Advocating Real Change), said: “We have all worked incredibly hard in order to resolve personal challenges and be successful. Because of this it can be difficult to recognise the unique advantages some may have in the workplace over others. By definition, privileges are the unearned assets or resources individuals carry that propel them forward. When these ‘assets’ go unrecognised, or are seen to be the norm, it is easy to overlook the challenges that those who lack access to privilege face.”

A 2009 Catalyst [study](#) found that almost three quarters of participants reported that many of the men they manage are either “unconcerned about issues of gender equality, did not see a compelling reason for becoming actively involved in gender initiatives or both.” This lethargy is one of the greatest barriers to getting men involved in the issue as well as a general lack of awareness and possible fears and concerns holding them back, including a zero-sum mentality, loss of status and the possibility of making mistakes.

The chief predictor, we found, of a man’s commitment to gender equality in the workplace is a sense of fair play. If men believe that the issue of women in senior leadership is a matter of fair play then they are more likely to actively support it. The more men know about gender inequalities, the more likely they are to act as advocates and to lead efforts to close the gender gap.

Men who serve as [champions or advocates](#) are powerful agents for change in the workplace. As the dominant group, they are in a prime position to influence cultural and organisational change.

Tadhg Young, Senior Vice President, [Head of Global Services](#) Ireland, State Street, said: “As there are often more men than women in the middle/top management positions in many organisations, a successful and sustained policy change is going to have a much higher chance of success when it is genuinely and actively supported by men in the organisation.”

A more balanced and equal workforce across all levels of business has many positive outcomes for men too. [Research](#) has shown they are happier and psychologically healthier when male norms are less pervasive in the workplace. “Increasingly, men are finding fulfilment in being both financial providers and caregivers to their children,” said [Jeanine Prime](#), Senior Vice President of Research at Catalyst who leads its ‘Engaging Men’ work. “And regardless of parental status men benefit from time spent outside of work, pursuing personal interests and maintaining key social relationships.”

Mr. Young explains how they approach the issue at [State Street](#): “When we are looking at our promotion pipeline, we probe and challenge if there is not a reasonable gender balance present. We also encourage flexible working options for staff [members] who want to continue contributing, but may have challenges with commuting or fixed hours.”

In 2012, Catalyst launched Men Advocating Real Change (MARC). [MARC](#) is a one-of-a-kind community created for professional men who share a common commitment to creating equitable and inclusive workplaces. While women are also welcome to participate, MARC primarily serves as a forum in which men engage in candid conversations about the role of gender in the workplace, and be inspired by insights and best practices to drive meaningful change.

All men can [take action](#) to support women in the workplace. On an individual level men can recognize that while the privileges that exist are not their fault, they can use their advantage and leadership to help support those without. We also need men to use the flexibility benefits that a company operates. These are not just for women with children but can positively help all employees. It sounds clichéd but we need workplaces to start conversations about these issues and to listen to all team members, while ensuring no-one is blamed or shamed.

“The rationale for gender balance in the workplace is clear: access to more diverse skills, attributes, and ways of thinking; reducing the risk of group-think; developing a reputation as an employer of choice for discerning graduates; and lowering turnover rates due to increased opportunities and career satisfaction,” concluded Tadhg Young.

Men are an essential [part of the solution](#) when it comes to gender equality in the workplace. We are calling on men to question male norms in the culture of an organisation and to partner with women to create more inclusive workplaces where all talent can thrive equally.



Notes:

- *The post gives the views of the author, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
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Allyson Zimmermann is Executive Director of [Catalyst Europe](#) leading the non-profit organization's strategy to create inclusive workplaces where women and all talent can advance.



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