



QUANTUM IMPACT GROUP

# GENDER EQUITY



**Beyond Good Intentions:  
How Allies Can Move from Passive Supporters  
to Active Leaders in Gender Equity**



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**Fiona** is passionate about supporting organisations to create cultures where everyone thrives and there are robust practices that enable all employees to reach their potential. She has a depth of experience as a senior leader, coach, and facilitator, which ensures that she understands the dynamics at play in organisations, the issues that get in the way of advancing the desired organisational change, and how to engage senior leaders in owning and driving the culture transformation to achieve the organisation's goals.

**Kate's** strong corporate experience and financial acumen combined with years of working as a consultant, facilitator, and coach provide a unique blend of skills and experience that guarantees practical and commercial outcomes for her clients. Kate's diverse professional and personal background means that she is well-positioned to coach and mentor leaders (both experienced and emerging) to get clear about their careers, have the confidence to ask for what they want and position themselves for success. Known for her direct and honest approach, Kate supports her clients to step out of their comfort zone, challenge the status quo and drive change for themselves and within their organisations.

Creating gender equity in our organisations is proving to be a tough challenge. Despite decades of good intentions, there is still a long way to go.

Instead of accepting the gender norms and default beliefs and assumptions that drive much of the corporate hierarchy, we are curious about the impact of allyship. What would happen if we really resourced leaders (particularly male leaders) to move beyond the barriers that can get in the way of supporting Gender Equity initiatives so that they could take a more active role in fast-tracking women's career progression?

In this document we explore the benefits of **Active Allyship**, the barriers and provide ten strategies to consider as you accelerate the leadership capability of leaders in your organisation:

- **The State of Play: Where are We Now?**
- **Why Allyship Matters: Why We Can't Afford for Men to Stay Silent**
- **The Benefits: Why We Should Act Now**
- **Active vs. Passive Allyship: Understanding the Distinction**
- **Barriers to Active Male Allyship**
- **Strategies to Foster A Culture of Active Allyship**
- **Conclusion**
- **Links to other articles and resources**



# Beyond Good Intentions: How Men Can Move from Passive Supporters to Active Leaders in Gender Equity

Despite good intentions, we remain a depressingly long way from gender equity, which the World Economic Forum predicts won't be achieved until 2158, a staggering 133 years from now (i)

If we accept that bold action is required to activate systemic and structural change, then that action must be driven by the most powerful people in the current system, which, in most cases, remains older white men. When men actively challenge bias or disrespectful behaviour and champion inclusivity, they disrupt the system and model the possibility of sustainable change.

The good news? Among men who actively participate in Allyship, 97% report that it has made them better leaders and human beings (ii). The case for engagement is clear, but turning passive supporters into active allies requires understanding the current landscape and addressing the barriers that hold men back.

To learn more click [here](#) for the full article.



# The State of Play: Where are We Now?

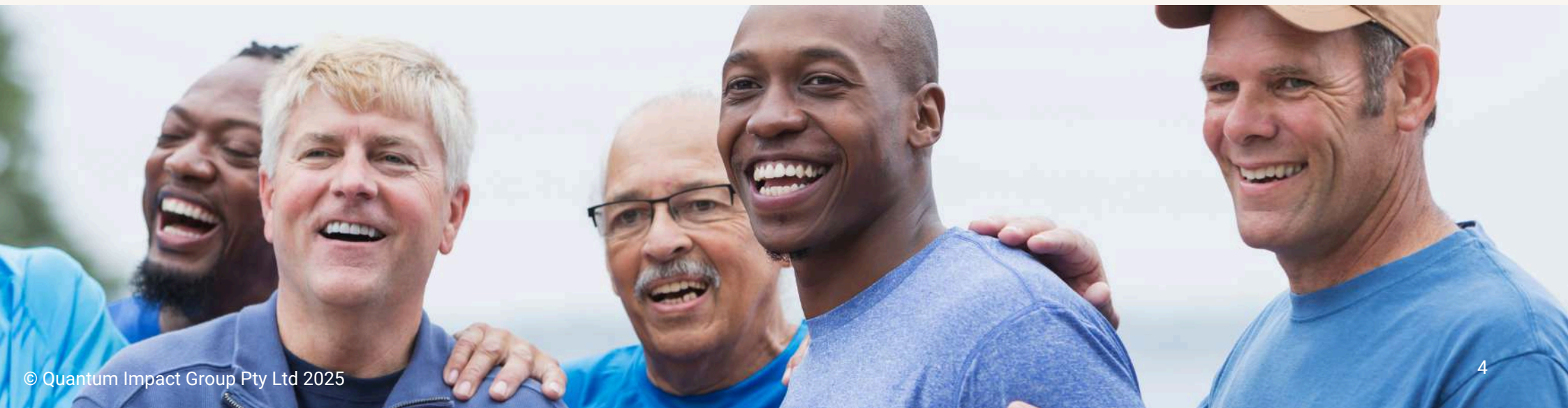
## Generational Perspectives

**Younger Men (Millennials/Gen Z):** Can often see gender equity as a "solved" issue having witnessed visible progress in their lifetime and a perceived focus on women in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives. They can be unaware of the systemic and gender bias challenges women continue to face today, and think that gender equality in the workplace has largely been achieved. An IPOS 2024 report notes that 60% of Gen Z men agree with the statement 'equality is going so far it discriminates against men' (iii).

**Mid-Career Men (Gen X):** These men have witnessed the career challenges faced by their partners, friends, sisters and female colleagues (the norms and expectations that have impeded career progression). These personal connections create a mix of silent supporters and vocal allies. At the same time there are some in this middle layer who resent the focus on women and can be viewed as passive detractors.

**Senior Leaders (Boomers):** May be influenced by the experiences and challenges their daughters and granddaughters have, offering a unique opportunity to connect through personal stories. Men who have daughters or have personally known women who faced discrimination are more likely to engage in gender equality discussions. In fact, 42% of the respondents in one study had daughters, and many cited this as a key motivator for their awareness of gender equity issues. These family relationships create powerful opportunities for engagement (iv).

The greatest opportunity lies with the 'silent majority'; men who hold a neutral perspective or are not consciously aware of the ongoing challenges and opportunities women face, who could be shifted from passive to active allies through targeted engagement.



# Male Allyship Matters: Why We Can't Afford for Men to Stay Silent

Gender equity is not just a women's issue; it's a leadership, business, and economic priority. Without active male engagement, workplaces lose top talent, innovation suffers, and economic potential remains untapped.

## Economic Impacts:

- **Decreased Productivity & Financial Performance:** Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 25% more likely to outperform financially than their peers (v).
- **The \$128 Billion Economic Gap:** Australia's economy could gain \$128 billion by removing gender-based barriers to workforce participation (vi).
- **Innovation and Risk:** Without diverse leadership, companies lose market opportunities, as diverse employees provide perspectives that can broaden understanding and reveal untapped markets.

## Organisational Impacts:

- **Talent Drain:** When women perceive that their career progression or fair remuneration is not matching their male peers, they look for opportunities with organisations that can demonstrate a commitment to gender equity.
- **Reputational Damage:** Procurement and hiring decisions increasingly favour gender-equitable organisations. Failing to act means losing business and top talent.
- **Reinforcing Stereotypes (and Culture):** When men don't actively challenge bias, discrimination persists, impacting the careers of women and other marginalised groups.



# The Benefits: Why We Should Act Now

The goal of gender equity is not just fairness, it's about unlocking the full potential of all individuals, businesses, and economies. When leaders challenge bias, advocate for equitable policies, and model inclusive leadership, they break echo chambers, amplify diverse voices, and create stronger, high-performing teams.

## Stronger Leadership & Workplace Impact

**Legacy & Leadership Growth:** Gender equity is one of the defining leadership challenges of our time. Male allies develop higher emotional intelligence, making them more effective leaders in today's diverse workplaces.

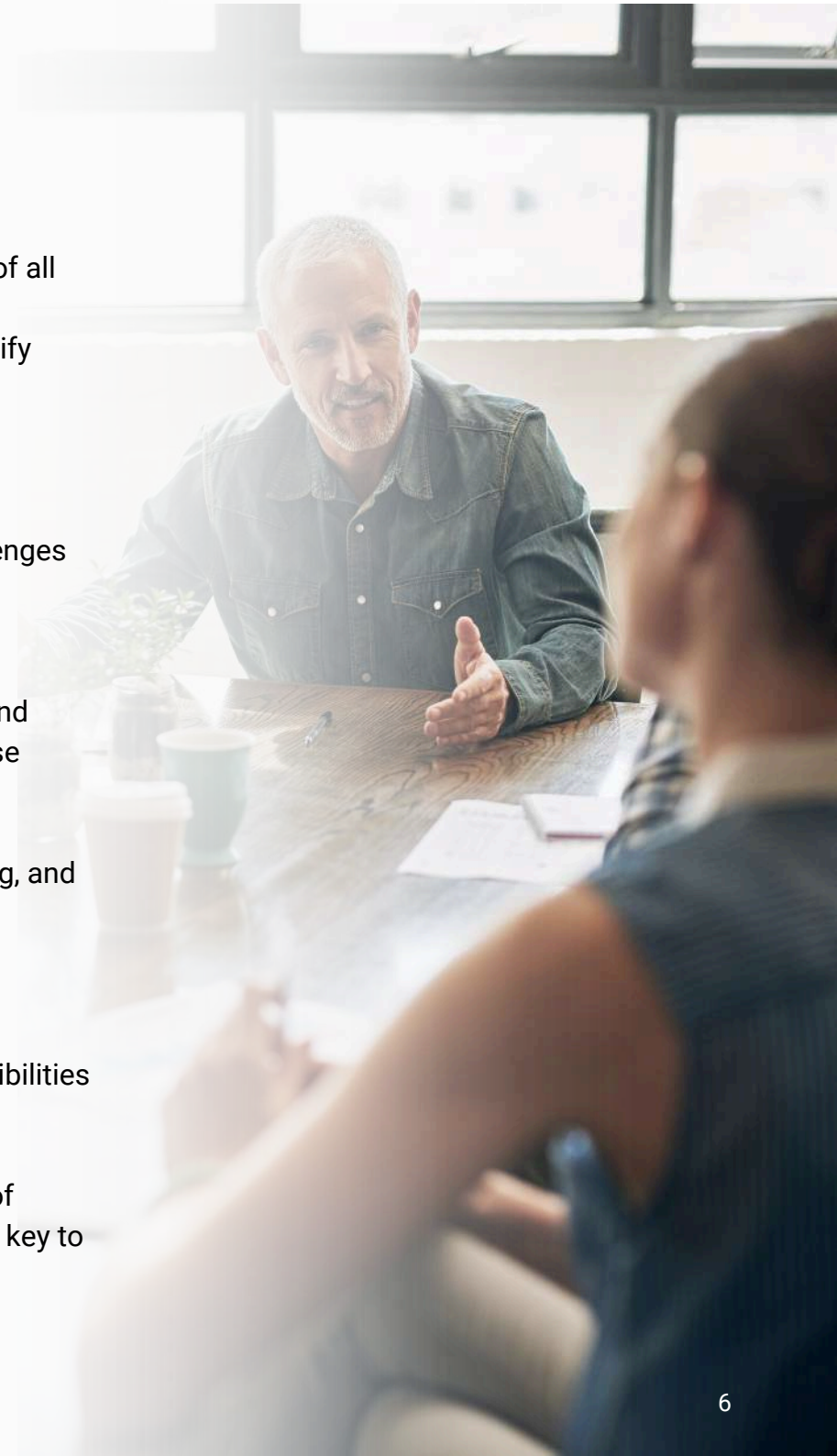
**A Stronger Talent Pipeline:** When men advocate for equitable hiring, promotions, and mentorship, more women move into leadership, creating a more resilient and diverse workforce.

**High-Performing, Innovative Teams:** Diverse teams drive creativity, problem-solving, and engagement, avoiding groupthink and stagnation.

## Societal & Personal Benefits

**Work-Life Balance & Well-Being:** Men who share caregiving and domestic responsibilities report higher life satisfaction, stronger relationships, and improved mental health.

**Reducing Harassment & Gender-Based Violence:** Gender equity creates a culture of respect, leading to safer workplaces and communities. Men's active involvement is key to breaking cycles of discrimination and violence.







# Active vs. Passive Allyship: Understanding the Distinction

Active Allyship involves intentional, consistent actions to support and advocate for marginalised or under-represented groups. In contrast, passive Allyship is characterised by a lack of action; individuals may agree with the principles of equality but do not take steps to address unfair practices or discrimination. Men often say they are unsure what to do, so providing examples and clarity of what active Allyship looks like is important.

## Supporting a Woman to Be Visible Example

- **Passive Allyship:** A male colleague notices that a woman's idea was ignored in a meeting, but later a man repeats it and gets credit. He **recognises the bias but does nothing** to address it.
- **Active Allyship:** Instead of staying silent, he immediately interjects and says, "Actually, that was Sarah's idea. I think we should hear more from her on this." He also makes a point to **amplify women's voices consistently in meetings**.

*Passive Allyship is believing in equality but not taking action.*

*Active Allyship is deliberately using your influence to create fairer workplaces, communities, and households*

To learn more and see examples click [here](#) for the full article.

# Barriers to Active Male Allyship

While many men express support for gender equality in principle, some feel they lack the knowledge and fear backlash if they 'get it wrong' or risk exclusion with their peers. McKinsey's *Women in the Workplace* report notes that managers play a central role in women's career advancement and daily work experiences, yet less than half of women involved reported getting help from their managers to advance or navigate work challenges(vii).

Some of the factors that contribute to men's reluctance to engage actively in gender equity efforts include:

## 1. Fear of Social Repercussions

Men may fear backlash or ostracism from peers when confronting sexist behaviours or advocating for equity. There's a difference between knowing something is the right thing to do and having a corporate culture that overtly supports and encourages you to take aligned action.

## 2. Uncertainty & Lack of Knowledge

Many men support gender equality in principle but are unsure how to take meaningful action. There is a knowledge gap around gender bias, privilege, and systemic barriers that disproportionately affect women. Some worry about saying the wrong thing or making mistakes, leading them to remain silent rather than risk criticism.

## 3. Lack of Organisational Focus or Incentives

In many workplaces, allyship is not tied to leadership expectations or performance evaluations.

Without clear metrics for measuring inclusive leadership behaviours, many male leaders do not recognise the importance of prioritising gender equity efforts.

## 4. Perceived Threat to Status or Power

Some men subconsciously see gender equity efforts as a threat to their own career progression. One of the underlying factors explaining men's ambivalence to gender equity can be related to the fact that as the higher-status group in society, men might be seen as having more to lose than to gain from gender equality (viii).

## 5. Cultural Norms & Masculinity Expectations

Traditional masculinity norms discourage men from engaging in "emotional" or "equity-focused" conversations. In male-dominated industries, allyship is often not modelled or reinforced, making it feel risky or unfamiliar.

## 6. Global and Cultural Variations

Approaches to gender equity vary significantly across cultures and geographic regions. What constitutes effective allyship in one cultural context may not translate to another, requiring nuanced, locally relevant approaches.

## 7. Lack of Exposure to Women's Experiences

Men who have not personally witnessed gender bias, either through colleagues, friends, or family—may struggle to grasp its impact and the importance of countering that.



# Strategies to Foster A Culture of Active Allyship

So, what is the answer? How do we encourage more men to engage in supporting gender equity? The following begins a list of strategies to promote active engagement by allies in your organisation:

## 1. Co-Creation, Not Saviorism

The best male allies use their influence to elevate women's voices, drive policy change, and challenge bias—without dominating the conversation. They recognise that their role is to elevate and amplify women's voices and impact, providing opportunities for women to step into more visible leadership roles.

## 2. Engage Men at All Levels

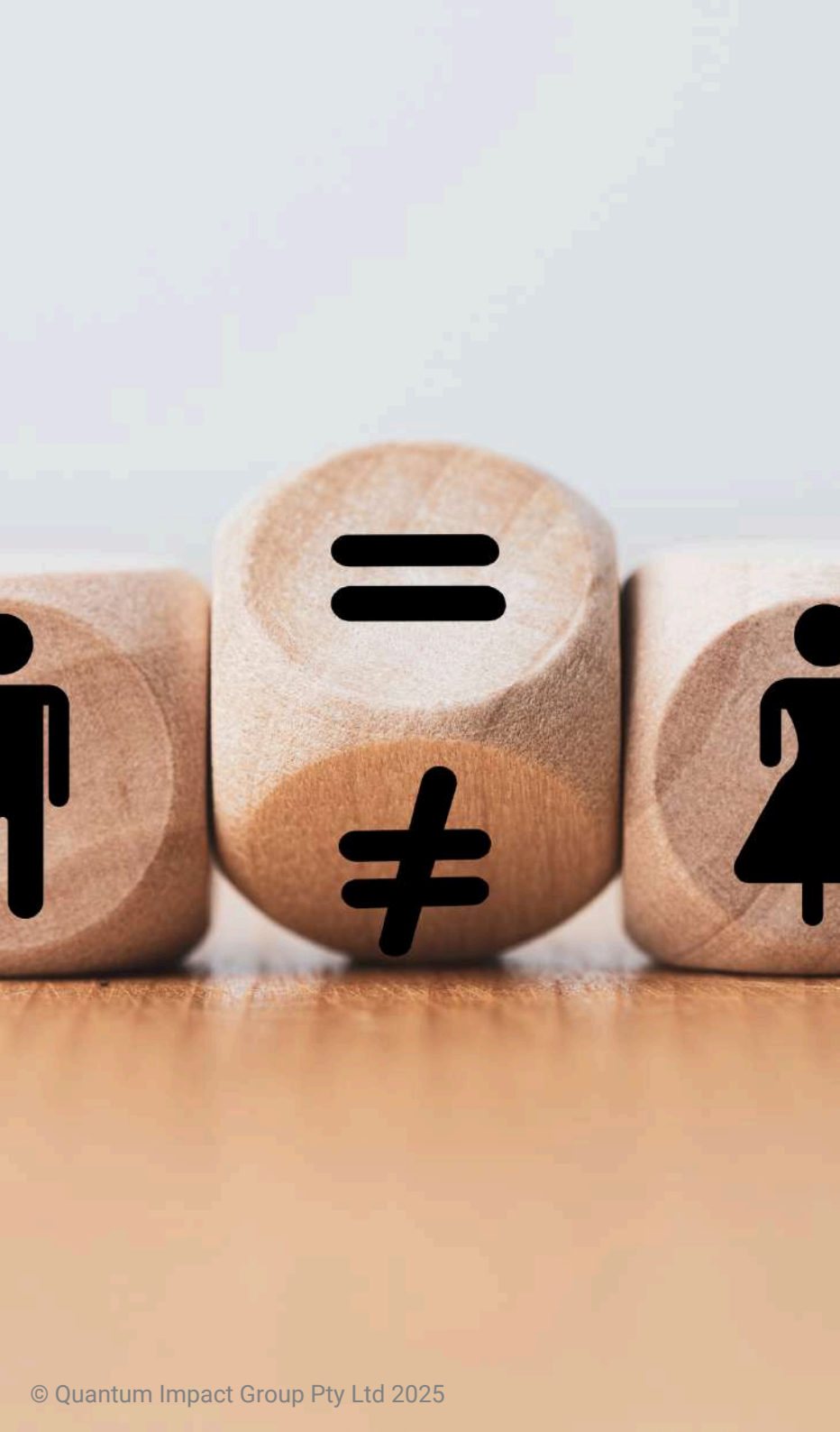
Encourage executives to openly support gender equity. When male leaders visibly commit to and practice allyship, it sets a powerful example for others to follow.

## 3. Education and Awareness

Development programs that focus on unconscious bias, privilege, and the tangible benefits of gender equity equip men with the knowledge and tools to act; these sessions need to include space for reflection and shared understanding. When organisations equip middle-level leaders with the skills and confidence to lead inclusively, they become drivers of system change.

To learn more and see examples click [here](#) for the full article.





#### **4. Creating Safe Spaces for Dialogue & Highlight the Benefits of Gender Equity:**

Create dedicated forums where men can openly discuss gender-related issues in a judgment-free environment, fostering honest conversations and personal growth. By framing gender norms and biases as societal influences that have shaped everyone, rather than assigning blame, men are more likely to engage in self-reflection and see the issue from a new perspective. These discussions require time, sensitivity, and careful facilitation, as they involve unpacking deeply ingrained beliefs and cultural expectations.

As part of this process, men are often surprised to realise how much they have given up in pursuit of their career and the cost to themselves, their personal and professional relationships as well as their own mental health and well-being.

#### **5. Measurable Accountability with Clear Calls to Action**

Provide men with specific steps they can take daily, rather than offering vague encouragement or expectations. Implement specific metrics to track allyship effectiveness that may include:

- Percentage of men participating in mentorship and sponsorship programs
- Promotion rates for women in teams with active male allies
- Engagement scores for women on teams with male leaders trained in allyship
- Retention rates for female talent in departments with strong male ally presence

Highlight and reward male leaders and teams that demonstrate a sustained commitment to gender equity.

## 6. Activate Through Personal Connection

Use storytelling and lived experiences to inspire action among neutral or passive men. When senior men share stories of what awakened their awareness and interest in creating gender-balanced workplaces, they make it safe for others to engage in more active allyship.

## 7. Address Technology and Remote Work Dynamics

As workplaces become increasingly digital, it's important that male allies are conscious of the ways in which virtual environments can exacerbate gender biases:

- Ensuring equal speaking time in virtual meetings; invite those who are quieter to provide input and ask questions
- Monitoring digital communication patterns for inclusive language. Be aware that sometimes without meaning language can be patronising, sexist, or racist
- Advocating for equitable technology access and training; ensure that everyone is able to upskill across new platforms and technology
- Address "proximity bias" that may disadvantage remote workers, who are disproportionately women

## 8. Organisational Policies and Commitments

Some organisations have started tying gender equity efforts to key performance indicators (KPIs), ensuring that leaders are held accountable for fostering inclusive environments. This structural approach not only incentivises active participation but also embeds gender equity into the organisational culture.

To learn more and see examples click [here](#) for the full article.







## 9. Intersectional Approaches

While gender equity is a great place to start, it is valuable to recognise that effective allyship must address multiple dimensions of identity:

- Provide education on how gender intersects with race, sexuality, disability, and other factors
- Tailor allyship strategies to support women with different identities and experiences
- Engage men from diverse backgrounds as allies to bring varied experiences and perspectives. In our work, we have often seen that **men who are part of a marginalised or under-represented group, are active allies because they share the experience of being overlooked by the dominant senior group.**

## 10. The Role of Single-Gender Educational Initiatives

Research indicates that men are more likely to engage deeply and authentically in discussions about gender when they are initially in male-only groups, this reduces the fear of saying the wrong thing and allows for honest reflection and growth.

Similarly, women's single-gender forums play a crucial role in rebalancing the system, addressing cultural and societal conditioning, and fast-tracking women's development in leadership contexts. This work is vital to ensuring we create sustainable pipelines of female talent.

Having worked, consulted and facilitated in this area for many years, we have seen the transformational impact of programs that go beyond tactical skills, and address the mindsets, beliefs and assumptions that hold women back. This transformative work resources women to become change agents within their organisations, and when complemented by male allies, supercharges progress towards gender equity. To find out more about our work in this area download our summary guide [here](#).

# Conclusion

The path to gender equity requires more than good intentions - it demands active participation from men at all levels of organisations and society. By addressing the barriers that prevent men from becoming active allies and implementing targeted strategies to foster engagement, we can accelerate progress toward a more equitable world.

The evidence is clear: when men move from passive support to active allyship, organisations thrive, women advance, and men themselves benefit from more inclusive and balanced workplaces.

As reported in the Saturday Paper recently, the Chief Executive of Rio Tinto's iron ore division Simon Trott told an audience this month that "we've got to do a better job explaining how diversity benefits us all" (ix).

Every person has a part to play in this shift and every day provides opportunities to take action, regardless of position or influence. By reinforcing the benefits to men of creating greater gender equity for the organisation, for society for our communities, we encourage them to take small, consistent actions, which can create powerful ripple effects.

**Let's commit to moving beyond good intentions to create a gender-equal world - one where all people can thrive and contribute their full potential.**





# Links to End Notes and Full Articles

## References:

- i) <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2024-2e5f5cd886/>
- ii) <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/598d8fb5e3df28d7f216e464/t/67b5b92342f53742b3b1c541/1739962665295/MaleAllyshipSurvey%28Feb%2725%29.pdf>
- iii) <https://www.ipsos.com/en/millennials-and-gen-z-less-favour-gender-equality-older-generations>
- iv) <https://www.management-issues.com/news/7644/male-employees-reluctant-to-engage-with-gender-equality-initiatives/>
- v) <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>
- vi) <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/womens-economic-equality-taskforce-final-report.pdf>
- vii) <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>
- viii) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10940445/#sec3>
- ix) <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2025/03/01/how-trumps-war-diversity-spilling-over-australia#login>

## Full Articles:

- [Beyond Good Intentions: How Men Can Move from Passive Supporters to Active Leaders in Gender Equity](#)
- [Women in Leadership programs: Transactional vs Transformational](#)
- [Women's Economic Empowerment, Work Force Participation and Closing the Gender Pay Gap](#)
- [Psychosocial Safety: unpacking the opportunities and risks](#)
- [Choosing to Challenge – The Ripple Effect of Speaking Up](#)
- [Innovation, Risk & Gender Equity](#)





## Next Steps

The fastest way to create a culture where gender equity is celebrated and supported is to ensure you have a sustainable pipeline of female talent and to resource leaders (particularly male leaders) to see the gaps, to recognise bias and blindspots and to take action.

Our facilitated round table discussions allow you to explore the pathways forward, the interventions and practices that will provide you with a brand leadership opportunity - to be an employer of choice, to have strong retention rates, to be innovative, productive and able to adapt well to market and internal challenges. Reach out to talk to us about how we can support you to go beyond intentions to creating a culture where everyone thrives.



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