

Engaging Men in Diversity: The Science of Effective Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

Organizational diversity initiatives rely on the unique role of men as gender equality advocates. This study leverages social psychologist Kurt Lewin's heuristic behavioral formula ($B=f(P,E)$) to bring men into workplace inclusion efforts. It is an academically-developed, practical guide toward changing behaviors in order to include men in the diversity agenda.

AUDIENCE

Appropriate for all levels of professionals who are interested in expanding their inclusion efforts to involve men. The ideal audience is women and men who seek to drive meaningful, science-based organizational change.

INTRODUCTION

"Male Advocates" for gender equality is an increasingly growing area of focus in the workplace, yet academic research on how to effectively change behavior of men in the workplace has not been readily applied.

Social psychologist Kurt Lewin states that behavior change is a function of both "person" and "environment" ($B = f(P,E)$), a heuristic formula drawn directly from field theory.

This study employs Lewin's formula to show actionable tips for how to involve men at the "person" (individual) and "environmental" (organizational culture) levels to drive change. The research project was granted direct access to a global financial services company's leadership team to understand what the most senior-level men are doing to champion diversity at the company, and the study has made meaning of these strategies using behavioral psychology. In addition, the study gathered survey data about male employee's attitudes toward feminism, female mentorship and the role of men in order to provide actionable data for workplace change; relevant statistics will be offered as part of this presentation.

Finally, the study follows this organization through several "interventions" that are geared at changing mindsets of men, which will be highlighted as part of the actionable outcomes for participants to take away.

$$B = f(P, E)$$

Kurt Lewin's behavioral heuristic formula

Research Study:

This was a two-part action research study:

For Part 1 (1:1 Interviews), 12 company senior leaders were selected, including men at the Board level, Senior Management Suite and other senior executives. They were selected based on recommendations from HR or diversity professionals as being an effective male leader for gender equality.

For Part 2 (Survey), a survey was administered to 45 male leaders: Men who had enrolled in a workshop about promoting male advocacy, and men who signed up to be part of the company's "Women in Technology" network. In line with Catalyst corporation's guidance, the survey was administered to those males who already had shown some interest in promoting gender equality. This approach was chosen given the objective of the study was to look at how to drive positive change, so these men's attitudes were likely to be more representative of "good" advocates.

OUTCOMES/CONCLUSION

Key takeaways from the research are practical actions rooted in social psychology, to engage men and specifically change male behavior toward advocacy.

The actions provided are purposefully distinct from, yet complementary to, industry research (Catalyst, 2009, Greatheart, 2013). All actions in this paper have been developed through a critical lens of Lewin's behavior formula $B = f(P, E)$.

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These actions are highlighted below by Person (Individual) and Environment (Organizational Context).

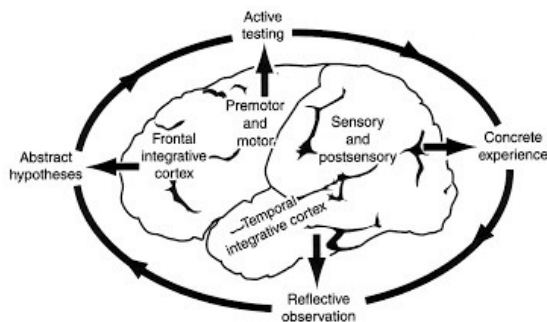
P – Person Factors:

(1) Nearly all senior leaders cited a salient epiphany that led them to be a male champion of gender equality.

11 out of 12 senior leaders cited a strong personal epiphany (“a-ha moment”) as their case for supporting diversity. In further discussion with these men, it appeared that these a-ha moments weren’t necessarily the ONLY turning point in changing their behavior, but were salient enough to help men make meaning of their visible commitment to diversity. David Kolb’s (1984) learning styles model provides an application of Reflective Practice, which is critical to making meaning of learning.

As such, organizations should be encouraged to help men actively make meaning of their experiences with diversity, through becoming reflective practitioners – forums, 1:1 coaching and “judgment-free” group discussions (male-only) can help hone this critical skill for potential male advocates.

ACTION: Offer Reflective Practice to allow men to “code” diversity-related experiences into the brain.



Reflective Observation in practice: From Zull, J. (2002) The Art of Changing the Brain. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing

(2) All senior leaders were strong storytellers.

All men interviewed offered at least 2 stories to illustrate their commitment to diversity. As corporate “improv training” and storytelling have now become an industry trend in leadership development (Monarath, H., 2014); organizations should encourage

male leaders to become adept at descriptive narration.

Organizational learning psychologist Donald Schön (1988) discussed storytelling as critical to transformational change: “...storytelling is the mode of description best suited to transformation in new situations of action.... When we get into the habit of recording our stories, we can look at them again, attending to the meanings we have built into them.”

ACTION: Train potential male advocates in becoming visible and adept at descriptive narration.

E – Environmental Factors:

(3) A very small number of male leaders emerged as true “legends” in championing diversity.

All 12 interviewees were active, visible male champions of diversity, yet two (2) male senior leaders from this group were continually cited by the others as “true champions”. These men’s reputations emerged repeatedly, almost as a multiplier for change – it seemed even having proximity and previous encounters to these 2 individuals gave other interviewees a strong sense of comfort and purpose in their own efforts.

Part 2 followed-up by anonymously asking survey participants to name a visible male leader of diversity: 80% of respondents (n=44) cited at least 1 of these 2 men. For organizational change to take hold, leadership is one of the most critical factors (Pasmore, B., 2014), upon which the individual qualities of leaders is paramount – as such, leveraging these “corporate legends” can create a place of environmental comfort while also being an accelerator for inspirational, forward-thinking.

ACTION: Leverage these inspiring leaders to drive change and create a culture of diversity acceptance in the organization.

(4) Some senior leaders stated “they have nothing to lose” by promoting diversity; acknowledging that this may not be the case for middle-management.

Male middle-managers may have more difficulty in understanding how promoting gender equality can help, not hurt them. (Senior leadership has already reached the top, some men acknowledged that they are “safe” from being threatened by a position going to a woman). As such, we leverage Catalyst

corporation's research study which encourages inclusion efforts to not paint diversity as a zero-sum game (e.g. by rewarding those who foster and retain diverse talent, instead of setting those individuals in competition with said talent).

ACTION: Messaging to middle-management men must be targeted and purposeful in order to counter zero-sum thinking.

(5) Men who had a professional female role model or female mentor were statistically more likely to cite the importance of supporting advancement of women in the workplace.

Actions around this finding come with some caution, as this research also showed that by and large, women still carry out the diversity & inclusion agenda as executors (either in formal "champion" roles, or informally by serving as mentors and coaches, in addition to their day jobs). Yet, while we cannot infer causation, there is a direct correlation with having female mentors and a male's support of women in the workplace. As such, creating systems to provide women to mentor men can help change mindsets of male colleagues; in particular the study recommends creating mentor pairs that are based around functional and technical skills.

ACTION: Provide organizational initiatives that allow for men to be meaningfully (functionally / technically) mentored by a female colleague.

BIO

Rachana Bhide is a leadership development and change management expert, with 16+ years of organizational change consulting experience in the United States and Europe. She obtained her M.A. in organizational psychology from Columbia University, upon which the research for "*Engaging Men in Diversity: The Science of Effective Inclusion*" was built.

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