The role of men in gender equality

Why gender equality is not solely a female domain
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Gender inequality and the gender pay gap – these are not women’s issues. Whilst disproportionately affecting women as opposed to men, these are human issues and are therefore for all of us to bear. Men and women. To eliminate these injustices for future generations, we need the entire population to see gender inequality as an issue for the human race that requires each and every one of us to make a stand and take action, regardless of gender.”

Women have done so much in advancing the cause for gender equality, but we cannot let the burden of challenge, change and progress sit with women alone. Admittedly, as an organisation, our expertise lies elsewhere, so to empower our people, enrich our workplace culture, and take a more proactive role in closing the gap and driving change, we sought out experts and advocates in the field of gender diversity.

In this white paper, “The Role of Men in Gender Equality”, we seek to understand the gender equality landscape through the lens of the workplace, focusing on the role men have played in the past, and can play in the future, in driving gender equality. We learn the stats and facts that frame the problem, and explore how we can challenge work stereotypes that negatively affect both women and men, discuss proven core principles that drive change and examine the role leadership plays in sustaining that change. Many of these concepts are pulled together in a case study on Benetas, an aged care service provider that has made remarkable progress developing gender balance and challenging stereotypes in a traditionally female-dominated industry.

Overall, the message was loud and clear: to achieve gender equality in society, we must achieve gender equality in the workplace. And to achieve gender equality in the workplace, we need men, alongside their female colleagues, to step up and play a more proactive role in driving change. I know the clarity these learnings have brought our organisation; I hope that this white paper provides you with some useful tools to help further drive that change within your own organisation.

About this white paper: Smartgroup Corporation commissioned Storyation to research and write this white paper to help us, and our clients, learn more about the role of men in driving gender equality in the workplace.
There is a growing understanding that gender equality is an issue that affects everyone and, as such, needs to involve everyone. While the conversation used to be around women driving change, it is now increasingly accepted that both men and women have a responsibility to make gender equality a reality in the workplace, in the home and in the community. It means men need to be just as proactive in taking steps to contribute to changes, to stand by women and shape the future. The role they play in gender equality is crucial.

Historically, the fight for equal rights has been led by women, for women. The suffragette movement in the late 19th century saw women protest in the streets to win the right to vote. In the 1970s, second-wave feminists agitated for sexual freedom, reproductive rights and workplace equality. Third-wave and fourth-wave feminism broadened the debate to tackle issues such as violence against women, maternity leave conditions, and the glass ceiling blocking women’s career progression.

Today, women are still pushing for change by eliminating the gender pay gap, joining executive boards and stamping out sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Yet there is a remarkable difference in modern discussions on women’s rights.

In the current phase, men are joining the chorus in steadily growing numbers. Male advocacy groups, politicians, artists and industry leaders are urging men to speak out on issues of gender equality for their own benefit as well as women’s. As these men inspire other men to challenge the entrenched problems of inequality, they are working towards a better future for themselves as well as women.

**Changing work stereotypes**

Women in Australia have made major inroads into workplace gender equality. However, they still experience inequality around pay and promotion opportunities, and they still encounter formal and informal discrimination.

Australia’s pay gap is calculated at 15.3 per cent and in the past two decades has only reached a low of 15 per cent. In practice, this means the average full-time employed woman takes home $251.20 less than her male equivalent each week.¹

Recent laws have attempted to redress this imbalance. Under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012, all non-public-sector employers with 100 or more employees in their corporate structure are required to report to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency annually. They must report on a set

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of gender equality indicators, including gender composition of the workforce and equal remuneration between women and men.²

Women are still overrepresented in part-time work in low-paid industries, and underrepresented in leadership roles in the private and public sectors.³

However, efforts across the corporate sector to break up “the boys' club” has seen the percentage of women on ASX 200 boards rise to 26.2 per cent in 2017, up from 8.3 per cent in 2009.⁴ The Australian Institute of Company Directors wants all boards to ensure 30 per cent of their directors are female and aims to hit this target by the end of 2018.⁵ Seventy boards reached this threshold by the end of 2017, but eight still have no women at all.⁶

**Gender inequality cuts both ways**

As much as women suffer from the effects of gender inequality, there are also serious problems for men. Skewed representations of masculinity put men under pressure to show physical and emotional strength and to provide financially as the family “breadwinner”.⁷

Men have a greater tendency not to recognise or respond to their own negative emotions, and this may result in more chronic and severe emotional responses to adverse life events.⁸ Psychologists believe this is among the leading reasons far more men commit suicide than women. Death by suicide was ranked 10th in the leading causes of death for Australian men in 2016 and suicide among males was three times higher than it was for females.⁹

Just like women, men also face workplace bias. Men who follow career paths in caring roles traditionally held by women can be subjected to discrimination. For example, men account for only 5 per cent of Australia’s early childhood education and care workforce and are dramatically under-represented in the maternal child and health workforce.¹⁰ And despite 57 per cent of upper-secondary teachers being women, only 39 per cent of principals are female.¹¹

All this illustrates just how gender inequality can be a challenge for both men and women, and how vitally they need each other to create change.

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Bringing more men into the gender equation

Making the workplace a fair and level playing field for women means better outcomes for men and women alike. Workplace gender equality is not only the just and right thing to do, it’s linked to better economic performance. Workplace gender parity is associated with improved national productivity and economic growth, increased organisational performance, enhanced corporate ability to attract talent and retain employees, and a better organisational reputation.12

Fundamental change, however, needs careful preparation. Formal, documented strategies help support businesses that are aiming to achieve equality among male and female employees and, crucially, expand the role of men in the equation.

Gender-equality plans may be new to Australia’s private sector, but are becoming a more common corporate tool. In Finland and Sweden, gender-equality plans are already enshrined in workplace law.13 Gender-equality policies identify and clarify the specific changes organisations need to achieve. They also act as an agenda that sets out the steps for managing and measuring change.

Some employers may see developing a gender-equality plan as more red tape. But they could also view it as an opportunity to grow and diversify the organisation, as well as ensure senior male managers take an active stake in any policies. By clearly communicating expectations and standards between managers and employees, these sorts of plans can create workplaces in which women and men are equally represented, valued and rewarded.14

Workplace gender segregation

There are many old-fashioned assumptions about workplaces that suit men and women. These stereotypes can be linked to the dominance of women in health care and education, and the overrepresentation of men in scientific and technical roles.

The male/female segregation in workforces is partly to blame for Australia’s persistent gender gap. It also causes other substantial economic and social impacts.

Female-dominated industries can often perpetuate the vulnerability of female workers, while industries with male-dominated management and executive leadership are more prone to complaints of sexual harassment and sex discrimination.15

It’s widely acknowledged that breaking down these conventions can offer huge economic benefits to companies and rewarding careers for individuals. Eliminating stereotypes around what is “men’s work” and what is “women’s work” means people can choose careers that best fulfil their potential. This starts with encouraging more men to work in professions dominated by women and more women to work in professions dominated by men.

However, this is a complex issue. Male-dominated industries are more highly paid than female-dominated industries, discouraging many men from pursuing careers in roles such as nursing, teaching and aged care. By the same token, rates of pay increase when more men enter a female-dominated industry.16

Views of gender and work can also arise from the way children learn about gender. Gender norms start to shape children’s sense of self and impact on their lives immediately:

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12Workplace Gender Equity Agency, About Workplace Gender Equality, (date undisclosed) 13Eurofound, Gender equality plans at the workplace, 2004 14Workplace Gender Equity Agency, Developing a workplace gender equality policy, (date undisclosed) 15Australian Human Rights Commission, Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women’s economic equality, 2017 16The Age, More men need to be recruited to female-dominated industries, 2016
many children quickly define jobs and activities as specific to either boys or girls.17

Shifting long-held gender stereotypes from an early age is intimately entwined with changing attitudes to workplace gender equality more broadly. Positive intergenerational impacts of this shift extend far beyond where people are employed.

Eliminating gender lines

Gender equality plans are key tools in encouraging future generations and, to a lesser extent, current generations, to think broadly about their career choices and not be constrained by entrenched gender labels. These plans are the framework that enable diverse workplaces to capture the brightest and best job candidates, no matter their gender.

Key features of effective gender-equity plans include:

• Providing equal pay for work of equal or comparable value as a central tenet of gender equality in the workplace. Equal pay creates a fair and respectful workplace, a motivated and productive workforce and improves staff retention, thereby reducing turnover costs.18

• Offering flexible work arrangements for men and women. This allows staff to balance caring responsibilities with work and participate more in family life. When employees can choose when, how and where they work, they are generally happier and more productive. Recent research shows men who take advantage of flexible conditions report experiencing negative judgements or repercussions for their career progression,19 so it’s vital for employers to promote flexible arrangements to men.

• Establishing gender-neutral job structures and role descriptions. Jobs should minimise stereotypical masculine and feminine attributes, while application and hiring information should be gender neutral.20

• Integrating gender equality into workplace culture, training and education. This supports employees, regardless of their gender, to choose jobs that are future-oriented and promising.21

• Developing effective communication and consultation, ensuring the business case for gender equality is understood and embraced at all levels of the organisational.22

• Challenging and addressing barriers to female or male career progression.

• Evaluating performance fairly. Gender-blind studies show that removing gender from decisions improves women’s chances of success.23

Organisations following the Workplace Gender Equality Agency reporting guidelines are perhaps best placed to prepare gender-equality policies. Many companies see the reports as an opportunity to measure their own progress both internally and compared with industry peers.24

However, the task is more challenging for small and medium business where reporting is not mandatory and research has uncovered a limited awareness of gender equality and pay equality.25

How it’s starting to work

Recent data suggests a welcome shift in gender norms across Australian workplaces. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures reveal more men are taking on casual work while women are gradually moving away from part-time jobs and towards full-time jobs.

According to its May 2016 survey of employers, the proportion of male casuals had increased from 17.4 per cent to 19.7 per cent of the total male workforce between May 2014 and May 2016. By comparison, female casuals fell slightly from 25.6 per cent to 25.4 per cent.26

The decline of Australia’s manufacturing and mining sectors and the rise of the nation’s “gig” economy are possible theories for this change. Another plausible idea is the progress our world is making in gender equality. More men are becoming role models for gender equality through campaigns as diverse as the UN-initiated international group HeForShe27 and Australia’s Male Champions of Change.28

On a global scale, we’re seeing powerful women such as actor, talk-show host and businesswoman Oprah Winfrey support the Time’s Up29 campaign and call on “phenomenal men” to fight alongside women for a future free of sexual harassment. In schools around the world, more women are being encouraged to enter STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) so they can pursue rewarding and higher-paying jobs.30

At a more local level, online documentary series the Equilibrium Challenge follows the lives of Australian men as they negotiate and move towards flexible working arrangements.31

Despite this groundswell of support, Australia still has room to improve. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development describes Australia as “a mid-range performer... across most gender equality outcomes”.32 In its report into the pursuit of gender equality, the OECD cites the gender pay gap as Australia’s biggest uphill battle.

How to engage men in a gender equality strategy

It’s obvious that Australia will not make much progress towards gender equality without the support of men. This is, as the Diversity Council Australia outlines, not because women can’t do it on their own or because men have been left out of the conversation or are now the victims, but because men, consciously or not, are inherently advantaged by the problem.  

Research by the Diversity Council of Australia shows there are ways men benefit from workplace gender inequality: their work performance is more likely to be evaluated positively; their views tend to be given more weight; and they are more likely to ascend to leadership roles.  

Engaging men in efforts to achieve gender equality shouldn’t come at the expense of women’s involvement. Nor is it the total solution. But if men strive to identify their unconscious bias and make changes to the way they think, behave and relate to each other and to women, it will go a long way towards transforming the status quo.

What we have learned

Can organisations really change the way men think about gender equality and actively engage them in the debate? The answer, overwhelmingly, is yes. Approaches to engaging men have become more sophisticated thanks to studies by diversity and inclusion experts and, critically, because of the input of men themselves.

Among the research conducted by the Diversity Council, key lessons include:

- Organisational change may start at the top, but it needs to reach all levels.
- Men should not be put on a pedestal for championing change.
- Not treating all men the same way is important. The diversity of men’s cultural and religious backgrounds, sexual orientation and any physical or mental disabilities need recognition.
- Men need to make personal changes, not just organisational changes.

Of course, not every man (or woman, for that matter) will support gender-equality initiatives. This tends to boil down to three common factors: apathy, fear and ignorance. Apathy because some men are unconcerned about the issues or do not see why they should become actively involved. Fear because they are worried about disapproval from other men, losing status or privilege, or saying the wrong thing. And ignorance because they see gender equality as a “women’s issue”, they feel ill-informed about gender matters or believe there isn’t a problem.

Helping men understand gender bias exists can make all the difference.

Once men begin to challenge traditional masculine norms and take a closer look at the negative impacts of inequality on men and women, they are more likely to back the cause for gender equality.

When men experience gender norms as restrictive barriers in their own lives, there is a greater chance they will appreciate how these behaviours affect women.

How organisations can engage men

Forward-thinking organisations not only want to engage men, but also increase men’s effectiveness in driving gender equality at work.

The critical first step for organisations is convincing men there are problems with the current state of play. For men to get behind gender-equality efforts, it’s essential they understand the problems caused by gender bias and that the issue deserves their attention.

33Diversity Council Australia, Men Make a Difference: Engaging Men on Gender Equality, 2017
34Ibid
36Catalyst, Engaging men in gender initiatives, 2009
37Ibid
38Catalyst, Engaging men in gender initiatives, 2009
Global workplace gender-equality thinktank Catalyst surveyed 178 businessmen from around the world, 57 per cent of whom identified as senior managers. The survey found 97 per cent were highly aware of gender bias and also believed it was important to achieve gender equality. But among men with low awareness of gender bias, only 74 per cent felt it was important.39

Men who are acutely aware of gender disparities are more likely to recognise when women are excluded in the workplace and to view this as a competitive disadvantage for their organisation.40

Assessing the survey results, Catalyst identified three qualities that predict how aware men are of gender bias:

• Defiance of some masculine norms: men who break with traditional masculine conventions such as opting to work part-time to care for young children.

• Having women mentors: men who are coached by women are more likely to think critically about gender.

• A strong sense of fair play: men who stand up for the ideals of fairness and equality for all.

Of these predictors, a moral sense of fairness is the most accurate way to identify male leaders of change. It’s also the strongest way to shape future advocates for gender equality. This, paired with the personal and organisational benefits arising from a more diverse and inclusive workforce, is at the core of educating men for better engagement in achieving gender equality.

Educating for and encouraging engagement

Senior leaders, human resources professionals and talent management teams play an important role in supporting men’s increasing engagement in workplace gender equality. By developing diverse and inclusive campaigns aimed specifically at men, they can create real and lasting change.

Men working at Industry Superannuation Property Trust have been encouraged and supported to use flexible working arrangements. The organisation has also created awareness of everyday sexism that can be aimed at men using flexible conditions.

Balancing the male female ratio has also been a strong focus for chief executive Daryl Browning.

“We have been a promoter of women, but equally we don’t want men to feel that they haven’t got opportunities as well.

“There’s no doubt that I think there is an increased awareness of subtle things like biases that would have been built in the home or at school, so we’ve spent quite a bit of time working on that in training sessions.”

There are many ways to educate and encourage male engagement. Examples include:

• Reverse mentoring. Men learn from a woman mentor who has received training in leadership and gender issues. Research shows men who have been mentored

by women are more aware of gender inequality than men who have not had this experience.41

- Presentations by inspiring male role models. Expose men to those courageous men who champion gender inclusion and challenge the status quo.42
- Networks for peer coaching. Groups of men can meet to share tips and advice on creating a more equitable workplace.43
- Immersion experiences. Offer men and women new roles so they can better understand how norms and assumptions create gender inequalities at work.44
- Leadership workshops. Engage women and men leaders in dialogue about what can be done to achieve gender equality.45

Research tells us it’s common for men in leadership roles to have negative attitudes to workplace education.46 Men in a position of power often expect they have little or nothing to gain from diversity and inclusion training. Management and human resources teams can shift pessimistic attitudes by building a compelling case for workplace equality through:

- Involving influential leaders. Participants are most likely to attend training sessions if they know their managers will also be there. Ask influential managers, especially men, to invite employees to participate in training and to assist in delivering content.
- Demonstrating community benefits. Men are more willing to participate in training if they know it will result in improvements with external communities. Incorporate opportunities for community outreach.
- Aligning with current job responsibilities. Men want to know the training is relevant to their current job and gives them a real chance of improving their job performance.47

Ten principles for organisations to effectively engage men on gender equality

In their research into how to engage men on gender equality, Diversity Council Australia researchers recommended the following ten principles:

- **Get the foundation right:**
  Ensure gender equality initiatives involve women and men as active and equal partners. For example, as part of the Male Champions of Change’s Panel Pledge, companies are urged to address gender imbalances if they are invited to professional speaking events. When companies who support the pledge are involved in or sponsoring a panel or conference, they encourage a woman to represent them and/or enquire about the organiser’s efforts to ensure women leaders are included.

- **Get the framing right:**
  Treat gender equality as a business issue, not a women’s issue. Integrate gender parity into the organisational culture and strategic vision.

- **Go wide:**
  Adopt an expanded framework that targets the full range of key gender equality areas including paid work, power and decision making, financial security, personal safety, interpersonal work relationships, caring duties and community involvement.

- **Get the messaging right:**
  It needs to appeal to men as well as women. Emphasise that men have a valuable role to play and appeal to their sense of social justice as well as their feelings of care and concern for the women in their lives.

- **Engage a diverse group of men:**
  Include men in different organisational roles and levels and from a variety of demographic backgrounds. Draw on diverse advocates, educators and spokespeople and craft organisational messages to appeal to a range of different men.

- **Educate about how to lead change effectively:**
  Leaders need to be visible and persistent, and accountable for an organisation’s progress on diversity and inclusion.

- **Make the connection between work and home:**
  Implement flexible work arrangements that encourage gender equality in caregiving.

- **Make the connection between work and community:**
  Frame gender inequality as a social problem. Contribute to community discussions about gender equality and social policy.

- **Build people’s gender confidence and capability:**
  Provide opportunities for both men and women to change their mindsets, assumptions and behaviours. Educate all staff on the impact of everyday sexism and encourage them to call it out.

- **Encourage men and women to challenge and change gender-biased organisational policies and practices:**
  Identify assumptions about gender that are built into organisational policies and practices that can affect gender equality.

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Finding prominence

More and more men are stepping up to be women’s allies in the fight for gender equality. Yet despite the swelling numbers, they lack public prominence.

Women are most outspoken in the fight for gender equality, even when it comes to campaigning for men’s involvement. Speaking at the UN’s launch of gender-equality initiative HeForShe in 2014, British actor Emma Watson urged men to participate.

“We want to try to mobilise as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for change. How can we effect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feels welcome to participate in the conversation?”

There are many women in the public eye who have become the faces of feminism and, by the same token, advocates for change. These include Pakistani activist for female education Malala Yousafzai and the founder of the MeToo movement, Tarana Burke.

In Australia, women are also leading the charge: Kate Jenkins is the nation’s Sex Discrimination Commissioner; Libby Lyons is the director of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency; Lisa Annese is the chief executive of the Diversity Council Australia; and Elizabeth Broderick is the founder of Male Champions of Change and former Sex Discrimination Commissioner.

While men may be outnumbered in the gender-equality conversation for now, they are slowly becoming more visible. In a 2017 article, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau expressed the hope that his sons would escape damaging notions of masculinity and explained why he is raising his children as feminists.

“Feminism is not just the belief that men and women are equal. It’s the knowledge that when we are all equal, all of us are more free.”

Men are also advocating for gender parity and pushing for change in a variety of ways around the globe. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women has recognised the work of Barbados musician Mikey Mercer, Indian social entrepreneur Arunachalam Muruganantham, American author and poet Carlos Andrés Gómez, Bosnian gender activist Feda Mehmedović and Japanese politician Hironobu Narisawa.

Change from the top down

Research shows that men are less supportive than women of initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality. But this isn’t necessarily due to malice; instead, it’s more likely to be caused by:

• ignorance of existing inequalities
• perceiving gender equality as a ‘women’s issue’
• assumptions that other men support sexism
• fear of being judged by male peers if they intervene
• not knowing what to do or say.

As gender equality campaigns ramp up and find the spotlight, Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins says men can no longer sit on their hands.

“Until recently most men have had no engagement in initiatives supporting gender equality and even worse, have worked in opposition believing gender equality would be bad for them.

“The first step to engagement is usually by learning more about the benefits to families and organisations of gender equality and the alarming statistics for Australian women, including women’s experience of violence in the home and sexual harassment at work; as well as women’s poor economic outcomes that leave them retiring with half the retirement savings of men and two and a half times more likely to live in poverty after retirement than men.

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ThoughtCo, Emma Watson’s 2014 Speech on Gender Equality, 2018
Marie Claire, Why I’m Raising my Kids to be Feminists, 2017
UN Women, Gender Equality Champions, (date undisclosed)
Catalyst, Engaging men in gender initiatives, 2009
“The #MeToo and #TimesUp movement has exposed the completely unacceptable rate of sexual harassment not only in workplaces but also in our everyday lives. It has highlighted the continuing lack of women in senior roles.

“It has made visible what many men in particular have said was previously invisible to them.

“It has started conversations between family members and colleagues and has given strength to many to share their personal experiences.

“While it’s confronting to come to terms with these ugly realities about our society, this has been a long time coming and it does feel like something of a turning point. It has the potential to kick off the attitudinal changes we need to see in our society.”

Jenkins says industry leaders need to be loud and proud about their efforts to end gender inequality.

“In our workplaces we need male leaders at all levels to personally commit to eliminating sex discrimination and promoting gender equality through words and actions.

“Leaders set the tone in their workplaces, so they can lead the change we need for better workplaces for everyone.

“It’s not a set-and-forget exercise. And it’s also not simple: change will require multiple, mutually reinforcing initiatives as it has in other areas of social change, like changing our attitudes to smoking and wearing seatbelts.

“Male leaders can work to overcome stereotypes and negative attitudes which prevent women from progressing in their careers. They can sponsor and support women’s careers, ensuring equal pay and opportunities for advancement.

“They can also take steps to ensure that policies are in place that allow caring responsibilities to be more equally distributed between men and women. Modern workplaces need to change to match the needs of our community, where both men and women want an active role in parenting.”

Men’s engagement is evolving

Academics are keenly exploring methods of activating men in the gender debate and peak industry bodies are following the results closely. These groups know it’s not enough for men merely to “sign up”. They need hearts and minds motivated for deeper engagement and ultimately better results for the community.

Galvanising men to join the fight against inequality is key to capturing greater public attention. Through a series of social experiments, researchers at the University of Newcastle and the Australian National University found men were more likely to engage in collective action if male advocates of gender equality, particularly those in positions of public leadership and authority, signal to both men and women that “we are all in this together”. Further, if men and women alike self-identify as feminists, they are more likely to confront sexism and mobilise towards activism.54

A 2012 UN-backed report by the UK’s Institute of Development Studies analysed the best techniques to engage men beyond changing individual men’s attitudes and behaviours. The Mobilising Men report recommended engaging men as gender activists working in teams to prepare detailed plans for how to challenge sexual and gender-based violence.

Researchers worked across India, Kenya and Uganda to develop programs to identify, recruit and train male activists to work with women in developing campaigns to challenge cultures that enable and enact violence against women.55

54The University of Newcastle and the Australian National University, “We for She”: Mobilising Men and Women to Act in Solidarity for Gender Equality, 2018 55Institute of Development Studies, Mobilising Men, 2012
Case study: 
Benetas

The challenge
Health care and social assistance is the fastest growing sector in Australia and to meet increasing demand for care, the workforce needs to triple by 2050. It is a female-dominated sector with women comprising 80 per cent of aged care workers and almost 90 per cent of graduates entering the industry.56

The strategies
Staff at aged-care service provider Benetas are striving for cultural change in their workplace by developing better gender balance and challenging gender stereotypes.

Strategies to achieve gender equality are framed by improving business performance and gaining a better understanding of how to appeal to what men and women need and want as customers.

Benetas supports the advancement of both genders in non-traditional roles. The company offers professional development for women in roles such as IT, finance, property and project management and men in roles such as nursing, domestic and personal care.

Benetas actively promotes the benefits of flexible work arrangements to its male employees, highlighting part-time, job-share and flexible opportunities in the jobs section of its website, which often features profiles of male care workers.

Men and women are encouraged to take up arrangements that allow them to purchase an additional two or four weeks of annual leave each year.

The organisation has also identified what it describes as a “hidden pay gap” as a result of women working part-time and taking more unpaid leave than men. At the same time, men tend to work full-time and take less leave, which hinders their capacity to share caring responsibilities outside work.57

To address this imbalance, Benetas introduced superannuation payments for all staff on paid parental leave in 2015. This is aimed at easing the financial pressure of taking time out of the workforce for both women and men.

Benetas offers eight weeks' paid parental leave for primary carers and two weeks' paid leave for secondary carers. Paid parental leave for secondary carers can also be staggered over three months to enable part-time work during the period. Some new fathers have taken advantage of this option to work part-time after the birth of their child. A number of men have also taken 12 months away from work to be the primary carer of their children so their spouse can return to work.

As well as flexibility, Benetas has prioritised clear succession planning and promotion opportunities to retain more male employees.

The results

These strategies have paid off. More men at the organisation are working flexibly and more men have been attracted to the healthcare and social assistance industry, with Benetas reporting a 3 per cent increase in male employees.

Benetas’s commitment to addressing the gender pay gap has seen the organisation’s overall gender pay gap narrow to 4 per cent compared with the overall national gender pay gap of 23 per cent.\(^{58}\)

From the Benetas CEO, Sandra Hills

“At Benetas, we’ve recognised workplace flexibility is a key driver of employment decisions for men – especially among young fathers, male managers and those approaching retirement. As with women, men have a range of priorities and aspirations, such as to be active parents or engaged in their community. We actively promote the benefits of flexible work to men, highlighting part-time, job-share and flexible job opportunities as well as featuring profiles of male care workers.

“The flexible work practices we offer, and actively promote, include paid parental leave (in addition to the government scheme), career development, study support, purchased leave arrangements, and superannuation payments for staff on paid parental leave.

“In the past five years we have seen a 3 per cent increase in male employees. It remains a priority for us to increase the number of males in the industry.

“Traditional, gender-segregated patterns of ‘male’ and ‘female’ work need to be addressed. Women make up a staggering 80 per cent\(^{59}\) of the health care and social assistance sector. We need to achieve greater gender balance by challenging deeply held assumptions of gender stereotypes and encourage men to consider a career in caring roles – traditionally considered to be ‘women’s work’.

“Benetas has received the Workplace Gender Equality Agency’s Employer of Choice for Gender Equality Citation for 12 consecutive years, one of only five organisations to receive the citation in the health care and social assistance sector in 2018. Although the aged-care sector faces challenges in attracting and retaining workers, the recognition of our commitment to gender equality has helped us stand out in a competitive job market, and played a role in our talent retention and acquisition.”

Sandra Hills
CEO
Benetas

\(^{58}\)Benetas, Annual Report 2016-17  \(^{59}\)Australian Bureau of Statistics, Healthcare and Social Assistance our largest industry, 2017
Conclusion

Gender equality will not be achieved if we only rely on the efforts of half the population. Moving towards meaningful equality will require an equal effort from both men and women. As the Male Champions of Change founder, Elizabeth Broderick, explains, “In most nations, men largely occupy the seats of power. Relying exclusively on women to lead change on gender equality is therefore illogical. We need decent, powerful men to step up beside women to create more gender equal world.”

As this whitepaper makes clear, there is a strong case for a strategic approach to gender equality, particularly when it comes to engaging men. Men can make a difference to some of the deep systemic issues women face in workforce participation, such as the pay gap and workplace gender segregation.

For some businesses, achieving this will involve radical workplace changes, and some employees will struggle with these. For others, it will mean little more than a few minor adjustments.

But it’s well worth it. Individuals and families stand to benefit from greater wellbeing, workplaces will benefit from increased productivity and innovation and the community will benefit from stronger economic outcomes.

When men add their voices to the conversation and throw their efforts behind the movement for gender equality, the world will progress towards a future in which men and women are equal partners in every aspect of work and life.


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