Beyond Women's Month: Making Gender Equality Stick

By Dr Nitasha Ramparsad

Dr Nitasha Ramparsad is the Director for Leadership Support at the National School of Government. She is committed to the empowerment of both men and women in the ongoing leadership challenges faced by the African continent. Her interest lies in social justice research and the pursuit of gender equality. She has published extensively in international peer reviewed journals and most recently presented at the South African Project Management Summit, in February 2019.

Introduction

Gender bias is attracting new interest with the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. These movements have been raising awareness about gender inequality and sexual harassment across the globe. The Global Talent Competitiveness Index ranks South Africa as 66 in the gender earnings gap, yet also ranks women as 86 in terms of leadership opportunities afforded to them. There seems to be no correlation between the efforts afforded to positioning women and closing the gender earnings gap. According to the Midyear Population Statistics of 2017[1], women make up half of South Africa's population. Women remain largely under-represented in positions of authority and power. This is of particular importance to organisations as these statistics represent a commitment to gender equality on paper only. In order to transform paper rights into "real" rights, organisations need to look at the (dis)enabling environment in the workplace. If Human Resource Practitioners considers the entire workforce, 44 in every 100 employed individuals are women, according to labour data released for the second quarter of 2017. Women fill 44% of skilled posts, which includes managers, professionals and technicians. This figure hasn't shifted much over the years; it was 44% in September 2002. Although South Africa has made great strides, gender representivity is still below the 50% mark for positions that come with a great deal of influence, according to data from 2017[2] women comprised 32% of Supreme Court of Appeal judges, 31% of advocates, 30% of ambassadors and 24% of heads of state-owned enterprises. If we

Of the Top 40 JSE listed companies, only one company has a female CEO.

take a brief look at the Top 40 JSE listed companies, only one company has a female CEO. Parliament fares a lot better – South Africa is ranked as the tenth country in the world with the most number of females in parliament, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, with just over 4 in every 10 benches held by a women.

This Spotlight paper looks at practical steps that Human Resource Practitioners can implement in the workplace in order to achieve gender equality in a more meaningful manner. This will enable transformation to move from paper rights to the lived experiences of the people whom legislation was intended for.

Rally political buy-in

Gender mainstreaming is led through a top-down approach, with senior management being held accountable for the success or failure of gender mainstreaming as a strategy for gender equality. Senior management buy-in is not easy to attain and therefore must be lobbied by HR practitioners with the help of those who already believe in the message of gender equality and who currently have seats of power in organisations. In the absence of such allies, Human Resource practitioners will have to make the case for gender equality by:

- Demonstrating how gender mainstreaming will contribute to better achieving the organisation's mandate and goals;
- Having concrete suggestions on how to introduce and implement gender mainstreaming as a transformation strategy;
- Understanding possible concerns and constraints and considering how to address these in advance;
- Finding initial support from staff members in key positions; and
- Approaching managers who are thought most-likely to support the initiative first.
- In approaching the implementation of gender mainstreaming it's crucial to consider the following key questions:
- Is promoting gender equality part of the organisation's general focus?
- Does the organisation have an official statement on their goal for gender equality and their strategy for pursuing gender mainstreaming? (This could also form part of the organisation's overall transformation strategy.)
- Is gender mainstreaming integrated in the regulations of the organisation and in both the formal and informal standard operating procedures?
- Do executive staff members demonstrate their commitment to gender equality and the implementation of gender mainstreaming, in both formal and informal ways?
- Do executive staff members exercise their responsibility for the implementation of gender mainstreaming, both by strengthening the commitment of all staff members and by adopting a gender equality perspective in their regular decision-making?

Gender mainstreaming is led through a top-down approach, with senior management being held accountable for the success or failure of gender mainstreaming as strategy for gender equality.

In the planning phase, it's important to realistically calculate the possible resources needed both financially and in terms of the relevant people who possesses the requisite skills. It is the responsibility of an organisation's management to provide the necessary resources. Furthermore, allocating sufficient resources is a strong signal from management about their commitment to implementing gender mainstreaming.

The workload of the gender mainstreaming support structure should also be accounted for. In organisations that already have gender equality staff, the responsibility for introducing gender mainstreaming will likely fall to them. However, considerations need to be made regarding whether the new workload can be assimilated by redistributing other tasks, extending working hours or recruiting additional staff.

Conducting a gender audit

An organisational analysis is required through a gender audit. A gender audit is a partici-patory method for conducting an organisational analysis. It is a guided process of self-as-sessment supported by experienced facilitators, who raise key issues, enhance awareness about norms and attitudes and foster organisational learning. A gender audit will address the cultural and informal aspects of an organisation's operation. It aims at building own-ership and promoting commitment to gender mainstreaming by involving as many staff as possible, for example, through a series of workshops and focus group meetings. This may be outsourced or undertaken by Human Resource Practitioners.

Consider the following elements when looking at the organisation:[3]

A gender audit will address the cultural and informal aspects of an organisation's operation.

Gender mainstreaming support structure	• Does the organisation already have a gender mainstreaming support structure? • If so, is it capable of fulfilling all of its tasks successfully (e.g. with regard to its structure, resources, competences, position within the organisation)? • If not, what structure is appropriate in terms of its tasks as well as the resources available? • Which approach works best to successfully establish an effective support structure?
Gender equality objectives	• Does the organisation have established and well-defined gender equality objectives? • Which gender equality objectives are both ambitious and realistic for the organisation to pursue? • What is the most effective and practicable way of developing and agreeing on gender equality objectives?
Communicating gender mainstreaming	• Are all staff members aware of the intended process of organisational change? • Are they well informed about both the planned activities, the reasons behind these and the aims of this process? • What ways of communicating gender mainstreaming work best in order to ensure transparency and commitment? • Is the organisation's public relations work gender sensitive in terms of language and illustrations?
Gender mainstreaming methods and tools	• Have gender mainstreaming methods and tools already been developed and applied? What has worked well and what hasn't? • In accordance with the organisation's regular practices, what are suitable methods for implementing gender mainstreaming? • How and by whom should respective tools be developed? • What are potential ways to introduce these?

Gender equality competence	• Are all staff members committed to gender mainstreaming? • Are they performing their respective tasks and following the rules of procedure in order to effectively implement gender mainstreaming? • Do all staff members have the gender expertise and methodological skills they need to fulfil their responsibility for implementing gender mainstreaming? • Which skills and knowledge need to be developed? • What is the best approach to developing gender equality competence that will serve to strengthen commitment?
Gender information management system	• Is information on gender issues available and easily accessible for staff members? • What information is needed but missing? • Are all statistics produced or used by the organisation gender disaggregated? • What is an effective way of collecting and disseminating all information and data that is needed to ensure the well-substantiated implementation of gender mainstreaming?
Gender equality action plans	• Have all units of the organisation analysed gender issues in their particular fields of activity, operationalised gender equality objectives and developed approaches for addressing gender issues? • What is an appropriate way to initiate and develop gender equality action plans in order to achieve this?
Equal opportunities within the organisation's personnel	• What is the gender balance among staff throughout the organisation's different levels and fields of activity? • Does the organisation have an equal opportunities plan to promote equal opportunities among its staff? • What is an efficient strategy to promote equal opportunities within the organisation?
Monitoring and steering organisational change	• Does the organisation have regular methods and procedures for monitoring and steering organisational processes? • How will the process of organisational change towards gender mainstreaming be steered, and the progress monitored in an effective way?

Performance management

For any project to be successful, the buy-in from senior management is crucial. Gumede (2008:10)[4] claims that in post-Apartheid South Africa, "Significant challenges facing the democratic government included rebuilding the institutional mechanisms and initiating and implementing legislation and policies that are in line with the Constitution to usher in a new era of a developmental State." Human Resources is responsible for leading, what is essentially a transformation strategy, and it is to be expected that there will be some resistance to change. Not all senior managers, whom are expected to lead and implement from

the top-down, will be in favour of gender equality. In order to circumvent this, a formal performance management system must be addressed in order to mainstream gender as a transformation strategy. Setting targets for gender equality in the workplace is a difficult exercise and requires much negotiation and influence. Targets are achievable, time-framed objectives which organisations can set on a regular basis to focus their efforts on achieving improved outcomes. They are an essential part of managing business performance and most organisations are familiar with a target setting process for financial and operating performance. Gender targets operate in much the same way by setting objectives around a key management area of focus, in this case, gender composition.

Key principles of target setting[5]:

1. Clarity: Set clear targets with time-lines to ensure progress can be measured.
2. Small steps: Consider setting interim goals and measures as steps towards a longer-term goal. This will focus immediate efforts and encourage momentum, while enabling the organisation to monitor progress.
3. Control: Ensure managers are able to influence the metrics and have appropriate control over the strategies and initiatives to achieve the targets.
4. Realistic: Set targets that can be achieved. This requires a thorough analysis of all of the possible barriers to achieving targets and the support needed for maximising the opportunities to achieve them.
5. Accountability: Create managerial accountabilities and rewards, e.g. linking remuneration or career progression to achieving targets.

Values Based Leadership (VBL)

The buy-in from senior management is inextricably linked to their values. How will Human Resource Practitioners drum up political will for a pertinent marginalised issue such as gender equality if the senior management cohort does not value this? Values Based Leadership (VBL) is therefore an area to be explored in attempting to mainstream gender for gender equality. Steve Jobs said "The only thing that works is management by values". It's no surprise that companies like Apple who foster a values-based approach in their leadership culture create connections that have a significant impact on company performance. *The Financial Times* defines value-based leadership as "Motivating employees by connecting organisational goals to employees' personal values". Often there is a misalignment between personal values and organisational values. Notably these have to be aligned in a creative way through shifting mindsets. There are many elements that make us view the world in different ways, our age, race, education, geographical location, religion to name a few. These elements ultimately make us diverse. However, gender equality is not a "nice to have" or an "events exercise". This is a legislated requirement that must be adhered to if society is to be transformed.

The values ascribed to for gender equality cannot be simply stated in a vision and mission poster in an organisation. In order to make this real, management and those who have a position of influence in an organisation must reflect on the following questions[6]:

*   "How can senior management integrate the core organisational values into the way teams operates?"
*   "What are some ways senior management can communicate the values to the team over the next thirty days?"
*   "How can senior management create greater personal alignment with organisational values on a daily basis?"
*   "How can senior management recognise and reward people who actively embody the values?"

Not all senior managers, whom are expected to lead and implement from the top-down, will be in favour of gender equality.

The values ascribed to for gender equality cannot be simply stated in a vision and mission poster in an organisation.

Looking ahead

Design a culture initiative that empowers managers to act as culture exemplars and ethics envoys to their teams. This will promote a stronger ethical culture and breed greater trust amongst their teams. When managers don't serve on the front line as culture envoys, it can breed a tone of cynicism and scepticism amongst employees. Create a shared vision, create a campaign and kick it off with a visible launch from senior leaders and middle managers. The objective is to inspire middle management with a compelling vision of how culture matters, and how leadership on the front line shapes culture. Invite managers to embrace and cascade the values message by sharing stories of when the company and its people really "walked the walk" on mission and values. The latter must be carefully managed so as not to intimidate the current employees.

Toolkits and coaching can assist with embedding the shared vision. Managers at every level need the right tools to engage their teams on the company's values and expected behaviours. Managers should be encouraged to have regular discussions with their teams to keep values on everyone's minds. Managers will need coaching on how to comfortably conduct values discussions with their teams. Research suggests that discussion-based training that explores challenging, grey-area situations may have the most impact. Many organisations are developing toolkits—electronic versions of "meetings in a box"—that contain resources, case studies, facilitator guides, and other learning aids to help bring values to life. Be prepared to refresh and revise the case discussions to stay on top of the relevant issues and keep employees engaged. Consider collecting real stories from employee participants to enrich the case discussion.

These initiatives should have a performance management component that concretises commitments to gender equality. Poor performance against at targets must be addressed and recognition must be offered, to those who are able to reflect their commitment to gender equality through their outputs. In high-performing cultures, recognition and celebration can reinforce the spirit of the company. Promoting greater alignment between the company's core values and day-to-day operations through real stories helps crystalise the message to employees worldwide. Identify communication channels and forums to publicly celebrate employees for their acts of values-based leadership and values-based decision making.

Conclusion

If there is investment in initiatives towards concretised gender equality measures in the workplace senior management must place value on operationalising these initiatives at all levels. Individual follow-up is critical moving from policy to implementation. The organisation must commit to change and enhance work behaviours, actions, and interactions. Reward and recognition systems and performance management systems must support and reward new behaviours. Consequences must exist for behaviours that undermine the values agreed upon.

Notably South Africa is already on the world stage with regard to gender equality at parliamentary level with 50 percent of female Ministers being appointed for the first time in world history in May 2019. As a country, organisations across sectors need to look at how meaningful transformation for gender equality can be achieved at implementation level. Appointing female Ministers is the first step in a series of steps that must create an enabling environment for women to thrive in the workplace. If the proposed steps above outlining the major elements of a gender action plan are implemented by Human Resource Practitioners, this will essentially put into effect the necessary conditions that create the enabling environment to uphold a workplace that values gender equality. There will be a major shift in the position of women in South Africa moving away from paper-based rights to realised rights.

Research suggests that discussion-based training that explores challenging, grey-area situations may have the most impact.

South Africa is already on the world stage with regard to gender equality at parliamentary level.

Endnotes

1 Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 2, 2017. Available at:www.stastsa.gov.za Accessed 11 April 2019

2 Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 2, 2017. Available at:www.stastsa.gov.za Accessed 11 April 2019

3 European Union, INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-institutional-transformation/what-institutional-transformation. Accessed 23 April 2019

4 Gumede, V. (2008). 'Public policy making in a post-Apartheid South Africa: A preliminary perspective'. Africanus. 38(2): 7-23

5 Setting Gender Targets Available at: https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/SETTING-GENDER-TARGETS-Online-accessible_0.pdf. Accessed 9 May 2019

6 Can Values Based Leadership Improve Effectiveness Available at: https://theglasshammer.com/2015/04/23/how-can-values-based-leadership-improve-your-effectiveness/ accessed 28 March 2019