



## Engaging and Working with Men on Gender Equality in the Tech Sector

Lunch Discussion - June 25, 2018 12:30-2:30, NYC

The goal of this informal lunch discussion was to review what is already being done to engage men on gender equality in the tech sector, identify the lessons learned from existing engagements and explore opportunities for further collaboration to effectively engage men in this area.

The discussion was held under the Chatham House Rule and co-organized by ITU and UN Women in support of EQUALS, the global partnership for gender equality in the digital age ([www.equals.org](http://www.equals.org)).

A document accompanying this summary includes links to relevant initiatives, tools, articles and other resources on engaging men on gender equality. More resources were identified during the discussion and added thereafter.

- How are men in the tech sector currently being engaged on gender equality and what lessons can we learn?

There are a number of initiatives to engage men on gender equality and to promote gender equality in the tech sector. Since men are the majority among leadership in tech firms and in tech roles, efforts on gender equality in the tech sector often seek to engage men. As in other sectors, many gender equality events and activities in the tech sector attract a super majority of women. More recently though, interest in engaging men on gender equality has increased, with new events, initiatives, tools and other resources appearing. Whether they seek to engage men as champions, allies, advocates and/or as beneficiaries, the goal is to supplement efforts by women not to replace them.

Among other things participants mentioned were:

- Unconscious bias training being conducted in many companies and other organizations;
- Pledges by men not to be on any more all male panels;
- Commitments, such as to the UK's Tech talent charter, by tech company leaders (typically men) to greater diversity in their workforce through greater efforts in recruitment and retention;
- Men being encouraged to call out language and non - inclusive behaviours (such as interrupting women more often or he-peating women's ideas and taking credit) in other men including because they are less likely to be penalized than women;
- Efforts that seek to build greater emotional or cultural intelligence generally, better decision making, better meeting etiquette, training in different leadership styles, or other skills that address but do not focus only on gender issues or diversity and inclusion;
- Encouraging senior men to engage with employee resource groups;
- Male champion or ally programmes;



- Men talking with other men about their own personal involvement in gender equality initiatives;
- Men reaching out to less involved men to invite them to come along to gender equality events and join the conversation;
- How to balance the fact that many women (and men) are frustrated with lack of progress on gender equality and may feel angry, with men's defensive feelings and discomfort with that frustration;
- The importance of creating a space of empathy (safe space for learning) so that men are not fearful of saying the wrong thing or making a mistake where what men really think can be expressed and responded to. Acknowledging that safe space means different things to different people;
- Recognizing that to achieve inclusion and its benefits, the process may initially be uncomfortable and requires work, acknowledging that non-diverse teams and being with people that are like you may feel better at first but are suboptimal;
- Recognizing that women can also be sexist and their language can also be harmful and reinforce stereotypes;
- The importance of recognizing intersectionalities and that women of color and queer women may have different and compounded experiences of gender discrimination;
- Creating gender neutral employee benefits to appeal to employees of all genders;
- Encouraging all parents, including men, to take parental leave;
- The importance of senior men modeling use of policies like parental leave and flexible work arrangements to reduce the penalty that women experience from using such arrangements;
- The importance of story telling and creating opportunities for men to hear and learn about the struggles and barriers that women face that may be different to their own career journeys;
- Recognition that efforts to engage men will take time and not bear fruit overnight. The more men you get involved, the more comfortable men will feel and change may happen faster;
- The positive impact that female mentors can have for men and that male sponsors can have for women;
- Utilizing the idea of fictive kin
  - Essentially – empathizing, understanding the perspectives of others and creating a team bond



- Helping men to see why gender equality is important for them too, such as because they may have a daughter and not want her to experience discrimination or be excluded. Recognizing that there is no one size fits all approach as across cultures some men have different expectations for their daughters. Moreover, it was pointed out that women should be treated fairly because they are people, not just because they are related to men i.e. someone's daughter, sister etc.;
- Connecting with men on their identity elements (could be an “invisible” minority status) or experiences that have made them feel excluded to build their empathy and compassion and relate to gender equality in a different way;
- Creating new gender equal norms and expectations for children e.g. make it ok for boys to cry and show feelings and for girls to be bossy and to love STEM;
- Knowing that there are also cultural and power dynamics in play (i.e. a person may not have as much influence as it appears);
- Taking a top-to-bottom approach – attitudes of CEOs can set the tone for the company;
- Equality and non - discrimination are a human right, but there is also a strong business case for more diverse and inclusive teams, including for innovation, and a cost to toxic work environments. Moreover, strong economies are contributing to a competition for talent and diversity and inclusion can be a brand differentiator especially where there are skilled labour shortages. A number of participants cautioned against assuming that men are only moved by the business case;
- There was a debate around whether to try to change values or actions or both. On the whole, the group felt that it was the actions that were more important and easier to change than what is inside someone's head and that changed actions may lead to changed values;
- Exercises that are designed to help men see the benefits that their gender has afforded to them in terms of how others treat them and opportunities that come their way. Personal stories example: Ask people to write out their biggest successes in life
  - Think about whether you would have achieved the same successes if you were of a different gender.
  - This exercise points to unrecognized disadvantages/advantages of your gender
- One way to aid people in comprehending the perspectives and lived experiences of others is the philosopher Rawl's thought experiment “The Original Position”



- Essentially, a group of people is put in charge of remaking society. However, they have no information about who *they* will be in said remade society (gender, race, sexuality, health, age, etc). They are operating under the “veil of ignorance”, which allows the person to arrange society in an equal and fair fashion, as if they created prejudice, they do not know if the prejudice would harm or help them.
- More info here: (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/original-position/>)
- How do we address the fear of “zero sum” and backlash?
  - There does seem to be some backlash and diversity fatigue going on, with some men fearful of what the implications are for their own career opportunities and some men nervous about what to say and do especially in the wake of #metoo. Some men and women wonder why such programmes are still needed. If men can see the rationale and the long-term benefits of gender equality including for themselves then we can break away from the idea of “zero sum” for men. See December 2017 note on the backlash discussion with many more strategies and tactics;
- Bottom-up approach and dispelling myths with facts are very important;
- Men are of course not homogeneous – we may need different approaches for different groups of men e.g. C suite men – business case?;
- Do we need new/different language on diversity and inclusion that might be more effective in appealing to men? If so, perhaps a focus on what skills and workplace policies and conditions that an organization will need to be continually innovative, most productive, not burn out staff, reduce turnover, fill talent gaps etc may be more impactful.

➤ Closing

- There was widespread agreement that more effort on engaging men including going to where men are is important. This may include relevant messages and communications where men are more likely to see them, which may be non - traditional places for gender equality messages.
- Participants liked the small group engagement approach and a number of participants indicated interest in being engaged in follow up and other such dialogues and information exchanges. There was also appreciation for the resource list.