

# Barriers to empowerment and gender equality

## + how to break them down

There are many barriers in the workplace for men and women. By eliminating them, we can achieve an environment where both men and women can advance, improve their work-life balance and create happier and healthier workplaces and employees.

Workplace gender equality can only be achieved when employees are able to access and enjoy the same rewards and opportunities, equal pay for work of equal or comparable value, and all occupations and industries and roles are accessible, regardless of gender.

## Barriers to empowerment

- **Gendered attitudes** such as men don't need to, nor should they access flexible work arrangements or women are not interested in promotions because they have young children.
- **Work stereotypes** such as males make better leaders and managers or females can't do certain jobs.
- **Embedded bias** such as we overlook a candidate, in this case, the female in her early 30's, because she is put in the "will likely have kids and go on maternity leave" category.
- **Unconscious bias** where there is bias (conscious or unconscious) in the workplace, we continue to recruit, promote, allocate work, and manage performance with 'filters' on our thinking. You might assign work or lean towards someone's opinion more (even if they're not the subject matter expert) who you have unconscious affinity with.
- **Discrimination on the basis of gender**, particularly in relation to family and caring responsibilities.

## Breaking the barriers

The first step to reducing the barriers to empowerment and creating equality is to understand the benefits of it for the organisation and individuals:

### The benefits are:

- Increased organisational performance
- Enhanced ability to attract talent and retain employees
- Enhanced organisational reputation
- Improved national productivity and economic growth.



### Did you know?

Having a father involved in child care, in turn, has beneficial effects on a child's cognitive and behavioural development<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> (Baxter & Smart, 2011; Huerta et al., 2013)

## Build diversity and inclusion from the inside

True gender inclusion means any actions that support and empower women and men.

### DO:

- Empower your employees/colleagues by focussing on their strengths and diverse experiences
- Help women be more included and respected within the team (recognising their knowledge and area of expertise), acknowledge their contribution in front of your team/colleagues
- Provide opportunities for everyone to share their perspectives
- Start a rotating roster, to ensure women don't pick up all of the office/team chores
- Celebrate each other's work and acknowledge how differences add value to the team
- Make an effort to understand multiple viewpoints, to work with those who think, act, and believe differently than you
- Social activities in your team should be inclusive with respect to gender.

## Mentoring and networking

Mentorship is a critical component of success. Share knowledge and invite your employees to participate or give them some leadership tasks, so they can learn new skills.

### DO:

- Coach your staff or colleagues, it will give them more skills and credibility
- Allow everyone to attend networking opportunities to engage with senior management (it helps to build confidence and may be particularly helpful for women to further their careers)
- Reflect on behaviours that contribute to gender inequity, and actively engage in efforts to reduce disparities across genders
- Ensure women are given equal opportunities to specific assignments that provide an opportunity to advance or acquire new skills
- Include women in informal networks at suitable times.



### Did you know?

Employed women are twice as likely to do 15+ hours of domestic work than men<sup>2</sup>.

## Gender Bias

Everyone has unconscious biases, which play out in our everyday lives and interactions in the workplace. A women's ability to lead is often undermined by gender stereotypes. Working women face a set of challenges that intersect across gender, and culture and because of this, many women have to deal with daunting roadblocks such as other people's beliefs, attitudes, and experiences.

### DO:

- Don't shy away from talking about uncomfortable or difficult topics. Each of us regardless of our race or gender has a role to play
- Be open to feedback and learning
- Do not discredit the effectiveness of women leaders based on gender stereotypes
- Challenge yourself whether you are judging people fairly, reverse the gender of the person in question and see if it makes a difference in your thinking
- If you see harmful behaviour in your workplace, say something. Silence makes you complicit in it.

## Sponsorship

In any work culture, relationships are necessary for employees to attain high-visibility assignments, promotions, and connections.

For women, sponsors in positions of authority who use their influence intentionally to help others advance are essential to ensuring career advancement and professional development.

### DO:

- Recognise sponsorship as something we can all do, including and especially, men who can take several powerful actions
- Carefully and humbly listen to women colleagues, which can help them feel more included
- Take a look at your "go-to" people at work; is it a diverse group? Are you looking broadly and deeply for talent? Are women included in the informal activities and socialising that is also important for advancement?
- Sponsors are able to provide women with visibility, talk about their accomplishments behind closed doors, and promote them for diverse opportunities.

## Flexibility and work-life balance



Flexibility and work-life balance are an important part of breaking down barriers between genders.

Understanding that a woman may want to come back part-time or work flexible hours is important, as it acknowledges that men may want to take extended periods of parental leave.

### DO:

- Lead by example and make your staff feel more comfortable to access flexible working arrangements, especially if they see it being demonstrated by their manager
- Be consistent in your approach and allow some flexibility for everyone in your team
- Ensure women and men returning from leave, know what their role looks like
- Switch your focus to productivity and results, and not time spent at the desk
- Support any employee regardless of their gender to access parental leave
- Create a workplace culture where working parents feel supported to take on their family responsibilities, regardless of gender.

## Paid and unpaid care work



64.4% - unpaid care work  
35.6% - productive or paid work  
**Total work hours: 56.4**



36.1% - unpaid care work  
63.9% - productive or paid work  
**Total work hours: 55.5**

## Any job is for any gender

Access to all occupations and industries, including leadership roles should be available to all genders.

### DO:

- Be aware and challenge your gender stereotypes and biases
- Challenge assumptions about women at work and as leaders based on their stereotypical roles in society
- Be aware of your unconscious or hidden biases, these cause misunderstanding and may limit a woman's potential (Fact sheet 3)
- Ensure 'zero tolerance' of sexual harassment in the organisation at all times
- Support women to care for children and still stay on their career path
- Work on your teams' culture to allow a group of women to succeed, not just the occasional one or two.

## Sexual harassment and casual sexism

Sexual harassment remains a widespread problem in many workplaces, and at least one-quarter of women have reported some form of harassment on the job. This unwarranted behaviour costs employers in many ways: increased absenteeism, job turnover, and low productivity and engagement. Individually, women become depressed, experience anxiety, or quit all together in the hope of avoiding continued harassment.

### DO:

- Report any complaints or observations of harassment to the People and Culture team
- If you see harmful behaviour in your workplace, say something. Silence makes you complicit in it
- If you are in a senior leadership role deal with it appropriately and don't just ignore the situation.

### Did you know?

On average, Australian women have to work an extra 56 days a year to earn the same pay as men for doing the same work<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019

## Men can make a difference to gender equality and remove barriers to empowerment

Men can make a huge impact to gender equality in the workplace by committing to being a leader and role modelling the right behaviours in front of all staff.

- ### DO:
- Make it personal – men can see benefits for their female friends and relatives in gender equality
  - Communicate case for change and communicate the benefits of more diverse teams
  - Role model and encourage other men in your team to take time away from the office to attend or take on more of the caring responsibilities
  - Give credit, where credit is due. Recognise contributions and ideas of women in group settings and meetings
  - Ask women in your team if they want a new assignment, don't assume the answer will be no due to their commitments.

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out more?**

Visit us at Level 2 Civic Centre.

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