4. Gender, Diversity and Indigeneity

Competitive Session

Champions of Change: Why do some CEOs champion gender diversity?

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ABSTRACT: Many organisations invest resources in increasing gender diversity but miss out on its potential benefits, partly because of lack of CEO commitment to gender diversity as a top strategic priority. In this paper we draw on diversity management and organisational change theories to explain why male leaders are important to the advancement of gender equity in leadership and to understand the factors that incentivise influential leaders to join male coalitions for gender equity change. We present a model of who is likely to join coalitions for gender equity and the practical implications of member mix for the sustainability of the group. This knowledge is important for gender equity in leadership, which in turn may benefit organisations and the nation.

Keywords: diversity at work; diversity management; changing demographics; valuing diversity.

INTRODUCTION

> *'No women, no work: Male Champions of Change CEOs tell suppliers to advance women or lose orders'*
>
> *Fiona Smith, BRW, Leadership Section, 7 November 2013*

The business case for gender diversity is intended to persuade organisations to promote and hire more women into senior leadership roles (Lückerath-Rovers, 2013; Mahadeo, Soobaroyen, & Hanuman, 2012). The business case rests on the idea that competent women are not just 'substitutes' for traditional male leaders; instead, female leaders 'have unique characteristics that create additional value' (Carter, D'Souza, Simkins, & Simpson, 2010, p.397). Despite this persistent message and increasing evidence of the costs of under-utilising female talent, women continue to be under-represented in leadership positions in organisations (Pash, 2014; Workplace Gender Equality Agency [WGEA], 2014). As a result, a number of coalitions of high profile (and powerful) men have emerged specifically to advocate for sex equity in the workplace. The first of these coalitions was established in the State of New South Wales [NSW] and was called the 'Male Champions of Change'. Inspired by the NSW 'Male Champions of Change', similar groups have subsequently formed in other Australian States (e.g., South Australia's 'SA Chiefs for Gender Equity' and Queensland's 'QLD Male Champions of Change') and in specific industries or professions (e.g., Property [Condon, 2014]). Contrary to the usual change efforts that focus on women (e.g., development opportunities for women in traditionally male dominated jobs and professions) or are driven mostly by women (e.g., women's professional networks), these coalitions leverage the role male leaders can play as change agents to advocate for and initiate workplace gender equity change.

As the ultimate or principal decision-makers in their organisations, these individuals have enormous power to introduce incremental (e.g., reporting on gender diversity) or transformational (e.g., move from a highly masculine culture to an androgynous one) change. Recognising male leaders as an under-utilised resource, Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick[1], formed the NSW 'Male Champions of Change' in 2010; a coalition of influential male CEOs and Chairmen of large organisations 'to ensure the issue of women's representation in leadership was at the forefront of the national agenda' (AHRC, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/male-champions-change-raise-bar-gender-reporting). In the years following its formation, these influential leaders used their personal and collective influence to introduce initiatives such as the 'No women, no work' (see above quote). However, not all CEOs (and other similarly powerful leaders) are champions of gender diversity change, as evidenced by women's continued under-representation in leadership positions (WGEA, 2014) and widening gender pay gap (Priestley, 2014).

The literature is silent on *why* some male leaders (e.g., CEOs) join coalitions with the purpose to champion gender diversity change. The scarce literature on CEOs' motives for championing gender diversity has focussed on those CEOs known to champion gender diversity in their organisations without joining coalitions of influential leaders. It appears from this literature that personal reasons to prioritise gender diversity as a strategic organisational initiative include having experienced first-hand (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009), or vicariously through their partners (Angier & Axelrod, 2014), exclusion or discrimination, and having female offspring (Dahl, Dezso, & Ross, 2012). However, accepting an invitation to join a coalition of men to advocate for greater women's representation in leadership, without having a history of public advocacy for gender equity, suggests that these members could be motivated by different reasons. For example, reasons for joining male coalitions for gender equity may be more varied and externally driven (e.g., status or visibility) than for isolated champions.

[1] Ms Broderick is the fifth and longest serving Sex Discrimination Commissioner in Australia; her term covers the 2007-2015 period (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_Discrimination_Commissioner).

It is important to understand why male leaders champion gender diversity change. First, diversity can provide companies with a competitive advantage (Slater, Weigand, & Zwirlein, 2008), particularly diversity at the top (Kulik & Metz, 2015). Second, better utilisation of female talent can benefit countries, as women's participation in the workforce is positively associated with economic growth (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi 2010; White, 2014). For example, analysts estimate that closing the gap in male and female employment in Australia would boost GDP by 11% and closing the gender productivity gap would boost it by 20% (Goldman Sachs JBWere, 2009). Third, change will continue to be slow or even elusive until the majority of Australian CEOs, of whom more than 95% are male (WGEA, 2014), make increased gender diversity a top strategic priority. Many executives and CEOs agree that gender diversity is a performance driver, yet none considers it a top strategic priority and few have implemented strategies to increase gender diversity in their organisations (Desvaux, Devillard, & Sancier-Sultan, 2010). Fourth, there is increased social and government expectations of gender balance at board of directors, CEO, and executive levels in organisations (e.g., Catalyst, 2012; Changarathil, 2014; Hausmann et al., 2010). These social and institutional pressures are likely to continue. Organisations that delay aligning themselves with the changing external environment may suffer in terms of recruitment, development and retention of female talent and, ultimately, performance.

In this paper we draw on diversity management and organisational change theories to first explain why leaders, and in particular male leaders, are important to the advancement of gender equity in the workplace and to understand the factors that incentivise influential leaders to join coalitions of gender diversity change.

THE ROLE OF LEADERS IN ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Organisational change is most successful when driven by powerful change agents (champions) (Kotter, 1996; Slater et al., 2008). But organisational change is never easy, and change associated with employee diversity may be particularly difficult (Roberson & Stevens, 2006; Thomas & Ely, 1996). However, some organisations are stand out successes, such as IBM, Procter & Gamble and Deloitte (McCracken, 2000; Slater et al., 2008). In each of these cases, gender diversity has been a complex, long-term goal and the change effort has involved the commitment of successive CEOs over a number of years (e.g., read about Deloitte's WIN initiative in McCracken [2000] and in Pellegrino, D'Amato, & Weisberg [2011]). CEOs' commitment is important because they can launch diversity initiatives and ensure that resources are available to support them (Ng, 2008).

Not surprisingly, therefore, organisational change efforts are usually initiated by powerful champions who support a creative idea or vision they believe in (Kotter, 1996). They know 'why' they need to change, 'where' they want to be, and persistently work on 'how' to get there (Kotter, 1996). The academic literature has developed a business case for diversity (establishing the 'why'), recommended workforce diversity as a goal (pointing to 'where'), and identified some best practices in diversity management (suggestive of the 'how'). Yet, only a few leaders (e.g., CEOs) consciously aim to diversify the gender composition of their organisations' workforces or their cadres of leaders.

The few cases of organisations that have become more inclusive of diverse employees (including gender diversity) regularly highlight CEOs' or other influential organisational leaders' commitment to change driven by an organisational crisis (e.g., IBM's profit loss; Slater, 1999; American-based Denny's restaurant's discrimination lawsuit; Marques, 2010). Although organisational crises are useful to initiate gender equity change, they are not always necessary. There are examples of CEOs who are committed to inclusive cultures, because it makes good business sense to be employee-oriented (e.g., *IKEA* [Marques, 2010] and SAS Institute [Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002]). Either way, champions of gender equity change are invariably male executives.

Further, the upper echelons (or Top Management Teams; Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and diversity literatures have shown that a CEO's characteristics, such as level of education, gender, and cognitive ability, are associated with the top management team's composition (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), innovation (Bantel & Jackson, 1989) and commitment to change (Musteen, Barker III, & Baeten, 2006). There is also some evidence that decision-makers' characteristics, such as age, influence their attitudes towards organisational diversity (Ng & Sears, 2012). However, little is known of what motivates CEOs and/or leaders to join coalitions of male peers to keep the issue of women's underrepresentation in leadership at the forefront of the national debate.

WHO IS LIKELY TO CHAMPION GENDER EQUITY?

Concern for women's differential treatment and scarcity in leadership positions in the workforce has been discussed in academic, social, work and government circles for a very long time (Metz & Kulik, 2014). This awareness has progressively given rise to a body of knowledge and to legislation aimed at understanding and addressing gender imbalances in work opportunities and rewards that are based on stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. Yet, a 2014 report published by the Chief Executive Women organisation noted that most bosses in Australia are still disinterested in gender equity issues (Sanders, Hellicar, & Fagg, 2014). So, what ignites some influential male leaders' interest in championing gender equity change?

Individuals' stances to change range from active supporters to active resistors of change (Kotter, 1996). Further, a large proportion of the individuals in between are 'bystanders' who neither actively resist nor actively support change. In the case of women's representation in leadership, this apathy may be due to belief that gender inequities are a thing of the past (e.g., Spoor & Schmitt, 2011), insufficiently developed understanding of the business case for gender diversity or fear of disapproval from male peers if one takes on the gender equity cause (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009). Thus, apathy towards gender equality change will likely persist until bystanders, as the largest group, publicly acknowledge gender inequality in the workplace (Spoor & Schmitt, 2011), understand how they (personally) or their organisations can gain from changing the status quo (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009), and feel psychologically safe supporting gender equity (Edmondson, 1999). Psychological safety is 'a belief that one is not at risk of embarrassment or rejection in a particular setting or role' (Edmondson & Roloff, 2008, p.186).

There are various reasons why individuals support gender equity change. One is stakeholder influence. For example, Agle, Mitchell and Sonnefeld (1999) used data provided by the CEOs of 80 large U.S. firms to examine who matters to CEOs. They found that stakeholder attributes (of power, legitimacy, urgency, and salience) affect the degree to which top managers give priority to competing stakeholders. Specifically, they found that 'the salience of stakeholders that are part of the traditional production function view of the firm – shareholders, employees, and customers – is higher than that of stakeholders that are part of the expanded stakeholder view for the firm: governments and communities' (p.520). Thus, it is possible that male supporters of gender equity are influenced by shareholder, employee and customer expectations of a more gender diverse organisation.

More important, however, might be the personal factors that incentivise male CEOs to address gender equity issues in their organisations. For example, eBay's CEO, John Donahoe, derived his passion from witnessing the greater career challenges his wife faced compared to him (Angier & Axelrod, 2014). Daughters are even more frequently mentioned in the media as driving factors (Heilbronn, 2014; Hewett, 2014; Sinclair, 1998). The personal values of CEOs might also influence their interest in diversity management. For example, Agle et al. (1999) found that 'other-regarding' CEO values (as opposed to self-interested values) significantly moderated the stakeholder attribute-salience relationship for employee and for customer stakeholders. An example of an item to measure the 'other-regarding' values is 'equality (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all)' (Agle et al., 1999, p. 514). A decade later, Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009) studied male champions of gender equity in the U.S. and found that they were characterised by concern for others and a strong sense of fair play. In fact, a strong sense of fair play was the most significant predictor of whether or not men (not just CEOs) became gender equity champions.

Still in the realm of personal factors, Briscoe, Chin, and Hambrick (2014) found that a CEO's political ideology influenced the likelihood of employee activism. Briscoe and colleagues used CEOs' records of political donations from 1985–2004 to measure their personal ideologies, and then examined the relationship between personal ideologies and the formation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employee groups. Briscoe et al. (2014) concluded that the political liberalism of CEOs created an opportune low risk environment for the formation of LGBT employee groups.

'Bystanders' might be similarly influenced by a variety of reasons, but their motives for championing gender equity change are likely skewed towards external factors. As such, their level of commitment to gender equity change in corporate leadership is expected to be lower than that of 'supporters'. Nevertheless, with time, some bystander male champions may become active supporters of gender equity. Bystanders' past lack of interest or advocacy for gender equality might have been partly due to unawareness of gender bias or lack of confidence in their own ability to be a champion of change (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009). Legislative changes and the new Australian Securities

Exchange (ASX) gender diversity reporting requirements announced in 2009 (ASX Media Release, 2009) have generated unprecedented media coverage in Australia of women's under-representation in leadership[2] in the private sector (e.g., Eastham, 2014). This media coverage alone would have increased issue awareness among some bystander decision-makers and organisational leaders.

However, some bystander individuals remain unconvinced of the benefits of increasing women's representation in corporate leadership and can be categorised as 'sceptical bystanders'. Sceptical bystanders are likely to only engage with gender equity to comply with legislative or institutional requirements. In doing so, they are likely driven by ulterior motives (e.g., to be seen as a good employer) or external reasons (e.g., legislative and institutional pressure). In the context of organisational and personal change, legislative and institutional requirements can be viewed as coercive pressure to change. Coercion is the least effective of all forms of persuasion in changing individuals' attitudes and behaviours (Kotter, 1996). Thus, this type of member (sceptical bystander) is unlikely to become a true 'supporter' of gender equity change.

But the least likely to champion gender equity is the 'resistor': the individual who actively or passively resists change (Kotter, 1996). When pressured to address gender inequities, the resistor is prone to justify doing nothing (Thomas & Ely, 1996) or to engage in superficial change (e.g., have statements on the organisation's website professing to value employee diversity; Marques, 2010).

Nevertheless, some CEOs may be inclined to advocate for gender equity in corporate leadership as a means of leaving a meaningful legacy. Australian CEOs are on average 54 years old (Pash, 2014). The older these influential leaders are, the more likely they are to be cognizant of time (Carstensen et al., 1999) and how they will be judged at the end of their current role, as another influential role may not eventuate. Thus, as leaders approach the end of their full-time working responsibilities, they may reflect on the kind of legacy they would like to leave behind (Carstensen, 2006). 'Supporters', for example, will likely be motivated to act on their values and beliefs that gender equity is a socially fair and economically beneficial goal.

[2] A Google search using 'gender', 'leader', 'women', 'news' and 'Australia' generated thousands of hits from December 2009, when the ASX announced the new gender diversity reporting requirements, to May 2015.

Further, as successful members of our society, individuals can feel a moral obligation to 'give back' to the community that benefitted them. One way to 'give back' is by improving the opportunities of members of traditionally under-privileged groups. Working women, as members of a traditionally under-represented group in leadership, fall in this category.

In sum, we propose that 'supporters' are principally motivated by internal factors to champion gender equity change. Internal factors are more likely than external ones to stoke an individual's passion for gender equity issues. As a result, 'supporters' are more likely than 'bystanders' to individually champion gender equity change in their own organisations, and 'sceptics' and 'resistors' are the least likely.

WHO IS LIKELY TO JOIN THE CHAMPIONS?

Most people (including CEOs) resist or are ambivalent about change (Kotter, 1996). Resistance mostly comes from individuals who do not understand the reasons for change, and/or benefit from the status quo and fear loss of status and privilege (Kotter, 1996). The issue of women's inequity in leadership, and some proposed solutions (e.g., quotas), often evoke strong emotions and emotive responses (Noon, 2010). Increases in the representation of women, particularly at coveted leadership levels (e.g., executive and Board of Directors) can threaten the majority and generate backlash (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Kossek, Markel, & McHugh, 2003). In very male dominated industries, such as construction, champions may encounter particularly strong opposition to change. Aurizon[3]'s CEO, Lance Hockridge, started a gender diversity initiative in 2011. He described the hostile reception he subsequently received at worksites: 'It was like I had a target on my back' (Sier, 2014). Further, increased gender diversity at executive level can be accompanied by costs, such as higher turnover and increased intergroup conflict (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2004; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Thus, many leaders may be reluctant to champion gender diversity change efforts alone or at all. Some, however, might do so as part of a collective or peer group.

Male coalitions of change might be attractive to some male leaders for a variety of reasons. Some might believe in gender equity, but deem individually-driven gender equity action impractical or

[3] Aurizon is Australia's largest rail freight operator and a top 50 ASX company (http://www.aurizon.com.au/aboutus/corporate-profile).

ultimately ineffective. Thus, being proponents of gender equity as part of a collective is attractive to these individuals. This rationale for collective action is supported by the industrial relations and political organisation literature, which explains motives for union (group) membership (e.g., Schnabel, 2003). For example, a qualitative Australian study concluded that some individuals join unions 'prompted by feelings of vulnerability, leading to an appreciation of union support' (Cregan, 2005, p. 300), and that individuals with greater awareness of workplace injustice are more likely than those with lower to join unions (Cregan, 2005).

Peer groups are known to provide inter-personal instrumental and socio-emotional support necessary to engage in difficult or unpopular causes. Gender equity change has certainly been difficult to achieve as evidenced by the resources that organisations have expended over the years in developing and implementing policies and practices to attract diverse employees, often with little success (French & Strachan, 2007; Strachan, Burgess, & Henderson, 2007). Gender equity change is also unpopular with members of the traditionally dominant group who may view gender equity initiatives as reverse-discrimination and threatening (EY, 2013; Noon, 2010). Recognising this as a barrier to gender equity change Brian Schwartz, Chairman of Insurance Australia Group, recommends 'Men need to embrace change and stop being threatened by it' (EY, 2013, p.12). Coalitions of peers can provide a psychological safe space where influential leaders feel free to express their views on gender equity and to focus on the group's goals without worrying about self-preservation or protection (Edmondson & Roloff, 2008). Thus, bystanders, who are male leaders traditionally ambivalent to gender equity in organisations, may view gender equity change as a worthy pursuit particularly if encouraged, or bolstered, by a group of peers.

Groups or coalitions of gender equity change may also appeal to ambivalent male leaders as sources of information. Based on social identity and social categorization theories, individuals identify themselves with people who they perceive to have commonalities with, such as similar background and work experience. Positions of CEO, Managing Director, and Chair, are coveted and socially prestigious and, thus, are very visible as a demographic characteristic along which people identify and categorise themselves (Tajfel, 1978). Individuals tend to perceive members of their own social identity group as more trustworthy, capable and credible than non-members (Brewer, 1979).

These characteristics of social identity groups align with psychological safety climate characteristics in teams of mutual respect and trust (Edmondson & Roloff, 2008). Thus, coalitions of male leaders provide a space for influential men who are ambivalent about gender equity in organisations to obtain information on this subject from members of their social identity group of CEO, Managing Director or Chair without risk of rejection or embarrassment. Edmondson (1999; 2003) has empirically established the relationship between psychological safety and speaking up, and between psychological safety individual learning, in teams. Further, gender equity information and opinions obtained from peers are more likely to be valued and respected than information from non-peers (Brewer, 1979).

Based on publicly available information, the first NSW Male Champions of Change group formed in Australia supports this rationale. The group has enjoyed extensive media coverage in Australia and overseas of its elite composition and social purpose, its goals, and its initiatives (e.g., see news listed on http://malechampionsofchange.com/category/news/). As a result, new members have joined the original (21 Member) ‘Male Champions of Change’ group or decided to take over the membership of retiring founding members (e.g., Ian Narev succeeded Ralph Norris as the CEO of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and member of the [NSW] Male Champions of Change group). It is very possible that the ease with which the NSW Male Champions of Change group attracts new members reflects its allure to the bystander male leader who prefers to champion gender equity change in the psychological safety of a male peer group.

Further, groups have the opportunity to create bigger more sustainable legacies because they have more potential for ripple effects. As such, male coalitions for gender equity change would appeal to the ‘supporter’ leader as a springboard for action. Again using the NSW MCC group as an example, collectively its members can disrupt the status quo by introducing initiatives such as the ‘No women, no work’ and the panel pledge. The panel pledge is an undertaking by the NSW champions to ask event organisers about the gender composition of their panels before accepting invitations to participate as panellists (Dunkley, 2013). In doing so collectively, the male champions force event organisers to consciously seek talented men and women for speaking events, thus also giving women the opportunity to become visible as leaders. It is reasonable to assume that few champions would have the same ability to change corporate event practice if they acted in isolation.

In sum, ‘supporters’ are the most likely to be enthusiastic about joining groups of peers to keep the issue of gender inequity in corporate leadership at the forefront of the national agenda. These groups of male leaders have the potential to be coalitions for gender diversity even when some members are initially ‘bystanders’ providing there are enough influential champions of gender equity in the group who are ‘supporters’ to spearhead initiatives and generate public awareness of the group’s goals and efforts. The visibility of successful coalitions for gender equity change might also attract ‘sceptic bystanders’ and ‘resistors’, but not necessarily for altruistic internal factors (e.g., other regarding value) or issue passion.

TOWARD A MOTIVATION MODEL

The Australian workforce is approximately 46 percent female (WGEA, 2014). Yet, the representation of women in corporate leadership continues to be abysmally low (e.g., women comprise 5% or less of the CEOs of the ASX 200 listed companies; Pash, 2014; WGEA, 2014) and few CEOs stand out as champions of gender diversity change. In this paper we explain why CEOs and other powerful organisational leaders are key to achieving gender equity in corporate leadership but only a few actively support it. Figure 1 presents a model of what motivates influential leaders to join coalitions of gender equity change and four types of male champion for gender equity. Based on this model, we outline some practical implications of membership mix (supporters, bystanders, sceptics and resistors) on the success and sustainability of these coalitions of male champions for gender equity.

Insert Figure 1 about here

For coalitions of male champions to be successful in maintaining the issue of gender inequity in corporate leadership at the forefront of the national agenda and in changing the status quo, founding coalition members need to be influential and prepared to collaborate towards the common goal of gender equity in leadership. Further, the sustainability of the coalition and of the coalition efforts are only possible if successive champions are similarly influential and collaborative members.

Cases of successful gender diversity initiatives indicate that performance measurement and accountability for achieving gender diversity goals is a requirement to ensure long-standing commitment to gender diversity in organisations (e.g., read eBay case; Angier & Axelrod, 2014). In a similar vein, male coalitions of gender equity change could expect their members to show positive change in women's representation in leadership in their own organisations and have a process of member performance measurement. Further, a selection process is desirable to ensure new members have the necessary characteristics, such as power and influence, to advance the group's purpose and are interested in learning the business case, or have a track record of advocacy, for gender equity.

Personal interests for joining not associated with the advancement of gender equity might be detrimental to the medium and long term viability of the group. For example, if some members' primary objective is to be seen as, rather than to be, a gender equity change leader, their passivity may slow or hinder the group's goal achievements. In turn, members disillusioned with the group's slow or lack of progress may be motivated to leave the group.

In contrast, individuals will remain in or be motivated to join successful groups (Edmondson & Roloff, 2008). Thus, successful coalitions of gender equity change should not have difficulty retaining and attracting members. More importantly, based on the similarity-attraction paradigm (Tajfel, 1978), successful coalitions of gender equity change are likely to attract male decision makers with similar gender equity values and aspirations to those of current members. As a result, successful male coalitions of change are more likely to be sustainable than less successful ones.

CONCLUSION

It is probable that the men who join coalitions of male leaders for gender equity come mostly from the supporters and the bystander sections of the population of male leaders. The reasons why supporters join coalitions of gender equity change are various. Understanding why some leaders champion gender diversity is important in assisting Boards of Directors and incumbent CEOs with succession planning, to ensure that the organisation's top strategic priorities align internal people management policies and practices with external expectations and pressures of workforce gender diversity. Further, the full utilisation of talent is essential for the competitive advantage and economic growth of organisations and, ultimately, Australia. Making gender diversity a strategic organisational priority is one way to unlock that potential.

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Figure 1. Who Joins Male Coalitions for Gender Equity Change