

PART FOUR

INDIVIDUALS

This part of the manual outlines what you can do, as an individual, to help shape the culture at your organisation so it becomes a more fair and respectful place for both sexes to work.

It is divided into three key sections:

1. **Introduction:** why you have a part to play in improving gender equality in your workplace
2. **Preparation:** useful background information to help you get started
3. **Action:** practical things you can do to improve gender equality in your workplace

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a lot you can do, as an individual, to help shape the culture of your organisation and ensure it becomes a more fair and respectful place to work for both sexes. Your personal attitudes and behaviours can inspire others and set a positive example for the entire organisation. You can also initiate or get involved in the bigger picture process to drive cultural change in your workplace. Whatever role you assume, it's wise to first make sure you understand the issue of gender equality thoroughly.

If you haven't already read Part One of this manual, we recommend that you do that now before reading this part of the manual. It is imperative that you understand the following concepts (covered in further detail in Part One) and be able to explain them to your colleagues:

- gender is socially constructed
- the terms 'equality' and 'equity' mean different things
- we are all biased when it comes to gender
- both men and women win if we create more equal workplaces
- flexible work practices should be for everyone, including men, and this may require them to overcome traditional gender expectations and even unconscious bias. Take flexible working conditions if they are offered to you and you want them – especially if you're male. The stigma attached (and the fear of career penalties) will only be overcome if there are positive role models who set the example for others.
- parenthood does not mean that employees 'take their eye off the ball' – it actually gives people an advantage by teaching them skills they can bring to the workplace
- bystander action is very influential in stopping gender bias and discrimination – it's your responsibility to speak up if you see or hear offensive remarks about gender. Things will never change unless somebody says, "actually, that's not okay."
- the gender pay gap in Australia is currently 18.8 per cent and widening – ask your manager what is being done to address this in your organisation
- achieving respect and gender equality in the workplace is directly linked to broader societal issues, like preventing violence against women – think about ways you can build respect for women in your workplace
- many people don't believe we still have an equality issue to address in Australia – you'll probably be met with some opposition when you start talking to people about gender equality, so know your stuff.

There are two clear avenues of action for individuals:

1. Effecting broad 'whole of organisation' change

You can do this by being a positive contributor and role model. You might contribute by having the right strategic conversations with senior leaders and encouraging them to make meaningful decisions around change. You might work on adjusting policies around parental leave, recruitment, or flexible work practices. You might initiate broad cross-organisation working groups, or come up with new campaigns to raise awareness of gender stereotypes at work. You might push for better leadership training around managing teams with a gender lens, or you might play an active part in building partnerships with external agencies that can help your business boost gender equality and respect. There are lots of ways to influence the broader organisational culture, but the key is to think big. Don't focus only on individuals; push for sustainable structural and policy changes for long lasting results.

You may be just one person, but you do have a part to play in helping your organisation achieve gender equality. The way you talk and how you behave can help set the tone for everyone. As an individual, you can be a positive role model and a champion of change, or you can be "part of the problem". Never underestimate the influence an individual can have on a workplace's culture.

Having said that, it's important to remain realistic about your role in all of this. Yes, you can drive the initial push for gender equality, but be aware that you'll need to surrender the wheel to leaders and decision-makers if change is going to occur at your workplace. When this handover occurs (and – remember – it has to, for this to work!), embrace your role as a champion for gender equality and offer to assist or gather information for the main drivers of the initiative.

2. Bystander action

Of course, you can also make a huge impact as a bystander who is willing to step in and speak up when you observe or hear something that's not right in regards to things like:

- a decision being made that is based on gender assumptions
- important meetings being held at times that exclude certain staff
- a colleague using derogatory language relating to someone's gender
- a carer or parent being given a hard time because of their caring responsibilities
- someone treating gender equality as a joke and undermining the direction the organisation wants to head in.

In all of these situations, bystanders should feel comfortable and confident to speak up and, what's more, expect their organisation to support them to do so.

You can also encourage colleagues to seek help or act on issues that are upsetting them. Remember, your colleagues have the right to escalate an issue into a complaint at any time – but the outcomes are usually better if they try talking to the person directly, asking their supervisor for assistance, speaking to a Contact Officer, or considering mediation or external help with the situation first. Although it's better if we can avoid problems escalating to this stage, complaints have to be lodged if all other avenues have been exhausted. These formal processes do eventually have an impact on how organisations manage difficulties in the future – so they are important.

2. PREPARATION

As an individual, it's hard to change the world overnight – but you can try to look after your little slice of it. Skill yourself up to:

- be inclusive and ensure everyone is respected
- notice wording in policies or other documents that could be changed to better promote gender equality (and letting the right person know)
- try to make sure that sexist stereotypes aren't used to limit what men and women want to do, or have access to
- recognise when unfair or sexist practices occur
- speak up in a productive way
- follow up with a manager or HR contact
- support colleagues who want something done about an incident.

Think about what you would do if you saw or heard:

- a group of colleagues ignoring another staff member because he/she had made a complaint about sexual harassment
- a senior person laughing off suggestions that proper process hadn't been observed
- a group of male managers teasing a new father because he wants to pick up his baby from crèche early on a Friday
- your work's social organiser laughing at complaints from women colleagues about a scheduled "Bloke's Golf Day"
- a female senior manager being repeatedly left out of drinks gatherings and other informal activities
- crude comments being made about a colleague's sexuality.

Sometimes it's wise to audit yourself, using this simple checklist:

- ☐ can I easily identify sexist, discriminatory, and gender biased behaviour at work?
- ☐ do I understand the impact of this behaviour on people of both sexes?
- ☐ do I know what our policies and procedures say about gender equality?
- ☐ do I feel comfortable to speak up and challenge gender inequality, gender assumptions, biases and expectations, and sexist behaviours?
- ☐ do I think expectations about gender dictate what roles people occupy in this organisation?
- ☐ do I think women are well represented within the organisational leadership group?
- ☐ do I view anybody within the organisation's leadership group as a positive role model for gender equality?
- ☐ do I think that flexibility is offered equally and without penalty to both sexes? If so, do both sexes take it up? Would I?
- ☐ do I believe a 'glass ceiling' or gender pay gap exists at this organisation?

DON'T FOCUS TOO MUCH ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

The key to gender equality is to focus on inclusion and fairness. It's important to acknowledge individual differences, but often they are to do with different personalities rather than whether that person is male or female. Yes, there are some basic differences in hormones, body size, etc., between men and women, but these things do not explain the very different ways we interact with the world. The social construct of 'gender' (what it means to be male or female in our society) is much more influential.

Individuals often become fixed in their certainty that the differences between men and women are innate and hard-wired and there's nothing we can do about them. We have often heard that men are better at spatial relations (parking cars, playing ball sports) and women are better at the softer skills (empathising with people and creative pursuits). This is a kind of 'neuro-sexism', which is challenged by people like Cordelia Fine in her book *'Delusions of Gender'*.⁵¹

*In fact, there are no major neurological differences between the sexes. There may be slight variations in the brains of women and men, but the wiring is soft, not hard. It is flexible, malleable and changeable.*⁵²

There are differences in male and female brains at birth, but they are tiny. Our upbringing, hobbies, the subjects we study, and our involvement in sports all impact the plasticity of our brain and, over time, we learn to be better at certain things. Similarly, if we are encouraged into leadership roles at work, spoken to about taking initiative and affecting change, and mentored and offered appropriate training opportunities, we will be much more likely to end up as leadership material. Trouble is, this currently happens much more commonly for men.



If you'd like to read more about the different pathways men and women tend to take (that have nothing to do with any brain differences), see the WGEA's *'Different Genders, Different Lives'* publication at:

www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/2014-03-04_PP_different_genders_different_lives.pdf

UNDERSTANDING GENDER EQUALITY AND THE LAW

We have laws about preventing and addressing discrimination in Australia. Sex discrimination is when a person is treated less favourably than a person of the opposite sex would be treated in the same or similar circumstances.

Gender equality laws now require workplaces to actively promote equality, rather than just deal with problems as they arise. The *Sex Discrimination Act* makes it against the law to treat you unfairly because of your:

- sex
- marital status
- family responsibilities
- pregnancy or potential to become pregnant
- because you are breastfeeding.

Obviously, the *Act* also makes sexual harassment against the law.



This definition appears in the Australian Human Rights Commission's publication *'Know Your Rights, Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment'*. You can find this at: www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/know-your-rights-sex-discrimination-and-sexual-harassment

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual behaviour that is likely to offend, humiliate or intimidate. It has nothing to do with mutual attraction or friendship. Examples include:

- unwelcome physical touching
- staring or leering
- suggestive comments or jokes
- unwanted requests to go out on dates
- requests for sex
- emailing pornography or rude jokes
- sending sexually explicit texts
- intrusive questions about your private life or body
- displaying posters, magazines or screen savers of a sexual nature.

It's important to explain to others what sexual harassment actually means, if you recognise there are problems emerging. Everyone has the right to be safe while at work – so, if you do encounter problems, you need to act early. You can speak to your manager, HR team, or Contact Officer.

Sexual harassment gets a lot of attention (with 1 in 5 women experiencing it during their career), but it's even more common for people to experience years of micro-inequities, or small examples of unfair treatment. These may take various forms.

The law recognises three forms of discrimination:

1. **Direct** discrimination
2. **Indirect** discrimination
3. **Victimisation.**

Let's explore each of these in a sex discrimination context in more detail:

1. Direct discrimination

Direct sex discrimination is less favourable treatment of a woman than a man (or vice versa) because of their sex. This usually impacts individuals.

Increasingly, over a period of a year, I became aware that I was being used to lure people into the business. I was told exactly what to wear to various functions and events – including “something sexy” on one occasion – and I was coached to engage with clients and bring them back to our work functions. I said it was inappropriate but nothing changed. None of my male colleagues were ever told what to wear.

– Anna, 22

2. Indirect discrimination

Indirect sex discrimination occurs in a broader context. It's when an employer applies a policy or practice equally to everyone that puts one sex at an unfair disadvantage. Indirect discrimination can easily affect many people if left unchecked.

An internal position at the organisation's crèche was advertised in the usual way, but when I called for further information they were very dismissive of me, saying that they were looking for a nurturing mother who had experience raising children. I have good childcare qualifications, but they refused to even consider me.

– Ben, 25

3. Victimisation

This can happen when you are treated less favourably or bullied or excluded because you make a complaint of discrimination or support a colleague who was complaining. You might be branded or treated as a troublemaker, or stopped from accessing opportunities that are open to others.

Once you are clear about your rights, it's important to move gender discussions away from always being about discrimination to being more about fairness and inclusion.

Ever since I was caught up in Toni's sexual harassment claim, people don't trust me. The senior managers ignore me and I haven't been offered any training since it happened. I am wondering how I can prove that the organisation's attitude towards me has changed and some key people haven't forgiven me for telling the truth. It's pretty obvious, but rather hard to substantiate.

– Mark, 42

3. ACTION

WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE THINGS AT WORK?

You can:

- raise awareness first, and start conversations
- find out what's currently happening in your organisation through HR and ask how you can contribute
- initiate requests for equality training
- be a positive role model.

THE 'DECIDE' MODEL

Here is a handy model that sums up what you, as an individual, can do about gender equality in your workplace:

- **D**on't put up with inequities in the workplace, at home or in the community – say something
- **E**ducate yourself by doing a course or reading more about gender inequities and inequality
- **C**ommunicate with colleagues, friends, family about it – start conversations
- **I**nforn someone if you see examples of inequities or discrimination. Raise their awareness in a respectful way
- **D**emand that sexism and sexual harassment is addressed in your workplace
- **E**mpower others to do something about it, too – work as a team.

HOW CAN I CONTRIBUTE TO A GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVE?

There are some great ways you can help propel a gender equality program forward. You can join a working group, contribute to the organisational plan, or (best of all) start collecting information.

It's helpful to talk to your manager or someone in HR about this first. Start by asking if they have any plans regarding gender equality and if they've tried to ascertain what's currently happening organisation-wide.

If you are given the go-ahead to gather information, start by asking individuals about standards of behaviour in their team and what they witness across the business. This can be done via workshops, focus groups, or a simple survey. This isn't an investigation; so don't gather names and dates of incidents unless that's what you have been asked to do. Instead, gather information on the kinds of general issues that regularly crop up. You might like to document some examples and alter the details. It's important not to circulate this information inappropriately through the business: take it to your manager or HR contact.


Useful questions to ask your colleagues include:

- are standards and expectations regarding behaviour clear?
- do people realise that we have some way to go to reach gender equality?
- does everyone know where to get information on the topic?
- do people recognise when inequities small or large occur?
- do they feel confident to speak up?
- are there ground rules about what bystanders might say if they see sexist behaviours or comments?
- do leaders role model appropriately supportive behaviours?
- what inclusive practices do you see at work?
- are men given equal access to flexibility if they want better work/life balance?

You can also volunteer to examine and assess your organisation's policies and procedures, and check if there is currently anything in them that relates to gender equality. You will need to look for things like:

- diversity policy or gender equality statement
- equal opportunity/anti-discrimination policy
- code of conduct/workplace behaviours policy
- parental/carers leave policy
- flexible work policy
- family violence leave policy.

Again, speak to someone in HR and find out if they would like your assistance.



I had a manager who was constantly saying things like, 'Time to toughen up, Princess' whenever I alerted her to sexist comments and issues in the (mostly male) team I worked with. She made it my problem, and took a 'I had to handle it and fight to get ahead... so should you' attitude.

I thought to myself, 'what if I was getting picked on about my cultural background?' Would she still be saying 'just deal with it'?

I eventually left that job. I couldn't change the culture of the whole organisation and I didn't think I should have had to.

– Leah, 26

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS CAN YOU SAY AS A BYSTANDER?

You will undoubtedly hear or observe behaviour that is discriminatory, sexist, and offensive during your working life – in fact, chances are it will be directed at you personally at some stage. It's important to know how to manage your response, and know how to stand up for yourself and others.

Your responses can range from:

- minor (raising an eyebrow and saying: "that doesn't sound right to me")
- moderate ("that is actually offensive. Please stop speaking in that way")
- major ("I'm going to report this behaviour. It's wrong, both ethically and legally").

You will know what kind of response you want to make, but make sure you feel safe to do so. If there has been a display of aggression in any way, seek some support from a manager or leader. If you feel there is no danger, it's important for you to stand up for yourself and talk to the person who has behaved badly.

The most common responses people are likely to make when they are pulled up for offensive comments or poor behaviour are:

What? Don't be ridiculous! I was only joking!

No, you've misunderstood me

You don't hear me complaining when women make jokes about men

There is no right way to deal with these difficult situations, but the important thing is not to lose your cool, or to get into an argument. Plan to always hold on to the principle of 'do no harm' during your discussion with the offender.

Imagine somebody has said something derogatory and sexist to you about "women belonging in the kitchen, not the workplace." Here are four steps that will help you handle the situation:

1. Stop and think about the idea or belief behind the comment. Yes, it's offended you, but where is it coming from? What gender bias or assumptions does it reveal? For example, in this case: Women are more naturally attuned to home duties than men.
2. Ask a clarifying question or make a response that is informed by this thought. For example:

So what you're saying is that you believe women have natural abilities that make them better than men at looking after a home? Do you really think that's true?

3. Make a response or ask a question that reflects wisdom in their idea or belief. This doesn't mean you agree with the overall statement. For example:

Perhaps women are, on the whole, more nurturing than men. But I'm not sure that this quality is innate. I think maybe society conditions women to be that way. What do you think?

4. Apply that wisdom to the topic at hand in a new way that is close enough to the person's way of thinking for them to be able to move forward with you. For example:

Society tells both men and women that they should act a certain way, or be good at a certain thing, or that they "belong" in a certain place. But do they really? Surely men are just as capable of cooking or cleaning a kitchen? If that's true, aren't women just as capable of working in an office or factory?

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING RESPECT IN THE WORKPLACE (FOR YOURSELF AND OTHERS)

- consider if there are gender inequities that you see and could be acting on
- notice when both men and women are treated unfairly or penalties are applied for thinking in different ways (e.g. a man arranged to attend his child's sports day and is given a hard time by others)
- focus on inclusion
- ask people on your team how they feel they are treated in terms of gender
- if you make a mistake and say something unfair, apologise and make a commitment that it won't happen again
- ensure everyone has access to opportunities at work
- support events and initiatives – be a champion of change
- build informal relationships by sharing articles or information or helping when colleagues are stressed or struggling
- assist others and ask for help when you need it
- share something of yourself, your interests, what you do for fun/ exercise/your community
- be strict about boundaries – know what you will and won't do (e.g. when it comes to something like gossip, don't say anything you wouldn't say to the person's face. This is actually a great general guideline for anyone in any workplace)
- go out for a drink with colleagues if you want to, but know when to leave – if you become uncomfortable with behaviour within the group, excuse yourself (we should be doing this in any group situation)
- if you are excluded from something, speak up and say: "I would've liked to have been included". If they don't apologise, be more clear with your message: "Next time, please do include me"
- talk about things you have in common (politics, music, books, movies)
- if you are uncomfortable at times, it's okay to admit it ("yeah, sometimes it's awkward, but I find a way through") rather than deny it ("no, it's fine. I know you didn't mean it") or accept it as your lot ("yes, I really hate the comments. But I guess I have to expect them, being the only female in the team"). You need to let people know if they are making you uncomfortable
- if you are the victim of something more serious than an unintended but discriminatory comment, say something to the offender one-on-one, not in front of the group. If that doesn't work, ask them clearly to accompany you to your manager or to HR to work things out
- should I be taking responsibility for this or is this based on social conditioning of women to appease?



We are gradually getting better. There are still a few questionable jokes told from time to time – but no one laughs any more.

– Sam, 27

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