



ENGAGING MEN

The Journey Toward Equity

Geoffrey T. Kerr
Alixandra Pollack



Men are a crucial and often untapped resource for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in organizations. Indeed, research shows that 96% of organizations report progress on DEI when men are actively involved, compared to only 30% that report progress when men are not engaged.¹

Men must be an integral part of the journey toward equity and inclusion. By ensuring men ignite and join in the conversation, provide their support, and reinforce their commitment, organizations can build a culture that truly lives out the values of diversity and equity. Leveraging the collective impact of all genders is the most effective way to attain long-lasting impact.

But how can organizations do this, exactly? Catalyst's landmark research series, *Engaging Men in Gender Initiatives*, provides data-backed strategies for successfully engaging men in gender-diversity initiatives. Its findings provide a path to equitable participation in DEI programs and the workplace.

Increase Awareness of Gender Bias

For men to become advocates of gender equity, they must first recognize that gender bias exists and that there is something wrong with the status quo. In the first report of the series, Catalyst researchers interviewed men who were “actively working to decrease gender disparities in their workplaces and communities”² to understand what factors affect men's awareness of gender bias and inequity. The men illuminated three factors that they perceived as related to an increased awareness of gender bias:³

DEFIANCE OF MASCULINE NORMS

Men who rejected traditional norms were more likely to be aware of gender bias.

WOMEN MENTORS

Men who had women mentors had a higher awareness of gender bias.

STRONG SENSE OF FAIR PLAY

Men who believed in fair play—being concerned about resource distribution in society—were more likely than those who did not to be aware of gender bias.

This study also found that a strong sense of fair play was associated with supporting DEI initiatives. As respondents' sense of fair play increased, their likelihood of being identified as someone who engages in concrete actions to enhance diversity similarly increased.⁴



Training Works

Building men's awareness of gender issues, and then equipping them with knowledge and skills to practice inclusion, can have a transformative impact.

In another study from the series,⁵ Catalyst surveyed people managers at a global engineering company who were mostly but not exclusively White men. Researchers looked at the impact of diversity and inclusion training on the workplace experiences of employees and their coworkers.⁶ They found that specific forms of training, namely the type of dialogue-based programming characteristic of [MARC](#) (Men Advocating Real Change)—that explicitly includes and addresses men—led to important changes noticed by participants, including increased:⁷

- Civility (and less gossip) within the workplace.
- Agreement that men experience greater privilege than women.
- Critical thinking about the experiences of different groups.
- Taking responsibility for exhibiting inclusive behaviors.
- Empathic listening.
- Conversations across difference.

Changes in civility, conversations across difference, and critical thinking were also observed by the coworkers of participants.⁸

Ten years into our delivery of MARC learning programs, our impact evaluation data suggests the same.⁹ For example, men who participated in Catalyst's [MARC Dialogue Teams Workshop](#)¹⁰ were more likely to agree that women are held to different standards in the workplace than men who had not yet participated.¹¹ After this training, participants across gender also reported increased confidence in their ability to act in support of DEI.¹²

Appeal to Men's Concerns

Achieving a gender-inclusive, bias-free workplace is not easy. To be successful, organizations need the full engagement and commitment of their entire workforce—of all genders. This is often not the case.

Researchers show that men can hold unfavorable attitudes about a training prior to their participation¹³ and these attitudes can stifle their learning during DEI-focused training. Organizations must be proactive in building a case for DEI training to counteract these negative and unproductive pre-training attitudes. All employees, but especially men, must understand the value of training and engage in training with a willing and open mind.¹⁴

To better understand determinants of men's engagement with DEI training, in another series report, Catalyst researchers surveyed a cohort of men who were middle or senior managers working in large organizations.¹⁵

Findings showed four factors that predicted men's interest in DEI training, listed below in order of importance:

1. What managers think about the training.

Men's impressions of how interested their fellow managers were in taking the training was the most powerful predictor of men's interest in DEI training. Influential managers, especially men, should be leveraged to increase the level of men's interest in DEI training. These managers can express interest in learning programs publicly and potentially support delivery of the training.¹⁶

2. Skills learned could positively impact the community.

The more people believed that DEI training could improve skills that would benefit their community, the more interested they were in signing up for DEI training. Organizations should emphasize both business and social benefits when encouraging participation in DEI training.¹⁷

3. Belief that training is relevant to current job.

The more people believed that DEI training was relevant to their current job, the more interested they were in the training. To leverage this finding, organizations should gather testimonials from people who have participated in the training before about how their newly learned skills benefited their jobs. These competencies should also be part of the organization's formal performance evaluation criteria. Finally, training should be relevant and relatable, addressing real world situations that participants may have encountered.¹⁸

4. Unwillingness to embrace zero-sum thinking.

In zero-sum thinking, people believe that any action that benefits one group (e.g., women) inevitably harms another group (e.g., men). **Let us be clear: Gender equity is not a zero-sum game.** However, men who endorse this false belief are less likely to express interest in DEI training. Organizations must dispel any notion that DEI is a zero-sum game. It is critical to discuss how gender stereotypes hurt people of all genders and how men will also experience benefits from an inclusive workplace.¹⁹



Trust the Process and Witness the Change

In the fourth report from the series, Catalyst conducted a case study of what it takes to achieve a major cultural shift inside workplaces that embrace DEI initiatives and found two milestones that signal positive change.²⁰

DEI conversations are deeper and more open-ended.

Non-judgmental conversations allow for people to engage in conversation without fear of reprisal, even across gender and race. As the researchers state: “When we all learn and continue to practice essential dialogic skills including demonstrating vulnerability, self-disclosing, suspending judgment, inquiring across difference, and exploring conflicts, over time interactions with people from whom we differ become positive and rewarding opportunities to learn and connect. With this positive reinforcement, reaching out to colleagues who differ from us can become habits that slowly shift the work culture into a more inclusive one.”²¹

More employees commit to act.

Conversations across difference will lead to an improved sense across employees of what action is needed to drive inclusion. For example, the study found that employees will be more likely to join both formal and informal groups to achieve collective action.²²

In this summary of the *Engaging Men in Gender Initiatives* series, we have likened the pursuit of equity to a journey, and we think the term is quite apt. It will take preparation, time, and countless steps to bring your organization ever closer to gender equity. And gaining the support of men is critical to reaching your destination.

Yet, you may still encounter obstacles on your journey. Our companion piece, *Engaging Men: Barriers and Gender Norms*, discusses the reasons why some men have difficulty buying in to gender equity.

We hope that you will continue taking steps toward equity across gender and other dimensions of identity. It is important to support the culture shift within your organization while addressing the barriers that people may encounter. By doing so, you will create a better, more equitable workplace for all employees.

How to cite: Kerr, G. & Pollack, A. (2022). *Engaging men: The journey toward equity*. Catalyst.

-
1. Krentz, M., Wierzbica, O., Abouzahr, K., Garcia-Alonso, J., & Taplett, F.B. (2017). *Five ways men can improve gender diversity at work*. Boston Consulting Group.
 2. Prime, J. & Moss-Racusin, C. A. (2009). *Engaging men in gender initiatives: What change agents need to know*. Catalyst.
 3. Prime & Moss-Racusin (2009).
 4. Prime & Moss-Racusin (2009).
 5. Prime, J., Foust-Cummings, H., Salib, E. R., & Moss-Racusin, C. A. (2012). *Calling all white men: Can training help create inclusive workplaces?* Catalyst.
 6. Prime et al. (2012).
 7. Prime et al. (2012).
 8. Prime et al. (2012).
 9. As part of its impact evaluation work, Catalyst conducts surveys before and after its workshops, measuring participants' DEI-related behaviors and attitudes. Participation in these surveys is voluntary. Of primary interest is how these behaviors and attitudes change over time, potentially due to workshop participation. In this case, using data collected from February 2020 to October 2021, we compared the responses from a sample of participants (N = 2,131, 61.4% men) about to begin MARC Dialogue Teams with a sample of participants (N = 185, 71.0% men) that had completed 12 months of MARC Dialogue Teams. We are unable to determine if the post-workshop participants comprise a subset of the pre-workshop participants, or if they are different participants. ANOVAs were conducted to assess the potential impact of time (pre- or post-workshop) on DEI-related behaviors and attitudes while controlling for participant gender.
 10. In MARC Dialogue Teams, self-led teams discuss DEI topics such as gender partnership and systemic barriers to inclusion over the course of 12 or 24 months. Team members come from a mixture of leadership levels and job roles, which allows participants to understand these DEI topics from a wide variety of perspectives.
 11. $t(1446) = -2.51, p < .05$.
 12. In a model controlling for self-identified gender, participants reported a higher degree of confidence in their ability to act in support of DEI after completing one year of the MARC Dialogue Teams Workshop as compared to before taking the workshop $F(1,2313) = 153.62, p < .01$.
 13. Holladay, C. L., Knight, J. L., Paige, D. L., & Quinoñes, M. A. (2003). *The influence of framing on attitudes toward diversity training*. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 14(3), 245-263.
 14. Prime, J., Moss-Racusin, C., & Foust-Cummings, H. (2009). *Engaging men in gender initiatives: Stacking the deck for success*. Catalyst.
 15. Prime, Moss-Racusin & Foust-Cummings (2009).
 16. Prime, Moss-Racusin & Foust-Cummings (2009).
 17. Prime, Moss-Racusin & Foust-Cummings (2009).
 18. Prime, Moss-Racusin & Foust-Cummings (2009).
 19. Prime, Moss-Racusin & Foust-Cummings (2009).
 20. Dinolfo, S., Prime, J., & Foust-Cummings, H. (2013). *Anatomy of change: How inclusive cultures evolve*. Catalyst.
 21. Dinolfo, Prime, & Foust-Cummings (2013), p. 9.
 22. Dinolfo, Prime, & Foust-Cummings (2013).