Hoop CONSULTING × PEOPLE MEASURES × THE 100% PROJECT

ENGAGING MALE LEADERS IN GENDER EQUITY:

Identity, Loss, and Culture Change

Frances Feenstra, Paul Starr, and Elena Carter



ALWAYS WAS. ALWAYS WILL BE.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we gather today.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People who may be joining us today.

We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded. We commit with energy to a future where all people have equity of opportunity and socially just outcomes.

ABOUT US



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TODAY'S FOCUS



01.

Understand the critical role male leaders play in shaping culture change for gender equity, and why progress often stalls without their active engagement.



02.

Explore how identity, loss, and competing priorities influence male leaders' engagement in gender equity, including how these dynamics contribute to resistance or disengagement.



03.

Learn practical approaches to position gender equity as part of leadership work, increasing engagement and accountability among (senior) male leaders.

And a surprise extra one!

“Gender inequity persists in organizations because it depends just as much on men’s leadership as on women’s.”

- Nicole Ferry

Assistant Professor, Copenhagen Business School

WHY MALE LEADERS MATTER

INFLUENCE & IMPACT

Everyday decisions and workplace culture.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY & ALLYSHIP

Challenging inequity rather than leaving it to women.

In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

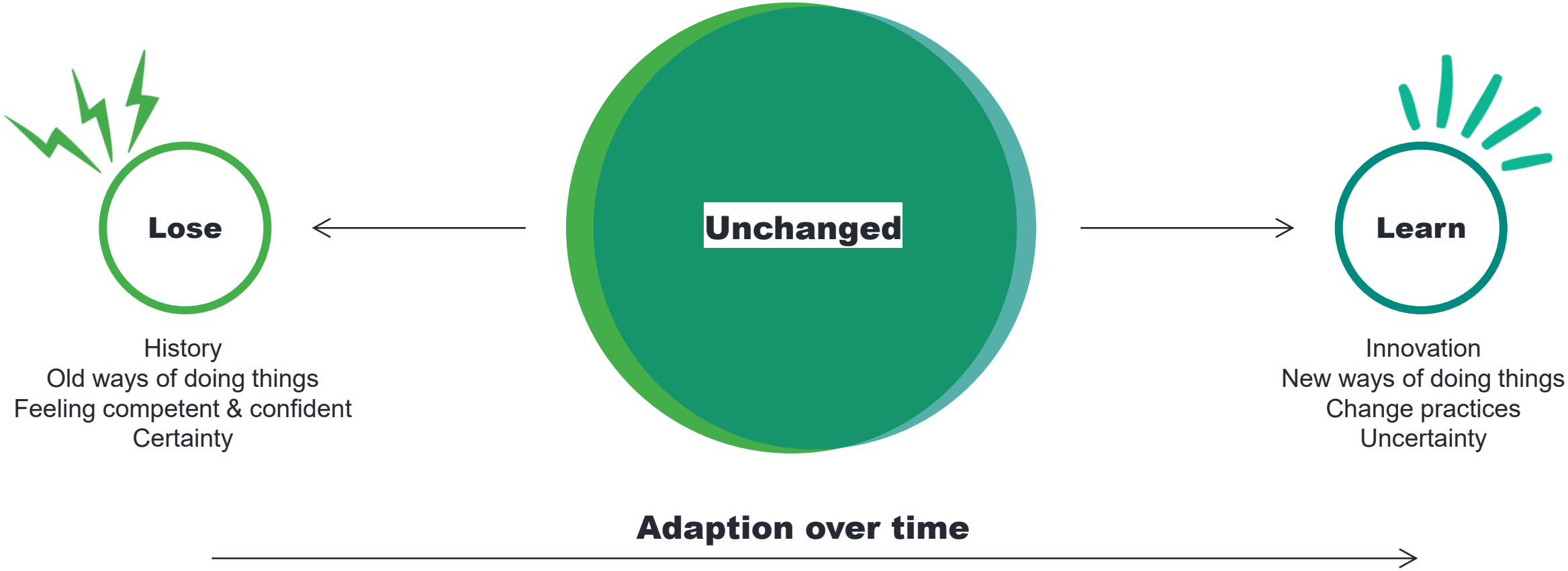
- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

TECHNICAL VS ADAPTIVE WORK

	Technical work	Adaptive work
The solution...	…is clear	…requires learning
The problem...	…is clear	…requires learning
Whose work is it?	Expert or authority	Stakeholders
Type of work	Efficient	Act experimentally
Timeline	ASAP	Longer term
Expectations	“Fix the problem”	“Make progress”
Attitude	Confidence and skill	Curiosity

Source: Adapted from Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009

ADAPTIVE MODEL OF CHANGE



BARRIERS TO PROGRESS

01. Silence & social norms.

02. Awareness, confidence & capability.

03. Perceived threats to fairness, merit & identity.

04. Limited organisational expectations & accountability.

Men's engagement is influenced by silence and social norms inherited from the system, individual attitudes and capability, perceived threat and loss, and the organisational environments in which they work.

MAKING PROGRESS: HOW TO ENGAGE MEN

01. Make support visible & shift norms.

02. Build confidence & capability.

03. Engage with assumptions.

04. Establish accountability.

01. Make support visible & shift norms

Show that supporting gender equity and challenging sexism are expected and supported.

✳ **ACTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS**

Encourage men who speak up and challenge sexist assumptions. Help make existing support among men more visible.

✳ **ACTIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL**

Create opportunities for men to hear from other men who actively support gender equity. Leaders model and reinforce constructive challenge.

MAKING PROGRESS: HOW TO ENGAGE MEN

01. Make support visible & shift norms.

02. Build confidence & capability.

03. Engage with assumptions.

04. Establish accountability.

02. Build confidence & capability

Help men recognise sexism and develop the skills to respond constructively.

- **ACTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS**

  Use discussion, reflection and feedback to build awareness of everyday sexism. Model and practise constructive interventions.

- **ACTIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL**

  Provide practical intervention skills training and create psychologically safe environments where people can ask questions and challenge assumptions.

MAKING PROGRESS: HOW TO ENGAGE MEN

02. Build confidence & capability

✳ **DEVELOPING MEN'S INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY**

Evidence-Informed Insights on MAIL Program

- Personal Relevance Drives Engagement: Research highlights that personal relevance supports sustained attitude change. All MAIL participants had a personal and/or professional interest in the program, which motivated their active engagement.
- Positive Shifts in Knowledge and Commitment: Consistent with gender equity program research, MAIL participants reported increased knowledge, self-awareness, confidence, and a stronger commitment to advancing gender equity.
- Evidence of Behaviour Change: Most MAIL participants reported implementing gender inclusive behaviours at work and interpersonally following the program. While long-term behaviour change evidence is mixed, MAIL outcomes reinforce the potential for meaningful impact.
- Safe Environment Enabled Deep Reflection: Themes of connection, challenge, growth, and safety suggest MAIL fostered a psychologically safe space for deep personal reflection – an underexplored but critical factor in gender equity interventions.
- Experiential Learning Enhances Effectiveness: Participants valued the programs experiential nature, aligning with evidence that immersive formats are more effective than information only formats.
- Organisational Support is Crucial: Despite gains, some participants faced workplace barriers that may hinder sustained behaviour change, underscoring the need for broader organisational support.

MAKING PROGRESS: HOW TO ENGAGE MEN

01. Make support visible & shift norms.

02. Build confidence & capability.

03. Engage with assumptions.

04. Establish accountability.

03. Engage with assumptions

Explore concerns and use evidence to challenge assumptions about fairness and merit.

ACTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

Explore concerns about fairness and merit. Use questions and evidence to challenge assumptions about who is capable or deserving.

ACTIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL

Explain the rationale for gender equity initiatives, share evidence of existing inequalities and establish transparent selection and promotion criteria.

MAKING PROGRESS: HOW TO ENGAGE MEN

01. Make support visible & shift norms.

02. Build confidence & capability.

03. Engage with assumptions.

04. Establish accountability.

04. Establish accountability

Make active responsibility for gender equity part of effective leadership.

- **ACTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS**

  Engage men in leadership positions in conversations about their responsibilities and what inclusive leadership looks like in everyday decisions.

- **ACTIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL**

  Embed inclusive leadership behaviours in leadership selection, development, KPIs and performance reviews. Hold leaders accountable.

Which of these strategies would have the biggest impact in your organisation?

01. Make support visible & shift norms.

02. Build confidence & capability.

03. Engage with assumptions.

04. Establish accountability.

WHAT ABOUT US?

Power, role conflict and professional risk



POWER

In a professional setting refers to the capacity to influence others, allocate resources, and make defining decisions.

A leader may have the power to cut short your career which makes it hard for you to challenge that person.

ROLE CONFLICT

Occurs when a professional faces contradictory or incompatible demands from two or more roles they hold, or from different stakeholders within a single role.



PROFESSIONAL RISK

Involves the potential for negative consequences affecting an individual's career trajectory, financial stability, or professional reputation.



CALLING OUT AND CALLING IN

	Setting	Approach	Goal	Potential outcome
Calling out	Public	Direct & immediate	Stop the behaviour & raise awareness	May interrupt but not necessarily lead to change
Calling in	Private	Reflective & understanding	Promote understanding & potential change	May lead to lasting behavioural changes

CALLING IN CONVERSATIONS

How to have a calling in conversation

01. Start by assuming good intent & explain impact.

02. Challenge stereotypes.

03. Help them reframe the situation.

04. Clarify & ask questions.

05. Take the oxygen out of the conversation.

06. Appeal to a shared point of reference.

07. State your disagreement in first-person.

From Ananth Gopal, Polykala

Thriving in complexity: Redefining the world of ~~work~~