

Men as Partners: Rethinking Allyship for Workplace Gender Equity through Action Research

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Abstract

This action research study examines the evolving role of men in advancing workplace gender equity, drawing on nearly a decade of initiatives across Europe and the MENA region. While legislative and cultural shifts have improved women's leadership representation, men's engagement remains inconsistent. Barriers such as masculinity norms, fear of backlash, and role uncertainty hinder meaningful participation. Using datasets from European divisions of global corporations, the study identifies four stages of men's allyship: Apathy, Ambivalence, Reflective and Responsible, and Energised and Motivated. These stages represent a shift from disengagement to active advocacy, shaped by cultural, organisational, and individual factors. Findings reveal systemic barriers—including entrenched gender norms, unclear allyship roles, and a lack of psychological safety—that limit men's participation. To address these challenges, the study highlights tailored interventions such as safe spaces for dialogue, visible leadership modelling, and structured mentorship and advocacy programs. The Gender Equity Mindset Model provides a framework for understanding and supporting men's allyship journeys, positioning it as a dynamic process requiring empathy, accountability, and sustained commitment. This research offers practical insights for embedding male allyship into diversity strategies, equipping organisations to create inclusive and equitable workplaces. It calls for expanded research across geographies, particularly in the MENA and Asia-Pacific regions, and an intersectional lens to deepen understanding. By refining interventions and addressing cultural dynamics, organisations can drive sustainable, systemic change where allyship becomes an embedded commitment to workplace equity.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Male Allyship, Workplace Transformation, Mindset-Stages, Cultural Change, Action Research