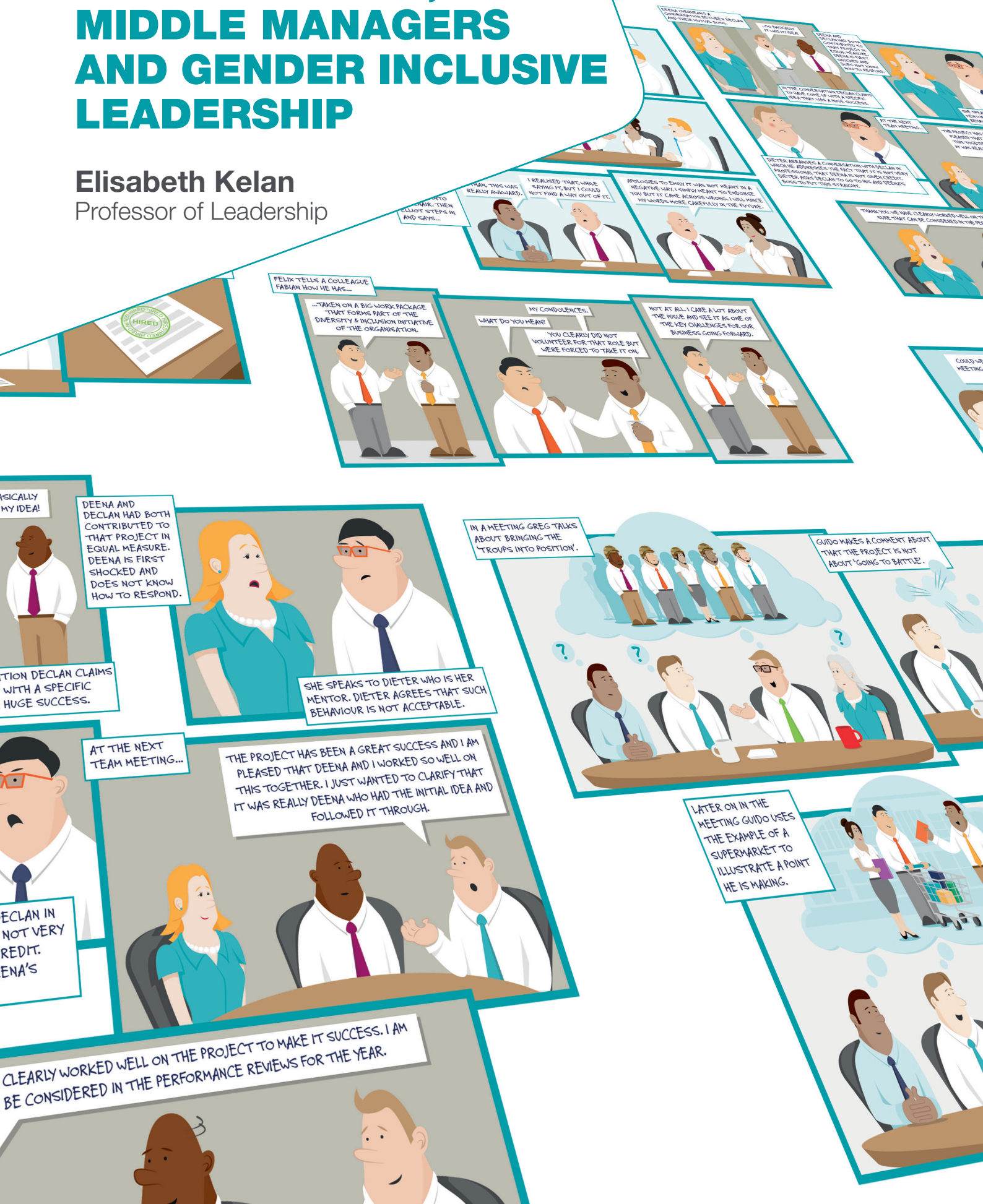


# LINCHPIN - MEN, MIDDLE MANAGERS AND GENDER INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

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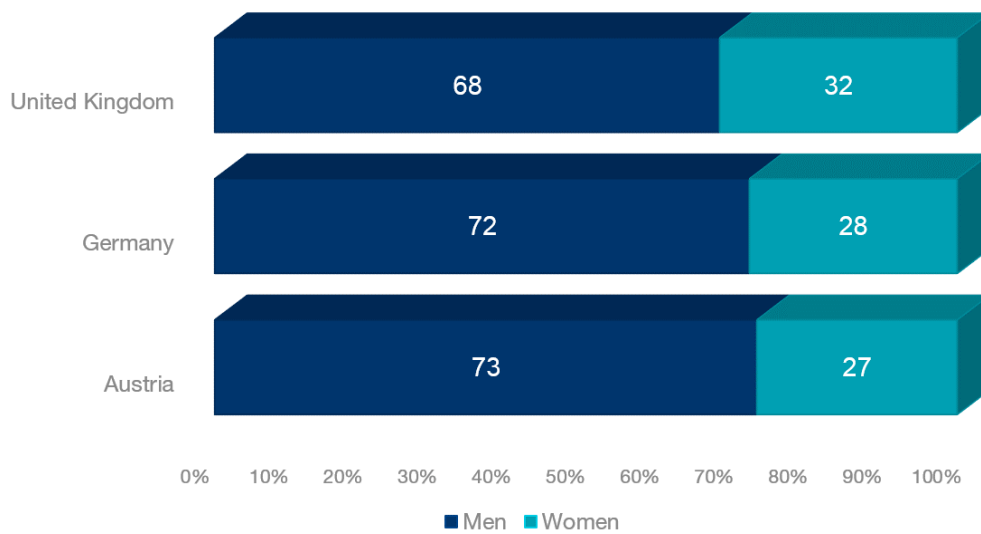


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# INTRODUCTION

Women’s underrepresentation in leadership roles in organisations has attracted a lot of attention in recent years. Much of this focus centres on how women need to change in order to fit into organisations. This approach, often called ‘fixing the women’, has been criticised because it leaves systems and structures in organisations unchallenged. Instead of changing women, it is organisational practices that need to change. This means that women as well as men have to engage reflectively with working practices. As men constitute 70% of managers and leaders in organisations (International Labour Organization 2015), men in leadership roles are central to changing gender relations at work by altering their workplace practices. However, men’s relevance and responsibility for gender change in the workplace is often ignored. How men as middle managers can contribute to gender parity is therefore a greatly neglected topic in practitioner and academic research.



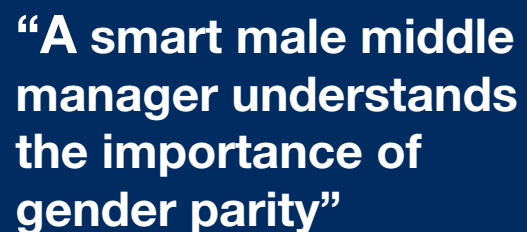
Data Source: International Labour Organization 2015

In a previous study (Kelan & Wratil 2014), the fact that CEOs see gender parity as an important issue for their organisations has been highlighted (see Appendix 1). It was also found that many CEOs feel that they struggle to move middle managers along with them on the journey toward gender parity. The permafrost of middle management appears reluctant to change because they are already overwhelmed by their daily activities. Middle management has been described as drowning in responsibilities with limited decision-making power, being undertrained and overworked, resistant to change or simply as the last representatives of the outdated and obsolete concept of middle management. Middle managers are squeezed between receiving strategic direction from above and delivering it through the work of those whom they manage.

Middle managers have therefore been called a linchpin between the executive and more junior levels of the organisation, and are central to organisational change processes (Harding et al. 2014). A survey of leading European companies suggests that while most CEOs support moves toward gender parity, only 13% of middle managers share this idea (McKinsey 2012). This suggests that while men as middle managers are pivotal for creating gender parity at work, they rarely fulfil this responsibility.

While great strides have been taken to make workplaces more gender equal, gender inequality is perpetuated by many [subtle workplace practices](#). We are talking here about the classic examples of a woman's comment being ignored in a meeting or someone who looks exactly like others in the organisation being hired (Wittenberg-Cox & Maitland 2008). These subtle practices erode women's motivation to remain in the workplace and limit their chances for career advancement. However, an individual woman has limited leeway to challenge this. Therefore, male middle managers play a pivotal role for two reasons. First, their [hierarchical position](#) means that they translate the strategic direction they receive from the top to their immediate environment. Middle managers could translate the aim for gender parity that many CEOs espouse into their immediate environment by changing daily interactions around gender. Second, if 70% of middle managers are men, this [numerical majority](#) could effectively progress change. This dual role of male middle managers is a powerful tool to effect change toward gender parity in organisations.

But why should male middle managers be motivated to support gender parity? One could argue that men have much to lose through gender parity; for them, achieving gender parity could mean relinquishing status, prestige and power. For example, men might harbour fears that a focus on gender parity will negatively impact on their chances of promotion. On a societal level, men might view gender parity as something worthwhile achieving while they might be less inclined to be at the receiving end of policies and procedures that are perceived to favour women. A more convincing strategy to engage men might be to show that gender parity is good for business. CEOs are leading the way in making the business case for gender parity (Kelan & Wratil 2014). If gender parity is on the CEO's agenda, then middle managers, particularly men, should realise that it is an important issue for the organisation and that engaging in it might be beneficial for their career. Smart managers understand that they need to look beyond their daily activities and show a wider interest in leadership and management in general and how it is practised within their organisation. A smart male middle manager will have to show that he understands the importance of gender parity and knows how to foster it.



**“A smart male middle manager understands the importance of gender parity”**

While it is one thing to acknowledge the importance of gender parity on an intellectual level, the practicalities of how to show gender inclusive leadership is a different one. It is therefore not surprising that many middle managers struggle to understand what gender inclusive leadership practices can look like. Even if middle managers feel the urge to be more gender equal, they often struggle to display that in their practices. We are talking here about the micro-practices of everyday life that are largely performed in an unconscious way. They are the **minutiae of routine and ritualistic activities** that are rarely reflected upon but where we know that gender inequalities might be particularly present.

The aim of this report is therefore to highlight those subtle micro-practices that men as middle managers can engage in to foster gender parity. This research focuses on small-scale examples many readers can use in their daily working practice. Therefore, the report is designed to help middle managers, particularly men, and other change agents in organisations to realise how they can adopt new micro-practices with the aim of creating gender parity. Although at times the practices might appear as detailed and obvious, it is this resemblance to everyday work practices that ensures they resonate with actual workplaces and real life. However, in the throes of everyday life, it is hard to critically reflect on interactions effectively. The report is a guide to which people can refer in order to add an additional level of reflexivity to their leadership practices. Many of the examples will not only be good for gender parity, but they also chime with how leadership should be practised in an increasingly global and diverse business world. The report also shows that middle managers matter – they matter greatly for making gender parity a reality.



## RESEARCH APPROACH

The research set out to explore the micro-practices that men as middle managers can engage in to create gender inclusive leadership. [But how can something so small-scale, detailed and situative be researched?](#) The research project had to break new ground to uncover not only those subtle practices but also to make them visible in a report format.

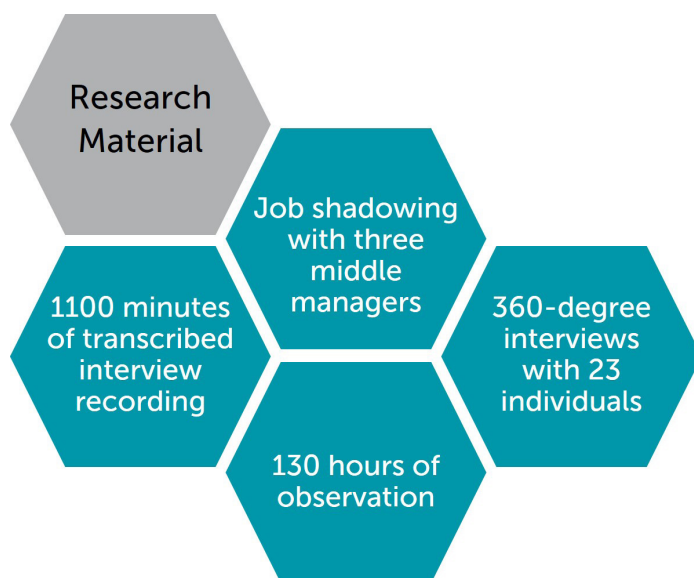
The first step in exploring gender inclusive leadership practices entailed a literature review. The existing literature was scrutinised to find evidence of how men have supported gender inclusiveness in the past. It became evident that few studies have systematically explored this question. Indeed, most prior research has shown how men often hinder women in the workplace. Examples include men who engage in self-promotion and who support and protect other men. It has also been documented that men take credit instead of crediting others. Men also hinder women by identifying with men who are like themselves, by bonding with other men and by dominating, for instance, in meeting situations. Men hinder women by being absent from or undermining women's events. Using gendered language through militaristic or sports metaphors and showing complete dedication to work, rather than other life activities, has also been described as a way in which men hold women back. Those practices have been collected and compiled in a compendium of practices (Kelan 2015); however, while insightful they were rather negative and were used as the background to compare and contrast them with practices that support gender inclusive leadership. This report, however, is focusing on the supportive practices of men as middle managers, rather than those that hinder women.

The second step entailed collecting empirical material in workplaces. A key insight from bias research is that biases are often [subconscious](#) – we do not realise that we have them which makes them so powerful and potentially harmful. Equally it can be presumed that inclusive leadership practices are also subconscious; leaders will often not realise that what they are displaying is an inclusive leadership practice. As there is limited evidence from prior research on how gender inclusive leadership looks for male middle managers, it was necessary to observe the actual practices of middle managers in situ to highlight how gender inclusive leadership might become manifest. Observation is commonly used in [ethnographic research](#) which typically entails researchers immersing themselves in the organisations they study. Therefore, following on from classic management studies (e.g. Mintzberg 1970), it was decided to observe middle managers. The approach taken is described in the literature as [job shadowing](#) (Czarniawska 2008), which means that the researcher follows the shadowees around in their daily work activities.

As I wanted to observe male middle managers who show gender inclusive leadership, a central concern was to identify managers who not only engage in those practices but who would agree to being shadowed by a researcher. I therefore approached my network to identify organisations that are leading on gender parity and that have done a lot of internal work to support inclusive

leadership practices. After verifying the general suitability of the organisations, they then suggested middle managers whom I could shadow. The criterion given was that the middle managers were fairly open in that they were seen as those who have people reporting to them and who report to senior leadership. This basically meant that middle managers managed others but generally their employees did not have their own reports. As one can imagine, this definition opens a range of positions but the key challenge was to identify men who were doing gender inclusivity well. After individuals had been suggested, I had conversations with them to assess their suitability for the study.

Following other job shadowing approaches, it was decided to keep the sample small to allow for depth of insight rather than looking at a great variety of individuals. In that sense the research was small-scale and purely qualitative to document and analyse gender inclusive leadership practices that men engage in. Three middle managers were selected for this study and each was followed for a week. Each of them worked in a different sector (professional services, media and chemicals) and in a different country (Austria, Germany and England). The study was not designed for representativeness but instead to identify and collect those practices that the middle managers engage in.



In total, 130 hours of observation were recorded in what are known as field notes. It is commonly presumed that observing interaction can change the interactions themselves (the so-called Hawthorne effect). For this research, therefore, it was presumed that the presence of the researcher would change the interaction. I regularly asked questions about what the shadowees were doing and equally I was often asked for my opinion, which meant I became part of the interaction. Rather than seeing the presence of the researcher as

‘contamination’, a more fruitful way to conceptualise observations is as an interplay between acting and spectating (Gill 2011). Such an approach is very useful for the study of gendered practices which are often seen as performed (Kelan 2009).

It would not be surprising to have observed a gender inclusive middle manager for an entire week without obtaining much material on gender. It was therefore decided to add a 360-degree angle to the research by conducting interviews not only with the shadowees but also with their co-workers

(peer, more junior and more senior). This can help to gather some general insight into how they see the workplace and what constitutes good leadership in the workplace. It also helps to gain an understanding of how gender plays a role in that workplace. The interviews also covered how gender parity was being managed in the organisation. Much of each interview was also about the shadowee as a leader.

A core challenge of interviews is that interviewees rarely talk at the level of micro-practices, which might appear irrelevant to them. It is exactly those practices that are central to this research. It was therefore decided to design some vignettes, little stories about incidents, where gender might play a role. These vignettes were developed from the literature review. They were read out to the research participants to gain an insight into how they would react but also to see if they were able to identify gender inequalities. An example would include a woman not being given the floor in a meeting. The vignettes allowed for a discussion on actual practices and solutions to commonly encountered problems and enriched the research material substantially. I conducted 23 interviews, 11 with men and 12 with women, generating circa 1100 minutes of recording. Those interviews were transcribed in full for further analysis.

The observation and interviews generated a kaleidoscope of practices often allowing similar situations to be seen in a different light. The material was very rich which makes it difficult to share it in a condensed report format. In order to illustrate some of the richness, scenes were developed out of what I observed in daily interactions and heard in interviews when discussing the vignettes. Sometimes it was also possible to discuss the scenes I had observed with the interviewees to

elicit their perspective on them. The resulting scenes therefore draw on a variety of perspectives and insights. These scenes are akin to ideal types (Weber 2013), which are formulated based on the empirical material but condensed into a pure form based on a real phenomenon. However, ideal types do not exist in reality as such. Ideal here is not used in the sense of perfection but in the sense of an idea. An ideal case is therefore an idea construct, which is used as a point of reference. Those ideal types cannot be verified or falsified and are therefore not hypotheses. They are used to make certain concepts more tangible. In this case they illustrate conceptual ideas. These scenes are suitably disguised so as not to identify the individuals or actions because protecting confidentiality is key for this type of research. The names in the scenes are, therefore, fictional and illustrative in purpose and are used to build ideal types that do not exist in reality as such. The resulting stories were developed into cartoon strips to communicate the gist.

**“Ideal types are idea constructs to make concepts more tangible”**



# GENDER INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR MEN AS MIDDLE MANAGERS



## Celebrating & Encouraging Women

The first key set of practices that could be observed in the research related to celebrating and encouraging women. These practices relate to how middle managers praised their women colleagues but also encouraged them to become more visible. Celebrating and encouraging women is practised by Dieter.

Dieter noticed that there was a vacancy to lead an important conference call that junior staff members use to stay up-to-date with developments in the field. He approached Dagmar, who often would shy away from leadership roles, to suggest that she took on the leadership of the call. At first she was hesitant because this would be outside her normal responsibilities. Dieter was aware of the fact that women are often less likely to put themselves forward and therefore he explained to Dagmar that showing leadership by taking on this additional responsibility would look good when it came to promotion.

It is well documented in research that women are often less likely to come forward to take on extra responsibility whereas men are more inclined to do so. Dieter is aware of this gender dimension and therefore encourages Dagmar to take this leadership role. By strongly suggesting the career benefits of taking on this responsibility, Dieter was able to motivate Dagmar to step forward to take on the task.

Dieter agreed to mentor a woman, Deena, because he is aware of the tendency to mentor people who are similar to oneself. As a mentor to Deena, Dieter encourages her to apply for a promotion.

Dieter: 'Have you thought about going for a promotion in the next round?' Deena: 'Not really. I have just been promoted and do not feel ready to take the next step'. Dieter: 'But you clearly meet the criteria. Why don't you take a look at the requirements and write up how you fulfil them? We can then discuss this.'

Dieter encourages Deena to go for promotion by inviting her to take a good look at the requirements and how she measures up. By asking her to bring it along to the next meeting, Dieter can make sure that Deena has a realistic understanding of what she needs to be promoted.

The lack of women on speaking panels has been much lamented. Organisers often claim that there are simply no women who could function as an expert.

Dieter was organising a panel and was keen to have a woman from the company to feature on this panel. Dieter talks with Desiree, a potential speaker, through the ideas behind the panel and what her role would be. Desiree is hesitant and says: 'I am not sure I would want to be on such a panel. It might be too political and I prefer to talk about facts'. Dieter responds that he would very much like her to talk about the facts and not politics but Desiree remains hesitant. Dieter reiterated that there would not be a better expert to be on the panel than her. Desiree asks if she can think about it and come back to him. The next day, Desiree calls Dieter to tell him that she is happy to be on the panel.

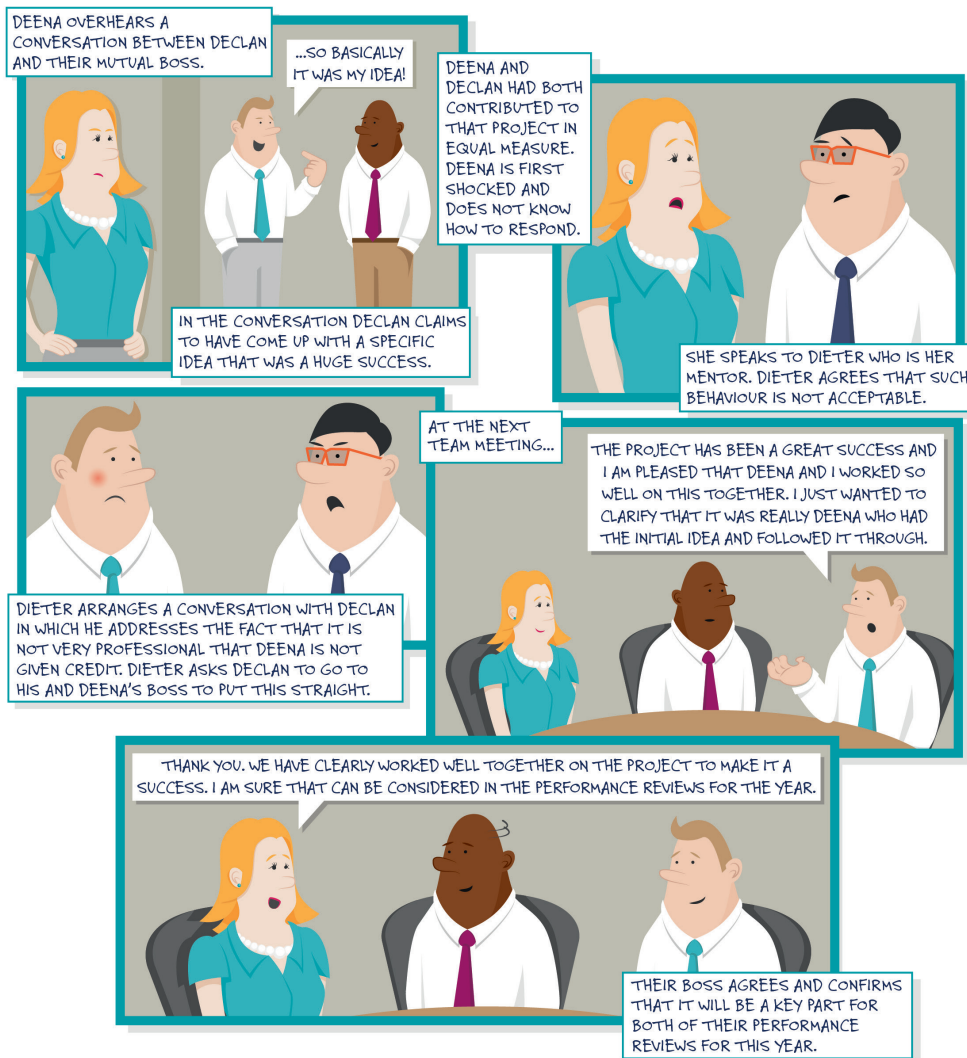
In this example, we not only see that Dieter actively tries to find a woman expert for the panel but moreover he is tenacious and works hard to convince Desiree to take on the role of the expert on the panel. Dieter is encouraging Desiree to become a panellist, thereby ensuring that this panel will have at least one woman on it.

Praising women is another way through which male middle managers can foster gender parity. One particular example of this is the following:

Dieter told his colleagues a story about Dolores who had been the point of contact for a client for a long period of time. As her responsibilities increased she had to let go of the client. The client had made some very warm comments thanking Dolores profoundly for all her hard work and stressing how outstanding she was.

This story is not actually about Dolores being appreciated by a client but about Dieter praising Dolores in front of others. This creates an impression of Dolores that she serves her clients well. By praising her, Dieter ensures that Dolores' skills are not rendered invisible and instead her success is celebrated. Praising a woman needs to be done in a serious, meaningful way to avoid it coming across as patronising. It helps to make women's contributions visible as these often go unnoticed (Fletcher 1999; Kelan 2009) and this has to be done in a systematic way to change practices.

Another common problem for women in the workplace is the fact that they do not receive the credit for the work they have done and men are often better at claiming it.

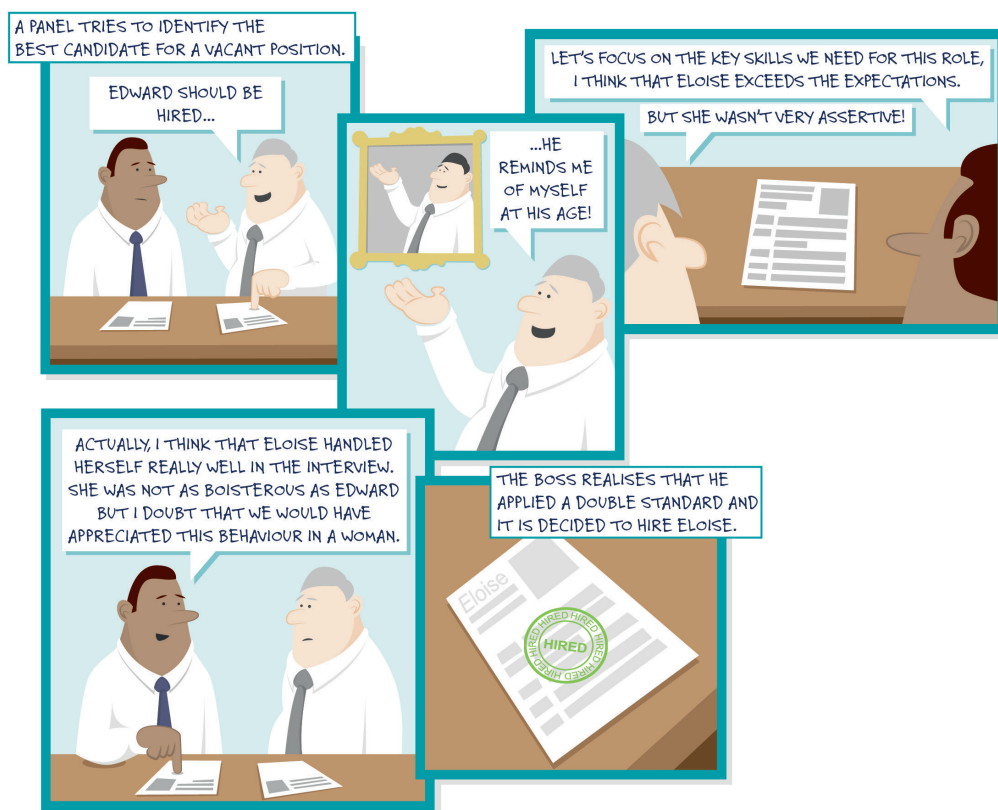


In this situation, it was Dieter who pointed out the unprofessional behaviour of Declan motivating him to put it straight with their boss. Deena was not required to raise it, which might have led to her being seen as vengeful. Instead Deena made sure that the success would be reflected in both their performance evaluations. This also ensured that their boss had acknowledged that both Deena and Declan contributed to the success of the project equally. Dieter was thereby instrumental in ensuring that Deena's contribution was acknowledged without letting her appear as vindictive.

Dieter has a clear understanding of the fact that women need to be celebrated for their achievements to make sure that their contributions do not go unnoticed. He is also aware that women sometimes need a bit more encouragement to step up to the job. Celebrating and encouraging women are practices that male middle managers have to practise in order to show gender inclusive leadership.

## Calling Out Bias

It was also often the responsibility of inclusive leaders to counteract situations where gender biases appear in the workplace. This often related to calling out bias to make it visible to others. It can be very powerful if men call out these gender biases but this needs to be managed with great sensitivity. In the following we will use Elliot as an example of how a gender inclusive leader brought bias to the attention of others.



This example illustrates two dynamics. First, the example speaks about the comfort that we experience with others who are like ourselves – we identify with the similar. This tendency has to be counteracted to allow for inclusive leadership to emerge. This means that the boss needs to realise that identifying with the similar is not the best strategy here. In this case Elliot, without being offensive, needed to ensure that Eberhard understands that his own assessment might be influenced by a gendered perception. Elliot is able to overcome this bias by focusing the discussion on the facts and the actual skills the candidates bring.

The second dynamic in this example relates to the paradox that women are often seen as not assertive enough; however, if women are assertive, they are often seen as aggressive. There is

no template for women displaying assertion without coming across as aggressive. Elliot points this out in this situation and is thereby able to highlight that his boss' expectations are influenced by his biases. Elliot does this gently rather than confrontationally, to avoid upsetting his boss. By drawing attention to the fact that the skills should be the reason to hire someone and that similar behaviour in men and women is often read differently, Elliot manages to convince his boss to hire Eloise.

Another example relates to casual remarks in the workplace that often position men and women differently.



Although well meaning and well intentioned, comments like this can be damaging. Clearly Ethan was not thinking about the implications of his choice of words and realised that they could be misread. However, he also clearly did not know what to do to remedy this situation. Elliot helped him by remarking that the comment was strange. Elliot does not say Ethan's comments were wrong but simply raised this as awkward. This provided the discursive space for Ethan to come back to it and put his statement straight. It also ensured that Emily did not have to intervene and voice her discomfort with this statement. It shows Elliot's ability not only to recognise this behaviour but also to point out that it is not appropriate.

Meetings are a central place where gender inequality is often played out. A common complaint made by many women in the workplace is that their comments are ignored in meetings or they are not given an opportunity to speak. Women have therefore developed sophisticated strategies of speaking up, such as building alliances prior to meetings (Ford 2008), but often still struggle to take the floor. Men therefore need to be aware of the fact that they often do not give women the chance to speak up. The following dynamic illustrates this:

Eleonora is the spokesperson for one task force. Elliot is part of this task force and is the deputy spokesperson for it. Eleonora and Elliot attend a meeting where different task forces report on their progress. For each task force the spokesperson reports back to the bigger group. After the spokesperson has concluded, the spokesperson normally refers to the deputy spokesperson, asking if they wish to add anything further. The meeting overruns significantly when the chair of the group, Elmer, moves to the group that Eleonora is the spokesperson for. Eleonora takes a moment to reflect on what she is going to start with. Elmer, clearly eager to bring the meeting to a conclusion looks at Elliot. Elliot, noticing his gaze, feels that he has been given the nod. Elliot is about to start to report to the group, when he remembers that it should be Eleonora who reports, not him. He does not say anything but instead looks at Eleonora who then starts to report back.

It is easy to see that in this situation, Elliot could have easily taken the floor and side-lined Eleonora thereby questioning her leadership of the task force. Clearly, Elmer looked at Elliot and thereby allocated the floor to him. However being aware of this dynamic, Elliot ensures that Eleonora is given the floor. The communication is non-verbal. Elliot does not say, 'over to you Eleonora' which could be seen as patronising but instead remains silent, allowing Eleonora to speak. Such subtle practices often go unnoticed but they could have had major repercussions for how Eleonora is perceived. Male middle managers need to develop an awareness of such subtle practices which are easy to miss.

Calling out bias therefore does not mean to aggressively confront others but rather to be aware of bias and ensure that it does not influence the situation or decision. It takes great political skill for men as middle managers to call out bias, verbally or non-verbally, and this is only possible if they understand the underlying dynamics and know how to counteract them.



## Championing & Defending Gender Initiatives

Many organisations have specific initiatives that they use to foster gender parity. It was in the context of such initiatives that male middle managers have a major role to play to display gender inclusive leadership. This involves championing and defending gender parity initiatives to other men but also to women.



In the research it was not uncommon for men who were active in gender parity topics to be seen as not undertaking this role voluntarily. The presumption often was that the men had been forced to take on the role. It was also common to belittle men who were taking responsibility for gender inclusion. Felix here reacts by first seeking clarity on what his colleague Fabian means, and then explains why he supports this initiative.

Another important function of supporting gender equality is to step in when gender parity initiatives are discussed negatively.

Fiona to Faye: 'I see that there is a Girl's Day advertised on the website. That is very unfair. My sons would certainly also like to visit the organisation but they cannot.' Felix, having overheard the conversation, stops by and explains that the Girl's Day is there to ensure that girls are encouraged to take a look what the organisation does. He explains that there are not many women in certain areas. While her sons can visit through the general programme, this specific Girl's Day is just for young girls to help them decide to work in areas where there are fewer women. Fiona: 'I see. That makes sense. As long as my boys can come and visit, too.'

Here Fiona questions if it is fair that girls are given the opportunity to see the organisation, which her sons might be denied. This conversation could have easily concluded that the gender equality

initiative is unfair to boys. It is a common sentiment in organisations where initiatives to create gender parity are often seen as automatically disadvantaging boys and men. By stepping in, Felix explained the reasons for the special initiative and alleviated fears that Fiona's sons were disadvantaged. Defending gender parity initiatives is therefore very important for gender inclusive leadership.

Another instance that was reported related to how men reacted when invited to an event on gender:

Finn: 'A seminar on gender. That sounds a bit esoteric. Not sure why that is needed'. Florian: 'Esoteric indeed. Are we not diverse already? I mean let's just bring our MBTI [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator] results to show them how diverse we are'. Felix: 'I do not think it has much to do with personality types or it being an esoteric topic. Let's just take a look at who buys our products. Florian, who buys your product?' Florian: 'Well, the last I have seen is that around 70% of our customers are female.' Felix responds: 'Right, 70% of our customers are female. Do you think you understand them Florian? The same is true for our talent. As a business we simply cannot lose the strategic opportunity that relates to women.' Finn: 'Good point. I probably would need to look into that issue.'

This situation could have easily turned into group of men denying the need to have special training on gender. It is often reported that men are highly resistant to attend and engage in such events because they do not see them as being relevant to them. Felix, as one of the group of men, is able to question the perception that Florian and Finn have about the event being esoteric, but also points out that they are already diverse. He makes sure that gender parity is seen by them as an issue that is directly relevant to their business.

Part of championing gender initiatives is also to support and complement others on their achievements in this area.

Felix runs into his colleague Franz. Franz has just appointed Friya to his team. Felix says: 'Friya is a great hire and it is fabulous to see that you now have gender parity in your team'.

By pointing out that Franz' hiring of Friya is also a move toward greater gender parity, Felix provides a positive feedback to Franz. Showing support for someone who does gender parity well is an important feature of male managers displaying gender inclusive leadership.

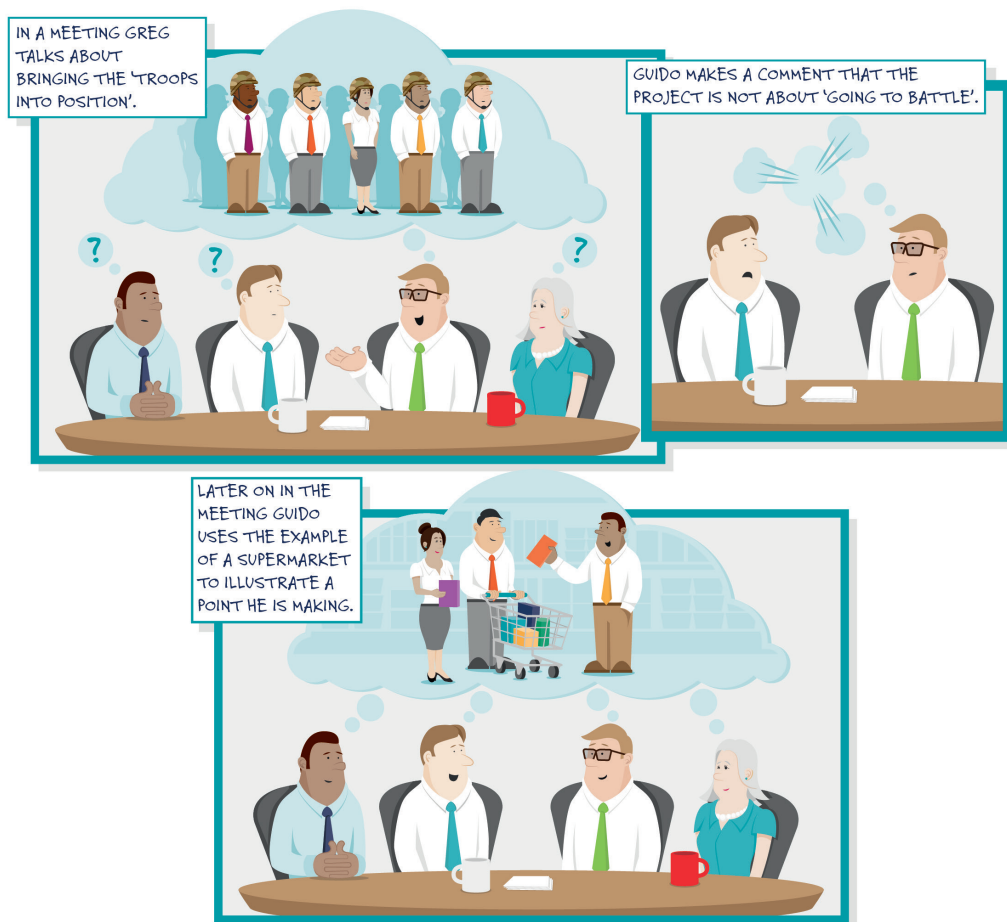
In order to be effective, it is central that men as middle managers are engaged in gender parity initiatives; however, very often such initiatives are not taken seriously by men or even by women. It is then the role of male middle managers to create an understanding of why the initiatives are important and valuable, and to provide positive feedback to others who show gender inclusive leadership. Only through men's involvement as middle managers can gender change in organisations be implemented.



## Challenging Working Practices

It is well understood that many working practices were developed by men and with men in mind. It is therefore not surprising that most careers presume 24/7 availability for work and uninterrupted working patterns, and that women find it difficult to fit into working practices that were not designed with them in mind. However, these working practices might also be ill-suited for many men. How work is done today largely still reflects industrial workplaces but this is not in line with agile working practices. Many of the male middle managers that I observed had an astute awareness of how traditional working practices are hindering both women and men to combine a private life and career.

Meetings are not only places where much work gets done in organisations, they are also a place where gendered metaphors and gendered language are experienced as exclusionary. It has, for instance, been documented that many metaphors in the business world reflect language used in the military and in sports, e.g. football. While some women are certainly interested in football, many show less interest and would be excluded from the conversation. Incidentally, many men would also be uncomfortable discussing football because they have limited interest in the subject. It is important to recognise gendered metaphors and language to avoid exclusionary practices. The following illustrates this:



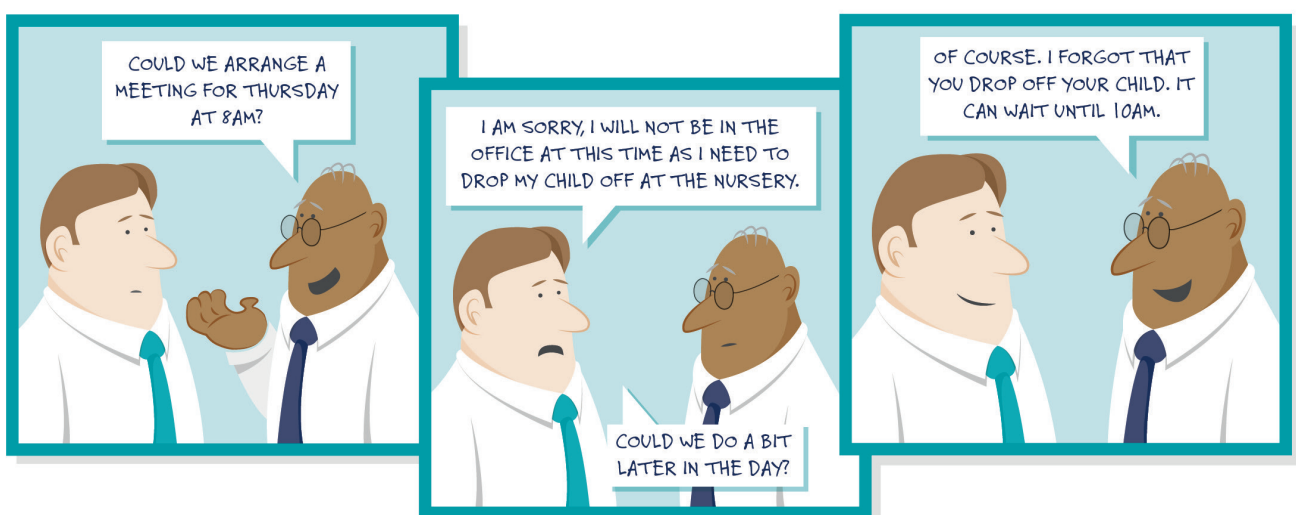
In this example Guido does two things. Firstly, he acknowledges the militaristic nature of the language that Greg has been using and thereby makes sure that this type of language is not seen as appropriate in business. He also offers an alternative example, that of a supermarket, which more closely aligns, although not exclusively, to the daily reality of women.

In meeting situations it is also common for men to start to outdo one another to show that they are better than the others. It is often suggested that women do not join in with this competition and if they do they are seen as inauthentic. Moreover this behaviour is often not conducive to actually getting work done.

In a meeting, Gideon boasts how well he has engaged with a particular client. Griffin joins in and tells an even better story of how he overcame a major problem with a client. Greg then adds to that by saying how much money he made for a client. At this point Guido steps in and states that they are really here to discuss how to better service a specific client and just outdoing each other is not going to be productive.

What we witness here is unproductive behaviour that groups of men sometimes display. This can include boasting about their abilities which in turn often means losing track of the actual task. Women often participate in this show of force equally. Guido here draws attention to the fact that the conversation is no longer constructive and thereby is able to guide the conversation into more productive channels.

In the academic literature it is often stated that the ideal worker has no life outside of work (Acker 1990). This indicates that any private life issues are not discussed in the workplace. It was evident in the research, however, that private life was not taboo for the male middle managers.



Guido here arranged his work to ensure that he could drop off his child at the nursery. Rather than hiding the fact by pretending to have another meeting, Guido makes it clear that he cannot be in

the office at that time of the morning due to his childcare commitment. Guido acknowledges that he had forgotten about it. While many women do it routinely, it is more unusual for men to be seen as responsible for the care of their children. It is also clear that a woman saying no to her boss for an early meeting would be regarded very negatively where when a man shows this untypical behaviour he is more likely to be regarded favourably. It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that men need to break the mould to allow a mindset change. It surprises people when men show a commitment for caring for their children, while it is met with rolling eyes if women do it. While clearly a double standard, the moment of surprise is useful because it breaks the gender patterns that people might hold in their mind. In the long run, it will then become more normal for men to show a commitment for caring for their children, thus evening out a long-standing gender bias. It requires honesty about what men are doing at a specific time to ensure that caring for children is not seen purely as a woman's job. Male middle managers can make their responsibilities in their private life visible through being transparent about their responsibilities, instead of hiding them.

The male middle managers observed for this study were also emotionally very aware of issues that arose as part of changing practices to ensure greater gender inclusion. They understood that listening to their team members and developing them were key elements of their job. Gender inclusive male middle managers often try to break the mould of established practices by, for instance, developing the leadership capabilities of diverse individuals. However such practices are often not well received by others.

Gabriella is a new member of the team. Guido hired her specifically to develop her as his deputy. Guido regularly took Gabriella to meetings to ensure that she was up to speed on content but also got to know the key stakeholders. The other team members were less happy about the additional attention Gabriella received and made snippy remarks to her such as 'Guido never takes me along to meetings'. The team members felt increasingly insecure about their own positions. Gabriella felt very irritated by the ill-feeling she sensed from other team members. Guido noticed that and arranged individual conversations with the other team members, as well as Gabriella, to assure them about their respective roles in the team and why Gabriella was being taken to meetings.

Guido's wish to develop Gabriella for a leadership role was met with resentment from the team. Guido noticed the tension and was able to alleviate the fears associated with change by listening to his team members and explaining his plan. This provided assurance to Gabriella and the other team members of their position.

The male middle managers were aware of the fact that working practices often entail the expectation that the ideal worker is a man. Not only were they aware of that but actively tried to counteract this by pointing out metaphors that speak more to men than to women, or by showing that they have responsibilities outside work, too. Gender inclusive middle managers also need to show emotional competence in dealing with issues that arise from changing working practices. The gender inclusive male middle manager thereby not only understands but also challenges the working practices that were designed with men in mind.

## A CHECKLIST FOR MEN WHO ARE ASPIRING GENDER INCLUSIVE MIDDLE MANAGERS

If you are a male middle manager and want to be more gender inclusive, the following checklist might be useful:

- Monitor meetings closely for potential gender bias.** Think about ways to ensure that women are being heard and be aware that women might express themselves differently from men.
- In hiring and promotion decisions, keep in mind that assumptions we make are not always correct.** Check your own assumptions and alert others to the assumptions they make.
- Mentor and sponsor a woman** by not only providing advice but also encouraging them to take developmental assignments.
- Make sure that your panels are not men-only** but fully represent the talent of individuals. Find women experts!
- Monitor how you and others speak about and to women.** Check which metaphors are used or even exclude them completely. Reflect on alternative language that could be used.
- Demonstrate support for women,** for instance, by attending women's group meetings, and take responsibility for gender parity.
- Do not hide commitments outside work.** Talk about them.
- Reserve a few minutes every day to reflect on how gender might have played a role in your workday.** Did you experience or notice any discomfort in you or others? What went well? What would you do differently?

Can you think of other ways men as middle managers can check their gender inclusive practices?

# GENDER INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP – A COMPENDIUM OF PRACTICES

Meta Practice	Exclusive Gender Practice	Inclusive Gender Practice
Celebrating & Encouraging Women	Self-Promotion - men promote themselves (Martin 1996; 2001)	Encouraging women to take developmental roles or apply for promotion
	Supporting & protecting - men ensuring that other men gain benefits and protecting them from harm (Martin 1996; 2001)	
	Taking credit - men using another's effort and taking credit for it (Martin 2001)	Celebrating women's performance & giving women credit
	Using others - men drawing on women's emotional work support (e.g. talking about private problems and expecting the other person to listen) (Martin 2001)	
Calling Out Bias	Male bonding through sexual objectification of women, shared interests (e.g. sports) and other ways to build a rapport with other men (Cockburn 1991; Hawkins 2013; Martin 2001)	Avoiding sexually charged remarks and innuendo
	Identifying with the similar - men search for candidates in their own networks and prefer to work with other men (e.g. seen as younger versions of themselves) (van den Brink & Benschop 2014)	Identify with the dissimilar and searching affirmatively (van den Brink & Benschop 2014)
	Dominating - men dominate in meetings (talking a lot, being unwilling to allow others to talk, using patronising and sexualised humour, derogatory remarks, getting what you want) (Cockburn 1991; Prichard 1996; Wahl 2014)	Making sure that women are given a voice in meetings (Wahl 2014) and not usurping speaking roles
Championing & Defending Gender Initiatives	Being absent or undermining women's events (Cockburn 1991; Vries 2015)	Taking an active role in gender parity initiatives, such as attending women's network events (Vries 2015) and leading on gender parity initiatives
	Belittling men who take a gender parity role	Defending gender parity initiatives
	Ignoring others who show gender inclusive leadership	Providing positive feedback to others who show gender inclusive leadership
Challenging Working Practices	Using gendered language - militaristic or sports metaphors (Martin 2001)	Challenging gendered language - using gender sensitive metaphors
	Competing with other men by trying to outdo each other	Developing constructive working practices
	Dedication to work - being fully dedicated to work (e.g. no caring responsibilities, constant travelling) (Wahl 2014)	Making responsibilities in private life visible
	Being rational - drawing on facts and figures (Wahl 2014) and ignoring emotional needs of team members in the light of change processes	Showing emotional competence in addressing fears (Ely & Meyerson 2010) associated with developing gender inclusive practices

## REFLECTIONS

The following questions are designed to facilitate deep reflection on the gender inclusive leadership practices discussed in this report. Please describe the situations as fully as possible.

1. Have you ever experienced a male middle manager who celebrates and encourages women in the workplace? What did he do?

2. Male middle managers can support gender parity by calling out biases. Have you experienced a similar situation?

3. Championing and defending initiatives for gender parity is a central function of male middle managers. Do you have an example for this?

4. Can you think of an example where a male middle manager challenged current working practices? What happened?

## KEY INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Men as middle managers have a major role to play to ensure that gender parity becomes a reality in organisations. While CEOs see gender parity as a strategic priority, the responsibility of male middle managers for displaying gender inclusive leadership practices has so far largely been ignored. Drawing on job shadowing and interviews, this report documents the small-scale everyday practices that often go unnoticed and are accepted as being just how work is. Those small-scale practices, particularly practised by men in management roles, are key to unlocking gender parity in organisations. Men as middle managers, due to their hierarchical role and gender association, can act as linchpins to make the strategic vision of gender parity a reality through their actions.

In this report four different practices that men as middle managers can engage in to support gender parity are discussed through considering ideal types that illustrate certain aspects of what male middle managers' gender inclusive leadership looks like:



**Celebrating & Encouraging Women** means to ensure that their skills do not go unnoticed and that women take on the roles that can advance their careers



**Calling Out Bias** refers to recognising potential gender bias and to draw it to the attention of others



**Championing & Defending** gender initiatives means that male middle managers not only support gender parity initiatives but ensure that they are understood by others

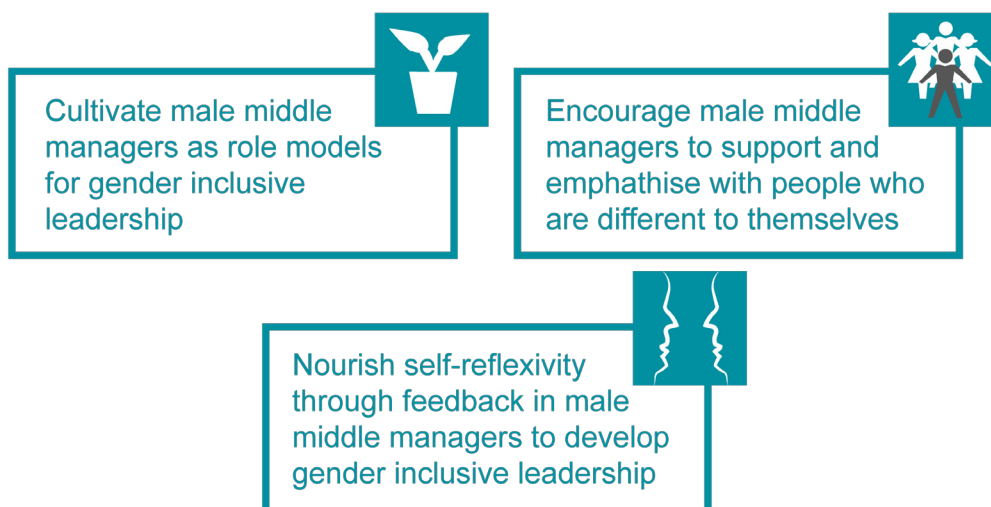


**Challenging Working Practices** which refers to male middle managers being able to challenge working practices to make them more gender-sensitive such as by making their own responsibilities outside work visible

While there is much talk about women needing more role models, organisations actually need to find **male middle managers as role models for gender inclusive leadership practices**. It is crucial that male middle managers start to model desired practices for others. This will encourage others to display gender inclusive leadership, too, and over time gender inclusive leadership will be seen as a key part of how good leadership is achieved. Ideally, showing gender inclusive leadership should be written into performance evaluation to formalise this commitment.

The research indicates that exceptional middle managers are coaching, developing, mentoring, sponsoring and supporting the people they manage. They try to understand and empathise with them. However, the inclusive male middle manager knows that these activities cannot only encompass people who are like himself. They need to encompass others such as women. Gender inclusive male middle managers **overcome the tendency to identify with people who are like themselves** and instead make an effort to connect with and support those who are different.

Gender inclusive male middle managers are also highly **self-reflective**; they consider their impact on others. Receiving feedback from their team as well as senior leaders on what middle managers do well and how they could improve is crucial for their own development. Men as middle managers need to develop the ability to think critically about their own leadership and about alternatives they could use next time to practice more inclusive leadership. For this to happen, middle managers need to set some time apart in their daily life to reflect on how they lead and who is included and excluded in that leadership. This can be achieved in a few minutes when a situation is mentally reviewed and assessed. This will not only improve middle managers' ability to show inclusive leadership, it will make them better leaders.



It is evident from this research that the next step for gender parity will rely on male middle managers practising gender inclusive leadership. By focusing on fine-grained practices, it has been possible to indicate areas where middle managers can develop gender inclusive leadership. The research has shown that gender parity in organisations should not be a conversation 'about and for women only'. Men as middle managers have an important role to play in gender parity efforts and they form the linchpin that can allow organisations to develop gender parity and make it a reality. It is therefore important that organisations make middle managers partners in the process of gender parity and provide opportunities for them to support the change effort and to generate impact. Male middle managers are a linchpin to make gender parity a reality in organisations.



## **SHARE YOUR VIEWS**

We would like to encourage you to provide some feedback on the report and to engage in some interactive exercises by going to:

<http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/inclusive>

Twitter @ekelan

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## **APPENDIX 1: SENIOR LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR GENDER PARITY**

The limited academic research on leadership practices for gender parity has outlined six critical practices that senior leaders can engage in to foster gender parity (Kelan & Wratil 2015): creating accountability, building ownership, communicating, leading by example, initiating and driving culture change. Accountability refers to the accountability of senior leaders themselves and to creating accountability in the chain of command. Developing ownership means building commitment and creating champions and advocates but also changing the practices of middle managers. Senior leaders need to communicate the business case but should also address fairness and their personal commitment to the issue. Leading by example entails visibility in supporting gender parity and role modelling inclusive behaviour. Initiating relates to supporting women's careers and to reviewing succession planning. Driving culture change relates to seeing gender change as a journey and creating a legacy. While this research has offered an understanding of inclusive leadership from senior leaders' point of view, there is little evidence to date on the practices of gender inclusive leadership in which male middle managers can engage.

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## NOTES

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