

Male Allies for Women Leaders: Why They Matter

Research Summary



OrangeGrove
Consulting



2019

Table of Contents

Demographics.....	3
The Current State	4
Complications.....	6
Consequences	8
Critical Questions	9
The Orange Grove Consulting-Brandon Hall Group POV	10
Authors and Contributors.....	16
About Orange Grove Consulting.....	17
About Brandon Hall Group	18

Demographics

311 Total Responses



Race/Ethnicity

- 79%** Caucasian
- 6%** African-American
- 5%** Asian
- 4%** Multiple Races
- 3%** Hispanic
- 3%** Other



15 Industries

Top 5: Banking, Construction, Education, Government and Manufacturing

Small, Mid-Size, and Large Organizations



28%

100 - 499 employees



30%

500-4,999 employees

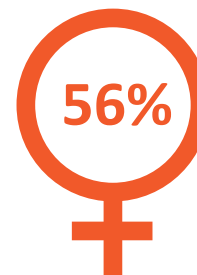


42%

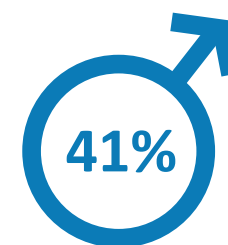
5,000+ employees

Gender

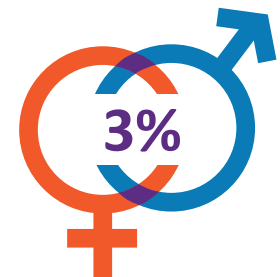
Women



Men



Non-conforming,
not listed or
failed to answer



The Current State

The World Economic Forum predicts that at the current rate, it will take women 118 years to achieve career progress equivalent to men.¹ Only 14% of organizations have a female CEO, according to 2019 Brandon Hall Group research, and most organizations have less than 20% of C-Suite seats filled by women. Go deeper into organizational leadership to line leaders and managers and we find that across the board, across all industries, women lag far behind men.²

Significant research shows the benefits that inclusion and diversity bring to companies — bottom-line benefits. McKinsey found that companies with lower gender diversity were 27% less likely to attain industry average profit margins.³ Yet, top leadership in most companies remains a predominantly white male, heteronormative domain.

Do You Agree that Women Need Male Allies to Success/Advance?

70%
Women

63%
Men

Source: 2019 Male Allyship Study by Orange Grove Consulting and Brandon Hall Group

Brandon Hall Group and **Orange Grove Consulting** jointly examined this issue in a 2019 survey focused on male allyship. We defined allyship simply as men supporting women's careers in the workplace. Male allies are critical components to women gaining traction in leadership, particularly at the higher levels.

Male allyship requires the understanding that some people have the privilege of realizing success and rewards in exchange for their talent

and hard work, while others do not. It is also about recognizing that there has historically been an advantage to being male.

Recognizing the systemic advantage men have doesn't reduce the ally's worth, but rather, it puts them in a position of greater responsibility to reduce the systemic barriers. It takes someone special to be able to get out of their own experience and understand someone else's reality. This is called "perspective taking" and it is a foundational leadership skill.

"I worked hard for everything I got. But can you imagine working as hard as you did but not getting anywhere? Others working just as hard and getting left behind?"

- A senior male leader in healthcare

Individuals responding to our survey felt that gender equity is an important strategic goal but that business leaders were not yet successfully doing anything about it.

Here is an example of typical comments we received from women who do not believe their employers are doing everything they could to promote gender equity:

“Nobody talks about it at all. The only thing that ever happens ... is that on International Women’s Day, some men will send messages saying things along the lines that they support and respect their female colleagues, etc. But even that doesn’t get into a discussion on gender equity.”

“This is particularly egregious, as I work in a field where approximately 80% of my colleagues are women — education. Somehow, though, all of our senior leaders are men and there is never a word spoken about gender equity at all.”

On the other side, there were also comments that suggested the reason for not explicitly addressing gender equity is because “we have not identified deficiencies in this regard” or that it is already embedded in how the company operates naturally.

Gender Equity in the Workplace

Individuals who believe gender equity in leadership is an important strategy



Individuals who believe their companies believe gender equity in leadership is an important strategy



Individuals who believe gender equity is a priority at their companies



Individuals who said their employer had done nothing to promote gender equity



Source: 2019 Male Allyship Study by
Orange Grove Consulting and Brandon Hall Group


¹ <https://www.weforum.org/focus/women-and-work>

² <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2017/05/21/432758/womens-leadership-gap/>


³ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity>

Complications

Addressing gender imbalance isn't easy to do. Half-hearted attempts at increasing leadership numbers, such as sending women to conferences or creating affinity groups, are not yielding change in the percentage of women represented. Nor is having the few women who achieved success act as role models and mentor everyone else, because they quickly become overburdened with the responsibility.



60% of men said they frequently or almost always **take action** to address barriers for women when they see them



58% of men said they always or usually **encourage** colleagues to get involved when they see women treated unfairly by the organization.

Source: 2019 Male Allyship Study by Orange Grove Consulting and Brandon Hall Group

Very real structural barriers persist, including pay inequity, lack of female role models and job segregation by traditional gender roles, not to mention the unconscious biases about gender. Change should be integrated with the strategic goals of the business.

Men Don't See the Barriers Women See

The study found a marked difference between how men and women perceive barriers to women's progress. Women cited lack of role models, lack of support structures such as mentorship and flexibility, and a lack of concerted effort to recruit, retain and promote women. Blatant discrimination, while cited by 16% of women, was recognized by only 4% of men. Women were also 64% more likely than men to cite lack of opportunities as a barrier.

Some of our survey comments that discounted these barriers, such as the belief that "nothing is holding women back" and "we hire only the best people for the job" can harm women because it shifts blame for the problem to the women themselves. The embedded message in those statements is: "If women can't succeed in this meritocracy we have, then there must be something wrong with them." These statements remove accountability from those in power. It also further entrenches invisible structural barriers because nobody with any power acknowledges they exist or works to remove them.

Those with Power Must be the Allies

We need to expand the definition of allyship. In essence, those with power must recognize and remove these barriers so that women aren't held back. Women can only chip away so much from the bottom; the barriers go away faster when someone in power is also chipping away from the top. Everyone within an organization needs an ally above them in the hierarchy who is focused on giving them the hand up they need.

Powerful allies matter. They make a difference by encouraging, by noticing barriers and by actively sponsoring people to progress in their careers. It requires someone who has power, privilege or a voice to speak up, support and make changes for those who haven't got there yet.

Being an ally is not being a protector: It's being a challenger. Allyship is not about benevolence, altruism or being a savior. Allyship requires standing up and changing the way things work. It can mean expending some social capital, which may be a barrier for some. But allies realize that lifting others is rewarding as well. It's not that women need to be protected or saved; everyone in business needs an ally.

The issue for women is there simply aren't enough of them in power to cover all of the women who need allies. Therefore, men need to be allies for women, too — not just for other men. For women to succeed faster and for barriers to come down, the men in power need to include more women in their ally efforts.



Consequences

Gender equity in leadership is a key component for building an inclusive and diverse workforce empowered to contribute a rich mix of ideas, competencies, skills and experiences. Having male allies is an important element of a gender-equity strategy. Organizations that do not create support networks for women leaders, including male allyships, impede progress to ensure leadership representative of the employee and customer base. Inequity can put organizations at a competitive disadvantage because it:

- Limits the breadth and depth of ideas needed to innovate and respond to market changes.
- Restricts the ability to grow.
- Constrains profitability.
- Risks losing your current customers.
- Reduces your ability to win new customers.
- Increases your liability for discrimination, disparate treatment or hostile work environment complaints.
- Damages your employer brand, which limits your ability to hire top talent and creates higher attrition risks.
- Inhibits sales relationships by not being able to relate to diverse prospects and customers.
- Impedes the ability to fill talent gaps internally or externally.
- Limits your succession planning capability because you won't have the breadth and depth of talent to move qualified people into critical positions.

31%



Employees are trained on embedding inclusion into everyday responsibilities

21%

Senior leaders are trained on how to manage diverse populations



Source: 2019 Brandon Hall Group
Women in Leadership Study

Critical Questions

Employers that seek to fully leverage the power of gender equity in leadership to improve business results must have answers to these questions:

- How can we do a better job creating awareness of unconscious bias, which creates barriers toward inclusion of women leaders and often restricts men from lending their support?
- How can we encourage more men to be allies of women seeking more responsible roles?
- How will support from allies, especially men, help increase the pipeline of women leaders?

We provide the following high-level recommendations to address those questions.



The Orange Grove Consulting-Brandon Hall Group POV

Allyship Defined

We define allies as people who recognize that certain groups face barriers to advancement that have nothing to do with their abilities as people, and do what they can to help by removing these barriers and promoting their positive accomplishments. Allies can be of any gender or race but they are especially effective when members of the dominant group in power. We focus predominantly on male allies because men

are usually in positions of power, so supporting those who are not is beneficial.

One way allies can help is by recognizing and promoting the strategic importance of inclusion. They are partners in the inclusion process. Allyship is at the apex of the gender-equity awareness continuum designed by Orange Grove Consulting.

Allyship Competency Continuum⁴

Denial	Gendered	Ostrich	Acknowledger	Ally
There is not a problem. Anyone can succeed regardless of gender	Men and women are different and each gender is better at certain things	I know there is bias but I am not biased. I treat each gender the same	I am learning about gender bias and am actively working to mitigate its effects on my decision making and interactions with others	I fully understand gender bias and am actively working to help others learn, too

Source: Orange Grove Consulting

⁴ © Watson and Detjen, 2020, Forthcoming, Adapted from a diversity workshop led by Farzana Nayani

Unconscious bias is one of the biggest barriers to women's advancement. We have seen this in this study and in others. Many people are blind to its existence and therefore assume a meritocracy exists. Allies can help by acknowledging the role of bias and the existence of different experiences and perspectives. Women and people of color have been highlighting bias for a long time and have not been fully heard. Hearing the same things from a man in power is more likely to be heard because it is not something people usually hear from them. When more people realize the role privilege plays in advancement, they become more open to helping to remove unseen barriers and leveling the playing field.

It takes a special kind of person to be an ally. Allies aren't threatened by the advancement of others or



Being a real man means doing the right thing, standing up to immorality and injustice when you see it, and expressing compassion, not contempt, for those who are less fortunate. In other words, it's about being courageous.

- Michael Kimmel, *Guyland*, 2008




strengthening the meritocracy. They speak out in support of people in situations where someone is being excluded or labelled unfairly and don't fear resistance.

It takes someone special to look beyond their own reality and experience, understand someone else's reality and understanding what it's like every day (e.g., a woman always thinking about their safety walking in the dark). Then they take the personal risk to take action — the ally is using some of his social capital to speak up and identify the bias in action.


Our view is that 21st century leadership means we need leaders who are acknowledgers and allies today. It is a core leadership competency.

Recognize Barriers and Biases

This is about getting educated and watching bias in action. In our survey, for example, women were 18% less likely to feel heard in meetings. Other research supports that women are routinely talked over, dismissed and have their ideas stolen by men in group settings. Allies notice this and can help others notice it, too.



Obviously, women feel constraints that men normally don't see. Instead of blowing that off, allies can use the opportunity to explore those differences further. One interviewee talked about how he observed a meeting where one-third of the attendees were men and two-thirds were women. He started counting who was speaking. He noticed that men spoke after men 40% of the time.



Noticing this matters because it makes visible those barriers which are normally hidden. Three ways you can notice:

1. Observe who speaks in meetings. Count the number of times people are interrupted, given airtime, have their ideas taken up or are given support for their ideas. Break this down by gender and race. What does it suggest?
2. Ask your female peers about their experience of gender in your workplace.
3. Read articles on gender bias and seek to understand what it is about.

Speak Up

When bias or a barrier emerges at work, allies can do something about it. For example, they can do what's called "amplification." Speak up for a person who spoke but was not heard. It goes like this: "I noticed we all just brushed past what Jenetia just said. Her point

was exactly what we've been looking for. Jenetia, can you elaborate more?" Another example is when a woman doesn't feel comfortable taking a risk, a male ally could say, "Go for it! I have your back."

Women and people of color have highlighted unconscious bias for a long time and their perspective is often dismissed. Having the same things said by a man in power is much more likely to be heard because it is unusual. It also is empowering because it serves as validation.

Three ways you can speak up:

1. When a woman's idea has been discounted in a meeting, amplify her point.
2. Go round-robin at your meetings and have everyone speak.
3. Moderate the discussions at your meetings so that no one dominates.

Speak Out

Allies should speak out when someone disparages another. Participating in stereotyping — “look, she’s got young kids, she won’t want a promotion,” “I can’t close my office door or I will be falsely accused of sexual harassment” or “Did you hear the joke about the blonde ...” — diminishes women.

Speaking out against this behavior helps everyone see its impact. It can be as simple as, “I don’t feel comfortable talking about our female peers in that way. Let’s change the subject.”

Three ways you can speak out:

- When you hear a stereotypical comment made, say something.
- When you see a stereotypical action being done, stop it.
- Speak to the person stereotyping privately. Ask them: “What are you assuming with that stereotype? Is that what you intended? Is there another way for us to address this?”

Take Action

Allies can use their power to move mountains or more specifically, adapt the system so barriers are reduced. They can change how the hiring and promotion system works,

expanding candidate pools and balancing promotional considerations to be more inclusive. This is one way you can do it: “I notice that all of the resumes you sent me are from men. Before we call any in for interviews, please get me at least one-third female candidates, too.”

One of the men we interviewed in our research, a senior technology executive, had been mentored by a woman early in his career. She showed him how gender bias manifested and enabled him to see what for most is invisible. When a woman is not on the slate for a project or promotion, this executive asks why. And he often gets pushback: “Look, she’s got kids. She’s not going to want to travel.” The executive responds: “Let her make that decision.”

Three ways you can take action:

1. Pick a process in your team that may be gendered (such as hiring or promotions) and test out a more equitable way to do it.
2. Ask a woman you interviewed for a position what you could do to help her and do it.
3. Challenge your leadership team to evaluate the role of gender with an assessment to find out what and where the problems are.

A word of caution: Allies might need to take a personal risk to speak up, speak out and take action. The ally is using some of his social capital to identify the bias in action. We must acknowledge this risk if we want more men to be allies. One of our interviewees said: “I worry. I feel like I’m getting it wrong. I hope that they can be patient.” Allies can acknowledge this for others. Can you rally more allies to your side? The more, the better in this area; it reduces the risk significantly if it becomes a behavioral norm.

And that’s the point. This is a skill just like any other skill. So, we must be patient with ourselves and each other as we all learn to be better allies. Learning to be an ally is part of being a leader.



The good news is many people have already started to help; 74% of female and 90% of male respondents say they have helped women progress within their organization in some way. How did they help? In a myriad ways, listed in order of mention, they have:

- Offered career support in terms of mentorship, sponsorship, general career coaching and advice
- Recognized a woman publicly — internally and externally
- Increased compensation to reduce the pay gap
- Helped to increase awareness about unconscious bias that people may have about women
- Encouraged women to recognize their own worth
- Championed gender efforts within the organization

Remember, everyone needs an ally! Allyship is not different from the traditional ad-hoc approaches used everywhere in organizations. Most still have senior leaders take someone under their wing, show them the ropes or give them a jumpstart with a good client or visible project. We know what allyship looks like; we need to apply it to a broader group of people beyond those who just look like us. We must also recognize that there's a learning curve. It takes time. Why not start now?



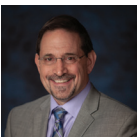
Authors and Contributors



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About Orange Grove Consulting

Orange Grove Consulting specializes in helping organizations improve gender equity and inclusivity through a set of consulting tools and training programs. Our end goal is to uncover and remove the limiting aspects of talent potential and processes to create more innovative, productive and competitive workplaces.

Our programs and consulting are tailored for the specific needs of our clients. We are never off-the-shelf; we use state-of-the-art research in developing our programs.

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Our Suite of Women's and Inclusive Leadership Programs uniquely addresses the underlying assumptions of what it means to be a high potential employee. We help develop more confident leaders and key influencers. Participants emerge from these courses with a clearer vision of career success and a new set of advanced leadership skills to help them accomplish their goals.

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Our newsletter brings out the latest research in gender and inclusion in a thought-provoking monthly blog that challenges assumptions and identifies action oriented ways to move the needle on gender and inclusion. [Sign up here.](#)



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About Brandon Hall Group

Brandon Hall Group is an HCM research and advisory services firm that provides insights around key performance areas, including Learning and Development, Talent Management, Leadership Development, Talent Acquisition, and HR/Workforce Management.

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 25 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

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