

GENDER DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE



A PLAN TO ELIMINATE RESISTANCE



PRODUCED BY:
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PREAMBLE

This plan to eliminate resistance is designed for any leader/change agent in an organization seeking to reduce the amount of disruption caused by individuals who are reluctant to accept actions designed to create gender equality in the workplace.





Executive Summary

In an ever increasingly culturally diverse country, Canadian businesses, and specifically those in the forest sector, must engage all facets of the current workforce that are available to them to fulfill current labour market shortages and be in tune with consumer market needs. It is no longer optional to “think about it” or put it on the back burner. It is time to act. The forest economy depends on it.

The Canadian population is comprised of a wide variety of diverse cultures who can fulfill these labour shortages and yet the workforce continues to be represented in majority by white men. Women of all races and religions are often equally or more qualified than their male counterparts and yet lack the same upward-mobility opportunities. Although there is a common understanding of this basic economic need, onboarding diverse and inclusive cultures in organizations still seems to be met with resistance.

A reluctance to make gender diversity and inclusion (GDI) a priority comes at a financial cost that most senior executives fail to understand. To summarize this business imperative briefly, organizations that have GDI are:

- Twice as likely to exceed or meet financial targets;
- Six times more likely to be innovative and agile;
- Three times more likely to be high performing;

- Have significant benefits to men and boys in improved health and work-life balance.

These statistics¹ are among the many that are documented worldwide on the need for diverse and inclusive cultures. Yet there is a failure to act.

Knowing how to identify resistance and how it presents in both an active and passive manner, sets the foundation for understanding the root concerns – be it from senior levels or frontline employees. From denying there’s a need for GDI to calling people feminists for “pushing an agenda”; comments coming from either a man or a woman, unveiling the deeper issue is key.

The reasons for resistance get to the psychology underpinning it and can be from such things as a lack of awareness; a concern about their job being jeopardized; or “change fatigue” from previous unsuccessful attempts to shift the workplace culture. The current state comes with tremendous power, and the uncertainty of success and fear of the unknown can block change and create resistance. Knowing the reasons helps set a course for leading the GDI plan and engaging with employees effectively to guide them through to willful acceptance.

A deliberate and coordinated effort is needed from the leadership of the organization in conjunction with the communications and human resources teams.

¹
Deloitte.com/insights 2016

A leadership strategy is needed to secure and provide executive level leadership and engagement with implementing a GDI plan, significantly reducing resistance. At its core, having the most senior executive in the organization sponsoring a GDI plan is the difference between a smooth transition from the current state to a culturally diverse workforce. Analysis of data from Prosci Inc. Best Practices in Change Management (2018 Edition) research report shows a direct correlation between the effectiveness of sponsorship and the likelihood of meeting project objectives. 72% of respondents stated that effective engagement of sponsorship ensured the change was implemented successfully.

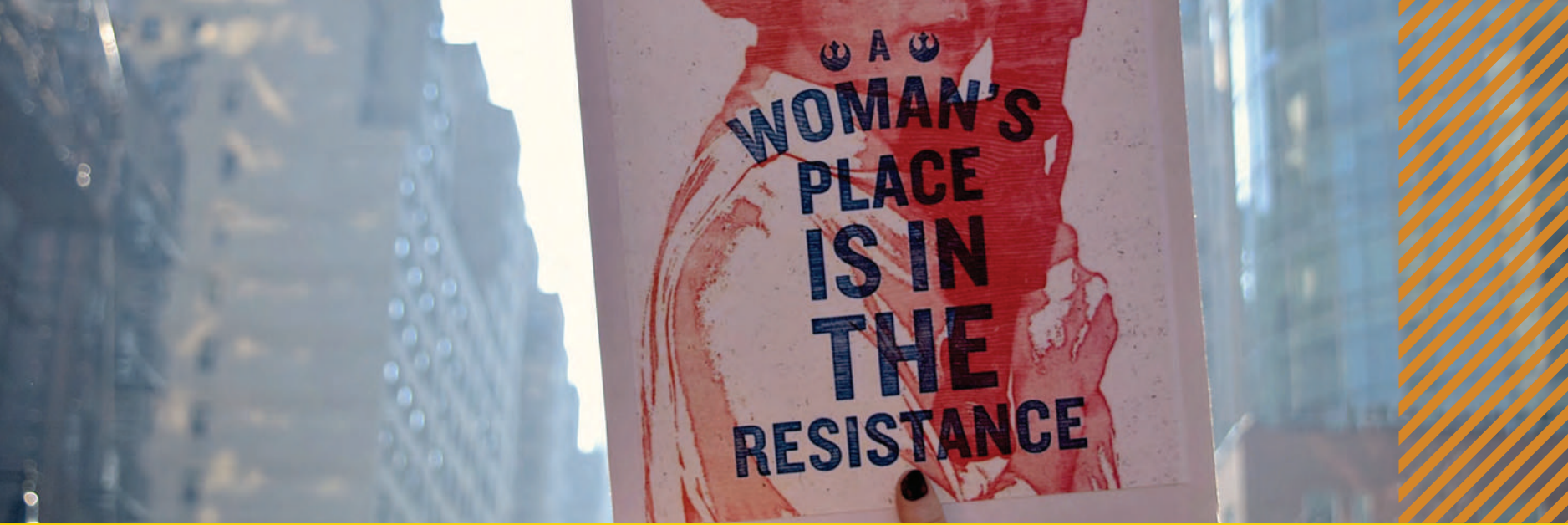
A human resources strategy is essential to involve middle managers and employees on GDI through multiple education and training opportunities, thereby significantly increasing acceptance of the change. Some people need time to onboard new knowledge and skills to broaden their capacity to embrace new ways of doing business.

Knowing the various methods to manage employees – male or female – senior level or entry – to help coach them through to accepting a new workplace culture can make all the difference. Providing avenues to give individuals additional time to voice their concerns can help guide them toward the future state more smoothly.

Resistance is not free – it comes at a high cost to the organization. The costs include such things as time delays from engaging with those who keep circling on the “why” this is happening instead of getting on with the “how”; outcomes of GDI objectives being delayed or not realized; absenteeism from those who wish to disengage from new skills development; all of these acts contribute to making it even harder to initiate GDI efforts again. These tactics impact the ability to actualize the economic benefits that are stated above.

The application of a structured process and set of tools for leading employees from the current way of operating to a diverse and inclusive culture will significantly improve acceptance of this new workforce composition.

This resistance plan provides clarity on the obstacles that can be faced when implementing a GDI plan and provides a path forward on how to overcome them. It is time to embrace the real vision of the future of the Canadian workforce and see the benefits of multiculturalism in our workplace for the betterment of our society, and our economy.



Diagnostique What Is Resistance?

The notion of resistance constitutes one of the serious challenges regarding organizational behaviour and change. There is always a reaction to change – be it positive or negative – to an initiative that is disrupting the status quo. Resistance is considered to be an outcome of such unpredictable consequences from which individuals become directly affected. It exists in almost every organization as an obstacle when implementing a gender diversity and inclusion (GDI) strategy.

For the purposes of this plan, resistance specifically means opposition to the vision and actions of a GDI strategy at each stage of implementation (i.e. design, planning, execution). Resistance shows up in the form of actions and non-actions of individuals. It is often that people are not resisting the change itself but the possibility of losing status, power, or current comforts/privileges and/or from a fear of the unknown. In short, individuals are creatures of habit and often prefer to maintain the status quo over learning new skills, tools and approaches for conducting themselves in the workplace.

While some contemporary literature suggests a more positive focus on resilience instead of resistance, to pretend resistance does not occur is detrimental to initiatives and to employees. Actively managing and mitigating resistance is a key part of implementing a gender diversity and inclusion strategy.

Changes that result from implementing a GDI strategy requires that one challenges the norms, practices and assumptions concerning the relations between men and women at both the individual and institutional levels. Identifying resistance and understanding the psychology of it will help get ahead of it so it can be reduced as much as possible.

What does resistance look like?

Active Resistance:

Hostility, sexist humor, devaluation and disparaging women's accomplishments or professional commitment, interrupting, denial of access to resources, "what's in it for men?"

Passive Resistance:

Negative body language, foot dragging, inertia, chilly climate, making the procedures more difficult, giving less attention, uncomfortable social atmosphere, giving less access to institutional resources, discomfort, inappropriate treatment.

How Do I Identify Resistance?

It may seem intuitive to know when you've met resistance – someone has argued with your point of view – ignored your comments – found workarounds to what is to be the new way of doing business, among other things. However, being able to systematically unearth where/who is resisting, and why, is key to knowing how best to move individuals toward the desired state of acceptance to the new way of doing business.

There are several ways to identify resistance in your organization when implementing a GDI strategy as identified below:

Observed behaviour showing a lack of adoption or buy-in

This is seen most notably when employees do not visibly adopt or commit to the new vision. Behaviours that indicate a lack of buy-in include absenteeism, limited feedback, failure to provide requested information, workarounds and the use of old ways of doing things. Resistance can be seen through monitoring information communications throughout the organization (e.g. “the grapevine”, discussions in hallways, water cooler conversations, lunch discussion, etc.) and by observing body language.

Use feedback tools to solicit acceptance of a GDI strategy

Employees can identify resistance using metrics and feedback systems to solicit responses to the GDI strategy from various levels in the organization. Surveys, stakeholder analyses, readiness assessments, social media and email accounts used solely for feedback purposes are commonly used.

Seek feedback through informal networks

Leadership networks and other communication networks throughout the organization are other ways information comes forward about the resistance to the GDI plan.

Conduct meetings, interviews, focus groups and training workshops

Resistance can surface through discussions at meetings or focus group and training workshops that are designed to help implement a GDI plan. Some people will complain and ask negative, loaded or redundant questions to try and derail the discussion. The extent of these interventions helps to determine the level of resistance in the organization. Exercising these above-mentioned means to find out assess resistance to the GDI plan will help you determine the root cause for this reaction. The table below identifies the common forms of resistance to implementing a gender diversity and inclusion strategy. It provides resistance statements that are often said and the psychology behind the resistance, allowing the change agent/lead to determine the best course of mitigative action.

Common Forms of Resistance

FORMS OF RESISTANCE	OFTEN SAID	EXPLANATION
Denial	There is no Problem here	Denial of the problem or the credibility of the case for change; often blame the victims.
Refusal of responsibility	Its not my job to do something about it	Refusal to recognize responsibility
Inaction	Its not a priority right now	Refusal to implement a change initiative
Placate	Yes, yes. We must do something one day	Efforts to appease or pacify those advocating for change in order to limit its impact
Diminishing	Of course, we'd appoint more women, if only they were more experienced	Simulating change while covertly undermining it
Shifter	What about men's rights "Men are victims too, you know"	Shifting progressive frameworks and goals to meet another groups agenda
Reversal	We tried that once and women didn't want to take up the promotion/ training opportunity	Reversing or dismantling a change initiative
Extreme	These feminists deserve to have push back, don't they see it's been like this forever?	Aggressive, attacking response
Separateness	I don't want to be involved in this because my credibility will be questioned	Women that want to separate from CD&I to protect themselves from missing out on future opportunities
Competitive	There are only so few positions at the top and if anyone is going to fill that senior job, it's me	Women sharpening their elbows and competing for positions and not supporting one another



2. Reasons for Resistance

Any change agent knows that conducting a proper change management process from start to finish is your best weapon to immediately reducing resistance from the onset. According to the well-respected ADKAR change management approach, this includes going through the necessary phases of: awareness, desire, knowledge, skills development and recognition. Change agents who support leaders in organizations with implementing a GDI strategy should be well versed in this model of change management and will be able to help shepherd the strategy through with substantially reduced amounts of resistance.

Grouping the root cause issues that have been raised through the above-mentioned identification methods will provide clarity and focus to group discussions aimed at addressing these concerns. Reasons for resistance can include lack of awareness; impact on current job role; organizations' past performance with change, and lack of visible support and commitment from managers and executives. Each reason will be discussed below.

Lack of Awareness

Employees often resist gender diversity & inclusion because they lack awareness of why there is a need to do anything or don't understand the nature of what needs to be done. This lack of awareness shows up in many forms such as not seeing a problem on gender inequities in the workplace; a tendency to ignore gender related conversations; finding it all irrelevant; consider gender equality policies as unnecessary or are the type to resist any change at all.

It's important to convey the business reasons for making the change and the consequences of not changing. People are often looking at it from the "what's in it for me?" state of mind. "Even when there is no explicit institutional policy, managers can feel insecure as they feel anxiety and uncertainty about how the change will affect them, their job status, their social relationships, and other work-related factors." Employees also lacked awareness because their manager/supervisor was uninformed about the change or were sending mixed messages.

People will resist change if they believe those responsible for the change are not to be trusted, either because they do not have their best interests at heart, or because they are not being open and honest with them about the change and its impact. "Sometimes mistrust between core functions and central support functions are based in past resentments. Resistance may be therefore caused by lack of trust with the positions of the project team in the organization and not by the project itself." In these instances, relationship building is required to heal past grievances and to build a shared commitment to change.

Change is a departure from the past way of doing business. Those people associated with the previous state – that either wasn't working or is being superseded – are likely to be defensive about the new way of doing business. When change involves a shift in direction or new thinking, the people responsible for the previous direction fear the perception that they were wrong. As such, "saving face" can cause some people to resist the change. Leaders can help people maintain dignity by celebrating those elements of the past that are worth honoring and making it clear that the world has changed.

Lack of awareness also encompasses the notion of gender blindness. Stereotypes occur between culturally defined types of people. Often unconscious, male-dominated organizations value their priorities and lifestyles implicitly more than women, creating gender inequalities and the need to maintain the status quo. Fear of a shift in priorities is perceived as a threat and resistance can take over.

This lack of awareness on the benefits of the change also applies to women who often have unease with being seen as different in a male-dominated area. Women can most comfortably become part of such masculine structures by becoming pseudo-males by "distancing" themselves from other women and from what is perceived as feminine because drawing attention to gender exacerbates their marginal position. As a result, women can tend to have a gender-neutral position to avoid being perceived as someone who might be politically engaged in "women's issues."

Impact on Current Job Role

Many employees resist change when they believe there will be a negative impact on their job role or workload. Specifically, employees are resistant to changes that:

- Increase the amount of work they would be required to perform
- Cause a loss of position or power when a GDI strategy is implemented
- Employees feared the change and the associated measures would "work against them"

A common concern, although rarely vocalized but captured through surveys, is that privileges may come to an end because of more female competitors for promotions or in hiring processes for future jobs. Possibilities of losing chances for promotion because of quotas or feeling unfair and uncomfortable to be promoted by the quota, can create considerable resistance in different forms.

People want to be hired based on their merit, not based on a quota. However, creating a gender-neutral selection process, particularly in STEM fields, denies, overlooks or explains away women's under-representation in male-dominated areas and points the finger at women not meeting criteria as opposed to looking at the systematic, institutional and cultural inequalities. Therefore, gender equity initiatives aimed at removing barriers for women, strengthening their capacities or proposing quotas are often viewed as a threat to a merit-based system.

Resistance can also be seen with implementing a GDI strategy simply because it's a new topic or method for doing business. The feeling of a permanent change can increase the feeling of inconvenience, especially when the work that is connected to changes seems to be without any use or has been added to the everyday workload. Giving up the status quo can therefore increase discomfort which makes some people resist a change of this kind.

Organizations' Past Performance with Change

The organization's past failure to shift the workplace culture to be more inclusive can cause a lack of commitment to a current effort. Some employees are considered "serial resisters" – meaning those who resist any sort of change whatsoever. The feeling of exhaustion (also called change saturation or change fatigue) to a change can come up when introducing a new change initiative and be perceived as an extra-burden in general. People can also lose excitement about the change if things move slowly as is often the case with gender initiatives or if they do not see any concrete benefits from previous efforts.

Senior management can have gender equality policies in place that demonstrate a commitment to this issue and may even have a couple of “pet projects” or early attempts at making change on gender equity in the organization, giving some people the sense that “enough has been done already” or the perception that nothing further is required. This leaves them lacking interest and passively slipping away from engaging – thus displaying resistance.

Lack of Visible Support and Commitment from Managers and Executives

There is often a lack of support from employees when the employee’s managers did not stress the importance of making the GDI strategy a priority or did not show a personal commitment to making the change themselves. A lack of visible support from senior management contributes to employee resistance, especially when executives fail to communicate directly with employees or when employees lack trust in senior management.

Creating gender equality in the workplace requires a fundamental understanding that it is not a one-off action item and takes time, that it requires a number of people to execute it, and it requires financial resources – just like any other change initiative. “Organizations with inadequate resources prefer to maintain their status quo since change requires capital and personnel with appropriate skills and time.” Senior management has the important task of preparing the organization by investing appropriate human and financial resources in the GDI strategy. If not, resistance can surface because employees do not see senior management taking the issue seriously.

Assigning the right people and the right number of people to implement a GDI strategy is key to ensuring questions by employees are answered properly and adequately. Failure to do so can create a breakdown in trust and credibility in the process, causing resistance. Making GDI a priority for the business ensures resources are assigned and that it is not being done on the side of the desk.



3. A Plan to Eliminate Resistance

When Resistance Is Encountered

Resistance can be expected at any stage of implementing a GDI strategy. At the beginning of making a change of this kind, there can be the perception that something is being taken away. As you move into implementation, there can be feelings of being in an unknown or changing environment which can often leave people feeling unsettled and likely wanting to return to the “business as usual” state. As you move the organization toward the desired end goal – that being a diverse and inclusive workplace environment – there can be challenges for some with learning something new or the fear of failure. It also forces some individuals to question their current belief systems, causing some hesitation as they learn new information that can bring them along.

The question is not if resistance to GDI will be encountered, but rather how support to employees is given through the change process to help manage their resistance and minimize the impact on employees and the organization.

To have a GDI strategy implemented successfully (i.e. the least amount of resistance), and to ensure the most efficient use of resources (financial and human), it needs to be rolled out across the organization. More often than not, resistance is at its peak just after it has been communicated about the GDI strategy and during the preliminary training/discussions. Other times resistance is common include:

- When the GDI strategy moves forward without input from employees from across the organization;
- When impacted groups realize there will be a new way of carrying out their roles.

What Group Is Most Likely to Resist GDI Actions? Why?

Knowing who is most reluctant to onboard a new way of doing business is helpful in advance of starting a GDI strategy because it allows you to be forewarned and being forewarned is being forearmed. According to Prosci Inc.'s assessment of implementing change management projects of any kind, managers are the most likely to resist or hesitate to onboard the new way of doing business. In the context of GDI, this would still apply, but of course there would also be individuals at various levels that can also push back. (Each level of the organization is discussed in subsequent sections below). However, extrapolating from the Prosci Inc. study and applying to a GDI strategy context, middle managers are particularly reluctant to onboard new approaches to doing their job because they:

Lack Awareness About Why they Need to do Anything on GDI

The biggest issue for managers is the lack of understanding of the scope, timeline and impact of the changes on themselves and their staff. It's important to keep them engaged at the planning phase and encourage and leverage their cooperative nature to achieve the end goal. Having clear communication on their roles and responsibilities gives them confidence that they can do what is expected of them. The lack of information in the planning phase can lead managers to fear a negative impact on them and their employees, causing upfront resistance. Articulating the benefits to managers from the beginning of the planning phase reduces anxieties and allows for open two-way communication on implementation. Benefits include such things as strong team performance, innovation and other aspects of the GDI business case.

Loss of Control or Negative Impact on their Role

Many managers can feel threatened that the GDI strategy will reduce the value of their personal knowledge and contribution, making them feel less capable on their job. This can have them feel incompetent because it takes them out of their comfort zone and changed the way they do their jobs. Also, just the threat of losing their jobs, the misperception that they now have to compete for their job based on a policy and not on merit, can cause stress and anxiety and have them feeling threatened.

Perception of Increased Workload

Some middle managers fear that the GDI strategy will increase their workload when they already feel overworked. They feel they lack the time needed to take new courses, to learn new skills to educate themselves on GDI issues. It also can create an issue with competing priorities between the demands of their job and the new priority set out by senior management to take on GDI training of any kind. In their minds, an increase in training is at the cost of productivity as there is only so much time in the day. This can all feel like a burden to them and they therefore resist.

Previous Failed Attempts With GDI

If there have been attempts made previously to "Do something" on GDI in the organization previously, but it was perceived as lip service to the cause such as just developing a D&I policy but with no follow through, managers are less likely to trust that this GDI strategy will be carried out properly and they will resist getting engaged at all.

Specific Strategies to Eliminate Resistance

According to Prosci Inc. benchmark study, 44% of participants from their 2011 survey on change initiatives indicated that more than half of the resistance they experience could have been avoided by using effective change management methods. (Note: This statistic can be consistently traced back over many years in the 40-50% range). These methods include communications, leadership, employee involvement as well as training and mentoring. Academic and grey literature reports on resistance to gender equity initiatives suggest similar key methods to address resistance to GDI.

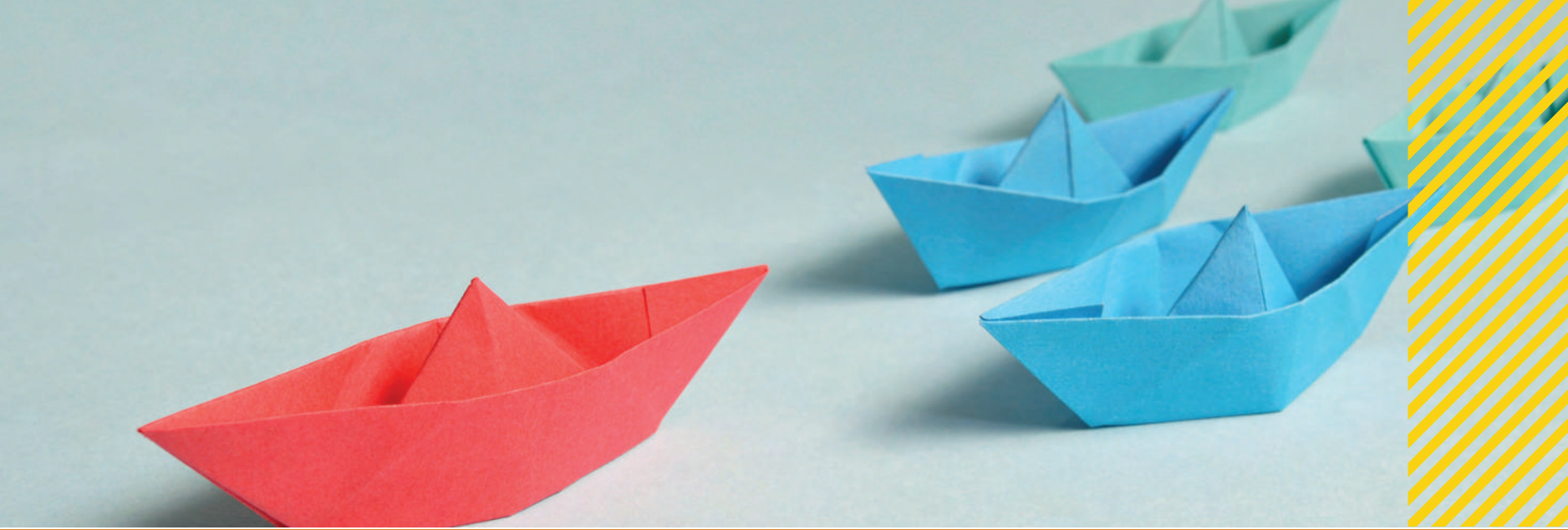
In an effort to streamline these methods and make it applicable to the GDI discussion, three key strategies have emerged, that when fully implemented, will significantly reduce resistance. These strategies include a:

- Leadership strategy
- Communications strategy
- HR strategy

Each of these strategies will be discussed further below and are the keys to a resistance plan. These strategies give guidance to leaders and change agents on how to constructively implement a GDI plan and by doing so, ensuring the least amount of resistance as possible. Individual organizations will need to tailor this information to their own context and may require an expert to guide them through that process.



There has been a tendency to-date to task the vice president of the human resources branch of an organization with the sole responsibility of implementing a change on gender diversity & inclusion (GDI). A fundamental paradigm shift from this approach is needed if resistance to GDI is to be eliminated. A key take-away from this resistance plan is that it requires several players to reduce resistance and it all starts with leadership. In other words, leadership must come from the top and in close coordination with the most senior HR and Communications executives.



Leadership Strategy

Purpose: To secure and provide executive level leadership and engagement in implementing the GDI plan, ensuring a significant reduction in resistance.

Moving gender diversity and inclusion from a social discussion into an economic one has become the most effective way to convince senior executives that this is a priority. It requires their leadership and attention to execute it effectively.

Secure Executive Buy-In

Convincing some executives is easier than others and for those that are not convinced to make this shift in their corporate culture, a change agent in the organization must first create the business case and present it to the senior executives to get their commitment, including resources (human and financial). Without this in hand, it will be a piece meal approach, that could easily backfire with one-off projects that can become easy targets for the nay-sayers to shoot down and argue “it’s not worth it.” Gather data from leading companies in your sector, or if none seem to exist, from a similar sector, and begin building your case. There are many resources now available to help do this and if you find yourself stuck, engage a gender strategist to guide you.

It may be that the majority of executives are supportive but there is one in particular that continues to resist. In this instance, engaging them one-on-one in conversation to get to the root issue for that individual will be an effective approach to overcome their reluctance to accept this culture change. Coaching them through any misperceptions or fears will alleviate this tension and allow for an open dialogue that can move from resistance to cooperation. Their concerns are often around things such as:

- Cost of taking action (human and financial)
- Length of time to execute
- Rate of success
- Fear of the unknown

These concerns can be countered by pointing out:

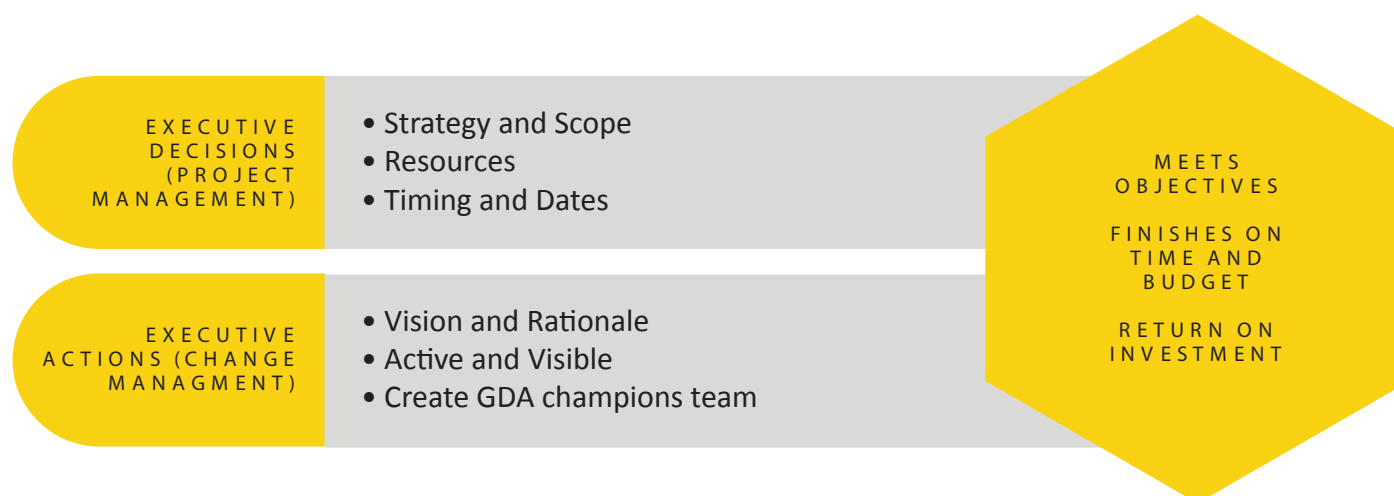
- The cost of inaction – from higher turnover rates to mishandling of equipment without women, plus there is now documented evidence on increased performance, innovation and better decision making with women in executive roles and in technical positions – there are costs associated with not having women as part of a team
- Any given change initiative takes time to implement – this change follows other change initiative processes but will have not just an economic benefit but a social one as well
- Success will occur if this is done across the organization and resistance will be minimal
- Showcasing other companies that have successfully implemented a GDI strategy and have benefitted from a high economic and social return on their investment

These points and others unique to the organization form part of the rationale and business case for convincing senior executives to move forward with a GDI strategy.

Create Sponsor/Lead Action Plan

A sponsor is the individual who is championing the GDI implementation effort across an organization. It can be the president or a direct report to the president that has been assigned the leadership role on his/her behalf to lead this across the organization. Having an action plan for this individual is very useful to help break down exactly what their role is. This not only empowers that individual to feel competent with what they need to do, but also gives them comfort to see exactly what is expected of them. In both cases, it reduces inertia and uncertainty about getting started, which can also explain why there is resistance in the first place.

The diagram below articulates the action plan or roadmap of what is expected to successfully deliver on a GDI strategy. The sponsor/lead must manage both the project management and change management aspects of this effort for it to be successful and to have the least amount of resistance across all levels of the organization. It's straightforward and familiar to executives but important to realize that it applies in the context of GDI implementation as well.



Vision and Rationale - One of the key factors to successfully reducing the amount of resistance when implementing a GDI strategy is the ability for the leader to articulate the vision and rationale behind it. Building off of the business case information that started this ball rolling in the first place, the sponsor/lead will work with the communications team to develop key messages to build momentum on this change initiative.

The sponsor/Lead needs to ensure that concerns that are raised are responded to in a timely manner. Being proactive and getting out ahead of it with the "readiness assessment" (as discussed in the communications strategy) will allow for candid and consistent messaging, addressing concerns and providing feedback to reduce any resistance that is surfacing.

Visible and Active - Executives and senior managers can mitigate resistance by demonstrating their alignment with the GDI strategy in an active and visible way while engaging subordinates in discussions about it. It's important to be consistently visible and engaged directly with employees at various events/milestones. All literature on this topic makes it clear that getting senior leadership involved is critical to getting traction on this issue. It's the ingredient that moves the organization from awareness to action. It's what significantly increase employee buy-in support of the change and significantly reduces resistance.

The sponsor/Lead needs to ensure that concerns that are raised are responded to in a timely manner. Being proactive and getting out ahead of it with the "readiness assessment" (as discussed in the communications strategy) will allow for candid and consistent messaging, addressing concerns and providing feedback to reduce any resistance that is surfacing.

The Critical Role of the Sponsor/Lead

The sponsor/lead activities align nicely into the three phases of the project (Planning, Design, and Implementation). There are many actions for the sponsor to do in each phase, and it is highly recommended to have a conversation with a gender expert to help guide the sponsor through what their particular context is and what they're aiming to do.

For example, the Planning phase includes things such as: selecting the right GDI officer as the lead, identifying resources, and setting priorities for day-to-day work versus project work to allow adequate task force member participation, among other things.

The Design phase includes duties such as attending key project meetings, holding the task force accountable for results, and being accessible to the GDI officer and task force when necessary.

Whereas the Implementation phase includes actions such as removing roadblocks and helping overcome obstacles, resolving conflict issues, and responding to any escalation that may arise.

Suffice it to say that with each phase, the leader/sponsor plays a key role in the success of the GDI strategy. There are also ways to help coach the leader/sponsor throughout the process to ensure that individual is fully informed on how best to move forward. Coaching the sponsor, first and foremost, helps get the right language, mindset, and understanding from which to springboard into the various audiences in the organization who will be listening carefully to what is being said and done by the lead on this initiative.

Create GDI Champions Team

The last key ingredient for the leadership to execute that will significantly help eliminate resistance is to identify employees at various levels across the organization to participate in the Gender Diversity & Inclusion (GDI) Champions team. This team will be the ambassadors to the change initiative and will be expected to advocate and engage with employees on the reasons behind doing this in the first place. Choosing the right team is important – some people you choose may not be onboard yet, but they are allies nevertheless because when they do learn and understand more fully the "why" and "how", they can become your strongest advocates.

By building this team, you are building a coalition of the willing. These are the "early adopters" who will be strategically represented across the organization to have your back on this issue. They will be the eyes and ears for the sponsor/lead. Educating this team on the "do's" and "don'ts" section of this report will help empower them to have the means to address resistance on your behalf.



Communications Strategy

Purpose: To raise awareness of GDI across the organization and strengthen commitment to it in a transparent manner, significantly reducing the amount of resistance.

Conduct Early Assessment

A resistance plan begins with tasking the communications team to prepare for resistance when implementing a gender diversity and inclusion strategy across an organization. This can be achieved by conducting a resistance to GDI assessment with the GDI Champions Team. This kick starts the whole operation into action. (see “suggested question to guide resistance” to GDI below). This process will allow several key things to take place:

- It creates an opportunity for feedback on what resistance is occurring in the organization and where it’s occurring
- It ensures people feel heard
- It provides an opportunity to pinpoint where to course correct any misinformation
- It also creates a safe environment to discuss diverse views at the beginning of the GDI strategy process

Being heard is an essential ingredient to eliminating resistance, especially when it is followed by taking concerted action on what has been heard. People need to be able to voice their fears, concerns, and biases without being shut down or ridiculed. This is the first step to a two-way open and transparent dialogue.

The list of questions below helps the senior executive team to prepare for resistance from GDI implementation. This can be facilitated by a gender expert to help guide the group through this process. By starting with this assessment from the top, adequate measures can be put in place to minimize resistance. Preparing for resistance is key.

Suggested Questions to Guide Resistance Process

Have you identified where in the organization resistance might come from?

You can anticipate resistance coming from groups that are invested heavily in how things are done today. You can also expect resistance from the parts of the organization where a particular change has a high impact or where there is history of failed changes. Proactively identifying where resistance might come from will help you develop tactics for mitigation.

Have you identified potential risks that may occur from those who resist?

Risks here mean such things as project delays (e.g. implementation delays), ROI slower than expected, GDI derailed completely.

Do you know the top reasons why employees resist GDI?

Do you have a system in place to identify and react to resistance when it happens?

see Do's and Don'ts section of the report

Have you prepared the people you need to have respond to resistance?

The most effective “managers of resistance” are those who have credibility and respect with the individual who is resisting a change – likely the direct supervisor or manager. Be sure they are equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to manage the GDI implementation effectively.

With these answers in mind, the Communications team can now reach out to the organization as a whole, either through a survey or through directors engaging directly with staff meetings by having a discussion on GDI. The five questions listed below allow for the dialogue to begin. Direct supervisors are best suited to administer this assessment, either verbally or in writing as employees often trust them the most.

1. For the current change underway, describe the business, customer or competitor issues that you believe have created a need for change. Why do you think a GDI strategy is happening here?
2. What factors affect your desire to change? Would you consider yourself in favor of the change, neutral toward the change or opposed to the change? Do you support a GDI strategy?
3. List the skills and knowledge that you believe are necessary to support the change. On a scale of 1 to 5, where would you rate your current training on these skills and knowledge areas? Do you have the training you need to implement it successfully?
4. Considering these skills and knowledge areas in your day-to-day work, how would you rate your ability to implement the changes? Are you having any difficulty implementing this GDI training? If yes, in what areas?
5. Is there adequate reinforcement and support for the change going forward? In what areas can we provide additional support or reinforcement? Are you getting the support you need?

Answers to these questions is highly valuable information. It will provide insights into people's views on the issue, their capacity to meet the expected new normal, and where there is need for support. With that information tucked under your hat, you are now able to strengthen and inform the leadership and HR strategies to roll out the GDI strategy with less resistance.

As that is underway, the VP Communications can begin tying company objectives to communication objectives, ensuring all executives are working collaboratively on their various aspects to GDI implementation. This united, senior executive approach initiates the beginning of any resistance being minimized.

Tie Company Objectives to Communication Objectives

A GDI communications strategy should clearly articulate the vision and objectives as well as how it will meet those objectives. Having a united message from visible key players such as the president in the organization will raise awareness, create consistency and show solidarity on the decision that a more equitable workplace is a priority.

It is important that your GDI communications objectives are seen to contribute to the achievement of the overall objectives of the organisation. In this way they will be recognised not as an “add-on”, but something fundamental to operational or policy objectives in achieving the organisation’s overall mission.

Driving the communications strategy is the rationale behind making the change in the first place. Indicating to staff that there will be two-way dialogue discussions for engaging with them and hearing their feedback is also key. Framing the discussion to be inclusive of men and women will reduce resistance and demonstrate that everyone has something to gain from this initiative. This can begin through discussions on shared values, taking the heat off of a male versus female dynamic. A good first place to start on this discussion is around the shared value of respect, regardless of gender, race or religion.

Each of the organisation’s strategic objectives (from its business plan) can be broken down to show how operations and communications can contribute to reducing resistance. Below are some example ideas.

Objective 1: To have a 50:50 ratio of men to women in senior executive and supervisory roles

Operational of Policy Objective	Communications Objective
To train our staff on hiring practices that seek out women and minorities	To ensure all staff understand this standard will be adhered to
To provide opportunities for education, training and mentoring on GDI	To ensure all staff understand what is expected of them
To provide open and transparent dialogue between staff and senior management on	To ensure all staff have opportunities to communicate their needs and concerns

Objective 2: To play a key role in the sector on GDI

Operational of Policy Objective	Communications Objective
To train staff on how to increase GDI within the supply chain	To ensure all staff understand what is expected of them
To engage with others in the sector to share best practices on GDI	To provide a flow of information between stakeholders
To develop key messaging to position the organization within the sector on GDI	To be approached by media for opinions on GDI

Objective 3: To have all staff working toward GDI across the organization

Operational of Policy Objective	Communications Objective
To educate senior management and managers on GDI	To ensure all executives and managers understand the rationale/ business case and benefits of GDI
To educate all staff on purpose of doing a GDI plan	To provide opportunities to engage in two-way dialogue on what is expected of them as this change rolls out

- As with any communications strategy, it's important to convey the timeline for achieving your objectives and to be realistic in terms of resources, both human and financial, so that you can measure the efforts underway. Abiding by the timelines will give employees confidence that executives are taking this issue seriously and there's no going back. It will also ensure that the senior management is accountable for implementation.
- Key stakeholders to be targeting for this communications strategy include executives, middle managers and employees, both in head office and in satellite locations. These target audiences are discussed more fully in the HR strategy below.

Create Communication Methods and Key Messaging

How you frame your key messages to both an internal and external audiences will reduce resistance. Below are some suggested methods to stimulate thinking, however, there are many other ideas that will come to light according to your particular context.

Internal Communications

Use the channels and forms of communication customarily used within your organisation. These may be formal channels such as standing instructions and internal newsletters or these may involve informal practices such as participation of executive managers in certain working sessions or holding speeches at events. It may be particularly helpful to make GDI planning a regular item on the agenda of team meetings. Another useful part of the communication strategy may be to enable networking among staff members involved in the process and to encourage regular face-to-face contact with coaches.

When it comes to introducing a GDI strategy, innovative forms of communication should be used as an addition, not a replacement, to regular communication channels. For example, it is helpful to offer clear, compelling accounts of the issue and the solutions using real life stories and personal accounts from within the organization. Recognize an individual for his/her leadership on actions relating to implementation of GDI. This will not only serve to reinforce this is a priority for the organization but will also create a sense of competition among staff to seek recognition themselves. Telling real life accounts of someone's experience will help people connect on an emotional level. When you tie rational facts with emotional experiences, you have a powerful ally to reduce resistance.

Managing misinformation is key – have FAQs that speak to common myths and misperceptions along with factual responses. Have those circulated through various internal means such as an internal website, weekly meeting session (i.e. have a couple of FAQs as part of each meeting) or through speech delivery. There are many ways to course correct information and ensure people are motivated toward this change and therefore less inclined to resist.

Be aware of the forms of resistance (see above section) and prepare for those comments. Craft a response that will shift the conversation from negative to positive.

External Communications

A communications strategy also makes gender equality a visible part of an organisation's external identity and self-portrayal. Nothing beats external pressure/awareness to hold people accountable internally. This is the impetus behind being transparent with gender data being included in an annual report. It conveys to the external audience that the organization is working on changing things and holds them accountable if things don't change. By having external stakeholders aware that this is a priority for the organization, it will reduce resistance internally as there will be more accountability to making it happen. Some ideas for effectively communicating to your external audiences include:

- Explicitly address gender equality as one of the organisation's main objectives and clearly highlight this, e.g. on the organisation website or in its publications
- Review and adjust all of the organisation's public relations activities to ensure the use of gender-sensitive language and avoid gender stereotypes in images and photos
- Deliver appropriate training to staff members who are responsible for public relations work
- Distribute guidelines on gender-sensitive language to all personnel at the respective organisation so that people are approaching each other in a respectful manner

Workplan

With your target audiences and key communications methods identified, the next step is to draw up a table that indicates the key communications activities, budget, and resources allocated to delivering the strategy. The work plan should also include proposed timelines and identify particular milestones within the strategy. This will allow you to measure clear steps towards short, medium and long-term goals.

Evaluate Success

Regular feedback helps to measure progress, understand where resistance lies and provides a finger on the pulse of this change effort. Your communications strategy should conclude with a section on evaluation. What does success look like and how will you know when objectives have been met?

Various tools can be used to evaluate different parts of your communications strategy. These could be simple measures such as the number of responses to e-bulletins, hits to your internal website on GDI or water cooler conversations. They could be focused on policy changes, for example have the procurement policies been put in place that ensures a 50-50 ratio of women led businesses are a part of the supply chain? You could also include measures of media coverage; not only in terms of volume, but also breadth and depth. How many key messages were delivered internally? Externally? How often were your key messages mentioned in other forums and has there been a shift in public attitude on GDI vis-à-vis your organization? Look at both internal and external indicators of success. This evaluation will help inform new communications that will propel the momentum forward on successful implementation of GDI.



Human Resources Strategy

Purpose: To involve middle managers and employees on gender diversity & inclusion through multiple education and training opportunities, thereby significantly reducing resistance to the change.

An HR strategy is the third critical ingredient to contribute to a plan to eliminate resistance. It provides middle managers and employees with multiple reinforcing training opportunities on GDI to ensure the culture change sticks. The learning environment created, the various options for teaching, the content and the educators for this change are all important components to having a successful outcome from training.

This section outlines how best to engage middle managers and employees so as to have the least amount of resistance.

Multiple Reinforcing Training Opportunities

All employees (i.e. managers and employees) feel more comfortable with a change and demonstrate less resistance when they are given the skills necessary to effectively make the change.

The leadership strategy provides guidance on how to engage executives, and as such will not be the focus of this section. However, their involvement in some of the initiatives that are targeting middle managers and employees provides significant reinforcement to the HR strategy's efforts. Their presence at some of these training opportunities will go a long way to show leadership and that this change effort is a priority for the organization.

Research from both a change management perspective and gender studies that have assessed how to reduce resistance both point to specific ways to engage managers and employees:

Multiple Reinforcing Training Methods:

Coaching

“Early” workshops

Specific training workshops that allows learning on key topics

Network of ambassadors

FAQ section on website

Online training for specific audiences (men, women, manager, employee) mentoring programs

Middle-Manager Engagement

Open a two-way dialogue about the “what” and “why” of GDI – this is considered the most effective way to manage resistance from managers. This targeted communication with managers is most effective when it is detailed, timely, candid and face-to-face and there is an openness to giving feedback. Managers are generally wanting to know:

- The reason for doing GDI and the risks of not doing it;
- The personal and professional benefits to doing GDI;
- Clarity about the goals of the GDI strategy;
- What the vision is;
- When milestones for achieving the goals of the GDI strategy will be anticipated;
- An understanding of their role and responsibility to implement the GDI strategy;
- What resources will be made available to them so they are as informed as can be.

These discussions can be in a group setting, however, if there is someone that still seems reluctant to engage/act on the GDI strategy, one-on-one coaching with someone they trust inside the organization and who is on board with it should engage them to allow an airing of their concerns. As mentioned in other parts of this resistance plan, these concerns are often rooted in misinformation so having the opportunity for expressing themselves and course correcting information will enable that person to get on board.

Give managers the tools and time to succeed – Managers are quick to onboard the new way of doing business when they understand why things need to change and have been given the tools to succeed at implementing it. Building their confidence on the new subject matter is key to reducing resistance, as is giving them the time to learn what’s expected of them amidst other current competing priorities. Having a workplan with clear actions and timelines can help with this.

Sharing best practices can provide incentives for employees and motivation for continuing in the absence of “early wins” and/or concrete benefits being realized. Let people be heard. Even if they don’t agree, being heard is an important part of the process toward changing mindsets.

Engage senior leadership – Managers are less resistant when there is active support from leadership and when they were granted the necessary resources to implement the GDI strategy. Resources can mean training on GDI and/or change management, time, and/or coaching. The leadership strategy outlines when sponsors/leaders for a GDI strategy should engage with managers and employees and includes their active and visible involvement at workshops or town hall sessions where the business case/rationale is given, among other times. This reduces managers resistance because they feel they are talking with someone who is in a position to take action on their concerns.

Involve managers in all stages of the project – Engaging managers in the design, planning, and implementation phases of GDI implementation gives them ownership and greater buy-in to what is about to unfold in the organization. Early involvement allows managers to become “agents of change” and empowers them to feel part of the solution. The psychology of change on this is that they feel the change is happening with them, not to them. Coaching managers to be change role models, or agents of change, made them more accountable in the success of the GDI implementation.

Employee Engagement

Employees can overcome any resistance to a GDI strategy by having managers and leadership address their concerns. Specifically, they seek:

Awareness of why the change is needed – Employees want to know why there is a need for a GDI strategy and what the results will be from implementing it. Specific things to articulate to employees includes details on the:

- Goals/objectives of the GDI strategy;
- Why it's happening;
- Personal and organizational risks if no change is made.

Understanding of how the GDI strategy affects them – Explaining how the GDI strategy will impact and benefit employees, including how they will contribute to it, is the second most important means of reducing resistance. Explaining “what's in it for me?” and engaging in conversations about the personal impact of the GDI strategy are significant aspects to reducing resistance. Understanding what impact will result from a GDI strategy allows for clarity on expectations and a realistic view of what's going to happen.

There are several ways to go about this:

Communications - An effective way to reduce resistance from employees is to provide clear, honest, two-way communications that are conducted early and regularly. These communications should be face-to-face from managers with consistent and structured messages and should begin at the projects inception and continue until completion. This approach provides a forum for employees to share their ideas and concerns. It also allows for regular feedback about the project and an opportunity to receive regular updates on the project's progress. Face-to-face sessions allow for employee comment and interactions and increased employee buy-in and ownership of the GDI strategy. This works most effectively when employees feel their ideas/concerns are acted on.

Leadership involvement – As is the case with managers, increased involvement by the sponsor/lead of the GDI strategy substantially increases the level of buy-in and reduces resistance. Any concerns that have been raised by employees in their discussions with managers can be raised and addressed in these interactions from leadership through such things as town hall sessions, blogs, or internal bulletins from leadership. Having candid, proactive and consistent messaging from the leadership can significantly reduce resistance. Having the sponsor/lead “walk the talk” will demonstrate to employees that GDI is a priority and it's here to stay.

As much as possible it should include women, men, different cultural representation and cohorts. The more diverse the team, the better, as this is the group that will be the change agents to help the sponsor implement the change effort. As mentioned previously, this team will be the front lines to reducing resistance across the organization – the eyes and ears of what's going on and where there are issues that need to be addressed. The more they represent the various components of the organization, the higher the likelihood that people will onboard the GDI strategy.

Together the GDI champions team can develop a workplan that sets out the actions that should be undertaken and corresponding timelines. Actions can be such things as how they will coordinate the efforts of the leadership strategy with the communications strategy; holding knowledge training amongst themselves on change management tools to empower them to engage with resistant employees and any other needed component that will ensure buy-in to the GDI strategy.

As part of this, the GDI Champions team can spur their own “ambassadors” to help with reducing resistance. These folks are the ones who are already bought in to the new world order but aren't sitting on the GDI champions team. They are extended members in their ambassadorial role, and the more you can empower them with knowledge and skills, the greater the likelihood of the change taking affect with the least amount of resistance.

Provide Incentives & Recognition

Giving managers and employees the training and skills development for onboarding GDI is essential to reducing resistance, however, keeping their focus on continuing this effort so it is sustained is also important. Providing incentives and recognition helps with this.

Incentives – incentives can show up in performance review processes, incentivizing people to aspire to demonstrate empathy, impulse control, assertiveness, self-awareness such that they are recognized by their manager and peers for having a respectful manner in their interactions with everyone.

Incentives often inspire people to bring their best to the table, to lure them to the changed behavior that is the end goal of the GDI strategy. There are many ways to create incentives and it will depend on your particular context to find the ones that work best for you.

Recognition – everyone has something to contribute at work – and within the context of GDI, this includes recognition for the diverse views that are brought to the table to help innovate, increase performance and strengthen decision making. Executives and managers need to build this lens into the delivery of their messages to employees. This reinforces a culture that is accepting and wanting different views as it is considered a business strength.

Something that is often overlooked when creating incentives and recognition, however, is providing the necessary resources to carry it out successfully. For example, ensuring there are resources available for coaching or allocating resources for tracking performance. These tools are important to sustain low numbers of resistance. Providing managers with the authority to motivate employees through incentive programs and performance reviews helps empower managers, allows them a creative license to find incentives that work best for their particular team and spurs energy around GDI into the workplace in innovative ways.

Employee involvement and participation - Employees are less resistant when they are engaged in the process and when they have the opportunity to provide feedback. Direct involvement of employees increases their buy-in to the solution and results in positive word-of-mouth about the GDI strategy. Involving employees early gives them a sense of control and empowerment which leads them to become active agents of the change. Early involvement also allows for the roles at all levels in the organization to be identified and understood from the beginning, ensuring no mix ups with messaging.

Manager involvement and support - Managers need to provide employees with key messages about the GDI strategy, to coach them through the transition and equip them to be successful after the change is in place. Managers are in the best position to talk about expectations for each employee including performance expectations that would be part of future evaluations or performance reviews. This is most effective in managing the change if managers are trusted by those they were coaching. Employee resistance is lower if the manager already supports or is bought into the GDI strategy.

Create GDI Champion Team Workplan

The leadership strategy first introduces this idea of a Gender Diversity & Inclusion (GDI) Champions Team and it is something that the sponsor/lead of the organization must set in motion. Once the lead for this team has been established, that individual needs to identify members for the team that represent different aspects of the organization. This can include people within corporate and satellite offices, different branches within corporate, different levels (i.e. front line, supervisory, executive).



4. Do's and Don'ts for Managing Resistance

The following “do’s” and “don’t’s” are recommended for most change initiatives that are implemented across an organization and have been set in the context of gender diversity and inclusion. They are useful for the GDI Champions Team to know and have “at the ready” when having discussions with people who are resisting gender diversity & inclusion conversations and actions. It is also important for the sponsor/lead (e.g. president) to know these tactics and be aware that these approaches are being used.

The do’s and don’ts listed below build off of the earlier discussion on identifying the root cause for resistance. As the “resistance to GDI 5 step process” outlines, coaching one-on-one with individuals who are reluctant to onboard GDI can most often address the root cause issues, thereby eliminating resistance.

Do's

- Listen and understand objections
- Focus on the “what” and let go of the “how”
- Remove systemic barriers
- Provide clear choices and consequences
- Create hope
- Show the benefit in a real and tangible way
- Make a personal appeal
- Convert the strongest dissenters – winning over one or two of those who are in strong dissent creates a powerful ally going forward
- Create a financial incentive and/or give recognition
- Create an example

Resistance to GDI 5 step process:

1. Identify the root cause of resistance (see resistance to GDI assessment)
2. Address the root cause of this resistance through personal coaching
3. Provide ongoing coaching opportunities and gather feedback from the employee or manager over a defined period of time.
4. Communicate the consequences for not support the change
5. Implement the consequences for not supporting the change.

Note: Usually steps 1-3 only are required

1. Listen and Understand Objections

A critical step any manager should take when creating the desire to implement a GDI strategy is to listen. The power of true listening and empathy is often underestimated. In many cases, employees simply want to be heard and to voice their objections. Understanding these objections can often provide a clear path toward resolution.

Listening can also help managers identify misunderstandings about the focus on gender diversity and inclusion. Rumours and background conversations often produce incorrect messages and wrong perceptions. Only through listening can managers identify these wrong perceptions and provide a correct and clear story about what is taking place.

When engaging in this process, managers should avoid debating or arguing with employees. The goal is to listen and understand and provide clarity about the process and end goal toward gender equality in the organization.

2. Focus on the “What” and Let Go of the “How”

In some instances, it is effective for managers to let go of the “how” and simply communicate “what” needs to change. This process transfers ownership of the solution to employees.

Managers can share a clear vision of the end state, along with specific goals and timelines with employees. Employees then take on the task of achieving that vision. Employee involvement and ownership naturally builds the desire to support the GDI culture shift and ensures that employee objections are addressed in the solution.

The use of this technique can require greater resources to engage people in small-group settings. Uniting all managers with the same task will allow for a “full-court press” on the issue across the organization.

3. Remove Barriers

This is connected closely to the first step, in that the discussion that takes place may reveal personal beliefs and biases that are obstructing the individual from accepting the notion of gender equality.

Through coaching and further discussions, education and training, individuals can air their views and learn new responses to what is happening. I will caution, though, that it does not always work. Sometimes you have a “Hugh” dissenter, and it may be that other actions, as identified below, will be the most effective (i.e., consequences for inaction).

4. Provide Simple, Clear Choices and Consequences

Ultimately, it’s up to each and every employee to make a choice to accept gender equality and inclusion in the workplace. Managers can facilitate the GDI strategy by being clear about the choices available to employees in an effort to support staff. For example, managers can offer the choices of:

- Speaking directly with the manager about why there is resistance
- Speaking with a coach
- Attending training
- Being identified as a champion for the business unit, which will allow them to learn and see firsthand why this change is important to the organization

In the absence of pursuing one of these choices, it’s important to also articulate the consequences of inaction, which may not be too favourable. If the culture of the company is moving in a direction that an individual isn’t accepting of, it may be time to find a new place for that individual to work.

5. Create Hope

Many people respond positively to the opportunity for a better future. They want to have hope. Senior leaders and middle managers can create the conditions for successful uptake of diversity and inclusion by sharing their passion for it, creating excitement and enthusiasm, and creating hope in a better future for employees and the organization. People like to follow a leader who can create hope and whom they respect and trust. Having senior leadership exhibit regular, visible, and active participation in the GDI strategy creates hope and energy around the future state of gender equality and inclusion.

6. Show the Benefits in a Real and Tangible Way

For some employees, seeing is believing. Demonstrating the benefits of a GDI strategy in a real and tangible way can spur on employees. Some ideas for doing this include:

- Sharing case studies of other companies who have successfully implemented a GDI strategy
- Inviting guests to provide personal testimonials of how they did it in their organization
- Visibly demonstrating the success of pilot programs or trials within your own organization (share small wins and celebrate success publicly)
- When hiring contractors or supply chain companies –write directly into contract agreements Statement of Work that women have to be on boards or on teams to be hired by the company – this creates a domino effect in ensuring more women are hired.

7. Make a Personal Appeal

When a manager has a close working relationship with an employee, using a personal appeal to support the GDI strategy can create the motivation to be more accepting.

If the manager doesn't have a close relationship, they can look for an ally who can do this for them. A personal appeal works best with honest, open relationships where there is a high degree of trust and respect. A personal appeal may sound like:

- "I believe in this culture change."
- "This is important to me because . . ." (e.g., "I see my daughter entering this field one day," or, "I've travelled to a lot of cultures and have respect for other ways of interacting with each other").
- "I want your support."

In a personal appeal, there is both an emotional component and an expectations component. In other words, "I'm counting on you." The emotional component is part of each person's desire to support the people they are close to and whom they trust.

The "I'm counting on you" component implies that the employee will be taken care of in the future, regardless of how things turn out with the culture change. Both of these elements can build support for the GDI strategy.

8. Convert the Strongest Dissenters

There is often one vocal dissenter you are working with who has made it known to you and others that they do not want to do anything different than what they've been doing. When you have one or more of these strong and vocal employees chirping up, they can negatively influence many other employees within the organization.

By targeting these strongest dissenters, managers can use special tactics and interventions as outlined here to convert them to support the strategy. By doing so, the strongest dissenters can become your strongest advocates. They are often equally vocal in their support as they were in their resistance.

By focusing your energy on a few strong resistors rather than on large groups of employees, two objectives are achieved for building positive momentum. First, you regain some control over the powerful background conversations that take place around the water cooler and during breaks. Second, you gain champions that are already influential among their peers. If you are not successful in converting strong dissenters, then Step 9 may be a viable option.

9. Create a Financial Incentive and/or Give Recognition

If you find that the steps above will not be the most effective, you could create incentives such as bonus pay for creating and maintaining a diverse team and tie it to the individual's performance measurement plan. Alternatively, if a bonus system is not feasible, giving the resistor a title within your team that engages them more in this change effort – such as having them participate in the GDI champions team – can help bring them along through education and influence of others who are already onboard with making this shift in the workplace culture.

Another incentive is through awards and recognition. People like to be recognized for their effort to align with what is being asked of them. Highlight their effort in a blog post within the company, social media, or at a corporate event. This will inspire others to follow suit.

10. Create a Healthy Culture

There are some employees that are outwardly undermining GDI efforts and are not going to accept the new workforce culture. With those people who have dug their heels in and are avoiding discussions, training, or not onboarding new behaviours, the best way to manage them can be to discuss opportunities for them outside your organization in a respectful manner. This will send the message that:

- The organization takes this issue seriously
- Employees need to be aligned with the corporate culture
- The consequences of not moving forward with the organization are real and impactful

This tactic doesn't need to be a negative experience for the employee who is leaving. Termination packages, early retirement offerings, or a number of other programs can make this a positive process for the individual leaving and, at the same time, send the right message to the organization.

Note: This option is considered a last resort. All other tactics should be explored prior to this one, as it can create a culture of fear which can lead to unintended consequences. I believe the majority of people who demonstrate resistance need a lot of coaching but can eventually get there and do not need to be shown the door.

Don'ts

Below are some banana peels to watch out for when implementing a GDI plan that if slipped on, will create greater resistance:

- Ignoring resistance and expecting it to go away. Ignoring resistance doesn't make it go away and in some cases can make it worse.

- Not listening to and understanding the concerns of those impacted. Not understanding the root cause of resistance prevents you from responding to the real issues and leads to the conclusion that all resistance is the same. This can lead to an ineffective, one-size-fits-all approach to managing resistance. Better to not assume all behaviour as a result of resistance, but rather work to listen to impacted employees and ask questions to understand the root causes and reasons for their behaviour.
- Attempting to force a solution. Applying force from senior management is not an effective way to get employees to onboard the new approach. This approach does not build the buy-in and engagement of those impacted and can therefore make it difficult to manage resistance.
- Underestimating the resistance. Underestimating the resistance to change is a significant mistake because it results in a lack of planning for the change. This lack of planning is most significant in the areas of building executive sponsorship and securing their involvement.
- Communicating ineffectively. Poor communication increases the likelihood that you will have resistance. Poor communication includes such things as: inconsistent messaging, incorrect messages, incorrect senders, bad timing and dishonest information. Using a public forum to confront resisters is also a mistake.



5. Conclusion

Resistance to implementing gender diversity & inclusion in an organization is a common situation, however, it can be reduced significantly if you are prepared. Building a coordinated and united approach among leadership, communications and human resources in an organization will make the resisters less likely to unravel your efforts and slow down attaining your goals.

A leadership strategy ensures GDI is a priority for the organization and will be taken seriously. Bolstered by a GDI champions team, resistance will be minimized through a series of multiple reinforcing actions implemented through the Communications and HR strategies and processes. Combined, these three strategies will significantly reduce, if not entirely eliminate, any resistance to embracing a diverse and inclusive workplace culture.

Change of this nature takes time, and as such, patience and determination are needed. Without a doubt, the ultimate benefits to the social fabric of the organization and economic returns from doing so far outweigh the cost of inaction.

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