

A woman's place is everywhere and anywhere - Addressing gender discrimination in the workplace

By [Vukani Mngxati](#), issued by [Stone](#)

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Writing as a man about gender discrimination in the workplace might seem condescending. I have never been at the receiving end of sexist comments. I have never had a boardroom of men speak over me in meetings and push my ideas aside, only for them to claim those same ideas as their own later.



These are only experiences that I have heard first-hand from my female colleagues. So, it might be rich for me to be writing this, but it needs to be said. Not just by me but other males in leadership positions. It is time for louder voices.

A recent study conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) showed that an estimated 264 million people suffer from depression globally with many of these people also suffering from symptoms of anxiety. The WHO estimates depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy US\$ 1 trillion each year in lost productivity. Further research indicates that gender discrimination in the workplace is a huge contributing factor to levels of depression among women, trans and people who don't conform with the gender norms that are expected of them.



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In 2021, 66.9% of managerial positions were occupied by men compared to just 33.1% occupied by women. Data coming from the US shows that about 5.3 million women in the United States alone lost their jobs because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We must ask the tough questions – why were women disproportionately affected by the pandemic when it comes to employment? What can we do about it as leaders? And make no mistake, this needs to be everyone's struggle in the workplace. We need to all take responsibility for mitigating the pressures that women may face, whether it is due to archaic understandings of women's roles in society or unfair work practices that discriminate against women.

I will not deny that we have made a solid start when it comes to addressing gender discrimination in the workplace. But discussions are not enough to address the insidious sexism that still permeates the workplace. I say insidious because people may outwardly recognise that transformation is needed because that is what they are expected to say,

but they just are not walking the talk when it comes down to transformation.

The key here is that men need to realise that they are just as, if not more, responsible for gender transformation. We need to start actively seeking to promote women to senior and managerial positions and actively recruiting women for entry-level jobs. Supporting gender transformation initiatives in tertiary institutions so that the gender imbalance in graduates evens out is also essential.

And when it comes to the actual workplace environment? Sure, women should be more confident in their ideas and convictions, but that is a difficult skill to finesse when you have men talking at you and over you, as well as not giving you the time of day just because of some preconceived ideas about your gender. It comes down to this: women should be confident and secure in their authority, but the C-suite business environment also needs to create an environment that fosters this. This environment starts with creating open channels of communication for women to address the issues that they face.

Research shows that when it comes to workplace culture, there is a large gap between what leaders think is going on and what employees say is happening on the ground. Closing this perception gap will yield substantial benefits for companies and their employees.

Everyone should feel supported enough to discuss the issues that they face in the workplace and creating that space is all our jobs. Beyond this, we need to stop assigning gendered traits to ideas of success. I have heard chatter that a good leader in a senior position leads with a strong attitude that lauds cold and calculated reason more than anything else.

Society has associated these traits with masculinity. This needs to stop. Leaders – both men and women – are human beings. They have bad days, they have emotions, they make mistakes. This is not weakness but humanity. I think a good start would be getting rid of the idea that leaders should be robots and that toxic masculine traits are the same traits that are praised in leadership.

It is our responsibility – especially as men – to create an equal society where everyone can thrive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vukani Mhgxati is CEO of Accenture in Africa.

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