POWER TO CREATE INCLUSIVE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE COALITION

Listen, learn and lead with action

Contents

Colleagues,

The Champions of Change Coalition engages leaders to advance inclusive gender equality in workplaces and society. Harnessing the power held by CEOs to drive change has always been integral to our approach.

This discussion paper looks at power: individual power and the power systems and structures within organisations. It also explores how these systems and structures impact inclusive gender equality.

Women's movements have led the way in this space, drawing attention to how gendered power systems and structures disadvantage women across all spheres of life. The Coalition's work is informed by this pioneering approach and aims to disrupt the status quo.

At an organisational level, we have done considerable work on systems of power that create barriers to gender equality:

- acting to redefine the concept of 'merit' and its application;
- identifying and fixing inherent gender biases in pay and reward systems; disrupting traditional responses to sexual harassment in the workplace;
- ensuring the perspectives of women leaders are included in public life through initiatives such as the Panel Pledge.

While we have made progress, barriers to success remain.

It is clear that a range of demographic and socio-economic tailwinds work to elevate the career trajectory of some individuals over others. Leaders may not be aware of the systems of power that have supported or hindered their own progress until they reflect back on their careers. But with consideration, it becomes clear that, for example sexism, classism, ableism, racism, ageism, homophobia and transphobia can intersect to influence the way power is conceived, and how it is attained, distributed and used in organisations and communities.

We've learned that the preconditions for organisational conversations about power are psychological safety, transparency and accountability. Building the vocabulary to talk about power and structural inequalities is a part of learning and change. Conversations about power dynamics may be uncomfortable, but are necessary to create change.

As with any learning process, our understanding will deepen over time. Leaders should expect to feel uncomfortable and vulnerable while they learn about the way in which power impacts people differently. But by discussing these issues openly, we believe we can strengthen the systems of power that support inclusive gender equality, disrupt those that don't, and tap into the types of power that have traditionally been undervalued to accelerate change.

As a start, we have sought to explore how power is attained and attributed, make visible the systems of power that can exist in organisations, and demonstrate how our power can affect inclusive gender equality.

We are focused on how we can use our power as a coalition to drive change.

This discussion paper provides practical actions leaders can take to better understand and use their power to help achieve inclusive gender equality in their organisations and in the community more broadly.

Our Coalition started in 2010 with a group of 10 senior men focused on advancing women into leadership positions. At the time, it was disruptive because male business leaders were not engaged on gender equality and progress was slow. Today, as a network of more than 260 CEOs, we have harnessed the views and experiences of leaders from diverse backgrounds across our Champions of Change groups to accelerate change on inclusive gender equality.

We recognise women in all their diversity

We recognise that efforts to advance gender equality have not lifted all women equally. By highlighting the specific demographics of people who experience exclusion, we increase the issue's visibility and boost understanding of how exclusion is experienced within organisations and in society more generally.
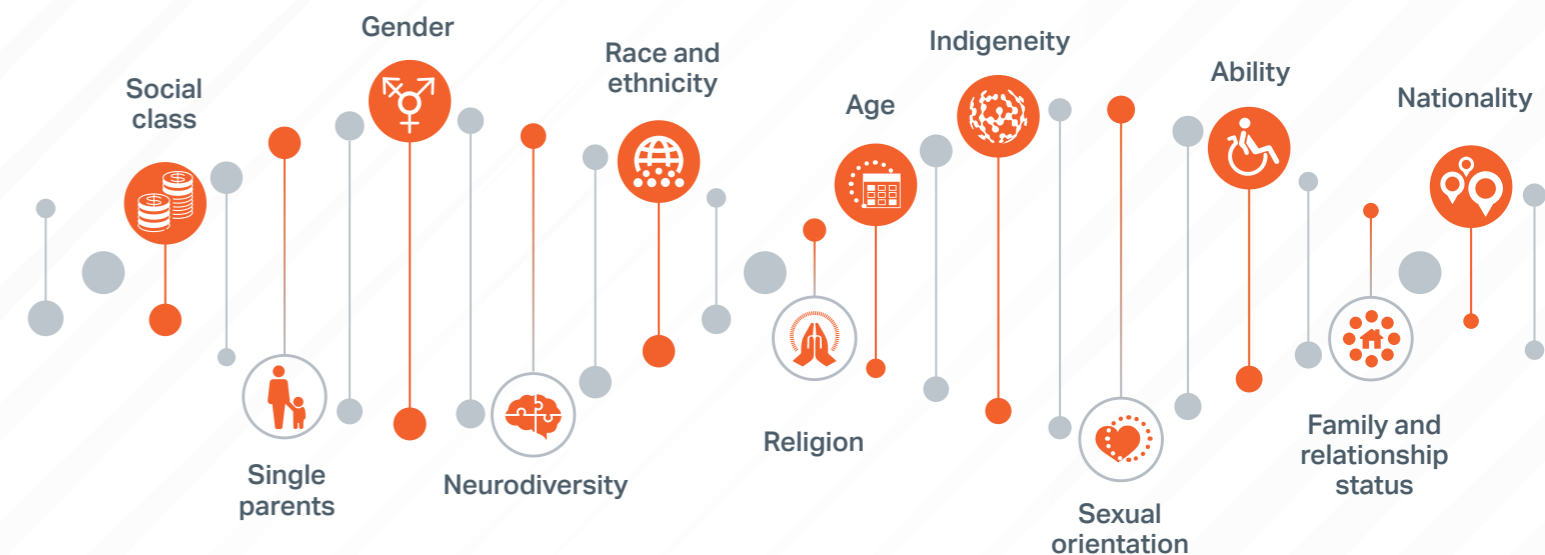
Throughout this document, the terms **women, women in all their diversity, women experiencing intersecting inequalities and diverse people** are used to improve readability. Women includes both cis and trans women.

When referring to **women experiencing intersecting inequalities**, means the structural inequalities and multiple, intersecting and compounding barriers to inclusion and progression faced by:

- women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- First Nations women
- ethnically and/or racially marginalised women
- single parents
- women with disability
- neurodivergent women
- LGBTIQ+ women.

When referring to **diverse people**, this means the wealth and variety of people who broadly reflect the diversity of our population.

Inclusive gender equality recognises that diversity, equity and inclusion strategies must consider and engage all genders in global efforts to achieve gender equality, with a particular focus on elevating and advancing currently under-represented and marginalised groups. At its core, the intent is to create respectful, safe and inclusive cultures of belonging for all.

Social class • Single parents • Gender • Neurodiversity • Race and ethnicity • Age • Religion • Indigeneity • Sexual orientation • Ability • Family and relationship status • Nationality

Understanding power dynamics in the context of inclusive gender equality

Power dynamics exist in all human activities – at home, at work, in societies, and across geopolitical relations.

The ubiquity and pervasive pursuit of power – and the benefits available to those who hold it – have led to it being a subject of academic research and ethical discussion.

There are countless theories of power, and lenses through which it can be examined. We have considered many of them for this discussion paper.

Relationships of power between individuals and groups are dynamic and are shaped by circumstance, societies and cultures. They are reinforced by historical norms, practices and patterns.

An examination of power dynamics in the workplace also needs to be responsive to the historical and structural forces that shape people's lives today. For First Nations people, the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation have led to dispossession and the fundamental disruption of societal structures, communities and cultures. First Nations women have been stalwarts in the leadership of their peoples. However, the lived experiences of First Nations women are impacted by institutional racism, intergenerational trauma, disempowerment and gender inequality. In the workplace context, evidence shows First Nations women experience systemic marginalisation and discrimination on the basis of their Indigeneity and gender.[1]

An example of how structural power imbalances have impacted First Nations peoples is access to wealth and property. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were subject to social and economic exclusion, which has contributed to disadvantage and poverty. Given this exclusion and power imbalance, First Nations peoples, families and communities have not had the same opportunities to build wealth compared to non-Indigenous peoples.

In the context of advancing gender equality, power is about who holds access to, and control over, resources, rights, opportunities and influence – and how that access is attained.

Women's ability to thrive is tied to **societies' political systems** because these systems allocate resources, rights, opportunities and influence.

Organisations and institutions are typically microcosms of the societies in which they operate. As such, the way power operates within **organisations** can reflect both societal norms and the cultures created by leaders. Champions of Change, for example, leverages a CEO's power to make changes to an organisation's systems, structures and processes (and the cultures they create) in order to support inclusive gender equality.

Power dynamics are also a feature of **intimate and personal relationships**. These relationships can sustain and nourish us at a foundational level. Yet, when power in these relationships is misused or abused (including through domestic and family violence), it can cause serious long-term harm.

While recognising the interconnectedness of these three spheres – societal, organisational and personal.

This discussion paper focuses on power in leadership within organisations and institutions.
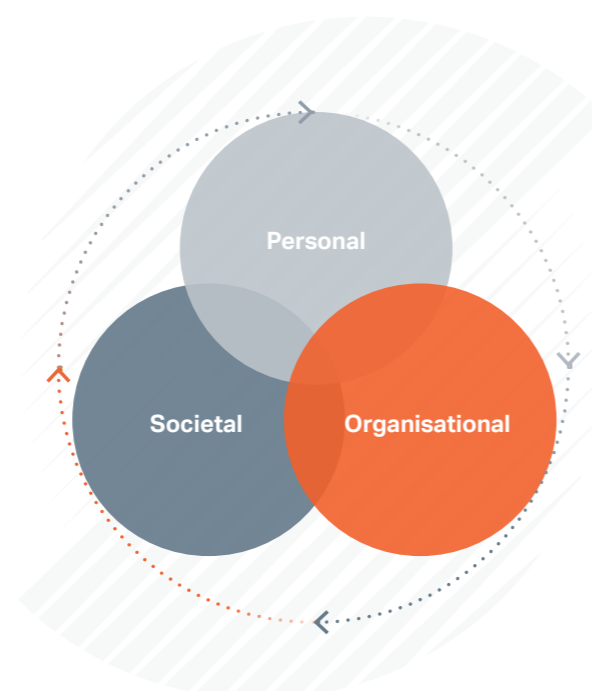
> Most of us recognise and understand power to some extent. But often, we recognise power in its most visible or direct form, but not in other, or more complex forms that it takes.
>
> For example, we see that women's lack of economic resources is a cause of their lack of voice in their families, or that social attitudes cause son preference and discrimination against girls. So we launch income generation or micro-credit programs for women, or awareness campaigns on the rights of girls. Then we find that while these have helped to some extent, the basic social attitudes are still in place. Women are earning more but their husbands are controlling their income.
>
> This is because our strategies addressed the symptoms, not the root causes, of these problems. If we want to change power equations effectively, we have to have a much deeper and clearer understanding of power.
>
> This must begin with a greater awareness of the different locations in which power operates, its different faces or forms, and how power structures are constructed and survive.
>
> Understanding power in all its dimensions is especially important for women's rights and gender equality activists because the invisible and ideological dimensions of power are as important as access to resources in maintaining gender discrimination.[2]

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1 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report*, AHRC website, 2020, accessed 26 May 2023.
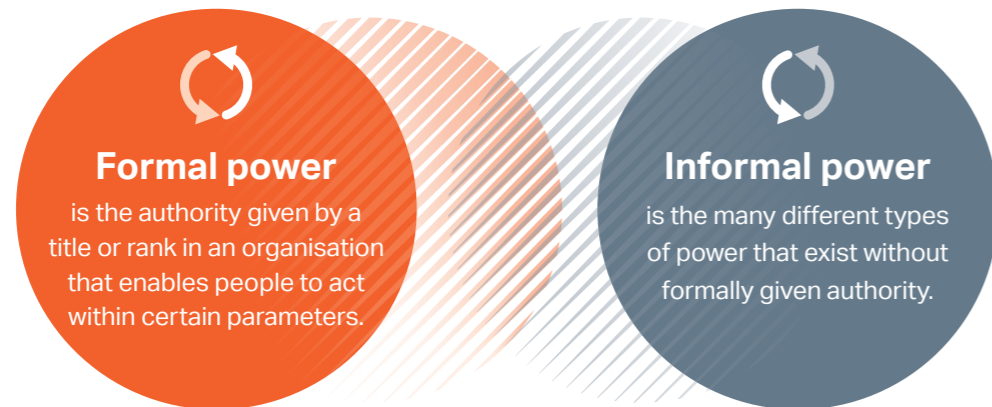
2 S Baltiwala *All about power: Understanding social power & power structures*, CREA website, n.d., accessed 26 May 2022.

Power and its impact on inclusive gender equality in organisations

Positions of power in organisations

Different types of power are exercised within organisations, and can be used – intentionally or unintentionally – to inhibit or advance inclusive gender equality.

Formal power
is the authority given by a title or rank in an organisation that enables people to act within certain parameters.

Informal power
is the many different types of power that exist without formally given authority.

Whether formal or informal, the reality is that power in organisations and institutions is largely held by men. There is no reason to believe that women are any less qualified to hold power in equal measure to men. Instead, the unequal distribution of power across genders reflects two factors:

- The long-tail impact of rigid gender stereotypes and social norms position men as primary breadwinners and decision-makers and women as primary carers and emotional supporters within families and society.

- The societal and organisational structures provide men (particularly white, cisgender, able-bodied men) with advantages. This is sometimes described as 'privilege', and more pointedly as 'white male privilege'.

The concentration of power within a narrow pool of talent creates a limiting perception of how people in positions of power appear. Affinity bias – the innate tendency to preference people who are similar to ourselves – delivers a self-perpetuating cycle of a 'leadership type' for people in positions of power.

When women do hold positions of formal power, often their voices need to be amplified by other people to achieve cut-through. There are also unwritten rules about how they should 'show up' (for example, how they should present themselves and the type and styles

of contributions they should make). When women do not comply with these unwritten rules and/or when women 'fail' in their roles, there can be strong, even vitriolic, responses to them that are not applied equally when men 'fail' or present and/or behave differently.

There is a mental, physical and emotional toll that is taken when women are forced to conform to the white male status quo. When women who experience intersecting inequalities are forced to 'fit in', 'be chameleons', or 'code switch'[3] to be accepted and/ or progress, their unique skills, experiences and perspectives can be lost to organisations.

Gender norms have also served to entrench gendered power dynamics; for example, the social and economic pressure on men to be the breadwinner and for women to undertake a disproportionate share of unpaid care work.

There are expectations that the unequal balance of power will naturally resolve through generational change, yet there is no evidence to support that it is happening with any pace. At the current rate of change, the World Economic Forum suggests gender parity across economic, education, health and political benchmarks will not be achieved globally for another 132 years.[4]

Structural systemic gender bias in policies, processes and organisational cultures

Men have historically held positions of power in workplaces. In these positions of power, they have naturally overseen the creation of organisational systems, structures and processes using their own experience and worldview to inform their thinking and decision-making. As a result of these dynamics, many organisations and institutions have organisational features that are often better suited to men than people of other genders.

Incremental changes to organisational practices – such as the creation of gender-neutral parental leave policies – are welcome progress. However, without considered action to disrupt the way that power is intentionally or unintentionally conferred through systems, structures and processes (and the cultures they create), these organisational features continue to support the allocation of resources, opportunities and influence in a way that reinforces the status quo.

3   V Mapedzahama, F Laffernis, A Barhoum and J O'Leary *Culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership: A framework for (intersectional) organisational action*, Diversity Council Australia website, 2023, accessed 26 May 2023.

4   World Economic Forum (WEF) *Global gender gap report 2022*, WEF website, 2022, accessed 26 May 2023.

Perceptions of power also matter[5]

At a personal level, people attribute power to themselves and others based on a broad range of factors, many of which are entirely subjective.

Conscious or unconscious assessments of power dynamics might include questions such as:

- Do I/or they have formal/positional authority?
- Where do they 'sit' in a hierarchy compared to me?
- Do they share my worldview/perspective?
- What do I need from them/do they need from me – are there other ways for us to meet these needs?

They might also include the application of stereotypes associated with:

- appearance
- age
- ethnicity
- likely socio-economic status
- apparent gender
- sexuality
- presence, presentation and/or posture
- use of language and presentation skills.

In an instant, these considerations determine our assessment of relative power. A person may feel empowered, disempowered or equal in a relationship.

Such perceptions of power can change considerably based on the circumstances, and they are relevant to gender equality.

For example, a senior woman leader may hold power and influence through her position with her team but may not have the same power and influence as her male peers on an executive team. An Aboriginal woman leader may hold power and influence in her community but experience marginalisation in a workplace.

Leaders in the corporate sector may place more value on their financial power than the social and cultural power of leaders in the community sector.

People who have experienced disadvantage or who have been marginalised can be acutely aware of the situations within which they hold power, and the situations within which they do not.

For women in workplaces, particularly male-dominated workplaces, there can be an underlying sense of disempowerment. This an be exacerbated for women from diverse and marginalised backgrounds.

Privilege

- Privilege is a special right, advantage or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.
- Privilege is often invisible to those who have it because people who are granted or achieve certain advantages and benefits often have no reason to believe, or critically examine why, others aren't equally able to receive these privileges.
- Privilege is relational – an individual can be both privileged and marginalised at the same time. An example of this is women parliamentarians, who receive incredible privilege as a result of their work, yet are often marginalised as a group within their workplace.

5 J Battilana and T Casciaro, *Power for All: How it really works and why it's everyone's business*, Simon & Schuster, 2021, London.

Using power to drive change

Through this discussion paper, we aim to help strengthen the systems of power that support inclusive gender equality, disrupt those that don't, and tap into the types of power that have traditionally been undervalued to accelerate change.

This includes sharing examples of how we have seen power manifest in our organisations and how that power can inhibit or advance inclusive gender equality. It also includes a focus on how leaders can better understand, use and share power.

Five actions for leaders

1 Understand how you attained power.

2 Understand how others perceive your use of power.

3 Consider how and who you are empowering.

4 Understand the types of personal power used in your organisation and how they impact gender equality.

5 Challenge organisational systems, structures, processes and cultures to ensure they empower employees equally.

1. Understand how you attained power

A belief in meritocracy is underpinned by the assumption that 'the system' is fair. However, we do not each begin at the same starting point.

It's important for leaders to consider how they have attained the personal power they hold.

This includes reflecting on the qualifications, skills, capabilities, personal values and experiences that contributed to attaining power. It's equally important for leaders to consider thresholds they might have passed through automatically or relatively easily due to their gender, social class, Indigeneity, race/ethnicity, physical ability, sexuality or age.

One of our Members described this as "The Green Light Pathway to Power – where doors open because of attributes like race, gender, education and networks".

These 'green lights' are contextual. In the business context, many green lights exist beyond that of subject matter expertise or experience.

Sharing your personal experiences on your pathway to power, with or without the assistance of green lights, can:

- encourage others to share their experiences, including their achievements and the challenges they have faced
- create opportunity for discussion about real or perceived barriers to power
- help others to better understand different perspectives, and constructively challenge your own views
- demonstrate that access to traditional power structures, networks and/or career trajectories are not necessarily prerequisites for leadership positions.

Reflecting on how you attained power:

➲ Are you aware of any green lights on your pathway to power?

➲ Are there situations when you feel powerless or hold less power? What is the cause of this and how do you respond in these situations?

➲ Which perspectives are you missing because of your personal pathway to power?

➲ Are you aware of talented people who haven't reached their full potential? What barriers might they be experiencing?

Examples of green lights	
One among many	People tend to listen to, form relationships with, and value the perspectives of, people who look and sound like them. This phenomenon is known as homophily.[6] When we are similar to those around us – in gender, social class, Indigeneity, race/ethnicity, physical ability, sexuality, and/or age – 'affinity bias' affirms our perspectives, positions and worldviews. It also makes it more likely that we reject people who come from different backgrounds, have different viewpoints, and worldviews, or who present differently.[7]
Physical presentation	People who are tall, present as physically fit/appear strong, and have a 'healthy' stature are considered to be more 'suitable' for leadership positions.[8] Similar attributes/advantages are conveyed to people who are 'good looking'.[9]
Physical and mental health	People who are able to easily maintain their physical and mental wellbeing are able to devote more time and energy to their work. Chronic health conditions and mental wellbeing require management. Not only can employers and colleagues misinterpret health management as a performance issue, but managing health and wellbeing can reduce a person's capacity to 'lean in' at work.
Availability/ 'bandwidth'	While everyone has the same 24 hours in a day, some people are able to allocate their time differently. An individual's bandwidth for work can be increased by social support structures – such as a supportive extended family, outsourcing of tasks such as cleaning and other domestic activities, or an absence of caring or other social responsibilities.
Financial stability	People with financial stability and access to economic resources are better positioned to take career risks, such as signing on for short-term contracts in high-stakes roles or taking on roles in the high-risk and high-reward contexts that can be thresholds for career advancement.
Access to education	Linked to financial stability is access to education. People who have attended elite schools and/or who can invest in high-quality further education and professional development may experience better employment outcomes. Access to education can also create and support networks of influential people, perpetuating inequality of opportunity.

6 M McPherson, L Smith-Lovin and JM Cook, 'Birds of a Feather: Homophily in social networks', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 2001, Vol. 27, 415–444.

7 Lean In, 'What is Affinity Bias?', Lean In website, accessed 26 May 2023.

8 RA Divine, RM Holmes and G Wang, 'Do executives' aesthetic attributes matter to career and organisation outcomes? A critical review and theoretical integration', 2021, 32(1):101478, *The Leadership Quarterly.*

9 Association for Psychological Science (APS), 'The Look of Leadership', APS website, December 2015, accessed 26 May 2023.

2 Understand how others perceive your use of power

It is beneficial for leaders to develop and maintain their awareness of how others perceive their leadership and their use of power, particularly in the context of advancing women into leadership and achieving inclusive gender equality.

Leaders can seek feedback from a range of people on what they say, how they act, what they prioritise and how they measure. This gives them a better sense of their true impact and the 'leadership shadow' they cast. The purpose of this exercise isn't to find fault but to improve people's understanding of how behaviour (even unintentionally) impacts others, to be more transparent and intentional in their commitment to inclusive gender equality, and to invite stakeholders to make leaders accountable for their actions and progress.

The Leadership Shadow exercise also reinforces the notion that unless leaders are aware of their power and its impact, they risk unconsciously misusing it. This can occur when people:

- are buoyed by overconfidence or a sense of invincibility

- focus on the benefits of power to themselves and those important to them, rather than the successful delivery of organisational outcomes

- fail to consider others' perspectives.[10]

Reflecting on how other people perceive your use of power:

➡ What is the shadow you cast in the way you use, enable and share power?

➡ Do you shine a light on the informal power structures that hold women back, and take practical action to change them?

➡ How do you respond to ideas and perspectives that challenge your beliefs?

➡ How often do you step back to elevate the voices of others?

➡ How often do you seek, hear, amplify and act on the opinions and perspectives of women and diverse people?

➡ Whose voices do you tend to elevate and promote? How often do people see you increasing the visibility and influence of diverse women?

➡ How do you ensure transparency and accountability for decisions that impact gender equality, particularly with regard to the distribution of power (for example, performance appraisals, promotion and recruitment processes, talent development opportunities and the conduct of investigations)?

3 Consider how and who you are empowering

Reflect critically on how – and with whom – you enable and share power. Doing so can challenge affinity bias and highlight the green lights you may be giving some people over others. Doing this can also help to enhance understanding of talent in your organisation and broaden the skills and perspectives contributing to your organisation.

In the Champions of Change and Chief Executive Women's report *In the Eye of the Beholder: Avoiding the Merit Trap*, the concept of 'merit' is defined as being comprised of people's:

- potential as well as past performance

- impact as a team member, rather than as a sole contributor

- skills and experience alignment with the future needs of the organisation.

Remaining open to the presentation of merit in many forms empowers people with different skills, perspectives, worldviews and experiences to contribute to their greatest potential.

Reflecting on how and who you are empowering:

➡ How do you define merit?

➡ Who are you empowering, and why?

➡ In what ways are the people in your network similar or different to you?

➡ Do the people you are empowering reflect your customer/client base and/or the communities within which your organisation operates?

➡ Are you considering how individuals' life experiences might help your business to better understand your customers, and how their different perspectives might enrich critical business discussions?

➡ Do the people you are empowering understand how community, society and population needs are changing and evolving?

10 J Battilana and T Casciaro, *Power for All: How it really works and why it's everyone's business*, Simon & Schuster, 2021, London.

4. Understand the types of personal power used in your organisation and how they impact gender equality

Women's movements have long advocated for making power systems and structures more visible to show how they can intentionally or unintentionally disadvantage and marginalise women.

Being conscious of how formal and informal power is used helps to highlight how it can inhibit or advance inclusive gender equality. Informal power, in particular, tends to be less visible.
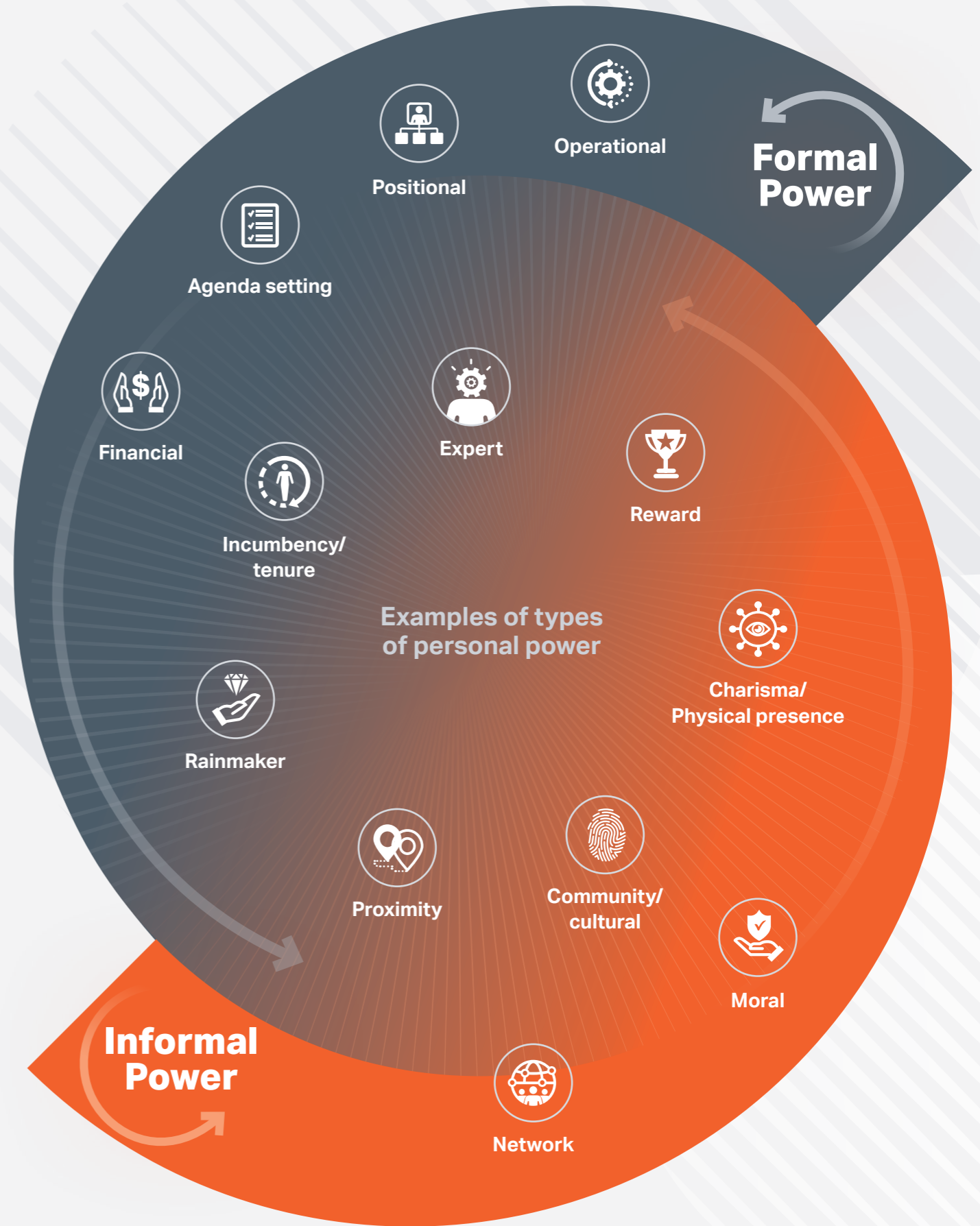
This means its negative consequences are harder to identify and prevent.

Organisations' function, context and strategies tend to reward and reinforce the use of particular types of personal power. Some examples of personal power and how it can be used to advance or inhibit gender equality are outlined in the table below and in more detail on pages 18–21.

Formal Power				
Positional The power and authority held by people due to their formal position, title and rank in an organisation.		**Agenda setting** The power and authority held by people who set the agenda, determine priorities, shape the narrative, and influence others.	
Operational The power and authority held by people who design and implement corporate processes, systems and structures.		**Financial** The power held by people with decision-making authority to prevent, commence, continue and extend financial investment.	
Rainmaker The power held by people who assure revenue streams, close deals, and attract or retain clients.		**Expert** The power held by people who possess technical information, or specific skills and expertise in demand in their industry.	
Incumbency/tenure The power held by people by virtue of longevity within a particular position, business area or organisation.		**Reward** The power held by people to reward others, including through pay rises, leave, promotions, bonuses, work allocation or development opportunities.	
Proximity The power held by people due to their physical proximity or role in advising those in power.		**Community/cultural** The power held by people due to their deep understanding, knowledge of, trust, affiliation, connection and leadership across a particular community, cultural setting or segment of society.	
Charisma/physical presence The power held by people who influence through character, likeability, amenability, sexuality and/or physical presence.		**Moral** The power held by people who are perceived to have moral standing to speak on an issue.	
Network The power held on the basis of who a person knows, the size and influence of their network/s, internally and externally.		**Informal Power**	

Reflecting on the types of personal power used in our organisations:

➡ What types of personal power are valued and used in your organisation/sector/industry?

➡ Are different types of personal power attained consistently across all genders?

Examples of types of personal power

How personal power can be used to inhibit or advance inclusive gender equality

Type of power	Inhibiting gender equality	Advancing inclusive gender equality	Leveraging this power to embed inclusive gender equality in your organisation
Positional power	*I'm focussed on delivering return to shareholders, not changing the world.*	*Gender equality is a key element of our corporate strategy because it delivers better business outcomes and it's the right thing to do.*	◗ Aim for 40:40:20 in Board and leadership teams for business success, and leverage diverse experience and perspectives. ◗ Clearly state the case for inclusive gender equality. ◗ Include the achievement of inclusive gender equality as a key element of corporate strategy. ◗ Set representation targets. ◗ Measure progress towards goals and report transparently on progress. ◗ Ensure standards of expected behaviour are explicit and demonstrate action to uphold these standards. ◗ Value, respect and engage with different types of power such as cultural/community power.
Agenda-setting power	*Domestic and family violence is not a topic that we want to get involved in. Business has no role to play.*	*I want us to focus on how domestic and family violence could be impacting our people, customers and communities.*	
	Our code has always been a men's sport – designed by men, played by men, run by men.	*We want all genders to play, enjoy and feel included in our sport. We are focused on a future that treats and values everyone.*	
Operational power	*We've designed this process/equipment/system to suit the typical employee, who is a man.*	*Our process/equipment/system features user-centred design. Our goal is to ensure there are no barriers to its use by anyone.*	◗ Design systems and processes that enable gender equality and empower women. ◗ Engage all genders and people from diverse backgrounds in the development of processes, equipment and systems. ◗ Proactively consider how organisational design can intentionally or unintentionally exclude minority or marginalised groups.
Financial power	*It would be nice to build women's change rooms, but costs are tight and the majority of our workforce/participants are male.*	*Let's consider how our resources are being allocated in a way that meets the needs of our current and future workforce, and the diversity of the community within which we operate.*	◗ Monitor how and by whom financial decisions are made to advance gender equality, including applying a gender lens to investing and driving gender equality through the supply chain.
Proximity power	*The reality is you need to actually be in the room when the decisions are made.*	*Let's ensure we have a broad range of perspectives on this decision. How can we make that happen?*	◗ Enable and support flexible working. ◗ Ensure all team members have the opportunity to inform or review proposed actions and decisions before finalising them.
	Let's make sure the head table at the event gathers all our VIPs together.	*Let's make sure the VIPs are spread around the room at this event and are connecting with as many different stakeholders as possible.*	◗ Value, respect and engage with different types of power such as cultural/community power. ◗ Avoid concentrating powerful people in groups at forums and events. ◗ Track gender balance in hotspot roles and/or divisions and set targets aligned to KPIs.
Rainmaker power	*Let's deal with his behaviour quickly and quietly. We can't afford to lose him.*	*It is unacceptable to treat any employee in that way regardless of the revenue they generate. Let's ensure there's a fair and independent review of what has happened here.*	◗ Ensure standards of expected behaviour are explicit and demonstrate action to uphold these standards.
Expert power	*He's the global leader on this subject. We have to trust his judgement.*	*Let's ensure he's bringing a range of views and experiences, and is developing diverse people rather just supporting those in his image.*	◗ Ensure you are developing and attracting talent to meet the future needs of particular roles rather than replicating what is perceived to have been successful in the past.

How personal power can be used to inhibit or advance inclusive gender equality

Type of power	Inhibiting gender equality	Advancing inclusive gender equality	Leveraging this power to embed inclusive gender equality in your organisation
Incumbency/ tenure power	*Jim's been in the role for years. No one can replace him.*	*Let's focus on future skills needed and develop a gender-balanced and diverse list of candidates.*	Redefine 'merit' to include: – potential as well as past performance – impact as a team member, rather than as a sole contributor – skills and experience alignment with the future needs of the organisation.
	You have to have been on the field and in the locker room to know how to coach.	*Great coaches know how to get the best out of people and teams. You don't have to have played the game at the highest level to do that.*	
Reward power	*He's working long hours and deserves this pay rise and bonus.*	*Let's focus on what outcomes were achieved (and how) to determine how the pay rises/bonuses are allocated.*	Track gender balance in hotspot roles and/or divisions and set targets aligned to KPIs. Develop and communicate clear and transparent systems and criteria for reward and recognition programs. Introduce reviews of remuneration outcomes to assess how power systems and structures may be influencing outcomes.
	There's a few overtime shifts coming up. This will make the boys happy!	*Let's see who's looking for overtime this month and share the opportunities around.*	Communicate pay bands openly. Conduct regular pay equity audits – communicate outcomes and address any anomalies. Value performance and/or outcomes over presenteeism.
Charisma/physical presence power	*He's got self-confidence, passion, gravitas and has boundless energy … let's get him out among our stakeholders.*	*What our stakeholders want is people who can listen and understand different perspectives so we can consider and respond to them in our actions and decisions.*	Use the Panel Pledge to elevate the voices and views of women and diverse people. Reflect on your leadership shadow and how your actions and decisions can best lead on gender equality. Ensure open and fair recruitment and promotion processes, including balanced interview panels.
Moral power	*It's not our job to be the arbiter of moral standards. We live in a free country, and if there is a market for that product, we should sell it.*	*Our products and marketing will not perpetuate harmful stereotypes of women. Our products and services should support gender equality and be respectful and inclusive for all.*	Bring a diversity of views to problem-solving, including women leaders from a range of sectors. Test your products, services and communications to ensure they support inclusive gender equality and safe, caring and respectful societies.
Network power	*Let's get him in on this project. I saw him at the game last week and he's looking for his next challenge.*	*Let's run a clear and transparent process to find the best candidate for the role.*	Use the Panel Pledge to elevate the voices and views of women and diverse people. Undertake mutual mentoring programs to diversify your networks, learn from and invest in the development of diverse people.
Community/cultural power	*Only he can speak on behalf of the community.*	*Let's make sure all perspectives, particularly those of women and marginalised voices in the community, are heard.*	Seek out a range of perspectives from a community. Elevate women's voices and experiences across diverse communities in your organisation to inform your gender equality priorities and actions. Ensure representation is genuine, and where possible draw from local community organisations and undertake cultural awareness training to increase cultural capability.

5 Challenge organisational systems, structures, processes and cultures to ensure they empower employees equally

Particular focus is required to examine how inequality can be 'baked in' to the way an organisation operates. Structural inequalities based on gender, social class, race/ethnicity, ability, sexuality and age are embedded within our workplaces.

Exclusionary processes can hinder the outcomes we wish to achieve. We need to flip processes to orient around desired outcomes so that good ideas, and people with diverse opinions, are not locked out.

Historical practices, such as firing employees when they became pregnant or requiring women's salaries to be paid into their husband's bank account, provide obvious examples of how organisations have previously reinforced inequality and power imbalances across genders.

Many exclusionary practices today are not as obvious or readily identifiable. Seemingly small decisions in aspects of workforce management, workplace design and organisational design can lead to negative outcomes for women and diverse people.

For example:

- job descriptions that seek people with 'senior, long-term experience' in male-dominated sectors

- facilities designed for men that don't include, for example, safe, clean bathrooms/change rooms for women

- uniforms and tools designed for men that don't reflect the needs of women

- parental leave policies that are not equally available to, or supportive of, all genders

- pathways to leadership that require a record of unbroken work, professional development or training

- exclusion of part-time employees from development programs or bonus schemes

- setting of regular meetings at times that may be difficult for all people to attend (for example, early mornings)

- psychometric testing or interview processes that focus on 'cultural fit' with the status quo.

These examples underline the importance of applying user-centred organisational design at the outset (or through purposeful review) to advance inclusive gender equality.

The recent mass adoption of more flexible ways of working is an example of ways changes to organisational systems, structures and processes can contribute to this agenda.

Until the COVID-19 pandemic, flexible and remote working was not accepted as an essential capability for all businesses.

Generally, flexible work provisions were treated as a 'benefit' and offered mainly to 'working mothers'. But COVID-19 lockdowns (and the subsequent rise in working from home) have demonstrated that flexible ways of working can support business continuity, high-performance and employee engagement.

The pandemic has shifted many organisational cultures – with leadership teams forced to trust employees more and empower them to do work in ways that make sense for them.

At the same time, businesses' adoption of new technologies and more flexible ways of working have disrupted an entrenched system of Proximity power – whereby 'standard office hours/work week' inhibited many women's advancement.

The use and value of Proximity Power has been permanently disrupted by the pandemic, with many organisations now recognising the importance of digital-first work practices in an increasingly online and mobile business world.*

> " Once power is distributed in a certain way, over time the resulting hierarchy acquires a patina of legitimacy. It becomes the natural order of things, and we forget that other human beings created it in the first place. Fortunately, what human beings have created, human beings can change. Sticky is not the same thing as stuck. "
>
> *Power for All*[11]
> J Battilana and T Casciaro

11 J Battilana and T Casciaro, *Power for All: How it really works and why it's everyone's business*, Simon & Schuster, 2021, London.
An ongoing challenge will be to ensure that the benefits of flexible ways of working support the inclusion of all. For example, digital literacy and access to technology are major barriers to equal participation.

Other system, structure and process shifts that redistribute power are also emerging. Organisations within the Coalition are moving from overly prescriptive and unintentionally exclusionary practices to principle-based, inclusive, human-centred approaches.

These shifts include:

- **Location-agnostic work** – which enables us to access a broader pool of talent and supports our people to be in physical locations that are aligned with their personal priorities.

- **Use of portable leave provisions** – which enables us to access a broader pool of talent and supports our people to observe cultural and spiritual events that are meaningful to them.

- **Increased transparency in remuneration** – which supports pay equity and enables us to attract appropriate candidates in a competitive skills market.

- **Increased transparency and accountability about action to address harmful behaviour in the workplace** – which reduces safety and legal risks to organisations, disrupts harmful power imbalances, and empowers people to demand respectful workplace behaviour.

- **Greater focus on the required outcomes of work, and accountability for delivery of these outcomes** – rather than a myopic focus on prescriptive work-completion processes.

These emerging practices may appear disparate, but they are underpinned by the same strategic intent. We're actively making organisational systems, structures and processes more inclusive of a diverse pool of talent.

Importantly, these practices do not necessarily constitute changes to individual employees' entitlements or create increased industrial complexity or administration. Instead, through increased systemic transparency, accountability, agility and flexibility, they empower employees to:

- use their entitlements in ways that best support their lives

- remove systemic inequities

- end harmful and/or illegal behaviour in the workplace.

Empowering all employees through organisational system, structure and process design will:

- support the attraction, retention and promotion of a larger pool of more diverse talent

- increase employee engagement and performance,[12/13] and reduce organisational risks.

Reflecting on organisational systems, structures, processes and cultures:

➡ Which employees benefit from the systems, structures and processes in your organisation?

➡ Do your organisation's systems, structures and processes encourage transparency and accountability to enable inclusive gender equality?

12 H Reisinger and D Fetterer, 'Forget flexibility. Your employees want autonomy', *Harvard Business Review*, October 2021, accessed 26 May 2023.

13 A Lee, S Willis and A Wei Tian, 'When empowering employees works, and when it doesn't', *Harvard Business Review*, March 2018, accessed 26 May 2023.

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Acknowledgements

The Champions of Change Coalition includes
CEOs, secretaries of government departments,
non-executive directors and community leaders
who believe gender equality is a major business,
economic, societal and human rights issue.
Established in 2010 by Elizabeth Broderick AO,
our mission is inclusive gender equality across
our workplaces by 2030 and a significant
and sustainable increase in the representation
of women in leadership.

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Listen, learn and lead with action