



"WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE."

RICHARD KUTI - INCLUSION LEAD AT AND DIGITAL

A WHITE PAPER BASED ON THE MEN AS ADVOCATES FOR WOMEN'S VISIBILITY SUMMIT HOSTED BY BRANDEDU. THE SUMMIT WAS SUPPORTED BY HEADFIRST GROUP AND AND DIGITAL AT HEINEKEN EXPERIENCE IN AMSTERDAM IN JUNE 2023.

“MEN LISTEN BETTER TO MEN. AND WE NEED MORE MEN TO USE THAT PRIVILEGE.”

NANCY POLEON - FOUNDER OF BRANDEDU

Background

Countless studies underscore the advantages of having gender balance in management teams and boards.

Yet, the question remains: why are still so few women at the top?

Currently, men still make up most leadership positions. While this is often viewed as a driver of inequality, we believe it presents an unparalleled opportunity for men to take a proactive role in advancing gender representation within their organizations.

BrandedU strives to increase women’s visibility in business and get more equal representation in executive leadership and pipelines. That’s why three years ago, BrandedU launched ‘Men as Advocates’: an annual event to invite men to the conversation on gender equity. The initiative was inspired by co-host Maarten van Rossum’s former experiences as a diplomat in Afghanistan, where he learned firsthand from male and female locals about the urgent action needed from men for Afghan women’s rights to be recognized.

The goal is simple: get men talking and learning alongside other men and women on how to create more inclusive organizations.

Throughout its previous editions, Men as Advocates continues to evolve to promote dynamic conversations and demonstrate that advancing equal gender representation is possible, and worth it. In the first edition, the initial aim was geared at women sharing the value of having a male ally in their career journey. Its success led to last year's edition where BrandedU 'flipped the script' and introduced a 'manel' (a panel consisting of only men) to hear more from male allies themselves on how they advocate for women's visibility.

The conclusion of last year's event led to FIVE concrete strategies for male leaders to become better advocates. These included:

- 1. Men using their privilege to open doors for women;**
- 2. Holding themselves accountable to create more inclusive spaces;**
- 3. Leveraging their position as gatekeepers;**
- 4. Practicing curiosity and;**
- 5. Learning to constructively show their emotions (check it out [HERE](#)).**

This year's third edition is all about turning those strategies into action. It's about showing that action to support women's representation by men is possible, and within reach. It's about creating transparency and inviting new ideas. And it's about making allies visible to those who aspire to be one too. In fact, as Nancy Poleon stated in her opening speech "men listen better to men. And we need more men to use that privilege, so we can reframe the fact that some men think gender equity is a woman's issue. It's not".

We wrote this white paper to shed light on how men can take action and learn from the efforts of other (male) advocates. We therefore dedicate this white paper to men eager to make a difference; for women seeking male allies in their career advancements; and all those working towards equal representation.

About the summit

On 12 June 2023, Men as Advocates hosted by BrandedU and moderated by Nancy Poleon (Founder, BrandedU) and Maarten van Rossum (Head of Strategy, &FLUENCE), invited nine men to participate across seven 'manels' and share their actions to be better male advocates on gender equity in today's organizations.

This 'manel' included:

- Alain Visser, Chief Executive Officer at Lynk & Co International
- Han Kolff, Chairman of the Board at HeadFirst Group
- Maarten van Rossum, Head of Strategy at &FLUENCE
- Michel Grummel, Partner at EY Netherlands
- Paramijt Uppal, Founder and Foodie at AND Digital
- Peter Green, Regional Sales Director Europe at the Heineken Company
- Peter Kouwen, Vice President and Client Partner at Salesforce
- Sergio Panday, Co-Founder and Managing Director at Roots Inspire
- Stephan Segbers, Chief Operating Officer at Essent

"Manel" discussions tapped into a range of action-oriented topics including: how men can ask more critical questions, grow diverse talent, be a positive rule-breaker or create safe spaces for women and other minorities. Throughout the 'manels', audience participants were also welcomed to pose additional questions or ideas to each speaker to make discussions as interactive as possible.

EQUAL REPRESENTATION

As last year, participants were asked to attend in pairs of the opposite gender. Women were encouraged to attend alongside an aspiring male advocate, and men to take part alongside a woman they support in her career advancement. This was with the ultimate goal to achieve a 50-50 gender representation in the audience and get people in the room who share a common goal to create impact.

“**TO FIX A SYSTEM THAT HAS BEEN BROKEN FOR CENTURIES IT TAKES MORE THAN JUST DOING THE RIGHT THING**”

ALAIN VISSER - CEO AT LYNK&CO

EVER EVOLVING SUMMIT

In response to last year's participant feedback, two workshops were also added to the roster. This was to foster more collaboration between panellists and participants and give space for more one-to-one discussions among men and women. These breakout sessions included the following workshops:

When gatekeepers become allies, everybody wins, hosted by AND Digital.

Led by: Richard Kuti, Inclusion Lead, AND Digital.

The goal of this workshop was unpacking gatekeepers' roles in supporting employees to feel empowered and bring their best selves at work. Key themes included issues of structural inclusion, leadership support and ally strategies in organizations.

Practicing Curiosity: Ask questions, even the uncomfortable ones, hosted by HeadFirst Group.

Led by: Florine Onderwijzer, Managing Director Professionals & Partner Services, Headfirst Group.

The goal of this workshop was to unpack the different ways we listen and are heard in our organizations. This included the importance of '360 listening,' or not merely listening to speak, but rather recognizing the importance of non-verbal cues when communicating with others. Group discussions explored conversational dynamics among men and women, and what it means to connect through conversation as an advocate.



Roadmap

Among the many learnings that surfaced during the event (and shared in this report), it was exceedingly clear: to make necessary progress, more accountability is needed and to do that it needs to be measured. As Richard Kuti rightfully stated, "what gets measured, gets done."

In this report, four tangible actions are outlined and built on the strategies of last year's whitepaper to support (male) allies measuring their progress towards being a gender equity advocate. Each action is inspired by the discussions and stories shared by panellists and enthusiastic participants during the 2023 Men as Advocates event.

So how do YOU measure up? How can YOU take action?

ACTION #1 - ASK & LISTEN

(Male) leaders who encourage open conversations where employees can share their experiences are a necessity to build inclusive, high-performing organizations. One first action to become a (male) advocate is learning to initiate genuine, open conversations with women and other minorities. This involves asking more open or critical questions, and actively listening. Asking open questions implies questions that require more than ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and actively listening means listening to understand. Reflected in the HeadFirst workshop led by Florine Onderwijzer, this was referred to as ‘360 Listening:’ the importance of being equally aware of what is being said, and what is not being said such as gauging others’ underlying feelings or thoughts.

Peter Kouwen underscored the importance of first asking how we show up for others. The way we show up, he explains, are the ways we are curious and the ways we figure out what is happening around us (good or bad). In turn, this shapes how we ask the right questions and support others.

As part of this process, Sergio Panday stated the value of asking others more ‘why’ questions. He clarified that such questions force us to avoid window-dressed responses, and give more context to our actions. An example was illustrated by Michel Grummel while sharing his experience in asking more critical questions, “Challenge them. Ask hard Questions. Why are we failing? Why did we actually fail at not being a more diverse team?” He explained that by not asking these questions, it’s too easy for leaders to move on and not learn.



In addition to asking critical questions, Sergio Panday also underscored the importance of connecting with employees for their views on what change should look like, “Asking more women, how would you change the world?” Or Han Kolff’s suggestion, “What does a good society look like to you?” Through Peter Kouwen’s experiences, (male) leaders and managers should recognize barriers and opportunities with others, and ensure they receive support on these assumptions. This means listening for their needs and wants. From there Peter mentioned, “ideas can be translated into effective action and make the desired difference for all involved.” Han Kolff also recounted his boardroom experiences when more careful asking and listening occurs, “In boardrooms, if you get more diverse views in place, you are able to solve the bigger issues. And you can be more daring because you aren’t held back by the past. So, you are more ready to change, and push the change forward.”

During the breakout sessions, participants further discussed insightful tips on becoming better communicators within our workplaces. Among many, this included: dedicating the moment to listen to another person, asking others first what’s important to them, and avoiding assuming where a discussion should go.



ACTION #2 - SHARE & INVITE

Creating an inclusive, organizational culture also means giving space for voices to be heard. A second action for aspiring (male) advocates is inviting other (male) leaders to share their mistakes and inviting our critics to discussions. As Nancy Poleon stated, “We need to invite critics of the system.” Richard Kuti added to this, explaining that when we invite our critics, it creates a deeper learning of complex issues and demonstrates a commitment to facilitate a constructive exchange of ideas. He further clarified this must happen in a safe space so true learning can take place. (Male) leaders should set a tone for honest discourse, so employees feel valued, supported and empowered.

Peter Kouwen explained how sharing his mistakes in his team has not only helped him understand who he is as a man, but he received feedback on how it showed others how to avoid similar mistakes too. For instance, expressing faults he made, or situations in which he felt unsure or not good enough. In turn, this stimulated collaborative dialogues on how the team may tackle mistakes in the future and take steps forward.



Co-host Maarten van Rossum acknowledged the strength of this transparency, and how it enables men to be their true selves and lead more easily. Peter mentioned it took time to build the courage, but when he did, he quickly saw the positive effects it had on himself and his team.

Han Kolff also expressed the positive repercussions he experienced when opening and sharing his mistakes. It helped him address uncomfortable situations more effectively, without breaking the relationship with the other person or group involved. He suggested addressing such situations by saying, “It’s OK to talk about [topic]. But let’s just move onto another topic.” He further explained that it took practice and experimenting to confront such situations, “Sometimes you’re clumsy at it, or it doesn’t go the best way at first. But you do get better at it. And better at making others feel comfortable to move away from those types of conversations.” What this implies is that gender equity should not be seen as a ‘zero-sum game’ ([Source](#), [Source](#)). Rather, inviting others into a space to share lessons or improvements can generate clarity, credibility, and collective understanding.

ACTION #3 - CULTIVATE & CREATE

(Male) gatekeepers are often at the crux of organizational decisions, and the people these changes impact. This opens innovative possibilities for male advocates to increase the visibility of women and minorities in decision-making across organizations. As our panellists shared, a third action is about cultivating spaces for these groups within organizations but also across sectors and networks.

Within organizations, this can mean substantial impact on how to attract diverse talent. Paramijt Uppal shared his experience when recognizing the talent gap in the tech sector, and how its lack of diversity hindered organizations. For Paramijt, placing priority on employees' transferable skills cultivated new ways for his company to solve problems, "A big part of tech focuses on users. The human being, and the human problems we want to solve. And users include everyone. That should invite all types of backgrounds." Considering transferable skills is about considering how individuals' different skills, knowledge and competencies can be utilized from one industry to another. Besides achieving more innovative solutions across his company, Paramijt mentioned, "it also allows people to be who they really are."

(Male) gatekeepers can also create visibility in how talent, or employees are compensated once hired. Negotiation expert Maarten van Rossum highlighted workplace negotiations as a crucial outlet for making more inclusive decisions and addressing inequalities. To Maarten, negotiations can be a space to build relationships and solve problems together. He explained that many times, women are asked to negotiate differently to ensure they get salary raises or advancements, but it's the men that should also negotiate differently with women, "We should reward negotiation behaviour that creates more value between people."

Maarten gave the example of labour contracts, highlighting that while managers may focus only on salary, there are more creative ways to compensate and position individuals for success, benefiting all parties involved. For example, more flexible working arrangements, employee benefits or supplementary training to accelerate individuals' career advancements.

Equal to consider, is how visibility can be cultivated across sectors and professional networks. For Alain Visser, he questioned the current status quo of the automotive industry—a traditionally male dominated sector—when creating the company Lynk and Co, “if society is made up of different genders, why isn't the automotive industry? Why aren't companies?” To Alain, being a rule-breaker in a distinguished sector isn't impossible. Instead, he flipped that assumption on its back to explain that it just means there are more opportunities to create new rules.

A different yet matched illustration was made by Stephan Segbers who shared his initial doubts of whether he should participate as a head sponsor to a Women's network event, “A women's network? Should I, a man, be the one who sponsors it? And then I thought, what am I thinking? It's obvious. Of course, I should.” Nancy Poleon underscored its impact, “He showed up, and that mattered. He listened to my speech, and it meant something.” This shows that you can create visibility for others by supporting them in their spaces too.



ACTION #4 - SUPPORT & STRUCTURE

Being an agent of change is necessary to transform today's organizational decisions and practices, but equally important is establishing robust support systems and structures to secure the long-term benefits of an inclusive workplace. A fourth action is how (male) leaders can develop strong, accountable practices to safeguard sustainable progress.

As Richard Kuti reflected on the AND Digital workshop, "It still isn't business-as-usual to have safe spaces to discuss ideas. Organizations need to build this into their structures and policies...We're here to fix systems, not people." Participants in this workshop brainstormed ideas on how to structure these support systems within organizations. Two recurring ideas shared included implementing DEI-related KPIs or mandatory recruitment procedures. This was discussed to not only safeguard inclusive practices to create new organizational norms, but also to help reduce any reluctance between employees in charge of making decisions.

During the panel, Alain Visser shared Lynk and Co's approach to achieving a 50-50 workforce, "It starts with recruitment. It's so essential to have the right recruiters and brief them well that you really want diversity. Sometimes you have to force it. Sometimes you deliberately plan to recruit women. And you can't do that in an advertisement, so we say we strongly favour or support strong women applicants. But you have to force it. There's no other way...You have to do more; you have to fix the unbalance." The benefits of structural measures were also shared by Han Kolff who explained that it gives both male and female leaders the push to show what's possible. Over the course of his leadership, Han Kolff shared that processes need to be re-organized to ensure more women leadership happens, and that there's more than one way of achieving it. For instance, finding dedicated recruiters, or simply making more positions open to women. "You can't do it alone. You must understand there is lots of quality out there, and you are going to gain instead of losing things. Having experienced this myself, the threshold to pass is difficult, and pushing [women] through helps."

Once individuals are recruited, Sergio Panday touched on the importance of avoiding 'tokenistic' practices to manage and retain talent within organizations. In his experience at Roots Inspire—a company supporting to advance diverse talent in leadership positions—he often sees tokenism as a broader issue. For example, when organizations put someone in a leadership position but don't give the individual the power to succeed, "Because even if your intentions are right but the guidance isn't there, and someone is not setup to succeed. It's still tokenism." To overcome this challenge, Sergio underscored the need for organizations to build strong mentor programs where current leaders mentor rising talent to support the development of individuals as they embark on their careers. Sergio explained that this is crucial for many individuals who come from different backgrounds and experiences, "For many, they quickly outgrow family and friends' advice. With gender, it's the same, what works for a man doesn't work for a woman. Many ambitious people face loneliness in their journey to break through barriers due to being the only diverse member in their team or company. So having support of a network and knowing you aren't the only one is extremely valuable."

Lastly, discussions underscored support systems and structures needing robust measuring metrics to track progress adequately. Key performance indicators (KPIs) were mentioned as an important structural facet. In addition to this, Maarten van Rossum emphasized the need for multiple modes of measurement, considering just raw data, but also persons' experiences both positive and negative, to gauge progress. He highlighted that these measures help clarify and adjust behaviour, promote common ground, and reward employees, fostering collective learning through conversations.

Conclusions

To benefit from diversity, organizations need to create a culture that values equality and sees differences as opportunities to learn and connect. Men have an important role in driving positive change by using their influence and privilege to promote equality. This requires actively listening to others, having difficult conversations, and speaking up against behaviours that hinder a culture of learning, respect, and equality. It's not an easy task, but those who truly commit to these actions will understand that having a diverse workforce is better, even though it may seem harder at first. By doing so, they will also realize that increasing the visibility and representation of women and minorities comes from the collective effort of committing to these actions and the lessons learned along the way.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

- ALAIN VISSER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AT LYNK & CO INTERNATIONAL
- SERGIO PANDAY, CO-FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR AT ROOTS INSPIRE
- STEPHAN SEGBERS, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER AT ESSENT
- PETER GREEN, REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR EUROPE AT THE HEINEKEN COMPANY
- MICHEL GRUMMEL, PARTNER AT EY NETHERLANDS
- PETER KOUWEN, VICE PRESIDENT AND CLIENT PARTNER AT SALESFORCE
- MAARTEN VAN ROSSUM, HEAD OF STRATEGY AT &FLUENCE
- HAN KOLFF, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AT HEADFIRST GROUP
- PARAMIJT UPPAL, FOUNDER AND FOODIE AT AND DIGITAL
- RICHARD KUTI, INCLUSION LEAD AT AND DIGITAL
- FLORINE ONDERWIJZER, MANAGING DIRECTOR PROFESSIONALS & PARTNER SERVICES AT HEADFIRST.

Calls to action

NEXT STEPS TO GET INVOLVED & STAY INVOLVED

The overwhelming support and growing traction from our passionate participants and panellists continue to be a driving force of BrandedU's mission to advance men's involvement in accelerating women's representation in our workplaces. To continue to drive this forward, below we outline next actions to get involved, or stay involved:

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: MEN AS ADVOCATES, AN ANNUAL EVENT

BrandedU is thrilled to announce that starting in 2024, Men as Advocates will dedicate the second Monday of June each year to continue our mission and promote a committed, growing network of (male) advocates. As with our previous editions, each year will build on insights from past editions to generate cumulative impact and encourage knowledge-sharing across organizations. For details on the next edition of Men as Advocates, click [HERE](#). See you June 10th 2024!

HOSTING MEN AS ADVOCATES AT YOUR WORKPLACE

BrandedU wants to bring these discussions even closer to your workplace. For this reason, BrandedU invites companies from all industries to partner with us and host a 'Men as Advocates' event at their offices. Committed to bringing organizations inspiring speakers, engaging workshops and thought-provoking discussions, hosting a company-specific 'Men as Advocates' event will foster the needed, important dialogues, but now among colleagues across your organization. Want to continue the conversation & get men more involved in your organization? Connect with [us](#) to advance (male) ally ship in your workplace.

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Nancy Poleon
Founder BrandedU
September, 2023.

