

# MAPPING THE PATH



Funded by the  
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of Ministers

## *New Masculinities in the Nordics*

The report that unlocks the potential of  
male allyship in the workplace



 **Add Gender**

**NIKK** Nordic Information  
on Gender



**BOSS**  
Business Partner

**TAL  
TECH**



# Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OUR STUDY

KEY CONCEPTS

KEY TERMS

THE JOURNEY TO ALLYSHIP

METHOD

FINDINGS

CONCLUSIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

FUTURE RESEARCH & AREAS OF INTEREST

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

*Homosociality*  
*Allyship*



*Awareness*      *Motivations*  
*Behaviors*      *What wakes men up?*

*4 ally archetypes*  
*Hacking homosociality*

*Trainings*  
*Advise*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## *Mapping the Path - New Masculinities in the Nordics*



NIKK Nordic Information on Gender

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the New Masculinities in the Nordics project, supported by NIKK's Nordic Gender Equality Fund. The purpose of the project was to investigate men's responses to diversity interventions and gender equality practices in Nordic and Baltic workplaces with the intention of formulating recommendations and innovative best practices for those working with Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI). The purpose of the project was to collect and make sense of men's attitudes towards gender equality initiatives in the workplace. The intent from the beginning of the project was to reach men with attitudes across a broad spectrum, both positive and negative, toward gender equality, but the resulting findings paint a picture of men as allies and supporters of gender equality. Drawing on existing literature concerning homosociality and allyship, this report identifies key areas for novel intervention, where men can be encouraged by other men to behave differently, and even become allies themselves. Therefore, this report concludes with a series of recommendations aimed at practitioners leveraging our findings regarding men, homosociality, and allyship to design and implement programming accordingly.

### **PROJECT PARTNERS**

Add Gender, Sweden

BOSS Business Partner, Sweden

KUN, Norway

NORM, Denmark

TalTech University, Estonia

Funded by: NIKK – Nordic Information on Gender on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024-2026.

#### *The project:*

#### *New Masculinities in the Nordics*

The aim of the project is to research and compile a report on men's reactions to diversity initiatives and gender equality practices in Nordic workplaces. This report was launched February 2026.

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Researcher in gender, new technologies, and futures of work. TalTech, Estonia

## OUR STUDY

### CONTEXT

In recent years, the media debate around gender equality and the growing public interest in the topic have led to a more polarized discourse. As a result, there has been increased attention to the strong negative reactions toward the gender equality movement, attracting those who oppose it.

The project was therefore initiated by a group of professionals working with gender equality both theoretically and practically in Denmark, Norway, Estonia, and Sweden. The aim was to understand how male employees perceive gender equality in the workplace.

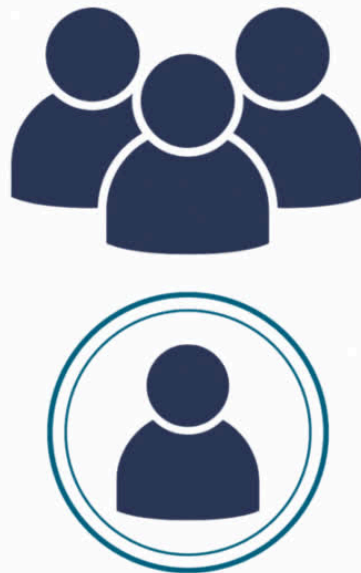
The research team initially intended to reach men with negative attitudes toward DEI. However, the recruited informants turned out to be largely supportive of gender equality measures and in many cases even enthusiastic about DEI. The collected data reflected a general eagerness among participants to contribute to positive change in their workplaces.

The planned outcome of the project is a report focusing on challenges, issues, and insights related to integrating gender equality methods at work. It will also include concrete recommendations for employers that can be adapted to the contexts of Denmark, Estonia, Norway, and Sweden.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are as follows:

- How have workplace gender equality initiatives (policies, initiatives, activities, training, etc.) been met/perceived by men?
- How can our findings inform and improve our own efforts towards gender equality (through training/assessing etc.)?
- How can our findings inform and improve interventions (designed by HR, Human Resources or DEI professionals) to advance gender equality in workplaces?



February 2026



## KEY CONCEPTS

### **KEY CONCEPTS**

Two concepts are vital to making sense of the data collected for this project: homosociality and allyship. Homosociality accounts for what the men shared about their relationships and interactions with other men, while the concept of allyship encapsulates many of the men's perspectives and behaviours.

### **HOMOSOCIALITY**

Distinct from homosexuality, which refers to sexuality, homosociality is a concept that accounts for social bonds between people of the same gender. In its most common application, in studies to do with men and masculinities, it is characterized as a mechanism through which hegemonic masculinity is maintained (Bird, 1996; Hammarén & Johansson, 2014; Lipman-Blumen, 1976). One rather iconic study to do with men's homosociality considered how a group of working-class boys resisted conformity to middle class socialization and created a tight-knit bond that entailed the exclusion and oppression of girls, immigrants, and other boys (Willis, 2017). Constituent to homosociality is the contemporary notion of "bromance," describing an intimate and even emotionally intense friendship between men (Davies, 2014; DeAngelis, 2014). These homosocial bonds have been shown to shape the way boys and men relate to/with girls and women. For instance, a researcher who interviewed young men enrolled at a military university found that friendship amongst men was forged through the sharing of sexual fantasies, desires, and experiences they had with women (Flood, 2008). This research claims that men bond over memories of collective sexual harassment and use women as a kind of currency or social capital to climb the ladder of social hierarchy.

Homosociality is not in and of itself "bad." Some research has captured the broader set of identities that have emerged as men resist orthodox masculine archetypes, and cultural expectations of men have changed (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Murray & White, 2017; White & Hobson, 2015; White & Robinson, 2016). Some studies have highlighted the utility of homosocial spaces in tackling cultural habits specific to boys and men (Hayes, Burns, & Egan, 2024). The central premise of homosociality is that men seek other men's approval, and that the approval of male peers is often considered far and above the approval of women. Therefore, homosociality could also result in men holding each other to higher standards.



## KEY CONCEPTS

### **ALLYSHIP**

An ally is someone who works alongside (with, for, in defence of, etc.) a marginalized or oppressed group in their quest for fair treatment and justice. Becoming an ally often begins with an awareness of a system of oppression and an ability to recognize its machinations. This poses a challenge in terms of addressing sexism in the workplace because men are far less likely to notice sexism and the unfair treatment of women (Blumenthal, 1998; McCord, Joseph, Dhanani, & Beus, 2018; Rodin, Price, Bryson, & Sanchez, 1990; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Men frequently become aware of gender issues when they affect someone close to them, so their motivations to engage in allyship are often rooted in their relationships with women—their daughters, wives, or mentors (Dubow & Ashcraft, 2016; Nash, et al., 2021). Our project *New Masculinities in the Nordics* shows, however, several other motivations for male allies. This will be detailed in the Results section.

Research shows that, even when equipped with knowledge and the best intentions, men experience uncertainty about their own behaviour, anxiety about making mistakes, and might still hold the belief that gender equity is a “women’s issue” (DuBow & Ashcroft, 2016; Madsen, Townsend, & Scribner, 2020). A shift from passivity to active allyship comes about through introspection, courageous responsibility, and authentic discussion (Luthra, 2022).

Among the strategies men take up that could be considered allyship are: mentoring women colleagues, especially towards leadership development; ensuring a diverse candidate list in hiring processes; acknowledging and emphasizing the contributions of women they work with (Madsen, Townsend, & Scribner, 2020). Sometimes, when men do behave as allies and confront sexism, they are perceived as legitimate and serious, which can even result in positive work evaluations (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). However, men are also wary of titles like “champion of change” which feel performative or undeserved (Nash et al., 2021).

## KEY TERMS

### KEY TERMS

Below is a chart outlining key terms as they function in this report.



<b>TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY</b>	refers to a mode of being, informed by cultural norms and expectations, characterized by traits like strength, emotional stoicism, and dominance
<b>NEW MASCULINITIES</b>	refers to the fact that novel and evolving modes of being, divergent from traditional masculinity, are emerging
<b>MEN</b>	refers to a person with lived experience as a man
<b>GENDER</b>	not to be confused with biological sex, refers to social and cultural practices related to a person's identification as a man or woman, or along a gender spectrum (many cultures use a gender binary)
<b>IDENTITY</b>	refers to a set of qualities that characterize a person, often across familiar categories including age, sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, personality, etc.
<b>NORDICS</b>	refers to a set of countries with a shared geography and culture in Northern Europe and the Arctic, including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden; Estonia is also included for the purposes of this study
<b>RACE</b>	refers to socially constructed race categories, that are not intrinsic to human beings, but have been created over time, often to the benefit of socially dominant groups
<b>DIVERISTY</b>	refers to the presence of variety across people's identities (as described above) in a given group or organization
<b>EQUALITY</b>	refers to equal treatment of people regardless of their identities (as described above) in a given context or organization



## KEY TERMS

<b><i>INCLUSION</i></b>	refers to the ability of people, especially those disadvantages on the basis of their identity, to participate and feel a sense of belonging
<b><i>HR</i></b>	refers to Human Resources within an organization
<b><i>DEI</i></b>	refers to Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion, frameworks often operating at the organizational level that promote these stated values
<b><i>GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVES</i></b>	refers to measures, interventions, training related to gender equality, under the DEI framework, offered by an organization
<b><i>INDIFFERENCE</i></b>	refers to a potential response to DEI whereby the person is apathetic or uncaring
<b><i>RESISTANCE</i></b>	refers to a potential response to DEI whereby the person is hesitant or pushes back against set out organizational activities
<b><i>HOSTILITY</i></b>	refers to a potential response to DEI whereby the person rejects, perhaps aggressively, set out organizational activities
<b><i>HOMOSOCIALITY</i></b>	refers to the social bonds between people of the same gender, especially in exclusively same-gender contexts
<b><i>ALLYSHIP</i></b>	refers to efforts made by people to advance the interests of marginalized groups

# THE JOURNEY TO ALLYSHIP

## THE JOURNEY TO ALLYSHIP

In understanding the journey to allyship it's important to emphasize that allyship is “an ongoing real-time behaviour rather than a static identity” and involves commitment and accountability (Anicha et al., 2018, p. 163). One model of allyship development describes a six-step process: “(1) pre-college attitudes, (2) acquiring information, (3) meaning making, (4) confidence: in themselves, in their views, and in their knowledge bases, (5) skill development, and (6) the importance of chance and recruitment” (Reason & Broido, 2005, p. 21-13). This approach, however, is aligned to a very particular university trajectory and cannot account for ally identity development in later stages, or the potential for regression or reversal. Building upon this model, Casey and Smith proposed a process which included (1) a sensitizing experience, (2) an opportunity experience, and (3) a process of iterative meaning making which led to active involvement in gender-based violence prevention (2010). Another model which highlights the vitality of early commitments in setting the groundwork for active allyship: (1) understanding oppression, (2) understanding different oppressions, (3) consciousness and healing, (4) working for one's own liberation, (5) becoming an ally, (6) educating other allies, and (7) hope (Bishop, 2015).

A more recent literature review synthesizing the findings of various studies to do with allyship posited another, broader model involving (1) turning points, (2) learning, (3) action, and (4) skill building and maturation, as illustrated below (Halvorsen, et al., 2025, p. 16).



Despite the emergence of these useful models, “there has been very little examination of the specific antecedents and process which White heterosexual men have experienced to come to engage in intersectional allyship” (Halvorsen et al., 2025, p. 7).



## METHOD

### **DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In the interest of transparency, the development of research questions is outlined here.

The project proposal in May 2024 listed the research questions as follows:

- How have gender equality efforts been implemented and how are they received?
- What are the various perspectives held by men concerning key pillars of gender equality: equal pay, leave policies, hiring, and promotion policies etc.?
- What can be garnered from gathering these perspectives that can inform efforts to get men on board with gender equality?

Upon confirmation of funding, the team convened initial meetings and sought to clarify the purpose of the research to be performed. Naturally the research questions evolved with discussion.

Prior to beginning data collection in January 2025 the research questions were concretized as already stated above in this report:

- How have workplace gender equality initiatives (policies, initiatives, activities, training, etc.) been met/perceived by men?
- How can our findings inform and improve our own efforts towards gender equality (through training/assessing etc.)?
- How can our findings inform and improve interventions (designed by HR or EDI professionals) to advance gender equality in workplaces?

### **PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

Participants were solicited to participate in the study via an online interview request form (Appendix A) which was shared widely through professional networks and on social media. The target audience was identified as (1) having lived experience as a man, (2) having worked at least two years, and (3) having been involved in or observed gender equality activities at work. This recruitment survey garnered 40 responses, from which 23 interviews took place.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

Twenty-three qualitative interviews were conducted by research team members across the four national contexts (nine in Sweden, six in Estonia, four in Denmark, & four in Norway) between January and April 2025. Interviews were structured with reference to a predetermined guide (Appendix B), but with a semi-structured protocol. Research team members adopted a highly attentive and responsive approach whereby interviewees were prompted to share their perspectives freely and emphasize what they felt was most significant.

Interviews lasted between 15 and 50 minutes; they were audio recorded, transcribed, and, if necessary, translated to English. All participant data and raw transcriptions were collected and stored according to standard research ethics and in line with the GDPR. For the purposes of this report, interviewees were assigned a pseudonym.



## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The analysis was conducted through the lens of intersectionality, whereby various systems of oppression, beyond just the patriarchy, are considered. In practice, this materialized as a careful tending to the complex identities of our interviewees (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). The participants themselves pointed towards aspects of their identity as mutually constitutive, evoking their age, country of origin, race\*, ethnicity, native spoken language, etc. as they shared their perspectives.

*\*please note that participants in this study self-identified along race based categories.*

The data was analysed according to inductive research norms, whereby patterns and themes were identified in the data through a “live” and iterative process (Locke, Feldman, & Golden-Biddle, 2015). To begin, all data was shared between two members of the research team for individual review and notation. A thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was combined with emotion coding techniques (Hagenauer, Gerda, & Volet, 2014; Volet, Seghezzi, & Ritchie, 2019). This process yielded a division of data into (1) Perceptions, and (2) Feelings. This initial analysis was shared with the broader team at an in-person workshop in Tallinn in May 2025 where additional analysis and triangulation took place.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The recruitment methods, which drew largely on the networks of team members all of whom are already engaged in equality or diversity work, rendered a bias. None of the interviewees expressed strong oppositional views towards equality measures.

Moreover, the research team is made up of professionals with varying levels of research experience and diverse personal priorities situated within the specific cultural contexts of their locale. Although the potential for drastic variance was mitigated by data collection preparation and an interviewing training session held in January 2025, there was inevitably variance in how the interviews were performed.

Finally, a portion of the interviews were conducted in the participants’ native tongue. Although this likely allowed the interviewee to express themselves better, it also meant the potential loss of meaning through the translation process. Similarly, there was risk of miscommunication of misunderstanding in those interviews conducted in English with interviewees less comfortable with the language.

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## **CONTACT**

Keep up to date with the project and our partners. <https://addgender.se/new-masculinities/>



## FINDINGS

### **AWARENESS OF INEQUALITIES**

As mentioned above, awareness is the seed from which allyship can blossom. Participants shared a variety of key moments which contributed to their understanding of the experience of women and minority groups. There is, for the men, a distinction between instances in their personal life that bring them to awareness versus those in a professional setting.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the men spoke of the role women played in shaping their awareness. Lukas described his mother as a “dominant force” and, having grown up with two sisters, he was more than familiar with discussions to do with gender equality. Numerous interviewees emphasized the vitality of having a daughter. In instances when he witnessed unfair treatment of women, Linus explained, “yes, sometimes I think about it if it was my daughter.”

Participants shared experiences of observing their workplace environment and noting weaknesses or issues related to diversity and equality. For instance, one interviewee explained, “just looking around, it was mostly people who either worked with each other before, studied with each other before, or just partied with each other”; this was creating a “bubble,” a lack of diverse ideas (Henrik). Mart shared, “I realized I have only had one manager who is a woman my whole career- it’s still not that common.” Some interviewees seem quite attuned to nuanced gender dynamics.

Aksel described how in his workplace “ideas proposed by women are only taken seriously when represented by a male colleague” and similarly, Anders observed task or role distribution whereby, “the people having the vision, the ideas, the direction they were men, and then the people trying organize the work- they were women.”

It was not just awareness about their environment, but also an awareness of their own limitations, that seemed to contribute to participants’ development towards allyship. For example, Mart explained, “I have to be aware of my biases, because in the end I’m a man, right?” In the context of attempting to bring about change in his workplace, Henrik noted that he was “far from being perfect and representative to lead” on it; eventually he opted to seek out the expertise of DEI professionals. In fact, Henrik goes on to outline how he asked the owner of a DEI consultancy “if I could spar with her, if she could be my mentor.”

These kinds of humble reflections are complicated by the complex intersectional position some interviewees hold. For example, Taavi, a racialized man, explained, “when I joined the company I looked at the leadership team and saw all white men, my first thought was, ‘am I being tokenized?’” He went on to describe his experience being placed on the hiring panel for the company’s first head of DEI: “I felt like I was, I was put on the panel because I ticked the box,” but “it just felt like not the right thing.”

## FINDINGS

### ***...AWARENESS OF INEQUALITIES***

Interpersonal interactions, especially with family members, seem to be amongst the most impactful in terms of increasing the men's awareness when it comes to diversity and inclusion. Yet, there is also an awareness of the workplace as a "boys club" (Henrik) where men listen to other men most keenly, that men's opinions and perspectives are privileged. However, some men noted that amongst their male colleagues, their "connections don't include anybody that actively speaks about this topic and so I've gotten accustomed to that, I don't pay much attention to it" (Taavi).



### ***MOTIVATIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY ALLYSHIP***

There was also a broader concern about organizational awareness amongst participants. That is- it seemed that the men believed that, just as their own allyship begins with awareness, so too does structural allyship, or organizational change. One interviewee outlined a mapping exercise, whereby an anonymous survey was conducted to capture the breadth of diverse experiences and perspectives held by employees at their organization (Henrik). He also explained that he himself felt like an outsider, due to his inability to speak the dominant language, when he joined the company, explaining, "I had no allies here. I need to. I need to change it." In this sense, he understands the value of allyship, at the very least when relevant to his own linguistic limitations.

Motivations for behaving as an ally and, at times, requesting or taking on the work of organizational change can be considered under two main categories: personal ethics/beliefs and business case benefits.

Again, many of the participants spoke of their partners or daughters. Oskar spoke at length about how becoming a father changed his perspective and motivates him to create a better future for her: "I myself have become a father and have a daughter and that colours me." He goes on, "yes, now we have daughters," it's "some kind of wakeup" that "it's insanely important" to "change things for my daughter's sake." And finally, he shares, "it's time for me and everyone who is middle-aged men in positions of power to pave the way, to make sure that this is going to fucking work [for women]." Linus described themselves as always having strong values; "Yes, I know what is right and wrong."

## FINDINGS

### **...MOTIVATIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY ALLYSHIP**

In industries where it was applicable, there was a desire for symmetry between clients/customers and service providers. Linus explained that diversity is good for business: “it’s better for everyone if you’re not moulded into one mold- our customers are not all middle-aged men.” A similar sentiment was shared by a manager who shared, “one vice president told us something that really made sense to me, he said that diversity is an engineering problem, because if you don’t have women or you don’t have people from other cultures and so on, your products will not be good” (Mart). Having a diverse workforce “gives a dynamic work situation in itself” but also, “a better and kind of more attractive employer brand” to potential employees (Elias). Similarly, Henrik described how “people were really, really happy that we were amongst the best places to work in [the country] for women.” Effectively, many of the men were motivated by the aspiration of creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace.

Some of the interviewees noted that men want to be met where they are, and that this approach can be particularly motivating. Henrik told a story of a man coming into the office assessing inclusion: “Like all these dudes, they’re like, ‘finally, somebody speaks about diversity and inclusion like in a way that is relatable, like I was afraid that when he comes, he’s going to talk about quotas and the whatever wage gaps,’ but people were like excited.” Instead, this man pointed out tangible and easily mutable aspects of their workplace that could change. Henrik explains, “he went through the office, and he opened our shelves, and was like, ‘you have four kinds of coffee and one kind of tea’” and “‘you have six kinds of beer, all of them alcoholic, and like only one soda’... he wanted to spark conversation about being inclusive and people loved it.”

Some of the men were also motivated by what they understood was possible. For instance, Mart observed that organizations often frame diversity measures or initiatives as difficult. However, Mart himself explained, “people can’t use their excuses,” like “this [hiring women] doesn’t work because there’s no talent base.” Instead Mart emphasized, “you’ve got to create it. Like if you want something, go create it” - implying that organizations ought to invest in potential future employees preemptively.



## FINDINGS

### BEHAVIOURS & ACTIONS

Organizational policy, though useful to some extent, seems to be perceived by participants as inadequate. As Aksel explains, “policies are just words on paper, but culture is something that is lived,” later emphasizing the point, “policies alone don’t drive change, it’s the culture and everyday behaviours that make the difference.” Sander described feeling disappointed when reading his company policies: “it was like, oh, that’s a low bar.”

Another interviewee noted their own “ignorance of what sort of specific politics have been implemented” (Magnus). Jaan shared that when the Human Resource personnel change, “everything pretty much changes” to the extent that policy becomes obsolete or inactionable; “at a certain moment, for me, all those company values were bullshit, because it only works with certain people there” to maintain the culture accordingly.

Action taken by the men as allies ranged from the miniscule to those of lasting impact. One participant noted that he started to reflect upon his sexist language and was consciously encouraging women colleagues to apply for promotion (Lukas). Taavi explained a general eagerness to improve: “I would like to be corrected. And I would like to evolve, if I’m doing this wrong.” And yet another interviewee described a desire to be “a safe person,” or someone who contributes to creating safe spaces (Magnus).

## WHAT WAKES MEN UP?



### The Daughter Effect

Witnessing inequality through female family members creates moral conviction.

*“It’s some kind of wakeup... to change things for my daughter’s sake.” — Oskar*



### The Professional Bubble

Noticing that decisions are made in echo chambers.

*“Just looking around, it was mostly people who... partied with each other... creating a lack of diverse ideas.” — Henrik*



### The Engineering Problem

Recognizing that lack of diversity leads to worse products.

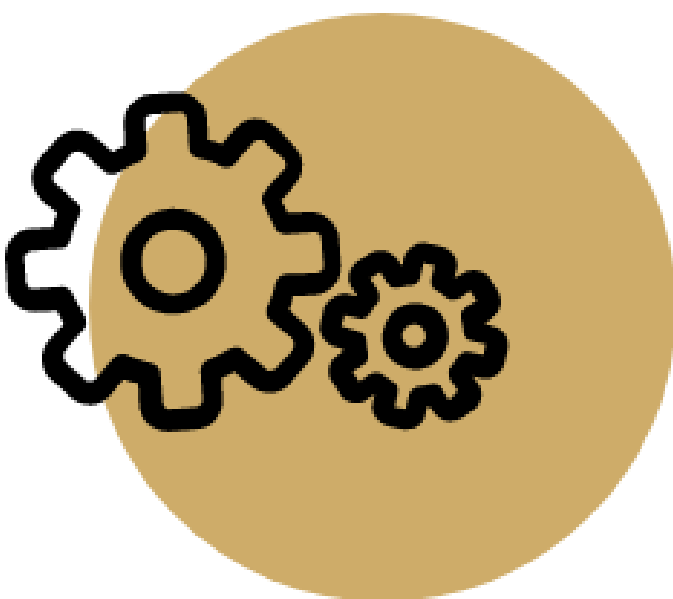
*“Diversity is an engineering problem... if you don’t have women... your products will not be good.” — Mart*

## FINDINGS

### ...BEHAVIOURS & ACTIONS

There was an awareness amongst participants that being in leadership positions also impacted their ability to effect change. One participant anticipated a future where they would be in a position of power: “the day that I get into a leading position, I will at least do what I can to make sure it [discrimination] doesn’t happen.” Another, who is a senior manager, clarified, “my job is to manage people. People are different. So, if you have different needs, I should cater to them. If you get motivated in a different way, I should cater. There’s no one size fits all” (Taavi).

It also seemed apparent that part of the actions taken by interviewees included being a sounding board for their colleagues. Emil, for instance, explains that his employees “feel so safe that they contact me directly when something happens, so we can have a dialogue about it” and they ask him how to proceed. Mart, who is an experienced manager, explained, “the typical question that I don’t like, but the one I hear the most is ‘why do we have to hire women?’- so there is this struggle all the time.” When asked how to address colleagues who are especially resistant to gender equality measures, Mart told the interviewer that “the main thing is to be transparent and open to discuss these things.” He went to provide an example how he might prompt other men to behave as allies: “I hear second hand information about how a woman was treated wrongly and I should be like, ‘you don’t just have to tell the story, you can also do something in the moment.’”



*“I would like to be corrected. And I would like to evolve, if I’m doing this wrong.”*



## FINDINGS




### ***COSTS & RISKS OF ALLYSHIP***

Interviewees acknowledged that DEI, and their own allyship is not without its challenges, downsides, and potential costs. Some participants resented the fact that they themselves were taking on considerable extra labour in order to address issues. Anders explained, “I would have wished that the initiatives came from the department instead of us having to fix it ourselves.” And, that doing such work, especially when highly visible, is not always celebrated. Peeter described DEI as “still very much stigmatized,” while Henrik shared an example where “there was a lot of backlash” and that some of his colleagues “didn’t feel like it was necessary as long as the job was being done.” Any efforts or achievements can seemingly be undone with a lack of support from leadership. Emil explained, “the boss comes in and chuckles or says something about how now we do some kind of ‘woke training’” and “no one will take it seriously and then there will be people who take it badly and it will not do anything.”





## THE COST OF CARING: WHY MEN STAY SILENT

### THE RISKS

-  **Backlash:** Fear of ‘woke’ stigma or peer mockery.
-  **Tokenism:** Minorities fearing being ‘tick-box’ exercises.
-  **Status Loss:** The perceived cost of losing privilege.

### THE FRICTION

-  **Organizational Hypocrisy:** Leadership that treats policies as ‘words on paper’.
-  **Lack of Script:** Men don’t know HOW to intervene.

**Men fear losing social capital with other men.**

## FINDINGS

### ***...COSTS & RISKS OF ALLYSHIP***

At times participants pointed towards the various pressures and stakeholders that impact an organization's ability to engage in meaningful DEI work. There is an obvious "trade-off between money and effort" because "of course, there are things that would make us even more inclusive and more diverse, but it would be difficult to measure for ourselves in the short term" (Linus). Relatedly, Jaan seemed especially aware of their own employment precarity: "I know that every moment I could get laid off and nobody cares. Nobody cares about the values when the things don't make any sense financially anymore. We're all a big family until the money runs out and we have to let go of people" (Jaan).

Finally, there was some general recognition of the possibility that DEI involves loss for men, whether they are allies or not. Those subject to shifts in the workplace experience loss; "men who have been used to having quite a lot of privilege and then notice that they no longer have it and that there is a backlash" (Nikolas). At the same time, men seem to crave "good role models" (Viktor), who are "open about their own shortcomings and failures" (Peeter) and come to move through this change graciously.





## CONCLUSIONS

The themes identified above (Awareness of Inequality, Motivations for Gender Equality, Behaviours & Actions, and Costs & Risks of Allyship) are demonstrative of the men's general support and enthusiasm for gender equality initiatives in the workplace. Analysis of the recurring patterns in the data reveal (1) a series of Ally Archetypes, (2) Hacking Homosociality, and (3) the Ally's Journey.

### ALLY ARCHETYPES

*These archetypes can be seen as illustrative tendencies rather than fixed identities.*

Some participants could be described as “**observers**”; they were knowledgeable about gender equality and inclusion, recognized their importance, and often noticed subtle barriers to change, but rarely spoke up or intervened. Their quiet awareness and broad perspective, however, positioned them as potentially valuable allies should the right opportunity arise or if some additional support were provided.

Others acted as “**empowered agents**”, combining positive attitudes toward equality with the authority or resources to influence their organizations. They could, for instance, make decisions related to recruitment or allocate budgets for training and inclusion initiatives. While these participants were well-placed to create change, they also emphasized that equality work requires organizational backing and cannot rely on individual commitment alone.

A third group reflected the experiences of “**disempowered agents**”, namely men who wanted to contribute actively but lacked either the formal authority or organizational support to do so. Despite their motivation, they often faced resistance, indifference, or even negative reactions when trying to promote DEI efforts. As a result, the disempowered agent may try to speak up, bring new ideas and act within their range of power, but faces backlash for it. The backlash can either be passive, such as no change is made, or active, such as loss of work or social approval. It's important to note that the disempowered agent is a man of action, and that the only thing stopping him from changing his workplace are external circumstances. This group is very internally motivated.

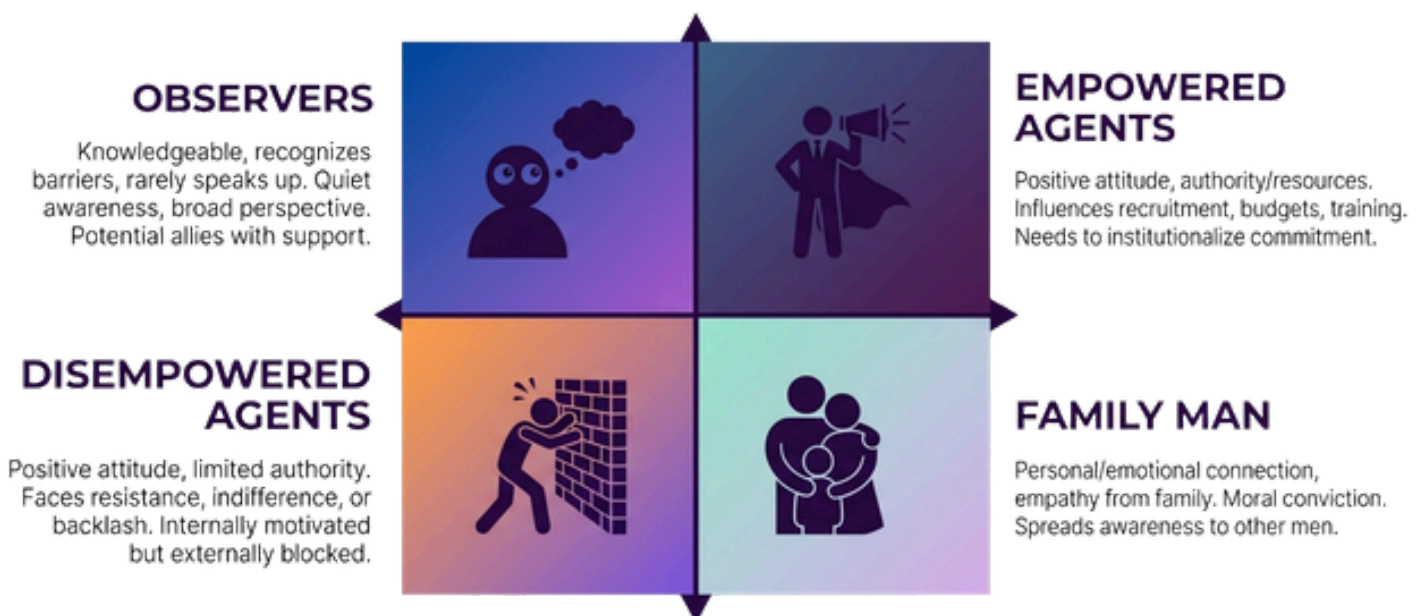
*“The disempowered agent is a man of action waiting for a signal. It is time for organizations to give that signal.”*

# CONCLUSIONS

## ...ALLY ARCHETYPES

Several participants described motivations that could be linked to personal and emotional connections, for example through family life. “The family man” expressed empathy and a sense of fairness rooted in relationships with women close to them, such as daughters, partners, or mothers, that taught them to empathize with women’s struggles in the workplace. Their allyship was often grounded in moral conviction and care rather than organizational logic or business arguments. Instead of business arguments, this group focuses on values such as justice and doing what is right because they care about women like they care about their female family members. The family man archetype has a key ability to spread awareness to other men about being a good ally and supporter of DEI initiatives in the workplace.

## The 4 Ally Archetypes



Note: These are illustrative tendencies, not fixed identities. Men can move between quadrants.

# CONCLUSIONS

## HACKING HOMOSOCIALITY

The dominant discourse concerning gender equality in the workplace often positions women as the problem. That is—women are operating at a deficit that, if addressed, will render their treatment and success in the workplace improved. Not only is this framing incorrect, but it also undermines the efficacy of efforts to “solve the problem.” For instance, when diversity initiatives are aimed at women alone, it leads to widespread concerns about fairness and even potential increased negative treatment of women (Cundiff et al., 2018). Shifting this discourse to the patriarchy is the desirable outcome.

To shift focus, a powerful method is to utilize the existing knowledge, network and motivation of male allies, and to empower them in their allyship. “Hacking homosociality” is a term for using the mutual respect that above mentioned research has shown exists between men, for gender transformative purposes. Men have the ability to inspire other men to include women in the decision-making in the workplaces, to hire inclusively, and have open discussions about biases, attitudes and unequal practices. However, to reach full benefit of homosociality, male allies should be armed with effective arguments and preferably training in how to respond to negative attitudes and indifference.



### *The shift*

- From “Women as the problem” (fixing women).
- To “System Change” (using male networks for gender equality transformative action)

**Core Concept:** Men listen to other men. Traditional DEI relies on women educating men. “Hacking Homosociality” means using male peer validation to drive equality.

# CONCLUSIONS

## ALLY'S JOURNEY

The ally archetypes above exist along a cartesian plane with awareness and action axis. Ideally men are set on their own journey towards becoming empowered agents- that is both aware, and acting upon that awareness. Based on this analysis we propose a model of the ally's journey, building upon recent calls to begin or expedite the journey to allyship by facilitating or creating turning points in the lives of men. The below illustration encapsulates some of these findings, noting how impactful insights gained from experiences in the familial and professional setting are, while underscoring the role men can play in shaping other men's journey.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for the findings and analysis presented in this report to be taken up, we have formulated a series of recommendations aimed at DEI and HR practitioners. Importantly, “hacking homosociality” is not about simply lecturing or giving out spreadsheets with facts. Instead, the practice should be a conversation with male allies about their contexts and support needs. By supporting already existing allies, and mitigating the costs and risks they might encounter, we can help to set them on the path of paying it forward, talking with other men and having even greater impact by influencing their peers. Therefore we have highlighted two primary recommendations, (1) Allyship Mentorship Programmes, and (2) Allyship Skills Training, along with a variety of general advice.

### **ALLYSHIP MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES**

There is a long and well documented history of men’s entitlement to the emotional labour of minority groups in activism spaces (Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Gorski & Erakat, 2019; Katsikana, 2021). Existing approaches to DEI remain over reliant on the explanatory efforts of women. Instead of recreating this pervasive overreliance, Allyship Mentorship Programmes ought to be developed whereby men take on the labour of mentoring other men along their allyship journeys.

Reversed mentorship programme is about switching roles from the more traditional, where the manager or expert is the mentor and the mentee is the person new to the job, new to the work area or the country. Reversing it means switching it, so that the person new to the work area or the country leads the way, shows their point of view, how they understand things and gives honest feedback. With migrants and refugees, this has been useful in addressing exclusion and finding gaps in communication, cultural sensitivity and better understanding among colleagues.

### **ALLYSHIP SKILLS TRAINING**

Inclusivity training has been shown to have limited impact and effectiveness (Bezrukova et al., 2012; Bezrukova et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2019). Some diversity initiatives have even been assessed as exacerbating, rather than mitigating bias and inequality (Hellerstedt et al., 2024; Legault, Gutsell, & Inzlicht, 2011). For instance, some studies have revealed that drawing attention to biases can in fact normalize stereotyping practices (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015) and that foregrounding bias can result in a disempowered and unmotivated workforce when it comes to addressing gender issues because they are perceived as immutable (Hennes et al., 2018).

Bias can come to be interpreted as immutable, therefore having a disempowering effect on employees. Furthermore, training “is one area that has been met with harsh criticism,” because it is “widespread and often mandatory” (Burnett & Aguinis, 2024, p. 174). Diversity training is typically provided to all gender audiences despite the fact that this one-size-fits-all approach delivers suboptimal results (Purvanova & Bryant, 2024). Increasing calls for custom designed training that addresses the scepticisms and criticisms men might hold.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### GENERAL ADVISE

#### *Identify the allies*

This is especially helpful in a workplace DEI intervention. The allies can be any group of people that are privileged within the issue that is going to be addressed in the intervention, for example the group “men” in a gender equality intervention. When the allies are identified, take steps to start a conversation with them and find out what kind of support they need.

#### *Facilitate networking between male allies*

We have seen that men who support gender equality and diversity in their workplaces can feel isolated in their priorities, and sometimes even isolated because of what they support. One way to reduce the isolation is to create networks, either online or in person, for allies to connect. We suggest that the practitioner decides what span the network should have; workplace-wide, industry-wide, or between industries. Nationally or internationally.

#### *Contextualize the DEI work*

As we have seen through this project, cultural context is important for the effectiveness of interventions. What is recommended in one context can be wrong in another. For that reason, we recommend to begin any intervention with mapping both the micro culture in the organization, and the macro culture within the country. We noticed significant differences even within the Nordic countries, even though they are seen as quite similar.

#### *Inform of rights in the workplace*

Being an ally can come at the cost of being seen as a “problem”, or that the suggestions are seen as not relevant or important. However, if DEI solutions are framed as official and necessary by law, the cost of being an ally can be mitigated.

#### *Focus on allies for longevity*

As DEI practitioners we know that when we leave a workplace after a completed project, it is up to the organisation itself to upkeep the DEI work. During this project, we have seen that male allies have an inherent motivation to create an equal workplace, which will not end just because the DEI intervention ended. For that reason, focusing on supporting, educating and connecting with allies is key for long-term change in the workplace.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## CUMULATIVE PARTNER ADVICE

Below, some of the project partners have written recommendations for practitioners that they use within their organizations to work with change. However, understanding and accounting for local context is vital to the success of DEI interventions. We advise a context-based communication style.

Rather than framing gender equality as a set of vague values, we suggest making it concrete in everyday life by focusing on already practiced behaviours and valuing even small changes.

### *Asking critical questions*

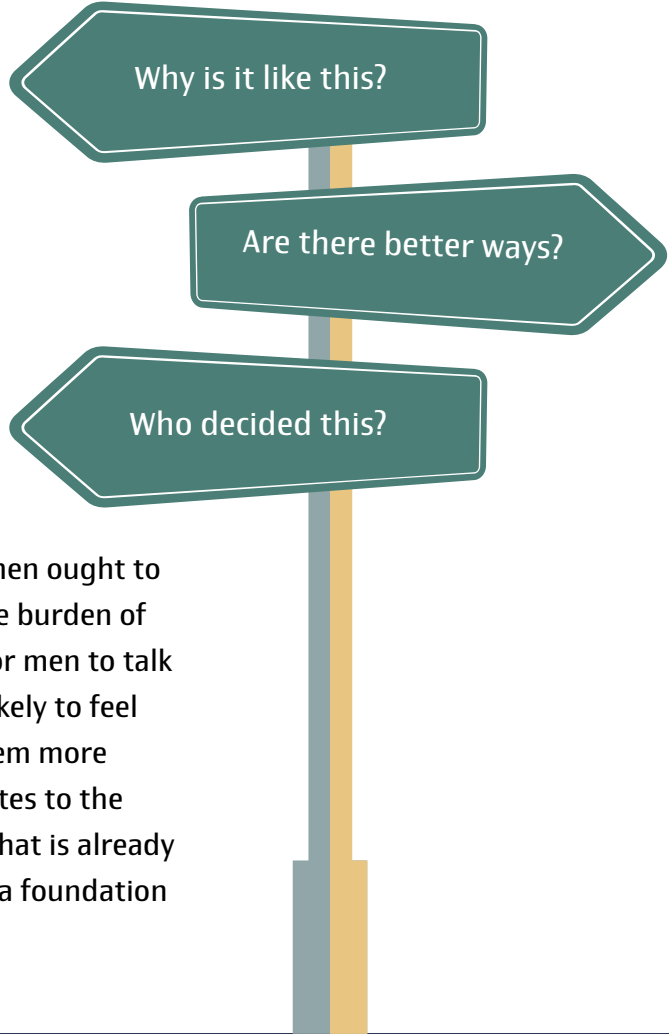
- This can happen on a granular level by reviewing how meetings are led, how decisions are made, who takes up space, and who gets to develop and grow in an organization, or on a more meta level by asking four critical questions:

- (1) Why is it like this?
- (2) Who decided this?
- (3) Who will benefit or have a disadvantage because of this, and in what way?
- (4) Are there better ways?

This practical approach is bolstered when managers have a mandate to lead the way.

### *Men taking responsibility*

- Furthermore, an organization can make explicit that men ought to take the responsibility for men, relieving women of the burden of gender equality work. By creating forums and space for men to talk to each other about norms and behaviours, they are likely to feel more ownership over potential changes, rendering them more sustainable. The Salutogenic Perspective also contributes to the sustainability of change, where focus is placed upon what is already working and healthy in an organization to build upon a foundation with the engagement of men.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *...CUMULATIVE PARTNER ADVICE*

#### *Men are diverse*

- Alongside these efforts it is vital to move beyond the “male monolith.” That is, we must acknowledge. We must acknowledge that men are not a single segment or target group. They possess diverse ambitions, cultural backgrounds, and personal drivers - ranging from business-case logic to a deep-seated sense of justice. Segmented communication, perhaps by leveraging the above identified Ally Archetypes (The Observer, Empowered Agent, Disempowered Agent, and Family Man) could provide a foundation for more nuanced discussion.

#### *Facing resistance is a part of change*

- Engagement in gender equality often means going against the status quo, which inherently triggers resistance from various directions - colleagues, friends, family, and even from both men and women. Men who engage may face backlash, ranging from passive indifference to active. Therefore, we must encourage men to be transparent when they receive negative feedback. It is vital to help allies understand that being questioned or criticized is a natural consequence of challenging existing norms; it is a sign of impact, not necessarily a sign of being on the “wrong path”. Women also face resistance when engaging; highlighting this shared experience can build solidarity and help men navigate the “woke” labeling or chuckle-factor from leadership.



**WE ARE HERE TO HELP!** *Contact us for trainings and knowledge sharing.*



# ***FUTURE RESEARCH & AREAS OF INTEREST***

Finally, given the limited scope of our work here, there is naturally much work still to be done. We see great potential in working further with homosociality to bring about positive outcomes, bolstering men as they face the costs and risks of their allyship. And furthermore, we recognize that there are many men who are far away from the beginning of their allyship journey that are deserving of a tailored approach.

## ***ALLYSHIP & BEYOND***

There is substantial empirical evidence illustrative of the pervasive backlash to DEI initiatives (Burnett & Aguinis, 2024). Amongst the methods for mitigating these negative responses, research has found that adopting a context-conscious approach, where the work environment and culture serve as a starting point informing any training, as well as post-learning phases (Roberson, Moore, & Bell, 2022).

## ***REACHING MEN OF DIVERSE ATTITUDES***

This research project reveals important methodological considerations for those interested in reaching men hostile to DEI.

These men are also likely engaging in homosocial environments where their views are confirmed by others and, as other scholars have noted, investigating this is “time heavy and potentially risky research territory,” requiring “long period of insider and ethnographic type involvement in the field” (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014, pg. 45).

In this sense, it is also likely that women researchers will have greater difficulty. The team concluded that data collection from online forums, where users (and researchers) can be anonymous, is likely where the most authentic data can be accessed.



## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

We are grateful to our participants who were generous with their time and energy.

## ***THANK YOU & NEXT STEP***

The New Masculinities in the Nordics project demonstrates that men are not obstacles to gender equality, but vital allies whose support is rooted in personal values and business logic. By "hacking homosociality"- leveraging the social bonds and mutual respect between men—organizations can transform passive observers into empowered agents of change. Please contact us in the project if you want to take the next step together with us.



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## APPENDICES

### **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW REQUEST FORM**

Dear Men in the Nordics,

Are you interested in sharing your views on gender equality activities at the workplace? We are conducting an interview study and would love to hear from you!

We are a team of researchers from several Nordic countries, and we are keen to hear your perspective on gender equality initiatives. For example: salary audits, workshops, presentations, thematic days, positive action hiring or promotions, training programs, workplace gender equality audits, or any other initiatives aimed at improving gender equality within your organisation.

If the following applies to you, you are our target audience:

- You have worked for at least two years\*
- You have lived experience as a man
- You'll be an especially valuable participant if you have been involved in or observed gender equality activities at work.

\*You don't need to be currently employed, as long as you have work experience in the past.

The interview will only take 30-45 minutes.

Your participation will be completely anonymous, and the findings will be compiled into a publicly available report.

We will conduct interviews in January and February 2025. However, we will be reaching out to those who express interest on an ongoing basis until then.

For more details about the project and its funding, please click here: [www.addgender.se/new-masculinities](http://www.addgender.se/new-masculinities).

We sincerely hope you'll consider participating in this important study!

Best regards,

The team behind New Masculinities in the Nordics

The project partners are Add Gender and Boss Business Partner from Sweden, KUN Centre for Equality and Diversity from Norway, NORM from Denmark and TalTech University from Estonia.



# APPENDICES

## ***APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW REQUEST FORM***

Name:

E-mail:

Working Experience (in years):

Where are you based?

- Sweden
- Denmark
- Norway
- Estonia
- Other
- If other, please specify:

Have you encountered gender equality measures/interventions/training in your workplace? If so, provide some examples. (optional)

Do you consent to use keeping your information in accordance with GDPR?

- Yes, only during the project time.
- Yes, during and past the project for future reference, information, and invitation.
- No.

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### 1. Introduction & Context

- Tell me about your role in the organization.
- How did you come to work in this role/organization?
- How long have you worked there?
- What are the positives and negatives of your position?
- How would you describe your working environment?
- Tell me about any gender equality initiatives you have witnessed/experienced/taken part in at your workplace.
- How, if at all, has your workplace evolved to take gender equality into account?
- Describe any relevant policies, plans, strategies, or procedures.
- Which, if any, gender equality initiatives have you participated in?
- How has your workplace evolved to take gender equality into account?

### 2. Conceptual Perceptions

- How would you define equality?
- What does gender equality in the workplace mean to you?
- How have your views on gender equality changed over the years?
- Personal Experiences & Reflections
- Tell me about any experiences you've had of exclusion or discrimination in your workplace.
- What do you think this exclusion or discrimination was based on?
- How do these experiences (or lack thereof) inform your perception of your workplace?
- How do these experiences (or lack thereof) inform your perception of fairness?

### 3. Practical Perceptions

- How does the pursuit of gender equality in your workplace make you feel?
- Describe your reaction to new policies, plans, strategies, or procedures to do with gender equality being introduced in your workplace.
- Which measures spark the most emotions in you?
- What barriers prevent you from embracing or engaging with gender equality initiatives?

### 4. Future Outlook

- What suggestions would you make to improve gender equality initiatives at your workplace?
- What steps do you think should be taken to achieve a more inclusive workplace?
- What role do you think leadership ought to play in these initiatives?

Thank you

*Mapping the Path*

# ***NEW MASCULINITIES IN THE NORDICS***

February 2026

*Read more about the project:*



[Project webpage](#)

**NIKK** Nordic Information  
on Gender



Funded by the  
Nordic Council  
of Ministers

