

May
2023



Supporting Leaders to Drive Institutional Change for Gender Equality within Global Health Institutions

Brief

WomenLift
Health

Global Center *for* Gender Equality



Acknowledgements

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Supporting Leaders to Drive Institutional Change for Gender Equality within Global Health Institutions

Deeper institutional and cultural change is needed to achieve and sustain true equality, and leaders are essential to driving this change. **The critical role of leaders in advancing an intentional agenda for gender equality is clear:** They set the standard for behaviors within organizations, and they decide what and who gets endorsed, accepted, or overlooked.¹ Senior leaders need prolonged and multifaceted support to identify and address barriers to gender equality and the obstacles facing women in leadership roles.

WomenLift Health and the Global Center for Gender Equality have partnered to explore the role of leaders in promoting deep institutional change for gender equality in global health institutions (GHIs). Our primary inquiry involved identifying **the essential resources and support required to empower leaders to drive institutional and cultural transformation for gender equality** within GHIs.

This brief explores the role of leadership in the promotion of gender equality within institutional cultures and systems. It examines the current state of discourse in both academic and grey literature, identifies gaps in resources, and explores the perspectives of individual leaders within the health sector. Finally, the brief provides recommendations for organizations such as WomenLift Health that recognize that, for their response to be comprehensive, **organizations must look well beyond representation and drive to the heart of institutional systems, structures, and cultures.**

The Landscape: A Bird's-Eye View

There is a tendency within management systems and traditional organizational structures to focus on elements of change that are easily measured and observed. This undoubtedly has been the case for the role leadership plays in promoting gender equality and how that role has been interpreted by institutions spanning the public, private, and nonprofit sectors: that **equity in representation is a proxy for gender equality**. Encouragingly, while much of the literature focuses narrowly on increasing women's representation as the main strategy for promoting gender equality, recognition of **the importance of broader and transformative institutional change** for gender equality is becoming more widespread. However, the distinctive role of **leaders in promoting and achieving gender-transformative institutional change** is less specifically addressed in the literature and other resources (see Figure 1).

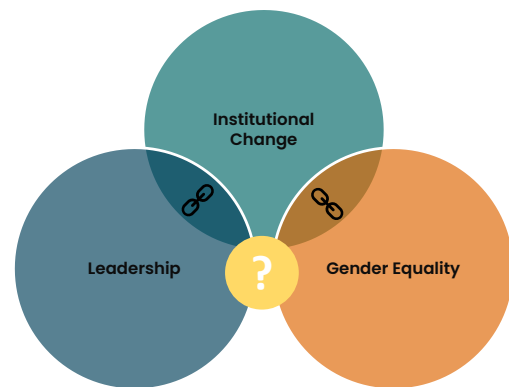


Figure 1 – Linking Leadership, GE, and Institutional Change

In other words, what we see across the landscape of this discussion are linkages of the role of leadership in institutional change with the importance of institutional change that leads to progress in gender equality, but much less consideration of the **specific role of leadership in the achievement of institutional change for gender equality**. However, important threads within emerging discussions and practices do identify how leaders can promote institutional change for gender equality and how organizations can support them effectively. We found that there are some persistent and well-documented leadership practices or initiatives for the promotion of gender equality—for example, the use of organizational data, human resource management, or training and sensitization. However, there are some practices that are

¹ King, M. 2020. "Leaders, Stop Denying the Gender Inequity in Your Organization." <https://hbr.org/2020/06/leaders-stop-denying-the-gender-inequity-in-your-organization>

more complex, focus on achieving deeper institutional change, and seem to present more challenges for leadership (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 – Leadership Practices to Drive Institutional Change

Not surprisingly, practical resources that support the former are more abundant and more easily accessed. The deeper, and perhaps more challenging, leadership practices range from making the case to self-reflection and feminist leadership styles.

Drawing from our extensive research, unique in-house expertise, and robust dialogues with top-tier influencers and leaders across the health sector—spanning private corporations, multilaterals, a public health agency, universities, prominent INGOs, and beyond—we’ve pinpointed a suite of actionable strategies that can support leaders in driving institutional change for gender equality. We conducted workshops and interviews to gain insights from senior leaders on the key challenges, successes, and needs they face as they drive an agenda for social change, particularly related to gender, within GHIs.² Our analysis indicates that four key areas could be strategic for supporting leaders: **accountability, men’s allyship, next-generation leaders, and feminist leadership approaches.**

Accountability

Accountability is a central concern across the literature, and this concern was echoed by the leaders we consulted across the health sector. There is great interest and momentum to enhance the collective accountability of GHIs, with initiatives such as Global Health 50/50, but leaders question how effective measures to increase gender equality can be unless those measures are routinely evaluated.³

Accountability has been referred to as the “missing link” in the process of broader institutional change for gender equality,⁴ and this includes both formal and informal accountability mechanisms and practices. For leaders to make a difference for gender equality in their institutions, they must understand their own and their organizations’ impact. This requires establishing effective accountability systems that not only track

² Key informant interviews were conducted in September and October 2022 with 21 senior leaders in the United States and Canada who work in the global health sector.

³ McCarthy, C., Barnard, S., Thomson, D., and Dainty, A. 2021. “Understanding Gender Equality Policy and Practice Gaps Through the Lens of Organisational Justice: Development of an Employee Alignment Model.” *Front. Sociol.*, 30 November 2021. Sec. Gender, Sex and Sexualities. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2021.681086/full#B77>

⁴ Asare, J. 2021. “Accountability: The Missing Link In Your DEI Program.” *FORBES*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2021/12/24/accountability-the-missing-link-in-your-dei-program/?sh=23a6d893609b>

progress on critical milestones that can help turn policies into actions⁵ but also—perhaps more importantly—can amplify gender equality as an organizational and leadership priority. Our landscape review identified several formal methods and approaches for how senior leaders can hold staff, teams, and organizations accountable on gender equality by focusing on components of talent management—for example, integrating gender into specific performance measurements and evaluation components and embedding gender equality competencies and outcomes in job descriptions and performance appraisals.⁶

These internal accountability mechanisms are more commonly discussed in management literature and may seem more obvious than external accountability measures; however, it is equally important that external accountability is established, and this, too, can be both formal and informal (see Figure 3). For example, making a public commitment to gender equality is an important starting point for demonstrating accountability and addressing gender inequities in the workplace.⁷ This can signal an important position—to staff, stakeholders, and the broader public—and, as noted by interview respondents, the failure of leadership to make clear statements can be equally impactful in a damaging way.

I am struggling because of the recent response with the Roe v. Wade decision. The company wanted to be more neutral. The CEO was getting pressure on both sides. ... They eventually sent out a very watered-down message from someone else—not even as a CEO. I was incredibly disappointed and feeling alone in terms of leadership.
— Interviewee

A more formal external accountability mechanism from the literature was the recommendation that senior leaders push their organization’s commitments on gender equality further by advocating for them to become a “gender equality-certified” organization, such as by the EDGE Certified Foundation.⁸



Internal/Formal	Performance evaluations, internal gender audits, hiring/recruitment targets, staff satisfaction surveys
External/Formal	External certification, external public assessments
Internal/Informal	Stating commitments, demonstrating behaviors in support of equality, being consistent in GE integration in decision-making spaces
External/Informal	Making public commitments; being transparent about organizational progress, targets, and challenges; taking a public position on issues of gender equality

Figure 3 - Types of Accountabilities for Gender Equality⁹

Despite these conceptual discussions and momentum, and while it is increasingly recognized that representation is not sufficient and that cultural change is required, the kind of qualitative evaluation and accountability required to measure that change continues to prove challenging—or absent entirely. Most forms of accountability are concerned with setting targets and measuring indicators that focus on what most believe are proxies for gender equality—representation, pay equity, etc.—but are actually

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Behavioural Insights Team. 2021. “How to improve gender equality in the workplace: Evidence-based actions for employers.” https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/BIT_How_to_improve_gender_equality_report.pdf

⁷ Center for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities and Global Health 50/50. 2022. “Gender and Health 50/50 Nepal: Catalyzing change for gender equality and health equity.” Kathmandu, Nepal. https://nepal5050.org/wp-content/themes/nepal5050/media/Nepal%205050%20Report%202022_GH5050%20CREHPA.pdf

⁸ EDGE Certification Foundation. 2022. “What is EDGE?” <https://edge-cert.org/certifications/>

⁹ While both the Gender@Work Framework and the graphic representation of different types of accountabilities shown here consist of four quadrants, they differ in their focus and approach. This accountability-focused graph specifically examines accountability for gender equality, while the Gender@Work Framework (<https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>) takes a broader approach to understanding and promoting gender equality by considering how gender issues are present at multiple levels of an organization, including individual attitudes and systemic factors. The graphic representation of different types of accountabilities was developed to help leaders map out and visualize the different types of accountability, including internal/formal, external/formal, internal/informal, and external/informal, for gender equality.

symptoms of gender inequality. This focus fails to provide any context that can support strategies for change and, in fact, can mislead by indicating change driven by factors other than real cultural shifts.¹⁰

Those resources or services that are available specifically to measure gender equality have some quality approaches to offer, such as good gender equality audit processes. However, they are usually applied at a single point in time and are rarely integrated into regular and institutionalized accountability systems. In addition, informal accountability can be particularly difficult for leaders to promote and establish within an organization. While fostering a culture of accountability is important, there is often a lack of resources and practical advice on how to effectively implement these changes.

The interviewees' perspectives were largely consistent with the existing literature and resources, acknowledging the importance of accountability. However, their emphasis was primarily on more conventional forms of formal accountability, focused on gender equity rather than equality. Interviewees were less likely to explicitly name this as a gap in thinking or approach.

How to support leaders to drive change

- Leaders can be supported in their efforts to gain a stronger understanding of best practices and innovations for measuring and monitoring gender-transformative change and how to use and apply metrics that go beyond the proxy indicators of representation and pay equity to examine gendered attitudes and perspectives and implicit/explicit promotion of gender norms. This should include familiarization with the design of strong and purpose-driven indicators and the use of qualitative data to assess and respond to changes in gender equality.
- Leaders can be provided with an introduction to, and the opportunity for deeper dives into, the totality of options and approaches for strengthening different types of accountabilities for gender equality. This should include looking at their own individual actions and how they can support cultures and systems of accountability from whatever leadership position they hold and what they should be held accountable for. They should be helped to identify opportunities within their own spheres to achieve improved accountability.
- Leaders can be supported in their efforts to be responsive to the culture of their institution and the perspectives of their colleagues in their design (or advocacy and promotion) of accountability approaches for gender equality. For example, their colleagues might be driven by informal and social accountability and discouraged by formal and punitive accountability mechanisms. Or leadership may already focus too much on external accountability for gender equality, creating the appearance of window-dressing—and they may be in need of internal and peer accountability that has more direct consequences for leadership. Recognizing that people and cultures are motivated differently and respond to different incentives for change is an important element for the identification of effective accountability approaches.

Men's Allyship

Organizations and coalitions increasingly seek to engage allies in gender equality initiatives.¹¹ Often men who hold positions of power and influence within institutions are asked to be “champions,” to step up in favor of women’s empowerment, and to be accountable for change on gender equality issues.¹² The idea

¹⁰ Razavi, S. 2019. “Indicators as Substitute for Policy Contestation and Accountability? Some Reflections on the 2030 Agenda from the Perspective of Gender Equality and Women’s Rights” <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.12633>

¹¹ Champions of Change Coalition, 2022. “About the Champions of Change Coalition.” <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/about-us/>

International Gender Champions, 2023. “About: Who We Are.” <https://genderchampions.com/about>

United Nations Global Compact, 2023. “Endorse the Women’s Empowerment Principles.” <https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/action/womens-principles>

¹² UN Women, Emerging Solutions for Gender Equality. 2018. <https://www.heforshe.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/HeForShe%20Emerging%20Solutions%20Report%202018%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>

is to shift the burden of creating gender inclusivity and change from those who may lack organizational power (women) to those who may possess it (men).¹³ Whether by invitation or by personal choice, being an ally requires continuous reflection, moving from words into action, and understanding one's privileges and role in systemic oppression.¹⁴ In brief, effective allies use their power to support organizational change and social justice without perpetuating domination.¹⁵ There is a common tension for allies, who may acknowledge the oppressive system and act to change it but, at the same time, may be seen as benefiting from their actions, such as through increased reputation and prestige.

What is allyship? ... I think, for men—for white men, for cis-white men—to acknowledge and support and raise up the voices of those around us. To step back, in many cases, to those that nurture and create a supportive environment.

— Interviewee

The approach to engaging men as allies usually includes these five elements:¹⁶

- **Enhancing motivation:** This includes making equality personal for men leaders, challenging a climate of futility and highlighting the benefits of equality for all.
- **Promoting critical reflection:** This process includes encouraging men to educate themselves about diverse identities and experiences. It requires acknowledging that the current system tends to favor men over others, and recognizing that organizational practices perpetuate these advantages. Moreover, it emphasizes that by adhering to the rules of this system, consciously or unconsciously, individuals contribute to inequality.
- **Creating an enabling environment for men's participation:** This may involve developing a clear organizational policy for gender equality, removing barriers for men's support and discouraging zero-sum thinking, involving men in gender-related initiatives, and recognizing male advocates.
- **Triggering dialogue:** This refers to the creation of spaces for courageous conversations, thereby challenging a culture of silence around gender issues.
- **Focusing on action:** This involves facilitating the translation of intention into action. It encourages allies to utilize their influence to promote organizational change and social justice without furthering domination. Moreover, it involves implementing measures to hold men accountable for progress on gender equality.

The term “champion” is itself justifiably critiqued, having strong connotations of masculine heroism and a command-and-control style of leadership.¹⁷ Beyond terminology, there is an issue with current expectations for male leaders in particular to lead organizational change toward gender equality, much as they might lead any other business-driven change agenda. It is essential that leaders recognize that promoting gender equality cannot be done in the same way as other organizational change processes and that, rather, an approach must be taken with a clear analysis of gender and power.

It is therefore not surprising that several organizations and campaigns have created resources and offer services to support male allies to gender equality within institutions in the private and public sector. There

¹³ Sawyer, K. and Valerio, A. 2018. “Making the case for male champions for gender inclusiveness at work.” *Organizational Dynamics*. Volume 47, Issue 1, January–March 2018, pp. 1–7.

¹⁴ Patton, L.D. and Bondi, S. 2015. Nice white men or social justice allies? Using critical race theory to examine how white male faculty and administrators engage in ally work. *Race Ethn Educ.* 2015;18(4): 488–514. p. 507, 489, 510.

¹⁵ Nash, M., Grant, R., Moore, R., and Winzenberg, T. 2021. Male allyship in institutional STEMM gender equity initiatives. *PLoS ONE* 16(3): e0248373. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0248373>

¹⁶ Catalyst. 2021. “Actions Organizations Can Take to Build Advocates for Gender Equity.” <https://www.catalyst.org/research/actions-organizations-gender-equity/>

¹⁷ Kelan, E.K. and Wratil, P. Post-heroic leadership, tempered radicalism and senior leaders as change agents for gender equality. *European Management Review*, 2018;15(1): 5–18. p. 6.

is a growing understanding in both sectors of the challenges faced by male allies. However, there are fewer resources and discussions about how to be an effective ally beyond generic lists of actions. Unanswered questions include: How can men be allies in both formal and informal spaces? How can one support allies who derive their power and privilege from existing systems? What are the more effective approaches to allyship? How do women perceive and feel supported by allies? How can male allies go from intent to action? How can one motivate others to become allies? What role can senior women play in engaging and motivating men to become allies in the gender equality struggle?

While the issue of male allyship was not seen as a top priority by the interviewees, it is clear that in the absence of working with and engaging male senior leaders, organizational change for gender equality will fall short.

How to support leaders to drive change

- Men leaders can be provided with practical examples of approaches, skills, and tactics based on the lived experience of women with men allies, with the goal of amplifying the voices and experiences of women with men allies so that allies can reflect, learn, and be more responsive to the needs and preferences of women.
- Leaders can be supported to better identify and engage men allies and hold them accountable. There are very few resources for leaders that can help them identify true allies who are genuine and not merely performative. Moreover, any change strategy requires not simply identifying allies but effectively engaging them. Finally, while the onus of accountability should fall on the individuals, holding others accountable is a critical skill that can drive change.

Next-Generation Leaders

An emerging area in the literature, and a frequent focus among interview respondents, is recognition of the importance of younger generations in driving organizational change for gender equality. The literature raises the concern that if organizations fail to take action on gender equality, they will not only lose their current women leaders but also risk losing the *next generation* of women leaders, as young women may place a higher premium on working in equitable, supportive, and inclusive workplaces.¹⁸ The literature also underscores the importance of leaders understanding that their role centers on empowering and mentoring those around them, which includes cultivating the next generation of leaders.¹⁹ One way leaders can do this is through sponsorship relationships—ensuring they are as diverse as possible, and in particular aiming for multigenerational programs.²⁰

Several interview respondents raised an interesting perspective that not only recognizes the importance of empowering the next generation of leaders within the movement for gender equality but also acknowledges that the next generation will shape its own definition of, and movement for, gender equality.

Within our company, we have five generations of staff. ... What does gender and social inclusion look like to the previous generation, the current, what will it look like in the future? ... There are so many nuances.

— Interviewee

¹⁸ LeanIn. 2022. "Women in the Workplace." <https://leanin.org/women-in-the-workplace-report-2022/were-in-the-midst-of-a-great-breakup#!>

¹⁹ Rios, C. 2015. "You can bring feminist leadership to work - here are 5 genius ways to make it happen." <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/07/feminist-leadership-workplace/#:~:text=Feminist%20leadership%20is%20participatory%2C%20inclusive,of%20something%20bigger%20than%20themselves>

²⁰ Bolden-Barrett, V. 2017. "How to mentor or sponsor women - without sending the wrong message." <https://www.hrdiver.com/news/how-to-mentor-or-sponsor-women-without-sending-the-wrong-message/510325/>

As a response to this recognition, some literature highlights the potential of “reverse mentoring” and how this can also contribute to the sustainability of gender equality change. While there has been limited research on the impacts of such an approach, one study highlights how reverse mentoring resulted in a number of positive practices, including the use of gender-inclusive language.²¹

I’m a senior staff person here, but where I am doing much of the learning is that sort of next generation of women leaders, and that’s changing the way I’m thinking about leadership and leadership opportunities. So it’s less of a “mentor from somebody who’s in a structure above me,” but in some ways being mentored by the next generation.

— Interviewee

A variety of resources and strategies are available for nurturing the next generation of leaders, and particularly women leaders. However, there are fewer resources and discussions about how current leaders can support a next generation of leaders that will promote gender equality more broadly. For example, what does it mean to mentor or sponsor potential leaders as agents of social and cultural change within an institution, and how are those next-generation leaders identified and engaged? How do they want to be engaged? How can the relationship between current leaders and next-generation leaders be purposefully designed to strengthen the movement for change? What support does the next generation of men leaders need to realize themselves as gender equality allies? And while there are many guidelines, studies, and courses or programs that explore successful mentorship and sponsorship strategies in general, few have a focus on gender equality and institutional change, and few examine how to incorporate a variety of approaches into a cohesive and feasible strategy for engaging future leaders for gender equality.

It was clear from interviewees that leaders who promote gender equality at the institutional level recognize the importance of nurturing the next generation of leaders—and that additional support, structures, and strategies are needed for them to address some of the barriers and challenges to this engagement and to devise the right combination of strategies for their position and institution.

How to support leaders to drive change

- Leaders can be supported as individuals and as strategy-setters. Senior leaders need support to determine what they can do as individual leaders to back the next generation of gender equality advocates. But they should also be supported in building broader institutional strategies and structures to boost the next generation of leaders—and this includes how those strategies can be resourced and monitored.
- Leaders can be counseled to more deeply explore the role of the next generation of men leaders and how they can be nurtured to support institutional change for gender equality. There can sometimes be resistance to expanding focus to include men leaders, as though it is a shift or redirection away from women leaders. However, institutional change requires the engagement of leaders of all genders, including and perhaps especially men leaders. This area not only holds great potential for leaders in terms of broadening perspectives but also is a potentially interesting area of inquiry for research.
- Leaders can be provided with contemporary and practical examples of approaches to engaging the next generation of leaders, not just guidelines. This includes practical and relatable examples of successes and challenges, mitigation strategies, obstacles, and solutions. This should include

²¹ Raza A. and Onyesoh K. 2020. “Reverse mentoring for senior NHS leaders: a new type of relationship.” *Future Healthc J.* 2020 Feb;7(1):94–96. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7032576/>

real-world discussions about time-poverty, gendered and racial power dynamics, structural and resource support, and other challenges related to nurturing the next generation of leaders.

Transformative/Feminist Leadership Approaches

When considering the role of leadership in the achievement of gender equality, some useful discussions emerge around transformative and feminist leadership. Proponents of transformative leadership suggest that if systemic and structural change is needed to achieve gender equality,²² then leaders must spearhead that change by **leading that transformation** and by transforming **the way they lead**.²³

It needs to be fixed—not just by getting more women but by changing the model of leadership. Health is about communities. You cannot change health outcomes by giving instructions. It requires the public to be engaged. It requires public ownership. That’s a feminist style of leadership.

— Interviewee

Both transformative leadership and feminist leadership are grounded in the principles of social justice, equity, and democratic (or collaborative) processes that emphasize shared power. Feminist leadership is a form of transformative leadership that embodies feminist principles by keeping “issues of gender, race, social class, ability, and sexual orientation at the forefront of what they do”²⁴ and by focusing both on the macro-level changes that are needed and on the value and worth of each individual.²⁵ Feminist leadership demands that systems of power are interrogated and prioritizes horizontal leadership, rather than hierarchical or vertical leadership.²⁶

Throughout the literature and from key informant interviews with prominent leaders in the sector, we see various degrees of transformative leadership styles (whether identified as feminist or not) that have contributed, or could contribute, to broad institutional change for gender equality. These take shape in both formal and informal organizational structures; some have become recognized as good practices, some are emerging innovations, and some remain persistent challenges faced by leaders committed to the achievement of change.

Interviewees described various transformative and feminist approaches to leadership—not, however, always identifying those approaches as such. Introducing transformative leadership and offering resources to better understand feminist leadership can empower leaders to adopt their own version of these valuable approaches. There are ample resources that discuss the theory and concepts of transformative leadership—and feminist leadership as a form of transformative leadership. To some degree, these include generalized prescriptions or guidance on what these styles of leadership require, and some resources are more specific and provide concrete examples. But these approaches to leadership are complex, and it can be challenging to apply them when set against different contexts, institutional cultures, and sometimes-limited parameters for independent change.

²² For example, see ESDC. 2019. “Women and the workplace – How employers can advance equality and diversity – Report from the Symposium on Women and the Workplace.” <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/women-symposium.html#h2.1-3.2>; and Kang, S. and Kaplan, S. 2019. “Working toward gender diversity and inclusion in medicine: myths and solutions.” *The Lancet* Volume 393, Issue 10171, 9–15. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673618331386>

²³ Shields, C. 2010. “Transformative Leadership: Working for Equity in Diverse Contexts.” https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/deib-explorer/files/transformative_leadership.pdf

²⁴ Barton, T. 2006. “Feminist Leadership: Building Nurturing Academic Communities.” *Advancing Women in Leadership Online Journal*. <https://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/fall2006/barton.htm>

²⁵ Batliwala, S. and Friedman, M. 2014. “Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership: A Toolkit for Organizations and Movements.” https://www.sexualrightsinitiative.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/2019-05/Final%20Feminist%20Leadership%20Manual%2014-4-14_0.pdf

²⁶ Batliwala, S. Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women’s Movements. 2012. <https://issuu.com/awid/docs/changing-their-world-2nd-ed-eng?e=2350791/3186048>

How to support leaders to drive change

- A significant challenge for leaders, and in fact for many who want to incorporate transformative approaches to their work, is to understand that it does not require an “all or nothing” commitment. Leaders need support to explore the opportunities within their own context and their own roles for incorporating leadership styles that are transformative and focused on achievement, to the degree that they are able and motivated. Initially, this requires being introduced to some of the nuances of these leadership styles in an accessible and conversational way, and then being supported to explore what aspects will most support their own aspirations for change as a leader and within their institution.
- Leaders who lack a deep understanding of transformative leadership for gender equality principles may find it difficult to apply them in their organizations and be unable to translate intent into action. Leaders may gain from exposure to a diversity of viewpoints on transformative leadership for gender equality, as well as from real-world examples of how to use feminist leadership principles in several contexts and situations to overcome the difficulties brought on by a lack of awareness and knowledge. Moreover, supporting leaders to develop critical consciousness is key to developing a style of transformative leadership for gender equality, as it allows leaders to analyze power dynamics within their institutions and the deeper structures and to explore opportunities for change.

Conclusion

Addressing structural issues and workplace norms at the organizational level is a necessary step to promoting gender equality and women’s leadership within organizations. Senior leaders, regardless of gender identity, are widely understood to play a central role in generating systemic and institutional change for gender equality and—linked to this—in promoting women’s leadership.²⁷ Leaders set the tone for organizational behavior and determine which actions and individuals are supported, recognized, or ignored. To effectively tackle the multifaceted challenges that hinder gender equality within GHIs, senior leaders need comprehensive and long-term support that addresses the various aspects of the issue.

Based on our analysis, we have identified four critical areas that could be strategic for supporting leaders: promoting accountability, engaging men leaders as allies, nurturing next-generation leaders, and adopting feminist leadership approaches. Across these four areas, there is a shortage of practical guidance and examples for leaders to effectively support institutional-level gender equality changes. The lack of practical guidance or examples in these critical areas presents a unique opportunity for WomenLift Health to take a leadership role in providing resources and support to senior leaders in GHIs.

Overall, supporting senior leaders to drive change for gender equality requires a nuanced and contextual approach that recognizes the complex challenges and opportunities within institutions. Leaders can be supported with various resources, strategies, and engagement approaches, such as gaining a deeper understanding of informal accountability mechanisms, exploring—at the strategic level—the role of the next generation of leaders, and being introduced to feminist leadership principles and practices. The four identified areas offer a path for WomenLift Health to expand its offerings and tailor a response that complements its focus on increasing women’s representation as the main strategy for promoting gender equality.

²⁷ Kelan, E.K. and Wratil, P. Post-heroic leadership, tempered radicalism and senior leaders as change agents for gender equality. *European Management Review*, 2018;15(1): 5–18. p. 6.