Flexible masculinities at work

The workplace is a social environment where masculine expectations are often reinforced, leading to the overemphasis of certain traits and behaviors. These expectations can negatively affect everyone at work, regardless of gender. These workplace expectations, called masculine defaults, can lead to gender biases and disadvantage gender minorities.

Because of masculine defaults:

MEN

- Men are expected to be independent, taking risks, and competitive.
- Men have higher rates of work withdrawal and lower rates of flexibility compared to women.
- Men who act masculine are held in higher regard in their workplaces.

WOMEN AND NONBINARY PEOPLE

- Women and nonbinary people have higher rates of work withdrawal compared to men.
- Women and nonbinary people are penalized for success at male tasks.
- Women and nonbinary people are more likely to be penalized for straying from masculine norms.

Masculine defaults can lead to gender biases and disadvantage gender minorities. To promote flexible masculinities, leaders can address these defaults by

1. Recognize the traits and behaviors that are considered masculine in your workplace.
2. Consider how gender norms and expectations may shape your own assumptions.
3. Challenge deeply embedded assumptions and beliefs around gender and work.
4. Ask yourself: Does your workplace reward traits that are stereotypically masculine (e.g., assertiveness, risk-taking)?
5. Ask yourself: Where would you look for structural inequities in your workplace? Would you know how to mitigate them?
6. Ask yourself: Do you have any practices that disadvantage gender minorities?
7. Consider how flexible working practices could benefit everyone in your workplace.

Flexible masculinities at work: Infographic.

Promote flexible masculinities in 3 steps

1. Recognize masculine defaults and mitigate them by creating a supportive work environment.
2. Challenge deeply embedded assumptions around gender and work.
3. Ask yourself questions to probe where thinking is shaping expectations.

Why it matters:

- Gender parity is crucial for organizational success.
- Organizations benefit from diverse perspectives and skills.
- Flexible working practices can benefit everyone, regardless of gender.

By promoting flexible masculinities, organizations can create a more inclusive and supportive work environment for all employees.