



Change management coaching: Transforming attitudes and practices for gender inclusion

Case study: d.light

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What you'll find inside

This case study describes the successful approach of d.light, a global solar energy manufacturer and distributor, to changing workplace perspectives and driving employee engagement to build a gender-inclusive workplace through a tailored 6-month change management coaching programme.

The results include a significant increase in women recruited, the implementation of several gender-inclusive workplace practices, and new department-specific action plans to improve gender balance. Finally, this case study describes the practical and logistical factors that enabled the success of this initiative.

Is this case study for you?

This case study is relevant to enterprises who are interested in improving their gender workforce balance, but require support for mid- to senior-level management to achieve targets and aspirations. This case study is also relevant for funders wishing to support such work.

Note that while this case study looks at a clean energy social enterprise, the findings and recommendations are relevant to any mid- to large-sized organisation.

We hope this case study sparks conversations within your organisation and provides a practical example of the benefits of applying a gender lens to internal organisational policies and practices.



The context: motivation for action

The energy sector is heavily male dominated, with women making up approximately 22% of employees globally.¹ Within the clean energy sector, specifically – including the off-grid energy sector – women make up a slightly larger portion of the workforce (approximately 32%)² and are found mostly in general administrative roles³, marketing and HR. Women are noticeably absent in sales, technical, and field-based roles.

The business case for increasing women's representation within clean energy organisations clearly identifies the performance-related benefits of gender inclusion, including higher return on investment,⁴ higher profitability, increased market share, enhanced innovation, among others.⁵

However, most businesses lack the necessary skills and practical know-how to take action to redress gender imbalances – particularly in male-dominated sectors.

About d.light

d.light is a social enterprise that aims to increase access to reliable lighting by manufacturing and selling high quality, affordable solar energy solutions such as lanterns, solar home systems, TVs, radios and smartphones, and availing their customers with Pay As You Go (PAYGo) financing solutions. Founded in 2006, d.light has since scaled to markets in 70 countries, with a physical presence in China, India, Africa, and the United States and over 800 employees.

¹ IRENA (2019), "[Renewable energy: A gender perspective](#)".

² IRENA (2019)

³ IRENA (2019)

⁴ USAID (2018), "Making the case for women in the energy sector", <https://www.usaid.gov/energy/gender/agent-women-energy-sector>

⁵ United Nations (2021), "Empowering women in the energy sector", https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/09/honduras_energy_compact_8_-_empowering_women_in_the_energy_sector_-_approved.pdf

The targets: setting ambitions and building momentum

With an eye to supporting growth in market share and revenues, and responding to investor priorities, over the last few years d.light has embarked on a number of gender-inclusive initiatives. In 2021, d.light signed the [Women's Empowerment Principles](#)⁶ (WEPs), publicly signalling its commitment to fostering business practices that tackle gender inequalities. That same year, with support from ResponsAbility – one of their investors – d.light's global team worked with Value for Women to analyse gender inclusion across the enterprise, develop global and country-level gender action plans, and generate buy-in with key decision makers.

As a result of this work, entering 2022 d.light India had a clear objective: **to reduce gender gaps in its team composition**. Specifically:

- **Increase women's representation from 3.5% to 30% by 2023, and 50% by 2025;**
- **Be known as an attractive and equal employer, and in particular as a "Great Place to Work for Women"; and**
- **Reverse the post-COVID increase in employee turnover, particularly focusing on retaining women staff.**

So in 2022, in a project funded by FMO, d.light India embarked on a collaboration with Value for Women to make these targets a reality.

⁶"The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) are a set of Principles offering guidance to business on how to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community. Established by UN Women and UN Global Compact, the WEPs are informed by international labour and human rights standards and grounded in the recognition that businesses have a stake in, and a responsibility for, gender equality and women's empowerment. WEPs are a primary vehicle for corporate delivery on gender equality dimensions of the 2030 agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. By joining the WEPs community, the CEO signals commitment to this agenda at the highest levels of the company and to work collaboratively in multistakeholder networks to foster business practices that empower women. These include equal pay for work of equal value, gender-responsive supply chain practices and zero tolerance against sexual harassment in the workplace." - see WEPs (n.d.), "[About](#)".



The challenges: what was creating the gender gap

To identify why d.light India was having difficulty attracting and retaining women staff, Value for Women conducted a gender diagnostic for d.light India operations (consisting of interviews, organisational data review, and an assessment of organisational policies and processes). A number of issues were contributing to the persisting gender gap:



Approximately 50% of all d.light roles are in sales, which are strongly influenced by gender and social norms that deter women's participation.

For example, expectations around unpaid care responsibilities, norms around women's mobility, and security concerns all contributed to a general perception that "sales roles are not for women". However, if d.light was to achieve its targets for closing the gender gap, it would need to recruit women sales agents.



"Our sales teams travel to last-mile villages, deep into rural settings where women's mobility is highly restricted due to family and societal pressures. Our sales teams travel extensively. Even if we want to hire women in field-based roles, not many women are ready to travel so much."

-Management Representative, d.light



Limited ability to attract women candidates.

Previously, d.light India did not have gender targets, gender-inclusive recruitment approaches or aspirations to be an inclusive employer. This was exacerbated by a lack of standardised working conditions that can create a more conducive working environment for women, such as flexible working (which is an important benefit to prospective women employees).⁷ These conditions combined led to low representation of women, and a predominantly masculine work culture (which in turn can deter women from applying).



Low levels of employee engagement and limited feedback mechanisms.

An employee survey found low levels of satisfaction with learning and development opportunities, and confidence that sexual harassment would be taken seriously and would be investigated and addressed appropriately. d.light did have an anti-sexual harassment policy and committee in place, but the committee was not functioning effectively or aligned with specific Indian legal requirements.

These key challenges, coupled with lack of awareness on gender diversity policies, influenced both employees' perceptions and ability to advance gender inclusion.

d.light India realised that concerted efforts were required to meet targets and its WEPs commitment. Specifically, it was recognised that national leadership, the HR team, and department heads needed to understand and take ownership of gender inclusion to operationalise policies and achieve targets.

So d.light and Value for Women jointly embarked on a six-month programme of activities with senior and middle leaders from a range of departments, comprising two intertwined strategies:

- 1. Change management coaching for senior and middle management to adapt and implement gender-equitable workplace systems**
- 2. Strengthening and reconstitution of a Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) policy and committee to address grievances.**

⁷ Center for Creative Leadership (2020), "[What Women Want- And Why You Want Women- In the Workplace](#)"

Strategy 1:

Change Management Coaching

Who:

Senior management, including department heads from HR, finance, sales, supply chain management (SCM) & procurement, and women employees in middle management positions (from the HR department) to ensure women's representation.

What:

Over six months, Value for Women facilitated **two sessions each month** for participants to **build awareness, identify gaps, develop skills and clarify doubts and questions related to gender inclusion**. Additionally, d.light department heads and HR leads facilitated internal sessions, occasionally presided over by the country manager, to help the coaching cohort systematically reflect on the learnings from the Value for Women sessions and identify and support next steps. The programme was designed to have a very practical application, and by the end of the process, participants developed and implemented gender-inclusive recruitment and flexible work approaches - with the goal of increasing representation of women across the organisation.

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Overview of the change management coaching structure:

Month 1

An introduction: Gender sensitisation

- Key gender concepts
- Conscious and unconscious gender biases
- The business case for gender inclusion

Month 2

The employee lifecycle: Gender-inclusive best practices

- Gender inclusion across employee attraction, recruitment, onboarding, performance management, retention and separation
- Identifying and responding to gendered needs of employees

Month 3

In practice: Gender analysis and action planning

- Gender Gap Analysis of existing workplace systems, using a self-assessment tool. This focused on recruitment and selection practices, progression and promotion, pay banding and workplace policies and practices
- Development of Gender Action Plans (including short-, medium-, and long-term actions)

Month 4 & 5

Implementation: Gender Action Plans

See box below for more details.

Month 6

Wrap up: Sustainability planning

- Design of a sustainability plan for the change management coaching process
- Set-up of a Gender Inclusion Committee to continue working towards building and improving gender inclusion at d.light India

Months 4 & 5:

Strategies developed as part of the d.light India team's developed Gender Action Plans:

Based on the assessments and action planning conducted during month 3 of the coaching programme, the d.light team collectively developed and implemented a country-level Gender Action Plan. The following strategies were included here:

Strengthened gender-inclusive workplace

communications: Incorporated a gender-neutral vocabulary across all internal and external communications, including internal policies, presentations and job descriptions.

Improved gender-inclusive recruitment practices, including:

- *Candidate sourcing:* Previously d.light India depended on the screening/filtering function of an online job portal for sourcing women candidates, and had few qualified candidates. After the coaching, they invested in the services of an agency specialising in diversity hiring and recruited women for two specialised finance roles.
- *Return-to-work policy:* To attract quality women candidates, and especially to support a return to work strategy for women who had taken time out of the

workforce due to caring responsibilities, d.light piloted a return-to-work policy. This new policy helped d.light fill one position and based on positive experiences the company is planning to review and formalise this.

- *Gender sensitivity training for recruiting managers* is being rolled out across the organisation, including materials on how to address unconscious bias, first with recruitment managers and then with other staff during 2023.
- *Gender-inclusive hiring manual:* The coaching cohort developed a gender-inclusive hiring guide to establish best practices for the recruiting managers.

Formalised flexible working opportunities:

- *Flexible work policy:* d.light has introduced a work from home policy for up to 2 days each month for all employees operating out of their head office. The intention behind this policy is to provide all employees (permanent and temporary), especially women who have additional care responsibilities at home, the option of remote working on days when they are unable to travel to work.





Results

The coaching programme resulted in both **direct practical changes** to a more inclusive and gender-balanced work environment, largely as a result of the gender-inclusive practices implemented, and **changes in perceptions, awareness and buy-in for gender inclusion**.

Most concretely, within the 6-month coaching period, women employees increased from 3.5% to 11%, mostly in the finance, HR, sales, marketing and SCM & procurement departments - a large increase in a very short space of time!

Through a series of surveys (including a baseline and endline assessment, and surveys throughout the coaching process), Value for Women tracked **attitude change** amongst the management team over the six months. We found **increased engagement, knowledge, and skills in the coaching cohort**:

- The number of coaching participants who 'strongly agreed' they were willing to work towards strengthening gender inclusion at d.light **increased from 30% to 100%**
- The number of coaching participants who 'strongly agreed' they have the knowledge and skills to create a diverse and equitable workplace **increased from 30% to 100%**

We saw this change in action. During the initial gender diagnostic phase, the d.light team had not considered women for sales/field roles given the prevailing gender

norms. **After attending the coaching sessions, the participants, acknowledged that they were operating from a fixed mindset**, and subsequently developed a list of vacant positions where women could be considered, which included the sales department, and specifically the Key Account Manager roles.



"I couldn't imagine considering women candidates for roles that require field visits in remote areas... After participating in the change management sessions, I now believe that our recruitment process and strategy should not limit women from applying to field-based positions. We should provide equal opportunities. Even though it may currently seem challenging to find and support women candidates for executive and sales roles, we can bring in women candidates for regional sales manager positions and provide them the necessary support."

- Customer Service Head, d.light India

There is also now **pride in gender inclusion**; the coaching cohort excitedly shared with the Value for Women team when one women employee was promoted from a mid- to senior-level management position in the SCM & procurement department. This particular promotion wasn't explicitly part of the coaching programme's scope - and the fact that the d.light team enthusiastically shared this news speaks to a broader momentum and motivation among the team.

In addition to these intended outcomes, we observed a number of unintended positive results from this process (see box below).

POSITIVE EXTERNALITIES FROM CHANGE MANAGEMENT COACHING

While gender inclusion attitude, behaviour and practice changes were targeted to increase the number of women employees, they also **improved employee engagement within d.light overall**. Specifically, coaching participants anecdotally reported improved employee relations/workplace culture and improvements in employee motivation levels and productivity. Additionally, comparing pre- and post-intervention survey data showed an 8 percentage point increase in the number of employees who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that the company cares about providing equal opportunities for women and men to thrive in the company.

The d.light India MD also noted the gender-inclusive coaching has supported a **more inclusive mindset towards diversity in general**.



"There has been a notable shift in the mindset of our people. They now recognise and value the significance of fostering a gender-inclusive business and operating as a diverse team. This transformation has extended beyond just gender and encompasses other dimensions of diversity as well. Initially, there was a perception that certain roles were not suitable for women. However, through the successful implementation of change management coaching, we were able to challenge and overcome these fixed mindsets."

- India MD, d.light

Finally, some participants also noted **making changes in their personal lives** as a result of the coaching process.



"I feel like I can actually work on this to make changes happen."

- d.light Manager

These outcomes have direct implications for potential enterprise cost savings:

an IFC study estimated that the average cost of replacing a skilled worker can range between 90-200% of their annual salary.⁸ In another example, when The Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, Ltd. in Japan undertook gender-smart initiatives that resulted in a more than four-fold increase in the retention of new mothers, it saved an estimated 5,000 million Japanese yen (US\$45 million) in employee turnover-related costs.⁹

Hence, **coaching appears to not only be a powerful tool for recruiting more women but also to bring about broad positive outcomes with financial implications for businesses.**

⁸ IFC (2017), ["Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare"](#)

⁹ IFC (2017)

Strategy 2:

Strengthen PoSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) provisions and compliance

Who:

Senior management, including department heads from HR, finance, sales, SCM & procurement, and women employees in mid-senior and middle management positions (since there was no representation of women in senior roles).

What:

Strengthened PoSH policy to be in full compliance with regulations in India. This included:

- Updating the PoSH policy based on feedback from Value for Women and legal experts;
- Establishing a sexual harassment grievance redressal procedure for formally receiving complaints, conducting inquiry, filing recommendations, and taking decisions;
- Re-forming its anti-sexual harassment committee (also known as Internal Committee), with a presiding officer and employee members recruited in compliance with local legal requirements (50% women and at least 1 external committee member);
- Onboarding an external consultant member on the anti-sexual harassment committee, in compliance with PoSH law;
- Building capacity of the internal anti-sexual harassment committee members to prevent and redress cases of sexual harassment; and
- Organising the first PoSH awareness training for India employees, covering such topics as rights and redress avenues available, proper reporting channels and the names of the committee members.

Results

Measured through pre- and post-intervention surveys, our results show that today, d.light's workplace culture includes a stronger understanding and operationalisation of the PoSH policy. Employees are aware not only of the process, but are now also better able to recognise and respond to incidences of sexual harassment.

Whereas previously no India office employees had been trained in PoSH, today 100% of employees have received PoSH awareness training, and **100% of anti-sexual harassment committee members are aware of their roles and responsibilities as committee members.**

d.light staff show increased awareness of the various forms of sexual harassment and how they manifest in a workplace:

	Baseline	Endline
Staff who correctly identified that complimenting someone's appearance can be construed as sexual harassment	26%	41%
Staff indicating they feel 'extremely comfortable' reporting incidents of sexual harassment	77%	86%
Staff correctly identifying the Internal Committee as the line of reporting for sexual harassment incidents	71%	90%

Key success factors

Whilst anti-bias training can be criticised for both not achieving its intended aims, and in some cases increasing biased behaviour¹⁰, this 6-month, tailored, intensive, experiential coaching programme was very effective in achieving organisational and behaviour change at d.light. To improve chances of replication and success, organisations undertaking – and funding – gender-inclusive endeavours are invited to keep in mind the following key factors:

Ensuring ownership and buy-in

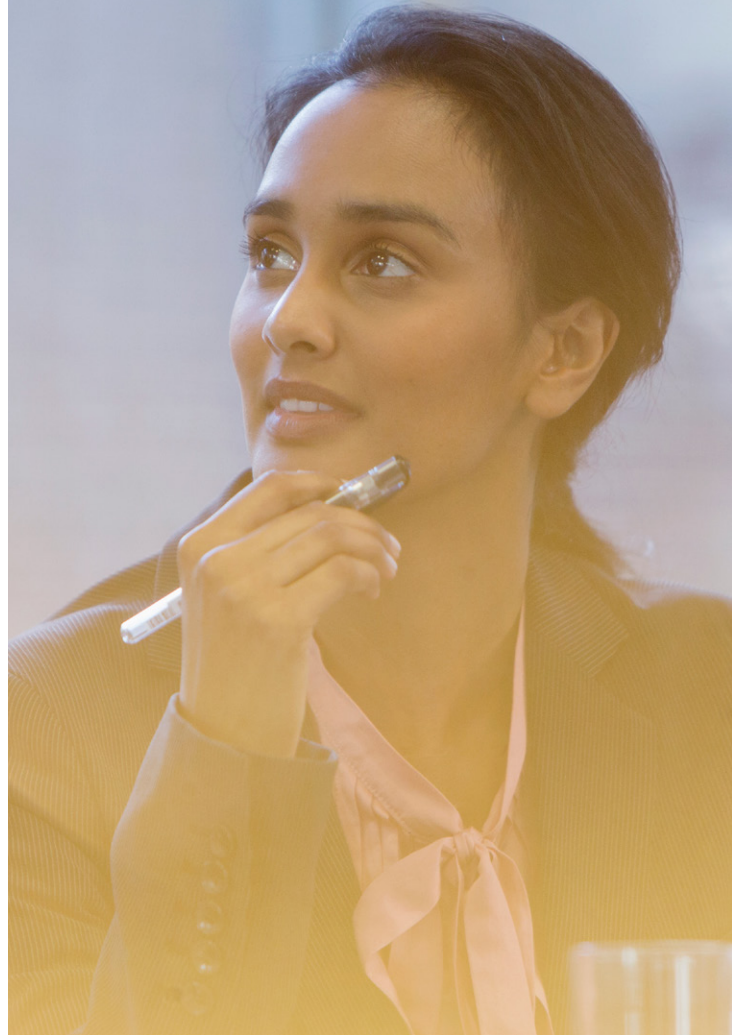
- 1. Impact came from requiring participants to self-identify a problem, learn tools to solve that problem, and implement these tools.** The d.light coaching programme was designed in a step-by-step process, beginning with sensitisation of participants to develop knowledge and understanding of gender issues within society and workplaces; followed by activities that helped the team to self-identify the gender inclusion-related challenges and barriers within their company and department; and finally sessions that helped the cohort to ideate and navigate solutions and bridge the team's gaps in skills required to improve gender inclusion in the company. This step-by-step approach helped the participants build ownership and commit to the coaching programme.
 - 2. Strong buy-in and support from d.light senior leadership was instrumental in providing the initial push to the country team to commit to the change management coaching process.** Change management coaching is a time-intensive process and employees may find it hard to attend all sessions due to work commitments or consider it low priority. Senior leadership mitigated this risk through communicating the priority of the programme, the commitment requirements, and making arrangements for staff to block this time in their schedule. With higher accountability towards senior leadership, the coaching participants were more likely to commit to attending the first few sessions of the program, which are important for building the initial commitment, which eventually contributed to meaningful buy-in.
 - 3. To further improve the engagement, accountability and ownership among the coaching participants, the programme used a mix of external and internal facilitation techniques.** While the external sessions (those facilitated by Value for Women) helped build knowledge and skills and clarify doubts, the internal sessions (those facilitated by d.light) were critical for advancing action and supporting the sustainability of actions.
- Programme design: Delivery mode, structure, cadence and participants all need to align**
- 4. In-person engagements were critical to effective change management coaching,** especially with participants who did not have prior gender inclusion experience. In this case, the in-person sessions with Value for Women were instrumental in creating a safe space and helping participants build rapport with the facilitator and open up to new concepts and beliefs. The virtual follow-up sessions with Value for Women were held each month to clarify questions and share reflections discussed during d.light's internal team check-ins.
 - 5. Incorporation of employees from across different teams, and not just HR, supported stronger policy and practice formulation and implementation across the organisation.** Diverse representation was prioritised in the selection criteria, so that the cohort would include women and men from different departments and at different levels. This was to re-emphasise the point that all departments and managers have a role to play in advancing gender inclusion, across the organisation
- ## Ensuring suitability and sustainability
- 6. Having regular touch points between the leadership team and the coaching cohort can help ensure ambitions become reality.** At d.light, the engagement and support of the India MD and global HR team at strategic points helped roll out workplace strategies and new gender-inclusive policies in a systematic way that saw employee acceptance.
 - 7. Planning for sustainability from the beginning of the change management process allows for better outcomes.** The coaching cohort within d.light was formed with an objective of eventually converting it into a Gender Inclusion Committee, with the continued mandate of advocating for, championing and raising awareness on gender equality. After the completion of the collaboration, d.light decided to retain the coaching cohort members as committee members.

¹⁰ Onyeador et al (2021), "[Moving Beyond Implicit Bias Training: Policy Insights for Increasing Organisational Diversity](#)", Policy Insights from the Behavioural and Brain Sciences, 8(1), 19-26.

TIPS FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

Consider a timeframe longer than six months. At the end of the six months of formal sessions, the coaching participants were still implementing learnings and expressed a need for a few additional months of light engagement with Value for Women to support questions that were arising.

Have a short, initial session to identify interested, available team members. Even though d.light leadership was bought into the collaboration, it took time for participants to see the value of the programme. It could be valuable to organise an initial internal session, without the external facilitator, where leadership outlines the gender inclusion vision and objectives to the identified coaching participants. This can allow the team members to raise questions and concerns in a safe space, ensures that the programme is framed as an important organisational initiative rather than merely an external training offering, and can build buy-in among cohort members for self-selection of those most interested and bought in.



Conclusion

As a result of the 6-month gender-focused change management coaching programme, d.light has changed its practices in a number of areas that are already contributing to a more inclusive and gender-balanced work environment. **The gender balance has already increased significantly, more than tripling from 3.5% to 11%.** The changes seen in the pre-post survey, data, and observation, including on employee engagement, motivation and productivity, speak to additional business impacts and cost savings d.light can expect over a longer period of time. In less than a year, d.light India went from having some of the most pressing gender gaps within d.light globally, to offering a model for the other d.light country offices.

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