ROYAL ECONOMIC SOCIETY

How (and why) to be an active bystander

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Chair: Mary Morgan, LSE and RES President-Elect

Equasense

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Culture change in economics: why and how

- Underrepresentation of talent and views coming from different groups, leaky pipeline and hostile climate documented in research
- RES active in support of this research and promotion of a culture of inclusion, promoting diversity in its activities and creating a system for sanctioning bad behaviours. There is a Code of Conduct, a Complaints Procedure and a Standards of Conduct Committee.
- The Women's Committee has engaged with #metooinecon supporting past and present victims and those who have been their allies, collaborating with RES Diversity Champion, Conference Secretary and RES Trustee Board to take action with a Statement and this Active Bystander conference session.

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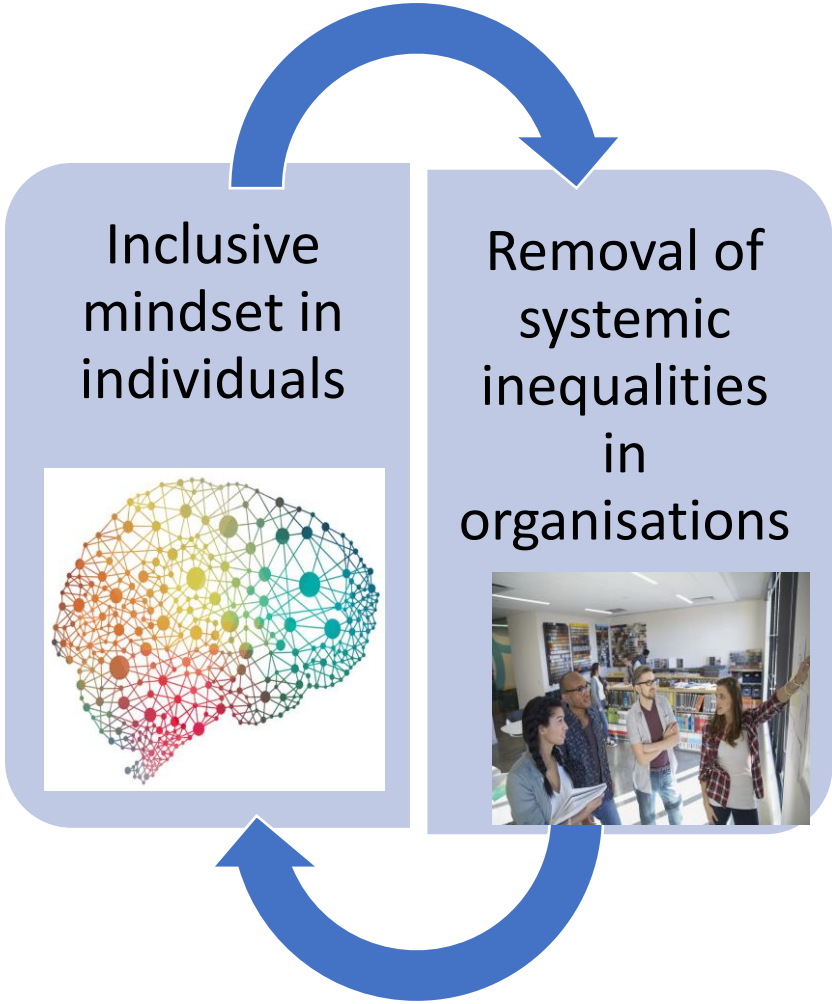
Whose responsibility?

Disadvantage and discrimination on the basis of social group identity is maintained at:

- Individual
- Systemic, and
- Societal level

Responsibility to act individually and collectively to disrupt negative behaviours by individuals AND change the systems and culture



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Why is it hard to act?

- Ambiguity of the situation – “am I interpreting this correctly?”
- Perceived or real cost of intervening to the individual (particularly in strong hierarchies or power imbalance situations)
- Lack of knowledge of how to intervene
- If there is a crowd around, the “bystander effect” might also come into play
  - social norms “ no-one else seems to think this is a problem”
  - diffusion of responsibility “someone else will step in” or “someone else will be better able to help” or “loads of people must have called this in already”

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However!

Research shows that if there are lots of people around and one person starts to help, more people are likely to join in because:

- ambiguity is resolved,
- social norms reverse and
- someone is perceived to “know what to do”

Notice → Interpret → Take responsibility

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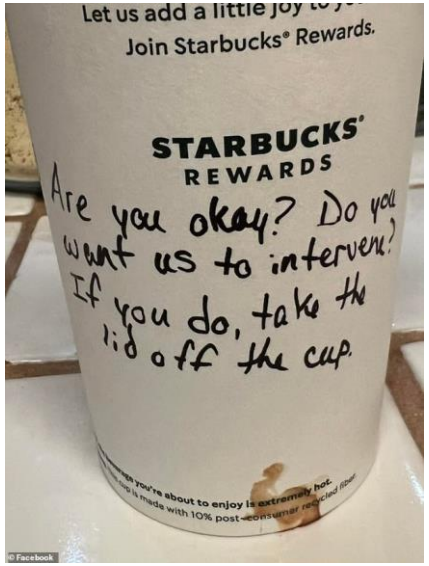
Be creative!



A Starbucks barista team noticed a man talking loudly and persistently to a 19 year old girl who was studying in their store. They took over a spare hot chocolate that “someone forgot to collect” and gave it to the girl. On the cup they had written “Are you ok? Do want us to intervene? If you do, take the lid off the cup”

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Reflection:

In our settings within the discipline, what could taking responsibility as an active bystander look like?

Taking responsibility and intervening – the 4 Ds

(Be) **Direct**:

Use “I” statements – “I am uncomfortable with hearing you refer to X like that, please stop”. “I don’t like it when you use language and phrases like that, we should be more respectful”.

Distract:

Change the subject if within a conversation, or ask the person for directions/time if intervening from outside the exchange. Anything to disrupt the conversation and provide a way for people to move on.

Delegate:

Find someone else (or a group) to intervene on your behalf (this could include meeting organisers, session chairs, or security/police if appropriate. Framing expected codes of behaviour at the start of every meeting/event.

Delay:

Check in with the person affected afterwards or talk to the person responsible for the behaviour.

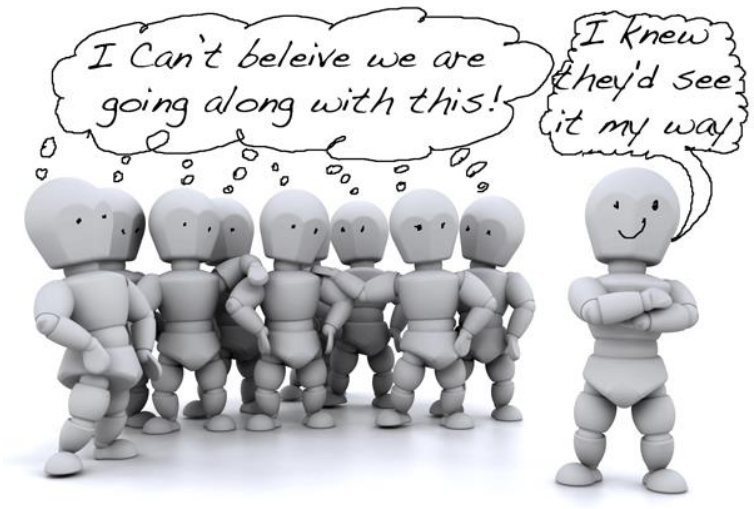
Options for talking to someone about their behaviour

Curiosity / awareness: “As your long-term colleague / friend I wonder if you are aware that saying […] can have the effect of […]”

Social norms: “We don’t usually use that language because… “ or “Most people would view that behaviour as inappropriate – we tend to do… instead”

Empathy: “How would you feel is someone treated you or someone you are close to in that way?”

Opportunities for choosing to be an active bystander



Decision making and process design

Conference

Lectures, workshops and sessions

Peer review processes and discussions

Everyday conversations

Dinners and social events

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What are the ways you could be active bystander?

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Identify the one thing that you will do as your own call to action

More information will be added to the RES Website as resources are developed