Storytelling Project

2018 Report

Stories collected by:
Quantum Impact

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Introduction

Women's Storytelling

Quantum Impact is a diversity and inclusion non-profit focused on helping mission-driven organizations achieve greater impact by helping them build inclusive and innovative teams.

On March 8, 2017 - International Women's Day - Quantum Impact launched our Women's Storytelling Project. Our objective was simple: bring the international development (or social global impact) community's whisper network into the light.

For years, women working in global social impact have shared their experiences as women primarily at happy hours and with other female co-workers through whispered conversations. We shared stories, rolled our eyes, laughed a little, shrugged and went back to work.

But the stories and experiences kept piling up. And, they help paint a picture of systemic issues in how this sector - and so many others - and how these hold women back.

Throughout the past year, we have collected over 30 stories from women across the U.S. and the world about their experiences.

Why stories?

Our researchers began with stories because stories are remembered 22 times more than facts and figures alone[1]. Stories help to humanize; stories help us to understand each other, to empathize with what other people are going through; and to help provide context that data alone can't do.

2017 was also a powerful year for stories. Time Magazine's coveted Person of the Year award went to the brave women who told their stories about the sexual harassment they faced in their offices.[2] We also saw stories spur discussion through the #MeToo movement[3], and subsequent conversations such as #AidToo[4] that also helped to highlight the experiences that women in the U.S. and elsewhere have had in their workplaces and personal lives.

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[1] https://womensleadership.stanford.edu/stories
[2] http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/
[3] https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/10/the-movement-of-metoo/542979/
[4] https://www.devex.com/news/aidtoo-how-development-organizations-can-respond-to-sexual-violence-91707

As noted above, there are a number of stories from women at all levels across the globe that have been well documented and shared. Quantum Impact wanted to share stories specifically from the global social impact sector for two main reasons:

- **Avenue for women to share stories.** We wanted to create a safe space for women to share their stories and have their voices heard. We thought that this was particularly relevant for a sector that talked a lot about women's empowerment across the world.

- **Relevance to spark a broader conversation.** Secondly, we wanted to find stories that were by professionals in this sector who were talking about specific things in this sector. We wanted to find the most relevant stories we could so that we could use these stories to help us find solutions moving forward.

Other research

Our researchers did pair our story collection dissemination work with data and literature review through two additional projects:

- **Survey of leadership teams and boards**. We also examined the leadership teams of over 200 different organizations that work in global social impact and explored and examined the gender, race, and ethnic breakdown of those teams. In this, we were excited to collaborate with Dr. Michelle Sandhoff, Associate Professor of Sociology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a published author and expert on diversity in organizations. Please see additional information about our partnership with Dr. Sandhoff in Annex 1: Leadership Survey. Full report is available here: https://www.quantumimpact.org/2018-report/

- **Literature Review.** We began reviewing and cataloging the existing body of evidence and research,. We have included an annotated bibliography with some of the most critical research that we have reviewed to date; we have also included much of this data in this report. We continue to expand our literature and research review to include additional studies and reviews.

Methodology

Story Collection

Over the course of nearly a year, Quantum Impact collected stories through a number of methods:

- **Email invitation to share stories.** We directly [emailed](#) nearly 400 individuals who work in global social impact via direct email to invite them to share stories[5].
- **Website collection.** We posted an open call on [our website](#) asking for people to share their stories.[6]
- **Storytelling Roundtables.** We also helped a total of 3 "Storytelling Roundtables" that included over two dozen women. These Roundtables provided an opportunity for women to share their stories verbally within a safe space.

Once the stories had been collected, our researchers got permission from each interested storytelling to share their stories (see below.)

Sharing Stories

To share these stories, our researchers first provided context to many of our stories by finding relevant studies that highlight and explain the type of bias or harassment that women faced. For example, in stories about recruitment, we framed the story with research about some of the systemic obstacles that women face in recruitment processes.

Next, we have and will share our stories through 3 main avenues:

- **Women in Working in Development Campaign.** In February of 2018, we partnered with DevEx on the [Women Working in Development Campaign](#). [DevEx](#) is the lead information and recruitment center for the international development community and has nearly 1 million subscribers to its various services[7]. Through this campaign, we shared 5 highly powerful stories via DevEx's media channels.
- **Quantum Impact's Website.** We also cross-published a curated list on the Quantum Impact [blog](#)[8].
- **Educational outreach.** Finally, our researchers have used these stories to frame Quantum Impact's training and other educational materials in order to make these resources as relevant to global social impact as possible.

Key Findings

Summary of stories

Below, we capture a snapshot of some of our stories and why they are relevant:

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[5] https://us15.campaign-archive.com/?u=f3ceb1b50c085d3d784f2bef7&id=6143d5dbbb

[6] https://www.quantumimpact.org/sharestory/

[7] https://pages.devex.com/about-devex

[8] https://www.quantumimpact.org/storyblog/

Story topic	Summary blurb	Why it matters
Recruitment and hiring	A woman who immigrated to the US was passed over for a position in Washington, DC supporting a project being implemented in her home country. The person who got that job was considered more qualified, because he had 3 months of volunteer experience teaching English there, and studied the language in college.	Biases persist in recruiting - particularly the 'like me' bias that naturally leads recruiters to select new hires whom they most relate to. Without knowing it, we can advance implicit assumptions about the value of different qualifications for working in international development. This leads to loss of different, critical insights and perspectives by not recruiting and hiring the right talent.
Bias	"The time when I became aware that racial bias existed was when myself and another African American colleague had the experience that we were making copies in the printing room, and had different people at different times ask us for more staples or file folders. There was an assumption that we must be one of the workers whose job it was to maintain the supplies, because all of the other employees who worked in maintenance were African American, as well."	Unconscious bias leads us to form judgments based on social hardwiring. It's demoralizing for staff when they find that their colleagues operate unaware of their biases and judge them for something out of their control. Without recognizing the implicit judgments that our minds form, we can think and behave in ways that harm our co-workers. Case in point, assuming someone works in maintenance because of their race.
Mentorship	Early in her career, a woman experienced two different situations where male mentors crossed professional lines and made passes at her, leading to situations where she felt pressure: allow for flirtation in exchange for professional advancement, or stand up for herself at risk of losing important opportunities/references for the future?	There is a lack of female mentors in most industries, including in international development, where women are underrepresented in positions of influence. Without female mentors, young professionals often struggle to find the right guidance for their careers. Additionally, instead of mentorship, women may experience pressure to enter into transactional relationships with male colleagues/mentors - favoritism for career advancement in exchange for allowing harassment or sexual advances. The power imbalance in these relationships puts the woman in a compromised position, which can lower her self esteem and erode trust in other male colleagues, rather than benefiting

		her long- term professional growth.
Performance Evaluations and wage gap	"I had been acting chief of party, managed all these people, won new projects for the company and was still being paid really low. I didn't hop between companies to bump up my salary because I had kids. It's really tough to be a working mother in international development and not be able to pick up and leave. It hurts us professionally, but we should be able to make it up in other ways."	Little data is available for the international development industry about compensation of women in the workforce. However, we know that in general women earn 83% of what men earn. We also know that women with kids are systematically passed up for promotions and career opportunities. Economists have found that in the U.S. having one child reduces a woman's earnings by roughly 6%; having two depresses them by 15%. By contrast, fatherhood spurs men to work around 80 more hours a year, on average, which bumps up men's earnings by around 6%; this bonus is largest among highly educated professionals.
Micro/Macro Aggression (Safety)	A woman of color/religious minority had a white, male co-worker threaten physical violence on account of her religion. She was told by HR that she had no reason to complain. A senior executive advised her not to take the colleagues' comments so seriously because he was a "good guy" and to toughen up/not be so sensitive. She headed the advice, only to receive in her performance feedback the critique that she was too aggressive and needed to be nicer.	Google research shows that psychological safety is the #1 factor enabling people to perform at their best. This can be particularly tricky for minorities to navigate, when they must convert considerable energy to a "second job" that no one has hired them to do: minding their reputations, only putting their best foot forward, and hiding stereotyped inadequacies from others and themselves. It also highlights the gendered feedback women receive about being "sensitive", "aggressive" and "difficult." Research shows that women are 75% more likely to receive feedback about their personality than their male counterparts.
Micro/Macro Aggression (Safety)	A woman of color was admitted into a highly prestigious and competitive fellowship-type program as a young professional. She left a fourth of the way through as a result of being sexually harassed in the office and feeling too uncomfortable to confront the perpetrator or to talk to HR about what was happening. This changed the course of her	Executives often justify lack of diversity in hiring and promotion saying that there aren't sufficient qualified women/minority candidates. However, many women and minorities walk away from advancement opportunities simply because of feeling unsafe or unwelcome. This is particularly problematic for

	career since she closed the door on a major opportunity.	international development, when organizations whose mission is to create equitable opportunities for people around the globe cannot provide the same conditions for their staff in the U.S. or overseas.
Micro/Macro Aggression (Safety)	A young female professional received numerous comments about her clothes, especially if she would wear a dress. Eventually she stopped wearing some outfits to work altogether. She felt uncomfortable, her male colleagues received no such comments. She felt distracted and self conscious during meetings, and her productivity suffered.	Men who comment on women's clothing can generate unwanted attention for female colleagues, and cause women to feel unsafe in the workplace. There is also an added layer of complexity when it comes to appropriate work dress for women of color and for LGTBQ+ staff.

Full stories

We believe that it's critical to also hear these stories in these courageous women's own words. As such, we have captured these stories in their full form on our website: https://www.quantumimpact.org/storyblog/. These stories also include research that helps to contextualize these stories within a broader system.

Analysis

Out of the 30 stories that we logged, we found that the following popular themes:

- 27% of our stories covered stories of micro or macro aggression. These stories touched upon topics related to safety and the long-term impact that has on women
- 20% of our stories covered themes of bias - including both racial and gender bias
- 6% of stories addressed issues related to performance evaluations and promotions
- 6% of stories touched on recruitment and some of the challenges that women (and people of color) face
- 3% of stories touched on motherhood and the challenges of being a working mother in this sector
- An additional 25% of stories touched on other themes including leadership, systemic challenges, etc.

Conclusions

Over the course of the year, we also drew some conclusions from our work collecting and sharing stories:

- **Stories unlock conversations.** Discussing diversity and inclusion can be tricky and hard to access. What our researchers found consistently was that using stories helped open up discussions, helped illustrate critical points, and helped generate both additional instances where they or colleagues might have faced adversity, and - importantly - possible solutions that they think would fit for themselves, their teams or their organizations.

- **Incidents have long-lasting effects.** Our stories ranged from the serious to just common occurrences that make up the day to day lives of women, including stories about clothes and shoes. What was clear is that each "incident" that a storyteller shared was short in duration - but the impact that the person felt went on for months to years. For example, multiple women told us that after working with one supervisor who practiced micro or macro aggressions in the workplace, it made it harder for them to trust their next supervisor. Or, for women who had a bad experience with one mentor, it tainted their association with mentorship for years to come.

  This is important because this type of nuance is harder to capture through data and statistics alone, highlighting how critical storytelling is.

- **Stories are hard.** At the same, we also had all our storytellers tells us how surprisingly difficult it was to tell their stories. Even the researchers themselves struggled with writing and sharing their own stories. These are personal events that have silently shaped women's careers for years. The stories they shared were often tied to incidents that led to decreased confidence, or even lower performance - and these are difficult things to share.

  As such, we continue to be appreciated and thankful for every storyteller who has come forward to share their story.

Recommendations

Based on our work, we have the following recommendations:

- **Creating safe spaces and networks.** Given how powerful stories can be, we encourage organizations to create safe spaces or networks, including through the use of Employee Resource Groups or other affinity groups, that enable women to more

openly share their experiences and help further pull these stories out of the shadows of the whisper network.

- **Rely on existing research.** At the same time, given how difficult storytelling can be, we also encourage organizations, supervisors and individuals to rely on existing research and publically available stories to education themselves and their teams, and to deepen their own understandings. We acknowledge and want to emphasize that it's not the responsibility of women or people of color to alone have to share and explain their experiences in order to enact change. Rather, all of us have to collectively take responsibility to use the information that is already public to help us chart a path forward.

- **Address small issues alongside larger ones.** Because even small instances of adversity can have long-term effects, we also call on organizations, teams and individuals to take even "small" or "minor" issues seriously and take action immediately.