D&I: Key Enablers to Create an Equitable Workplace
Moving away from compliance mandate to changing mindset & culture

GUEST VIEW

The importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the workplace has steadily risen in the overall business landscape. Companies understand that creating an equitable workplace focusing on D&I is essential for the business.

An equitable workplace ensures that all employees have equal access to opportunities, resources and benefits regardless of their background. It creates a work environment where everyone is heard and valued, creating a sense of psychological safety and trust, and promoting belonging. In an equitable workplace, all employees can thrive and contribute to the organization's success.

There is a growing impetus to move away from looking at D&I as a compliance mandate and training program and to make it a part of the work culture through experiential learning, process change, transparency, and accountability. As companies cater to different markets and their customers come from diverse backgrounds, the workforce must value and reflect the diversity of styles and thinking. Furthermore, D&I is not just a moral imperative but also a business imperative. Research has shown that diverse teams are more innovative and productive, leading to better business outcomes and an engaged workforce. Diverse teams

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can also help organizations to identify new opportunities and solve complex problems more effectively.

The Government of India has introduced several policies and initiatives to support D&I in the workplace. Despite that, there is still a long way to go in achieving diversity and inclusion in the workplace. According to a study by Deloitte[1], women hold only 17.1% of board seats in India, and only 4.7% of CEOs are women. Similarly, various reports found that people with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing and retaining employment. Additionally, LGBTQ individuals often face discrimination in the workplace due to a lack of legal protections and societal biases.

Most organizations measure progress regarding diversity commitments through adherence to compliance standards, which may focus on activities instead of the impact of those activities. More focus is on activities that address professional development, unconscious bias, and inclusive behaviours at the individual
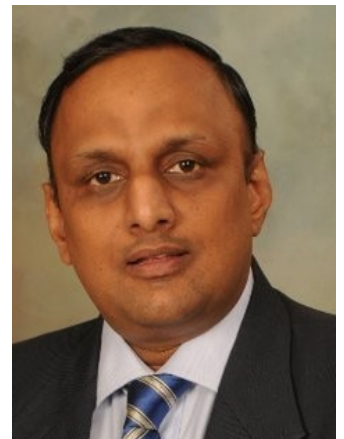
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level. Often this comes in the form of training alone, which generally does not instigate the behaviour or cultural change required to improve equitable outcomes.

To create an equitable workforce with a focus on D&I, corporates in India need to look at some key enablers:

"Glocal" (global-local) approach: a global DEI strategy might not work for every region/ country as

[1] Deloitte: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/gx-women-in-the-boardroom-seventh-edition.pdf

gender, age, disability status, and sexual orientation may be relatively consistent worldwide, while race, ethnicity, and religion, as well as regulations, culture, and history, vary greatly across geographies.

Leadership commitment & accountability: leaders must foster an inclusive workplace culture that supports diversity and welcomes differences by making it a priority for the organization and setting D&I goals and metrics, communicating the importance of D&I and holding themselves and their teams accountable for creating an inclusive workplace.

Inclusive policies and practices: there is a need to have policies that cater to diverse needs and requirements, like flexible work arrangements, which can help individuals with disabilities or caregiving responsibilities to manage their work and personal lives.

Continuous learning: to help employees understand the importance of D&I, recognize their own biases, learn how to interact with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, build empathy and develop cross-cultural communication skills it is critically important to have continuous learning within the organisation.

Employee resource groups: these voluntary groups provide a support network for employees with similar backgrounds or interests. They help foster a sense of community and

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belonging among employees, provide network opportunities, provide feedback on D&I initiatives, and identify areas of improvement.

Diverse hiring practices: adopt hiring practices that promote diversity and inclusion like sourcing candidates from a variety of backgrounds, ensuring that job descriptions and recruitment process does not create unintentional barriers for certain groups, establishing diverse interview panels, partnering with organizations that focus on D&I to source candidates from underrepresented groups.

Inclusive communication: adopt inclusive communication practices like using gender-neutral language, avoiding stereotypes, and ensuring communication is accessible to all employees.

Employee feedback and engagement: create opportunities for employees to provide feedback on D&I initiatives and engagement with the organization.

Monitoring and measuring progress: of the D&I goals like tracking diversity metrics, analyzing retention rates for diverse employees, and evaluating the impact of D&I initiatives on the organization.

Accessible technologies and infrastructure: invest in assistive technologies and make physical infrastructure accessible, like installing ramps, accessible and all-gender restrooms.

Employees, clients, shareholders, and society now expect organizations to live up to the expectations of a social enterprise by fulfilling their commitments and responsibility of making a positive impact in the community. For example, Gen Z and millennials who are convinced of their employers' societal and environmental impact, and their efforts to create a diverse and inclusive environment, are more likely to stay with their employers for more years.

Just as every business strategy is tailored to the individual organization's customer needs, achieving equitable outcomes requires a tailored approach-based organization's strategy, context, and history of engagement with communities. It is important to create a level playing field by launching interventions that foster a culture where everyone has access to equitable opportunities. By making these small changes, organizations can attract and retain a more diverse talent pool and create an equitable workplace that values diversity and inclusion.

Today, we are witnessing a growing momentum on the adoption of D&I among companies with few companies getting ahead of the learning curve, while many have just started their D&I journey and are trying to build the D&I blocks. This is an opportune time to build cross-learning platforms that can promote diversity within industry. In this context, CII has started a platform called the India Business & Disability Network (CII IBDN) which serves as a platform to network, build capacity and form mutually beneficial partnerships to create an inclusive, accessible and a barrier-free workplace within the corporate sector. Especially for companies who want to start their D&I journey, this would be an appropriate platform that can equip them and help with D&I solutions, through peer company support.

With increasing support from the eco-system in terms of Government policies, growing numbers of NGOs and D&I solution service providers and platforms like IBDN, we can only look forward to a better, equitable and inclusive world of work.

Views expressed are personal

India has always been a country with enormous diversity: there is a whole spectrum of ethnicities, languages, food, and culture within the country, and we are richer because of this diversity. Even before diversity and inclusion became topics of deliberations and views, Indians mingled and benefitted from the different perspectives that diverse people bring.

However, the diversity seen in society is not adequately reflected in the workforce, especially if you look at the corporate world. There are groups of people such as women, people with disabilities and from the LGBTQ community who have been marginalised and face insurmountable barriers to entering the workforce. If you look at women as a group, traditionally, due to the barriers they have faced, many gravitate towards jobs that society sees as more suitable for women: teaching, and nursing for example, even though there is no scientific evidence to prove that they lack the temperament and/or skills to excel in male-dominated jobs. In fact, there are several examples of women, whether in sectors such as banking or among start-ups, who have carved new paths and achieved remarkable success. But their numbers are small, and the proverbial glass ceiling not only continues to exist but is also quite unbreakable.

Recognising the potential of women and their poor representation in the workforce, CII launched the Indian Women Network in 2013. Envisioned as a network for career women, CII IWN works towards co-creating empowering ecosystems that will help women achieve their full economic potential. Through a gamut of initiatives focussed on policy advocacy, leadership training and mentorship, CII IWN through its 23 India chapters is promoting the inclusion of women in the workforce.

The pandemic ushered in several changes such as widespread digitalisation which makes access to education geographic location agnostic. It also throws up new and remote work opportunities. The time is ripe to accelerate the inclusion of women in the workforce.

So what can India Inc do to promote D&I in the workplace, especially the inclusion of women? In my perspective, there are some enablers which will make a huge difference.

Creating inclusive policies and procedures: corporates must re-examine all their policies through the D&I lens, especially the gender lens. A lot of hidden biases and discriminations go unnoticed at the policy level. The inclusive policies should be disseminated widely, with regular sensitisation sessions for employees to keep the policies alive in the minds of the employees. Appropriate mechanisms for grievance redressal need to be in place to report any discrimination or harassment, thereby ensuring an inclusive culture.

Creating a culture of inclusion: corporates need to sensitise and train their employees to accept and embrace diversity. They need to ensure that stereotypes are not perpetuated and that all communication is gender-neutral, respectful and inclusive. The atmosphere at the workplace should encourage diverse people to celebrate their diversity and not hide it. Instead of trying to create a melting pot, the focus should be on creating a mosaic with vibrant colours.

Hiring from diverse backgrounds: corporates must redefine hiring practices to promote D&I. Recruitment policies must be inclusive and hidden biases removed to ensure a level playing field for all. They should actively recruit from diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds.

Inclusive training and career-development support - Corporates must acknowledge that some groups have or face disadvantages due to socio-economic factors: the number of women studying STEM subjects remains low, leaving them out of jobs that require proficiency in the subjects. Corporates can look at ways to educate or upskill women to be a part of the workforce in areas considered male bastions, such as the manufacturing sector.

Provide flexible work arrangements: a large number of women drop out of the workforce at various stages in their lives when they find it difficult to balance their responsibilities at home/towards their families and their professional responsibilities. Corporates must have flexible and adaptive policies to ensure that women can continue to contribute meaningfully throughout their career lifecycles.

Safety at the workplace: While this seems obvious, it is often poorly addressed in many workplaces. Women working night shifts or on factory floors or returning late at night after work hours end must feel safe and corporates can help address the safety concerns of women.

Promoting gender diversity at the top: corporates need to identify women with leadership potential and mentor/train them for

Smita Agarwal
Chairperson, CII National Committee for Women Empowerment & Indian Women Network and Director & CFO at PTC Industries

leadership roles. A diverse leadership will create an environment that promotes D&I and inspires women to aim for leadership roles. Women should not feel unacknowledged or underrepresented at the decision-making table.

Most corporates lack the wherewithal to ascertain how they are faring in their journey of D&I. The CII IWN, therefore, developed an online Gender Diagnostic Tool to enable companies to self-assess and identify any strengths, gaps or opportunities to help improve gender parity within the company.

In the post-pandemic world, D&I can be a game changer vis-à-vis corporate culture and help create a more inclusive world and we must accelerate the change to reap the benefits.

Views expressed are personal

A Commitment For Change

Seema Arora

CEO, CII Foundation and Deputy Director General, CII

❝Diversity and inclusion should be an integral part of an organization. A diverse workforce brings rich experiences and skills, leading to increased creativity, engagement, and productivity, ultimately benefiting the organisation. Organisations must have policies and frameworks in place that foster a culture where each individual is valued, and differences celebrated.❞

5 GENDER EQUALITY

Sustainable Development Goal 5

Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls

Goal 5 calls for achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030.

The social and economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has made the situation even bleaker. Progress in many areas, including time spent on unpaid care and domestic work, decision-making regarding sexual and reproductive health, and gender-responsive budgeting, is falling behind.

Women's health services, already poorly funded, have faced major disruptions. Violence against women remains endemic. And despite women's leadership in responding to COVID-19, they still trail men in securing the decision-making positions they deserve.

Commitment and bold action are needed to accelerate progress, including through the promotion of laws, policies, budgets and institutions that advance gender equality. Greater investment in gender statistics is vital, since less than half of the data required to monitor Goal 5 are currently available.[1]

Goal 5 Targets[2]

5.1   End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.2   Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.3   Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

5.4   Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

5.5   Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decisionmaking in political, economic and public life

5.6   Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

5.A   Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

5.B   Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

5.C   Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

[1] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/

[2] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/

Promoting Digital & Financial Independence to Reduce Gender Inequality

Voices from the Ground

To bridge the gender gap with respect to digital and financial literacy and create a more equitable society, the CII Foundation worked with grassroots women in select States to improve their digital and financial literacy under its Woman Exemplar Program.

> Taking the Prime Minister's initiative of Digital India forward, we have started with 10 villages in Mhaswad, Maharashtra. I wish to take it to the entire country. Join hands with us and help us make India go online.

Rupali Shinde
Woman Exemplar 2020, Maharashtra

Rupali learnt how to use technology to facilitate her business, and has also started training women on digital transactions. Today, Rupali is leading the digital revolution in the rural Satara district of Maharashtra.

To know more about Rupali and her work

[**Click here**]

> For every single woman, widow, separated, unmarried or a woman with a disability, economic independence becomes pivotal in her journey of becoming self-reliant and away from abuse. I want to work on uplifting the livelihoods of single women constituting 8.6% of the female population (Census, 2011) of India.

Lali Dhakad
Woman Exemplar 2019, Rajasthan

Lali was instrumental in organizing the 2003 state convention on the rights of single women and invited women's rights organizations and community-based organizations from across the state to share their work and experiences. This finally created a policy shift in Rajasthan, where widows could avail pension, irrespective of having children above the age of 18.

To know more about Lali Dhakad and her work

[**Click here**]