The Future is HERe
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Ryan Lowe
Partner, People Advisory Services, EY
Although India has traditionally been a very diverse society in areas like culture, religion and language, gender diversity is one area where India has not made enough progress. However, the time is ripe for putting this very critical imperative at the center stage. The top management in India is still primarily a man's business (as much as we would like to believe otherwise). But the race to grow women leaders is firmly on in India Inc.

In the last few years, there has been forward movement in the diversity agenda with the Government and organizations collectively making efforts to bridge the gap and support women employees to grow. Iceland, Norway and Finland are known to have made exceptional progress in eliminating the gender gap. In fact, Iceland is the first country to mandate equal pay for equal work as per law. Additionally, it is mandatory for Icelandic companies to have 40% women on their boards.

India also took a giant leap toward closing this gap with the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017. The Bill took some concrete steps that supported women employees in their careers. There is, however, still a lot more ground to cover.

It has increasingly become more important to create an equal and inclusive environment at the workplace. The business case for diversity (gender in particular) and inclusion is now broadly accepted and its benefits increasingly understood.

In light of this background, EY has partnered with Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Indian Women Network (IWN) as knowledge provider to build a research paper that contributes to building a better working world for all genders.

We intended to gain a better insight into the current maturity level of organizations and understand how the benefits of D&I can be optimized for all stakeholders. Our focus remained primarily on organizations’ business case for gender diversity and understanding the scope of initiatives that have the potential to create an inclusive working environment. We hope that the report gives you some insight into the key barriers to gender diversity and encourages you to build an environment that is inclusive and gender equal! We look forward to your feedback to continue our work in creating a gender equal world.
Pallavi Jha
Chairperson, CII IWN Western Region
Managing Director, Dale Carnegie India
From recent global events, it is apparent that gender disparity is not just an India-centric problem; it is a serious global challenge. In the latest Gender Disparity Index rankings that were released, India slipped to a disappointing 130. Clearly, there are several human, policy, societal and attitudinal obstacles that need to be overcome besides government prescriptions, which will enable greater sensitivity toward the female population of India. Some of the difficulties may appear insurmountable and long-term, but it is about time we seriously commenced a corrective action.

Currently, we have made modest progress in trying to break the formidable glass ceiling, for instance, by making board representation of women professionals a mandatory regulatory requirement or through POSH and extension of maternity leave benefits. While this has made a salutary shift, we have to move beyond symbolism by ensuring a sustainable gender equality policy that will foster the spontaneous unstoppable rise of women in the corporate hierarchy. Issues such as mid-career disruption, eliminating unconscious bias or greater flexibility in working hours assume great relevance in today’s environment.

Finally, we saw that the worldwide trending social media hashtag #MeToo found much resonance in India and has opened up a Pandora’s box on the elephant in the room: sexual harassment of women in the workplace. It is undoubtedly established now that not only is the unfortunate malaise of sexual harassment and intimidatory tactics to silence the aggrieved victim prevalent across several industries, but the safety of women in general is becoming an endemic issue as well. Driven by concerns of safety and security, organizations are constrained from providing the same opportunities for travel and experiences to women as compared to their male counterparts. This, along with the career breaks on account of their societal and biological roles, results in unequal career growth and disparity in pay and fair representation across the workforce, particularly in leadership. Thus, the industry needs to look at the long-term ramifications of gender disparity which are not restricted to the corporate sector, but to the society as a whole.

At CII Indian Women Network, we are driven by the imperative that Indian women become a core critical mass of the workforce to bring about the transformational change in attitude and behavior. We have also recognized the importance of some amazing women role models who can inspire the future generation into believing that there are no limits to what a woman can achieve. One critical aspect is our own self-belief and innermost conviction that will ultimately help us triumph in our relentless struggle for gender equality. It is a pleasure to share this comprehensive report with you that captures the universe of several variables that will impact our future progress. We remain totally convinced that our collective endeavor will inevitably lead to a better world for women, both in their careers and lives.
Diversity landscape

Inclusiveness is about leveraging these differences to achieve better business results. It is about creating an environment where all our people feel, and are, valued; where they can bring their differences to work each day; and where they contribute their personal best in every way possible.

Gender diversity at workplace indicates healthy representation of all genders that constitute the organizational workforce. A healthy gender representation across all levels of the organization has shown encouraging the flow of innovative ideas, thoughts and improvement in the financial performance of organizations. Reports have indicated that as of 2015, women held only 7.7% of board seats and just 2.7% of board chairs[1].

While considering D&I initiatives, improving diversity with overall numbers takes primary focus. Inclusion is usually ignored or dealt with separately. We at EY feel that the inclusion of all organizational groups is key to ensuring that any diversity initiative is sustainable in the long run.

To achieve gender inclusion at the workplace, organizations must ensure that policies and programs consider and respect the individuality of their employees. Gender inclusion should be accompanied with a deeper commitment from organizations and strengthened by leadership endorsement.
Women are increasingly voicing their demands for equal treatment at the workplace. Some sectors in India have seen a rise in the number of women leaders. However, this increase in the number of women leaders is limited primarily to the banking, financial services, technology and pharmaceutical sectors, where the hiring of women has increased significantly across organizational levels. According to a recent EY report based on a 2015 WEF study, India has an even longer way to go in order to achieve gender parity at the workplace.

I actually believe that the Indian woman cannot wait for an affirmative action to claim her rightful place on the board. She must be proactive about leaning in and taking charge of her own career trajectory and if the organization wants to enjoy the benefits of her loyalty, then it must learn to support her.

Gautam Chainani | CHRO, JSW Group

Where is India on the global diversity map?

According to the World Economic Forum’s annual Global Gender Gap Report 2016, Iceland stands number one in gender equality and has closed almost 80% of the gender gap. It celebrated Women’s Day 2016 by making equal wages a law mandate. Even in Finland, organizations with over 30 employees must have a gender equality model in place that compares wages of male and female employees. Most Nordic countries provide mandatory parental leave that can be used by both men and women.

Globally, the Philippines stands second in the percentage of women in senior management at 39%, surpassed only by Russia. Only 9% businesses have no women in senior management. In China, working mothers get at least 98 days of maternity leave and 100% of their salary comes from the Government and employer combined.

India took a big leap toward gender parity with the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017. The Extended Paternity Benefits Bill 2017, if passed, would further demonstrate a major step toward accepting the evolving social gender roles in the country.

Women are increasingly voicing their demands for equal treatment at the workplace. Some sectors in India have seen a rise in the number of women leaders. However, this increase in the number of women leaders is limited primarily to the banking, financial services, technology and pharmaceutical sectors, where the hiring of women has increased significantly across organizational levels. According to a 2015 study, more than half (54%) of women CEOs in India were in the financial and banking sectors. This rise in the representation of women has yet to filter into other major sectors such as manufacturing, which have a longer way to go to utilize the large female talent pool available.

The Future is HERe
It is important to understand that people perform to the best of their abilities when they feel a sense of inclusion. If the focus is only laid on diversity, it shows progress only on paper and ignores the core element of inclusiveness. A long-term impact can only be maintained if diverse working groups are included, encouraged and empowered.

Through our work across sectors and research conducted, we think some of the major challenges that hinder the progress of D&I initiatives include:

- Unconscious bias
- Ineffective implementation of policies
- Fewer women in leadership roles
- Lack of awareness about the benefits of gender diversity.

In fact, our survey reveals that 69% organizations have been unable to understand the financial benefits of diversity.

These hindrances lead to a widening of the gender gap.

According to a 2017 World Bank report, in over two decades preceding 2013, female labor force participation fell from 34.8% to 27%. In India, education enrolment for women does not naturally lead to jobs. In towns and cities, 68.3% of women who graduate do not have paid jobs, says a 2015 report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Women’s Voices, Employment and Entrepreneurship in India. This leads us to the question – Where are the women who graduated and what are they doing?

16% respondents in our survey reported having no women on the board and 47% reported that there are no more than 5% women in senior management roles. These organizations have only fulfilled the statutory requirement of One women member on the board. In fact, from our responses of respondents in senior management, only 33% were women.

While we have seen a substantial rise in the number of women who have graduated, there are not enough women making it to higher management roles in the workplace. So, where are these women?

The pyramid below depicts the average strength of women in organisations that were surveyed across sectors:

- **Board/Senior Management**: 0-5%
- **Entry Level**: 20-40%

**Is education leading to jobs?**

29% think hiring at middle management level is a challenge.

68% find senior management level hiring a challenge.

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**Why is the representation so minimal?**

Work-life balance continues to be a struggle for women in the workforce. Social norms, especially in India, traditionally saw women as homemakers and men as the breadwinners. There has been a significant change in this aspect to a time when women are making their mark in all fields of work.

The Indian Air Force created history in 2016 when it commissioned three women as fighter pilots. In February 2016, the then President of India Pranab Mukherjee announced that women would be allowed to join the combat forces, and the process of recruiting young women as jawans has already started. Israel is one of the few countries that require a mandatory two-year service in the army for men as well as women.

While there are many positives we see today, women still face several challenges. Some of the challenges they face at the workplace include disparity in pay structure and organizational policies that do not consider gender differences. Most of these challenges come from a lack of appropriate representation for women across the hierarchy. This is specifically true in the top management, from where the decisions flow across the organization.

- **34%** respondents opined that D&I initiatives are not given priority at the management levels.
- **23%** female respondents find it challenging to attain work-life balance on account of organizational policies.
- **43%** organizations have said they find it difficult to attract and retain female talent.

In a scenario where across the world organizations are discussing the “war for talent,” it is not a comforting fact that organizations are finding it difficult to hire and retain one-half of the talent pool. This reflects that often, organizations are unable to facilitate an inclusive environment and are unable to recognize it as a crucial element of being able to utilize female talent.

There are several additional factors that affect the success of women as they make their way up the corporate ladder. The following factors act as barriers for women and hinder their growth.
Unconscious bias

Unconscious bias has been one of the biggest challenges to the progress of women. Female respondents said that they face managerial bias. Unconscious bias stems from traditional gender roles and unevolved social norms. This bias is known to be present in senior levels of organizations as well and affects the growth of women in the workplace.

This bias affects the work environment and creates an atmosphere that is not inclusive for all employees. It is therefore crucial to conduct programs that create awareness of the prevalent biases and how they impact the business. Active male participation from all levels in the organization must be encouraged for these programs.

Often, assumptions of character and personality are based on gender. A handful of male respondents to our survey used terms like “passion,” “empathy” and even “gossip” in response to an open-ended question regarding areas in which women outshine men. Are these general parameters for judging one’s competency to perform workplace tasks? If so, are men judged along the same parameters? The bias is often unintentional but it is essential to eradicate this to ensure equal treatment.

In a study done at an American university, scientists within the university’s Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) faculty were handed two seemingly identical resumes with only one significant difference – one with the name John at the top and the other with the name Jennifer. Surprisingly, the scientists did not review these resumes solely on the basis of merit. Despite being as qualified as John, Jennifer was seen as less competent and scientists were less inclined to act as her mentor. Such bias often exists in recruitment in various sectors of the corporate world. Creating the concept of blind resumes can play a major role in eliminating this bias.

Exclusion from informal networks

Sometimes in case of a late-night emergency in a plant, women may not be able to travel to the location. However, even if she helps a man over the phone by instructing him on how to solve the problem, she is given no credit for it. The man’s physical presence in such cases is given more weightage. This is a problem that predominantly exists in the manufacturing sector.

Female respondents believe that there are different performance standards and expectations set from male and female employees working at the same level. This results from stereotyping. Women who take maternity breaks are often overlooked for promotions. The quality of work done by them is ignored and deserving promotion cases are held back. Practices like these and others can be dealt with through active policy making, one that accommodates the needs of all employees and ensures that they are not biased toward any employee group.

Based on our interactions with female employees at client organizations, it was observed that women are often overlooked as viable candidates for programs or projects that require travel outside their base location. It is presumed that women will be unable to travel. These concerns for safety should not act as hindrances to their career path. To avoid this, facilities for safe travel can be made for women and men equally. Any employee, male or female, is precious to the organization.

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Female respondents have said that they feel an exclusion from informal networks in the workplace. The concept of a “corporate men’s club” has always existed. There has always been a sense of exclusion for women from informal networks that exist in organizations. Exclusion from these networks can be held against women and affect female employee engagement and interactions.

To improve the quality of engagement, creating formal or informal women’s networking forums or employee resource groups has been an effective case study to improve employee engagement and employee effort.

Women-focused formal or informal networks also help connect women employees across the organization. They enable networking and serve as a platform to communicate the challenges women face and how some women are overcoming them. These networks become sounding boards and help women to steer through the gender bias storm.
They strengthen women participation in organization initiatives.

However, there is still a need to disband any existing “men’s club” syndrome in organizations to ensure inclusion of all work groups.

**Disparity in pay structure**

According to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap report, 2016, globally an average woman gets paid as little as half the salary as an average male \[^{[11]}\]. According to the same report, in the US, on average a woman gets paid about 77% of the salary her male colleague would \[^{[12]}\]. India lags behind with women getting paid about 25% lesser than men \[^{[13]}\]. This trend extends across all sectors. Female respondents have opined that there is a disparity in the pay structure among their peers. This disparity can be majorly contributed to bias in hiring and salaries offered. Another excuse for this is usually women’s time out of the workforce impacting their career progression.

Iceland’s equal wages law demands transparency in the pay structure \[^{[14]}\]. Encouraging an atmosphere of that kind can prove to be effective. Additionally, awareness programs to help eliminate unconscious bias at all levels will help accelerate the growth of women in achieving an equal status in organizations. Further, it will enhance the utilization of all available talent to an optimized level and mutually benefit the organization as well as all employees.

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**Dr. Prince Augustin**  
EVP - Group Human Capital & Leadership Development Mahindra & Mahindra

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**Kalpana Unadkat**  
Partner Khaitan & Co.
Defining the business case for diversity

More Women On Boards = Better Business Performance

Well-validated research from across the world reveals a direct correlation between the number of women in the boardroom and improved financial performance. EY’s analysis supports these conclusions. Gender diversity also improves team decision-making and innovation capabilities for development of new products or services.

Along with a well-defined business case for gender diversity, it is also important for organizations to outline action points that ensure valuable ROI for the firm.

In India, social norms have always enforced a patriarchal culture. Traditions that started off as a simple division of roles based on the concept of practicality have been blindly followed without recognizing the changing dynamics of gender roles.
Promoting diversity is becoming critical for every organization’s success in this evolving marketplace. Before we move further, it is quintessential to understand why it is so important to build a diverse workplace.

A parity of gender representation brings forth a diversity in thought. Men and women have different styles of thinking, decision making and innovating. This difference can be leveraged to enable new ideas and superior performance. Differences in experiences, cultures and education can bring about varied forms of creativity and innovation.

A diverse workplace helps maintain an appropriate representation of all employees, employers, stakeholders and customers. This enables an organization to broaden its reach and gain a better understanding of markets with a well-rounded perspective. It also helps them identify upcoming trends and consumer choices in the future. A study conducted on 800 business units from the retail and hospitality sectors in 2014 showed that gender-diverse organizations showed a better financial profit as compared to those dominated by a single gender[16].

In fact, several studies have indicated that at a macro level, greater involvement of women in the workforce is beneficial for the economy. Extensive research quotes how companies with a diverse work environment tend to outperform those without one. A leading research firm estimated that improved gender parity in can contribute up to US$700 billion to the global gross domestic product (GDP)[17]. It has been found that companies with women on the board have a higher return on equity than the average of corporate firms in India[18].

A global survey undertaken by EY and the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Dublin, 2015, displayed a significant correlation between women in corporate leadership and profitability.

The report showed that an organization with 30% female leaders could add up to 6 percentage points to its net margin[19].

For example, a leading telecom multinational leverages the financial benefits of gender diversity to boost its business case.

A study conducted on the financial performance of US companies from 2011 to 2016 found that those with at least three women on the board posted an 11% higher return on equity, and their earnings per share were 45% higher than companies with no women directors[20]. Creating an inclusive culture for all employees also helps organizations reduce employee turnover costs by retaining valued talent.

Promoting women’s participation goes beyond “just feminism”; it is deeply connected to establishing economic stability. Competencies in areas of business, entrepreneurship, finance and leadership are not exclusive to men. For every woman who is excluded from the eligible talent pool, there is a consequent economic loss.

Payal Agrawal | Director - Business Head CSS, Middle India and International Markets, Johnson & Johnson

Organizations are still unaware about the real concept of diversity and the benefits it brings to them. D&I initiatives must be core drivers for the organizations. D&I is the need of the hour to have not just diversity of thought but also to cater to a gender diverse customer base.

33% of our respondent organizations say gender diversity also helps improve their brand.
Women face challenges when they are going on maternity leave and are unable to return to work. Are we keeping in touch with these women while they are away? Keeping in touch to some extent, eliminates the need for a Second Innings program.

Kalpana Unadkat
Partner Khaitan & Co.

It was further observed that some respondents are not aware of their organization’s diversity purpose and vision. Putting forth a defined diversity purpose is irrelevant if it does not cascade down from leadership levels to the employees. It eliminates the possibility of collective participation from the entire organization.

Only 31% organizations have understood the financial benefits of having a diverse gender population, and have built a business case in support of it.

In our survey, 72% respondents said that their organizations have a well-defined diversity purpose and vision. This shows that organizations are attempting to put forth diversity as an important focus area.

Additionally, 50% of these simply leverage Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and their image for being diverse organizations to attract and retain women employees.
These organizations are taking a piece meal approach, often influenced by other leading global organizations within their sector to simply increase their gender numbers. This, in the long run, is unlikely to have any significant impact on these organizations' business case.

Only 39% organizations deploy formal centralized budgets for their gender diversity business case. 39% organizations do not provide structure to their business case by allotting budgets on a case-by-case basis. A lack of formal budgeting displays a lack of structure and commitment from senior management in the business case, thereby making it difficult to implement any initiatives taken.

On a positive note, 53% of these organizations recognize that a gender-diverse organization has an improved working environment and are using it to improve their attractiveness as employers and retain the best-in-class talent, i.e., men and women.

It is important to note that without understanding the benefits and designing a clear business case in tandem with them, effective execution of D&I programs can be difficult.
Popular D&I initiatives

Over the past few years, organizations have made efforts to adopt D&I as a focus area. Various initiatives have been adopted to build a culture of inclusion. While there is a lot to be done, some initiatives have helped organizations create a healthier, more vibrant and inclusive workplace.

Initiatives such as flexible timings, sponsorship and mentoring programs have helped organizations boost their gender diversity agenda. A few like the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) and Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 are law-mandated steps to incorporate and protect gender diversity in the corporate landscape. Aside from putting forth policies that help women maintain a safe workplace environment and sustain a work-life balance, these initiatives provide strict guidelines for implementation in organizations. Despite minimal lapses, such guidelines leave little margin for error in the implementation of initiatives.

Of the initiatives that have been put into action, only a few have been fully successful. Below are some insights into why a few of these initiatives have proven to be beneficial and have seen significant success.
Successful initiatives

**POSH**

The global approach to sexual harassment is quite versatile. Each country encompasses different definitions of harassment in the workplace. Australia has one of the oldest sexual harassment policies that dates back to 1984. India defines “sexual harassment” as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment occurs when:

1. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly over a term or condition of an individual's employment.

2. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual.

3. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of reasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating a hostile, intimidating or offensive work environment.

In India, the POSH Act has shown the most success with 72% respondents saying it has proven beneficial to them. Its law-mandated nature provides rights and a rigid course of action to prevent sexual harassment of women in the workplace. POSH provides helpful directives that begin by creating awareness of the program to every step of implementation. Its scope grants punishment to the offender and anonymity to the victim. This has helped give women employees a sense of security and safety in their work environment.

In accordance with the law, 65% of responding organizations have conducted awareness programs for all employees. However, 22% organizations have briefed their employees through emails, which can often go unread and ignored. Is this done simply to acknowledge the law rather than to build a secure environment?

A few respondents were unaware of any briefings that may or may not have been made, which represents a lack of communication rigor on the part of the organizations. An organization must actively find effective ways of communicating its policies to employees.

**Extended maternity benefits**

57% respondents said that the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 has positively impacted the career cycles of women. This amendment to the Act provides an extended leave with pay for new mothers up to 6 months. It ensures that women are not held back from taking on new roles whether they are personal or professional. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 provides for procedures in case of every possible scenario including pay, time for leave for adoptive mothers, even mandatory crèche facilities at the workplace.

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Under Project Suryashakti, women were given an opportunity to venture into the male-dominated space of solar panel installation. With advanced training on solar power plant PV installation, close to 50 women are now installing these panels on rooftops.

Dr. Prince Augustin | EVP - Group Human Capital & Leadership Development Mahindra & Mahindra

The Launch of Spring Board is our effort in bringing about changes in mind sets and policies and introducing sustainable initiatives for women, after hearing it from them about their needs. I personally envision a bright future for women at JSW, and in next 2 to 3 years’ time our goal is to significantly enhance our gender diversity ratio as well as become the Employer of Choice for women employees.

Gautam Chainani | CHRO JSW Group

A small percentage of organizations have conducted awareness workshops only for women, rather than for all employees. It is vital for men, more than women, to be familiar with POSH for the policy to have the right impact in creating a safe and inclusive environment.
workplace or near it. 43% respondents have said that crèche facilities were beneficial for them.

On the contrary, there is a growing concern that this six-month maternity leave impacts the career growth of women and makes them unemployable and incapable to join at the same position as when they left. It is vital to understand that if given the right kind of support, women can get back on track with their career.

**Second innings program for women**

To eliminate concerns about the negative impact of extended maternity benefits, second innings programs are increasingly gaining importance. They help women understand new developments and procedural and regulatory changes in their respective fields. Several job portals are targeted solely toward women who are looking to restart their careers helping them with opportunities to grow.

**What steps are you taking to create an effective second innings program?**

Setups like the First Moms Club are helping first-time mothers cope with motherhood and the changes it brings to a woman’s life. The club is also helping mothers find suitable jobs after their maternity break. An initiative like MOJO (Mom on Jobs) started by FMC has been successful among the members.

**Work-life balance**

In terms of self-defined initiatives, work-life balance related policies such as part-time work and work from home options have seen the most success.

57% respondents said that such policies have proven beneficial for them.

Such policies are relevant to both male and female employees and provide for work-from-home options, flexible work timings and in some instances even job sharing. If practiced effectively, these policies can help employees manage their responsibilities at work and home. However, 55% female respondents and 49% male respondents still expressed their struggle to maintain work-life balance due to work pressure.

Through open-ended responses, several men questioned the lack of work-life related workshops that are male inclusive, especially in light of evolving social roles wherein increasingly men are including child care in their social responsibilities. Equal participation of mothers and fathers has been especially prevalent among the millennials. Further, the need for extended paternity leave is also being stressed upon.

There are countries like Norway and Sweden that offer various benefits for paternity leave, which extends up to even 18 weeks in the latter. Research done by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has shown that fathers who are offered a paid paternity leave have a greater inclination to help and contribute more at home. Additionally, it has been observed that women who have more help at home from their spouses tend to return to work from maternity leave much before their leave ends. In fact, a study based in Sweden showed that for every month husbands took parental leave, a working mother’s future earnings increased by 7% [23].

The Jobs Act in Italy includes laws to encourage work-life balance. These laws are intended to support flexible work timings and part-time work to meet the needs of parents. They also provide opportunities for parental leave to be taken on an hourly basis. Companies are offered relief on social security contributions if they address the need for work-life balance among their employees [24]. Such policies encourage employees to work from home and decide their timings, without any significant loss in salary.

When it comes to professional concerns, several women face the problem of safe commute after working late. This restricts them from being able to put in long hours, which consciously or unconsciously affects their pay. To overcome this, a few large MNCs have taken the initiative of providing secure travel facilities for women who work late, regardless of their position in the organization. Providing a carpool service for women employees would

"India is a democratised rigid society. So for behaviour change to be introduced and implemented, it has be mandated by law. Law then becomes the negative enforcement."

Dr. Prince Augustin | EVP - Group Human Capital & Leadership Development Mahindra & Mahindra
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is equally important to establish an effective communication channel to capture feedback from the women employees who are part of these programs.

In addition to this, identifying high-potential women talent and grooming them early on in their career can encourage women to put in their best efforts and achieve their potential. Commitment from strong male leaders in such cases acts as a morale booster for young women who otherwise feel a sense of exclusion. For high-potential talent, enhanced education and learning opportunities prove to be beneficial.

Travel benefits for expectant and new mothers

Some organizations have recently introduced additional travel benefits for expectant and new mothers. These benefits include business class travel for expectant mothers during the last two trimesters of pregnancy, to ensure that comfortable travel is possible during this period. A few organizations have also allowed new mothers to travel with their babies and a nanny, to ensure that mothers do not miss “business critical” travel opportunities during the first year after childbirth. These forward-looking policies are meant to ensure that women are not at a disadvantage during the period that they are nursing their infants.
With an intention to provide a clear strategy for accelerating the women in the workforce, EY introduced the Women. Fast Forward program. EY surveyed 400 leaders of companies from a cross-section of industries in EMEIA, Asia Pacific and North America. This three-point strategy is:

1. First, establish a clear path for women to ascend to leadership, including leadership pipeline programs, a supportive environment, setting measurable goals for leadership representation, appointing male sponsors for female employees and establishing internal women’s networks.

2. Second, emphasize work-life integration by adopting both formal and informal flexible work arrangements that benefit both men and women.

3. Third, build a supportive culture by having an active CEO who visibly supports the advancement of women, developing a company-wide message that bias is unacceptable, enlightening all employees and educating management about conscious and unconscious bias, and ensuring that formal and informal sponsorship of women and underrepresented groups is part of all senior leaders’ goals and priorities.

Role of D&I councils in the success of initiatives

Effective governance mechanisms are important to ensure successful implementation of initiatives. Apart from appointing diversity leaders and monitoring initiatives, establishing a formal D&I council can ensure an effective check on D&I initiatives.

Only 24% of the respondents said that their organizations have set up formal D&I councils.

Organizations need to make sure that employees are aware of such a council. If they are not, valuable feedback and active participation are lost. D&I councils can play a major role in ensuring effective implementation, especially when they have strong leadership backing and appropriate female participation.

While keeping this in mind, it is also critical to see that all employee groups are given sufficient representation among the members of the council. A diverse mix of skills within the members through a thorough selection process can make the functioning of the council effective.

Additionally, it helps if the functions and responsibilities of the council members are well defined. These key factors help maintain a flow of diverse ideas and perspectives.

When putting forth responsibilities, it helps when leaders are held accountable for the success of D&I initiatives. Making gender diversity a part of performance appraisals for senior management helps garner participation from male leaders.

Increasing effectiveness of D&I councils

Forward looking

Often, members tend to focus on their own personal diversity agendas and individual concerns. Their focus must remain on upcoming trends and long-term changes that could support their organization in building a brand for itself as D&I leader.

Communication

A failure to communicate could lead to the demise of any D&I initiative. It is important for D&I councils to maintain interaction between members and employees across the organization. However, at no point is it a good idea for them to sway from their primary agenda and begin to act as a “complaint body.”

The goal of a D&I council should not be to make policies but rather to link diversity with existing organizational initiatives and ensure implementation across the organization.

A great way to avoid such errors is to rotate the members of the council annually or biennially. This makes room for fresh perspectives and innovative ideas that can contribute significantly to the council’s efforts. However, too much rotation can also hinder the continuity of effort.

Kalpana Unadkat | Partner Khaitan & Co.

We don’t have too many female role models. Which brings me to ask, are we creating enough women role models across all sectors?
Organizations must establish internal guidelines to ensure proportionate gender representation on every project team, task force, committee or panel - most particularly on those related to recruitment, increments, promotions, customer support and marketing.

Pallavi Jha | Chairperson, CII IWN Western Region
Managing Director, Dale Carnegie India

Initiatives taken at EY

**Spreading awareness of unconscious bias**
To address issues around unconscious bias, EY conducts theatre-based sessions and awareness drives for employees to draw attention toward unconscious bias. These initiatives help employees dispel some of the myths and stereotypes that are held about women in general, as well as share some of the solutions to help reduce the gender gap - both internally and externally. These sessions include artists enacting situations EY employees face at the workplace.

**Focused hiring**
As part of an initiative RecruitHER, EY has taken special measures to eliminate bias at the workplace against hiring women for specific job roles. Through communication collaterals, we help recruiters and interviewers identify and debunk myths around hiring women, thus making EY a gender-neutral workplace.

**EY Women Informal Network (EYWIN)**
The network was formed specifically to reach out to our women employees. The network has partnered with leading organizations to impart online training modules on specific skills such as persuasion and building a personal digital brand. The network communicates regularly with the employees to share and discuss any policy changes introduced in the firm. The network is led by senior management.

**Flexible working options**
The firm provides flexible working options to all its employees, helping them balance home and work priorities.

**Extended maternity benefits**
In line with the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, EY gives its women employees the benefit to take maternity leave of 26 weeks. Crèche facilities have also been provided at EY offices.

**Workshops for women on boards**
This day-long workshop is hosted by EY India for enabling existing and potential women directors to be more effective in their board roles, and provides comprehensive insights on varied aspects of a director’s role and effectively discharging their duties on the board. The workshop features practical experiences of senior board members and technical sessions from EY on topics such as corporate governance and financial reporting.

**EY Women Business Leaders Network (WBLN)**
EY WBLN is a platform for senior/CXO women from India Inc. to come together and benefit from shared insights into their path to leadership. It is an integral part of our Women. Fast Forward initiative launched globally, with a view to seeing more women in leadership positions in business and economy.
Implementable solutions

Organizations struggle to create a gender-diverse working environment.

In response to our survey:

- 42% respondents said their organizations are unable to attract and retain female talent.
- 21% respondents said that their organizations conduct gender audits.
- 37% said they do not conduct gender audits at all, and 41% said that they are not aware of any gender audits conducted.
- 28% senior management responses said they were not aware of their gender diversity targets.

Keeping the above challenges in mind, EY recommends adopting and implementing the following key initiatives:
Women business leaders can do more to mentor their women subordinates. We see too many episodic mentoring activities which are done for a feel good. Mentoring needs to be sustained and sincere. Similarly aspiring women need to be more assertive and help themselves rather than waiting for things to happen for them.

Pallavi Jha | Chairperson, CII IWN Western Region
Managing Director, Dale Carnegie India

Gender parity audits

Without making an assessment of their current gender numbers, an organization will be unable to create a significant impact on gender diversity and in return reap the benefits of having a diverse workforce. To better understand its population, an organization can make use of gender parity audits.

Gender parity audits are an assessment tool that provide the extent to which gender equality has been effectively incorporated into organizational policies and programs, structure, decision-making processes as well as consequent budgets. A good starting point is a compensation and benefits audit focusing on gender parity.

Only after recognizing the present state can organizations set a reasonable gender diversity target and work toward it. This diversity target should be set while keeping in mind organization benefits as well as the overall growth of the company and its employees. Gender diversity should never come at the cost of an organization’s performance; it should rather support the growth of the organization by harnessing the benefits of diverse thoughts and ideas.
Maintaining effective communication

Communication is an effective tool to bind employees together and make them feel inclusive. Male and female employees have different communication styles, and realizing this is critical to creating an engaging environment. Industries benefit when male and female leaders share the stage.

Male leaders play an important role in improving communication channels. Regular interaction with female employees encouraging them to share and discuss their thoughts will benefit the organization as a whole.

Addressing unconscious bias

Unconscious bias can affect talent staffing and performance review. It affects how organizations hire, promote and develop its people. Research has identified as many as 150 factors for unconscious bias.

Organizations could use the crowdsourcing model or an external partner to identify the organizational gender biases, how they manifest and how to get rid of them. Getting rid of unconscious bias calls for a change deep-within. We need powerful and influential sponsors at the leadership level who will be committed to this cause and transmit their stance to the entire firm. In India, this is one of the major causes of gender inequality and if tackled well, will offer organizations rich dividends.

EY is creating a digital learning solution to support its clients.

Effective D&I councils

Successful and effective D&I councils help create a fair and trusting environment to ensure best talent is attracted and retained. Participation and presence of senior management at the council send a clear message to the company and external stakeholders that D&I is a critical goal of the organization. D&I thus becomes a priority.
Mentorship programs

Structured formal mentorship programs are critical given that male leaders tend to channel their mentoring advice to male protégés. It is essential that mentors and mentees are provided with tools or training to help make these programs effective. Without these and governance mechanisms, the programs become mere check-the-box programs.

Women leadership programs

In EY’s experience, women leadership programs have helped client organizations build pipelines of high-performing women ready to take on senior roles. Based on organization-specific leadership competencies, it helps chart individual learning and growth plans for the participants.

Women networking forums

Women networking forums have proven to be an effective medium to attract, develop, retain and advance women employees. Such a forum can help encourage four key aspects:

**Dialogue**
- It improves dialogue about the challenges women are facing at the workplace.

**Networking**
- It acts as a platform to make new internal and external connections.

**Mentoring**
- It helps women employees seek informal career advice from senior leaders.

**Advancement**
- It prepares women for growth and leadership opportunities.
Let us picture a world that does not associate itself with the concept of gender diversity, a world where we have progressed so much that we no longer need to be careful about exclusion because in its essence it is all inclusive. A world where we do not see gender before making decisions within our organizations and socio-economic environments; gender blindness, if you will. From this point on, we do not mention any gender; instead, we look to each other as individuals with unique abilities.

In modern times, issues of co-existence between men and women have been intensified.
In order for a better future, we need to focus on the now. Propagating this concept is essential for change.

Start with a simple conversation about the subject and encourage someone to believe in this idea of a better future. Imagine the idea of YOU being a part of this change, the gratification that you could feel after making someone finally understand the reality of the situation and encouraging them to be a part of this movement and advocate the same message. A world where everyone works together with no ulterior motive but equality. The ultimate utopia can be a reality only if we collectively work toward it.

Diversity will move beyond just genders. It will be more inclusive with greater inclusion of specially abled, LGBTs. Gender Diversity will give way to Thought Diversity.

Dr. Prince Augustin
EVP - Group Human Capital & Leadership Development Mahindra & Mahindra

There will be higher engagement with families. We will see more and more men helping their spouses with familial responsibilities. There will be greater realization that careers and jobs of women are equally critical. Korea and China saw greater number of women in the workforce essentially because the families could no longer sustain with one family member earning salaries.

Payal Agrawal
Director - Business Head CSS, Middle India and International Markets, Johnson & Johnson

The fact is that women feel guilty for missing out on familial responsibilities. It’s perfectly alright to share these responsibilities with their spouses. Take a practical view, we can’t do everything.

Kalpana Unadkat
Partner Khaitan & Co.
Top 4 focus areas for gender diversity

- Changes in HR policies
- Recruitment & Selection
- Learning & Development
- Behavioural/Mind-Set Change

Does your organization have a Diversity purpose & vision?

- 80% Yes
- 20% No

Gender Diversity targets

- 35% of the respondents were unaware of any gender diversity target
- 30% of the organizations do not have any gender diversity target.

Does your organization conduct gender audits?

- I am not aware
  - 42%
- No
  - 36%
- Yes
  - 22%
Is Gender Diversity a part of your Performance Management System?

- **39%**: Yes, for senior leaders and function leaders
- **30%**: No
- **29%**: I am not aware

*2% skipped this question

Effectiveness of Gender Diversity initiatives (according to women)

- **33%**: Employee Engagement activities to motivate employees and boost morale
- **21%**: Sponsorship and Mentoring Programs
- **16%**: Creche facilities
- **13%**: Specific development interventions for women employees
- **30%**: Flexible working hours and work from home options
- **23%**: Maternity Benefits

Challenges Gender Diversity faces in your organization

- **Women said**
  - **45%**: Addressing existing biases among managers & employees
  - **42%**: Lack of skilled women candidates in the external talent pool
  - **40%**: Difficulty in attracting and retaining women candidates

- **Men said**
  - **35%**: Lack of skilled women candidates in the external talent pool
  - **35%**: Difficulty in attracting and retaining women candidates
  - **31%**: The business case for diversity is not considered a priority across management levels

Are men in top leadership doing enough for the growth of women employees in the organization?

- **63%**: women respondents said No
- **37%**: men respondents said No and 39% said Yes

The Future is HERe
Survey demographics

Responses from 17 states across India

- 48% men
- 52% women

Sector

- 35% responses from the Service sector
  - Financial Services Sector
  - Consulting
  - BPO/kPO/.COM
  - Education and Media Sector
  - Legal, Hospitality/Travel and Market Research

- 23% manufacturing
- 13% includes sectors like pharma and healthcare, retail, real estate and construction
- 16% IT sector
- 15% miscellaneous sectors

Survey demographics
## Role

- **Board Members**: 6%
- **Senior Management**: 28%
- **Middle Management**: 31%
- **Executive**: 10%
- **HR representatives**: 26%

## Annual Turnover

- **Up to 1000 cr**: 25%
- **1000 cr - 10000 cr**: 42%
- **More than 10000 cr**: 33%
Concluding thoughts

Several studies by reputed institutions have proven that D&I are critical for an organization to be more successful and profitable. Forward-thinking organizations have recognized this in India and designed policies and undertaken several initiatives to enable a more gender-balanced organization. However, several other organizations are still at different stages of that journey.

Defining a clear business case for D&I with budgets to effectively design and deploy policies, putting in place a D&I council and having a seat on the board for the D&I leader to weave diversity and inclusion in the strategic initiatives of the organization will assist in harnessing the benefits. D&I policy implementation is crucial and needs to be monitored by senior management to assess its efficacy. Organizations need to constantly work toward reducing unconscious bias in decision making. The tone at the top is also critical to driving the shift in mindset and commitment to D&I policies by the senior management of organizations.

The Government of India has proactively undertaken several D&I-enabling steps from a regulatory perspective — including the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, requirement of a women director to be on the board of specified companies, extended maternity benefits and reduction in EPF contribution by women — which is commendable.

As India emerges as one of the global economic superpowers, women will play a valuable role in contributing to India’s GDP growth. It is incumbent upon corporates to create an enabling environment and a level playing field for the female talent such as having clear D&I policies, removing disparity in pay scales and providing paternity leave, flexibility, effective sponsorship and mentoring, etc., which will encourage women to break the glass ceiling and attain senior positions, which will in turn benefit corporates through innovative outcomes and higher profitability.
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Special thanks to Saachi Shivdasani for her contribution to the report.

Acknowledgement

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The Future is HERe

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes.

CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization, playing a proactive role in India’s development process. Founded in 1895, India’s premier business association has over 8,500 members, from the private as well as public sectors, including SMEs and MNCs, and an indirect membership of over 200,000 enterprises from around 265 national and regional sectoral industry bodies.

CII charts change by working closely with Government on policy issues, interfacing with thought leaders, and enhancing efficiency, competitiveness and business opportunities for industry through a range of specialized services and strategic global linkages. It also provides a platform for consensus-building and networking on key issues.

Extending its agenda beyond business, CII assists industry to identify and execute corporate citizenship programmes. Partnerships with civil society organizations carry forward corporate initiatives for integrated and inclusive development across diverse domains including affirmative action, healthcare, education, livelihood, diversity management, skill development, empowerment of women, and water, to name a few.

As a developmental institution working towards India’s overall growth with a special focus on India@75 in 2022, the CII theme for 2017-18, India@75: Inclusive. Ahead. Responsible emphasizes Industry’s role in partnering Government to accelerate India’s growth and development. The focus will be on key enablers such as job creation; skill development and training; affirmative action; women parity; new models of development; sustainability; corporate social responsibility, governance and transparency.

With 67 offices, including 9 Centres of Excellence, in India, and 11 overseas offices in Australia, Bahrain, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Singapore, South Africa, UK, and USA, as well as institutional partnerships with 355 counterpart organizations in 126 countries, CII serves as a reference point for Indian industry and the international business community.
ABOUT CII INDIAN WOMEN NETWORK (IWN)

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) felt that career women require a structured network to discuss the experiences and challenges to become better professionals at work; as well as the importance of creating gender parity in business & society.

CII in 2013 launched the Indian Women Network (IWN) – an exclusive platform for career women.

IWN stakeholders include:

- Women in Industry
- Women Entrepreneurs & Women in Family Businesses
- Women Independent Professionals
- Women Students & Faculty in Higher Education Institutions

IWN is currently present in 14 States, 1 Union Territory & 5 Zones nationally.

Today’s business demands require not only core competence but also continuous and comprehensive learning, adapting to worldwide best practices, cater to domestic markets with global standards. IWN works towards enabling women become better professionals and achievers in their respective fields through various need based services for its members.

IWN’s activities and initiatives are executed through its 3 task forces namely Learning & Development, Policy & Advocacy and Health & Wellbeing.

On the whole, IWN is a platform that provides learning, knowledge enhancement and networking opportunities. It is an environment of likeminded career women to share experiences, provide solutions & overcome challenges.
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EYIN1804-004

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