Efficient Gender Diversity Leads to Enhanced Productivity

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- BY **KUNAL SEN**

An estimated 12 million people are joining the workforce every year, and, organizations have begun to understand the role of diversity in enhancing their effectiveness internally. Research has also proven that the more diverse the workforce, the more productive the employees.

The TeamLease Gender Diversity report 2016¹ has stated that India could add between sixteen to sixty percent to its national income, if women represented a proportionate measure of the labour force. In order to achieve this, India needs to recast its outdated societal outlook in a substantial manner. The report has also come forth with an explanation as to why efforts at diversity are not fulfilling their promises, and presents a new paradigm for understanding and leveraging gender diversity.

What ails the workplace?

At the root of the problem that ails the workplace is the 'workplace stereotype'. Women are perceived to be suited for roles that do not require physical or intellectual 'heavy-lifting'; or those that are traditionally considered 'masculine' in terms of their demands for 'contact-sport' like vigour, which are either process-oriented roles, or staff functions. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be employed in line functions, and are further discriminated, for roles that are considered feminine and are chided for being 'effeminate', if they chose to work in such roles.

The global debate about

discrimination on the grounds of wages also plays out intensely in India. It is a double whammy when one considers wage-based discrimination along with the role-based discrimination as mentioned above. On the one hand, the labour market considers women less privileged for certain roles and coveted positions, and on the other, it deems it fit not to pay them on par with men.

An even bigger hurdle in the form of stereotyped leadership capabilities stand in the way of truly deserving women from progressing towards leadership. This last barrier is the biggest and the knottiest among all. The ambiguous definition and characteristic of leadership, and the mythical discourse linked with it, is dominated by masculine traits. The

represent the most efficient career funnels for women. BFSI in particular has great parity right up to the leadership level; and has for long presented roles, that adapted to women with utmost comfort. Over time, the progression for women has also turned out to be efficient. In fact, I.T. firms are able to offer great working conditions and have a far lower degree of bias, since they are relatively new age. The scenario in the U.S. however is contrasting. Technology firms in the Silicon Valley have gained a reputation for being biased against women. The Valley has nurtured a male-cult and initiatives such as Lean In are aimed at challenging this status quo.

Airline and Hospitality businesses have historically positioned themselves as women-friendly workplaces.

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stereotype helps in branding women as either trying too hard, being too pleasant, or at worst aggressive, when they are merely carrying out their roles in a similar, and at the same time, in an effective manner like their male counterparts.

The barriers to women do not just persist in continuing and progressing within an organization. They prevail in various stages women might cross in their workplace journey. Marriage, maternity and child rearing are typical milestones when women might want out, though temporarily, and many employers are yet to formulate effective policy frameworks and organizational practices that could accommodate such realities.

While several progressive organizations have put in place policies and practices that address some of these aspects, these measures are still in their early days and thus do not represent a complete picture. The increasing demands of the modern workplace, with its cross-cultural and multi-locational work dimensions counteract such measures as well.
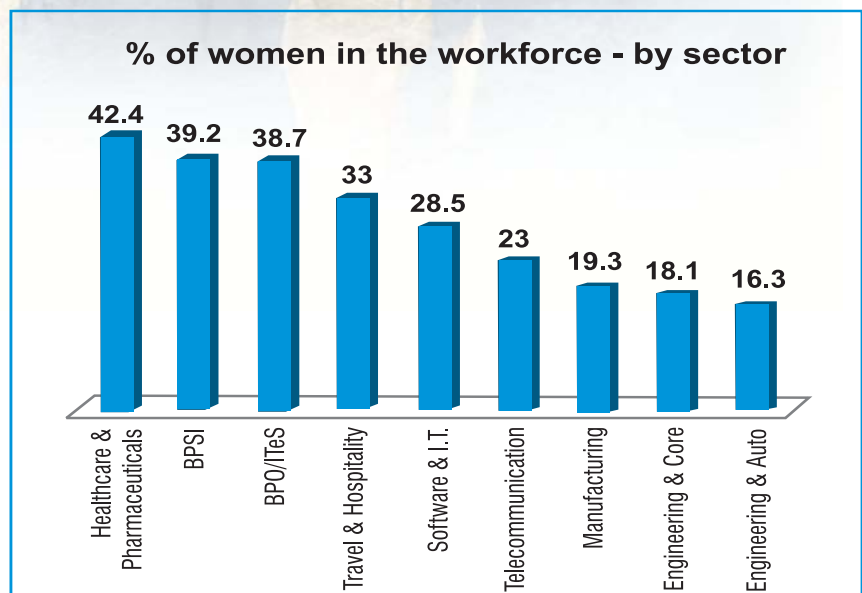
The BFSI and IT sectors seem to

Although the two sectors are awash with stereotypical roles, these are roles that women associate a high degree of dignity and pride.

The financial regulator's (SEBI) mandate that publicly listed companies induct at least one woman on their

boards has seen some action that is favourable to bringing in equality to the boardroom. Such a step, implemented across businesses, could mean better decision making through the consideration of varied views by the boards and, therefore, better corporate governance.

One of the findings of the report1 was that there is a significant

% of women in the workforce - by sector

Sector	%
Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals	42.4
BPSI	39.2
BPO/ITeS	38.7
Travel & Hospitality	33
Software & I.T.	28.5
Telecommunication	23
Manufacturing	19.3
Engineering & Core	18.1
Engineering & Auto	16.3

Source : India Skills Report, CII People Strong wheebox, 2014

divergence between employee expectations and organizational policies in terms of gender equality. Employees perceive Organizations to be merely fulfilling the statutory norms rather than addressing the pecuniary issue of gender diversity.

Roadmap to Gender Diversity at the workplace

A comprehensive, three-layered, approach wherein foundational layer of parity and advocacy, a mid-tier of effective performance review and leadership pipeline capabilities, followed by adequately funded policy implementation is therefore recommended.

Once the basics are in place, organizations must address the managerial and leadership gaps and aim to groom women leaders from within the organization. This layer must then enable employers to finally articulate policies, capitalize the initiative and catalyse the entire transformation via technology.

Ten point recommendation

1. Labour Reform (formal, flexi staff): Large segments of women are yet out of the purview of the labour laws need to be brought within the legal purview. Simplification of the labour needs to pave way for greater workforce participation for women in formal workforce and ensure their safety.

2. Tourism: Nearly ninety percent of the women employed in the Tourism industry are in low-skill and low paying jobs. The industry needs to bring parity with initiatives such as working alongside the 'Priyadarshini'2 initiative that aims to undertake vocational

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measures and involve women as stakeholders in the Tourism industry.

3. Public Transport: Apart from enhancing safety and usability for women, the public transport sector must incentivise the adoption of public transport as a means of livelihood by women. The sector could enable more women in training and securing commercial driving licenses. The Government's Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) initiative is a step in the right direction.

4. Micro-Finance: Micro-finance has been seen to empower women at the economic as well as the social level by reducing poverty and increasing their savings. They also work towards enhancing their abilities and their roles in family and institutions. Easier access to funds, especially for rural women, has the potential to alleviate poverty substantially.

5. Distance /Online Education: MOOC platforms are gaining enormous traction at the global level, and platforms such as these could be helpful in enabling women in India who are geographically constrained, with modular education aimed at specific occupational opportunities.
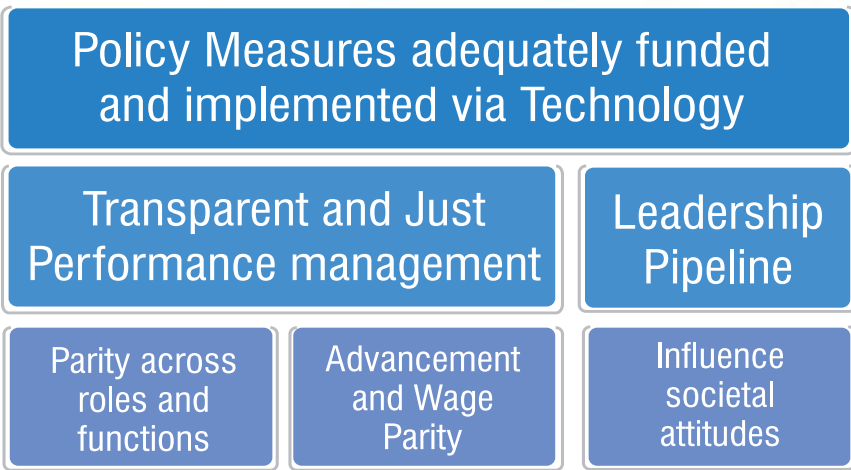
6. Dedicated Matching infrastructure [job fairs, employment exchanges, matching apps]: Mapping jobs to women at an individualized level where their specific skills and needs are best leveraged could be a game changer for Gender Diversity. Such platforms would not just drive scale, they would also solve for a big talent supply-demand problem.

7. Urbanisation: In India, it is difficult for women to migrate to cities to seek job opportunities as compared to men. Creating employment opportunities by taking jobs to such women reside could affect diversity positively. This would also decongest cities and help better rural employment.

8. Work related security: With India emerging as the top destination for global delivery means enormous opportunities for women in the workforce. Women's security, however, has not kept pace with this opportunity. Governments and employers need to modernize and implement effective security measures for women at workplaces as well as in transit.

9. Up-skilling: The subsistence level employment bias against women needs concerted measures to up-skill them in order to empower women in higher paying workplace roles that have been traditionally a men's bastion. The NSDC as well as private initiatives need to design courses that train women for better paying jobs.

10. Hygiene amenities: Workplace and outbound amenities for hygiene are a significant hindrance in getting more women into the workforce. Employers especially in the micro and small-business sectors need to be sensitized to this deficiency and enabled to create women-friendly amenities. ⒽⒸ

1. http://www.teamlease.com/resources/reports/gender-diversity-report/
2. A scheme introduced by the Government of Maharastra

Policy Measures adequately funded and implemented via Technology

Transparent and Just Performance management

Leadership Pipeline

Parity across roles and functions	Advancement and Wage Parity	Influence societal attitudes