

Diversity in the technology industry

Lipika Mohanty, Director People & Development shares nuggets on enabling women to scale up to leadership position



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Gender ratio, especially the minuscule representation of women in leadership roles, has been an ongoing discussion amongst the industry DEI professionals, HR leaders, and companies in general!

Enough has been said of its socio-cultural genesis, and organizations around the world are working towards elevating these numbers. However, there is another holdup to this leadership march of women that we have now started recognizing and trying to alleviate - the fact that increasingly, women are quitting mid-way through their flying careers. This phenomenon is not limited to the corporate world, but is also visible wide and deep at the geopolitical level. As the applause surrounding women's achievements grows, the question mark surrounding the robust status of women in leadership roles also frequently hits the headlines.

To resolve this quagmire, there is an urgent need to identify the root cause and work from the ground up across all our policies and programmes, holistically, not only as industry trendsetters and change-makers, but also in the way we are socio-economically structured and the mindset we carry.

► The Root

Without delving too much into the stereotypical gender biases, though these are the foundational stumbling blocks, we need to acknowledge that the opportunities denied or lost at the very beginning of life and career tend to have an enormous impact. These are usually seen being overcome by the herculean efforts of women themselves on a personal level. At the corporate level, it is a known fact that the employment life cycles of a man and a woman differ substantially. While life's milestones like marriage and parenthood or crises like separation and divorce may bring in their wake similar emotional turmoil, the subsequent impact that cascades across other facets of their lives is poles apart.

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► The Pertinent Questions

Women are as ambitious as men, if not more. Data shows that organizations with a gender-diverse workforce positively contribute to their bottom line, as women leaders bring diversity and offer unique perspectives to meet challenges, solve problems, and help design new inclusive products and services. Reports have proven that they are twice as likely to spend time building DEI at workplaces as men. The famous balancing act of juggling responsibilities both at home and at the workplace has been aced by women. so, then

- How come it's only a few women who rise up to leadership roles, and even then, they face burnout much earlier!
 - Why do more women tend to drop out of the talent pipeline or pipe down their aspirations at mid-to-senior levels? Only 1 out of every 10 makes it to the leadership team!
 - Why do only a paltry 7% of women hold chief executive-level roles, while only 13% hold managing director-level positions?
 - Why do the social norms around race, sexual orientation, or disability thwart women's growth more than men's?
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The mythical glass ceiling is nothing but a range of barriers to women's advancement in the workplace. These barriers are placed very subtly and in a variety of indistinct forms before them!

➤ **The Role of Corporates**

While tech companies are hiring and developing female leaders, it is time to step up and be more innovative in encouraging more women to pursue careers in leadership roles. Resolving gender imbalances and prioritizing gender diversity __as a standard practice must be at the core of every corporate policy. Adopting gender-blind hiring, offering mentorship and networking to women, and fostering inclusive cultures would help increase the number of women employees and leaders in the industry.

Hiring: The Hiring process should be solely based on the best fitment of the role and the skills required. Many would argue that gender-blind hiring should be the key criterion, However, when the focus is on equity, a candidate's potential as a woman must also be considered. Equity in opportunities is a must if we need to swing the bat in the right direction.

Role Models and Mentoring: More female leaders in the tech industry can serve as inspirational role models for other women stepping into the workforce. Through professional networking, professional bodies within the industry, and also in the organizations, these women leaders can serve as mentors, inspiring the next generation of women in tech and providing support and guidance to those just starting out.

Providing equitable access to upskilling opportunities and resources: To support women in advancing to high-level positions, tech companies should create a supportive environment and offer mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching programmes.

Adopting customized learning paths that follow the 60-20-20 rule, entailing self-paced learning (60%), classroom sessions and workshops (20%), and mentoring processes (20%), can be effective. A rotational leadership programme to encourage women to participate in upskilling and learning & development programmes to increase the number of women in leadership roles has also proven to be very successful.

In addition, there is also a role that women need to play in this; they should communicate their career goals and advocate for themselves by pursuing challenging opportunities and leadership roles. Being proactive in raising their hands for advancement opportunities and making people aware of what one is made of is also crucial for women's career growth.

Building an inclusive ecosystem: HR leaders can conduct pulse surveys and one-on-one meetings to collect data and identify organizational biases. These data points can be used to develop policies and promote positive change. To promote a more balanced and inclusive workforce, technology organizations should aim for a standardized gender ratio that includes at least 40% of women employees, of which 20% should be in leadership roles.

Providing more flexibility for women employees: Corporates should be able to plug the exits or issues of stunted growth as women employees cover life's significant milestones that change their status. A supportive environment that caters to women's unique needs post-marriage, when adapting to motherhood, or when setting out to take on the world as a lone warrior enhances their confidence and encourages tremendous growth in their career trajectory!

Gender bias in deep technology positions can make it difficult for women to earn recognition and advance their careers. Further, women have to work doubly hard to earn the same recognition as their male counterparts. Women leaders are twice as likely as men to be mistaken for someone more junior, and are more likely to see a co-worker get credit for their ideas, according to a report.

A flexible work environment that helps plan work better to balance demands at home and work is the key. Introducing staggered work hours, extra work-from-home facilities, creche at the workplace, etc are some of the ways companies can help build a more equitable workplace.

➤ **An inclusive future**

It will take another 132 years to reach gender equality worldwide, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022. However, I believe that this timeline can be fast-tracked if we take positive and conclusive steps right now.



Gender equity can be a starting point for building a society that embodies Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at its core. Corporates can be an important peg in this quest. They play a consequential role in discouraging gender barriers, and tackling head-on the impact of such barriers, be it the gender pay gap, gender diversity in hiring, or creating a more equitable and inclusive workforce.

The efforts by corporates are bound to have a cascading impact seeping through age-old societal norms that have been instrumental in pulling down women globally. Government support also serves as a tenacious enabler in this effort. The coming together of corporates and government to address the issue of under-representation of women in the boardroom has definitely heralded a silver lining. Half the battle is won if the intent and willpower remain unwavering.

