

How to Create Gender Diversity in the Workplace

Author: Tatenda Sayenda . March 2020

Though some women have made strides in the workplace, breaking the glass ceiling, obtaining higher positions in the workplace, the problem persists, we still have females struggling to make it to the top due to male dominance. In celebrating Women's Day, the newly appointed CEO for Lafarge, Ms Precious Murena-Nyika posted the following on Linked In "Why do people still say 'she is a female Pilot or I met a female Engineer'?in this generation surely we have made more progress than that." Women made remarkable progress accessing positions of power and authority in the 1970s and 1980s, but that progress slowed considerably in the 1990s and has stalled completely in this century. The theme for this year's International Women's Day, "I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights", focuses on strengthening the steps towards achieving gender equality.

The UN stresses, "Today, not a single country can claim to have achieved gender equality. Multiple obstacles remain unchanged in law and culture. Women and girls continue to be undervalued; they work more and earn less and have fewer choices, and experience multiple forms of violence at home and in public spaces." Despite international and domestic laws, policies, pledges and commitments, Sustainable Development Goal 5, calling for gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls, this continues to be far away from the goal. Ask people why women remain so dramatically underrepresented, and you will hear from the vast majority lament, an unfortunate but inevitable "truth"—that goes something like this: High-level jobs require extremely long hours, women's devotion to family makes it impossible for them to put in those hours, and their careers suffer as a result. We call this explanation of the work/family narrative. In a 2012 survey of more than 6,500 Harvard Business School alumni from many different industries, 73% of men and 85% of women invoked it to explain women's stalled advancement.

Research has shown that what holds women back at work is not some unique challenge of balancing the demands of work and family but rather a general problem of overwork that prevails in contemporary corporate culture. In the US alone there are more CEOs named David (4.5%) than there are CEOs who are women (4.1%) — and David isn't even the most common first name among CEOs. Many organizations have started investing hundreds of millions of dollars on diversity initiatives each year. But the biggest challenge seems to be figuring out how to overcome unconscious biases that get in the way of these well-intentioned programs.

According to Gallup, Gender diversity is vital to any workplace. Not just because it's a commendable goal; it simply makes bottom-line business sense. In a recent Gallup study, it was discovered that hiring a demographically diverse workforce can improve a company's financial performance. The study of more than 800 business units from two companies representing two different industries -- retail and hospitality -- finds that gender-diverse business units have better financial outcomes than those dominated by one gender:

- Gender-diverse business units in the retail company have a 14% higher average comparable revenue than less-diverse business units (5.24% vs. 4.58%).
- Gender-diverse business units in the hospitality company show a 19% higher average quarterly net profit (\$16,296 vs. \$13,702) than less-diverse business units.

The Gallup study went on to suggest that gender-diverse teams perform better than single-gender teams for several reasons:

- Men and women have different viewpoints, ideas, and market insights, which enables better problem solving, ultimately leading to superior performance at the business unit level.
- A gender-diverse workforce provides easier access to resources, such as various sources of credit, multiple sources of information, and wider industry knowledge.
- A gender-diverse workforce allows the company to serve an increasingly diverse customer base.
- Gender diversity helps companies attract and retain talented women. This is especially relevant as more women join the labor force around the world. Companies cannot afford to ignore 50% of the potential workforce and expect to be competitive in the global economy.

A study by McKinsey projects that in a “full potential” scenario in which women participate in the economy identically to men, \$28 trillion dollars (26%) would be added to the annual global GDP when compared to the current business-as-usual scenario.

Question is how organizations can continue to strive and implement diversity in the workplace?:

A key finding of the Gallup study is that gender-diverse and engaged business units outperform those that are less diverse and less engaged. Managers not only need to increase gender diversity in business units but also create workplaces that engage employees. Open, trusting, and supportive relationships among coworkers and supervisors unleash the power of diversity by enabling employees to turn their differences in thought, behavior, skills, knowledge, and talent into innovative ideas and practices that can drive a company forward.

Secondly, the study finds that gender diversity varies substantially across business units within a company, which in turn affects the business performance of these units. To achieve the real benefits that diversity can bring, leaders and managers must look carefully at the gender balance in specific business units when designing and implementing a strategy to increase diversity. A blanket policy designed to increase overall gender diversity at a company, for example, is unlikely to achieve the desired results or to increase financial performance.

Making gender diversity a business priority can lead to financial benefits and help a company realize its full potential. To reap the bottom-line benefits that diversity can bring, business leaders must:

- Identify business units that are less gender diverse.
- Develop a hiring strategy that increases gender diversity in these units without reducing or ignoring merit. For example, studies indicate that when women feel they are hired to fill quotas, it negatively affects relationships between coworkers.

- Create an engaged culture that enables men and women to form trusting relationships and motivates them to perform at a high level.
- Set inclusiveness goals, and hold managers accountable for diversity.

Furthermore, an organization as highlighted by Lever (a Talent organization that aims at how organizations can grow their teams) can do the following to create a gender diverse organization:

1. Build an inclusive team- look within and evaluate your company culture. Is your company a good place to work, regardless of gender? Do you treat people across the gender spectrum equally? Consult your employees to learn how you can build a more inclusive workplace, and put in the work to continually improve your company culture. An inclusive culture will help build your employer brand, so you can attract and retain a diverse workforce.
2. Write better job descriptions- Improve gender diversity in the workplace by removing gender biases from your job descriptions—before you even speak with a candidate. Men will apply if they are 60 percent qualified, whereas women will only apply when they are 100 percent qualified. Rather than writing job descriptions with a list of qualifications, craft performance-based job descriptions that focus on what the person hired would be responsible for accomplishing. Also, be careful to avoid gendered language.
3. Implement fair compensation practices- On average, women earn 77.9 percent of what men earn. Once experience, industry, and job level are factored in, a woman still only earns 97.8 percent of what an equally qualified man with the same job earns. If you want to attract, hire, and retain top-tier talent, you need to compensate them fairly—regardless of gender. A formal employee compensation strategy can help. Utilize data to set compensation bands for each position, and consider each employee’s experience, skills, education, and performance to determine where they should fall within that band.

Women too can add value to organizations, even when put in top positions, it is time that gender diversity in workplaces is not only talk but put into action. Some women have made it to the top, and many more women can make it to the top if given a chance, bringing with them so much value and transformation in organizations just like their male counterparts.

Tatenda Sayenda-Havire is a consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm.

Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950/2900276/2900966 or email: tatenda@ipccconsultants.com or visit our website at www.ipccconsultants.com

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