

Unleashing the female potential: Genpact's approach towards promoting gender diversity

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What is diversity?

Diversity refers to any dimension on the basis of which individuals can be differentiated. It may refer to observable attributes such as age, gender, race, skin colour, disability status, parental status, geography, etc. It also encompasses invisible or less observable forms of differences such as working styles, thinking styles, personal beliefs, personality traits, etc. (Ferdman and Sagiv, 2012).

In an organization, diversity can be perceived as an umbrella under which there are employees belonging to various groups or classifications. It is an “all-inclusive” term that refers to policies and practices that seek to include individuals who are different from traditional members (Herring, 2009). Diversity makes an organization a heterogeneous place where employees may perceive, think, feel and behave differently.

What is gender diversity?

Gender diversity in an organization is attained when there is a fair representation of all genders in the workforce. A gap in this representation or a gender gap, especially at senior positions of management, has been observed globally. A research conducted in 91 countries by the Peterson Institute for International Economics in 2016 revealed that nearly

one-third of the 21,980 firms surveyed did not have any female representation in senior executive positions (i.e. Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, etc.) or on their Board of Directors (Noland *et al.*, 2016).

A 2008 report by the Gender Advisory Council of PwC compares the continuous exit of competent and skilled women from the talent pipeline of an organization to leakage of water from a faulty and perforated pipeline (PwC Gender Advisory Council, 2008). It states that at an entry level, the number of women in an organization is almost equal to that of men. However, this number of female employees reduces at a fast rate due to voluntary terminations, especially at the mid-level career stage. This implies that eventually there will be fewer women at the top, which will result in loss of resources and productivity for the organization.

Multiple and conflicting priorities in lives of women are often cited as one of the main reasons for their professional careers reaching a plateau, getting slowed down or disrupted. At mid and senior levels in organizations, ensuring “anytime, anywhere” availability at work is becoming the norm for accelerated career progression. Since most women are also primary caregivers at home, they often find it difficult to

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ensure this kind of availability at workplace. Thus, skilled and talented women are often seen taking mid-career breaks despite the difficulty associated with making comebacks post such breaks.

How do female employees add value to an organization?

A global study conducted by Ernst & Young in 2015 surveyed 400 leaders in organizations across Asia, EMEA (Europe, Middle-East, India and Africa) and North America (Ernst and Young, 2015). This study highlighted that organizations with women in senior executive leadership roles and on Board of Directors generated better business results and achieved better financial performance.

Gender diversity has become a strategic imperative for organizations due to advantages such as:

- creation of an enriched workplace and better problem resolution through perspectives of employees from all genders;
- improved reputation of organization, which aids in further attracting more number of talented workforce;
- efficient utilization of the relatively untapped and larger pool of talented employees; and
- strengthening of teams through better collaboration, communication and mentoring by utilization of higher emotional intelligence and nurturing skills of women;

Attaining gender diversity has, therefore, become an objective for organizations across the world. Consequently, many organizations are increasing their commitment to gender diversity through planned interventions and supportive policies.

How can organizations help?

To encourage the rise of women to higher levels of management, organizations need to focus on creating equal opportunities for all. Initiatives should be taken to create a work environment that is conducive for women to continue working so that juggling career and family becomes easier for them. Organizations can contribute towards this in ways as mentioned next.

Change in mindset

A change in the mindset is a pre-requisite. For example, many organizations still carry a mindset that women usually tend to choose family over career. However, studies on gender diversity indicate that an increasing number of women want both careers and family and do not necessarily want to select one over the other. Such shifts in thinking call for a change in perception and mindset of organizations.

Culture and diversity training

A culture should be inculcated in organizations to accept differences. Employees need to be sensitized and made aware of the importance and requirement of such acceptance of diversity. Trainings can help to create and accept diversity, especially looking at the varied workforce in organizations today.

Supportive human resource practices

Organizations can promote gender diversity by formulating and implementing conducive human resource practices. For instance, hiring should be transparent and should focus purely on talent and merit to remove any kind of gender bias. Defining a clear career progression path for their female employees, succession planning

and investing in their development can help them visualize long-term careers for themselves. Proper mentoring, coaching and providing role models in leadership positions can also be helpful in this direction.

Work-life policies

These consist of policies that aim at providing flexibility in work arrangements to help employees achieve work-life balance. Such policies are important to attract and retain women employees.

Research suggests that employees who have access to flexible workplace arrangements are more satisfied with their lives and jobs, face less conflict between work and family and have fewer mental and physical health problems. Work-life policies may include provisions such as job security, job protection during pregnancy, child care benefits such as crèche, paid and unpaid maternity leaves and sabbaticals, options for flexible employment such as part-time arrangement, telecommuting, etc.

Diversity initiatives

Organizations are taking initiatives and steps towards encouraging gender diversity. Genpact, a global leader in business process management and services, is a notable example of an organization that has implemented innovative practices to promote its female employees.

Genpact's initiative towards gender diversity

In an effort to retain their female employees, Genpact has implemented special recruitment initiatives such as "Returning Moms" and "Career 2.0". These steps have been taken to increase the number of women in significant positions and to prevent the drain of valuable female talent from the organization.

Returning Moms

Organizational support is vital for women who join back post maternity leave, as domestic and professional responsibilities get juxtaposed. To smoothen this transition, Genpact has implemented a programme called "Returning Moms". Under the programme, in the first year of their return, women employees are offered flexi-timings and a choice to work from a more convenient office location. Benefits such as subsidized day care and crèche are also provided under this programme.

Career 2.0

Career breaks are often seen as hindrances towards getting employment opportunities in future and can also impact the emoluments received on return. This is especially true for women who are seen with scepticism, due to their earlier decision to focus on their families rather than their careers. Genpact has tried to do away with this bias with its newly launched global programme, Career 2.0.

This recruitment programme has been started to tap the potential of women who gave up their careers due to various reasons or were on sabbaticals. The intent of this programme is to help talented, able and skilled women return to their careers by helping them pursue their jobs. Middle- or senior-level positions are offered to such women along with flexibility of even choosing their work days.

Discussion and conclusion

Genpact has placed almost 90 per cent of such women employees under the programme. The impact of the programme has been in favour of the organization, as no woman employee has exited the organization post maternity. Initiatives like these come at a time

when organizations are putting massive efforts towards attracting, engaging and retaining their employees. Such programmes are helpful towards garnering employees' commitment and loyalty towards the organization.

As the business ecosystem changes rapidly, organizations are steadily realizing that gender diversity adds to their business performance and bottom lines. There is still a lot that can be done to improve the representation and participation of women in organizations. There is a further need to genuinely embrace diversity in gender and support women to achieve their career goals. It now needs to become a business imperative.

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