

# Are inclusive workplaces a distant dream for the Indian corporates?

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There have been increasing conversations about inequality at the workplace. The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) shows that the gender gap is widening at an alarming rate. According to the Gender Development Index by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India's progress towards gender equality has been disappointing, despite a rapid economic growth rate.

The word, 'equality' emphasises the need for bringing gender positivity at the workplace by driving discussion, promoting awareness and amending policies that aid in creating an environment that safeguards all employees. A progressive work culture is one wherein all employees feel valued, heard and comfortable. Whilst, no one individual is responsible for creating an inclusive culture, the leadership sets the tone for the company. An inclusive work policy adapted at all levels of the hierarchy ensures the outstanding performance of the entire workforce. On the other hand, a biased workplace is likely to remain outdated with less diversity in ideation.

The World Values Survey and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

data has found a strong link between age-old societal attitudes and gender-equality outcomes. Besides affecting the role of women at work, cultural attitudes reinforce expectations about the roles that women are best equipped to play and can impact fundamental notions of their value in society. Therefore, recognising the personal definitions of well-being, work-life balance and family care, form an integral part of employee benefits.

Ensuring safety for women working long hours, flexibility in working arrangements for mothers, extended maternity and paternity leaves, enabling grocery deliveries, day-care services and work-from-home options are some of the ways that organisations can help employees to uphold their familial and societal commitments. Financial assistance and certain housing benefits that help achieve the quintessential Indian dream of owning one's own home, go a long way in creating a supportive and an all-inclusive workplace culture.

Other drivers of representation are hiring and promotions, which if done impartially at the entry-level itself, it can significantly reduce the disparity, leading to an equitable representation across all levels within an organisation. As per recent studies conducted by the McKinsey Global Institute India has one of the largest opportunities in the world to boost its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by simply advancing women's equality and increasing women's participation in the labour force.

Creating a 'people-first' company culture takes unconditional and ongoing commitment from every level in the organisation as well: from executives to managers, human resources, administration, customer service representatives, entry-level employees, etc. It is indeed a team effort. There is a huge responsibility on the shoulders of policymakers to act on gender equality and implement changes. India is an incredibly diverse country, and businesses today should celebrate and thrive on the region's high level of cultural breadth to provide workplaces that are positive, supportive and conducive for all.