

# Social Stereotypes At Play

*Arnabi Marjit, Vice-President and Head D&I, Lupin, highlights the challenges of creating equitable workplace, given the inherent biases*



Biases are a part of human existence and can prevent organisations from leveraging the value of diversity in the workforce. Biases can take several forms and often result in the exclusion of those employees from opportunities for which they may be suitable.

This is especially rampant in a country like India where years of patriarchy have ingrained in us certain biases. These biases then percolate from our personal/social lives into our workspace, as each of us bring our whole self to work every day. It then becomes a whole new struggle to remove these biases from daily transactions at work.

While investing in creating an equitable workplace, the true challenge has been gaining 'commitment right' from the top to the mid-segment of the organisation and having gained it, sustaining the change across processes and over a period of time.

For Lupin, one important focus area has been inclusiveness for women. Although at first glance this may come across as the primary dimension of diversity, it has its own set of challenges, strongly driven by gender bias and stereotypes that have become calcified over centuries.

## **1. Changing Leadership Mindset**

Leadership starts right at the top and travels down till the middle. Societal pressures make it imperative that we as leaders espouse equality of gender in all walks of life. However, actioning these across our workspaces becomes a challenge. One of the critical stakeholders of implementation of the D&I strategy are the mid-level managers and team leaders who manage large teams and have strict delivery targets. There is an immense opportunity to leverage middle managers; and in doing so, we must focus efforts on sensitization of these groups.

### **a. Legacy Mindsets**

A large proportion of the workforce at the leadership and mid-management levels carry the attitudes followed for decades – loaded with stereotypes and gender biases rooted in a patriarchal society. This poses a challenge in implementing new practices that drive inclusion. The resistance to change comes at every step of the way, from hiring to retention.

### **b. Industry and Domain**

Over the years our experience and observation has reinforced our thinking – women don't work in manufacturing and women cannot travel thereby cannot be in a sales job. Some of the key challenges that business leaders and line managers share pertain to flexibility and stability of women in jobs, in these areas.

Our effort in enlisting support has always focused on creating awareness and building sensitivity around the subject of D&I. Right from interviewing workshops to first-time managers to induction level programmes, we indoctrinate the employees at every stage about the sensitivity that they need to exhibit while dealing with the other gender. The aim of the programme of gender sensitization is to instil a sense of ownership and accountability towards building an inclusive mindset. This, in turn, helps managers role model inclusive behaviour in various decision points of hiring, advancement, and retention.

## **2. Making D&I Measurable**

The essence of successful implementation of D&I practices is in formulating a clear strategy, setting clear expectations and holding people accountable.

### **a. Articulating a Clear D&I Strategy**

'Well planned is half done' — this adage is the lynch pin of all successful change management initiatives. Laying down a D&I strategy clearly and then cascading it down right from the top ensures organization-wide 'buy-in'.

### **b. Identifying Metrics**

The balance between the fuzzy idea of D&I and converting it to measurable indices is a tough one to strike. Nevertheless, it is important to identify key metrics that business leaders are accountable for. Linking it to their performance plans makes it sustainable.

### **c. Diversity Champions**

The intent of D&I efforts and continuous action is strengthened when we build ambassadors for a given cause. These leaders can act as catalysts and can take it to a whole new trajectory. They need to be provided adequate support and resources to be seen as visible 'agents of change' that we want to see in the organisation.

#### **d. Celebrations**

No matter how frivolous it might seem; celebrations are key for providing the visibility to the cause. Events like International Women's Day draw the attention of even employees who would otherwise be oblivious to all other forms of communication. Involving the larger population is key to inclusion. Hence, we need to make these celebrations as inclusive as possible.

As any change management exercise would have it, we need to tread the path from initial shock to basic awareness. We must appreciate and acknowledge that this is a continuous process that will need to be fed with intent and backed with affirmative action, until it becomes a part of our DNA.

<http://bwpeople.businessworld.in/article/Social-Stereotypes-At-Play/03-08-2022-440371/>