

Corporate India Tweaks Variables for Solving Gender Diversity Equation

From exclusive roles to preferential hiring, cos helping women break glass ceiling

Women Ahead

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New Delhi | Kolkata: India Inc is working hard to improve the gender diversity equation, especially at the top deck.

Conglomerates such as Mahindra & Mahindra and Vedanta and e-commerce companies like Droom, among others, are seeking women to fill leadership roles. While gender parity is distant, some progress can be reported in this regard on International Women's Day. Such is the push being given

to diversity that executive search firms, including the likes of Korn Ferry, EMA Partners, INSIST Consulting and Egon Zehnder, said clients were increasingly rolling out roles exclusively for women. Others are insisting on having higher female representation when it comes to considering candidates for any mandate.

"What was initially being driven by multinationals has taken off in a big way in Indian companies as well," said A Ramachandran, senior partner, EMA Partners. "Every search these days is a gender diverse search and there are even companies specifically looking to hire only women for certain roles. There has been a 50-60% increase in roles where companies are looking to hire only women."

Clients, both Indian business houses and multinationals, are asking for at least one female candidate's resume for

all mandates, said Navnit Singh, chairman, Korn Ferry India.

INSIST Consulting is currently running a search for a consumer company with diversified products, including female health, to find a woman for the CEO role.

"Earlier, it was about 'Given two equals, we prefer a woman'. Now 'We want a woman only' has started," said R Suresh, founder of INSIST Consulting.

Human resource executives agree this is happening. "Our mandate to search firms is clear. We won't accept recommendations unless there is a healthy representation of women in the slate of candidates. We have also started earmarking roles specifically for women," said Madhu Srivastava, group chief HR officer at metals and mining conglomerate Vedanta.

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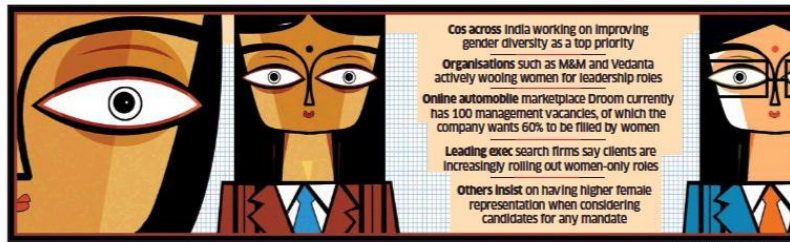


Illustration: ANIRBAN BORA

'Shift in the Needle'

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Vedanta is looking to increase the representation of women in its workforce to 30% by end 2020 from about 11% at present. Roles earmarked for women at Vedanta are primarily in areas such as in HR, finance and other enabling functions, besides those based in metros. "We tend to choose roles where talent is available, and location is not a problem," said Srivastava.

These initiatives are percolating to the mid-level as well, said Srivastava, citing the example of a woman who was recently hired as head of security at Jharsuguda in Odisha where the company has a facility.

Online automobile marketplace Droom currently has 100 management vacancies, of which the company wants 60% to be filled by women, chief executive Sandeep Aggarwal said.

Mahindra & Mahindra has told consultants that at least half the resumes should be those of women. "Everything being equal, we give gender a preference," said Prince Augustin, executive vice president, group human capital and leadership development.

The automaker is also making efforts to start at the entry level so that a leadership pipeline of women is created. "There has been a shift in the needle as a result of these policies to improve gender diversity in our group. But it would take another couple of years for notable changes in gender diversity," Augustin said.

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GENDER DIVERSITY PUSH

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ught by multinationals with a global mandate to focus gender diversity. The Indian units of such companies are typically responding to expectations from the parent.

"Some of our global clients say that 50% of the slate needs to be diverse. There are others who say they will only look at a man if they cannot close in on a woman for the role," said Kathuria.

Sanrump Misra, director, group HR at the Aditya Birla Group, said the conglomerate was not in favour of setting targets or earmarking roles for women since that runs the risk of pandering to gender stereotypes. However, the group that has 14% women in its management cadre and 3% in its senior leadership, is constantly looking at strategies to remove roadblocks for women and create a more facilitatory framework for them.

For executive searches as well, the company insists on asking whether female candidate are well represented, said Misra.

