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# EMPOWERING TIMES



## *THINKING ALOUD*

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Founder & Director - Srishti, Pune



Dear Reader,

Corporates thrive in a global village where diversity plays an important role. A sub-set of diversity is Gender Diversity - a concept which is gaining momentum the world over. Research studies have shown that Gender Diversity matters and is more than just a moral obligation.

While some countries have taken legislative actions, imposed quotas, and other measures like moral persuasion and voluntary schemes to enhance women representation in corporates, reports have pointed out that a gender diverse company has a lot to offer. Integrating Gender Diversity within a corporate setting, translates into increased productivity, greater innovation, better decision-making, and higher employee retention and satisfaction. Case in point is Genpact which has created a set of long-term and short-term hiring and promotion goals which enables the company to support women in the organization. Added to this is the sensitisation training and workshops coupled with its flagship initiative, Career 2.0, which focuses on recruiting women on a career break.

While companies with a global presence have taken steps towards formulating policies on enhancing Gender Diversity in their respective firms, where do Indian companies stand on this? On 01, April 2015, SEBI had mandated that companies appointment at least one woman to their respective company board. Tata Motors is another name that can be associated with constantly striving to address the needs of diverse employees and has even formed a Diversity Council at the apex and unit levels for this.

ET this month looks at the growing importance of **Gender Diversity**. Although the argument for Gender Diversity is strong from an economic standpoint, reports highlight that women in India are especially under-represented. Nevertheless, India is certainly on the Gender Diversity bandwagon but has a long way to go.

In the **Thinking Aloud** segment, **Jay** puts forth his thoughts on the various challenges while creating an



environment of inclusivity and the acceptance of diversity at the workplace and the ways to overcome these.

On the **Podium**, we have **Vaijayanthi Bhat**, Founder of start-up company, BreadCrumbsCo, who throws some light on the fact that India Inc. is slowly and steadily moving towards the concept of Gender Diversity.

Voracious reader, **Sunita Shetty** reviews **Iris Bohnet's** book, **What Works - Gender Equality by Design** in the **We Recommend** section. The read summarises the author's insights drawn from companies, universities and governments from across the globe and highlights evidence-based interventions that could be adopted to address gender bias.

In the **Wonder Women** section, we feature **Debjani Banerjee** - Founder & Director of Srishti, Pune, which houses lifestyle brands and handicraft products from across India. She shares her inspiring entrepreneurial journey with us.

In **Figures of Speech**, **Vikram's** toon is not convinced of Gender Diversity just as yet!

As always, we value your opinion, so do let us know how you liked this issue. To visit our previous issues you can visit the Resources section on the website or simply **[Click Here](#)**. You can also follow us on **[Facebook](#)**, **[Twitter](#)**, **[LinkedIn](#)** & **[Google+](#)** - where you can join our community to continue the dialogue with us!

## THINKING ALOUD

# Diversity - The Neglected Element

- Jay

*We inhabit a universe that is characterized by diversity. (Desmond Tutu)*

In a world where barriers are easy to construct, there are some wise people who are attempting to build an inclusive community. One of the positive aspects of civilizational progress is the realisation that we all come into the world with our unique characteristics & talents, which if harnessed well, can only benefit the larger community that we belong to. Narrow prejudices hinder the growth of the community and only leads to sub-optimization of the results that can be generated if we were receptive to the offering of each one of us.

In seeking to explore this subject, let us begin by defining it. To me, Diversity is best explained as uniqueness that 'can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.' While this definition is wide in its sweep, to my mind, it encompasses a wide range of situations that we now find in our world.

To realise the benefits of diversity, begin by studying nature. Nature's bio-diversity has created a world for us that is not just beautiful and appealing but also created unlimited bounty. This variety has enabled forests to sustain themselves in the face of changing weather patterns and ensured their longevity at times of physical peril for its growth.

Similarly, research indicates that inclusive workplaces offer immense benefits to the organization. To mention a few, a wider community at the workplace means a variety of viewpoints through which better generation of ideas whenever challenges arise. Not only does this offer potentially a broader service range to serve customers

but also the chance for more effective execution of strategies.

However, one cannot ignore the fact that there remains various challenges to the acceptance of diversity at the workplace. To begin with, is the debilitating impact of stereotyping others. The fearful minds of many quickly tend to externalize issues by blaming the one 'who is not like us'. This resistance could take mild forms like ignoring the presence of the 'other' to actual violent action against the stranger.

There are two good weapons to combat the challenge of lack of inclusion. First of all, raise the level of knowledge on the subject of diversity. The ignorant mind is the fearful one, and is fertile to old notions of right & wrong. Education & creating awareness on the various elements of diversity is a good first step to dispel wrong notions. The second step, is to create dialogue between the groups. Open and frank conversation is the best solution to build bridges of understanding as it humanizes situations by creating granular discussions between faces who otherwise would remain strangers to each other. I need hardly add that both the both steps need powerful facilitation through skilful professionals who know how to resolve conflicts.

The conventional step used today is to mandate change. While this seems a faster way to create progress, it has limited impact as the roots of ignorance are not addressed. However, there can be no denying the reality that statutory compulsion does become necessary at times. But for real change to occur, creating genuine and on-going dialogue between opposing voices is the real measure for sustainable development by bringing to life the true benefits of an inclusive society & thereby a more productive workplace. So, let us participate in creating a world that truly believes in the power of inclusion to harness the potential of a rainbow society.

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## PODIUM

### Interview with Vaijayanthi Bhat Founder of BreadCrumbsCo



*Vaijayanthi is the founder of BreadCrumbsCo. - a Gender Diversity and Inclusivity consulting service firm. It delivers impactful training for corporates in this regard.*

*Vaijayanthi has more than 12 years of corporate experience in the IT industry in varying capacities and has led and successfully delivered high pressure project implementations across industries such as banking, telecommunication and retail. She is passionate about teaming up with ambitious and talented women who want to progress in their careers.*

**ET: Gender Diversity is a buzzword that is gaining traction the world over. What is this concept all about and why is it important in the corporate world?**

**VB:** There are a number of reasons why diversity is a buzzword today.

A more diverse environment results in greater productivity and innovation, because it brings together varied perspectives and solutions to challenges. To sustain a more diverse environment, the overall organization culture needs to be more respectful and inclusive, which results in happier employees, which of course results in higher retention. Customers these days have access to more information and are more discerning with their choices. It is therefore great for a company's reputation and brand to be known as an inclusive organization. Besides, why not tap into the huge talent pool of resources that exists in the market amongst women? If you are someone who needs to look at hard numbers to be convinced, there is now research backed evidence that organizations with more diversity across different levels perform better financially.

**ET: How can companies integrate Gender Diversity within the DNA of an organization?**

**VB:** It is not easy, however it is not impossible either. We now have many examples of organizations who have been able to successfully make Gender Diversity an integral part of their persona. Firstly, improving the diversity ratio has to be made a business priority, and the commitment has to be real and not just one for the papers. For example, for Procter & Gamble India - it is not just about Gender Diversity amongst employees. P&G has expanded their supplier development and sourcing from women-owned business in their supply chains across the world, with India being a part of this initiative. They also continue to push the envelope on diversity through their brand advertising campaigns.

Secondly, organizations internally need to look at individual departments to see how they can address the diversity issue across the board. To continue with the P&G example, P&G India hires 50% women into entry level management roles and they get promoted into next assignments at the same progression as men. The company's Hyderabad plant was one of the first plants to have 30% women across the workforce.

Third, it cannot only be about numbers. The organization culture and environment has to transform to become inclusive and respectful of any, and all differences. Change in an organization culture should filter down from the top management. The approach to becoming inclusive must be holistic. Policies, processes, infrastructure should support the transformation. Organizations have to persist with their commitment to parity, as it takes time for measures taken to have an impact.

Many companies who have found success in Gender Diversity by making men part of the Gender Diversity solution. Men are being looked at as mentors to help women move up the corporate ladder. Leena Nair, the HR Director of Hindustan Unilever (HUL), who eventually moved on to a global role, cites mentoring by former Chairman Keki Dadiseth among the reasons that helped shape her career graph. K.V Kamath of ICICI is another good example of being a mentor to many lady executives who have moved on to occupying top positions in banks today.

**ET: What are the various indicators that help in measuring the level of diversity in a firm?**

**VB:** The most obvious one is to look at the quantitative numbers across different levels. In general, gender disparity numbers at entry level jobs look very different from the numbers when you hit middle level

management and get worse as you go up the ladder. Other quantitative data can be collected by studying differences in salary and attrition rate. Gathering feedback, opinions and experiences from employees is also a good way of understanding how things stand on the ground and will help an organization's understanding of how its culture is impacting its employees.

**ET: What is the potential outcome and broader economic impact of companies which are high on the Gender Diversity scale?**

**VB:** A McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) report on how advancing women's equality can add USD 12 Trillion to global growth. The numbers also reveal that women contribute barely 17% of India's GDP. Companies in India are waking up to these statistics that various reports and surveys have published and see the benefits of making Gender Diversity a business imperative. The broader impact of Gender Diversity at the workplace are a larger pool of talented people to recruit from, teams with different perspectives that foster greater creativity and innovation and more importantly, a better understanding of a diverse customer base.

**ET: What are the latest trends surrounding Gender Diversity in India Inc.?**

**VB:** India Inc. has jumped on the diversity bandwagon a little later than companies globally. So we will also need to wait a little longer to see the impact of changes in policies and procedures. The latest trend has been the government's recent intervention in changing the maternity policy. There has been much debate on whether this is a step forward or if this will discourage companies from hiring women. There is a case to be made, no matter which side you pick. Companies in India like IKEA and Deutsche Bank have changed the narrative here by offering both men and women six months leave at child birth. Another trend that is gathering momentum is retaining women post maternity. Apart from on-site child care and flexi-hours, organizations have various training programs for mothers returning to the workplace. Infosys has an app that keep women on maternity leave connected to the workplace. The Tata SCIP (Second Careers Inspiring Possibilities) is a platform that enables women who have taken a career break to return to the corporate world on their terms by providing them a plethora of career options to choose from, so that they can work when they want, where they want, on the project they want and at the pace they want.

India Inc. is also seeing an official role for diversity in the hierarchy - it is not uncommon now to see people with designations like Head - Diversity & Inclusivity. The conversation around diversity is also now taking on a broader

scope. Apart from gender, diversity now includes people with different abilities, sexual orientation, race, religion and much more. What is heartening to see is diversity is now getting to be front and center for India Inc. They are embracing it in full measure and more importantly making it a business imperative.

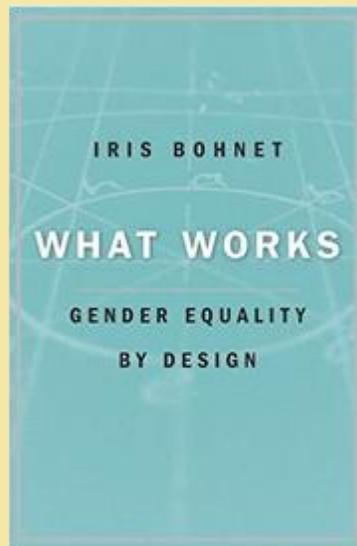
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**WE RECOMMEND**

## What Works - Gender Equality by Design

- Iris Bohnet

Reviewed by Sunita Shetty



A new book by Harvard University Professor Iris Bohnet, *What Works: Gender Equality By Design*, provides research data to show that de-biasing organizations instead of individuals can have a huge impact on gender equality. Bohnet, a behavioral economist at Harvard Kennedy School, builds on new insights drawn from companies and universities which will change the narrative in hiring, promotions, business and governments. The book's goal is to offer behavioral design to make it easier for our biased minds to get things right.

Organizations spend time and money on Diversity Training and Gender Sensitization but have had limited success. No one is immune from bias but it's amazing how many people think they are. According to one noted neuroscientist, 80% to 90% of the mind works unconsciously. Bohnet shows us that bias is also built into our practices and procedures, not just in our minds. The book starts with 'The Promise of Behavioral Design' - tackling bias by design. Until not so long ago, symphony orchestra directors and selection committees were quite comfortable

with all-male, all-white orchestras and were unaware of their gender bias playing a part in the selection of a musician. When the Boston Symphony Orchestra began asking musicians to audition behind a curtain, allowing judgements to be based on the quality of music alone, a female musician's chance of being chosen rose by 50%! A simple design change in the selection process made a huge difference to eliminating gender bias.

Similarly, applying behavioral design to Talent Management allows us to make better decisions when picking up the best candidates for a job. Most managers express a preference for unstructured interviews but data shows that structured interviews not only prove more equitable, but are better predictors of future performance. Yet as Bohnet points out, the case against such interviews is "overwhelming." She cites Google, known for its progressive practices, which came to this same conclusion after an exhaustive review of its approach to recruitment and hiring. She suggests various tools that can be used to guard against evaluation bias during interviews.

Bohnet's ideas are well researched, whether it's how to reduce the effect of bias in recruitment and evaluation processes, or designing school and work. This book provides a behavioral toolkit and numerous workable suggestions that can be implemented to address unintentional discrimination in the workplace.

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## WONDER WOMEN

### Debjani Banerjee

#### Founder & Director - Srishti, Pune



An entrepreneur by chance, Debjani Banerjee is the Founder and Director of Pune based Srishti Lifestyle. The love and passion for Indian traditional art and craft inspired Debjani to start something of her own. From a humble beginning of retailing craft based products from her home, she later moved on to share a friend's apartment when her business started to grow. Eventually, Srishti as a company began in 2009 in Baner, Pune.

Under the mother company, Shrishti, Srishti Lifestyle was incorporated in 2016, under which there is brand Craftus, for fashion and accessories; Craftus - Craft and loom: a craft store which promotes hand-crafted products from different parts of India; and Srishti - a manufacturing unit in Pune which caters to contract manufacturing for the established brands.

Although she was fortunate to have the support of her family and friends, she did stumble during her entrepreneurial journey. In trying to expand her retail outlet too fast, she failed. It was here that she learnt to always gauge a project from a financial and customer point of view. Further, funding her business was a major bottleneck. Without funds at the right time it was very difficult to expand the company.

Various successful entrepreneurs have inspired Debjani. She defines success as the happiness you get while seeing your business grow, creating job opportunities, empowering women, while definitely creating wealth which benefits all stakeholders. In line with the changing times, Debjani opines that there is no specific leadership challenges for women; the leadership challenges are the same, irrespective of gender.

The 2010 Goldman Sachs Women's Entrepreneurship Program in association with ISB, Hyderabad was an eye opener for Debjani. It was here that she got equipped with chalking out a strategy for future business expansions, branding, financing and other business related themes. Debjani also came in contact with many business owners from diversified fields which gave her the insights of how different kinds of businesses work. The hands on mentoring sessions guided her business too.

Debjani's future plans for her company includes establishing brand Craftus, both domestically and in the international market.

All the best for your future endeavours, Debjani!

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## THROUGH THE LENS



In his April trip to the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand, wildlife photographer, **Rupesh Balsara**, captured a picture of the magnificent Tigress (named Paru). The Park, which is a part of the larger Corbett Tiger Reserve, is spread over a sprawling 520 square kilometre area and is one of the premier tiger reserves of the country.

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