

BRIDGING THE GENDER DIVIDE

Male-dominated sectors such as aeronautics, construction and manufacturing are trying to bridge the gender gap to foster innovation, performance and engagement

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Women have traditionally been hired in fields such as hospitality, healthcare and education. Now male-dominated sectors such as aeronautics, construction, manufacturing, energy, auto, utilities etc that have a male workforce of over 70%, are making serious efforts to bridge the gender gap. They believe that gender balance is essential to help foster innovation, performance and engagement.

There is no denying the fact that it's the nature of the industry and the job profile that drives the gender preference in any industry, but it's also an accepted fact that gender balance too is essential for the leadership development of any organisation.

Women bring empathy to the workplace

According to Lalit Jain, director and co-founder of Annectos, an HR solutions company, "Gender diversity at any workplace is extremely important. Research has proven that women bring empathy

and intuition to workplaces, especially so if they hold leadership positions. Gender balance levels the professional playing field."

It's due to this reason that many male-dominated industries are taking measures to bring down the gender difference at the workplace. One of the HR policies of aeronautics giant Airbus aims at recruiting at least 25% new women candidates, "because diversity, including gender balance, is a very important element of our business to help foster innovation, performance and engagement," says Anne Galabert, Airbus spokesperson.

"We are encouraging girls to consider a career with Airbus, by inspiring and supporting young female students to take up engineering and aeronautical studies. There are many initiatives where we invite high school female students to visit Airbus and meet our female employees to talk about their experience and to understand how we can engage them. We also discuss the exciting international career opportunities they can expect at Airbus," she says.

In addition, Airbus participates in several career fairs

and conferences promoting women in aviation and breaking gender stereotypes.

While the women university graduates in France in subjects such as aeronautics hovers at around 18%, a target of 25% women recruits is a big challenge for the company. "In order to get more women into aeronautics, we need to attract them at an early age - at school - so they study technical and engineering subjects before joining a company like Airbus," says Galabert.

Gender diversity encourages competition

Similar efforts have been taken by other industry leaders to ensure gender equality. "At Allcargo 14% of our workforce comprises female executives. It's one of the highest in the logistics space," says Ajit Jangle, chief operating officer and HR head, Allcargo Logistics Ltd.

"We believe that a mix of both genders can touch upon certain critical aspects and ideas that any single gender on standalone basis may fail to do. This co-existence can also encourage healthy competition, leading to efficiency and making a cohesive team. That's what we follow as a

policy at Allcargo and that is what makes us leaders in the industry leader as well as in our space," adds Jangle.

Ronesh Puri, managing director, Executive Access, a headhunting firm, believes that traditional industries are male-dominated because they are framed in a male-dominated structure, but that's not the case with the new industries.

"Industries such as IT, e-commerce have better gender diversity. Finance and production industries also have much greater gender diversity. It's an important element in any business. Whatever be the products sold or the services rendered by an organisation, about 50% is for women unless it is a very male dominant product. Hence, having a better understanding of the DNA helps organisations and leads to better decision-making. The revenue and productivity curve also increases significantly. But unless the agenda of gender diversity is taken seriously it won't yield adequate results," says Puri.

Many HR experts are of the view that critical hiring is important and companies should try and give preference to women while hiring.

