

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE TECH INDUSTRY TODAY AND TOMORROW

'In 2008 when the Taliban took over Svat Valley in Pakistan, they forbid girls to go to schools. In 2009 Malala Yousafzai a Pakistani girl of the age of only 11, started talking against it and going to school risking her life and the life of her father. In 2012 when she was only 14 she was shot on her head on a bus, when a terrorist entered the bus, he asked who is Malala Yousafzai here, if you don't tell I will shoot everyone, so she said it was her and got the shot but survived and in 2014 she got a Nobel peace prize.'  
Anonymous, 2020



Moderator  
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Head of Sales at  
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Throughout this knowledge sharing session, that took place virtually via CC-Webinar.Live platform on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2020, a group of female leaders from *26FIVE*, *Bankai Group*, *Seaborn*, *IX Reach*, and *Ribbon Communications* discussed how diverse workplaces could lead to higher productivity, greater innovation, and higher achievement. They also looked at corporate strategies and structures towards better integration, key challenges women facing in the telco industry, and company programs introduced to tackle them.

9<sup>th</sup> December 2020

## Ani Davidyan:

The report from January 2018 from Mckinsey on "Delivering through diversity" established that there is a positive correlation between diversity and company financial performance. Whereas gender diverse companies worldwide had a 21 percent likelihood of outperforming their industry peers on EBIT margin, and they also had a 27 percent likelihood of outperforming peers on longer-term value creation. With this said Naaz I would appreciate to hear your take on how diverse workplaces could lead to higher productivity and achievement?

## Naaz Bax:

Necessarily, a diverse workforce will bring better decision-making, better problem solving because you have more ideas. They're not grouped-think, you don't have this homogenous group of ideas, you have very different perspectives. So there you're thinking out of the box as we said. Increased creativity again, for the same reasons, right? You've got innovation coming from people who feel like there are all these different ideas and the best ideas are born out of these diverse groups and innovation and you feel like you can present something without hav-

ing pushback. As was already said, when you're diverse, you can attract and retain top talent, right? There was a study in 2018 by Randstad where I said 78% of employees say a workplace where people are treated equally is important to them.

And that leads to things like decreases in absenteeism. Because if you have a diverse group, you don't feel like people are dissimilar to you. So you feel more likely to go to work. If people are not like you, you're more likely to be out of work. There are many that said, workers who are dissimilar to their teams, are almost twice as likely to call in absent. So that leads to that robust onboarding process for a company, right? So that you can put out those policies of diversity and inclusion. So in that same vein, if you do all these steps, you'll have happier employees, right? So you have all these things in place, your employees are happier. And when your employees are happier, guess what happens? You have greater productivity, right? So if I'm happy to be where I'm working, I'm going to do more and I'm going to participate more.

And gender-diverse companies are 15% more likely to outperform those who aren't. And those who are ethnically diverse are 35% more likely to outperform. They will by default create higher revenues. Harvard Business Review reported that those companies that have that 2D diversity are 45% more likely to report their firm's market share. And McKinsey showed that the EBIT margins at the most diverse businesses were 14% higher, as you said. So all of those things together, why wouldn't you do it? We've done all the studies. Let's get it done. We're all echoing the exact same sentiments. We've taken the studies, we've done the work, it's out there. We know it's real. So let's get to it.

## Ani:

That's so true. And Rebecca, can we hear your opinion on it?

**Rebecca Lewis:**

We need a mix of sexes and ethnicity as well. Women think with a different side of their brain, so they bring a different side of thinking to a problem in a different approach than if you just have one set of thinkers, you won't get as many different approaches. I also think a lot of the time you see quite a good mix of women in what I would call sort of the lower levels of the company, particularly in functions like sales, marketing, HR, legal, finance, not so much really on the tech, tech side. But what I think is important is to keep that mix as it continues higher in the industry. We see it as a pyramid, women are tending to drop off and this is where we need women, to be we as mentors, as we've stated for other women, and to encourage policies themselves within the company so that their voice is heard. So I think that's a really key thing that policies that encourage senior management to hear women's voices and to see their values and thereby promoting them up the tree, and that's how they become mentors to the younger women. I think it's really key.

**Ani:**

That's so true. I totally agree. I think we all need to fight for creating a more inclusive future, which will then drive the financial results accordingly. And I think men and women, everyone is interested in having better financial results in general.

**Rebecca:**

Absolutely.

**Ani:**

So my next question is directed to Sophie. Sophie, we want to know your opinion on how we can improve the corporate strategies and structures towards better integration of women, even though all reports outline that our world is 200 years away from complete equality, and Europe is 60 years away from complete equality. So what do we need to do from the corporate level, from the structural level to make this change happen?

**Sophie Ann Terrisse:**

There's a couple of things on what we've observed working with a client is they are a lot of initiative in particular in the last 10 years. And they can be, human resources oriented or they can be CSR oriented or they can be pure diversity inclusion program. What's really interesting is very often, we have customer or client that comes to us with one assignment and they

say, "We want to run the CSR project to talk about women empowerment." And we're like, "Okay, so how is this connected with your HR goals and objectives. How do you kind of align everything?" We also get a lot of requests saying, we need to do an inclusion project. We need to attract certain talents. So HR is then included, but not necessarily linked to the CSR project.

So the larger corporation has the luxury to have those three funnels: HR, DNI, and CSR. And now you're also adding the ESG and the S stands for social, which is all around inclusion as another agenda. So I think a corporation, first of all, you need to sit back and kind of bring all of those initiatives into one program. I mentioned very quickly the Accenture project, which truly has been one of the most impressive ventures I've ever seen, where Accenture in India said that they needed 40% of their workforce to be women. And India, a lot of challenges and it was not just a recruitment marketing initiative, it was a management initiative. And now Accenture India even has the female CEO in charge. We started this group with a thousand people. They have 120,000 people, I think. Women and men.

So that's the other thing. It's not about women talking about the issues because I think we have a lot of that. It's about men and women coming together to just take action. And I think corporations really need to, first of all, align their initiative and their dollars in a way where men and women are actually all invested in getting that pay off everything we're talking about, which is, the higher result, better margin. I love the 2.3 higher cashflows per employee because I totally agree with Naaz. We don't need to demonstrate it, we just need to do it. So again, I think it's connecting programs, but also connecting them through a woman and a man lifespan. Everything is so individualized. It's like you're going to have a program for returning to work. Okay, what about the program to go and have a baby? Then you have a program to take care of small children. What about the program to help with teenage and college visits? That you're going to have a program to take some time off to take care of parents. Well, why can't you facilitate the longer-term program for women and men to take care of parents and family? So I think it starts with this. And the second thing is that as a smaller level company, you have an option to just put very simple rules and requirements that you need 50/50 in everything. So we have offices in the US and India and in

Asia and our entire team at every level is pretty much 50/50. And it's not a rule, it's not a requirement, it's just the way our culture works. So I think you have at a lower scale, be in a position to just say, that's just the way it's going to be. And I think that helps a great deal.

**Ani:**

I think it's very interesting that we all say it's feasible, it's understandable. We all know what are the issues, we need to solve these issues now, but despite of this somehow, in the communication and information technology industry, only 24% of all workforce are women. It's interesting to understand what are the key challenges that women are facing in this industry and how we should tackle those issues in general. Priyanka, can I have your opinion on it?

**Priyanka Brahmabhatt:**

As Sophie said, we have to work on it and it was so good to hear about Accenture working on it by giving an agenda for hiring women. And also the problem that we are facing because of this general bias that has been going on all the time, that more and more girls or women of tomorrow, they have got it embedded somewhere in their minds that you know what? This is how it is. So what's the point of getting STEM because it's so hard to get a job and as you said, we need to have men allies. I know I learned this from someone about the power of three, that if in the room, there is a question asked to a woman, the question is very conducive, if two women join her, then it becomes a force. So two powerful women, empower a woman. And to power women, we also need men allies not to speak for us or on us, on our behalf but we need them because they know the language between the transition of the current culture and the culture that we want to bring. So it's so important that we have a hand to hand formation going, and we are getting there with all this talking. There are companies, and there are people who are actually making steps towards it, but yes, we need more programs and we need to encourage more and more people in colleges and high schools, not only to take STEM for girls but to also enable them to stand and enable girls to get the job and internships in the training.

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