



The time for authentic change is now!

Says, Naheed Chowdhry, Founder and CEO, IWill Consulting

17 Sustainable Development Goals

On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at a historic UN Summit - officially came into force. Over the next fifteen years, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change. (Source: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>)

The 5th Goal – Gender Parity

One of those Sustainable Development Goals is Gender Parity. The World Economic Forum notes that gender parity is fundamental to whether and how economies and societies thrive. It says ensuring the full development and appropriate deployment of half of the world's total talent pool has a vast bearing on the growth, competitiveness and future-readiness of economies and businesses worldwide. As per a report dated 11th June on the WEF website - There isn't a country in the world that's currently set to achieve gender equality by the UN's target of 2030. (Source: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/there-isnt-a-single-country-on-track-to-make-the-uns-targets-for-gender-equality/>)

The Workplace Gender Parity Story is No Better

Workplace gender parity is based on 2 key factors: equal pay and identical career progression for any given scope of work – regardless of employee gender.

In a study covering 350 C-suite leaders across 51 countries and industries ranging from foods, restaurants, CPG/FMCG, oil, retail and luxury, Ernst and Young found that while pay gap remains a universal issue, even the top

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gender equality companies have more **women in staff roles than line roles**.

So, are we going backwards? What's driving this? A deep dive reveals 5 disconnects:

1. Business leaders **assume that the issue is nearly solved** despite little progress within their own companies
2. Companies **don't effectively measure how well women are progressing** through the workforce and into senior leadership.
3. Organisations are **not creating pipelines** for future female leaders
4. Men & women **don't see the issue the same way**
5. Different sectors agree on the value of diversity but are making **uneven progress towards gender parity.**"

As per McKinsey's study in 2017, less than half of men report that advancing women is an important priority for them. And even when things are changing, they are not changing fast enough.

Study finds major gap between knowledge vs application of gender policies across organisations

A recent extensive study conducted by iWill for the Restaurant Industry across the UK, USA, India, Australia & Canada found that while 66% of women in US strongly agree that 'men and women are equally likely to be promoted to MIDDLE-management positions in my company' the number drops to 17% in India highlighting a sense of **global imbalance in gender parity & equity in the workplace**.

The story does not get any better when we look at endorsements for the same statement at the TOP management level. Only 16% of women in UK, Australia, Canada endorse the statement hinting an **implicit bias that stops women from breaking the glass ceiling at the top of the global corporate rung**.

The study also finds the gap is the largest for women between the ages of 35-44: typically, the age when women adopt caregiver responsibilities.



The Motherhood Penalty

According to Naheed Chowdhry, Founder & CEO - iWill Consulting, "the gap becomes largest when women take on caregiver responsibilities. In fact, there is a term for it: the 'Motherhood Penalty'. There is an assumption that women will lose focus if they are juggling caregiving responsibilities with work. This significantly impacts their future career growth. We see it all around us- men are judged on future potential, women on past performance. And what demoralises women even more is the everyday micro-aggressions – signalling disrespect and inequality. For example, they need to provide more evidence of competence than others do. Their sense of judgement is often more scrutinised and questioned by others in comparison to their male peers. Often women have to deal with being addressed in a less than professional way, being mistaken for someone at a much lower level than their current positions because of stereotyping."

More than 70% of men and women sampled in the study agreed that 'Women are more likely than men to leave their careers to care for their family.'

Primary care giving duties are still anchored with women and societal and self-expectations are often based on the same.

Women as Bullies: The Queenbee Syndrome

The iWill study has also found **an alarming trend** of another, less-mentioned but equally present concern: **women bullying women in the workplace – also known as the "Queen Bee" syndrome**. For women new to or insecure in senior roles, many often believe they have to mimic male behaviors and actions in order to be taken seriously. Says Naheed, "you may have come across the odd photograph of women dressed in masculine clothing, arms crossed across chests in a typically male pose, yet insisting they are the epitome of female empowerment at work." The study has found an equal number of men confirming that they have witnessed women delaying female employee career growths.



First defined in 1973, the Queen Bee syndrome describes a woman in a position of authority who views or treats subordinates more critically if they are female. Cecilia Harvey is an expert who has conducted extensive research on this subject, finding that in a business environment, a "queen bee" often sees other, usually younger, women as competitors and refuse to help them advance within a company, preferring to mentor a male over a female employee. Some such "queen bees" may actively take steps to hinder another woman's advancement as they are seen as direct competitors.

Talk vs Action

It is interesting to note that while the impact of gender disparity is easy to verbalize in words and numbers, the **actual experience of disparity at a busy workspace is 'fuzzier' and thus risks becoming less real, tangible & thus difficult to be cognizant of at times.** This is probably the reason why almost 61% of the TG (216 out of 358) sampled globally in the 'Restaurant Study' endorse that they have rarely or never experienced gender-related obstacles in their career in spite of agreeing with other statements that clearly reflect that gender disparity exists in their work ecosystem and 92% of respondents say gender equality in the workplace is important to them. 48% of all women surveyed agreed that they have witnessed and / or experienced situations where a male colleague at any level (including peers, junior, or managers) has actively limited the career advancement of a female employee.

The question to ask then is – **Do women get acclimatized to being discriminated against to such a point that they can no longer identify the same? Do they get desensitized to the vulnerability of being at the receiving end of gender bias? Do they depersonalize it as something that may happen to others but not them as a coping mechanism?** Perhaps this is a point of further enquiry and research.

According to Bene Brown the famous "Vulnerability Researcher" with her own show on Netflix - "The minute you stop caring what people think, you lose capacity--you lose capacity to be vulnerable. People are confused about what is vulnerability and what isn't," Brown says. "Having the courage to show up

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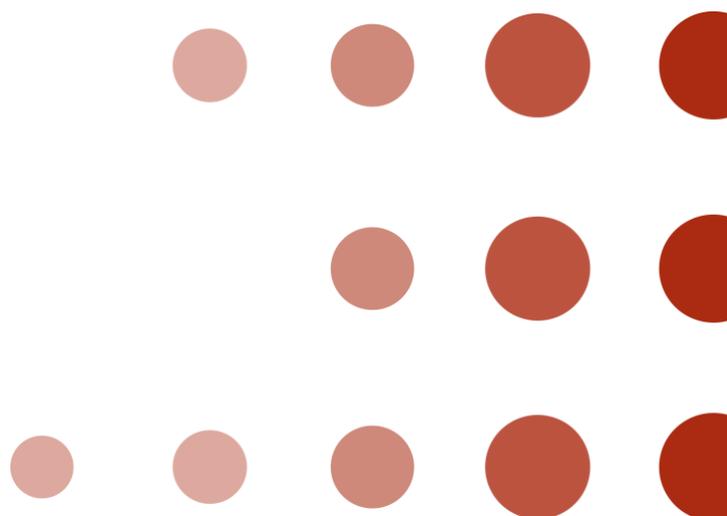


and be seen and put yourself out there when you have no control over the situation: That's vulnerability. Vulnerability is the absolute prerequisite for badassery. Vulnerability feels terrifying, and like it could be costly," Brown says. "But it is never going to be as costly as getting to the end of your life and thinking 'what if I would have shown up?'

And while the women may be getting desensitized are gender policies inadvertently risking alienating the male fraternity. **54% of all males in the 'Restaurant Survey' population felt that company policies which aim to promote gender equality in the workplace favor women over men.**

The GameChanger

Says Naheed, "Gender Parity is not about advocating active, aggressive feminism. It is about engaging men as much as women in creating a permanent, authentic solution in the workplace – based on both data and empathy. There must be an inclusive and pragmatic approach for **real, everyday people**".





About iWill

iWill is the world's first inclusive, end-to-end solution for addressing gender parity in organisations. Working within existing organisational policies, iWill focuses on converting these into actionable steps with an authentic, positive and scalable approach to shift mindsets at Middle Management level. iWill has gained interest and support from gender-parity advocates around the world, as well as from the UN Women Council.

If you would like to access our research and find out more about iWill and how it can help your organization ensure your gender parity policy is translated into action, write to us at info@iwill.global.

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