

Startups Drive Gender Diversity Agenda

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Bengaluru: Last year, Myntra carried out a social experiment at its workplace. The Bengaluru-based online fashion company named several meeting rooms after renowned woman technologists and leaders from across the world, to drive better sensitivity towards gender diversity. Today, meetings are carried out in rooms named after achievers like computer scientist Barbara Liskov and fashion designer Coco Chanel.

Earlier this year, Paytm rolled out an email helpline exclusively for its woman employees. The forum not only helps promptly address queries, issues and concerns, but also allows senior leaders at the payments and ecommerce firm to communicate directly and quickly with female staff.

Myntra and Paytm are not alone in trying to close the gender diversity gap. Other new-age companies like Urban Ladder, Go-Jek, Jugnoo and ShopClues are also putting in place various initiatives to drive this agenda.

“Research has conclusively proven that companies with diverse teams are better in decision-making and perform better financially. However, there is a trend of startup co-founders being predominantly male, although our acceptance of women in some sectors like banking is an encouraging sign,” said Jappreet Sethi, CEO of YoStartups, which provides consultancy services to new-age companies.

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On A Roll

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GO-JEK INDIA pays employees who refer female candidates double the referral fees usually given for male candidates

URBAN LADDER has started driving open discussions in the workplace to help set goals around gender sensitisation

the workforce is female, which the company is looking to increase further. At the company, initiatives towards building gender diversity are driven by feedback from employees.

This year it received feedback from female employees that they were having difficulty in striking a balance between work pressure and taking care of their children who were at

home during the summer vacation. The startup assigned a section of the office as the ‘Missions’ Play Area’ where employees could keep their children when they came to work.

At Paytm, the focus is on building an enabling work environment for female employees, and senior leadership regularly reviews diversity numbers across levels.

“We’ve had daycare facilities in place for more than a year now to ensure that female employees who have become mothers do not have to drop out of the workforce. Even when they’re coming back to work, we offer lots of flexibility in choosing roles and timings so that they can strike a proper balance between work and familial responsibilities,” associate vice-president Manav Jain told ET.

Company leaders at Myntra are paying close attention to sourcing a higher number of woman candidates without influencing the selection process. “An example of this is the campus hiring at women-only campuses as well as hiring a significantly higher number of woman interns and making PPOs (pre-placement offers) post evaluation,” said Abhishek Sen, vice president of human capital and consumer experience at Myntra.

The Bengaluru-based startup is also working towards introducing a transition plan of up to six months for women returning to work after a career break. This includes flexible-work options.

A gender-diversity agenda needs to have a top-down approach, said Babu Vittal, HR head at ShopClues. “Having a woman co-founder (Radhika Aggarwal) at the helm of things makes all the difference for us.”

The company is driving the need to increase diversity numbers at fresher- and lateral-level recruitment, and there are multiple leadership development programmes for female employees in all levels. The Gurgaon-headquartered ecommerce company has also recently rolled out e-learning capsules to drive awareness and sensitisation around gender diversity.

At Go-Jek’s India development centre, which supports the Indonesia-headquartered startup, employees who refer female candidates get double the referral fee given for male candidates. “When employees refer female engineers with more than 10 years of experience, we pay ₹7.5 lakh,” director Sidu Ponnappa said.

Furniture and home decor startup Urban Ladder has started driving open discussions in the workplace — especially with the leadership team — so that they can set goals around gender sensitisation within their teams. On the functional leadership front, there are women spearheading critical functions like engineering, customer service, branding, interior and decor design.

“We think of ourselves as an egalitarian organisation with strong feminist values,” said co-founder Rajiv Srivatsa. The company runs regular sessions on gender sensitivity training and prevention of sexual harassment.

Startups need to get more women early on in the business with more than just token equity and representation, said YoStartups’ Sethi. “Even big corporations like Uber have stumbled because they did not build enough diversity in the culture early on.”