

## POST COVID GENDER- FROM EQUALITY TO EQUIVALENCE

A **sudden rise** in the feminist movements around the world over last decade supporting **gender parity** in workplace show the **extent** of the problem . **Jan 2018** saw a movement called "**Time's Up** ", by a group of over 300 women in Hollywood for creating a safe workplace free from **gender discrimination**. Similar protests included " Women's March" as also " He or she " . Although they helped reform work norms, social perspective and human rights laws to some extent, much remains to be done.

**Elisabeth Kelan** coined the term **Gender Fatigue** to denote that whilst gender discrimination continues in organizations , people strive to deny its existence and showcase their workplaces as gender neutral.

Despite the fact that we are barely scratching its surface, there are several companies claiming gender-neutral workplaces by merely showing **diversity** in recruitment or creating a POSH (prevention of sexual harassment ) committee. In the current scenario, organisations have been implementing gender parity mostly **quantitatively** with performance indicators such as ‘Percentage of women in the workforce’ or the ‘Number of sexual misconduct cases ’. Overlooking qualitative socio- cultural **indices** makes the entire approach half baked .This claim of having reached the destination, while the journey has only begun is **proof** of gender fatigue setting in.

The **reasons** for gender fatigue range from **inaccurate definition** at the individual level to a **lack of philosophy** over organisational dimension. As the theoretical construct is flawed , implementation too gets skewed. For instance, the term “ **Gender Parity** ” is **inorganic** and reduces an individual to a statistic. Likewise, merely having a POSH committee is antiseptic- it prevents harassment without promoting respect. The associated goal of “ Gender Equality” is **mechanical** and that of “ Gender neutrality” seems robotic - former is Philosophically **utopian** while latter remains mathematically **impossible** .

It is incumbent to **define** ‘gender parity’ in a more granular manner, by including social , economic and cultural aspects in its meaning. Perhaps “ Gender **supplementing** ” could be a definition associated with the philosophy of “ **Gender Friendliness** ” .Associated goals of “ Gender **equivalence**” and that of “ Gender **Integrated**” work environment may be more apt. By supplementing is meant that all the regular work can be carried out by men and women alike. Gender **Friendliness** implies same awards and rewards for same work. “ **Equivalence**” means that - all other factors being equal - women

work comparatively better in certain aspects while men perform well in others. It is observed that women exhibit an edge in HR, administration and sales while men perform well in management, marketing and finance. **Integrated** work environment points to a complementarity of work spaces. Generally speaking, men perform better in alien spaces and outdoors while women seem to thrive in offices and familiar places. The approach is to underline complementary and supplementary nature of gender based upon **individual intelligencies** and **workspace Indices**. Idea is to graduate from merely curbing the negative in past by removing discrimination to currently providing a level playing field by gender neutrality to promoting **future positivity** by gender matched ecosystems..

With a new design and plan in place, **implementation** too should be viewed holistically. At the level of individual employees- going beyond mere training session at the time of induction, gender equality will become **a way of life** if expressed in terms of equal opportunities, career growth, perks parity, representation in the boards and having a voice. Women at the senior management level ought to be encouraged to network with women colleagues to create ambassadors of change. They could mentor junior women employees. Revamp referral policy to promote diversity. Organizations can use **financial incentives** to encourage action.

At the **organisational dimensions** they must ensure that these indicators of change are tracked accurately, reported correctly and shared in a transparent manner. To catalyse these changes, strategic investment of **public funds** should be made in gender equality initiatives, over and above CSR steps. This will reduce fatigue and will accelerate equality. The point that gender equality initiatives make for a good Return on Investment (ROI) will convert organisations. **Gender Ratings** could be made a key assessment criterion. The workplace must evolve beyond merely **inclusive** to being **participatory** as well. Policies may be tweaked to create integrated gender friendly work ecosystems. The expenditure on these should be seen as “investment” transcending welfare.

Gender equivalence is a continuously evolving process. Once the definition and philosophy are in place, a **dynamic equilibrium** – equivalence in changing scenarios - is attained. **Covid Pandemic** offers both an opportunity and a crisis. Gender equivalence may be achieved in progressive organisations while gender fatigue may deepen in regressive ones. Changes such as WFH represent opportunities and prospects of economic downturn portrays crisis. Next couple of years promise to provide evidence for ratifying the **equivalence model**. Hence this application.

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