



I LEAD

A survey by



FOREWORD

The need for women in leadership positions is an evidential truth that organizations in India have woken up to in the recent past.

This revelation has come forth due to their sheer professional acumen, determination, empathy and interpersonal soft skills. Women professionals also bring along a much-needed dose of diversity and inclusivity to the workplace. Corporate groups and entities in India today realize that a strong representation by women is need-of-the-hour measure to stay ahead and afloat amidst stiff global competition. The archaic scenario is steadily evolving and making way for women on top. Nonetheless, there is indeed a long way to go.

Comprehensive research about workplace trends has indicated the result of having women in leadership roles with robust increase in profits, sophisticated negotiations, effective communication, impactful interpersonal skills, and team spirit. Despite, these data-backed indicators, there are only a handful of Indian companies with women in leadership positions.

The situation is no different for the communications industry, where despite women already forming a very large part of the workforce, almost 34%, compared to a national average of 14%, the ratio drops to just 11% at senior management positions, and a mere 3% in boardrooms. Mere tokenism approach to diversity, with D&I policies being more of a 'tick-in-the-box' initiative, with little ability to eliminate gender discrimination, increasing instances of workplace bias and deep rooted sexism, limited mentoring and training support, and lopsided HR policies, re-emphasize the need for the communications industry to talk the walk of creating an inclusive and equitable work environment for women. The pandemic has further augmented the need for an immediate intervention.



“
Understand aspirations and ambitions of women professionals to feel nurtured and equally represented at high position
”

With this as the background, it is **essential to bring focus to workplace biases faced by women** aspiring for leadership roles, equal pay, growth and development opportunities, and better job satisfaction.

The Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (WICCI) and India's premier Management School - the Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode (IIMK) collaborated on a defining survey to understand aspirations and ambitions of women professionals to feel nurtured and equally represented at high positions in the field of media and communications.

The online survey **I LEAD** conducted in early 2021, received an overwhelming **response from 1000+ women communication professionals** (across genres of Journalism, Advertising, Public Relations, Digital Communications, Content Writing, Corporate Affairs and Corporate Communications). The survey attracted an overwhelming response and the results were concluded post a comprehensive analysis, followed by focused group discussions with key influencers. **Findings of the survey reveal key gaps associated with women traversing the climb to the top of the leadership ladder, the unspoken biases lurking in various policies and processes, and the steps that the communication industry must take to empower 'Women of Future'**



KEY ROADBLOCKS

The **I LEAD** survey
identified major issues faced by women
in Communications organizations.



ROADBLOCK

1

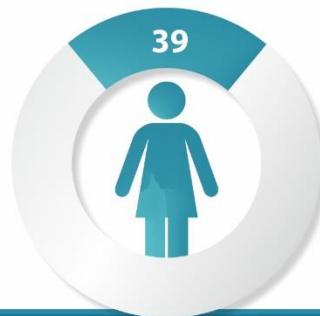
BIASES IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Only **39% respondents** of the survey agreed that their **current organizations** stood for an equal distribution of **women and men in senior leadership positions**.

With the majority disagreeing or being neutral (61%) to the statement, there is **a big question mark on the very concept of gender equality at the workplace**.

These findings are revelatory enough to comprehend that the Indian Media & Communications industry lags in terms of gender equality in senior leadership positions

The Communications industry **needs to walk the talk by creating more leadership roles to deserving women**.



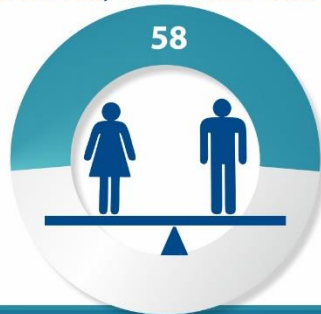
ROADBLOCK

2

POOR HIRING POLICIES AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Only **53% respondents** agreed to the fact that their **organizations adapt recruiting, promoting and succession planning keeping gender diversity in mind**. The remaining respondents either disagreed or remained neutral to this statement. This clearly indicates the importance of gender diversity in the HR policies of organizations. The need for transformation must begin with equal opportunities right at the root level. An **alarming 47%** of the respondents still felt that their organizations **need to do more efforts in hiring policies** and succession planning keeping gender diversity in mind.

58% respondents agreed that their **organizations ensure that women and men receive equal pay** for an equal value of work. While both these numbers seem good in, it unfortunately reiterates that the industry is far from creating inclusive growth opportunities for the vast majority of its workforce – WOMEN! A lot more needs to be done by Communications industry to state that they are an equal opportunity employer in HR Policies/Recruitment drives, a format followed by international bodies including United Nations, MSF, Amnesty International etc.



ROADBLOCK

3

LACK OF FORMAL MENTORING PROGRAMMES

When asked about a formal mentoring programme for aspiring women leaders in their organizations, only 32% agreed while the others disagreed or remained neutral to the statement. This strongly points out the **need for having a formal mentoring programme for aspiring women leaders** to shape up their career in the right direction.

Also, about 37% women found gaps in their organizations **provide upskilling opportunities** to women which shows a lot needs to be done for a progressive direction for the women of the future.



ROADBLOCK

4

POLICY GAPS UPON RETURN TO WORK

One of the major findings of the survey indicated the absence of a clear trajectory regarding the career path of women joining work post maternity and appropriate policies regarding pregnancy benefits, post-maternity and sabbatical that support the advancement of women employees.

Returning to the workplace has never been easy for women across any sector and it is no different for the communications industry. Our observation shows that **women in their mid-management level find planning a family as their biggest hurdle** as the industry lacks clarity and direction and often women succumb to mental wellness pressures both at work and home.

This was seen from the fact that only **47% of the women felt that their organizations do have a clear career direction/growth path** charted for women who join back post maternity. Despite the rules and regulations related to leaves and benefits, only **59% agreed that their organizations have appropriate policies regarding pregnancy benefits, post-maternity and sabbatical that support the advancement of women employees.**

SUGGESTED ROADMAP



THE OTS FRAMEWORK

Reflecting on the key takeaways from the survey, WICCI PR & DM Council -IIMK recommend addressing three major gaps through a structured framework emerging as the suggested roadmap for the Industry.

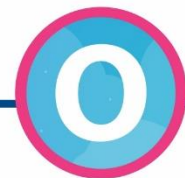
Gaps emerged at

1 Policy level

2 Skillset level

3 Mindset level

The survey has led to a road map to transformation (OTS) for the Communications industry to become better workplaces by filling the above stated gaps.



Organizational
Policies



Training,
Mentoring and
Development



Support
System

ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES



The need for better organizational policies emerged at the forefront of the road map. There is a **need for equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender or cultural background**; along with a need for equal pay and merit-driven selection for bigger roles. Gender should not prevent women from being given the opportunity to take on leadership roles.

“
There should be equal hiring in leadership roles, and efforts are to be made which ensure openness by clients to accept women leaders.
”

Anonymous respondent

The HR policies should ensure **diversity and inclusion in hiring and retaining talent**, and also implement policies related to maternity which include maternity and paternity leaves, post-maternity facilities, a clear plan of career growth post maternity.

“
Make it easier for women to get back to work after pregnancy, sabbaticals.
”

Anonymous respondent

TRAINING, MENTORING AND DEVELOPMENT



Another respondent of the survey suggested a **strong need to promote learning and development programs for women**. Organizations should encourage greater number of relevant coaching programs to mentor and support women in the workplace even after a career gap. It is also important to **encourage women to pursue higher education** as many either pursue higher education, join workforce and fail to continue their professional choices and many others find no time or opportunity to do so due to commitments at work and family. It is essential for women to learn on the job to help them grow as individuals. There is a **need for greater exposure, training and mentoring** for grooming women to become world-class leaders.

**Mentor the younger ambitious middle-level women.
It's at this stage that they fall between the cracks.
It's also at this stage they transform into a leader.
If it sorts out at this stage,
you will see more women at C-suite levels in future.**

Anonymous respondent

**Train women
for leadership roles.
Provide multi-skilling
opportunities to women
workforce and give them
global work exposure.**

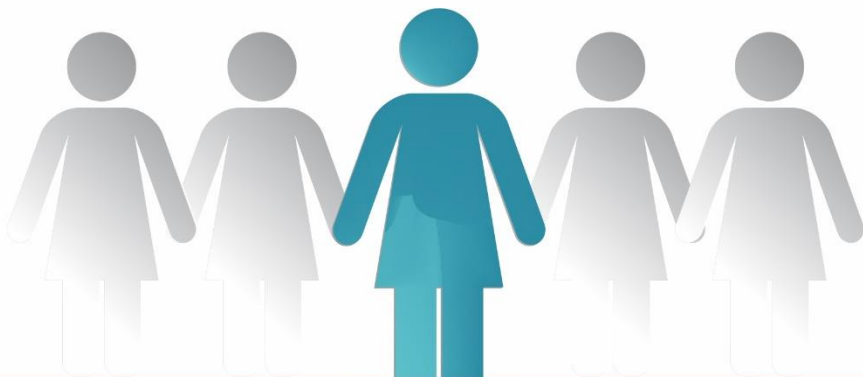
Anonymous respondent

SUPPORT SYSTEM



Women need **support and encouragement from the management**. It's good to have a dream, but not every woman is chasing her dream. Organizations need to create an urge in aspiring women by way of crafting meaningful conversations in informal and semi-formal networks and forums in addition to the formal policies. There should be **a support network in the organization** that would be supportive of other women in the organization by listening to them effectively and making them comfortable enough to speak up. Women leadership recruitment agencies need to be differently incentivized because men still command a larger pay package.

Meaningful conversations in informal and semi-formal environments and forums in addition to the formal policies, will help encourage more women employees. Additional responsibility lies with human resource departments, consultancies, and recruiters to ensure 'equal pay' is a reality for women, at different stages of their careers.



**An informal support group
in every office with one or two people leading it.
And the freedom to talk to them
even about the silliest of problems one on one,
without being pressurized to do it.
And no HRs in the group, please.**

Anonymous respondent



Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry's Public Relations and Digital Marketing Council aims to be the force for gender equality and opportunity for women within the communications industry, and society in general. Its mission is to help women in communications thrive within the industry and reach the highest levels of leadership, by providing them with unique content and connections that educate, empower and inspire. Its strategy involves 'Celebrating the Difference and Uniqueness' that women bring to the table and explore new approaches for cultivating, engaging and retaining this critically important talent.

WICCI'S Public Relations and Digital Marketing Council is led by Kavita Lakhani, Director - Operations, Weber Shandwick and Co-Chair, Women's Leadership Network, Interpublic Group. The Council comprises of senior women professionals, young women achievers and entrepreneurs across industries with experience in Corporate Communications, Public Relations, Digital Marketing, Journalism, Personal Branding and Leadership Mentoring.

Council members named in alphabetical order: Aahana Dhar (Communications and Media Lead, Asia, The Rockefeller foundation), Anjali Mehra, (VP Marketing, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts), Aruna Balkrishna (Independent Communications Consultant, Charu Raizada (Communication Strategist, Brand and Crisis expert), Divya Narayan (Senior PR Manager, Amazon), Mou Chakravorty (Associate Director, Marketing, Brand and Communications, Deloitte India), Namita Ramani Sharma (Senior Marketing Manager, Tata AIG General Insurance), Neha Mishra (Founder, Neha Talks, Behavioral Master Trainer & Partner, Epinomi Consulting), Nimisha Tiwari (Editor, ET Panache Travel & Media Solutions, The Times of India), Nishtha Arora (Independent Digital Marketing Consultant), Prasadha Menon (Director & Head - Brand, Marketing & Communications, Optum), Preeti Binoy (Head Corporate Communications & Government Affairs, Kimberly-Clark India), Priti Srivastava (Sr. Vice President, Corporate Affairs - Reliance Industries and Sustainable Growth Mentor at Navratan Foundations), Priya Bendre (Associate General Manager, Communications, Fortis Healthcare), Radha Radhakrishnan (Global Head, Corporate Communications, Wipro Enterprises Limited), Shiwani Varma Vyas (Head Of Corporate Communications & CSR at Lowe's India) and Tarunjeet Rattan (Founder, Nucleus PR).



The Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode is the 5th IIM to be established by the Government of India.

The growth story of IIM Kozhikode is not just about the numbers, but also about some remarkably innovative initiatives that has set the bench mark for other institutions in the country. Many such **innovations like championing Gender Diversity were emulated by others, and IIM Kozhikode takes pride in being a change agent that transformed the higher education space in India.**

With many firsts already to its name, IIMK singlehandedly broke the glass ceiling for 'Women in Management' by admitting more than 50% women in its flagship Post Graduate Programme (MBA) back in 2013 when women representation at IIMs was a dismal 8-10%, for close to 50 years!

The institute repeated the feat again in the year 2020. 'Diversity in Leadership' is one of the main pillars of IIMK's historic twenty-five year journey and currently 30% faculty members and 40% members of IIMK Board of Governors are women.

This WICCI-IIMK initiative at the institute is being led by Prof. Debashis Chatterjee, Director IIMK and Prof. Deepa Sethi Chairperson (PGP-LSM) and the Project Coordinator for this Survey.





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