

Looking Beyond The Barriers

Glenn Llopis, a prolific entrepreneur writes in the Forbes that Diversity initiatives in organisations, irrespective of their size, fall flat after a very short period since the people involved in the programme were simply ignorant of the exercise. He emphasises the fact that many organisations approach the aspect of diversity as a problem, while it should in fact be seen as an opportunity.

BY S. AJAY KUMAR

Human Capital was involved in a conversation with Tim Braswell, Head - Human Resources, PNB MetLife, who spoke about the Diversity and Inclusion (D & I) initiatives that are in vogue within the organisation to ensure a women friendly workplace, and the way forward for the D & I programme in the future.

Why are we witnessing added emphasis on Diversity & Inclusion in Indian organisations off late?

It is interesting to note how a quiet yet intense movement has begun within the workplaces in India; which is embracing D&I. Organisations today have realized the value of diversity. When people hail from diverse backgrounds with varied experiences, value systems and working styles, it is possible to learn from one another and arrive at a whole new perspective, which otherwise, may have been an oblivious thought. Organisations are making conscious efforts to embrace people from across backgrounds and make each person feel Included. If a firm allows free thinking and expression of its employee's beliefs, then it will have a satisfied employee base, which subsequently reflects in its work and behaviour. Organisations that have embraced diversity are likely to have seen greater progress with their bottom line as well, having reaped a 'diversity dividend' first quantified in a recent study by the Center for Talent

Innovation (CTI). If organisations do not recognise the importance of diversity in the workplace, they are likely to be left behind while an entire eco-system of businesses, societies, government and regulators are pro-diversity. A research from Catalyst shows that increasing the level of female employment could help raise GDP by 5% in the US, 11% in Italy, and 27% in India. A high performance culture is a clear result of diverse views and better decision making and there is no denial of the fact.

How have your D&I programmes changed workplace demographics and diversity within the management over time?

As an organisation, the essence of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) has always been a significant ingredient of our talent management strategy. We

introduced it formally in our HR policy in 2014, and created a D&I Council to promote diversity and inclusion within the organisation. At PNB MetLife, we celebrate 'Inclusion Week' every year in June to propagate the significance of raising awareness on our D&I programmes and track our progress to date. We also host an Unconscious Bias workshop for our senior leadership team, which helps create awareness of how the unconscious mind works and influences our decisions at the workplace. D&I is a very comprehensive concept. As the first phase of our journey, PNB MetLife has focused on gender diversity. Some of the objectives of our gender diversity programme revolved around increasing representation of women across all levels, creating an able environment that promotes equal opportunity. These efforts have produced strong results

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relevant topics. The sole objective of the D&I council is to provide employees the freedom to voice their ideas and opinions, and transform them into action. The council is continually working to inculcate diversity and inclusion within the training materials and courses. The very rationale behind developing this council and D&I Ambassadors rests on the fact that we intend to promote and practice diversity and inclusion at every level, within the organisation.

It is unfortunate that in India gender still plays an important role, especially in senior management levels. According to reports, female senior managers score lower than male senior managers on the engagement scale. What measures have you adopted at PNB MetLife to enhance engagement and to create more women leaders?

Representation of female senior managers in the senior management level has always been a challenge across industries. While we appreciate and believe women have great business acumen, and can make significant contributions to the business, the women talent pool remains underdeveloped in India. Another reason for this gap is the existence of an unfortunate and unforced bias towards women at large, and over their ability to add value where and when it matters the most. We have programmes that support and encourage women to perform to the best of their ability, while constantly elevating their skills and abilities.

Our key programmes for Women Include:

Diversity & Inclusion Ambassadors - A network of employees spread across the country, with the objective of spreading D&I messaging amongst colleagues. The network shares the feedback and need for our women colleagues and addresses them with expert input and advice.

Returnship - A Programme to identify and hire second career women (women returning to their career after a break)

POWER - PNB MetLife Leadership Orientation & Development Programme for Women to Enhance Leadership Readiness (POWER). This programme which has been recently launched is aimed at developing and

strengthening the leadership capabilities of our women by providing training and fostering mentor/mentee relationships between identified women employees and our leaders.

Women of Excellence Workshops are organised on Women's Day, and attended by both men and women. The workshop focuses on - building awareness about leadership ambition gap, identifying the double bind dilemmas and ways to address them, recognizing how to flip the script in the workplace, identifying equal partnership opportunities and ways to ensure work-life integration.

Off late, maternity leave has been the source of much debate in the corporate segment. Can you please elaborate on the maternity leave policy practiced at PNB MetLife?

For working women, maternity can be joyful and stressful at the same time. To help our valued female employees manage this transition better and spend quality time with the newborn, we at PNB MetLife revised our Maternity Leave policy in September 2016, and increased the leave period to 26 weeks, starting from and up to eight weeks prior to the expected date of delivery. We will also provide an additional leave of 30 days to the employee in case of medical exigencies that may crop up after child birth. In case of surrogacy, or in case a female employee is seeking to legally adopt a child, she is granted a 12 week leave. In cases of more than two surviving children, the entitlement of Maternity Leave is 12 weeks. In the event of miscarriage, an employee can avail leave for six weeks from the date of miscarriage. Further to the above, to ensure a stress free maternity break we also offer:

- Waivers of targets during maternity leave - Goal Sheet targets for female employees in sales profiles are frozen during the maternity leave period.
- We have developed our coaching

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programme 'Family Matters' for expecting mothers to ensure that they are well prepared for their parental leave transitions in a way that supports their personal values and career goals. Coaching them on the ways of planning their leave, and handover their responsibilities to a colleague is one of the best ways to initiate dialogue with their managers when they want to resume work.

- Employees may work from home subject to mutual agreement with the employee's manager and approval of the said manager.
- PNB MetLife has partnered with various service providers to extend crèche facilities/day care centres, at discounted rates in different parts of the country. We currently have tie-ups with 32 organisations spread across India.

What are the new ways adopted by

PNB MetLife to lead by example and find unity in diversity? How has PNB MetLife sensitized their internal stakeholders to be less prejudiced about prevalent social biases?

At PNB MetLife, we may not have been the pioneer of diversity; however, our focused approach over the years to make a difference in this field has been recognized by external bodies. We have been recognised as one among the Top "100 Best Company for Women" consecutively in 2016 and 2017 by the prestigious Working Mother and AVATAR group. We won an award for our women friendly policies towards creating a women-enabling workforce by empowering them and building inclusive work environment for their growth in the organisation. We have conducted Unconscious Bias workshops for our senior management in collaboration with Ernst & Young and Inclusion Matters for People Managers. The workshops were focused on gaining awareness of how the unconscious mind works, understanding the impact of unconscious bias in the workplace, and on business success, and over ways of managing our bias and build a culture of Inclusion.

What challenges have you faced in implementing the D&I policy?

Our vast geographical spread across 110 locations at times poses a challenge to ensure uniform implementation of D&I initiatives. We understand that managing diversity is a significant organisational challenge, so we ensure that our managerial skills adapt to accommodate a multicultural work environment. Every workplace has people who resist diversity and the changes it brings, even in the most positive environments. Individuals who do not take a diversity plan seriously are a big challenge to managers and owners trying to implement and maintain a plan. We ensure that our communication channel is continuous, with a high focus

with an improvement in the percentage of female workforce, which is in fact increasing every year, starting at 22 per cent in 2014 to 33 per cent in 2017. While gender diversity continues to be our primary focus, inclusion of differently abled to the workforce and facilitating women professionals to be able to resume their career after a break are also areas of increased emphasis.

How do you ensure that your D&I policy is practiced all across the organisation and levels? It is our constant endeavour to foster

a work environment where employees bring their whole self to work. At PNB MetLife, men play an active role as advocates of gender diversity, and leaders consistently engage in nurturing a culture of inclusion in their respective line of business by advocating diversity. Our D&I Council comprises of senior leadership team representation across departments. In addition to the D&I Council, we also have D&I Ambassadors - a team of cross functional employees spread across branches. These ambassadors receive training on D&I and help the council create awareness among employees on





on the benefits of having a diverse representation amongst employees. It is also noted that women drop out of the workforce due to a number of factors including personal situations, responsibility of raising children etc. thereby reducing the talent pool available in the market for employment.

It is said that millennials give more importance to a better quality of life as compared to money. Has your firm adopted specific measures to deal with the differing expectations of the millennial work force?

Millennials have a completely new outlook on life, and therefore, their demands from their employer differ from previous generations to a great extent. They want to create one life, to integrate home and work. They are technology-centred and aspire to rapid career growth and success. We have a strong Internal Job Posting policy for ambitious and aspiring employees with the right potential to move into challenging assignments of their choice. Our work from home and flexi-time policies are widely used by our employees according to their need. We recognized the focus of this generation on personal time, and have therefore revised our leave policy to offer Birthday and Wedding Anniversary to everyone which becomes effective from their date of joining.

Tell us about any student training initiatives conducted by PNB MetLife. What are the innovative tools that you employ to train the millennial workforce?

Learning on the go, seems to work well with Gen Y today. They like to be in control of things including their L&D, and learn at their own pace. Alongside our traditional classroom training, we have a robust Learning Management System with (LMS), which is accessible through "One People Place" to all the employees of PNB MetLife. LMS offers the following for our employees

- Access to around 5000 learning modules
- Ability to add external training events (Conferences or on-the-job training)
- Ability to search for courses by subject area, key word, language, delivery method, location etc.
- Simple view of upcoming assignments, deadlines and enrolment options
- Can recommend courses to peers
- Can print certificates of completion any time

The ePathshala App is another milestone achievement made in the field of modern day training, and which has won the award in the "Best Use of Technology in Training" category at the prestigious National Excellence in Training Award 2017. Our content development team (sales training), sought to transform the learning experience at PNB MetLife with this application which has transformed learning into a methodology that is robust, innovative, fun and cost efficient. The ePathshala App is the official training app at PNB MetLife and is available in both Android and iOS platforms. Our widespread operations make it impossible to bring

everyone into the classroom. However, it is imperative that our field employees are well trained and well versed with our products and processes. Mobile learning through the ePathshala app helps us connect and educate our entire sales force. We have a targeted PMLI actuarial development programme for fresh graduates that focuses on developing future leaders of PNB MetLife who will create innovative business solutions. Actuarial Development Programme is a full-time rotation programme, wherein PMLI will train fresh graduates for executive-level assignments and assist them in preparing for the actuarial exams, while they complete two/three year rotations, on average, within core areas of PNB MetLife's business.

What are the measures undertaken by PNB MetLife to ensure that the specific needs of employees with disabilities are catered to?

At PNB MetLife 'Equality and Inclusion' serve as the cornerstone in the way we do our business. All employment decisions at PNB MetLife are based on business needs, job requirements and individual qualifications without regard to race, colour, religion or belief, national, social or ethnic origin, sex (including pregnancy), age, physical, mental or sensory disability, HIV Status, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, family or parental status, or any others protected by the laws or regulations. PNB MetLife does not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on any of these characteristics. We embarked on our journey of inclusive employment when we recruited differently abled employees in 2016. In order to cater to the specific needs of these employees, we modified our premises to best suit their requirements. We have also designed and conducted Sensitization Training for employees with an aim to create awareness on how to best deal with team members who have special needs. For example, how to help someone in a wheelchair to ensure that their journey is as trouble-free as possible. We believe that a work culture that respects, celebrates and harnesses differences will ultimately benefit everyone and drive the company and community forward. We are an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer.