



Talent Landscape and Women in Manufacturing

February 2024

Introduction

Odgers Berndtson brought together CEOs from the manufacturing sector to talk about the talent landscape & what it would take to see more Women CEOs leading in the sector.

The sector has traditionally been biased against female employees due to assumptions about responsibilities related to biological functions and child-rearing. However, the professional paths of women diverge from men's due to expected social and family roles that sometimes require career breaks. Most women drop out of the labour force mid-career due to childbirth, though with support could continue contributing. Unconscious biases start from home through school and are carried into the workplace, hindering women's participation in the workforce. Recognising this could boost the economy, with estimates **that in the long term GDP per capita would be almost 20% higher than otherwise, if all gender employment gaps were to be closed.**¹ Moreover, the perception that manufacturing lacks glamour compared to industries such as IT or FMCG discourages many qualified women from considering careers in this sector. However, during the dialogue conducted by Odgers Berndtson with CEOs in the Manufacturing sector, it came to light that there are roles within the manufacturing sector, such as IT, that can easily attract gender diverse talent.

Effective Recruitment Strategies

Most talent strategies and diversity policies aimed at higher representation of women fail at middle management levels due to ingrained biases against female employees. This bias persists on both the recruiter and candidate sides, limiting opportunities. Within companies, a common perception holds that women would not be interested in the traditional types of roles. Changing such perceptions with training & sensitization, especially among internal stakeholders responsible for hiring, proves vital.

The talent pipeline for women in manufacturing companies needs to start at bottom-level positions and then groom them to take on higher roles over time. Mandating gender diversity across functions, departments, and leadership levels helps recruit and retain women. Using normal attrition and replacement opportunities to mandate hiring qualified women candidates for vacant roles ensures diversity is increased organically over a period of time.

¹Steven Penning (Feb 2022), World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, A Gender Employment Gap Index (GEGI) - A Simple Measure of the Economic Gains from Closing Gender Employment Gaps, with an Application to the Pacific Islands, World Bank Document

Another important step is attracting talent from diverse industries by emphasising the technological aspects of modern-day manufacturing. This helps attract women talent from diverse sectors, who are keen to build their careers in the digital/technology-focused areas.

Policies and Practices for Promoting Gender Equality in the Workplace

Once hired, grooming, and developing women internally is key. Providing approachable role models in female leaders allows younger women to discuss the challenges they may face. Both male and female managers should cultivate an environment where all feel comfortable seeking advice.

Manufacturing companies can introduce several policies to improve diversity and support women in the workforce. Offering flexibility like work-from-home options post-maternity can help retain talented women who have to balance domestic responsibilities. Training managers on supporting women with family obligations can promote better work-life balance. Addressing infrastructure issues in rural areas and ensuring safety improves accessibility.

Providing paternity leave is also critical as modern families raise children as nuclear units. Recruiting women with career breaks capitalises on existing skills while reducing training costs. Celebrating those who hire such talent reinforces an inclusive culture. Diversity goals must consider both short and long-term impacts. Quotas and reservations have proven effective at increasing representation over time.

Successful practices include mandating gender diversity even in internship programs. Repeatedly communicating the importance of these policies reinforces organisational priorities around diversity & inclusion.

Overall, a holistic approach to women's career development and work-life integration can boost retention and performance across the manufacturing sector.

Capturing some Key Points that came out through the CXO Dialogue –



Preeti Bajaj

CEO & Managing Director
Luminous Power Technologies (P) Ltd.

“As a CEO in the manufacturing industry, I firmly believe that our greatest strength lies in the diversity of our workforce, the equity of our opportunities, and the inclusivity of our culture. Embracing diversity isn't just a moral imperative; it's a strategic advantage that fuels innovation, creativity, and resilience in the face of challenges.” At Luminous, we have taken consistent steps towards building a stronger, more diverse, and more equitable global enterprise. We also place the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the heart of our business strategy, including SDG #5 to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. Together, we're shaping a future where every voice, regardless of gender, plays a pivotal role in the success manufacturing ecosystem.”

“Initially, the focus should be on changing the mindset within our own companies to recognize that women are capable and skilled technicians.

We have learnt from experience that 99% of women candidates, if not more, were eager to pursue job opportunities in IT/ ITES/ Tech roles. The perception of the lack of interest of women candidates towards the manufacturing sector, was held by some individuals, which is now fast changing.”



Amit Gossain

Managing Director
KONE Elevator - India & South Asia



Bhavana Bindra

Managing Director - South Asia
REHAU

“The intent to move the needle on diversity, needs to be translated into a serious mandate across functions, across levels & across the organization. This needs to be supported with policies, guidelines & training for managers on how to deal with different scenarios.”

“By directly examining the code of conduct, provisions, and consequence management, we are actively addressing and challenging stereotypes & biases. Through discussions on policy, we are promoting work-life balance and supporting employee well-being. By following the 3S behavioural aspects - Sweekar (Acceptance), Sanmann (Respect) and Seema (Boundary) we are providing the ecosystem for the colleagues to flourish.”



Dr. Rajan Venkatesh

CEO and Managing Director,
Laxmi Organic Industries Ltd.



Sanjay Sudhakaran

Managing Director
Johnson Controls - Hitachi Air Conditioning

“The simplest explanation is that there is a lack of women with relevant experience in our industry. It is crucial for hiring managers and leadership to be open to considering candidates from diverse industries, especially with the increasing intersection of technology across different sectors.”

“Unless we do something deliberately, we cannot get there. At Brady, our team consists of close to 40% women at the shop- floor level. If you have women at the entry-level, and also have women as part at the mid - manager level who they can look upto, then the chances of these women staying in the system increase & their professional journey within the organization enhances. I believe it all starts with the top leaders taking the steps & following through on their commitment to DE&I to the end.”



Sacheen Lathkar

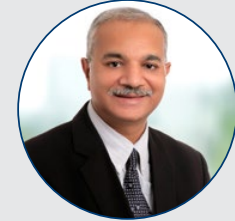
Director India Business
Brady Corporation



Dilip Sawhney
Managing Director,
Rockwell Automation India

“That the big needle movement will happen by increasing the representation of female managers. Not only can they contribute as effective decision-makers, but they can also serve as role models for others striving for success.”

“We are observing an increasing number of clients prioritizing exclusive gender diversity mandates for various leadership roles, not just for functional leadership roles in HR, Finance, Communications, et al, but also for operations leadership roles like plant directors, cluster heads, supply chain heads, and heads of R&D within the manufacturing sector. Clients are going through a learning phase with us and have allowed us to expand the candidate pool to include individuals from adjacent sectors. A very encouraging aspect is that our searches have resulted in successful placements, with candidates performing exceptionally well in their respective roles.”



Dr. Prasad Medury
Managing Director India
Odgers Berndtson



Vineeta Chopra
Consultant-Industrial Practice &
India Practice Leader-Diversity &
Inclusion (D&I), Odgers Berndtson

“In the last decade or so, many organizations have set excellent examples by investing in manufacturing units fully operated by women. A large number of companies are walking the DE&I talk by ensuring the right resources, infrastructure and fair working environment are available to their employees. I firmly believe that while there may be few female leaders at present, we will soon witness a more balanced representation of women professionals across all levels of manufacturing operations.”

Thanks to all the eminent participants of the roundtable:

- **Amit Gossain**, Managing Director, KONE Elevator - India & South Asia
- **Beena Kothadia**, Executive Plant Management, GE
- **Bhavana Bindra**, Managing Director-South Asia, REHAU
- **Dilip Sawhney**, Managing Director, Rockwell Automation India
- **Preeti Bajaj**, CEO & Managing Director, Luminous Power Technologies (P) Ltd
- **Dr. Rajan Venkatesh**, CEO and Managing Director, Laxmi Organic Industries Ltd
- **Sacheen Lathkar**, Director India Business, Brady Corporation
- **Sanjay Sudhakaran**, Managing Director, Johnson Controls – Hitachi Air Conditioning
- **Dr. Prasad Medury**, Managing Director India, Odgers Berndtson
- **Vineeta Chopra**, Consultant-Industrial Practice & India Practice Leader-Diversity & Inclusion (D&I), Odgers Berndtson